

**Folklore of the United States
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Songs and Ballads of the Anthracite Miners

Recorded and Edited by George Korson, 1947

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A1—DOWN, DOWN, DOWN. Sung by William E. Keating at Pottsville, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

'Down, Down, Down,' started out as a barroom ballad but its swing and charm have won it general acceptance even beyond the anthracite region. It relates the experiences of a miner reporting for work with a hangover. But it is more than the record of a tipsy worker's muddled thoughts. Its significance lies in its reflection of the miner's daily buffetings and the surprising good humor with which he faces them.

Originally the ballad had about forty stanzas, but because it was too long to sing without interruption, it was broken up into groups of stanzas corresponding to the levels of an anthracite mine. At each level, the customers standing around the bar would yell, "Time out for a round of drinks!" The singer's drinks were on the house, his traditional prerogative.

'Down, Down, Down' had a word-of-mouth existence for a number of years before being set down on paper. Bill Keating, now sixty, was unable to write until he was thirty-two (he learned his ABC's in the army during World War I). Even after he became literate, wielding a pen was more irksome to him than a miner's pick. It was much easier to make a ballad out of his head and just sing it. How finally in 1927 he came to write down the ballad has become a legend in Schuylkill County.

For the story and complete text, see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, pp. 38-53; B. A. Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore*, Crown, New York, 1944.

1. With your kind attention, a song I will trill,
All ye who must toil with the pick and the drill,
And sweat for your bread in that hole in Oak Hill,
That goes down, down, down.
2. When I was a boy said my daddy to me:
"Stay out of the mines, take my warning," said he,
"Or with dust you'll be choked and a pauper you'll be,
Broken down, down, down."
3. But I went to Oak Hill and I asked for a job,
A mule for to drive, or a gangway to rob.
The boss said, "Come out, Bill, and follow the mob
That goes down, down, down."
4. I was booked the next day to go down in the mine,
I goes into Tim Harvey's and samples some [moon]
shine.

With a real near-beer headache, I reported on time
To go down, down, down.

5. Said Pete McAvoy, "Here's Bill Keatin' the scamp."
Just back, Pete supposed, from a million-mile tramp.
Then he showed me the "windie" where I'd get a lamp
To go down, down, down.
6. The lamp man he squints through the windie at me,
"What's your name and your age and your number?"
said he.
"Bill Keatin', I'm thirty, number twenty-three,
Mark that down, down, down."
7. With a frown of disfavor, my joke it was met,
For an argument plainly, Jim Griffiths was set.
For he told me that divil a lamp would I get
To go down, down, down.
8. I said, "Mr. Lamp Man, now don't leave us fight;
Can't ye see by me eyes I was boozin' all night?
Sure the mines will be dark and I'll have to have light
While I'm down, down, down."
9. With an old greasy apron, he polished his speck,
He declared of the rules he'd be makin' a wreck,
If he'd give me a lamp without a brass check
To go down, down, down.
10. Then I found the supply clerk for whom I inquired,
He was stubborn as blazes, with malice all fired.
He gave me a lot of red tape and the check I required,
To go down, down, down.
11. I at last had the check that would peacify Jim,
So into the windie I flung it to him.
"Now," said I, "quit your grumblin' and give me a glim
To go down, down, down."
12. A contraption he gave me, a hose in a box,
'Twas so heavy I thought it was loaded with rocks.
If a car jumped the road, you could use it for blocks
While you're down, down, down.
13. By two rusty clamps it's attached to your cap,
And the box it hangs onto your hip by a strap,
Oh, the man that transported them lamps to the Gap
May go down, down, down.
14. Then into the office I sauntered to Sam.
With a cheery "Good mornin'," says I, "Here I am,
With booze in me bottle and beer in me can
To go down, down, down.
15. He said, "Billy, me bucko, how are you today?"
"Outside of a headache," I said, "I'm O.K.
I've been samplin' the moonshine in every cafe
In the town, town, town."

