

# The Ritchie Family of Kentucky

JEAN RITCHIE Interviews Her Family,  
with Documentary Recordings



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FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FA 2316

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THE  
RITCHIE  
FAMILY  
OF  
KENTUCKY

Introductory Note

Ever since I have been "singin' for people," as my Dad would put it, I have been more and more conscious of things I say by way of introduction to songs, things like, "This is a song I learned from my Mother," "Dad Ritchie used to sing this one at play-parties," and so on. Lately I've been thinking how much better it would be if, instead of hearing me sing the songs, the audience could somehow hear Mom herself singing the lullabye or love song I was telling about, or could listen in to Dad actually entertaining the playparty folks, or could hear our whole family singing together.

But I never could manage that. Dad always says he's too old for travel, and Mom says she has to stay and tend to the cow and the chickens -- and Dad. The "children" are scattered throughout seven states, and so I always have to sing alone.

The next best thing, thought I, would be to put out a record, with different family voices singing and talking. My husband George Pickow and I began work on it, but the same problems arose--Dad had lost his singing voice, and the family was never together. But, we made new recordings of as many as we could, then went through miles of our old family tapes and wires to find usable, interesting material for the rest of the album. Now, these old recordings were made "for fun," with nobody taking notice of background noises, and this accounts for the many inconsistencies in quality throughout the record. However, so many people have expressed interest in this project, we feel sure that most everybody will forgive the crying babies, rattling dishes, barking dogs and the old "muly cow" bawling to be milked.

This is by no means a complete family record (to the members from whom we were unable to get good recordings, or any recordings, we apologize), but we have tried to make a sort of miniature painting, with an honest and truthful likeness, and we hope everybody will accept it as such.

Jean Ritchie

## THE RITCHIES OF KENTUCKY

A Kentucky Mountain Family Talks and Sings its Traditional Heritage

Jean Ritchie, Narrator

### SIDE I

GREEN GRAVELS (A local game, sung and played by neighbor cousins of the Ritchies, the children and grandchildren of Hiram and Abbie Pratt, and their friends, on Masons Creek, near Viper, Kentucky. It is a simple game. All the children join hands in a ring and walk around to the left, singing the song. Each time the line is sung, "O Susie, O Susie, your truelove is dead," a different child is named, and that child turns and joins hands facing out of the circle, until all children in the circle are facing to the outside. Then each one has to "Name your sweetheart," amid much laughing and blushing, and is allowed to turn to the inside of the circle again.)

Green gravels, green gravels,  
The earth is so green.  
All over creation  
Ashamed to be seen.  
O Midge, O Midge,  
Your truelove is dead,  
He wrote you a letter  
To turn back your head.

Jean: There were fourteen children born to Balis and Abigail Hall Ritchie, in the Cumberland Mountain village of Viper, Kentucky. There was May, Ollie Mallie, Una, Raymond, Kitty, Truman, Patty, Edna, Jewel, Opal, Pauline, Wilmer...I'm the youngest of them and they called me Jean.

I can remember pretty far back into my childhood, and I reckon that, on the whole, it was a happy childhood. Well, we had our bad times, too--a few fusses, many spankings and once in awhile a right keen switch around the legs. And there were some times when the meal and the flour and the meat and lard ran low. But we had a world of fun, and it more than made up for all that.

Some of the happiest times of those early days were the summer twilights on our front porch, when our family would gather to sing the moon up.

LORD THOMAS AND FAIR ELLENDER (An old-time love ballad, sung in our family for as long as anyone can remember. The lead voice here is Una's, and, as best I recollect, those "joining in" are Edna, Mallie, Mom and me. The reason that it sounds as though some of us didn't know the song in spots, might be interesting. We all do know the song, but, having learned it through the oral process and over a period of time--three generations are represented, in actual number of years--that each of us is singing individually. Naturally, there were differences of a word here, a phrase there, particularly since, when this recording was made, we had not all sung together for a few years. The differences were so noticeable in the beginning, before Una took a firm lead, that the first few verses had to be left off the record. I will give them here in print, so that nobody will think we started the song in the middle!)

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(O mother, O mother, come riddle it down,  
Come riddle it both as one.  
Say must I marry fair Ellender, say,  
Or bring the brown girl home?

The brown girl she has houses and lands,  
Fair Ellender she has none;  
My blessings on you, my own dear son,  
Go bring me the brown girl home.

He rode till he came to Fair Ellender's gate,  
The tingled all on the ring;  
No one so ready as Fair Ellender herself  
To arise and bid him come in.

O what's the news, Lord Thomas, she cried,  
What news have you brought to me?  
I've come to ask you to my wedding,  
Now what do you think of me?

