

John Jacob Niles *Sings Folk Songs*
Folkways Records FA 2373



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GO 'WAY FROM MY WINDOW

John Jacob Niles

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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John Jacob Niles

SINGS

FOLK SONGS

SIDE I

Band 1: FROG WENT A-COURTING

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The English-speaking people of the earth have been singing a song concerning the marriage of a frog and a mouse for more than 400 years. The song originated in the times of Elizabeth I, in protest against the possibility of her marriage to a French prince. As most children living in rural Kentucky, I sang such a song, and when I grew up and discovered how notes could be put together to create new tunes, I did the original tune over and rewrote the text. In its present form, it was first sung in concert in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1920, at the Conservatory of Music.

Frog went courting and he did ride
Sword and pistol by his side
He rode up to Miss Mousey's door
Where he been often before
Saying Miss Mousey is you in?
Yes Sugarfoot I cart and spin
Frog went a courting, he did ride
High diddle dee a day.

He got that Mousey on his knee
Says Little Sugarfoot will you marry me?
Oh Sir, I can't do that without the sayso of Uncle
Rat - now
Oh Brother Rat, soon came home - he
Saying who has been here since I have been gone?
Frog went a courting, he did ride
High diddle diddle a day.

A fine young gentleman visited me
One that asked for to marry me
Rat just laughed and split his side
To think of Mousey being a bride.
Next day that Rat went up to town
To buy Miss Mousey's wedding gown.
Frog went a courting, he did ride
High diddle diddle a day.

What's the best thing for a wedding gown?
Acorn hollowed, grey and brown
What's the best place for a ceremony?
Down in a swamp in a Howard tree.
Tell me what that wedding cake will be
Why, two brown beans and a black-eyed pea.
Frog went a courting, he did ride
High diddle diddle a day.

First to come was Mr. Snake
He ate up the whole wedding cake
Now a come in old Rastus louse
Dance a breakdown around the house
Next to come was Major tick
And he ate so much it make him sick
Frog went a courting, he did ride
High diddle diddle a day.

Then come in old Mr. Cat
All them children cried out, scat!
Frog was in a terrible fright
He up and say to them good night
What you say is Miss Mousey's lot,
Why she got spotted on the spot.
Frog went a courting, he did ride
High diddle, diddle a day

Band 2: I'M SO GLAD TROUBLE DON'T LAST ALWAY

(Copyright, G. Schirmer, Inc.)

A Negro spiritual, well known to the revival meetings in the Cabbage Patch, Louisville, Ky.

I'm so glad trouble don't last alway
I'm so glad trouble don't last alway
Make more room down in your heart for me
Oh my Lord, oh my Lord, what shall I do?

I'm so glad devil don't own my soul
I'm so glad devil don't own my soul
Make more room down in your heart for me
Oh my Lord, oh my Lord, what shall I do?

I'm so glad Jesus done died for me
I'm so glad my Jesus done died for me
Make more room down in your heart for me
Oh my Lord, oh my Lord, what shall I do?

Band 3: WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?

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When I was a child, my mother and I used to sing a shortened version of this sad tale, but I did not write it down until many years later, when Aunt Beth Holcolm of Whitesburg, Ky. sang me a few additional verses. So I took all the verses and set them to a new tune, employing the Dorian scale.

Who killed cock robin?
It must have been a sparrow.
Who killed cock robin?
It must have been a sparrow.
Who killed cock robin?
Why it must have been a sparrow.
Yon goes he with bow and arrow.
Who saw him die?
It must have been a green fly.
Who saw him die?
It must have been a green fly.
Who saw him die?
Why it must have been a green fly
'Cause he's got the sharpest eye.

Who made the coffin?
It must have been a snail, snail.
Who made the coffin?
It must have been a snail, snail.
Who made the coffin?
Why it must have been a snail.
With his hammer, saw and nail.
Who stitched his shroud up?
It must have been a eagle.
Who stitched his shroud up?
It must have been a eagle.
Who stitched his shroud up?
Why it must have been a eagle.
'Cause he's got the sharpest needle.

