James Bird - song lyrics

American Old-time song lyrics from www.traditionalmusic.co.uk

JAMES BIRD.
[Sent to as for publication by Mr. J. F. McDermott, the Scranton agent of The Williamsport (Pa.) Breakfast Table.
In the last issue of The Breakfast Table a news item from Erie, Pa. was published, stating that A. 15. Bird, of Williamsport. was making a search on the beach of the lake near that city for the skeleton of James Bird, a soldier executed for desertion in 1812. A. B. Bird is well known in tins city as the special agent of the Travelers' Insurance Company, and the story of the tragic fate of his second cousin is of more than ordinary local interest. The fate of James Bird was a sad and unjust one, brought about by the wickedest betrayal that the faney can conceive. It has been the theme of both song and story, ever since he was shot on shipboard in Lake Erie, three-quarters of a century ago. Much that has been written, concerning his death, is familiar to all the older residents of Erie, and at every gathering of old folks, even at tins late day, the " Song of Bird " is invariably sung. While A. B. Bird was at Erie, he gained much valuable information touching on the case of the executed soldier. His visit there looking for his grave and skeleton succeeded in arousing interest anew in songs and stories that have been written. All indicate that Bird's offense was of a trivial nature and really was not a reason for any disgrace. It is because of this that his memory is kept alive by story and song. A few years ago, the "Song of Bird," was published at Erie, and created a good deal of dis-cushion. C. J. Sabin, who now lives in Champaign, I'll., has written the song from memory for publication. He says: "I was familiar in my boyhood with Bird's story, as the man who betrayed him lived only 12 miles from where I was born. After Perry's victory on Lake Erie, Bird was idle a long time, and seeing no further need of his service in the fleet, he deserted and finally went to work for a man named Waterman, near Gowanda, N. Y. I have seen Waterman many times and often passed the land cleared by Bird for him. When Waterman was owing Bird quite a sum for work, he told him, if he would go with him to Buffalo he could get the money there to pay him. Arriving there, and finding no United States troops, Mr. Waterman in-duced him to go with him to Erie, saying he would pay his fare, and that the man who was to let him have the money had gone to Erie. Bird not suspecting his design went with him. Once there. Bird was surrendered to the troops, and Waterman, pocketing the reward for returning deserters, left him to be shot, balancing his own account at the same time And never paying Bird a cent for his labor. Waterman's family were a wretched set when I knew them, on this and other accounts." The song is as follows:

Sons of pleasure, listen to me,
And ye daughters, too, give ear,
And a sad and mournful story
As e'er was told you soon shall hear.

Hull, you know, his troops surrendered,
And defenseless left the West,
When our forces quick assembled,
The invader to resist.

Among the troops that marched to Erie

Were the Kingston Volunteers.
Captain Thomas their commander,
To protect our West frontiers.

Tender were the scenes of parting,
Mothers wrung their hands and cried;
Maidens wept their loves in secret,
Fathers strove their tears to hide.

But there's one among that number,
Tall and graceful is his mien,
Firm his step, his look undaunted,
Scarce a nobler youth was seen.

One sweet kiss he snatched from Mary,
Craved his mother's prayers once more,
Pressed his father's band and left them
For Lake Erie's distant shore.

Mary tried to say farewell, James,
Waved her hand, but nothing spoke,
Good-bye. Bird, may heaves protect you,
From the rest the parting broke.

Soon he came where noble Perry
Had assembled all his fleet;
There the gallant Bird enlisted,
Hoping soon the foe to meet.

Where is Bird? the battle rages;
Is he in the strife, or no?
Now the cannons roar tremendous;
Dare he meet the furious foe?

Ah! behold, and see with Perry,
In the self-same ship he fights;
See his messmates fall around him,
Nothing can his soul affright.

But behold! a ball has struck him;
See the crimson current flow;
"Leave the deck," exclaims brave Perry;
"No," cries Bird, " I will not go.

Here on deck I take my station.
Ne'er will Bird his colors fly;
I'll stand by you, gallant captain,
Till we conquer or we die."

So he fought, though faint and bleeding,
Till our "stars and stripes" arose;
Victory had crowned our efforts
All triumphant o'er our foes.

And, did Bird receive a pension?
Was he to his friends restored?
No; nor never to his bosom
Clasped the maid his heart adored.

And there came most dismal tidings
From Lake Erie's distant shore;
Better if poor Bird had perished

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'Mid the battle's awful roar.

"Dearest pareuts," says the letter,
"This will bring sad news to you;
Do not mourn your first beloved,
Though this brings his last adieu.

I must suffer for desertion
From the brig Niagara;
Read this letter, brothers, sisters,
'Tis the last you'll have from me."

Sad and gloomy was the morning
Bird was ordered out to die;
Who's the heart, not dead to pity,
But for him will heave a sigh?

Lo! he fought so brave at Erie,
Freely bled, and nobly dared;
Let his courage plead for mercy,
Let his precious life be spared.

See! he kneels upon the coffin,
Sure his death can do no good;
Spare him! Hark! Oh. God, they've shot him,
See! his bosom streams with blood.

Farewell, Bird, farewell forever,
Friends and home you'll see no more;
But his mangled corpse lies buried
On Lake Erie's distant shore.

The words "Spare him! Hark! Oh, God, they've shot him."
are said to have been uttered by Commodore Perry, who had
ridden on horseback from Buffalo to Erie to save Bird's life,
arriving just as the volley was fired that killed him. The brig
Niagara still lies sunk in Misery Bay. Lake Erie, and can be seen
when the water is clear. - The Williamsport (Pa.) Breakfast Table.

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