16. "Now, where was this job at?" I wanted to know.
"Was it up in the new drift?" but he shook his head, no.
"When you hit the fifth lift you'll have one more to go,
So go down, down, down."
17. I asked him what tools would I need in the place.
"Very few," said the boss with the grin on his face.
"One number six shovel and damn little space
While you're down, down, down."
18. When you're drivin' the gangway you need lots of tools,
And you buy them yourself, it's the anthracite rules,
But a laggin' suffices to drive balky mules,
When you're down, down, down.
19. At drivin' mules I'm not overy slick
But the plugs in Oak Hill I showed many's a trick,
When I hollered "Yey" if they started to kick,
They went down, down, down.
20. Then up to the head of the shaft I made haste,
I saluted the top-man and stood in my place.
I says, "Give me a cage for I've no time to waste,
Let me down, down, down."
21. "All aboard for the bottom!" the top-man did yell,
We stepped on the cage, and he gave her the bell,
Then from under our feet, like a bat out o' hell,
She went down, down, down.

A2—THE AVONDALE MINE DISASTER. Sung by
John J. Quinn at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania,
1946. Recorded by George Korson.

'The Avondale Mine Disaster' recounts the anthracite industry's first major tragedy, in which 110 men and boys were lost. In the manner of early collieries, the Avondale was ventilated by means of a furnace built on the bottom level, its flue running up the height of the shaft. This shaft, leading to the breaker above, was the only outlet.

The fire started early in the morning of September 6, 1869, when the flue partition caught fire. The flames roared up the shaft and fired the breaker. Men and boys, their only avenue of escape cut off, and the air currents stopped, fought a desperate battle against gases. Rescue work began immediately after the fire was extinguished. A box with a slot top containing a dog attached to a lighted lantern was let down into the shaft to test the air. While the dog survived, the light in the lantern was snuffed out by black damp.

However, the mere fact that the dog had come back alive held out a slender hope to hundreds of anxious people that their loved ones might still be

alive. Volunteers went down the shaft, only to return immediately gasping for air. Even after this experience, Thomas W. Williams and David Jones,

Two Welshmen brave, without dismay,
And courage without fail,
Went down the shaft without delay
In the mines of Avondale.

When they reached the bottom, they signalled for a pick and shovel, but died before using them. After the gases had been cleared, a crew descended to the bottom where they found the bodies of the two heroic Welshmen and those of the other victims.

The excitement caused by the disaster had not yet subsided, nor had the grief been assuaged, when a ballad appeared which told the tragic story. Nobody knew its origin or its composer, though different names appeared on the penny broadsides which sold by the hundreds. Everybody sang it—and shed a tear for the widows and orphans. It was a favorite of the itinerant miner-minstrels and for more than a quarter of a century was the most popular ballad in the region. Its vogue spread beyond the hardcoal fields and variants have been found by folk song collectors as far distant as Newfoundland.

For further information see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, pp. 180-191.

1. Good Christians all, both great and small,
I pray you lend an ear,
And listen with attention while
The truth I will declare;
When you hear this lamentation,
I will cause you to weep and wail,
About the suffocation
In the mines of Avondale.
2. On the sixth day of September,
Eighteen sixty-nine,
Those miners all then got a call
To go work in the mine;
But little did they think that [day]
That death would soon prevail
Before they would return again
From the mines of Avondale.
3. The women and their children,
Their hearts were filled with joy,
To see their men go to their work
Likewise every boy;
But a dismal sight in broad daylight,
Soon made them turn pale,
When they saw the breaker burning
O'er the mines of Avondale.

4. From here and there, and everywhere,
They gathered in a crowd,
Some tearing off their clothes and hair,
And crying out aloud—
“Get out our husbands and our sons,
Death He’s going to steal
Their lives away without delay
In the mines of Avondale.”
5. But all in vain, there was no hope
One single soul to save,
For there is no second outlet
From the subterranean cave.
No pen can write the awful fright
And horror that prevailed,
Among those dying victims,
In the mines of Avondale.
6. A consultation then was held,
’Twas asked who’d volunteer
For to go down this dismal shaft,
To seek their comrades dear;
Two Welshmen brave, without dismay,
And courage without fail,
Went down the shaft, without delay,
In the mines of Avondale.
7. When at the bottom they arrived,
And thought to make their way,
One of them died for want of air,
While the other in great dismay,
He gave a sign to hoist him up,
To tell the dreadful tale,
That all was lost forever
In the mines of Avondale.
8. Every effort then took place
To send down some fresh air;
The men that next went down again
They took of them good care;
They traversed through the chambers,
And this time did not fail
In finding those dead bodies
In the mines of Avondale.
9. Sixty-seven was the number
That in a heap were found,
It seemed that they were bewailing
Their fate underneath the ground;
They found the father with his son
Clasped in his arms so pale.
It was a heart rendering scene
In the mines of Avondale.
10. Now to conclude, and make an end,
Their number I’ll pen down—
A hundred and ten of brave strong men
Were smothered underground;