O mother, O mother, come riddle it down,  
Come riddle it both as one.  
Say must I go to Lord Thomas' wedding  
Or stay at home and mourn?

She got up, she riddled it down,  
She riddled it both as one,  
Saying, My dear daughter, my blessings on you,  
But stay at home and mourn.

The brown girl she has business there,  
You know that you have none,  
So my dear daughter, my blessings on you,  
But stay at home and mourn.

She dressed herself in lily-white lawn,  
Her head she wrapped in green  
And every town that she rode through  
They took her to be some queen.

She rode till she came to Lord Thomas' gate,  
She tingled all on the ring.  
No one so ready as Lord Thomas himself  
To arise and bid her come in.

He took her by the lily-white hand,  
He led her through the hall.  
He seated her down in a rocking chair  
Amongst those ladies all.

Is this your bride, Lord Thomas, she cried,  
She looks so wonderful brown;  
You once could've married the fairest young lady  
That ever the sun shone on.

O hush, O hush, Fair Ellen, he cried,  
And don't describe her to me;  
I would not give your little finger  
For the brown girl's whole bodee.

The brown girl having a knife in her hand,  
It being both keen and sharp,  
Betwixt the long ribs and the short  
She pierced Fair Ellender's heart.

O are you blind, Lord Thomas, she cried,  
Or is it you cannot see?  
O don't you see my own hearts blood  
Come trinkling down my knee?

Lord Thomas having a sword by his side  
As he walked through the hall,  
He cut off the head of his own brown bride  
And kicked it against the wall.

O father, O father, go dig my grave,  
Go dig it both wide and deep;  
And bury Fair Ellender in my arms  
And the brown girl at my feet.

Then placing the handle against the wall,  
The blade a-torge his heart,  
Saying, did you ever see three lovers meet  
That had so soon to part.

Jean: Our mother, Abigail Hall Ritchie, was born in Perry County, but Dad was an outsider, almost a furriner, because he came from Clear Creek in Knott County, about thirty miles away. But let Mom tell it.

Mom: Well, I was born in Perry County. Lived fifteen years on Clear Creek where we'uz first settled, then went to Hindman and lived two years, and then we come back to Perry County and been living here ever since.

Jean: How old were you when you got married?

Mom: Seventeen year and six months old...I thought it was old to get married!

Jean: She told me about the long months of waiting before the wedding, and she said, "I was in what you'd call about the sixth or seventh grade nowadays, somewhere long there. But it was a hard matter to keep my mind on book learning, so it didn't make much difference to me. I'd set with my eyes on the snowy hills and dream about my wedding day... what it would be like...how long off, and how close up it seemed, and what kind of cloth Pap would bring me for my dress.

"Bout the only thing I did learn that whole winter was, I remember, one day some of us girls were a-walking together at recess and Mary Cornett, she got to singing at a little song. Foolish little thing, but I got struck on the words and that evening I walked home with her and made her sing it over and over until I learnt it. After that I sung it around the house so much that Mammy Sally threatened to whup me if I didn't hush."

SOMEBODY'S TALL AND HANDSOME

Somebody's tall and handsome,  
Somebody's fond and true,  
Somebody's hair is very dark  
And somebody's eyes are, too.

I love somebody fondly  
I love somebody true;  
I love somebody with all my heart--  
He loves somebody, too.

Somebody called to see me,  
Somebody called last night,  
Somebody asked me to be his bride;  
Of course I said, All right.

I am somebody's darling,  
I am somebody's pride;  
The day is not far distance  
When I'll be somebody's bride.

Somebody's tall and handsome,  
Somebody's fond and true;  
Somebody's hair is very dark  
And somebody's eyes are, too.

Jean: Sounds like it's supposed to be "Somebody's eyes are blue."

Mom: It was--I changed it!

Jean: What'd you change it for, 'cause Dad's eyes are brown?

Mom: Yes. (Much laughter)

Mom: Well, Dad and me started out housekeeping fifty-five years ago  
...now just look what a crowd we got around us!

BRIGHTEST AND BEST (Sung by fifty-eight members of the Ritchie family, with dulcimer accompaniment. Note: This is a traditional Christmas carol, sung around our part of the country to an old mountain tune which can be found in various shape-note collections as "Star In The East." This was the favorite carol of Grandmother Ritchie, or Granny Katty as everybody called her. She'd sit before the fireplace on Old Christmas Eve--she never would recognize December twenty-fifty--and tell us how the elderberry bush in the corner of the yard'd blossom out at midnight on this night, right in the snow, and that the mule and cow brutes would be kneeling down, out there in the barn. Then she'd hum and sing on, "Brightest and Best." She especially loved the second verse, the one that begins, "Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining..." It's a long song, so we could leave only two verses on this record, but we print here the entire song.

