Far in the Mountains Vols 1 & 2

MTCD 321-2

Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander

Cecil Sharp visited Meadows of Dan (socalled because it is the headwater of the Dan River) in Patrick County, on the 27th August, 1918, and noted a number of songs from Dad Blackard, the local 'banjer-man'. Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander's parents knew Dad Blackard and some of her ballads, inherited from her father, were similar to those sung by Blackard to Sharp. Eunice had worked in the mountains as a teacher in a one-room, logcabin school, and told me, with some embarrassment, how she had entertained the school children by singing to them, their favourite song apparently being The Preacher and the Bear, which was originally from the minstrel-stage. Some of Eunice's ballads were recorded in 1932 by Arthur Kyle Davis, on behalf of the Virginia Folklore Society.

22. Little Massie Grove (Child 81, Roud 52)

(Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, VA. 7.8.79)

Spoken: This song, in this area, was called Little Massie Grove

My high, my high, my high holiday, And the very first day in the year. Little Massie Grove to the church did go, The Gospel for to hear, to hear, The Gospel for to hear.

The first one in was a lady fair, And the next one was a girl. The next one was Lord Barnard's wife, The fairest of them all. *etc*.

Little Massie Grove was standing near, To him she cast an eye. Saying, 'You must go home with me today, All night in my arms to lie' *etc*.

'Oh no, no,' said little Massie Grove, 'I dare not for my life. For I see by the ring that you wear on your hand, That you are Lord Bamard's wife.' *etc.*

"Why should I hold those vows sacred, When he's so far away? He's gone on the top of King's Mountain, Prince Henry for to see." *etc.* So they went home, a-hugging and kissing, And then they fell asleep. And when they awoke on the next day's moming, Lord Barnard stood at their feet. *etc*.

Saying, 'How do you like my new coverlid? And how do you like my sheet? And how do you like my fair young wife Who lies in your arms and sleeps?' etc.

"Very well do I like your new coverlid. Very well do I like your sheet. Much better do I like your fair young wife Who lies in my arms and sleeps." *etc.*

'Rise up, rise up little Massie Grove, Put on your clothes as quick as you can. It shall never be said in this wide world, That I slew a naked man.' *etc.*

'Oh no, no,' said little Massie Grove. 'I dare not for my life. For around your waist you have two swords, And me not so much as a knife.' *etc.*

'If around my waist I have two swords, And you not so much as a knife. You may take the best of them, And then I'll take your life. *etc.*

'You may strike the first blow, Now strike it like a man. And I will strike the second blow, And I'll kill you if I can.' etc.

Little Massie struck the first blow, It wounded deep and sore. Lord Barnard struck the second blow, Little Massie couldn't fight no more. etc.

Lord Barnard took his fair young wife, And he set her on his knee. 'Now which one did you love the best? Little Massie Grove or me?' etc.

'Very well do I like your deep blue eyes. Very well do I like your chin. Much better did I like little Massie Grove, Than you and all of your kin.' *etc*

According to Professor Child, who lists fourteen versions of this ballad, there is a 1630 entry for the ballad in the records of the Stationers' Regsisters. He also mentions that the ballad can be found in several blackletter broadside collections from the middle of the 17th century. Most British versions have the *Mattie Groves/Musgrave* title, whilst a good number of North American ones use *Lord Daniel/Banner*.

I wonder if other listeners have noticed the similarities in this story with those in the legends of King Arthur. Arthur, like Lord Daniel, carried two swords (*Excalibur* and *Caliburnus*) and, again like Lord Daniel, discovered his wife Guinevere to be having an affair, in this case with Lancelot. Arthur did not, of course, kill Lancelot, but did, nevertheless, send other knights to kill him in what is now France. I am sure that this is coincidence... well, almost sure!

While still quite popular with American singers (Cas Wallin sings his version - titled Lord Daniel - on Volume 3, track 29, of this set, and Dillard Chandler, one of Cas Wallin's neighbours, sings his version of the ballad on Folkways LP 2309), this is one of the ballads that has all but disappeared from the British tradition - although the late Jeannie Robertson had not one, but two versions! (For one of these, see volume one of *Classic Ballads of Britain and Ireland* - Rounder 1775). According to Mark Wilson, many American singers who had heard the song in their youth - such as Buell Kazee and Almeda Riddle - refused to learn the piece because of its perceived 'smutty' content.

 Wild Hog in the Woods (Child 18, Roud 29) (Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, VA. 7.8.79)

Spoken: I'll sing There is a Wild Hog in the Woods as my father used to sing it.

There is a wild hog in the woods, Diddle-o-down, diddle-o-day. There is a wild hog in the woods, Diddle-o.

There is a wild hog in the woods, Kills a man and drinks his blood. Cam-o-kay, cut him down, kill him if you can.

I wish I could that wild hog see, And see if he'd take a fight with me.

