

BALLADS AND BALLAD LITERATURE.

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With almost all peoples, ballads and rude poetry furnish the oldest fragments of history. Buckle, the historian, says: "All history is at first ballads." Besides their contributions to history, songs have helped to inspire national bravery, and in a variety of ways have made men happy and useful. The Norsemen had their Skalds; the Latin races their trouveres, troubadours, jongleurs and minstrels; the Germans had their minnesingers and meistersingers; and the Britons and Celts their gleemen and bards. Maistre Wace, who lived in the middle of the XII century, has left an imaginary description of the various poets who took part at the coronation of King Arthur. His is an interesting picture of a medieval minstrel company. His "idle singers of an empty day" he classifies into "jongleurs, singers and rhymers," and adds; "many songs might you hear, rote songs, vocal songs, fiddler's lays and notes, lays for harps, lays for sytols, lyres and corn pipes, symphonies, psalteries, monochords, cymbals. Of performers there were plenty, male and female, and some said tales and fables."

At festivals, public and private, the minstrel was an important personage. In the Gothic hall of the noble his harp and voice were ready with stories oftentimes told, but ever new, of knightly bravery in battle, and devotion in love; while at more public gatherings such as the visitation of a bishop, the installation of an abbot, or above all, at the coronation of a king, national themes became the burden of his song. But the minstrel was as much at home, and was as welcome in the cottage of the peasant as in the hall of the baron. A fragment from "Chevy Chace," some of the exploits of Robin Hood, or a minor ditty of local bravery, love, devotion or suffering, sufficed to make all listeners akin, and assured the minstrel a welcome wherever he went. Chaucer's picture of the minstrel of his time is realistic and evidently from the life:

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" Somewhat he lisped for his wantonness
 " To make the English sweete upon his tongue ;
 " And in his Harping when that he had songe,
 " His Eyen twinkled in his Head aright,
 " As don the Sterres in a frosty night."

In the middle ages minstrels were often well rewarded. The Chroniclers record that some of them built churches and founded religious houses. Their attractions sometimes excited the clergy to jealousy ; for in the olden time many liked songs better than sermons, and preferred to be pleased than instructed.

Of the pre-Christian, heathen literature of Britain, time has left but little trace. The ordeal of modern criticism has reduced the heathen remains of the Celtic period to a few fragments. "Beowulf," an Anglo-Saxon poem of the VIII century, is, in spirit, more Christian than heathen. The "Traveller's Song," which is assigned to the latter half of the VI century, recites the poet's experiences as a travelling gleeman. Another piece "Deor's Complaint," which is held to be of about the same age, is the lament of a bard whom another had supplanted in his lord's favor. The scholarship of England in Anglo-Saxon times was practically confined to the clergy, and the literature of that period is characteristically religious. Translations and paraphrases of the Gospels and narrative portions of the Scriptures, homilies, pastorals, legends, and annals, and chronicles by monastics, are the chief treasures bequeathed to posterity by writers of the middle ages. An interesting list of the best writings of that time, and a summary of their contents may be found in Ten Brinks History of English Literature.

Ballads were originally dancing songs ; but, as now understood, they are lyrical poems, in which some popular story is pointedly told. A ballad may, indeed must, include sentiment or passion, or both ; but it is essential for these to be coupled with succinct graphic narration of outward action. Sentiment and passion, unaccompanied by narrative, when poetically expressed, fall under some of the infinite varieties into which songs of war, sentiment, and love, and religious hymns may be subdivided, rather than to ballad poetry.

Many of the older ballads of our collections have been orally handed down, till recent times ; and nobody knows their exact age or authorship. There is indeed a growing belief that the vital por-

tions of some of the great ballads, like the essential forms of many popular marchen, fables, and nursery rhymes, have been roving about the world for ages, like the wandering Jew, and are the common inheritance of many peoples. The comparative method of investigation applied to popular stories shows some tales to be veritable cosmopolites, strangers nowhere; and the same method applied to the study of popular ballads, may have much to teach concerning them. But it is not strange that folk-poetry even in countries far apart should have lineaments, and strong points in common. Human hearts throb with like passions under different skies. Good and evil, joy and sorrow, love and hate, temptation and self-abnegation, the unspeakable beauty of the earth below, and the heavens above, these—the ultimate elements of all poetry—are common to all lands and ages.

Although the exact date of the older ballads cannot be determined, some of them are undoubtedly closely related to the *lais*, metrical romances and fabliaux, which came into vogue in England, soon after the Norman conquest. These romances, first in verse, and afterwards in prose, dealt with a variety of subjects, legendary and actual, amongst which were the exploits of Alexander the Great; the fall of Troy; the legends of King Arthur; and those of the Holy Grail. These, and many similar topics, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, were written in metrical form, and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries they were reduced to prose, and re-arranged in many shapes. Some of these romances are veritable art treasures; they were written in monasteries, and years of labor were bestowed on their initial letters, miniatures and decoration. Specimens of these manuscripts are still preserved. They are jealously guarded in the great libraries of the world, not only for their rarity, but for the influence of such romances on the literature of Europe, and on the system of chivalry which dominated what was best in Europe for some centuries. Several of these romances were printed by the early printers. Caxton both translated and printed the "Historyes of Troye," and Sir Thomas Malory prepared for Caxton's press a book of the Arthurian legends, which in our own time have been presented to the world anew with such melodious freshness by Tennyson.

At its date of issue, in 1765, and for some time after, the book entitled "Reliques of Ancient English poetry," published by Thos. Percy, was the best collection of ballads known. Percy was a man of literary tastes, who enjoyed the friendship of Garrick, Johnson, Shenstone, and other men of note in his day. For a quarter of a century he was rector at Easton Maundit, a village near Nottingham, and afterwards, by favor of the Duke of Northumberland, he became Bishop of Dromore, the see once held by Jeremy Taylor. That Percy had qualifications for making a good collection of ballad poetry, may be seen from his own song, commencing :

"Oh, Nancy, wilt thou go with me
 "Nor sigh to leave the flaunting town?
 "Can silent glens have charms for thee
 "The lowly cot and russet gown?"

