NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN
FOLKSONGS AND BALLADS
sung by ARTUS MOSER

TRADITIONAL ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH
“CHILD BALLADS”
STILL BEING SUNG IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA
NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN FOLKSONGS AND BALLADS

sung by ARTUS MOSER

Introduction

All the songs in this collection are still circulating within the past few years in various sections of the Appalachian Mountains and over the rural areas of the state that once existed.

The collection of folk songs of English and Scottish development or origin and are known by the scholars as the Child Ballads. After the nineteenth century scholar and collector who first assembled and recorded the authoritative collection of folk ballads, Professor Francis James Child of Harvard University.

He had a vast and historic knowledge of folkloric and folk balladry, overcoming even barriers of different languages to secure his classical and to compare and evaluate them and to attempt to derive their sources. Not only that, he ranged down through the centuries with great familiarity in order to find traces or versions of which he was able to collect (more than he considered priceless gems of literature, -- and many of them have been of better quality and more than could be found in England or Scotland; and what a collection he might have made and what genuine, authentic tunes and versions, and what interesting people he might have met, and what interesting scenes he might have visited, had he only looked upon him with a little more curiosity. He might have enriched his own scholarly integrity and brought old Harvard a bit closer to the Appalachians in many ways other than the dulcimer."

Professor Child was totally unaware during his lifetime, up to 1896, at least, of the fact that a ground-breaking great collection (it ran into five huge volumes) that there were any extant ballads of significance to be found in the United States. Certainly more people in America were still singing these ballads than could be found in England or Scotland; and what a collection he might have made and what genuine, authentic tunes and versions, and what interesting people he might have met, and what interesting scenes he might have visited, had he only looked upon him with a little more curiosity. He might have enriched his own scholarly integrity and brought old Harvard a bit closer to the Appalachians in many ways other than the dulcimer."

Biographical Sketch of Artus Monroe Moser

A man of many talents and many activities, Artus Monroe Moser has had a lifelong interest in folk music. Born on September 14, 1894 in Catawba County of western North Carolina. His elementary and high school years were spent in the Mount Airy area.

After several years of teaching in the rural areas of North Carolina, he attended Biltmore High School in Asheville, North Carolina. His elementary schooling was elementary and his high school was a special in literary research in a college that he attended.

Since folk music was so natural to his surroundings, Moser gave little thought to it as he completed his elementary and high school years. After several years of teaching in these institutions, he returned home and continued his work at the branch of the University of North Carolina at Asheville, where he began collecting folk music in an album, entitled "NORTH CAROLINA FOLK SONGS AND BALLADS".

Though Mr. Moser has presented many public performances of songs and gave many lectures on the folk ballads, he still considers himself mainly as a collector. He says: "I do not consider myself as a virtuoso on the dulcimer, but I have played literally hundreds of the tunes as they were sung to me, or I remember them from my recordings. I enjoy singing these -- these strange modal tunes, with their often sad or tragicomical words. My family also enjoys singing them, and when we are all assembled at home, we make up quite a lively group of performers."

Mr. Moser was married in 1929 to Mabel Ruth Young of Salisbury, North Carolina. They are the parents of three children: Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Moser, of college music teacher; Artus M. Jr., M.D., a practicing physician in Asheville, N.C., and Janette Irene, a special in literary research in a college in California.

Notes

1. THE BLUE BELLS OF SCOTLAND

The origin of this song is unknown. It was being sung near the end of the eighteenth century. It was first sung before the famous London actress, Mrs. Dorothy Jordan (1768-1816). Her real name was Blind, and she was an excellent and charming personality, taking a leading part in many plays. In the mountains of western North Carolina, where many of the highland Scotch settled, this song has always been a favorite, especially among the young people. I derived this version from a song supplied by Brenda Robertson of Asheville High School in Clay County, N.C.