There he comes through yonders marsh, He splits his way through oak and ash.

Bangum drew his wooden knife, To rob that wild hog of his life.

They fought for/four hours of the day, At length that wild hog stole away.

They followed that wild hog to his den, And there found the bones of a thousand men.

Wild Hog in the Woods is an Old World ballad which has now, to all intent and purpose, disappeared from the lips of European singers (although it was collected in the UK from six singers between 1850 and 1905), but which has nevertheless survived quite well in North America (there are 4 versions in Sharp's Appalachian collection). Professor Child, who called it Sir Lionel, linked it to the Medieval romance of Sir Eglamour of Artois, as well as to various Scandinavian ballads of the 16th century.

The Kimble Family - who can be heard singing on Volume 2 of this set - recorded an instrumental version of *Wild Hog in the Woods* (Marimac cassette 9036 and County LP 746).

24. The Miller's Will (Laws Q21, Roud 138)

(Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, Va. 4.9.80)

The miller called his oldest son, He said, 'My race is nearly run. If I should leave to you this mill Tell me what toll you intend to steal'

Chorus: Ranktum-day, ranktum do, Ranktum-a-diddle-um-a-daddy-o.

'Oh, father you know my name is Rex. Out of six bushels I'll take six pecks. Corn to steal, the mill to grind. I think a good living I'm sure to find.'

'The mill's not yours,' the old man said. 'The mill's not yours,' the old man said. 'The mill's not yours,' the old man said. 'You'll starve to death when I am dead.'

The miller called his second son, He said, 'My race is nearly run. If I should leave to you this mill Tell me what toll you intend to steal.'

'Oh, father you know my name is Ralph. Out of each bushel I'll take one half. Corn to steal, the mill to grind. I think a good living I'm sure to find.'

'The mill's not yours,' the old man said. 'The mill's not yours,' the old man said. 'The mill's not yours,' the old man said. 'You'll starve to death when I am dead.'

The miller called his youngest son. He said, 'My race is nearly run. If I should leave to you this mill, Tell me what toll you intend to steal.'

'Oh, father you know my name is Wright, And stealing com's my chief delight. I'll steal the com and swipe the sack, And cuss the little boys if they ever come back!'

'The mill is yours,' the old man cried. 'The mill is yours,' the old man cried. 'The mill is yours,' the old man cried. And closed his mean old eyes and died.

In European folklore cheating millers are as

old as Chaucer, if not older. Our present song appeared on 17th and 18th century blackletter broadsides, one of which is preserved in the Roxburghe Collection, and was subsequently reprinted by Victorian printers such as Catnach and Pitts. Cecil Sharp collected versions in Kentucky and North Carolina, though he seems to have missed it in Virginia. I thought that I had exhausted Eunice's repertoire when she telephoned my motel to say that she had remembered a few more songs, including this fine version of *The Miller's Will* which her father had originally sung to her when she was a child.

Jumbo Brightwell, from Suffolk, sings a good version on Topic TSCD 664 and Ola Belle Reed has a version on her *Land of Yahoe* CD (Rounder 8041). A 1929 recording by the Carson Brothers and Sprinkle (who may have been from Texas) has been reissued on the CD *Times Ain't Like They Used to Be - vol.1* (Yazoo CD 2028).

25. Over the River to Charlie (Roud 729) (Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, VA. 16.8.79)

Your weevly wheat's not fit to eat, Neither is your barley. All I want is the best of rye, To bake a cake for Charlie.

Chorus: Rise you up in the morning, All together early. You need not be at all afraid, Indeed I love you dearly.

Over the river to feed my sheep, Over the river to Charlie. Over the river to feed my sheep, And measure up my barley.

Usually known as a 'play-party' piece, it is thought by some that the song refers to the Jacobite 'Bonnie' Prince Charlie, whose troops were defeated by the English at the Battle of Culloden, near Inverness, in 1746. Jean Ritchie, the well-known Kentucky singer used to sing it, and a recording by Granville Bowlin, also from from Kentucky, can be heard on Smithsonian Folkways SF CD 40077. The Ozark fiddle-player Art Galbraith played a fiddle version in 6/8 time (Rounder 0157).

26. The Cruel Sister (Child 10, Roud 8) (Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, VA. 7.8.79) Bow-down.

There was an old woman who lived by the sea, Bow-so-bend-to-me.

There was an old woman who lived by the sea, Daughters she had, one, two, three.

I'll be true to my love if my love will be true to me.

There was a young sailor to see them came. Chose for his love the youngest one.

He gave to her a beaver hat. The oldest she thought hard of that.

He gave to her a ring of gold. That made the oldest one scold.

Sister, sister, come down to the shore, And watch the waves come rolling o'er.

As they were walking by the briny brim, The old one pushed the young one in.

