

SONGS OF ROBERT BURNS

Sung
by
Ewan
MacColl

A Choice from the
Songs Written and
Collected by Burns,
Sung to the
Original Tunes.
Selection and
Research by
Ralph Knight.

Folkways
Records
FW 8758

M
1746
B96
S698
1959

MUSIC LP

Cover design by Ronald Clyne.

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O That I Had Ne'er Been Married
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There's Cauld Kail In Aberdeen
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Duncan Gray
Wha'll Mow Me Now?
Rattlin, Roarin Willie
Hey, Ca' Thro'
To Daunton Me
Jumpin John
What Can a Young Lassie Do Wi' An Auld Man?
The Dusty Miller
Tibbie Dunbar
The Cooper O' Cuddy
She's Fair and Fause
The Deil's Awa Wi' th' Exciseman
A Man's a Man For A' That

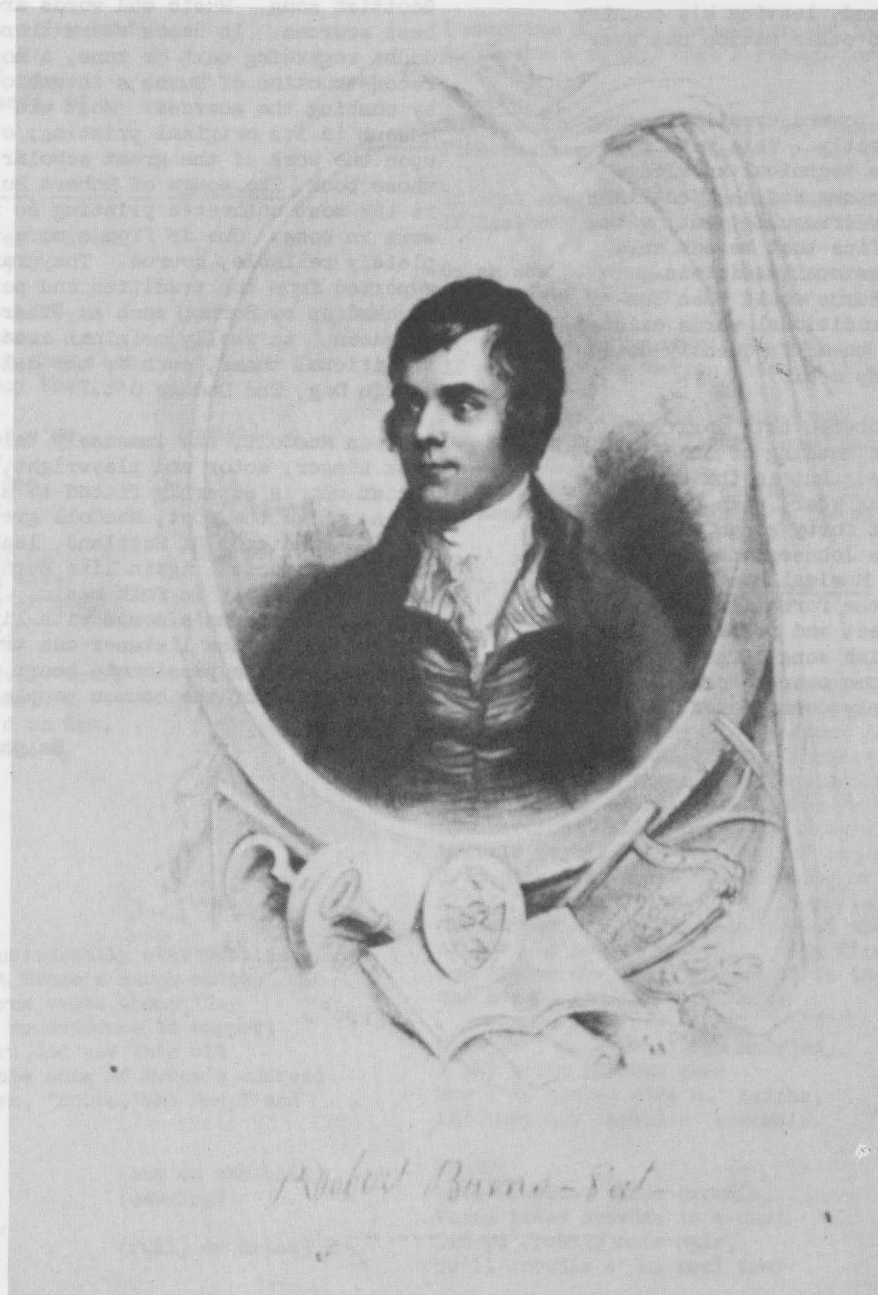
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Introduction and notes on the songs by Ralph Knight



