

Lady Elizabeth Wardlaw (1677-1727)

1 *Hardyknute*

I.

Stately stept he east the wa',  
And stately stept he west,  
Full seventy years he now had seen,  
Wi' scarce seven years of rest.  
He liv'd when Britons breach of faith 5  
Wrought Scotland mickle wae:  
And ay his sword tauld to their cost,  
He was their deadlye fae.

II.

High on a hill his castle stood,  
With ha's and tow'rs a height, 10  
And goodly chambers fair to se,  
Where he lodged mony a knight.  
His dame sae peerless anes and fair,  
For chaste and beauty deem'd,  
Nae marrow had in all the land, 15  
Save ELENOR the queen.

III.

Full thirteen sons to him she bare,  
All men of valour stout;  
In bloody fight with sword in hand  
Nine lost their lives bot doubt: 20  
Four yet remain, lang may they live  
To stand by liege and land;  
High was their fame, high was their might,  
And high was their command.

IV.

Great love they bare to FAIRLY fair, 25

Their sister saft and dear,  
 Her girdle shaw'd her middle gimp,  
 And gowden glist her hair.  
 What waefu' wae her beauty bred!  
 Waefu' to young and auld, 30  
 Waefu' I trow to kyth and kin,  
 As story ever tauld.

V.

The king of Norse in summer tyde,  
 Puff'd up with pow'r and might,  
 Landed in fair Scotland the isle 35  
 With mony a hardy knight.  
 The tydings to our good Scots king  
 Came, as he sat at dine,  
 With noble chiefs in brave aray,  
 Drinking the blood-red wine. 40

VI.

'To horse, to horse, my royal liege,  
 Your faes stand on the strand,  
 Full twenty thousand glittering spears  
 The king of Norse commands.'  
 'Bring me my steed Mage dapple gray,' 45  
 Our good king rose and cry'd,  
 A trustier beast in a' the land  
 A Scots king nevir try'd.

VII.

'Go, little page, tell Hardyknute,  
 That lives on hill sae hie, 50  
 To draw his sword, the dread of faes,  
 And haste and follow me.'  
 The little page flew swift as dart  
 Flung by his master's arm,  
 'Come down, come down, lord Hardyknute, 55  
 And rid your king frae harm.'

VIII.

Then red, red grew his dark-brown cheeks,  
Sae did his dark-brown brow;  
His looks grew keen, as they were wont  
In dangers great to do; 60  
He's ta'en a horn as green as g[r]ass,  
And gi'en five sounds sae shill,  
That trees in green wood shook thereat,  
Sae loud rang ilka hill.

IX.

His sons in manly sport and glee, 65  
Had past that summer's morn,  
When low down in a grassy dale,  
They heard their father's horn.  
'That horn,' quo' they, 'ne'er sounds in peace,  
We've other sport to bide.' 70  
And soon they hy'd them up the hill,  
And soon were at his side.

X.

'Late, late yestreen I ween'd in peace  
To end my lengthened life,  
My age might well excuse my arm 75  
Frae manly feats of strife;  
But now that Norse do's proudly boast  
Fair Scotland to inthrall,  
It's ne'er be said of Hardyknute,  
He fear'd to fight or fall. 80

XI.

Robin of Rothsay, bend thy bow,  
Thy arrows shoot sae leel,  
That mony a comely countenance  
They've turnd to deadly pale.  
Brade Thomas, take you but your lance, 85

You need nae weapons mair,  
If you fight wi't as you did anes  
'Gainst Westmoreland's fierce heir.

XII.

And Malcolm, light of foot as stag  
That runs in forest wild, 90  
Get me my thousands three of men  
Well bred to sword and shield:  
Bring me my horse and harnisine  
My blade of mettal clear.  
If faes but ken'd the hand it bare, 95  
They soon had fled for fear.

XIII.

Farewell my dame sae peerless good,  
(And took her by the hand),  
Fairer to me in age you seem,  
Than maids for beauty fam'd. 100  
My youngest son shall here remain  
To guard these stately towers,  
And shut the silver bolt that keeps  
Sae fast your painted bowers.'

XIV.

And first she wet her comely cheiks, 105  
And then her boddice green,  
Her silken cords of twirtle twist,  
Well plett with silver sheen;  
And apron set with mony a dice  
Of needle-wark sae rare, 110  
Wove by nae hand, as ye may guess,  
Save that of Fairly fair.

XV.

And he has ridden o'er muir and moss,  
O'er hills and mony a glen,

When he came to a wounded knight 115  
    Making a heavy mane;  
‘Here maun I lye, here maun I dye,  
    By treacherie’s false guiles;  
Witless I was that e’er ga faith  
    To wicked woman’s smiles.’ 120

XVI.

