

TSDL103

**ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH
FOLK BALLADS
A.L. LLOYD AND EWAN
MACCOLL**

With concertina accompaniment
by Alf Edwards

TOPIC

English and Scottish Folk Ballads

sung by

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Recorded by Bill Leader

The print reproduced on the front of the sleeve is *Solway Moss*, plate 52 from the Liber Studiorum series of mezzotints by J.M.W. Turner, R.A. Turner made this print (one of the finest of the series) in 1816. In spirit it is close to the wild, stirring and savage world of the ballads.

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ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH FOLK BALLADS

*Sung by A. L. Lloyd and Ewan MacColl
With Alf Edwards (concertina)*

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY A. L. LLOYD
WITH TEXT OF THE SONGS

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Introduction

The folk ballad is a folk tale put into verse and set to music. Among British ballads are some of the oldest as well as greatest folk songs we have. Romantic writers used to consider them the essence of all that was most deeply national in poetry and music and theme; but now we know that in fact the ballad type, in form and subject matter, is remarkably similar over the greater part of Europe, and many of our most prized ballad themes are shared by peoples living as far apart as Spain, Scandinavia and the Balkans. That need be no cause for disappointment; the best British folk ballads are the equal of any for fine poetry, handsome melody, mettlesome spirit and high imagination.

The oldest of the ballads originated among a wild proud people in a barbarous time, and the qualities of that society reflect clearly in the ballad texts. In the hillier stonier parts of Britain lived a rough people, cattle grazers and cattle thieves, petty nobility and their peasants who sometimes comprised a large gang or small private army to engage in raiding or the settlement of family feuds. Life in these parts was poor, stirring, bloody. Matters of loyalty and pride counted for a great deal. Such was the society that produced the earlier folk ballads, which might be made by the lord himself (who was often a man indistinguishable from his neighbours except

through his fierceness and rapacity, and who had been awarded or had snatched his distinction by virtue of those qualities) or by one of his peasants or by a professional or semi-professional minstrel engaged to entertain the rough company. The names of the ballad-makers are not known to us. Indeed, as Professor F. J. Child has said: 'Though a man and not a people has composed them, still the author counts for nothing, and it is not by a mere accident, but with the best reasons, that they have come down to us anonymous'. Those 'best reasons' are mainly that the ballad producing society was, in its primitive way, oddly democratic. In it, men were more or less equal, or if one was better than another it was on account of his strength, courage and wits rather than on account of his possessions. As the historian A. L. Morton puts it: 'Even if class divisions existed, class oppression was much less evident than the universal oppression of harsh necessity, the prevailing poverty, the barrenness of the earth, the reiving and raiding that were part of the life of a wild (stretch of) country. Joys and fears, hopes and doubts, deeds and beliefs were largely common to all'.

It used to be thought that the ballads were somehow local to the strip of bare hilly country extending from Newcastle up to Edinburgh, and from Berwick across to Carlisle, and on that account they became known as 'Border Ballads'. The name is utterly misleading.

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We now know that the ballads circulated all over England and Scotland, and were made up in many different regions. In fact the two areas that have proved most rewarding to folk song collectors searching for ballads are Aberdeen and – Somerset! It is the case, however, that the peculiar way of life that is mirrored in the ballads lasted longest in the Border country, where a few free-booting families still survived in the eighteenth century, and also that a number of good ballads mention Border place and family names. Still, it is high time we broke ourselves of the habit of too readily attaching the label of ‘Border’ to our traditional ballads.

Of course, by no means all our ballads are concerned with themes of raiding and feuding. Nor were all of them created by members of such a society as is sketched above. Some are ancient pieces of moralizing symbology, such as *The Prickly Bush* (though in our version the symbolic element is overlaid) and *The Cruel Mother*. Some are genial peasant improvisations on religious legends, such as *The Bitter Withy*. Others are novelistic adventure stories, such as *The ‘Sweet Kumadie’*, or romances such as *The Demon Lover* which, in some versions, has lost its element of magic and emerges as a simple story of *crime passionel*. But the kernel of our folk ballads, the most characteristic productions, are doubtless the proud brave hard tragedies of the kind

of *Hughie the Graeme* and *The Baron of Brackley*, the nearest thing we have to the great hero-epics of early times and more primitive societies.

Our ballads are well known in book versions, though it must be said that the great anthologies don’t always contain the best specimens. They are less well known in sung versions, though they were made to be sung, not read. In this connection, the poet Robert Frost has something pertinent to say: “Voice and ear are left at a loss what to do with the ballad until supplied with the tune it was written to go with... *Unsung*, it stays half-lacking.” May this record do something to repair a lack.

