

Singing the Child Ballads

Rosaleen Gregory

With the previous set we reached the fourth volume of Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, and here we have four more items that may be found in the first half of that volume, although in only one instance did I actually take my version from Child's collection. Two of the texts I sing are in dialect, although I anglicize them slightly to make them more intelligible for non-Scottish listeners.

Child # 217: *The Broom of Cowdenknowes*

I came upon this lively ballad quite recently in a book called *Songs of Scotland*, edited by Wilma Paterson (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1996). Or rather, I found the lovely lilting tune there, but the words, although stated to be 'traditional', had a very eighteenth-century pastoral tinge ('swains', 'charms' and 'dames') and most of the story was missing. So I went in search of the longest, most complete, extant narrative versions, and found what I wanted in Child. This is substantially his G version, which derives from Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-03) and was allegedly collected in 'Etrick Forest'. An earlier version of the ballad—perhaps the original—occurs in William Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius* (1733), which Child does not mention, although he was familiar with those titled "Bonny May" in Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc.* (1769) and Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787). Antedating all these Scottish versions was a lengthy seventeenth-century Northumbrian lyric with a similar tune and burden, titled "The Lovely Northerne Lass". It appeared on a London broadside published (c. 1640) during the reign of Charles I and was subsequently much reprinted; it may be found in the Roxburghe, Douce, and Euing broadside collections (among others). Child characterized this song as an "English 'ditty' (not a traditional ballad)" but he did rather grudgingly print it in an appendix, commenting that the refrain incorporated the words:

"O the broom, and the bonny, bonny broom,
And the broom of the Cowdenknows!"
And aye sae sweet as the lassie sang,
I' the bought, milking the ewes.

"O, the broom, the bonny broom,
The broom of the Cowden Knowes!
Fain would I be in the North Countrey
To milk my dadyes ewes."

He also points out that the tune was "remarkably popular", which does not surprise me.

Child # 219: *The Gardener*

This one I know as "Proud Maisrie", and I learned it many years ago from the singing of the English folk-singer Shirley Collins. She recorded it on her 1964 collaboration with Davey Graham, the LP *Folk Roots, New Routes*.

Child # 220: *The Bonny Lass of Anglesey*

Learned from Paddy Tutty, who performs it on her 1983 cassette *Paddy Tutty* and on her Prairie Druid CD *The Roving Jewel*, issued in the year 2000. The original text, found in David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*, was expanded by Martin Carthy, and his version is the one given here. Peter Buchan also collected a version and called it "altogether a political piece", perhaps an early reference to gender politics! The guitar chords are optional; I usually sing this unaccompanied.

Child # 226: *Lizzie Lindsay*

The only one out of this batch for which I use a guitar accompaniment. Although I knew the ballad before then, I was reminded of it about fifteen years ago by the (former) Nova Scotia folk-rock group Black Pool, and I learned it from their 1992 CD, *The Seahorse*. Their version is a condensed compilation from verses found in George Kinloch's two manuscript variants of the ballad, collected from Catherine Beattie of Mearnsire and Mrs. Bouchart of Dundee.

The Broom of Cowdenknowes

The hills were high on ilka side,
An' the bought i' the lirk o' the hill,
And aye, as she sang, her voice it rang
Out-oer the head o' yon hill.

There was a troop o gentlemen
Came riding merrily by,
And one o them has rode out o the way,
To the bought to the bonny may.

“Weel may ye save an see, bonny lass,
An weel may ye save and see!”

“An sae wi you, ye weel-bred knight,
And what’s your will wi me?”

“The night is misty and mirk, fair may,
And I have ridden astray,
And will ye be so kind, fair may,
As come out and point my way?”

“Ride out, ride out, ye ramp rider!
Your steed’s baith stout and strang;
For out of the bought I dare na come,
For fear at ye do me wrang.”

“O winna ye pity me, bonny lass?
O winna ye pity me?
An winna ye pity my poor steed,
Stands trembling at yon tree?”

“I wadna pity your poor steed,
Tho it were tied to a thorn;
For if ye wad gain my love the night
Ye wad slight me ere the morn.