‘Sir knight, gin you were in my bower,  
    To lean on silken seat,  
My lady’s kindly care you’d prove,  
    Who ne’er knew deadly hate:  
Herself wou’d watch you a’ the day, 125  
    Her maids a dead of night;  
And Fairly fair your heart wou’d chear,  
    As she stands in your sight.

XVII.

Arise young knight, and mount your stead,  
    Full lowns the shynand day: 130  
Choose frae my menzie whom ye please  
    To lead you on the way.’  
With smileless look, and visage wan  
    The wounded knight reply’d,  
‘Kind chieftain, your intent pursue, 135  
    For here I maun abyde.

XVIII.

To me nae after day nor night  
    Can e’er be sweet or fair,  
But soon beneath some draping tree,  
    Cauld death shall end my care.’ 140  
With him nae pleading might prevail;  
    Brave Hardyknute to gain  
With fairest words, and reason strong,  
    Strave courteously in vain.

XIX.

Syne he has gane far hynd out o'er 145  
Lord Chattan's land sae wide;  
That lord a worthy wight was ay,  
When faes his courage sey'd:  
Of Pictish race by mother's side,  
When Picts rul'd Caledon, 150  
Lord Chattan claim'd the princely maid,  
When he sav'd Pictish crown.

XX.

Now with his fierce and stalwart train,  
He reach'd a rising hight,  
Quhair braid encampit on the dale, 155  
Norss menzie lay in sicht.  
'Yonder, my valiant sons and feirs,  
Our raging revers wait  
On the unconquert Scottish sward  
To try with us their fate. 160

XXI.

Make orisons to him that sav'd  
Our sauls upon the rude;  
Syne bravely shaw your veins are fill'd  
With Caledonian blude.'  
Then furth he drew his trusty glave, 165  
While thousands all around  
Drawn frae their sheaths glanc'd in the sun;  
And loud the bougles sound.

XXII.

To joyn his king adoun the hill  
In hast his merch he made, 170  
While, playand pibrochs, minstralls meit  
Afore him stately strade.  
'Thrice welcome, valiant stoup of weir,  
Thy nations shield and pride;

Thy king nae reason has to fear 175  
When thou art by his side.'

XXIII.

When bows were bent and darts were thravn;  
For thrang scarce cou'd they flee;  
The darts clove arrows as they met,  
The arrows dart the tree. 180  
Lang did they rage and fight fu' fierce,  
With little skaith to mon,  
But bloody, bloody was the field,  
Ere that lang day was done.

XXIV.

The king of Scots, that sindle brook'd 185  
The war that look'd like play,  
Drew his braid sword, and brake his bow,  
Sin bows seem'd but delay.  
Quoth noble Rothsay, 'Mine I'll keep,  
I wat it's bled a score.' 190  
'Haste up my merry men,' cry'd the king,  
As he rode on before.

XXV.

The king of Norse he sought to find,  
With him to mense the faught,  
But on his forehead there did light 195  
A sharp unsonsie shaft;  
As he his hand put up to feel  
The wound, an arrow keen,  
O waefu' chance! there pinn'd his hand  
In midst between his een. 200

XXVI.

'Revenge, revenge,' cry'd Rothsay's heir,  
'Your mail-coat sha' na bide  
The strength and sharpness of my dart:'

Then sent it through his side.  
Another arrow well he mark'd, 205  
It pierc'd his neck in twa,  
His hands then quat the silver reins,  
He low as earth did fa'.

XXVII.

'Sair bleids my liege, sair, sair he bleeds!'  
Again wi' might he drew 210  
And gesture dread his sturdy bow,  
Fast the braid arrow flew:  
Wae to the knight he ettled at;  
Lament now, queen Elgreed;  
High dames, too, wail your darling's fall, 215  
His youth and comely meed.

XXVIII.

'Take aff, take aff his costly jupe  
(Of gold well was it twin'd,  
Knit like the fowler's net, through quhilk,  
His steelly harness shin'd) 220  
Take, Norse, that gift frae me, and bid  
Him venge the blood it bears;  
Say, if he face my bended bow,  
He sure nae weapon fears.'

XXIX.

Proud Norse with giant body tall, 225  
Braid shoulders and arms strong,  
Cry'd, 'Where is Hardyknute sae fam'd,  
And fear'd at Britain's throne:  
Tho' Britons tremble at his name,  
I soon shall make him wail, 230  
That e'er my sword was made sae sharp,  
Sae saft his coat of mail.'

