The Ghost of Pleasant Ned

Songs that were popular in Dublin in 1808

A few old, nearly forgotten Irish songs resurrected, rehabilitated, arranged (lyrics and chords) and briefly explained by Kenn Amdahl.

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About the book itself: The Irish Musical Repository

In 2008, my son Paul gave me a book of Irish songs (*The Irish Musical Repository*) published in Dublin in 1808. It included only the melody line and lyrics but no chords, no rests, no description of the speed or feeling of the song, and no credit to whoever wrote them. I casually started to learn the first song in the book, adding my own chords and fingerpicking, adding rests where they felt appropriate (Maybe the guys who put the book together didn't know how to use them but there was no place to breathe. More likely, everyone at the time knew the songs and didn't need a precise blueprint for playing them). Surprisingly, I liked the song. The lyrics were great, if dated, once I did the research to understand them.

The book was published in 1808; I got it in 2008, exactly 200 years later. Someone born in 1780 would be 28 years old when the book came out, just like someone born in 1980 would be 28 in 2008. That little coincidence made it easier for me to visualize people and events. I could picture how old they were without doing any math.

These old Irish songs became an obsession with me, probably because my own life was so difficult at the time. I needed an escape, so I went back to 1808. I resurrected over a dozen of them, did a ton of research, learned their histories, and became time-travel buddies with the guys who wrote them. The first time I took the guitar into my back yard and sang one to the sky and trees, it felt like an Irish songwriter who'd been asleep for 200 years woke up and saw the world again through my eyes. I felt sure he was smiling

Although I tried not to infect the songs too much with myself, my gentle modifications to fit my own fingers and voice certainly changed them. Plus, I'm not even a tiny bit Irish.

Before Mr. Google and Mr. Amazon took control of all old written material, I dreamed I'd put out a little book with the lyrics and my arrangements, plus stories behind the songs. With luck, it would be a delight to read and reawaken interest in songs from this period. Toward that end, I typed 60 single-space pages of notes about the songs, the song writers, the politics of the day, and even a little history of my physical copy of the book: who had owned it, what became of them (two were ministers, one a lawyer, one could possibly have attended the premier of Handel's Messiah in Dublin, one woman died in the Tay Bridge disaster. Its first owner in 1808 was George Louden, a minister in Inveraray, Scotland. I found one quote by him: "There are four alehouses in the parish, at present, which have no good effect on the morals of the people." He gave the book as a gift to his grandson). I hoped to include an audio CD or thumb drive of the songs. In my imagination, the audio would be pristine recordings of my own highly-polished and heartbreakingly artistic renditions. Alas, I've never been a great singer, the songs were difficult for me, and I never mastered them well enough to release them. The only recordings I have are the "rough draft" versions I recorded on my computer. Those are included on my website. Later, Big Data digitized a version of *Repository* that was printed in London. It's no longer in danger of vanishing completely.

When my computer broke, I lost all the research I'd done on these songs. A completely different project became urgent and that obsession spawned my book *Revenge of the Pond Scum.* The Irish songs moved to a back burner and remained there for the last 15 years or so.

Historical Context

Back in the seventies (not the disco 1970s, but the revolutionary 1770s) the pesky American colonies rebelled. This spread the British military thin just as the ambitious French circled threateningly. The Irish were torn; some wanted to become independent of England, others sought more of a partnership.

The Irish Volunteers became the Homeland Security of the British Isles, defending them from outsiders. At one point, this force was 100,000 strong and was led by a fellow named Henry Grattan (born 1746). Grattan was a

member of the Irish Parliament, and replaced Henry Flood as the most powerful voice of the country. By many accounts he was the finest orator of his generation. The Irish were very proud of him. After the war with the American colonies, the Volunteers continued as a political group trying to reconcile the weird relationship between Ireland and England. Ireland was subservient to England. England outlawed speaking, writing, and singing in Irish Gaelic. One observer said that, because of this, the world lost 1,000 years of Irish music. Ireland had its own parliament, but laws passed did not go into effect unless England approved. Presbyterians and Catholics, the vast majority of the population, were excluded from public life. Only members of the Anglican Church of Ireland could hold office. Most Irish didn't want to break away completely like America, but they wanted the rights granted to their English brothers, and wanted the right to make their own laws, under their own constitution. But they still wanted a friendly union of some sort with England.

Toward that end, in 1779 a group of very smart and interesting Irish fellows started The Order Of Saint Patrick in the town of Cork. The membership is a Who's Who of the time. There were about fifty members, all either prominent attorneys, judges, or members of the Irish Parliament. Grattan belonged, as did Henry Flood, and notable attorneys John Philpot Curran and Edward Lysaght. These people became central to the songs represented here.

The group met at the home of John Philpot Curran. From the beginning, the Order had two avowed purposes: to promote the emancipation of Ireland and to drink and have fun. With so much intellect and wit assembled, they did both. They met every Saturday during part of the year. They created goofball bylaws in contorted Latin, and began each meeting with a silly invocation. But they were also seriously smart, committed people. The regular addition of wine to the agenda, ensured that the meetings were never boring. In fact because of the importance of the corkscrew to these meetings, the group developed the nickname "Monks of the Screw." Curran wrote a song with that title, the term has endured, and a modem music group has adopted it as its name. They began calling Curran's house the priory (a religious house) and Curran became known as the prior. The group included members of all denominations in a friendly spirit of non discrimination, including at least one priest, Father O'Leary, as an honorary member.

In 1782, Grattan was able to successfully declare Ireland's legal independence from England. It was a friendly split: Ireland (and Grattan) remained loyal to the crown. It seemed like England and Ireland had taken the first steps toward a partnership as equals. The Monks of the Screw gradually disbanded.

For several years, Grattan worked for Catholic emancipation and other democratic reforms. He failed. In the 1790's, the clashes between disenfranchised segments of the population grew increasingly heated. Some elements wanted to partner with the French who many believed were about to invade. Others wanted to join England, some wanted complete independence. Ultimately in 1798, the country exploded in a bloody rebellion. The movement for merging Ireland's sovereignty into England became stronger.

Grattan spoke against the union of the Irish and British parliaments at the last meeting of the Irish Parliament in 1800. Despite the power of his oratory, the vote was for union. Grattan retired for five years. In 1805 he became a member of the Parliament of the United Kingdoms. On his first day, he took a seat in the back, but one of the other legislators brought him forward, saying, "This is no place for the Irish Demosthenes."

Because of these politics, the words "union," "loyalty" and "united" hold special meaning whenever they appear in one of these songs.

People often wrote lyrics to fit existing music (the melody was called "the air." One might say the lyrics of "On Top Of Spaghetti"would be sung "to the air of On Top of Old Smokey"). Some of the songs I learned are based on older songs. The book did not list the songwriters, but I tracked them down. Some were fascinating characters. If I got interested in a songwriter, I did more research. Sometimes Mr. Google told me the name of one of his songs that wasn't in the book. A few times I found those lyrics, then later found the "air" it was sung to and put them together. There are dozens of songs in the book; I barely scratched the surface.

A Sprig of Shellaleh

By Edward Lysaght (1763-1810)

Everyone called Edward Lysaght "Pleasant Ned." He got a B.A. at Trinity College, got his M.A. at Oxford, and studied law at the Middle Temple in London before returning to Ireland. He was smart, but as he said, "the law is my trade. but conviviality is my profession." He was a member of the Monks Of the Screw and famous for his wit. He was often invited to parties just to entertain. The renowned English poet Thomas Moore said, "I look back upon Lysaght with feelings of love, All his words were like drops of music." Incidentally, because England outlawed singing in the Irish Gaelic language, Moore took it upon himself to write English words to many old Irish airs. His book of those songs was also published in 1808 and it's the one that became famous. A huge percentage of the songs we think of today as "traditional Irish songs" are from the Englishman Moore's book.

Several of Pleasant Ned's songs are still sung, although he's rarely credited. "Roy's Wife" and "The Tanyard Side" can be heard on youtube. "The Rakes of Mallow" remains a favorite drinking song at Notre Dame.

Pleasant Ned was often broke, and joked about that. Sometimes when he was supposed to bring wine to a party, he brought a poem instead. He vigorously courted and then married a woman (some called her "plain") who convinced him her father was rich. Alas, 'twas a lie. When his father in law declared bankruptcy, Lyaght's finances took a further nosedive. To avoid creditors, sometimes Ned slept at Trinity College. Although quite political, he was willing to accept money to write lampoons of causes he supported. When he died "in an embarrassing situation" the bar took up a collection for his widow and two daughters and gave them 2,480 pounds (equal to about a quarter million U.S.dollars today)

Pleasant Ned became my favorite Irish songwriter of that time. I liked his songs and identified with his life of cheerful poverty, his wisecracking, and that he liked hanging out with really smart people.

The Vocabulary

There is no "shillelagh" tree, so no literal sprigs sprout on forest floors. The heavy walking sticks known as shillelagh (which is spelled about eight different ways) are typically made of oak—especially from the forest near the town of Shillelagh—and were often used as clubs in fights. The term "sprig of shillelagh" is an understated joke; Theodore O'Roosevelt might have said "speak softly, but carry a wee sprig of shillelagh." But grown men did fight with these walking sticks, using them the way kids play at sword fighting. Often this was just in harmless fun, but drunk Irishmen wielding heavy oak walking sticks inevitably led to bruises. Just as the shamrock became a symbol of Ireland, the shillelagh became a symbol for an Irish paddy-wack (a guy who likes to fight).

I suspect "nate" means neat, maybe like "clean" or "smooth."

King John signed two notable documents from 1199 to 1216— the Magna Carta and a document giving the Irish permission to have a fair at the town of Donnybrook, every year on August 26. For over 600 years, beginning in 1204, this event occupied at least two weeks of August.

Donnybrook Fair was a huge and rowdy annual festival, noted for drinking, horse-racing, gambling and fights. The fair gave rise to the term donnybrook as a fight. One story suggests that an Irishman would walk along at the Fair letting the back of his coat drag, just daring someone to step on it so he could provoke a fight. The English disputed the story, saying they found it unbelievable that an Irishman could afford a coat.

The neighbors may not have all loved the fair. In 1855, the mayor of Dublin raised 3,000 pounds to buy the land and close it down.

A Barcelona is a silk neckerchief. An Irishman's name first name was often Pat or Dermot, so those became generic terms. A woman's name was likely to be Sheila, so that became a generic name for a woman or girlfriend.

In legends, the "Land of the Oak" is where the god Zeus lives. That is, heaven. According to the song, Ireland (often called Erin) is right next door to heaven. That is, maybe not *quite* as good as heaven, but pretty close. The Thames, Tweed and Shannon are rivers in England, Scotland and Ireland respectively. The rose refers to England, the thistle to Scotland, the shamrock to Ireland. Fifty years after this book was published, someone added the leek, representing Wales.

History of the song

The song describes the conflicting desire of the Irish to be part of a union with England and the desire to remain fiercely independent. Most of the songs I learned were from the years before this was resolved. *The Repository* was published eight years after Ireland joined England in the "United Kingdom." Those who fought for union had won. The challenge for the Irish, like southerners after the U.S. Civil War, was to be loyal to the crown but also retain their pride in being Irish. This song reflects the optimism that it will all work out. It was probably not a coincidence that it was the first song in the book, and the first one I learned,

This song was well known in 1808. Fifty years later it had crossed the Atlantic and a Civil War song was sung "to the tune of A Sprig Of Shillelagh." More than a hundred years after *The Irish Musical Repository* was published, a World War I song was also "sung to the tune." Yet I have found no evidence that it has ever been recorded on tape or CD or wax cylinder. A different song with a similar name was recorded on a wax cylinder which I listened to.(The Library of Congress preserves 50,000 wax cylinders which they have been digitizing. Thousands of those recordings are now available to the public to download for free.)

