

## CHAPTER IV

### SOME NOTES ON POPULAR SONGS

THE subject of songs (and by songs I mean poems made only to be sung, as distinguished from ballads which may be written only to be recited) appears to me to have much significance for students of literature. As for the importance of song in itself I need hardly remind you of the famous statement of a famous man to the effect that he did not care who made the laws of the people if he were allowed to make their songs. That reference is to patriotic songs, songs embodying the national ideals. But other classes of songs may be important in quite another way, in a literary way; and it is of these latter that I should like to talk with you. There is much to be learned from the simple art of many popular songs,—not because such songs represent the work of some one man more gifted than another man, but because they generally represent, in their examples, the work of many minds. What I mean is this;—many of the best European songs did not belong to written literature until the time of one or two generations ago. Before that time they had belonged to what we call oral literature;—everybody knew them by heart, though nobody had written them down. For hundreds of years they had been sung; the parents of one generation teaching them to the children, and so passing them on to the next. When a composition has had a long life of this kind, existing only upon the lips of the people and in their hearts, one thing is sure to happen; namely, that the poem is greatly improved in the course of time. Almost every singer makes a little change in the words to suit himself; and the people who hear him sing criticize at once. But if the change happens to be an

improvement it is likely to become accepted. And that is why the old songs of the people are better than the new ones. They represent a longer experience with the text, and a great deal of sincere criticism, and a great many instinctive improvements. And in every country of Europe the old popular songs are better than the new ones. Very probably this is true of Japan as well, though I am not competent to make the statement.

Unfortunately in regard to the songs most famous in English, the Japanese student must find himself at a serious disadvantage—for the simple reason that the number of popular songs in pure English—in the English of the written language—is very small. Nearly all of the good popular songs—because they are popular songs—happen to be written in some provincial dialect. This is the case with even the songs of Burns; and this is the case with the best songs of Ireland and Wales. English men of letters find great pleasure and profit in the study of such songs; and ladies play them on the piano and sing them at great parties. But all classes are tolerably familiar with some forms of the provincial dialects (but for use in this country it is quite otherwise). We find the dialect a great obstacle. Another fact is that although the English are great poets, they do not seem to be such good song writers as the Celts; they have less vivid emotion; and the best of our so-called English songs have been written by Celts. It is not the same way in other countries in Europe. Everywhere there are dialects of course, but, in France, for example, the difference between ordinary provincial French and literary French is not really so great as the difference between Scotch dialect and English dialect. Some provinces of France, such as Celtic Brittany or the old southern regions may be said to have idioms of their own; also provinces bordering on Germany have peculiar dialects. But in the great body of Central France, the differences are less striking, and are becoming always less with wider education. I do not think that we have in any case any English song of a popular character,

quite so good as the French song. Let me give you one French example. Except in the spelling of the preposition with which the second line begins, there is nothing in the language at all different from ordinary French, and the song is said to belong to the sixteenth century.

En passant par la Lorraine,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
J'ai rencontré trois capitaines,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Dondaine!  
Avecque mes sabots !

J'ai rencontré trois capitaines,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Ils m'ont appelé vilaine,  
Avecque mes sabots, &c.

Ils m'ont appelé vilaine,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Mais je ne suis point si vilaine,  
Avecque mes sabots, &c.

Je ne suis point si vilaine,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Puisque le fils du roi m'aimé,  
Avecque mes sabots, &c.

Puisque le fils du roi m'aimé,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Il m'a donné pour étrenne,  
Avecque mes sabots, &c.

Il m'a donné pour étrenne,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Une bourse d'écus plaine,  
Avecque mes sabots, &c.

Une bourse d'écus plaine,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Un bouquet de marjolaine,  
Avecque mes sabots, &c.

Un bouquet de marjolaine,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Je l'ai planté dans la plaine.  
Avecque mes sabots, &c.

Je l'ai planté dans la plaine,  
Avecque mes sabots,  
S'il fleurit, je serai reine!  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Dondaine!  
Avecque mes sabots!

(As I was going through Lorraine,  
With my wooden shoes,  
I met three captains,  
With my wooden shoes,  
Dondaine!  
With my wooden shoes!

I met three captains,  
With my wooden shoes,  
They called me ugly,  
With my wooden shoes, &c.

They called me ugly,  
With my wooden shoes,  
But I am not so ugly,  
With my wooden shoes, &c.

I am not so ugly at all,  
With my wooden shoes,  
For the son of the King makes love to me,  
With my wooden shoes, &c.

Yes, the son of the King makes love to me,  
With my wooden shoes,  
He has given me for a gift,  
With my wooden shoes, &c.

He has given me for a gift,  
With my wooden shoes,

A purse full of golden crowns,  
With my wooden shoes, &c.

A purse full of golden crowns,  
With my wooden shoes.  
And a bunch of marjoram,  
With my wooden shoes, &c.

A bunch of marjoram,  
With my wooden shoes,  
I have planted it in the field,  
With my wooden shoes, &c.

I have planted it in the field,  
With my wooden shoes,  
If it blossoms I shall be Queen,  
With my wooden shoes,  
Dondaine!  
With my wooden shoes!)