Hail the blest morn when the great Mediator  
Down from the regions of glory descends;  
Shepherds, go worship the Babe in the manger,  
Lo! for a guard the bright angels attend.

CHORUS:

Brightest and best of the suns of the morning,  
Dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid;  
Star of the east, the horizon adorning,  
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining,  
Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall.  
Angels adore Him, in slumber reclining  
Maker and Monarch and Savior of all.

(CHORUS)

Say, shall we yield Him in costly devotion  
Odors of Edom and offerings divine?  
Gems from the mountain and pearls from the ocean,  
Myrrh from the forest and gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,  
Vainly with gifts would His favor secure.  
Richer by far is the heart's adoration,  
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.



Mom Ritchie

Jean: Didn't they say that you were the first one on Clear Creek to have a Christmas tree for your children?

Mom: Yes...I'd read about 'em having Christmas trees, and I went down the creek way a piece. I'us looking for an evergreen, and I couldn't find one, so I cut a sourwood tree--had all the tags a-hanging on it, and I decorated it with red ribbon, red paper, popcorn, and red apples. It pleased the children so well that they've had a Christmas tree ever since.

Jean: As the baby in this big family, I have many a thing to remember. I love to think on our work together in the hillside cornfields, and when I think about those times, that song comes to my mind--the one we used to sing to sort of tease the boys--the one about the young man that wouldn't raise corn.

THE YOUNG MAN THAT WOULDN'T RAISE CORN (Sung by Edna and Jean Ritchie, guitar accompaniment)

Come all young ladies and listen to my song,  
I'll tell you of a young man that wouldn't raise corn;  
The reason why I cannot tell,  
This young man was always well.

In the month of June he planted his corn,  
In July he laid it by;  
In October there came a frost,  
The seed of his corn this young man lost.

He goeth down and he peepeth in,  
The weeds and the grass was up to his chin;  
The weeds and the grass they grew so high,  
Caused this young man for to cry.

He goeth down to his near neighbor's land,  
Goin a-courtin as I understand,  
Goin a-courtin as sure's you're born--  
Kind sir, have you wed\* your corn?

Yes my dear, in reply,  
Yes my dear, I've laid it by  
But it ain't worth while to strive in vain,  
Don't believe to my soul it's going to raise one grain.

A healthy young man that won't raise corn  
Is the laziest man that ever was born.  
Single I am and single I'll remain,  
A lazy man I won't maintain.

\* wed -- weeded

Jean: Our family had its worries. There were eleven girls born in our house, and only three boys, and that seemed to be pretty much the pattern all over the country. There was a little song we used to sing over the dishwashing, and by the time the older girls got up into their teens, this song came to have real meaning.

**I WONDER WHEN I SHALL BE MARRIED** (Sung by Jean and Edna Ritchie, unaccompanied.)

Note: This song was brought to our part of the country by English settlers, and the older Ritchie girls probably learned this version of it from their classmates at one of the settlement schools, Hindman or Pine Mountain. By the time we younger ones came along, it was an established Ritchie song, known in and around Viper as "the Ritchie Old Maids' Song."

I wonder when I shall be married,  
O be married! O be married!  
I wonder when I shall be married  
For my beauty's beginning to fade.

My mother, she is so willing,  
O so willing, O so willing;  
My mother, she is so willing  
For she has four daughters beside.

My father has forty good shillings,  
O good shillings, O good shillings;  
My father has forty good shillings  
And they will be mine when he dies.

My shoes have gone to be mended,  
O be mended, O be mended;  
My shoes have gone to be mended  
And my petticoat's gone to dye green.

And they will be ready by Sunday,  
O by Sunday, O by Sunday;  
And they will be ready by Sunday,  
O, say won't I look like a queen!

A cup, a spoon and a trencher  
O a trencher, O a trencher;  
A cup, a spoon and a trencher  
And a candlestick made out of clay.

O, say won't I then be a bargain,  
O a bargain, O a bargain;  
O, say won't I then be a bargain  
For someone to carry away?

I wonder when I shall be married,  
O be married! O be Married!  
I wonder when I shall be married,  
For my beauty's beginning to fade.

Jean: (Over laughing and talk by Uncle Jason and children) Now, you get Mom and Dad and Uncle Jason to talking about their young days when they were courting and going to play-parties, and before you know it you've got a party going, with everybody, old folks down to babies, joining in the games.

Mom: Once or twice every year we'd have corn-huskings and quiltings, and in the spring we'd have log-rollings ... clearing ground, cutting down logs and rolling 'em in piles and burning 'em ...

Jean: Girls help with that, too?

Mom: No, the girls quilted and cooked. Men'd do that. And then at night we'd have great fun, play Boston ... Charlie ...

