VARIOUS AUTHORS

THE ANCIENT ENGLISH POETRY

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The Ancient English Poetry

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

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In undertaking the supervision of a new edition of the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, I felt that no safer or better guidance could be followed than that of Bishop Percy himself; and as he always strove, in the several editions published by himself, to embody therein the sum of the knowledge of his times, so I, following at a distance, have endeavoured, by gathering from many quarters particulars published since his death, to make his book still more worthy of the great reputation it has acquired.

Each edition published during the lifetime of the author contained large additions and corrections; but since the publication of the fourth edition, in 1794, no changes worth mentioning have been made, with the exception of such as occur in a revision brought out by the Rev. R. A. Willmott in 1857. His object, however, was to form a handy volume, and he therefore cleared away all Percy's Essays and Prefaces, and added short notices of his own, founded on Percy's facts, and, in some instances, on recent information.

The desire for a new edition of the *Reliques* has more particularly grown since the publication of the original folio MS. in 1867, and I trust that the readers of the present edition may feel disposed to accept it as in some degree satisfying this desire.

In the preparation of the present edition, the whole of Percy's work has been reprinted from his fourth edition, which contains his last touches; and in order that no confusion should be occasioned to the reader, all my notes and additions have been placed between brackets. The chief

of these are the additional prefaces to the various pieces, the glossarial notes at the foot of the page, and the collation of such pieces as are taken from the folio MS. The complete glossary, which will be appended to the third volume, might seem to render the glossarial notes unnecessary; but there may be some readers who will find them useful. With regard to the pieces taken from the folio MS., the originals have been printed after Percy's copies in those cases which had undergone considerable alterations. Readers have now, therefore, before them complete materials for forming an opinion as to the use the Bishop made of his manuscript.

After commencing my work, I found that to treat the Essays interspersed throughout the book as the Prefaces had been treated, would necessitate so many notes and corrections as to cause confusion; and as the Essays on the English Stage, and the Metrical Romances, are necessarily out of date, the trouble expended would not have been repaid by the utility of the result. I have, therefore, thrown them to the end of their respective volumes, where they can be read exactly as Percy left them.

In concluding these explanations, I have much pleasure in expressing my thanks to those friends who have assisted me, and to those writers without whose previous labours mine could not have been performed, more particularly to Messrs. Furnivall and Hales, who most kindly gave me permission to use any part of their edition of the folio MS. To Mr. Hales I am also indebted for many valuable hints, of which I have gladly availed myself.

Henry B. Wheatley.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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Several questions of general interest have arisen for discussion by the editor during the work of revision. Notes upon these have been brought together, so as to form an introduction, which it is hoped may be of some use to the readers of the *Reliques*, in the absence of an exhaustive compilation, which has yet to be made. Here there is no attempt at completeness of treatment, and the notes are roughly arranged under the following headings:—

- The Minstrels.
- Ballads and Ballad Writers.
- Imitators and Forgers.
- Authenticity of certain Ballads.
- Preservers of the Ballads.
- Life of Percy.
- Folio MS. and the *Reliques*.
- Ballad Literature since Percy.

The Minstrels.

When Percy wrote the opening sentence in his first sketch of that "Essay on the Ancient English Minstrels" (1765), which was the foundation of the literature of the subject, he little expected the severe handling he was to receive from the furious Ritson for his hasty utterance. His words were, "The

minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient bards, who united the arts of poetry and music, and sung verses to the harp of their own composing." The bishop was afterwards convinced, from Ritson's remarks, that the rule he had enunciated was too rigid, and in the later form of the Essay he somewhat modified his language. The last portion of the sentence then stood, "composed by themselves or others," and a note was added to the effect that he was "wedded to no hypothesis."