Burns said of that song: "It is perhaps the most beautiful ballad in the English language." The first edition of Percy's book contained 176 pieces, 45 of which were taken from an old written ballad book. That old manuscript, since become famous, was a long, narrow, folio volume, containing 195 songs, ballads, and metrical romances. Percy found it on the floor at a friend's house. He was just in time to save it from destruction, as the servants had begun to use it for lighting the fire. After Percy's death, it passed into the possession of his son-in-law, and in 1868 was bought for the British Museum, where it remains. The handwriting of the old ballad book is held by experts to be of the time of the restoration. Mr. Furnival, the great authority on such questions of English literature, calls it "The foundation document of English balladry." In conjunction with Mr. Hales, Mr. Furnival in 1867-68 printed the manuscript in full. Sir Walter Scott acknowledged his obligation to Percy's Reliques, and their influence on his tastes and pursuits. He says: "The first time I could scrape a few shillings together I bought a copy of these beloved volumes; nor do I believe that I ever read a book half so frequently, or with half the enthusiasm."

Shortly after the Reliques were printed for Percy, Joseph Ritson published his "Ancient Songs and Ballads." Ritson's book, though printed in 1787, and dated 1790, was not published until 1792. It is a collection of ballads, chronologically arranged, from the time of Henry the Second to the Revolution; and is edited with great care. Ritson made no pretension to genius, as that gift is usually explained, but by the

special definition, according to Carlyle, that "genius is the capacity to take infinite pains," he was a genius of good standing, for few men ever took more pains to do accurate work than he did. But like some men of that stamp, he had a perverse temper, and took an almost impish delight in pointing out the petty inaccuracies of other workers in the same field of labor as his own. Scott appreciated Ritson's exact knowledge, and careful work, and rarely disagreed with him, though a story is told, that Ritson, when a visitor at Scott's house, on one occasion became so aggressive that Leyden, despite his fondness for literature, could stand the irritation no longer, and threatened to "thraw Ritson's neck," and pitch him out of the window. Despite imperfections of temper, which in his later life became a grave affliction, Joseph Ritson is entitled to the thanks of all who take pleasure in the antiquities of English literature.

Since Ritson's day, Scott, Motherwell, Aytoun, Lockhart, Jamieson, Chambers, and others, have edited collections of ballads, and numerous British societies have printed for their members, ballads of particular periods. Scott's collection of border ballads was just in time to save many of them from oblivion, as their oral transmission was then confined to a few old people, and the next generation would have known little or nothing of them. The completest collection of old ballads is that edited by Prof. F. J. Child, of Harvard University. The Ballads, in 4 vols., edited some years since by Prof. Child, for the Boston edition of the British poets, made lovers of ballad literature his debtors, and the limited edition in 10 parts, just completed under his care, is a superb work, quite unrivalled of its kind.

If the modern ballads, which have permanently enriched the literature of the nineteenth century, be added to those of earlier date, ballad literature becomes doubled in volume, and not depreciated in quality. The poets of Germany following in the footsteps of their forbears, have turned the genius of their language and predilections of the Teutonic race to account, in producing ballads of unsurpassed beauty, and most of the English poets of later years have added to the value of the hoard.

Many a garland might be strung from the beauties of ballad poetry. The limits of this paper permit only a flower or two to be plucked here and there. As with Sinbad in the valley of diamonds,

the difficulty is to choose from such abundance. In such a case we may forbear to quote in order of time or subject. The bee flits from blossom to blossom, and gathers honey, regardless of the order of his visitations, and our illustrations may be more pleasing from variety than from formal selection.

The Cuckoo song is said to be the oldest song in the English language. Ritson places it third in chronological order in his list, and neither of the two which precede it is in English. The Latin convivial song of Walter Mapes stands first, and the second is the French song by Richard the First, written during his captivity in Germany on his return from the East. The MS. of the Cuckoo Song is in the British Museum, and is referred to the year 1250. Although not within the pale of ballads proper, its beauty and age both claim for it first place in English Lyric poetry.

Summer is y-comen in,
 Loud sing, cuckoo ;
 Groweth seed,
 And bloweth mead
 And spring'th the wood now
 Sing cuckoo !
 Ewe bleateth after lamb,
 Low'th after calf cow,
 Bullock sterteth,*
 Buck verteth,
 Merry sing cuckoo !
 Cuckoo, cuckoo !
 Well sings thou, cuckoo !
 Nor swike† thou never now.

The best known of the old ballads is that called Chevy Chase. There are several ballads, some English, others Scottish, concerning battles on the border. The only fight in which a Douglas fell when battling with a Percy, was that of August 9th, 1388, at Otterburn, where the Earl of Douglas was slain on the field. In the ballads, victory is claimed for both sides, according to the national predilection of the singer. Froissart, the French chronicler, says the Scots were victorious. Chevy Chase is in an ancient and modern version, both of which are more recent than the Otterburn ballads. The minstrel opens with a hunting foray, which is soon merged in the battle given in the older ballads. But, anachronisms are no rarities in these old songs, and historical accuracy is

* gambols

† cease

not to be expected. The modern version of Chevy Chase, if less accurate than the older songs, is an admirable ballad. Every incident of the day is fixed in the memory, never to be forgotten. The meeting of the armies, the death of Douglas, and the roll call after the battle, are described with much force. How gruesome is the picture of the scene after the fight :

“ Next day did many widows come,
 Their husbands to bewail ;
 They washed their wounds in brinish tears,
 But all would not prevail.

Their bodies bathed in purple blood
 They bore with them away ;
 They kissed them— dead— a thousand times,
 When they were clad in clay.”

