

## THE GOSPEL SHIP

New World Records 80294

### The Gospel Ship Baptist Hymns & White Spirituals from the Southern Mountains

by Alan Lomax

My years of field work in this country convince me that at least half our English-language musical heritage was religious. Indeed, until the rise of the modern entertainment industry most organized musical activity in most American communities centered on the church--for example, the backwoods singing schools discussed below (also see New World Records 80205, *White Spirituals from the Sacred Harp*) were usually church-sponsored. Today, as modernization wipes out the settings in which secular folk songs were created, the church continues to provide theaters in which new song styles arise to meet the needs of changing forms of worship. The religious revolution that began in the Reformation has continued in wave after wave of revivals, some large, some small, but most expressing the determination of some group to have the kind of music in church that they preferred and in which they could participate. This folk process has enriched the repertory of Protestantism with the patterns of many subcultures and many periods.

Sometimes the people held on to old forms, like lining hymns (in which the preacher sings the first line and the congregation follows; see Track etc.) or spirituals, which the whole church sings, preferring them to a fancier program by the choir, to which the congregation passively listens. Bringing choirs and organs and musical directors into the southern folk church silenced the congregation and the spiritual in the once folksy Baptist and Methodist churches, so that the folk moved out and founded the song-heavy sects of the Holiness movement.

Use of instruments likewise expressed traditional preferences. Strict old-fashioned groups, like the Primitive Baptists, simply banned all instruments as tools of the devil, and this conservatism fostered the preservation of the older songs with scales and with ornamentation. The fiddle and the banjo were called "the devil's stalking horses," the square dancers and jollifications where they were played were out of bounds for the straitlaced, and church members who persisted in playing or following this music could be brought before the congregation and put out of church. Until very recently (perhaps the Fifties), therefore, the piano and the harmonium were seldom heard in most folk churches. Stringed instruments, however, met a friendlier reception among white folk religionists: the guitar, the banjo, and then little combinations (first in "old-timey," then in bluegrass style) appeared in the evangelical churches and on recordings. Groups like the Carter family commonly sang sacred songs on their radio and recording dates (see New World Records NW 287, *Country Music: South and West*, Side One, Band 5), and the serious convert could have the string music he enjoyed, without feeling a threat to his religion.

Here and there, particularly in the black storefront churches, all sorts of instruments were brought in to increase the pleasure and excitement of the meetings. String groups, drums, trumpets, trombones, then, validated by general middle-class use, organs, and, recently, electrified instruments--until almost any combo may turn up anywhere in the now populous Holiness and Sanctified churches. Along with the instruments have come the tunes and sounds of secular music, including ragtime, jazz, blues, swing, and now rock, all permitted, according to the preference of the congregation, so long as the texts of the songs remained sacred.

All along, the evangelical hymnodists, like the Methodist Charles Wesley, have robbed the devil of his best tunes. In his brief and excellent history of Southern white spirituals (Jackson, 1953, Preface; see Bibliography), John Powell tells how St. Aldhem, in the time of King Alfred, would disguise himself as a street singer, attract a crowd with worldly ditties, then, by gradually introducing words from the Scriptures, bring his hearers to consider their salvation. Among his other reforms, Luther revised German hymnody, writing in the vernacular and using German folk songs and carols for his melodic material. A sixteenth-century example cited by Powell is the love song "John Come Kiss Me Now," transformed so that the Lord, rather than a woman, calls on John (man) in these lines:

My shepherds call, my preachers cry,  
John, come kiss me now,  
John, come kiss me by and by,  
And make no mair ado.

Even the Puritans collected tunes for their hymns in taverns. Shakespeare refers to this in *The Winter's Tale*, where he speaks of a Puritan who "sings Psalms to hornepipes." George Pullen Jackson found the shape-note hymnbooks of the American frontier packed with worldly ballad tunes such as "Barbara Allen," "Lord Lovell," and "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" (Jackson, 1953). Often the parodies were without disguise. The Scottish Rev. William McDonald turned the inviting

Will you go, lassie, go to the braes of Balquidder,  
Where the blackberries grow in the bonnie blooming heather

into the hymn called "The Sinner's Invitation":

Sinner go, will you go, to the highlands of heaven,  
Where the storms never blow and the long summer's given.

An even more striking religious parody of a secular piece occurs in the song "John Adkin's Farewell" (Jackson, 1953), where the favorite drinking song of the frontier (known as "Clinch Mountain," "Rye Whiskey," etc.) is used to mount a drunkard's confessional:

Poor drunkards, poor drunkards, take warning to me,  
The fruits of transgression behold now I see:  
My soul is tormented, my body confined,  
My friends and my children, left weeping behind.

Because of the lack of documents, the earliest parallels Jackson can trace are folk songs of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. He assumes--properly, I feel--that the older, unidentified tunes are derived from folk sources for which we have no record.