**CHARLIE** (Played by Chris, Karen, Mary Evelyn, Jonnie and Kathy Kermiet, children of Paul and Pauline Ritchie Kermiet)

Charlie's neat and Charlie's sweet  
And Charlie he's a dandy;  
Charlie he's the very lad  
That stole my strip-ed candy.

My pretty little pink, I once did think  
I never could do without you;  
Since I've lost all hopes of you  
I care very little about you.

**CHORUS;**  
Over the river to feed my sheep,  
Over the river to Charlie;  
Over the river to feed my sheep  
And measure up my barley.

Don't want your wheat, don't want your cheat,  
Neither do I want your barley;  
I'll take a little of the best you got  
To bake a cake for Charlie!

Uncle Jason: I thought that was nice!

Mom: Yes, that was about the nicest ... Boston and Charlie ...

Uncle Jason: That was a nice drill ... it was just like a drill of some kind. Hit's pretty nice I think, to have a crew that understands it just right. They had one they played and sung, "Turn, Julie-Ann turn, turn Old Jubilee!"

TURN, JULIE-ANN TURN (Sung by Jean with Dulcimer accompaniment)

Far down on the railroad track,  
Far down on the sea;  
Far down on the railroad track  
Turn old Jubilee!

CHORUS:  
Turn, Julie-Ann turn,  
Turn Old Jubilee.

Circle around, my Julie-Ann,  
Circle around I say;  
Circle around my Julie-Ann  
I ain't got long to stay.

My truelove spied me down the road,  
She hung her head and cried,  
Said, Yanner comes a booger-man,  
O where can I hide?

I'll go up on the mountaintop,  
Tell you what I'll do;  
I'll stand and tell the whole wide world  
I love no one but you.

I'll go up on the mountaintop,  
Give my horn a blow;  
If I can't get the girl I want,  
Let that old girl go!



Mom

Edna

Jean

Jean: Dad Ritchie says they always used to sing a lot when he was going to playparties, in the times between rounds of dancing when they all dropped down on the floor to rest. Then they'd go round the circle and ask for their favorite songs. At first they'd want light ones, to give the boys something to laugh at, so they could scrooch over closer to the right girls.

JOE BOWERS ( Sung by Dad Ritchie, unaccompanied. Note: Uncle Jason's brother, back in the late 1800's, took a ramble through Arkansas, Missouri and Texas. From him and many others like him, who "went West" and returned, Kentucky Mountain folks learned several songs about the gold rushes, cowboy life, etc., that have nothing to do with our own tradition. Our family, with its nine redheads, especially enjoyed the joke at the end of "Joe Bowers," that, "Sally had a baby and the baby had red hair!")

My name is Joseph Bowers, I have a brother Ike,  
I come from Old Missouri, all the way from Pike,  
I'll tell you how I left there, and how I came to roam  
And leave my poor old Mammy so far away from home.

I used to court a gal there, her name was Sally Black,  
I asked her if she'd marry me, she said it was a whack;  
Says she to me, Joe Bowers, before we hitch for life,  
You ought to hung a little home to take your little wife.

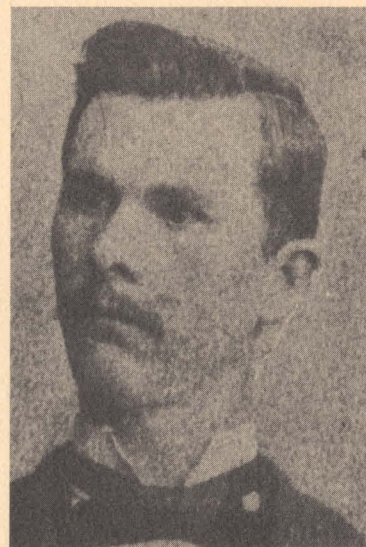
O Sally, dearest Sally, O sally for your sake,  
I'll go to Californy and try to raise a stake.  
When I got to that country I hadn't nary a red,  
I had such wolfish feelings, I wished myself most dead.

At length I went to mining, put in the biggest licks  
Right down upon the boulders just like a thousand bricks.  
I worked both late and early in rain and sun and snow,  
I was working for my Sally, 'twas all the same to Joe.

At length I got a letter from my dear Brother Ike,  
It came from Old Missouri all the way from Pike.  
It brought to me the darndest news that ever you did hear,  
My heart is almost bursting, so pray excuse this tear.

It said that Sal was false to me, her love from me had fled,  
She'd got married to a butcher and the butcher's hair was red;  
And more than that the letter said, enough to make one swear,  
That Sally had a baby and the baby had red hair!

Jean: After the funny songs, when the company had settled and the sweethearts were paired off, then they'd want the sweet, loving songs.