'Sister, sister, give me your hand. I'll give to you my house and land.'

'I'll give you neither hand nor glove, All I want is your true love.'

If we combine Dan Tate's *The Wind and the Rain* (track 10) with Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander's *The Cruel Sister* we have the almost complete story of the ballad of *The Two Sisters*; one in which a jealous sister's treachery is revealed by the singing instrument made out of the victim's bones and hair. Some scholars have suggested a Scandinavian origin to the piece, which, at one time, was widespread throughout Europe. Eunice's tune, by the way, seems like a variant on that used for the song *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*.

Horton Barker, from Virginia, had a wonderful version (available on Rounder CD 1516), as did the Ozark singer Charles Ingenthron (Rounder CD 1108).

There was an old woman who lived by the sea,

Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander

 It's Hard to Love (Roud 824) (Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, VA. 22.8.80)

It's hard to love when you can't be loved, It's hard to love in vain. But the worst of love is a broken heart, Did you ever feel the pain? Did you ever feel the pain, dear one? Did you ever feel the pain? The worst of love is a broken heart, Did you ever feel the pain?

Look up, look down this lonesome road, Hang down your head and cry. The best of friends must part sometime, So why not you and I? Why not you and I dear one? Why not you and I? The best of friends must part sometime, So why not you and I?

Eunice learnt this from her mother. Like many Appalachian songs it is made up of 'floating' verses which can move easily from one song to another. A 1920s recording by Hayes Shepherd ('The Appalachian Vagabond') of Kentucky has been reissued on the album *The Music of Kentucky* volume 2 (Yazoo 2014). Also in the '20s, Gene Austin recorded a 'pop/folk' song which used the 'Look up/look down' lines and which became something of a standard.

 The Three Little Babes (Child 79, Roud 196) (Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, VA. 7.8.79)

Spoken: This song, my mother called The Three Little Babes. She learnt it from her mother. It's very old.

There lived a lady, lady gay, And children she had three. She sent them away to a northern school, To learn their gramarie.

They had not been gone but a very short time, Scarcely three weeks to the day. 'Til death, cold death, came stealing along And stole those babes away.

'There lives a King in Heaven,' she cried, 'A King of a high degree. Oh, send me back my three little babes. Oh, send them back to me.'

Christmas time was drawing nigh, The night being clear and cold. She saw her three little babes coming back, Coming back to their mother's home. She spread them a table of bread and wine, Just as neat as it could be. 'Come eat, come drink, my three little babes. Come eat, come drink with me.'

'We can't eat your bread,' said the oldest one, 'Neither can we drink your wine. For the Saviour Dear is standing near, To Him we must resign.'

She made them a bed in the far back-room, Put on it a neat white sheet. And over the top spread a golden spread, That they might better sleep.

'Take it off, take it off,' cried the oldest one, 'Take it off, take it off,' cried one. 'What's to become of this wicked world, Since sin has first begun?'

'Cold clay, cold clay, hangs over my head, Green grass grows over my feet. And every tear that you shed for me, But wets my winding sheet.'

Professor Child called this ancient piece The Wife of Usher's Well. It is still rather common in parts of America, although it seems to have faded from British tradition. The idea that excessive grief disturbs the dead is also to be found in the ballad of The Unquiet Grave (Child 78), and I am tempted to believe that, ultimately, the ballads are giving out sound advice on how to cope with bereavement - and this long before psychologists had been heard of! In other words, whilst excessive grief might harm the dead, it can certainly be as harmful. and probably more so, to those still living. David Atkinson, in a fascinating study History, Symbol, and Meaning in 'The Cruel Mother' (Folk Music Journal vol.6, no.3. 1992. pp.359 - 380) links The Wife of Usher's Well to a number of other ballads, including The Cruel Mother (Child 20), on the grounds that in these ballads the revenant children establish a connection between their respective mothers and Christ.

The final word in verse 1, gramarie, is often translated as meaning witchcraft. It comes from the Scottish word glamourie, meaning the ancient world of Glamoury, which comprises Celtic lore connected with the natural world of animals, plants, seasons, the weather etc. It can also imply the casting of spells, of charming the eye, and of making objects appear more beauitful than they really are (in the eighteenth century Alam Ramsay used the expression 'glamourit sicht') and it can mean witchcraft, but, in this case, probably refers more to sympathetic magic.

Eunice recorded a version of this, and other ballads, for A K Davis of the Virginia Folklore Society on 10th August, 1932.

Texas Gladden, a fine Appalachian singer can be heard singing versions on two Rounder albums (CD1702 & CD1800) and Buell Kazee's version is included on the Smithsonian Folkways Anthology of American Folk Music (SFW 40090).

 I Know a Pretty Little Girl (Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, VA. 22.8.80)

I know a pretty little girl, And I want her for my wife. She's neat, she's sweet, she's pretty little feet, And she's never kissed a boy in her life.

