Mrs. Brown and the Ballad

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IT WAS Francis James Child's aim, pursued through the greater part of a scholarly lifetime, to collect and segregate all the genuinely traditional copies of the extant British popular ballads. In the great work which embodies the fruits of his labor, he brands as suspect in varying degree the texts which had received any sort of editing before they reached his hands, and regards as usually most trustworthy those which had been taken down verbatim from the singing of persons who had learned them from others' singing. He was best satisfied when he could discover no evidence, either extrinsic or intrinsic, that a text had had any previous connection with print. In an unbroken oral tradition, he believed, were to be found the specimens of greatest authenticity, because such texts were least likely to have been affected by any sort of deliberate alteration. But the very conditions of such transmission make it, of course, all but impossible to check the accuracy, or fidelity, of the record from stage to stage. For it almost never happens that an interceptor secures successive copies of a ballad in a consecutive line of descent. We only know that changes occur even under ideal conditions, for the existence of variant texts puts the fact beyond dispute. It is the object of the present paper to examine briefly a case which by lucky accident provides more than the usual amount of evidence as to what has happened to ballad texts within a brief span, under very favorable conditions of oral transmission.

One of Child's esteemed sources was an eighteenth-century Scotswoman, Mrs. Brown of Falkland, in Fife, whose importance to the popular ballad may be readily suggested by means of a few figures. Of the nearly three dozen ballad texts which she preserved, Child allowed every one a place in his canon. Four of these are the only extant versions. Twenty others are Child's A, or primary, texts; and four more his B texts. Early in the last century, Scott admitted a dozen of her ballads into his *Minstrelsy;* and Jamieson, skirting Scott's choices, made use of more than a score in his kindred collection of 1806. These are powerful witnesses to the authenticity and value of her records, which offer besides a rare opportunity for the study of variation in traditional balladry.

Anna Gordon Brown was born at Old Machar, Aberdeen, in 1747, and died in the same place, in 1810. Her father, Thomas Gordon, was Professor of Humanity at King's College, Aberdeen; and her husband, the Rev. Andrew Brown, D.D., Aberdeen, was minister at Falkland and later at Tranent. Robert

Anderson characterized Mrs. Brown to Bishop Percy in the following highly relevant terms: "Mrs. Brown is fond of ballad poetry, writes verses, and reads everything in the marvellous way. Yet her character places her above the suspicion of literary imposture; but it is wonderful how she should happen to be the depository of so many curious and valuable ballads."[1] The wonder is abated by unpublished letters from her father and herself, which explain that she learned her repertory as a child from the singing of three persons: an aunt, her mother, and an old nurse of the family. The aunt, her mother's sister, was her chief source, and had herself learned these ballads from the singing of countrywomen in the district of Braemar, not far from Balmoral on the River Dee, "a sequestered, romantic pastoral country" where she spent her married life. This lady, Mrs. Farquharson, had had a decent education for her circumstances, and made a respectable marriage. Her father, William Forbes of Disblair, had possessed a music library and musical instruments which together were worth almost as much as all the rest of his property. In speaking of Mrs. Farquharson's songs, Professor Gordon said he was sure that she "invented nor added nothing herself." She had, he said, "a tenacious memory, which retained all the songs she had heard," and her niece, his daughter, was blessed with a memory equally good, and had "almost the whole store of her songs lodged in it."[2]

Mrs. Brown herself records that in 1783, at the request of William Tytler, she had compiled a manuscript with a large number of her pieces, intending it for him. But when he requested further to have the tunes also recorded, as she writes, "My Father ordered Bob Scott [her nephew, later Professor of Greek at Aberdeen], then a very young boy & a mere novice in musick to try to do it & he & I set to work. but [*sic*] found the business so crabbed that in order to abridge our labours a little we selected what we thought the best of the Ballads whose tunes being added in the best manner we could were sent" to Mr. Tytler.[3] This was the origin of the two MSS known to Child as the Jamieson-Brown and the William Tytler-Brown MSS: the first with twenty texts and no music, the second, made soon after, containing fifteen texts and tunes. The first, which was later given to Robert Jamieson, eventually found its way to the University of Edinburgh Library among David Laing's papers. The second has vanished, but what we may regard as a very exact transcript in Joseph Ritson's hand was given not long since by Dr. Rosenbach to Harvard [HCL 25241.37.5].

