

## CHAPTER III

### ON THE STORIES OF THE BEST ENGLISH BALLADS

IF you look at the great collection of English ballads made by Prof. Child in eight volumes, you will easily recognize that the literature of the subject is extensive—and that it must have no small value to have thus absorbed the best period of a scholar's life. The first good collector of this popular literature was Sir Walter Scott—another proof that the subject is not to be lightly treated. I have often tried to arouse in former pupils some interest in this popular literature, which has been the fountain of inspiration for every great English poet since Scott's time—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, the two Rossettis, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne: all these studied and imitated the old ballads. Perhaps Shelley did not study them much; but even he derived something from them; and I do not think the great poets of the last century can really be understood without some understanding of narrative poetry from which they learned so much. But I have not been able so far to awaken much real interest on the subject; and I imagine that the chief reason is the dialect in which the ballads are written. Dialect is an apparent obstacle, and disheartens the student at sight. But I imagine that he is thinking in such moments, of the dialect of Burns—that he supposes the ballad dialect equally difficult. It is not. With a little patience only—you need not even use a glossary at all—the dialect of the best ballads can be easily mastered. To-day I am going to treat of the ballads in a totally different way—hoping to be more successful in pleasing you. I shall only talk about the very best ballads in the English language, and try to explain the merits in them.

There are not many of the best—in spite of those eight volumes of nearly four hundred pages each. There are really only about five or six which it is indispensable to know,—indispensable because they have inspired so many works of art (paintings, drawings, even statues) and because you can scarcely open a book of good literature in which some reference to them is not made. The other day only, one of you asked me about a quotation in Kingsley, which I did not at the moment recognize. It did not occur to me until the evening of the same day that the extract was from an old ballad of which the story probably dates back to the time of the Crusades. The ballad “Young Beichan” happens to be known by several names; it is not one of the very best, but we may have occasion to mention it later on.

I believe that the ballad of “Childe Waters” is acknowledged by most great poets and critics to be the best of all the English ballads. I do not myself like it so much as a Scotch ballad “Tam Lin” which I place next in order. But I must submit my judgment now to the judgment of men much wiser; and therefore I shall put “Childe Waters” first. I do not know whether it will please you; but it has pleased millions and millions of Western people, and it has been the subject of many paintings, and you should try to understand why it has been so much liked. The reason that I cannot altogether like it is only that it seems to me too cruel; but it is the story of a cruel age,—and the singer purposely made the cruelty as strong as possible in order to bring out more radiantly the contrast of the opposite qualities, gentleness and patience. Childe Waters is a nobleman who has seduced a country girl—probably a girl of good family, under promise of marriage. When she finds herself in a delicate situation, she wants him to befriend her; but he determines to put her affection to every possible test. He is a cruel man, though not altogether bad, as we shall see in the end. It is a queer fact that the story of “The Nutbrowne Maide”, one of the earliest in English literature which has

a dialogue form, turns upon the test of a woman's affection. But the author of "The Nutbrowne Maide" must have been to school, and his training may have kept him from being too cruel. The author of "Childe Waters" was probably an unschooled man of the people, who felt no restraint upon his sincerity, and who made his verses as simply as birds sing. Let us now take the story, using the original verse now and then, when the poet rises to his best. It begins, like all good ballads, not at the beginning, but in the middle of the story.

Childe Waters in his stable stoode  
 And stroakt his milke-white steede;  
 To him a fayre yonge ladye came  
 As ever ware womans weede.

Sayes, "Christ you save, good Childe Waters,"  
 Sayes, "Christ you save and see;  
 My girdle of gold that was too longe,  
 Is now too short for mee."

Of course this means that she is about to become a mother — indeed the next stanza states the fact much more directly. But Childe Waters is a suspicious man; he does not show her any sympathy, and replies—

"If the child be mine, faire Ellen," he sayd,  
 "Be mine as you tell mee,  
 Then take you Cheshire and Lancashire both,  
 Take them your owne to bee.

"If, the childe be mine, faire Ellen," he sayd,  
 "Be mine, as you doe sweare,  
 Then take you Cheshire and Lancashire both,  
 And make that child your heyre."