The Blue Bells of Scotland

O, where, tell me where has your highland laddie gone?
O, where, tell me where has your highland laddie gone?
I wish I were a dove and had wings and could fly;  
About my love's dwelling this night  
I'd shine on her.  
(Straight to my love's bosom this night I would fly)  
And in her pretty arms all night I would lie;  
And I'd love pretty Saro till the dawning of day.

At the foot of yonder mountain there  
runs a clear stream;  
And in her pretty arms all night I would lie.

Notes

3. A BED OF PRIMROSES

This song I recorded from the singing of Marcus Martin, a noted folk musician -- a fiddle player and a maker of violins -- from Cullomaga in Macon County in the Great Smoky Mountains region; but he moved with his large family to the Swannanoa Valley to work in a blanket factory in the town of Swannanoa, where he has resided for many years. Many of his fiddle tunes and ballads were recorded by me for the Archive of American Folk Songs of the Library of Congress. In this ballad, in 1943-'47, he learned this song from his parents and neighbors when he was very young, gallant and handsome, at this writing he is still retaining, as he has a large, splendid family of boys (men now), all of whom are talented in some artistically work and especially in music, and as folk craftsmen.

The Daniel O'Connell mentioned as the hero in the song was an Irish political leader, who lived from 1775-1847. He was instrumental in bringing about the Emancipation Act of 1829. He urged the repeal of the Union with Great Britain and worked to solve the land Irish question. Other titles to this song are "The Irish Dream Song", and "The Irish Dream", Good texts are found in West Virginia, Michigan, and a few other states. The piece is common in English broadsides. Cox has good versions in the "Folk-Songs of the South", pp. 447-448.

A BED OF PRIMROSES

One evening late as I was rambling  
On the banks of a clear stream;  
I took my seat on a bed of primroses,  
And quickly fell into a dream.  
I dreamed I saw a fair female;  
Her features I'd never seen before,  
As she sighed for the wrongs of her country,  
As she strayed along Erin's green shore.

She resembled the goddess of freedom,  
And liberty was the mantle she wore;  
It was trimmed with the roses of Shamrock.  
That grew along Erin's green shore,  
Then quickly I addressed this fair female;  
My true jewel, come tell me your name.

Said she to me, you are a stranger,  
Or also I would have asked you the same  
I'm the daughter of Daniel O'Connell,  
Just lately from England come o'er;  
I've come to awake my brethren,  
That slumber on Erin's green shore.

In the triumph of joy I awakened,  
And found that it all was a dream.  
This beautiful fair female fled from me,  
And I longed to be slumbering again.

May the heavens be her guardian angel,  
If I never see her anymore;  
May the sunbeam of fair freedom  
As she strays along Erin's green shore.

Notes

4. GET UP AND BAR THE DOOR

This ballad has been taken over by my family and made a North Carolina ballad by virtue of the fact that we found a tune in some obscure source and we took the standard version as given in the Scottish and English texts and modernized them for our purpose. As a result it is rather well and is certainly usable. I derived this particular text from the Scottish version because so many times it seemed to fit so well the mountain log home in Western North Carolina, with which I am familiar. The mountain people barred the door instead of looking it, since locks at first were not available. The long rifle was also just above the door, loaded and ready for action in case of danger or attack.

The mountain husband was "lord of his castle" and always felt that he should have the last word when it came to managing the domestic affairs as well as those of his farm and business. He was often inclined to dominate his wife, but she soon saw to it that he didn't carry this too far, and she often asserted her independence, as in this case of who should get up and bar the door, especially since she was pregnant and he was "just sitting there."

GET UP AND BAR THE DOOR

It fell about the Martinmas time,  
And a gay time it was then,  
When our good wife had puddings to make,  
And she boiled them in a pan, O.

The wind so cold blew north and south;  
And blew into the floor, O,  
Says our good man to our good wife,  
Get up and bar the door, O.

My hand is in my mixing bowl,  
Good man as you may see,  
If it shouldn't be barred this hundred years,  
It'll not be barred by me, O.

They made a pact, 'twixt then two,  
They made it firm and sure, O;  
That whoever should speak the first word,  
Should rise and bar the door, O.

