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THE BALLAD OF CAPTAIN KIDD

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THE NEW YORK sea captain and pirate, William Kidd, was hanged at Execution Dock, London, at low tide on the afternoon of May 23, 1701. The proceedings against him had been long and notorious. The actions for which he was tried had been still more notorious—one involving murder and five, piracy. His career had been brief, brilliant in the beginning and catastrophic at the end. The general excitement at the time of his execution and all during his imprisonment in London had been at fever pitch. Gossip went to work, and the wildest tales of Kidd’s wickedness and wealth were believed. Kidd was exhibited, as was the custom, for a fee while he was still in prison. Upon his death, numerous accounts both factual and fictitious appeared. There were at least five accounts of the trial proceedings. The articles of agreement between Captain Kidd and his Whig backers were reprinted in several forms. At least five broadsides appeared at the time of execution. Two were prepared by Paul Lorrain, the Newgate chaplain, featuring the behavior upon the scaffold of Kidd and of the seven other men executed with him. The chaplain naturally stressed the corruptness of Kidd, his defiant stubbornness, his drunken condition, and his spectacular second hanging necessitated by the breaking of the rope the first time. The three other broadsides were Captain Kid’s Farewel to the Seas, a ballad; an Elegy on the Death of Capt. William Kidd in rough couplets; and a Dialogue Between the Ghost of Captain Kidd and the Napper in the Strand. Of all these, the ballad only was destined to live on. The “accounts” became matters of record and biography. The ballad flourished. It was so popular in the Colonies where Kidd had established his home, and it was so changed through myriad renditions that it became a definite part of American balladry and folklore. It thus became one of America’s first ballads, as the larger legend of his exploits may be considered our first folk legend.

Captain Kidd had gone out from New York in 1696 a privateer of high degree, bearing King William’s own commission to take Captain Tew and certain other Madagascar pirates who were
ruining the East Indian trade. Kidd’s reputation had been bright. He had been respected and trusted both in England and the Colonies. He had been publicly rewarded for maritime services to the Crown. He had been given a new ship, the *Adventure Galley*, for his last great enterprise; and, when he left England at least, he had had a hand-picked crew. The greatest men in the English government were his co-adventurers. Yet instead of taking the Madagascar pirates, he had at first left them pretty much alone. Then, after most of his crew had gone over to the pirates, he had fraternized over the cup with them and exchanged gifts. His crew had, furthermore, mutinied at sea and had so itched to go freebooting for themselves that not even the mortal disciplining of an impudent gunner had deterred them. Thus, either forced by his men or having given in to the great temptations surrounding him, Captain Kidd had taken several vessels and attempted to take more. The *Quida Merchant*, a great Moorish ship sailing under a French commission, had brought him close to £100,000 of booty. Two years had passed. His ship, now a rotting hulk, he had abandoned at Madagascar and had rounded the Cape in his big prize ship headed for home. At the West Indies he had found himself a proclaimed, hunted pirate. Craftily beaching the loaded ship in a secret cove on the shore of Hispaniola, he had then come north in a sloop, touching at Delaware Bay and Gardiner’s Island not without alarms and general consternation among honest folk. Lured into Boston by a specious promise, he had been arrested and shipped back to England in chains. To the public of England he was a notorious apostate, a good man gone very wrong and, to the relief of all, finally apprehended.

It was only natural that ballads should be written about him. *Captain Kid’s Farewel to the Seas* was done in the usual eighteenth-century manner for sale and distribution among the crowds gathered to witness the hanging of so famous a man. We know how the criminal went to execution in the London of 1701, how he traveled across the city from Newgate, Marshalsea, or the Fleet to Tyburn or Execution Dock by a prescribed route, how the crowd made holiday, howling, laughing, quarreling, swilling beer and gin, hurling impudent and ribald jests, picking pockets, hawking wares, elbowing for the wall, singing ballads, reading broadsides, eluding or engaging strolling whores—one continual fair all the
way. The hangman swore at delays. The condemned was more often than not drunk or drinking hard, uttering vilification and blasphemy that might turn, however, to moral speech and dying confession upon the scaffold. The crowd, exhorted by the victim himself to take the road to heaven and shun the road to hell, might buy his life story or a ballad of him. If he were a spectacular favorite like the prison-breaker Jack Sheppard, they threw nosegays and cheered. If he were otherwise, like the King of the underworld Jonathan Wild, they jeered, pelted, and spat at him. We do not know their actions or emotions that afternoon, whether they cheered or pelted the doomed pirate Captain as he stood with the noose about his neck riding backwards in the cart. It is safe to guess that by the thousand they hooted and jeered. Kidd had done nothing to endear himself to the London mob. He went to a public death conceived as the just desert of a public enemy, “a most notorious pirate” among many in the mass executions then going on. Or, as wrote the unknown author of the Elegy on the Death of Capt. William Kidd that appeared the day after the execution,