A. L. LLOYD

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HENRY MARTIN:

Sung by A. L. Lloyd, with Alf Edwards (concertina)

In the early days of capitalist competition, there was often little difference between the merchantman and the pirate ship. In 1746, some Portuguese vessels plundered a rich Scottish ship owned by the merchant John Barton. As a result, the Scottish king granted 'letters of reprisal' to the merchant's sons, Andrew, Robert and John. Helped by his two brothers, and armed with the king's permit, Sir Andrew Barton attacked not only ships of the Portuguese trade (at that time the richest in the world, due to discoveries and acquisitions in India) but also Flemish vessels engaged in business, legal or illegal, in the North Sea. Sir Andrew was a fierce man, who sent three barrels of salted Flemish pirates' heads as a present to King James IV in 1506. A few years later, he took to piracy against English ships. Henry VIII sent out several vessels after him, and in a battle on August 2nd, 1511, Barton was killed, his ship captured, and (it is said) *his* head was cut off and taken to England for

display. A long ballad (82 verses!) was made about the piracy, pursuit and defeat of Sir Andrew Barton. It was printed and sold from cheap stationers' stalls in St. Paul's churchyard and elsewhere. In the course of time, as it was passed on by word of mouth from one country singer to another, it grew shorter. At length, only the first part of the ballad, the account of the piracy, was remembered. Perhaps through mis-hearing at some stage, the name of the bold Scottish seaman had become altered from 'Andrew Barton' to 'Henry Martin', and in that form it became fixed and survived well into the twentieth century in many parts of England, in several versions that, on the whole, differ only slightly from each other. The Aeolian (La mode) tune used here was noted some sixty years ago from Roger Luxton, of Halwell, Devon, by the Rev. S. Baring Gould.

In merry Scotland in merry Scotland,
There lived brothers three,
And they did cast lots which of them should go,
should go, should go,
A-robbing all on the salt sea.

Well, the lot it fell out upon Henry Martin.
The youngest of these brothers three,
That he should turn pirate all on the salt sea, salt sea,
salt sea.
To maintain his two brothers and he.

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He hadn't been sailing three long winter's nights
Nor yet three short winter days
Before he espied a lofty tall ship, a tall ship, a tall ship
Come bearing down on him straightway.

'Hallo, hallo,' cried Henry Martin,
'How far are you going?' says he.
'I'm a rich merchant ship, for old England I am bound,
I'm bound, I'm bound,
Will you please for to let me pass free?'

'Oh no, no, no,' cries Henry Martin,
'Heave o and heave to,' says he.
'For I mean to take from you your rich flowing gold,
flowing gold,
Or send your fair bodies to the sea.'

Then broadside for broadside and at it they went,
And they fought for three hours and more,
Till at last Henry Martin gave her the death shot, the
death shot, the death shot,
And down to the bottom she went.

Bad news, bad news, my brave English boys,
Bad news for fair London town.
There's a rich merchant ship and she's cast away, cast
away, cast away,
And all of her merry men drowned.

THE BARON OF BRACKLEY:

Sung by Ewan MacColl (unaccompanied)

The soil of the Scottish mountainsides was thin and stony, denuded by torrents. Until the middle of the eighteenth century there was poverty and savagery in the glens. Men led fierce hard lives, bound together in clans, often far away from effective authority, forming themselves into bands that sometime grew to the proportions of a private army, raiding and plundering their neighbours with a ferocity far exceeding the worst excesses of the American Wild West. Bravery and cruelty, loyalty and treachery abounded in their extremest degree among such societies, as the ballads show. *The Baron of Brackley* presents a pitiless picture of a way of life still persisting in the Scottish north-east (the ballad's location is near Aberdeen) in the 1660s when the Gordons of Brackley were engaged in bitter feuds with the Farquharsons of Inverey, raiding each other's farms, massacring the men and driving off the cattle. Whether the treacherous wife, who exploits her husband's sense of honour and pride to send him to certain death outside the walls of his beleaguered castle*, is based on a real life character, we do not know. The ballads may accurately reflect the mood of an age and the spirit of a society but they are rarely reliable in historical detail.

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The tune is hexatonic minor (with no 6th).

* It is worth noting that as often as not the 'castle' of the petty Highland aristocrat was no more than a fortified farmhouse.

Doon Deeside came Inverey, whistlin and playin.
He's lichted at Brackley's yett at the day dawin.
(yett = gate)

Says: 'Baron o' Brackley, it's are ye within?
There's sharp swords at your yett will gar your blood
spin' (gar = make)

Up spake the proud baron o'er the castle wa':
'Are ye come to spoil or plunder my ha'?
Or gin ye be gentlemen, licht and come in.
Gin ye drink o' my wine ye'll no' gar my blood spin.'

His lady rose up, to the window she went.
She heard her kye lowin o'er hill and o'er fen.
(kye = cattle)
'Oh, rise up, bold Brackley, and turn back your kye.
The lads o' Drumwharren are drivin them by!'

'How can I rise, lady, and turn them again?
For whaur I hae ae man I'd lief to hae ten.'
She called on her marys to come to her hand,
Says: 'Bring your rocks, lasses, we will them
command.' (rock = distaff)

'Gin I had a husband as I wot I hae nane,
He'd no' be in his bed and see his kye taen.'
'Now haud your tongue, Peggy, and gie me my gun.
Ye'll see me gang oot, but I'll never come in.'

'Arise, Betsy Gordon, and gie me my gun.
I will gang oot though I never come in.
Then kiss me, my Peggy, I'll no longer stay,
For I will gan oot and I'll meet Inverey.'

When Brackley was ready and stood in the close,
(close = yard)
A bonnier callant ne'er mounted a horse.
'What'll come o' your lady and your bonny young son?
Oh, what'll come o' them when Brackley is gane?'

'Strike, dogs,' cries Inverey, 'fecht till you're slain,
For we are four hundred and ye are four men!'
'Strike, strike, ye proud boaster, your honour is gane.
Your lands we will plunder and your castle we'll
burn!'