The present collection begins with representatives of one of the earliest Protestant styles--the free-rhythmed antiphony of the Primitive Baptist hymns. Here a leader intones to a set tune the words of the first line of a psalm, leads the congregation through this line in unison, intones the text of the next line, leads the congregation through that text, and so on till the end of the psalm. Some authorities believe that this practice originated in England in the early seventeenth century (Foote;

see Bibliography). Moreover, it has been frequently pointed out that this was a very useful method on the American frontier, where hymnbooks were scarce and few could read them. The same condition, of course, has pertained since the foundation of the Christian church. More interesting are the close parallels between this "lining-out style" and the traditional antiphony of the Catholic mass. Both are free in rhythm, often highly embellished, responsorial, and heavily laden with an arcane text given out by a leader. In this fashion the maximum of religious doctrine--long and complex texts--can be sung by large, illiterate congregations, and this potential was realized when Calvin had the psalms (which had formerly been sung in Latin) translated into the vulgate so that they could be understood by the congregations who sang them. The antiquity of lining out is further attested by the fact that it is still characteristic of the most conservative of Protestant groups--old-fashioned Presbyterian congregations in Calvinist Scotland and the German Amish--who sing exclusively in this manner. Indeed, Amish singing is so "drawn out," so heavily ornamented syllable by syllable with slides, melismata, and graces, that any line can take almost a minute to sing.

The complexity of text, the rhythmic freedom, and the variation of ornament from singer to singer in this lined-out style create striking and often rich heterophony. In a world survey of song styles I have found that this style is most frequent in the ritual music of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Orient and much less common elsewhere. In this kind of heterophony the choir trails the leader, picking up the text and tune just a step behind him. Thus I take the lining hymn to be a survival of the mannerisms of Eastern ritual in British and American folk music. Just as the priests of ages past attempted to lead their followers through precise repetitions of the sacred litanies, so the modern Primitive Baptist song leader, turning to the pages of Elder Thomas's *Choir Selection of Hymns* (1877), brings his fellow worshipers line by line through some elaborately phrased doctrine-laden text by Calvin or by Isaac Watts. The result is, on the one hand, extreme conservatism--the texts are unchanged and the melodies are stable--but, because the singers pull away and constantly return to the central melodic current in deeply felt ornamental variations, great emotional tension is created, like that of a surging crowd pouring down a narrow street or of an angelic throng, in some old canvas, mounting toward heaven. It is easy to be caught up in this feeling. The singers often weep, and even the visitor finds it hard to hold back his tears. The African-American form of the lining-out hymn, enriched by stirring harmony, is sometimes all that remains of folk music in the black service of today, and because it is the favorite music of many of the older heads of the church, it is mistakenly called the earliest black spiritual music.

The lining-hymn form is one solution to the problem, introduced by Protestant musical reformers, of how to achieve acceptable congregational renditions of religious songs with texts sufficiently laden with metaphors and doctrine to stir the intellect. In Middle Europe, with its cultural bent for group singing, this was not a prime difficulty, as it was in most of Western Europe, where group singing (like the culture) is not very unified unless it is performed, after considerable practice, by the choir. Anglo-American critics have constantly bemoaned the low state of congregational singing, and hymnodists have struggled to improve it. A contemporary likened the psalm singing of New England Puritans to the braying of a collection of jackasses (although the sound may well have been stirringly heterophonic like the singing on this record). Thus William Billings and others developed the shape-note system and the singing school to improve matters. By using familiar tunes and simple everyday language, early hymnodists like Watts and John and Charles Wesley gained more participation and a better sound from their congregations. But so long as hymns were settings of rather elaborate verse, the problem remained.

One remedy emerged in the Great Revival led by the Baptists, which occurred more or less simultaneously in Great Britain and America toward the end of the eighteenth century and has continued in America since then. The Baptists were the folkly sect in both Britain and America, never accepting a central church authority and devoted to free rather than prescribed singing (Jackson, 1939). The spirit of the folk Baptists dominated the Great Revival, which swept the American frontier right after the American Revolution. In the wilderness camp meetings, great throngs abandoned themselves to religious ecstasy-leaping, rolling, jerking, crying out, dancing, and above all, singing. Jackson believes the revival spirituals were born in the furnace of these mass meetings; he has found no publication of them prior to 1800. The prime character of these songs is the importance of choruses, burdens, refrains, and repeated lines. Jackson shows that the earlier hymns were "sung to pieces" in these revivals--and that repetition was lavishly introduced, thus facilitating mass performance.

Jackson has argued in all his work that the white revival spirituals were *altogether* the work of white congregations and that the parallels between them and the better-known Negro spirituals were the result of blacks borrowing from whites. Such a one-way process is not what has been observed in the other fields of expressive culture in the United States--dialect, dance, ragtime, jazz, blues, rock--where the back-and-forth *exchange* of ideas and influence between blacks and whites is the norm. Since blacks participated in the white camp meetings as well as in their own, there is no reason to suppose that they did not here also make sizable contributions as singers and song makers in their own vein, notably in refrain and repetition-filled songs, which Jackson recognizes as the distinctive feature of the revival spiritual.

Dozens of African-American folk religious songs in French and Spanish as well as in the various dialects of the English-speaking West Indies are plainly black creations yet are similar to the slave-time black spirituals. This family of Caribbean religious songs has an African character; in fact some songs have now been shown to be African importations. Therefore, although Jackson's evidence concerning the creative use of British folk songs by white folk religionists and black is certainly valid, the other side of the exchange--the diffusion of African song style into American folk music, white and black--must be considered.

