

THE LAND O' THE LEAL

William Montgomerie

Lady Nairne's recension of this song was written in 1798, on the death of the eldest child of Mr. and Mrs. Archibald Campbell Colquhoun of Killermont. The song remained anonymous, till Lady Nairne's death in 1845, in R. A. Smith's *The Scottish Minstrel* (Edinburgh 1821-4).

In the *Universal Magazine* of 12th February, 1809 (p. 120) appeared a letter signed by R. H. [Robert Hone]:

. . . During a visit to a gentleman in the neighbourhood of the county where Burns first "warbled his woodnotes wild" I was anxious to obtain every information respecting that highly favoured but ill-fated son of the muses. Amongst others the following anecdote was related to me. Burns being in the company with some of his boon companions the conversation turned on the old song, to the tune of Hey tutti tait to which Bruce led on his troops at the battle of Bannockburn, the words of which are as follows:

"I'm wearin awa John, I'm wearin awa John,
I'm wearin awa to the Land of the Leal.
There's a needle in the wa John, keep it to your sel John,
I'm wearin awa to the Land of the Leal.
You'll eat and drink to me John, you'll eat and drink to me John
You'll eat and drink to me John, sugar sops and all."

Burns on a sudden sank into a deep musing, and taking a blank leaf from his pocket-book he wrote the following: which for pathos and simplicity will not yield to any of his productions:

I'm wearin awa John, like snaw wreaths when it's thaw John,
I'm wearin awa to the land of the Leal.
There's nae sorrowing there, there's neither cauld nor care John,
The day's aye fair John in the land o the Leal etc.

This seems to have been the first reference in print to the folk song which was the inspiration of Lady Nairne's song. Two correspondents in the same issue dismissed Mr. Hone's contribution, and that seems to have been the last heard of the matter during the 19th century. But the song was still alive in oral tradition.

Gavin Greig (1856-1914) recorded the most complete version of the folk song from Mrs. Jaffray, Mintlaw, in 1910 (MS. LII. p. 1 [Ab. 762]):

BE KIN' TAE YER NAINSEL, JOHN



There's three speens i' the creel, John, There's



three speens i' the creel, John, Gie the tane to the lassie an' the



tither to the laddie an' the cuttie tae yer nainsel, John.



Sae be kin' tae yer nainsel, John, Sae be kin' tae yer nainsel,



John. We're a- wear-in' a- wa tae the lan's o' the leal, Sae be



kin' tae yer nainsel, John.

There's three speens i' the creel, John,
 There's three speens i' the creel, John,
 Gie the tane tae the lassie, an' the tither tae the laddie,
 An' the cuttie tae yer nainsel', John.
 Sae be kin' tae yer nainsel', John,
 Sae be kin' tae yer nainsel', John,
 We're a' wearin' awa tae the lan's o' the leal
 Sae be kin' tae yer nainsel', John.

There's three kye in the byre, John,
 There's three kye in the byre, John,
 Gie the tane tae the lassie, an' the tither tae the laddie,
 An' the quakie tae yer nainsel', John,
 Sae be kin', etc.

There's three carts and three ploughs, John,
 There's three carts and three ploughs, John,
 Gie the tane tae the lassie, and the tither tae the laddie,
 And the tither tae yer nainsel', John.
 Sae be kin', etc.

There's thirty acres o' ploo'd land, John,
 There's thirty acres o' ploo'd land, John,
 Gie the corn tae the lassie, and the bere tae the laddie,
 And the tatties tae yer nainsel', John.
 Sae be kin', etc.

Ye'll mak' a drink tae me, John,
 Ye'll mak a drink tae me, John,
 Wi' a wee bittie butter and a little pucklie sucer,
 An' a wee drap o' the dram, John.
 Sae be kin', etc.

It's I'm in gaun tae leave ye, John,
 It's I'm in gaun tae leave ye, John,
 Sae be kin' tae the lassie, and be kin' tae the laddie,
 An' be kin' tae yer nainsel', John.
 Sae be kin', etc.

Noo my wife she's deid and gone,
 Noo my wife she's deid and gone,
 But I maun hae anither, I've plenty for tae keep her,
 An' be kin' tae my nainsel', John
 Sae be kin' tae yer nainsel', John
 Sae be kin' tae yer nainsel', John
 We're a wearin' awa tae the lan's o' the leal,
 An' be kin' tae yer nainsel', John.

James Brebner, Auchechoch, sang a shorter song (MS. L. p. 31 [Ab. 760]) noted down by Gavin Greig:



There is three nowte in the byre, John, There is three nowte in the



byre, John; There is ane for the laddie and ane for the lassie, Sae be



kin' to yer nainsel John. Sae be kin' to yer nainsel



John, Sae be kin' to yer nainsel', John, For I'm wearin' awa' to the



land o' the leal, Sae be kin' to yer nainsel', John.

There is three nowte in the byre, John,
There is three nowte in the byre, John,
There is ane for the laddie, and anither for the lassie,
And the stirkie for yer nainsel John.