I ask her for a kiss. She says, 'You're such a beau. I'll kiss you now, but I'll vow and declare, I'll never do so anymore.'

'For I'm going to be a better girl, And never kiss again. For fear my momma might find it out, And cause her, oh, such pain.'

'You may walk, you may talk, You may hold my hand. But kissing is a crime. I never expect to kiss you again, Until the next time.'

I went to see her the other day, But I didn't go to stay. She leaned her head upon my breast, Saying, 'The old folks are far away.'

I kissed her a dozen times, Till someone came to the door. She kissed me then, And there declared she'd never do so anymore.

Repeat verse 3, Repeat verse 4

Rather like the Scottish song Some Say that Kissing's a Sin. I can find no trace of the song elsewhere. Eunice learnt it as a young girl from a neighbour's daughter, who may have picked it up from the 1935 version recorded as Kissing is a Crime by the Carter Family (ARC 6-05-53, which has been reissued by Bear Family in a boxed set of all the Carter Family recordings).

 Lord Bateman (Child 53, Roud 40) (Sung by Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander at her home in Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, VA. 7.8.79)

Spoken: I'll sing the ballad of Lord Bateman.

There was a rich man lived in England, And an only son had he. He never, never could be contented, Till he set sail upon the sea.

He sailed to the East and he sailed to the West, He sailed till he came to the Turkish shore; And there he was taken and put in prison, Where he could see nor hear no more.

That old Turk had an only daughter, And she was beautiful to see. 'What would you bestow upon any fair maiden, Who out of this prison would set you free?'

'Oh I have land and I have living, And I have a castle of high degree. All this I bestow upon any fair maiden, Who out of this prison would set me free.'

She took him in her father's parlour, She gave him of her father's wine. And every health that she drank unto him, Was, 'I wish'd Lord Bateman you'd be mine.'

'Seven long years I'll wait with patience, Seven long years and one day more. And then if you don't cross over to me, Some other woman I must adore.'

Seven long years had passed and gone, Seven long years and three weeks beside. Then Susan gathered up her silks and finery And thought she would cross the rolling tide.

She sailed till she came to Lord Bateman's castle, Then she made the valley ring. Saying, 'If this is Lord Bateman's castle, Surely there's a noble heart within.'

Downstairs ran the proud young porter, Open and bade the (?) come in. Saying, 'Yes, this is Lord Bateman's castle And today he's taken a new bride in.'

'Go ask him for three cuts of his bread, And a bottle of his wine so strong. And ask him if he does remember Who freed him from his dying thong?'

Upstairs ran the proud young porter, Down before Lord Bateman on his knee. Saying, 'At your gate is the prettiest creature That ever my two eyes did see.'

Then up started proud Lord Bateman, And a mighty oath swear he. 'I'll forfeit all my land and living, If Susan Pye has crossed the sea.'

Then upspake the new bride's father, Saying, 'Today I would rather she'd have died. To think that for some other woman, You would forsake your lawful bride.' 'It is true I've married your daughter, But she is none the worse of me. While Susan came with her horse and saddle, And paid my way across the briny sea.'

Professor Child prints fifteen versions of this ballad, all but one from Scotland. He also mentions a number of European examples from Spain to Scandinavia.

Cecil Sharp noted a tune for this ballad from Joe Blackett of Meadows of Dan, VA., on 28.8.1918. In 1916 he collected a single verse and tune from Mrs. Zipporah Rice (then a fifteen year-old girl) of Sodom Laurel, who I met in 1980. The ballad was printed in some early American songsters and, according to Mark Wilson, was heard on the radio fairly often. After collecting a very full set of *Lord Bateman* from a Sussex gypsy some years ago, I was intrigued to hear the singer's three daughters arguing among themselves as to whether it really was possible for a man to marry two women on the same day.

Roby Monroe Hicks, of Beech Mountain, NC., sings a version of Lord Bateman on the Appleseed CD Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still (APR CD 1035), and Ozark singer Ollie Gilbert sings it on Rounder CD 1707. For a version from New Jersey, see Everett Pitt's rendition on Marimac 9200. A Library of Congress recording by Pleaz Moberly should be reissued soon by Rounder Records. Campbell MacLean and Bella Higgins sing Scottish versions on The Muckle Sangs (Greentrax CD 9005) and Jeannie Robertson, Bella's half-sister, can be heard singing part of her version on volume one of Rounder's Classic Ballads of Britain and Ireland (CD 1775), which also includes part of Thomas Moran's version. English singers include Joseph Taylor, Ben Baxter, Tom Willett and both Wiggy and Denny Smith (Musical Traditions MTCD307).

Some people believe that the folksong *The Turkish Lady* is a variant of the ballad. For this song, see Rounder's Harry Cox CD *What Will Become of England?* (CD 1839).