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Robert Burns As A Song-Writer

From earliest childhood Robert Burns was enchanted by the songs, ballads and dances current in his native Ayrshire and among the people whom he met later in his travels about Scotland. This rich music, of mysterious, elusive cadence, wild and beautiful, formed the foundation and source of the great poet's work in song. It may be said, in fact, that Burns's unique greatness lies precisely in his having so completely merged his own personality with that of the Scottish people as expressed in their music.

He took songs and dance music wherever they could be found--from his memory going back to his mother's singing, from friends who sang and played, and from music collections. His touchstone of merit was always that the music and words should have been long tested by "Nature's Judges, the Common People." Tirelessly collecting, writing, patching up, Burns finally created a national treasury of song for Scotland, leaving his country a gift the like of which no other nation has ever received from a poet.

With Burns, the first step toward creating a song was to learn the tune perfectly. This wasn't always easy because Burns's technical knowledge of music was rather rudimentary and the Scottish tunes are frequently highly irregular; but, with practice, his ear grew so fine that he was able to guide the work of professional musicians. Having mastered the tune, Burns would then compose words to fit. When traditional words existed, he was careful to preserve them, frequently doing little more than patching up a bit.

In the early years Burns pursued this work for pleasure, publishing almost nothing of the songs in his first books of verse. But in the spring of 1787, in his twenty-ninth year, when he had collected or composed about forty songs, he was invited by an editor, James Johnson, to contribute to a collection, The Scots Musical Museum, and this event was to lead to the formation of a comprehensive plan to collect and prepare for the press every existing Scottish song. The first volume of the Museum was then nearly ready for the press. Burns immediately contributed two

songs and quickly assumed the work of chief editor. Under his guidance, the Museum, originally projected as two volumes of one hundred songs each, grew to six volumes. Of the six hundred songs finally published, at least two hundred were contributed by Burns.

Later, in 1792, Burns was again invited to contribute to another work, A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs. This work permitted Burns but little leeway because its editor, George Thomson, a shallow dilettante who believed himself to be a keen judge of music and poetry, often overruled Burns's views. Thomson's real aim was to Anglicize and emasculate Scottish song in order to tame it for salon performance. In a series of remarkable letters, Burns fought out the question with Thomson, striving to preserve the great oral tradition against Thomson's ruinous alterations and needless ornamentations. Of course Burns never changed Thomson's views, but, in the letters, left us a record of his own.

No effort has been spared to see to it that the songs on this recording conform to Burns's way in Scottish song. Music and words are drawn from the best sources. In cases where there may have been a doubt regarding text or tune, a most careful reconstruction of Burns's intentions has been made by combing the sources. Most are taken from the Museum in its original printing; others are based upon the work of the great scholar, James C. Dick, whose book, The Songs of Robert Burns (London, 1903), is the most authentic printing so far of Burns's work in song. One is from a more rare, but completely reliable, source. They range from songs reported from the tradition and perhaps only slightly touched up by Burns, such as "There's Cauld Kail In Aberdeen," to wholly original creations of Burns on traditional tunes, such as the delightful "The Rantin Dog, The Daddie O't."