Journalists at the time thought this song described an Irishman's character better than anything else that had ever been written. One proclaimed that the name of Edward Lysaght would live on forever, for this song alone, if for nothing else. To which I say:"forever" apparently isn't what it used to be.

Edward "Pleasant Ned" Lysaght

A modern replica of an old Irish walking stick

A Sprig Of Shillelagh

C Am Dm7 G
O love is the soul of a neat Irishman,
C Am Dm7 G
He loves all the lovely, loves all that he can
C Am G C Dm Em Dm
With his sprig of shillelah and shamrock so green
C Am Dm7 G
His heart is good humored tis honest and sound
C Am Dm7 G
No malice or hatred is there to be found
F6 Em Dm7 C
He courts and he marries, he drinks and he fights
C Am Dm7 G
For love, all for love, for in that he delights
C Am G C Dm Em Dm
With his sprig of shillelagh and shamrock so green

Dm or F6 both fine. I said F6 to remind me I want the F in the bass to walk down

Who has e'er had the luck to see Donnybrook Fair
An Irishman all in his glory is there
With his sprig of shillelagh and shamrock so green
His clothes spick and span new, without e'er a speck
A neat Barcelona tied round his nate neck
He goes to a tent and he spends his half crown
He meets with a friend and for love knocks him down
With his sprig of shillelaghand shamrock so green

As evening returning as homeward he goes
His heart soft with whisky his head soft with blows
From a sprig of shillelagh and shamrock so green
He meets with his Sheela who blushing a smile
Cries "Get ye gone, Pat," yet consents all the while.
To the priest soon they go and nine months after that
A fine baby cries. "How d'ye do, father Pat,
With your sprig of shillelagh and shamrock so green?"

Bless the country say I that gave Patrick his birth
Bless the land of the oak and its neighboring earth
Where grows the shillelagh and shamrock so green
May the sons of the Thames, the Tweed and the Shannon
Drub the French who dare plant at our confines a cannon
United and happy at loyalty's shrine
May the rose and the thistle long flourish and twine
Round a sprig of shillelagh and a shamrock so green,

Cushlamachree

Credited to John Philpot Curran (1750-1817)

As a child, Curran was known as "Stutterin' Jack" but he worked hard and overcame his impediment. He got his legal education at Trinity College in Dublin and at London's Middle Temple. As a student, Curran was described as "the wildest, wittiest, dreamiest student of old Trinity." He became a prominent lawyer; many called him the greatest orator of his time. A generation later, across the ocean, Abraham Lincoln learned his own craft by practicing Curran's speeches. Frederick Douglas "played" Curran on stage and performed his speeches.

Curran was a brilliant wit but feared in court. He defended several high profile treason cases, including Theobald Wolfe Tone. Some of his sayings have survived to this day, including "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance." Once, a judge said, "If that be the law, Mr. Curran, I shall burn all my law books." Curran replied, "my lord, you should read them first."

Although usually kind, sometimes his patience wore thin, especially when confronted by the pompous. On a boat trip, Curran was dressed plainly and an English gentleman decided to make some sport of the apparent rube in front of two pretty ladies. At some point, Curran got fed up and decided to give the man his own medicine. He started debating with the fellow so successfully, humorously and bitingly that the two young women left the deck to have wine with Curran, leaving the offending gentleman befuddled and embarrassingly alone.

Curran is credited with writing only four songs, including Cushlamachree, a word that means "joy of my heart" or "sweetheart." The word originally translated as "pulse of my heart" which might suggest someone you were willing to bleed for. It's a love song to "Erin," the nickname for Ireland. Ten years after this book came out, someone wrote a poem about falling in love "On hearing a woman sing Cushlamachree." The word has survived in a quiet way: Harlan Ellison, the famous sci-fi author used it on his blog; Clint Eastwood used it in the movie Million Dollar Baby. A ship named *Bark Cushlamachree* brought many Irish immigrants to America during the potato famine. As a result, the ship and its records became important to genealogy enthusiasts. So far, I haven't seen evidence of anyone recording the song on wax cylinder, phonograph or CD.

Later in his life, Curran moved to London and hung out with some of the leading writers, attorneys and wits of the day. Many of their names remain famous, including the poet Thomas Moore.

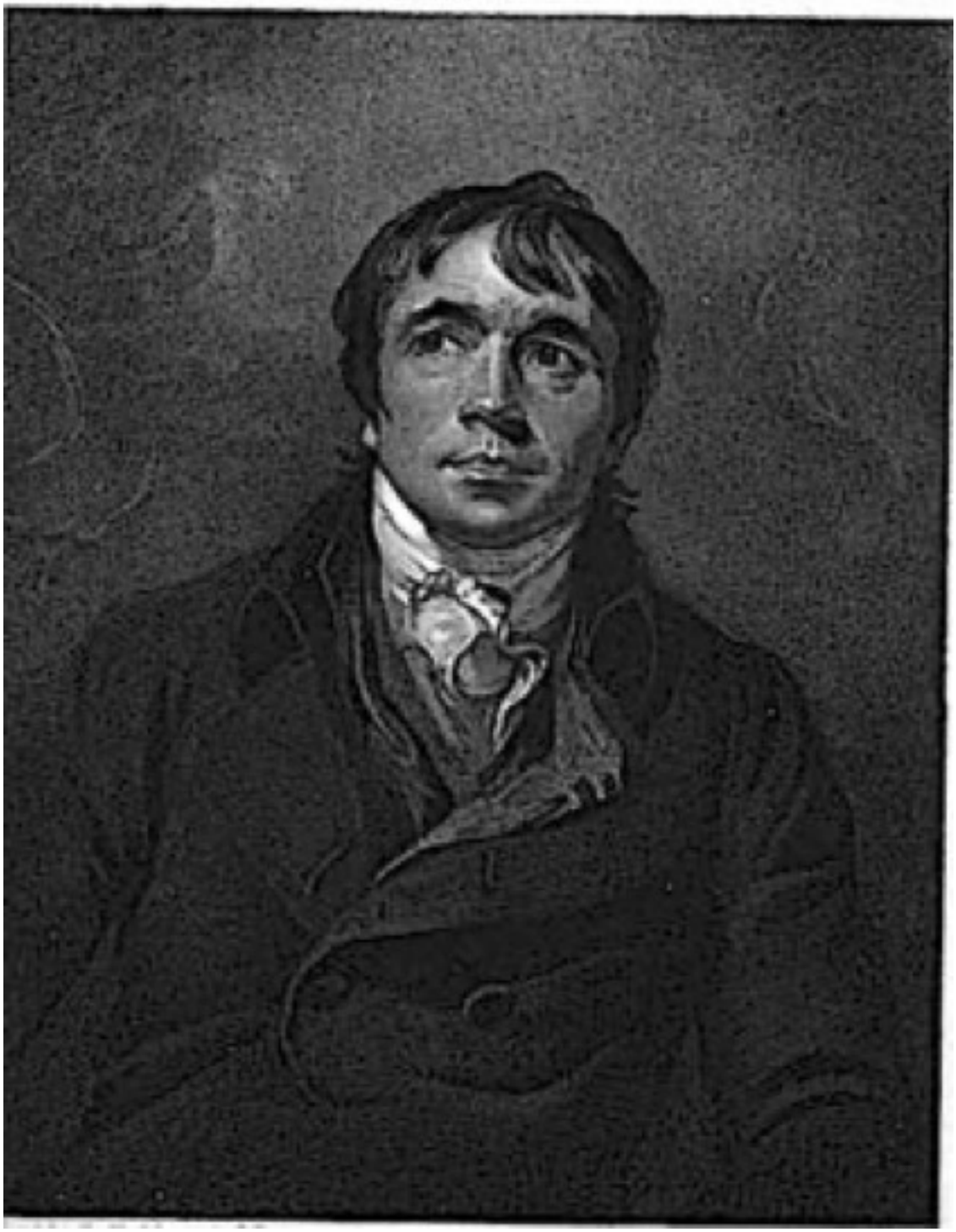
I have a theory that the song may have had a more poignant birth.

Curran's daughter Sarah fell in love with Robert Emmet (1778-1803), a hippie radical rabble rouser of his time. They were secretly engaged. But Emmet led a protest that got out of hand and someone died. Although Emmet wasn't directly involved in the incident, he became a wanted man and fled the country. He lived in exile, knowing that he'd be tried (and almost certainly convicted) for murder and treason if he returned. Alas, he just couldn't stay away from Sarah. He returned to Ireland and was arrested. At his trial, the prosecution foolishly called Curran to the stand. Curran's response to the prosecutor's attack on his daughter's fiancé, was so forceful, the prosecuting attorney stepped backward away from him as if pushed by a strong wind and nearly fell into the laps of people in the front row. They didn't ask Curran any more questions. Nevertheless, Emmet was convicted and sentenced to hang.

While in jail waiting his execution, he smuggled a letter out to Curran. I suspect he may have written Cushlamachree in his cell and included the lyrics in that letter, probably to be set to a much older air. The song talks about loving Ireland (and perhaps Sarah?) while "wandering in exile." As far as I know, no one else has suggested Emmet as the author of the song. The possible motive: Curran was prominent enough he could

probably get away with attaching his name to a song that sounded just a little rebellious.

Emmet gave an impassioned speech from the dock before he was hanged, and that speech remains famous. It ended with the words: “When my country takes her place among the nations of the Earth, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written.”



John Philpot “Stutterin’ Jack” Curran

Robert Emmet
(from a water color on ivory)

Cushlamachree

By John Philpot Curran

capo 2

Em B7 G Bm

Dear Erin, how sweetly thy green bosom rises

Em B C B

An emerald set in the ring of the sea

Em B7 G Bm

Each blade of thy meadows my faithful heart prizes

Am Em

Thou queen of the west the world's Cushlamachree

G Bm Am D

Thy gates open wide to the poor and the stranger;

G Em D C

There smiles hospitality hearty and free

G Bm Am Em

Thy friendship is seen in the moment of danger

D Am Em

And the wanderer is welcomed with Cushlamachree

Thy sons they are brave but the battle once over

In brotherly peace with their foes they agree

And the roseate cheeks of thy daughters discover

The soul-speaking blush that says Cushlamachree

Then flourish forever my dear native Erin

While sadly I wander in exile from thee

And firm as thy mountains no injury fearing

May Heaven defend its own Cushlamachree.

Kitty of Coleraine

by Edward "Pleasant Ned" Lysaght

This is a humorous song: a guy startles a girl who is walking with a pitcher of milk balanced on her head. She stumbles, the pitcher falls off her head and breaks. She starts to cry. He comforts her the way any proper gentleman would. As an additional altruistic gesture, he even gives her a nice, brotherly kiss. You know, the way any gentleman would. One thing leads to another, and pretty soon he's figured out a whole new strategy for picking up girls. In fact, by the end of the song, there's not an intact milk pitcher in the entire town.

The phrase "the devil a pitcher was whole in Colraine" seems obscure today, which slows down the joke. Basically, not even the Devil could find an intact pitcher in this town.