In the present collection the great folk spiritual "I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger" is clearly Anglo-American in structure; its melodic kinship with songs such as "Fair and Tender Ladies" and "East Virginia" as well as its poetic cast argue this. "When the Stars Begin to Fall" might well be a white adaptation of a black revival song, although as recorded here it doesn't have the swing of a black piece. However, "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean," though it was performed by the Smiths along with the previous song as a white spiritual, is actually a faithful rendition of a widely distributed recording by Blind Lemon Jefferson, the black genius of Texas blues. In this same way other black songs certainly entered the white folk revival repertory.

The discussion thus far has considered only the older levels of white religious folk music. Much less is known or understood about urban nineteenth-century influence in this field. It is a vast area, into which no scholar has yet ventured far. (Jackson found one man who had written nineteen thousand hymns for the popular market and had then lost count.) Conventional melodies and part writing soon eliminated the older folk strain from official church hymnbooks, and Protestant folk revival

cults followed suit, so that the rather saccharine hymns of the Salvation Army type, produced by Moody/Sankey and Stamps/Baxter, came to dominate the scene. This tendency has been an important influence on most white folk religious song making and among the hillbilly, country-and-western, and white Holiness singers. In the present collection "The Old Gospel Ship," "My Lord Keeps a Record," and "Jim and Me" belong to the modern "gospel" rather than the "spiritual" type. In "The Airplane Ride," a modern Holiness song from eastern Kentucky and of local composition, the touch of oral folk poetry and folk melody are reasserted.

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Tracks 1-5 were recorded in Blackey, a small mining and farming community in the rugged hill country of eastern Kentucky, where so many ways of America's pioneer past have lingered on. Among these is an allegiance to the Primitive Baptist faith, "primitive" because it sticks to "old-timey ways," including foot-washing ceremonies. These old-time Baptists believe in strict interpretation of the Bible and in personal salvation; they shun the things of the world such as dancing, drinking, gambling, and makeup; above all, they celebrate the hard but satisfying culture of their ancestors, and their services are conducted with the democratic spirit the American Revolution fostered. As the spirit moves him, each member rises and "gives testimony"--in effect preaches at length and with great feeling about sacred matters close to his heart. Usually he closes his remarks by leading the congregation through a favorite lining-out hymn. Because everything that takes place in the service is spontaneous, because there is no ritual and nothing perfunctory, and because the people are deeply serious, the atmosphere of meetings, at least those I attended, is charged with emotion. The speakers, whose thoughts are so much focused on their own dead, are often on the point of "breaking down." Perhaps it was because these mountaineers were expressing religious feelings similar to those of my own Scots-Irish forebears that I found myself moved to tears during the singing. Yet something truly remarkable is expressed--something of the agony and the strength of the ancestors of the mountain Primitive Baptists who long ago fought and died for the principle of religious liberty at the time of the American Revolution and during the long struggles of the Protestant Reformation.

Track 1

*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*

**Ike Caudill leading the congregation of the Mount Olivet Regular Baptist Church, Blackey, Kentucky**

One of the traditional hymns was written by William Williams in Welsh (1745) and translated into English in 1777. It is a national favorite and is sung frequently at public gatherings such as football matches, where many thousand Welsh voices in harmony sound indescribably grand. The effect created by Ike Caudill and his fellow worshipers, as they sing a kind of heterophony, is equally impressive.

<i>Leader:</i>	Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
	Pilgrim through this barren land,
<i>Congregation:</i>	Pilgrim through this barren land,
<i>Leader:</i>	I am weak but Thou art mighty,
<i>Congregation:</i>	I am weak but Thou art mighty,
<i>Leader:</i>	Hold me with Thy powerful hands.

*Congregation:* Hold me with Thy powerful hands.

Bread of heaven, bread of heaven  
Feed me till I want no more.  
Open thou the crystal fountains,  
Whence the healing streams do  
flow.  
With the fiery cloudy pillar,  
Lead me all my journey through.  
Strong deliverer, strong  
deliverer,  
Be thou still my strength and  
shield.

Feed me with the heavenly  
manna,  
In this barren wilderness,  
Be my sword and shield and  
banner....

*(Public domain)*

Track 2

*Testimony on Pioneer Religion*

**By D. N. Asher of Blackey, Kentucky**

D. N. Asher, one of the elders of the church, speaks on a favorite theme of these meetings--the Spartan virtues of the good old days:

...Endure harvest as a good soldier.

Paul had in mind just what we would have to go through with and he made it very plain that we had a great warfare in this world of ours and I've said here of late hundreds of times this world is not worth living in unless it is lived for the Lord. There's too much trouble, too much misery, too much heartache and pain. But when we get to thinking about the great God on heaven that rules and the great governor of all the earth and His promise is such rich promises we can pick up courage and go on.

We can do that, friends, I'm doing it, I've lived till I'll be eighty years old the fourth day of January and I've been a praying man now fifty-one years and I hope the last word that I say in this world will be "God look down upon me in mercy."

...When they first stormed the wild seas they lived hard, they had to clear land, they didn't have any houses at all, just rough little log huts, didn't have no chairs like we have now, nor no beds like we have to sleep on. Just little log huts they would throw up. But the Lord was with them, Grace divine was with them in such a strong way; that evenings they would sit on their little dirt porches on the

three-legged stools in old hog-skin moccasins and coonskin caps and sing the songs that we've sung tonight: "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah, Pilgrim through the barren land, I'm weak but Thou art mighty, Hold me with Thy powerful hands." God was with them and blessed them to have all kinds of good fruit in this land and country mast and all and everything, and you couldn't hardly hear your ears when you went out in the woods for the acorns and chestnuts and everything a-fallin' and rollin' through the timber, God was a-blessin' them.

