

**A SYLLABUS OF  
KENTUCKY  
FOLK-SONGS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649258901

A syllabus of Kentucky folk-songs by Hubert G. Shearin

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Cover @ 2017

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Transylvania University Studies in English

II

## A Syllabus of Kentucky Folk-Songs

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STANFORD LIBRARY



Transylvania Printing Company  
Lexington, Kentucky  
1911

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## INTRODUCTION

This syllabus, or finding-list, is offered to lovers of folk-literature in the hope that it may not be without interest and value to them for purposes of comparison and identification. It includes 333 items, exclusive of 114 variants, and embraces all popular songs that have so far come to hand as having been "learned by ear instead of by eye," as existing through oral transmission—song-ballads, love-songs, number-songs, dance-songs, play-songs, child-songs, counting-out rimes, lullabies, jigs, nonsense rimes, ditties, etc.

There is every reason to believe that many more such await the collector; in fact, their number is constantly being increased even today by the creation of new ones, by adaptation of the old, and even by the absorption, and consequent metamorphosis, of literary, quasi-literary, or pseudo-literary types into the current of oral tradition.

This collection, then, is by no means complete: means have not been available for a systematic and scientific search for these folk-songs, which have been gathered very casually during the past five years through occasional travel, acquaintanceship, and correspondence in only the twenty-one following counties: Fayette, Madison, Rowan, Elliott, Carter, Boyd, Lawrence, Morgan, Johnson, Pike, Knott, Breathitt, Clay, Laurel, Rockcastle, Garrard, Boyle, Anderson, Shelby, Henry, and Owen—all lying in Central and Eastern Kentucky.

All of the material listed has thus been collected in this State, though a variant of *The Jew's Daughter*, page 8, has come by chance from Michigan, and another of *The Pretty Mohee*, page 12, was sent from Georgia. The Cumberland Mountain region, in the eastern part of the State, has naturally furnished the larger half of the material, because of local conditions favorable to the propagation of folk-song. However, sections of Kentucky lying farther to the westward are almost equally prolific. The wide extension of the same ballad throughout the State argues convincingly for the unity of the Kentucky stock—a fact which may be confirmed in more ways than one.

The arrangement is as follows: The material in hand is loosely grouped in eighteen sections, according to origin, chronology, content, or form. Though logically at fault, because of the cross-division thus inevitably entailed, this plan has seemed to be the best. No real confusion will result to the user in consequence. In fact, no matter what system be adopted, certain songs will belong equally well to two or more different categories.

Under each of these eighteen main divisions the treatment of the individual song-ballad is in general as follows: First, stands the title, with variant titles in parentheses. Should this be unknown, a caption coined by the editors is placed in brackets. Secondly, a Roman numeral immediately follows the above to denote the number of versions, if variants have been found. Thirdly, the prosodical character of the song is roughly indicated by a combination of letters and numerals. Each letter indicates a line; the variation in the letters indicates, in the usual fashion, the rime-scheme of the stanza. Each numeral indicates the number of stresses in the line (or lines) denoted by the letter (or letters) immediately succeeding it. When a chorus, burden, or refrain is present, the metrical scheme of this stands immediately after an "and," as, for example, in *The Blue and the Gray*, page 14. In the case of the refrain, the letters used are independent of those immediately preceding the "and", and denoting the rime-scheme of the stanza proper. Fourthly, an Arabic numeral follows to indicate the number of stanzas in the song, exclusive of the refrain, should one be present. If the number of stanzas in a ballad is indeterminable, because its form is fragmentary, or because its variant versions differ in length, this fact is indicated by an appended *ca* (*circa*). Sixth, and last, is a synopsis, or other attempt to give briefly such data as may serve to complete the identification.

Illustration of the third item above may be helpful. Thus in *Pretty Polly*, on page 7, 4aabb indicates a quatrain riming in couplets, with four stresses in each line. In *Jackaro*, page 9, 3abcb indicates a quatrain riming alternately, with three stressed syllables in each line. In *The King's Daughter*, page 7, 4a3b4c3b indicates a quatrain, with only the second and fourth lines riming and with four

stresses in the first and third lines and three stresses in the second and fourth. In *Johnnie Came from Sea*, page 14, 6aa denotes a rimed couplet, with six stresses in each line.

It has, naturally, been difficult at times to decide whether certain stanzas should be counted as couplets, or as quatrains half as long. In such cases, the air, or tune, and other data, often rather subtle, have been employed in making decision. The quatrain form has in uncertain instances been given the benefit of the doubt. Even thus, certain minor inconsistencies will perhaps be noted. It is hardly necessary to add that assonance freely occurs in the place of rime, and as such it is considered throughout.

All attempt to indicate the prevailing metrical unit, or foot, within the line has been frankly given over. Iambs, dactyls, and their ilk receive scant courtesy from the composer of folk-song, who without qualm or quaver will stretch one syllable, or even an utter silence (*caesura*), into the time of a complete bar; while in the next breath he will with equal equanimity huddle a dozen syllables into the same period. Consequently, this item, even if it could be indicated, would have scant descriptive value.

