

James Hogg (1770-1835)

2 *Earl Walter*

The Twelfth Bard's Song from "the Queen's Wake"

"What makes Earl Walter pace the wood
In the wan light of the moon?
Why altered is Earl Walter's mood
So strangely, and so soon?" —

"It is his lot to fight a knight 5
Whom man could never tame,
To-morrow, in his sovereign's sight,
Or bear perpetual shame." —

"Go warn the Clyde, go warn the Ayr, 10
Go warn them suddenly,
If none will fight for Earl Walter,
Some one may fight for me." —

"Now hold your tongue, my daughter dear, 15
Now hold your tongue for shame!
For never shall my son Walter
Disgrace his father's name.

"Shall ladies tell, and minstrels sing, 20
How lord of Scottish blood
By proxy fought before his king
No, never! by the rood!" —

Earl Walter rose ere it was day,
For battle made him boun';
Earl Walter mounted his bonny gray,
And rode to Stirling town.

Old Hamilton from the tower came down, 25
“Go saddle a steed for me,
And I’ll away to Stirling town,
This deadly bout to see.

“Mine eye is dim, my locks are gray,
My cheek is furred and wan; 30
Ah, me! but I have seen the day
I feared not single man!

“Bring me my steed,” said Hamilton;
“Darcie his vaunts may rue;
Whoever slays my only son 35
Must fight the father too.

“Whoever fights my noble son
May foin the best he can;
Whoever braves Wat Hamilton,
Shall know he braves a man.” — 40

And there was riding in belt and brand,
And running o’er holt and lea;
For all the lords of fair Scotland
Came there the fight to see.

And squire, and groom, and baron bold, 45
Trooping in thousands came,
And many a hind, and warrior old,
And many a lovely dame.

When good Earl Walter rode the ring,
Upon his mettled gray, 50
There was none so ready as our good king
To bid that earl good day.

For one so gallant and so young,
Oh! many a heart beat high;

And no fair eye in all the throng, 55
Nor rosy cheek, was dry.

But up then spoke the king's daughter,
Fair Margaret was her name —
"If we should lose brave Earl Walter,
My sire is sore to blame. 60

"Forbid the fight, my liege, I pray,
Upon my bended knee." —
"Daughter, I'm loath to say you nay;
It cannot, must not be." —

"Proclaim it round," the princess cried, 65
"Proclaim it suddenly;
If none will fight for Earl Walter,
Some one may fight for me.

"In Douglas-dale I have a tower, 70
With many a holm and hill,
I'll give them all, and ten times more,
To him will Darcie kill." —

But up then spoke old Hamilton,
And doffed his bonnet blue;
In his sunk eye the tear-drop shone, 75
And his gray locks o'er it flew: —

"Cease, cease, thou lovely royal maid,
Small cause hast thou for pain;
Wat Hamilton shall have no aid
'Gainst lord of France or Spain. 80

"I love my boy; but should he fly,
Or other for him fight,
Heaven grant that first his parent's eye
May set in endless night!" —

Young Margaret blushed, her weeping staid, 85
 And quietly looked on:
Now Margaret was the fairest maid
 On whom the daylight shone.

Her eye was like the star of love
 That blinks across the evening dun; 90
The locks that waved that eye above,
 Like light clouds curling round the sun.

When Darcie entered in the ring,
 A shudder round the circle flew:
Like men who from a serpent spring, 95
 They startled at the view.

His look so fierce, his crest so high,
 His belts and bands of gold,
And the glances of his charger's eye
 Were dreadful to behold. 100

But when he saw Earl Walter's face,
 So rosy and so young,
He frowned, and sneered with haughty grace,
 And round disdainful flung.

“What! dost thou turn my skill to sport, 105
 And break thy jests on me?
Think'st thou I sought the Scottish court
 To play with boys like thee?

“Fond youth, go home and learn to ride;
 For pity get thee gone; 110
Tilt with the girls and boys of Clyde,
 And boast of what thou'st done.

“If Darcie's spear but touch thy breast,

It flies thy body through;
If Darcie's sword come o'er thy crest, 115
It cleaves thy head in two."

"I came not here to vaunt, Darcie;
I came not here to scold;
It ill befits a knight like thee
Such proud discourse to hold. 120

"To-morrow boast, amid the throng,
Of deeds which thou hast done;
To-day restrain thy saucy tongue;
Rude blusterer, come on!"