XXX.



That brag his stout heart cou'd na bide,  
It lent him youthfu' micht:  
'Tm Hardyknute; this day,' he cry'd, 235  
    'To Scotland's king I heght  
To lay thee low, as horses hoof;  
    My word I mean to keep.'  
Syne with the first stroke e'er he strake,  
    He garr'd his body bleed. 240

XXXI.

Norss' een like gray gosehawk's stair'd wyld,  
    He sigh'd wi' shame and spite;  
'Disgrac'd is now my far-fam'd arm  
    That left thee power to strike:'  
Then ga' his head a blow sae fell, 245  
    It made him doun to stoup,  
As laigh as he to ladies us'd  
    In courtly guise to lout.

XXXII.

Fu' soon he rais'd his bent body,  
    His bow he marvell'd sair, 250  
Sin blows till then on him but darr'd  
    As touch of Fairly fair:  
Norse marvell'd too as sair as he  
    To see his stately look;  
Sae soon as e'er he strake a fae, 255  
    Sae soon his life he took.

XXXIII.

Where like a fire to heather set,  
    Bauld Thomas did advance,  
Ane sturdy fae with look enrag'd  
    Up toward him did prance; 260  
He spurr'd his steid through thickest ranks  
    The hardy youth to quell,  
Wha stood unmov'd at his approach

His fury to repell.

XXXIV.

'That short brown shaft sae meanly trimm'd,                   265  
Looks like poor Scotlands gear,  
But dreadfull seems the rusty point!  
And loud he leugh in jear.  
'Oft Britons blood has dimm'd its shine;  
This point cut short their vaunt:'                                 270  
Syne pierc'd the boasters bearded cheek;  
Nae time he took to taunt.

XXXV.

Short while he in his saddle swang,  
His stirrup was nae stay,  
Sae feeble hang his unbent knee                                 275  
Sure taiken he was fey:  
Swith on the harden't clay he fell,  
Right far was heard the thud:  
But Thomas look't nae as he lay  
All waltering in his blud:   280

XXXVI.

With careless gesture, mind unmov't,  
On rode he north the plain;  
His seem in throng of fiercest strife,  
When winner ay the same:  
Nor yet his heart dames dimplet cheek                         285  
Could mease soft love to bruik,  
Till vengefu' Ann return'd his scorn,  
Then languid grew his luik.

XXXVII.

In thraws of death, with walowit cheik  
All panting on the plain,   290  
The fainting corps of warriours lay,  
Ne're to arise again;

Ne're to return to native land,  
Nae mair with blithsome sounds  
To boast the glories of the day, 295  
And shaw their shining wounds.

XXXVIII.

On Norways coast the widowit dame  
May wash the rocks with tears,  
May lang luik ow'r the shipless seas  
Befor her mate appears. 300  
Cease, Emma, cease to hope in vain;  
Thy lord lyes in the clay;  
The valiant Scots nae revers thole  
To carry life away.

XXXIX.

Here on a lee, where stands a cross 305  
Set up for monument,  
Thousands fu' fierce that summer's day  
Fill'd keen war's black intent.  
Let Scots, while Scots, praise Hardyknute,  
Let Norse the name ay dread, 310  
Ay how he faught, aft how he spar'd,  
Shall latest ages read.

XL.

Now loud and chill blew th' westlin wind,  
Sair beat the heavy shower,  
Mirk grew the night ere Hardyknute 315  
Wan near his stately tower.  
His tow'r that us'd wi' torches blaze  
To shine sae far at night,  
Seem'd now as black as mourning weed,  
Nae marvel sair he sigh'd. 320

XLI.

'There's nae light in my lady's bower,

There's nae light in my ha';  
Nae blink shines round my Fairly fair,  
Nor ward stands on my wa',  
'What bodes it? Robert, Thomas, say;'— 325  
Nae answer fitts their dread.  
'Stand back, my sons, I'll be your guide,'  
But by they past with speed.

XLII.

'As fast I've sped owre Scotland's faes,'—  
There ceas'd his brag of weir, 330  
Sair sham'd to mind ought but his dame,  
And maiden Fairly fair.  
Black fear he felt, but what to fear  
He wist nae yet; wi' dread  
Sair shook his body, sair his limbs, 335  
And a' the warrior fled.

1719

(From Thomas Percy, ed. *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our earlier Poets; Together with Some Few of Later Date*. Vol. 2. With Memoir and Critical Dissertation by the Rev. George Gilfillan. Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1858. A rpt. entire from Percy's last edition of 1794)