

The Quest for Folk Songs in Hampshire.

Dr. G. B. Gardiner, a skilled linguist and musician from Edinburgh, has been for several months actively engaged in collecting, and in many cases rescuing from oblivion, folk songs in Hampshire. It has been my privilege to meet him more than once, to hear his interesting account of his searches, and to listen to his admirable rendering of some of his choice recoveries. I asked him to honour the members of the Hampshire Field Club by writing an article for their Proceedings on his work and its results; but he was forced to reply : "I am so overwhelmed with songs—tunes, texts, and notes—that my hands will be full for months." However he referred me to a letter which he wrote to the *Hampshire Chronicle* of September 1st, 1906, and by the courtesy of the proprietors of that excellent paper, I am permitted to reproduce the letter in full.

F.J.C.H.

When I first had the pleasure of meeting you last summer, I had just begun the work of collecting folk songs in Hampshire. You now ask me to report progress, and I gladly comply with your request, if it were only to have the opportunity of publicly acknowledging your own courtesy, the kindness of my numerous singers, and the willing help of many good people in the county.

Throughout my life I have been a lover of folk-songs, in the first instance, of course, of the songs of Scotland. In the course of many visits to the Continent I gradually extended my range, and three years ago I entered on the systematic study of the folk-songs of Europe, learning typical examples of ancient French, German, Russian, Swedish, Finnish, Hungarian, and even Bohemian and Slovenian songs. I had just studied with intense interest the volume of marvellous songs edited for the Manx Society by Mr. Gill, when it occurred to me to inquire about the songs of England, the real old traditional songs, with no composer's name, the songs handed down by the cottagers of the country from father to son for generations. I wondered whether Englishmen had any songs of the same character as the old Scotch songs—songs which they could endearingly call *our* songs. In the current English song-books there was, indeed to be found a sprinkling of the songs of the soil, the autochthonous songs of our land, such as "Barbara Allen," "The Oak and the Ash," and a very few others, but not the mass of purely traditional music that is contained in the great Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Hungarian, or Swedish collections. Surely, I thought, it could not be that our country was the only country in Europe that was destitute of spontaneous melody.

It was at this stage that I joined the Folk Song Society and obtained six numbers of its Journal. I also provided myself with "Sussex Songs," "English County Songs," "Songs of the West," "A Garland of Country Song," "Folk Songs from Somerset," "English Folk Songs," and "Traditional Tunes," the collections in which are contained the songs still sung in country places and recently rescued from oblivion. In these volumes I at last found what I wanted—a body of nameless, hereditary, English songs of the people corresponding to the songs published in the Swedish collection of Geijer and Afzelius, the Manx collection, the Balmoral collection of Scotch songs, and the Hungarian collection of Matrai Gabriel. In the English song-books I have named are to be found dozens and scores of songs of surpassing beauty, the existence of which was only then revealed to me, and is, I fear, practically unknown to the mass of educated Englishmen. Indeed, I have never met a professional musician who could name to me more than five or six English songs of the same type as the songs of Burns. Yet we possess collections that in quantity and quality will compare favourably with those of any Continental country. I would even venture to assert that from the

songs of the English peasantry a hundred could be selected equal to the hundred best songs of Europe contained in the "International Folk Song Album" of Dr. Reimann. Dr. Vaughan Williams says that the collector has "the ever-present chance of picking up some rare old ballad or an exquisitely beautiful melody worthy, within its smaller compass, of a place beside the finest compositions of the greatest composers."

What could excel in beauty or quaintness "Cicely Sweet," "Down by a Riverside," "The Hostess' Daughter," "The Marigold," "Strawberry Fair," "Sweet Nightingale," "The Seeds of Love," "The Sweet Primeroses," "The Drowned Lover," "I'm Seventeen Come Sunday ?" "The good people of Twyford sing "The Sweet Primeroses" in an exquisitely beautiful form, if any one wants a lovely song, let him go to Twyford and learn "The Primeroses" instead of buying the treacly drawing-room ballads that are so unblushingly thrust upon us from day to day. These constitute the tinned meat department of musical literature.