[1] John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* ... (London, 1817–1858), VII, 90.

[2] Gordon to A. F. Tytler, 19 Jan., 1793, transcript in Harvard College Library MS 25241.37.5, fols. 7–8.

[3] Mrs. Brown to A. F. Tytler, 23 Dec., 1800, tr. in HCL, Child MSS, X, 85.

When Walter Scott was beginning to busy himself about the *Minstrelsy,* he applied to Alexander Fraser Tytler, who lent him the William Tytler MS and approached Mrs. Brown afresh in Scott's behalf. The result of his application was a third collection, now called the A. F. Tytler-Brown MS, made in the spring of 1800, and presumably still the property of the Tytler family at Aldourie Castle. This MS contains nine ballads, seven of them new, the other two independent copies of ballads in the Jamieson, but omitted from the William Tytler MS. If Mrs. Brown sent tunes for these nine ballads, as she said she intended to do, they were separately transmitted, and have been lost.

Evidences of Mrs. Brown's literary awareness appear in these letters to A. F. Tytler, in a quotation from Ossian, and in her designating certain of her ballads as "not near so ancient" as others. It is pertinent to add that her sense of propriety was much offended by Scott's naming her in print, in his prefatory acknowledgments. These are matters which have a possible bearing on her transmission of traditional song, which we are now in a position to examine more closely.

The variations that occur between the two MSS of approximately the same date throw valuable light on the degree of fidelity to which Mrs. Brown felt herself committed with regard to a given text. It is unsatisfactory to have to forego most of the detailed evidence, but any one, I believe, who will take the trouble to collate the texts will find himself in agreement with the following conclusions. We should bear in mind that when Mrs. Brown's second copy was made she had the first one by her, so that any changes must have been deliberately introduced.

Mrs. Brown's alterations are due to five causes: (1) corrections of memory; (2) rationalizing; (3) metrical considerations; (4) regularizing and reducing dialectal features; (5) considerations that may loosely be called aesthetic.

Strikingly little can be laid to the first cause, of memory revisal. "Young Bekie" acquires a couple of additional stanzas, and lines are added here and there in other ballads. There are occasional, but infrequent, shifts in the position of a stanza, which could be owing to the same cause. Such changes usually occur in connection with a sequence involving "incremental repetition." Thus, in "Willy's Lady," the series of proffered gifts in the Jamieson copy stands as *girdle—steed,* but in the William Tytler MS runs *cup—steed—girdle,* with consequent lengthening of the ballad by repetition of the related lines. A clear case of rationalizing occurs in the change of the line "O seven foot he lap a back" to "O seven foot he started back." Changes for the sake of greater metrical smoothness lie on every hand. Thus, "Five hundred pound

maid I'll gie to the[e]" becomes "Five hundred pounds I'll gie to thee." The lines

Then stopped ha they their loud loud sang
And tane up the still mournin

become

Soon did they drop the loud, loud sang,
Took up the still mourning.

The treatment of dialect is not consistent in either MS, but generally dialect is muffled in revision, unless rhyme requires its emphasis. Typical is the change, "An' spear nae leave" to "An' ask nae leave."