Sir Walter Scott criticised the controversy in his interesting article on *Romance* in the supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, where he wrote: "When so popular a department of poetry has attained this decided character, it becomes time to inquire who were the composers of these numerous, lengthened, and once-admired narratives which are called metrical romances, and from whence they drew their authority. Both these subjects of discussion have been the source of great controversy among antiquarians; a class of men who, be it said with their forgiveness, are apt to be both positive and polemical upon the very points which are least susceptible of proof, and which are least valuable if the truth could be ascertained; and which, therefore, we would gladly have seen handled with more diffidence and better temper in proportion to their uncertainty." After some remarks upon the essays of Percy and Ritson, he added, "Yet there is so little room for this extreme loss of temper, that upon a recent perusal of both these ingenious essays, we were surprised to find that the reverend editor of the *Reliques* and the accurate antiquary have differed so very little as in essential facts they appear to have done. Quotations are indeed made by both with no sparing hand; and hot arguments, and on one side, at least, hard words are unsparingly employed; while, as is said to happen in

theological polemics, the contest grows warmer in proportion as the ground concerning which it is carried on is narrower and more insignificant. In reality their systems do not essentially differ." Ritson's great object was to set forth more clearly than Percy had done that the term *minstrel* was a comprehensive one, including the poet, the singer, and the musician, not to mention the *fablier*, *conteur*, *jugleur*, *baladin*, &c.

Ritson delighted in collecting instances of the degradation into which the minstrel gradually sank, and, with little of Percy's taste, he actually preferred the ballad-writer's songs to those of the minstrel. Percy, on the other hand, gathered together all the material he could to set the minstrel in a good light. There is abundant evidence that the latter was right in his view of the minstrel's position in feudal times, but there were grades in this profession as in others, and law-givers doubtless found it necessary to control such Bohemians as wandered about the country without licence. The minstrel of a noble house was distinguished by bearing the badge of his lord attached to a silver chain, and just as in later times the players who did not bear the name of some courtier were the subjects of parliamentary enactments, so the unattached minstrels were treated as vagrants. Besides the minstrels of great lords, there were others attached to important cities. On May 26, 1298, as appears by the Wardrobe accounts of Edward I., that king gave 6*s.* 8*d.* to Walter Lovel, the harper of Chichester, whom he found playing the harp before the tomb of St. Richard in the Cathedral of Chichester.

Waits were formerly attached to most corporate towns, and were, in fact, the corporation minstrels. They wore a livery and a badge, and were formed into a sort of guild. No one, even were he an inhabitant of the town, was suffered

to play in public who was not free of the guild. Besides singing out the hours of the night, and warning the town against dangers, they accompanied themselves with the harp, the pipe, the hautboy, and other instruments. They played in the town for the gratification of the inhabitants, and attended the mayor on all state occasions. At the mayor's feast they occupied the minstrels' gallery. From the merchants' guild book at Leicester, it appears that as early as 1314 "Hugh the Trumpeter" was made free of the guild, and in 1481 "Henry Howman, a harper," was also made free, while in 1499 "Thomas Wylkyns, Wayte," and in 1612 "Thomas Pollard, musician," were likewise admitted.[1]

Percy collected so many facts concerning the old minstrels, that it is not necessary to add much to his stock of information, especially as, though a very interesting subject in itself, it has really very little to do with the contents of the *Reliques*.

The knightly Troubadours and Trouvères, and such men as Taillefer, the Norman minstrel, who at the battle of Hastings advanced on horseback before the invading host, and gave the signal for attack by singing the Song of Roland, who died at Roncesvalles, had little in common with the authors of the ballads in this book.

