IRISH COUNTRY SONGS

Edited and arranged by

HERBERT HUGHES

Volume III

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Please include full details of title, author, composer, arranger and publisher of this work (where applicable) on THE PERFORMING-RIGHT SOCIETY'S returns whenever it is publicly performed.

PREFACE TO VOL. III

"N the course of a lecture delivered before the Royal Dublin Society last year I had occasion to refer to the relationship between the folk-song, as sung by the peasant who is giving voice to an ancient tradition, and the same song put into print with a piano accompaniment. The present volume, like the others that have preceded it, illustrates that relationship, obvious enough to the expert but only vaguely understood by many educated people. The folk-song becomes, as I think, an art-song, as much because it goes into print, with all the implications of print, as because it suffers a severe metamorphosis through harmonisation, and possibly earlier metamorphoses through being forced into the strait-waistcoat of an imported ecclesiastical mode and adapted to the notation of the tempered scale. The art of harmony-inseparable, as it is, from scientific laws—is, moreover, a period affair, practised by the musician according to his own fancy. It may be true that the musician who sets some old, anonymous song to harmony of his own invention recreates it; but it is equally true that his setting will suggest a period as definitely as a crinoline or a streamline car or a piece of architecture, and hardly less subject to the natural laws of change and decay. The tune itself may be of the kind that survives fashion, its origin may be of the remotest antiquity, but under his hand it is definitely transmuted into an art-song, an art-song of his own generation. If the tune be a good one, and his setting poor and unimaginative, someone else will surely come along and reset it according to his particular fashion, and the bad setting will as surely perish. If his setting be good he will give new life to the old song, sending it out into the world among people who had never known it in its native environment. For those who prefer the untouched original there is always the countryside, even if the singers of the old songs are becoming fewer year by year.

It is, therefore, with a certain diffidence that I have harmonised the songs in this volume. Most of the tunes are familiar throughout Ireland, and very old, and my only excuse for setting them afresh is to make them more widely known beyond the frontiers of Ulster and the Free State. To place any of these songs or ballads in a series associated with pure folk-song would seem, moreover, to require explanation, only two coming into the ordinary "traditional" category. Not one conforms strictly to the indigenous ballad type, although "The Gallows Tree" and "Shule Agra" (Siúbatt a Śnáo) nearly approach it. Each of those has a dramatic power combined with an artfulness of structure-in other words, a literary value-not found in the average ballad of the broadsheet. Yet each has become, as the other songs here have become, so much a part of what may truly be called the ballad-consciousness of the countryside that their inclusion in this edition of Irish Country Songs has seemed to me not merely justifiable but desirable. Several of the tunes have had, like the now famous "Air from Londonderry," more than one set of verses put to them, and my choice of George Colman's words to "Savourneen Deelish" ('S a muinnin vitir) rather than, say, Thomas Campbell's, and Denis Florence MacCarthy's words to "The Drinaun Donn" (an onoisnean roonn) rather than those of Robert Dwyer Joyce is, I confess, purely arbitrary.

George Colman the Younger was a considerable figure in his day, and not always a pleasant one. As a boy he was at Westminster School, went up to Christ Church, Oxford, and after spending some terms at King's College, Aberdeen, and Lincoln's Inn, soon plunged into the world of the London theatre. He had the excuse of following closely in his father's footsteps, for George Colman the Elder (1732-1794), sometimes called George the First, had also been to Westminster and Christ Church, and was already much involved in theatrical enterprises. The elder George had formed a friendship with David Garrick, was the author of a number

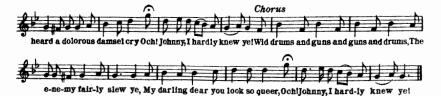
of successful plays, had acquired a fourth share in Covent Garden Theatre, and bought the theatre in the Haymarket. The younger George succeeded to these theatrical interests, wrote many successful pieces himself, and on his father's death took on the management of the Haymarket Theatre at a salary of £600 per annum. Certain financial difficulties followed which entailed sanctuary for some years within the Rules of King's Bench, from which he was finally released by the kindness of George IV. It was during his office as Examiner of Plays, to which he was appointed by the Lord Chamberlain, the Duke of Montrose, that he conspicuously abused his authority; for while his own plays were, as a biographer states, open to charges of indecency and profanity, he was illiberal and severe to those of his contemporaries, often successfully holding them up. There is no record, I think, of a production of The Surrender of Calais within living memory, yet I feel that the verses Colman wrote for that forgotten play are so good—they were sung by an Irish character called O'Carrol—that they should not The reference to be allowed to suffer the oblivion of countless other "period" pieces. booty in the last verse recalls a perquisite as much appreciated by the underpaid and badly-fed soldier of the Napoleonic wars as by the returning warrior of our own day who could drag home a captured machine-gun under the eyes of the transport officer and describe it as personal luggage. Shakespeare's famous rendering of Caitin of a Stoin into Callino, castore me, in the fourth act of Henry the Fifth, finds a parallel in Colman's effort to reduce the intractable 'S a muipnin vitir, Civin of to some sort of phonetic verisimilitude in this fashion:



Dr. Samuel Arnold (1740-1802) was Colman's musical collaborator in this work, which was produced in 1791.

