

THE COLLECTOR'S FOLIOS

AN excellent fire made the Collector's study - or library, for it passed among his household by both names - pleasant and cosy. Its owner was busy with his books; making the attempt, always a futile attempt, to reduce his volumes to order. The fact was, he was being gradually conquered by them, and little by little he was getting engulfed. Folios demand space, a space which the Collector had not to give, and with a weary sigh the old man placed a heavy pile on the hearthrug beside him.

'These will have to go upstairs somewhere - I confess I don't know where,' he wailed to himself.

At this moment the Musician entered, with the spirit of modernity expressed in every gesture.

'Well!' he exclaimed as, a greeting to the Collector, who was kneeling on the hearthrug by his masterful folios.

The Collector looked up wearily. 'My young friend, I have just now evolved a profound scientific fact. Man is not descended from the monkey tribe, but from the magpie, and my ever-growing collection furnishes ample proof.'

'Yes,' agreed the Musician, 'I should think there's a good deal of useless rubbish among your collection. For example, this stuff,' and the Musician opened at random one of the folios on the hearthrug. Popular drawing-room music, seemingly, of the Regency period. 'That's not much good, I should say.'

The Collector was roused by this sneer at his collection. He took a more dignified attitude, and rose to his feet, confronting the Musician who, with lazy indifference, had sunk into an easychair, and was taking out his cigarette case.

'Young fellow,' cried the Collector in stern tones; 'you don't know what you are talking about.'

'Oh, I beg pardon. I see you had selected that lot for the dustbin.'

'The dustbin has had its tribute long ago. But let me tell you, sir, that my collection represents all types and periods of British music, besides including Irish and French. Also, that if a proper history of music be ever again attempted, it will have to include a notice of much that is bad - or that which we in our present-day wisdom think bad. The painter has to paint shadows as well as lights.' The Collector paused for breath, and took the other chair.

'Let me tell you,' he said in calmer tones, 'that these bound folios represent types of sheet music from its earliest day down, as you chanced to see, to the period of the Regency, and even a little bit beyond that date. The later volumes, as indicated by the inscribed names, have all belonged to ladies, and they represent the popular taste of the young ladies of their time. The sheets have been so cherished that they have been sent to local binders, who have put a plentiful display of musical emblems in gilt on the covers - the binding of most of them has, I am sure, made a hole in each lady's pocket-money.'

'But let us see if they are all the rubbish you conceive.' The Collector here took up a volume from the heap and opened it.

'Here,' he said, 'is the first edition of Dr. Haydn's *VI Original Canzonettas*, dedicated to Mrs. John Hunter, the wife of the great surgeon. It is "printed for the author, and sold by him at 1 Bury Street, St. James's." It is of interest because it has Haydn's own signature, and includes that charming song (written by Mrs. Hunter), "My mother bids me bind my hair." It was published in 1794, on Haydn's second visit to England. Then again' (here the Collector took up an oblong folio volume), 'we have another Haydn item. As you see, all these are Italian songs, chiefly published by Birchall about 1790. They illustrate the fact that the Italian method of singing was much in vogue, and that young ladies knew sufficient of Italian to sing in that language. Well, here among them is *Ariana a Naxos*, a cantata published by Haydn on his first arrival in England in 1791. This also bears Haydn's own

signature, and is "printed for the author, and sold by him at No. 18 Great Pulteney Street," which was only a few doors removed from John Broadwood's, where he so often slipped in to try harpsichord or pianoforte, the centre of a group of worshippers. What memories of musical London at the end of the eighteenth century do these two Haydn items call up! We can visualize the dainty drawing-room of talented Mrs. John Hunter, the wife of the greatest surgeon of his time, herself the daughter of a Scotch surgeon, a lady of refinement, and author of many bright verses which have had their day of popularity. These half-dozen bound volumes in oblong and upright folio are English operas, and they, as you see by the outside label, belonged to Princess Sophia, the daughter of George III; her beautifully engraved bookplate is in each.

'Scattered among these other folios are a large number of the sea songs composed, sung, and published by Charles Dibdin. They each have his signature, and include the originals of "Tom Bowling," "The Token," and many other of his famous songs that struck such a healthy note among much that was less vigorous.

'Dibdin's sea songs were rather a queer taste for young ladies.'

'Well, I don't know. You see, we can easily believe that they had brothers or sweethearts serving on the King's ships, and so Dibdin would naturally appeal to them, as he did to everybody else.

'All throughout this period there was a wave of excellent song current; and if some lyrics existed which were rather feeble, we miss, what is so much in evidence to-day, a mawkish eroticism. Here, for example, is a love song, manly and charming, known even to-day, "The Thorn." The words are really by Burns, although this has been questioned, and the music by William Shield. When Incledon sang it, how delighted must have been his auditors! This is one of several original issues which I possess. See, here is Shield's own sprawling signature on the end leaf. Here is another of Incledon's songs, "The Streamlet," from Shield's *Woodman*. It is quite simple in character, but was, in its time, ranked as one of the most beautiful of English ballads.