Of modern ballads Lenore by Burger is a masterpiece. Its reputation has long been world-wide ; and Germany prizes it as the ballad of ballads. The birth of the modern ballad in Germany dates from its production. Burger wrote this celebrated piece in 1773, eight years after the publication of Percy's Reliques. With a firm hand Burger has pictured the old heathen belief that love is stronger than death, inasmuch as even the rest of the dead may be broken by grief of the living. And with like skill he shows the sinfulness of murmuring or despairing over the dealings of Providence with men. The sources of Burger's ballad, are “ Sweet William's Ghost,” an ancient ballad given by Percy ; an old German *volkslied*, and a tale told him by a peasant girl—of a phantom trooper, who at midnight bore to his grave his disconsolate sweetheart. These suggested Lenore to Burger, as Bandello's novel suggested Romeo and Juliet to Shakespeare. In both cases outlines of the story were to hand, but they were only the motive stimulating the master's higher art, the crude elements to be transmuted to gold in the alembic of the poet's imagination. Dramatists, musicians and painters, have been attracted by this ballad, and have made their arts minister to illustrating its weird beauty. Sir Walter Scott translated it into English in 1795, and it was published the following year under the name of “ William and Helen.” Scott's attention was drawn to the ballad by the chorus of the midnight ride, by which the flight of the spectral steed is made so realistic that it can be almost heard. Taylor's translation of that stanza was repeated to Scott, who used nearly the same words in his version, informing

his readers that for doing so he "had obtained forgiveness of the gentleman to whom the chorus properly belongs." The original chorus reads :

Und immer weiter, hopp, hopp, hopp !
 Ging's fort in sausendum Galopp,
 Das Ross und Reiter Schnoben
 Und Kies and funken stoben.

The translation Scott heard reads :

Tramp ! tramp ! across the land they speed,
 Splash ! splash ! across the sea ;
 Hurrah ! the dead can ride apace !
 Dost fear to ride with me !

Scott's own translation in full is :

From heavy dreams fair Helen rose,
 And eyed the dawning red ;
 " Alas, my love, thou tarriest long !
 O, art thou false or dead ?"

With gallant Fred'rick's princely power
 He sought the bold Crusade ;
 But not a word from Judah's wars
 Told Helen how he sped.

With Paynim and with Saracen
 At length a truce was made,
 And ev'ry knight return'd to dry
 The tears his love had shed.

Our gallant host was homeward bound
 With many a song of joy ;
 Green waved the laurel in each plume,
 The badge of victory.

And old and young, and sire and son
 To meet them crowd the way,
 With shouts and mirth and melody,
 The debt of love to pay.

Full many a maid her true love met,
 And sobb'd in his embrace,
 And flutt'ring joy in tears and smiles
 Array'd full many a face.

Nor joy nor smile for Helen sad ;
 She sought the host in vain ;
 For none could tell her William's fate,
 If faithless, or if slain.

The martial band is past and gone ;
 She rends her raven hair,
 And in distractions bitter mood
 She weeps with wild despair.

" O rise, my child," her mother said,
 " Nor sorrow thou in vain ;
 A perjured lover's fleeting heart
 No tears recall again."

- “ O, mother, what is gone is gone !
 What's lost forever lorn ;
 Death, death alone can comfort me ;
 O had I ne'er been born !
- “ O break, my heart, O break at once !
 Drink my life-blood Despair !
 No joy remains on earth for me,
 For me in heaven no share.”
- “ O enter not in judgment, Lord !”
 The pious mother prays ;
- “ Impute not guilt to thy frail child !
 She knows not what she says.
- “ O say thy pater noster child !
 O turn to God and grace !
 His will that turned thy bliss to bale,
 Can change thy bale to bliss.”
- “ O mother, mother, what is bliss ?
 O mother, what is bale ?
 My William's love was heaven on earth,
 Without it earth is hell.
- “ Why should I pray to ruthless Heaven,
 Since my love, William, 's slain ?
 I only pray'd for William's sake,
 And all my prayers were vain.”
- “ O take the sacrament, my child,
 And check those tears that flow ;
 By resignation's humble prayer,
 O hallow'd be thy woe !”
- “ No sacrament can quench this fire,
 Or slake this scorching pain,
 No sacrament can bid the dead
 Arise and live again.
- “ O break, my heart, O break at once !
 Be thou my god, Despair !
 Heaven's heaviest blow has fallen on me,
 And vain each fruitless prayer.”
- “ O enter not in judgment, Lord,
 With thy frail child of clay !
 She knows not what her tongue has spoke
 Impute it not, I pray !
- “ Forbear, my child, this desperate woe,
 And turn to God and grace ;
 Well can devotion's heavenly glow
 Convert thy bale to bliss.”
- “ O mother, mother, what is bliss ?
 O mother, what is bale ?
 Without my William what were heaven ?
 Or with him what were hell ?”

Wild she arraigns the eternal doom,
 Upbraids each sacred power,
 Till spent, she sought her silent room
 All in the lonely tower.

She beat her breast, she wrung her hands,
 Till sun and day were o'er,
 And through the glimmering lattice shone
 The twinkling of the star.

Then crash ! The heavy drawbridge fell,
 That o'er the moat was hung ;
 And clatter ! clatter ! on its boards
 The hoof of courser rung.

The clank of echoing steel was heard,
 As off the rider bounded ;
 And slowly on the winding stair
 A heavy footstep sounded.

And hark ! and hark ! a knock—tap ! tap !
 A rustling, stifled noise ;
 Door latch and tinkling staples ring ;
 At length a whispering voice.

“ Awake, awake, arise, my love !
 How, Helen, dost thou fare ?
 Wakest thou, or sleep'st ? Laugh'st thou or weep'st ?
 Hast thought on me, my fair ? ”

“ My love ! my love ! so late by night !
 I waked, I wept for thee :
 Much have I borne since dawn of morn ;
 Where, William, could'st thou be ? ”

“ We saddle late—from Hungary
 I rode since darkness fell ;
 And to its bourne we both return
 Before the matin bell.

“ O rest this night within my arms,
 And warm thee in their fold !
 Chill howls through hawthorn bush the wind,
 My love is deadly cold.”

“ Let the wind howl through hawthorn bush !
 This night we must away ;
 The steed is wight, the spur is bright ;
 I cannot stay till day.”

“ Busk, busk and boune ! Thou mount'st behind
 Upon my black barb steed :
 O'er stock and stile, a hundred miles,
 We haste to bridal bed.”

“ To-night ! to-night a hundred miles ?
 O dearest William, stay !
 The bell strik'st twelve—dark dismal hour !
 O wait, my love, till day ! ”

“ Look here, look here, the moon shines clear,
 Full fast I ween we ride,
 Mount and away ! for 'ere the day
 We reach our bridal bed.

“ The black barb snorts, the bridle rings ;
 Haste, busk and boune, and seat thee ;
 The feast is made, the chamber spread,
 The bridal guests await thee.”

