

Oh My Little Darling: Folk Song Types

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The mysterious quality that defines the folk song apart from other forms of music lies in the means by which the song is preserved over time and transmitted in space from author to audience. The folk song lives in memory alone, and like the proverbial river into which one can never step twice, it is always in the process of becoming. But discussion of “the folk song” inevitably degenerates into abstraction and theory, aptly illustrating the poet William Blake’s charge that “To generalize is to be an idiot.”

Members of a folk community—people who learn and preserve their literature by memory—avoid abstraction by classifying their songs: “Here’s an old love song,” a singer may say by way of introducing anything from “Barbara Allen” to “Gentle Annie.” Or “Here’s a baby-bouncing song,” or “My daddy used to sing this one every morning while he shaved.” Such comments suggest two ways to define types of folk songs: by the song’s text or thematic content (“an old love song”), and by the song’s function in the singer’s life (“a baby-bouncing song”). Folklorists have devised elaborate classification schemes for folk songs, but for our present purposes we shall differentiate types of folk songs by content or function.

The most intensively studied and one of the most interesting and frequently encountered types is the ballad. We can define the ballad most simply as a sung narrative—a story—that focuses on a single incident. The literary analogue of the ballad is the short story. Structural anthropologists, Claude Lévi-Stauss among them, have recently suggested that the construction of narratives such as one finds in ballads and myths is a function of the unconscious. The ubiquity and appeal of the ballad may thus be understood as analogous to Joseph Campbell’s definition of myth as a public dream, and a dream as a private myth; the ballad is a shared dream.

Folklorists recognize three types of English-language ballads. In the nineteenth century the American scholar and Chaucerian, Francis James Child, organized a collection of 305 sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century written ballad texts that posterity has come to accept as the main body of English-language ballads, the “Child ballads.” About one third of these are still sung in America by country people who seldom have any idea of the English and Scottish medieval origin of their songs.

A second type of ballad derives from the printing presses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when in Britain and Colonial America publishers widely and cheaply sold song texts printed on single sheets of paper (broadsides). The texts often described some recent newsworthy battle or execution in traditional narrative clichés, and headnotes suggested commonly known tunes to which the words could be sung. Broadside ballads were the pop music of their time. Some proved popular enough to be remembered long after the disappearance of the original printed sheets, and thus became folk songs. In the standard study of American ballads traceable to broadside origins, G. Malcolm Laws writes:

The ballads deal mainly with subjects of great intrinsic interest to all human beings. War

and lesser human conflicts, crime and punishment, violence and death, love and sex, humor and trickery, hatred and revenge, dangerous adventures and calamities—these were among the favorite subjects of the balladists, just as they have been grist for the mill of the scops, the epic poets, the novelists, the newspapermen, the county historians, and the playwrights....If a stranger wanted to know about the composite character of the common people in the Englishspeaking world, he could hardly do better than to study their traditional ballads.

A third type of ballad is that composed in America, often about a real event but always narrated using traditional stanza forms, phrasing, and often plots—sometimes even to the extent of substituting local place names and characters in an older song whose narrative happened to resemble the local sequence of events.

Laws has devised a classification system for the study of the latter two types of ballads, and the interested reader should consult the Laws titles in the Bibliography.

Old ballads and other types of folk songs have lasted longest in the rural Southeast, the part of the United States that most closely meets the textbook definition of a “folk culture,” in which culture is relatively homogeneous and customs are shared across class and ethnic lines. For this reason, this album focuses on the rural Southeast as a rich source of American folk life. Our range is roughly from Virginia and Kentucky south to Alabama and west to Texas.

Another reason for choosing this area is that greater aural documentation predating the post-World War II inroads of the electronic media and the merchandising of popular culture—standardizing and modernizing influences that tend to destroy or radically alter long-preserved folkways—exists for the Southeast than for any other American region. First, beginning in 1923, record companies, unable to sell satisfactory quantities of popular and classical discs to southerners who hewed to their own music, recorded thousands of discs of outstanding local musicians that were then sold where the performers were known. Second, field recordings for the Library of Congress from 1933 until World War II centered on this area. These two sources provide an unparalleled documentation of an American regional folk-song repertoire and its performing styles.

Relatively few of these discs are easily available to modern audiences. Yet the songs are the “varied carols” of Walt Whitman’s singing America, and the recordings enable us to hear a population of Americans, some born in the nineteenth century, who developed their repertoires and performing artistry before films, phonograph records, radio, and television transformed us into passive consumers rather than makers of culture. “I am large,” said Whitman in his role of American Everyman, “I contain multitudes.” So sing the country people we hear on this record. They introduce us to songs that have been, in the words of the old hymn, “a long time traveling away from home.” Here, on a new stage, the songs portray the old dramas, conflicts, and celebrations of the American character.

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THE RECORDINGS

Side One

Band 1

CHILDREN'S SONG

Chick-A-Li-Lee-Lo

Almeda Riddle, vocal.

Recorded 1959 in Heber Springs, Ark.

Originally issued on Atlantic 1350.

While children are perfectly capable of composing songs or adapting adult songs to their own uses, most of the finest children's songs have been made by adults, one-time children whose years have earned them a double perspective on childhood. In his notes for the record album *American Folk Songs for Children* (Atlantic 1350), Alan Lomax wrote:

The best song-makers for children are the folk, whose rhymes are rubbed clean and hard against the bone of life, whose fantasies are heart-warming and fertile because they rise out of billions of accumulated hours of living with and caring for children. . . . The jingles, riddles, silly ballads, wistful lullabies, jiggy tunes and game songs belonging to the children of the American frontier will one day make a book far more warm and witty than the traditional Mother Goose.

While reminiscent of many children's songs (such as "Bobby Shaftoe"), Almeda Riddle's "Chick-A-Li-Lee-Lo" is unique with the singer, who learned it from her mother probably near the turn of the century. The song can entertain a very young child with its tuneful, crowing nonsense syllables and for the older child—especially a girl—the song presents a simple but profound lesson in the traditional place of the female in our culture. She will strive for autonomy ("I'm gonna marry who I please") but ultimately depend on others ("Oh, I hope he'll marry me!"), and will wait patiently at home for Little Johnnie Green to tire of adventurously exploring the great world.

Almeda Riddle, of Heber Springs, Arkansas, was born in 1898 and is a grandmother whose songs rise from tending many children. Alan Lomax called her the finest American singer he'd heard in twenty years. Mrs. Riddle's repertoire includes native and British ballads, children's songs, sentimental songs, and hymns, all of which she sings with equal artistry. Her most recent record album is *Ballads and Hymns from the Ozarks* (Rounder 0017). She is the subject of Roger Abrahams' book *A Singer and Her Songs: Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads* (University of Louisiana Press, 1971).

La-la-la-chick-a-li-lee-lo,

La-la-la-chick-a-li-lee-lo. (*repeated with each stanza*)

I'm gonna marry who I please, la-la-lachicka-li-lee-lo,
I betcha I will if you marry me, la-la-lachicka-li-lee-lo.

Now I'm gonna marry Little Johnnie Green,
He's the prettiest boy I've ever seen.

But he's gone off to the wars away,
He'll come back some pretty fair day.

Now yonder he comes I do believe,
Oh, I hope he'll marry me!

Band 2

PLAY-PARTY SONG

King William Was King George's Son

Mr. and Mrs. Crockett Ward, vocals.

Recorded October, 1937, in Galax, Va., by John Lomax. Library of

Congress Archive of American Folk Song 1365 A2.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1837 story "The Maypole of Merrymount," which depicts the Puritan leader John Endecott purging in the name of asceticism and hard work a Massachusetts community of its heritage of English maypole dancing and ritual celebration, portrays in fantasy a fact of early American life. Communities dominated by a Calvinist ethic found in English set dancing to the fiddle the influence of the devil, and forbade their young people the ancient pleasures of rhythmic movement and playful partner-choosing. As an alternative entertainment young people developed "play-parties," formation games that substituted the players' singing for the fiddler's music and "playing" for dancing, activities that preserved the spirit of set dancing while remaining within the bounds of propriety set by the ministers and the community elders.