Then by there came two gentlemen,  
At twelve O'clock at night, O;  
And they could neither see house nor hall,  
Nor fire nor candle light, O.

Now whether this be a rich man's house,  
Or whether it be a poor, O;  
But never a word would one of them speak,  
For barring of the door, O.

And first they ate the white pudding;  
And then they ate the brown, O;  
Though much they good wife thought to herself,  
Yet never a word she spoke, O.

Then says the one unto the other,  
Here, man, take you my knife, O;  
And you shave off the old man's beard,  
While I kiss the good wife, O.

But there's no warm water in the love house,  
What then shall we do now, O?  
What aileth it with the pudding brew, That boils into the pan, O?

O up then and started our good man,  
And an angry man was he, O;
Will you kiss my wife before my face,  
And sealed me with that pudding brew?  
Then up and started our good wife,  
Gave three skips on the floor, O!  
Good man you've spoken the very first word.  
Get up and bar the door, O.

Notes

5. GENTLE FAIR JENNIE  
(“The Wife Wrapt in Weather’s Skin”)  
The text and tune of this ballad came from the famous Ritchie family of Kentucky, the words and music being communicated to me as the first recorder of Jean Ritchie at the Bethesda Folk Festival in 1941. I was collecting then for the Archive of Folklore of the Library of Congress, and among several other ballads and folk songs for which she has since made famous in her albums and collections.

Very few texts of this ballad are to be found in North Carolina. But the ballad is found here as well as in practically all the other states. Most of the texts are short, and all show considerable minor variations; but I have taken the liberty of combining some of the stanzas into the version I sing here from an original singing of Ritchie.

The story told often in fragmentary form is the usual one of the unremorseful wife reforméd by a mocking beating, responsibility for which the husband escapes by wrapping his wife in a sheep’s skin and beating the skin. It seems, however, that this is not the same effect as if the real thing had been administered, or I would say even better, as I am still somewhat doubtful of its efficacy at any rate.

The refrains vary both in Great Britain and in North America. The “Gentle Fair Jenny” refrain, known in New England and the Appalachians, has apparently given not only the title to the ballad, but a name to the wife; it is, however, a rationalisation of an old herb refrain, “Juniper, gentian, and rosemary,” supposedly a list of magical plants that serve as a refrain for other ballads. (See the “Elfin Knight”, Child No. 2 in this series.)

6. HOW THE SQUIRE COURTED NANCY  
(“The Wife Wrapped in Weather’s Skin”)  
Child No. 297

I married me a wife and took her home,  
Gentle fair Jenny, fair Rosie Marie;  
But I oftimes wished I had let her alone,  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

All in the kitchen she would not use,  
Gentle fair Jenny, fair Rosie Marie;  
For fear of spoiling her new cloth clothes,  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

First day at noon I came in from the plow;  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
My dearest little wife, is my dinner ready now?  
As the dew flies over, etc.

There’s a little piece of corn bread lying on the shelf,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
If you want any more you can cook it yourself;  
As the dew flies, etc.

Second day at noon I came in from the plow;  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
My dearest little wife, is my dinner ready now?  
As the dew flies over, etc.

I am not your servant, I am not your slave,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
This was the answer the young wife gave,  
As the dew flies over, etc.

I took my knife and went out to the barn,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
And I cut me a hickory as long as my arm,  
As the dew flies, etc.

Then I went out to my sheep pen,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
And there had off an old sheep’s skin,  
As the dew flies, etc.

I placed it around my young wife’s back,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
And made her knickery go hokey-whack,  
As the dew flies, etc.

I’ll tell my father and all my kin,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
That you whipped me with that hickory limb,  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

You can tell your father and all your kin,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
That I was only tanning myself,  
As the dew flies, etc.

