

FRANK KIDSON

[Obituary by J T Lightwood]



ALL who knew Mr. Frank Kidson, his friends and all who were acquainted with his work and reputation, deeply regret his sudden death, which took place last November. Born in Leeds over sixty years ago, he spent practically the whole of his life in and around the city, and became a recognised authority on its early history. Always a student, he was ever seeking to add to his knowledge, his two chief studies being the history of Leeds pottery and the story of the development of folk-song. For many years his niece, Miss Ethel Kidson, had been his constant companion. A gifted authoress herself, she took a keen delight in her uncle's work, sharing his labours and frequently writing about or lecturing on the subjects in which they were both so deeply interested.

A visit to Frank Kidson was at once an education and a joy. What a wonderful library he had! and wherever did all those volumes, ancient and modern, come from? More particularly the ancient, for his collection of eighteenth century operas and other music is probably unique. He seemed to have well-nigh every early opera that was ever published, and in many cases there might be two or more editions of each. He knew what was in them, too. He was no mere book collector like some who boast the number of volumes in their library. He knew his books; they were his friends. Ask him for the origin of some particular tune, and he would trace it back through this volume and that till he got to the rock bottom. Dances of various nations - English, Welsh, Irish, Scotch and French, he was equally familiar with.

He was a great authority on folk songs. His love for these quaint old airs had been lifelong and he was gathering them together and tracing their history as far as he could before the modern folk-song 'cult' came into existence. His kindly nature ever prevented him from criticising in public the 'discoveries' of certain modern folk-song enthusiasts who have turned the art into a commercial undertaking. No. Kidson could have told them a thing or two that would have surprised them, but he was content to let them go their own way. It is a matter of regret that no concise account has ever been written of his treasures. Scarce editions of Handel and Haydn are here, with the latter's Ariana a Naxos, bearing the composer's autograph. Also the first edition of Morley's *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practical Musicke*, 1597.

Frank Kidson lived among his books, and he was ever handling them, making fresh discoveries and bringing to light beautiful though long-forgotten melodies. He contributed many articles to newspapers and magazines, and readers of the early numbers of *The Choir* will remember with pleasure the amusing series he contributed under the guise of discussions between Collector and Musician. One of his articles, on Folk Song and the Popular Song, aroused considerable attention at the time. It will be reproduced in the March number of the *CHOIR* not only as a memorial to its gifted writer, but also because it to a certain extent anticipates 'Community Singing,' which is so much to the front just now.

His contributions to *The Musical Times* - 'New Lights on Old Tunes' - were some of the earliest authoritative articles on the history of folk music, and he naturally took a prominent part in the establishment of the Folk-Song Society in 1898, serving for many years on its Committee. The fifth number of the Society's Journal consisted chiefly of curious old songs garnered from his collection. In collaboration with Mr. Alfred Moffat, Mr. Kidson also published valuable sets of old melodies and folk songs. The Editor of the new *Grove's Dictionary* naturally looked to him for valuable help, and his response was some three or four hundred contributions to that work. His literary works include a volume on English 'Folk-song and Dance,' to which Mrs. Mary Neal also contributed. But in some respects his most important literary undertaking was his work on *British Music Publishers*, which is the standard - in fact the only work on the subject, and which has proved indispensable to the music historian. During the years that followed its publication in 1898 he accumulated a vast quantity of valuable information which still remains in manuscript. If the members of the Carnegie Trust could see their way to publish it, they would not only be doing an inestimable service to the history of our music, but they would also be doing worthy honour to one who laboured long and lovingly in the pursuit and diffusion of knowledge in one of the most interesting and important bypaths of the history of music.