The Devil (ready for him) Goal’d [sic] and Hang’d him,
   To no one’s Sorrow, rather Joy display;
   Who weeps to see a Conquer’d Beast of Prey?¹

A much gayer little piece of moral warning was the Dialogue between the Ghost of Capt. Kidd, and the Napper in the Strand. It went as follows:

Kid: From the Boat of old Charon in the Stygian Ferry,
   From my Ship I am come again to my Wherry,
   And from thence, my old Friend, with you to be merry;
   Which nobody can deny.

Nap: Stand off, thou grand Pyrate, I have nothing to do
   With such plund’ring Rogues and Robbers as you,
   Had I been of your Jury, I had hang’d you too;
   Which, &c.

Kid: How now Brother Napper, why in such a Fury?
   It could not have been worse, had you been of my Jury?
   But I left you in better Temper I assure you:
   Which, &c.

¹ The Elegy is to be found in the library of Harvard University.
The Ballad of Captain Kidd

Nap: But you and the Devill still ow'd me a Shame,
And now with a Vengeance at last it came,
And it has quite ruin'd my honest good Name;
Which, &c.

Kid: But Brother, you know that was pretty well gone;
For tho the Seeds of your Honesty often were sown,
I never yet heard that any were grown:
Which, &c.

Nap: Thou Son of a Boatswain, begot in a Skuller,
Thou Dunce of a Pyrate, my Head is not duller;
Tho you got your Wealth faster, my Pocket is fuller,
Which, &c.

Kid: But be not so haughty and angry, good Brother,
If we two Kidnappers understand one another,
There will be no occasion for all this pother:
Which, &c.

Nap: A Kinsman, but no Cater-Cousin I had;
And of such you know I oft ship'd you a Lad,
But this last and the Law have almost made me mad:
Which, &c.

Kid: I hope you took warning by my woful Condition,
For that good Advice I gave with Contrition,
To take care how you acted beyond your Commission;
Which, &c.

Nap: A Commission they told me I had of the Peace,
But not to send People away to the Seas,
Which makes me almost melt in my Grease:
Which, &c.

Kid: It is time I confess, now you're taken thus napping,
To take care lest you coach it with me to Wapping,
Since you see me trapan'd, some are as good at trapping;
Which, &c.

Nap: 'Tis true, Brother Kid, that I live in the Strand,
Where the Low-water Mark is the nearer at hand,
You are Pyrate at Sea, as I Pyrate at Land;
Which nobody can deny.²

²The Dialogue first appeared in 1702. It was reprinted under the title of A Dialogue between the Ghost of Capt. Kidd, and a Kid-napper in Poems on State Affairs (London, 1704), from which (III, 381-383) I have transcribed it.
As for Captain Kid's Farewel to the Seas, it was a good job of ballad making and was destined to go far and live long. It was the first and truest fiction of Kidd. As a reporter in verse, the anonymous author stuck to facts better than anyone who followed him. Indeed, it might be safely said, he was the only one to cling reasonably to truth. The ships he named were the correct ones, excepting only one. He properly associated Kidd with Captain Culliford, a Madagascar "captain" with whom Kidd drank and fraternized, and who was even brought into the ballad in the first person. All was, of course, heightened and moralized according to the practices of the journalism of the day. The ballad was blessed with a familiar tune. It almost immediately came to the Colonies, where it was so popular for a hundred years that the rude verse of its twenty-two five-line stanzas was worn down to easier smoothness and its narrative naively reworked. One was, therefore, the original English version. The other was the later American one which, for all its errors (Kidd's first name had been changed to "Robert"), captured the fancy of the folk everywhere and is still sung.