At the head o' the Etnach the battle began.
At little Auchoilzie they killed the first man.
First they killed ae man and syne they killed twa,
And they killed gallant Brackley, the flower o' them a.

'Came ye by Brackley's yetts, came ye by there,
And saw ye his Peggy a-tearin her hair?'

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'Oh, it's I came by Brackley's yetts, I came by there,
And I saw Peggy Gordon a-braidin her hair.'

'She was rantin and dancing and singin for joy.
'She swore that ere nicht she would feast Inverey.'
'She eat wi' him, drank wi' him, welcomed him in.
She was kind to the man that had slain her Baron.

'Oh, fie on ye, lady, why did ya dae sae.
Ye opened your yetts tae the fause Inverey.
There's dule in the kitchen and mirth in the ha',
(dule = mourning)
For the Baron o' Brackley is dead and awa.

THE CRUEL MOTHER:

Sung by A. L. Lloyd, with Alf Edwards (concertina)

The ballad seems to be old, for it is full of primitive folklore notions such as the knife from which blood can never be washed (the instance of Lady Macbeth comes to mind). Also primitive is the idea that the dead who have not undergone the ceremony that initiates them fully into the world of the living (in this case, christening) can never be properly received and incorporated into the world of the dead, but must return to plague the living. Some scholars think *The Cruel Mother* may have been brought to England by invading Norsemen, since practically the same story occurs in Danish balladry (Little Kirsten gives birth to twins in the woods; she hides them under a stone;

eight years later they return from the gates of the land of the dead to confront her; she fails to recognise them until they re-tell the story of her crime; she tries to please them with gifts but they curse her and she is doomed to hell-fire). Verse by verse, the Danish sets of the ballad so closely resemble the English that it seems unlikely that the importation took place so long ago. More probably, it is a case of an ancient folk tale being turned into a lyrical ballad, perhaps within the last four hundred years, and spreading in various parts of Europe, possibly with the help of printed versions all deriving from a single original (whether that original was English or Danish or in some other language, our present researches do not tell us). The terrible story has had a particular fascination for children and the ballad became a game song. A folklorist saw the game being played in a Lancashire orphanage in 1915. The children called it *The Lady Drest in Green*. (There was a lady drest in green, / *Fair a lair a lido*, / There was a lady drest in green, / *Down by the greenwood side*, o). The song describes how the lady kills her baby with a penknife, tries to wash off the blood, goes home to lie down, is aroused by three 'bobbies' at the door, who extract a confession from her and rush her off to prison, and 'That was the end of Mrs. Green'. It is a ring game. Two children in the middle impersonate Mrs. Green and the baby, following the action of the song. The children in the ring dance around, singing the

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refrains, until the 'bobbies' rush in and seize the mother, when the ring breaks up. In his *London Street Games* (1931 ed.), Norman Douglas prints a corrupt version current in East and South-east London during the First World War. The ballad has remained a great favourite and is still to be heard from country singers all over the British Isles and America (where sometimes the event is given a railway setting, 'down by old Greenwood Siding'). The Dorian (Re-mode) tune we use was obtained by H. E. D. Hammond from Mrs. Bowring, of Cerne Abbas, Dorset. It is printed in *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, ed. R. Vaughan Williams and A. L. Lloyd (1959).

She leaned herself against a thorn,
All alone and so lonely,
And there she had two pretty babes born,
And it's down by the greenwood sidey.

And she took off her ribbon belt,
And she bound them hand and leg.

Smile not so sweet, my bonny babes.
If you smile so sweet, you'll smile me dead.

She had a penknife long and sharp,
And she pressed it through their tender heart.

She digged a grave beyond the sun,
And there she's buried the sweet babes in.

She stuck her penknife on the green,
And the more she rubbed, more blood was seen.

She threw the penknife far away.
And the further she threw the nearer it came.

As she was going by the church
She seen two pretty babes in the porch.

As she came to her father's hall
She seen two pretty babes playing at ball.

'O babes, o babes, if you were mine,
I'd dress you up in the scarlet fine.'

'o mother, o mother, we once were thine,
You didn't dress us in scarlet fine.'

You took a penknife long and sharp
And pressed it through our tender heart.

You dug a grave beyond the sun,
And buried us under a marble stone.'

'O babes, o babes, what have I to do
For the cruel thing that I did to you?'

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'Seven long years a bird in the wood,
And seven long years a fish in the flood.

Seven long years a warning bell,
And seven long years in the deeps of hell.'

LORD RANDAL:

Sung by Ewan MacColl (unaccompanied)

This is one of the most widespread of all European ballads, known in Italy, Germany, Holland, the Scandinavian countries (including Iceland), also in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. It has been particularly common in Britain (Sharp noted seventeen versions of it in Somerset alone: though curiously enough Gavin Greig, who collected several hundred ballads in the folkloristically rich parish of New Deer, Aberdeenshire, found only four versions of *Lord Ronald* – as many Scottish singers prefer to call it – and two of these he describes as 'very fragmentary').

It is possible that the ballad began its life in Italy, where it was printed on a Veronese broadside dated 1629 under the title of *L'Avvelenato* (The Poisoned One). There is no sure trace of the ballad in Britain before the closing years of the eighteenth century, in Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1803), to which Burns contributed several Scottish folk songs. Sir Walter Scott thought that the ballad may originally have concerned the death of Thomas Randal, Earl

of Murray and nephew to Robert Bruce, who died at Musselburgh in 1332. This is sheer guesswork of the kind that early ballad scholars liked to indulge in. There is not even evidence that Sir Thomas Randal was poisoned. In the mid-nineteenth century, *Lord Randal* was made into a Cockney burlesque song much favoured by stage comedians, and in its comic form it may still be heard among schoolchildren in the poorer parts of London.