"King William Was King George's Son," which may represent folk memories of English wartime recruiting and the country games mentioned in Shakespeare's plays, was a play-party known throughout the rural South and Midwest. Beneath its veneer of innocent play it preserved the rituals of courtship and the forbidden sensuous pleasure of the kiss. The game was played as follows: The players join hands and form a circle around one boy, who takes the part of King William. During the first stanza the circle dances around him. During the second the circle stops while King William walks about the circle inspecting each girl. As the third stanza begins, King William kneels before the girl of his choice, bows, and kisses her hand. On the last line he rises and joins the circle beside his lady, while the boy he replaces goes to the center and becomes the new King William. Of such simpleheartedness were the pleasures of our forebears.

Many of the best nineteenth-century play-party songs were collected by folklorists in the 1920s and '30s from older men and women who recalled them from their childhood. Mr. and Mrs. Crockett Ward's performance of "King William Was King George's Son" undoubtedly represents a memory of their youth.

One conceives only with difficulty an American community in which play-parties might still be performed, and we hear in this performance an example of American social life that has vanished as effectively as Hawthorne's pagan maypole.

King William was King George's son
And from the royal race he run,
Upon his breast he wore a star,
To show to the world he's a man of war.

Go choose you east, go choose you west,
Go choose the one that you love best;
If she's not here, take her part,
Choose you another with all your heart.

Down on this carpet you shall kneel
As sure as the grass grows in the field,
Hug her neat and kiss her sweet,
Then you may rise up on your feet.

Band 3

CHILD BALLAD

Sweet William

Fields Ward, vocal. Recorded October, 1937, in Galax, Va., by John Lomax.
Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 1357 B1.

John Lomax discovered in the Ward family of Galax, Virginia, this beautiful American version of an ancient ballad known throughout northern Europe. There are versions from Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, and the story may derive from those about the epic hero Hildebrand. Francis James Child included the British versions of the ballad, under the generic title "Earl Brand," as number seven in his collection. Fields Ward learned the present version in his youth from his mother.

Older versions contain magical elements of a name taboo, but the rationalist Anglo-American mind has typically pared away European superstition and has left only the stark outline of the story. The central event of all the versions is the theft of a bride, with a subsequent battle between the hero and the bride's father and brothers, after which the victorious hero dies.

Fields Ward, son of Mr. and Mrs. Crockett Ward, is an outstanding musician, the most versatile singer of his family. He can not only perform the subtly cadenced and toned unaccompanied singing heard here but can also sing lead in a full string-band performance or sing to his own banjo or guitar accompaniment. While still in his teens, Ward recorded commercially for Okeh with his father and uncle as Crockett Ward and His Boys. He most recently has been heard on a 1975 LP, *Bury Me Not on the Prairie* (Rounder 0036).

Note: A more recent version of "Sweet William" was made by Fields Ward, and is available on Biograph Records RC 6002.

Was in the merry, merry month of May
When the meadows looked fresh and gay,
He hung his bugles around about his neck
And he went riding away.

He rode 'till he came to Fair Ellen's home.
He knocked and he tingled at the ring.
"Asleep or awake. Fair Ellen," I said,
"Pray arise and let me in."

Fair Ellen she arose and she slipped on her clothes
To let Sweet William in:
No one was so ready as Fair Ellen herself
To arise and let him in.

Then he mounted her upon the milkwhite steed,
Himself on the iron gray.
He hung his bugles around about his neck
And they went riding away.

They rode 'till came in three miles of the place,
They stopped and looked all around.
They looked and they saw some seven armed men
Come hasting over the ground.

"You get down, Fair Ellen," I said,
"And take my steed in hand,
'Till I go back to yonder's spring
And stop those seven armed men."

She stood 'till she saw her six brothers fall,
Her father fell so near.
"Sweet William," I said, "come and stop your chase
For you seem almost too severe."

She took a hankerchief from her side,
Was made of linen so fine;
She took and wiped his bleeding, bleeding wound
For the blood run as red as any wine.

Then he mounted her upon the milkwhite steed,
Himself on the iron gray,
He hung his bugles around about his neck
And they went riding away.

They rode 'till they came to his mother's house,

They knocked and he tingled at the ring,
“Asleep or awake, dear mother,” I said,
“Pray arise and let me in.”

His mother arose and she slipped on her clothes
To let Sweet William in;
No one was so ready as his mother herself
To arise and let him in.

“Dear mother,” I said, “come and bind up my head,
You never shall bind it anymore.”
Sweet William he died from the wound that he bore
And Fair Ellen she died also.

Band 4

BROADSIDE BALLAD

The Lexington Murder

Wesley Hargis, vocal and guitar.

*Recorded 1934 in the State Penitentiary, Raleigh, N. C., by
John and Alan Lomax. Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 90 A.*

Folklorists have traced this murder ballad not to an actual event but to an eighteenth-century London broadside, “The Berkshire Tragedy, or the Wittan Miller: With An Account of Murdering his Sweetheart.” That ballad’s forty-four stanzas recount a detailed story of seduction, murder, trial, and conviction, along with an explanation for the sweetheart’s murder:

For the damsel came to me and said
By you I am with child:
I hope dear John you’ll marry me
For you have me defil’d.

Early in the nineteenth century an unknown person—probably a Bostonian, possibly a printer—rewrote “The Berkshire Tragedy” by omitting the stanza describing the girl’s pregnancy, leaving off the legalistic second half of the original broadside’s story, and publishing the remaining stanzas as a new broadside titled “The Lexington Miller.” The resultant ballad evidently circulated widely, for traditional texts recognizably traceable to it—like that of the present song—have been collected from Canada to Florida. G. Malcolm Laws discusses the genesis of the song in *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, pp.104-22.

The popularity of songs describing the slaying of a woman by her lover remains unsatisfactorily explained. One theory posits a social significance for this popularity: though we almost never hear of it in the traditional texts, we are to understand the girl has become pregnant, and the man, betrothed or married to another, or otherwise compromised, murders her to preserve the public illusion of his moral purity; Theodore Dreiser novelistically handled the theme in the significantly titled *An American Tragedy*. On the other hand, psychologists point out that in literature all the characters of a narrative are projections of a single mind (originally the author’s, subsequently the reader’s), so that the murder represents a conflict *within* the human mind (a psychic reality) rather than in the human community (a social reality). Thus the murdered-girl ballads may function as psychodramas for the folk audience somewhat as Poe’s “William Wilson” or Stevenson’s “Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde” do for literate audiences—to depict the psychic crime of destroying one’s potential for wholeness by killing one’s mirror image or other self.

Nothing is known of Wesley Hargis, who recorded only “The Lexington Murder” for the Lomaxes on their visit to the State Penitentiary in Raleigh to collect Negro prison songs in 1934. Hargis’ recording is listed in Godrich and Dixon’s *Blues and Gospel Records 1902-1942*, evidently reflecting the authors’ belief that Hargis was a black convict and his performance an example of Negro folk music. On aural evidence,

however, Hargis is most certainly white, and he may not have been a prisoner.

My tender parents who brought me
here provided for me well,
And in the city of Lexington they put
me in a mill.
Last Saturday night three weeks ago, oh
cursed be the day.
The devil put it in my heart to take her
sweet life away.
I went down to her sister's house at
eight o'clock that night,
And she, the poor girl, seemed to think
at her I had a fight.
I asked her if she would take a walk a little
way with me,
That we might have a little talk, about
our wedding day.
We walked along a path side by side till
we come to some silent place;
I picked a stick up from the ground and
smote her in the face.
She fell down on her bending knees and
there for mercy she cried,
'For heaven's sakes, don't murder me
here, I'm not prepared to die.'
I heeded not her mercy cry, but smote
her all the more.
Until I see her innocent blood, the blood
I could never restore.
I folded my hands in her coal-black hair,
to cover up all of my sins,
I drug her down to the riverside and
there I threw her in.
I started on my way back home and met
my servant John,
"Why do you look so very weak and yet
you are forlorn.
And what is the cause of so much blood
upon your hands and clothes?"
As an innocent one I replied, "Was a
bleeding at the nose."
I lit my candle and went to bed just
thinking I'd take a rest.
It seems as if the flames of hell was
burning in my breast.
Young men, young men then take warning,
if your sweethearts are true,
Don't never let the devil get the upper
hand of you.

