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FOLK SONG COLLECTING

Dr. Gardiner's Visits to Petersfield

That England even at the present day abounds in old-fashioned songs of great beauty and interest, the saving of which from oblivion is a task worth the attention of all who realise the part which folk-song formerly played in the every-day life of English people—and may yet do again it is to be hoped to some extent in the future—is proved by the researches in the last few years of several enthusiastic collectors, such for instance as Mr. Cecil Sharp, who has collected the folk-songs of Somersetshire, and who sometime ago delighted Petersfield people with a lecture. For Hampshire people particular interest attaches to the labours of Dr. G. B. Gardiner, who for four years has been working with equal success in this county. Dr. Gardiner, as we noted in our last issue, recently paid a second visit to this neighbourhood, and in a very pleasant interview we had the satisfaction of gleaning from him some account of the results of his investigations and the interesting and often queer experiences he has met with.

In the course of our conversation we gathered from the doctor, whose enthusiasm for the enterprise in which he is engaged is, it must be confessed, very contagious, that throughout his life he has been a lover of folk songs, in the first instance as one might naturally expect those of Scotland, his native land. In the course of many visits to the Continent he gradually extended his range and eventually it occurred to him to inquire whether Englishmen had any songs of the same character as the beautiful old Scotch songs which are sung through the English-speaking world, and which he explained to us were all collected, words and music, more than a century ago. He joined the Folk Song Society which is endeavouring at the eleventh hour to record and preserve for the nation what still remains of the musical heritage of England, and in its journal and certain English song books which already existed he found sufficient to warrant him in undertaking a systematic quest. He first began collecting in Cornwall and Somersetshire and then Hampshire, having been recommended to him as a promising county, he began operations here in June, 1905. Since that time he has explored most parts of the county and collected altogether, we believe, over 1,200 songs.

Much that is intensely interesting might be written of the results in general, but in our conversation with Dr. Gardiner and Mr. J. F. Guyer, of Southampton, who notes the tunes for him, our object was to ascertain whether he had succeeded in unearthing anything of value in this neighbourhood, and considerations of space compel us to make that the principal text of this brief article.

Dr. Gardiner told us that he first visited Petersfield in the middle of August last year, staying for a period of 10 days. In his search for singers he first went to the Workhouse and there he found an excellent singer in the person of William Garrett, since unfortunately deceased, who gave the doctor and his musical colleague about 10 songs. The best of these were, he considered, one beginning "Tis of a rich merchant in London did dwell," which tells

of a case of disappointment in love, and another, the tune of which had a very ancient ring about it, commencing "As I walked out one night." From Richard Moore, the messenger at the Workhouse, he got a most interesting and curious fragment of the ballad, "The cruel mother." He collected 16 songs altogether from the Workhouse, all it is interesting to note from male inmates. The next hunting ground was the travellers' camp near the Heath and there from James Ray he got a song with a very remarkable melody, the opening verse of which was:

"For the blacksmith courted me
Nine long months and better,
At first he won my heart
Till he wrote to me a letter."

Proceeding to Catherington Union he was fortunate in finding James Hill, 79 years of age, a good singer with a large number of songs. Hill had worked at one time round Rowland's Castle but was really a Sussex man. From him Dr. Gardiner obtained an admirable version of the ancient song :

"Through briars and through bushes
I lately took my way,"

and also another curious one about an English slave and a Turkish lady, the subject of which in itself points to the song being one of a very early date. The opening verse is:

"Come, my virgins, and I pray draw near,
A very pretty story you soon shall hear.
'Twas of a Turkish lady brave
That fell in love with an English slave."

Dr. Gardiner also obtained from the same source a fine melody wedded to the well-known old ballad, entitled "The unquiet grave," the first verse of which runs as follows :

"How cold, how cold, the does blow,
And trickling falls the rain;
I never, never, had but one true love,
In the green wood he was slain."

Dr. Gardiner was asked whether there were any songs peculiar to the county, and we gathered from him there were probably some but the bulk of those he had discovered were really variants of those which are current in other counties, and in fact versions of the same songs were to be found over a great part of southern England. He considers the richest part of the county is the district lying between the Alton line and the main Basingstoke line, a purely agricultural district. The New Forest has yielded about 150 to 200 songs, but probably the more ancient both in words and music he has discovered in the district previously referred to. Up to the date of our interview he had found 81 songs in the Petersfield district. In answer to our further inquiry, he said it was premature to say whether this was a very rich part of the county or not. He was inclined to think it was. He stated that he had recovered portions of 31

of the ancient ballads, from the three verses of Dick Moore at Petersfield to one of 17 verses and another of 28. Some of these went back, he explained, 300 or 400 years and as proof of it he mentioned that a singer at Chawton, Mr. Johnson, sings an ancient song of a certain Captain Ward, an officer in the navy in the beginning of the reign of James I., who left the navy and became a privateer. The "Dreadnought" of the period, a ship called the Rainbow, was sent in pursuit of him but Captain Ward was an Englishman and as good a sailor and as brave a combatant as his pursuers and he cracked his fingers at them, exclaiming "Go tell my king he may rule on land, but Captain Ward may rule the sea." Ever since then the song had been floating about and been carried down by oral tradition in Hampshire for the intervening centuries. Another song, two versions of which Dr. Gardiner discovered in Hampshire in the summer of 1907, was,

"One night as I lay slumbering in my bed."

The text of this has been traced to the year 1596.

We were particularly interested in the song, "Old Swansea Town," a rollicking sea song which Dr. Gardiner obtained at Hursley and of which he sang us a verse or two. This song appears to have escaped the net of other collectors. One of the verses is as follows:

"Here's adieu to you, my Nancy,
Ten thousand times adieu,
I'm bound to cross the ocean, girl
I'm bound to part from you.
I'm bound to part from you, fine girl,
You're the girl that I adore;
But still I live in hopes to see
Old Swansea Town once more."

Of the many amusing incidents in his search after songs related by Dr. Gardiner, he mentions the lady at Whitchurch who the moment she heard him speak of old songs exclaimed, "We don't want any old songs; we've got no money to give for old songs; we really don't require any to-day," and a reply which he received at Hursley when he asked if there was anyone in the place who could warble an old song, that there was "a blind man who sometimes made an awful noise in the tap-room." From this singer he obtained "Swansea Town."

Dr. Gardiner gave us some interesting details of the method he and his assistant employ in discovering singers and recording the words and tunes. Mr. Guyer has noted for his 502 melodies and he considers that perhaps the finest of these is, "I was invited to a wedding," sung by Mr. Thos. Bulbeck, of Lady Holt Park, during their last visit to this neighbourhood, which again extended over 10 days. Since our interview Dr. Gardiner writes to inform us that the total for this visit was 55 songs, exactly the number they collected in August. He hopes to be back again later on and to find all the old people in good voice.

The next journal of the Folk Song Society to be published in May or June is to consist exclusively of songs collected by Dr. Gardiner in Hampshire, and Novello & Co. have in hand a volume of 16 of the choicest of the Hampshire songs.