The melody used by Ewan MacColl (learnt from his mother, of Perthshire origin) is of major-minor character with mixolydian inflections, due to its fluctuating 3rd and 7th steps. Some of the Scottish *Lord Randal* tunes are forms of the well known *Villikens and his Dinah* melody, and it is possible that Ewan MacColl's tune is a distant and colourful cousin of the same humble family

'Oh, whaur hae ye been, Lord Randal, my son?
Oh whaur hae ye been, my bonny young man?
'I've been to the wild wood, mither, mak' my bed soon,
For I'm weary wi' huntin, and I fain would lie doon.'

'Whaur gat ye your supper, Lord Randal, my son?
Whaur gat ye your supper, my bonny young man?'
'I dined wi' my true love, mither, mak' my bed soon,
For I'm weary wi' huntin, and I fain would lie doon.'

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'What happened to your bloodhounds, Lord Randal,
my son?
What happened to your bloodhounds, my bonny
young man?'
'Oh, they swelled and they died, mither, mak' my bed
soon,
For I'm weary wi' huntin, and I fain would lie doon.'

'What gat ye to your supper, Lord Randal, my son?
What gat ye to your supper, my bonny young man?'
'Oh I gat eels boiled in brose, mither, mak' my bed
soon,
For I'm weary wi' huntin, and I fain would lie doon.'
(brose = broth)

'I fear that ye are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son.
I fear that ye are poisoned, my bonny young man.'
'Oh aye, I'm poisoned, mither, mak' my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart and I fain would lie doon.'

'What will ye leave your brither, Lord Randal, my son?
What will ye leave your brither, my bonny young
man?'
'The horse and the saddle that hangs in yon stable,
For I'm sick at the heart and I fain would lie doon.'

'What will ye leave your sweetheart, Lord Randal, my
son?
What will ye leave your sweetheart, my bonny young

man?'
'The tow and the halter that hangs on yon tree,
(tow = rope)
And there let her hang for the poisonin o' me.'

THE BITTER WITHY

Sung by A. L. Lloyd with Alf Edwards (concertina)

English country folk in the past showed themselves
to be attracted to many 'unofficial' scriptural legends,
notably to those that depicted Biblical characters
acting like European rustics, and most particularly to
those that held an element of social protest or at least
of egalitarianism. Thus, for instance, in the famous
Cherry Tree Carol, Joseph speaks like a true peasant
husband when he and his pregnant wife are making
their way through the orchard, and Mary asks him to
gather her some cherries, and we are told:

Up then spoke Joseph, with words rude and
wild:

'Let him gather thee cherries that put thee
with child.'

The Bitter Withy carol is likewise peopled with figures
out of the rural landscape of medieval England – the
child playing ball in the street, the snobbish young
rich boys who scorn him, the rich young mothers who
run with their tale of disaster, and the angry mother
who chastises her child by laying him across her knee
and thrashing him. *The Bitter Withy* (a carol without
any connection with Christmas) remained

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one of the most favoured of English religious folk songs until very recent years, perhaps on account of its social content; the fact that in it, the snobbish young lords receive their 'comeuppance' at the hands of the Infant Jesus seems to have endeared the carol to countless generations of humble singers. The tradition of Jesus supporting himself on a sunbeam, and his companions trying to do so and fatally falling, is to be found in the Apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, and also in a 13th Century English manuscript containing rhymed legends of the life of Jesus. A fresco in the church of San Martino in Lucca, Italy, shows the Virgin Mary chastising the young Jesus (though when the surrealist painter Max Ernst painted a similar scene in the early 1930s, the French authorities impounded his picture as being blasphemous). The incident of Christ's cursing the willow in the last verse, is no doubt a folklorish attempt to explain a natural phenomenon: it is a fact that the willow is very prone to 'perish at the heart'. The carol seems to have survived best in Hereford and Shropshire, where Vaughan Williams obtained more than half a dozen versions in 1908-9. The present tune is hexachordal (consisting of six adjacent steps) and of major character.

As it befell on a bright holiday,
Small hail from the sky did fall.
Our Saviour asked his mother dear

If he might go and play at ball.

'At ball, at ball, my own dear son,
It's time that you were gone,
But don't let me hear of any mischief
At night when you come home.'

So up the hill and down the hill
Our sweet young Saviour run,
Until he met three rich young lords.
'Good morning' to each one.

'Good morn good morn, good morn,' said they.
'Good morning', then said he,
'And which of you three rich young lords
Will play at ball with me?'

'Oh, we're all lords and ladies' sons,
Born in our bower and hall,
And you are nothing but a poor maid's child,
Born in an ox's stall.'

'It's if I'm nothing but a poor maid's child
Born in an ox's stall,
I'll make you believe in your latter end
I'm an angel above you all.'

So he made him a bridge of the beams of the sun,
And over the water run he.

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Them rich young lords chased after him
And drowned they were all three.

Then up the hill and down the hill
Three rich young mothers run,
Crying: 'Mary mild, fetch home your child,
For ours he's drowned each one.'