And so tonight, my friends, they's a day a-comin' that we will look upon them and see the old hardships that they went through but yet they went along depending on the divine grace of God. No wonder we like to sing sometimes, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see." There's no greater song on earth that could be that God is all in all...

### *Amazing Grace*

### **Howard Adams leading the congregation of the Thornton Regular Baptist Church, Mayking, Kentucky**

This frontier favorite, often printed in the shape-note books and under various titles-- "New Britain," "Symphony," "Solon," "Redemption" --has recently become nationally popular in a rather poor variant of the tunes sung by the folk. The origin of the melody is unknown, but the poem is by John Newtown (1725-1807). Apparently Newtown lived as a wicked sinner for many years, then turned to religion and became a power as a preacher and hymn writer. In "Amazing Grace" he expressed his feelings at the time of his conversion. (Jackson, 1953; *Original Sacred Harp*.)

*Leader and*

*Congregation:* Amazing grace, how sweet the  
sound

That saved a wretch like me.

*Leader:* ...was lost but now I'm found,

*Congregation:* I once was lost but now I'm  
found,

*Leader:* Was blind but now I see.

*Congregation:* Was blind but now I see.

Was grace that taught my heart to  
fear,

And grace my fears relieve.

How precious did that grace  
appear,

The hour I first believed.

*(Public domain)*

Track 3

*Poor Pilgrim of Sorrow*

**Testimony by the Rev. I. D. Beck. Congregation of the Mount Olivet Regular Baptist Church, Blackey, Kentucky**

After his testimony Reverend Beck led the song. Jackson (1939) explains the ballad-like feeling of this piece by showing its textual and melodic kinship to a narrative song, "Banks of the Lea," which begins

When first in this country a stranger,  
Curiosity caused me to roam,  
Over Europe I resolved to be a stranger,  
When I left Philadelphia (or "dear Ireland"), my  
home.

He also points out its close kinship to a hymn, especially popular among blacks, that has the lines

I heard of a city called heaven  
I'm striving to make it my home....

*Testimony by Reverend I. D. Beck:*

...If we expect to get any blessings in this life, we'll have to humble ourselves down, submit ourselves into the hands of God. I'm in Your presence realizing that, within me, that my weakness and unworthiness, that I'm unable to preach one word of the gospel unless that the Lord in Heaven sees fit to look down upon me for a few minutes of time as I love to say that this five minutes or one or two minutes with the blessings of the Lord is worth more to me than standing without the spirit all day. I love the spirit of the Lord and it's sweet, comes, if it's in you for just a moment it's so sweet when it comes.

I'd rather that we sing a song....

*Leader:* I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow,  
Cast out in a wide world to roam.  
I have no promise of tomorrow,

*Leader and  
Congregation:* I have no promise of tomorrow,  
*Leader:* I've started to make heaven my  
home.

*Leader and  
Congregation:* Started to make heaven my home.  
*Leader:* I know I'm weak and unworthy,

*Leader and  
Congregation:* I know I'm weak and unworthy,  
*Leader:* My heart is so prone to sin.

*Leader and  
Congregation:* My heart is so prone to sin.  
*Leader:* But Jesus the Saviour Almighty,

*Leader and*  
*Congregation:* But Jesus the Saviour Almighty  
*Leader:* Promised to take me in.  
*Leader and*  
*Congregation:* Promised to take me in.

When friends and relations  
forsake me,  
Troubles all 'round me so high,  
I think of the kind words of Jesus,  
Poor pilgrim, I'm always nigh.

Track 4  
*Testimony*

**By George Spangler of the Thornton Regular Baptist Church, Mayking, Kentucky**

I don't want to take up any more of your time here tonight, we have other preachers. I didn't feel like being up here to begin with but as I said I'm glad to be out preaching one more time, may be my last time. I don't know about that, but let me, knowing that, knowing that I'm going to die, brother Harry, knowing that God's a-going to call me home some of these days, call me home I call it, brother Steve, and it is my eternal home. I've got a little home out yonder, oh, I've just got a little home out there. God has leased me or let me live out there on a little piece of land, brother Harry, don't belong to me. Truth of the matter is it belongs to God, bless His name tonight, it don't belong to me. I'm just, He just, He just, He just rented it to me, just let me live out there and just giving me, a-giving me time. Brother, He gives, He gives every man and every woman a chance to seek Him. Every sinner man and sinner woman a chance to seek Him before He call him home. Ah, bless His name tonight, then let's praise His holy name. I want to ask the children of God that are here tonight bless His name tonight when you get on the firing line. When you talk to men and women that you come in contact with and that some save, oh will you invite them to come on or ask them to come on, come to the church, bless Your holy name, bless Your name tonight. Church, the church is a home for the children of God yes it is, it's a home for the children of God. And if there's any children, if there's any Christian people in the house tonight, any man or woman in this house tonight that's been born again drink of that living water. Oh, you're away from home! I know you're not, satisfied....