This song is still occasionally sung. It may have resurfaced partly because of a 1949 Bing Crosby movie, "Top O' the Morning." In that movie, Bing sings it while fooling around with an old squeeze-box. Bing could sing the heck out of any song, but he plays the squeeze-box in a nearly random way, like someone had just handed him an instrument he'd never played before. A cute little kid sings it on Youtube.

I figured out the song before I heard anyone else do it. Melodically, my version is nearly identical to those, but the others don't have any chords. It's not a difficult song to play, but some of the chords I finally came up with would not be obvious to a beginning musician. Maybe that's the reason people usually sing it acapella: they just couldn't figure out a way to play the few spots that are tricky. The addition of accompaniment gives my version a slightly different flavor than those others. Plus, I ain't a cute little kid. Or Bing Crosby.

In 1935 the songwriter Jimmy Kennedy saw a yacht named "The Kitty of Coleraine" lit by the setting sun off the northern coast of Ireland. It inspired him to write the song "Red Sails in the Sunset." That song was recorded dozens of times by artists as varied as Bing Crosby and The Beatles. The song's title inspired the Red Sails Festival held annually in Portstewart, Northern Ireland, which continues to this day.

Stylized metal sail sculpture on the Coleraine roundabout in Portstewart

Kitty of Coleraine
Edward “Pleasant Ned” Lysaght

D Bm G A
As beautiful Kitty one morning was tripping
D G Em A
With a pitcher of milk from the fair at Coleraine,
D Bm G A
When she saw me she stumbled. the pitcher down tumbled,
D G A D
And all the sweet butter-milk watered the plain.
D A D A
Oh! what shall I do now? ‘twas looking at you, now;
D Bm Fdim7 F#dim7 G#dim7 A
Sure, sure, such a pitcher I’ll ne’er meet again;
D Bm G A
‘Twas the pride of my dairy! 0 Barney M’Cleary,
D G A D
You’re sent as a plague to the girls of Coleraine!

I sat down beside her, and gently did chide her,

That such a misfortune should give her such pain;

A kiss then I gave her, and, ere I did leave her,

She vowed for such pleasure she’d break it again.

‘twas hay-making season-I can’t tell the reason-Misfortunes

will never come single, ‘tis plain;

For very soon after poor Kitty’s disaster

The devil a pitcher was whole in Coleraine.

The Ghost of Pleasant Ned
By Kenn Amdahl

After spending so much time learning these songs—transposing them to keys that fit my voice and guitar style, choosing chords that felt appropriate (including resisting the modern impulse to over-use the "dominant" chord built on the fourth note of the scale because I learned they didn't favor it) then tracking down the identity of each song writer and learning about them—I felt a kinship with them that transcended the mere two centuries that separated us. So I wrote my own 200-year-old Irish song.


Kenn Amdahl in 2008

I employed some of the musical patterns my long-dead friends liked. I chose some archaic phrasing, included the nick-names of some of my new song-writing buddies, and referred to some of the little inside jokes from their songs.

Irish folk music sung by English speakers has a weird little quirk: it often employs nonsense phrases. For example in the song "Gilgarry Mountain" made popular by Peter, Paul, and Mary, the chorus sounds like "musha ringum durum don, whack fol de darry oh." No apparent meaning, just sounds. Similarly, some of these old songs in my book employed nonsense phrases. But I noticed clues that suggest something: Because England outlawed singing in Irish and the Irish didn't like that, maybe the songwriters were actually slipping in Irish Gaelic words as a sly inside joke. To the English, they were mere nonsense phrases. I only found a few hints, enough to become suspicious but not enough evidence to convict anyone.

For example, the word "smalilou" appears in several songs. The closest Irish word I found means a "small smudge," that is a trifling inconvenience, a tiny mistake. Using the Irish word would be a crime, but there's no law against nonsense. The humorous "Irish Drinking Song," written by an Englishman, refers to all that "smalilou nonsense."

The phrase "paddy whack" means an Irishman who likes to fight. I don't know if that had its roots in Gaelic Irish, but it became widespread enough it doesn't matter.

The grain that pays the rent is any grain that makes alcohol.

John Bull is an imaginary personification of England, similar to America's "Uncle Sam." He is depicted as a well-fed 18th century farmer who first appeared in political satires by John Arbuthnot (1667-1735).

During the American Revolution, the Irish Volunteers defended England from attacks by the opportunistic French. At one point there were 100,000 Irish Volunteers, led by an Irish hero named Grattan.

The Ghost of Pleasant Ned

Kenn Amdahl capo 2

D G

Oh, we'll sing right fair

  D

We'll drink our share

G C

After the last tall tale's been said

G C G

We'll sing one more By the convent door

Am7 D

With the ghost of Pleasant Ned—And Stutterin' Jack, he's a paddy whack,
Raise a round when we come back—

G Bm Em D G

To the ghost of Pleasant Ned

C D G Em

Fair young maid through the meadow comes

Am7 D G C

Bright as dew in the morning sun

D G Em

And as sure as grapes make wine

C Am7 D

The lads aren't far behind

Am7 G

So dance a step, place a bet,

Am7 D G

Toast the grain that pays the rent

C D G Em

Night falls on both king and cur

C Am7 D

So while the blood yet stirs... (we'll sing right fair etc.)

The lads may rant, the lads may roar

John Bull sends 'em marching off to war

But they don't understand

Gold is changing hands

Then mamas pray, sons obey,

Paddy drinks and counts the days

'Til the sun can shine once more

And his lad limps through that door... (Then we'll sing right fair etc.)

Kate Kearney

By Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson's pen name)

Lady Morgan was an excellent singer and storyteller. Her novel *The Wild Irish Girl* remains in print today. Here's a story about the night of her birth in her own words from her biography:

"On Christmas Eve, 1783, a party was gathered in Dublin at the house of a popular Irish actor, by name Robert Owenson. His wife was not present, having excused herself on the plea of indisposition; but the feast progressed merrily, with singing, toasts, and story-telling, and it was already Christmas morning when a breathless messenger appeared on the threshold to inform the host of the arrival of an unexpected Christmas present from his wife. He hastily quitted the room on receiving the announcement, and an hour later returned beaming to his guests (who had not thought of dispersing in the meantime) bringing word that all was going well, and he was the proud father of "a dear little Irish girl," the blessing he had long wished for. This intelligence was greeted with a half-suppressed cheer by the company, who arranged before they left to meet again a month later and celebrate the christening. One of them, Edward Lysaght a noted lawyer and wit of that day, agreeing to stand sponsor.

The party then broke up and made the best haste they could to their several homes, for the night was cold and the snow was falling. Lysaght, who had the farthest to go, trudged steadily onward, his mind yet filled with thoughts of the feast just over and of the little baby who was soon to be his god-daughter, while the notes of a Christmas carol, sung by a child whose form he could dimly perceive some distance in advance, floated back to his ears and fell in pleasantly with his thoughts. Overtaking the child, he was enabled to catch the last words of her song. They were the well-known refrain :

"Christmas comes but once a year.
And when it comes it brings good cheer."

As the song died away the singer sank down suddenly upon the steps of a brilliantly lighted house resounding with music and laughter. He went up to her and found that she was dead, still grasping her ballad in her hand.

This pathetic story of her birthright was almost the first story told to Robert Owenson's little daughter. and a short poem upon the subject by Lysaght was the first thing she ever learned by heart."

The girl grew up to become a well-known author and celebrity, and one of the first feminists. She and Pleasant Ned remained close for as long as he lived. They dedicated poems to each other. She was quite pretty and flamboyant. She took the name "Lady Morgan" as a pen name, perhaps being enamored of Morgan le Fay in the Arthurian stories. When she and Anna Jameson (also an author with some sort of family connection to Jameson Irish whiskey) were traveling in Europe, Ralph Waldo Emerson made a point to arrange to meet them and take them to lunch. We know of only one song that she wrote, and this is it. She wrote it while she was still a teenager. She performed it herself in her 1807 play, 'The First Attempt' in Dublin. She would have been 24.

This song is about a real person. Kate Kearney was a fabled beauty, reputed to be a witch, who distilled very strong "poitin" (whiskey) called 'Kate Kearney's Mountain Dew.' According to old descriptions, this brew was "very fierce and wild, requiring not less than seven times its own quantity of water to tame and subdue it." Kate lived in a stone cottage with walls three feet thick that survives and is now a restaurant called "Kate Kearney's Cottage." The song was from a woman's perspective, warning her husband or boyfriend to beware of Kate. And, by extension, beware of any beautiful woman who might ply a guy with whiskey and attention. Beautiful, playful women in lonely, private setting far from home are witches and they will kill you. Take my word for it: just stay away, Buster!

In *The Irish Musical Repository,* the song has two verses, then an additional two verses described as the response to the song.

The original song is plaintive and haunting. Although the response has the same melody and word-pattern (and therefore a mournful character), the words seem like a man teasing the original singer. I suspect the response was written by Lady Morgan's godfather, Pleasant Ned. The man who sings *this* version is not at all frightened by beautiful Kate or her whiskey or charms. Pretty woman, whiskey, a private cottage—that all sounds just fine to this guy. I can imagine Lady Morgan singing the first two verses (which she did sing in Europe even twenty years later) to hushed listeners, then Pleasant Ned singing the next two and provoking giggles.

Although there are a number of historical references to the song, by 2008 I hadn't found any evidence that anyone has ever recorded it. I haven't searched since then.

In 1838 a cave was discovered about a mile from Kate's cabin that contained an ancient building covered with writing from the pre Christian era. Known as Dunloe's Cave, its description reminds me of Mary Stewart's depiction of Merlin's home in *The Crystal Cave*. So maybe Kate was a witch, after all.

Sydney Owenson aka "Lady Morgan"

Kate Kearney's place in the mid 1800s

Kate Kearney's place today. It's a lovely restaurant and pub

Kate Kearney
By Lady Morgan
capo 2

C

Oh did you not hear of Kate Kearney?
C G

She lives on the banks of Killarney
F6 Em

From the glance of her eye
Dm E7

Shun danger and fly
Am F C

For fatal's the glance of Kate Kearney.
Am

For the eye is so modestly beaming
C G

You'll ne'er think of mischief she's dreaming
F6 C

Yet oh, I can tell
Dm E7

How fatal the spell
Am F C

That lurks in the eye of Kate Kearney

Oh should you e'er meet this Kate Kearney
Who lives on the banks of Killarney
Beware of her smile for many a wile
Lies hid in the smile of Kate Kearney
Though she looks so bewitchingly simple
There's mischief in every dimple
And who dares inhale
Her sigh's spicy gale
Must die by the breath of Kate Kearney

(response to Kate Kearney, perhaps by Pleasant Ned Lysaght)

Oh yes I have seen this Kate Kearney
Who lives near the lake of Killarney
From her love-beaming eye what mortal can fly
Unsubdued by the glance of Kate Kearney
For that eye so seducingly meaning
Assures me of mischief she's dreaming
And I feel 'tis in vain
To fly from the chain
That binds me to lovely Kate Kearney

At eve when I've met this Kate Kearney
On the flower-mantled banks of Killarney
Her smile would impart
Thrilling joy to my heart
As I gazed on the charming Kate Kearney
On the banks of Killarney reclining
My bosom to rapture resigning
I've felt the keen smart
Or love's fatal dart
And inhaled the warm sigh of Kate Kearney

Paddy the Piper

John Henry "Irish" Johnstone (1749-1828)

Johnstone sang this song, and it's credited to him in various places. But he sang so many songs by other people, I can't be positive it's his creation.