Third day at noon I came in from the plow,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
My dearest little wife, is my dinner ready now?  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

She flew about, the table was spread,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
And yes sir, and no sir, was all that she said,  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

The story told often in fragmentary form is the usual one of the unremorseful wife reforméd by a mocking beating, responsibility for which the husband escapes by wrapping his wife in a sheep’s skin and beating the skin. It seems, however, that this is not the same effect as if the real thing had been administered, or I would say even better, as I am still somewhat doubtful of its efficacy at any rate.

The refrains vary both in Great Britain and in North America. The “Gentle Fair Jenny” refrain, known in New England and the Appalachians, has apparently given not only the title to the ballad, but a name to the wife; it is, however, a rationalisation of an old herb refrain, “Juniper, gentian, and rosemary,” supposedly a list of magical plants that serve as a refrain for other ballads. (See the “Elfin Knight”, Child No. 2 in this series.)

GENTLE FAIR JENNIE  
(“The Wife Wrapt in Weather’s Skin”)  
Child No. 297

I married me a wife and took her home,  
Gentle fair Jenny, fair Rosie Marie;  
But I oftimes wished I had let her alone,  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

All in the kitchen she would not use,  
Gentle fair Jenny, fair Rosie Marie;  
For fear of spoiling her new cloth clothes,  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

First day at noon I came in from the plow;  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
My dearest little wife, is my dinner ready now?  
As the dew flies over, etc.

There’s a little piece of corn bread lying on the shelf,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
If you want any more you can cook it yourself;  
As the dew flies, etc.

Second day at noon I came in from the plow;  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
My dearest little wife, is my dinner ready now?  
As the dew flies over, etc.

I am not your servant, I am not your slave,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
This was the answer the young wife gave,  
As the dew flies over, etc.

I took my knife and went out to the barn,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
And I cut me a hickory as long as my arm,  
As the dew flies, etc.

Then I went out to my sheep pen,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
And there had off an old sheep’s skin,  
As the dew flies, etc.

I placed it around my young wife’s back,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
And made her knickery go hokey-whack,  
As the dew flies, etc.

I’ll tell my father and all my kin,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
That you whipped me with that hickory limb,  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

You can tell your father and all your kin,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
That I was only tanning myself,  
As the dew flies, etc.

Third day at noon I came in from the plow,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
My dearest little wife, is my dinner ready now?  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

She flew about, the table was spread,  
Gentle fair Jenny, etc.  
And yes sir, and no sir, was all that she said,  
As the dew flies over the green valley.

He courted her on a rainy day,  
And agreed all night with her to stay.

Chorus:

Fol lidi do dey do  
Fol lidi do dey do.

When I slip up and pull the string,  
You come down and let me in.

Chorus:

Fol lidi do dey do  
Fol lidi do dey do.

3. Jack lay concealed all in the entry  
So darn his eyes if he didn’t venture  
So Jack slipped up and pulled the string,  
And she came down and let him in.

Chorus:

Fol lidi do dey do  
Fol lidi do dey do.

4. And back to bed Miss Nancy did retire;  
Thinking she had her little square;  
But the square slipped up and pulled the string,  
And the devil’s the one that let him in.
Chorus: Fol loliddle lee dololiddle lee die day. But the squire slipped up and pulled the string and she didn't see the one that let him in. Fol loliddle lee dololiddle lee die die day.

5. The squire flew back all in a passion; cursed all the women in the nation; swore there was not one that would be true, but if she was she'd devilish few.

Chorus: Fol loliddle lee dololiddle lee die day. Scared there was not that would be true, but if she was she'd devilish few. Fol loliddle lee dol; Fol loliddle lee die day.

6. So early next morning our Miss Nancy awakened; she found she was so sadly mistaken: there lay Jack in checkered shirt, his face and hands all daubed with dirt.

Chorus: Fol loliddle lee dololiddle lee die day. There lay Jack in checkered shirt. His face and hands all daubed with dirt. Fol loliddle lee dololiddle lee die die day.

7. How came you here, you sassy fellow? You came to rob me of my pleasure. When I slipped up and pulled the string, you came down and let me in.

