



THE SHEPHERD'S SONG

Border Ballads

WILLIE SCOTT

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The rolling Border country, where the north of England and the south of Scotland march together, sometimes along great rivers like the Tweed, sometimes over inhospitable and largely uninhabited moorland, has provided the setting for some of the most colourful stretches of the history of the two countries. Out of this topographically fascinating area where Scotland ends and England begins; where internecine strife and sometimes open warfare raged sporadically for centuries; came a great wealth of balladry and song. Nobody knows who made the ballads.

For the most part, they told of family feuds that ended in violent deaths, or bloody battles shorter in duration but larger in scale. The tradition of singing was carried on and related to simpler, everyday happenings once the fierce quarrels of the past had finally resolved themselves. Farmers and shepherds sang of the changing seasons, of the social gatherings that marked off the divisions of the year, or of the skills and technicalities of their calling. They sang at Shepherds Suppers, and similar gatherings, to keep themselves amused, and to break an isolation which there was neither gramophone nor radio to penetrate.

William James Scott, whose voice is to be heard on this disc, is one such singer. He comes from a long line of singing Scotts, bred to the trade of the shepherd. Willie Scott was born in the Scottish village of Canonbie, about half way between Longtown in Cumberland and Laugholm in Dumfriesshire, in 1897, one of a family of seven. His father was also a shepherd, who moved about. And so it happened that Willie received some of his schooling near Brampton, in Cumberland, an experience which no doubt attuned his ear to the dialect of the English side of the Border. When he was eleven years old, Willie left school to work on a farm at Stobbs, near Hawick, in Roxburghshire. In these days work began for a farm lad at 6 o'clock in the morning and went on until 6 o'clock at night, or, as Willie puts it now, "later if you could still see". After money for his keep had been deducted, Willie was left with seven

shillings a week. In his adult years Willie shepherded in Fife, and is now about to retire from the job he has held high in the hills above Duns, Berwickshire, for the past seventeen years. Willie's brothers Tom and John both sang, and taught Willie some of their songs. In 1917, Willie married Frances Isobel Thomson, the daughter of a Canonbie ploughman. She was an expert whistler and played the accordion. Their children carried on the Scott tradition; Sandy in Australia: Thomas, who was killed over Holland in 1945 while with the R.A.F.: Jim, who lives in Hawick, to where Willie is retiring; and Robert, who plays the accordion and the fiddle.

Among his other accomplishments, Willie is also an expert at fashioning shepherd's crooks, one of which was presented to the Queen a number of years ago. This tall, handsome, silver-haired man in his seventies, who can still cover a full day's walking in the hills, finds that the young country folk want to get into the towns for their time off work. They sing different songs, and for different reasons, in the towns. This disc then, is a record of a Border way of life which the inventions of our time are rapidly turning into a part of our past.

THE SHEPHERD'S SONG

Willie learned this from his brother Tom. It is known to have been sung by John Irvine of Langholm, half-a-century ago. It is a catalogue song, recounting the various skills the shepherd practises throughout the season, his recurring wish at the end of each chorus being "But I wish the cauld East winds wuld never blow." The thirsty shepherd is advised to keep off strong drink after his labours:

"just thole your drouth a wee, till your
ain low hills ye'll see,
And the bonnie bubblin' streams will
quench it a'."

The song rocks itself up and down two little modal phrases.

PIPER MacNEIL

"Willie got this song from another shepherd who was also a piper and fiddler, and who worked at Eskdalemuir, Dumfriesshire, around 1910. The piper was "A canty chap and a couthy chiel", who "dearly lo'ed the whisky O!" Not even the remonstrances of his mother could persuade him to give up his dram. For in every situation he faced, his consolatory refrain was:

"The Whisky's guid an' the whisky's grand
A wee drappie o't 'll dae nae hairm
I only wish I'd in my airms
A great big barrel o' Hieland whisky O!"

The melody to that sizeable Scots-Irish tune family of which *The Garden Where the Pirates Grow* and *Ten Green Bottles* are, perhaps, the best known members.