Strong love prevail'd ; she busks, she bounes,
 She mounts the barb behind,
 And round her darling William's waist
 Her lily arms she twined.

And hurry ! hurry ! off they rode,
 As fast as fast might be,
 Spurned from the courser's thundering heels
 The flashing pebbles flee.

And on the right, and on the left,
 'Ere they could snatch a view,
 Fast, fast each mountain, mead and plain
 And cot and castle flew.

Sit fast, dost fear ? The moon shines clear—
 Fleet goes my barb, keep hold !
 Fearest thou ? “ O no,” she faintly said ;
 “ But why so stern and cold ?

“ What yonder rings ? what yonder sings ?
 Why shrieks the owlet grey ?”
 'Tis death-bell's clang, 'tis funeral song,
 The body to the clay.

“ With song and clang, at morrow's dawn,
 Ye may inter the dead ;
 To-night I ride with my young bride
 To deck our bridal bed.

“ Come with thy choir, thou coffin'd guest,
 To swell our nuptial song.
 Come priest to bless our marriage feast,
 Come all, come all along !”

Ceased clang and song, down sunk the bier ;
 The shrouded corpse arose ;
 And hurry ! hurry ! all the train,
 The thundering steed pursues.

And forward ! forward ! on they go ;
 High snorts the straining steed ;
 Thick pants the rider's labouring breath
 As headlong on they speed.

“ O William, why this savage haste ?
 And where thy bridal bed ?
 'Tis distant far, low, damp and chill,
 And narrow, trustless maid.

“ No room for me ? ” “ Enough for both ;
 Speed ! speed ! my barb, thy course ! ”
 O'er thundering bridge, through boiling surge,
 He drove the furious horse.

Tramp ! tramp ! along the land they rode,
 Splash ! splash ! along the sea,
 The scourge is wight, the spur is bright,
 The flashing pebbles flee.

Fled past on right and left how fast
 Each forest, grove and bower !
 On right and left fled past how fast
 Each city, town and tower !

“ Dost fear ? Dost fear ? the moon shines clear,
 Dost fear to ride with me ?
 Hurrah ! hurrah ! the dead can ride !
 “ O William, let them be ! ”

“ See there ! see there ! What yonder swings
 And creaks 'mid whistling rain ? ”
 “ Gibbet and steel, th' accursed wheel ;
 A murderer in his chain.

“ Hello ! thou felon, follow here ;
 To bridal bed we ride ;
 And thou shall prance a fetter dance
 Before me and my bride.”

And hurry ! hurry ! clash, clash, clash !
 The wasted form descends,
 And fleet as wind through hazel bush,
 The wild career attends.

Tramp ! tramp ! along the land they rode,
 Splash ! splash ! along the sea ;
 The scourge is red, the spur drops blood,
 The flashing pebbles flee.

How fled what moonshine faintly shewed !
 How fled what darkness hid !
 How fled the earth beneath their feet,
 The heaven above their head !

“ Dost fear ? dost fear ? the moon shines clear,
 And well the dead can ride ;
 Dost faithful Helen fear for them ? ”
 “ O leave in peace the dead ! ”

“ Barb ! barb ! methinks I hear the cock ;
 The sand will soon be run ;
 Barb ! barb ! I smell the morning air,
 The race is well-nigh done.”

Tramp ! tramp ! along the land they rode,
 Splash ! splash ! along the sea ;
 The scourge is red, the spur drops blood,
 The flashing pebbles flee.

“ Hurrah ! hurrah ! well ride the dead ;
 The bride, the bride is come ;
 And soon we reach the bridal bed,
 For Helen, here’s my home.”

Reluctant on its rusty hinge,
 Revolved an iron door,
 And by the pale moon’s setting beam
 Were seen a church and tower.

With many a shriek and cry whiz round,
 The birds of midnight, scared,
 And rustling like autumnal leaves
 Unhallow’d ghosts were heard.

O’er many a tomb and tombstone pale,
 He spurr’d the fiery horse,
 Till sudden at an open grave
 He checked the wondrous course.

The falling gauntlet quits the rein,
 Down drops the casque of steel,
 The cuirass leaves his shrinking side,
 The spur his gory heel.

The eyes desert the naked skull,
 The mould’ring flesh the bone,
 ’Till Helen’s lily arms entwine
 A ghastly skeleton.

The furious barb snorts fire and foam,
 And with a fearful bound,
 Dissolves at once in empty air,
 And leaves her on the ground.

Half seen by fits, by fits half heard,
 Pale spectres flit along,
 Wheel round the maid in dismal dance
 And howl the funeral song.

“ E’en when the heart ’s with anguish cleft,
 Revere the doom of heaven ;
 Her soul is from her body reft,
 Her spirit be forgiven !”

A writer of ballads pitched in a different key, but worthy to rank with Lenore in excellence, was Macaulay. It is now half a century since his *Lays of Ancient Rome* first appeared. Their brilliant author was then at his best as essayist, reviewer and orator. His old antagonist, Prof. Wilson, of Edinburgh, gave them in “Blackwood” a hearty greeting. “What !” he says. “Poetry from Macaulay? Ay, and why not? The House hushes itself to hear him even though Stanley is the cry! If he be not the first of critics (spare our blushes) who is? Name the young poet who could have written the *Armada*. The young poets all want fire; Macaulay is

full of fire. The young poets are somewhat weakly ; he is strong. The young poets are rather ignorant ; his knowledge is great. The young poets mumble books ; he devours them. The young poets dally with their subject ; he strikes its heart. The young poets are still their own heroes ; he sees but the chiefs he celebrates. The young poets weave dreams with shadows transitory as clouds without substance ; he builds realities lasting as rocks. The young poets steal from all and sundry, and deny their thefts ; he robs in the face of day. Whom? Homer. Sir Walter would have rejoiced in Horatius as if he had been a doughty Douglas.

‘ Now by our sire Quirinus
It was a goodly sight
To see the thirty standards
Swept down the tide of flight.’