Chorus: Fol loliddle lee dololiddle lee die day. When I slipped up and pulled the string, you came down and let me in. Fol loliddle lee dololiddle lee die die day.

Notes

7. THE CAMBRIC SHIRT ("The Elfkin Knight")

The ballad of the Cambric Shirt, or "The Elfkin Knight", is related to a remarkable group of ballad stories, in which difficult tasks or embarrassments of a knight and his maid are cleverly answered. The ballad is a question and answer story between mother and son, and the form and the words make it seem so. This ballad, like the riddle ballad, is a question and answer story between mother and son. The son has killed his brother in this case. It is number 13 in the standard collection of ballads made by Professor James F. Child, and the mother is also complicated. But in the North Carolina versions the mother is never involved, but is herself something of a victim of the tragedy. The tragedy always involves the brother, variously referred to as "my dear brother", "my young brother", etc., but never the father as in some other of the Professor Child collection. Bishop Thomas Percy, English folklorist and churchman, 1729-1811, in his collection of Scottish ballads, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, found this ballad and a large assortment of others under a bureau at a friend's house, where the servant girl was using sheets of the manuscript to kindle the fire. He rescued it just in time — and of course several songs had already disappeared in the fire. It was probably at least a hundred years old when the good bishop recovered it.

I rescued it down at Hot Springs, North Carolina, from the singing of Mrs. Claudia Roberts in 1945. She had learned it when a child in South Carolina, but she and her family lived at Hot Springs before going to that state, and she had returned to make her home in North Carolina when I had the privilege of recording this ballad.

EDWARD

How come that blood on your shirt there, pray, son, pray tell it unto me? It's the blood of the old grayhound that ran you fox for me.

Oh, it is too red for the old grayhound, pray, son, pray tell it unto me? It's the blood of the old bay horse that plowed that field for me.

Oh, it is too red for the old bay horse, pray, son, pray tell it unto me? It's the blood of my dear brother that could not help me.

Oh, what did you both fall out about, pray, son, pray tell it unto me? For cutting down a holly bush which might have made a tree.

Oh, what will you do with your children three, pray, son, pray tell it unto me? I'll leave them all alone with you to long remember me.

Oh, what will you do with your pretty little wife, pray, son, pray tell it unto me? She may set her foot on yonder ship and sail along with me.

Oh, when are you ever coming back, pray, son, pray tell it unto me? When the sun and the moon both run together, which you know that will never be.

Notes

9. KATTY MOREY

I recorded this ballad from the singing of Mrs. Glauber Sharp, Hot Springs, North Carolina, 1941. She said her father often sang this piece, but that he did not think it proper for her to sing it and she hesitated to sing it. Finally I persuaded her, according to Cecil J. Sharp in his *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians*, p. 331, the tune is a variant of "The Dowie Dens of Yarrow". His text of "Kaltie Morey", No. 62, which he collected at Flag Pond, Tennessee, gives a few more details of what really happened than does my text in a few particulars. The first two stanzas throw some light.

Come young, come old, come all draw nigh, come listen to my story: I'll tell you what a plan I've found to spoil Miss Katty Morey.

I went unto her father's house, just like a clever fellow, I told her that the plums and grapes were ripe, yes, they were fine and mellow.

The plot thickens when it is revealed that in that age it was probably carried a quiver and bow and arrows or a javelin, which he could use with great skill. It was indeed risky to climb a tree to escape in...
I wrote my love a letter in rosy red lines;
She sent me an answer all twisted in lines;
Saying, Keep your love letters and I will keep mine;
Just we write to your love and I'll write to mine.

Green grows the laurels, all sparkling with dew;
I'm lonely, my darling since parting with you;
But by our next meeting I hope you'll come to view
And exchange the green laurel for the red, white, and blue.

