The Lincolnshire poacher
Lowlands
I once loved a girl
She moved thro' the fair
The seven little pigs
O speak then my love
Le veritable amour
The unfortunate troubadour
The reaper's ghost
Two comments
Go 'way, old man
The wife wrapped in wether's skin
My good old man
No hiding place
The Lincolnshire Poacher  Known in several counties of England, this version is attributed to Lincoln­shire. I have known it for as long as I can remember, and believe I first saw some of the words in print in “Tom Brown’s School Days”—does anyone still read this? The third verse is an addition of my own.

Lowlands  The refrain, “Lowlands away, my John,” suggests that this English sea song may have been used as a chanty. It became intimations of reality.

I Once Loved a Girl  In the late 1930s I made several trips by Greyhound bus from California to the east coast of the U.S.A. In order to audition for managers and other possible employers in the professional music world. On one of these trips I met Redfern Mason, who was music critic of the old Boston Transcript. Mason was a man of great charm and knowledge, and had lived a most varied life. I once ran for mayor of San Francisco on the Socialist ticket and was defeated in a scandalous election involving charges of ballot box stuffing, etc. His book, “The Song Lore of Ireland”, published in 1911, is valuable reading if you are lucky enough to find a copy. Mason was the first professional music critic on the east coast to give me encouragement, as was Alfred Frankenstein on the west coast. Mason told me of an Irish song called “I once loved a boy”, thought it would be just right for my voice, and urged me to look for it in the Boston library. I found it, changed the lyrics just enough to make it more suitably a man’s song, and here it is.

She Moved Thro’ the Fair  An Irish love song from County Donegal. The words are adapted by Padric Colum from an old ballad. John McCormack used to sing this in the beautiful arrangement for piano by Herbert Hughes, unfortunately not suited to guitar. I have been content with a simple alternation of D major and E major chords.

The Seven Little Pigs  This was sung to me in upper New York State a few years ago, and I have since heard identical versions in Alaska and Vermont. In each case the singer was of urban background, and I judge the song to be not a true folk song but one of those quite stiltful imitations many of which became well known through the popular Irish concert and music hall singers of a half-century ago.

O Speck Then, My Love  In 18th century Spain the most important musical instrument was the vihuela de mano—ar hand vihuela, as opposed to the bowed vihuela. It had the figure eight shape and the flat top and back of the guitar, but was double stringed like the lute, and its music was written in tablature. A good deal of this music is still in existence, both solo pieces and songs with vihuela accompaniment. Here is one of the songs, written by Luis Milan, a virtuoso performer and noted composer of that time. It was published in 1535 in Valencia as part of Milan’s major work entitled El Maestro. The original text was Portuguese, and I have based my English version on it without holding myself to a literal translation. The vocal line and the accompaniment are unaltered. The song was brought to my attention by John Ward, the Harvard musicologist, who is perhaps the leading authority on the vihuela and its music.

The Reaper’s Ghost  In 1935, in an English pub, I overheard two men speaking of a supposedly haunted field nearby. It appeared that in the time of their grandfathers a local farmer vanished under peculiar circumstances. He was seen crossing a hayfield at sunset, passed behind a pile of hay, did not come into view on the other side, was not to be found behind the hay, and was never seen again. The spirit moved me to put the story into ballad verse and set it to music, and I did so that very night.

Two Comments  (a.) On a Mizie  (b.) On an Old Womans. These were translated by William Cowper, 1731-1800, from the ancient Greek, and set to music by myself.

Go ‘Way, Old Man  I learned this in 1936 in California, from Barnard Walls, who learned it in Kentucky.

The Wife Wrapped in Weather’s Skin  Sung to me in New York in 1941, though I believe the singer’s source was Sharp’s Southern Appalachian collection. For the benefit of urbanites, a wether is a castrated ram.

My Good Old Man  An American folk song known in many versions in the midwestern and southeastern parts of the country. A “hant”, or “hauken”, is a ghost, and I understand the implication to be that the interrogator (the old woman?) is already a hant.

No Hiding Place  I learned this from David Lloyd Garrison in Santa Barbara in 1929. It is often included in collections of spirituals, but it always sounded more like a revivalist song to me. I was therefore pleased to learn recently from a southern friend that it is indeed sung in the somewhat boisterous, if spiritual, atmosphere of revival gatherings.