

THE COLLECTOR ON PATRIOTIC SONGS

OUR two friends, the Collector and the Musician, were walking towards the former's suburban residence after a rather dreary matinee in aid of one of the many charities which the war has brought into being. It was a quiet afternoon, mild as summer, and the dying sun just tinged the house-tops pleasantly, making even prosaic villadom into something that an artist might feel inclined to attempt on canvas.

The maple saplings that fringed the roadway had retained most of their leaves through a mild winter, and these took charming colours in the weak sunlight; and the purples, browns, and greys that belonged to the trees contrasted harmoniously with the holly and privet hedges, that still were green.

In such a calm it looked as if war in all its horrors, across the narrow strip of sea, was an unreal thing, a terrible dream or nightmare.

The thought apparently occurred to each, and the older man remarked:

'What if the war came to us as it has done to every square inch of Belgium and Northern France? Can we mentally picture this quiet road under such conditions as is every road there? See these villas, roofless; their ruins and wrecked furniture scattered among the flower beds! Carcasses of horses putrefying on the wayside; corpses of women and children in the houses, unburied save for the debris that mercifully covers them. A few starved dogs and cats wandering - always wandering - in search of food or dead and gone masters.'

'It is too horrible to picture, certainly,' murmured the Musician; 'and yet we see it daily - illustrated on the cinema films, or in the pictorial newspapers and journals. See it, too, almost unmoved; it is really too great for our comprehension, unless, indeed, we had experienced such things.'

'Yes, I'm afraid that's quite true,' agreed the Collector; 'it is beyond the strength of our imagination. God forbid that we should see the reality.'

They walked on a little way in silence, and came upon a small boy, an errand lad, evidently, who was whistling with all the power that youth possesses when specially gifted with the art, and unencumbered by care. He was making the evening air ring with the French national time, the 'Marseillaise.'

The Collector stopped short.

'Why is that lad,' he asked querulously, 'not whistling one of our own national airs?'

'Really, it's beyond my knowledge,' said the Musician; 'better ask him.'

'I will;' said the Collector, decisively. 'Boy, are you French?'

The boy paused in his rendering, and stared.

'No!' at last he said, somewhat resentfully; 'I'm English.'

'Then why on earth don't you whistle "Rule, Britannia"?'

'Because,' said the lad turning to go, 'I like this best'; and he resumed his whistling.

The Musician laughed. 'You have got your answer; he likes that best!'

It may here be remarked, parenthetically, that the Collector, with his usual persistence, afterwards asked many small boys whom he found whistling the air - a good number - why they didn't whistle an English rather than a French national air, and got much the same answer.

'But,' said the Collector, turning to the Musician, 'is it really a finer air than "Rule, Britannia" or "God Save the King"?''

'The latter may be left out of the argument. It is not a thing that we lightly play or sing; it is reserved for special occasions, and then we really mean what we sing.'

'But "Rule, Britannia,"' said the Collector, 'is a fine tune, and is eminently English. I ignore all the attempts to belittle its originality. There may be a bar or phrase that Handel, or somebody else, used before, but that can be said of any tune; it is astonishing, considering the limits of our octave and the prescribed form for lyrics, how much variety can be got by different combinations of notes and time.'

'Well,' said the Musician, 'the boy had reason on his side - the "Marseillaise" is a tune with great force and power; but considering it is far from simple, has several flatted notes, and is essentially an art tune, rather than of the popular variety (that has simple if commonplace phrases), it is strange it is such a favourite.'

'I don't know whether,' said the Collector, 'the best modern copies stick quite to the original form; probably not. Of course it was composed as a military march, and follows all the conventions of the military marches of its period. Compare the "Duke of York's March," and hundreds of others of the time. They have all this peculiar "rat, tat, tat, tat" progression, the jerky *staccato* effect of dotted quavers with semiquavers, and so forth. It came into being in 1792. I have it in a little Glasgow book of airs (Aird's *Selections*, vol. iv) as "Marche des Marseillois," in 1794.'

'Did Rouget de Lisle really compose it ?' asked the Musician.

'I see no reason to doubt it. It is generally granted that he wrote the words, but I should fancy he composed the tune first; but so far as I know, he is not credited with other musical compositions.'

'The Germans have claimed it as of German origin.'

'Yes, it's like them to do so. They have since then claimed more important things, and unfortunately got them!' said the Collector. 'The Marseillaise was for a long time prohibited in France. When Napoleon III got to be Emperor the official tune was, "Partant pour la Syrie," said to be the composition of his mother, Queen Hortense, and also said to be by the music teacher of that exalted lady. Royal talent in the arts is never granted readily; the every-day world knows how difficult it is to obtain perfection in them. Anyhow, it's a pretty tune, with a strain of melancholy running through it.'