Rip went the spurs in either steed, 125
To different posts they sprung;
Quivered each spear o'er charger's head;
Forward each warrior hung.

The horn blew once — the horn blew twice —
Oh! many a heart beat high! 130
'Twas silence all! — the horn blew thrice —
Dazzled was every eye.

Hast thou not seen, from heaven, in ire,
The eagle swift descend?
Hast thou not seen the sheeted fire 135
The lowering darkness rend?

Not faster glides the eagle gray
Adown the yielding wind;
Not faster bears the bolt away,
Leaving the storm behind; 140

Than flew the warriors on their way,
With full suspended breath;
Than flew the warriors on their way

Across the field of death.

So fierce the shock, so loud the clang, 145
The gleams of fire were seen;
The rocks and towers of Stirling rang,
And the red blood fell between.

Earl Walter's gray was borne aside,
Lord Darcie's black held on. 150
"Oh! ever alack," fair Margaret cried,
"The brave Earl Walter's gone!"
"Oh! ever alack," the king replied,
"That ever the deed was done!"

Earl Walter's broken corslet doffed, 155
He turned with lightened eye;
His glancing spear he raised aloft,
And seemed to threat the sky.

Lord Darcie's spear aimed at his breast,
He parried dext'rously; 160
Then caught him rudely by the wrist,
Saying, "Warrior, come with me!"

Lord Darcie drew, Lord Darcie threw,
But threw and drew in vain;
Lord Darcie drew, Lord Darcie threw, 165
And spurred his black amain.

Down came Lord Darcie; casque and brand
Loud rattled on the clay;
Down came Earl Walter; hand in hand,
And head to head they lay. 170

Lord Darcie's steed turned to his lord,
And trembling stood behind;
But off Earl Walter's dapple scoured

Far fleeter than the wind;
Nor stop, nor stay, nor gate, nor ford, 175
Could make her look behind.

O'er holt, o'er hill, o'er slope and slack,
She sought her native stall;
She liked not Darcie's doughty black,
Nor Darcie's spear at all. 180

"Even go thy ways," Earl Walter cried,
"Since better may not be:
I'll trust my life with weapon tried,
But never again with thee.

"Rise up, Lord Darcie, sey thy brand, 185
And fling thy mail away;
For foot to foot, and hand to hand,
We'll now decide the day."

So said, so done: their helms they flung,
Their doublets linked and sheen; 190
And hauberk, armlet, cuirass, rung
Promiscuous on the green.

"Now, Darcie! now thy dreaded name,
That oft has chilled a foe,
Thy hard-earned honours, and thy fame, 195
Depend on every blow.

"Sharp be thine eye, and firm thy hand;
Thy heart unmoved remain;
For never was the Scottish brand
Upreared and reared in vain." — 200

"Now do thy best, young Hamilton,
Rewarded shalt thou be;
Thy king, thy country, and thy kin,

Lord Darcie's sword he forced a-hight,
And tripped him on the plain.
"O, ever alack," then cried the knight, 235
"I ne'er shall rise again!"

When good Earl Walter saw he grew
So pale and lay so low,
Away his brace of swords he threw,
And raised his fainting foe. 240

Then rang the list with shouts of joy,
Loud and more loud they grew,
And many a bonnet to the sky
And many a coif they threw.

The tear stood in the father's eye, — 245
He wiped his aged brow: —
"Give me thy hand, my gallant boy!
I knew thee not till now.

"My liege, my king, this is my son
Whom I present to thee; 250
Nor would I change Wat Hamilton
For all the lads I see!"

"Welcome, my friend and warrior old!
This gallant son of thine
Is much too good for baron bold, 255
He must be son of mine!

"For he shall wed my daughter dear,
The flower of fair Scotland;
The badge of honour he shall wear,
And sit at my right hand. 260

"And he shall have the lands of Kyle,

And royal bounds of Clyde;
And he shall have all Arran's Isle
To dower his royal bride."

The princess smiled, and sore was flushed, 265
O, but her heart was fain!
And aye her cheek of beauty blushed,
Like rose-bud in the rain.

From this the Hamiltons of Clyde 270
Their royal lineage draw;
And thus was won the fairest bride
That Scotland ever saw!

1813

(From *The Works of the Ettrick Shepherd*. With Memoir of
the Author by the Rev. Thomas Thomson. London: Blackie
& Son, 1876)