Balis Ritchie

PRETTY SARO (Sung by Pauline, Edna and Jean Ritchie. Note: This is another song that has been widely credited to the Ritchie family in various collections. Actually, its adoption by us is comparatively recent (we have known and sung it maybe thirty years). Versions of "Pretty Saro" are to be found all through our mountains, however, and at least two of the verses sung here are recurrent in other songs that have been in our family for hundreds of years. No one remembers just where this particular tune and set of words was first learned, but we think Edna was the first to bring it home, and she thinks she learned it from someone at Borea, Kentucky, where she went to college.)

Down in some lone valley  
In a lonesome place,  
Where the wild birds do whistle  
And their notes do increase,  
Farewell, Pretty Saro,  
I bid you adieu;  
And I'll dream of Pretty Saro  
Wherever I go.

My love she won't have me,  
So I understand.  
She wants a freeholder  
Who owns house and land.  
I cannot maintain her  
With silver and gold,  
Nor by all the fine things  
That a big house can hold.

If I were a merchant  
And could write a fine hand,  
I would write my love a letter  
That she'd understand;  
I'd write it by the river  
Where the waters o'erflow,  
And I'll dream of Pretty Saro  
Wherever I go.



Abbie and Balis Ritchie

## SIDE II

Jean: Well, at the playparties, or in any gathering where singing is going on, seems like the longer they sing, the longer and more important the songs get, and the more interested the singers get in what they're singing. That's when they get started on what I call the big songs, the "long love ballits, "like the one Uncle Jason sings about Lord Bateman and the Turkish Lady.

LORD BATEMAN AND THE TURKISH LADY (Note: Our family version of this seems to have been learned by some ancestor from an Eighteenth Century English broadside. The story is about the same as is told in Child's earlier Scottish version, "Young Beichan (Child 53), or in any of the other fourteen variants printed by Professor Child, but the Ritchie song is apparently a much modernized one. It is almost as though some ambitious Eighteenth Century minstrel had decided, "Here is a good song but it's not commercial in its present form,"--and proceeded to rewrite "Lord Bateman" and bring him up to date for the slick modern broadsheet market! If anyone wanted to locate the earliest written forms of this ballad, he would probably find them in Old Norse, but, since these wouldn't make much sense to the American public, the Ritchies will here give their English, and favorite, version.)

Lord Bateman was a noble lord,  
He thought himself of a high degree;  
He could not rest nor be contented  
Till he had sailed the old salt sea.

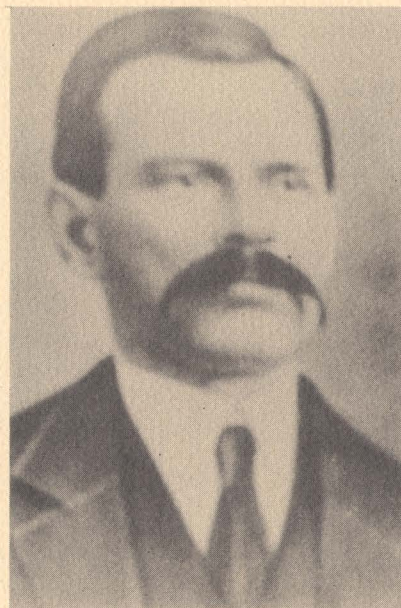
O he sailed east, and he sailed to the westward,  
He sailed all over to the Turkish shore.  
There he got caught and put in prison  
Never to be released any more.

Now the Turk he had one only daughter  
And she was fair as she could be;  
She stole the keys to her father's prison  
And declared Lord Bateman she'd set free.

She took him down to the deepest cellar  
And gave him a drink of the strongest wine.  
She threw her loving little arms around him  
Crying, O Lord Bateman, if you were mine!

They made a vow, they made a promise,  
For seven long years they made it to stand;  
He vowed he'd marry no other woman,  
She vowed she'd marry no other man.

Well, seven long years has rolled around,  
Seven years and it seems like twenty-nine.  
It's she's packed up all of her gay clothing  
And declared Lord Bateman she would go find.



Uncle Jason Ritchie

O she sailed east and she sailed to the westward,  
She sailed all over to the England shore.  
She rode till she came to Lord Bateman's castle  
And she summonsed his porter right down to the door.

O is this not Lord Bateman's castle  
And is his lordship not within?  
O yes, O yes, cried the proud young porter,  
He's a-just now bringing his new bride in!

What's the news, what's the news, you proud young porter?  
What's the news, what's the news that you brought to me?  
There stands a lady outside of your castle,  
She's the fairest one, I ever did see.

She has got a gold ring on every finger,  
And on one finger she has got three,  
And enough gay gold all about her middle  
As would buy Northumberland of thee.