THE KIELDER HUNT

A Northumbrian song, written by James Armstrong of Redesdale, Northumberland, and published in 1879 in a book called *Wannie Blossoms*. In some ways it is musically the most interesting piece in this recital, a Scots Borderer's version of a song from "the other side", though given with a good measure of Northumbrian dialect. It, too, is a catalogue song, recounting not only the various local worthies who attend the hunt: all those who cried:

"Hark away! Hark away, o'er the bonnie
hills o'Kielder! Hark away!"
until the singer can record:

"The hunt is done, his brush is won,
I hear the death halloo,"

and the song ends with the conventional toast to the "gallant sportsmen a" who brought matters to this conclusion.

JAMIE RAEBURN

A Glasgow song about a man expecting to be transported for a crime the nature of which we are not told. According to Robert Ford, editor of *Vagabond Songs and Ballads of Scotland*, Raeburn was a baker, unjustly accused of theft and banished for life to Botany Bay, c.1840. However, the Glasgow policeman and folk song enthusiast, Supt. John Ord, had all the criminal records searched from 1833 on, without finding trace of Raeburn's conviction. Still, the song, is a great favourite. "One of the most popular folk songs we have", says Gavin Greig.

BONNIE WEE TRAMPIN' LASS

A song which Willie's wife used to sing when she was a girl. A simple story of happy love, it tells how the singer met his girl, who was working for ten shillings a week at a mill, and how they "stood there bletherin' for a while, about the thing called luv". Married, they were "happy as happy can be", so that the singer now has: "Two bonnie bairnies by my side And a third yin on my knee".

BLOODY WATERLOO

A once widespread song. Willie got his version from his brother, who first heard it at Westerkirk, near Langholm. It is a strange heartless song about a woman by the banks of Clyde "weepin' for her Willie lad, Who sailed for Waterloo". A soldier appears to 'bring her news that he saw her Willie fall before 'the French, and that "six bayonets were in his side" before Willie's eyes were closed. Then the soldier reveals himself to be none other than Willie himself, safely returned! After playing such a heartless trick, he hardly deserves the forgiveness he gets. The tune is related to that of the sailor song: *Rounding the Horn*.

JOCK GEDDES

Willie first heard a gamekeeper sing it at a dipping contest in 1905. Years later, he found the words printed in a local paper, and so added the song to his repertoire. It is the story of one who "at market whiles got fu", and who, on one occasion got so fu' that he "tripped and fell amang the midden:" whereupon a sow, who "smelt his mou", turned her attentions to him. Sober, he reflected that he would never have guessed he would live to be "kissed by a sou". The tune is a variant of *Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch*.

THE DOWIE DENS OF YARROW

Willie's version deals with the same theme as the familiar ballad (Child 214), though it goes to a different air from the usual one. His father, who shepherded in Yarrow, picked up this version around 1882, and passed on to Willie in due course.

HERD LADDIE O' THE GLEN

This song, to the tune *Bonnie Strathyre*, was written by Willie himself. Bad weather prevented him getting to the funeral of an old friend. In the mood of sad reflection brought about by these circumstances, he happened to hear *Bonnie Strathyre* sung on the radio by James Urquhart, and *Herd Laddie o' the Glen* became Willie's tribute to his dead friend.

THE LADS THAT WERE REARED AMANG HEATHER

Willie says this was popular around the turn of the century. It comes from Dumfriesshire, though it has also been found in Peeblesshire. It is one of those self-congratulatory songs of the "here's tae us, wha's like us" sort not unknown in Scottish folk-song. Here, however, the self-congratulators are Highlanders who equate the Lowlands with superior class-consciousness, saying away with:

"Your soirees and concerts and balls,
For a dance in the barn is worth ten in the halls
To the lads that were reared amang heather".

There is a certain social irony, too, in the line:
"When a king wants guid sodgers he kens
where tae send".

More than one king knew "where to send", and did, as the disproportionate Highland losses in the First World War testify. The tune is related to *The Limerick Rake*.

The
Shepard's Song

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