

Sheep, Don't You Know The Tide

Jonathan Cape (1908)



When I was once in - Bal - ti - more A man came up to me and cried,
- Sheep, sheep, don't you know the tide? - Yes, yes, we know the tide.



"Come, I have eigh-teen hun-dred sheep To Glasgow bound on Tues-day's tide."
Sheep, sheep, don't you know the tide? - Oh yes, we know the tide.

The first night we were out at sea

Those sheep were quiet in their mind.

The second night they cried with fear--

They smelt no pastures in the wind.

Sheep, sheep, don't you know the wind? (etc.)

They sniffed, poor things, for their green fields,

They cried so loud I could not sleep.

They would not eat, they would not drink,

But bleated o'er the salt sea deep.

Sheep, sheep, don't you know the deep? (etc.)

To sort the living from the dead,

Inside the pens we crawled each day,

And ere we came to Glasgow town,

Five hundred sheep had passed away.

Sheep, sheep, don't you know the way? (etc.)

For all of fifty shillings down

I sailed across the salt sea deep.

For fifty thousand shillings down

I would not sail again with sheep.

Sheep, sheep, don't you know the sheep?

Oh yes, we know the sheep.

For fifty million shillings down

I would not sail again with sheep.

Sheep, sheep, don't you know the tide

Oh yes, we know the tide.

Sheep, sheep, you're bound to ride

Sheep on the deep and how they cried--

Sheep on the deep and how they cried.

The Boarding Party's interest in sheep comes primarily from our many friends who are shearers, carders, spinners, dyers, knitters, weavers and waulkers of wool and not from that animal's questionable affiliation with the maritime trades. Even the veterinarian (tanky) on board royal navy ships was better known for dispensing grog than for butchering mutton. But sheep do get around, and they have a bad reputation among sailors. K. C. remembers the regular arrival in Saudi Arabia of the Australian sheep carrier ships and their strong and distinctive odor.

W. H. Davies (1871-1940) was an Englishman who spent many years roaming the USA as a vagrant and working as a cowboy and as an animal handler aboard ships carrying live cargo. His "Autobiography of a Super-Tramp" ("with a preface by G. Bernard Shaw;" London: Jonathan Cape, 1908) contains vivid descriptions of his shipboard experiences with cattle and--far worse--sheep. He was also a poet, and published hundreds of verses, many of which reflect his life experiences.

Jonathan, with the help of good friend Susan Hills, put together this song by combining and adapting two poems, "Sheep" (1911) and "A Child's Pet" (1920--about the one tame sheep in a hold full of miserable creatures), both of which are found in The Complete Poems of W. H. Davies (Jonathan Cape, 1963). The refrain and tune are adapted from a traditional spiritual, "Sheep, Sheep, Don't You Know the Road," as sung by Helen Schneyer, who heard it from Bessie Jones of the Georgia Sea Island Singers.