I think this to be one of the most perfect little songs ever written in any language—perfect as the expression of a very simple incident told in the simplest possible way, with a joyousness, a naïvete that is not at all in English character, a simplicity such as might have existed among those old Greek peasants, among whom Theocritus delighted to dwell. This is the narrative:—

A young peasant goes to the neighboring little town, perhaps for the first time in her life, to buy herself a pair of wooden shoes, sabots, just as a Japanese peasant girl, living in some remote mountain village, might go to the nearest town to buy herself a good pair of “geta.” However, you must suppose the French girl to be still more unsophisticated than her far Eastern sisters;—very probably she does not know how to read or write, and her notions of right and wrong are doubtless much looser. Nevertheless she is a very pleasing creature, ready to believe what anybody tells her. When she gets to the little town, after walking all day perhaps, it happens that the king’s son notices her

as she passes by. We may imagine the king's son to be something of a scamp, although perhaps a gentleman according to the morals of the time. Anyhow, after the girl bought her wooden shoes, the king's son sends for her, makes love to her, gives her a purse full of gold pieces, and gives her a little bunch of sweet marjoram—a plant sacred to lovers—telling her that if it ever blossoms in her garden, he will come to marry her; then she may expect to be queen some day. And she believes everything he tells her. So she goes back to her mountain village very happy. On the way some soldiers see her and remark how pretty that girl would be if she did not wear those ugly wooden shoes; and they jeer at her a little, pretending to think her ugly. Then she answers them in all her simplicity: "How can I be ugly? I cannot be so ugly as you think, for the king's son—and he ought to know—thinks that I am pretty and loved me: And he gave me all his money, and this marjoram, in spite of my wooden shoes. You do not know—perhaps I shall some day be queen, with my wooden shoes!" What a charming simplicity appears through the whole composition, and what young gaiety, and what merry music!

Perhaps you may say that the little song is not exactly moral. Well, I do not think that this objection ought to be made. If not exactly moral it is not at least immoral—there is nothing wicked in it; it is only a little picture of a life so innocent as not to know what is really right and wrong according to conventional standards. Does not the girl think that it is her duty to please the king's son and does she not believe his promise to marry her when the sweet marjoram blossoms in the garden? That is the way to consider that song. It is a picture not of viciousness at all, but of an innocence so childish as to consider all the world good and everybody true. Even the soldiers who tell her that she is ugly do so only because they did not know that she was loved by the king's son!

French songs of this class never treat love-subjects in the deep sentimental way that they are treated in English

songs. There is no rigid morality about them; and there is no cant. They express either the joy of life or the sadness of death with absolute sincerity,—and if a religious thought appears in them you may be sure that it is just as sincere as expression of the young passions. Nevertheless I cannot wish to underrate English popular songs. They too have their beauty, and their sincerity, though it is something very different. I shall give you an example in the form of a little ballad composed by the Baroness Nairne. Perhaps you would say this, being the work of an educated woman, and woman of rank, does not truly represent the popular songs. But you would be wrong in thinking so. The ballad is simply made up with fragments of old popular songs, and is written in the dialect of the Scotch peasant; and the proof of the truth is that it became popular at once. It represents only a slight literary improvement in construction over the more primitive forms of the same story; and it is written to a popular air. I shall read to you, so far as possible in English—

#### TUVER HUNTINGTOWER

“When you go away, Jamie,  
 When you go away, laddie,  
 What will you give my heart to cheer,  
 When you are far away, Jamie?”

“I’ll give you a fine new gown, Jeanie,  
 I’ll give you a fine new gown, lassie,  
 And it will be a silken one,  
 With Valenciennes trimmed round, Jeanie.”

“O, that’s no love at all, laddie,  
 That’s no love at all, Jamie,  
 How could I bear fine gowns to wear,  
 When you are far away, laddie?”

“But mind me when away, Jamie  
 Mind me when away, laddie,

For out of sight is out of mind  
With many folks we know, Jamie.”

“O, that can never be, Jeanie,  
Forget you ne'er can be, lassie;  
O, go with me to the north countrie,  
My bonny bride to be, Jennie.

“The hills are grand and high, Jeanie,  
The burnice is running clear, lassie,  
'Mong birds and braes, where wild deer strays,  
O, come with me and see, lassie.”

“I will not go with you, laddie,  
I told you so before, Jamie;  
Till free consent my parents give,  
I cannot go with you, Jamie.”

“But when you're wed to me, Jeanie,  
Then they will forgive, lassie;  
How can you be so cold to me,  
Who loved you well and long, lassie.”

“Not so long as them, laddie,  
Not so long as them, Jamie;  
A grief to them I would not be  
Not for the Duke himsel', Jamie.

“We'll save our penny fee, laddie,  
To keep from poor-tithes free, Jamie;  
And then their blessing they will give  
Both to you and me, Jamie.”

“Huntingtower is mine, lassie,  
Huntingtower is mine, Jeanie,  
Huntingtower and Blairnagower,  
And all that 's mine is thine, Jeanie!”

