

HAMPSHIRE CHRONICLE 20/2/09

DR. GARDINER ON FOLK SONGS.

At a meeting of the Southampton Society of Old Hartleyans, held at Hartley College, on the evening of yesterday week, Dr. Geo. B. Gardiner (of the Folk Song Society) gave a lecture on "English Folk Song." The chair was taken by Mr H. F. Muir, B.Sc. (Vice-President), and there was a large attendance.

The first part of Dr. Gardiner's address was historical, showing how the songs of Scotland were collected and published between 1780 and 1820; the consequence is that it is now extremely difficult to discover in the Lowlands of Scotland any unrecorded songs of real value, though such are still to be found in plenty in the Highlands. English folk-songs stand in a totally different position. The first to collect and publish traditional songs in England was the Rev. John Broadwood, who brought out a small volume of Sussex songs about the year 1840. Fifty years elapsed before the work of this great pioneer was followed up. About 1890 Miss Broadwood and Mr. Fuller Maitland brought out "English County Songs", in which a serious attempt was made to give a few songs characteristic of each county of England. About the same time Dr. Barrett published "54 English Folk Songs," beginning with a beautiful melody which had been sung for 150 years in a Gloucestershire family. One of the most eminent authorities on folk-song is Mr. Frank Kidson, of Leeds, whose "Traditional Tunes" came out about the same time. These collections were followed by Mr. Baring-Gould's "Songs of the West," and his "Garland of Country Song," comprising 171 songs, collected in Devon and Cornwall. It was not till 1903 that Mr. Cecil Sharp undertook the systematic collection of folk-songs in Somersetshire; from that day to this he has recovered in that county over 2000 songs, and he has brought out four volumes of "Folk-songs from Somerset," and is about to publish a fifth, which will bring the number of his harmonised songs up to 130. Miss Lucy Broadwood has just issued an interesting collection of 39 folk-songs and carols. If we add together the songs in the harmonised collections, the songs that have appeared or are about to appear in Novello's county albums, the English people will soon possess a body of 600 harmonised folk-songs, remarkable for their quaintness or beauty, which would ere long have perished off the face of the earth but for the energy and enthusiasm of collectors. Instead of having no folk-songs England may yet prove to be as rich in them as any country in the world.

Dr. Gardiner was in Bath in the year 1904, and was working on songs, and there he first made the acquaintance of Baring-Gould's charming collection, "Songs of the West." He tried to master that book as well as Sharp's first volume of Somerset songs. It was in 1905, at St. Ives, in Cornwall, that Gardiner first became a collector, obtaining a few songs at St. Ives and Helston, and later on at Launceston and at Milverton, in Somerset. His difficulty at this time was to find a musician to note the melodies, but he consulted Miss Lucy Broadwood, the Secretary of the Folk Song Society, and she recommended Hampshire as a promising county, and informed him that Mr. Balfour Gardiner, the composer, had kindly offered to help him if he settled

in Winchester. He began his first season in Hampshire in the month of June, a very unsuitable time, as people are busy haymaking and later on harvesting; in that season he recovered only about 60 songs. Beginning in the middle of March in the following year he collected no less than 421, and in the height of summer he visited the workhouses, where singers can be had at any time. Dr. Gardiner has now been to all the workhouses in the county excepting two. The following season yielded as many as 419. Dr. Gardiner was at work again last year and his collection in Hampshire numbers 1085, and in all nearly 1200. Many amusing incidents in his search after song were related by Dr. Gardiner, and amongst others the following:- "My first hunting ground was Twyford, near Winchester, and there I made an awkward mistake. I asked the landlord of an inn, who had just come to Twyford, if he knew of any singers, and he recommended me a Mr. Sherry. I knocked at the door indicated and asked for Mr. Sherry. He angrily replied 'My name is not Sherry: it is Chivers.' I had unfortunately addressed him by his nickname and the wonder is that I escaped with my life. At Whitchurch a year later I had similar bad luck. An old lady had been told of me, and was prepared to give me a carol and some songs. When I called at her house her daughter, who knew nothing of me, to my misfortune answered the door. The moment she heard me speak of old songs she exclaimed 'We don't want any old songs; we've no money to give for old songs; we really don't require any today.'

"When I first visited Hursley I asked the innkeeper and his wife to name anyone that could warble a song as old as the parish church. They could give me no help, when their daughter said 'There's a blind man, who sometimes makes an awful noise in the taproom; you might try him, he lives at the far end of the village, and keeps poultry; you will know his house by the duck-pond beside it. Knocking at the door, I asked 'Are you Mr. X.' 'Yes that's my name, but you're a stranger, are you not?' 'Yes, I'm in Hursley for the first time; in that sense I'm a stranger; but they tell me at the inn you are such a singer, and I am so very fond of a good old song, that I hope we shall not long be strangers to each other.' Mr. X. had been a bluejacket, and was in his time a noted boxer. Years ago he and his shipmates fell in with some American sailors in a Japanese port, and became friendly with them. Afterwards they had some drink, quarrelled, and came to blows. Mr. X. sent the Americans down like ninepins, but unfortunately he fell and received a kick in the nose, the mark of which he carries to this day. Although blind, Mr X. could tell his cocks, hens, and ducks by touch, and, as he sang, he could not get them out of mind, but would interject remarks about them to his nephew, who came in the afternoon to help with the poultry. From this singer I obtained 'Robin Hood and the Bold Tanner,' one of the ancient ballads of our country, in thirteen verses, with a melody of distinctly ancient flavour. His most notable song was, however, 'Swansea Town,' which appears to have escaped the nets of other collectors."

Dr. Gardiner found that Mr. Balfour Gardiner could not give him as much time as he expected, and he had to enlist the services of Mr. C. Gamblin, of Winchester, for the north and east of the county, and of Mr. Guyer, of Southampton, for the south and west. In the course of four seasons those gentlemen had noted for him 100, 460, and 450, songs, and Dr. Gardiner said he was indebted to them not less for many acts of kindness than for the care and fidelity with which they have carried out their

musical work. Towards the close of his lecture Dr. Gardiner dealt with the controversial question of the modern ballad, as to which he was somewhat scathing, and put in contrast the old-time ballad, arguing that the people had a musical as well as a poetical language.

The course of the lecture was interspersed with the following songs:- "Sing ovy, Sing Ivy," Mr.C. Dawes (sung. by Wm. Mason, Easton); "The Seeds of Love," Miss E. V. Boyce (sung by Chas. Mills, Cheriton); "The Marigold," Mr Barker; "Sovay, Sovay," Miss E. Hood (sung by Mrs. Burke, Tichborne); "Our Ship she lies in harbour," Miss Boyce (sung by Mrs. Edwards, Hartley Wintney); "Abroad as. I was walking," Mr. C. Dawes (sung by Alfred Porter, Basingstoke); "Here's adieu, my lovely Nancy," Mr. Barker (sung by David Marlow, 84, Basingstoke); "The Sweet Primeroses," Miss E. Hood (sung by the late John Carter, Twyford) ; and "The Trees in the Wood," Mr. Barker.

Hampshire Voices