The name of Twyford reminds me that that village was my first happy hunting-ground in Hampshire. I say happy, because I had there a hearty welcome. In Twyford I collected eleven songs and two carols, one of which appeared in the seventh Journal of the Society. Hursley yielded ten songs, among them "Old Swansea Town," a bold sea-song, what some country people call "a rattler," and "Robin Hood and the Bold Tanner," the text of which, according to Mr. Cecil Sharp, has come down by word of mouth for 300 years. An excellent singer at Itchen Abbas gave me, among eighteen songs, "Lord Paget," a song of the Peninsular War, and a very fine ancient melody wedded to modern words about Avington Pond. The most beautiful of the sixty songs I collected last summer was a version of "The Seeds of Love," obtained from a fine tenor at Cheriton. Practically the same tune is reprinted from Chappell at page 40 of John Hullah's "Songbook," but the Hampshire muse has added some touches which greatly enhance its beauty.

"The Seeds of Love" leads me to a few remarks on the distribution of songs. Curiously I found this melody again in the second volume of "Songs of the North," where it is described as an ancient Northern air. Who can determine its birthplace? "I'm Seventeen come Sunday," a favourite throughout out the South of England, resembles the Manx song, "She answered me quite Modestly," and this in turn is allied to "St. Patrick was a Gentleman," and to a MS Highland tune in the library of Mr. T. A. Mackay, Edinburgh. The air of "Green Bushes," familiar to most country singers, is almost identical with "The Lament of the Duchess of Gloucester " in the Manx collection. Last summer I received from a correspondent at Helston, in Cornwall, a plaintive song, "Poor Old Maidens." You can imagine my disappointment when I found this song note for note in Christie's "Traditional airs of Aberdeen, Banff, and Moray." Another song printed by Christie, and also found in the South, is "Claudy Banks." "Ground for the Floor," in "English County Songs," was noted in Cambridgeshire, but I have heard it at Dummer, and at Padstow, in Cornwall. Examples could be multiplied indefinitely.

Bringing with me thirty songs collected near Bath I resumed my labours here in the middle of March, and have now for the year a budget of 316 songs. Of songs noted in Hampshire alone I have altogether about 350. This season I have worked in succession Old Alresford, Bishop's Sutton, Micheldever, Whitchurch, Lyndhurst, and the workhouses at Lyndhurst Road, Romsey, Southampton, Fareham, Winchester, Whitchurch, and I am now busy at the workhouse at Basingstoke. A singer well-known in the Forest for his remarkable memory gave me over 30 songs, and his brother 16. From one singer at Fareham I obtained 21 songs, from one at Micheldever 15, and from another 12. An old gentleman at Dummer, the head of a very musical family, furnished ten fine carols and four songs, one of remarkable beauty, "The Drowned Lover." Of the workhouses Southampton yielded 45 songs, Fareham 25, Winchester 20, and Basingstoke, which has turned 50, promises far to surpass the rest. The reason why I am exploring the workhouses is this. My labour has been seriously interrupted by the haymaking and the harvest. One day I walked for miles near Lyndhurst and Minstead without making any headway. Everybody was working till sunset, and came home rather in a sleeping than a singing mood. I politely said to some of the people, "This is

really too bad. My song-harvest is at a standstill. To oblige me could you not put off that haymaking for a year?" They would not consent.

People sometimes ask me how I discover my singers. Well I simply ask anybody. If I am driving to Micheldever or Lyndhurst, I tell the driver what I am doing, and ask him to name anyone who can sing an old-world song. If he cannot tell, I go to the blacksmith or the innkeeper, who know the neighbourhood as well as most men, and am invariably received with the utmost civility. When I make my first visit I explain what I am doing and the kind of song I want, and when people really understand my object I find them not only willing but eager to help me. Besides, a singer is always a jolly good fellow. Sometimes one is misunderstood. I have been asked, "Are you travelling for the Gramophone Company?" "Do you represent Novello and Co.?" And I have even been taken for a detective. Once I called on an old lady who was prepared for my visit. Unfortunately, someone else answered the door, and when I spoke of old songs the answer was, "We don't want old songs." "We have no money to give for old songs." "We really don't require any to-day."