Who dug his grave?
It must have been a black crow.
Who dug his grave?
It must have been a black crow.
Who dug his grave?
Why it must have been a black crow.
With his little grubbing hoe.*

*A hoe with a heavy, flat blade for grubbing up roots.

Who hauled him to it?
It must have been a skylark.
Who hauled him to it?
It must have been a skylark.
Who hauled him to it?
Why it must have been a sky lark.
With his little horse and cart.

Who smoothed his mound o'er?
It must have been a man-drake.
Who smoothed his mound o'er?
It must have been a man-drake.
Who smoothed his mound o'er?
Why it must have been a man-drake
With his little wooden rake.
Who said the preachment?
It must have been a mourning dove.
Who said the preachment?
It must have been a mourning dove.
Who said the preachment?
Why it must have been a mourning dove,
And he said it out of love.

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Band 4: JOHN HENRY

(Copyright, G. Schirmer, Inc.)

Most of the versions of this work-song recorded in West Virginia refer to the central figure as John Hardy, while those coming from Eastern Kentucky refer to him as John Henry. Nowadays, the song is usually called John Henry, and it concerns an actual Negro man, named John Hardy, who was executed by hanging, according to a record found in the courthouse at Welch, Mc Dowell County, W. Va., dated the 19th day of January, 1894.

When John Henry was about three days old,
A-sittin' on his old pappy's knee,
He gave-a one long loud and-a lonesome cry,
Said, "Dat hammer'll be the death of me." oh
Said, "Dat hammer'll be the death of me."

Now John Henry said to his Captain one day,
Why "A man ain't nothing but a man,
But before I'll be governed by an ole steam drill,
I'll die with my hammer in my hand,
I'll die with my hammer in my hand."

Now John Henry swung his hammer around of his head
He brought that hammer down on the ground.
A man in Chatanooga, two hundred miles away,
Heard an awful rumbling sound,
Heard an awful rumbling sound.

Now John Henry had a pretty little gal
Her name was Polly Anne.
When John Henry was sick and a-layin' on his bed,
Polly drove steel like a man,
Oh, Polly drove steel like a man.

When John Henry died, they wasn't no box
Big enough to hold his bones,
So they buried him in a box-car deep in the ground,
And let two mountains be his grave-stones,
Oh they let two mountains be his grave-stones.

John Henry.

(Pigeon Forge, Tenn.)

Band 5: GO FIND MY TRUE LOVE.

(Copyright G. Schirmer, Inc.)

A long time ago there was an English nursery-rhyme known as "Betty Pringle's Pig". By the time this little ditty got to America, Miss

Pringle was an old, old woman, and is referred to as such: the Schirmer title is, "There Was an Old Woman, and She Had a Little Pig". In West Virginia, however, John Harrington Cox reports two versions of this song, one in which the pig belongs to Sam Fanny and another where the owner is Joe Finley. The song as I sing it came to me from a group of candlewick-bedspread makers at Ringgold, Ga. in the summer of 1934.

There was an old woman and she had a little pig,
Go find my true love;
There was an old woman and she had a little pig,
It didn't cost much 'cause it wasn't very big,
Go find my true love in some lonesome valley.

Now this little pig it did a heap of harm,
Go find my true love;
Now this little pig it did a heap of harm,
Making little tracks all around that barn,
Go find my true love in some lonesome valley.

Now this little pig died and it died in its bed
Go find my true love;
Now this little pig died and it died in its bed,
All because it didn't have no bread,
Go find my true love in some lonesome valley.

Now the old woman's husband died account of grief
Go find my true love;
Now the old woman's husband died account of grief -
Wasn't that a sad relief?
Go find my true love in some lonesome valley.

And then the old woman wept and she sobbed and she
cried,
Go find my true love;
Then the old woman wept and she sobbed and she
cried,
And she too then laid down and died,
Go find my true love in some lonesome valley.

And then they laid 'em out all cold and dead,
Go find my true love;
And then they laid 'em out all cold and dead,
With the pig at the foot and the husband at the head,
Go find my true love in some lonesome valley.

(Ringgold, Ga.)