Childe Waters is a gentleman — in the worldly sense of the term. He is quite willing to be generous with his mistress, to pay her handsomely. But that is not what she wants: she is a good woman, in spite of her imprudence,

and it is his love that she wants, not his money. He may give her all the land in England, and she would think it worth nothing in comparison with his real affection. Her answer is beautiful in its passionate sincerity:—

Shee sayes, “I had rather have one kisse,  
Childe Waters, of thy mouth,  
Than I wolde have Cheshire and Lancashire both,  
That lye by north and southe.

“And I had rather have one twinkling,  
Childe Waters, of thine ee,  
Than I wolde have Cheshire and Lancashire both,  
To take them mine owne to bee.”

So that is what she wants! to become his wife? Does she really love him as she says?—or does she only love position,—want to become the wife of a lord? Evidently she does not care anything about money; but perhaps she cares for position—perhaps she is afraid of shame. In that case he will give her an opportunity to prove her affection—and he will do this without mercy, without the slightest sign of pity. He instantly tells her that he has to go north, and that he wants a pretty woman to travel with him. It is a brutal answer; but she immediately replies:—

“Thoughe I am not that ladye fayre,  
Yet let me go with thee:  
And ever I pray you, Childe Waters,  
Your foot-page let me bee.”

She is not pretty enough for him—she humbly says—but will he not let her go with him as a foot-page. Remember that the foot-page had to run by the horse, like the Japanese *betto*.

“You want to be my foot-page—do you?” he says. “Very well; you must dress in a boy’s clothes, and cut off your hair.” A woman does not like to sacrifice her hair, especially if it is very beautiful. But she cuts it off without

any hesitation, and runs by the horse. You might suppose that, for the sake of the child, the man rides slow. But he does not. Probably he understands how much the woman can bear. He rides fast. They come to a river. "Can you swim?" he asks. "No", she answers; "but I can try." Into the deep water he spurs his horse and *swims* his horse across the stream. And she follows him. Here comes the stanza from which Macaulay quoted, in writing his ballad of Horatius:—

The salt waters bare up her clothes,  
Our Ladye bare up her chinne;  
Childe Waters was a woe man, good Lord,  
To see faire Ellen swimme!

Perhaps he was sorry in his heart; but the heart of the lord of the feudal age was iron;—and he only thought of himself, "She can bear more than that." At last they come to his castle. Instead of saying one kind word to her he tells her that he has a mistress, much more beautiful than she in that castle. She answers sweetly, "Then I will wait upon her." A banquet is held to celebrate the lord's arrival; but he makes the tired woman wait upon the table, until a lady in the house remarks how handsome this servant is. "More like a girl than a boy" says another lady. But the old grey mother with a mother's eye understands the whole story at once,—and she maliciously observes,— "A girl—no, a woman great with child." The lord gives his mother one quick glance to impose silence, and orders Ellen to leave the room, and to go and eat in the kitchen. But her trials are not yet over for that night—he tells her that she must go out and find him a female companion for the evening— "And she must be very pretty" he tells her. She does this. Then she is told to go and sleep in the stable among the horses. She does so without complaint. But in the middle of the night her child is born, born among the feet of the horses. Even the horses are kind to her: they keep still for her sake. After that her troubles

are at an end. She has been tried to the uttermost. Now comes the lord, takes up his young son tenderly, and says to the mother, "Wife and lady you shall be, and this boy shall inherit all things after me, and our wedding and your churching shall be upon the same day." That is the story. It is a cruel story; but it ends well. To understand the merit of it we must remember that the people of those times were hardier — a woman could bear much more pain than a woman of to-day. Was it necessary to test affection in so cruel a way? No: but fair Ellen had herself to blame. Why did she lower herself to be seduced before the time in which she might have been married? The lord's position was logical and something like this: "Nobody can trust the honour of a woman who has been morally weak — not at least until she shows that she can be morally strong. I shall torture this woman therefore until I find out whether she is morally strong. And if she is strong, then I will marry her." But of course the cruelty was atrocious.

