

The Song of Ladye Bessiye

As printed in Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript. Ballads and Romances, ed. J.W. Hales and F.J. Furnivall, 3 vols. (London, 1868), III, pp. 319-363. Electronic text prepared by Roberta Lamaere.

(Please note that this is a work in progress; these documents have been converted but not checked, and need to be labeled with citation data and acknowledgements. Students especially are cautioned that this is not a definitive electronic edition.)

Marginal Notes

The marginal notes to the Hales and Furnivall edition are listed below according to stanza and line, or lines, to which they correspond in the text.

Stanza 1: l.1 – God save; ll.3-4 – the King and the Commons!

Stanza 2: ll.5-6 – In Richard III.'s time

Stanza 3: ll.9-12 – the Stanleys were the greatest lords in England;

Stanza 4: ll.13-14 – and when lady Bessye

Stanza 5: ll.19-20 – was staying in London with Lord Derby,

Stanza 6: ll.23-24 – she complained to him against her uncle, King Richard:

Stanza 7: ll.27-28 – “He drowned my brothers

Stanza 8: l.29 – in a pipe of wine; ll.31-32 – and wanted to put away his Queen and lie with me.

Stanza 9: ll.35-36 – You too may meet with Buckingham's fate.

Stanza 11: l.41 – Help, too; ll.43-44 – Richmond, who is exiled.

Stanza 12: ll.46-48 – I love him. Think how my father, King Edward, on his deathbed, left me

Stanza 13: l.51 – to your care,

Stanza 14: l.54 – as he knew that you could make me Queen.

Stanza 15: ll.58-59 – Richard will destroy all the royal blood.

Stanza 16: ll.63-64 – He slew King Henry in the Tower.

Stanza 17: l.65 – Stanley, your brother Sir William; l.67 – can bring 500 men,

Stanza 18: l.69 – your son George; l.71 – 1000 men

Stanza 19: ll.73-74 – your son Edward 300 men,

Stanza 20: ll.77-79 – your nephew Sir J. Savage 1500 men,

Stanza 21: l.83 – Sir G. Talbott

Stanza 22: l.85 – 1000 men (?)

Stanza 22: l.87 – yourself 1000 men:

Stanza 23: ll.89-91 – You and yours can bring Richmond back, and then he’ll be King, and I Queen.”

Stanza 24: ll.93-95 – Lord Derby answers, that if Richard knew of this

Stanza 25: ll.97-98 – he’d burn her, and kill him.; l.100 – She must begone.

Stanza 26: ll.101-102 – “Is there no grace? Am I never to be Queen?

Stanza 27: ll.107-108 – Stanley! Think on the day of doom,

Stanza 28: ll.109-110 – when Christ shall judge you.

Stanza 29: ll.113-115 – Care not for death, so that you can answer God!”

Stanza 30: ll.117-118 – Bessye dashes her head-jewels on the ground,

Stanza 31: l.124 – tears her hair,

Stanza 32: l.125 – wrings her hands.; ll.127-128 – laments, and bids Lord Derby farewell.

Stanza 33: l.131 – He turns pale,

Stanza 34: ll.134-135 – weeps, says “Stay, Bessie!; l.136 - Here

Stanza 35: ll.137-138 – I fear overhearers,

Stanza 36: ll.143-144 – but at 9 to-night, I’ll be in your bower

Stanza 37: l.145 – and talk more with you.; ll.147-148 – Have a charcoal fire that won’t smoke,

Stanza 38: ll.151-152 – and pen, ink and paper all ready.”

Stanza 39: l.153 – She goes home,; l.155 – sends away her maids,

Stanza 40: l.157 – gets ready a charcoal fire,; l.159 – wine; l.160 – and spices,

Stanza 41: l.161 – pen and paper,

Stanza 42: l.166 – and reads her book of prophecy,

Stanza 43: ll.170-171 – till Lord Derby comes at 9 at night.

Stanza 44: l.173 – She bars her door,

Stanza 45: l.177 – and gives him wine and spice.; l.180 – It works,

Stanza 46: ll.183-184 – and he promises her whatever she asks.

Stanza 47: ll.185-197 – She wants only her Richmond.

Stanza 48: ll.190-192 – Lord Derby says he’d grant her request if he had a clerk he could trust to write for him.

Stanza 49: l.196 – Bessye says she’ll be clerk,

Stanza 50: ll.197-198 – and gets her paper, &c. ready.

Stanza 51: ll.203-204 – Lord Derby dictates a letter to Sir William Stanley,; l.205 – telling him to come to him

Stanza 53: l.211 – by May 3.