Band 6: I HAD A CAT

This is an accumulative nursery rhyme which was a great favorite in the Niles family. The text varied from year to year, depending on the particular animals we wished to celebrate in song. The tune is composition. Although very simple, it seems to be quite effective.

I had a cat and the cat pleased me
And I fed that cat on yonder's tree
Cat said "Chim Chat, Chim Chat"
I said "Fiddle I Fee"...

I had me a cow and the cow pleased me
And I fed that cow on yonder's tree
Cow said "Moo, Moo, Moo Moo".
Cat said "Chim Chat, Chim Chat".
And I said "Fiddle I Fee".

I had me a dog and the dog pleased me
And I fed that dog on yonder's tree
Dog said "Bow Wow, Bow Wow"
Cow said "Moo, Moo, Moo Moo"
Cat said "Chim Chat, Chim Chat"
I said "Fiddle I fee".

I had me a duck and the duck pleased me
And I fed that duck on Yonder's tree
Duck said "Quack, quack, Quack quack".
Dog
Cow
Cat
I said

I had me a guinea and the guinea pleased me
And I fed that guinea on yonder's tree
Guinea said "Patrack patrack, Patrack patrack".
Duck
Cow
Dog
Cat
I said

I had me a hog and the hog pleased me
And I fed that hog on yonder's tree
Hog went "ghooghoo ghoo ghoo"
guinea
Duck
Dog
Cat
I said

I had me a mule and the mule pleased me
And I fed that mule on yonder's tree
Mule said Heehaw...Heehaw...Heehaw..
Hog said
Guinea said
Duck said
Dog
Cat
I said

Band 7: THE FROG IN THE SPRING

(Copyright, G. Schirmer, Inc.)

This is a shortened version of "The Frog Went A-Courting". The singing members of my family were constantly trying to re-write, clarify, shorten or otherwise improve the "family music" we sang and loved so much. This is what happened to the above-mentioned frog song when it turned out to be "The Frog in the Spring". Each verse in the shortened version is made up of two lines with the addition of two lines of repetitious nonsense.

There was a frog lived in a spring,
Singing twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle wing.

He was so hoarse he could not sing,
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle wing.

He tucked in a swig of corn whiskey
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle whee
And then his singing was fine and free
And he merrily sang twiddle, widdle, widdle whee.

He courted a mouse and her name was Bess
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle widdle, widdle
widdle wess
And he courted and he courted 'til she said yes
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle wess.

Her ma and pa says, "frog's ain't nice".
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle wice
She said, "they're quite as nice as mice"
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle wice

So they was married, folks can tell
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle well
And they lived in the bottom of the old green
well
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle well

Then Mousey waded in water to her chin
Twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle, win
And she often wished she was a maid again
A singin' twiddle, widdle, widdle, widdle, widdle,
widdle win.

Band 8: POSHEEN, POSHEEN, POSHO

(Copyright, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.)

Once used by Granny Hatchett to quiet and amuse her grandchildren. Granny Hatchett lived in Cherokee County, N.C. during the early 1930's.

Posheen, posheen, posho,
A man-mouse stubbed his toe.
He wrapped it up with a cotton band
And made it fast with a blue silk strand,
Posheen, posheen, posho.

Posheen, posheen, posho,
A girl-mouse laughed so
To see a man-mouse with a wrapped up toe.
She laughed ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho,
Posheen, posheen, posho.

Posheen, posheen, posho.
Her granny was angered so.
She plucked a stem of yellow broom corn
And with a will she laid it on,
Posheen, posheen, posho.

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Band 9: THE LASS FROM THE LOW COUNTRY

(Copyright, G. Schirmer, Inc.)

In the early summer of 1933 an old man named Hugh Stallcup, who lived near Murphy, N.C. sang me a garbled little love-song he called "The Ash from the Hill Country". Two lines of this sad love ditty formed the basis for the poem of the "Lass from the Low Country". They were:

A lass who lived at the bottom of the valley,
At the bottom where the low waters ran, ...etc..

Soon thereafter, I wrote a tune I could sing to dulcimer accompaniment. Contrary to popular belief, I wrote the text and tune of this love-song.

