

Johnny Armstrong

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There dwelt a man in faire Westmerland
Ionne Armstrong men did him call
He had nither lands nor rents coming in
Yet he kept eight score men in his hall

He had horses and harness for them all,
Goodly steeds were all milk white;
O the golden bands an about their necks,
And their weapons, they were all alike.

Newes then was brought unto the king
That there was sicke a won as hee,
That lived (I)jyke a bold out-law,
And robbed all the north country.

The king he writt an a letter then,
A letter which was large and long;
He signed it with his owne hand,
And he promised to doe him no wrong.

When this letter carne Ionne untill,
His heart it was as blythe as birds on the tree:
"Never was I sent for before any king,
My father, my grandfather, nor none but mee.

"And if wee goe the king before,
I would we went most orderly;
Every man of you shall have his scarlet cloak,
Laced with silver laces three.

"Every one of you shall have his velvett coat,
Laced with silver lace so white;
O the golden bands an about your necks,
Black hatts, white feathers, all alyke"

By the morrow morninge at ten of the clock,
Towards Edenborough gon was hee,
And with him all his eight score men;
Good lord, it was a goodly sight for to see!

When Ionne came befower the king,

He fell downe on his knee;
"O pardon, my souveraine leige; he said,
"O pardon my eight score men and mee!-

"Thou shalt have no pardon, thou traytor strong,
For thy eight score men nor thee;
For to-morrow morning by ten of the clock,
Both thou and them shall hang on the gallow-tree"

But Ionne lookd over his left shoulder,
Good Lord, what a grievous look looked hee!
Saying, "Asking grace of a graceles face-
Why there is none for you nor me"

But Ionne had a bright sword by his side,
And it was made of the mettle so free,
That had not the king stept his foot aside,
He had smitten his head from his faire bodde.

Saying, "fight on, my merry men all,
And see that none of you be taine;
For rather then men shall say we were hanged,
Let them report how we were slaine."

Then, God wott, faire Eddenburrrough rose,
And so besett poore Ionne rounde,
That fowerscore and tenn of Ionne's best men
Lay gasping all upon the ground.

Then like a mad man Ionne laid about,
And like a mad man then fought hee,
Until a falce Scot came Ionne behinde,
And runn him through the faire boddee.

Saying, "fight on, my merry men all,
And see that none o you be taine;
For I will stand by and bleed but awhile,
And then will I come and fight againe!"

Newes then was brought to young Ionne Armstrong,
As he stood by his nurse's knee,
Who vowed if ere he lived for to be a man,
O' the treacherous Scots revengd hee'd be.

Child #169

From the Penguin Book of Folk Ballads

John Armstrong of Gilnockie, Eksdale was border reiver. In 1530,
James V of Scotland led am army against him.

SOF