

FOLK MUSIC OF THE UNITED STATES

Issued from the Collections of the Archive of American Folk Song

31 A. & B. 1. THE GOLDEN WILLOW TREE

Sung with banjo by Justus Begley at Hazard, Kentucky,
1937. Recorded by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax.

THIS is perhaps the best-known, if not the best, of the English and Scottish ballads dealing with the sea. In spite of the queer losses of meaning which Old World names and events have suffered, the story of the brave cabin boy and his betrayal by the false captain has lost none of its appeal for American singers and their audiences. The ship that "went by the name of the Golden Willow Tree" (more commonly, the Golden Vanity) was originally the Sweet Trinity, built by Sir Walter Raleigh. The Lowlands, or Low Countries, have become the "lowland lonesome low" (sometimes, the "lonesome sea"), while the ship itself sails against the "British Roverie" in "South Amerikee." In some versions the cabin boy, instead of being left to drown, is rescued; in others he is given a sea burial by his shipmates.

Many listeners will find Justus Begley's vigorous accompaniment on the five-string banjo not the least attractive part of his performance. He sang the ballad while running for sheriff of Perry County, Kentucky.

For texts and notes, see *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, edited by Francis James Child, Part IX (Boston, 1894), No. 286.

B. A. B.

1. There was a little ship in South Amerikee,
Crying, O the land that lies so low.
There was a little ship in South Amerikee,
She went by the name of the Golden Willow Tree,
As she sailed in the lowland lonesome low,
As she sailed in the lowland so low.
2. We hadn't been a-sailing more than two weeks or three,
Crying, O the land that lies so low.
We hadn't been a-sailing more than two weeks or three
Till we came in sight of the British Roverie,
As she sailed in the lowland lonesome low,
As she sailed in the lowland so low.*
3. Up stepped a little carpenter boy,
Crying, O the lonesome land so low.
Up stepped a little carpenter boy,
Says, "What will you give me for the ship that I'll
destroy?
And I'll sink 'em in the lowland lonesome low,
And I'll sink 'em in the lowland so low."
4. "I'll give you gold or I'll give thee"—
Crying, O the lonesome land so low—
"I'll give you gold or I'll give thee
The fairest of my daughters as she sails upon the sea,
If you'll sink 'em in the lowland lonesome low,
If you'll sink 'em in the land that lies so low."
5. Then he turned upon his back and away swam he,
Crying, O the lonesome land so low.
He turned upon his back and away swum he.
He swum till he came to the British Roverie,
As she sailed in the lowland lonesome low,
As she sailed in the lowland so low.
6. He had a little instrument fitted for his use,
Crying, O the lonesome land so low.
He had a little instrument fitted for his use.
He bored nine holes and he bored them all at once,
And he sank her in the lowland lonesome low,
And he sank her in the lowland so low.
7. Well, he turned upon his breast and back swum he,
Crying, O the lonesome land so low.
He turned upon his breast and back swum he.
He swum till he came to the Golden Willow Tree,
As she sailed in the lowland lonesome low,
As she sailed in the lowland so low.
8. "Captain, O Captain, come take me on board"—
Crying, O the lonesome land so low—
"O Captain, O Captain, come take me on board,
And do unto me as good as your word,
For I sank 'em in the lowland lonesome low,
I sank her in the lowland so low."
9. "Oh, no, I won't take you on board"—
Crying, O the lonesome land so low—
"Oh, no, I won't take you on board,
Nor do unto you as good as my word,
Though you sank 'em in the lowland lonesome low,
Though you sank 'em in the lowland so low."
10. "If it wasn't for the love that I have for your men"—
Crying, O the land that lies so low—
"If it wasn't for the love that I have for your men,
I'd do unto you as I done unto them.
I'd sink you in the lowland lonesome low,
I'd sink you in the lowland so low."
11. He turned upon his head and down swum he,
Crying, O the lonesome land so low,
He turned upon his head and down swum he.
He swum till he came to the bottom of the sea,
Sank himself in the lowland lonesome low,
Sank himself in the lowland so low.

*The following stanza has been omitted by the singer at this point:

Up stepped the Captain, says, "What we going to do?"
Crying, O the lonesome land so low.

Up stepped the Captain, says, "What we going to do?
If we overtake them, they'll cut us in two,
And they'll sink us in the lowland lonesome low,
They'll sink us in the lowland so low."