The English ballad, now to be found only in the library of the Duke of Crawford, goes as follows:

Captain Kid's Farewel to the Seas, or, the Famous Pirate's Lament, 1701.
To the tune of Coming down

My name is Captain Kid, who has sail'd, [who has sail'd],
My name is Captain Kid, who has sail'd;
    My name is Captain Kid
What the laws did still forbid
Unluckily I did while I sail'd, [while I sail'd, etc].

Upon the ocean wide, when I sail'd, [when I sail'd],
Upon the ocean wide, when I sail'd,
    Upon the ocean wide
    I robbed on every side,
With the most ambitious pride, when I sail'd.

My faults I will display while I sail'd, [while I sail'd],
My faults I will display while I sail'd,
    My faults I will display,
Committed day by day
[A line lost.].
Many long leagues from shore when I sail'd, [when I sail'd],
Many long leagues from shore when I sail'd,
    Many long leagues from shore
    I murdered William Moore,
And laid him in his gore, when I sail'd.

Because a word he spoke when I sail'd, [when I sail'd],
Because a word he spoke when I sail'd,
    Because a work he spoke,
    I with a bucket broke
His scull at one sad stroke, when I sail'd.

I struck with a good will when I sail'd, [when I sail'd],
I struck with a good will when I sail'd,
    I struck with a good will,
    And did a gunner kill
As being cruel still when I sail'd.

A Quida merchant then while I sail'd, [while I sail'd],
A Quida merchant then while I sail'd,
    A Quida merchant then
    I robbed of hundreds ten,
Assisted by my men, while I sail'd.

A banker's ship of France, while I sail'd, [while I sail'd],
A banker's ship of France, while I sail'd,
    A banker's ship of France
    Before us did advance:
I seized her by chance, while I sailed.

Full fourteen ships I see when I sailed, [when I sailed],
Full fourteen ships I see when I sailed,
    Full fourteen ships I see
    Merchants of high degree;
They were too hard for me when I sailed.

We steered from sound to sound while we sailed, [while we sailed],
We steered from sound to sound while we sailed,
    We steered from sound to sound,
    A Moorish ship we found;
Her men we stripped and bound while we sailed.

Upon the ocean seas while we sailed, [while we sailed],
Upon the ocean seas while we sailed,
    Upon the ocean seas
    A warlike Portuguese
In sport did us displease, while we sailed.
At famous Malabar when we sailed, [when we sailed],  
At famous Malabar when we sailed,  
    At famous Malabar  
    We went ashore, each tar,  
And robbed the natives there, when we sailed.  
Then after this we chased, while we sailed, [while we sailed],  
Then after this we chased, while we sailed,  
    Then after this we chased  
    A rich Armenian, graced  
With wealth, which we embraced, while we sailed.  
Many Moorish ships we took while we sailed, [while we sailed],  
Many Moorish ships we took while we sailed,  
    Many Moorish ships we took;  
    We did still for plunder look;  
All conscience we forsook while we sailed.  
I, Captain Culliford, while I sailed, [while I sailed],  
I, Captain Culliford, while I sailed,  
    I, Captain Culliford,  
    Did many merchants board,  
Which did much wealth afford, while we sailed.  
Two hundred bars of gold, while we sail'd, [while we sail'd],  
Two hundred bars of gold, while we sail'd,  
    Two hundred bars of gold  
    And rix dollars manifold  
We seized uncontrolled, while we sailed.  
*St. John*, a ship of fame, when we sailed, [when we sailed],  
*St. John*, a ship of fame, when we sailed,  
    *St. John*, a ship of fame  
    We plundered when she came,  
With more than I could name, when we sailed.  
We taken was at last, and must die, [and must die],  
We taken was at last, and must die,  
    We taken were at last  
    And into prison cast:  
Now, sentence being past, we must die.  
Tho' we have resigned while we must die, [while we must die],  
Tho' we have resigned while we must die,  
    Tho' we have resigned awhile,  
    While fortune seemed to smile,  
Now on the British isle we must die.
Farewel the ocean main, we must die, [we must die],
Farewel the ocean main, we must die,
    Farewel the ocean main:
    The coast of France or Spain
We ne'er shall see again; we must die.