In the foregoing ballad we had an example of what physical and moral pain a woman could bear for love's sake. In the next ballad we have an account of what a woman could do for love's sake in a still more difficult direction. I mean against supernatural enemies, goblins, and fairies. You may say that this is a story of the impossible,—therefore not worthy of serious consideration. But in this judgment you would be wrong. The supernatural world of goblins and fairies is really only symbolical of what men most fear in reality. There is no supernatural fancy, no superstition, which does not shadow some truth. I understand this poem to represent only what a woman is really capable of, for love's sake, in the presence of danger and death. Have not even sisters been known to save an infant brother by facing tigers and lions? Have not mothers gone into fire to save their children? What would not a mother do to save her child? And, after all, are not the realities of fire and of tigers much more dreadful than would be the realities of ghosts and fairies? Try to think

of the ballad in this way; and you will find it beautiful. The name of this ballad is "Tam Lin;" — there are many versions, but the best is this which Walter Scott wrote down from dictation. Occasionally this ballad appears in anthologies, but when it does, it is shortened by foolish people, on account of a single stanza. We need not be foolish; and we can read the stanza in question.

There is supposed to be, out in the country, in Scotland, at a place called Carterhaugh, a hill haunted by a fairy in the shape of a beautiful man. Whenever a girl happens to be alone in that neighborhood, the man comes and demands payment, for her presence in his domain. She must either give him some article of value or give him her virginity. Therefore it is very dangerous to go to that place. A mother is supposed to be speaking, or perhaps a father, in the opening verses of the ballad.

"O I forbid ye, maidens all,  
That wear gold on your hair,  
To come or go by Carterhaugh,  
For young Tamlane is there.

"There's none that goes by Carterhaugh,  
But must leave him a wad,  
Either gold rings or green mantles,  
Or else their maidenhood.

"Now gold rings ye may buy, maidens,  
Green mantles ye may spin;  
But, if ye lose your maidenhood,  
Ye'll ne'er get that again."

In spite of this warning, a spirited girl called Janet, insists on going to Carterhaugh. When the fairy-man comes, she refuses to be afraid, and refuses to give him any pledge. But she returns home, not a maiden, but a pregnant woman. Great is the family's scandal. In this part of the poem the singer shows a great deal of humour as well as of pathos. In repeating Janet's sharp answers to people who would insult

her in consequence. She bravely says that she did nothing wrong; that she has only been unfortunate;—that the father of the child is not a man, but a fairy;—and that in spite of his being a fairy, she is going to force him to marry her, and to become a good father to the child. Everybody thinks this impossible, but the brave woman knows that she can do it, and she does—

She goes again by herself to the haunted hill, and waits until the fairy stands before her. There is an adjuration, or prayer by which all spirits or goblins can be made to answer questions asked them; and she repeats that adjuration—demanding the fairy to tell her truly whether he is a fairy born, or only an adopted fairy — a stolen child. (For it was long believed, and is still believed in some parts of Europe that fairies steal children and change them into fairies.) He answers her according to the truth—which she suspects: he is really a human being, the son of a great nobleman; but he was stolen by the fairies when a child. The incident of the stealing is worth quoting — because it illustrates a queer superstition, which you will find still better told in a very weird modern poem by Sir Samuel Ferguson, entitled, “The Fairy Thorn.”

“There came a wind out of the north,  
A sharp wind and a snell;  
And a deep sleep came over me,  
And from my horse I fell.”

The fairy spell is usually described as coming with a strange cold (or “snell”) wind, as the ballad here relates. This fairy Tamlane does not wish to remain a fairy: he would be glad to return again to the world of humanity. But he cannot do so, unless some woman have courage enough to save him, by daring all sorts of supernatural dangers.

“On a certain night,” he says, “I and all the fairies will ride by a place that you know; and if you are then brave enough to pull me off my horse, and hold me tightly,



until all the fairies go away, I can become a man again. But as you hold me I shall change shape.—I shall become fire, I shall become a monster, I shall become a snake. At last I shall become simply a naked man; then throw your cloak over me, and I am saved.”

She goes to the place which he has mentioned at midnight; and sure enough, the fairies come riding by, preceded by the will-o'-the-wisp. She is brave, and watches for him; and the rest is told better in verse than in prose:

And first went by the black black steed,  
 And then went by the brown;  
 But fast she gript the milk-white steed,  
 And pulled the rider down.

