

Sawney Ogilvie's Duel with his Wife

(Lyrics by Thomas Whittle, 18th C. From Bell's Rhymes of Northern Bards, 1812)

Good people, give ear to the fatalest duel
That Morpeth e'er saw since it was a town;
Where fire is kindled and has so much fuel,
I wou'd not be he that wou'd quench't for a crown.

Poor Sawney, as canny a North British hallion
As e'er crost the border this million of weeks,
Miscarried and married a Scottish tarpawlin,
That pays his pack-shoulders and will have the breeks.

I pity him still when I think of his kindred—
Lord Ogleby was his near cousin of late;
And if he and somebody else had not hinder'd,
He might have been heir unto all his estate.
His stature was small, and his shape like a monkey,
His beard like a bundle of scallions or leeks;
Right bonny he was, but now he's worn scruntly,
And fully as fit for the horns as the breeks.

It fell on a day, he may it remember,
Tho' others rejoiced, yet so did not he,
When tidings were brought that Lisle did surrender,
It grieves me to think on't, his wife took the gee.
These witches still itches and stretches
commission,
And if they be crossed they are still taking peeks,
And Sawney, poor man, he was out of condition,
And hardly well fit for defending the breeks.

She muttered and moun'g'd, and looked deuced misty,
And Sawney said something as who cou'd forbear?
Then straight she began, and went to it handfisty,
She withered about and dang down all the gear;
The dishes and dublers went flying like fury—
She broke more that day than would mend in two weeks;
And had it been put to a judge or a jury,
They could tell whether deserved the breeks.

But Sawney grew weary, and fain would be civil,
Being auld and unfeary, and fail'd of his strength;
Then she cowp'd him o'er the kail-pot with a kevil,
And there he lay labouring all his long length.
His body was soddy, and sore he was bruised,
'The bark of his shin was all standing in peaks;
No stivat e'er lived was so much misused
As sare as auld Sawney for claiming the breeks.

The noise was so great all the neighbours did hear them,
She made his scalp ring like the clap of a bell;
But never a soul had the mense to come near them,
Tho' he shouted "Murder!" with many a yell.
She laid on whisky-whasky, and held like a steary—
Wight Wallace could hardly have with her kept streaks,
And never gave over until she was weary,
And Sawney was willing to yield her the breeks.

And now she must still be observed like a madam,
She'll cause him to curvet and skip like a frog;
And if he refuses, she's ready to scud him;
Deuce take such a life, it wou'd weary a dog.
Ere I were so served, I wou'd see the deil take her.
I hate both the name and the nature of sneaks,
But if she were mine I wou'd clearly forsake her,
And let her make a kirk and a mill of the breeks.