By far the majority of changes—and the number can hardly average less than one to a line—can be attributed to the wish to hand on as attractive a text as possible from the point of view of a reader of taste. To this end, there is continual substitution of one word for another, change of tense, grammatical change, change for elegance, or for logic, even—once or twice—change *pudoris causa*. A few characteristic examples from a single ballad, "Jack the little Scot", are:

Jamieson-Brown] O Johney was as brave a knight
Wm. Tytler-Brown] Johny was as brave a knight

J-B] An he's done him to the English court
WT-B] And he is to the English court

J-B] To Johney proves wi child
WT-B] To Johny grows wi' child

J-B] That will rin into fair England
WT-B] That will gang unto fair England

J-B] . . . the king then cried
WT-B] . . . then cried the king

But the most interesting and significant of such changes have to do with the endings of the ballads. Here there is slight possibility of the difference being caused by improved recollection. There are five ballads wherein the endings notably differ. Of three of these, Mrs. Brown simply omits the feeble concluding lines. In the other two cases, she rounds off an inconclusive or unclimactic ending with additional lines intended to give force or point. Thus, the final stanza of "Rose the Red and White Lilly" is omitted in the second copy; it is:

Then out it spake her Rose the red
An a hearty laugh laugh she
I wonder what would our step dame say
Gin she this sight did see.

On the other hand, the Jamieson copy of "Kempion" ends thus:

An relieved sall she never be,
Till St Mungo come oer the sea

to which the Tytler copy adds,—thereby making a six-line stanza, to which the tune would have to be especially accommodated:

An' sighing said that weary wight,
I fear that day I'll never see.

It is, therefore, abundantly clear that for Mrs. Brown there was nothing sacred about the mere words of her ballads. The text which she had drawn out of the stores of her own memory was no more fixed and immutable by virtue of being once transferred to paper than it had been before that irrelevant act occurred. Had some one of Ritson's school of thought—which is to say our current scholarly persuasion—told her that by writing down her ballads she had automatically produced a standard authoritative text, from which henceforth even she herself must not depart by so much as a syllable, unless she could swear that in so doing she was reverting more closely to what she had heard in girlhood,—what would have been her amazement! Might she not have retorted that she herself had never in her life heard such a standard text; and that, to cite an analogy, when she told a story on two or three separate occasions she did not think herself obliged, under pain of being considered dishonest, to adhere to a parrotlike repetition of the identical words she had first employed? Had not the person from whom she had received the story done his or her best for it, and should she not do the same? Thus, as clearly appears from her contemporaneous texts of the same ballads, she viewed her proper function as an active participation, not a passive, inert reception as indiscriminately careful to perpetuate blemishes as beauties. Mirrorlike perpetuators of tradition have in fact latterly existed, but they must inevitably be either scholars or persons of a very low grade of intelligence. (Parenthetically, it might be remarked that only the former are entirely pleased by the latter, but that not even the latter are quite satisfied with the former.)

If we have correctly described Mrs. Brown's attitude toward her songs as coöperative rather than passive, we have yet to learn what effect might be produced upon her contribution by 'tract of time.' The two ballads of which she made copies nearly a score of years apart provide us with a lucky index of this aspect of individual variation. In these two cases, the later records were made quite independently of the earlier, which in fact she had supposed lost.

The ballads in question are "Lord John and Burd Ellen," previously called "Burd Ellen," and "Love Gregor," which the earlier copy names "Fair Anny." We have, it appears to me, sufficient assurance that Mrs. Brown's remembrance of these ballads had not in the meanwhile become crossed with foreign versions, in that she makes clear to A. F. Tytler, in 1800, that she has not for many years exercised her faculties in this direction, and is now reviving an interest long laid aside.