They’re in their graves till this last day,
Their widows may bewail,
And the orphans’ cries they rend the skies
All round through Avondale!

A3—ME JOHNNY MITCHELL MAN. Sung by Jerry Byrne at Buck Run, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

‘Me Johnny Mitchell Man’ is a product of the anthracite strike of 1902, which gave the Slavic mine workers the opportunity they had been waiting for to vindicate themselves. Their existence had been extremely difficult owing to the general belief that they had been imported by the coal operators to lower wages and degrade working conditions.

The Slavs worried John Mitchell, the strike leader. When he first came into the region, Mitchell saw clearly that if he were to succeed in his mission to organize the industry, racial and national barriers must first be broken down. He made this one of his first objectives. All races, creeds, and classes he addressed with this gospel: “The coal you dig is not Slavic coal, or Polish coal, or Irish coal. It is coal.”

At every opportunity he urged the Welsh and Irish miners to be tolerant toward their Slavic brothers. It took time and much persuasion to dissipate the mutual hatred and distrust. Gradually, however, he accomplished his purpose, and Slavs mingled with English-speaking fellow workers at mass meetings, picnics, and parades on terms of equality. The Slavs grew to worship Mitchell. When he finally issued the call to strike, there was no doubt in his mind as to where they stood. ‘Me Johnny Mitchell Man’ in the Slavic-American dialect, sung throughout the region, had reassured him. This ballad was written by Con Carbon of Wilkes-Barre, one of the most prolific of the anthracite bards and minstrels.

For further information see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, pp. 216, 234-236.

1. For you know Joe Silovatsky,
Dat man is my brudder.
Last night he’s come to my shanty:
“John, I’m’a come I’m’a tell you for,
I’m’a tell you for tomorra, John,
Evening dark as night;
Dotsa miners all, beeg un small,
Gonna have a strike.
Dunt be scabby fella, John,
Dat’s I’m tell you right,” he say.
“No sir, Mike, come out on strike,
I’m’a Johnny Mitchell man.”

CHORUS:

Well, I'm dun' afraid fer nothin',
Dat's me nevair shcare.
Come on a strike tomorra night?
Dat's de business I dunt care.
Right-a here I'm tell you,
Me not scabby fella
I'm a good union citizen,
I'm'a Johnny Mitchell man.

2. Well, me belong fer union,
I'm good citizen,
Seven, mebbe 'leven year,
I'm workin' in beeg, beeg 'Merica;
I'm workin fer de Black Heat',
Down in de Lytle Shaft
In de Nottingham, Conyngham
Un every place like dat.
I'm got lotsa money.
Nine hoondret mebbe ten,
Un strike kin come, like son of a gun
I'm'a Johnny Mitchell man.

A4—BOYS ON THE HILL—Hornpipe: Fiddle Tune.

Played on the fiddle by James Muldowney of Pottsville, Pennsylvania. Recorded in the Newkirk Tunnel Mine, Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, 1946, by George Korson.

Miners working in the lower levels of the anthracite mines frequently had long waits before the empty cars returned to be filled with the newly broken coal. To while away the time, they not only sang their traditional songs but also danced jigs on iron sheets to the tune of fiddles which they carried into the mine to provide music.

A5—ON JOHNNY MITCHELL'S TRAIN. Sung by Jerry Byrne at Buck Run, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

'On Johnny Mitchell's Train' came out of the famous anthracite strike of 1902 which established the United Mine Workers of America in the hard-coal mining industry. In the midst of the strike, which lasted about six months, many strikers left for the big cities in search of work to tide them over until peace came. Having no money they hopped freight trains, jocularly termed "Johnny Mitchell specials" after the miners' leader.