"Johnny, I hardly knew ye," so well remembered to-day by the older generation, is a characteristic case of a song surviving its period and presenting a problem for the later folklorist. It is a song that I have remembered since I was a child, sung in Ireland to the tune of " Johnny comes marching home," which tune has appeared in popular collections as "old English." When I first thought of putting it in this volume I discussed the song with my father, who is in his eighty-second year, with Mr. Henry W. Nevinson, Dr. John S. Crone, and others whose memories went back to the American Civil War, or a little after. Without being dogmatic, they agreed that it belonged to that period and came from the States, Sir Richard Terry remarking that it was probably in the repertory of the Christy Minstrels. I did not want to commit my friends to an opinion on a song heard so long ago, but made some researches. I knew that the late Mrs. C. Milligan Fox, with whom I had the pleasure of working in the early days of the Irish Folk Song Society, had published a version of it in New York as "an old Irish ballad, collected and arranged "by herself. This was in 1915. But I discovered that a song with the same title, with "words and music by J. B. Geoghegan," had been published in London about 1867, and "sung with tremendous applause by Harry Liston, the star comic." The words of Mr. Geoghegan's song were substantially the same as those recorded by Mrs. Fox, but the tune, while recalling that of "Johnny comes marching home," was definitely an inferior one:





Note the word "wid": a relic of its stage-Irish phase. The cover-design of this publication of the 'sixties was in colour, pretty in its conventional way, showing the dolorous damsel with hair nicely parted in the middle, complete with shawl, pinafore, and a pair of elegant shoes on incredibly small feet. She is making a gesture of surprise before a heavily mustachioed soldier who is clad in red tunic and dark trousers, and wearing the high infantry cap of the time, with an eye-guard over one eye, an arm in a sling, and one leg doubled up in a short crutch.

So far it would have appeared that the song was Geoghegan's, with all the printed authority of his now-defunct publishers. But further research dated it back, conjecturally, to the period immediately succeeding the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, when, as H. H. Sparling pointed out, Irish regiments were extensively recruited for the East India service. In his "Irish Minstrelsy" (Walter Scott, 1887) Sparling described it as a street ballad in which "the island of Ceylon" is given as "the island of Sulloon"; and in the complete edition of that work he made the following note:

Because in one late version "Why did you run from me and the child?" is made "Why did you skedaddle," etc., and this word only came into use during the War of Secession, some have imagined this song to be of recent date, and have even attributed it to the Irish-American music halls. My own memory carries it back to very near the war, when I heard an old fisherman sing it, to whom it was even then old. It was he who told me of its age and meaning, what I have said above, which is corroborated by the reference to Ceylon. It is hard to believe that any one can read this wonderful piece of grotesquerie, with its mingling of pathos and ribald mockery so closely allied to the spirit that produced "The night before Larry was stretched," and be unable to see either its value or its genuineness.

According to D. J. O'Donoghue (" The Poets of Ireland," Dublin, 1912) J. B. Geoghegan died at Bolton on January 21, 1889, at the age of 74, according to some papers and at 79 according to others. He was the author of "some admired songs," such as "John Barleycorn" (of which one may recall pre-Geoghegan variants), "Merry England," etc. He managed the Victoria Music Hall in Bolton for 25 years and was proprietor of the Star Theatre, Hanley, and altogether was responsible for over 200 songs. The resemblance between the tune printed above and that of "Johnny comes marching home" is such that one is tempted to assume that the composer's memory was at fault. The practice of setting music-hall doggerel to traditional tunes without acknowledgment is not, of course, uncommon, and has been profitably developed by more than one famous comedian of our own day. Some years ago I was visited by an American doggerel writer who sought my collaboration in songs that should have a world-wide appeal; we were to concentrate on songs that should be a "hit." "You must," he said, "be reminiscent"; and he proceeded to coach me in the procedure, quoting the most favourable material upon which to begin work. It was only then that I realised that the business of being reminiscent in music is a business indeed; and my visitor, who had all the frankness of a good merchant selling his wares in the best market, was quite sincerely puzzled and a little hurt by my refusal to consider so easy a proposition. Is it too much to suppose that the late Mr. Geoghegan, with the music-hall mind of his epoch, considered that a good old ballad was anybody's property?