31 B. 2. THE RAMBLING BOY

Sung with banjo by Justus Begley at Hazard, Kentucky,
1937. Recorded by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax.

THE central theme of this "rake's farewell" (of British provenience) is that of the "rake and rambler" who has been driven by marriage to a highwayman's career and is now condemned to die. As in most ballads about condemned men, there are the usual sentimental references to the pretty sweetheart and the weeping mother. The boastfully defiant close, however, distinguishes the "Rambling Boy" type from the "Claude Allen" type (Record 35 B), with its parting advice to "take warning." Most American versions of "The Rambling Boy" are given a local setting; but some still refer to London City or Dublin City instead of Cumberland City or Columbus City.

For texts and notes, see *Ballads and Songs Collected by the Missouri Folk-Lore Society*, edited by H. M. Belden (Columbia, Missouri, 1940), pp. 136-137; *Ballads of the Kentucky Highlands*, by Harvey H. Fuson (London, 1931), pp. 63-64; *Folk-Songs from the Southern Highlands*, collected and edited by Mellinger Edward Henry (New York, 1938), pp. 327-328; and *Our Singing Country*, collected and compiled by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, Ruth Crawford Seeger, music editor (New York, 1941), pp. 314-315.

B. A. B.

1. I am a poor and a ramblin' boy.
To many other shores I have been.
In Cumberland City I paid my way
To spend my money at the balls and play.
2. In Cumberland City I married me a wife.
I loved her as I love my life.

She treated me kind both night and day
And caused me to rob on the road highway.

3. So, my pretty little miss, now fare you well.
I love you so well no one can tell.
If pleasure no more on earth I feel,
I wouldn't serve you as you served me.
4. Oh, my pretty little miss, sixteen years old,
Her hair just as yellow as the shining gold,
The prettiest face, oh, the sweetest hands—
Bless the ground on where she stands.
5. Now my mother sits and weeps and moans.
My sister says she's left alone.
My true love cries in deep despair,
With her dark brown eyes and her fair and curly hair.
6. So I'll get me some paper and it's I'll sit down,
Drop a few lines to my Governor Brown,
And every word shall be the truth.
Oh, pray for the governor to turn me loose.
7. I'll buy me a ticket in Greenville town,
Get on the train and it's I'll sit down.
Oh, the wheels will roll and the whistle will blow,
And it'll take me six months to get back home.
8. Come, young and old, and stand around,
To see me laid in this cold ground.
I'm not ashamed or afraid to die,
But I hope to meet you a bye and bye.

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33 A. THE TWO SISTERS

Sung by Horton Barker at Chilhowie, Virginia, 1939.
Recorded by Herbert Halpert.

IN THE United States, the "romantic and mournful song" of "The Twa Sisters" has become pure melodrama, with the miller (who originally came to the younger sister's rescue) displacing the elder sister as the villain of the piece. Gone, too, is the folk-tale motif of the singing bones. This has to do with fitting the hair and other parts of the drowned girl's body into a harp or other musical instrument, whose "voice" exposes the jealous sister's guilt.

Horton Barker gives the song a slightly droll turn, and makes the most of the dance-like refrain. In this connection it is interesting to note that the use of the ballad as a dance-song has been reported from Nebraska by Louise Pound, from Kentucky by Jean Thomas, and from Mississippi by A. P. Hudson. (See *The American Play-Party Song*, by B. A. Botkin, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1937, pp. 59-61.)

For texts and notes, see *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, edited by Francis James Child, Part I (Boston, 1882), No. 10.

B. A. B.

1. There was an old woman lived on the seashore,
Bow and balance to me.
There was an old woman lived on the seashore,
Her number of daughters one, two, three, four,
And I'll be true to my love if my love'll be true to me.
2. There was a young man came by to see them,
And the oldest one got struck on him.
3. He bought the youngest a beaver hat,
And the oldest one got mad at that.
4. "Oh, sister, oh, sister, let's walk the seashore,
And see the ships as they sail o'er."
5. While these two sisters were walking the shore,
The oldest pushed the youngest o'er.
6. "Oh, sister, oh, sister, please lend me your hand,
And you may have Willie and all of his land."
7. "I never, I never will lend you my hand,
But I'll have Willie and all of his land."
8. Sometime she sank and sometime she swam,
Until she came to the old mill dam.
9. The miller he got his fishing hook,
And fished the maiden out of the brook.