Now in the former song we have the story of a king's son making love to an innocent country girl, who has no idea of guile—in this we have the story of a great nobleman disguising himself as a common peasant not only in order



to win but in order to test a girl of the people. But the Scottish girl is no fool. Probably she is innocent in the best sense; but there is nothing weak about her. She loves the handsome mountain lad and is willing to become his wife, but on condition that her parents approve the marriage; and they will not approve it until he shows that he has money enough to take good care of her. Then he says "Well, I must go away to another country and make some money; and I will send nice presents." Presents do not mean love. No: she does not want his presents; she only wants him to keep his promise to her, to remember her when he is away. He tries once more perhaps for the twentieth time to persuade her to go away secretly with him, then he will certainly marry her. But she answers him that she will never cause her parents a moment's sadness even to please him. "But I have loved you so long—I have loved you so long and well; how can you be so cold-hearted?" She makes him the fine answer. "Neither so long and so well as have my parents loved me. No, we must save our money so as to assure ourselves against want—then our parents will be glad to have us married." If she would have run away with him, he would have despised her;—he was looking for a woman of strong character. And he has found her and then for the first time he tells her who he is,—the lord of all the country round—asking her to become his wife simply because she is good and true. This is a very old subject of English ballad and popular song; and it is founded upon actual fact. You may remember Tennyson took one incident of the same kind for the subject of "The Lord of Burleigh." Many novels have been written about the same thing. Nevertheless, fine as the Scotch song is, I should not think of giving it preference over the French song. There is a simple art about that, a truth of life which cannot be surpassed.

I told you about the skill of the French popular singers in treating sad subjects also. Let me give one example—the story of a dead peasant girl—or, rather the story of the

feeling of the lover who sees her dead. Perhaps she might have been at one time as innocent as the girl who went to buy the wooden shoes. The title of the piece is "La Morte." It is composed by a country poet of great talent, Gabriel Vicaire, who unfortunately became mad and died a few years ago. It is written altogether in the speech of the common people and the idioms are all colloquial. But how very touching it is!

Avant-hier, la pauvre Lise,  
Sans crier gare, a trépassé.

Elle est au milieu de l'église  
Sur un tréteau qu'on a dressé.

Elle est en face de la Vierge,  
Elle qui pécha tant de fois.

A ses pieds fume un petit cierge  
Dans un long chandelier de bois.

Les gens qui sortent de confesse  
Ont grand'hâte de s'en aller,

Et le curé bâcle sa messe:  
Son déjeuner pourrait brûler.

Aux malheureux courte prière;  
Ça ne rapporte quasi rien.

Pas un âme autour de la bière;  
On dirait qu'on enterre un chien.

Seul, à genoux près de la porte,  
Je regarde, et je n'ose entrer.

Je pense aux cheveux de la morte  
Que le soleil venait dorer,

A ses yeux bleu de violette,  
Si doux alors que je l'aimais,

A sa bouche aujourd'hui muette  
Et qui ne rira plus jamais.

(Day before yesterday, without a word, poor Lise died. She is there in the middle of the church, lying upon the little framework which they made for her.

She is lying there in front of the Virgin,—she who sinned so many times.

At her feet a small taper smokes in a wooden candle stick.

The people who have finished making their confessions seem in a great hurry to get away.

And the priest hurries through his mass—perhaps he is thinking that his breakfast will burn if he does not finish quickly.

Short prayers for the wretched;—praying for such people brings in scarcely any money at all.

And there is not a single soul about the bier;—one would say that it was only a dog that is going to be buried.

I only, on my knees at the door, I look and dare not enter.

I think of her violet-blue eyes—so sweet in the time when I used to love her; I think of her mouth now that will never smile again.)

The young peasant who tells us this does not much like the priest: he understands human nature pretty well; and he knows that the poor dead girl is not receiving the consideration to which true Christianity should entitle her. The priests do not give her case much attention, because she has no rich friend to pay well for the service; and the village folks pay no fees for the funeral at all. Of course she was not a good girl from the religious point of view; but that is no reason for burying her like a dog. He kneels at the door of the church, and is afraid to go in. Why? afraid perhaps of showing his emotions—because he cannot help thinking of the days when he loved her, when she was his mistress. And then, he begins to think about the doctrine of the future life. He does not like the priests; but he believes—he believes in the soul, in heaven and in hell, in Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. And as he believes

he must pray for the girl. First he speaks to her: then he prays for her—and that prayer is one of the most delightful things in modern French literature.

Ah! pauvre belle . . .

.....

..... Où sont les rêves  
Qui nous rendaient le cœur content?

.....

Tes lèvres, fleurant comme roses,  
Où l'amour menait si grand bruit,

Tes lèvres sont a jamais closes;  
Tes yeux moqueurs sont dans la nuit.

.....

Dis-moi, pauvre âme abandonnée,  
As-tu déjà vu le bon Dieu?

Au puis d'enfer es-tu damnée?  
As-tu mis la robe de feu?

.....

Parle, parle. Est-ce vrai qu'on souffre  
Mille morts éternellement?

S'il ne te faut qu'une neuvaine  
Pour sortir du mauvais chemin,

Pour vêtir la cape de laine,  
Je n'attendrai pas à demain.

