

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,
Which in the haven lay, 90
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
She banged it off again. 95
- 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")]