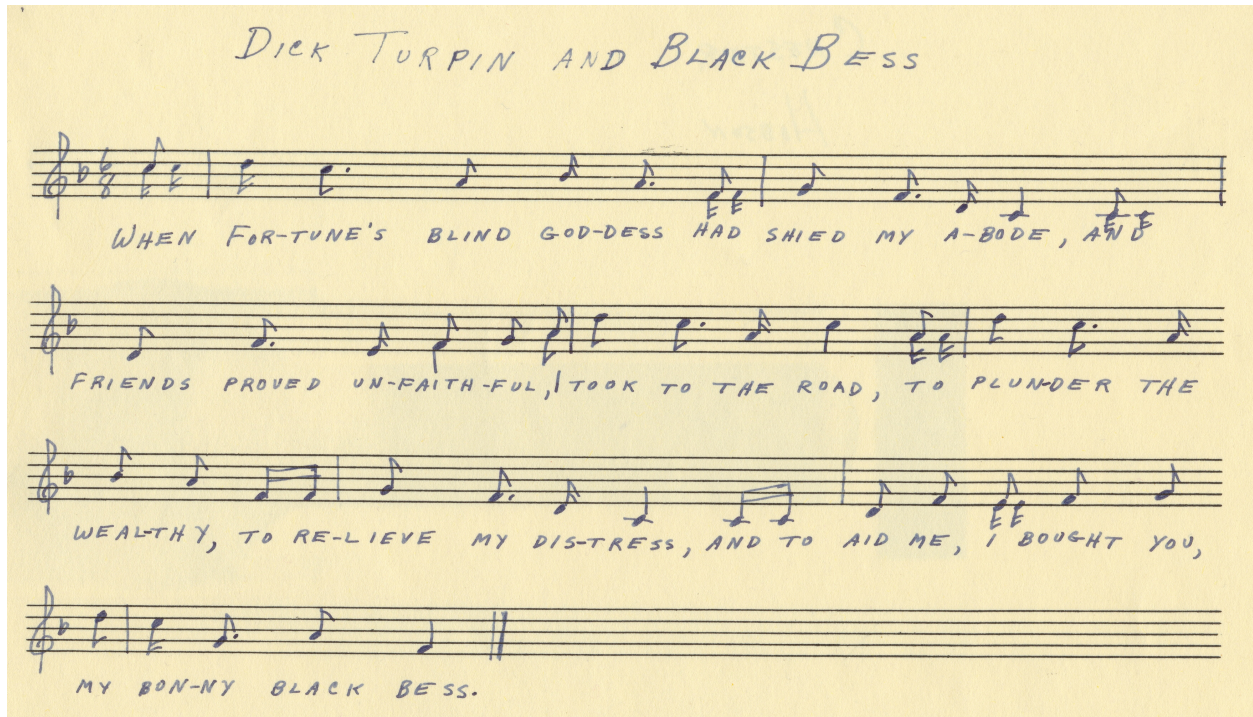


Dick Turpin and Black Bess

As sung by
William Jacobs Morgan
08-04-1946 Berlin, WI

DICK TURPIN AND BLACK BESS



WHEN FOR-TUNE'S BLIND GOD-DESS HAD SHIED MY A-BODE, AND
FRIENDS PROVED UN-FAITH-FUL, I TOOK TO THE ROAD, TO PLUNDER THE
WEALTHY, TO RE-LIEVE MY DISTRESS, AND TO AID ME, I BOUGHT YOU,
MY BON-NY BLACK BESS.

Verse 1.

When Fortune, blind Goddess, has shied my
abode
And friends proved unfaithful I took to the road
To plunder the wealthy, relieve my distress
And to aid me I bought you, my bonny Black
Bess.

Verse 2.

How still you would stand when some carriage
I'd stop
While I picked up the jewels its inmates had
dropped.
I ne'er robbed a poor man, nor did I distress
The widow or orphan, my bonny Black Bess.

Verse 3.

When sables black midnight her mantles had
spread,
O'er the fair face of nature how softly you tread.
Thro' fate or good fortune, no unwelcome guests
We took millions of fortune, my bonny Black
Bess.

Verse 4.

When Arden's famed justice did me hotly pursue,
From London to Yorktown, like lightning you
flew.
No tollgate could stop you, broad rivers you
crossed,
You took me in ten hours, my bonny Black Bess.

Verse 5.

Ill fate now comes o'er me, and oppressed is my lot;
The law now pursues me for the man that I shot.
To save me, dear Bessie, you did do your best;
You are worn out and weary, my bonny Black Bess.

Verse 6.

Hark, the bloodhounds approacheth, but they never can catch
A beast like you, Bessie, so gallant and brave.
You must die, my dear friend, oh, it does me oppress;
Lie there, I have shot you, my bonny Black Bess.

Verse 7.

In future's bright ages, when I'm dead and gone,
My story be handed from father to son.
Though some may pity, yet they must confess,
'Twas in kindness I shot you, my bonny Black Bess.

Verse 8.

Now I'll climb yonder sapling, so stately and tall,
And there I'll await the swift fatal ball.
I'll die like a man, and I'll soon be at rest;
Fare thee well now forever, my bonny Black Bess.

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcription by Peters, p. 189.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Sung by William Jacob Morgan, age 76, Berlin 1946

There are various legends and songs about the English highwayman, Dick Turpin, who it appears robbed the rich to give to the poor and was hanged in 1739. In this song, Turpin, knowing he will soon be captured, bids farewell to his faithful horse, bonny Black Bess, and then he shoots her before the pursuing hounds can kill her.

Morgan believed that the song must be several hundred years old. He had learned it from his father, James D. Morgan, who came to Canada from Manchester, England, with his father who had been a messenger in Wellington's army.

[Morgan's father] had a horse called King George – for 20 [30?] years he slept at night by the side of the horse.

Editor's notes:

Examples of the variety of songs about Dick Turpin can be found in the sources below. The song "Turpin Hero" is listed in Cecil Sharp's collection as an "old ballad revised, 1739" (Sharp 146). Neither the tune nor text is similar to Mr. Morgan's song, yet it is about the figure Dick Turpin. "Black Bess" from *Old Time Songs and Poems* has a similar theme of a robber and his black horse, but the specific words and verses are different from Mr. Morgan's version.

Alternate titles/related songs: "Black Bess," "Bonnie Black Bess," "My Bonnie Black Bess," "Turpin Hero."



Sources:

Gardner, Emelyn Elizabeth, and Geraldine Jencks Chickering, collectors and editors. *Ballads and Songs of Southern Michigan*. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1967. Reprinted from original, c1939. "My Bonny Black Bess" text and tune very similar.

Lomax, John A., collector. *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. 1916. New edition with additions. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1922.

Old Time Songs and Poems, Vol. 1, no. 2, 1967. "Black Bess" text only.

Peters, Harry B., ed. *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*. Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977.

Pound, Louise. *Poetic Origins and the Ballad*. The Macmillan Company, New York 1921.

Randolph, Vance, collector and editor. *Ozark Folksongs*. Vol. II. Columbia, Mo.: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1946-50. "Bonnie Black Bess" text similar, tune different.

Sharp, Cecil J., editor and arranger. *A Book of British Song for Home and School*. London: J. Murray, 1902. "Turpin Hero."

K.G.