

## William Brown

From the singing of Mike Ballantyne

Important though new songs may be, we should also remember that many songs of the past continue to be not only pleasing, but also topical. "William Brown" would undoubtedly draw from Utah Phillips a wizened smile. "My, my," he would scoff. "How times change," he would add ironically.

We take the song from Mike Ballantyne's songbook *Pint Pot and Plough: Thirty-One English Traditional Folksongs* reviewed on page 38 of this issue.

A nice young man was Wil-liam Brown, He worked for a wage in a nor-thern town. He  
 worked from six till eight at night, tur-ning a wheel from left to right. Chorus: Keep that wheel a-  
 tur-ning, Keep that wheel a- tur-ning, Keep that wheel a- tur-ning, And do a lit-tle  
 more each day.

A nice young man was William Brown,  
 He worked for a wage in a northern town.  
 He worked from six till eight at night,  
 Turning a wheel from left to right.

### Chorus

Keep that wheel a-turning,  
 Keep that wheel a-turning,  
 Keep that wheel a-turning,  
 And do a little more each day.

The boss, one day, to William came,  
 He said, "Look here, young what's-your-name,  
 We're not content with what you do,  
 So turn a little harder or it's out with you."

So William turned and he made her run,  
 Three times round in the place of one.

*Among other notes regarding the song's provenance, Ballantyne offers an earlier version of the final verse given here, one more verse pointing the moral, and a revised chorus for these last two verses, all of which were in the song's original version but have been dropped by many singers. For those who like their morals well-sharpened, here they are:*

But sad the sequel now to tell,  
 With profits raised the boss could sell  
 To a take-over group from London town  
 The first redundant case was Brown!

*New Chorus* Now he's in the queue a'waiting,  
 He's in the queue a'waiting,

He turned so hard he soon was made  
 The Lord High Turner of the trade.

William turned with the same sweet smile,  
 The goods he made grew quite a pile.  
 He filled the room and the room next door,  
 And overflowed to the basement floor.

The nation heard this wondrous tale,  
 The news appeared in the *Sketch* and the *Mail*.  
 The railways ran excursions down,  
 All for to see young William Brown.

But sad the sequel is to tell,  
 He turned out more than the boss could sell.  
 The market slumped and the price went down,  
 Seven more days and they sacked young Brown

He's in the queue a'waiting,  
 And he gets a little thinner each day.

Now, workers, don't be such a clown,  
 But take a tip from William Brown.  
 If you work too hard you'll surely be  
 Wiser but poorer, same as he.