That is the way of doing business ; a cut and a thrust style, without any flourish. Scott’s style when his blood was up, and the first words came like a vanguard impatient for battle.” Those were hearty words from an opponent, the amende honorable for prior disparagement. Such praise was high ; but it has been sustained by two generations of readers. Sir G. O. Trevelyan, nephew and biographer of Macaulay, says, in his uncle’s life, that to June 1875 upwards of a hundred thousand copies of the ballads had passed into the hands of readers. That indicates the existence of a healthier public taste than moaning pessimists would willingly admit can be found. Many a schoolboy knows by heart the response of Horatius to the Consul’s appeal to hold the bridge and save the town, when he spake out :

“ To every man upon this earth,
Death cometh soon or late,
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his gods.

And for the tender mother,
Who dandled him to rest,
And for the wife who nurses
His baby at her breast.”

* * * * He and two comrades kept the foe in play :

“ For Romans in Rome’s quarrel
Spared neither land nor gold,
Nor son, nor wife, nor limb nor life,
In the brave days of old.

Then none was for a party ;
 Then all were for the state ;
 Then the great man helped the poor,
 And the poor man loved the great ;
 Then lands were fairly portioned ;
 Then spoils were fairly sold ;
 The Romans were like brothers
 In the brave days of old."

The end of the lay is as well known as its beginning. In stirring verse the exploits of Horatius are sung. We are made eye-witnesses of his bravery at the bridge ; his plunge into the Tiber, and escape ; the gratitude of his country, and the statue in his honor :

" And still his name sounds stirring,
 Unto the men of Rome,
 As the trumpet-blast that cries to them
 To charge the Volscian home ;
 And wives still pray to Juno
 For boys with hearts as bold,
 As his who kept the bridge so well
 In the brave days of old."

But it was no marvel that he, who at twenty-four could write the "Battle of Ivry," should at forty-two write the "Lays of Ancient Rome." The Huguenot song of triumph was recognized as a promise of greater things to come, and rightly so, for its opening verse is an outburst of exultation which strikes the heart as does an opening chorus from some great tone master :

" Now glory to the Lord of Hosts from whom all glories are !
 And glory to our Sovereign Liege, King Henry of Navarre !
 Now let there be the merry sound of music and of dance,
 Through thy corn fields green, and sunny vines, oh pleasant land of France !
 And thou Rochelle, our own Rochelle, proud city of the waters,
 Again let rapture light the eyes of all thy mourning daughters.
 As thou wert constant in our ills be joyous in our joys,
 For cold and stiff, and still are they who wrought thy walls annoy,
 Hurrah ! Hurrah ! a single field hath turned the chance of war,
 Hurrah ! Hurrah ! for Ivry and Henry of Navarre."

A plaintive tenderness is the crowning glory of many Scottish ballads : they are as sad as music in a minor key. Of that class, "Waly, Waly," a ballad of about the middle of XVI century, is a good example :

" O Waly, Waly, up the bank,
 O Waly, Waly, down the brae,
 And Waly, Waly, yon burn-side,
 Where I and my love were wont to gae !
 I lean'd my back unto an aik,
 I thocht it was a trustie tree,
 But first it bow'd and syne it brak',—
 Sae my true love did lichtlie me."

O Waly, Waly, but love be bonnie,
 A little time when it is new!
 But when its auld it waxeth cold
 And fadeth awa' like the morning dew.
 O wherefore should I busk my heid,
 And wherefore should I kame my hair?
 For my true love has me forsook,
 And says he'll never lo'e me mair—

Noo Arthur's seat shall be my bed
 The sheets sall ne'er be press'd by me;
 Saint Anton's well sall be my drink;
 Since my true love's forsaken me—
 Martinmas wind, when wilt thou blaw,
 And shake the green leaves off the tree?
 O gentle death, when wilt thou come?
 For of my life I am weary.

'Tis not the frost that freezes fell,
 Nor blowing snow's inclemencie,
 'Tis not sic cauld that makes me cry;
 But my love's heart grown cauld to me.
 When we cam' in by Glasgow toun,
 We were a comely sight to see:
 My love was clad in the black velvet,
 An' I mysel' in cramasie.

But had I wist before I kiss'd
 That love had been so ill to win,
 I'd lock'd my heart in a case o' goud,
 And pinn'ed it wi' a siller pin—
 And oh! if my young babe were born,
 And set upon the nurse's knee;
 And I mysel' were dead and gane,
 And the green grass growing over me!"

Of the border ballads, one of the best is "Jamie Telfer." Along the border in the olden time there was a class of impartial folk who:—

"Drove the beeves that made their broth,
 From England, and from Scotland both."

This ballad goes back to one Martinmas night when the Captain of the Bewcastle drove off Jamie Telfer's kye. The story runs:

"And when they cam to the fair Dodhead
 Right hastily they climbed the heel;
 They loosed the kye out, ane and a'
 And ranshacked the house right weel.

Now Jamie Telfer's heart was sair,
 The tear aye rowing in his e'e;
 He pled wi' the captain to hae his gear,
 Or else revenged he would be.

The captain turned him round and leugh;
 Said—"Man, there's naething in thy house
 But ae auld sword without a sheath.
 That hardly now wad fell a mouse!"

The poor fellow ran ten miles through the sprinkled snow to Gibby Elliot, the only man who refused him help, saying :

“ Gae seek you succor where you paid black-mail,
For, man ! ye ne'er paid money to me ”

He next carries the fray to auld Jock Grieve, who is married to his wife's sister ; so he sat Jamie on the back of a weel fed bonny black and sped him on his way to give the fray to William's Wat, who with two sons joined him and took the fray to Branksome Ha'. His chief, bauld Buccleuch, heard the story, and said :

“ Alack for wae ! ” quoth the gude auld lord,
“ And ever my heart is wae for thee !
But fye, gar cry on Willie, my son
And see that he comes to me speedilie !

“ Gar warn the water, braid and wide,
Gar warn it soon and hastily !
They that winna ride for Telfer's kye,
Let them never look in the face o' me ! ”

The country side was warned :

“ And aye the ower-word o' the thrang
Was : ‘ Rise for Branksome readilie ! ’ ”

The raiders are overtaken with the cattle ; there is a fight, with slaughter, in which the captain was wounded and the cattle rescued. When they were ready to go back, one of the party hinted that it would be poetic justice to take back with them a few of Bewcastle's kye, so :

“ When they came back to the fair Dodhead,
They were a welcome sight to see !
For instead of his ain ten milk-kye
Jamie Telfer has gotten thirty and three.”