10. "Oh, miller, oh, miller, here's five gold rings,
To push the maiden in again."
11. The miller received those five gold rings,
And pushed the maiden in again.
12. The miller was hung at his own mill gate,
For drowning little sister Kate.

33 B. LORD THOMAS AND FAIR ELLENDER

Sung by Horton Barker at Chilhowie, Virginia, 1939.
Recorded by Herbert Halpert.

NEXT to "Barbara Allen," "Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender," or "The Brown Girl," has become the "most widely distributed of all the ballads surviving in America." (See *South Carolina Ballads*, by Reed Smith, Cambridge, 1928, p. 109.) Like "Barbara Allen," it has the sentimental appeal of a story of unhappy love, with the added thrill of wholesale slaughter. The horror of the tragedy is relieved by a decorative, nursery-tale quality, enhanced by such archaisms as "tingled the rein" (ring) and such stock ballad phrases as "milky white steed" and "lily-white hand." Some versions of the ballad end with the motif made familiar by "Barbara Allen"—that of the rose and the brier growing out of the lovers' graves to entwine in a true-lover's knot. For all its grimness, the business of kicking the severed head of the brown girl against the wall is apt to strike the listener as humorous. At the same time, lines like "They took her to be some queen" have the ring of folk poetry.

Reed Smith (*ibid.*) explains the brown girl's rôle of villainess as growing out of the preference for blondes found in Germanic folklore.

For texts and notes, see *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* edited by Francis James Child, Part III (Boston, 1885), No. 73.

B. A. B.

1. "Lord Thomas, Lord Thomas, take my advice.
Go bring the brown girl home,
For she has land and a house of her own;
Fair Ellender she has none."
2. He called it to his waiting maids,
By one, by two, by three.
"Go bridle, go saddle my milky white steed;
Fair Ellender I must see."
3. He rode and he rode till he came to her gate.
So loudly he tingled the rein.*
And none was so ready as fair Ellender herself
As she rose to let him in.

* Ring.

4. "I've come to ask you to my wedding to-day."
"Bad news, Lord Thomas," says she,
"For I your bride I thought I would be.
Bad news, Lord Thomas," says she.
5. She called it to her father and mother
To make them both as one.
"Shall I go to Lord Thomas's wedding
Or tarry at home alone?"
6. She dressed herself so fine in silk,
Her very maids in green;
And every city that she rode through,
They took her to be some queen.
7. She rode and she rode till she came to his gate.
So loudly she tingled the rein.
And none was so ready as Lord Thomas himself
As he rose to let her in.
8. He took her by the lily-white hand;
He led her through the hall;
He sot her down at the head of the table
Among the quality all.
9. "Lord Thomas," says she, "is this your bride?
I'm sure she looks very brown.
You might have married as fair a young lady
As ever the sun shone on."
10. The brown girl had a penknife in her hand,
It keen and very sharp.
Between the long ribs and the short,
She pierced Fair Ellender to the heart.
11. He took the brown girl by the hand;
He led her through the hall;
And with his sword he cut her head off,
And kicked it against the wall.
12. He placed the handle against the ground,
The point against his breast,
Saying, "Here's the death of three true lovers.
God send their souls to rest.
13. "I want my grave dug long and wide,
And dig it very deep.
I want Fair Ellender in my arms,
The brown girl at my feet."

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34 A. BOLAKINS (LAMKIN)

Sung by Mrs. Lena Bare Turbyfill at Elk Park, North Carolina, 1939. Recorded by Herbert Halpert.

THE jingle and the singsong of "Bolakins" may seem inappropriate to a grisly tragedy of blood, but they have a certain appropriateness of ironic contrast. In the same key is the name, Lamkin, of which Bolakins is one of many forms, described by Child as an "ironical designation for the bloody mason, the terror of countless nurseries." "Foster" may be a corruption of "false nurse"; "many marigolds" is "as much red gold"; and the "stake of stand-by" is the "stake a-standing by."

For virtually the same text and tune by the same singer, see *Beech Mountain Folk Songs and Ballads*, by Maurice Matteson and Mellinger Edward Henry (New York, 1936), pp. 20-21. For other texts and notes, see *The English and Scottish Ballads*, edited by Francis James Child, Part IV (Boston, 1886), No. 93.