"But what does this craze mean?" someone may say. It means this. The beautiful old Scotch songs which are sung throughout the English-speaking world were all collected, words and music, more than a century ago. Walter Scott noted the Border Ballads about the same time. In 1858 the Norwegian Government commissioned Dr. Sophus Bugge, now famous throughout the world as a philologist, to explore the valleys of Norway for ancient songs and legends, and, if I am not misinformed, the rustic songs of Germany are now being collected at the expense of the Emperor. In like manner the Folk Song Society is endeavouring, at the eleventh hour, to record and preserve for the nation what still remains of the musical heritage of England. A writer in the *Morning Post* says that this is a work of supererogation. The quantity and the quality of the material already collected by the Society is proof that the writer speaks without knowledge. One of my Basingstoke singers, a fine old gentleman of 84, would learn his first songs as far back as 1830, in the days of the stage coach, when Basingstoke was but a sleepy and sequestered village. Is it not obvious that from such a man we may hear songs that have come down many generations? In point of fact we do. I have already referred to my Hursley ballad, a complete version of which is to be seen in Ritson's "Robin Hood Ballads" (1823). A Micheldever singer gave me a song about Captain Ward, a noted pirate of the reign of James I. His text is a fragment of No. 287 of Child's great book of British ballads. I have another fragment, "The Blackbird," which is pronounced to be part of an old ballad by that eminent authority, Mr. Frank Kidson, of Leeds. In Lyndhurst I found a text of the well known "Golden Vanity" with a fresh and excellent tune (Child, No. 236), and I had the offer of "Henry Martyn" (No. 250). "With my ring ding, ding a ding a ding," the refrain of "The Cobbler," from Winchester Workhouse, has to me quite ancient sound. I have also recently collected a fresh tune to "Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor" (see "English County Songs") and a brief version of "Georgie." The texts are very often doggerel or corrupt and fragmentary, and sometimes they are unfit for publication. But a skilled hand can put them into a presentable and even an elegant shape, as may be seen in "Songs of the West" and "Folk Songs from Somerset." In regard to the music, when I submitted my budget to a young composer he selected 24 of the tunes as possessing superlative merit from his point of view, and thought there were at least 50 that would be extremely interesting and valuable to singers.

The subjects of the songs are of almost infinite variety. There is, for example, the song beginning " 'Tis of a merchant's daughter," or " 'Tis of a gallant sailor," describing some romance or adventure in a dozen verses. Many a romantic song opens with "As I was a-walking" or "As I rode out." Susan, Nancy, and other fair ladies have inspired many a noble lay. What wonder? Then there is the haymaking and the sheepshearing song with a health to the master and mistress. There is a song about almost every sort of tradesman in the High Street of Winchester, "The brisk young butcher," "The tailor," "The cobbler," "The chimney-sweep," and about others not represented there, "The collier's son," "The miners." Even the professions do not escape. I lately unearthed "The lawyer" and "The doctor." One of my most recent captures is "The hangman" or "The prickly bush." In sea-

songs, as might be expected, Hampshire abounds. Examples are, "Paul Jones," "The bold Princess Royal," "The Isle of France," "The Banks of Newfoundland," "The loss of the Ramillies," "The Golden Vanity," "From sweet Dundee," "Nelson," "Old Swansea Town," "Captain Ward," "As I was a-cruising all on the Spanish shore."

Before concluding I wish to ask a particular favour of your readers. I should be extremely obliged if any one would send me a complete text of :—

"I am a cobbler brave, just got my freedom.
Oh, I've fixed my mind all on a bonny woman,
With my ring ding, ding a ding a ding
With my cuckoo and my goo,
With my ring ding, ding a ding a ding,
But still she is my dearie."

and of "The Blackbird" beginning :-

"If I was a blackbird I'd whistle and sing,
And I'd follow the ship that my love was in."

My labours would also be greatly lightened, if some of your readers would kindly furnish me with the names and addresses of singers who could give me old world songs in considerable numbers. Such singers, both men and women, exist but the difficulty is to find them.

My best thanks are due to my singers and other kind friends in the places I have named, and to the Boards of Guardians and the masters of the workhouses in various parts of the county. I also acknowledge my great obligation to Mr. Balfour Gardiner, the composer, Mr. H. E. D. Hammond, of the Folk Song Society, Mr. Gamblin, of Winchester, Mr. J. F. Guyer, of Southampton, and Mr. Duncan Hume, of Bournemouth, for the extraordinary care and patience with which they noted the tunes.

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