

As if a distant noise he hears.
 The Dwarf waves his long lean arm on high, 5
 And signs to the lovers to part and fly;
 No time was then to vow or sigh.
 Fair Margaret, through the hazel grove,
 Flew like the startled cushat-dove:
 The Dwarf the stirrup held and rein; 10
 Vaulted the Knight on his steed amain,
 And, pondering deep that morning's scene,
 Rode eastward through the hawthorns green.

(Interlude)

While thus he pour'd the lengthen'd tale,
 The Minstrel's voice began to fail:
 Full slyly smiled the observant page,
 And gave the wither'd hand of age
 A goblet, crown'd with mighty wine, 5
 The blood of Velez' scorched vine.
 He raised the silver cup on high,
 And, while the big drop fill'd his eye,
 Pray'd God to bless the Duchess long,
 And all who cheer'd a son of song. 10
 The attending maidens smiled to see
 How long, how deep, how zealously,
 The precious juice the Minstrel quaff'd;
 And he, embolden'd by the draught,
 Look'd gaily back to them, and laugh'd. 15
 The cordial nectar of the bowl
 Swell'd his old veins, and cheer'd his soul;
 A lighter, livelier prelude ran,
 Ere thus his tale again began.

CANTO THIRD

I

And said I that my limbs were old,
 And said I that my blood was cold,
 And that my kindly fire was fled,
 And my poor wither'd heart was dead,
 5 And that I might not sing of love?—
 How could I to the dearest theme,
 That ever warm'd a minstrel's dream,
 So foul, so false a recreant prove!
 How could I name Love's very name,
 10 Nor wake my heart to notes of flame!

II

In peace, Love tunes the shepherd's reed;
 In war, he mounts the warrior's steed;
 In halls, in gay attire is seen;
 In hamlets, dances on the green.
 5 Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
 And men below, and saints above;
 For love is heaven, and heaven is love.

III

So thought Lord Cranstoun, as I ween,
 While, pondering deep the tender scene,
 He rode through Branksome's hawthorn green.

But the page shouted wild and shrill—
 And scarce his helmet could he don, 5
 When downward from the shady hill
 A stately knight came pricking on.
 That warrior's steed, so dapple-grey,
 Was dark with sweat, and splashed with clay;
 His armour red with many a stain: 10
 He seem'd in such a weary plight,
 As if he had ridden the livelong night:
 For it was William of Deloraine.

IV

But no whit weary did he seem,
 When, dancing in the sunny beam,
 He mark'd the crane on the Baron's crest,
 For his ready spear was in his rest.
 Few were the words, and stern and high, 5
 That mark'd the foeman's feudal hate;
 For question fierce, and proud reply,
 Gave signal soon of dire debate.
 Their very coursers seem'd to know
 That each was other's mortal foe, 10
 And snorted fire, when wheel'd around,
 To give each knight his vantage-ground.

V

In rapid round the Baron bent:
 He sigh'd a sigh, and pray'd a prayer;
 The prayer was to his patron saint,
 The sigh was to his ladye fair.

5 Stout Deloraine nor sigh'd nor pray'd,
 Nor saint, nor ladye, call'd to aid;
 But he stoop'd his head, and couch'd his spear,
 And spurred his steed to full career.
 The meeting of these champions proud
 10 Seem'd like the bursting thunder-cloud.

VI

Stern was the dint the Borderer lent!
 The stately Baron backwards bent;
 Bent backwards to his horse's tail,
 And his plumes went scattering on the gale;
 5 The tough ash spear, so stout and true,
 Into a thousand flinders flew.
 But Cranstoun's lance, of more avail,
 Pierced through, like silk, the Borderer's mail;
 Through shield, and jack, and acton, past,
 10 Deep in his bosom broke at last.—
 Still sate the warrior, saddle-fast,
 Till, stumbling in the mortal shock,
 Down went the steed, the girthing broke,
 Hurl'd on a heap lay man and horse.
 15 The Baron onward pass'd his course;
 Nor knew—so giddy roll'd his brain—
 His foe lay stretched upon the plain.

VII

But when he rein'd his courser round,
 And saw his foeman on the ground
 Lie senseless as the bloody clay,

He bade his page to stanch the wound,
 And there beside the warrior stay, 5
 And tend him in his doubtful state,
 And lead him to Branksome castle-gate:
 His noble mind was inly moved
 For the kinsman of the maid he loved.
 "This shalt thou do without delay: 10
 No longer here myself may stay;
 Unless the swifter I speed away,
 Short shrift will be at my dying day."