*Why Must I Wear This Shroud?*

**Congregation of the Thornton Regular Baptist Church, Mayking, Kentucky**

The closeness of all mortals to the grave, the brevity of life, the relief from earthly sorrow offered by death--these were all perennial themes of our Protestant ancestors. This preoccupation with death may seem morbid to us moderns, who are shielded from direct contact with death by the funeral director, but to the common folk of the past death was an everyday experience. War, plague, childbed fever, starvation, fatal work accidents, public executions, all were common experiences.

The American revivalists had lived through a long period of war with the Indians as well as the Revolution. They had all looked death in the face.

*Leader:* And must I wear this shroud?  
*Leader and*  
*Congregation:* And must I wear this shroud?  
*Leader:* Time will rob you of your bloom.  
*Leader and*  
*Congregation:* Time will rob you of your bloom.  
*Leader:* Death will drag you to your tomb.  
*Leader and*  
*Congregation:* Death will drag you to your tomb.  
*Leader:* Then you'll cry, "I want to be...  
*Leader and*  
*Congregation:* Then you'll cry, "I want to be  
*Leader:* Happy in Eternity."  
*Leader and*  
*Congregation:* "... Happy in Eternity."

Will you go to Heaven or Hell?  
One you must and there to dwell.  
Christ will come and quickly too,  
I must meet Him, so must you.  
Then you'll cry, "I want to be  
Happy in Eternity."

*(Public domain)*

Track 5  
*Testimony*

### **By Reverend I. D. Beck of the Mount Olivet Regular Baptist Church**

...Well, I've heard so many more worthy brethren preach that I just feel like, sometimes I die each lesson, and I love to feel that way, because when I get in the presence of a great band, a host of the children of God.

You know, in our association, people are fightin' me everywhere. Now right here, you see the regular preachers that's here all the time, nobody don't come and help us. They won't come and then I try my best to get correspondence with other brothers and sisters, other associations, and then my name is mud. I can't understand why that we don't want to fellowship one another. We must, we must have forgiving hearts and do all we can for peace. If we could get together and, how much stronger this great Baptist family that this young man has come here to take a recording back to Congress, or wherever he takes it, put it in the store, for how that the people come into this country.

How they come singin' through the hills, no doubt in my mind. When there was a house every ten, or five or six miles separated, I'd love to live back then, I would. If it'd been God's will I'd love to live in them old days, where all these things of the world that we have to contend with today wouldn't be a-hinderin' the blessings that they had. I feel like that when they left home, going to meetin' they sung all the way there, ridin' their horses through the hills, going to the old-time meetin' house and when they got there, no wonder they shouted, no wonder they rejoiced because they had one thing in mind, that was to honor and to glorify their King, and today it's altogether different, seem like. We don't come together for that purpose. Many other things we come and before we can get in the church-house you've got someone's grief to listen to. That's not the way it goes. And we're not promised a bed of roses no how. We begin to think everything's going to be given to you on a platter. Was it done that way for the Lord? Let's try to understand them things, what kind of a life? It's Jesus lived in poverty here on earth, brother Earl. He didn't have none of the things we have today.

Even one time He sayin' the foxes have holes or the birds in air have a nest, but the Son of Man not know where to lay His head. And I feel tonight, children, that it's time that we all begin. (I've been makin' light of this old-fashioned way.) But I feel like it's time you begin to get more into it than ever before, get back and live just like they lived. That don't mean we have to go and change our clothing and all these things, but it means that we all should be humble and say "Thy will be done, oh God, Thy will be done, with me as it is in heaven." And if we do that, my friends, God will bless us, but in obedience only are you blessed, and the commandments of God are not grievous to His children. If you're a child of God and his commandments, they're not grievous to you. I feel like, brethren, that it's time that we all begin to suffer some, sacrifice and not be a-sitting down and moving up and sayin' "I will." I've not been that way, brother Jack, we've had a hard time. I'm glad that I lived to be under the call of Jesus Christ. Brethren, when you do it all for the glory and honor of God He'll bless your prayers and He'll pay you here while you're here in this life and when you die He's gonna pay no more. Brethren, I don't know whether I, whether I'm going to be able to preach or not tonight I never know these things....

*When Jesus Christ Was Here on Earth*

### **Reverend I. D. Beck leading the congregation of the Mount Olivet Regular Baptist Church**

A balladlike moment out of the life of Jesus. The recordings of the Mount Olivet group were made at a weeknight prayer meeting, when no more than twenty people were present. The efficiency of this lining-out style is witnessed by the grandeur of the sound this small group contrived to create.

*Leader and*

*Congregation:*

When Jesus Christ was here on earth

*Leader:*

They said He was a spy.

*Leader and*

*Congregation:*

They said He was a spy.

*Leader:*

He healed the sick and raised the dead.

*Leader and*

*Congregation:*

He healed the sick and raised the dead.

*Leader:*

Go thou and prophesy.

*Leader and*

*Congregation:*            Go thou and prophesy.

                                  While passing by a sinful crowd  
                                  I heard a woman say,  
                                  If I could but His garment touch  
                                  I wouldn't have to die.

                                  He said to Peter, James, and John  
                                  It's written I must die;  
                                  Shed my blood on Calvary  
                                  And never more to die.