She bids you to send her a slice of bread,  
She bids you to send her a drink of wine,  
And not to forget the Turkish Lady  
That freed you from your close confine.

O up and spoke that new bride's mother,  
She never was known to speak so free;  
O what's to become of my only daughter?  
She has just been made a bride to thee?

O I've done no harm to your only daughter  
And she is the none of the worse for me;  
She came to me with a horse and saddle  
And she shall go home in coacheree.

Lord Bateman he pounded his fist on the table  
And broke it in pieces one, two, three.  
Says, I'll forsake all for the Turkish Lady,  
She has crossed that old salt sea for me.

**AMAZING GRACE** (Heard in distance, then nearer. Sung by the congregation of the  
Little Zion Church, Jeff, Kentucky.)

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.

Tw'as grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace that fear relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed!

Jean: The year after Mom Ritchie was married, she joined the Little Zion Church of Jeff Kentucky. They're the Old Regular Baptists. It was in 1910, and Uncle Ira Combs Baptized her.

(Note: Reverend Sam Combs, son of Uncle Ira, is now the pastor of this church. The Old Regulars built in our mountains the first churches, served by circuit-riding preachers. Old Regular Baptists are not to be confused with the Holiness Church people, "Holy-Rollers," as some call them. Nor do the Old Regulars handle snakes, dance or roll on the floor. Yet it is an emotional church in that its members are not ashamed to show their feelings. Preachers shout, clap their hands, and pray their prayers in often very beautiful modal chants; men shout many heart-felt amens and women sometimes cry aloud. But there is a basic dignity, a deep sense of humility, a touching, almost childlike reverence ever-present in these meetings, setting them apart from most of the "modern" church services I have attended since.

The music is for the most part minor or modal, and is further made strange to modern ears because each song is "lined out" by the song leader, he being the only one who has a book. This book is usually the SWEET SONGSTER, containing words only, the leader choosing a tune at his discretion to fit the meter. Many people have told me that this music is like plains chants, others liken it to American Indian music, and some think it sounds Oriental. I think that it most likely came from early Welsh church music, or from the Wee Free Kirks of the Scottish Hebrides. It is an emotional music, to suit the character of the church. Little babies in their mother's arms always set up a wail in unison, as soon as one of these old mournful tunes begins to rise up around them in the meetin-house. Tears stand in the eyes of women and men alike. It is impossible not to feel moved when in the midst of this big sea of sound. Yet these songs have great dignity, they are deeply, powerfully simple, and are among the most hauntingly beautiful pieces of music I have ever heard.)

Rev. Combs: Remember now, everybody go down to the River Side with us and help us sing--

Brother: The baptizin'll be just above the bridge, out there, just above the bridge.

Rev. Combs: PRAYER (Leads the congregation in prayer at the water, before the baptism.)

SWEET RIVERS OF REDEEMING LOVE (Sung by congregation. Note: This is a favorite song at baptizings, held down at the foot of a hilly cornfield path outside the church-house, in a deepish hole of water in the North Fork of the Kentucky River. We print here four of the ten verses.)

Sweet rivers of redeeming love  
Lie just before my eyes;  
Had I the pinions of a dove  
I'd to those regions fly.

I'd rise superior to my pain,  
With joy outstrip the wind;  
I'd cross this cold and stormy main  
And leave the world behind.

While I'm in prison here below  
In anguish, pain and smart,  
Ofttimes those troubles I forego  
When love surrounds my heart.

In darkest shadows of the night,  
Faith mounts the upper sky.  
I there behold my heart's delight,  
And would rejoice to die.



Jean: On sundays it was hard to get Mom to sing anything but meeting songs, but on other days she'd sing ballads and love songs and game songs as she went about the work. I remember one song in particular, that she calls "a little foolish thing" that was her Mother's lullabye song--my Grandmother Patty Hall. And Mom would sing it for us whenever we were sleepy or hurt, and the love and the remembering in her voice made it a very special song for us.

DARBY RAM (Sung by Mom Ritchie)

I went down to Darby's house  
All on a market day;  
I saw the finest lamb  
That ever was fed on hay.

The wool on the lamb's belly  
Drug nine miles on the ground;  
I went to old Darby's house  
And stole a thousand pound.

CHORUS:

Fol lol day,  
Fol lol diddle lolly day.

The wool on the lamb's back  
Reached to the sky.  
The eagles they built there,  
You hear the young 'uns cry.

The first tooth he had  
Held a hundred of a horn,  
The next tooth he had  
Held sixty barrel of corn.

The one that cut his throat  
Got drowned in the blood;  
The one that held his head  
Got washed away in the flood.