“For I ken you by your weel-busked hat,
And your merrie twinkling ee,
That ye’re the laird o the Oakland hills,
An ye may weel seem for to be.”

“But I am not the laird o the Oakland hills,
Ye’re far mistaen o me;
But I’m ane of the men about his house
An right aft in his companie.”

He’s taen her by the middle slim,
And by the grass-green sleeve,
He’s lifted her over the fauld-dyke,
And asked of her sma leave.

He’s taen out a purse o gowd,
And streekd her yellow hair:
“Now take ye that, my bonnie may,
Of me till you hear mair.”

O he’s leapt on his berry-brown steed,
An soon he’s o’ertaen his men;
And ane and a’ cried out to him,
“O master, ye’ve tarryd lang!”

“O I hae been east, and I hae been west,
An I hae been far oer the knows,
But the bonniest lass that ever I saw

Is i’ the bought, milkin’ the ewes.”

She set the cog upon her head,
And she’s gane singing hame:
“O where hae ye been, my ae daughter?
Ye hae na been your lane.”

“O nae body was wi me, father,
O nae body has been wi me;
The night is misty and mirk, father,
Ye may gang to the door and see.

“But wae be to your ewe-herd, father,
And an ill deed may he die!
He built the bought at the back o the know
And a fox has frighted me.

“There came a fox to the door of the bought,
The like I never saw;
And ere he had taken the lamb he did
I had rather he had taen them a’.”

O whan fifteen weeks was come and gane,
Fifteen weeks and three,
That lassie began to look thin and pale,
An to long for his merry-twinkling ee.

It fell on a day, on a hot summer day,
She was ca’ing out her father’s kye,
By came a troop of gentlemen,
A’ merrily riding bye.

“Weel may ye save an see, bonny may!
Weel may ye save and see!
Weel I wat ye be a very bonny may,
But whose is that babe ye are wi?”

Never a word could that lassie say,
For never an ane could she blame,
And never a word could the lassie say,
But “I have a good man at hame.”

“Ye lie, ye lie, my very bonny may,
Sae loud as I hear you lie!
For dinna ye mind that misty night
I was i’ the bought wi thee?”

“I ken you by your middle sae slim,
An your merry-twinkling ee,
That ye’re the bonny lass o’ the Cowdenknowes
An ye may weel seem for to be.”

Than he’s leapd off his berry-brown steed,
An he’s set that fair may on:
“Caw out your kye, gude father, yourself,
For she’s never caw them out again.

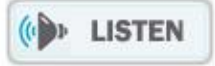
“I am the laird of the Oakland hills,

I hae thirty plows and three,
An I hae gotten the bonniest lass

That's in a' the south country."

The Broom of Cowdenknows

Traditional



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue42_1/The_Broom_of_Cowdenknowes.mp3

Voice

O the broom, the bon-ny bon-ny broom, and the broom³ of the Cow - den -
knows. And aye sae sweet as the las-sie sang i the bought, milk - ing the yowes.

The Gardener (Proud Maisry)

Traditional



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue42_1/The_Gardener.mp3

Voice

Proud Mais-ry stands in her bower door, As slim as a will - ow
wand. And by there came a gard - en-er child, With a red rose in his
hand, his hand, With a red rose in his hand.

Proud Maisrie stands in the bower door
As slim as a willow wand,
And by there came a gardener child
With a red rose in his hand,
With a red rose in his hand.

"O you shall have my rose, fair maid,
If you'll give your flower to me,
And among the flowers in your father's yard
I'll make a gown for thee,
I'll make a gown for thee.

"Your dress shall be the smelling thyme
And your petticoat chamomile,
And your apron of the celandine,
Come kiss, sweetheart, and join,
Come kiss, sweetheart, and join.

"Your feet I'll shoe with yon red rue
That grows in the garden fine,
And I'll line them with taraxacum,
So join your love with mine,
So join your love with mine."

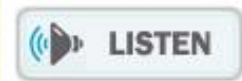
“Since you have made a gown for me
Among the summer flowers,
So I will make a suit for thee
Among the winter showers
Among the winter showers.