From Newgate now in carts we must go, [we must go],
From Newgate now in carts we must go,
    From Newgate now in carts,
    With sad and heavy hearts,
To have our due deserts we must go.

Some thousands they will flock when we die, [when we die],
Some thousands they will flock when we die,
    Some thousands they will flock
    To Execution Dock,
Where we must stand the shock and must die.\textsuperscript{8}

Typical of its kind, this ballad combines the vigor of narrative, the pleasure of internal rhyme, repetition, and refrain, and the emotional release of moral condemnation. It is, however, roughly constructed.

The American version taken from an extant broadside in the Brown University Library goes as follows:

\begin{center}
THE DYING WORDS OF
\vspace{1em}
Capt. Robert Kidd
\end{center}

A noted Pirate, who was hanged at Execution Dock, in England.

You captains brave and bold, hear our cries, hear our cries,
You captains brave and bold hear our cries,
    You captains brave and bold, tho' you seem uncontrol'd
Don't for the sake of gold lose your souls, lose your souls,
Don't for the sake of gold lose your souls.

My Name was Robert Kidd, when I sail'd, when I sail'd,
    My name was Robert Kidd when I sail'd,
My name was Robert Kidd, God's laws I did forbid,
    And so wickedly I did when I sail'd.

\textsuperscript{8} War conditions prevent obtaining a facsimile of this ballad. I have transcribed it from J. F. Jameson's \textit{Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period} (New York, 1923), pp. 253-257.
My parents taught me well, when I sail'd, when I sail'd,
   My parents taught me well when I sail'd,
My parents taught me well to shun the gates of hell,
   But against them I did rebel, when I sail'd.

I curs'd my father dear when I sail'd, when I sail'd,
   I curs'd my father dear when I sail'd,
I curs'd my father dear, and her that did me bear,
   And so wickedly did swear when I sail'd.

I made a solemn vow, when I sail'd, when I sail'd,
   I made a solemn vow, when I sail'd.
I made a solemn vow, to God I would not bow,
   Nor myself one prayer allow, when I sail'd.

I'd a bible in my hand, when I sail'd, when I sail'd,
   I'd a bible in my hand when I sail'd,
I'd a bible in my hand by my father's great command,
   But I sunk it in the sand when I sail'd.

I murder'd William Moore as I sail'd as I sail'd,
   I murder'd William Moore as I sail'd;
I murder'd William Moore, and I left him in his gore,
   Not many leagues from shore, as I sail'd.

And being cruel still, as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   And being cruel still, as I sail'd;
And being cruel still, my gunner I did kill,
   And his precious blood did spill as I sail'd.

My mate took sick and died, as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   My mate took sick and died, as I sail'd;
My mate took sick and died, which me much terrified,
   When he call'd me to his bedside, as I sail'd.

And unto me did say, see me die, see me die,
   And unto me did say, see me die;
And unto me did say, take warning now I pray,
   There'll come a reckoning day, you must die.

You cannot then withstand, when you die, when you die,
   You cannot then withstand, when you die;
You cannot then withstand the judgements of God's hand,
   But bound in iron bands you must die.
The Ballad of Captain Kidd

I was sick and nigh to death as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   I was sick and nigh to death as I sail'd!
I was sick and nigh to death, and vow'd at every breath,
   To walk in wisdom's ways as I sail'd.

I thought I was undone, as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   I thought I was undone, as I sail'd;
I thought I was undone, that my wicked glass was run,
   But my health did soon return, as I sail'd.

My repentance lasted not, as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   My repentance lasted not, as I sail'd;
My repentance lasted not, my vows I soon forgot,
   Damnation's my just lot, as I sail'd.

I steer'd from sound to sound, as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   I steer'd from sound to sound, as I sail'd;
I steer'd from sound to sound, and many ships I found,
   And most of them I burned as I sail'd.

I spy'd three ships of France, as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   I spy'd three ships of France as I sail'd.
I spy'd three ships of France, to them I did advance,
   And took them all by chance, as I sail'd.

I spy'd three ships of Spain, as I sail'd, as I sail'd.
   I spy'd three ships of Spain as I sail'd;
I spy'd three ships of Spain, I fir'd on them, amain,
   Till most of them were slain, as I sail'd.