In Ewan MacColl, the immensely talented Scottish folk singer, actor and playwright, we have an artist who is superbly fitted to sing Burns's songs. Like the poet, MacColl grew up in the singing tradition of Scotland, learning the style from his parents. Again like Burns, he has gone on to work deeply in folk music. His warm voice communicates Burns's songs with living force. In this recording the listener can truly gain much insight into the passionate heart of "the world's greatest poet of the common people."

Ralph Knight

SIDE A

Green Grow The Rashes, O

(Tune: As Title)

Burns knew "the merry old tune," "Green Grow The Rashes, O", as a bawdy song that had been long current in Scotland. When Jean Armour delivered a set of twins from her first pregnancy, Burns, in an excess of pride and happiness, sent a bawdy version of his own to a friend to signalize the event. The chorus, possibly traditional, went:

Green grow the rashes, O;
Green grow the rashes, O;
The lasses they hae wimble bores,
The widows they hae gashes, O.

Earlier, Burns had written the masterpiece known to all the world, one of the two songs contributed to the first volume of The Scots Musical Museum:

There's nought but care on ev'ry han',
In ev'ry hour that passes, O:
What signifies the life o' man,
An' 'twere not for the lasses, O?

CHORUS:

Green grow the rashes, O; (rushes)
Green grow the rashes, O;
The sweetest hours that e'er I spend,
Are spent among the lasses, O.

The warly race may riches chase, (worldly)
An' riches still may fly them, O,
An' tho' at last they catch them fast,
Their hearts can ne'er enjoy them, O.

But gie me a cannie hour at e'en, (quiet)
My arms about my dearie, O,
An' warly cares an' warly men
May a' gae tapsalteerie, O! (topsy-turvy)

For you sae douce, ye sneer at this; (sedate)
Ye're nought but senseless asses, O;
The wisest man the warl' e'er saw,
He dearly lov'd the lasses, O.

Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears
Her noblest work she classes, O:
Her prentice han' she try'd on man,
An' then she made the lasses, O.

Landlady, Count The Lawin

(Tune: Hey tutti taiti)

"I have met the tradition universally over Scotland ...that this air was Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn," Burns wrote about "Hey tutti taiti," but there is no evidence to support his belief. Burns, however, did use this old dance tune as the air for his song of Bruce's address to his troops at Bannockburn, "Scots, Wha Hae," and for this drinking song:

Landlady, count the lawin, (sum up the bill)
The day is near the dawin; (dawning)
Ye're a' blind drunk, boys,
And I'm but jolly fou. (full, or drunk)

CHORUS:

Hey tutti taiti,
How tutti taiti,
Hey tutti taiti,
Wha's fou now? (Who's)

Cog and ye were ay fou, (Drinking bowl; ever)
Cog and ye were ay fou,
I wad sit and sing to you,
If ye were ay fou!

Weel may ye a' be!
Ill may ye never see!
God bless the king
And the companie!

I Maun Hae A Wife

(Tune: Buy Broom Besoms)

"Buy Broom Besoms," obviously having it origin as a broom-hawker's song, was a well-known tune in Burns's time. Apparently Burns did little more with the words than report them:

I maun hae a wife, whatsoe'er she be; (must have)
An she be a woman, that's enough for me.

CHORUS:

Buy broom besoms! Wha will buy them now? (straws)
Fine heather ringers, better never grew.

If that she be bony, I shall think her right:
If that she be ugly, where's the odds at night?

O, an she be young, how happy shall I be?
If that she be auld, the sooner she will die.

If that she be fruitfu', O! what joy is there!
If she should be barren, less will be my care.