She pulled him from the milk-white steed,  
 And let the bridle fall;  
 And up there raise a ghastly cry—  
 “He’s won among us all!”—

They shaped him in fair Janet’s arms,  
 An esk, but and an adder;  
 She held him fast in every shape—  
 To be her bairn’s father.

They shaped him in her arms at last,  
 A mother-naked man:  
 She wrapt him in her green mantle,  
 And so her true love won!

. . . . .

Up then spake the Queen of Fairies,  
 Out of a bush of rye—  
 “She’s taken away the finest knight  
 In all my company.”

. . . . .

“Had I but known, Tamlane,” she says,  
 “Before you came from home—  
 I’d have taken out your heart of flesh,  
 Put in a heart of stone.”

And so the ballad story comes to a happy ending. In the book you will find three or four different versions; and in Scott's, which is the best, the description of the transformation of the fairy into all kinds of monster shapes is most weirdly and powerfully told. It is the emotional quality of the poem, combined with the supernatural element, which has made it so famous. All through Northern Europe the story is known. But it is very curious to remember that there is a very old Greek story of the same kind told by Homer. You will find it in the *Odyssey*, and you will find it elsewhere. The story is of the God Proteus, who could be made to tell his divine secret only by the person who had the courage to hold him fast while he was changing shape. If any person was brave enough to do that the god would tell him whatever he wished to know. It is certainly very strange to find the Scotch ballad containing the Greek myth, quite independently of any scholarship. Perhaps we have here one of those world stories of which the origin is older than any literature.

The third of the old ballads about which every student ought, I think, to know something is "Thomas the Rhymer." It is very frequently referred to in literature; and, like the preceding one, is a fairy tale. I am sorry to say that the best version of it is in a very old dialect, and that you would have to read it very patiently, in order to see the quaint and curious beauty of it. Everybody knows the later version printed by Scott; but only men of letters know the older version, which you will find on page 97 of the first volume of Professor Child's work. This may be as old as the fifteenth century — let us say 1450. I shall not quote; but merely epitomize the narrative. A wandering musician named Thomas of Erseldune (the name spelt in many ways) was one day resting under a tree, by the way-side, when there appeared before him so beautiful a woman that he imagined he saw the Virgin Mary. But she told him that he must not worship her: she was only the Queen of the Fairies. The more Thomas looked at her, the more

he admired her; and she warned him that he must not admire her too much. Nevertheless he dared to make love to her. She told him, "If you kiss me, you will belong to me, body and soul." He is not afraid and kisses her; but from that hour he becomes her slave, and she takes him with her into the fairy world for the time of seven years. In the older version there is a curious account, which you do not find in Scott's version. As soon as Thomas has embraced the Queen of the Fairies, her beauty suddenly withers; and she becomes a hideous old woman. Now this is the most interesting part of the narrative to the folklorist. All through the legends of mediæval superstition you will find that the seer or magician must remain perfectly chaste in order to retain his supernatural faculty; and the spirits themselves remain strong or weak according to their purity in the matter of sex. Under any conditions of moral weakness the charm breaks. An immense amount of romantic incident has been founded upon these queer beliefs.

The ballad of Thomas ends happily, for after having remained seven years with the fairies, as a faithful servant, Thomas is allowed to return to the world. The parts of the poem particularly celebrated in literature belong to the new rather than to the old version; and they are celebrated particularly because of their fanciful charm. I mean the descriptions of fairy land and of its magical fruit. When Thomas is being taken to the palace of the Fairy Queen, they pass underneath the earth, and they cross the River of Blood :—

O they rode on, and farther on,  
And they waded through rivers above the knee,  
And they saw neither sun nor moon,  
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

It was mirk mirk night, and there was no stern light,  
And they waded through red blood up to the knee;  
For all the blood that is shed upon earth  
Runs through the springs of that country.