From a border foray, to remembrance of Rob Roy, and the passing stave chanted by Wordsworth at his grave, is an easy transition :

“ Heaven gave Rob Roy a dauntless heart,
And wondrous length and strength of arm ;
Nor craved he more to quell his foes,
Or keep his friends from harm.

Yet was Rob Roy as wise as brave ;
Forgive me if the phrase be strong ;
A poet worthy of Rob Roy
Must scorn a timid song.

Say then that he was wise as brave ;
As wise in thought, as bold in deed :
For in the principles of things
He sought his moral creed.

Said generous Rob, 'what need of books?
 Burn all the statutes and their shelves;
 They stir us up against our kind;
 And worse, against ourselves.

We have a passion—make a law,
 Too false to guide us or control!
 And for the law itself we fight,
 In bitterness of soul.

And puzzled, blinded, thus we lose
 Distinctions that are plain and few;
 These find I graven on my heart,
 That tells me what to do.

The creatures see of flood and field,
 And those that travel on the wind!
 With them no strife can last; they live
 In peace and peace of mind.

For why? because the good old rule
 Sufficeth them, the simple plan
 That they should take who have the power,
 And they should keep who can.

A lesson that is quickly learned,
 A signal this which all can see;
 Thus nothing here provokes the strong
 To wanton cruelty.

All kinds and creatures stand and fall
 By strength of prowess or of wit:
 'Tis God's appointment who must sway,
 And who is to submit.

Since then the rule of right is plain,
 And longest life is but a day;
 To have my ends, maintain my rights,
 I'll take the shortest way.

And thus among these rocks he lived,
 Through summer heat and winter snow;
 The Eagle, he was lord above;
 And Rob was lord below.

So was it—*would* at least have been
 But through untowardness of fate;
 For polity was then too strong—
 He came an age too late.

And had it been thy lot to live
 With us who now behold the light,
 Thou would'st have nobly stirred thyself
 And battled for the right.

For thou wert still the poor man's stay,
 The poor man's heart, the poor man's hand,
 And all the oppressed, who wanted strength,
 Had thine at their command."

German literature is especially rich in ballads. Goethe, Schiller, and Heine were masters of the art; and to Uhland's fancy we are indebted for ballads of exquisite beauty. The Erlkœnig of Goethe was translated by Scott; and the translations, by Lord Lytton, of Schiller's ballads, are well known. Baskerville has translated many of Uhland's ballads. The "Minstrel" from the first part of Wilhelm Meister written by Goethe, in his youth, is a charming ballad:

“ ‘What is it at the gate I hear?
 What on the bridge is sounding?
 Let's have the singing to our ear,
 Along the hall rebounding.’
 So spake the King; the page he ran;
 Back came the boy; the King again
 Cried: ‘Bring us in the Minstrel.’

‘My greeting to ye noble lords!
 Ye gentle ladies greeting!
 Like stars on stars rich heaven affords;
 Names fail at such a meeting.
 In hall, of pomp and splendour full,
 I close my eyes, mine not the role,
 Now, wonderingly to revel.’

With eyelids closed, the minstrel's call,
 Brings perfect tones o'erflowing;
 The brave knights glancing round the hall
 And fair cheeks coyer glowing.
 The King enchanted with such art,
 Cried: ‘Give him for this wond'rous part,
 A golden chain to pay him.’

‘Give not the golden chain to me,
 But to the knights, who ever
 In fight, before their helmets see
 Stern foemen's lances shiver.
 Give it the Chancellor you keep,
 And let him add it to the heap
 Of burdens he must carry.

‘I sing but as the warbler sings
 That nestles in the bushes.
 The song that without effort springs
 Rewards itself, and pushes
 All else aside. Still this I pine,
 Let them a glass of generous wine,
 Bring me in golden goblet.’

Before 'twas quaff'd he held it high,
 ‘Oh nectar sweet, refreshing;
 And threefold happy family,
 Where thou art trivial blessing,
 Heaven's joy be with ye; think on me;
 And thank ye God as fervently,
 As I for this do thank ye.’”

The extract given from Wordsworth's poem calls to remembrance the "Lost Leader," by Browning. A letter in 1875, from Browning, acknowledges that Wordsworth was the lay figure for the "Lost Leader;" just as Dicken's admitted that Leigh Hunt was the prototype of Skimpole; and his own father of Micawber. Before middle life, Wordsworth lost some of his early ideals, and became out of touch with the aspirations of Browning. In his old age the latter, however, said the "Lost Leader" was not intended to be a full and true portrait of Wordsworth, or he would never have talked of "handfuls of silver and bits of riband," which he is sure never influenced the great poet's change of politics.

I.

"Just for a handful of silver he left us,
 Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
 Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
 Lost all the others she lets us devote;
 They with the gold to give doled him out silver,
 So much was theirs who so little allowed;
 How all our coppers had gone for his service!
 Rags—were they purple his heart had been proud!
 We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him,
 Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
 Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
 Made him our pattern to live and to die!
 Shakespeare was of us; Milton was for us,
 Burns, Shelley were with us—they watch from their graves;
 He alone breaks from the van and the free men,
 He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!"

II.

We shall march prospering—not through his presence;
 Songs may inspirit us—not from his lyre;
 Deeds will be done—while he boasts his quiescence,
 Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire:
 Blot out his name then, record one lost soul more,
 One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
 One more devil's triumph and sorrow for angels,
 One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
 Life's night begins; let him never come back to us!
 There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
 Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,
 Never glad confident morning again!
 Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,
 Menace our heart ere we master his own,
 Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
 Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne."

"Sir Patrick Spens" is one of the best of the old Scottish ballads. It was first published in the Percy collection; but Sir Walter Scott was able, after much search, to give several additional stanzas

to Percy's version. Sir Patrick is commended to the King as "the best sailor that ever sailed the sea," and is sent by the King :

"To Noroway, to Noroway,
To Noroway o'er the faem,
The King's daughter of Noroway,
'Tis thou maun bring her hame."