Traversant forêts et rivières,  
Les pieds saignant, le cœur navré,

A Notre-Dame de Fourvières,  
Pénitent noir, je m'en irai.

Bienheureux le pauvre qui touche  
Les grains d'or de son chapelet!

Elle peut d'un mot de sa bouche  
Nous rendre blancs comme le lait,

Elle peut d'un signe de tête,  
Effacer notre iniquité.

Je lui donnerai pour sa fête,  
Manteau d'hiver, manteau d'été;

Et, quand viendra la grand foire,  
Je veux offrir à son Jésus

Un moulin aux ailes d'ivoire,  
Pour qu'il rie en soufflant dessus

(Ah! pretty girl! where are now the dreams which once made us so happy?

.....

Thy lips once blooming like roses—thy lips which love me so talkative,—

Thy lips are closed forever; they mocking eyes are in the everlasting night.

.....

Tell me, thou poor forsaken soul, hast thou already seen the good God?

Art thou condemned to the pit of Hell? Hast thou put on the robe of fire?

.....

Speak to me, speak! Is it true that one suffers a thousand deaths for all eternity?

If thou dost only need a nine days prayer to help thee out of the evil way,

Then, indeed, I shall not wait until to-morrow to put on the woolen robe of a pilgrim.

And as a black penitent I shall go through forests and over rivers, with bleeding feet, and sorrowing heart to our lady of Fourvieres.

Blessed is the person able to touch the golden beads of her rosary!

With a single word of her lips she can make us white as milk.

With one nod she can blot out our iniquity.

For the next festival I will make her a gift of a cloak for winter, and a cloak for summer ;

And when the time of the great fair shall come, I intend to offer to her child Jesus

A little wind-mill with ivory vanes that he may laugh as he blows upon it.)

You must understand that the little wind-mill referred to is very much like the Japanese toy called "kazaguruma"; the child turns the wheel by blowing upon it with its breath. Is there not something pathetically delightful in the artlessness of this promised gift to the Virgin's son. Such a poem could only have been imagined in a country of Catholic peasantry; and the sentiment is exactly true to life. The French peasant is hard and keen in mere matters of barter and trade; and he is a quick observer of human nature, but his religious side is as simple as that of a little child; and it is not by any means unattractive on that account.

Well, our English song writers and ballad writers cannot manage for some reason or other, to write things as touching and as artless as this—except when they take to dialect, and even then they appear to be much more artificial than the French. In the whole range of English song literature there are very, very few things that are not somewhat artificial, if we except the pieces written in dialect. I almost believe that we could count the exceptions upon our fingers—that is to say, I doubt if we have ten really fine songs, not written in dialect, and not so literary as to seem artificial. We have Burns of course; but Burns is only great in dialect, and has no value when he expresses himself in ordinary English. In fact there are but two periods in English literature to which we may look for earnest and artless songs of beauty—the old ballad age, and the nineteenth century.

Now going back to the old English period, we find a few popular songs of the true quality—songs which are at once artless and yet beautiful, which possess the universal element of literary excellence without being literary. Such is the little song about the "Cuckoo," the song of "Alisoun,"

and later, the song of "The Nut-Brown Maid"; still later the drinking song in the English language, that wonderful "Back and side go bare, go bare!"—which ushers in like a joyous roundelay the beginning of true English drama. After that the chief singers were the dramatists; and Shakespeare's songs were the best of these. But these were not of a kind to become popular in the sense that I mean. After the beginning of drama the true popular song existed chiefly in dialect. When we come to the nineteenth century there is a revival of the older tastes; but how very imperfect that revival is! There was Moore who wrote hundreds of songs—some very beautiful from a literary point of view, yet mostly artificial, and the expression of a class feeling or a class fashion. There was Sir Walter Scott; he could write and did write great songs; but he wrote them in dialect. I don't think that we have had any great author who was successful in producing a popular song of the finest quality before the time of Charles Kingsley. He wrote about half a dozen,—two or three of which almost immediately became known the whole world over, being translated into many languages including Japanese. That is a proof for you how rare and how precious a perfect song of this kind can be. None of the four great Victorian poets made a really beautiful popular song of the kind that I am referring to—though both Tennyson and Rossetti have shown, in their mastery of ballad form, that under certain circumstances they might have been able to do so. One female poet produced two fine songs. Jean Ingelow (she wrote in English, not in dialect). To-day there is one great song writer, whose songs are now being sung in English camps and upon English ships all around the world—Kipling; but even Kipling persistently writes in dialect. It would seem as if it requires an astonishing amount of courage or an extraordinary combination of favorable conditions, to produce a fine song in common English. There is no such condition in France. French singers write their songs in pure French; and the result is quite as effective as if dialect were used.

