

FOR LOVERS AND STUDENTS OF FOLK-SONG

[By Anne G Gilchrist]

HERE is a collection of songs* designed for the singer rather than the folk-song student, whose needs are met in the pages of the Folk-Song Society's journal and other collections where the history and science of English folk-song are discussed by experts-- Mr. Kidson himself among them. Singers will find in this new Garland an excellent variety of really singable songs, which, in relation to a modern audience, not all folk-songs, however great their musical interest and value, can honestly be said to be. But as the Victorian drawing-room is nowadays being transformed into the lounge, so the drawing-room song, with its tinkling accompaniment of fifty years ago, or the heavy 'Crunch!' 'cranch!' handful of black and white notes - six in one hand and seven in the other - of a later fashion, is no longer the only species of serious domestic vocal music to be heard. For the wireless, between fits of syncopation and syncope, will bring into the house folksongs arranged by various accomplished musicians, even when the music-lover does not see their titles at his music-seller's.

Readers of THE CHOIR hardly need to be reminded that Mr. Frank Kidson was one of the pioneers of folk-song collection in England (though the Rev. John Broadwood was its absolute initiator, in 1843), Mr. Kidson's little volume, *Traditional Tunes*, with interesting notes thereon, being published in 1891, some dozen years before the late Mr. Cecil Sharp, who has since done so much for English folk-song, entered the field. About the same date also appeared Mr. Baring-Gould's *Songs of the West*, W. A. Barrett's *English Folk-Songs*, and Miss Broadwood and Mr. Fuller Maitland's *English County Songs* (1893). In passing, I may say that it was the introduction to three of these collections -- an entrance into a new world of song - and to their editors-- which first set me folk-song hunting on my own account.

This is not the place to discuss the essential qualities of folk-song of the purest type -- modal in tune and wholly traditional in text. Some songs are made by the folk: others though not made are widely sung by them, though perhaps a century or more may elapse in the process of full adoption of a song which meets their approval; and during this period the song undergoes changes-- not necessarily corruptions-- which mould it more closely to folk modes of thought and expression. Whether the English flowers which form Mr. Kidson's Garland are all native to the folk or have in some cases become naturalised among them matters little in a collection whose obvious aim has been rather to rescue from oblivion what is worthy alike of presentation, preservation, and performance-- the three essential 'P.'s' from a vocalist's point of view - than to look too curiously into the question whether one may here and there find a 'garden escape,' as the botanist would say.

One recognises amongst these sixty hitherto unprinted versions many songs which have now become more or less known in other forms to the musical world; but others, as far as one's personal knowledge goes, have never before been printed, or arranged for modern performance. Amongst these may be noted the full-blooded sailor ditty, 'On board a Ninety-Eight,' the racing song of 'Creeping Jane,' the famous old Lancashire ballad 'Jone o' Greenfield's Ramble' - now first printed with its tune - and the quaint and pretty little (surely) eighteenth-century song 'I design'd to say No, but mistook and said Yes!' - too arch to be the child of folk parentage, but engaging enough to be adopted by a simple jest-loving people. 'The Peelers and the Pig' is a re-writing of an old Irish political song, the original hero of the ballad being a wandering goat which got arrested - in an excess of zeal - by the Irish New Police, and made a good defence. 'Turpin Hero' is a good version of the old highwayman song, and 'Drink old England dry' the very thing for a student's supper chorus or a marching tune - as long as no French friends are present to have their feelings hurt by ancient allusions to Napoleonic boasts.

Sea songs, soldier songs, country songs, tragic or pathetic ballads are all well represented - chiefly by north-country versions - and there was room for Mr. Kidson's new (in the sense of hitherto

unknown) tunes, especially as there are musicians to whom a modal tune is still music of a not wholly attractive type, for few of these tunes are strictly or severely modal, and many are just in our familiar major and minor keys. The accompaniments are arranged with all Mr. Moffat's wonted skill and experience, and while avoiding the commonplace are neither difficult nor over-elaborated for their subjects.

As regards the words, it has been expedient - as Mr. Kidson willingly confesses, and as every folk song collector knows to be often necessary in arranging folk-song for actual performance - to do a little patching. There is no living folk-songist more skilled in such a delicate process than Mr. Kidson. Like the King's doctor who was sent for to mend the snapped-off nose, and 'sewed it on so neatly the seam was never seen,' Mr. Kidson can patch a hole or cover a black spot in an old song with a piece of the same stuff so that the join of old and new is invisible - though where he finds the piece to match he alone knows! There are very few editors who have this gift and whose hand cannot be easily - too easily - detected, but Mr. Kidson has the true instinct for what is 'of a piece' with his original, and works in full sympathy with his pattern.

This delightful collection may be cordially recommended for schools, colleges, concert and home use. It contains songs to please all tastes, moods, and occasions, and even the singer who makes a speciality of English folk-songs will find here something new to add to his repertoire.

A. G. G.

** A Garland of English Folk-Songs, being a collection of sixty folk-songs collected and edited by Frank Kidson. M.A., with pianoforte accompaniments by Alfred Moffat. Price 6s. net. (Ascherberg, Hopwood, and Crew, London.)*