I'd ninety bars of gold, as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   I'd ninety bars of gold as I sail'd,
I'd ninety bars of gold and dollars manifold,
   With riches uncon'el'd, as I sail'd.

Then fourteen ships I see, as I sail'd, as I sail'd,
   Then fourteen ships I see, as I sail'd,
Then fourteen ships I see, and all brave men they be,
   And they were too hard for me, as I sail'd.

Thus being o'ertaken at last, I must die, I must die,
   Thus being o'ertaken at last, I must die,
Thus being o'ertaken at last, and into prison cast,
   And sentence being past, I must die.
Farewell to the raging main, for I must die, for I must die,
Farewell to the raging main, for I must die,
Farewell to the raging main, to Turkey, France & Spain,
    I shall ne'er see you again, for I must die.

To Newgate now I'm cast, and must die, and must die,
    To Newgate now I'm cast, and must die;
To Newgate now I'm cast, with sad and heavy heart,
    To receive my just desert, I must die.

To Execution Dock, I must go, I must go,
    To Execution Dock, I must go;
To Execution Dock, where many thousands flock,
    But I must bear my shock, and must die.

Come all ye young and old, see me die, see me die,
    Come all ye young and old, see me die;
Come all ye young and old, you're welcome to my gold,
    For by it I've lost my soul, and must die.

Take warning now by me, for I must die, for I must die,
    Take warning now by me, for I must die;
Take warning now by me, and shun bad company,
    Lest you come to hell with me, for I must die;
    Lest you come to hell with me, for I must die.4

Placed side by side, the English and American versions of the
same ballad provide an interesting exhibition of the growth of a
folk ballad. The earlier version, less fanciful but yet sensitive to
popular demands of 1701, presents a narrative-confession to be sung
to a familiar tune. It corresponds to that original composition that
we must assume was the basis or starting point of each old popular
ballad, but long since lost in anonymity and the passing of time.
In this instance we still have it. And when differences between it
and the survival of it a hundred years later in America are pointed
out in that survival, they are seen to be elements dear to the folk
and familiar in popular ballad practice. The matter that has fallen
away is minor matter of fact, nonfolk; and all stanzas or lines
retained from the first composition are those that suit the tradi-
tional atmosphere. Some of these are reworked and elaborated

4 Several copies of the Captain Kidd broadside are to be found in the library of Har-
vard University. The one at Brown University is the clearest and therefore the most
easily photographed. There are only minor differences among them of title, spelling, and
punctuation.
upon, usually with the purpose of intensifying the wicked character of Kidd, now Robert instead of William.

One instance may be selected. In the London news ballad of 1701 all the ships mentioned are real in Kidd’s experience—all but the *St. John*. All of these except the fleet of fourteen are dropped out as the ballad changes. These fourteen are used as a beginning of the finale in the later American form, the turning of the tide against Kidd that led to his capture and execution. Though the chronology be contrary to fact, it was useful in the evolution of the ballad. The “Full fourteen ships I see” stanza thus drops down from its original position as the ninth, to the nineteenth.

Furthermore, the captured ships become apocryphal “ships of France” and “ships of Spain,” duly satisfying patriotic feeling against traditional enemies and crystallizing them in groups of the magic number three. This is perhaps the clearest indication of the power of tradition in the folk mind.

The very beginning and ending of the American version, finally, are worth a word. The original London ballad, clinging to an almost factual or news account, had begun, “My name is Captain Kid.” In time, however, additions both at the beginning and end gave it the moral dying-confession and dance-macabre touch so familiar in the ballads of much older times, and suitable always to the temperament of simple evangelical piety. A beginning stanza, in the meter and manner of the Irish “Come all Ye’s,” exhorts, “you captains brave and bold” not to “lose your souls” for the sake of gold; and eight later stanzas fill out the moral, ending with an address to all and sundry, “Take warning now by me, and shun bad company” and so avoid the fires of hell. Thus the rather accurate news ballad of 1701 became the almost completely fictitious cry of a lost soul by 1801, horror mounting to a climax and the emotions and senses engulfed the while in the multitudinous repetition of the melancholy “as I sailed.” Simple American folk appropriated the ballad, adapting it to the art, tradition, and etiquette they knew.

