

THE COLLECTOR ON CATCHES

(BEING NO. XIX OF 'THE COLLECTOR SERIES.')

THE house adjoining the Collector's modest abode was at last taken. The clangour of pails, the shuffling of boards and tressels, and the scraping of walls plainly proclaimed that whitewashers, painters, and paperhangers were having merry times at high wages. Presently the family moved in; a family which included sons and daughters, and a father and mother of dignified aspect. The first glimpses of the Collector's household showed that they were 'nice people,' and the borrowing and lending of a step-ladder opened the way to friendly relations, especially between the maids of the two households. The Collector himself, walking in the back garden, had a neighbourly chat with Mr. Next-door, the subject being --- potatoes.

'I wonder,' queried Mr. Next-door, 'if this land is any good for potatoes? One feels that one should do something towards the shortage and help things along. What's your experience regarding potatoes?'

The Collector confessed he had no experience in regard to potatoes save in their boiled state. 'Well, I haven't,' remarked Mr. Next-door; 'but I think I'll invest in a few seed potatoes, and shove 'em in on these borders and see what happens. I don't suppose they'll come to any good, but one can but try, eh?'

'Very good resolution,' agreed the Collector, 'I'll follow your example.'

And so it befell that a smallbag of seed potatoes was purchased and shared between the two neighbours, and the Collector and his new friend vigorously dug, trenched, and dabbled with praiseworthy zeal. A creditable backache was the result in both cases, and to the Collector it was brought home that he was not so young, vitally, as he had fondly supposed.

After they had painfully straightened themselves after each evening's work, an invitation to 'come in and have a chat' was a natural result of this agricultural comradeship. Accordingly the Collector's hobby was revealed.

'You've a lot of books here,' said Mr. Next-door, glancing round. 'Are they all music?' he asked as he examined the backs more closely.

'All music and musical literature,' assented the Collector with modest pride. 'And I can assure you, my dear sir, there are many rare and valuable works among them.'

The Collector thereupon, with a gleeful gleam in his eye, brought down volume after volume in a bewildering manner until poor Mr. Next-door sank into a chair and, under the guise of lighting one of his host's cigarettes, called for breathing time.

'When I was a younger man, Mr. Collector, I was rather a dab at part-singing. I sang in our choir at home, and so did my wife, before we were married. Dear, dear, how time flies! I got quite a shock sometimes when I see my big grown-up daughters nearly as old as their mother was in those far-off days. For it seems but yesterday since I used to go to their house on Saturday evenings to sing part-songs. Her sisters and the old boy, her father, used to join in. I remember our great effort was "Who will o'er the Downs so free." Before leaving, I would suggest a walk round the square in which the house stood; that was the best substitute for "the Downs so free" which we could get.'

Mr. Next-door looked sentimental, and for a while smoked his cigarette in silence. 'I have often thought we might revive part-singing in the family, for the benefit,' he added, 'of the girls. I think they would like it, as my wife and I did.'

'Try catches!' said the Collector, jumping up and eagerly going to his book-case. 'Try catches!'

Mr. Next-door was a little puzzled.

'Well, I used to play a little cricket years ago, but I'm afraid my wife and the girls are a bit butter-fingered, and it wouldn't do in the drawing-room, you know. We can't have "Cricket on the Hearth.'" And Mr. Next-door chuckled at his own pleasantry.

'I don't mean cricket,' said the Collector, 'I mean only catches.' ...

'Oh, I'm sure the wife wouldn't like it. Think of the chimney ornaments and gas globes. We can't introduce ball practice inside the house.'

The Collector, in his eagerness to ride his hobby, was oblivious of his friend's misapprehension.

'Now, look here,' he said, as he lugged forth half a dozen volumes from the shelves, 'Here are several collections of "Catches and Gleees.' ...

'Oh!'

'I mean catches,' asserted the Collector. 'There is a lot of most excellent catches which it would be as well to revive during these modern days.

'I can lend you any amount. But wait a bit, I'll expound all about it; for I see, my dear sir, that you don't quite grasp the idea.'

The Collector armed himself with a dozen or more volumes, chiefly oblongs, and settled into his paces.

'Look here, you can go quietly through this lot by yourself, you know. There are plenty suitable for family singing, though some the ladies might not like. I confess the singing of "Catches and Gleees" has gone out of fashion - I don't know why - for many are witty, both as regards music and words - for, my dear sir, there is equally wit in music as in words.

'I don't know any modern versifier who could write such neat witty examples as you will find here among these books, and I doubt whether any modern composer could readily enter into the spirit of such things; anyhow, nobody appears to have tried for the past century or more. I wonder, by the way, when was the last "catch" made.'

'What is the difference between a catch and a glee?'

'Well,' answered the Collector, 'in a glee the parts generally commence simultaneously - not always. Also in the character of the words. The catch is so called, I presume, by the fact that the voices "catch" each other up. The piece is so composed that if the voice parts were sung together they would harmonize, but as a matter of fact, the first voice commences alone and continues to the end, then, without a break, sings his part over again. Meanwhile the second voice commences his part as soon as the first voice recommences, and the third voice begins as soon as the second recommences, and the fourth voice, if there be a fourth part, when the third voice recommences. Thus there arises a confusion of words, which, if the catch be ingeniously written, produces a witty effect, that it is impossible to discover on first reading.