B. A. B.

1. Bolakins was a very fine mason
As ever laid stone.
He built a fine castle
And the pay he got none.
2. "Where is the gentleman?
Is he at home?"
"He's gone down to Marion
For to visit his son."
3. "Where is the lady?
Is she at home?"
"She's upstairs sleeping,"
Said the foster to him.
4. "How will we get her down
Such a dark night as this?"
"We'll stick her little baby
Full of needles and pins."
They stuck her little baby
Full of needles and pins.
5. The foster she rocked,
And Bolakins he sung,
While blood and tears
From the cradle did run.
6. Down come our lady,
Not thinking any harm.
Old Bolakins,
He took her in his arms.
7. "Bolakins, Bolakins,
Spare my life one day.
I'll give you many marigolds
As my horse can carry away.
8. "Bolakins, Bolakins,
Spare my life one hour.
I'll give you daughter Bessie,
My own blooming flower."
9. "You better keep your daughter Bessie
For to run through the flood,
And scour a silver basin
For to catch your heart's blood."
10. Daughter Bessie climbed up
In the window so high,
And saw her father
Come riding hard by.
11. "Oh, father, oh, father,
Can you blame me?
Old Bolakins
Has killed your lady.
12. "Oh, father, oh, father,
Can you blame me?
Old Bolakins
Has killed your baby."
13. They hung old Bolakins
To the sea-gallows tree
And tied the foster
To the stake of stand-by.

34 B. THE THREE BABES

Sung by I. G. Greer of Thomasville, North Carolina, with dulcimer by Mrs. I. G. Greer. Recorded at Greensboro, North Carolina, 1941, by Fletcher Collins.

ONE of the few English and Scottish ballads on religious themes, "The Wife of Usher's Well" (as it was originally entitled) has the genuine thrill of the supernatural. In American versions (known as "The Three Babes" or "The Lady Gay"), the effect is all the more poignant because the "three stout and stalwart sons" have become "three little babes" and the mysticism is clothed in a homely vernacular.

For texts and notes, see *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, edited by Francis James Child, Part III (Boston, 1885), No. 79.

B. A. B.

1. There was a lady of beauty rare,
And children she had three.
She sent them away to the North Countree
For to learn their grammaree.

2. They hadn't been gone so very long,
Scarcely three months and a day,
When there came a sickness all over the land
And swept them all away.
3. And when she came this for to know,
She wrung her hands full sore,
Saying, "Alas, alas, my three little babes,
I never shall see any more.
4. "Ain't there a king in heaven," she cried,
"Who used to wear a crown?
I pray the Lord will me reward
And send my three babes down."
5. It was a-come near Christmas time,
The nights was long and cold,
When her three little babes come a-runnin' down
To their dear mammy's home.
6. She fixed them a bed in the backmost room,
All covered with clean white sheets,
And o'er the top a golden one
That they might soundly sleep.
7. "Take it off, take it off," said the oldest one,
"Take it off, we say again.
A woe, a woe, to this wicked world,
So long since pride began."
8. She spread a table for them there,
All covered with cakes and wine,
And said, "Come, eat, my three little babes,
Come, eat, and drink of mine."
9. "We do not want your cakes, mammy,
We do not want your wine,
For in the morning by the break of day
With the Savior we must dine."

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35 A. SANFORD BARNEY

Sung by I. G. Greer of Thomasville, North Carolina, with dulcimer by Mrs. I. G. Greer. Recorded at Greensboro, North Carolina, 1941, by Fletcher Collins.

THIS native ballad belongs to the general class of Western songs of "hard times" or "poor country," which describe pioneer conditions with realism and humor. It is also related to the literature of local satire, of which Arkansas seems to have had more than its share. According to H. M. Belden, (*Ballads and Songs Collected by the Missouri Folk-Lore Society*, Columbia, Missouri, 1940, pp. 424-426), it was "originally a song of Irish navvies imported to work on railroads in Arkansas." In most versions, however, including the present one, the traveler (known also as Sanford Barnes and Bill Stafford) has become a migratory worker or hobo, employed by his unprepossessing hotel-keeper to dig drainage ditches. For all its doggerel form and vaudeville style, the song is a genuine bit of Americana and American humor.

For another tune, see *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, collected by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax (New York, 1938), pp. 283-285. For texts and notes, see *Tall Tales of Arkansas*, by James R. Masterson (Boston, 1943), pp. 255-268.

