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THE  
**EDINBURGH MAGAZINE,**

AND  
**LITERARY MISCELLANY;**

A NEW SERIES

OF THE

**SCOTS MAGAZINE.**

4  
JUNE—DECEMBER, 1822.

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*Ne quid falsi dicere audeat, ne quid veri non audeat.*

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ILLUSTRATIONS OF SCOTTISH BALLAD  
POETRY.

## No. I.

ABOUT twenty-five years ago, there were published in England no less than five translations of Bürger's celebrated Ballad of "William and Lenore." In the periodical publications of the day, it was insinuated that the plot had been taken from the Scottish ballad of "Sweet William's Ghost," in Percy's *Reliques*, Vol. III., p. 127; and in the monthly *Magazine* for September 1796, the author was supposed to have found his materials in an English ballad entitled, "The Suffolk Miracle, or, A Relation of a young man who, a month after his death, appeared to his sweetheart, and carried her on horseback for forty miles, in two hours, and was never seen after, but in his grave." Now, although it is certainly true, that the wits of Göttingen, (of whom Bürger was one) were at that time sadly ballad-struck by "Percy's *Reliques*;" yet there is no "Suffolk Miracle" there; and the traditions of his own country sufficiently justify our adopting, without reserve, the statement given in Bürger's *Life*, (Works, Vol. IV., p. 36,) by his confidential friend and biographer, Dr Althop, that Bürger once heard a peasant girl, by moonlight, singing,

"The moon shines bright;  
The dead ride swift—  
Fair love! art not afraid?"

and that this was the only foundation he had for his poem; nor could the most anxious inquiries of himself and his friends ever recover another line of the original. In the second volume of "Des Knaben Wunderhorn," p. 19, however, the whole ballad (evidently a recent fabrication) is given, with a notice by the Editors, that "Bürger heard this song in an adjacent room."

In the first volume of Rahbek and Nyerup's valuable edition of the Da-

nish Ballads, p. 363, we find a scrap of a Norwegian song,

"The moon shines,  
The dead man grins;  
Art thou not afraid?"

which Oelenschlaeger has preserved in his "Palnatoke;" and in the very curious and extensive collection lately published at Stockholm, (of which more hereafter,) Pref. p. lii., there is a similar passage still remembered in Sweden;

"The moon shines,  
The dead man rides;  
Bolla! art not afraid?"

All those seem to have belonged to tales founded upon opinions once general (though now confined to the peasantry) among all the kindred nations of the north. Like our own tales and *superstitions*, (if they must be called by that name,) they are all of a moral tendency; their influence upon the minds and manners of the people was formerly very powerful; and the salutary effects of that influence are now fast disappearing, where the *old light*, which was steady and distinct, has been put out by the *new light*, which flickers and dazzles, and too often shines upon objects which were better left in the shade.

The following ballad (the original of which will be found in Vol. I., p. 210, of Nyerup and Rahbek's "Udvalgte Danske Viser fra Middelalderen,") is here given, not on account of any striking beauty to be found in itself, but because of its strong resemblance to some of the oldest and most characteristic remains of the same kind in our own country, which we wish to illustrate, by furnishing, from time to time, select specimens from the ample materials in our possession; leaving the reasonings upon the subject to your readers, or to your friend W. W., who has shewn that he can reason equally well upon any thing, or upon nothing at all!

## AAGE AND ELSE.

It was the knight Sir Aage,  
He's ridden him under ðe\*,

\* "Under ðe;" i. e. *under isle*, is a phrase of constant occurrence in the Danish and Swedish ballads, and therefore we leave it just as we found it.

And he's wedded the maiden Elselille,  
She was sae fair a may.

He's wedded the maiden Elselille,  
Wi' mickle goud and fee ;  
And that day month thereafter,  
In the black mools lay he.

It was the maiden Elselille,  
Sair was her maen and dool ;  
That heard the knight Sir Aage,  
Hyne under the black mool.

Up raise the knight Sir Aage,  
His kist upon his back † ;  
Sae nigh'd he near the maiden's bow'r,  
Wi' mickle pain and wrack.

Wi' the kist he rapped at the door ;  
He had nae claeding on :  
" Rise up, rise up, maiden Else,  
And lat your bridegroom in."

Then up spak maiden Elselille,  
" I'll nae unbar the door,  
But an thou the name o' Jesus name,  
As thou could do afore."

" Rise up, rise up, maiden Else,  
Unbar to me the door,  
For the name o' Jesus I can name,  
As I could do afore."

Up raise she, Elselille—ay down  
Her cheeks the tears did rin ;  
Unbarr'd the door to the dead man,  
To come her bow'r within.

And she has ta'en her gouden keam,  
And keam'd wi' it his hair ;  
For ilka hair she reddit out,  
She loot fa' a moody tear.

" Now tell me, knight Sir Aage,  
Allerdearest ! tell to me,  
How is it in the swarthy mools,  
And in the greaf wi' thee ?"

" It's every time thy heart is glad,  
Or joy with thee is found,  
Wi' leaves o' roses a' my greaf  
Is sweetly curtain'd round.

" It's every time thy heart is sad,  
Or dowie is thy mood,  
My weary kist is a' within  
Fill'd fu' o' lapper'd blood."

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† In the old Romances, people of the first rank sleep without their shirts ; and as ghosts in Germany, and in the North, generally come from their graves stark naked, and with their coffins on their backs, the presumption is, that they were buried without shrouds. In the wooden cuts to one of the older editions of the German " Heldenbuch," a skeleton bearing a coffin several times occurs.

" The red coek craws ;—I maun awa',  
And tak' my leave o' thee ;  
The dead maun to the eard return,  
And there's nae boot for me.

" The black coek craws ;—I maun awa',  
And to the greaf gang down :  
The gates o' Heaven are opening—"  
To gang I maun be bown."

Up raise the knight Sir Aage,  
Took the kist upon his back,  
And he is to the kirk-yard gane,  
Wi' mickle pain and wrack.

"Twas then the maiden Elselille,  
Sae dowie was her fa,  
Her bridegroom she has followed,  
Out throw the mirky shaw.

When he wan throw the mirky shaw,  
And in the kirk-yard there,  
Swythe turn'd to colour o' the ground  
Sir Aage's yellow hair.

And whan he throw the kirk-yard wan,  
And in the kirk he gaced ;  
The roses blacken'd on his cheek,  
As haw as ony lead.

" O hear me now, love Elselille,  
Thou allerdearest mine !  
Thou greet nor sorrow never mair,  
Nor for thy bridegroom pine !

" Look up, look up to the lift sae clear,  
Wi' starnies sma' and bright,  
Look up, and ye fu' well may see  
How sauchly gangs the night."

She lookit up to the heav'n clear †,  
And starnies bright and sma' :—  
Down sank the dead into the eard,  
And him nae mair she saw.

Hame gaed the maiden Elselille,  
Wi' heart fu' sad and wae ;  
And that day month thereafter  
In the swart mools she lay.

R. JAMIESON.

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\* " The gates of Heaven are opening," &c. In several of the Swedish ballads, as well as in some of our own, the ghost, on similar occasions, says, " *The bells of Heaven are ringing*" to mattins. Even the " *amœna piorum concilia, elysium-que*" of Virgil, however beautiful, is tame and flat when compared with this.

† In the Northern ballads, the beloved object who is revisited by a friendly ghost, is always desired to look up to the moon or stars, while the phantom vanishes—Our ghosts are not so delicate.