For further information see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, pp. 204-239.

1. I'm an honest union laborin' man,
And I'll have you understand,
I'll tell you just the reason why,
I left the mining land.
It was Baer and Morgan done it,
And for they'll repent,
For we don't intend to work a tap,
Till we get the ten percent.

CHORUS:

- There's no use for Mr. Durkin,
In the coal mine to be workin';
We were a little shaky,
But no longer we're in pain.
So what's the use o' kickin',
When the top and bottom's stickin'?
I'll pack me grip and make a trip,
On Johnny Mitchell's train.
2. I struck a place called Coatesville,
A flourishin' iron town,
Where politics were very strong,
And candidates goin' around.
I was invited to a party,
He says, "Phat are you go', Dan?"
I says, "I'll tell you plump and plain,
I'm a Johnny Mitchell man."
3. When I landed in New York City,
I a friend of course did meet,
I axed him if he would show me
The place they call Wall Street.
I met several operators,
Assembled in a mob,
Along with Morgan's president,
I think they called him Schwab.
4. The small operators they were pl'adin',
And they wanted to give in,
And recognize the union—
But Baer said that's too thin.
So it broke up in a wrangle,
Put Baer nearly insane,
Then I took a side-door Pullman car
On Johnny Mitchell's train.
5. So I'll bid ye all adieu now,
Let ye bid me the same,
The strike is nearly o'er,
And with joy I'm near insane.
Here's health unto the union,
Which is very strong they say,
Likewise to the conductor
On Johnny Mitchell's train.

A6—ROLLING ON THE RYE GRASS—Reel: Fiddle Tune. Played on the fiddle by James Muldowney. Recorded in the Newkirk Tunnel

Mine, Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, 1946, by George Korson.

A7—THE OLD MINER'S REFRAIN. Sung by Daniel Walsh at Centralia, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

'The old Miner's Refrain,' one of the oldest anthracite ballads, recalls the former custom of employing old miners to pick slate in the breaker alongside boys. As mechanical slate pickers have displaced manual picking, there no longer is any place for old men in the breaker. This ballad reflects the full cycle of an anthracite miner's career—from the age of eight when he first went into the breaker until he returned to it again a very old man. Summed up are his hopes, dreams, thwarted ambitions and the fear of a dependent old age.

For complete text see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, p. 273.

1. I'm getting old and feeble and I cannot work no more,
I have laid my rusty mining tools away;
For forty years and over I have toiled about the mines,
But now I'm getting feeble, old and gray.
I started in the breaker and went back to it again,
But now my work is finished for all time;
The only place that's left me is the almshouse for a
home,
Where I'm going to lay this weary head of mine.

CHORUS:

Where are the boys that worked with me in the breakers
long ago?
Many of them now have gone to rest;
Their cares of life are over and they've left this world of
woe;
And their spirits now are roaming with the blest.

2. In the chutes I graduated instead of going to school—
Remember, friends, my parents they were poor;
When a boy left the cradle it was always made the rule
To try and keep starvation from the door.
At eight years of age to the breaker I first went,
To learn the occupation of a slave;
I certainly was delighted, and on picking slate was bent—
My ambition it was noble, strong and brave.

B1—JOHN J. CURTIS. Sung by Andrew Rada at Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

It was in May, 1888, long before the Pennsylvania Workmen's Compensation Act was enacted, that John J. Curtis was blinded while at work in the Morea colliery in Schuylkill County. Rather than accept charity, he decided upon the career of a miner-minstrel. Joseph Gallagher of Lansford created the text and soon broadsides were printed. Led by a Scranton boy, Curtis roamed the region singing or reciting this ballad and selling the broadsides. Wherever miners gathered—in saloons, cigar shops, fire houses and at one social function or another—there Curtis and his youthful guide were to be found.

When, in July, 1925, I obtained the text of this ballad from Gallagher he told me he had not set it to music. Somewhere along the way Curtis picked up this tune.

For complete text see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, p. 201.