Four feet he had,  
Four feet stood on the ground,  
And every foot he had  
Covered a half-acre of ground.

Jean: Well, Mom remembers her mother singing that, and her baby remembers her singing it. That's how good songs live so long I guess. Nowadays they've got a long name for it, call it the "folk process or oral song transmission," and that's supposed to be the best kind! And it really does seem to work better, and I'll give you an example. Here's our little son Peter, three years old, and of course in this day and age he hears a great many folk songs on records--he has a private record library that high--and still, the songs he really learns best are the ones we sing with him. And, the ones we sing with him are more than likely the ones I learned from my mother or father. And so it goes...

DANCE TO YOUR DADDY (Sung by Jean Ritchie Pickow, George and Peter Pickow)

Dance to your Daddy,  
My little laddie,  
Dance to your Daddy,  
My little man;  
You shall have a fishie  
In your little dishie,  
You shall have a fishie  
When the boat comes in.

Dance to your Mammie  
My little lambie,  
Dance to your Mammie  
My bonnie lamb;  
You shall have a suppie  
In your little cuppie,  
You shall have a suppie  
When the cow comes home!

Jean: There's another lullabye I recollect and love, and one that'll outlive me by many generations.

GO TELL AUNT RHODIE (Sung by Edna and Jean, two dulcimers)

Go tell Aunt Rhodie,  
Go tell Aunt Rhodie,  
Go tell Aunt Rhodie  
Her old gray goose is dead.

She died last Friday,  
She died last Friday,  
She died last Friday  
Behind the old barnshed.

The one that she's been saving,  
The one that she's been saving,  
The one that she's been saving  
To make her a featherbed.

She left nine little goslings,  
She left nine little goslings,  
She left nine little goslings,  
To scratch for their own bread.



Dad tries to do women's work.

Jean: When I got too big to be rocked to sleep, I escaped out of Mom's arms to join the crew of children that always gathered to run and holler and play games round outside our house, in those warm moonlit summer twilights. What breathless times we had...pure magic!

COUNTER:

FIVE-TEN (A counting game of hide-and-seek, played by our cousins, the children and grandchildren of Hiram and Abbie Pratt, and their friends.)

Five, ten, fifteen, twenty,  
Twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty,  
Forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, sixty,  
Sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five, eighty,  
Eighty-five, ninety, ninety-five, a hundred!

Bushel of wheat and a bushel of rye,  
Who ain't hid, holler "I!"

HIDERS:

"I!"

COUNTER:

(Repeats counting to one hundred by fives)

Bushel of wheat and a bushel of clover,  
Who ain't hid, can't hide over.

Here I come, like a bee!  
Stinging everyone I see!

One-two-three for Midge!

LONDON BRIDGE (Played by Pratt children and friends)

(Two chosen leaders make an arch, others file through, all sing.  
On last word of each verse, "arch" falls down, imprisoning a child.)

(He goes behind leader whose name is Salt, and so on each time)

LEADER:

Which'd you rather be, salt or pepper?

CHILD:

(Makes choice) Salt

London Bridge is half fell down,  
Half fell down, half fell down,  
London Bridge is half fell down  
My true lover.

London Bridge is all fell down,  
All fell down, all fell down,  
London Bridge is all fell down,  
My true lover.

London Bridge is half built up,  
Half built up, half built up,  
London Bridge is half built up,  
My true lover.

London Bridge is all built up,  
All built up, all built up,  
London Bridge is all built up,  
My true lover.

(After the last captured child has chosen sides, the leaders shout, "The salt's bad!" or "The pepper's bad!" whichever has been decided upon by prearrangement. Assuming that "the salt's bad," all Salts then chase the Peppers until all have been caught. The last two Peppers to be caught become the leaders for the next game. Any two names may be chosen, as, Gold and Silver, Red and Blue Mountain and Valley, etc.)

**SKIP TO MY LOU** (A partner-stealing game. All partners stand together in one big circle, girls on the right of boys. The one who is "It" skips around inside the circle while the others sing, and he steals a partner from one of the couples. The person whose partner is stolen follows immediately, skipping round the ring and stealing another partner. Meanwhile, the first couple skip around until they return to the girl's place, where they rejoin the circle. This action is continuous, until the chorus is thrown in, at will, "Skip, skip, skip to my Lou," when all the couples join hands in promenade position and skip in a counter-clockwise circle, the one who is left without a partner skipping alone. At the end of this chorus, the big ring forms again and the game goes on as before with the stealer taking a partner wherever he will.)