They reached Norway safely, but when about to return, one of the seamen warned Sir Patrick that he feared a deadly storm, for :

"I saw the new moon late yestreen
Wi' the auld moon in her arm ;
And if we gang to sea master,
I fear we'll come to harm."

They hadna sailed a league, a league,
A league, but barely three,
When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud
And gurlly grew the sea.

The ankers brak, and the topmast lap,
It was sic a deadly storm ;
And the waves came o'er the broken ship
Till a' her sides were torn."

Sir Patrick Spens went up the rigging to spy for land, but :

"He hadna gane a step, a step,
A step, but barely ane,
When a boult flew out of our goodly ship
And the salt sea it came in."

The efforts to save the ship were unavailing.

"And lang, lang may the maidens sit,
Wi' their gowd kaims in their hair,
A' waiting for their ain dear loves—
For them they'll see na mair."

The ballad poetry of Ireland deserves special consideration. Due attention to the ballads of John Banim, Gerald Griffin, and Thomas Davis, would alone exceed the limits of this paper, and to curtail them would reprehensibly mar them. I however, quote a short ballad from Lover and one from Moore. That from Lover is founded on the old superstition that when a beautiful child dies it is stolen by the fairies :

"A mother came when the stars were paling,
Wailing round a lonely spring ;
Thus she cried while tears were falling,
Calling on the Fairy King :

'Why with spells my child caressing,
Courting him with fairy joy ;
Why destroy a mother's blessing,
Wherefore steal my baby boy ?

'O'er the mountain, through the wild wood,
Where his childhood loved to play;
Where the flowers are freshly springing,
There I wander day by day.

'There I wander, growing fonder
Of the child that made my joy;
On the echoes wildly calling,
To restore my fairy boy.

'But in vain my plaintive calling,
Tears are falling all in vain;
He now sports with fairy pleasure,
He's the treasure of their train!

'Fare thee well my child forever,
In this world I've lost my joy,
But in the next we ne'er shall sever,
There I'll find my angel boy.'"

The ballad quoted from Moore is founded on the Mærcen that a maiden richly appalled, and bearing a wand, on which she carried a ring of great value, travelled, without escort, unmolested, from one end of Ireland to the other :

"Rich and rare were the gems she wore
And a bright gold ring on her wand she bore;
But oh! her beauty was far beyond
Her sparkling gems, or snow-white wand.

'Lady, dost thou not fear to stray,
'So lone and lovely through this bleak way?
'Are Erin's sons so good or so cold
'As not to be tempted by woman or gold?

'Sir Knight, I feel not the least alarm,
'No son of Erin will offer me harm;
'For though they love women and golden store,
'Sir Knight, they love honor and virtue more.'

On she went, and her maiden smile
In safety lighted her round the Green Isle,
And blest forever is she who relied
Upon Erin's honor and Erin's pride."

The Rowley poems, interesting from their intrinsic value, and from the circumstances under which they were written by poor Chatterton, contain ballads of much merit. Chatterton pretended that his poems were written by a Bristol monk, a contemporary and friend of Lydgate, of Bury, and of the time of Master Canynge, Mayor of Bristol, and builder of the Church of St. Mary, Redcliffe, of that town. In the ballad of "The Bristol Tragedy" it is Master Canning who intercedes with King Edward for Sir Charles Bawdin, who was beheaded, and his body, according to the barbarity of the

times, mutilated for treason. The Bristol ballad is one of the best of the Rowley poems. For two centuries some of the Chatterton family were sextons at the Church of St. Mary, Redcliffe, Bristol. During Chatterton's life, his uncle was sexton. The boy poet gave it out that the poems he produced had been found by elder members of his family, in the muniment chest of Redcliffe Church, and were transcribed by him. To sustain his story illuminated documents were produced, as marvellous in their way as the poems, and these, and the boy's extreme youth, aided to keep up for almost a hundred years controversy as to the authenticity of these poems.

It was at Bristol that Joseph Cottle, the bookseller, nearly a hundred years ago, published a little work, called "Lyrical Ballads," of some interest in relation to our subject. That little book was the joint production of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, two men who have exercised great influence on English literature. The ballads of their volume were conjointly written by the two poets, when they were at their best, and during the period of their closest intimacy. Like the "Blue Boy" of Gainsborough, the artist, the work of each was done to illustrate a theory. Wordsworth and Coleridge differed in opinion as to the relative poetical value of incidents of common everyday life, and those which border on the supernatural. Each wrote ballads for this volume to prove his own theory. Wordsworth wrote more than a dozen pieces on his side; while, Coleridge wrote only one, the "Ancient Mariner," in proof of his contention. The essence of the controversy between these distinguished poets existed long before their day, and will divide the opinions of men long after them. But, if it did not settle their dispute, their controversy gave to the English language some of its best ballads. Both the "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" are too long to quote in their entirety, and to mutilate them would be a wrong :

" Farewell, farewell ! but this I tell
 To thee thou Wedding Guest !
 He prayeth well, who loveth well,
 Both man and bird and beast."

The songs of the people command passing reference. Thomas Hood, Ebenezer Elliott, Ernest Jones, and Gerald Massey have written ballads that are bright, humorous and delightful, but some of their songs are veritable voices from the depths, wails of despair that startle the ear, and make the heart ache. Their gloomiest

dirges have been serviceable. Hood's "Song of the Shirt," and Noel's "Pauper's Drive," with its doleful chorus,

" Rattle his bones over the stones ;
He's only a pauper whom nobody owns,"

more effectively forced attention to the miseries of the poor than all the reports and figures compiled by commissioners : "I have had no childhood," said one of these men, "ever since I can remember I have had the aching fear of want throbbing in heart and brow." Who can wonder at the biting irony of his cry :

" Smitten stones will talk with fiery tongue,
And the worm, when trodden, will turn ;
But cowards, ye cringe to the cruellest wrongs,
And answer with nevera spurn.

Then torture, oh ! tyrants, the spiritless drove,
Old England's helots will bear ;
There's no hell in their hatred, no God in their love ;
No shame in their dearth's despair.

For our fathers are praying for pauper pay,
Our mothers with death's kiss are white ;
Our sons are the rich man's serfs by day,
And our daughters his slaves by night."

