

**THE SONGS AND BALLADS
OF CUMBERLAND, AND
THE LAKE COUNTRY**

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The Songs and Ballads of Cumberland, and the Lake Country by Sidney Gilpin

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JOHN WOODCOCK GRAVES.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FRAGMENT.

MY life has been so erratic and so singularly varied by unprecedented events that a volume of considerable compass might be filled to excite wonder, laughter, tears, or the deepest sorrow. It would be vain, however, to attempt any such task, as the space allowed will only admit of fragmentary portions or the barest outline.

My great grandfather, John Graves, lived and died a man of some property at Heskett-Newmarket. I never heard much of my grandfather, John Woodcock, but know that he had two sons and a daughter. My father's name was Joseph. He was a plumber, glazier, and ironmonger at Wigton; and married Ann the seventh daughter of Thomas Matthews of the same place. I was the only son of the issue, and my mother used to tell very precisely that I was born at eight o'clock on the morning of the 9th of February, 1795,* and Chris-

* I think I am correct with the year; but how far this is so may be seen at Wigton Church.

tened in the same mantle as was Count Henry Jeromé De Salis.

When six or seven years old I lived at Cocker-mouth with my uncle George. We boarded at an inn kept by his aunt, a widow, and I was sent to school, where I learned to read and cipher. When nine years old my father died, and we went to Wigton to attend the funeral, which I did not see as I was off at the time playing at marbles with my cousins. There I remained, and was sent to school in a "Clay Daubin" in a back yard. I passed through arithmetic, and could excel my teacher in writing. I think this is all the school teaching I ever had. My mother strove to make my father "an honest man" by paying his debts when he was dead; saying, "I was his wife, and by that compact am responsible; though God knows that while I was saving he was spending." Widowed, helpless, and in debt, she walked to Carlisle to administer, but was told that she must have witness to the intestate effects; so her first journey to the county town was in vain.

About the age of fourteen I took off again to my uncle at Cocker-mouth, and remained with him till I was twenty. He was a house, sign, and coach painter, but rarely taught me anything. His wife and he kept a bathing hotel at Skinburness, which occupied a good deal of their time. He had a clever foreman, for whom I cared nothing; so I frequently went a-hunting with the hounds of Joseph

Steel, Esq. An old bachelor, whose name was Joseph Faulder, and his sister lived opposite ; and to that man I owe anything good I have done or know. I spent every spare moment with this old pair. Mary, his sister, was a kind old woman, but occasionally took drink. Joe was most abstemious, and retired as a hermit. He lived a hundred years too soon. He was John Dalton's* intimate friend ; and I could now portray them shaking hands, such a thrilling effect did their meeting produce on my young mind. Whenever I look back on what I have read and seen through life I cannot find a single man to compare to my old mentor. Dear amiable Joe Faulder ! he fixed in me a love of Truth, and bent my purpose to pursue it, guarding me against having my mind weakened by the false theories or superstitions which would inevitably arise around my walk in life.

My uncle declining business at Cockermonth, I felt a strong desire to go to France, Italy, &c. I had often talked with Joe about painters and sculptors ; so I thought I would work, travel, and learn. I had made some drawings ; and as he had taught me a little of comparative anatomy—grace—the line of beauty—that nature must always be our great guide—that copies from others are odious even in excellence—I was determined to strike out

* John Dalton, the celebrated mathematician and natural philosopher : born at Eaglesfield, near Cockermonth, 1766 ; died, 1844.

a path for myself on general principles, and to receive nothing as correct until I had learned, as Euclid phrases it, *not only that the thing was true, but why it was so.* With my box on board at Skinburness to go to Liverpool, I went to Wigton on foot to bid farewell to my mother and sisters; but my friends pressed me so much to remain that I finally yielded much against my will. I was not long in Wigton before I was introduced to Miss Jane Atkinson of Rosley, whom I married. She only lived about twelve months after, and I was left to retirement in the house we had taken on Market-hill, Wigton.

I had a friend named Walter Simpson who was a very superior young man. We spent days and nights together; were subscribers to a library; and thus read, studied, and experimented. So the time passed for four or five years, when I thought I would marry a neighbour's daughter, whom I had known from childhood. I was daily in her father's house. One evening I had staid late reading in the parlour. She was sewing; the rest of the family had retired. After asking what o'clock it was, I laid down the paper and placing my arms on the table, said to her, "Miss Porthouse, I have been thinking for some time of putting a question to you." "And pray," asked she, "what kind of a question is it? A foolish one, I'll warrant." "I've been thinking," said I, "of proposing marriage to you!" She started, looked me sternly in the face, then

without a single word snatched up the lighted candle, and indignantly stalked away—up stairs—and slammed the door to. However, we were married afterwards, and have had eight children. I married her because I thought she possessed a strong mind and mild temper;* but, to tell the truth, I cannot say that we were by any means happily mated. She was as tall, or nearly, so as myself, exceedingly graceful in her deportment, and of good education. She could not be called a beauty, yet to a stranger there was that which won esteem in preference to beauty. Her friends were ardently attached to her, while her parents and the rest of the family stood in awe of her as the superior mind.

I was connected with the woollen mills at Caldbeck for some time; but these turned out a ruinous game. I was cheated, robbed, and galled to such an extent, by those who ought to have been my best friends, that I resolved to go to the farthest corner of the earth. I made a wreck of all; left machinery, book-debts, &c., in the hands of a relative, to provide for my two dear daughters whom I left behind; and landed in Hobart Town, Tasmania, in 1833, with my wife and four children, and about £10 in my pocket. I cannot now begin an endless narrative of my travelling, voyaging, and

*Samuel Jefferson, author of the "History of Carlisle," and other local works of interest, married a sister to the Miss Porthouse above mentioned.

adventures in these distant colonies; otherwise I could relate sufficient strange incidents to fill at least an ordinary octavo volume.

In stature I am about the middle height, straight, proportionate and of lithesome gait. I used to be called "lish," with a temper inclined to merriment, which has floated me over many woes; but, alas! how often have I thought that my poor mother's *Jerome mantle* ought to have been my shroud! I have frequently been called inventive, and during late years have brought to considerable perfection several machines—especially one for preparing the New Zealand flax.

Nearly forty years have now wasted away since John Peel and I sat in a snug parlour at Caldbeck among the Cumbrian mountains. We were then both in the hey-day of manhood, and hunters of the olden fashion; meeting the night before to arrange earth stopping; and in the morning to take the best part of the hunt—the drag over the mountains in the mist—while fashionable hunters still lay in the blankets. Large flakes of snow fell that evening. We sat by the fireside hunting over again many a good run, and recalling the feats of each particular hound, or narrow neck-break 'scapes, when a flaxen-haired daughter of mine came in saying, "Father, what do they say to what granny sings?" Granny was singing to sleep my eldest son—now a leading barrister in Hobart Town—with an old rant