Shortly after Johnstone joined the military, his commanding officer noticed his remarkable singing voice and managed to get him out of the service so that he could sing. He became an opera singer, known for his high voice. He was known as the best singer of his age, and fifty years later saying that someone "sang like Irish Johnstone" was still a well-known compliment. Around 1803 his voice began to give out and he became more involved with acting. His ability to portray both genteel and coarse Irishmen led to his nickname.

John Henry Johnstone, as Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan in Charles Macklin's *Love à-la-Mode*

Johnstone was apparently very cheap. His friend John Philpot Curran often joked about that. Only a few of these quips have survived the centuries. (Johnstone: "Guess what I spent in London?" Curran: "About a fortnight").

This song requites a large vocal range (very high notes as well as very low notes) making it tricky for us mere mortals to sing. Johnstone was obviously showing off when he wrote it. Unlike, say, the Star Spangled Banner, this one leaps up and down regularly, rather than simply hitting that high note once.

An Irish bagpipe (the uilleann pipe) is different from the familiar Scottish bagpipe. It's played sitting down and has a much more pleasant sound; in fact, it's almost a musical sound. One of the pipes plays a single steady note, it's known as the "drone." A phiz is an archaic term for gaze. Och hone is a nonsense exclamation, like "gee whiz." The farra la lala la loo probably was intended to give the singer an excuse to sing lovely notes, just like the bagpipe. With that in mind, I sing the last set of them, when the kid is trying to play, as goofy clunker notes.

It's a humorous song about a poor country kid who decides to leave home to be part of a traveling musician's act. It's possible the man is blind, like so many traveling musicians of that era, and needed someone to help guide him. When the man dies, the kid picks up the bagpipes and tries to take his place. It seems a bit off color (a kid traipses around the country naked with a grown man, singing and leaping like a frog…maybe it's just me.) I bet the song would crack up any room of half-drunk Irishmen if a notable actor/comedian sang it with all the potential flourishes it invites.

The melody has survived and been recorded as an instrumental jig.

William Talbot, famous uilleann piper in the early 1800s. He lost his sight to smallpox when he was four. Like many others who suffered his plight, he became a traveling musician. He played for King George IV in 1832 when the King visited Dublin.

Paddy the Piper
capo 3

D A D
When I was a boy in my fathers mud edifice
D A D
Tender and bare as a pig in a sty
D A D
Out at the door as I looked with a steady phiz
D A D
Who but Pat Murphy the piper passed by
D Bm Em A
Says Paddy but few play this music can you play?
G Em A D
Says I, I can't tell for I never did try
F#m Em D
He told me that he had a charm
F#m Em D
To make the pipes prettily speak
F#m Em D
Then he squeezed a bag under his arm
G D A D
And sweetly they set up a squeak
F#m Em D
With a farra lalla lalloo
F#m Em D
Och hone how he handled the drone
F#m Em D
And then such sweet music he blew
G D A D
'Twould have melted the heart of a stone.

2
Your pipe, says I, Paddy so neatly comes over me
Naked I'll wander wherever it blows
And if my father should try to recover me
Sure it won't be by describing my clothes
The music I hear now takes hold of my ear now
And leads me all over the world by the nose

So I followed his bagpipe so sweet
And sung as I leapt like a frog
Adieu to my family seat
So pleasantly placed in a bog
With my faralla (etc)

3

Full five years I followed him, nothing could sunder us
Til he one morning had taken a nap
And slipped from the bridge to the river just under us
Souse to the bottom just like a blind pup.
I roared out and balled out and heavily called out
Oh Paddy my friend don't you mean to come up?

But he was dead as a nail in a door
Poor Paddy was laid on the shelf
So I took up his pipes on the shore
And now I've set up for myself.
With my faralla, laralla loo
To be sure I have not got the knack
To play faralla laralla loo, aye and bubberoo dieroo whack.

Irish Drinking Song

Charles Dibdin (1735-1814) (Three years younger than George Washington)

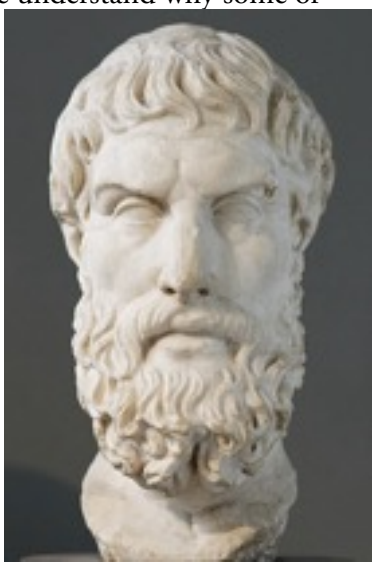
Dibdin was an Englishman who pretty much invented the one-man show. He wrote several operas and thousands of songs. He bought his own theater building in London, and performed there nightly. The fact that English songwriters were included in this book of Irish songs suggests they were a pretty inclusive crowd.

Irish songs use a lot of fa la la's and other nonsense words, although some words the English considered nonsense could have been sly injections of illegal Irish Gaelic words. Smallilou for example, is the name of one of the other songs in this book. I found some evidence that it could have meant a "smudge" or small imperfection. That made sense in that song. In my mind, if a nonsense word shows up fairly often, maybe it actually means something. Whereas phrases like"Sh-boom" or "bop shoo wop" don't have a recurring role.

The word "boddern" seems a likely invention: he needed a word to rhyme with modem. The phrase "musha what boderation" means, I think, "goodness what a fuss." In 2008 I found one old definition of the word "taef" meaning "thief." Did Aristotle have a reputation for shoplifting? Alas, my Internet does not go back that far. In 2024, there are so many acronyms using those letters, the definitional water is quite muddy. One definition that wasn't there 15 years ago (in the Urban Dictionary, of all places): "a girl name which means the fantasy that comes when someone is sleeping." OK, I can see Aristotle getting so drunk the fantasy girl in his dream does too and wanders away into the sea. It could happen to anyone.

Aesop was a Greek storyteller, famous for his "fables." Marcus Gavius Apicius was a Roman gourmet and lover of luxury. Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who believed in simplicity, but got the erroneous reputation for endorsing gluttony and drunken behavior. A tight hand: very disciplined.

This is a humorous song. I picture Dibdin acting it out as a dialog. perhaps between an Irishman and an Englishman, with different accents for different verses. I would not be surprised to learn that sometimes Irish Johnstone joined him for a guest appearance. Perhaps Johnstone performed the song himself in Dublin. Some of the jokes require a good knowledge of history. Without more research, I don't quite understand why some of this is funny. So I just laugh whenever anyone else does.



"Nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little"— Epicurus

Irish Drinking Song capo 2

D A
Of the ancients it's speaking my soul you'd be after
D A
That they never got how came you so
A Bm F#m Em
Would you seriously make the good folks die with laughter
D G
To be sure their dogs tricks we don't know
Bm A D
To be sure their dogs tricks we don't know

CHORUS:

D
With your smalilou nonsense
A
And all your queer bodderns
G A
Since whiskey's a liquor divine
G A
To be sure the old ancients
Em
As well as the moderns
D A G
Did not love a sly sup of good wine
D A D
Did not love a sly sup of good wine

Apicius and Aesop as authors assure us
Would swig till as drunk as a beast
Then what do you think of that rogue Epicurus
Was not he a tight hand at a feast?

Alexander the Great at his banquets who drank hard
When he no more worlds could subdue
Shed tears, to be sure, but 'twas tears of the tankard
To refresh him and pray would not you

Then that other old fellow they called Aristotle
Such a devil of a tippler was he
That one night having taken too much of his bottle
The taef staggered into the sea

Then they made what they called of their wine a libation
Which as all authority quotes
They threw on the ground- musha what boderation
To be sure 'twas not thrown down their throats

Smalilou

Robert Merry (1755-1798) and William Shield (1748-1829)

Although I lost all the "research" I'd saved back when I was learning these songs, I retain some tidbits. In an email from that year, I mentioned this song (Smailou): "Have not been able to find a word about the song online except that its title became the name of a novel a hundred years later, and it is quoted in another book by that same author. Well, Google is digitizing books so quickly that now, a month after the last time I checked, I was able to track down quite a bit of information without working very hard or long. It's from the play "A Picture in Paris" written in 1790, words by Robert Merry and music by William Shields (who did the music for the last song I learned). Robert Merry was the most popular poet in England at the time; he signed his poems with the name "Della Crusta." His style of emotional, romantic poetry was completely panned by the "real" poets of the day, but loved by the people. It launched the whole Della Crustan style of poetry.

William Shield was a prominent violinist and composer and friend of the composer Haydn. He is best remembered for his light English opera, "Rosina." It contains musical phrases from a much older folk tune we now know as Auld Lang Syne (which Robert Burns heard a street musician sing. Burns promptly wrote it down and published it as his own. Much as he did with Slave's Lament. But that's a different story). Because Shield's operas are light, contain English language, spoken dialog, and bits of familiar folk melodies, some people consider him the first composer of what we now know as musicals. A festival in England in his honor sounds pretty fun.

The word "smalilou" could be an old Irish word for smudge. That is, a small imperfection. In this song, the lovestruck lad tries to convince a nun to leave the convent and run off with him. His strategy is to sing over the convent walls the word "smalilou." In my mind, he's suggesting to the young lady that the circumstances that prevent their bliss (you know, her being a cloistered nun and all) are a mere trifle, an inconvenience. A smudge, not a stain.

Gramachree is how people wrote the Gaelic phrase "Graidh mo chroidhe" for English speakers. It means "love of my heart" or sweetheart. Again, nothing to see here, not the illegal Irish language, just a nonsense word. I suggest the last line of the chorus might translate to "a sweet and innocent young girl mixed up with a Hell-raising Irish rascal."

A different tune called Gramachree is mentioned between 1646 and 1648. "Gramachree Molly" was published in 1780. Thomas Moore used the melody from that one as the air for his song "The Harp that Once through Tara's Halls."

Smalilou capo 2

Em D B7
There was an Irish lad, Who loved a cloister'd nun,
Em G Em D Em
And it made him very sad, For what was to be done.
G D G D
He thought it was a big shame A most confounded sin,
G D G D
That she could not get out at all And he could not get in
Em B7 Em G
Yet he went every day, he could do nothing more,
Em B7 Em B7
Yet he went every day un-to the convent door,
Em D Em D
And he sung sweetly, smaIilou, smaIilou smaIilou
Em
And be sung sweet-Iy, smaIilou,
G B7 Em
gramachree, and paddy whack

To catch a glimpse of her he play'd a thousand tricks
The bolts he tried to stir, and he gave. the wall some kicks :
He stamp'd, and raved and sigh'd, and pray'd,
And many times he swore, The devil burn the iron bolts
The devil take the door !
Yet he went every day, he made it a rule; Yet he - went every day, ·and looked like a· fool
Though he sung sweetly, &c.
One mom she left her bed,
Because she could not sleep, And to the window sped,
To take a little peep;
And what did she do then ?
I'm sure you'll think it right; She bade the honest lad good day
And bade the nuns good night.
Tenderly she listen'd to all he had to say,
Then jumped into his arms, and so they ran away,
And they sung sweetly, &c

Since Love is the Plan

John O'Keeffe and William Shield (1748-1829)

And a bit by Kenn Amdahl (1949-)

This is from a comic opera called "The Poor Soldier." The opera was originally called "The Shamrock, or The Anniversary of St. Patrick." Thirteen years after it first played in England, it became the very first musical play ever performed in Sydney, Australia. "The Poor Soldier " was one of George Washington's favorite operas, and it remained a staple of an American production company for fifty years. A company called A-R Editions may have the actual sheet music but I haven't checked them out.