Be she green or gray; be she black or fair;
Let her be a woman, I shall seek nae mair. (more)

If she like a drappie, she and I'll agree; (drop of liquor)
If she dinna like it, there's the mair for me. (does not)

O That I Had Ne'er Been Married

(Tune: Crowdie)

Burns loved his children passionately and lived with deep fears that he would die and leave them penniless and helpless. "I cannot describe to you," he wrote to a friend, "the anxious, sleepless hours these ties frequently give me. I see a train of helpless little folks: me, & my exertions, all their stay; & on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang! If I am nipt off...what would become of my little flock!" Then, "in order to leave talking of the matter so gravely," he quotes the chorus of the old song, "Crowdie." The first stanza and chorus are traditional, as is the tune; the second stanza is Burns's:

O, that I had ne'er been married,
I wad never had nae care!
Now I've gotten wife an' bairns, (children)
An' they cry 'Crowdie' evermair. (oatmeal gruel)

CHORUS:

Once crowdie, twice crowdie, (Once)
Three times crowdie in a day!
Gin ye crowdie onie mair, (If)
Ye'll crowdie a' my meal away.

Waefu' Want and Hunger fley me, (scare)
Glowrin by the hallan en'; (staring; porch-end)
Sair I fecht them at the door, (hard; fight)
But ay I'm eerie they come ben. (ever; frightened; in)

Galloway Tam

(Tune: As Title)

"Galloway Tam," again, was an old song, little changed by Burns:

O, Galloway Tam cam here to woo;
I'd rather we'd gien him the brawnit cow; (given; red-brown)
For our lass Bess may curse and ban
The wanton wit o' Galloway Tam.

O, Galloway Tam cam here to shear;
I'd rather we'd gien him the gude gray mare; (good)
He kist the gudewife and strack the gudeman; (wife; struck; husband)
And that's the tricks o' Galloway Tam.

I Hae A Wife O' My Ain

(Tune: As Title)

This proud, brave song was written by Burns to an old dance tune shortly after his marriage to Jean Armour:

I hae a wife o' my ain,
I'll partake wi' naebody:
I'll take cuckold frae nane,
I'll gie cuckold to naebody.

I hae a penny to spend,
There--thanks to naebody!
I hae naething to lend,
I'll borrow frae naebody.

I am naebody's lord,
I'll be slave to naebody.
I hae a guid braid sword, (good broad)
I'll tak dunts frae naebody.. (blows)

I'll be merry and free,
I'll be sad for naebody.
Naebody cares for me,
I care for naebody.

There's Cauld Kail In Aberdeen

(Tune: Cauld Kail)

These words to the well-known air, "Cauld Kail," were collected by Burns from singing current in his day:

There's cauld kail in Aberdeen, (cold cabbage)
And castocks in Strathbogie; (cabbage stems)
When ilka lad maun hae his lass, (every)
Then fye, gie me my coggie. (wooden drinking vessel)

CHORUS:

My coggie, Sirs, my coggie, Sirs,
I canna want my coggie;
I wadna gie my three-girr'd cap (three-banded cup)
For e'er a quine on Bogle. (queen, or woman)

There's Johnnie Smith has got a wife
That scrimps him o' his coggie,
If she were mine, upon my life
I wad douk her in a bogie. (duck; bog)

A Braw Wooer

(Tune: The Lothian Lassie)

There was no hint in any earlier work for this rollicking narrative, though the tune was old and "a great favorite of mine," Burns wrote:

Last May a braw wooer cam down the lang glen, (fine)
And sair wi' his love he did deave me. (hard; deafen)
I said there was naething I hated like men:
The deuce gae wi'm to believe me, believe me--
The deuce gae wi'm to believe me!

He spak o' the darts in my bonie black een, (eyes)
And vow'd for my love he was diein.
I said, he might die when he liket for Jean:
The Lord forgie me for liein, for liein--
The Lord forgie me for liein!

A weel-stocket mailen, himsel for the laird, (farm; landlord)
And marriage aff-hand were his proffers:
I never loot on that I kenn'd it, or car'd, (let; noticed)
But thought I might hae waur offers, waur offers-- (worse)
But thought I might hae waur offers.

But what wad ye think? In a fortnight or less
(The Deil tak his taste to gae near her!) (Devil)
He up the Gate-Slack to my black cousin, Bess! (hill-path)
Guess ye how, the jad! I could bear her, could
bear her--
Guess ye how, the jad! I could bear her.

