

George Walter Thornbury (1828-76)

3 *Old Sir Walter*

A Story of 1734.

Stout Sir Walter was old but hearty:
A velvet cap on his long grey hair,
A full white rose at his gold-laced button:
Many were laughing, but none looked gayer.

Such a beast was his jet black hunter, 5
Silver-spotted with foam and froth,
Brawny in flank and fiery-blooded,
Stung by the spur to a curbless wrath!

Gaily blowing his horn, he scrambled
Over the stone wall four feet two; 10
See saw over the old park railing,
Shaking the thistle-head rich with dew.

A long black face the sour Whig huntsman
Pulled, when he saw Sir Walter come
Trotting up gay by the oak wood cover. 15
Why when he cheered did they all sit dumb?

Why when he flung up his hat and shouted,
“God save King George!” they bawling cried,
As a Justice, drawing a long-sealed parchment,
Rode up grim to Sir Walter’s side. 20

“In King George’s name, arrest him, lieges!
This is the villain who fought at Boyne:
He sliced the feather from off my beaver,
And ran his sword twice into my groin.”

Then out whipp’d blades: the horns they sounded, 25
The field came flocking in thick and fast,
But Sir Walter flogged at the barking rabble,
And through them all like a whirlwind pass’d.

“A hundred guineas to seize the traitor!”
Cried the Justice, purple and white with rage, 30
Then such a spurring, whipping, and flogging,
Was never seen in the strangest age.

The hunter whipped off Spot and Fowler,
Viper and Fury, and all the pack,
And set them fast, with their red tongues lolling 35
And white teeth fix’d, on Sir Walter’s track.

Loud on the wind came blast of bugle,
All together the hounds gave tongue,
They swept like a hail-storm down by the gibbet,
Where the black rags still in the cold storm hung. 40

The rain cut faces like long whip lashes,
The wind blew strong in its wayward will,
And powdering fast, the men and horses
Thundering swept down Frampton Hill.

There half the grooms at last pull’d bridle, 45
Swearing ’twould ruin their bits of blood;
Three Whig rogues flew out of the saddle,
And two were plumped in the river mud.

Three men stuck to the leading rebel;
The first was a Whig lord, fat and red, 50
The next a yellow-faced lean attorney,
And the last a Justice, as some one said.

Slap at the fence went old Sir Walter,
Slap at the ditch by the pollard-tree,
Crash through the hazels, over the water, 55
And wherever he went, there went the three.

Into the hill-fence broke Sir Walter,
Right through the tangle of branch and thorns,
Swish’d the rasper up by the windmill,
In spite of the cries and blowing of horns. 60

Lines of flames trailed all the scarlet
Streaming, the dogs half a mile before,
Whoop! with a cry all after Sir Walter,
Driving wildly along the shore.

Over the timber flew old Sir Walter, 65
Light as a swallow, sure and swift,
For his sturdy arm his “pull and hustle”
Could help a nag at the deadest lift.

Off went his gold-laced hat and bugle,
His scarlet cloak he then let fall, 70
And into the river spurr’d old Sir Walter,
Boldly there, in the sight of all.

There was many a sore on back and wither,
Many a spur that ran with red,
But none of them caught the stout Sir Walter, 75
Though they counted of horses sixty head.

There was many a fetlock cut and wounded,
Many a hock deep lam’d with thorns,
Many a man that two years after
Shuddered to hear the sound of horns. 80

But on the fallow, the long clay fallow,
Foundered his black mare, Lilly Lee,
And Sir Walter sat on the tough old saddle,
Waiting the coming of all the three.

Never such chase of stag or vermin, 85
Along the park pale, in and out;
On they thundered, fast over the railing,
Driving the fence in splints about.

The first he shot with his long steel pistol,
The second he slew with his Irish sword, 90
The third he threw in the brook, and mounted
Quick on the steed of the fat Whig lord.

Then off to the ship at the nearest harbour,

Gallop'd Sir Walter, sure and fleet.
He died, 'tis true, in an old French garret, 95
But his heart went true to the latest beat.
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A white rose, stifled and very sickly,
Pined for air at the window-sill,
But the last fond look of the brave old trooper
Was fixed on the dying emblem — still, 100

All alone in the dusky garret,
He turn'd to the flower with a father's pride,
“God save King James!” the old man murmured,
“God — save — the — King!” he moaned and died.

1857

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