Shield used a traditional Irish melody from a song called The Irish Lovers Morning Walk. The words to that have not survived, as far as I could tell in 2008, although there was mention online of it in a manuscript from 1780. In the years since I researched this, other sources now say the tune was by Scottish fiddler John Bruce. Of course, whoever wrote the melody, Robert Burns was sure to write some words to it and claim it. He wrote two sets of words to this tune in 1788 and 1793. I don't know for sure if the original was Irish or Scottish, but when I was learning it, the oldest reference I found was The Irish Lovers Morning Walk, universally accepted as an Irish air.

I liked the song, but the second verse didn't make much sense for me to sing today. It seemed silly and dated compared to the first verse. I wanted to change pronouns for a male perspective anyway (the singer was a woman in the play) so I wrote a new verse that incorporates a morning walk and some of the original words. Obviously, I first obtained cosmic approval from O'Keeffe and Shield. For you purists, I posted their original lyrics to that verse as well. Use whichever works best for you.

I picked a key that gave me a shot at singing all the notes, but even so it goes higher than I can reasonably sing and also lower than I can sing. I suspect it was designed to be sung by a duet, a man and woman, each taking the parts in their ranges.

Between 1782 and 1796, John O'Keeffe wrote over 25 plays and librettos for comic operas.

Since Love is the Plan capo 2

D F#m Em A
Since love is the plan, I'll love if I can
D F#m G D
But first let me tell you what sort of (wo)man
D Bm Em A
In demeanor she's sweet, in dress spruce and neat
D Bm Em A
No matter how tall– so she's over five feet
D Bm G A
Not dull nor too witty, her eyes I'll think pretty
Bm F#m Em A
If sparkling with pleasure whenever we meet
G F#m Em A
Not dull nor too witty her eyes I'll think pretty
Bm F#m G D
If sparkling with pleasure whenever we meet.

Though gentle and shy, any man she'd defeat
Yet never be conquered by any but me
We'll watch the sun rise in each other's eyes
Our lips will collide as the sea meets the sky
We'll stroll through the morning a new plan a'borning
To walk every day through the dawn of our love
To walk every day through the dawn of our love
(Repeat "we'll stroll… to end")

Since Love is the Plan, original second verse:

Though gentle he be, his man he shall see,
Yet never be conquer'd by any but me
In a song bear a bob, in a glass hob or nob,
Yet drink of his reason his noddle ne'er rob.
This is a fancy, if such a man can see,
I'm his, if he's mine until then I am free

Bumper Squire Jones

Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738)

O'Carolan, perhaps the most famous Irish harpist of all time, was born a hundred years too early. That timing cost him his sight. On the other hand, had he been born a few years later he'd be forgotten by now.

When he was 18 (about 1688) he contracted smallpox, which left him blind. By that time, people in other countries had been "vaccinating" against the disease for 200 years by intentionally exposing healthy people to smallpox– a practice known as variolation (after a name for smallpox, 'la variole')

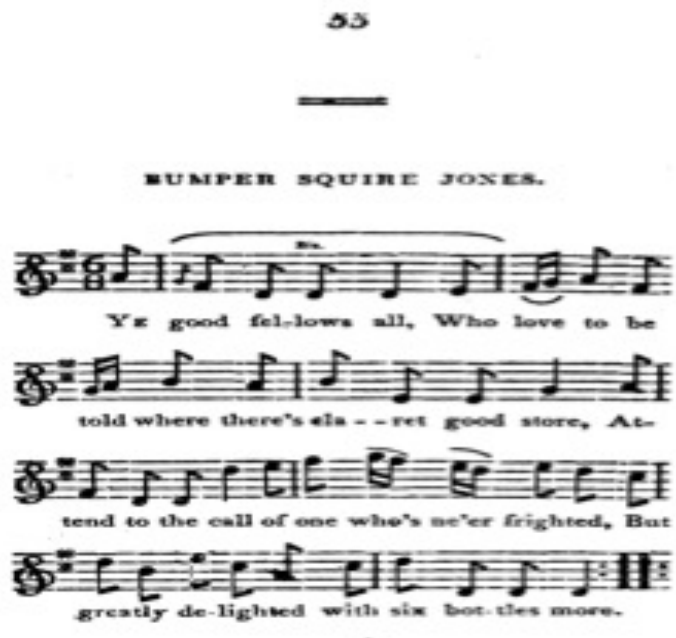
But in O'Carolan's time, in Ireland, smallpox often resulted in either death or blindness. This happened so often they developed the tradition of training the blind to be traveling musicians, playing either harp or bagpipes. O'Carolan spent three years with a musical tutor learning to play the Irish harp. Then his tutor gave him a horse and a bit of cash and sent him on his way. He became the most famous wandering minstrel of his time; his music remains popular to this day.

When he wrote words to sing to his tunes, they were often in Irish because he wasn't as confident with English. Unique among harpists of his day, a more proficient, sighted, trained musician decided to write down sheet music of O'Carolan's songs and publish them. All 214 of Carolan's tunes (as identified by Donal O'Sullivan) are described in the 1958 edition of *Carolan: The Life Times and Music of an Irish Harper*

I'd seen the title "Bumper Squire Jones" many times over the years on record albums, but I had no recollection of ever actually hearing it. So, when I saw it in this book, it seemed a great opportunity for an experiment. I decided to decode the song the same way I'd done the others; don't listen to it first, just figure out the notes as well as I could, choose chords that made sense to me, put in rests where I needed to breathe and interpret some of the weird markings in the book as if I were writing the song myself. Would that mark mean a repeat? A change in tempo? I determined to avoid listening to contemporary versions until I recorded a rough take of my version. Although I was curious how close I came to the versions being played at Celtic festivals around the world I never mastered the song, with all its tricky little runs and arpeggiated chords in the melody that make a lot of sense for a harpist to play but are hard to sing. I confess, even 15 years after I did this, I still haven't listened to a contemporary version.

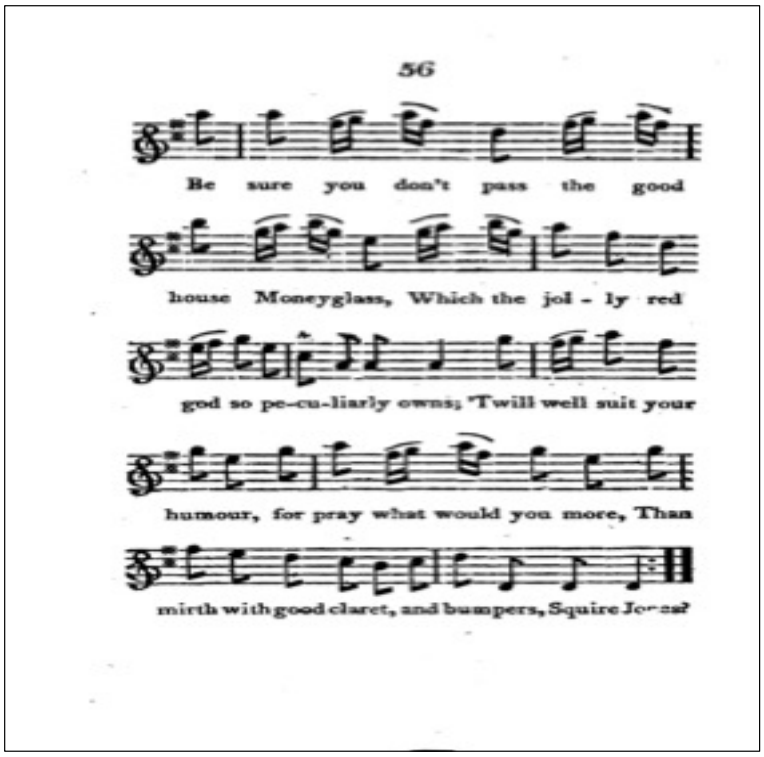
Irish harp. Often carved from a single piece of wood and made sturdy to withstand the strain of its brass strings. The "Celtic Harp" with its softer gut strings (now usually nylon) wasn't invented until 1830 or so.

In 1730 O'Carolan composed this song to honor his host while staying at the home of Thomas Morris Jones, Esq. of Moneyglass. A story about that event has come down to us in a couple different versions. O'Carolan practiced his new song in his bedroom before showing it to anyone. In the adjoining room, either a violinist named "Moore" or a "Baron Dawson" heard it quite clearly. That secret listener had a quick ear for music and a wicked sense of humor. He wrote his own words to O'Carolan's tune. The next day, when O'Carolan played the tune, the eavesdropper protested. That's not a new song, he insisted. And proceeded to play his own song, written the night before to O'Carolan's tune. This created a good deal of anger, confusion, and ultimately laughter when the stunt was revealed. The eavesdropper's words, in quite competent English, are probably what survived.



The word Bis is from the Italian and means "play it twice." There didn't seem much point in repeating the words (unless you had a chorus helping you, or drunks in a bar echoing) so I inserted a little guitar lick that was quite similar to the phrase the music wanted repeated.

This song had been around for nearly 80 years by the time the book was published. I suspect that at least some of the many verses were concocted during that time by an assortment of poets and wags. I've included all the ones from the book on the following pages. The verse about lawyers brought to mind my old lawyer buddies, Curran and Lysaght.



A "bumper" is a mug of beer full to brimming over. The singer could be asking for a refill. "A bumper, please, kind sire." A "bumper" might also be slang for a generously built person. The title does not have a comma after 'bumper' so I think it's a bit of a pun,

Bumper Squire Jones capo 2

D G
Ye good fellows all,

G Am7 D
Who love to be told where there's claret good store,

G Em
Attend to the call

Bm D C D
of one who's ne'er frighted, but greatly delighted

G
with six bottles more.

Bm Em Am7 D
Be sure you don't pass the good house Moneyglass,

G Am7 D
Which the jolly red god so peculiarly owns;

G Am7 G Am7
'Twill well suit your humour, for pray what would you more,

G D G
Than mirth with good claret, and bumpers, Squire Jones?

Ye lovers who pine
For lasses, who oft prove as cruel as fair,
Who whimper and whine for lilies and roses,
With eyes, lips, and noses, or tip of an ear.
Come hither, I'll shew you how Phillis and Chloe
No more shall occasion such sighs and such groans;
For what mortal so stupid as not to quit Cupid,
When call'd by good claret, and bumpers, Squire Jones

Ye poets who write,
And brag of your drinking famed Helicon's brook,
Though all you get by't is a dinner oft times,
In reward for your rhymes, with Humphry the duke;
Learn Bacchus to follow, and quit your Apollo,
Forsake all the Muses, those senseless old drones;
Our jingling of glasses your rhyming surpasses,
When crowned with good claret, and bumpers, Squire Jones.