The amount of change in the first of these ballads is not spectacular, until toward the end. But the divergence between the copies of "Love Gregor" and "Fair Anny," in spite of a close parallelism in line content, is so extreme as to constitute a virtual remaking of the whole ballad. The variations are by no possibility that I can envisage due to imperfect recollection, acting by itself. It is quite clear that Mrs. Brown had a full and accurate recollection of the ballad narrative in all its details. What she apparently did not remember, or care to reproduce, was the exact way in which she had sung the ballad before,—the words she had used, the turn of her phrases. She reaches the same points at the same time, but only about a sixth of the lines are even approximately identical. Nothing but a line-for-line comparison can bring home this really startling display of textual fluidity; but we must here be content with a representative extract, stanzas 5 to 9:

Jamieson-Brown	A. F. Tytler-Brown
O gin I had a bony ship An men to sail wi me It's I would gang to my true love Since he winna come to me.	But I will get a bonny boat And I will sail sail the sea For I maun gang to Love Gregor Since he canno come hame to me.
Her fathers gien her a bonny ship An sent her to the stran She's tane her young son in her arms An turnd her back to the lan.	O she has gotten a bonny boat And saill'd the sa't sea fame She lang'd to see her ain true love Since he could no come hame.
She had na been o' the sea saillin About a month or more Till landed has she her bonny ship Near her true loves door.	O row your boat my mariners And bring me to the land For yonder I see my Loves castle Close by the sat sea strand. [salt]
The night was dark, & the win' blew caul An her love was fast asleep An the bairn that was in her twa arms Fu sair began to weep.	She has ta'en her young son in her arms And to the door shes gone And lang shes knocked & sair shes ca'd But answer got she none.
Long stood she at her true loves door An lang tirl'd at the pin At length up gat his fa'se mither Says, Wha's that wou'd be in.	O open the door Love Gregor she says O open and let me in For the wind blaw's thro my yellow hair And the rain draps oer my skin.

Here are two equally authoritative renditions of the same story. It cannot be maintained that the second is less authentic than the first; indeed, if anything, in the passage quoted the first text seems a little more self-conscious, a shade less natural, than the second. Is it not clear that what Mrs. Brown was trying for in the version of 1800 was, not to recover her own text of 1783, but to recover, or re-create, the ballad itself, the essential, ideal "Lass of Roch

Royal," as it exists in solution in the sum of all its traditional variations? In this attempt she produced a new version, one which had not existed before, and in that sense—but that sense alone—quite *un*traditional. It cannot be supposed that this version was any closer to the one she had learned at her aunt's knee than the version she had sung seventeen years earlier. But neither is it to be assumed that the version of 1783 is in any literal sense the exact replica of her aunt's singing. Nor do I believe that there is any need to infer that she had learned two versions of the ballad, one of which she recorded in 1783, the other in 1800. She herself never suggests that she knew more than one. For her, both texts appear to be the identical ballad, which she declares in 1800 she never saw either in print or manuscript, but which she learned as a little girl from hearing it sung, and had carried in her memory all these years.

What was it she had carried in her memory? Not a *text,* but a *ballad:* a fluid entity soluble in the mind, to be concretely realized at will in words and music. When she wrote in 1800 that her nephew had recently been after her in Jamieson's behalf and that by his application her "recollections & faculties" had been aroused,[4] she chose her terms with a clear sense that something more than mere remembering was involved. An exactly analogous case can be cited in Cecil Sharp's experience with his blind singer, Henry Larcombe. Whenever Sharp asked him to repeat a phrase or a stanza, Larcombe sang him a new variant, beautiful, authentic, equally satisfying, and this apparently without realizing that he was not giving exactly what had been requested.[5] What such singers have in mind is a melodic idea, not a note-for-note record; and what any one else will learn from their singing will inevitably be likewise the *idea* of a song, because it is too fluid for any other kind of record to be captured, except by mechanical means.

Thus we begin to understand how much in this traditional art depends upon the instrument of reproduction. But there is another mode of estimating Mrs. Brown's performance, an approach through comparative study of other nearly contemporaneous records of her ballads as they came from different singers. To make such analysis cogent would require a good deal of time and space for the marshaling of details and the weighing of evidence inevitably subjective in greater or less degree. Here there is room only for a few unsupported assertions.