VIII

Away in speed Lord Cranstoun rode; 7
 The Goblin-Page behind abode;
 His lord's command he ne'er withstood,
 Though small his pleasure to do good.
 As the corslet off he took, 5
 The Dwarf espied the Mighty Book!
 Much he marvell'd a knight of pride,
 Like a book-bosom'd priest should ride:
 He thought not to search or stanch the wound
 Until the secret he had found. 10

IX

The iron band, the iron clasp,
 Resisted long the elfin grasp:
 For when the first he had undone,
 It closed as he the next begun.
 Those iron clasps, that iron band, 5
 Would not yield to unchristen'd hand,

Till he smear'd the cover o'er
 With the Borderer's curdled gore;
 A moment then the volume spread,
 10 And one short spell therein he read.
 It had much of glamour might,
 Could make a ladye seem a knight;
 The cobwebs on a dungeon wall
 Seem tapestry in lordly hall;
 15 A nut-shell seem a gilded barge,
 A sheeling seem a palace large,
 And youth seem age, and age seem youth—
 All was delusion, nought was truth.

X

He had not read another spell,
 When on his cheek a buffet fell,
 So fierce it stretch'd him on the plain,
 Beside the wounded Deloraine.
 5 From the ground he rose dismay'd,
 And shook his huge and matted head;
 One word he mutter'd and no more,
 "Man of age, thou smitest sore!"
 No more the Elfin Page durst try
 10 Into the wondrous Book to pry;
 The clasps, though smear'd with Christian gore,
 Shut faster than they were before.
 He hid it underneath his cloak.—
 Now, if you ask who gave the stroke,
 15 I cannot tell, so mot I thrive;
 It was not given by man alive.

*Cranstoun
goes away*

XI

Unwillingly himself he address'd
 To do his master's high behest:
 He lifted up the living corse,
 And laid it on the weary horse;
 He led him into Branksome Hall, 5
 Before the beards of the warders all;
 And each did after swear and say,
 There only pass'd a wain of hay.
 He took him to Lord David's tower,
 Even to the Lady's secret bower; 10
 And, but that stronger spells were spread,
 And the door might not be opened,
 He had laid him on her very bed.
 Whate'er he did of gramarye,
 Was always done maliciously; 15
 He flung the warrior on the ground,
 And the blood well'd freshly from the wound.

XII

As he repass'd the outer court,
 He spied the fair young child at sport:
 He thought to train him to the wood;
 For, at a word, be it understood,
 He was always for ill, and never for good. 5
 Seem'd to the boy, some comrade gay
 Led him forth to the woods to play;
 On the drawbridge the warders stout
 Saw a terrier and lurcher passing out.

XIII

He led the boy o'er bank and fell,
 Until they came to the woodland brook;
 The running stream dissolved the spell,
 And his own elfish shape he took.
 5 Could he have had his pleasure vilde,
 He had crippled the joints of the noble child;
 Or, with his fingers long and lean,
 Had strangled him in fiendish spleen:
 But his awful mother he had in dread,
 10 And also his power was limited;
 So he but scowl'd on the startled child,
 And darted through the forest wild;
 The woodland brook he bounding cross'd,
 And laugh'd, and shouted, "Lost! lost! lost!"—

XIV

Full sore amaz'd at the wondrous change,
 And frighten'd as a child might be,
 At the wild yell and visage strange,
 And the dark words of gramarye,
 5 The child, amidst the forest bower,
 Stood rooted like a lily flower;
 And when at length, with trembling pace,
 He sought to find where Branksome lay,
 He fear'd to see that grisly face
 10 Glare from some thicket on his way.
 Thus, starting oft, he journey'd on,
 And deeper in the wood is gone,—

For aye the more he sought his way,
The farther still he went astray,—
Until he heard the mountains round
Ring to the baying of a hound.

15

XV

And hark! and hark! the deep-mouth'd
bark

Comes nigher still, and nigher;
Bursts on the path a dark blood-hound,
His tawny muzzle track'd the ground,
And his red eye shot fire.

5

Soon as the wilder'd child saw he,
He flew at him right furiouslie.
I ween you would have seen with joy
The bearing of the gallant boy,
When, worthy of his noble sire,

10

His wet cheek glow'd 'twixt fear and ire!
He faced the blood-hound manfully,
And held his little bat on high;
So fierce he struck, the dog, afraid,
At cautious distance hoarsely bay'd,

15

But still in act to spring;
When dash'd an archer through the glade,
And when he saw the hound was stay'd,

He drew his tough bow-string;
But a rough voice cried, "Shoot not, hoy!
Ho! shoot not, Edward—'Tis a boy!"

