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An Excellent

Popular Ballad,

CALLED

Sir James the Ross.



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Sir James the Ross.

Of all the Scottish Northern chiefs,
Of high and mighty name,
The bravest was Sir James the Ross,
A knight of meikle fame.

His growth was like a youthful oak,
That crowns the mountain's brow ;
And, waving o'er his shoulders broad,
His locks of yellow flew.

Wide were his fields ; his herds were large ;
And large his flocks of sheep ;
And num'rous werē his goats and deer
Upon the mountains steep.

The chieftain of the good Clan Ross,
A firm and warlike band ;
Five hundred warriors drew the sword,
Beneath his high command.

In bloody fight thrice had he stood,
Against the English keen ;
Ere two-and-twenty op'ning springs
This blooming youth had seen.

The fair Matilda dear he lov'd,
A maid of beauty rare ;
Even Marg ret on the Scottish throne,
Was never half so fair.

Long had he woo'd, long she refus'd
With seeming scorn and pride :
Yet oft her eyes confess'd the love
Her fearful words deny'd.

At length she bless'd his well try'd love,
 Allow'd his tender claim:
 She vow'd to him her virgin heart,
 And own'd an equal flame.

Her father, Buchan's cruel lord,
 Their passion disapprov'd:
 And bade her wed Sir John the Græme,
 And leave the youth she lov'd.—

One night they met, as they were wont,
 Deep in a shady wood,
 Where on a bank, beside the burn,
 A blooming saugh-tree stood,

Conceal'd among the underwood,
 The crafty Donald lay,
 The brother of Sir John the Græme,
 To watch what they might say.

When thus the maid began: "My sire
 Our passion disapproves;
 And bids me wed Sir John the Græme;
 So here must end our loves.

"My father's will must be obey'd,
 Nought boots me to withstand:
 Some fairer maid, in beauty's bloom,
 Shall bless thee wi' her hand.

"Soon will Matilda be forgot,
 And from thy mind effac'd;
 But may that happiness be thine
 Which I can never taste!"—

"What do I hear? Is this thy vow?"
 Sir James the Ross reply'd:

“ And will Matilda wed the Græme,
Tho’ sworn to be my bride ?

“ His sword shall sooner pierce my heart,
Than ’reave me of thy charms ;” —
And clasp’d her to his throbbing breast,
Fast lock’d within her arms.

“ I spake to try thy love,” she said :
“ I’ll ne’er wed man but thee ;
The grave shall be my bridle bed,
If Græme my husband be.

“ Take then, dear youth ! this faithful kiss,
In witness of my troth :
And ev’ry plague become my lot
That day I break my oath.”

They parted thus :—the sun was set :
Up hasty Donald flies ;
And, “ Turn thee, turn thee, beardless youth !”
He loud insulting cries.

Soon turn’d about the fearless chief,
And soon his sword he drew ;
For Donald’s blade before his breast,
Had pierced his tartans thro’.

“ This for my brother’s slighted love,
“ His wrongs sit on my arm.” —
Three paces back the youth retir’d,
And sav’d himself from harm.

Returning swift, his hand he rear’d
Frae Donald’s head above ;
And thro’ the brain and crashing bone,
His furious weapon drove.

Life issued at the wound; he fell
 A lump of lifeless clay;
 "So fall my foes," quo' valiant Ross,
 And stately strode away.

Thro' the green wood in haste he passed
 Unto Lord Buchan's hall;
 Beneath Matilda's window stood,
 And thus on her did call:

"Art thou asleep, Matilda fair!
 Awake my love! awake:
 Behold thy lover waits without,
 A long farewell to take:

"For I have slain fierce Donald Graeme;
 His blood is on my sword:
 And far, far distant are my men,
 Nor can defend their lord.

"To Skye I will direct my flight,
 Where my brave brothers bide,
 And raise the mighty of the Isles
 To combat on my side."

"O do not so," the maid replies;
 "With me till morning stay,
 For dark and dreary is the night,
 And dangerous the way.

"All night I'll watch thee in the park;
 My faithful page I'll send
 In haste to raise the brave Clan Ross,
 Their master to defend.

He laid him down beneath a bush,
 And wrapp'd him in his plaid;

While, trembling for her lover's fate,
At distance stood the maid,—

Swift ran the page o'er hill and dale,
Till, in a lowly glen,

He met the furious Sir John Græme,
With twenty of his men.

“Where goest thou, little page?” he said;
“So late who did thee send?”—

“I go to raise the brave Clan Ross,
Their master to defend:—

For he has slain fierce Donald Græme,
His blood is on his sword,

And far, far distant are his men,
Nor can assist their lord.”—

“And has he slain my brother dear?
The furious chief replies;

“Dishonour blast my name, but he
By me ere morning dies.

“Say, page! where is Sir James the Ross?
I will thee well reward.”—

“He sleeps into Lord Buchan's park;
Matilda is his guard.”—

They spurr'd their steeds, and furious flew
Like lightning o'er the lea:

They reach'd Lord Buchan's lofty towers
By dawning of the day.”—

Matilda stood without the gate,
Upon a rising ground,

And watch'd each object in the dawn,
All ear to every sound.

“ Where sleeps the Ross ? ” began the Græme,
 “ Or has the felon fled ?
 This hand shall lay the wretch on earth
 By whom my brother bled.”

And now the valiant knight awoke,
 The virgin shrieking heard :
 Straight up he rose, and drew his sword,
 When the fierce band appear'd.

“ Your sword last night my brother slew,
 His blood yet dims its shine :
 And, ere the sun shall gild the morn,
 Your blood shall reek on mine.”

“ Your words are brave,” the chief return'd,
 “ But deeds approve the man ;
 Set by your men, and, hand to hand,
 We'll try what valour can.”

With dauntless step he forward strode,
 And dar'd him to the fight :
 Then Græme gave back, and fear'd his arm,
 For well he knew his might.

Four of his men, the bravest four,
 Sunk down beneath his sword ;
 But still he scorn'd the poor revenge,
 And sought their haughty lord.

Behind him basely came the Græme,
 And pierc'd him in the side :
 Out spouting came the purple stream,
 And all his tartans dy'd,

But yet his hand not dropp'd the sword,
 Nor sunk he to the ground,

Till thro' his en'my's heart his steel
 Had forc'd a mortal wound.

Græme, like a tree by winds o'erthrown,
 Fell breathless on the clay ;
 And down beside him sunk the Ross,
 And faint and dying lay.

Matilda saw, and fast she ran :
 " O spare his life," she cry'd ;
 " Lord Buchan's daughter begs his life ;
 Let her not be deny'd."

Her well-known voice the hero heard ;
 He rais'd his death-clos'd eyes ;
 He fix'd them on the weeping maid,
 And weakly thus replies :

" In vain Matilda begs the life
 By death's arrest deny'd ;
 My race is run—adieu, my love !"—
 Then clos'd his eyes, and died.

The sword, yet warm, from his left side
 With frantic hand she drew ;
 " I come, Sir James the Ross," she cry'd,
 " I come to follow you."

The hilt she lean'd against the ground,
 And bar'd her snowy breast ;
 Then fell upon her lover's face,
 And sunk to endless rest.