Now if you look carefully at the French poem just quoted, you will find that, although every phrase in it is appropriate in the mouth of the peasant, there is nothing to distinguish it from the literary French except the use of the verb "bâcler" in the phrase "le curé bâcle sa messe" (which we might render into English colloquial, "the priest rattles through his mass.") The word is vulgarly popular, but it is pure French. Again the use of the word "quasi," signifying almost, or about, and used in the sense of our colloquial "just about nothing"—that is not used in literary French; but it is not only pure French, but old classical French which has changed its value in the course of centuries. The work is that of a scholar who delighted in listening to the speech of the peasant and studying the art of its use. The best English songs of a popular kind have also been written in a majority of cases by men of some learning. The old drinking song of "Back and side go bare" was probably the work of a country schoolmaster. I think we should understand from the history of such songs that the ability to write them depends altogether upon the ability to sympathize with the common people and to love them.

I shall try to offer you a few of the most note-worthy kinds of English popular songs, but you will perceive that I cannot avoid quoting some in dialect, because the songs not in dialect are so very rare. However, let us take first a song by Jean Ingelow which is not in dialect. It is a marriage song.

#### LIKE A LAVEROCK IN THE LIFT

It's we two, it's we two, it's we two for aye,  
All the world and we two, and Heaven be our stay.  
Like a laverock in the lift, sing, O bonny bride!  
All the world was Adam once, with Eve by his side.

What's the world, my lass, my love!—what can it do?  
I am thine, and thou art mine; life is sweet and new.  
If the world have missed the mark, let it stand by,  
For we two have gotten leave, and once more we'll try.



There are several other stanzas; the first stanza serving as a burden or chorus to the others. But the song falls short of the first rank: it is only the burden that is really fine, and that preserves the rest. The word "laverock" is northern country English for lark; and the word "lift" meaning "sky," is good old English. A better song is the author's "Long White Seam."

As I came round the harbor buoy,  
 The lights began to gleam,  
 No wave the land-locked water stirred,  
 The crags were white as cream;  
 And I marked my love by candle-light  
 Sewing her long white seam.  
 It's aye sewing ashore, my dear,  
 Watch and steer at sea,  
 It's reef and furl, and haul the line,  
 Set sail and think of thee.

I climbed to reach her cottage door;  
 O sweetly my love sings!  
 Like a shaft of light her voice breaks forth,  
 My soul to meet it springs  
 As the shining water leaped of old,  
 When stirred by angel wings.  
 Aye longing to list anew,  
 Awake and in my dream,  
 But never a song she sang like this,  
 Sewing her long white seam.

Fair fall the lights, the harbor lights,  
 That brought me in to thee,  
 And peace drop down on that low roof  
 For the sight that I did see,  
 And the voice, my dear, that rang so clear  
 All for the love of me.  
 For O, for O, with brows bent low  
 By the candle's flickering gleam,  
 Her wedding gown it was she wrought,  
 Sewing the long white seam.

This is a good song and yet there is something wanting in it,—the artless ease of the true popular song is missing in several lines. Still it is good; it makes a charming picture to the mind. I suppose you know the scriptural allusion to the stirring of waters of the healing pool by the wings of an angel. Perhaps you will wonder at the very fine line describing the crags as being “white as cream.” Are crags white, even in moonlight? Yes, they are—in England. The singer is describing the chalk-cliff at the mouth of the bay. But just because of the particular features of this song it lacks that tone of universal charm which we should ask for in a truly great song. Very much better, incomparably better, are the three songs of Kingsley—“The Three Fishers,” “The Sands of Dee,” and “Airly Beacon.” Perhaps the last is least known to you: we may quote it, for it is very short.

#### AIRLY BEACON

Airly Beacon, Airly Beacon;  
 Oh, the pleasant sight to see  
 Shires and towns from Airly Beacon,  
 While my love climbed up to me!

Airly Beacon, Airly Beacon;  
 Oh, the happy hours we lay  
 Deep in fern on Airly Beacon,  
 Courting through the summer's day!

Airly Beacon, Airly Beacon;  
 Oh, the weary haunt for me,  
 All alone on Airly Beacon,  
 With his baby on my knee!

Here the place signifies nothing, the country signifies nothing, the nationality signifies nothing; the truth and the pathos are of the universal kind, translatable into the language of all countries and the emotion of all hearts. That is a very great song—a song of the first and most

perfect, considering its brevity. Indeed the brevity is one of its marvellous qualities; the feat of expressing the joy and the sorrow of a whole life in twelve lines is not small. I think there is nothing to explain—further than to say that Airly Beacon is the name of a Scotch hill, upon which summit a beacon light used to be lighted. The rest of the story tells itself. You know that the word “shires” signifies in England about the same thing that the word “kuni” signifies in Japan.

We find nothing more to compare with Kingsley’s songs, in the whole of the nineteenth century:—we must go back to the eighteenth century for that, and to the time of Burns. I do not like to quote Burns to you because of his dialect; but there is one peice so very much resembling in its charm the song of Kingsley that I think we had better quote it. Translated into Japanese, I think you would find it beautiful. The subject is sad like the subject of Kingsley’s song. I shall read the verses as far as possible in English—though the charm to English readers is much related to the dialect.

Ye flowery banks of bonnie Doon,  
 How can ye bloom so fair!  
 How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
 And I so full of care!

Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonnie bird,  
 That sings upon the bough;  
 Thou minds me of the happy days,  
 When my false love was true.

Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonnie bird,  
 That sings beside thy mate;  
 For so I sat, and so I sang,  
 And wist not of my fate.

Oft I have rov’d by bonnie Doon,  
 To see the woodbine twine,  
 And every bird sang of its love,  
 And so did I of mine.

With lightsome heart I pulled a rose  
Upon its thorny tree;  
But my false lover stole the rose,  
And left the thorn with me.

I suppose you know this is very famous. It has the great quality of sincerity and simple beauty. I like Kingsley's "Airly Beacon" much better;—I think it is a higher piece of art. But the song of Burns is also beautiful; and he wrote a great many beautiful songs.

But if there is in the nineteenth century no great English songs of the popular kind to equal the songs of Kingsley, there are some songs of lesser quality which possess very considerable merit. One of these little songs, made in the pre-Victorian era by "Father Prout," about the sound of the bell in his native town is now sung all over the world. His real name was Francis Mahony; and he wrote many clever things, but nothing really famous except this one song. In the time of Moore and Byron it was one of the great treats at a social meeting to hear the old Irishman sing this one song. It is called "The Shandon Bells." But the cathedral really referred to is in the city of Cork; and many persons now visit Cork merely to hear the bells, remembering that song. I do not offer this song as a great literary composition; it is strictly a popular song; and all the better for any faults that it may happen to possess in regard to construction.

With deep affection,  
And recollection,  
I often think of  
    Those Shandon bells,  
Whose sounds so wild would,  
In the days of childhood,  
Fling round my cradle  
    Their magic spells.  
On this I ponder  
Where'er I wander,  
And thus grow fonder,

## ON POETRY

Sweet Cork, of thee;  
 With thy bells of Shandon,  
 That sound so grand on  
 The pleasant waters  
 Of the River Lee.

I've heard bells chiming  
 Full many a clime in,  
 Tolling sublime in  
 Cathedral shrine,  
 While at a glib rate  
 Brass tongues would vibrate—  
 But all their music  
 Spoke nought like thine;  
 For memory, dwelling  
 On each proud swelling  
 Of the belfry knelling  
 Its bold notes free,  
 Made the bells of Shandon  
 Sound far more grand on  
 The pleasant waters  
 Of the River Lee.

I've heard bells tolling  
 Old "Adrian's Mole" in,  
 Their thunder rolling  
 From the Vatican,  
 And cymbals glorious  
 Swinging uproarious  
 In the gorgeous turrets  
 Of Notre Dame;  
 But thy sounds were sweeter  
 Than the dome of Peter  
 Flings o'er the Tiber,  
 Pealing solemnly—  
 O! the bells of Shandon  
 Sound far more grand on  
 The pleasant waters  
 Of the River Lee.

There's a bell in Moscow,

While on tower and kiosk O!  
In Saint Sophia  
    The Turkman gets,  
And loud in air  
Calls men to prayer  
From the tapering summits  
    Of tall minarets.  
Such empty phantom  
I freely grant them;  
But there 's an anthem  
    More dear to me,—  
'Tis the bells of Shandon,  
That sound so grand on  
The pleasant waters  
    Of the River Lee.

A few explanations are needed. This man has travelled in Europe, and has heard the most famous bells of the Western world; but none of them sound so sweetly to his ears as the sound of the bells of his native town. The reference in the second stanza is to Rome. "Adrian's Mole" or more correctly spelt "Hadrian's Mole" is the name of the mausoleum of Rome constructed by Emperor Hadrian, a vast earthwork upon which many buildings now rest. The Vatican, you know, is the Pope's residence, adjoining the great cathedral of St. Peter's, where there are wonderful bells. Next we have reference to the bells of Notre Dame, the great cathedral of Paris; bells of which the sound has been made famous by Victor Hugo's novel of "Notre-Dame." The bell of Moscow, referred to, used to be considered the greatest bell in the world, until the great bells of China became known. The Moscow bell is useless, you know, having fallen by a fire and having broken. The reference to St. Sophia in Constantinople is correct, it must not be misunderstood. The building was constructed by the Emperor Justinian the Greek, and was once the greatest cathedral of the Christian world. But when the Turks captured the city they changed the cathedral into a mosque; although Western people still call it improperly St. Sophia, it is only

known in history by such a name, correctly speaking. In all Mohammedan countries the prayer is made to by singing, not by bells; and the use of the bells was forbidden by Mohammed. But the poet is a little unjust in speaking of the calls to the Mohamedan prayer as an "empty phantom." It is one of the most impressive and beautiful chants possible to hear; and one of the most pleasant experiences of Constantinople is to hear the singing of the summons to the prayer by the muezzin of the great mosque. A muezzin is always chosen for his splendid voice. Three times a day that voice rings all over the city, strongly as the sound of a great trumpet, but a phantom with tones of gold that pleases a musical ear.

The song of the bells of Shandon, remember, is in colloquial English and the colloquialism is playful—therefore we have the word "uproarious" in relation to the bells of Notre Dame. Of course this is not intended to be serious, only to express the indifference to the sound of any bells except those of his native city. Colloquial or not, however, it is a fine composition, and will probably give pleasure to lovers of literature for many years to come.