20

Nay, shot by hunter.

XVI

The speaker issued from the wood,
And check'd his fellow's surly mood,
And quell'd the ban-dog's ire:
He was an English yeoman good,
And born in Lancashire.

Well could he hit a fallow deer
Five hundred feet him fro;
With hand more true and eye more clear,
No archer bended bow.

His coal-black hair, shorn round and close,
Set off his sun-burn'd face;

Old England's sign, St. George's cross,
His barret-cap did grace;

His bugle-horn hung by his side,
All in a wolf-skin baldric tied;
And his short falchion, sharp and clear,
Had pierced the throat of many a deer.

Description of Hunter.

5

10

15

XVII

His kirtle, made of forest green,

Reached scantily to his knee;

And, at his belt, of arrows keen

A furbish'd sheaf bore he;

His buckler scarce in breadth a span,

No larger fence had he;

He never counted him a man,

Would strike below the knee:

His slacken'd bow was in his hand,

And the leash, that was his blood-hound's band.

10

XVIII

He would not do the fair child harm,
 But held him with his powerful arm,
 That he might neither fight nor flee;
 For when the Red-Cross spied he,
 The boy strove long and violently. 5
 "Now, by St. George," the archer cries,
 "Edward, methinks we have a prize!
 This boy's fair face, and courage free,
 Show he is come of high degree."—

XIX

"Yes! I am come of high degree,
 For I am the heir of bold Buccleuch;
 And, if thou dost not set me free,
 False Southron, thou shalt dearly rue!
 For Walter of Harden shall come with speed, 5
 And William of Deloraine, good at need,
 And every Scott, from Esk to Tweed;
 And, if thou dost not let me go,
 Despite thy arrows, and thy bow,
 I'll have thee hang'd to feed the crow!" 10

XX

"Gramercy, for thy good will, fair boy!
 My mind was never set so high;
 But if thou art chief of such a clan,
 And art the son of such a man,
 And ever comest to thy command, 5
 Our wardens had need to keep good order;

My bow of yew to a hazel wand,
 Thou'lt make them work upon the Border.
 Meantime, be pleased to come with me,
 For good Lord Dacre shalt thou see;
 I think our work is well begun,
 When we have taken thy father's son."

XXI

Although the child was led away,
 In Branksome still he seem'd to stay,
 For so the Dwarf his part did play;
 And, in the shape of that young boy,
 He wrought the castle much annoy. 5
 The comrades of the young Buccleuch
 He pinch'd, and beat, and overthrew;
 Nay, some of them he wellnigh slew.
 He tore Dame Maudlin's silken tire,
 And, as Sym Hall stood by the fire, 10
 He lighted the match of his bandelier,
 And wofully scorch'd the hackbuteer.
 It may be hardly thought or said,
 The mischief that the urchin made,
 Till many of the castle guess'd, 15
 That the young Baron was possess'd!

XXII

Well I ween the charm he held
 The noble Ladye had soon dispell'd;
 But she was deeply busied then
 To tend the wounded Deloraine.

The Child

The Hunter

Dwarf goes to castle in shape of boy

Much she wonder'd to find him lie,
 On the stone threshold stretch'd along;
 She thought some spirit of the sky
 Had done the bold moss-trooper wrong;
 Because, despite her precept dread,
 Perchance he in the Book had read;
 But the broken lance in his bosom stood,
 And it was earthly steel and wood.

XXIII

She drew the splinter from the wound,
 And with a charm she stanch'd the blood;
 She bade the gash be cleansed and bound;
 No longer by his couch she stood;
 But she has ta'en the broken lance,
 And wash'd it from the clotted gore,
 And salv'd the splinter o'er and o'er.
 William of Deloraine, in trance,
 Whene'er she turn'd it round and round,
 Twisted as if she gall'd his wound.
 Then to her maidens she did say,
 That he should be whole man and sound,
 Within the course of a night and day.
 Full long she toil'd; for she did rue
 Mishap to friend so stout and true.

XXIV

So pass'd the day—the evening fell,
 'Twas near the time of curfew bell;
 The air was mild, the wind was calm,

The stream was smooth, the dew was balm;
 E'en the rude watchman, on the tower,
 Enjoy'd and bless'd the lovely hour.
 Far more fair Margaret loved and bless'd
 The hour of silence and of rest.
 On the high turret sitting lone,
 She waked at times the lute's soft tone;
 Touch'd a wild note, and all between
 Thought of the bower of hawthorns green.
 Her golden hair stream'd free from band,
 Her fair cheek rested on her hand,
 Her blue eyes sought the west afar,
 For lovers love the western star.