But a' the niest week, as I petted wi' care, (next)
I gaed to the tryste o' Dalgarnock, (cattle fair)
And wha but my fine fickle lover was there?
I glowr'd as I'd seen a warlock, a warlock-- (stared; wizard)
I glowr'd as I'd seen a warlock.

But owre my left shouther I gae him a blink, (shoulder; look)
Lest neebours might say I was saucy.
My wooer he caper'd as he'd been in drink,
And vow'd I was his dear lassie, dear lassie--
And vow'd I was his dear lassie!

I spier'd for my cousin fu' couthy and sweet: (asked; affable)
Gin she had recover'd her hearin? (If)
And how her new shoon fit her auld, shachl'd feet? (shoes;
But heavens! how he fell a swearin, a swearin-- shapeless)
But heavens! how he fell a swearin!

He begged, for gudesake, I wad be his wife,
Or else I wad kill him wi' sorrow;
So e'en to preserve the poor body in life,
I think I maun wed him to-morrow, to-morrow-- (must)
I think I maun wed him to-morrow!

The Rantin Dog, The Daddie O't

(Tune: Whare Wad Bonie Annie Lie)

"I composed this song pretty early in life and sent it to a young girl, a very particular acquaintance of mine, who was at that time under a cloud," so Burns wrote of this merry masterpiece. No one now knows whether the "young girl...under a cloud," who would sing these words, was Elizabeth Paton, the mother of Burns's first child, or Jean Armour:

O wha my babie-clouts will buy, (who; baby clothes)
O wha will tent me when I cry; (comfort)
Wha will kiss me where I lie.
The rantin dog, the daddie o't. (rollicking)

O wha will own he did the faut, (fault)
O wha will buy the groanin maut, (midwife's ale)
O wha will tell me how to ca't?-- (what to name it)
The rantin dog, the daddie o't.

When I mount the Creepie-chair, (church repentance stool)
Wha will sit beside me there,
Gie me Rob, I'll seek nae mair--
The rantin dog, the daddie o't.

Wha will crack to me my lane; (talk with me alone)
Wha will mak me fidgin fain; (tingling with desire)
Wha will kiss me o'er again.
The rantin dog, the daddie o't.

Ay Waukin, O

(Tune: As Title)

Just how much this traditional song was touched up
is not known:

Simmer's a pleasant time: (Summer is)
Flowers of every colour,
The water rins owre the heugh, (runs; crag)
And I long for my true lover.

CHORUS:
Ay waukin, O, (Ever waking)
Waukin still and weary:
Sleep I can get nane
For thinking on my dearie.

When I sleep I dream,
When I wauk I'm eerie, (frightened)
Sleep I can get nane
For thinkin on my dearie.

Lanely night comes on,
A' the lave are sleepin, (others)
I think on my bonie lad,
And I bleer my een wi' greetin. (eyes; weeping)

Duncan Gray

(Tune: As Title)

This is one of three sets of words which Burns
wrote to the tune of a widely known bawdy song
of the same title:

Weary fa' you, Duncan Gray! (Woe befall)
(Ha, ha, the girdin o't!) (clasping)
Wae gae by you, Duncan Gray! (Woe go with you)
(Ha, ha, the girdin o't!)
When a' the lave gae to their play, (others go)
Then I maun sit the lee-lang day, (live-long)
And jeeg the cradle wi' my tae, (jog; toe)
And a' for the girdin o't!

Bonie was the Lammass moon (Lammass, the first of August)
(Ha, ha, the girdin o't!)
Glowrin a' the hills aboon (Looking; above)
(Ha, ha, the girdin o't!)
The girdin brak, the beast cam down,
I tint my curch and baith my shoon, (lost; kerchief; shoes)
And, Duncan, ye're an unco loun-- (terrible rogue)
Wae on the bad girdin o't!

But Duncan, gin ye'll keep your aith (if; oath)
(Ha, ha, the girdin o't!)
I'se bless you wi' my hindmost breath
(Ha, ha, the girdin o't!)