1. My name is John J. Curtis,
My age is twenty-eight,
I was born in Schuylkill County
And there I met my fate.
So now with your attention
If you'll be so kind,
I will tell you of that fatal day
That I was stricken blind.
2. It was on a bright May morning,
As the sun peeped o'er the hill,
The little birds sang loud and sweet,
And I seem to hear them still;
My heart was filled with purest joy
As to the mines I did stray,
To earn an honest living
In the colliery of P.A. [Pennsylvania]

B2—A CELEBRATED WORKINGMAN. Sung by Daniel Walsh at Centralia, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

'A celebrated workingman,' by Ed Foley, one of the most colorful of the anthracite minstrels, pokes fun at the off-hour braggart of the mines. In the mine patches the saloon was indeed the "poor man's club." Over their beer, in a congenial atmosphere, miners discussed affairs of home and village, swapped yarns and sang ballads. Now in every village saloon there were always some who regularly became tipsy on pay-nights and, in the recklessness born of their condition, they would loudly boast of

their strength and skill as miners. Knowing them at their true worth, their fellow miners were amused by these antics. When the exhibition became too realistic, the bartender might shout, "Here, cut it out! Get the safety lamp, you'll blow the place up!"

This ballad was given to the region for the first time by Foley himself at the wedding of a niece at Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania, one evening in October, 1892. It was an instantaneous hit and Foley was besieged to sing it over and over again until he was nearly exhausted. Its spread through the region is a matter of local history.

For complete text and information see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, pp. 37, 38, 46-47.

1. I'm a celebrated workingman, my duties I don't shirk,
I can cut more coal than any man from Pittsburgh to
New York,
It's a holy terrogation(?) boys, how I go through me
work—
When I'm seated at my glory in the barroom.
2. I can stand a set of timber, post and bar or single prop,
I can throw a chain on the bottom or I can throw it up
on top,
Oh, give me a pair of engines and be jeepers I'll not stop,
Till I land me triple wagons through the barroom.
3. I'll go down and work upon the platform or go out and
run the dump,
I can put in pulleys on the slope or go down and clean
the sump.
I can run a 20,000 horse-power steam engine pump—
That's providing that I have it in the barroom.
4. I'll go down and work the flat vein; I'll go up and work
the pitch,
I can work at the Potts or Newside—I don't care the
devil which,
I can show the old track layer how to decorate the
ditch—
Now haven't I often proved it in the barroom?
5. Now at driving I'm a daisy; just give me a balky team,
When I'll beat the spots of an evening run, be water,
wind, or steam,
With your balance planes, and endless chains, they're
nowhere to be seen,
When I pull me trip of wagons through the barroom.
6. Now at bossing I'm a daisy, and I know I'm no disgrace,
For I could raise your wages boys, just twelve cents up
the l'ast,
Now didn't the Reading Company miss me when they
didn't make their haste,
And capture me, before I struck the barroom?

7. I can show the boss or super how the air should circu-
late,
I can show the boss fireman how the steam should gene-
rate;
Now the trouble at the Pottsville shaft, sure I could
elucidate,
Now haven't I often proved it in the barroom?

B3—WHEN THE BREAKER STARTS UP FULL TIME. Sung by Jerry Byrne at Buck Run, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

The coal breaker, a straggling hulk of a building, is the most characteristic feature of the anthracite landscape. It is there that the amorphous lumps which the miner has extracted from the seam are cleansed and cracked into standard sizes for the market. Standing close to the mouth of a mine slope or shaft, it frequently may be found hugging a hill-side.

Almost from the time that the first breaker cast its shadow, miners have invested it with symbolical significance.

'When the Breaker Starts Up Full Time' catches the mining folk in a happy mood. After prolonged unemployment the miners hear a rumor that their breaker is to resume production. All the good things sung of in the ballad represent so much wishful thinking because in the eighties when this ballad appeared, luxuries were beyond reach even when the mines were working full time.

For further information see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, p. 19, 29-31.

1. Me troubles are o'er, Mrs. Murphy,
For the Ditchman next door told me straight,
That the breaker start full time on Monday,
That's what he told me at any rate.
Sure the boss he told Mickey this morning,
When he's 'bout to enter the mines,
That the coal was quite scarce down 'bout New York,
And the breaker would start on full time.