XXV

Is yon the star, o'er Penchryst Pen,
 That rises slowly to her ken,
 And spreading broad its wavering light,
 Shakes its loose tresses on the night?
 Is yon red glare the western star?—
 Oh! 'tis the beacon-blaze of war!
 Scarce could she draw her tighten'd breath,
 For well she knew the fire of death!

XXVI

The Warder view'd it blazing strong,
 And blew his war-note loud and long,
 Till, at the high and haughty sound,
 Rock, wood, and river, rung around.
 The blast alarm'd the festal hall,
 And startled forth the warriors all;

Far downward in the castle-yard,
 Full many a torch and cresset glared;
 And helms and plumes, confusedly toss'd,
 Were in the blaze half-seen, half-lost; 10
 And spears in wild disorder shook,
 Like reeds beside a frozen brook.

XXVII

The Seneschal, whose silver hair
 Was redden'd by the torches' glare,
 Stood in the midst, with gesture proud,
 And issued forth his mandates loud:—
 "On Penchryst glows a bale of fire, 5
 And three are kindling on Priestthaughswire:
 Ride out, ride out,
 The foe to scout!
 Mount, mount for Branksome, every man!
 Thou, Todrig, warn the Johnstone clan, 10
 That ever are true and stout—
 Ye need not send to Liddesdale;
 For, when they see the blazing bale,
 Elliots and Armstrongs never fail.—
 Ride, Alton, ride, for death and life! 15
 And warn the Warder of the strife.—
 Young Gilbert, let our beacon blaze,
 Our kin, and clan, and friends, to raise."

XXVIII

Fair Margaret, from the turret head,
 Heard, far below, the coursers' tread,

While loud the harness rung,
 As to their seats, with clamour dread,
 5 The ready horsemen sprung:
 And trampling hoofs, and iron coats,
 And leaders' voices, mingled notes,
 And out! and out!
 In hasty rout,
 10 The horsemen gallop'd forth;
 Dispersing to the south to scout,
 And east, and west, and north,
 To view their coming enemies,
 And warn their vassals and allies.

XXIX

The ready page, with hurried hand,
 Awaked the need-fire's slumbering brand,
 And ruddy blush'd the heaven:
 For a sheet of flame, from the turret high,
 5 Waved like a blood-flag on the sky,
 All flaring and uneven;
 And soon a score of fires, I ween,
 From height, and hill, and cliff, were seen;
 Each with war-like tidings fraught;
 10 Each from each the signal caught;
 Each after each they glanced to sight,
 As stars arise upon the night,
 They gleam'd on many a dusky tarn,
 Haunted by the lonely earn;
 15 On many a cairn's grey pyramid,
 Where urns of mighty chiefs lie hid;

*Seneschal sending men out
 to ride*

Till high Dunedin the blazes saw,
 From Soltra and Dumpender Law;
 And Lothian heard the Regent's order,
 That all should bowne them for the Border. 20

XXX ✓

The livelong night in Branksome rang
 The ceaseless sound of steel;
 The castle-bell, with backward clang,
 Sent forth the larum peal;
 Was frequent heard the heavy jar, 5
 Where massy stone and iron bar
 Were piled on echoing keep and tower,
 To whelm the foe with deadly shower;
 Was frequent heard the changing guard, 10
 And watch-word from the sleepless ward;
 While, wearied by the endless din,
 Blood-hound and ban-dog yell'd within.

XXXI

The noble Dame, amid the broil,
 Shared the grey Seneschal's high toil,
 And spoke of danger with a smile;
 Cheer'd the young knights, and council sage
 Held with the chiefs of riper age. 5
 No tidings of the foe were brought,
 Nor of his numbers knew they aught,
 Nor what in time of truce he sought.
 Some said, that there were thousands ten;
 And others ween'd that it was nought 10

But Leven Clans, or Tynedale men,
 Who came to gather in black mail;
 And Liddesdale, with small avail,
 Might drive them lightly back agen.
 15 So pass'd the anxious night away,
 And welcome was the peep of day.

(Interlude)

Ceased the high sound—the listening throng
 Applaud the Master of the Song;
 And marvel much, in helpless age,
 So hard should be his pilgrimage. 5
 Had he no friend—no daughter dear,
 His wandering toil to share and cheer;
 No son to be his father's stay,
 And guide him on the rugged way?
 “Ay, once he had—but he was dead!”—
 10 Upon the harp he stoop'd his head,
 And busied himself the strings withal,
 To hide the tear that fain would fall.
 In solemn measure, soft and slow,
 Arose a father's notes of woe.