Band 5

NATIVE BALLAD

Lily Schull

Mrs. Lena Bare Turbyfill and Mrs. Lloyd Bare Hagie, vocals.

Recorded April, 1939, in Elk Park, N. C., by Herbert Halpert . Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 2845 A1.

In this performance we can hear a native ballad taking shape, frozen by the phonograph record at one

moment of its continuing existence. Like many other American ballads— "Naomi Wise," "Tom Dooley," "Pearl Bryan," "Emma Hartsell"—the song recounts the aftermath of an actual murder in which a woman has died at the hands of a man under circumstances of sexual impropriety. Such notorious events in small rural communities seem to be natural topics for songs, but such murders also readily fit poetic conventions already familiar to the community through older murder ballads such as "The Lexington Murder." Life may or may not imitate art, but those events that do imitate art are obviously more readily transformed into art.

Lily Schull was actually Lillie Shaw, a black woman from near Mountain City, Tennessee, who was murdered in October, 1903, by one Finley Preston, also black, of Saw Mill Creek, Tennessee, as a consequence of a sexual triangle. Preston was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to be hanged, which was carried out on November 7, 1905, following two appeals and a second trial.

Mrs. Turbyfill and her sister, Mrs. Hagie, learned the song as teenagers from their sister Sabra, who learned it from a Tennessean named Glenn Crosswhite about 1914.

As "The Ballad of Finley Preston," this song is still sung in eastern Tennessee, and appears performed by Clint Howard and Fred Price on an LP, *The Ballad of Finley Preston* (Rounder 0009). Joe Wilson, of Trade, Tennessee, has traced the history of the song, and his excellent account of the circumstances of the murder, trial, and the genesis of the ballad, along with surviving photos of Preston's execution, appear in a booklet accompanying the album.

A great crowd has now gathered
All around this jail today,
To see me executed
And hear what I do say.

Now I must hang this morning
For the murder of Lily Schull,
Whom I so cruelly murdered
And her body shamefully burned.

The fire where I burned her
Is again now in my sight,
And her lovely face recovering
In the fire that burned so bright.

The cries of poor Lily
Again I can almost hear,
As she begged me not to kill her,
Her life alone to spare.

Now I bow down to Jesus
In penitential grief,
And I beg him now to save me
Like he did the lying thief.

Was then I heard the whisper
In a most gentle tone:
"My grave is one sufficient
To save the vilest one."

God bless my aged parents
Who mourn for me alone,
Also my wife and baby
Who will be left alone.

Band 6

AGRARIAN SONG

The Farmer Is the Man That Feeds Them All

Fiddlin' John Carson, vocal and fiddle.

Recorded November 7 and 8 1923, in New York. Originally issued on Okeh 40071.

Despite his chronic economic exploitation, the American farmer has never fully joined forces with the rest of American labor, and his organizations have proved shortlived and ineffective: the Farmers' Alliance, the Populist Party, the Greenback-Labor Party. As a result, John Greenway points out, few folk songs of protest have emerged from the farmer's misfortunes. One of the best is "The Farmer Is the Man That Feeds Them All," which seems to date from the post-Civil War period, when railroads and banks began to manipulate the price of corn and wheat and to foreclose on farmers who suddenly found themselves declared guilty of "overproduction." Beneath its reiteration of the economic importance of the farmer, the song implies the Jeffersonian mythology of the moral superiority of the agrarian who presumably does not lie, loaf, or use snuff.

Fiddlin' John Carson was born in 1868 in Fannin County, Georgia. He was one of the older southern musician to record commercially, and in his archaic performances we can hear a nineteenth-century style and repertoire. Carson worked in the cotton mills, but on the side became well known in Atlanta as a professional fiddler who often appeared in the Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers' Association conventions before World War I. His first record, made in June, 1923—"The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane" backed with "The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster's Going to Crow"—is usually cited as the one that began the countrymusic industry by demonstrating the existence of a market for discs of local southern musicians. Despite his urban-industrial orientation, Carson was sympathetic to the economic plight of the farmer, and in addition to the song heard here he recorded "The Honest Farmer," "The Taxes on the Farmer Feeds Them All," and two Populist campaign songs, "Tom Watson Special" and "Georgia's Three Dollar Tag," the latter written by Carson for Eugene Talmadge.

If you'll only look and see, I know you will agree,
That the farmer is the man that feeds them all.

While the women uses snuff,
And they never get enough.
But the farmer is the man that feeds them all.
When the farmer comes to town,
With his wagon broken down,
The farmer is the man that feeds them all.

Chorus

The farmer is the man, the farmer is the man,
Buys on the credit until fall.
Then they'll take him by the hand,
Then they'll lead him through the land,
And the merchant he's the man that gets it all.

While the judge on his bench,
He will scratch his head and wink,
But the farmer is the man that feeds them all.
And the lawyer, I'll declare,
Will tell a lie and swear,
But the farmer is the man that feeds them all.
(*Chorus*)

Oh, the doctor hangs around,
While the blacksmith whups his iron,
But the farmer is the man that feeds them all.
And the preacher and the cook,
They'll go trolling on the brook,
But the farmer is the man that feeds them all.

If you'll only look and see, I know you will agree,
That the farmer is the man that feeds them all.
(Chorus)

Band 7

LABOR SONG

Come All You Coal Miners

Sarah Ogan, vocal. Recorded 1937 in New York by Alan Lomax.

Originally issued on Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 1944 A-10 in.

At the dawn of the industrial age poets announced their reservations concerning the coming era of machines, science, and progress. At the turn of the nineteenth century William Blake deplored the “dark Satanic mills” already spreading over the green English countryside, and in 1819 Shelley wrote that “Hell is a city much like London—a populous and smoky city.” In time, equally eloquent protests against industrialism came from those most intimately exposed to industrial life—the workers—and not as visionary or elegant poetry but as folk poetry created and sung by many anonymous voices.

Sarah Ogan (nee Garland) was born of a musical and mining family at Elys Branch, Kentucky, in 1910, and married a miner in 1926. She and her family lived the paradox of capitalist industrialism as they watched the coal trains carry untold mineral wealth out of their valleys but saw cash returns so meager that the miners lived in perpetual poverty. Interested readers can follow the development of Sarah Ogan’s career as a radical folk poet in Archie Green’s LP *I Am a Girl of Constant Sorrow* (Folk Lyric FSA-26). Green wrote that Sarah regards “Come All You Coal Miners” less “as a polemical or protest song” than “as a personal statement of her deepest feelings and sorrow.” As such, the song combines personal experience and observation with traditional elements (such as the “Come all ye” opening) in a manner that exemplifies the finest of American labor folk songs—shy, perhaps, on economic theory, but bold and assertive in richly earned anger and righteous outrage.

Note: A more recent version of “Come All You Coal Miners” was made by this artist, under the name of Sarah Ogan Gunning, and is available on Rounder Records 4005.

Come all you coal miners, wherever you may be,
And listen to the story that I relate to thee.
My name is nothing extra, but the truth to you I’ll tell,
I am a coal miner’s wife, I’m sure I wish you well.

I was borned in old Kentucky, in the coal camp borned and bred,
I know all about the pinto beans, bulldog gravy and cornbread.
And I know how the coal miners work and slave in the coal mines every day,
For a dollar in the company store, for that is all they pay.