First, then, there is no doubt that her ballads, as might have been expected in the light of her origins and background, subsist on a higher than average level of well-bred literacy. This fact is not all to the good. Whilst it generally makes her texts easier and smoother reading, it is not infrequently responsible

[4] Letter cited, of 23 Dec., 1800.

[5] Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (London, 1907), p. 21.

for the presence of false notes, artificial touches, pretty sentimentalities, and a specious neatness that puts one on guard. Her versions seldom show the gaps and chasms, the rugged and abrupt leaps of narrative which are such characteristic and vivid features of traditional balladry. They show, on the contrary, an expository skill, a faculty of neat transition and summary, which is doubtfully welcome at this stage of art. It is symptomatic, too, that there are almost no real obscurities of phrase or idea, such as often appear in pure oral transmission. There are occasional moral observations and pious reflections, especially at the ends of her ballads, which are little above the broadside level and which jar our sense of fitness. It can hardly be an accident that where the erotic note is bluntly struck in other versions, in Mrs. Brown's it is sidestepped or soft-pedaled. Collateral evidence of a delicate taste is to be seen in the fact that she recalls no ballads which deal with the incest motive, like "Leesome Brand" or "Lizie Wan"; nor with parricide, like "Edward," nor infanticide, like "The Cruel Mother"; nor with any vigorous and outspoken themes of criminal passion, like "Young Hunting." It is striking that her nearest approach to this sort of thing is "The Bonny Birdy," a unique counterpart of "Little Musgrave" which plays down the element of guilty love almost to the vanishing point and ends with a heavily underlined moral. She pitches for the most part upon the marvelous, the supernatural, and the sentimentally romantic; and in her appetite for the last she is avid to the point of wholly uncritical acceptance of the most insipid folly.

All these factors help to define the refracting influences always at work upon a body of traditional song, even in the presence of a first-class transmitting instrument. The very finest of such instruments must pass its materials through a filter screen which allows certain effects to come through directly, but others distorted, or transmuted; whereas to others it is simply opaque or impervious. The process is unconscious or instinctive in inverse ratio to the degree of intelligence possessed by the singer. Mrs. Brown was regarded by Child as one of the best and most authentic of all his sources, and we have no desire to pull her down from that place of eminence. But Mrs. Brown, as we have now seen, adopted no passive attitude toward her text: her function was coöperative and re-creative. In the extent to which, from our point of view, it was successfully so lies the relative excellence of her texts. Confronted by the evidence of her variations, we can hardly avoid, as it seems to me, giving her a large proportion of responsibility for the particular form her ballads assumed while they were in her charge. It is equally certain that she grew up in an environment especially sympathetic and favorable to popular song, and learned her repertory from sources that differed very little, if at all, from herself. If we will, we may pass back the credit of her ballads to her aunt, Mrs.

