

RATTLIN ROARIN WILLIE — THE SONGS — II

[WEW = Sir Walter Elliot of Wolfelee; WEL = W. Elliott Lockhart]

WEW, mentioning the nursery rhyme, writes “This having been quoted by a correspondent to “Notes and Queries” in September 1858, to a lady at Arbroath, well versed in the ballad literature of the district in which she was born, it recalled to her memory the following somewhat quaint version”: –

O Willie you'll sell youre fiddle,
And buy some other thing;
O Willie you'll sell youre fiddle,
And buy some cradle or string;
If I would sell my fiddle,
The folk wad think I war mad;
For mony a canty nicht,
My fiddle and I hae had.

CHORUS

O rattlin', roarin' Willie,
Yer ae fu' welcome to me;
O rattlin', roarin' Willie,
Yer ae fu' welcome to me,
Yer ae fu' welcome to me,
For a' the ill they've said;
For mony a canty nicht
My Willie and I hae had.

Foul fa their kirks, and their sessions,
They're ae sae fond o' mischief;
They'll ca' me into their sessions,
They'll ca' me warse than a thief.
They'll ca' me warse than a thief,
And they'll make me curse and ban,
They'll brag me ae with their laws,
But d-I brake my legs gin I'll gang.

WEW does not name the “lady at Arbroath”, but a footnote by WEL (who names his own informants but not their sources) says that an “almost identical version” was collected in Bellingham, Northumberland, and a “somewhat similar version was current in the East Riding of Yorkshire about the time of Her Majesty's accession in 1837.”

A longer version mixes ballad elements — including a whole verse which, intriguingly, is not in the Scott or Cunningham versions — with the “sell your fiddle” motif, as well as a “rise and let me in” motif. It comes to WEW courtesy of Prof. Francis Child, the great ballad collector, and was “found in a MS. Collection in the Marchmont Library without date. This collection purports to have been gathered in the Counties of Berwick, Selkirk, Roxburgh, and Peebles.” (WEW) A footnote gives the source as “Sir Hugh Hume Campbell's MSS.”

O rattling, roaring Willie,
Where hae ye been sae late?
I have been at my ain kind Peggy,
Sae weel as I ken the gate.
Sae weel as I ken the gate,
And far better the gin,
An' the night were ever so dark
She'd rise and let me in.

Willie wadna lie in the kitchen,
Willie wadna lie in the ha';
But he would lie in the parlour,
Amang the fair maids a'.

O Willie, come sell yeer fiddle,
And go to the belian [?beltan?] fair:
I wadna sell my fiddle
For nae kin kind o' ware.
If I was to sell my fiddle
The folk wad think I was gaen mad,
For mony a canty day
My fiddle and I hae had.

O Willie has gaen to Jedburgh,
And he's for the rood to-day,
And Stobs and auld Falnath
They followed him a' the way.
They followed him a' the way,
They followed him up and down;
In the links of Ousenam water
They found him sleeping sound.

Stobs lighted off his horse,
And never a word he spoke,
Till he tied young Willie's hands
Fu' fast behind his back.
Fu' fast behind his back,
And down below his knee,
For drunk has been dainty Willie,
For sweet milk's gart him die.

The lasses o' Ousenam water,
Are rugging and tearing their hair,
And a' for the love o' Willie,
Because he was sae fair.
Because he was sae fair,
And pleasant for to see,
And drink will be dear to Willie,
For sweet milk will gar him die.

O Willie pu'd out his rapier,
It was o' the steel sae clear,
And he has encountered sweet milk

Without e'en dread or fear.
Without e'en dread or fear,
And fought most manfulie;
But Willie has stabbed sweet milk,
And the wound has gart him die.

A "fragment received from Aberdeenshire" [WEW] is supplied from Robert Chambers' *Songs of Scotland prior to Burns*, 1862, p. 138, in which Chambers gives his source: "Communicated to the editor in 1831 by Mr James Hendry, Keith, Aberdeenshire." It is a single "rise and let me in" verse:

Rattlin', roarin' Willie,
Where have ye been sae late?
I've been to see my Peggy
Sae weel as I ken the gate!
Sae weel as I ken the gate,
And the tirlin' o' the pin;
And gang I late or ear',
She'll rise and let me in!

The longest known song text comes from Peter Buchan's manuscript collection. Although Buchan had published *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the north of Scotland* in two volumes (Peterhead, 1828) this was not included; WEW tracked it down to Buchan's papers in the British Museum (Additional MSS., 29408).