Coal mining is the dangerousest work in our land today,
With plenty of dirty slaving work but very little pay.
Coal miner, won’t you wake up and open your eyes and see
What the dirty capitalist system is doing to you and me.

They take our very life blood, they take our children’s lives,
Take fathers away from children and husbands away from wives.
Coal miner’s, won’t you organize, wherever you may be,
And make this a land of freedom for workers like you and me.

Dear miners, they will slave you till you can’t work no more.
And what will you get for your labor but a dollar in the company store?
A tumble-down shack to live in, snow and rain pouring through the top,
You’ll have to pay the company rent, your payments never stop.

I am a coal miner's wife, I'm sure I wish you well.
Let's sink this capitalist system in the darkest pits of hell.

Band 8

LABOR SONG

Cotton Mill Blues

Daddy John Love, vocal and guitar.

Recorded June 20, 1936, in Charlotte, N.C. Originally issued on Bluebird B-6491.

One nonpolitical and noneconomic charge against industrial life has been that to tend a machine dehumanizes the worker, makes him long for release to a more natural and emotionally satisfying life. In Jack London's 1911 story "The Apostate" the child mill-hand protagonist is sickened by the incessant mechanical movement required by his machine-tending job, until he finally drifts out of the factory to a life of hoboing.

Likewise, many folk songs of industrial protest deal less with economic exploitation and political redress than simply with joyous escape from the repression of machine-tending or with symbolic rebellion against the machine's domination of human life. John Henry dies not for a better life for miners but rather because "Before I would see that steam drill beat me down, I'd die with a hammer in my hand." And one of the slyest of country songmakers, Uncle Dave Macon, observes in one of his stanzas probing the new industrial life that "It takes something more than a radio/To keep a man home and quiet at night."

Jack London's apostate had a number of real-life counterparts among North Carolina workers in the 1920s and '30s, men whose musical talents offered them an escape from servitude to the looms of the textile industry and created the possibility of success in the new workrooms of the radio and recording studio. Among the most successful of these millhands-turned-musicians were Mainer's Mountaineers, a group from near Asheville, North Carolina. J. E. Mainer provided the driving fiddle lead, his brother Wade played banjo and sang a smooth tenor lead, Zeke Morris added guitar and a high harmony voice, and Daddy John Love played second guitar and sang blues and yodeled novelty numbers. In 1932 the Mainers left mill work and began broadcasting on WBT in Charlotte. Beginning with sessions for Victor in 1934, the group recorded nearly two hundred sides.

While acknowledging the economic hardship of mill work, Love's "Cotton Mill Blues" is not about reform but about escape to an unrepressed life of song, drink, and gambling. The performance is punctuated by joyous yodels and bluesy guitar vamps in the pop-country style established in the late twenties by Jimmie Rodgers, the first national star of county music.

Got the cotton mill blues,
I sure love singing this song,
Gonna quit the old cotton mill
And it ain't gonna be very long.

I'm workin' in the cotton mill
For two dollars and a half a day,
The groceryman and the doctor
A-waitin' to draw my pay.

Well, some folks says
Saturday is pay day,
But I says Saturday's
Another day wasted away.

Well, I'm workin' in the cotton mill
Tryin' to do my best,
But I believe to my soul
I'm goin' to starve to death.

Well, I drink my booze
And I shoot my dice,
Times around the mill don't get better
I'm going to have to divorce my wife.

Well, I'm goin' to the country,
Gonna quit the old cotton mill;
I'm goin' to the country
Where I've got no grocer bill.

Band 9

COWBOY SONG

Whoopie-Ti- Yi- Yo

John I. White, vocal; Roy Smeck, guitar and harmonica.

Recorded April 2, 1931, in New York. Originally issued on Perfect 12712.

Many classic cowboy songs—such as “The Strawberry Roan”—are so recent that we can trace them to their authors and their first appearance in print in turn-of-the-century western newspapers and magazines. “Whoopie-Ti-Yi-Yo” is an exception, a genuinely anonymous folk song that is first mentioned in Owen Wister’s diary of 1893 written in central Texas. Alan Lomax in *The Folk Songs of North America* provides a provocative theory of the song’s genesis. The dogie, an orphan calf weaned too soon and with belly swollen from a premature diet of grass, needed sometimes to be carried on the cattle drive, slung across the cowboy’s saddle. Perhaps in the mind of some nineteenth-century cowboy, Lomax says, the dogie seemed like the child lulled by the cuckold of the old Irish song, “rocking the cradle and the child not his own,” and thus was created of ancient elements a new folk song. Beyond the tender “fathership” of the Irish song lies the archetype of Joseph of Galilee. Lomax concludes that the origin of the trail song may be the re-creative use of an old theme on the part of the northern cowboy who made the original dogie song—yet who can deny the kinship between the carpenter, Joseph, and the cowboy tenderly carrying the tired dogie across the pommel of his saddle?

Often billed on his records as “The Lone Star Ranger” or “The Lonesome Cowboy,” John I. White was by his own admission “neither lonesome nor a cowboy. I was born and raised in that most unWestern of American cities, Washington, D.C.” A student of rather than a participant in western life, White sang cowboy songs on NBC radio out of New York from 1927 to 1936, and between 1929 and 1931 recorded eighteen sides of material both traditional (“The Little Old Sod Shanty”) and ephemeral (“Pappy’s Buried on the Hill,” “Hillbilly Courtship”). Since 1965 White has written articles and books on the American West and on cowboy folklore.

As I was a-walking one morning for pleasure,
I met a cow puncher a-riding along;
His hat was thrown back and his spurs was a-jingling,
As he approached me he warbled this song:

Chorus

Whoopie-ti-yi-yo, get along little dogies,
It's your misfortune and none of my own,
Whoopie-ti-yi-yo, get along little dogies,
For old Wyoming will be your new home.

Early in the spring we round up the dogies,
We mark 'em and brand 'em and bob off their tails,
Round up the horses, load up the chuck wagon,
And throw the dogies out on the long trail.

(Chorus)

Some boys goes up the trail for pleasure,

But that's where they gets it most awfully wrong,
You haven't any idea of the trouble it gives us,
A-keepin' them dogies a-rollin' along.
(Chorus)

You'll make soup for Uncle Sam's Injuns,
It's "Beef, heap beef," I hear them cry.
Get along, get along, get along, little dogies,
You'll be big steers by and by.
(Chorus)

Your mothers was raised away down in Texas,
Where the jimson weed and the sand burrs grow;
We'll fill you up on prickly pear and cholla,
Then throw you on the trail to Idaho.
(Chorus)

Band 10

LYRIC SONG

Mon Cherie Bebe Creole

Dennis McGee, vocal and fiddle; S. D. Courville, fiddle.

Recorded 1928 in New Orleans. Originally issued on Vocalion 5319.

Folklorists classify as lyric songs those in which the text is subordinate to the melody, and whose function is to express strong feeling. The English folklorist Cecil Sharp describes the lyric song as one of "emotional and passionate utterance. . . usually the record of a personal experience—very frequently of an amatory nature."

The present song comes from the French-speaking Acadian (or Cajun) tradition of Louisiana, a tradition richer in lyric songs than in ballads, and one in which the powerful emotional content of ancient European French lyrics has been reinforced by contact with black American music and performance style, exemplifying Sharp's comment that American lyric songs "are yet in a measure so different [from European models] that they may fairly be considered a fresh contribution to the subject." "Mon Cherie Bebe Creole" is conventional in its lament for a lost love, but its genuine poetry lies less in its words (particularly the English translation) than in the tone of Dennis McGee's voice as buoyed by the soaring twin-fiddle accompaniment.

McGee, a Cajun farmer and barber from Chatagnier, Louisiana, recorded in the late 1920s some of the most moving and powerful American lyric-song performances. McGee and Courville modeled their twin-fiddle style on that of Courville's father and uncle, members of a family whose musical history is traceable to the eighteenth century. Both men, now past seventy, still perform strongly and in 1972 recorded an LP, *The Traditional Cajun Fiddling of Dennis McGee and S. D. Courville* (Morning Star 16001).