Thanks to the recent activities of professional and amateur collectors of ballads, it is now quite possible to trace the ballad of

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Captain Kidd over most of the eastern half of North America, and possibly into the American West, and certainly again, onto the high seas. "The Dying Words of Captain Robert Kidd," or more simply "Captain Kidd" or "Kidd's Lament," has been (and in some places still is) sung from Mississippi to Nova Scotia, in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, in the woods of Maine and the highlands of Carolina, in the fo'castle of ships, on the lone prairie, in the southern peninsula of Michigan, and in Pennsylvania camp meetings. Well into the twentieth century it has been heard on the lips of old seamen, and of Negroes on the Mississippi. Recent recordings, however, are often fragmentary, telescoped, or corrupted through faulty memories and the passing of folkways. "We have so often sung 'Captain Kidd' that it seems American," wrote J. A. Lomax recently. Without doubt the folk of America made it.

"Captain Kidd" came to mean first and foremost the tune to which it was sung, so that more than once other words were set to it. The famous ballad of Admiral Benbow, "O come all ye seamen bold, lend an ear, lend an ear," was sung to "Captain Kidd," as was also the ballad of Sam Hall.

Most of what we know, however, dates from practices and records of the nineteenth century. That "Captain Kidd" sang its way through its own century we deduce from indirect comment and ballad-conditions in general. The unsettled state of affairs in the Colonies in the later part of the eighteenth century, when American songs were concerned a great deal with psalmody and patriotism, may have been something of an interval, at least in the centers of population. But "Captain Kidd," nevertheless, had taken firm root in the folk mind, because, as already noted, by about the turn of the nineteenth century the ballad appears in its most highly perfected form, and antiquarians of that time look back with a significant glance, at a profusion of ballads. Yet as early as 1713 Cotton Mather regretted their perverting influence, as did others. Thomas Fleet, Boston printer, made no little part of his fortune from 1712 to 1758 printing and selling ballads. And an early practice of another Boston printer, James Franklin, was...
to set his young brother Benjamin to the composition, printing, and
distribution of ballads on events of the day. Only an accident of
time prevented Benjamin Franklin from writing a ballad on the
capture of Kidd as he did on the capture of Blackbeard. As Watson,
the annalist, turned the pages of "the old gazettes" in the first half
of the nineteenth century, preparing notes for his Annals of Phila-
delphia and New York, he recollected the "revival" of the "pensive
tones" of "Captain Kidd" in 1844 "in much bad taste" in camp
meetings, and wondered "that in so many pages . . . there should
be so little reference to a former age, of traditionary accounts and
reminiscences, nothing for instance in any form, about the former
pirates, nothing of Blackbeard or Kidd, and nothing of all the
ballads!"7

"Captain Kidd" was widely enough known in 1797 and fixed
enough in its familiar phrase and form to suffer a parody in cer-
tain Maine and New Hampshire newspapers. This was called
"Capt. Kidd's Successor," a stanza of which goes,

    I purchased Georgia land, as I sailed, as I sailed,
    I purchased Georgia land, as I sailed,
    I purchased Georgia land, made up of rocks and sand;
    But I paid in notes of hand—and I failed.8

A melancholy narrative, "Captain Kidd" was wedded some-
where to a plaintive ballad-tune in a minor key, the kind that
Hetty sang in The Deerslayer, "one of those natural melodies that
find favor with all classes, in every age, coming from and being
addressed to the feelings." Folklorists now recognize it as a variant
of a well-defined old Welsh ballad, known as Venture Gwen, or
the Plaint of the Widow (Montra Gwen, neu Cwynfau y Wraig
Weddw).9

This was a very important event. A good ballad may die if not
nourished on a good tune. "Captain Kidd" was unusually lucky
in this, taking on a meter and an air tested by a great nation of
balladists, a tune absolutely appropriate to its melancholy theme.
All commentators who have heard it sung (even those whose
musical notation betrays no minor key) say it must be rendered

8 I am indebted for this to Mr. W. Roy Mackenzie's useful note in Ballads and Sea
Songs from Nova Scotia, p. 279.
9 Journal of Welsh Folklore Society, III (1930), 45. See also II (1914-1915), 122.
feelingly plaintive and that it is then highly successful. It is a sad and a moral song. Watson's reference to its revival (in bad taste) as a hymn-tune among the pious, though startling, is but proof of its popularity and vigor. The notation most often followed is as follows:¹⁰

Among the many variations to be found in print and still being recorded by folklorists, this one received certain official sanction in community and "concert" singing and was in all probability the form sung and heard by more thousands of people than any other. It was first set down probably between 1800 and 1830.