Of Burns it is needless to speak. His songs are universally known ; and their merit everywhere appreciated. Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd, wrote with a grace beyond the reach of art. His "Kilmeny" and the "Jeanie Morrison," of Motherwell, are faultless. Poor Tannahill piped a reed of sweetest tone. What can surpass his "Braes o' Gleniffer?"

" Keen blows the wind o'er the Braes o' Gleniffer,
The auld castle's turrets are covered wi' snaw ;
How chang'd frae the time when I met wi' my lover
Among the broom bushes by Stanley green shaw ;
The wild flow'rs o' simmer were spread a' sae bonnie,
The mavis sang sweet frae the green birken tree ;
But far to the camp they hae march'd my dear Johnnie,
And now it is winter wi' nature and me."

Lord Tennyson in his "Idylls of the King," clad the Arthurian legends with all the graces of modern poetry. With what resistless charm he depicts Sir Galahad, the perfect knight, whose purity enabled him to find the holy graal ; and how he makes live again the less perfect knights of Arthur's court, who, subject to human frailties, were sometimes led into temptation, and sometimes failed to accord to others that forgiveness they implored from heaven for themselves. And how beautiful are his ballads. The wine from

his own vintage has the sparkle and delicacy of flavour of the wine he drew from the antique jars of the old legends. For example, read his "Lady Clare :"

It was the time when lilies blow,
And clouds are highest up in air,
Lord Ronald brought a lily white doe
To give his cousin, Lady Clare.

I trow they did not part in scorn,
Lovers long betrothed were they :
They two will wed the morrow morn,
God's blessing on the day.

"He does not love me for my birth,
Nor for my lands so broad and fair ;
He loves me for my own true worth,
And that is well," said Lady Clare.

In there came old Alice, the nurse,
Said, "who was this that went from thee ?"

"It was my cousin," said Lady Clare,
"To-morrow he weds with me."

"O God be thanked," said Alice the nurse,
That all comes round so just and fair ;
Lord Ronald is heir of all your lands,
And you are not the Lady Clare."

"Are ye out of your mind, my nurse, my nurse?"
Said Lady Clare, "that ye speak so wild ?"

"As God's above," said Alice the nurse,
I speak the truth : you are my child.

"The old Earl's daughter died at my breast ;
I speak the truth as I live by bread ;
I buried her like my own sweet child,
And put my child in her stead.

"Falsely, falsely have ye done,
O mother, she said, "if this be true,
To keep the best man under the sun,
So many years from his due."

"Nay, now my child," said Alice the nurse,
"But keep the secret for your life,
And all you have will be Lord Ronald's,
When you are man and wife."

"If I'm a beggar born," she said,
"I will speak out, for I dare not lie ;
Pull off, pull off the brooch of gold,
And fling the diamond necklace by."

"Nay now, my child," said Alice the nurse,
"But keep the secret all ye can."
She said, "not so ; but I will know,
If there be any faith in man."

“Nay now, what faith?” said Alice the nurse,
 The man will cleave unto his right,”
 “And he shall have it.” the lady replied,
 “Though I should die to-night.”

“Yet give one kiss to your mother dear !
 Alas, my child, I sinned for thee,”
 “O mother, mother, mother,” she said,
 “So strange it seems to me ”

“Yet here’s a kiss for my mother dear,
 My mother dear, if this be so,
 And lay your hand upon my head
 And bless me, mother, ere I go.”

She clad herself in a russet gown,
 She was no longer Lady Clare :
 She went by dale, and she went by down,
 With a single rose in her hair.

The lily-white doe Lord Ronald had brought
 Leapt up from where she lay,
 Dropt her head in the maiden’s hand,
 And followed her all the way.

Down stopt Lord Ronald from his tower ;
 “O Lady Clare, you shame your worth !
 Why come you drest like a village maid,
 That are the flower of the earth ?”

“If I come drest like a village maid,
 I am but as my fortunes are :
 I am a beggar born,” she said,
 “And not the Lady Clare.”

“Play me no tricks,” said Lord Ronald,
 For I am yours in word and deed.
 Play me no tricks, said Lord Ronald,
 “Your riddle is hard to read.”

O, and proudly stood she up !
 Her heart within her did not fail ;
 She looked into Lord Ronald’s face
 And told him all her nurse’s tale.

He laughed a laugh of merry scorn ;
 He turned and kissed her where she stood
 “If you are not the heiress born,
 And I,” said he, “the next in blood—”

“If you are not the heiress born,
 And I,” said he, “the lawful heir,
 We two will wed to-morrow morn,
 And you shall still be Lady Clare.”

These ballads are but as a drop from the ocean. Lack of space precludes reference to humorous ballads, of the class found in the “Bon Gaultier” book. And there are Irish, Spanish and Norse ballads of wondrous beauty ; songs from France, including those of

Beranger, the prince of song writers ; ballads from Greece, the land where the singer's art sprang at once to perfection ; songs from Italy, where Dante shewed that the vulgar tongue could touch the heart as effectively as the classic speech of the Cæsars ; and the ballads of Poe, Longfellow, Whittier, and Lowell in the new world ; of which no mention can be made. Regretfully one turns from these : for at hazard stanzas by the score might be taken, that have made life brighter, toil pleasanter, and the world better.

The modern ballads by Goethe, Scott, Schiller, Wordsworth, Uhland and Tennyson, need no comment. Gems of song from the treasury of the master singers of the century need no commendation. They are as wine that needs no bush ; and they will delight readers without end in the days to come. The ballads of the olden time, like those by and for whom they were sung, bear a composite character in which good and evil are curiously blended. But their sturdy merit bears scrutiny, and fears no criticism. There is no cause to exaggerate their merits, or screen their defects. In some will be found coarseness of thought and expression ; while others are common-place and abound in puerilities that are wearisome. But in many, may be found a combination of force, sweetness, and pathos unsurpassed, and but rarely equalled in literature. Sir Phillip Sydney could be moved by Chevy Chase, however rudely recited, as by the blast of a trumpet ; and, in this practical age, to thousands the past brings no remembrance of sweeter pleasure than that of the hours of childhood, spent at the knee of some venerated, though perhaps illiterate, member of the early home, who at the cottage hearth, in the evening gloaming, by oft-repeated recital of these old ballads, made the young heart dance with joy never to be forgotten.