“The milk-white snow shall be your shirt
And lie your body next,
And the mirk dark rain shall be your coat

With the wind gale at your breast
With the wind gale at your breast.

“The bonnet that’s upon your head
Shall be the mist so grey,
And every time that you pass by
I’ll wish you were away,
I’ll wish you were away.”

Bonny Lass of Anglesey



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue42_1/Bonny_Lass_of_Anglesey.mp3

Traditional

Voice

There he sits and there he stands a-lone, And oh! what a fright-ened king is
he..... Fif-teen lords have all come down, To dance and ga-in the vict-or-y.

There he sits and there he stands alone, and oh! what a frightened king is he,
Fifteen lords have all come down to dance and gain the victory.

Our king he keeps a good treasure, and he keeps it locked with a silver key,
But fifteen lords who have all come down, can dance his gold and his land away.

There he stands on the castle high, and oh! so loud, so loud I hear him cry:
"Go saddle your horse and bring to me the bonny lass of Anglesey."

Some rode north and some rode south, and some to the west they rode straightway,
They spied her on the mountain high, the bonny lass of Anglesey.

Up she starts as white as the milk, between the king and his company,
Cries: "What is the prize I have to ask if I do gain the victory?"

"Fifteen ploughs, a house and a mill, I will give to thee till the day thou die,
And the fairest knight in all my court, to take, your husband for to be."

"Fifteen ploughs, a house and a mill! Come now, that's no prize for the victory;
And there's no knight in all your court shall have me as a wife to be."

Up she starts as white as the milk, she danced as light as a leaf on the broken sea,
Till fifteen lords all cried aloud for the bonny lass of Anglesey.

She's taken fourteen one by one, saying: "Sweet, kind sir, will you dance with me?"
But e'er it's ten o'clock o' the night, they gave it o'er right shamefully.

But up and rose the fifteenth knight, and oh! what an angry man was he,
He laid aside his buckle and sword before he's gone so manfully.

And he's danced high and he's danced low, and he has danced all the livelong day,
Saying: "My feet shall be my death, e'er she gains the victory!"

"Oh my feet shall be my death, e'er this lass shall gain the victory."
But e'er it's ten o'clock o' the morn, he gave it o'er right shamefully.

She's taken the king all by the hand, saying: "Sweet, kind sir, will you walk with me?"
But e'er the king has gone one step she danced his gold and his land away.

Says: "Fifteen ploughs, a house and a mill; come, now, that's no prize for the victory."
And away she's gone with his treasure, the bonny lass of Anglesey.

She's taken all their buckles and swords, she's ta'en all their gold and their bright money,
And back to the mountains she's away, the bonny lass of Anglesey.

There's fifteen lords came a-swaggering down for to dance and gain the victory,
But fifteen lords and one high king go all ragged and bare today.

Lizzie Lindsay



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue42_1/Lizzie_Lindsay.mp3

Traditional

Voice

Will ye gang to the High-lands, Liz-zie Lind - say? Will ye gang to the Highlands with
m - e? Will ye gang to the High-lands, Liz-zie Lind - say? My bride and my darl - ing to
be.

Will ye gang to the Highlands, Lizzie Lindsay?
Will ye gang to the Highlands with me?
Will ye gang to the Highlands, Lizzie Lindsay?
My bride and my darling to be.

She turned her around on her heel,
And a very loud laugh gave she:
"I'd like to ken where that I'm ganging,
And wha I am gaun to gang wi."

My name it is Donald Macdonald,
I'll never think shame nor deny,
My father he is an old shepherd,
My mother she is an old dey.

Will ye gang to the Highlands, bonnie Lizzie?
Will ye gang to the Highlands wi me?
For ye shall get a bed of green rashes,
A pillow and a covering of grey.

Upraise then the bonny young lady,
And drew up her stockings and sheen,
And packed up her claise in fine bundles,
And awa' wi young Donald she's gaen.

Whan that they came to the Highlands,
The braes they were baith lang and stey,
Bonny Lizzie was wearied wi ganging,
She had travelled a long summer's day.