I have given examples of popular songs of love and sorrow and a good song on the subject of bells. What do you think of war as a subject for popular song? Perhaps you will say that it is not exactly suited to such forms of verse. But I am not sure about that: remember some of the Japanese songs upon the subject of the war with China. One or two of them are really popular, and yet full of spirit and full of irony. A popular song is best when ironical; and we have such songs in Scotch dialects that you can appreciate. It is about the battle of Killiecrankie. The battle of Killiecrankie was the last great battle fought between the English and the Scotch and it was one of the most remarkable battles in the world; because, on one side, there were 6,000 veteran English soldiers, who had fought in England on many fields of battle and who were supported by artillery—while on the other side there were only Scotch mountain peasants armed with nothing but the claymores, as you

read in Macaulay's "History of England." It lasted only about twenty minutes. The Scotch mountaineers, undismayed by the first volley of the soldiers, leapt down upon them from the mountain side and literally cut them all to pieces. Had not the leader, Dundee, been killed in the charge, the host of the Highlanders would not have melted away. It was so splendid a feat on the part of the peasants that all the poets of the time wrote something about it. Much as Dr. Johnson hated Scotchmen, he wrote a Latin poem on that battle. At a later date Wordsworth wrote a sonnet about it. And there have been many other poems on it during the nineteenth century. But none of these can compare for a moment with the thorough irony of a song made by the peasants themselves. Burns found the song and tried to reshape two stanzas; but critics have disapproved of the change. Really we do not know the name of the man who composed the song; but he was probably one of the very men who took part in the battle. This time I must give the dialect—the raw strength of the thing is there.

Whare ha'e ye been sae braw, lad?  
 Where ha'e ye been sae brankie, O?  
 O, whare ha'e ye been sae braw, lad?  
 Cam ye by Killiecrankie, O?  
     An ye had been whare I ha'e been,  
     Ye wadna been so cantie, O;  
     An' ye had seen what I ha'e seen,  
     I' the braes o' Killiecrankie, O.

I faught at land, I faught at sea,  
 At hame I fought my auntie, O;  
 But I met the devil an' Dundee,  
 On the braes o' Killiecrankie, O;  
     An ye had been, &c.

The bauld Pitcur fell in a furr,  
 An' Clavers got a clankie, O;  
 Or I had fed an Athol gled,  
 On the braes o' Killiecrankie, O.  
     It's nae shame, it's nae shame,



It's nae shame to shank ye, O ;  
There's sour slaes on Athol braes,  
And devils at Killiecrankie, O!

“Where have you been that you look so handsome to-day? Where have you been that you look so sprightly? Where have you been that you look so handsome, my boy? Did you have to come here by way of Killiecrankie?”

“O if you had been where I have been, you would never look so lively,—not if you had seen what I had seen on the plains of Killiecrankie.

“I fought both on land and on sea. At home I often fought with my aunt (the mother's sister is often a cause of quarrels in Scotch house-holds); but on the fields of Killiecrankie I met the devil himself with Dundee.

“Old bold Pitcur fell into a furrow and Clavers got a hard knock (he was shot dead in the front of the battle)—if it had not been for that I should have been food for the kites of Athol. It is no shame—it is no shame—it is no shame to run away;—there's sour berries on the field of Athol and devils at Killiecrankie.”

Of course in plain English the homely force of the thing, the rough mockery, is almost entirely lost. And indeed the great worth of the piece is not less due to the music than to the sarcasm. It is sung to one of the liveliest tunes ever composed; and to understand the stirring effect of the song upon modern Scotch regiments (they go into battle playing “In Killiecrankie”), you should hear the air played upon highland bag-pipes.

Going back through all English literature from the time of the Killiecrankie composition we can find no really popular song, having the qualities of first class merit combined with universal interest. There are literary songs in multitude; but they belong to lyrical poetry proper—not to the subject of this essay. On the other hand there are many dialect poems,—dialect songs of the highest class; but the fact of their being in dialect restricts them to a narrow place. I do not know whether we can really speak

of any other great songs, popular songs, in pure English till we come to the time of Shakespeare and a little before. In that time a number of small popular lyrics made their appearance, which you all know something about; yet, except as poetry they are mostly dead—which is proof that from the very beginning the true kind of life was not in them. A drinking song alone survives, which is actually still sung; that is a proof of its great merit. The earliest date manuscript of this song is not perhaps the best; but because it is the earliest to which a date can be appended with some certainty it is better to quote it. It must have been composed, if the author is known, some time between 1565 and 1600. In that case the author was a bishop—John Still, Bishop of Bath and Wells. It is rather strange in these times to think of a bishop writing a popular drinking song; but the bishops of old were not ascetics invariably. It is possible that the Bishop only rewrote the song after some older copy; and a version published by Bullen in his “Lyrics from the Elizabethan Dramatists” (in the appendix) is thought to be the older. However, I offer the version given in the latest Oxford Anthology as the work of Bishop Still.