B. A. B.

1. My name is Sanford Barney, and I came from Little Rock Town.
I've traveled this wide world over, I've traveled this wide world round.
I've had many ups and downs through life, better days I've saw,
But I never knew what misery was till I came to Arkansas.
2. 'Twas in the year of '82 in the merry month of June,
I landed at Hot Springs one sultry afternoon.
There came a walking skeleton, then gave to me his paw,
Invited me to his hotel, 'twas the best in Arkansas.
3. I followed my conductor unto his dwelling place.
It was starvation and poverty pictured on his face.
His bread it was corn dodgers, and beef I could not chaw.
He charged me fifty cents a meal in the state of Arkansas.
4. I started back next morning to catch the early train.
He said, "Young man, you better work for me. I have some land to drain.
I'll give you fifty cents a day, your washing and all chaw.
You'll feel quite like a different man when you leave old Arkansas."
5. I worked for the gentleman three weeks, Jess Harold was his name.
Six feet, seven inches in his stocking length, and slim as any crane.
His hair hung down like ringlets beside his slackened jaw.
He was a photygraft of all the gents that 'uz raised in Arkansas.
6. His bread it was corn dodgers as hard as any rock.
It made my teeth begin to loosen, my knees begin to knock.
I got so thin on sage and sassafras tea I could hide behind a straw.
I'm sure I was quite like a different man when I left old Arkansas.
7. I started back to Texas a quarter after five;
Nothing was left but skin and bones, half dead and half alive.
I got me a bottle of whisky, my misery for to thaw;
Got drunk as old Abraham Linkern when I left old Arkansas.
8. Farewell, farewell, Jess Harold, and likewise darling wife,
I know she never will forget me in the last days of her life.*
She put her little hand in mine and tried to bite my jaw,
And said, "Mr. Barnes, remember me when you leave old Arkansas."
9. Farewell, farewell, swamp angels, to canebrake in the chills.
Fare thee well to sage and sassafras tea and corn-dodger pills.
If ever I see that land again, I'll give to you my paw,
It will be through a telescope from here to Arkansas.

*This line was fumbled by the singer.

35 B. CLAUDE ALLEN

Sung with guitar by Hobart Smith at Saltville, Virginia, 1942. Recorded by Alan Lomax.

ACCORDING to information furnished by Professor Fletcher Collins, of Elon College, North Carolina, Claude Allen is still something of a local hero in the vicinity of Hillsdale, Virginia, where, with his brother Sidney and several others, he was arrested one Saturday night in 1912,

"for drinking and carrying on in the streets." At the trial following the arrest, the prisoners were fined one dollar each and sentenced to one day in jail. "Claude said right off he'd pay the fine but he was '--- -----' if he'd take a sentence, 'No, sir!' The Allens began shooting; so did the high sheriff and the other officials; and the Allens escaped through the windows. Claude was electrocuted for killing the sheriff; Sidney Allen was exiled from the state after his 35-year prison sentence had been commuted, and another brother was captured only years later when his sweetheart—to get a reward—told the police of his letters to her, written from somewhere out West."

For texts and notes, including the ballad of "Sidney Allen," see *Folk-Songs from the Southern Highlands*, collected and edited by Mellinger Edward Henry (New York, 1938), pp. 316-320. For a historical note on the "court-house massacre," see *Folksongs of Mississippi and Their Background*, by Arthur Palmer Hudson (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1936), p. 242.

1. Claude Allen he and his dear old pappy
Have met their fatal doom at last.
Their friends are glad their trouble's ended
And hope their souls are now at rest.
2. Claude Allen was that tall and handsome,
He still had hopes until the end
That he'll some way or other
Escape his death from the Richmond pen.
3. The governor being so hard-hearted,
Not caring what his friends might say,
He finally took his sweet life from him.
In the cold, cold ground his body lay.
4. Claude Allen had a pretty sweetheart,
She mourned the loss of the one she loved.
She hoped to meet beyond the river,
Her fair young face in heaven above.
5. Claude's mother's tears was gently flowing,
All for the one she loved so dear.
It seemed no one could tell her troubles,
It seemed no one could tell but her.
6. How sad, how sad, to think of killin'
A man all in his youthful years,
A-leaving his old mother weepin'
And all his friends in bitter tears.
7. Look up on yonder lonely mountain,
Claude Allen sleeps beneath the clay.
No more you'll hear his words of mercy
Or see his face till Judgment Day.
8. Come all young boys, you may take warning.
Be careful how you go astray,
Or you may be like poor Claude Allen
And have this awful debt to pay.