Stanza 54: ll.213-215 – He dictates another letter to his son George, bidding him also come

Stanza 56: l.221 – by May 3.; l.223 – Another to his son Edward,

Stanza 57: l.225 – bidding him to come by

Stanza 58: l.232 – May 3.

Stanza 59: ll.233-234 – Another to Sir J. Savage and Sir G. Talbot,

Stanza 60: l.239 – bidding them to come by May 3.

Stanza 61: 1.241 – Lord Derby seals the letters,
Stanza 62: 1.245 – but then he has no messenger he can trust.
Stanza 63: ll.249-251 – Bessye says Humphrey Bretton will take the letters.
Stanza 65: 1.257 – She takes Lord Derby to bed,
Stanza 66: 1.261 – and at day-spring; ll.263-264 – goes to Humphrey
Stanza 67: 1.265 – and calls him.; ll.267-268 – He asks who it is.
Stanza 68: ll.269-272 – “King Edward’s daughter, Lady Cleere, come to Lord Derby.”
Stanza 69: ll.275-276 – Humphrey goes with her
Stanza 70: 1.278 – to Lord Derby,
Stanza 72: 1.285 – who gives him the 6 letters.
Stanza 73: 1.291 - Bessye
Stanza 74: ll.295-296 – promises to reward him when she’s Queen,
Stanza 75: ll.299-300 – and tells him to avoid bad company,
Stanza 76: 1.301 – and not sit too long over his wine.
Stanza 77: ll.305-306 – She gives him nine nobles, and a cup of wine,; 1.308 – and he rides off to
Stanza 78: 1.309 – Sir W. Stanley,
Stanza 79: ll.313-314 – who asks after Lord Derby.
Stanza 80: ll.318-319 – If he is put in the Tower, London gates shall tremble for it.
Stanza 81: 1.323 – Humphrey hands him the Earl’s letter.
Stanza 82: 1.328 – Sir William bites his stick,
Stanza 83: ll.331-332 – gives Humphrey 100s.,
Stanza 85: 1.339 – tells him to go to sleep,
Stanza 86: 1.341 – and he’ll lend him a fresh horse.; 1.343 – Humphrey rests two hours,

Stanza 87: l.348 – rides to Latham,

Stanza 88: l.349 – and reaches it at nine.

Stanza 88: l.351 – The porter

Stanza 90: l.359 – lets him in,

Stanza 92: ll.365-366 – and takes him to Lord Strange in bed.

Stanza 93: l.371 – Humphrey gives him his letter,

Stanza 95: l.381 – and he promises; l.382 – to keep his appointment.

Stanza 96: l.384 – Humphrey rides on to Manchester.; l.387 – sees Sir Edward Stanley and his brother,

Stanza 98: l.393 – and gives them their letters.; l.396 – They rejoice.

Stanza 99: l.399 – Buckingham shall be revenged,

Stanza 100: l.401 – and Bessy's; l.404 – love brought over the sea.

Stanza 101: l.408 – Humphrey goes then to Sir John Savage,

Stanza 103: l.416 – and he swears to back his uncle.

Stanza 105: l.423 – Sir Gilbert Talbot's letter is not delivered, (Note: This doesn't appear to be true, according to the text.)

Stanza 106: l.427 – and he vows

Stanza 108: l.436 – that he'll set Lord Strange free,

Stanza 109: l.440 – bring Richmond to England,

Stanza 111: ll.445-446 – and live and die with Lord Derby.

Stanza 113: l.455 – Humphrey rides back to London,

Stanza 114: l.459 – and finds Lord Derby with King Richard.

Stanza 115: l.461 – Derby winks at him,

Stanza 116: l.465 – and asks him where he has been.

Stanza 117: ll.469-470 – “Amusing myself among my friends.”; 1.474 – “How are King Richard’s commons there?”

Stanza 118: ll.476, 478 – “They are the flower of archery, will fight, and never flee.”

Stanza 119: l.480 – Richard is glad,; l.483 – and promises

Stanza 120: l.485 – Lord Derby half England,

Stanza 121: l.490 – for no one is like him.

Stanza 122: l.493 – And he, Richard, will never tax the commons,

Stanza 123: ll.497-498 – who are his dearest treasures.

Stanza 124: l.501 – The King leaves them,; l.503 – and they go to Bessye’s bower.

Stanza 125: l.506 – She kisses Humphrey,

Stanza 126: ll.511-512 – and prays him to tell her his tidings,

Stanza 127: ll.513-516 – so that she may not mislead her lover.