Duncan, gin ye'll keep your aith,
The beast again can bear us baith,
And auld Mess John will mend the skaith (the minister; damage)
And clout the bad girdin o't. (repair)

Wha'll Mow Me Now?

(Tune: Comin Thro' The Rye)

"Coming Thro' The Rye" was an old bawdy song that
Burns once altered for general publication. But
on another occasion he wrote a completely new
set of verses, which, though bawdy, express a
profound moral aim:

O, I hae tint my rosy cheek, (lost)
Likewise my waste sae sma'; (waist)
O wae gae by the sodger lown (woe go with the rascal soldier)
The sodger did it a'.

CHORUS:
O wha'll mow me now, my jo, (the sex act; sweetheart)
An' wha'll mow me now:
A sodger wi' his bandileers (ammunition box)
Has bang'd my belly fu'.

Our dame hauds up her wanton tail, (holds)
As due as she gaes lie; (often as she lies down)
An' yet misca's a young thing, (abuses)
The trade if she but try.

Our dame can lae her ain gudeman, (lay; husband)
An' mow for glutton greed;
An' yet misca' a poor thing,
That's movin' for its bread.

Alake! sae sweet a tree as love,
Sic bitter fruit should bear!
Alake, that e'er a merry arse
Should draw a sa'tty tear. (salty)

But deevil damn the lousy loon, (devil; rascal)
Denies the bairn he got!
Or lea's the merry arse he lo'ed (child)
To wear a ragged coat! (leaves)

SIDE B

Rattlin, Roarin Willie

(Tune: As Title)

In "Rattlin, Roarin Willie" Burns added a final stanza to an immensely popular traditional song. The stanza honors "one of the worthiest fellows in the world, William Dunbar..." Dunbar was presiding officer of the Crochallan Fencibles, an Edinburgh club of convivial bachelors of which Burns was a leading member:

O rattlin, roarin Willie, (rollicking)
O he held to the fair, (went)
An' for to sell his fiddle
And buy some other ware;
But parting wi' his fiddle
The saut tear blin't his e'e-- (salt; blinded; eye)
And, rattlin, roarin Willie,
Ye're welcome hame to me!

'O Willie, come sell your fiddle,
An' sell your fiddle sae fine;
O Willie, come sell your fiddle
And buy a pint o' wine!
'If I should sell my fiddle,
The world would think I was mad; (world)
For monie a rantin day
My fiddle and I hae had.'

As I cam by Crochallan,
I cannily keekit ben, (quietly peeked in)
Rattlin, roarin Willie
Was sitting at yon boord-en'; (table side)
Sitting at yon boord-en',
And amang guid companie!
Rattlin, roarin Willie,
Ye're welcome hame to me.

Hey, Ca' Thro'

(Tune: As Title)

The four towns mentioned in the first stanza of this powerful work song are small fishing villages on the south coast of Fife. Burns is believed to have collected this song on a trip near there; it had never appeared in print before Burns reported it:

Up wi' the carls of Dysart (old men)
And the lads o' Buckhaven,
And the kimmers o' Largo (old women)
And the lasses o' Leven!

CHORUS:

Hey, ca' thro', ca' thro', (work away)
For we hae muckle ado! (much to do)

We hae tales to tell,
And we hae sangs to sing;
We hae pennies to spend,
And we hae pints to bring.

We'll live a' our days,
And them that comes behin',
Let them do the like,
And spend the gear they win! (wealth)

To Dauntion Me

(Tune: As Title)

"To Dauntion Me" was an old Jacobite song; Burns was attracted to the tune, which is now thought to have been of English origin even though well acclimated in the Scottish singing tradition, and wrote these fresh words for it:

The blude-red rose at Yule may blaw, (blood-red; blow)
The simmer lillies bloom in snaw, (summer; snow)
The frost may freeze the deepest sea,
But an auld man shall never dauntion me. (conquer)

CHORUS:

To dauntion me, and me sae young,
Wi' his fause heart and flatt'ring tongue: (false)
That is the thing you ne'er shall see,
For an auld man shall never dauntion me.