Sae be kin' to yer nainsel, John,
Sae be kin' to yer nainsel, John,
For I'm wearin' awa to the land o' the leal,
Sae be kin' to yer nainsel, John.

There is three horse in the stable, John, etc
There is ane for the laddie, and anither for the lassie,
And the stygie for yer nainsel, John,
Sae be kin' to yer nainsel, John, etc.

There is three sheep in the faul', John, etc
There is ane for the laddie, and anither for the lassie,
And the lambie for yer nainsel, John,
Sae be kin' to yer nainsel, John, etc.

Miss Bell Robertson (1841-1922) who could not sing, but contributed to Gavin Greig the texts of 383 ballads and folk songs, got her traditional material through her mother, Jean Gall, from Bell's grandmother, Isobel Stephen, a folk singer. The text Bell Robertson sent to Gavin Greig (F.S. N-E CXVII. p. 2) is "older than Lady Nairne's day" (F.S. N-E CXVI. p. 3):

Fy, gar heat a sup drink, John,
Fy, gar heat a sup drink, John,
Heat it wi' butter and meal,
For I'm wearin' awa', etc.

Gie Jock the coo, John,
Gie Jock the quey, John,
Keep the calf to yersel',
For I'm wearin' awa', etc.

Gie Jean the yowe, John,
Gie Jean the hog, John,
Keep the lammie to yersel', etc.
For I'm wearin' awa' etc.

Gie the lad the cup, John,
Gie the lass the plate,
Keep the riven dishie to yersel', etc.
Aye be kin' to yer nainsel, John,
For I'm wearin' awa', etc.

Bell Robertson told Gavin Greig that her mother knew Lady Nairne's song, or part of it, but that when she wished to put a child to sleep she always sang the other. The tunes were the same and so was the refrain. She began:

I'm wearin' awa', John,
Like snaw fin' its' thaw, John,
I'm wearin' awa to the land o' the leal,
Fy gar heat a sup drink, John,
Heat it wi' butter and meal, etc.

Bell Robertson never heard her mother say where she got her version of the song, but felt sure her aunt had got hers from her mother who would have been a girl about 1780.

Mrs. Strachan, Cuminestown, gave Gavin Greig the following extra verses:

There is three spunes in the creel, John,
There is three spunes in the creel;
There is ane for the laddie, and anither for the lassie,
And the auld kail cutty for yer nainsel, John;
Sae be kin', etc.

There's three pounds in the kist, John,
There's three pounds in the kist,
There's ane for the laddie, and anither for the lassie,
And all the owerplus to yer nainsel, John;
Sae be kin', etc.

(MS. L. p. 34 [Ab. 760])

A correspondent who signed herself "A Kinninmonth Lassie" sent Gavin Greig one further stanza:

There's hennies in the hen house, John,
Gie the hennies to the lassies,
And the deukies to the laddies,
And keep the cockies to yer nainsel, John.

(MS. XLIX. p. 111 [Ab. 759]).

Gavin Greig's collaborator, the Rev. James Bruce Duncan (1848-1917), U.F. Minister at Lynturk, in the Strathdon district of Aberdeenshire, collected 550 versions of texts and 800 records of tunes. His executor allowed me to examine Mr. Duncan's MSS, and to make extracts from them. From the

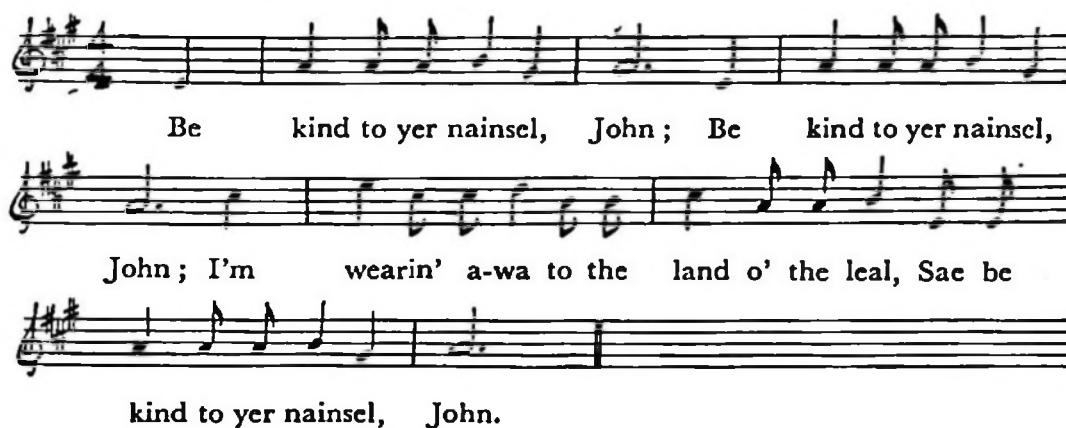
MS. *Folk Song Airs*, with his permission, I print below three versions of this tune.