'Now here we have a folio that has belonged to an Irish girl - you may learn a lesson from this. Observe they are mostly half-sheet songs - printed only on one side - and the paper is thin, and of greyish colour. Economy was evidently an object. Also you will notice that every song (there must be fifty or sixty in this volume) has been printed and published by some Dublin music-seller, as, Elizabeth Rhames, Anne Lee, John Lee, Gough, Hime, and others. Notice, as well, that all the songs are popular London successes. It is a fact that before the Union of Ireland and England, January 1, 1801, the English copyright did not extend to the sister isle, so, in consequence, Dublin music-sellers brought out pirated copies of every English song that was worth reprinting.

'They had fine times in this respect, as not only had they an Irish sale, but numbers of copies were smuggled into England. The Dublin Hime had a Liverpool brother - also a music-seller - and between them they worked the thing. Those in the know could always get cheap Irish reprints if they did not care to pay the English price. Edward Bunting, an Irishman who issued his collection of Irish airs in 1796, published through Preston of London, but half-a-dozen Irish publishers reprinted the work and sold it to their advantage. There are two or three of the Irish copies, along with the original, in the corner there.

'Now we are getting to the bottom of the heap of these folios, I will show you something that I think will really interest you.'

The Collector's eyes sparkled as he drew forth three folios, and with loving care opened the first.

'Here are specimens of the very first of sheet-music. It was at the end of the seventeenth century that single songs were first published, the beginning of the reign of sheet-music.

'Thomas Cross was the person to whom the happy idea first came, or was the first to put it in practice. He discovered the fact that the public would like to possess copies of any particular songs they had heard at the theatres, and that people in the country would like such songs without having to buy them in collections such as the Playfords issued. Also that this could be done by a cheaper

method than had hitherto been. So with rough-and-ready graver he cut on soft metal plates (or perhaps etched with needle and acid) the songs of the day, and sold them at twopence or threepence a copy.

'Dr. Blow, in his *Amphion Anglicus*, 1700, says:

*While in the shops we daily dangling view
False concords by Tom Cross engraven true.*

'Also:

*Music of many parts hath now no force;
Whole reams of Single Songs become our curse.*

'Tom Cross's father was an engraver of great merit, who did portraits and other fine work. Tom was so dutiful a son that when he commenced business as a music-engraver he added "junior" to his name. His first work, so far as I know, was the cutting of Purcell's *Sonatas of III Parts*, in 1683; and the last reference I can find for his work is 1732. It is rather amusing to note some of the advertisements Cross put on his songs. For example, here is one,' and the Collector rapidly turned the leaves of the folio - "beware of ye nonsensical punch't ones." Now my dear young friend, I'll lay you sixpence you don't understand that.'

'I'm no good at riddles of that degree of antiquity.'

The Collector chuckled.

'That's because you haven't gone into the history of the art you profess and, let me say, adorn. You must know that early in the eighteenth century John Walsh, the greatest music publisher of his time, began to introduce music produced by punching the notes on soft pewter plates on which stave-lines had been cut. It is the method used to-day, though we print it quicker by means of a lithographic transfer. Cross, as you see, always engraved or etched his plates, and objected to Walsh as a rival producer of sheet music. One advertisement from Cross tells us that he "has arrived at such perfection in musick that gentlemen may have their works fairly engraved, and as cheap as punch't, and sooner, he having good hands to assist him, covenanted for a term of years."'

'That's all very interesting,' said the Musician; 'but what do the songs consist of?'

'Here is the first copy of "Down among the Dead Men," one of our finest British melodies, you'll admit. The title says it was "sung by Mr. Dyer at Mr. Bullock's Booth at Southwark Fair." Fancy! this was first made public in a fair booth! Here is another song to the same air contemporary with it, "A Health to the Memory of Queen Anne." The chorus is the same:

*And he that will this health deny,
Down among the dead men let him lie.*

"Dead men" is nothing more dreadful than the empty bottles that lie under the tables.

'Then there are other delightful examples of English melody of the time before Purcell's influence had died away. Here are songs by John Barrett, a fit successor to "tuneful Harry," whose work is too little known. Also there are songs by Richard Leveridge, robust in melody, as he was as a singer. Henry Carey is represented too, and many others not so famous.'

The Musician sighed:

'Oh, no doubt, vastly interesting to old fogies like yourself, but, except for present-day stuff, I prefer Schubert and Schumann.'

'I don't,' said the Collector, with decision.

'Goth!' hissed the Musician.

FRANK KIDSON.