The River of Blood figures a good deal in Celtic folklore; and it has been used, symbolically, by not a few modern poets. The superstition was that the blood of murdered men never really dried up; but that sinking down through the earth it formed part of the River of Blood, whose voice perpetually calls to heaven for vengeance. All the poem, however, is not merely serious; there is humour, for example, in the disinclination expressed by Thomas not to eat the fruit of the fairy tree called the Tree of Truth. The man who eats the fruit of that tree is never afterwards able to tell a lie. Then says Thomas, "What shall I do? If I cannot tell a lie, how can I buy or sell anything? How can I even make love to a pretty woman? Unless the man can flatter and lie, he will always be at a disadvantage." But Thomas is obliged to eat the fruit. A commentator says that Thomas has here suggested the *immorality* of his age; but, when we come to think about it we may doubt if the world has much improved in truth-telling since the fifteenth century. It is quite as dangerous to tell the truth upon all occasions to-day as it would have been then.

The fourth ballad which I should recommend is the celebrated "Clerk Sunders" — of which the first stanza is often quoted:—

Clerk Sunders and may Margaret  
Walk'd owre yon garden green;  
And deep and heavy was the love  
That fell thir twa between.

I need scarcely say that it is the third line of the above stanza which has made it famous, simply owing to the great effect produced by the adjectives deep and heavy. This is a very celebrated sad story. The use of the term "clerk" (pronounced clark) shows the antiquity of the composition. In the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, knights and even kings, distinguished for learning, were often called clerks in addition to their other titles — the word then

signifying simply scholar. Clerk *Sunders* was probably a knight of good family, and a scholar, but poor. He was very anxious to marry a young lady; but poverty delayed their lawful union, and very imprudently he visited her at night in her own room. This room seems to have been in a castle. The lovers were betrayed; and seven brothers of the girl entered the room where both were sleeping. Of course death was the penalty for such folly -- but, in this case there was consideration. The elder brother says, "It is accounted a great shame to kill a man asleep." The second brother says: "After all, those two really love each other." The third brother says, "They have been engaged to marry for many years." None of the brothers, except the youngest and the fiercest wishes to kill. But the youngest brother, without saying a word, passes his sword through the body of Clerk *Sunders*. Afterwards the father attempts to console the daughter in vain. I think that *Rossetti* certainly made use of this ballad when writing his "The Bride's Prelude." In that terrible poem also it is the youngest brother who is the fiercest; and it is the father who first forgives. . . .

*May Margaret* (*may* is an old-fashioned English word for maiden) does not care to be forgiven: she only wants to die. In the dead of the night her dead lover comes to her room again, and asks her to give him back the promise that she had made to him—the promise of betrothal. You will find this curious idea in many of the ballads of the European Middle Ages. It was thought that death did not dissolve an unfulfilled promise of this kind; and that, unless the living party agreed to dissolve the compact, the dead could not rest. And that is why the ghost comes to *May Margaret*. She loves too much to be afraid, and asks him, ghost though he is, to kiss her, once more before she gives him back the promise. He answers that he dare not kiss her — because the kiss of a ghost brings death. And she wants to die, but he will not kiss her, because it would be wrong. So she gives him his promise unconditionally; but

she follows him to the grave-yard, and asks him if there is any room at his head or at his feet. The ballad ends with the answer of the ghost,—telling her that the grave has no place for her, and that he only wants her to put flowers on his tomb and to promise him never again to do anything wrong, even for love's sake. You can see what a powerful story this is, and how much might be made out of it by a great artist. It exists throughout the whole of Northern Europe only in ballad form; but even in this popular and rude shape it is a touching romantic story which has given rise to many household words.

The fifth ballad that I would mention has many titles—“Glasgerion,” “Glenkindie,” etc.—not to speak of titles in the ballad poetry of other countries where the song is well known. It is celebrated especially, for those who love literary suggestion, by the stanza describing the magical power of music, and witchcraft exercised by the great harper:—

He could harp the fish out of the sea,  
Or blood out of a stane,  
Or milk out of the maiden's breast  
That never bairns had nane,

Powers of this kind are frequently attributed to musicians in the folklore poetry of the North—and above all, in the wonderful Finnish epic of the *Kalevala*, which is really an epic of music. But all of Glasgerion's music does not help him from being betrayed by his own servant, who, dressed in the clothes of his master, secretly by night visits his master's mistress. By his manner, which is vulgar, the fraud is discovered, and the lady kills herself. Then the musician avenges her. It is an unpleasant subject, only tragedy, but the English composition has great merit in the way of simplicity and force.