#### JOLLY GOOD ALE AND OLD

I cannot eat but little meat,  
 My stomach is not good;  
 But sure I think that I can drink  
 With him that wears a hood.  
 Though I go bare, take ye no care,  
 I nothing am a-cold;  
 I stuff my skin so full within  
 Of jolly good ale and old.  
 Back and side go bare, go bare;  
 Both foot and hand go cold;  
 But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,  
 Whether it be new or old.

I love no roast but a nut-brown toast,

And a crab laid in the fire ;  
 A little bread shall do me stead ;  
 Much bread I not desire.  
 No frost nor snow, no wind, I trow,  
 Can hurt me if I wold ;  
 I am so wrapp'd and throughly lapp'd  
 Of jolly good ale and old.  
 Back and side go bare, go bare, &c.

And Tib, my wife, that as her life  
 Loveth well good ale to seek,  
 Full oft drinks she till ye may see  
 The tears run down her cheek :  
 Then doth she trowl to me the bowl  
 Even as a maltworm should,  
 And saith, 'Sweetheart, I took my part  
 Of this jolly good ale and old.'  
 Back and side go bare, go bare, &c.

Now let them drink till they nod and wink,  
 Even as good fellows should do ;  
 They shall not miss to have the bliss  
 Good ale doth bring men to ;  
 And all poor souls that have scour'd bowls  
 Or have them lustily troll'd,  
 God save the lives of them and their wives,  
 Whether they be young or old.  
 Back and side go bare, go bare ;  
 Both foot and hand go cold ;  
 But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,  
 Whether it be new or old.

Professor Saintsbury calls this "a magnificent song." It is indeed the very best drinking song in the English language, though I must say that I prefer the longer version in Bullen which has three more stanzas and is more curiously written and spelt, for example :

But yf that I  
 May have trwly  
 Good ale my belly full

I shall looke lyke one  
By swete sainte Johnn  
Were shoron agaynste the woole.

I advise you to look at the version I speak of. But perhaps you may wonder why not only Professor Saintsbury but almost every great critic has praised this song. Is it not vulgar, rough, devil-may-care? It faithfully represents the feeling of jollity of a particular class at a particular time; and if you could hear it sung to-day in London, as it sometimes is by a crowd of sturdy workman over their evening pot of ale, you would feel that there is a plenty of spirit and force in it. The great merit of the song is in what we call the rhythmic swing, which renders it admirably adapted for a rolling chorus of many voices. And this swing has been obtained of an admirable use of double rhymes. Of course you should remember that when this song was composed the English language was not pronounced altogether as it is now: indeed it is from this song that the philologist has been able to determine the sixteenth century accentuation and meaning of certain words. But I do not mean to call this song of the very highest class among popular songs. It is the very highest class of English drinking songs. But that is all. It has not got the world-quality which some of Kingsley's songs have got and it cannot rank with them. It is only a wonderful thing of its own kind.

I am not going to offer you any more examples of songs; indeed I doubt whether I could find any capable of illustrating the facts I wanted to bring out. In six or seven anthologies of lyric poetry, in two anthologies of musical songs, and in a number of other books I have searched untiringly for songs of the first quality, in pure English; and they do not exist. The result has been not merely to show that nearly all of the good English popular songs are in dialect, but that a song not in dialect, and yet holding the quality of universal interest, is one of the rarest and most precious things in literature. If Kingsley has no other claim, he would be still famous for all time through having

been able to write a few songs capable of being translated into any language under the sun. By the way, I did think that I had discovered a very great song, or was going to discover it, called "The Men of the Sea." I found some verses of it in a novel by Kipling where they were quoted as if taken from some ancient source; and I made inquiries in all directions hoping to secure the original. Nobody could find it. At last Mr. Kipling sent word that he had composed the verses out of his own head. All that now remains for me to say is this,—that if Mr. Kipling will ever take the time and pains to complete that song, he will have made one of the best songs ever written in any language:—a real world-song. But perhaps he will not ever be able to finish it. Such power does not come to a man by study,—it can come only as an inspiration.

A word in conclusion as to books about songs in English. The best anthology of songs with music for the student is the little collection in the Golden Treasury series called "The Song Book" edited by John Hullah. But you will find that the value of the book is chiefly musical and that such famous songs as "Aileen Aroon" "Robert Adais," "Home, Home" etc., live chiefly through the extraordinary beat of the tunes attached to them. Of course you will find songs of the highest merit such as "Auld Lang Syne," and "Comin thro the Rye." But these are in dialect. There are many collections of music; and you can look through them for months without finding anything like a great song. A great song not in dialect is sure to be in one of the best anthologies. But how many such songs does any anthology contain? Finally I may mention that there is a new book called "Stories of Famous Songs," published by an Englishman Fitzgerald. It is of very little value from a literary point of view,—for it does not give the text of the songs at all, but only relates many extraordinary stories concerning their authorship; moreover, English songs occupy only about one chapter of the book, the greater part of which is taken up with stories about songs of other countries. So that

even literature on the subject of this essay is very scanty. But that is only a proof of what I have been trying to tell you all along,—namely that there is nothing so rare as a good popular song. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that even great epics are more plentiful. We think often of things as unimportant because they are small, and sometimes forget the parable of the diamond.