Stanza 129: l.521 – Humphrey tells her

Stanza 130: ll.525-527 – that on May 3 her friends will be in London, and she shall be Queen.

Stanza 131: l.532 – Lord Derby

Stanza 132: ll.533-534 – withdraws to an old Inn in the suburbs,

Stanza 133: l.537 – and thither on May 3 come; l.539 – Sir William Stanley,

Stanza 135: l.548 – Lord Strange,

Stanza 138: ll.559-560 – Sir Edward Stanley, and his brother,

Stanza 141: l.569 – Sir John Savage, and Sir Gilbert Talbot.

Stanza 143: l.579 – Bessye welcomes them all.

Stanza 144: ll.583-584 – Lord Derby says he’ll

Stanza 145: l.585 – give her 40l.; l.587 – and 20,000 men.

Stanza 146: 1.589 – Sir William Stanley

Stanza 147: 1.593 – 10,000 men.; 11.595-596 – She shall be Queen, or he will die.

Stanza 148: 11.597, 599 – Sir John Savage will give 1000 marks.

Stanza 149: 1.601 – Lord Strange

Stanza 150: 1.605 – advises that they keep their money at home.

Stanza 151: 1.609 – Edward Stanley says

Stanza 152: 11.613-616 – he has neither men nor money, but he'll fight for Bessye.

Stanza 153: 1.618 – She thanks them all.; 11.619-620 – She'll send Richmond 10,000l,

Stanza 154: 1.623 – by Humphrey Bretton.

Stanza 155: 11.625-626 – He tries to excuse himself from taking it,

Stanza 156: 11.631-632 – but she tells him to be quiet; he shall take it

Stanza 157: 11.637-638 – in the saddleflaps of three mules.

Stanza 159: 1.643 – Lord Derby; 1.644 – says he

Stanza 160: 11.647-648, 650 – has a ship in which Humphrey shall go: no alien will

Stanza 161: 1.652 – touch his Eagle.

Stanza 162: 1.655 – Humphrey; 1.657 – sails from Hippon with the money,

Stanza 163: 1.661 – and reaches Bigeram Abbey, where Richmond is.

Stanza 164: 1.665 – He knocks at the gate;

Stanza 165: 1.671 – the porter

Stanza 166: 1.675 – is a Cheshire man.; 1.678 – and lets him in,

Stanza 168: 1.685 – and shows him

Stanza 169: 1.687 – Richmond shooting.; 11.691-692 – He may know the Earl by his long pale face,

Stanza 170: l.693-694 – and a wart above his chin.

Stanza 171: l.697 – Humphrey; l.699 – goes to Richmond,

Stanza 172: ll.703-704 – and gives him Bessye's letter, her money,

Stanza 173: l.705 – and her ring.; l.708 – Richmond kisses the ring,

Stanza 174: l.711 – but does not speak to Humphrey,

Stanza 175: l.713 – who thereupon gets up,

Stanza 176: ll.717-719 – tells him he comes from the Stanleys to make him King and give him a Queen.

Stanza 178: l.728 – What answer is he to give them?

Stanza 179: ll.729-730 – Richmond consults his friends,

Stanza 180: ll.735-736 – and says he can give no answer for three weeks.

Stanza 181: l.740 – He rips up the mules' saddles,

Stanza 182: l.741 – takes out the money,

Stanza 183: ll.747-748 – and goes to Paris to buy arms.

Stanza 184: ll.749-751 – He asks the King of France for help and ships.

Stanza 186: l.757 – The King; ll.759-760 – refuses them.

Stanza 187: l.763 – Richmond rides back to; l.764 – Humphrey,

Stanza 188: l.765 – gives him 100 marks.; l.767 – and bids him tell Bessye

Stanza 189: l.770 – he will come to her;

Stanza 191: l.777 – tell Sir William Stanley; ll.779-780 – that about Michaelmas he will land

Stanza 192: l.781 – at Milford Haven.; l.784 – and take Shrewsbury.

Stanza 194: ll.789-792 – Humphrey will none of Richmond's gold: he is his.

Stanza 195: l.793 – Humphrey; l.795 – returns to Lord Derby,

Stanza 196: 1.800 – who then goes westward,

Stanza 197: 1.801 – leaving Bessye at Leicester.

Stanza 198: ll.807-808 – He sends Lord Strange to King Richard.

Stanza 199: 1.809 – On Richmond's side are Sir William Stanley, with 10,000 men;

Stanza 200: 1.813 – Sir Gilbert Talbot, with 10,000; 1.815 – Sir John Savage, with 1500;

Stanza 201: 1.817 – Sir Edward Stanley, with 500 (Note: should be 300, according to the text); ll.819-820 – Rice ap Thomas, with 800.

