

## THE COLLECTOR ON WAR SONGS

THE Collector and the Musician were looking out of the window as a small batch of newly-recruited men were passing. Bright, new khaki, and equally fresh and unstained leather belts and strappings, were in contrast to the war harness which the two friends had seen a day or two previous, worn by some wounded fellows just back from the front. Half a dozen of the men had broken rather shamefacedly into song, and before the whole had passed the rest had joined in with the swinging chorus:

*We're all going the same way home,  
In the same direction,  
All the whole collection,  
We're all going the same way home.  
Let's be gay and hearty,  
Don't break up the party,  
We'll all cling together  
Like the ivy on the old garden wall.*

'Why in the world can't these men sing something better than those wretched music-hall songs? Surely there's any amount of patriotic things already written; or if there isn't, why doesn't some one get out something that's both good and appropriate?'

The Musician waxed eloquent in continuation, as he spoke of the fine old English songs that were available, and of the inspiriting lays that were all ready at hand.

'And yet,' he continued, 'our men can't sing anything better than "Tipperary" or "Roaming in the Gloaming" on the march or in the trenches.'

'My impetuous young friend,' said the Collector, 'when a man voluntarily exposes himself to be shot, blown up, or stabbed by the enemy, I think it would be hard to dictate to him the songs he should, or should not, sing while defending his position. As for its appropriateness, I am sure, my dear young friend, you will agree, when you have given it a moment's thought, that the soldier and those of his class are particularly happy in the choice of the songs they sing - so far as we at home have knowledge. You may or may not remember that during the Boer War the wily enemy always contrived to get on the tops of hills, and our forces were in the unfortunate position of being in the valleys and having to climb the hill sides in the face of a deadly fire. What, therefore, could be more appropriate than the popular song our men out there used to sing: "All that ever I want is a little bit off the top"?''

'You rail at those poor fellows lightheartedly singing: "We're all going the same way home." Well, so they are; and it's a matter of speculation what is that home they are all going to. "Let's be gay and hearty, Don't break up the party," and so forth, is sung less than half in jest, but a good deal more in earnest. None of those fellows intends to desert his comrades, wounded or in distress. Their "home" may be a shallow trench, with a few inches of earth above their dead bodies, but they'll cling together "like the ivy on the garden wall." And so, my young friend, what seems to be originally a glorification of a rather boozy party, going, with very uncertain stability, to their homes, is elevated to the highest degree of comradeship, loyalty, and duty.

'Such a song is not to be sneered at, nor could you, with all your talent - a talent to which I mentally take off my hat - provide anything that would be more appropriate.

'I might sermonize equally upon the ditty, "It's a long way to Tipperary," and point out the analogy that lies between that Irish county and the capital of Germany, but as I see you are impatient, you perhaps can do it as well for yourself.'

'Quite well,' assented the Musician, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

The Collector was, however, now mounted on his hobby and out for a run.

'All sorts of inappropriate songs have been associated with wars. For example, "Annie Laurie" is strongly linked with the Crimean War; so much so, in fact, that I have seen a letter written by Lady John Scott, the authoress, in reply to a query, in which she says that she composed the tune and adapted the words "during the period of the war in the Crimea." She had quite forgotten that it was composed and published as early as 1838, in the third volume of Paterson & Roy's *Vocal Melodies of Scotland*. It is narrated that a sergeant commenced singing "Annie Laurie" in the trenches before Sebastopol, and that presently the whole line was declaring fervently that "for bonnie Annie Laurie they would lay them down and die." That really excellent tune and song 'The Red, White and Blue' first saw the light during that same war, and why it cannot be revived again to-day is strange.

I don't know whether the "Cock o' the North" is in use just now, but you remember it was the tune played by the wounded piper at Dargai, who crouched behind a stone still playing that tune of defiance.

The history of the tune is well worth knowing. It is really "Joan's placket is torn" - note for note, practically - and this was sounded in ridicule from the deck of the captured "Royal Charles" in the Medway in June, 1667, as recorded by Pepys in his diary. The tune is even said to go back a century earlier, and in one form to have been played at the execution of Male Queen of Scots. But I'll waive the belief in that until I've more proof. Anyhow, it became the tune for any amount of lampoons and political skits during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Then the Army got hold of it - the Scottish regiments at any rate - and there is a little incident worth recalling in connexion with it during the Indian Mutiny.

'You know that the Residency at Delhi was some short distance from the city, and that both were surrounded by the rebels. The city used to signal from a high dome in Delhi to the Residency, and after the signalling was done a little bugler lad named Ross climbed up again and sounded, amid a hail of Sepoy bullets, the "Cock o' the North," which the rebels and all others knew to be a tune of insult, defiance, and derision. I remember the tune on its last legs, and in a state of degradation, fitted to a pantomime ditty.

'While on the subject of war songs, one could recall "Lilliburlero," but the tale of how it had a mighty influence in upsetting the power of James II, and of helping to win the battle of the Boyne, has been too often told. You will grant that "Lilliburlero" is much less appropriate than any song our soldiers sing to-day. By the way, do you know - talking of Irish songs - that that pretty air "Love's Young Dream," by Tom Moore, is set to the tune of one of the Irish rebel songs of 1798, "The Shan Van Vocht"? Moore was a bold man, for "The Shan Van Vocht" was in his day a proscribed song, though likely enough the Government didn't recognize in "Love's Young Dream" the underlying rebel tune. Also I may remind you that a hundred years ago Moore's melodies were in the height of favour with all classes. You know also that the British Army marched out of Brussels during the night and early morning to the contest that culminated at Waterloo. What could be more appropriate than the tune some of the Irish regiments played and sang as they left the city than "The Young May Moon is Beaming, Love"? I am not astronomer enough to calculate whether there was a moon on the morning of June 16, 1815, but I am sure the lively tune and the sentiment of its words were quite satisfactory to all concerned.

'Wives and sweethearts sang a less lively song than "The Young May Moon" after the event; and many, as the lines of the old folksong say:

*Lamented for their darling boys  
Slain at Waterloo.*

'Then, my dear fellow, I could tell many tales of the songs that ran through the American Civil War.

'How "John Brown's Body" - a noble tune, you will grant - was originally a camp-meeting tune with doggerel, strong religious verses; and how, being sung by a homesick youth named John Brown, it had all sorts of absurd verses fitted to it in ridicule of that particular Brown. But then came the affair at Harper's Ferry, and the murder of the other John Brown, and so the Northern army took up the song and added more verses, including one threatening to "Hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple-tree." Many a thousand men have marched to death or to victory to the strains of that tune, my boy.

'If your yawns had not been so frequent I might enter into the songs that meant so much, both in the German and the French camps, in that terrible Franco-German war of 1870. "Der Gute Kamerad" and many another *volkslied* were sung round the watchfires of the German army. The French had their songs, too, "Partant pour la Syrie" being one especially, as it was supposed to be the work of the Emperor's mother. After Sedan - well, say after the Commune - the "Marseillaise" held the field. Now, regarding that particular air --'

The Musician rose from his chair: 'Isn't it time for lunch?'

FRANK KIDSON.