The Great Revival of 1800 and after, spreading from Presbyterian camp meetings in Logan County, Kentucky, to the Cumberland district of Tennessee, to the Northwest Territory and the Carolinas, from the Presbyterians to the Methodists and the Baptists, played a definite part in nourishing and perpetuating the old ballad of Captain Kidd, notably its tune.

The unique feature of the revival was the camp meeting, and the predominant element of the camp meeting was the enthusiastic and at time tumultuous singing of stirring hymns. The older hymns (both versified psalms and conventional Protestant hymns since Watts) were naturally often too sober. "It is a pity that the

¹⁰ Transcribed by permission by Mrs. Margaret Mott from Helen K. Johnson's Our Familiar Songs (New York, 1881).
Devil has all the good tunes,” John Wesley is said to have remarked. This feeling for a lively tune seems to have been generally, if subconsciously felt, for many a rude camp-meeting song in rough and irregular couplets, long, common, and short meter, was composed. And many old ballads like “Barbara Allen,” “Lord Lovel,” or even “O’Reilly on the rolling sea, bound for Amerikee” were put to pious use.

The closeness of ballad and hymn is a well-known, even an ordinary, musical phenomenon, this common metrical formula of 8-6-8-6 coming to be called “common meter.” And the cult of the psalm tune and the ballad is a marked characteristic of American music in the early part of the nineteenth century, despite the springing up in Portland, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York of more ambitious music societies. Before 1820 the controversy over whether group singing, sacred and secular, should be done by rote or by note had ended in favor of the latter. As a result, singing schools, singing “teachers,” and tune books sprang into being. When the newer, cruder hymns, their language a mixing of Scripture and everyday speech and their tunes popular, took well, they not only passed from mouth to ear, but under the baton and notation of itinerant preachers and singing masters, were taught to audiences. Within the first decade of this wildfire religious movement, camp-meeting songbooks appeared, and the “camp-meeting hymn” had appeared by 1811 as a distinct type of American song—the spiritual folksong.

These were individualistic, often dealing with the rescue of sinners, often being narratives of personal experience, and often utilizing a refrain as a predominating feature. They filled much, or all, of the space in “songsters,” “tune-books,” and “harmonies” from Jeremiah Ingalls’s Christian Harmony (Exeter, New Hampshire, 1805) to Hauser’s and Turner’s The Olive Leaf (Philadelphia, 1878).

At first the camp-meeting books contained words only and were likely to appear under a title like Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Pious of All Denominations as Sung in Camp Meetings. Singing masters, like Jeremiah Ingalls of Exeter, New Hampshire, and others in New England, first set down the tunes.

Hopeful, mundane saints gathered symbolically at a hundred different rivers, thumbed the familiar pages and sang in their
whole-souled fashion hymns to the tune of "Captain Kidd" from William Moore's *Columbian Harmony* (1825) or Richard Weaver's *Tune Book* (1861). From the former they sang a pantheistic piece, beginning

Through all the world below
God is seen, all around.
Search hills and valleys through,
There he's found.
The growing of the corn,
The lily and the thorn,
The pleasant and forlorn,
All declare, God is there:
In meadows drest in green,
There he's seen.

"Wondrous Love" and "Remember Sinful Youth, you must die, you must die," of the same stanzaic pattern were there, too. From Richard Weaver's *Tune Book* they sang,

Come ye that fear the Lord,
Unto me, unto me.

And the Kidd hymn to which the annalist Watson familiarly referred, was "Farewell, Ye Blooming Youth." For seventy years or more Kidd was among the elect.