'But, before an air can become really national enough to voice the people's sentiments in a great crisis, it must have had a baptism of blood and fire; and the "Marseillaise" had that at its start, and as the recognized air for all revolutionary upheavals both in its native land and elsewhere, it has had a good share since. Strange to say, "Rule, Britannia" never seems to have really entered readily into the lists of national song. It has, of course, been sung at great gatherings, but it does not appear to have been, as it were, at the front. So that is perhaps why it has never become wholly popular. "God save the King" is, as I said before, something too sacred for singing on common occasions. The first authentic mention of its being sung was when the Scots rebels made Sir John Cope ride for his life from the field of battle at Preston Pans, and defeated his dragoons; both soldiers and general the

pride of the English Army. That was in September 1745, and when the news reached London the orchestras of both theatres played the air, and no doubt the audiences did as we do now, stood up and sang it.'

'There is one patriotic tune which has been sadly neglected,' remarked the Musician; 'I mean "The Red, White and Blue." I don't know who composed it, but it is a glorious tune; has a splendid swing, and is ideal for a march.'

'You are quite right; it is a fine tune. I remember, when I was a lad, before memories of the war in the Crimea had faded, it was a good deal sung, but I agree with you it's a pity it is now so neglected. I might suggest another fine patriotic tune, "Ye Sons of Albion." Strange to say, this has only survived to-day as the commonly known tune to the folk-song "The farmer's boy"; and one hears it on the piano organs occasionally.'

'Speaking of patriotic melodies,' said the Musician, 'why has Wales, with all her wealth of glorious old melody to fall back on, chosen "Land of My Fathers" for her national song? It is decidedly commonplace, and does not suggest the ruggedness of Wales.'

'There are several reasons, my good friend. In the first place, it is an easy, lilting tune - quite pleasant - but I grant you no pathos or deep feeling in it. Just the sort of thing that would be well rendered by a Welsh choir at a musical festival - the girls in white dresses, and the men in black coats. It has a capital swing with it, and if you and I were not on a public road, we would waltz to it! I should imagine people do dance to the melody at the seaside resorts of happy Wales. If the English translations in any way follow the original words, they sing of Cambria in a very ladylike fashion; though of course it was necessary to drag in allusions to the survival of the Welsh language in spite of the country having been "crushed by a hostile foe." One translation refers to the "traitors' foul knives"; the other, translating the same line, is content by speaking of "envious tales" which have not succeeded in silencing "the harp of Wales." This is fortunate, for the harp as a musical instrument has a beautiful quality not sufficiently made use of in modern music.'

'Then there is "God bless the Prince of Wales." That's a poor tune, surely,' said the Musician.

'Well, it's what may be called of the composite order. Some persons found out that if you sing the music to certain lines of certain Victorian drawing-room lyrics, and commence with the well-known missionary hymn, you will get the first part of "God bless the Prince of Wales" in all its integrity. Listen!' and the Collector sang:

*From Greenland's icy mountains,
Ah, never look so shy;
But meet me in the moonlight,
Good bye, sweetheart, good bye!*

The Musician laughed. 'Quite true; you remind me of Sims Reeves!'

'The second part is the better,' said the Collector. 'But for patriotic melodies of a high order we must turn to America; they have some good tunes.'

'Yes, and some of them English.'

'Right! Their finest tune is "The Star-spangled Banner," and that is the old English song "To Anacreon in Heaven," a perfectly fine air; but the Americans have altered one or two notes, which are not an improvement.'

'"Marching through Georgia" is a fine tune also, suggested the Musician; 'and "Yankee Doodle" is

delightful.'

'Agreed,' assented the Collector.

"John Brown's body" is also fine, and all these tunes have had their baptism of blood and fire. As you know, "John Brown's body" was originally a hymn sung at American camp meetings, to words something like these:

*Say, brother, will you meet us (thrice)
On Canaan's happy shore?*

This is followed by a "Glory, glory, Hallelujah" chorus. How this melody got to be adopted as the marching tune of the Northern Army in the American Civil War is a curious piece of song history. It was in this wise. A homesick soldier, with remembrances of happy times at camp meetings, used to sing the hymn. His name was John Brown, and his ribald comrades, using the tune, strung together any sort of words in ridicule, as "John Brown's knapsack is number ninety-nine," &c., &c., with the old chorus of "Glory, Hallelujah." Then it dawned that there was another John Brown, more fitting for the soldier to sing of - the hero of Harper's Ferry, who was shot - was it in 1859? - for instigating a rising of the negroes, the real beginning of the North and South upheaval. And so

*John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
But his soul goes marching on;*

and the line about hanging Jeff Davis "on a sour apple-tree" became an integral part of the song, and the original John Brown - the homesick soldier - sank into limbo.'

'Will this present war leave any lasting patriotic songs?' queried the Musician.

'There doesn't seem any sign of it so far,' answered the Collector. "'Tipperary" is, of course, an excellent tune; but, beyond the chorus, nobody seems to trouble to sing the words, if they know them. I am afraid the struggle is too great for people to sing about.'

'I wish it were over.'

'I echo your wish,' said the Collector, as he lifted the latch of the garden gate. 'Come in with me, and let's turn over a few old books.'

'Thanks,' said the Musician; 'but the concert was dreary enough.'

The Collector regarded his friend with pitying scorn, and went indoors.

FRANK KIDSON.