The ballad of Glasgerion has been made use of in very recent time: it helped to inspire an excellent contemporary ballad by Rudyard Kipling entitled “The Last Rhyme of True

Thomas"—in which the power of a poet is very finely described. Although Thomas the Rhymer is the hero of the composition, the incidents of this poem were suggested altogether by Glasgerion and the other versions of the same story under various names. Some day I want to read you that ballad—to illustrate the extraordinary value which a poet can find in certain old and half-forgotten Anglo-Saxon words.

One more ballad I shall briefly mention: "Young Beichan"—the name is also given as Bekie in some versions; and there are quite a number. In point of literary value this ballad is not, I think, equal to any of the others which I have mentioned—certainly not equal to dozens that might be mentioned. But if I were only to consider ballads from the literary point of view, I should have to speak to you of about twenty more. The object of this lecture is only to interest you in the most famous—that is the most generally known and the most often quoted. "Young Beichan" is one of these; and the story is pretty. Up to the eighteenth century it was not uncommon for Englishmen or other Europeans to be captured by Barbary pirates, and sold as slaves into Northern Africa. Perhaps the story of "Young Beichan" originally dates from the Crusades,—and the captivity of some knights among the Saracens. But it might, again, refer to later events, quite possible within very modern times. Europeans sold into slavery and purchased by Mohamedan masters, might better their condition by becoming Mohamedans. When a slave refuses to follow the faith of his master, even to-day, among the Arabs or other Mohamedan people, he is likely to find his condition made worse for him. In this ballad the captive repeatedly refuses to be converted, and is very cruelly treated until his master's daughter takes pity on him. She makes this proposal to him—"I shall help you to escape to your own country; but, if I do that for you, against my father's will, it is because I love you;—and you must promise to marry me if I can ever find a chance to go to

your country." He promises—as he loves her already; and she finds him, not only the means of escape, but money and a good ship and friends. Then he gets back to England. In England he waits for her several years; but as he receives no message from her, he begins to imagine that she will never come; and he makes arrangements to marry another person. In the middle of the wedding ceremony the Moorish lady suddenly makes her appearance—to remind him of his promise to marry her, and he keeps the promise. The first bride is sent back home with a double dower by way of compensation; then a second wedding begins, with the Moorish girl for bride. It is thus a story of love, gratitude, and faith; and perhaps for that reason it was very popular. But the story is not at all original to the ballad. Several such stories belong to the old literature of the Crusade; and, curiously enough, an Arabian story, of almost exactly the same kind, relating to a Christian girl and a Moorish lover, was found and translated only a few years ago.

I have not said anything to you about such universally known ballads as "Sir Patrick Spens," "Fair Annie," or "The Demon Lover" or "The Gay Goshawk." Because these you must already know; they are in almost every anthology. What would be well worth while for some Japanese scholar to attempt, would be a rendering into melodious colloquial Japanese, some of the famous ballads that are not in every anthology. Perhaps students will generally feel disinclined to make such an attempt, considering the work unworthy of trained effort. However, I am quite sure that such an opinion is wrong, and that it will be recognized as wrong at a future date. The very greatest of Western scholars and poets have not thought it beneath them to do this very thing: they are doing it even at the present moment, with the popular literature of all countries. For they understand that nothing helps more speedily to enrich national fancy and feeling than a wide dissemination of the best elements in the popular sentiment and fancy of other countries.



I want now to close this lecture by quoting to you a modern ballad, closely imitated from the ancient, but much more artistic. This is the ballad by Kipling of which I spoke, written in Northern dialect, and treating symbolically of a very great subject—the power of the poet who can speak to the *people* of his nation. There was, at that time some talk about appointing the young Anglo-Indian to the English laureateship. He would certainly have been the best man for it, except Swinburne. Swinburne's candidacy was impossible, on account of his more than radical expression of opinion in relation to religion and morals. Kipling, on the other hand, was considered too young;—besides, the laureateship depends a great deal upon social and political influences. But Kipling did not want to be the laureate; he was more than the laureate already in fact, though not in social rank. And, perhaps, to express his opinion of the real place of a singer he may have printed this composition. Some verses of it, at least, ought to please you. It is entitled "The Last Rhyme of True Thomas."