The transcription and translation of "Mon Cherie Bebe Creole," by Catherine Blanchet of Abbeville, Louisiana, were previously recorded on *Louisiana Cajun Music, Volume I: First Recordings, the 1920's* (Old Timey 108).

*Tu m'ambandonne, malheureuse,
Tu m'ambandonne pour toujours,
Malheureuse, -Aie yie yaie!
Chere apres m'en aller,
C'est pour mourir.
Dis bye-bye, chere maman,
Fais pas ca avec ton negre,
Tu vas me faire mourir pour toujours,
C'est chose malheureuse,*

*Dis bye-bye, chere vieille maman.
Gardez donc mes chapitres
Tu m'appelle chere, malheureuse,
T'as fait ca pour toujours,
Malheureuse, malheureuse,
Dis bye-bye a ton pap et ta mom.
Regardez donc, malheureuse
Et gardez donc et je suis apres
M'en aller dans les chemins
Tous les jours, tous les nuits,
Crie pour toi, malheureuse, si jolie.*

(You're leaving me, poor thing,
You're leaving me forever,
Poor thing, ay-ay-aye.
Dear, going away to die.

Say bye-bye, dear mama,
Don't do that to your honey,
You're going to kill me forever.
That's unfortunate,
Say bye-bye, dear old mama.

Look at my chapitres,
You call me dear, poor thing,
You have done that forever,
Poor thing, poor thing,
Say bye-bye to your pap and mom.

Look here, poor thing,
And look here and I am
Going out in the streets
Every day, every night,
Crying for you, poor thing, so pretty.)

Side Two

Band 1

BANJO SONG

Oh My Little Darling

Thaddeus C. Willingham, vocal and banjo.

*Recorded 1939 in Gulfport, Miss., by Herbert Halpert. Library
of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 3115 B1.*

Most contemporary interest in the five-string banjo lies in its capacity to serve as the vehicle for stunning instrumental displays, as in the hands of Courtney Johnson or Ralph Stanley. Most traditional musicians, however, value the banjo equally as an accompaniment to the voice, and an old-time banjoist such as Buell Kazee can elevate accompaniment to a high art. While the banjo can accompany every type of song—from Child ballad to hymn to blues—it has brought about its own genre, the banjo song, which seems to exist solely to be sung to the gallop of the instrument.

The banjo song usually consists of a conglomeration of stanzas (often couplets) that the player can fit to the tune (inevitably in 4/4 time). Stanzas come from many sources—lyric songs, dance calls, ballads. The only requirement is that each stanza makes a self-contained statement, and thus the stanzas can be performed in random order:

All I want's a big fine horse,

Corn to feed it on,
Pretty little girl to stay at home
And feed him when I'm gone.

A common source appears to be antebellum black songs about animals:

I went down to New Orleans,
What do you reckon I saw?
Sixteen possums pulling a plow,
Jaybird hollerin' "Haw!"

Another source is nineteenth-century minstrel-show songs, stanzas for which were sometimes composed by professional blackface singers and sometimes drawn from traditional stock; the latter often dropped back into tradition after a career of circulating in print or on the professional stage:

Oh Miss Liza poor gal,
Oh Miss Liza Jane,
Oh Miss Liza poor gal,
She died on the train.

Thaddeus C. Willingham was a countryman from Alabama on whose father's farm worked exslaves from whom he apparently learned much of his rich store of banjo songs—minstrel songs like "Old Dan Tucker," animal songs like "Cross-Eyed Gopher," dance tunes like "Shake Your Little Foot, Sally Ann." "Oh My Little Darling" seems to be unique with Willingham—at least it appears on no other commercial or field recordings of banjo playing—but it typifies the banjo song: its logic lies not in the disconnected stanzas but in the performance, in the perfect complement between Willingham's soft vocal and the snap and punch of his percussive banjo style.

Oh my little darling, don't you weep and cry,
Some sweet day a-coming, marry you and I.

Oh my little darling, don't you weep and moan,
Some sweet day a-coming, take my baby home.

Up and down the railroad, 'cross the county line,
Pretty little girls a-plenty, but a wife is hard to find.

Nigger drives the wagon, nigger walks behind,
Kill yourself a-laughing to see them horses flyin'.

Band 2

OUTLAW SONG

Been on the Job Too Long

Wilmer Watts and the Lonely Eagles: Wilmer Watts, vocal; Charles Freshour and Palmer Rhyne, instrumentalists.

Recorded October 29, 1929, in New York. Originally issued on Paramount 3210.

The Anglo-American tradition of individualism manifests itself in folk song as a long line of ballads glorifying the outlaw who willfully separates himself from the community and its mores. The most primitive English-language outlaw songs openly celebrate the antihero's deeds, as in the ancient Robin Hood ballads and some Negro badman ballads such as "Stackerlee" and "Po' Lazarus." More commonly, the outlaw song celebrates the criminal's defiance of the community but concludes by showing his confession and punishment. "Thus," notes Alan Lomax, "we can enjoy vicariously all the bloody deeds and then rid ourselves of guilt feelings by concurring in the criminal's punishment." Mixed violence and piety: a sure formula for success in our popular art.

Wilmer Watts's "Been on the Job Too Long" is better known as "Duncan and Brady," a ballad Malcolm Laws classifies (I 9) as of American Negro origin. The song recounts a showdown between deputy Alfred Bounds (changed in the song to "Duncan") and holdup man Brady that occurred about 1900 in Lamar County, Mississippi, in which Bounds beat Brady to the draw and killed him. The song is most commonly found in the Mississippi Valley, often with Brady the policeman and Duncan the outlaw. Watts's text is confused (most versions begin "Duncan, Duncan was tendin' bar/When in walked Brady with a shinin' star") but retains the "hard man" motif of black outlaw songs, the outlaw unrepentant beyond death, going to hell to defy even the nether community of the devil.

Watts was a textile worker in the mills near Belmont, North Carolina, who recorded commercially in Chicago in 1927 and in New York in 1929. He is of particular folkloristic interest because of the expressive vigor of his singing and his unusual repertoire of original songs and songs rarely encountered in the Carolinas. Charles Freshour is known to have traveled to Texas before World War I and may have brought the Texas- Mississippi Negro song about Duncan and Brady back to the East.

Twinkle, twinkle, 'lectric star,
Yonder goes Brady on a 'lectric car,
Makin' his way to the freedom land,
He's gonna kill him a drunkard like a bulldog man.

Chorus

'Cause he's been on the job too long.

Brady was a worker on the telephone wire,
'Long come Duncan with a shining star,
Looked at old Brady right; through the specs,
He says, "It's no use in talking, Brady, get your checks."
(*Chorus*)

Brady replied and he answered no,
Duncan showed him a sight that was never before,
Says, "Now Brady you're running your arrest,"
Old Duncan shot a hole through Brady's chest.
(*Chorus*)

Brady had a little twenty-five,
Kill a man about a half a mile,
Duncan had a big forty-four,
Well, he laid old Brady in the barroom door.
(*Chorus*)

Early in the morning, just about nine,
Horses and the hacks all formed a line,
White and the black all gathered around,
They gonna take Mr. Brady to the buryin' ground.
(*Chorus*)

Brady went to hell with a curse and a song,
Said, "Mr. Devil, well I ain't here long";
Devil says, "It is just this way,
Well, there's never been a drunkard here that got away."
(*Chorus*)

Brady had a little twenty-five,
Kill a man about a half a mile,
Duncan had a big forty-four,
Well, he laid old Brady in the barroom door.
(*Chorus*)

Band 3

MINSTREL SONG

Dr. Ginger Blue

Arthur Tanner and His Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers. Arthur Tanner, vocal.
Recorded April 12, 1929, in Atlanta. Originally issued on Columbia 15479.