*(Public domain)*

Tracks 6-14 present a miscellany of many of the types of religious folk songs and quasi-folk songs that have filled the Southern folk repertory. Compared to the lining-out hymns they strike a somewhat secular note: they are more often modeled after worldly ditties; their tempos are brisker; their texts are more colloquial. Musically a wide range is covered, from old modal tunes to modern gospel songs, with touches of black and pop influence.

Track 6

*The Old Gospel Ship*

**Ruby Vass, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Hillsville, Virginia**

A gospel song of the type that became popular around the turn of the century. Its earliest copyright claimant is Stamps/Baxter. The image of religion as a vessel sailing to heaven with a cargo of the faithful is a perennial favorite, occurring in old carols and modern songs alike. "The Old Ship of Zion," for example, is one of our best-known and best-loved religious folk songs among both blacks and whites.

*Chorus*

I'm goin' ta take a trip on that old gospel ship,  
I am going far beyond the sky,  
I'm goin' ta shout and sing till heavens ring,  
Till I bid this world goodbye.

I have good news to bring and that is why I sing,  
My joy with you I'll share.  
I'm going ta take a trip in that old gospel ship  
And go sailing through the air.

*(Chorus)*

I can scarcely wait, I know I won't be late,  
I'll spend my time in prayer,  
And when the ship come in, I will leave this world of sin  
And go sailing through the air.

*(Chorus)*

If you are ashamed of me, you ought not to be,  
Lest you better have a care;  
If too much fault you find, you will sure be left behind  
While I'm sailing through the air.

*(Chorus)*

*(Public domain)*

Track 7

*When the Stars Begin to Fall*

**Hobart Smith and Preston Smith, vocals and guitars; Texas Gladden, vocal. Recorded in Bluefield, Virginia**

Performed by Hobart and Preston Smith and their sister, Texas Gladden. A spiritual of the repetitious, revival type. It is impossible to say whether it originated in a white or a black congregation. There are a number of superlative black songs using the same refrain.

Oh fathers, what will you do?  
Fathers, what will you do?  
Fathers, what will you do?  
When the stars begin to fall.

I'll bid farewell to this old world,  
I'll bid farewell to this old world,  
I'll bid farewell to this old world,  
When the stars begin to fall.

I'll go home to the glory land,  
I'll go home to the glory land,  
I'll go home to the glory land,  
When the stars begin to fall.

Mothers, what will you do?  
Mothers, what will you do?  
Mothers, what will you do?  
When the stars begin to fall.

I'll go home to the glory land,  
I'll go home to the glory land,  
I'll go home to the glory land,  
When the stars begin to fall

I'll bid farewell to this old world,  
I'll bid farewell to this old world,

I'll bid farewell to this old world,  
When the stars begin to fall.

Oh brothers, what will you do?  
Brothers, what will you do?  
Brothers, what will you do?  
When the stars begin to fall.

I'll bid farewell to this old world,  
I'll bid farewell to this old world,  
I'll bid farewell to this old world,  
When the stars begin to fall.

#### Track 8

#### *Hicks's Farewell*

#### **Texas Gladden, vocal. Recorded in Salem, Virginia**

A pioneer religious lyric that dwells on the theme of parting, so poignant to the restless, westward-moving frontier folk. The tune is claimed by William Walker in *Southern Harmony* (1835):

The song (Poem) was composed by Reverend B. Hicks, a Baptist minister of South Carolina and sent to his wife while he was confined in Tennessee by a fever. Hicks was born in Spartanburg County, South Carolina, in 1798. He was an active revival preacher, song composer and singer. In his youth he had been a country fiddler, acquiring an "ugly habit of twitching his head and keeping time to the music, which he afterwards carried with him into the pulpit" and from which it is said, "he never, during his lifetime, was entirely relieved."

The Gladden text shows much evidence of oral transmission.

My brother preacher, fare you well,  
Your fellowship I love.  
In time no more I shall you see,  
But soon we'll meet above.

My little children near my heart,  
And nature seems to bind,  
It grieves me sorely to depart  
And leave them all behind.

My loving wife, don't grieve for me,  
Neither lament nor moan.  
For I shall with my Jesus be,  
When you are left alone.

My loving wife, my bosom friend,

The object of my love.  
The time's been sweet I've spent with you,  
You sweet and harmless dove.

Now oft'times you have looked for me  
And oft'times seen me come.  
But now I must depart from thee  
And never more return.

*(Public domain)*

Track 9

*See That My Grave Is Kept Clean*

### **Hobart Smith, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Bluefield, Virginia**

Hobart Smith is one of the truly great southern folk musicians, much of whose repertory, secular and sacred, was learned from blacks. Like many mountain musicians, he was bowled over by the guitar picking and the blues tunes of the black workers who came into the isolated hill communities with the railroads and the coal mines. Like all other southerners, of whatever background, Smith was impressed by the recordings of Blind Lemon Jefferson, who composed or at least popularized this magnificent poem about death. Smith's version omits some of the most vivid images of the black original:

When your heart stops beating and your toes get cold  
Ain't nothin' gonna do you but the cypress grove....

Did you ever hear a coffin sound?  
Then you know some poor boy's in the ground....

Smith's version:

Well, it's one kind favor I'll ask of you,  
Well, it's one kind favor I'll ask of you,  
Well, it's one kind favor I'll ask of you,  
Please see my grave is kept clean.