The wise son of Sirach enumerates among those famous men who are worthy to be praised "such as found out musical tunes, and recited verses in writing;" but, according to Hector Boece, the early Scottish kings thought otherwise. In the Laws of Kenneth II., "bardis" are mentioned with vagabonds, fools, and idle persons, to be scourged and burnt on the cheek, unless they found some work by which to live; and the same laws against them were, according to Boece, still in force in the reign of Macbeth, nearly two centuries later. Better times, however, came, and Scotch

bards and minstrels were highly favoured in the reign of James III.; but the sunshine did not last long. In 1574, "pipers, fiddlers, and minstrels" are again branded with the opprobrious term of vagabonds, and threatened with severe penalties; and the Regent Morton induced the Privy Council to issue an edict that "nane tak upon hand to emprent or sell whatsoever book, ballet, or other werk," without its being examined and licensed, under pain of death and confiscation of goods. In August, 1579, two poets of Edinburgh (William Turnbull, schoolmaster, and William Scot, notar, "baith weel belovit of the common people for their common offices"), were hanged for writing a satirical ballad against the Earl of Morton; and in October of the same year, the Estates passed an Act against beggars and "sic as make themselves fules and are bards… minstrels, sangsters, and tale tellers, not avowed in special service by some of the lords of parliament or great burghs."

The minstrels had their several rounds, and, as a general rule, did not interfere with each other; but it is probable that they occasionally made a foray into other districts, in order to replenish their worn-out stock of songs.

One of the last of the true minstrels was Richard Sheale, who enjoys the credit of having preserved the old version of *Chevy Chase*. He was for a time in the service of Edward, Earl of Derby, and wrote an elegy on the Countess, who died in January, 1558. He afterwards followed the profession of a minstrel at Tamworth, and his wife was a "sylke woman," who sold shirts, head clothes, and laces, &c., at the fairs of Lichfield and other neighbouring towns. On one occasion, when he left Tamworth on horseback, with his harp in his hand, he had the misfortune to be robbed by four highwaymen, who lay in wait for him near Dunsmore Heath. He wrote a long account of his misfortune in verse,[2] in

which he describes the grief of himself and his wife at their great loss, and laments over the coldness of worldly friends. He was robbed of threescore pounds—a large amount in those days—not obtained, however, from the exercise of his own skill, but by the sale of his wife's wares. This money was to be devoted to the payment of their debts, and in order that the carriage of it should not be a burden to him he changed it all for gold. He thought he might carry it safely, as no one would suspect a minstrel of possessing so much property, but he found to his cost that he had been foolishly bold. To add to his affliction, some of his acquaintances grieved him by saying that he was a lying knave, and had not been robbed, as it was not possible for a minstrel to have so much money. There was a little sweetness, however, in the poor minstrel's cup, for patrons were kind, and his loving neighbours at Tamworth exerted themselves to help him. They induced him to brew a bushel of malt, and sell the ale.

All this is related in a poem, which gives a vivid picture of the life of the time, although the verse does not do much credit to the poet's skill.

When the minstrel class had fallen to utter decay in England, it flourished with vigour in Wales; and we learn that the harpers and fiddlers were prominent figures in the Cymmortha, or gatherings of the people for mutual aid. These assemblies were of a similar character to the "Bees," which are common among our brethren in the United States. They were often abused for political purposes, and they gave some trouble to Burghley as they had previously done to Henry IV. In the reign of that king a statute was passed forbidding rhymers, minstrels, &c. from making the Cymmortha. The following extract from a MS. in the Lansdowne Collection in the British Museum, on the state of

Wales in Elizabeth's reign, shows the estimation in which the minstrels were then held:—

"Upon the Sundays and holidays the multitudes of all sorts of men, women, and children of every parish do use to meet in sundry places, either on some hill or on the side of some mountain, where their harpers and crowthers sing them songs of the doings of their ancestors."[3]