Contemporary racial awareness has led Americans justly to condemn the nineteenth-century minstrel show as a cultural embarrassment that for nearly a century perpetuated stereotypes of the black man as the happy, shuffling, ignorant, amoral, and comic “darky.” Yet to be unable to objectively study the minstrel stage is a cultural crime of another order that robs all Americans of a valuable part of their heritage.

However insulting we may find the blacked faces and parodied diction of the minstrel show, the minstrel stage was a locus of creative American art and the source of innovations that shaped the popular art of our own century. Beginning in the 1820s, the minstrel show introduced a new and distinctively American song, dance, comedy, and performing style. Through the minstrel show syncopated music, both from black folk sources and from white composers such as Stephen Foster, became the dominant form of American popular music. Minstrelshow dancers melded black flat-foot and Irish jig dancing into the uniquely American tap dance, and contemporary dance innovators from Fred Astaire to Twyla Tharp are the heirs to this tradition. Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson moved from the twilight of the minstrel stage directly into the new electronic day of movies, phonograph, and radio; and their performing style was carried into modern show business by singers like Judy Garland and Dean Martin.

About the turn of the century, the minstrel show, which had entertained rural and urban Americans alike, yielded the city stage to vaudeville, but minstrel elements lingered in the rural South in the traveling medicine show. This often consisted of the “doctor” who peddled “Indianherb” cure-alls from a wagon or auto, and one or more musician-comedians who drew and entertained the crowd. Some of the white medicineshow musicians, such as Tom Ashley, continued the black-face tradition of the minstrel stage; some shows featured black talent of the caliber of Willie McTell or Pink Anderson.

Arthur Tanner, of Georgia, a member of the Gid Tanner-Clayton McMichen Skillet Licker string bands centered in Atlanta, likely had such medicine-show experience. In 1929 members of the Skillet Lickers recorded an authentic-sounding skit of blackface comedy and music, “The Kickapoo Medicine Show” (Columbia 15482). Tanner’s “Dr. Ginger Blue” descends from an actual minstrel recitation, one version of which was published in 1854. The performance here provides a microcosm of American humorous entertainment: the antic nonsense of the first two spoken stanzas looks forward to the surrealistic action of the Walt Disney animated cartoon; the elevated metaphors of the fourth hark back to the poetry of Mark Twain’s tall tales; and the fifth stanza anticipates the verbal non sequitur insults of Groucho Marx. The minstrel recitation to a musical accompaniment may also be the source of the “talking blues” popularized by Woody Guthrie.

Always used to sing,
My name is Ginger Blue and I’ll tell you what I’ll do,
I’m a darky from the state of Alabama.
“Yesterday morning in the afternoon there came a little hungry boy down the street. He bought a custard for a living. He got mad and threw it plumb through a brick wall, jumped over into dry millpond and got drowned. You know, that’d make anybody...”

Chorus

Walk, talk, Ginger, and hire double trouble,
Always used to sing,
My name is Ginger Blue and I’ll tell you what I’ll do,
I’m a darky from the state of Alabama.

“You know, I was off down in the pasture this morning and the bird nests they was a-whistling all over the limbs. I got

scared and run up a black gum poplar, about five foot above the top of it, run out on a dead pine limb. That thing broke and I fell right straddle of a barb wire fence with both feet on the same side of it. And you know that'd make anybody..."

(Chorus)

"We was off down on Decatur Street last night a-havin' a little free-for-all. All the scared darkies you never did see 'cept me and Samson. We'd been to the boxing school; we thought we'd entertain 'em a little bit. You know, the first time hit him I clear like missed him and the next time I struck him right center in the same place. And you know that nigger made me..."

(Chorus)

"You know I stole on off down the street there and I met old Granny Whimpledimple. She had a nose like a stovepipe and ears like a tobacco leaf. And you know out of her mouth come a pitchfork of lightning and that'd make anybody..."

(Chorus)

"I stole on off uptown, I met Uncle John up there. I says, 'Hello, Uncle John, how's Aunt Dinah?' He says, 'Why, Aunt Dinah was unconscious last night all night long.' I says, 'What in the world was the matter with Aunt Dinah?' He says, 'Aw, you fool, you, she was just sound asleep.' That'd make anybody..."

(Chorus)

Band 4

BAWDY SONG

Crawling and Creeping

Asa Martin, vocal and lead guitar; James Roberts, guitar. *Recorded August 28, 1934, in New York.*

Originally issued on Perfect 13130.

Like that of many other Americans, my childhood exposure to "folklore" —stories and songs perpetuated in memory and transmitted by word-of-mouth—was principally to material of a sexual nature. Minnesota farmboys told obscene jokes that were hoary when they first appeared in the *Decameron*. Sexual jokes and songs remain the most easily collected form of folklore: who doesn't know at least one off-color story or song that he hasn't learned from print or electronic media? Yet until relatively recently this most ubiquitous of folklore remained little studied and largely uncollected by professional folklorists.

Whatever bawdy songs and stories were known to the earliest white folk musicians to record their lore have already been lost: little more than double-entendre (such as the Carolina Tar Heels' "My Sweet Farm Girl") or severely displaced (Cliff Carlisle's "Tom Cat Blues") bawdy songs—largely modeled on black "hokum" or "party blues"—found its way into the hillbilly record market. A rare exception is Asa Martin's "Crawling and Creeping," a highly expurgated version of a genuine Anglo-American bawdy song that provides an oblique view of the sexual lore known to country musicians but apparently rigorously excluded from the recording studios.

Unexpurgated texts of "Crawling and Creeping" (known in England as "Nancy and Johnny": see Harry Cox's recording on the English Folk Dance and Song Society LP 1004) depict a familiar sexual theme. The protagonist poses as a sexual fool who must pretend to be dreaming or ignorant while he tricks his target into helping him seduce her. Pregnancy is the inevitable result of the seduction (other texts read, "In about nine months she fell to weepin' / Along come a bastard acrawlin' and a-creepin'"), and punishment by castration is inflicted by the father/authority figure—often a doctor, whose sole function in sexual folklore, according to the folklorist Gershon Legman, is to punish by purgation or castration (as in the ancient "Doctor Krankheit" burlesque routine: "Oh my God, nurse, I told you to slip off his spectacles!").

Asa Martin, of Winchester, Kentucky, one of the more sophisticated performers to record folk songs commercially, has a long background in vaudeville and medicine shows. Apparently familiar with the unexpurgated "Crawling and Creeping," Martin cleverly suggests the motifs of the original while remaining in commercially acceptable taste: the length of the jail sentence suggests the pregnancy, the authority figure is the judge, and the nature of the punishment remains clear ("This crawlin' and creepin's

gonna be your last”). In Martin’s performance the usual refrain (in England, “With his long fol-de-diggydi-do right down to his knees”; in America, “Lay your leg over mine once more”) has been suppressed in favor of hot guitar breaks, among the first of their kind on hillbilly records.

Martin still performs in the Winchester area. His career has been ably documented by Mark Wilson in an LP, *Dr. Ginger Blue* (Rounder 0034), which focuses on Martin’s medicine-show entertainments.

I dreamed last night I was a-crawling and a-creeping (*repeat twice*)
Crawled in the room where Mary was sleeping,
But I ain’t gonna do it no more.

I stepped on a tack that was sticking in the floor (*repeat twice*)
And bopped my nose on the knot of the door,
But I ain’t gonna do it no more.

Mary waked up and she called the law (*repeat twice*)
The next stop I made was the city hall,
And I don’t want to do it no more.

The judge said, “Young man, don’t you laugh, (*repeat twice*)
This crawlin’ and creepin’s gonna be your last,
You’ll never want to do it no more.”

So he gave me nine months for crawling and a-creeping (*repeat twice*)
For goin’ in the room where Mary was sleeping,
But I ain’t gonna do it any more.

Band 5

BLUES SONG

Haunted Road Blues

Tom Clarence Ashley, vocal and guitar; Guinn Foster, harmonica and guitar.
Recorded December, 1931. Originally issued on Perfect 12779.

