



The lone rider hovering by the moat.

THE DEAD DU GUESCLIN*

A BALLAD FROM FROISSART (A.D. 1380)

By E. Sutton

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANK CRAIG

she summons ended, swift reply did float
From the sky-shadowing donjon's lancet-bars,
To the lone rider hovering by the moat
Y-strown with sleeping stars.



* Bertrand du Guesclin ceased to besiege Château-neuf-Randon, an English fortress in Guyenne, on condition that it should be surrendered if not relieved within a certain time, but fell sick of a fever and died on the very morning of the appointed day. The governor of the castle, when called upon to observe the compact, refused to deliver up the keys to any save the dead constable himself.

The Dead Du Guesclin

“Though Du Guesclin be dead, the pact I own,
Since aid has failed of the appointed hour.
Herald, abide below; to him alone
I yield me and my tower!”

Soon on the silence roared the rusted chain,
Jolted the drawbridge down; with angry light
The grated arch through sundered portals twain
Cross-barred the misty night

Sable and gules. Then from within there came
Thus lit, with sudden glints of moving mail,
And shades forebroadening from the cresset's flame,
The brawn of many a dale

From Berwick to Carlisle for beacons famed,
Bowmen and billmen habergeoned and stark,
The Leopard's litter, conquered but untamed,
And grimmer than the dark

Thick-woven 'neath the eastward towers. Their line
Thence issued like a serpent from a pool,
With scale on scale that spreit the young moonshine
Like icicles at Yule.

One trumpet sang their march, with mid-between
Steel-trampling silences, when near and far
The owls cried answer, to a forest dene
Wherein a ruddy spar

Of light that brake in arrows through the leaves
Led to an abbey, and thereby a fire
Blazed 'twixt the buttresses to the looming eaves
And gargoyles of the choir.

Ruined it was, and old, but rich and fair
Rose the wide portal, arched with seraphim
That peeped and hovered to the shuddering glare
Or sank in shadow dim.

Then at a challenge, forth from their array,
One knightly in bright armor came, who bore
The fortress keys, for whom the guard made way
Within that darksome door.

Groping and slow the English captain passed
Along a roofless transept where the wind
Shivered among the pillars, and at last,
Deep in the night enshrined,

Saw a great clearness, though as yet he heard
No sound but of his steps that gridingly
Rang on the flags, or in the vaulting slurred,
Fringing the clerestorie



The leopard's litter, conquered but untamed.—Page 86.

Blackly with shards and cantles like to fall.
Then was he 'ware that 'neath an altar's ray
Girt with grim steel and pomp armorial
The dead Du Guesclin lay.

Surcoated gules and argent, save the head
Clad all in panoply of Milan mail,
Beneath his bannered eagle beaked with red
That like an idle sail

The Dead Du Guesclin

Swung to the night-wind. So 'twixt shine and shade
Leaped the great lineaments that on fields of yore,
Cocherel, Auray, or Najara, swayed
The thundering waves of war.

Gisarme and axe and glaive two-handed stood
Rangèd four-square about his couch of peace,
Whereon for pall y-clad the carven wood
The glorious Fleurs-de-Lys,

Azure and or semée in sweeping line.
Incense arose in many a circling stream,
And the wan moon brake through the tapers' shine
Like music through a dream.

Alas, how changed that prince of chivalry,
By none save Chandos equalled in his day!
Captain of half the hosts of Christianie,
How silently he lay!

The hands that stormed the portals of Renown
Folded in supplication, while above,
All-pityingly, the Crucified looked down
On him who fought for love

Of France and Honor and fair Brittany:
And the knight English moving to the bier,
Upon a great brand leaning heavily
Beheld with heavy cheer.

Then while hot tears upon his gorget ran,
"Ah," said he, "liest thou so low, my lord,
The truest lover and the kindest man
That ever strake with sword!

"Thou that wert never matched of earthly fame
For fealty, valiaunce, or hardyness,
The goodliest in strength that ever came
Amid the knightly press!

"Of sinful flesh thou wast the truest friend
That ever bestrad horse or fought in field,
And in thy courtesy to none didst bend
That ever bare a shield.

"Yea, thou wert gentlest of all, I trow,
That ever ate in hall as ladies' guest,
And sternest knight unto thy mortal foe
That e'er put spear in rest.

"Lo; here I yield me and my company,
Here, on thy breast the guerdon of thy toil:
Would they were keys of Paradise for thee,
Whom may the Saints assoil!"