Ben Jonson introduces "Old Father Rosin," the chief minstrel of Highgate, as one of the principal characters in his *Tale of a Tub*; and the blind harpers continued for many years to keep up the remembrance of the fallen glories of the minstrel's profession. Tom D'Urfey relates how merrily *blind Tom* harped, and mention is made of "honest Jack Nichols, the harper," in Tom Brown's *Letters from the Dead to the Living* (Works, ii. 191). Sir Walter Scott, in the article on *Romance* referred to above, tells us that "about fifty or sixty years since" (which would be about the year 1770) "a person acquired the nickname of 'Roswal and Lillian,' from singing that romance about the streets of Edinburgh, which is probably the very last instance of the proper minstrel craft." Scott himself, however, gives later instances in the introduction to the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. He there writes: "It is certain that till a very late period the pipers, of whom there was one attached to each border town of note, and whose office was often hereditary, were the great depositaries of oral, and particularly of poetical tradition. About spring-time, and after harvest, it was the custom of these musicians to make a progress through a particular district of the country. The music and the tale repaid their lodging, and they were usually gratified, with a donation of seed corn. This order of minstrels is alluded to in the comic song of *Maggy Lauder*, who thus addresses a piper:

'Live ye upo' the border?'"[4]

To this is added the following note:—"These town pipers, an institution of great antiquity upon the borders, were certainly the last remains of the minstrel race. Robin Hastie, town piper of Jedburgh, perhaps the last of the order, died nine or ten years ago; his family was supposed to have held the office for about three centuries. Old age had rendered Robin a wretched performer, but he knew several old songs and tunes, which have probably died along with him. The town-pipers received a livery and salary from the community to which they belonged; and in some burghs they had a small allotment of land, called the Pipers' Croft." Scott further adds:—"Other itinerants, not professed musicians, found their welcome to their night's quarters readily ensured by their knowledge in legendary lore. John Græme, of Sowport, in Cumberland, commonly called the Long Quaker, a person of this latter description, was very lately alive, and several of the songs now published have been taken down from his recitation." A note contains some further particulars of this worthy:—"This person, perhaps the last of our professed ballad reciters, died since the publication of the first edition of this work. He was by profession an itinerant cleaner of clocks and watches, but a stentorian voice and tenacious memory qualified him eminently for remembering accurately and reciting with energy the border gathering songs and tales of war. His memory was latterly much impaired, yet the number of verses which he could pour forth, and the animation of his tone and gestures, formed a most extraordinary contrast to his extreme feebleness of person and dotage of mind." Ritson, in mentioning some relics of the minstrel class, writes:—"It is not long since that the public papers

announced the death of a person of this description somewhere in Derbyshire; and another from the county of Gloucester was within these few years to be seen in the streets of London; he played on an instrument of the rudest construction, which he properly enough called a *humstrum*, and chanted (amongst others) the old ballad of *Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor*, which, by the way, has every appearance of being originally a minstrel song." He adds further in a note:—"He appeared again in January, 1790, and called upon the present writer in the April following. He was between sixty and seventy years of age, but had not been brought up to the profession of a minstrel, nor possessed any great store of songs, of which that mentioned in the text seemed the principal. Having, it would seem, survived his minstrel talents, and forgot his epic, nay Pindaric art, he has been of late frequently observed begging in the streets."[5]

These quotations relate to the end of the last or to the very early part of the present century, but we can add a notice of minstrels who lived well on towards the middle of this century. Mr. J. H. Dixon, in the preface to his *Scottish Traditional Versions of Ancient Ballads*, printed for the Percy Society in 1845, writes as follows:—"Although the harp has long been silent in the dales of the north of England and Scotland, it has been succeeded by the violin, and a class of men are still in existence and pursuing their calling, who are the regular descendants and representatives of the minstrels of old. In his rambles amongst the hills of the North, and especially in the wild and romantic dales of Yorkshire, the editor has met with several of these characters. They are not idle vagabonds who have no other calling, but in general are honest and industrious, though poor men, having a local habitation as well as a name, and engaged in some calling, pastoral or manual. It is only at

certain periods, such as Christmas, or some other of the great festal seasons of the ancient church, that they take up the minstrel life, and levy contributions in the hall of the peer or squire, and in the cottage of the farmer or peasant. They are in general well-behaved, and often very witty fellows, and therefore their visits are always welcome. These minstrels do not sing modern songs, but, like their brethren of a bygone age, they keep to the ballads. The editor has in his possession some old poems, which he obtained from one of these minstrels, who is still living and fiddling in Yorkshire."