Over in Massachusetts in the 1850's another musical development was in full swing of interest to the pursuer of the Kidd ballad and of American popular song in general. In Stoughton, Boston, Braintree, Chelsea, Reading, and many other towns singing societies flourished, the humbler sort being in this instance a kind of secular parallel to the camp meetings but many of them historically much older. Originally organized to sing psalms and divert young minds from pernicious ballad trash, some of them came ere long to make terms even with ballads. Boston boasted a Haydn and Handel Society, but more of these organizations were of the "Billings and Holden School," simple folk under some enthusiastic tanner, carpenter, or farmer, singing songs they loved to sing. The New York papers indicate that ballad concerts were being given as early as 1844. Part of the movement may have been a reaction to "fashionable" music.

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One of the most famous leaders of these groups, though strangely slighted in histories of American music, was a shoe dealer of Wellfleet, Massachusetts, who retired from the salt air and fisher folk of Cape Cod to a farm north of Boston near Reading. Robert Kemp liked to sing the old church songs and had a knack of getting others to sing. People began gathering at his home some time around 1854 for the simple pleasure of group singing. Others came just to listen. The Reading Old Folks Musical Society was informally and spontaneously organized. Its members revived with such enthusiasm the songs of their fathers that the Reading Lyceum Hall was rented and a public concert given. Robert C. Kemp and his Old Folks Concert Troupe traveled to Lynn, Boston, Washington, and New York. Kemp came to be known as "Father Kemp," and enjoyed an international reputation and, in the United States, very considerable applause. Though completely untrained, he like David Harum allowed he was good enough at beating time; and by virtue of that astonishingly simple act, tapped the wells of emotional feeling of a large part of the nation, furnished the then rare pleasure of public entertainment, and withheld made of himself an outstanding, if not an important, figure in the American scene in the fifties and sixties. A seven-months tour took him into the West. In 1861 he toured England with thirty of his Old Folks Concert Troupe, visiting with indifferent success such centers as London, Liverpool, and Chester, and finally abandoning the enterprise. Back home he continued with Monday Popular Concerts at Boston and elsewhere. Within a few years he was compiling his own songbooks on the covers of which he was pictured in grandfatherly spectacles, fatherly full beard and, to us, the ministerial Prince Albert coat. A plain man, he appealed to common folk who loved simple old things and nothing too difficult. Though he declared he never knew a minim from a demisemiquaver, necessary at that time as eighth and quarter notes today, he gave in five years over nine hundred concerts to more than a million people. When he compiled a selection of these "concert" songs for a book, songs tested by his own extensive knowledge of old people's tastes and desires, he included "Kidd's Lament" both words and music. *Father Kemp's Old Folks Concert Tunes* was revised and enlarged several times—even as late as 1917. How many hundreds of thousands of America's old (or
young) folk sang the ballad of Captain Kidd under the baton of Father Kemp can never be known. Six thousand attended a single "concert" in the Academy of Music in New York, and the same figure is his own for the number of performances in his lifetime up to 1868.

I do not question that American grandmothers and the home-spun choirmaster Father Kemp did more than all others to perpetuate Captain Kidd to our times. America was developing its own composers. It was the day of Knight, Russell, and Foster—of "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," "Woodman, Spare That Tree," and "The Old Folks at Home."

Those who were denied the pleasure of hearing Father Kemp's Old Folks Concert Troupe may nevertheless have had on the parlor table, or more convenient to the fire or the pianoforte, any one of half a dozen other American songsters (besides the Old Folks Concert Tunes) in which the complete "Kidd's Lament" appeared. One of the most charming of these was the Forget Me Not Songster, dating from about 1840, from which Professor Harold Thompson took the eighteen stanzas of "Kidd" he reprints in his Body, Boots, and Britches.

It was in the camp meeting, the "concert" hall, and the more serious songsters that the ballad of Captain Kidd attained its highest eminence. Inevitably in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth came a decline into the cheap professionalism of the Negro minstrel show, the comic songsters, and the dime novel, that pulp ancestor of the modern pulps. The singing folk gave up their pirate Captain to a luridly notorious and clownishly absurd "Billy Kidd, King of the Kickeroos" of vaudeville and the music hall.

In the complete history of this famous old ballad we may notice one other extraordinary fact. No version of it concerns buried treasure. Captain Kidd sank his Bible in the sand, but no gold. That legend is another story.