Jean: And, up on the porch, older ones rocked and sang, and each of them heard his own magic childhood repeated in the children's laughing, heard the "voices of loved ones, songs of the past" . . . Many people think "Twilight A-Stealing" is a silly sentimental song; certainly it isn't a genuine folk song. It could be a hymn, but then it's not really religious either. Whatever it is, it always expresses what we feel as a family, together, and it's our own happy home we think about when we sing, "Gleameth the mansion, filled with delight, sweet happy home so bright."

**TWILIGHT A-STEALING** (Several Ritchies)

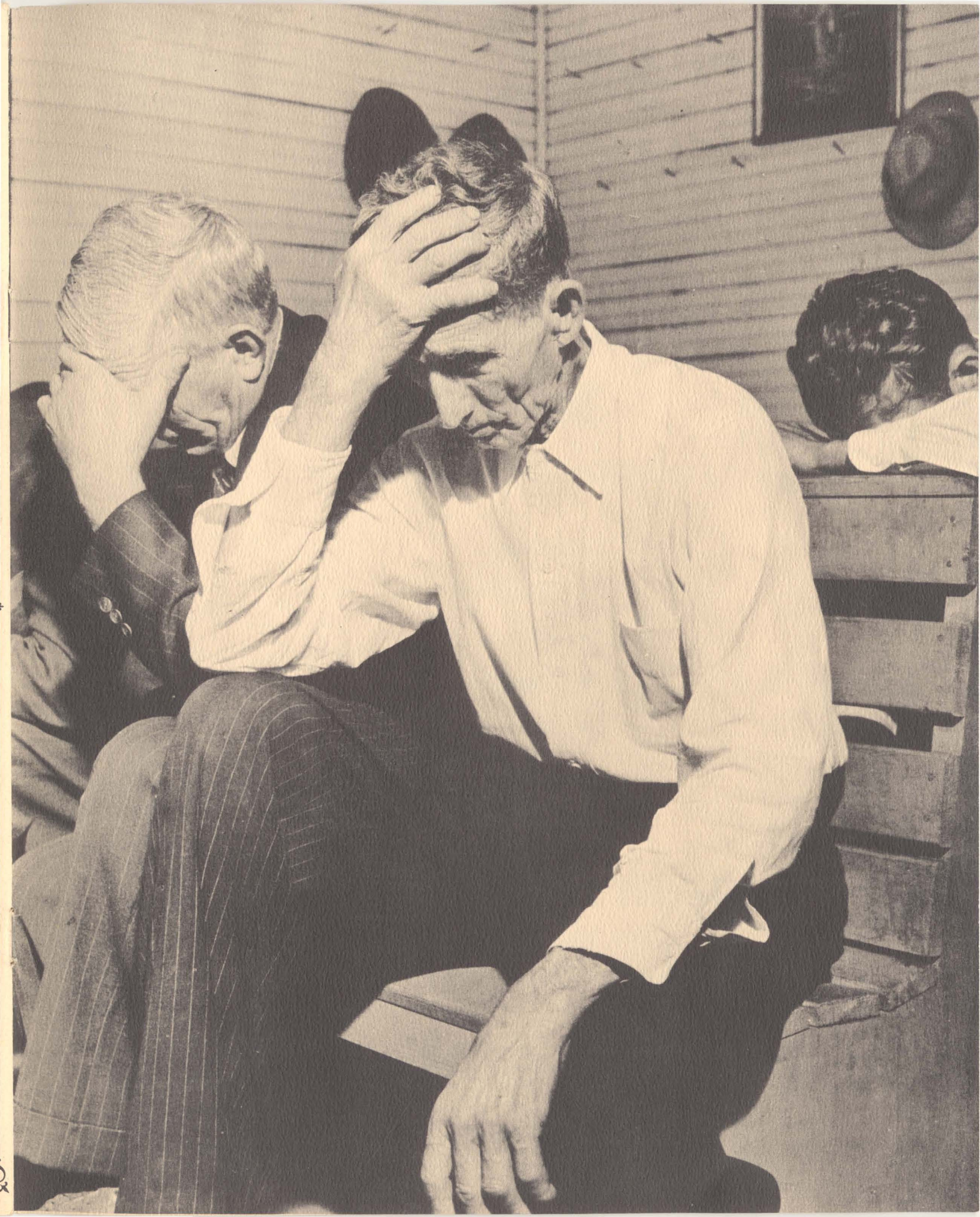
Twilight a-stealing over the sea,  
Shadows are falling, dark on the lea;  
Bourne on the night wind, voices of yore  
Come from the far-off shore.

**CHORUS:**

Far away beyond the starry sky,  
Where the love-light never, never dies,  
Gleameth the mansion filled with delight,  
Sweet happy home so bright.

Voices of loved ones, songs of the past  
Still linger round me while life shall last,  
Cheering my pathway while here I roam  
Seeking my far-off home.





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