In his *Ancient Poems, Ballads, and Songs of the Peasantry of England*, 1846, Mr. Dixon notices one of these relics of the past, viz. Francis King, who was well known in the western dales of Yorkshire as "the Skipton Minstrel:"—"This poor minstrel, from whose recitation two of our ballads were obtained, met his death by drowning in December, 1844. He had been at a merry meeting at Gargrave in Craven, and it is supposed that owing to the darkness of the night he had mistaken his homeward road, and walked into the water. He was one in whose character were combined the mimic and the minstrel, and his old jokes and older ballads and songs ever insured him a hearty welcome. His appearance was peculiar, and owing to one leg being shorter than its companion, he walked in such a manner as once drew from a wag the remark, 'that few *kings* had had more ups and downs in the world!' As a musician his talents were creditable, and some of the dance tunes that he was in the habit of composing showed that he was not deficient in the organ of melody. In the quiet churchyard of Gargrave may be seen the minstrel's grave."

Percy wrote an interesting note upon the division of some of the long ballads into fits (see vol. ii. p. 182). The

minstrel's payment for each of these fits was a groat; and so common was this remuneration, that a groat came to be generally spoken of as "fiddler's money."

Puttenham describes the blind harpers and tavern minstrels as giving a fit of mirth for a groat; and in Ben Jonson's *masque of the Metamorphosed Gipsies*, 1621, Townshead, the clown, cries out, "I cannot hold now; there's my groat, let's have a fit for mirth sake."

The payment seems to have remained the same, though the money became in time reduced in value, so that, as the minstrel fell in repute, his reward became less. In 1533, however, a Scotch eighteen-penny groat possessed a considerable buying power, as appears from the following extract:—

"Sir Walter Coupar, chaplaine in Edinburghe, gate a pynte of vyne, a laiffe of 36 vnce vaight, a peck of aite meill, a pynte of aill, a scheipe head, ane penny candell and a faire woman for ane xviii. penny grotte."[6]

After the Restoration, the sixpence took the place of the groat; and it is even now a current phrase to say, when several sixpences are given in change, "What a lot of fiddlers' money!"

Ballads and Ballad Writers.

One of the most important duties of the old minstrel was the chanting of the long romances of chivalry, and the question whether the ballads were detached portions of the romances, or the romances built up from ballads, has greatly agitated the minds of antiquaries. There seems reason to believe that in a large number of instances the most telling portions of the romance were turned into

ballads, and this is certainly the case in regard to several of those belonging to the Arthurian cycle. On the other side, such poems as Barbour's *Bruce* and Blind Harry's *Wallace* have, according to Motherwell, swept out of existence the memory of the ballads from which they were formed. When Barbour wrote, ballads relative to Bruce and his times were common, "for the poet, in speaking of certain 'thre worthi poyntis of wer,' omits the particulars of the 'thrid which fell into Esdaill,' being a victory gained by 'Schyr Johne the Soullis,' over 'Schyr Andrew Hardclay,' for this reason:—

> 'I will nocht rehers the maner,
> For wha sa likes thai may her,
> Young wemen quhen thai will play,
> Syng it amang thaim ilk day.'"[7]

Another instance of the agglutinative process may be cited in the gradual growth of the Robin Hood ballads into a sort of epic, the first draught of which we may see in the *Merrye Geste*. The directness and dramatic cast of the minstrel ballad, however, form a strong argument in favour of the theory that they were largely taken from the older romances and chronicles, and the fragmentary appearance of some of them gives force to this view. Without preface, they go at once straight to the incident to be described. Frequently the ballad opens with a conversation, and some explanation of the position of the interlocutors was probably given by the minstrel as a prose introduction. Motherwell, in illustration of the opinion that the abrupt transitions of the ballads were filled up by the explanations of the minstrels, gives the following modern instance:—