With the increasing importance of the blues to our popular music—jazz, rock, the ragtime revival—few Americans remain ignorant of the origin of the blues in African musical traditions of polyrhythm and improvisation and in the painful social reality of the black man’s experience in America. Yet the blues could never have branched beyond the black experience had it not found fertile ground in the larger white culture.

The word “blues” is believed to stem from the Elizabethan “blue devils,” and English-language culture owns a long heritage of lament and melancholy. The “graveyard” poetry of William Collins in the 1750s explored despair and near-morbid introspection as means of poetic creation. From *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* of the nineteenth century stems a literary tradition of confronting the void that at one level of culture yields Poe’s gloomy stories and poems and at another popular nineteenth-century songs, both religious and secular, that look despair and death unflinchingly in the eye. The Protestant hymn “O Lovely Appearance of Death,” for example, yields a chill worthy of Poe’s most spine-tingling stories.

One of the finest white blues singers, the Kentucky coal miner Dock Boggs, spoke of his melancholy “graveyard songs” and of a mood he called “getting in the graveyard” that becomes indistinguishable from “having the blues,” demonstrating a link between Afro-American and Anglo-American streams of poetry and aesthetic experience. White blues performers often tend toward the contemplation of death rather than the troubles of life that mark black blues. “Haunted Road Blues” combines elements of white “graveyard” and black blues traditions to exemplify the blues as a type of American song whose function is to enable the performer to emulate Trueblood, Ralph Ellison’s black sharecropper in *Invisible Man*, who looked upon chaos and was not destroyed.

Tom Clarence Ashley, from Mountain City, Tennessee, carried the musical heritage of his family and his

community into his career as a busker performing music and comedy for carnivals, medicine shows, dances, and occasionally on street corners. Ashley needed to add to his inherited stock of music songs his audience demanded, and it is likely that his mastery of the blues dates from his travels as a busker. Along with the North Carolina harmonica virtuoso Guinn (or Gwen) Foster, Ashley recorded several examples of blues and old-time songs, of which Ralph Rinzler has said, “Here the perfect blending of voice and harmonica is unique among the varied sounds to be heard in recorded American traditional music.” Ashley’s life and music are documented in three LPs, *Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley’s*, Vols I and II (Folkways 2355, 2359), and *Clarence Ashley and Tex Isley* (Folkways 2350).

I’m worried now but I won’t be worried long (*repeat*)
But the road is haunted, now honey down the road I’m gone.

Went down to the graveyard, looked down in my good girl’s face (*repeat*)
I love you, honey, but I sure can’t take your place.

Now when I die, good woman don’t you wear no black (*repeat*)
For if you do my ghost will come acreepin’ back.

Band 6

SENTIMENTAL

The Village School

Nelstone’s Hawaiians: Hubert Nelson and James Touchstone, vocals and guitars.
Recorded November 30, 1929, in Atlanta. Originally issued on Victor V- 40193.

Sigmund Spaeth’s *Read ‘Em and Weep* delightfully documents one of the more fascinating kinds of American nineteenth-century popular song, the sentimental ditty that panders for our tears by offering a parade of mistreated or dying children, homeless girls, betrayed suitors, forgotten aged mothers, or blind convict fathers. Spaeth’s tongue-in-cheek sophistication represents the only way urban audiences since the 1920s have been able to bear this lugubrious body of material—with condescension.

Yet these sentimental songs represent at the popular level significant nineteenth-century cultural currents: the Victorian cult of the child (Carroll’s Alice, Dickens’ Little Nell, Wordsworth’s child trailing clouds of glory) lies behind the endless line of unfortunate babes, and the Victorian canonization of marriage and the family (as in Tennyson’s “The Two Voices”) lies behind the little homes disrupted by drink, heartless landlords, or death. Paradoxically, the nineteenth century was asserting the innocence of the child and the holiness of the home at the same time it was beginning the merciless exploitation of children and the relentless disintegration of the extended family, and this pattern of betrayed ideals lies at the heart of the sentimental song and its earlier appeal.

Sentimental songs long forgotten elsewhere have lingered in memory in rural areas, and new ones continue to appear in popular music aimed at rural audiences. Dolly Parton’s “Coat of Many Colors” [see New World Records NW 207, *Country Music in the Modern Era*] can be considered a direct descendant of “The Village School”: the same tearful schoolchild appears, the same school environment as the arena of betrayed innocence.

Little is known about Nelstone’s Hawaiians, who recorded only twice, in Memphis in 1928 and in Atlanta in 1929, and who were certainly not Hawaiian. Despite their modish name and the up-to-date 1920s sound of their lead guitar—played with a steel slide bar in the manner introduced to the United States by Hawaiian pop musicians like Frank Ferera before World War I—the Nelstone group was in touch with deep currents of traditional music. Their recording of “The Fatal Flower Garden” (Victor V-40193: reissued in the Folkways *Anthology of American Music*) is a rare—in more ways than one—version of the archaic murdered-boy ballad “Sir Hugh” (Child 155), but the performers make no distinction between it and “The Village School”: both songs of childhood misfortune, the sublime and the ridiculous, are

presented with equal conviction and tenderness.

Our village school was crowded on examination day,
Some they came to see those children pass.
They felt so glad, of all of them, except two they knew
Who was always at the bottom of their class.

This day they missed as usual, their little hearts were sad,
The rest of them they seemed to be so gay.
When told no one would love them if they did not learn at school,
With tearful eyes the teacher she heard them say:

We have no one to care for us now,
No one to put us to bed;
No one to kiss and caress us at night
When our evening prayers have been said.
Since mother's been taken away,
We don't get along somehow.
That's why we don't pass
With the rest of the class,
We have no one to care for us now.

Band 7

HOMILETIC SONG

The Poor Drunkard's Dream

Wade Mainer, vocal; Sons of the Mountaineers.

Recorded August 21, 1939, in Atlanta. Originally issued on Bluebird B 8273.

Many folk songs have an admonitory or didactic character. Older British-derived broadside ballads of outlaws or murderers typically conclude in the voice of the transgressor pleading to his audience, "Don't do as I have done," or "Don't ever let the devil get the upper hand of you." In this way, folk songs may serve a similar function to that Bruno Bettelheim claims for fairy tales, articulating and preserving the moral wisdom of the community: don't kill, don't steal, don't lie.

Many American songs not only admonish the listener with moral advice but prescribe a way of life, instructing him to avoid the "sins" of indulgence—gambling, alcohol, and sex. Critics of American life consider this confusion of the indulgences of eternal human propensities with sin or crime one of our culture's great shortcomings and the origin of our world-despised self-righteousness. They point out that America's "crime" rate has always been understandably high, since America has more laws to prescribe and control human behavior than any other nation in history.

Some American folk songs, like "Little Brown Jug" or "Old Rosin the Beau," do extol the pleasures of drink in the manner of Robert Burns's toping songs. But the rise of the temperance movement in the 1870s brought a flood of songs condemning demon rum; these caught the fancy of moralistic folk minds, which learned them from temperance songbooks and pamphlets and over the years made them into preachy but genuinely moving folk songs. "The Poor Drunkard's Dream" (a descendant of an 1850s English song, "The Husband's Dream") attempts to frighten drinkers by depicting the anarchistic masculine world of booze as inimical to the civilized domestic state—precisely the point made at another cultural level by Jack London's 1913 temperance novel *John Barleycorn*.

Wade Mainer, a professional radio and recording artist since 1932, moved from North Carolina to Michigan in 1953 and retired from music to work for General Motors. In 1961 he resumed performing, principally gospel and homiletic songs similar to the present example.

It was one dark and stormy night,
I heard and saw an awful sight,

The lightning flashed, the thunders roll,
All about my dark benighted soul.

I saw another wicked crowd,
With bloodshot eyes and voices loud.
“Come in, young men, there’s plenty of room,
For this is a whiskey seller’s doom.”