Back when I was researching these songs, I came up with a meaning for "jolly red god," but I've forgotten it. My best current guess is that Jones had a statue of a laughing red Buddha, which invites prosperity. And it could be an indirect reference to a ruddy-face Irishman, built like a Buddha, who liked to drink a wee bumper from time to time. Someone else may have a better explanation

Ye soldiers so stout,
With plenty of oaths, though not plenty of coin,
Who make such a route of all your commanders,
Who served us in Flanders, and eke at the Boyne
Come leave off your rattling of fighting and battling,
And know you'd much better to sleep with whole bones;
Were you sent to Gibraltar, your note you'd soon alter,
And wish for good claret, and bumpers, Squire Jones

Ye clergy so wise;
Who mysteries profound can demonstrate clear,
How worthy to rise, you preach once a-week,
But your tithes never seek above once in a year;
Come here without failing, and leave off your railing
'Gainst bishops providing for dull stupid drones:
Says the text so divine, What is life without ,wine?
Then away with the claret, a bumper, Squire Jones.

Ye lawyers so just,
Be the cause what it will, who so learnedly plead,
How worthy of trust, you know black from white,
Yet prefer wrong to right as your chance to be fee'd;
Leave musty reports, and· forsake the king's courts,
Where dulness and discord have set up their thrones,
Burn Salkeld and Ventris, with all your damned entries
And away with the claret, a bumper, Squire Jones

William Salkeld (1671–1715), legal writer. His *Reports of Cases in the King's Bench,* 1689–1712, published posthumously in 1717 and 1718, was the standing authority for that period.

Sir Peyton Ventris famous judge and legal reporter.

Ye physical tribe,
Whose knowledge consists in hard words and grimace
When'er you prescribe, have at your devotion
Pills, bolus, or potion, be what will the case
Pray where is the need to purge, blister, or bleed?
When ailing yourselves, the whole faculty owns,
That the forms of old Galen are not so prevailing
As mirth with good claret, and bumpers, Squire Jones

Galen was an ancient doctor who discovered that blood vessels carry blood. Some consider him the father of modern medicine. This verse suggests that a doctor's main tool is big words and facial expressions. Maybe he's stingy with the drugs. But when the doctor himself gets sick, the entire pharmacy is at his disposal. Still, even that can't match the healing power of having a good time with friends over drinks.

Ye fox-hunters, eke,
That follow the call of the horn and the hound,
Who your ladies forsake before they awake,
To heat up the brake where the vermin is found;
Leave Piper and Blueman, shrill Dutchess and Trueman;
No music is found in such dissonant tones:
Would you ravish your ears with the songs of the spheres?
Hark! away to the claret! a bumper, Squire Jones.

The Man Who Led the Van of Irish Volunteers

Edward "Pleasant Ned" Lysaght
Tune– "*The British Grenadiers.*"

"We have but one good Volunteer Song,"says Thomas Davis; "it was written by Lysaght, after that illustrious militia was dissolved. That song is in praise of Grattan…It is spirited, and what is not always true of complimentary poetry, its sentiments are true." (*Essay on Irish Songs, 1844*)

While England was busy dealing with the American war of independence, its resources were stretched thin. It became vulnerable to outside threat, specifically the French who tried to invade a time or two. The Irish Volunteers was originally a sort of citizen-militia tasked with defending the homeland. It was loosely organized, and became more of a political force than a military one, arguing for free trade between England and Ireland (Irish good faced a tariff going into England, but English goods faced no similar penalty) and independent laws, including an Irish constitution. It set an enduring precedent in the region by using the threat of force to get its way. As the American hostilities came to an end, the Volunteers lost much of their motivation for existing and it sort of faded away. Once the countries joined together in 1800 as The United Kingdom, there really was no point.

When I discovered that my buddy Pleasant Ned had written this song, I tracked down the lyrics. The melody is well-known, so I put them together and filled in a guitar part. It's to the air of British Grenadiers, a marching tune used by the English (and strongly associated with them) since the early 1700s. Using this tune to celebrate an Irish hero was a not-so-subtle irony.

The word "van" is probably short for vanguard which means "the forefront of an action or movement." Could also be short for caravan: "a company of travelers on a journey through desert or hostile regions." Either one works.

The leader of the Irish Volunteers was Henry Grattan. He was considered a hero in Ireland. In the 15 years since I first looked into any of this, the Internet has made public a lot of information about him and them. Back then, information was pretty sketchy. Today, anyone who's interested could probably write several theses about Grattan and the Volunteers.

The Man Who Led the Van of Irish Volunteers

capo 3

G D G D G D G

The gen'rous sons of Erin, in manly virtue bold,

G D G D G D G

With hearts and hands preparing our country to uphold,

G C G D

Tho' cruel knaves and bigot slaves disturbed our isle some years,

G Am7 G C G D G

Now hail the man, who led the van of Irish Volunteers.

Just thirty years are ending, since first his glorious aid,
Our sacred rights defending, struck shackles from our trade;
To serve us still, with might and skill, the vet'ran now appears,
That gallant man, who led the van of Irish Volunteers.

He sows no vile dissensions; good will to all he bears:
He knows no vain pretensions, no paltry fears or cares;
To Erin's and to Britain's sons his worth his name endears;
They love the man, who led the van of Irish Volunteers.

Oppos'd by hirelings sordid, he broke oppression's chain;
On statute-books recorded his patriot acts remain;
The equipoize his mind employs of Commons, Kings and Peers,
The upright man, who led the van of Irish Volunteers.

A British Constitution, (to Erin ever true)
In spite of state pollution, he gained in "Eighty-two;"
He watch'd it in its cradle, and bedew'd its hearse with tears,
This gallant man, who led the van of Irish Volunteers.

While other nations tremble, by proud oppressors gall'd,
On hustings we'll assemble, by Erin's welfare call'd;
Our Grattan, there we'll meet him, and greet him with three cheers;
The gallant man, who led the van of Irish Volunteers.

Rakes of Mallow

Edward "Pleasant Ned" Lysaght

According to the Infinitely Wise machines in Mr. Google's garage in 2024, the word "rake" means:

"In a historical context, a rake (short for rakehell, analogous to "hellraiser") was a man who was habituated to immoral conduct, particularly womanizing. Often, a rake was also prodigal, wasting his (usually inherited) fortune on gambling, wine, women, and song, and incurring lavish debts in the process."

The "rake" became a stock character in plays and songs.

A dun is a bill collector. Dada is a father.

The town of Mallow, Ireland, is on the Blackwater River. It was known for its spa and was nicknamed "The Irish Bath."

The song was set to a familiar air. To this day, it is a "fight song" of the University of Notre Dam.

Blarney Castle, home of the famous stone, not far from Mallow.

Mallow Castle today

The Rakes of Mallow capot 3

G
Beauing, belling, dancing, drinking,
D
Breaking windows, cursing, sinking
G
Ever raking, never thinking,
D7 G
Live the Rakes of Mallow,
Em7 G
Spending faster than it comes,
Em7 G D
Beating waiter's bailiffs, duns,
Em7 G
Bacchus' true begotten sons,
D7 G
Live the Rakes of Mallow.

One time naught but claret drinking,
Then like politicians, thinking
To raise the sinking funds when sinking.
Live the Rakes of Mallow.

When at home, with da-da dying,
Still for mellow water crying,
But, where there's good claret plying
Live the Rakes of Mallow.

When at home with dadda dying,
Still for Mallow-water crying,
But where there is good claret plying
Live the rakes of Mallow.
Living short but merry lives,
Going where the devil drives,
Having sweethearts, but no wives,
Live the rakes of Mallow.

Racking tenants stewards teasing,
Swiftly spending, slowly raising,
Wishing to spend all their days in
Raking as at Mallow.
Thus to end a raking life,
We grow sober, take a wife,
Ever after live in strife,
And wish again for Mallow.

Slaves Lament and/or Trappan'd Maiden

By Charles Bates an/or Robert Burns

This is a blog post I wrote back in 2008, followed by the words and chords to these two related songs:

Last night I met the ghost of an old Scottish poet and songwriter. At least, maybe I did. He could have been from London.

I heard the song "Slave's Lament" only once, ten years ago. For some reason this week I kept thinking about it and tracked down the melody and words. When I realized it was from the same time period as the old Irish songs I've recreated I decided to learn it the same way I learned them. That is, I avoided listening to other versions and created my own arrangement from the bare sheet-music melody and words. Once I could sing and play it in my own way I started researching its origins.

First I learned that Burns had a real-life connection to slavery. He was going broke trying to farm and no one wanted his poetry. Before he starved to death, an acquaintance offered him a job helping to oversee slaves on a plantation in Jamaica. Burns accepted the job and sent his bride-to-be ahead to wait for him at the port where the ship "The Nancy" would take them to Jamaica. As in every starving writer's dream, at the last minute before he went to join her, his poetry book began to sell. Suddenly he could afford to be choosier. He turned down the job and stayed in Scotland; sadly, his fiancé died in the port city before he could retrieve her.

With his new literary success came other opportunities. For example, he was hired to help compile a wildly successful series of songbooks (Scot's Musical Museum) to preserve the Scottish musical tradition. For this task, he often edited or improved traditional songs that have come to be associated with him such as Auld Lang Syne.

Burns wrote Slave's Lament in the late 1780s. Later, Joseph Hayden created arrangements based on several of Burn's songs (including this one). This undoubtably helped the song survive. But there has been dispute over the origin of the melody. Did Burns use an older tune (which was a common practice) or did he adapt a traditional African tune (which was the story an editor proposed when he republished the collection long after Burns died)? There were similar songs by then, but which came first? Did Burns steal this melody or did those other songwriters steal from him? Within the last few years, several scholars have argued at length about this, probably to the dismay of their wives and friends who may wish they'd spend that time and enthusiasm inventing a new app for the i-phone.

I believe I solved that riddle this week, at least to my own satisfaction. Burns pretty much stole a song from a hundred years earlier called "The Trappan'd Maiden" that had been published in about 1685 by Charles Bates. Bates was known as an "obscure bookseller." That alone made me identify with him. From the evidence I've collected, he was also a self publisher, novelist, and song writer. He rewrote and published *The History of the Famous Exploits of Guy Earl of Warwick* for example. Today, that book is about as obscure as any of my own. A verse in The Trappan'd Maiden mentions serving Master Guy. Bates published "The Devil's Oak," a humorous song which was to be sung "to a very pleasant new tune." Based only on that flimsy evidence, I think he wrote both lyrics and melodies.

Bates hung out near "Pye corner" which is a section of London near the intersection of Cock Lane and Giltspur Street known in medieval times for legal brothels. It is also known as the spot where the Great Fire of London (1666) stopped. Bates used various printers in Pye Corner; one of his favorites was the "Sun and Bible" printers.

Charles paid the "Sun and Bible" to print up the broadside (a large sheet of paper with the words and an illustration) of Trappan'd Maiden. That's how one made money as a song writer in those days. We know the song became quite popular, but it still might have disappeared except for a peculiar old character who liked to collect songs and literature.

Samuel Pepys worked for the navy and loved to sing and dance. He never thought of himself as a writer, but he's now remembered primarily because his extensive diaries became our best window into the time period. He bought a copy of the Trappan'd Maiden for his huge, meticulously cataloged collection. Pepys' library (including 3,000 broadsides) has been digitized, so I managed to download a copy of the Trappan'd Maiden. Yes, it fits the Slave's Lament melody; beyond that, many of the words are nearly identical as well. I'm not sure anyone has really tried to play the two songs side by side until this week.