CHORUS:

And it's oh, my, if the news be true,
Me store bill's the first thing I'll pay,
And a new parlor suit and this lounge I will buy,
And an organ for Bridgie, hurray.
Me calico skirt I'll throw into the dirt
And silk ones won't I cut a shine?
Cheer up, Mrs. Murphy, be-damn we'll ate turkey,
(And if I get a chance, I'll put Jamesie in pants.)
When the breaker starts up on full time.

2. I'll ne'er stick a hand in the washtub,
 The Chinee man he'll get me trade,
 I'll ne'er pick a coal on the dirt bank;
 I'll buy everything ready-made.
 I'll dress up me children like fairies,
 I'll build up a house neat and fine,
 And we'll move away from the Hungaries,
 When the breaker starts up on full time.

B4—UNION MAN. Sung by Albert Morgan. Recorded in the Newkirk Tunnel Mine, Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, 1946, by George Korson.

This short ditty, sung with good humor by Albert Morgan, is an excellent example of the way the folk reflect in their songs the varied phases of their life. Better than an economist's report, the five stanzas are a satiric comment on rising wages and rising prices. They were composed by the singer and have circulated widely in the lower anthracite region.

I think I sing that little song,
 Hope I say it nothing wrong,
 Hope my song she bring you cheer
 Just like couple of shots of beer.

CHORUS:

Union man! Union man!
 He must have full dinner can!
 AFL, CIO
 Callin' strike, out she go!

We all contract, she expire:
 Mr. Lewis mad like fire;
 Miners strikin' too much time,
 Uncle Sam take over mines.

We signin' contract, we get raise
 After strikin' twenty days.
 Butcher comes and ringin' bell
 He raises prices—what the hell!

I'm drinkin' too much beer last night,
 To go to work I don't feel right.
 In my can some bread and meat,
 I'm too dam' sick I cannot eat.

I fire shot at 10 o'clock,
 Tumble brushes full of rock,
 Timber breakin' o'er my head,
 Jeepers cripes I think I'm dead!
 (Laughter of miners)

B5—THE MINER'S DOOM. Sung by Daniel Walsh at Centralia, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

'The Miner's Doom' is an old Welsh ballad which enjoyed a vogue in the anthracite region where many miners were Welsh. Thomas Jones of Seek, Schuylkill County, who gave me the text in 1925, had sung the ballad in his old home in South Wales.

For further information see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, pp. 188, 203.

1. At five in the morning as jolly as any,
 The miner doth rise to his work for to go,
 He caresses his wife and his children so dearly
 And bids them adieu before closing the door;
 And goes down the deep shaft at the speed of an arrow,
 His heart light and gay without fear or dread,
 He's no thoughts of descending to danger and peril—
 But his life is depending on one single thread.
2. His wife is his queen and his home is his palace,
 His children his glory, to maintain them he tries,
 He'll work like a hero; he faces all danger,
 He'll way-prive his own self their bare feet to hide.
 Now his day's work is o'er, he's homeward returning,
 He thinks not how the change in an hour will be,
 But he thinks how his wife and his children will greet him—
 But his home and his children he'll nevermore see.
3. Now his wife had been dreaming of her husband so
 dearly,
 She's seen him in danger—"God help me," she cried;
 Too true was the dream of a poor woman's sorrow.
 The rope broke ascending; her dear husband died.
 Their home that morning was as jov-al as any,
 But a dark cloud came rolling straight o'er their door—
 A widow, three children are left for to mourn him;
 The one that they ne'er will see any more.
4. At the day of his funeral the great crowds had gathered,
 He was loved by his friends, by his neighbors, by all,
 To the grave went his corpse, by his friends he was
 followed,
 The tears from our eyes like the rain they did fall,
 And the widow, lamenting the fate of her husband,
 Broken-hearted she died on the dear loved one's tomb,
 To the world now is left their three little children
 Whose father had met with a coal miner's doom.

B6—DOWN IN A COAL MINE. Sung by Morgan Jones at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

'Down in a Coal Mine' is probably the best known miner's song. Once sung all over the nation, it has at last found its resting place in the anthracite region. Its popularity with anthracite audiences was so well

established and of such long standing that at first I believed it to be an indigenous product. Having been molded so long by anthracite miners it does have the spirit and flavor of an anthracite ballad, and one has a difficult time convincing the average old-timer that it is not native.

