

*Rogant* INTRODUCTION

The way was long, the wind was cold,  
The Minstrel was infirm and old;  
His wither'd cheek, and tresses grey,  
Seem'd to have known a better day;  
— 5 The harp, his sole remaining joy,  
Was carried by an orphan boy.  
The last of all the Bards was he,  
Who sung of Border chivalry;  
For well a day! their date was fled,  
— 10 His tuneful brethren all were dead;  
And he, neglected and oppress'd,  
Wish'd to be with them, and at rest.  
No more, on prancing palfrey borne,  
He caroll'd light as lark at morn;  
— 15 No longer courted and caress'd,  
High placed in hall, a welcome guest,  
He pour'd to lord and lady gay,  
The unpremeditated lay:  
Old times were changed, old manners gone;  
— 20 A stranger fill'd the Stuarts' throne;  
The bigots of the iron time  
Had call'd his harmless art a crime.  
A wandering Harper, scorn'd and poor,  
He begg'd his bread from door to door;  
— 25 And tuned to please a peasant's ear,  
The harp a king had loved to hear.

*Arthur*  
 He pass'd where Newark's stately tower  
 Looks out from Yarrow's birchen bower:  
 The Minstrel gazed with wishful eye—  
 No humbler resting-place was nigh. 30  
 With hesitating step, at last,  
 X The embattled portal arch he pass'd,  
 Whose ponderous grate and massy bar  
 Had oft roll'd back the tide of war,  
 But never closed the iron door 35  
 Against the desolate and poor.  
 The Duchess mark'd his weary pace,  
 His timid mien, and reverend face,  
 And bade her page the menials tell,  
 > That they should tend the old man well: 40  
 For she had known adversity,  
 Though born in such a high degree;  
 In pride of power, in beauty's bloom,  
 Had wept o'er Monmouth's bloody tomb.

When kindness had his wants supplied, 45  
 And the old man was gratified,  
 Began to rise his minstrel pride:  
 And he began to talk anon,  
 Of good Earl Francis, dead and gone,  
 And of Earl Walter, rest him, God! 50  
 A braver ne'er to battle rode;  
 And how full many a tale he knew,  
 Of the old warriors of Buceleuch:  
 And, would the noble Duchess deign  
 To listen to an old man's strain, 55

Though stiff his hand, his voice, though weak,  
 He thought even yet, the sooth to speak,  
 That, if she loved the harp to hear,  
 He could make music to her ear.

*Arthur*  
 60 The humble boon was soon obtain'd;  
 The Aged Minstrel audience gain'd.  
 But, when he reach'd the room of state,  
 Where she, with all her ladies, sate,  
 Perchance he wish'd his boon denied:  
 65 For, when to tune his harp he tried,  
 His trembling hand had lost the ease,  
 Which marks security to please;  
 And scenes, long past, of joy and pain,  
 Came wildering o'er his aged brain—  
 70 He tried to tune his harp in vain!  
 The pitying Duchess praised its chime,  
 And gave him heart, and gave him time,  
 Till every string's according glee  
 Was blended into harmony.  
 75 And then, he said, he would full fain  
 He could recall an ancient strain,  
 He never thought to sing again.  
 It was not framed for village churls,  
 But for high dames and mighty earls;  
 80 He had play'd it to King Charles the Good,  
 When he kept court in Holyrood;  
 And much he wish'd, yet fear'd to try  
 The long-forgotten melody.  
 Amid the strings his fingers stray'd,

And an uncertain warbling made, 85  
 And oft he shook his hoary head.  
 But when he caught the measure wild,  
 The old man raised his face, and smiled;  
 And lighten'd up his faded eye,  
 With all a poet's ecstasy! 90  
 In varying cadence, soft or strong,  
 He swept the sounding chords along:  
 The present scene, the future lot,  
 His toils, his wants, were all forgot:  
 Cold diffidence, and age's frost, 95  
 In the full tide of song were lost;  
 Each blank, in faithless memory void,  
 The poet's glowing thought supplied;  
 And while his harp responsive rung,  
 'Twas thus the LATEST MINSTREL sung. 100

## CANTO FIRST

*Miss I dubb*

The feast was over in Branksome tower,  
 And the Ladye had gone to her secret bower;  
 Her bower that was guarded by word and by  
 spell,  
 Deadly to hear, and deadly to tell—  
 5 Jesu Maria, shield us well!  
 No living wight, save the Ladye alone,  
 Had dared to cross the threshold stone.

## II

The tables were drawn, it was idlesse all;  
 Knight, and page, and household squire,  
 Loiter'd through the lofty hall,  
 Or crowded round the ample fire:  
 5 The stag-hounds, weary with the chase,  
 Lay stretch'd upon the rushy floor,  
 And urged, in dreams, the forest race,  
 From Teviot-stone to Eskdale-moor.

*Mary*

## III

Nine-and-twenty knights of fame  
 Hung their shields in Branksome-Hall;  
 Nine-and-twenty squires of name  
 Brought them their steeds to bower from stall;