For a' his meal and a' his maut, (malt)
For a' his fresh beef and his saut, (salt)
For a' his gold and white monie,
An auld man shall never dauntion me.

His gear may buy him kye and yowes, (money; kine; ewes)
His gear may buy him glens and knowes; (valleys; hills)
But me he shall not buy nor fee, (hire)
For an auld man shall never dauntion me.

Jumpin John

(Tune: As Title)

"Jumpin John" is a very old tune. It is thought that Burns merely patched up old words:

Her daddie forbad, her minnie forbad, (mother)
Forbidden she wadna be:
She wadna trow't, the browst she brew'd (believed; brew)
Wad taste sae bitterlie.

CHORUS:

The lang lad they ca' Jumpin John
Beguil'd the bonie lassie.

A cow and a cauf, a yowe and a hauf, (calf; ewe; half)
And thretty guid shillins and three; (thirty)
A vera guid tocher, a cotter-man's dochter, (dowry; daughter)
The lass with the bonie black e'e.

What Can A Young Lassie Do Wi' An Auld Man?

(Tune: What Shall I Do With An Auld Man)

These words were suggested to Burns on little more than a hint found in an old title and tune:

What can a young lassie,
What shall a young lassie,
What can a young lassie
Do wi' an auld man?
Bad luck on the pennie
That tempted my minnie (mother)
To sell her poor Jenny
For siller an' lan'.

CHORUS:

What can a young lassie,
What shall a young lassie,
What can a young lassie
Do wi' an auld man?

He's always compleenin (complaining)
 Frae mornin to eenin; (From; evening)
 He hoasts and he hirples (coughs; hobbles)
 The weary day lang;
 He's doyl't and he's dozin; (stupid; torpid)
 His blude it is frozen--
 O, dreary's the night
 Wi' a crazy auld man!

He hums and he hankers,
 He frets and he cankers,
 I never can please him
 Do a' that I can;
 He's peevish an' jealous
 Of a' the young fellows--
 O, dool on the day (sorrow)
 I met wi' an auld man!

My auld auntie Katie
 Upon me taks pity,
 I'll do my endeavour
 To follow her plan:
 I'll cross him, and wrack him
 Until I heartbreak him,
 And then his auld brass
 Will buy me a new pan.

The Dusty Miller

(Tune: As Title)

A fragment from the tradition, touched up:

Hey the dusty miller
 And his dusty coat!
 He will spend a shilling
 Or he win a groat. (Ere)
 Dusty was the coat,
 Dusty was the colour,
 Dusty was the kiss
 That I gat frae the miller!

Hey the dusty miller
 And his dusty sack!
 Leeze me on the calling (Commend me to)
 Fills the dusty peck!
 Fills the dusty peck,
 Brings the (Silver, or money)
 I wad gie my coatie
 For the dusty miller!

Tibbie Dunbar

(Tune: Johnny McGill)

Burns reported that the tune of "Tibbie Dunbar" was said "to be the composition of John McGill, fiddler in Girvan; who called it after his own name." It was probably older, however, and may be of English origin. The words are Burns's:

O, wilt thou go wi' me, sweet Tibbie Dunbar?
 O, wilt thou go wi' me, sweet Tibbie Dunbar?
 Wilt thou ride on a horse, or be drawn in a car,
 Or walk by my side, O sweet Tibbie Dunbar?

I care na thy daddie, his lands and his money;
 I care na thy kin, sae high and sae lordly;
 But say that thou'lt hae me for better or waur, (worse)
 And come in thy coatie, sweet Tibbie Dunbar.

The Cooper O' Cuddy

(Tune: Bab At The Bowster)

This lively song was written to be sung to the tune of a famous dance game, "Bab At The Bowster," which, Burns wrote, "is to be met with everywhere."

