

The Cambric shirt

Handwritten musical score for the song "The Cambric shirt". The score is written on three staves in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The lyrics are written below the notes.

Come buy me come buy me a cambric shirt (savoury says rose-
- mary and thyme) without any seam and good needlework then you shall be true
lover of mine

CAMBRIC SHIRT

The words were written down by Miss Heatley and attached to the manuscript she also notes:- Mrs Humphreys 75 years old. This was her father's song sung April 25 1904 by her. Vaughan Williams notes:- County Songs (Scarb Fair) Kidson, Baring Gould.

This song has similarities to Scarborough Fair and Father left me an acre of land both of which have different beginnings, but continue with the riddle verses. The version in Lucy Broadwood's county songs seems to be in two parts, Scarborough Fair and Acre of Land. These should be compared with Child No 2 Elfin Knight.

Come buy me a cambric shirt
Savoury says rosemary and thyme
Without any seam or good needle work
Then you shall be a true lover of mine

Come wash it out in yonder well
Where spring never dropped nor drop ever fell

Come hang it out on yonder thorn
That never has blew blossom since Adam was born

And now you have asked me questions three
And now I will ask as many of thee

Come buy me an acre of land
Between the seawater and the sea sand'

Come plough it up with one ram's horn
And sow it all over with one pepper corn

Come harrow it all over with a bramble bush
And cut it all down with one royal rush

And make me a wagon with hair and lime
And cart it home with six jenny wrens

Stack it all up a mouse's hole
And thresh it all out with an old shoe sole

And fan it up with an oyster shell
And stack it all up in a goose's quill

And then go to market my corn to sell
And bring home the money as I may at-tell

And when you have done and finished your work
And then come to me for your cambric shirt

In Vaughan Williams' scrapbook there is a copy of this text with very few variations at the top it says Mrs Humphreys Sep 1917 and signed at the bottom by FWH (Florence Heatley) dated Nov 28 1920 Ingrave.

Why this song was noted down from Mrs Humphreys in 1917 (she would have been about 88 then) is not known. I would not think that Vaughan Williams requested it but possibly it was found in some papers and forwarded to Ralph by Miss F Heatley in 1920 for his collection.

This is a rather interesting item for another reason. Florence Heatley's handwriting is shown to be very similar to a note signed by Georgina Heatley. This now casts some doubt on who wrote out the songs for Vaughan Williams. Were they the work of one or both sisters?

THE CAMBRIC SHIRT

I pray you make me one cambric shirt
Savory, sage, rosemary and thyme
With out either needle nor yet needle work
And then you shall be a true lover of mine

And wash it all over in a dry well
Where never was water nor never rain fell

I pray you to hang it all on to a thorn
Where never was bud since man was born

I pray you to hire me one acre of land
A twixt the salt water and the sea sand

Plow it all over with one ram's horn
And crop it all over with one pepper corn

And pick it all up with a cobbler's awl
And stow it all into the mouser's hall