Oh, he was a lord of high degree,
And she was a lass from the Low Countree,
But she loved his lordship so tenderly,
Oh, sorrow, sing sorrow:
Now she sleeps in the valley where the wild-
flowers nod,
And no one knows she loved him but herself
and God.

One morn when the sun was on the mead,
He passed her door on a milk-white steed;
She smiled and she spoke, but he paid no heed,
Oh, sorrow, sing sorrow:
Now she sleeps in the valley where the wild-
flowers nod,
And no one knows she loved him but herself and
God.

If you be a lass from the Low Countree,
Don't love of no lord of high degree;
They hain't got a heart for sympathy,
Oh, sorrow, sing sorrow:
Now she sleeps in the valley where the wild-
flowers nod,
And no one knows she loved him but herself
and God.

(Cherokee County, N.C.)

Band 10: JACK O' DIAMONDS

(Copyright, G. Schirmer, Inc.)

One of the well-known songs of the gambling man. "No one ever, ever knew and no one now will know" whether the tune employed herewith was first used to motivate the hymn known as "Halleluja, Thine the Glory" or to brighten up the sad story of the "Jack of Diamonds".

Jack o' diamonds, Jack o' diamonds, I know you
of old -
You've robbed my poor pockets of silver and gold.
My woman is hungry and my babies are too;
My troubles, Jack o' diamonds, is all caused by you.

Now, whisky and brandy hain't no friend to my kind,
Hit killed my poor daddy and bothered my mind.
My daddy drunk whisky, my daddy drunk ale,
They whopped him with the rawhide and sometimes
with a flail.

I'll build me a cabin on yon mountain high,
Where the wild birds can cheer me as they fly on
by.
Go 'way now, young ladies, and let me alone,
'Cause you know I'm just a poor boy and a long way
from home.

Jack o' diamonds, Jack o' diamonds, I know you of
old,
You've robbed my poor pockets of silver and gold.
Oh, I've gambled and gambled from sundown 'til
morn,
And I've got no more money than the day I was
born.
Jack o' Diamonds.

(Jefferson County, Ky.)

(Verses collected from workmen engaged by my father between the years of 1910 and 1917. The tune is well known throughout the United States. I am not prepared to say whether it was first sung as a sacred song or as a secular folk-song, like the one given above. "Hallelujah, Thine the Glory" is one of the sacred versions, and "Hallelujah, I'm a Hobo" is a well-known secular version. J.J.N.)

Band 11: I WONDER AS I WANDER

(Copyright, G. Schirmer, Inc.)

I wrote this carol, words and music, in 1933,
based on a fragment of song heard in Murphy, N.C.

I wonder as I wander, out under the sky,
How Jesus our Savior did come for to die,
For poor on'ry people like you and like I...
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus, 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wise men and shepherd and farmers and all.
But high from the heavens a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
A star in the sky or a bird on the wing,
Or all of God's angels in heaven to sing,
He surely could have had it, 'cause he was the King.

(Repeat the first verse.)

(Murphy, Cherokee County, North Carolina.)

Band 12: GO 'WAY FROM MY WINDOW

(Copyright, G. Schirmer, Inc.)

I wrote this song, text and tune, in 1908, when I was 16 years of age. It was a love offering to a local girl. She rejected the song and the composer. The idea came from one line, sung over and over again by a ditch-digger employed by my father around the turn of the century.

Go 'way from my window,
Go 'way from my door,
Go 'way, 'way, 'way from my bedside,
And bother me no more.

I'll give you back your letters,
I'll give you back your ring,
But I'll n'er forget my own true love,
As long as songbirds sing,
As long as songbirds sing.

I'll go tell all my brothers,
Tell all my sisters too,
That the reason why my heart is broke,
Is all account of you,
Is all account of you.

Go on your way, be happy,
Go on your way, and rest,
Remember dear that you're the one,
I really did love best,
I really did love best.

Go 'way from my window,
Go 'way from my door,
Go 'way, 'way, 'way from my bedside,
And bother me no more,
And bother me no more.