The Trappan'd Maiden is about a young woman from England forced to become a slave at a Virginia tobacco plantation in the 1600s. If you change the phrasing just slightly, you can move from a verse of Burn's song to this one without anyone even noticing the difference. I chose three verses from Trappan'd Maiden that could be sung by either a man or woman, trimmed some of the repeated lines from Slave's Lament and combined the two songs. In the middle of the night, I found myself playing the thing in my brain, going between the two phrasings.

Then I had a dream. I'd left something in the basement of a house and had gone down to retrieve it. When I reached the bottom of the stairs I realized that the thing had come alive and sort of possessed the house. The dream became disturbing and dark and I tried to say, "It's alive! It's alive." But I can't form words in my sleep. I thrashed around and groaned until my wife woke me.

I went back to sleep, but the dream repeated itself. This time, I was watching a guy sleep who was having the dream I'd just had. I knew he was going down the stairs, knew he realized that the thing was alive and wanting to say it out loud. He started thrashing and groaning. I tried to wake him from his nightmare. At that point, my wife woke me again. I'd been thrashing and groaning all over again.

This time, as I drifted off, it occurred to me that it was probably the ghost of Robert Burns trying to connect with me in some way. But I was a very strange character to him. We spoke so differently and had such different lives in different centuries. It was hard for both of us. So I introduced myself. I told him my name, and who my family was, and where I lived. It did not feel odd to reassure some apparition of my imagination in this way; I take my imagination very seriously. On the off chance that I was right, he had to be a lot more confused than me. Once I gently explained the situation, we both relaxed and went to sleep.

This morning, my neighbor called. She'd gotten up before dawn and saw that the dome light in my wife's car was on. The neighbor thought that very strange because *she* had just awakened from an odd dream about a car and its light. I thought it odd because we hadn't driven the car for two days. The last time we did we had noticed the dome light wasn't working. We had a long conversation about it. Had it suddenly repaired itself just to exhaust the car's battery? I went out to check. The dome light was not on, the battery wasn't dead, the car started fine. I let the car warm up. When I shut it off and opened the door, the dome light came on.

Of course, I had to google "the ghost of Robert Burns." Yes, of course, there have been many sightings. Most interesting was a blog by Carrillee Collins Burke who took a photo of Robert Burns' grave. A weird white glow showed up in the photo. The photo is in Yesterday's Memories magazine.

An earlier ghost story had nothing to do with Burns. In 1762 (when Burns was a child of three) perhaps the most famous resident of Pye Corner was the "Cock Lane Ghost." People were convinced that the ghost of Fanny Lynes made appearances and various noises. Because of the sounds it made, they nicknamed the ghost "Scratchin' Fanny" which I'm sure got a snicker every time they said it. So many people flocked to seances in the area the streets became impassable. This was about thirty years after Charles Bates turned his publishing business over to Sarah Bates, who I assume was his daughter. I only mention it because ghosts seem to show up near the places Bates haunted when alive.

This song has touched many people. Charles Bates probably wrote the original. Samuel Pepys preserved it. A hundred years later, Robert Burns updated it for his own time. Joseph Hayden arranged it for classical musicians. Thomas Jefferson, who claimed his first love was music and singing, may have sung it while Burns was still alive. I was startled to learn that Abraham Lincoln loved the poetry of Burns so much that, as a young man, he memorized all of it. Until just before his death, he'd recite Burn's poetry to anyone who would listen. Therefore, it's quite likely that he knew the lyrics to Slave's Lament; perhaps he sang it fifty years after Burns died.

I'm not sure that I actually believe in "ghosts." But I do believe that we leave our scent on the things we touch. Our fragrance (or stench) might be detectable years later on a song or poem, perhaps enough to conjure and connect the people who ran it through their fingers and voices. If Lincoln sang this song, perhaps some part of him survives in it. Pepys and Hayden and Burns might be in there somewhere. If a song can conjure a departed musician, it could be any of them.

But my money's on Charles Bates. I bet it's been a long time since anyone sang his original words to the melody he wrote. That might be just enough to stir a sleeping poet to say "it's alive! My song is alive within a new home!" It now resides with another writer/self publisher who feels pretty comfortable near "Pye-Corner." Especially "Pumpkin Pye Corner." Perhaps Charles roused himself from a 300 year nap just long enough to disturb my own sleep.

Then, to demonstrate his approval, he fixed the dome light in my wife's car.

In my version, the first three verses are Burn's song "Slave's Lament" The last three verses are from Bates's song "The Trappan'd Maiden")END OF BLOG POST

UPDATE:

I got Bates's words by downloading a copy of the broadsheet back in 2008. Interestingly, the lyrics that I sing are slightly different from what I can download today. I may have typed something wrong, or someone else may have. I will include both Burn's lyrics and Bates's so you can compare.

December, 2024. Fifteen years have passed. I got busy with other things and abandoned these old songs. I've only played them for a handful of people. Since then I wrote and published several books, including *The Manitou Bell,* a ghost-story/time-travel adventure partly set in the spooky old house of my Colorado childhood. One of the primary "ghosts" is a kid who actually died in the house in 1897. Until this week, I never noticed a weird coincidence about the kid's name: Charles Bates Whiting.

Nor did I make the possible connection of the real kid to a character in Charles Dickens' 1838 novel *Oliver Twist*. In that book, Charley Bates is a pickpocket, but reforms. As Dickens explains at the end of the book, "Charles Bates… is now the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire."

The kid who lived and died in my house (and may have slept in my room) the kid who inspired my fictionalized ghost may have been optimistically named for Dickens's merry character. The Dickens character may have been named for the songwriter who immortalized a poor slave girl. Far fetched, of course, But who knows?

‘The Slave’s Lament’ (Robert Burns 1759-1796) capo 2

Em G D B7

It was in sweet Senegal that my foes did me enthralL,

C Em G B7

For the lands of Virginia, – ginia, O:

Em G D B7

Torn from that lovely shore, and must never see it more;

Em B7 Em G B7

And alas! I am weary, weary O:

All on that charming coast is no bitter snow and frost,
Like the lands of Virginia, – ginia, O:
There streams forever flow, and there flowers forever blow,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:
There streams for ever flow, and there flowers for ever blow,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:

The burden I must bear, while the cruel scourge I fear,
In the lands of Virginia, – ginia, O;
And I think on friends most dear, with the bitter, bitter tear,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:

Trappan'd Maiden (Charles Bates published in 1685)

Give ear unto a Maid
That lately was betray'd
And sent into Virginny O
In brief I shall declare
What I have suffered there
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

When that first I came
To this Land of Fame
Which is called Virginny, O
The Axe and the Hoe
Have wrought my Overthrow
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

Five Years served I
Under Master Guy
In the Land of Virginny, O
Which made me for to know
Sorrow, Grief, and Woe
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

When my Dame says, Go
Then I must do so
In the Land of Virginny, O
When she sits at Meat
Then I have none to eat
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

The Cloaths that I brought in
They are worn very thin
In the Land of Virginny, O
Which makes me for to say
Alas, and Well-a-day
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

Instead of Beds of Ease
To lye down when I please
In the Land of Virginny, O
Upon a Bed of Straw
I lay down full of Woe
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

Then the Spider she
Daily waits on me
In the Land of Virginny, O
Round about my Bed
She spins her tender web
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

So soon as it is day
To work I must away
In the Land of Virginny, O
Then my Dame she knocks
With her Tinder-box
When that I AM weary
weary, weary, weary, O

I have play'd my part
Both at Plow and at Cart
In the Land of Virginny, O
Billats from the Wood
Upon my back they load
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

Instead of drinking Beer
I drink the Water clear
In the Land of Virginny, O
Which makes me pale and wan
Do all that e'r I can
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

If my Dame says, Go
I dare not say no
In the Land of Virginny, O
The Water from the Spring
Upon my head I bring
When that I am weary
weary, weary, weary, O

When the Mill doth stand
I'm ready at command
In the Land of Virginny, O
The Morter for to make
Which made my heart to ake
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

When the Child doth cry
I must sing, By a by
In the Land of Virginny, O
No rest that I can have
Whilst I am here a Slave
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

A thousand Woes beside
That I do here abide
In the Land of Virginny, O
In misery I spend
My time that hath no end
When that I was weary
weary, weary, weary, O

Then let Maids beware
All by my ill-fare
In the Land of Virginny, O
Be sure thou stay at home
For if you do here come
You will all be weary
weary, weary, weary, O

But if it be my chance
Homewards to advance
From the Land of Virginny, O
If that I once more
Land on English Shore
I'll no more be weary
weary, weary, weary, O

Slaves from Africa started arriving in Virginia in 1619. But the slave traders weren't picky. They also kidnapped and sold poor kids from the streets of London without regard to their ethnicity. In Trappan'd Maiden, the singer expresses her desire to return to England.

Kate of Garnavilla

Edward "Pleasant Ned" Lysaght

Roko de Caiseal in Garnavilla, Tipperary Ireland

This song was not in the Irish Repository. I pieced it together while I was researching the songwriters. Some years after his death, someone wrote this about Lysaght :

"A man of more varied talents than Lysaght was impossible to meet. In his personal character he was a thorough Irishman: brave, brilliant, witty, eloquent and devil may care. He was a capital songwriter; his poems are full of that indescribably animal buoyancy which is a chief essence of Irish genius, He had a flow of exuberant spirits; his gaiety was like the laugh of matchless Mrs. Nisbett, an infallible cure for the blue devils, a potent destroyer of spleen His famous and universally popular Sprig of Shilleala: his "Kate of Garnavilla' and other still popular songs will always preserve his name… The river thus dearly remembered is the Ovsan or White River, which sports in great variety of character through a romantic glen where the poet loved to wander."

I tracked down the lyrics in a different old book and discovered it was sung to the air of "Roy's Wife" which I then tracked down as well. Combine lyrics and air, add some chords and you get the song I recorded, which may not be quite the way it was actually done back then.

"Beauty's train" is an ancient phrase, it refers to the procession of beauty from generation to generation. Philomel is a figure in Greek mythology who lost her voice. In Pleasant Ned's time it was the nickname for a nightingale (a bird with a musical call). A lay is a song. "Mien" refers to both appearance and the way someone carries themself. Gilding means painting something with gold or gold-colored paint. To paraphrase the song: "Kate is pure and sweet, more musical than a nightingale, and watching her walk is like watching a beautiful sailboat on gently rolling water. And if this songwriter has anything to say about it, she and her community will know only peace and joy.

I had a heck of a time trying to get the rhythm to feel right. Part of it wanted to be a quick jig, other parts felt more lyrical. Finally I decided to play the verse lyrically, then double time the chorus to get that lilting feeling. In another burst of musical hubris, (and assuming no one outside my own kitchen would ever hear it to complain), I shortened "Garnavilla" by cutting out the last syllable the second time it's used in the chorus. That final syllable just felt awkward to me. It's probably not historically accurate, but I think a guy like Ned, with his indescribably animal buoyancy, would approve. I also found myself singing "been to" rather than "been at." Obviously, I've got a wee bit of animal buoyancy myself.

Ned spoke Irish Gaelic as well as English. I found a reference to his Gaelic song "Garan na Bhile." That is apparently still sung. Imagine my surprise when an online translation tool said "Garan na Bhile" translates to "Garnavilla." So it's probably the same song.

The town of Garnavilla is still best known as the setting for this song, although (as of 2008) I couldn't find evidence that it's ever been recorded with Pleasant Ned's lyrics. As "Roy's Wife," the melody is still played as a fiddle tune. As of 2024 a guy in Scotland has recorded it with the "Roy's Wife" words and attributes the song to himself.