It was originally a stage song composed by J. B. Geoghegan in 1872, when it was published by S. Brainerd's Sons.

For complete text see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, pp. 9, 277-278.

1. I am a jovial collier lad, as blithe as blithe can be,
And let the times be good or bad, they're all the same to me;
There's little of this world I know and care less for its ways,
And where the dog star never glows, I wear away the days.

CHORUS:

Down in a coal mine, underneath the ground,
Where a gleam of sunshine never can be found;
Digging dusky diamonds all the year around,
Away down in a coal mine, underneath the ground.

2. My hands are horny, hard and black from working in the vein,
Like the clothes upon my back my speech is rough and plain;
And if I stumble with my tongue I've one excuse to say,
It's not the collier's heart that's bad, it's his head that goes astray.

B7—THE SHOOFLY. Sung by Daniel Walsh at Centralia, Pennsylvania, 1946. Recorded by George Korson.

This ballad articulates the thoughts of the miners in the depression of the early '70's. In 1871 the little mine patch of Valley Furnace received a blow from which it never recovered: the mine gave out. Normally the miners might have found jobs at the Shoofly, a nearby colliery. There, however, a bad seam had been struck and men were being laid off. The only alternative to starvation was to gather meager belongings, leave old associations, and trek across the Broad Mountain into the Mahanoy Valley then being opened to mining.

These troubles preyed on the mind of a little old Irish-woman in Valley Furnace. Her heart was breaking because of the debts she owed in the store and because all her good neighbors were deserting the village. Felix O'Hare, who kept night school for breaker boys at nearby Silver Creek Patch, used to pass the woman's cottage on his way to and from school. The simple mining folk believed that his meager book learning, acquired by dint of much whale oil burned after working hours, equipped him to solve all of life's problems. And so the little old woman would stop him as he went by and pour out her troubles to him. He lent a sympathetic ear and tried to comfort her.

One evening, profoundly moved, he spent half the night trying to put into a ballad some of the things she had told him, and thus created 'The Shoofly.' Never formally published, the ballad spread by word of mouth and in a short time the whole region was singing it. Only his immediate family knew that O'Hare had composed the ballad and the little Irish-woman herself was not told that its author was her schoolmaster confidant. When she heard it sung, however, and identified herself with the "old lady" in the ballad, she gave a curse upon the man who had thus exploited her. Not long afterward, O'Hare was drowned in Silver Creek.

For complete text and information see: George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938, pp. 19, 27-28.

1. As I went a-walking one fine summer's morning,
It was down by the Furnace I chanced for to stroll.
I espied an old lady, I'll swear she was eighty,
At the foot of the dirt banks a-rooting for coal;
And when I drew nigh her she sat on her hunkers
For to fill up her scuttle she just had begin—
And to herself she was singing a ditty,
And these are the words the old lady did sing:

CHORUS:

Crying O-ho! Sure I'm nearly distracted,
For it's down by the Shoofly they cut a bad vein;
And since they condemned the old slope at the Furnace,
Shure all me fine neighbors must leave here again.

2. " 'Twas only last evenin' that I asked McGinley
To tell me the reason the Furnace gave o'er.
He told me the company had spent eighty thousand,
And finding no prospects they would spend no more.
He said that the Diamond it was rather bony,
Beside too much dirt in the seven-foot vein;
And as for the Mammoth, there's no length of gangway,
Unless they buy land from old Abel and Swayne.

3. "And as for Michael Rooney, I owe him some money,
Likewise Patrick Kearns, I owe him some more;
And as for old John Eagen, I'll ne'er see his wagon,
But I think of the debt that I owe in the store.
I owe butcher and baker, likewise the shoemaker,
And for plowin' me garden I owe Pat McQuail;
Likewise his old mother, for one thing and another,
And to drive away bother, an odd quart of ale.

4. "But if God spares me children until the next summer,
Instead of a burden, they will be a gain;
And out of their earnin's I'll save an odd dollar,
And build a snug home at the 'Foot of the Plane.'
Then rolling in riches, in silks and in satin,
I ne'er shall forget the days I was poor,
And likewise the neighbors that stood by my children,
Kept want and starvation away from me door."