The King has called for priest and cup,  
 The King has taken spur and blade  
 To dub True Thomas as a belted knight,  
 And all for the sake o' the songs he made.

They have sought him high, they have sought him low,  
 They have sought him over down and lea;  
 They have found him by the milk-white thorn  
 That guards the gates o' Faerie.

*'Twas bent beneath and blue above,  
 Their eyes were held that they might not see  
 The kine that grazed between the knowes,  
 Oh, they were the Queens o' Faerie!*

The burden of the ballad as you will see presently is the most artistic part of it. And we shall find that the art is altogether in the use of ancient English words. "Bent" of course means grass; but unless you have been among

English country people, you might never have heard the term. "Knowes" is the same as "knolls;" but here the student of English poetry is reminded of a famous Scotch woman, who sang before the time of Robert Burns, and made a very famous song entitled "Ca' the yowes to the knowes,"—that is, "Call the sheep out to the grazing hill." However, what I want to call your notice particularly to here, is the correct use of the word "faerie" in this modern ballad. Properly speaking the word "fairy"—it does not matter how you spell it—means magic, and does not mean a being of any kind. Fairyland, or fairy, properly means the land of magic. What is commonly understood by a fairy is a spirit; but the true English word for this spirit is Elf. And in old ballads we find the term "faery-elf" sometimes, meaning a wonder-working or magical spirit. Of course to-day we mean spirit when we say fairy; but it did not have that meaning in olden time,—and if we make a correct imitation of an old ballad we ought to remember the fact as the poet does.

"Now cease your song," the King he said,  
"O, cease your song and get you dight  
To vow your vow and watch your arms,  
For I will dub you a belted knight.

"For I will give you a horse o' pride,  
Wi' blazon and spur and page and squire;  
Wi' keep and tail and seizin and law,  
And land to hold at your desire."

True Thomas smiled above his harp,  
And turned his face to the naked sky,  
Where, blown before the wastrel wind,  
The thistle-down she floated by.

"I ha' vowed my vow in another place,  
And bitter oath it was on me,  
I ha' watched my arms the lee-long night  
Where five-score fighting-men would flee.

“My lance is tipped o’ the hammered flame,  
 My shield is beat o’ the moonlight cold;  
 And I won my spurs in the Middle World,  
 A thousand fathoms beneath the mould.

“And what should I make wi’ a horse o’ pride,  
 And what should I make wi’ a sword so brown,  
 But spill the rings o’ the Gentle Folk  
 And flyte my kin in the Fairy Town?

“And what should I make wi’ blazon and belt,  
 Wi’ keep and tail and seizin and fee,  
 And what should I do wi’ page and squire  
 That am a king in my own countrie?

“For I send east and I send west,  
 And I send as far as my will may flee,  
 By dawn and dusk and the drinking rain,  
 And syne my Sendings return to me.

“They come wi’ news of the groanin’ earth,  
 They come wi’ news o’ the roarin’ sea,  
 Wi’ word of Spirit and Ghost and Flesh,  
 And man that’s mazed among the three.”

The king insists that Thomas should give proof of his skill;—and the proof is given in the true old magical fashion of the ballads—first by a war strain which fills the listener with the passion of battle; then by a love strain, which makes the hearers remember the days of their first affection; then by a sorrowful strain; which makes even the king weep for remembrance of the follies of his youth. Of course this is the same idea that inspired Dryden’s great ode “Alexander’s Feast;” but the method is that of the glasgerion ballad, quite as effective in a simple way. It is the splendid use of the modified refrain, however, that makes this ballad especially worth reading; and the effects are obtained by the use of obsolete words—not of Scotch words. The following terms,—bent, knowes, wasterel, flyte (to put to scorn), rax, birlled, brattled, splent (a kind of mail

armour), eyass (a young hawk), pye (king-fisher), and routed (bowed),—these are not used by Burns, but by Chaucer, with one or two exceptions. The exceptions include the word rax, to wrench out, which is modern dialect. But the fact that I want to emphasize is only this—that the best ballad writer of the present time is no mere ballad-monger but a careful student of old English forms, and especially of the Middle English of Chaucer's time.