Then Mary mild fetched home her child
And laid him across her knee,
And with a handful of willow twigs
She gave him lashes three.

'Ah, bitter withy, ah, bitter withy,
You've caused me to smart,
And the withy shall be the very first tree
To perish at the heart.'

THE SWEET KUMADIE:

Sung by Ewan MacColl with Alf Edwards (concertina)
This very favourite ballad seems to have reached the height of its popularity in the seventeenth century, but English country singers went on singing it for another two hundred years, and during that time it crossed the border into Scotland and spread at least as far as Aberdeen in sundry shapes and to various tunes.

Among his collection of ballad sheets, Samuel Pepys

had a broadside of it, printed in the 1680s. In his version, the villainous captain is identified as Sir Walter Raleigh, and the ballad starts:

Sir Walter Raleigh has built a ship,
In the Neatherlands.
Sir Walter Raleigh has built a ship,
In the Neatherlands.
And it is called The Sweet Trinity,
And was taken by the false gallaly.
Sailing in the Lowlands.

In his time, Raleigh was no favourite with the common people, who considered him arrogant, selfish, an upstart, heartless to those beneath him. The ballad-story is sheer fiction but it corresponds to the popular view of Raleigh in his lifetime and for many decades after. Gradually, however, the character of Raleigh faded, his name dropped out of the ballad. Likewise the name of the ship, *Sweet Trinity*, became altered to *Holy Trinity*, *Golden Vanity*, *Golden Victory* (in Nelson's time), *Yellow Golden Tree*, *Sweet Willow Tree*, *Sweet Kumadie*, and others. The enemy is sometimes unspecified, sometimes French, sometimes Turkish. The fate of the brave little cabin boy is also various, according to the emotional preference of the singer. Sometimes the boy is well rewarded; in other versions he is left to drown; in others still he is picked up, dies on deck, is sewn

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in cowhide and thrown overboard. In the present version, the cowhide motif is misplaced and the cabin boy wears it as a kind of bathing costume. In some English versions, the boy dives overboard in his 'stark bare skin'. This got changed by one sailor singer into 'black bear skin'. The singer explained that this was the boy's covering at night and he wished to wear it as a disguise while in the water.

The tune is hexatonic major (no 7th).

There was a ship sailed to the north country,
And the name o' the ship was the Sweet Kumadie.
She was built o' the pine and the bay oak tree,
And she sailed on the Lowlands, Lowlands,
And she sailed on the Lowlands low.

We hadna been sailing a week but barely three,
When the look out man he sighted a French gaudie,
And he said: 'We'll all be sunk to the bottom o' the sea
As we sail on the Lowlands, Lowlands,
As we sail on the Lowlands low.'

Then oot and spak our cabin boy and oot spak he,
Says: 'Captain, o captain, what will ye gie to me
If I swim along the side o' the French gaudie
And sink her in the Lowlands, Lowlands,
And sink her in the Lowlands.

It's I will gie ye gowd and I will gie ye fee,
And my eldest dochter your bride for to be,
If ye'll swim along the side o' the French gaudie
And sink her in the Lowlands low.
Ye'll rowl me intae an old bull's skin.
Ye'll tak me to the side and then ye'll throw me in,
Wi' my instruments about me, to the gaudie I will
swim,
And I'll sink her in the Lowlands, Lowlands
And sink her in the Lowlands low.

The boy bent his back and awa swam he.
He swam till he came to the French gaudie.
Wi' his instruments about him, he started to mak free
And sink her in the Lowlands, Lowlands,
To sink her in the Lowlands low.

Some were at the cairds and some were at the dice.
Four and twenty holes he has pierced in her side.
Until the saut water it splashed before their eyes,
And they sank in the Lowlands, Lowlands,
And they sank in the Lowlands low.

'O captain, o captain, be as good as your word.
Ye'll throw me a rope and ye'll pull me on board.
The gaudie she lies at the bottom o' the road.
She is lyin in the Lowlands, Lowlands,
She's lyin in the Lowlands low.'

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'I winna throw a rope or pull ye on board.
Ye can swim till ye sink, just as true as my word.
Ye can swim till ye sink to the bottom o' the sea.
Ye can sink in the Lowlands, Lowlands,
Ye can sink in the Lowlands low.

'Ye'll throw me a rope and ye'll pull me frae the sea,
Or I'll swim to the side o' your **Sweet Kumadie**,
And I'll send her to the bottom like the French gaudie
That's lyin in the Lowlands, Lowlands,
That's lyin in the Lowlands low.

He's thrown to him a rope and they've pulled him frae
the sea,
He's gien to him the gowd and he's gien to him the
fee,
And his eldest dochter his bride for to be,
As they sailed on the Lowlands, Lowlands,
As they sailed on the Lowlands low.