The song Buchan collected expands many of the elements of the shorter ones — Willie intriguingly has a chanter as well as a fiddle — but has no trace of the dramatic events of the ballads. The mentions of "Clanallan" and "guid companie" recall — or could they have anticipated? — Burns' stanza. The "cradle string" here and the "cradle or string" in the Arbroath version are plausibly explained by Poppy Holden as "an aid to multitasking; you pull the string to rock a cradle while you work at a distance". She draws attention to the line "And she can pull a cradle string" in a Forfarshire version of the children's song "Water Wallflower".

<http://sniff.numachi.com/pages/tiWALLFLW2.html>

My rantin' roarin' Willie,
Where hae ye been sae late?
I hae been at my Meggie,
Sae weel's I kent the gate.
Sae weel's I kent the gate,
And far better kent the gin,
Sleep ye or wake ye, Meggie,
Ye'll open and lat me in.

My rantin' roarin' Willie,
Ye're welcome aye to me,
My rantin' roarin' Willie,
Ye're welcome aye to me;

For a' that's dane an' said,
For a' that's said or dane,
My rantin' roarin' Willie,
I'll rise and lat ye in.

As I cam in by Clanallan,
The night was wondrous late,
A cloud o' mist came down,
I almost tint the gate.
First I tint my stockings,
An' syne I tint my shoon;
But yet I'm arrived at Meggie
When a' these hours are dane.

Now ye maun sell your fiddle
To buy a wedding ring,
An' ye maun sell your chanter
To buy a cradle string.
If I would sell my fiddle
Fouk wou'd say I'm mad,
Sae mony a canty night
Hae me an' my fiddle had.

My rantin' roarin' Willie!
Were I but fit to rise,
But an' ye kent my case
It wou'd put me in surprise.
A spring well in the dean, Willie,
Dear has been to me;
I've fa'n and broken my buckets,
And cutted my knee in three.

Win up, win up, my Meggie,
And lie nae langer in pine,
For I wou'd sell my fiddle,
To buy you a pint o' wine.
To buy you a pint o' wine,
I would cheer your heart for aye,
For O! my bonnie Meggie,
There's nane I like, like thee.

Gin ye wou'd sell your fiddle,
Fouk wou'd say ye're mad,
Sae mony a merry night
You an' your fiddle hae had;
You an' your fiddle hae had,
Amang guid companie,
Amuse you the best way ye can
And come nae mair to me.

Awa wi' your kirks an' sessions,
Ye're aye right fond o' mischief;
You threaten me wi' the creepie,
And ca's me ware than a thief.

And ca's me ware than a thief,
Provokes me to curse an' ban,
And threatens me wi' the creepie,
But deil sit on it gin ye gang.

O my bonnie Meggie,
Be constant and be kind,
What ware wou'd ye be, Meggie,
To lay your lips to mine:
To lay your lips to mine,
'Twill neither cure nor kill,
For kissing is but a touch,
And a touch will do nae ill.

Get ye gane noo, Willie,
Vex me nae mair wi' din;
For it is not my intention
This night to lat you in.
For whether it cure or kill,
Ye sanna be kiss'd by me;
Sae gang the road ye came,
For ever ye lat me be.

O farewell then, my Meggie,
Farewell then and adieu;
It's been a misspent time
That I hae spent wi' you.
I hae widden the water,
I hae sail'd the sea;
And I've deene mair for Meggie
Nor ere she'll do for me.

Farewell then my Meggie,
Farewell for a' time;
I hope the next time that we meet,
I hope you'll be mair kind.
Now I'll take up myself
Among jovial companie,
And live a bachelor's life,
And come nae mair to thee.

Wi' three merry good fellows
Sae merrily I'll be set:
And ower a bowl of punch
Sae merrily we'se be met:
Sae merrily we'se be met,
And merry shall we be,
Then every lad will hae his glass,
And a lass upon his knee.

There is much variety but also much in common between the various song texts. Three ingredients, the "sell your fiddle" motif, the "rise and let me in" motif, and the historical narrative, occur singly and in so many combinations that any idea of fixed subject matter, let alone a definitive version, evaporates, although the "sell your fiddle" motif crops up so

often, even surviving as a nursery rhyme, that it may represent the gist of the original song.

The source locations of the songs quoted are:

Aberdeenshire (Keith, Peterhead)

Angus (Arbroath)

Ayrshire (Robert Burns)

Borders (Sir Walter Scott; “the Counties of Berwick, Selkirk, Roxburgh, and Peebles”)

Dumfriesshire (Allan Cunningham)

Northumberland (Bellingham)

Yorkshire (East Riding)

This may tell us more about where songs were collected or composed than where they were sung, but it is easy to see how the Borders could be the radiating source of this song.