It is a pleasant duty to acknowledge gratefully the assistance of those who have transmitted to our hands many of the songs: Mesdames J. W. Combs, W. T. Phillips, Jennie L. Combs, Richard Smith, Martha Smith, Ruth Hackney, W. F. Hays, Ollie Huff, Robin Cornett, Lucy Banks, Sarah Burton, Kittie Jordan, and Ruby Martin; Misses Martha Jent, Maud Dean, Virginia Jordan, Jessie Green, Lizzie Cody, Margaret Combs, Barbara Smith, Helena E. Rose, Sarah Burton, Sarah Hillman, Cordia Bramblett, Nannie S. Graham, Myrtle Wheeler, Melissa Holbrook, Rosetta Wheeler, Ruth Hackney, Ora McDavid, Jeannette McDavid; Messrs. Wm. W. Berry, Chas. Hackney, S. B. Wheeler, R. L. Morgan, Enoch Wheeler, Thos. H. Hackney, James Goodman, W. S. Wheeler, Harry M. Morgan, Henry Lester, T. G. Wheeler, C. F. Bishop, and John C. Jones.

Especially helpful as collaborators have been Messrs. Winfred Cox, Emory E. Wheeler, Roud Shaw, A. B. Johnston, C. E. Phillips, and H. Williamson.



Kind words or letters of appreciation and, in some cases, of suggestion, from the following have encouraged the preparation of this syllabus: Professors Alexander S. Mackenzie, of the Kentucky State University; Clarence C. Freeman, of Transylvania University; John A. Lomax, of the University of Texas; Albert H. Tolman, of the University of Chicago; John M. McBride, Jr., of the University of the South; George Lyman Kittredge, of Harvard University; Henry M. Belden, of the University of Missouri; and Katherine Jackson, formerly of Bryn Mawr College, who has most generously given the use of her manuscript collection. None of the shortcomings of this brochure, however, can be imputed to them in the slightest degree.

## SYLLABUS

## I.

*The songs in this group are the survivors of English and Scottish originals, found for the most part in the Child collection. Certain of those given in sections II to XVIII below could doubtless, with due effort, be identified in like manner.*

THE KING'S DAUGHTER (SIX PRETTY FAIR MAIDS, PRETTY POLLY), iv, 4a3b4c3b, 9ca: Variants of Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight, Child, No. 4. By a stratagem she drowns the lover just as he is about to drown her.

PRETTY POLLY, iv, 4aabb, 9ca: Parallel in general plot to the above, save that she is led by the lover to an open grave and there slain. (Cf. 5, page 28.)

FAIR ELLENDER, 4a3b4c3b, 10: A variant of the Earl Brand cycle, Child, No. 7.

LORD OF OLD COUNTRY, 4aa, with refrain as below, 10ca: A variant of The Two Sisters, Child, No. 10.

The miller was hung upon Fish-gate, Bosodown,  
The miller was hung upon Fish-gate,  
(These sons were sent to me)  
The miller was hung upon Fish-gate  
For drowning of my sister Kate!  
I'll be true, true to my true-love,  
If my love'll be true to me.

THE ROPE AND THE GALLOWES (LORD RANDAL), 4aa, 12ca: A variant of Lord Randal, Child, No. 12.

EDWARD, 4a3b4c3b, 10: A variant of the Old World ballad of the same name, Child, No. 13.

THE GREENWOOD SIDE (THREE LITTLE BABES), ii, 4a3b4c3b, 9: Variants of The Cruel Mother, Child, No. 20.

LITTLE WILLIE, 4a3b4c3b, 5: A variant of The Two Brothers, Child, No. 49.

LORD BATEMAN (THE TURKISH LADY), ii, 4abcb, 17ca: Variants of Young Beichan, Child, No. 53.

LOVING HENRY (SWEET WILLIAM AND FAIR ELLENDER), iii, 4a3b4c3b, 11ca: Variants of Young Hunting, Child, No. 68.

LORD THOMAS AND FAIR ELLENDER, iii, 4a3b4c3b, 17ca: Variants of Lord Thomas and Fair Elinor, Child, No. 73.

FAIR MARGARET AND SWEET WILLIAM, iv, 4a3b4c3b, 15ca: Variants of the Old World ballad of the same name, Child, No. 74. (Published by Combs in Jour. Am. Folklore, 23.381.)

LORD LOVELY, 4a3b4c3b, 9: A variant of Lord Level, Child, No. 75.

COLD WINTER'S NIGHT (BOSOM FRIEND, LOVER'S FAREWELL), vii, 4a3b4c3b, 9ca: Variants of The Lass of Loch Royal, Child, No. 76. (Published by Shearin, Mod. Lang. Review, Oct., 1911, p. 514.)

LORD VANNER'S (DANIEL'S) WIFE, ii, 4a3b4c3b, 17ca: Variants of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard, Child, No. 81.

BARBARA ALLEN, vi, 4a3b4c3b, 11ca: Variants of Barbara Allen's Cruelty, Child, No. 84.

THE BAILIFF'S DAUGHTER OF ISLINGTON, 4a3b4c3b, 12: A variant of the Old World ballad of the same name, Child, No. 105.

THE JEW'S DAUGHTER, ii, 4a3b4c3b, 12ca: Variants of Sir Hugh, Child, No. 155. One of the Kentucky versions makes the murdered boy's mother go seeking him switch in hand, to punish him for not returning home before night-fall. (Communicated by Dr. Katherine Jackson.)

THE HOUSE CARPENTER, iii, 4a3b4c3b, 13ca: Variants of The Demon Lover, Child, No. 243.

DANDOO: A fragmentary variant of The Wife Wrapt in Wether's Skin, Child, No. 277, as follows:

He put the sheepskin to his wife's back, Dandoo;  
 He put the sheepskin to his wife's back,  
 Clima cli clash to ma clingo,  
 He put the sheepskin to his wife's back  
 And he made the old switch go whickity-whack,