NOTES
11. I CALLED BUT NOBODY ANSWERED

This song came out of the Nashville, Tennessee, milieu when the folk singers and musicians began to assemble every Saturday night many years ago at what became known humorously as "The Grand Old Opry" of fifty years ago. It grew from a tale area many of the finest folk musicians of the region, and it became famous for the talent it presented. This song about the mountain man returning to his mountain home after years of absence, perhaps traveling and making his living as a folk musician, or in some of the other occupations which drew the mountain dweller the rather unprofitable life he had been living to the factory and the urban area. It has been said that you may get the mountain man out of the mountains, but you can seldom get the memory of the mountains out of him. He will find his way back to the family reunion, the community picnic, or the singing or music convention. This song expresses his nostalgia.

I CALLED BUT NOBODY ANSWERED
("Old Cabin Home")

I wandered again to my old mountain home,
And I called for the loved one I wanted to see;
Then I awaited the voice that would bid me come in;
But nobody answered me.

Chorus:
I called and I called, but nobody answered;
I searched everywhere, but no one I could see;
Then I knocked on the door as if I had been before;
But nobody answered me.

My thoughts all turned back to the long, long ago,
To the memories of my childhood so happy and free;
Like the prudential son, I had wandered back home;
But nobody answered me.

Then I turned away from that dear cabin home,
From the place that perhaps never more would I see;
And as I turned to go, I called then one more;
But nobody answered me.

NOTES
12. LADY MARGARET AND SWEET WILLIAM
("Fair Margaret and Sweet William")

This ballad I collected from the singing of Mr. Claudious Roberts at Hot Springs, North Carolina, in 1943, for the Library of Congress.

The story of the North Carolina text is this: Sweet William arrises and prepares for his wedding day. He denies that there is anything of moment between Lady Margaret and himself, and says that on the following day Lady Margaret will "see a rich wedding." Lady Margaret sits at her high bower window, and waiting to see if the couple will really appear at the church, she combs her long golden hair, in some ballads, "with a silver comb." But soon she sees them approaching the church yard. She throws down her comb in her emotion and "throwes back her long yellow hair." Then she "comes down" from her high bower window, never to be seen there again. That night the ghost of Lady Margaret appears at the foot of the church in which William and his bride are sleeping, and she carries on a conversation with him. Next morning he awakens his wife and gets permission to go and visit lady Margaret. But he does not return.

The version that I sing here is short and ends with a stanza from another ballad. This ballad represents the few instances in the ballads collected in America where a ghost appears in a scene, and the ghost is not usually dwelt upon as the same ballad might be given in England, certainly as it would be given during the Middle Ages when this ballad must have had its beginning.

FAIR MARGARET AND SWEET WILLIAM

Lady Margaret was sitting in her high bower window, A-looking back her long yellow hair;
Oh, whom did she see by William and his bride
Riding by the church yard there?
'Twas back she threw her long flowing hair,
Throw down her ivory comb;
Oh, let me go bid Sweet Willie adieu,
For no more will I go there.

It was late that night when they all were asleep;
And his bride lay in his arms;
Lady Margaret appeared all dressed in white,
A-standing at his bed feet.
Oh, how do you like your fine feather bed;
Oh, how do you like your sheet;
Oh, how do you like that gay young lady That is standing at your bed feet?
Very well do I like my fine feather bed;
Very well do I like my sheet;
Much better do I like that fair young lady That is standing at your bed feet.
He rose early the next morning;
Went and saddled his milk-white steed;
Oh, let me ride to Lady Margaret's door,
For no more will I go there.
In Lady Margaret a-sitting in her own bower room;
Or is she in the hall?
Lady Margaret is laying in her own black coffin,
With her face turned to the wall.
Uncover the coffin, take off the lid;
Unfold the linen so fine;
And let me kiss those cold pale lips,
For so often they've kissed nice.
Oh, when you see some handsome doves,A-flying from pine to pine,
A weeping for their lost true loves
Like I shall weep for mine.

* Just as in some of these songs, extra syllables are added that the words in singing -- in this case syllables are omitted, so that "Margaret" becomes "Marget."
Artus Moser / Swannanoa N.C.

Recreation at W.C.C.