Farquharson, to whom, certainly, all gratitude is due. But we shall not thereby have altered the nature of the case one whit. There is no reason for supposing that the ballads were more stable in Mrs. Farquharson's handling, or that she was less coöperative in her rendition of them, than her niece. We come into contact here with a vital, active stage of oral tradition. It is creative, or at least re-creative, and is at a vast remove from the state of mental sleepwalking in which the older ballads have latterly been perpetuated in one region or another. At the stage which we are considering, there was no lack of awareness. There was plenty of quickness of parts in the eighteenth-century Scot, whether cotter or laird; and nothing is clearer than that popular balladry in that region and time was as widely practiced, as well understood in its conventions, and as generally interesting to all levels of the community,—from Lady Wardlaw and Lady Hume to Mrs. Harris's nursemaid, from Lord Hailes to James Rankin, Peter Buchan's blind beggar,—as was, say, the kindred traditional pastime of country dancing in seventeenth-century England. Not all practiced the technique with equal success, it goes without saying; but with whatever degree of success it was cultivated, it could count on a lively and sympathetic response among gentle and simple. It was Lady Hume who gave "Young Waters" to the Foulis brothers to be printed in 1755. It was Lord Hailes who transmitted to Percy the now famous copies of "Edward" and "Sir Patrick Spens" which appeared a decade later in the *Reliques*. But it was countless persons, in all walks of life, who were singing them, shaping and reshaping them more to their liking as they sang. Eighteenth-century Scotland, there is no doubt at all, was a nation of ballad singers and ballad lovers. How much earlier it had been so no one knows; but it is a fact that what we today know as British balladry at its best is a mass of texts taken down by interested persons from living Scottish tradition in the latter half of the eighteenth century, or learned then and transmitted to print or manuscript early in the following century. It has been estimated that about 1,000 Scottish texts have been preserved in Child's volumes: and of these almost the whole bulk comes from persons whose memories reached back into the eighteenth century. Regardless of how deeply the roots penetrate into the soil of the past, it remains true that the flowers we have bloomed in the age of Hume and Hailes, of Boswell and Burns: this latter spring is their season which we know and admire, and which, Robin Hood apart, gives the dominant tone to Child's whole collection. In the face of a living and vital tradition, such as is typified by Mrs. Brown, it is merely silly to speak of the fourteenth or the fifteenth century as "*The* Golden Age of British Balladry." That may indeed have been *a* golden age. But it is altogether improbable that "Sir Patrick Spens," or "Edward," or "Clerk Saunders," or "The Wife of Usher's Well," were better ballads three or four hundred years earlier than they were when they flowered afresh under the benignant and

vitalizing sun of a later age. Indeed, there is even reason to surmise that Scottish balladry was of comparatively late growth. There is at least no evidence that it reached its fullest development much before the eighteenth century, however clear it may be that with the opening of the nineteenth century it was on the decline. What I am concerned to insist upon is the fact that in the eighteenth century there was enough vital energy in traditional song to put forth naturally, as flowers proper to the season, not excavated fossils, "Sir Patrick Spens," "Mary Hamilton," and the rest. Last year's blooms are not this year's, though they spring from the same root. For each season there has to be a fresh re-creative effort; and in the day of Burns, thanks to a living tradition, as good versions were burgeoning as perhaps had ever flowered.[6]

If there were occasion, we could find further evidence of a conscious re-creative tradition in the ballad music which has survived. It is clear, for example, that a four-phrase tune carrying a text in quatrains, in which the second and fourth lines are refrain, does not imperceptibly make itself over into an eight-phrase tune carrying a text in which the first line is thrice repeated, the repetitions being sandwiched by refrain-lines of a quite different pattern, the whole concluded by a refrain on the seventh and eighth lines. Changes of this sort are obviously deliberate, not automatic and subconscious.

What is implied by such consideration as the foregoing is a widening of the meaning of the term Tradition. We must include in it a much greater allowance for conscious cerebration than we have been in the habit of doing. Thus, it is clear that a great many Scottish ballads—and "Edward" is one of the number—were remade in the eighteenth century, not instinctively and unconsciously, but as intelligently and artistically as might be. The beckoning image of a perfectly pure traditional text which ever gleams on the ballad-scholar's horizon—a text, that is, over which the individual transmitters from generation to generation have exerted no conscious control—is nothing but a scholarly mirage. The golden age of balladry, whenever it occurred, was an age when there was a maximum of creative and re-creative energy coursing through the ballads and a minimum of merely passive re-recording. The further into such an active tradition we penetrate, the fainter become the outlines of that "precious specimen of the unspoiled traditional ballad" of which Child was ever in pursuit, unless "unspoiled" and "traditional" be allowed to mean something a good deal more positive than what the terms are generally taken to convey.

[6] Child appears unable to conceive of such vitality in traditional re-creation. Faced by the discrepancy in Mrs. Brown's two versions of "The Lass of Roch Royal," he can only suggest that the later, since it is "by no means an imperfectly remembered version of its predecessor" "is to be regarded as a blending of two independent versions known to Mrs. Brown, which no doubt had much in common, though not so much as" the version of 1783 and that of 1800. [*English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, II, 213–214.]