It's a long, long lane ain't got no end,  
It's a long lane ain't got no end,  
It's a long lane ain't got no end,  
It's the longest lane that's ever been.

Well, it's three white horses in a line,  
Three white horses in a line,  
Three white horses in a line,  
Gonna take me to my buryin' ground.

Oh, dig my grave with a silver spade,  
Dig my grave with a silver spade,  
Well, it's dig my grave with a silver spade,  
You can let me down with a golden chain.

*(Repeat second stanza)*

Oh, dig my grave with a silver spade,  
Dig my grave with a silver spade,  
Dig my grave with a silver spade,  
You can let me down with a golden chain.

Did you ever hear a trumpet sound?  
Ever hear a trumpet sound?  
Did you ever hear the trumpet sound?  
You would know the poor boy's in the ground.

It's a long, long lane ain't got no end,  
Long lane ain't got no end,  
Long lane ain't got no end,  
It's the longest lane that's ever been.

Did you ever hear a church bell toll?  
Did you ever hear a church bell toll?  
Did you ever hear a church bell toll?  
You will know the poor boy's dead and gone.

*(Public domain)*

Track 10

*I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger*

**Almeda Riddle, vocal. Recorded in Heber Springs, Arkansas**

Almeda Riddle, one of the finest singers of the Ozarks, here performs the best-known and in many ways the most beautiful of white spirituals, first popularized by Burl Ives. There is much to indicate that the anonymous author modeled his song after an American mountain lyric (see Jackson, 1953), one form of which begins

I am a man of constant sorrow,  
I have seen troubles all my days,  
I'll bid farewell to old Virginia  
The place where I was partly raised...

Almeda Riddle sings the standard religious text, often printed in shape-note books.

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger,

I'm traveling through a world of woe,  
But there's no sickness, toil or danger  
In that bright land to which I go.  
I'm going there to see my mother,  
She said she'd meet me when I come,  
I'm only going over Jordan,  
I'm only going over home.

I know dark clouds are going to gather 'round me,  
I know my way'll be rough and steep,  
But beautiful fields lie just before me,  
Where God's redeemed their vigils keep.  
I'm going there to see my loved ones,  
Gone on before me one by one,  
I'm only going over Jordan,  
I'm only going over home.

I'll soon be free from earthly trials,  
This body rest in the old churchyard,  
I'd drop this cross of self-denial,  
And I'll go singing home to God.  
I'm going there to see my saviour,  
I'll dwell with Him and I'll never roam,  
Oh I'm just going over Jordan,  
I'm only going over home.

*(Public domain)*

Track 11

*The Little Family*

**Ollie Gilbert, vocal. Recorded in Timbo, Arkansas**

The ballad-singing people of the frontier preserved a number of the carols and spirituals that had originated among the folk of Great Britain. "The Cherry Tree Carol" is better known to city audiences, but this story of Joseph's little family was always far more popular among the religious folk of the backwoods and was often included in shape-note hymnbooks (Jackson, 1953; Thomas). Ollie Gilbert performs it in grand ballad style and with changes in text.

There were a little family who lived in Bethany,  
Two sisters and a brother composed the family.  
While they were living so happy, so good, pure,  
and kind,  
Their brother was afflicted and by disease  
confined.

When Jesus heard the tiding, far in a distant land,

So quickly did He hasten to see the holy land.  
When Martha saw Him coming, she met Him on  
the way,  
And told Him of her brother, who'd died and  
passed away.

When Mary saw Him coming, she run and met  
Him, too,  
Fell at His feet a-weeping, rehearsed the tale of  
woe,  
When Jesus saw her weeping, He fell a-weeping,  
too,  
And wept until they showed Him where Laz'rus  
lay entombed.

He rolled away the stone, looked into the grave,  
And prayed to His heavenly father, His loving  
friends arrayed.  
He rolled back the cover, looked into the gloomy  
mound,  
And as the breath was given he walked upon the  
ground.

If we would only but love Jesus and do His  
blessed will,  
Like these two loving sisters, He'd always treat us  
well.  
And at death He would redeem us and carry us to  
the sky,  
And there we'd live forever, where pleasure  
never dies.

*(Public domain)*

Track 12

*Jim and Me*

**Hobart Smith and Preston Smith, vocals and guitars; Texas Gladden, vocal. Recorded in Bluefield, Virginia**

Composed by the Garner brothers of Muncie, Indiana, in 1924. Like so many other American homiletic songs, it makes drink and tobacco into major sins.

The story I am telling you, you should have heard  
before,  
If you had called a year ago, and then again today,  
There is no need of telling you 'cause you can

plainly see  
What our God has done for us, He's done for Jim  
and me.

*(Chorus)*

The pail that holds the milk today, it used to  
spill with beer.  
We've not spent a cent for drink in now almost a  
year.  
Look into our cupboard, sir, there's sugar, flour,  
and tea,  
What our God has done for us they did for Jim and  
me.  
Used to be afraid of him when coming home a  
night,  
Now he brings me joy of spring and fills me with  
delight.  
The baby plays around his chair and climbs upon  
his knee,  
And what God has done for us He's done for  
Jim and me.