Stanza 202: ll.821-823 – Sir William Stanley says

Stanza 203: 1.828 – Richmond lands in England to-night.

Stanza 204: ll.830-832 – He sends Warburton to Shrewsbury, to order Richmond to be admitted.

Stanza 206: ll.838-839 – Warburton throws the orders into the town,

Stanza 207: 1.841 – and the gates are thrown open.; 1.844 - Richard

Stanza 208: ll.845-846 – summons his Lords. Percy, with; 1.848 – 30,000 men;

Stanza 209: 1.849 – Norfolk,; 1.851 – Surrey,

Stanza 210: ll.853-855 – Bishop of Durham, Sir William Bawmer, Scroope and Kent,

Stanza 211: 1.957 – with 20,000 men each; 1.859 – and Sir William Harrington.

Stanza 212: ll.861-862 – The King sends to; ll.863-864 – Lord Derby, he must bring 20,000 men,

Stanza 213: ll.865-866 – or Lord Strange shall die.

Stanza 214: ll.870-872 – Sir William Stanley must bring 10,000 or die.

Stanza 215: 1.873 – Sir William

Stanza 216: ll.877-878 – defies the King.; 1.880 - Richard

Stanza 217: ll.882-883 – orders Lord Strange to the Tower.

Stanza 219: 1.889 - Richmond

Stanza 220: ll.893-894 – sends to Sir William at Stone.

Stanza 221: l.897 – They meet at Stafford,; l.900 – Richmond kisses him,

Stanza 222: ll.903-904 – and Stanley assures Richmond

Stanza 223: ll.905-906 – he'll make him king or die,; l.907 – and Lady Bessye shall be his wife.

Stanza 225: l.915 – Sir William Stanley hears that; l.917-918 – Lord Stanley has fought Richard.

Stanza 227: l.923 – He hastens to Lichfield,

Stanza 228: l.927 – and then Bosworth; l.930 – where are,

Stanza 229: l.931 – Lord Derby,; l.933 – Sir J. Savage,

Stanza 230: l.937 – Sir W. Stanley,; l.939 – and Rice ap Thomas.

Stanza 231: ll.941-943 – Richmond asks Lord Derby to let him; l.944 – lead the van.

Stanza 232: l.947 – Lord Derby

Stanza 233: ll.949-952 – consents, and puts Sir W. Stanley with him.

Stanza 234: ll.953-956 – Savage is to lead one wing, and Rice ap Thomas is to break King Richard's line.

Stanza 235: l.960 – Richard sees the Stanley banner,

Stanza 236: l.963 – and bids Lord Strange prepare to die.

Stanza 237: l.967 – Lord Strange; l.969 – laments for his wife.

Stanza 239: l.978 – He sends her his ring,

Stanza 241: l.983 – and tells her, if his uncle loses,; ll.985-986 – to take his son over the sea,

Stanza 242: l.987 – that afterwards; l.989 – he may revenge his father's death.

Stanza 243: ll.992-994 – Sir William Harrington asks Richard to wait until the other Stanleys

Stanza 244: l.995 – are taken,; l.998 – so that all may be killed together.

Stanza 246: ll.1003-1004 – Richard refuses,

Stanza 247: l.1007 – but his line is broken,; l.1009 – and Richard goes to fight.

Stanza 249: ll.1017-1018 – Percy and 30,000 men leave him.

Stanza 250: l.1019 - Norfolk

Stanza 251: l.1023 – is slain by Sir John Savage,; l.1026 - and his son taken.

Stanza 252: ll.1027-1028 – Lord Dacres and others flee.

Stanza 253: ll.1031-1032 – Richard prays them to stay and die with him.

Stanza 254: l.1037 – Harrington says they

Stanza 255: l.1040 – can't resist the Stanleys,; l.1042 – Richard had better flee.

Stanza 257: l.1050 – But Richard swears he'll die King of England.

Stanza 258: l.1051 – His crown is hewed off him,; l.1053 – and his helmet dashed into his head,

Stanza 259: l.1055 – and he is carried to Leicester,; l.1057 - Bessye

Stanza 260: l.1059 – taunts his corpse,; l.1062 – welcomes Lord Derby.

Stanza 261: ll.1065-1066 – The Red Rose and White meet,

Stanza 262: l.1067 – and are married.

Stanza 263: ll.1071-1073 – Lord Derby and Sir William Stanley crown them.

Stanza 265: l.1079 – God save; ll.1081-1082 – our King and the Commons!