THE DEMON LOVER:

Sung by A. L. Lloyd (unaccompanied)

In the 17th century a very popular ballad was printed by several broadside publishers, entitled: 'A Warning for Married Women, being an example of Mrs Jane Reynolds (a West country woman), born near Plymouth, who, having plighted her troth to a Seaman, was afterwards married to a Carpenter, and at last carried away by a Spirit, the manner how

shall be presently recited.' To a West country tune called 'The Fair Maid of Bristol', 'Bateman', or 'John True'. Samuel Pepys had this one in his collection also. It was a longish ballad (32 verses) but a very poor composition made by some hack poet. Perhaps the doggerel writer made his version on the basis of a fine ballad already current among folk singers. Or perhaps the folk singers took the printed song and in the course of passing it on from mouth to mouth over the years and across the shires they reshaped it into something of pride, dignity and terror. Whatever the case, the ballad has come down to us in far more handsome form than Pepys had it. Though very rarely met with nowadays, it was formerly well known in Scotland as well as in England. For instance, Walter Scott included a good version in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1812 edn.) Generally the Scottish texts of this ballad are better than the English ones, none of which tell the full story (we have filled out our version by borrowing some stanzas from Scottish sets of the ballad), but none of the Scottish tunes for it are as good as those found in the South and West of England. Our present tune was noted by H. E. D. Hammond from Mrs. Russell of Upway, near Dorchester, Dorset, in 1907. Cecil Sharp considered it 'one of the finest Dorian airs' he had seen. Dr. Vaughan Williams made a splendid choral setting of the opening verses of this ballad, which he called: *The Lover's Ghost*.

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'Well met, well met, my own true love.
Long time I have been absent from thee.
I'm lately come from the salt sea,
And it's all for the sake, my love, of thee.

I have three ships all on the sea,
And one of them has brought me to land.
I've four and twenty seamen on board,
And you shall have music at your command.'

She says 'I am now wed to a ship carpenter.
To a ship carpenter I am bound,
And I wouldn't leave my husband dear
For twice the sum of ten hundred pound.

'I might have had a king's daughter,
And fain she would have married me,
But I forsook her crown of gold,
And it was all for the sake, my love, of thee.

So I pray you leave your husband, dear,
And sail away with me,
And I'll take you where the white lilies grow
All on the banks of Italy.

And the ship wherein my love shall sail
Is wondrous to behold
The sails shall be of shining silk,
And the masts be of red beaten gold.'

So she dressed herself in her gay clothing,
Most glorious to behold,
And she trod the salt water side,
Oh, she shone like glittering gold.

They hadn't sailed a day and a day
And a day but barely three,
She cast herself down on the deck,
And she wept most bitterly.

'Oh hold your tongue, my dearest dear,
Let all your sorrows be,
I'll take you where the white lilies grow
All on the bottom of the sea.'

And as she turned herself round about,
So tall and tall he seemed to be,
Until the tops of that gallant ship
No taller were than he.

And he struck the topmast with his hand,
The mainmast with his knee,
And he broke that shining ship in two
And he dashed it in the bottom of the sea.

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HUGHIE THE GRAEME:

Sung by Ewan MacColl with Alf Edwards (concertina)

We do not know if Hugh Graeme, the border raider, is a figure of history or fiction. Several versions of the ballad set the scene of his plundering activities in the neighbourhood of Carlisle, and we are reminded that in 1548, complaints were laid to the Lord Bishop of Carlisle against more than four hundred freebooters and outlaws, of whom Hugh may have been one. The present version places the action further north, in the neighbourhood of 'Strievelin toun' (Stirling), but as with the Border versions, the sympathies are all with the bad man and all against the authorities. Hugh was perhaps unusually well-favoured in having the Earl of Home's wife to speak up for him, though her intervention was fruitless. The earliest printed form of the ballad appears – a little surprisingly perhaps – in the compilation of mainly saucy songs known as *Durfey's Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1720), but it was already quite an old song then. Once common, the ballad seems to have become very rare in tradition. Only one version is reported in the twentieth century, obtained by the diligent Scottish collector Gavin Greig from Mrs. Lyall of Skene, near Aberdeen. Mrs. Lyall's excellent Dorian tune is the one used here by Ewan MacColl.

The lair o' Home he's a-huntin gane
Over the hills and the mountains clear,

And he has tane Sir Hugh the Graeme
For stealing o' the Bishop's mare.
Tey amarey o, Londonderry,
Tey amerey o, London dee.

They hae tane Sir Hugh the Graeme
And led him doon through Strievelin toun.
Fifteen o' them cried oot at yence:
'Sir Hugh the Graeme, he must gae doon!'

'Were I to dee,' says Hughie the Graeme,
'My parents would think it a very great lack.'
Fu' fifteen feet in the air he jumped,
Wi' his hands bound fast behind his back.

Then oot and spak the Lady Black,
And o' her words she was recht free:
'A thousand pounds, my lord, I'll gie
If Hugh the Graeme's set free tae me.'

'Ye haud your tongue, ye Lady Black,
And ye'll let a' your pleadin be.
Though ye would gie me thousands ten,
It's for my honour he would dee.'

Then oot it spak our Lady Home,
And oh, a sorry woman was she:
'I'll gie ye a hundred milk white steeds
Gin ye'll free Hugh the Graeme tae me.'

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'Oh, haud your tongue, ye Lady Home,
And ye'll let a' your pleadins be.
Though a' the Graemes were in this court
He should be hangéd high for me.'

He looked over his left shouther;
It was to see what he could see;
And there he saw his auld feyther
Come weepin and wailin piteously.

'Oh, hauld your tongue, my auld feyther,
And ye'll let a' your mournin be.
For if that they reive me o' my life
They canna haud the heavens frae me.'
(reive = rob)

'Ye'll gie my brither John the sword
That's pointed wi' the metal clear,
And bid him come at eight o' the clock
And see me pay the Bishop's mare.