*(Chorus)*

I used to smoke a dirty pipe and chew the filthy  
weed,  
But oh, delight, the hand of God has sentenced  
our reprieve.  
Haven't got a nickel, sir, for tobacco you will not  
see,  
Oh what our God has done for us He did for Jim  
and me.

*(Chorus)*

© Garner Bros.

Track 13

*The Airplane Ride*

**Mrs. Nell Hampton, vocal. (*Place of recording unknown*)**

One of the thousands of new spirituals created in the new small churches of the Holiness movement, this song has the touch of true folklore in the vivid metaphors of the verse and the gawky charm of the melody.

So one of these nights and about twelve o'clock,  
This old world's goin' ta reel and rock.  
Saints will tremble and cry for pain,

For the Lord's gonna come in his heavenly  
airplane.

*(Chorus)*

So you thirsty of every trade,  
Get your ticket for an airplane ride.  
For Jesus the saviour is comin' again,  
To take us up to glory in his heavenly airplane.

You've got to be ready if you take this ride,  
Quit your sinnin' and humble your pride.  
And furnish your life all frank and clean,  
And a vessel of glory to come, a machine.

*(Chorus)*

When the wedding is over and we all set down  
At the married supper with a harp and crown;  
We'll lend our voices with the heavenly throne,  
And praise our saviour while the years rolls on.

*(Chorus)*

Track 14

*My Lord Keeps a Record*

**The Mountain Ramblers: James Lindsay, vocal, guitar, and mandolin; Cullen Galyen and Charles Hawes, vocals and banjos; Eldridge Montgomery, vocal and guitar; Thurman Pugh, vocal and bass. Recorded in Galax, Virginia**

The barbershop-quartet style developed by the blackface minstrels of the nineteenth century has left its mark on the gospel style and here, markedly, on a sacred song in bluegrass style. I agree with the scholars who suggest that the vocal pedal point employed in gospel represents a black influence. In this case, where the syncopated bass part constantly intervenes with the lead, one has an example of the major characterizer of African vocal style--the overlapping of rhythmically different parts. Thus a traditional white hymn, touched by this element of black style, takes on a new spirit.

What a wonderful, beautiful picture I have  
Of a place without sorrow or fear,  
And I'm going to live in that city someday,  
For my days are all numbered down here.

*(Chorus)*

My Lord (yes, my Lord) keeps a record (keeps a  
record)

Of the moments I'm living down here (living  
down here).

He knows (yes, He knows) all about me (all about

me),  
All my troubles, my sorrows, my fears.  
I'm living (yes, I'm living) each moment (every  
moment)  
Through the mercy of God's loving praise (God's  
loving praise).  
Someday (yes, someday) He will call me (He will  
call me)  
To that wonderful, beautiful, marvelous place.

I will walk on the streets of that city of gold  
I will bask in that heavenly light.  
And I'll look on the face of my Saviour so dear  
In that city where cometh no night.  
(Chorus)

Now I ought to be doing the will of my Lord,  
As I travel this wearisome land.  
So I'll not be ashamed of my record up there,  
When I stand at my Saviour's right hand.  
(Chorus)  
(Public domain)

Alan Lomax, *co-founder of the Archives of American Folksongs, has been, for the past forty years, among the most active field recordists of folk songs. He has produced a number of folk recordings for New World Records.*

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**The Gospel Ship**  
**Baptist Hymns & White Spirituals from the Southern Mountains**  
80294-2

- 1 **Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah** 5:43  
Ike Caudill leading the congregation of the Mount Olivet Regular Baptist Church, Blackey, Kentucky
- 2 **Testimony on Pioneer Religion** 4:42  
D. N. Asher  
**Amazing Grace**  
Howard Adams leading the congregation of the Thornton Regular Baptist Church, Mayking, Kentucky
- 3 **Poor Pilgrim of Sorrow** 3:10  
Testimony by the Rev. I. D. Beck. Congregation of the Mount Olivet Regular Baptist Church, Blackey, Kentucky
- 4 **Testimony** 4:59  
George Spangler of the Thornton Regular Baptist Church, Mayking, Kentucky  
**Why Must I Wear This Shroud?**  
Congregation of the Thornton Regular Baptist Church
- 5 **Testimony** 6:51  
Reverend I. D. Beck of the Mount Olivet Regular Baptist Church, Blackey, Kentucky  
**When Jesus Christ Was Here on Earth**  
Reverend I. D. Beck leading the congregation of the Mount Olivet Regular Baptist Church
- 6 **The Old Gospel Ship** 2:54  
Ruby Vass

- 7 **When the Stars Begin to Fall** (Hobart Smith) 4:19  
Hobart Smith, Preston Smith, and Texas Gladden
- 8 **Hicks's Farewell** 2:07  
Texas Gladden
- 9 **See That My Grave Is Kept Clean** 3:19  
Hobart Smith
- 10 **I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger** 2:59  
Almeda Riddle
- 11 **The Little Family** 1:40  
Ollie Gilbert
- 12 **Jim and Me** (Garner Brothers) 2:31  
(publ. Garner Brothers)  
Hobart Smith, Preston Smith, and Texas Gladden
- 13 **The Airplane Ride** (Nell Hampton) 1:38  
Nell Hampton
- 14 **My Lord Keeps a Record** 3:19  
The Mountain Ramblers

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