Confronted by these considerations, scholars may have recourse to the hypothetical homogeneous community, or society, where all who meddled with ballads were so much alike, so much at one in attitude and outlook, that all the meddling went the same way, so that they finally meddled things into supreme beauty and effectiveness. This is the very ecstasy of meddling. It must have been long ago, because no such homogeneity could be observed in medieval Europe; and after such a triumph as "Edward" or "Spens" or "Usher's Well" had been achieved, there was nothing further to be done but to hand down the miracle in its fragile perfection, unchanged through centuries of oral transmission, until it might haply fall into the hands of a Percy or a Walter Scott, to be placed on display in a literary museum.

But it is, on the contrary, altogether probable that there was good and bad in ballad making from the very beginning. The part which the individual human being was playing in the making of ballads in the fourteenth century was not different in kind from the part played by similar individuals in eighteenth-century Scotland. There were, that is to say, coarse spirits and there were finer spirits, gifted and creative and imaginative singers, and singers uninspired and insensitive. The ballad product mirrored these differences perforce, and in the long run or the short run excellence never survived—unless it was fixed on paper at the lucky moment of its ascendancy. Supreme felicity is inevitably almost nonexistent in balladry; and where it is approached, we may be sure that it has recently been achieved, or re-achieved. Tradition, as Ritson once remarked, "is a species of alchemy that converts gold to lead."

But if any version of a ballad is the net result of the talents and of the shortcomings of the individual singers who have successively possessed it, it is obvious that we cannot be precise or rigid in defining "pure" tradition. When we try to be, we immediately run headlong into contradictions. We cannot consistently hold, for example, that Walter Scott's "improvements" of the ballads that passed through his hands are illegitimate, but that Mrs. Brown's are not. Let it be objected that Scott's changes were for print, but Mrs. Brown's were a part of oral tradition: the difference is more apparent than real. In both cases, the changes of which we are aware were written down. We have, moreover, no knowledge that any specific text from Mrs. Brown ever passed on into continued oral circulation. It may have done so,—but so may Scott's, if any singer took it up and launched it on the stream. If such a thing occurred,—and in fact there is reason in Scott's case to believe that it did—the changes would merely add grist to the traditional mill and be exposed to the same chances of survival as Mrs. Brown's. In truth, what Scott did is not different in kind from what every member of the re-creative ballad-singing tradition had always done or had felt at liberty to do with these songs, though Scott may have done it generally with more consideration, and often with more tact, than most singers

could command. Child waxes somewhat indignant over Scott's independent treatment of his texts, and never fails to rebuke him and any one else who ventured to change a word. But had Scott remained anonymous, and had he sung his changes back into the oral stream instead of fixing them in print, he would have to be accepted as an unusually gifted, but not less authentic, link in the ballad tradition. The texts which had passed currently through his hands would be no more open to the charge of spuriousness than all the rest which have been altered by unknown hands. Certainly they might conceivably be regarded as uncharacteristic, either in part or as a whole; but, not to be paradoxical, there is much more in Child's volumes that is not characteristic of "pure" tradition than the contrary. In the end it has to be acknowledged that the changes were introduced, both consciously and unwittingly, both in singing and for print, by individuals named and unnamed, and that the only standard of judgment which can be consistently applied is the largely subjective one of the degree of success achieved in the kind attempted. At one end of the scale of taste and ability is Scott, and at the other end, say, James Rankin of Tarwathie, or Peter Buchan himself. The mean position is occupied by numberless singers, unknown, but of whom Mrs. Brown may stand as the type, who took an equally positive and coöperative attitude toward their ballads, but who were not teased by genius or egocentricity into an idiosyncratic contribution, nor betrayed by vulgar and insensitive natures into a debasement of their poetic inheritance.