And brither James, tak ye the sword
That's pointed wi' the metal broon.
Come up the morn at eight o' the clock
And see your brither pitten doon.
(pitten (put) doon = punished)

Ye'll tell this news tae Maggie my wife,
The next time ye come o'er the moor.

She is the cause I lose my life,
For wi' the Bishop she played the whore.
Tey amarey o, Londonderry,
Tey amarey o, London dee.

THE PRICKLY BUSH:

Sung by A. L. Lloyd with Alf Edwards (concertina)

In the opinion of many scholars this is among the oldest, most typical and most interesting of ballads. It has turned up in countless versions in the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, in Central Europe, Hungary, Rumania and Russia, and the ballad specialist Francis J. Child considered that the best version of all is Sicilian. It has enjoyed very wide currency in the British Isles and also in the USA, where it has been described as 'easily the favourite of all the traditional ballads among the Negroes'. In many versions, the story tells of a young woman captured by pirates or brigands; father, mother, brother, sister, refuse to pay ransom, but the lover sets her free. In earlier forms of the ballad, the girl is condemned to die for the loss of a golden ball (or golden key, either signifying the girl's honour which, when lost, can only be restored by her lover.) There is a folk tale, once well known in England in which a stranger gives a girl a golden ball. If she loses it, she is to be hanged. While playing with the ball she does lose it. At the gallows, her kindred refuse to help, but the lover recovers the ball after terrible adventures

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in the house of ill-omen where it had rolled. It seems that verses of *The Prickly Bush* (also called *The Maid Freed from the Gallows*) were sung in the course of telling the story. The losing of the golden ball and the subsequent scene at the gallows used to form a children's game in Lancashire in the 19th century, again accompanied by the song. In Missouri, the song is used as part of a story of a Negro girl with a magic golden ball that will make her white. From a similar *cante-fable*, the admired Negro singer Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly) evolved a version that became well known after it appeared on a commercial disc. Many layers of folklore, extending to very primitive times, may be revealed by deep study of this ancient ballad, in which, at some stage in certain versions, the condemned person has changed sex and become a man who is freed by his girlfriend.

The form of the ballad is likewise interesting. It is frequently suggested that the ballads originated as choral dances. That is, a group formed a ring and danced round. A member of the group sang a single line or set of lines, and the rest came in with a refrain. It has been further suggested that ballads were actually created in the course of this operation, with various members of the group improvising sequences (alternated with refrain) until the ballad story was carried to a conclusion. Now, not many ballads, as we know them, show signs of this kind of communal

creation. But *The Prickly Bush*, with its extremely simple construction, may well have come into being in such a way. Few ballads show such clear signs of a primitive dramatic structure as this one, though the major tune, collected by Lucy Broadwood in Buckinghamshire, is probably fairly modern.

'O hangman, hold your hand,' he cried,
'Oh, hold it for a while,
I think I see my own dear father
Coming over the yonder style.'

'O father, have you brought me gold,
And will you set me free,
Or have you come to see me hung
All on this high gallows tree?'

'Oh no, I have not brought thee gold,
And I'll not set thee free,
For I am come to see you hung
All on that high gallows tree.'
Oh, the prickly bush, the prickly bush.
It pricked my heart full sore,
And if ever I get out of that prickly bush,
I'll never get in any more.

Similar dialogues ensue between the condemned man and his mother and brother. Finally, his sweetheart arrives and he addresses her in terms similar to those

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used to his father. The girl, however, has a different answer:

Oh yes, I've brought you gold,' she cried,
'And I will set you free,
For I would never see you hung
All on that old gallows tree.'

Oh, the prickly bush, the prickly bush.
It pricked my heart full sore,
And now that I'm out of that prickly bush,
I'll never get in any more.

THE BEGGAR MAN:

Sung by Ewan MacColl (unaccompanied)

A lively, rather ribald ballad called The Jolly Beggar was extremely well known in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was originally Scottish, though it also circulated in England on at least one broadside print (c. 1670-75), sold off cheap stationers' stalls at fairgrounds, and from door to door by itinerant pedlars. In 1724, the Scottish poet Alan Ramsey re-wrote the ballad and published it in his widely read *Tea-Table Miscellany* under the title of *The Gaberlunzie Man* ('gaberlunzie' or 'gaberlunzie' = beggar), and in this secondary revised form the song of the saucy beggar who runs off with the farmer's daughter and brings her back, years later, as a gay lady, became vastly popular in rural Scotland. In the course of being passed by word of mouth, the 'new' ballad

lost what marks it had of Ramsey's literary hand; in short, it became re-folklorized. Still, Ramsey's brushing up had given the ballad a new direction and *The Gaberlunzie Man* (or *Beggar Man*, as it is called here) is quite distinct from the older *Jolly Beggar*. There is a tradition, based on no clear evidence, that both ballads derive from an original written by James V of Scotland, who is popularly supposed to have travelled the country disguised as a beggar, the 'guidman o' Ballangeich'. Several tunes are used for this ballad. Ewan MacColl's fine melody (pentatonic, without 3rd or 7th) is closely related to a number of tunes attached to the 'Gaberlunzie' text in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen, and collected by Gavin Greig in the early part of the present century. An American (New Brunswick) version of the ballad is sung to substantially the same tune.