CHORUS:

We'll hide the cooper behind the door,
 Behind the door, behind the door,
 We'll hide the cooper behind the door
 And cover him under a mawn, O. (basket)

The cooper o' Cuddy came here awa, (here about)
 He ca'd the girrs out o'er us a', (knocked; hoops)
 An' our guidwife has gotten a ca', (knock)
 That's anger'd the silly guidman, O. (frail husband)

He sought them out, he sought them in,
 Wi' 'Deil hae her!' an' 'Deil hae him!' (Devil)
 But the body he was sae doited and blin', (stupid)
 He wist na where he was gaun, O.

They cooper'd at e'en, they cooper'd at morn,
 Till our guidman has gotten the scorn:
 On ilka brow she's planted a horn, (every)
 And swears that there they will stan', O.

She's Fair And Fause

(Tune: The Lads Of Leith)

"She's Fair And Fause" is believed to have been written about a friend's unlucky love affair:

She's fair and fause that causes my smart; (false)
 I lo'ed her muckle and lang; (much)
 She's broken her vow, she's broken my heart;
 And I may e'en gae hang. (go)
 A coof cam in wi' routh o' gear, (dolt; plenty; money)
 And I hae tint my dearest dear;
 But Woman is but warld's gear,
 Sae let the bonie lass gang!

Whae'er ye be that Woman love,
 To this be never blind:
 Nae ferlie 'tis, tho' fickle she prove, (No wonder)
 A woman has't by kind.
 O Woman lovely, Woman fair,
 An angel form's faun to thy share, (fallen)
 'Twad been o'er muckle to gien thee mair
 I mean an angel mind.

The Deil's Awa Wi' Th' Exciseman

(Tune: The Hemp-dresser)

In the last years of his life, while living in the town of Dumfries, Burns was an exciseman, a government officer who inspects and rates articles liable to taxation. An old tune gave Burns the idea for this wildly farcical assault on tax collectors. It is said that Burns sang it at a dinner of fellow officers:

The Deil cam fiddlin thro' the town, (Devil)
 And danc'd awa wi' th' Exciseman,
 And ilka wife cries: 'Auld Mahoun, (every; old devil)
 I wish you luck o' the prize, man!

CHORUS:

The Deil's awa, the Deil's awa,
 The Deil's awa wi' th' Exciseman!
 He's danc'd awa, he's danc'd awa,
 He's danc'd awa wi' th' Exciseman!

'We'll mak our maut, and we'll brew our drink, (malt)
We'll laugh, sing, and rejoice, man,
And monie braw thanks to the muckle black Deil, (fine; big)
That danc'd awa wi' th' Exciseman.

There's threesome reels, there's foursome reels,
There's hornpipes and strathspeys, man, (Scottish dances)
But the ae best dance ere cam to the land (one)
Was The Deil's Awa wi' th' Exciseman.

A Man's A Man For A' That

(Tune: For A' That)

"A great critic...on songs says that love & wine
are the exclusive themes for song-writing. The
following is on neither subject & consequently
is no Song; but will be allowed, I think, to be
two or three pretty good prose thoughts, inverted
into rhyme." Thus Burns wrote in sending along
this song to George Thomson. Fortunately Burns
followed his impulses, rather than the strictures
of the "great critic," and found political matter
also to be a suitable theme for songs:

Is there for honest poverty
That hings his head, an' a' that? (hangs)
The coward slave, we pass him by--
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an' a' that,
Our toils obscure, an' a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that. (gold)

What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey, an' a' that? (coarse grey woolen)
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine--
A man's a man for a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
Their tinsel show, an' a' that,
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that.

Ye see yon birkie ca'd 'a lord,' (fellow; called)
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that?
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a cuif for a' that. (dolt)
For a' that, an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that,
The man o' independent mind,
He looks an' laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a' that!
But an honest man's aboon his might-- (above)
Guid faith, he mauna fa' that! (must not claim)
For a' that, an' a' that,
Their dignities, an' a' that,
The pith o' sense an' pride o' worth
Are higher rank than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may
(As come it will for a' that)
That Sense and Worth o'er a' the earth
Shall bear the gree an' a' that! (have the first place)
For a' that, an' a' that,
It's comin yet for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that.