The first version (p. 55) noted from the singing of Mrs. G., learnt from her step-grandmother, Mrs. Duncan, Craighculter, was written down in 1905:

(For) I am wearin' awa, John, I am wearin' - a
 wa, John; I'm wearin' awa to the land o' the leal, So be
 kin' to your nain sel, John, O.

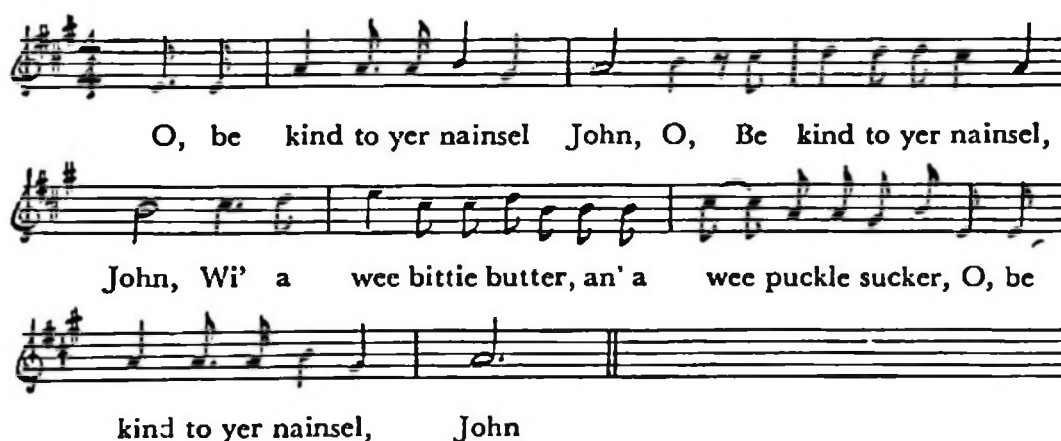
Mrs. G. states that she heard the song from her step grandmother nearly 60 years ago, and that it was sung to her father as a child by his stepmother's mother—say about 1822, when she was already advanced in years, being known as "Aul' Jean Strachan". Most probably she had learnt the song long before: old people usually sang only songs learnt in youth. That would take the song back to the end of the 18th century. Now Lady Nairne's "The Land o' the Leal" goes back to 1798, and contains these coincidences with this: (1) the use of the expression "The land o' the leal" for heaven; (2) the combination of this with the words "I am wearin awa" and (3) the address to the husband as "John" and (4) the use of all these in an address from a dying wife to her husband. Even the first coincidence could hardly be accidental, and the union of the four accidentally is impossible. Then the dates include the supposition of this folk-song borrowing from Lady Nairne's words that were otherwise probable; and the alternative is that she took the expressions above from the popular song, being struck with their beauty, and gave them a more serious setting. That was in harmony with her ordinary practice. It is true that she does not mention this when stating the origin of the song ("I wrote it merely because I like the air so much"); but that was in old age, and she might have forgotten or thought the circumstances unimportant, as the practice was so common. But this discovery of the suggestion of Lady Nairne's song, and the origin of its most striking expression, is exceedingly interesting though no editor has known of it.

Mr. Duncan's Second Tune, First Version (No. 80A, p. 55), learnt by Mrs. Petrie from her mother, was noted in 1906:



Be kind to yer nainsel, John; Be kind to yer nainsel,
John; I'm wearin' a-wa to the land o' the leal, Sae be
kind to yer nainsel, John.

The Second Tune, Second Version (No. 80B, p. 55) from Mr. Anderson, was noted by Miss Jessie H. McDonald in 1905:



O, be kind to yer nainsel John, O, Be kind to yer nainsel,
John, Wi' a wee bittie butter, an' a wee puckle sucker, O, be
kind to yer nainsel, John

In Robert Hone's letter in the *Universal Magazine*, 1809, the song is called "the old song, to the tune of Hey tutti tait", and when Lady Nairne stated in old age that she wrote it "because I liked the air so much" she was not referring to an air that came to her merely as an air; it would have words, and it is natural that the old words to the air should have echoes in her version. Robert Burns is full of such echoes, and for the same reason. Miss Bell Robertson, whose opinion in such matters carries weight informed Gavin Greig that her version was "older than Lady Nairne's day".

On the evidence it can be stated that it is more probable that Lady Nairne based her version on the folk song, than that the folk song is a parody of Lady Nairne's version.

NOTE

MSS. XLIX, L, and LII refer to the relevant numbers of the collection of Gavin Greig's manuscripts, now in the library of King's College, Aberdeen, where they are catalogued as Nos. 759, 760, and 762, respectively.

F.S. N-E is Gavin Greig's "Folk Song of the North-East". Two series 1907-11. CXVI and CXVII are two sections of this publication which is not paginated conventionally.

I record here my thanks to Mr. Duncan's Trustee who, at great personal inconvenience, allowed me to examine Mr. Duncan's MSS at my leisure for several days on more than one occasion; and to the staff of King's College Library, Aberdeen.