The sentiment created on both sides of the Atlantic by the War of Secession was certainly worth exploiting. Thus far, then, my friends had good excuse for associating the song with that epoch.

Two of the songs in this volume—"Roisín Dubh" (Roirín Dub) and "The Redhaired Man's Wife"—bear symbolistic titles that belong to a time when it was the habit of poets and ballad-writers to refer to Ireland under a concealed name. She became Caitiún ni-houtinan, the Sean bean boct (the Poor Old Woman), Dark Rosaleen, Mainín ni-Cuttenan, and so on. When the fiat went forth from Dublin Castle that ballads (being powerful political instruments) were not to be sold, ballad-mongers adopted the simple subterfuge of selling bundles of straw, especially on such lucrative occasions as market days, for the price of a broadsheet, giving the concealed broadsheet away with the bundle of straw. In Jacobite times the allegorical ballad was at the height of its vogue, yet when the ban was lifted the allegorical method remained, and has persisted even into the twentieth century, becoming living drama in Yeats's "Cathleen ni-Houlihan" and poignantly lyrical in Katherine Tynan's poem. Changing fashions may bring a new method and a new imagery into Anglo-Irish verse, but it is unlikely that the theme will ever be exhausted, or that James Clarence Mangan's treatment of it will ever be surpassed—

Oh! my dark Rosaleen,
Do not sigh, do not weep!
The priests are on the ocean green,
They march along the deep.
There's wine from the royal Pope
Upon the ocean green,
And Spanish ale shall give you hope,
My dark Rosaleen!
Shall glad your heart, shall give you hope,
Shall give you health, and help and hope,
My dark Rosaleen.

Over hills and through dales
Have I roamed for your sake;
All yesterday I sailed with sails
On river and on lake.
The Erne at its highest flood,
I dashed across unseen,
For there was lightning in my blood,
My dark Rosaleen!
Oh! there was lightning in my blood,
Red lightning lightened through my blood,
My dark Rosaleen.

Dedham, Christmas, 1934.

HERBERT HUGHES.

The Leprehaun 4224487



PATRICK WESTON JOYCE (1827-1914)

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The Taibot Press Ltd., Dublin.

Air taken down by P.W. Joyce from a ballad singer in Limerick in 1853







Editor's Note. When Dr. Joyce published his collection of old Irish airs in 1872 he was unable to remember more than one line of the ballad to which this air had been sung both in Dublin and Limerick, and wrote the words here given. In his "Ancient Irish Music" (1901 Edition) he made the following remarks about the leprehaun: "It may be necessary to state, for the information of those who are not acquainted with Irish fairies, that the leprehaun is a very tricky little fellow, usually dressed in a green coat, red cap and knee breeches, and silver shoe buckles, whom you may sometimes see in the shades of evening, or by moonlight under a bush, and he is generally making or mending a shoe... If you catch him and hold him, he will, after a little threatening, shew you where treasure is hid, or give you a purse in which you will always find money. But if you once take your eyes off him, he is gone in an instant; and he is very ingenious in devising tricks to induce you to look round... Every Irishman understands well the terms cruiskeen and mountain dew... but for the benefit of the rest of the world I think it better to state that cruiskeen is a small jar and that mountain dew is potteen or illicit whiskey." H. H.

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Rich and Rare









I'm not myself at all

Words and air by SAMUEL LOVER (1797-1868)





H. 14235





Róisin Dubh

(LITTLE BLACK ROSE)

THOMAS FURLONG 1794-1827 from the Irish



^{*}Pronounced Rosheen Doov.

Note:— Rôisin Dubh was one of the many secret or allegorical names by which Ireland was referred to in bardic literature and folk-lore. See note on "The Red Haired Man's Wife."







The Gallows Tree

Anon.







H. 14235

The Red-Haired Man's Wife



Editor's Note. It is easy to conventionalise this very old air by putting it into a strict 3-4 measure. I have preferred to write it out in this way so that the singer may the more easily express its freedom of rhythm. The note-values are to be taken as an approximation only. "The Red-Haired Man's Wife" is one of several symbolistic names for Ireland mentioned in the Preface. H.H.







Shule Agra

ANON. 18th Century

AIR- Siábail a zpáo



^{*}Pronounced Ish-go-day-too, ma-vourn-yeen-slawn



H. 14235





H. 14235

The Drinaun Donn

(THE BROWN THORN)





H. 14235





An Irish Elegy





H. 14235



Savourneen Deelish





H. 14235



H. 14235

Oh, breathe not his name





H. 14235

Johnny, I hardly knew ye!

Traditional









H. 14235