A beggar man cam ower yon lea,
And mony a fine tale he telt me,
Searchin oot for charity:
'Will ye lodge a beggar man?'
Lal al tee too roo ree

The nicht was cauld and the carle was wet,
And doon beyond the ingle he sat,
(ingle = hearth, fire)
And he's thrown his meal pyock offn his back
(pyock = poke = sack)

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And aye as he ranted and sang.

(The daughter of the house speaks)

'If I was black as I am white
As the snaw that lies on yonder dyke,
I would dress myself some beggar-like,
And awa wi' you I would gang.'

'O lassie o lassie, you're far ower young,
And ye hae na the cant o' the beggin tongue,
And ye hae na the cant o' the beggin tongue,
And wi' me ye canna gang.'

'I'll bend my back, I'd bow my knee,
And I'll put a black patch on my ee,
And for a beggar they will tak me
Syne awa wi' you I will gang.'
(Syne = then)

Twass then they twa made up the plot
To rise twa hours before the auld folk,
And so cannily they slipped the lock
And through the fields they ran.

Early neist morning the auld wife rose,
And at her leisure put on her clothes,
And syne to the servant's bed she goes
To spear for the silly old man.
(spear = enquire, silly = simple)

She gaed to the bed whaur the beggar lay,
But the strae was cauld and he was away,
(strae = straw)
And she clapped her hands and cried: 'Welladay!
Is there ony o' our guid gear gane?'

Some ran to the coffer, some ran to the kist,
(kist = chest)
But nocht was awa that could be missed,
And she danced her lane, cried: 'Praise be the blest,
(her lane = alone)
I've lodged an honest auld man!'

'Since naethin's awa that we can learn,
The kyeis to milk and the milk is to kern.
(kern = churn)
Gae back to the hoose and wauken my bairn
And bid her come speedily ben.'
(ben = through)

The servant gaed whaur the dochter lay,
But the sheets were cauld and she was away,
And fast to the guidwife she did say:
'She's awa wi' the beggar-man!'

'Oh fie, gar ride, oh fie, gar run
And haste ye find these traitors again,
For she'll be brunt and he'll be slain,
(brunt = burnt)

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The wearifu' beggar man!

Some gaed on horseback, some gaed on foot,
A' but the auld wife and she wasna fit,
And she hobbled about frae hip to hip,
And aye as she cursed and banned.
(banned = swore)

Meanwhile far oot ower yon lea,
Safe in a glen whaur nane could see,
This twa wi' muckle mirth and glee
Frae a new cheese-cutter whanged.

Years hae passed, some twa or three,
And the same beggar man cam over the lea,
Says: 'Guid wife, for your courtesie,
Will ye lodge a beggar man?'

'Oh, a beggar, a beggar I'll ne'er lodge again,
For I had a dochter but ane o' my ain
And awa wi' a beggar man she's gaen
And I dinna ken whence nor whaur.'

'Yonder she's comin oot ower yon lea,
Wi' mony a fine tale to tell ye,
And she's gotten a baby at her knee
And another yen comin hame.

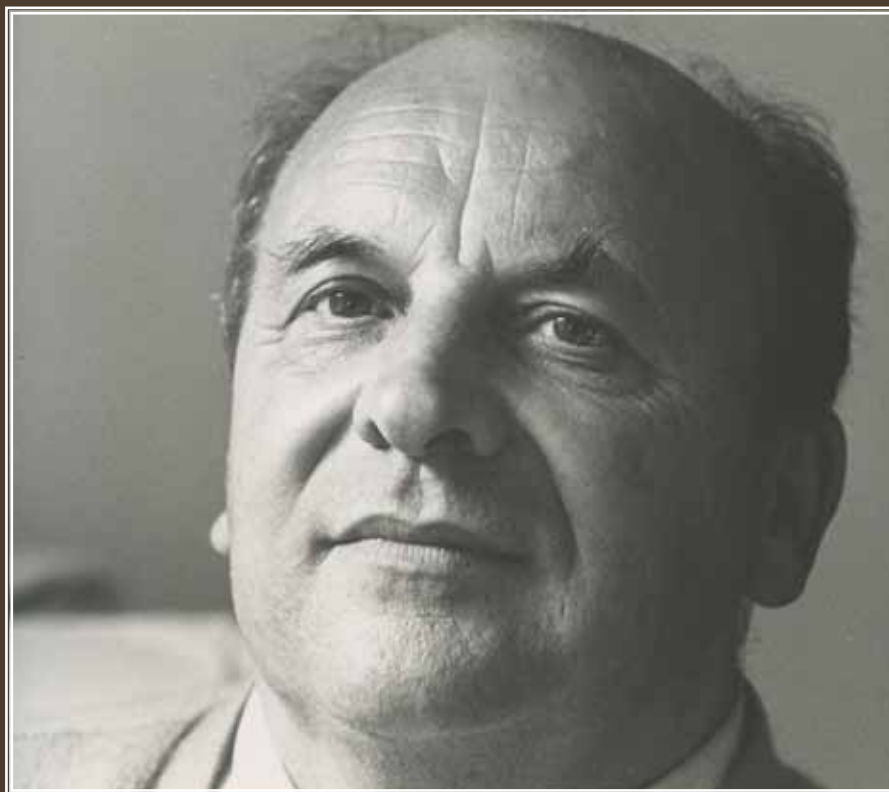
Yonder she's comin, to your bower

Wi' silks and satin and mony a flower.'
And she held up her hand and she blessed the hour
That she followed the beggar man.
Lal al tee too roo ree.

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