

Robert Lambe (1712-95)

1 *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heughs*

- 1 The king is gone from Bambrough castle,  
Long may the princess mourn;  
Long may she stand on the castle wall,  
Looking for his return.
- 2 She has knotted the keys upon a string, 5  
And with her she has them taen,  
She has cast them oer her left shoulder,  
And to the gate she is gane.
- 3 She tripped out, she tripped in,  
She tript into the yard; 10  
But it was more for the king's sake,  
Than for the queen's regard.
- 4 It fell out on a day the king  
Brought the queen with him home,  
And all the lords in our country 15  
To welcome them did come.
- 5 'O welcome, father,' the lady cries,  
'Unto your halls and bowers;  
And so are you, my stepmother,  
For all that is here is yours.' 20
- 6 A lord said, wondering while she spake,  
This princess of the North  
Surpasses all of female kind  
In beauty and in worth.
- 7 The envious queen replied: At least, 25  
You might have excepted me;  
In a few hours I will her bring  
Down to a low degree.

- 8 I will her liken to a laidley worm,  
That warps about the stone, 30  
And not till Childy Wynd comes back  
Shall she again be won.
- 9 The princess stood at the bower door,  
Laughing, who could her blame?  
But eer the next day's sun went down, 35  
A long worm she became.
- 10 For seven miles east, and seven miles west,  
And seven miles north and south,  
No blade of grass or corn could grow,  
So venomous was her mouth. 40
- 11 The milk of seven stately cows —  
It was costly her to keep —  
Was brought her daily, which she drank  
Before she went to sleep.
- 12 At this day may be seen the cave 45  
Which held her folded up,  
And the stone trough, the very same  
Out of which she did sup.
- 13 Word went east, and word went west,  
And word is gone over the sea, 50  
That a laidley worm in Spindleston Heughs  
Would ruin the north country.
- 14 Word went east, word went west,  
And over the sea did go;  
The Child of Wynd got wit of it, 55  
Which filled his heart with woe.
- 15 He called straight his merry men all,  
They thirty were and three:  
'I wish I were at Spindleston,  
This desperate worm to see. 60
- 16 'We have no time now here to waste,

Hence quickly let us sail;  
My only sister Margaret,  
Something, I fear, doth ail.'

- 17 They built a ship without delay, 65  
With masts of the rown tree,  
With fluttering sails of silk so fine,  
And set her on the sea.
- 18 They went aboard; the wind with speed 70  
Blew them along the deep;  
At length they spied an huge square tower,  
On a rock high and steep.
- 19 The sea was smooth, the weather clear;  
When they approached nigher,  
King Ida's castle they well knew, 75  
And the banks of Bambroughshire.
- 20 The queen looked out at her bower-window,  
To see what she could see;  
There she espied a gallant ship,  
Sailing upon the sea. 80
- 21 When she beheld the silken sails,  
Full glancing in the sun,  
To sink the ship she sent away  
Her witch-wives every one.
- 22 Their spells were vain; the hags returned 85  
To the queen in sorrowful mood,  
Crying that witches have no power  
Where there is rown-tree wood.
- 23 Her last effort, she sent a boat, 90  
Which in the haven lay,  
With armed men to board the ship,  
But they were driven away.
- 24 The worm leapt up, the worm leapt down,  
She plaited round the stane;

- And ay as the ship came to the land 95  
She banged it off again.
- 25 The Child then ran out of her reach  
The ship on Budle sand,  
And jumping into the shallow sea,  
Securely got to land. 100
- 26 And now he drew his berry-brown sword,  
And laid it on her head,  
And swore, if she did harm to him,  
That he would strike her dead.
- 27 'O quit thy sword, and bend thy bow, 105  
And give me kisses three;  
For though I am a poisonous worm,  
No hurt I will do to thee.
- 28 'O quit thy sword, and bend thy bow,  
And give me kisses three; 110  
If I am not won eer the sun go down,  
Won I shall never be.'
- 29 He quitted his sword, he bent his bow,  
He gave her kisses three;  
She crept into a hole a worm, 115  
But stept out a lady.
- 30 No cloathing had this lady fine,  
To keep her from the cold;  
He took his mantle from him about,  
And round her did it fold. 120
- 31 He has taken his mantle from him about,  
And it he wrapt her in,  
And they are up to Bambrough castle,  
As fast as they can win.
- 32 His absence and her serpent shape 125  
The king had long deplored;  
He now rejoiced to see them both

Again to him restored.

- 33 The queen they wanted, whom they found  
All pale, and sore afraid, 130  
Because she knew her power must yield  
To Childy Wynd's, who said:
- 34 'Woe be to thee, thou wicked witch,  
An ill death mayest thou dee;  
As thou my sister hast likened, 135  
So likened shalt thou be.
- 35 'I will turn you into a toad,  
That on the ground doth wend,  
And won, won shalt thou never be,  
Till this world hath an end.' 140
- 36 Now on the sand near Ida's tower,  
She crawls a loathsome toad,  
And venom spits on every maid  
She meets upon her road.
- 37 The virgins all of Bambrough town 145  
Will swear that they have seen  
This spiteful toad, of monstrous size,  
Whilst walking they have been.
- 38 All folks believe within the shire  
This story to be true, 150  
And they all run to Spindleston,  
The cave and trough to view.
- 39 This fact now Duncan Frasier,  
Of Cheviot, sings in rhyme,  
Lest Bambroughshire men should forget 155  
Some part of it in time.

[From Francis James Child, ed. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. 1: 312-13 (Appendix to "Kemp Owyne")]