Lovely Kate of Garnavilla
Edward Lysaght

CHORUS:

G C
Have you been at Garnavilla?

G D
Have you seen at Garnaville

G Em Am Bm
Beauty's train trip o'er the plain

G Em
With the lovely Kate of Garnavilla

VERSES

G Em C D
Oh! She's pure as virgin snows

G Em C D
Ere they light on woodland hill-o

G Em Bm
Sweet as dew drop on wild rose

G C
ls Lovely Kate of Garnavilla

Philomel, I've listened oft
To thy lay, nigh weeping willow;
Oh the strains more sweet more soft
That flows from Kate of Garnavilla.

As a noble ship I've seen
Sailing o'er the swelling billow
So I've marked the graceful mien
Of lovely Kate of Garnavilla

If poet's prayers can banish cares
No cares shall come to Garnavilla
Joy's bright rays shall gild her days
And dove-like peace perch on her pillow

(Last CHORUS)
Charming maid of Garnavilla
Lovely maid of Gamaville
Beauty grace and virtue wait
On lovely Kate of Garnavilla.

Sweet Kathlane Machree

By James Hook (1746-1827) (three years younger than Thomas Jefferson)

Hook was an Englishman who wrote his first opera at age eight. His song "I wish you all good night" won a gold prize in 1776 from the Catch Society ("catches" were rounds, and very popular). He wrote more than 30 operas and 2,000 songs, taught music, was an early proponent of the piano as a real instrument, and wrote a book (*Guida di Musica)* about music. Much of his classical music is still performed today, but none of his songs as far as I can tell. I haven't found any record of anyone ever recording this sweet, funny, and poignant song.

"My true little heart"was a phrase usually used by or about women. This song twists that; it talks about the male singer's heart being the woman's captive pet, her slave.

There's a funny play on the word "constant." He can't understand why she would wander when he's so "constant" (that is, faithful). Why, in fact, he's so "constant" (consistent and predictable) that he loves every woman in the world. Why in the world would she leave a guy as constant as him?

The last verse hints at the politics of the day: union or no union? But it does so with such gentle humor the song probably offended no one.

James Hook from an engraving made in 1800

Sweet Kathlane Machree capo 3

C Am F C
Ye winds and ye waves bear my sorrows away
C Am F G
And ye echoes go babble for naught can I say
C Am F C
Oh bear to the ear of sweet Kathlane Machree
C Am G C
That my thoughts are on her though she thinks not of me.
Am Em
Oh why will you wander
Am Em
Like goose leaving gander
Dm G
Sweet Kathlane Machree, sweet Kathlane Machree
C Dm
Fly all the world over
C Am
You'll ne'er find a lover
Em Am C G
So constant as me, so constant as me
Am F
Sweet Kathlane Machree,
Am C
Sweet Kathlane Machree

My true little heart is your own, thy dear creature
I'm tender by habit and constant by nature
A lover so constant and true you'll ne'er find
For I love the whole sex that are pretty and kind

Then why will you wander. . . (etc.)

No union's the word, it is not keeping order
To leave your poor Dermot in grief and disorder
United to thee every hardship I'll brave
And when dead I will own myself still your fond slave

Then why will you wander…(etc.)

UPDATE re James Hook

I got curious about the Christmas song mentioned earlier in Lady Morgan's biography. Although many songs include the phrase "Christmas comes but once a year" I couldn't find any with her second line. Finally, in December 2024, I got lucky. Four lines from the song are quoted in a "mummers' play" published in 1670. That led me to other clues, including an article that mentioned my old friend James Hook, so I focused on him. Turns out he arranged the song and published his version in 1811, including three part harmony and a piano part. It was in a chapbook of songs for children (*The Second Volume of Christmas Box)* which Google digitized. I'll upload that to this page.

The song starts "Bounce buckram velvet's dear; Christmas comes but once a year." Buckram is a relatively coarse cloth, sort of like canvas. When soaked in starch, it can be formed into things like hats, and is still used to cover hardback books. My guess is that it was fairly cheap and probably used in clothing by the poor. If so, maybe buckram became slang for a poor person. According to the OED, the word "bounce" back in the late 1600s could refer to dancing, especially a woman dancing. But it also meant to knock loudly, like on a door. The girl in Lady Morgan's story was singing outside a house at Christmas while festivities were transpiring within. The tradition of going house to house singing carols ("wassailing") began in the 13th century, so that makes sense. Maybe poor kids ("buckram") knocked ("bounced") on doors at Christmas hoping for handouts, much like more modern kids do at Halloween. They needed some coins to dress for the season because velvet is dear (expensive). I can imagine them singing this short refrain as a sort of "trick or treat" expression. And perhaps their trick was to perform a little dance. All that's just speculation.

In the mummers' play of 1670, the words were a bit different. In the play, they sang "bouncers, bucklers, velvet's dear." Maybe the image of poor young girls dancing and bouncing about didn't feel proper for a Christmas play so they modified the song. Or maybe those were the original words and it evolved. In the 1670 version, the last line was "when it's gone it's never near." Not a great line, and kind of a downer for a Christmas song. Mr. Hook apparently agreed with me. When he published his arrangement in 1811, he omitted the last line altogether. If I decide to sing the song, I think I'll substitute my own last line: "May joy surround your journey here."

Lady Morgan's story always bothered me. The song was 100 years old by the time she was born. All the kids probably knew it, so why would the cold and unlucky little singer be holding a paper with the words? My bet is that young Sydney's devoted godfather, Pleasant Ned—who was an entertainer at heart just like Lady Morgan would become— loved to tell stories to the little girl on his knee, some scary, some sad, and some funny. I think Ned would have loved to give his god-daughter some expensive gift, but he couldn't afford it. So I think he gave her this story, a fantasy about the magic night of her birth, complete with a tragic figure she could identify with, the light of celebration spilling onto icy streets, Christmas cheer and drunk uncles, plus a haunting song. I can picture young Sydney's eyes growing wide with wonder every time he told it. Whether or not she "believed" it, I think she treasured the story for the rest of her life, perhaps more than any tale of angels and wise men.

I Was the Boy for Bewitching 'em

James Kenney (1780-1849)

Kenney, an Irishman, wrote 40 operas, most after the *Repository* was published. This was from the comic opera "Matrimony," one of his first three, published in 1805. It was sung by an aging ladies' man. One could probably track down the actual sheet music these days, but I haven't tried.

Capo 2 (first 4 lines are the chorus)

G Em Bm D
I was the boy for bewitching 'em,

G Em Am7 D
Whether good-humored or coy;

G Em Am7 G
All cried when I was beseeching them,

C Bm G
Do what you will with me joy.

Em A Bm F#m7
Daughters be cautious and steady,

C A D
Mothers would cry out for fear;

Em A Bm F#m7
Won't you take care now of Teddy,

C Bm Am7 D
Oh! he is the devil, my dear.

I was the boy… etc

From every quarter I gathered them,
Very few rivals had I
If I found any I feathered them,
That made them plaguily shy.
Pat Mooney my Sheilah once meeting,
I twigged him beginning his clack;
Says he, at my heart I've a beating,
Says I, then take one at your back.
I was the boy… etc.
Many a lass that would fly away,
When other wooers but spoke;
Once if I took her "I die" away,
There was an end of the joke.
Beauties, no matter how cruel,
Hundreds of lads though they crossed,
When I came nigh to them jewel,
Melted like mud in a frost
I was the boy… etc.

Epilog: Obsessions
December 30, 2024

Every month I have lunch with a dozen other geezers, most older than me by a decade or two. All are bright and accomplished. They've been getting together like this for 25 years so I was honored they invited me to join their group when I moved to Eugene, Oregon in late 2016.

We discuss issues of the day in a lively but polite manner. Sometimes I can't contribute much: for example, I was the only guy who didn't have a favorite Eleanor Roosevelt story.

Sometime one of us does a presentation on a topic that interest him but isn't common knowledge. One month a guy who wrote the book on standards for nuclear power plant control rooms talked about his current obsession: using calculus to tune hanging wind chimes. Another month a retired engineer and inventor talked about using a 3D printer. One month I brought in a guitar and demonstrated a few tricks finger-style guitarists use.

I've got another turn coming up this spring. I remembered the old Irish songs I worked on 15 years ago, thought it might be fun to play and explain a couple of them, but it felt daunting. It's been over a decade since I sang them and when my computer crashed years ago, I lost nearly all my notes. If I did it, I wanted to print up the lyrics to the two or three songs I intended to play, plus maybe a line or two of explanation. That two page handout evolved into this little booklet, just like trying to learn one old Irish song 15 years ago evolved into a curious passion.

On some level, I'm not a grown man; I'm an excitable little terrier. When I catch the scent of an interesting idea, I often chase it down every rabbit hole in my path until my masters ring the dinner bell.

Or, in the case of these songs, until a more powerful scent overcomes me and I wheel around to run off in a whole new direction.

Back in the days when old Irish songs occupied much of my attention, a friend and I scheduled a long-overdue lunch. She was a writer and editor I'd known for decades who always made me smile. A couple of weeks before our lunch she wrote to warn me that a mysterious disease was gradually paralyzing her and she was now confined to a wheel chair. She didn't know much about the disease—she thought no one did. I dropped the Irish songs and tried to learn what I could about her illness before our lunch. When I did, I discovered an expansive new meadow full of rabbit holes.

That new obsession evolved into my book *Revenge of the Pond Scum* (a name I chose because it made my friend laugh from her wheel chair). After the book was published, I became convinced she'd been inadvertently poisoned while she'd been living in the Caribbean by a huge exterminating company using a banned chemical. The company ultimately paid out nearly $100 million in claims, although I had nothing to do with that. Unfortunately, by then it was too late for my friend. The only dimly positive note was that a few scientists reached out to tell me that my book had been useful to them in their research.

An obsession is a singular focus on something. Samual Pepys was obsessed with his diary and with musical broadsides before many people collected them. Edison was obsessed with electricity, Your Uncle Chester is obsessed with colorful postage stamps from the 1920s. Some of the songwriters mentioned in these pages were clearly obsessed; you don't write 40 operas and 2,000 songs without a singleness of purpose.

Most obsessions are harmless. Some are valuable because they distract a person who needs a vacation from reality. Some are overtly positive. The intense extended focus of Einstein, Curie, Newton and Edison changed the world. Without obsessions, large things don't happen. We should probably teach kids how to become consumed by

glorious passions instead of teaching them how to become bored with the latest video game.

On the other hand, a few are obviously destructive. Focusing one's attention on gambling, drugs, or get-rich-quick-without-working schemes can destroy a life. Let's all avoid those.

Mine are brief, intense August thunderstorms. In the midst of the hail and soaking rain, they are as impossible for me to ignore as Thor's celestial hammer of lighting and thunder crashing around my head.

But soon the storm dissipates. The sun returns to clear blue skies, the birds recall their songs, children skip though the wet grass and shoppers scurry down shiny streets to the next sale.

Thanks for visiting my little storm. I hope the air around you feels bit clearer and the seedlings in your garden enjoyed being splashed.

Maybe you'll pick up your own guitar and reawaken some sleeping poet. If you do, I hope you take your guitar out into the backyard and sing their song to the trees and clouds.

These guys love to go outside once in a while.

Kenn Amdahl

Kenn Amdahl in 2024