I started on, got there at last,
I tried to take another glass,
And every time I stirred it well,
I thought about a poor drunkard’s hell.

I set it down and left that place,
I tried to seek redeeming grace,
I prayed a prayer that Paul did pray,
That God might save my soul that day.

I started out to change my life,
I thought of my neglected wife,
I found her weeping o’er her bed
Because her darling little babe was dead.

I told her not to mourn and weep,
For her little baby just fell asleep,
And that the little soul would wake above,
With God’s eternal peace and love.

I took her by her lily white hand,
She was so weak she could not stand,
I set her down and with a prayer,
That God might save us all up there.

I am so glad salvation’s free,
That I might rest on Calvary,
That I might live a sober life,
With a happy home and a loving wife.

Band 8

EVANGELICAL HYMN

If the Light Has Gone Out in Your Soul

Ernest Phipps and His Holiness Singers: Minnie Phipps, Nora Byrley,
and A.G. Baker, vocals; Ernest Phipps and R. N. Johnson, fiddles; Ethel
Baker, piano; Eula Johnson, banjo; Shirley Jones, guitar; D. L. McVey,
mandolin.

Recorded October 29, 1928, in Bristol, Tenn. Originally issued on Victor 40010.

A generation before the Revolution, American Protestants rebelled against doctrinaire Old World Puritanism. Anticipating the Romantic Movement, this new spirit in religion—the Great Awakening—elevated emotion over reason and personal experience over theology. Religious music followed suit, and the evangelical hymns of Isaac Watts and John and Charles Wesley replaced the solemn and decorous psalmody brought from England.

Evangelical hymns paraphrased rather than quoted the Bible, substituting direct, vigorous, vernacular English for the already archaic King James translation. The evangelical texts emphasized not doctrine but

direct salvation through the experience of Christ.

“If the Light Has Gone Out in Your Soul” is a modern descendant of the evangelical hymns of the Great Awakening, and the hand-clapping, foot-stomping drive of this performance is the survival in our time of the “heart strangely warmed” by a personally experienced religious fire. Like the hymns of Watts and the Wesleys, “If the Light Has Gone Out in Your Soul” focuses on sin and death, and appeals to the convert to feel in his heart the dark dread of a life without the redeeming light of salvation.

Ernest Phipps was a Holiness preacher from near Corbin, Kentucky, who in 1927 and 1928 took members of his congregation to Bristol, Tennessee, to record for Victor a dozen of the most exciting examples of evangelical folk music preserved on disc.

When the sun of your life has gone down,
And the clouds in the west turn to gold;
Oh how sad when the year’s end has come,
If the light has gone out in your soul.

Chorus

Oh just think how in death you must feel,
With the light growing dim in your soul,
Oh how lone it would be, oh how sad,
If the light has gone out in your soul.

When you come to the end of the way,
And life’s story for you has been told;
Oh how sad all the years will appear,
If the light has gone out in your soul.

(Chorus)

When the chilly winds of death around you steal,
And the clouds hang around black as coal;
What a dread in your life you will feel,
If the light has gone out in your soul.

(Chorus)

Oh I mean to live for God while I’m here,
Soul and body by Jesus controlled;
When I come to the end of the way,
With the light burning bright in my soul.

(Chorus)

Band 9

HYMN

I’m a Long Time Traveling Away from Home

J. T. Allison’s Sacred Harp Singers.

Recorded 1927 in Richmond, Ind. Originally issued on Gennett 6255.

In Colonial America, religious music was central to Puritan life: the first book published here was *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640). And in Colonial life the two subsequent directions of American religious singing were established. One direction, which we might term Apollonian, stressed contemplation, order and rigor, adherence to a text and disciplined performance; another direction, one we might call Dionysian, stressed spontaneity, improvisation, originality, and emotional abandon—the Pentecostal experience that even today challenges the conservative decorum of orthodox religious practice.

One of the older “Apollonian” traditions of American religious song is the pioneer school of shape-note

music described by George Pullen Jackson in his classic study *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*. Adherents of this tradition sing a repertoire consisting of the 461 songs of *The Sacred Harp*, a hymnbook first published in 1844, each set in harmony parts for four voices and printed in an unconventional notation in which degrees of the scale are designated by shapes—square, round, triangular, and diamond. The shape-note system, says Lomax, “was invented by American pioneer music masters” to render “sight-reading far easier for non-bookish people.” Sacred Harp singers can still be heard in the rural South in churches and on radio, and a convention of Sacred Harp singers meets annually in Alabama.

“I’m a Long Time Traveling Away from Home” illustrates the performing method of a typical Sacred Harp group: the leader first conducts the group through the melody in sol-fa syllables, and then the members sing the stanzas from the hymnbook. The metaphor of the Christian soul as a mere sojourner on earth traveling toward its ultimate home in heaven appears from St. Augustine through *Pilgrim’s Progress* and into our own time.

J. T. Allison’s Sacred Harp Singers, from Moody, Alabama, are among the finest of the numerous recorded Sacred Harp groups. The lovely, solemn “I’m a Long Time Traveling Away from Home” is to modern ears the most accessible *Sacred Harp* melody.

Effacing charms of earth’s fair well,
Your springs of joy are dry;
My soul shall seek another world,
A brighter world on high.

Chorus

I’m a long time traveling here below,
I’m a long time traveling away from home;
I’m a long time traveling here below,
To lay this body down.

Farewell, my friends, whose tender care
Has long increased my love;
Your fond embrace I now exchange
For better friends above.
(*Chorus*)

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White Spirituals. Atlantic 1349.

Side One Total time 25:23

1 CHICK-A-LI-LEE-LO (Traditional)	1:18
Almeda Riddle	
2 KING WILLIAM WAS KING GEORGE'S SON (Traditional)	:40
Mr. and Mrs. Crockett Ward	
3 SWEET WILLIAM (Traditional)	3:42
Fields Ward	
4 THE LEXINGTON MURDER (Traditional)	3:34
Wesley Hargis	
5 LILY SCHULL (Traditional)	3:17
Mrs. Lena Bare Turbyfill and Mrs. Lloyd Bare Hagie	
6 THE FARMER IS THE MAN THAT FEEDS THEM ALL (Traditional)	3:01
Fiddlin' John Carson	
7 COME ALL YOU COAL MINERS (Traditional)	2:12
Sarah Ogan	
8 COTTON MILL BLUES (Traditional)	2:15
Daddy John Love	
9 WHOOPEE-TI-YI-YO (Traditional)	2:40
John White and Roy Smeck	
10 MON CHERIE BEBE CREOLE (Traditional)	2:44
Dennis McGee and S.D. Courville	

Side Two Total time 25:36

1 OH MY LITTLE DARLING (Traditional)	2:07
Thaddeus C. Willingham	
2 BEEN ON THE JOB TOO LONG (Traditional)	3:08
Wilmer Watts and The Lonely Eagles	
3 DR. GINGER BLUE (Traditional)	3:00
Arthur Tanner and His Blue Ridge Cornshuckers	
4 CRAWLING AND CREEPING (Traditional)	2:40
Asa Martin and James Roberts	
5 HAUNTED ROAD BLUES (Traditional)	3:07
Tom Clarence Ashley and Guinn Foster	
6 THE VILLAGE SCHOOL (Traditional)	3:01
Nelstone's Hawaiians (Herbert Nelson and James Touchstone)	
7 THE POOR DRUNKARD'S DREAM (Traditional)	2:44
Wade Mainer and Sons of the Mountaineers	
8 IF THE LIGHT HAS GONE OUT IN YOUR SOUL (Traditional)	2:57
Ernest Phipps and His Holiness Singers	
9 I'M A LONG TIME TRAVELING AWAY FROM HOME (Traditional)	2:52
J.T. Allison's Sacred Harp Singers	

Full discographic information and a complete list of the performers for each selection may be found within the individual discussions of the works in the liner notes.

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