'For instance, you know the well-known example by Dr. Callcott:

*Ah, how, Sophia, can you leave
Your lover, and of hope bereave.
Go fetch the Indian's borrow'd plume,
Yet richer far than that you bloom;
I'm but a lodger in your heart,
And more than me, I fear, have part.*

Here we have what appears to be merely an ordinary love-song, but sung as in the catch the effect is an exclamation: "A house afire!" followed by "Go, fetch the engines!" sung by the second voice, while the third voice calmly proclaims "I'm but a lodger." In that period I may tell you that the "d" in "Indian's" was quite correctly pronounced "j," and as a consequence the word had a near resemblance to "engines."

'Then, of course, you know how the sale of Hawkins' "History of Music" was damped by the catch which ended, "Burney's history pleases me," the third voice appearing to be repeating in reference to Sir John Hawkins' work:

*Burn his history!
Burn his history!
Burney's history pleases me.*

'But these are well-known examples, though they best explain what a catch really aimed at. Many of the old catches were, of course, best suited to the wits of Charles II's reign or to the jovial fellows who sang them in the eighteenth century.

'Now I need not tell you of the Catch Clubs and the Glee Clubs, all with most expensive subscriptions, and patronized by the nobility and gentry of the time, who not only sang themselves, but hired the best professional singers to join in with them and to sing solo pieces. The Glee Club was formed in 1737, and met at the Crown and Anchor, a famous musical tavern in the Strand. Then it removed to the Freemason's Tavern, meeting once a fortnight. There had been dozens of similar musical societies prior to this. The members dined at half-past four, and each subscriber paid seven guineas for his ten nights, and could introduce a friend at one guinea a time. After dinner each member had a part-book placed before him, and he either sang or followed the singing by the book.

'I have seen old pottery dessert plates with a transfer of the words and music of a catch printed upon them. This, I suppose, served the purpose of a book after dessert was finished.

'Knives with a part engraved on the blade also exist, or did exist. The singing was done by the members seated.

'Of course the catches were not always of a sober and discreet character, which led John Bland, of 45 Holborn, to publish, late in the eighteenth century, a ladies' collection of catches and glees. I can lend you this, but elsewhere we can find many delightful catches quite suitable for family singing, which would not in the least degree offend your charming daughters.

'Here, for example, is one from Henry Playford's *Pleasant Musical Companion*, sixth edition, 1720,' and the Collector turned over the leaves of a leather-covered oblong quarto.

'This was set to music by Henry Purcell, who did not disdain to compose a large number of humorous catches, which retained their popularity for half a century and more after his death.'

The Collector read out the following:

*When V and I together meet,
We make up six in house or street,
Yet I and V may meet once more,
And then we two can make but four;
But when that V from I am gone,
Alas! poor I can make but one!*

Another in the same book is:-

'A rebus on the late Mr. Henry Purcell's name by Mr. Tomlinson, set to musick by Mr. John Lenton.'

*The mate to a cock, and corn tall as wheat,
Is his Christian name, who in musick's compleat,
His surname begins with the grace of a cat,
And concludes with the house of a hermit, note that.*

*His skill and performance each auditor wins,
But the poet deserves a good kick on the shins.*

'If you don't like any of these, I will lend you some very pretty catches which have a good effect when sung. These are the street cries of London and of Dublin. We get many very quaint things, which, I believe, are real transcripts of the original musical cries by the hawkers of that period. In those days, my dear sir, there appears to have been a good deal more music in the streets than at present.'

'The hoot of the motor horn is the accepted music of the street now,' interjected his friend. 'Quite so, and that has got more hideous than ever. How any human being with a soul to save could countenance such horrible - but there! I'll say no more.'

'To resume about street cries.'

'The lavender cries, which still exist in London streets, are the sole survivors of the old musical street cries. Many have been noted down by members of the Folk-song Society, and they are in general very pretty.'

'By the way, do you know,' asked the Collector, suddenly breaking off his discourse on "catches," 'the story of the pretty song "Caller herring"?'

'No.'

'Well, it is this way; Nathaniel Gow, the son of the more famous Neil Gow, the Scottish fiddler, hearing a Newhaven fish-wife crying "Caller herring" (that is, "cold," as a sign of freshness), the cry mingling with the bells of St. George's Church at practice, conceived the idea of making a harpsichord piece, using the original cry intermingled with the bells. This was about 1798-9. The piece was well liked, and Gow attempted to follow it up with another - "who'll buy my pease and beans, hot and warm" and "Buy rock partens," the two cries together in the same piece. I possess the original sheet issues,' chuckled the Collector.

'It was some twenty years after this that Lady Nairne published her song in the fourth volume of *The Scottish Minstrel*, anonymously. In a later edition it came into the fifth volume, and was signed "B. B.," which was supposed to indicate Mrs. Bogan of Bogan, a "Mrs. Harris" *nom de plume* which Lady Nairne sometimes adopted.

'But, to return to catches, I strongly advise you, my dear sir, to go in for them during the winter months; they will prove a never-failing source of musical fun to your people, if carefully selected.'

Mr. Next-door, perhaps a little wearied with the Collector's long disquisition, switched on the discourse to potatoes and National Service.

FRANK KIDSON.