"Traces of such a custom still remain in the lowlands of Scotland among those who have stores of these songs upon

their memory. Reciters frequently, when any part of the narrative appears incomplete, supply the defect in prose.... I have heard the ancient ballad of *Young Beichan and Susan Pye* dilated by a story-teller into a tale of very remarkable dimensions—a paragraph of prose, and then a *screed* of rhyme, alternately given. From this ballad I may give a short specimen, after the fashion of the venerable authority from whom I quote: 'Well ye must know that in the Moor's castle there was a massymore, which is a dark, deep dungeon for keeping prisoners. It was twenty feet below the ground, and into this hole they closed poor Beichan. There he stood, night and day, up to his waist in puddle water; but night or day, it was all one to him, for no ae styme of light ever got in. So he lay there a long and weary while, and thinking on his heavy weird, he made a mournfu' sang to pass the time, and this was the sang that he made, and grat when he sang it, for he never thought of ever escaping from the massymore, or of seeing his ain country again:

> 'My hounds they all ran masterless,
> My hawks they flee from tree to tree;
> My youngest brother will heir my lands,
> And fair England again I'll never see.
>
> Oh were I free as I hae been,
> And my ship swimming once more on sea;
> I'd turn my face to fair England,
> And sail no more to a strange countrie.'

'Now the cruel Moor had a beautiful daughter, called Susan Pye, who was accustomed to take a walk every morning in her garden, and as she was walking ae day she

heard the sough o' Beichan's sang, coming, as it were, from below the ground,'" &c.[8]

The contrast between the construction of minstrel ballads and those of the ballad-mongers who arose as a class in the reign of Elizabeth is very marked. The ballad-singers who succeeded the minstrels were sufficiently wise not to reject the treasures of their predecessors, and many of the old songs were rewritten and lengthened to suit their purpose. *Sir Patrick Spence* would perhaps be the best of the minstrel ballads to oppose to one of the best of the later ballads, such as the *Beggar's Daughter of Bednall Green*; but as its authenticity has been disputed, it will be well to choose another, and *Captaine Carre*, which Ritson allows to have been one of the few minstrel ballads he acknowledges, will do well for the purpose. As both these poems are before our readers, it will only be necessary to quote the first stanzas of each. The version in the folio MS. of *Captain Carre* commences abruptly thus:—

> "ffaith maister, whither you will,
> whereas you like the best,
> unto the castle of Bitton's borrow,
> and there to take your rest."[9]

This is a remarkable contrast to the opening of the *Beggar's Daughter*:—

> "Itt was a blind beggar, had long lost his sight,
> He had a faire daughter of bewty most bright;
> And many a gallant brave suiter had shee,
> For none was soe comelye as pretty
> Bessee."[10]

Some may think, however, that this ballad is an adaptation by the ballad-monger from an older original, so that perhaps a still better instance of the great change in form that the ballads underwent will be found in the *Children in the Wood*.[11] This favourite ballad is one of the best specimens of that didactic style which is so natural in the hands of the master, but degenerates into such tedious twaddle when copied by the pupil. The first stanza is:—

> "Now ponder well, you parents deare,
> These wordes, which I shall write;
> A doleful story you shall heare,
> In time brought forth to light.
> A gentleman of good account
> In Norfolke dwelt of late,
> Who did in honour far surmount
> Most men of his estate."

To put the matter simply, we may say that the writer of the old minstrel ballad expected an unhesitating belief for all his statements. "If fifteen stalwart foresters are slain by one stout knight, single-handed, he never steps out of his way to prove the truth of such an achievement by appealing to the exploits of some other notable manslayer."[12] On the other hand the professional ballad-writer gives a reason for everything he states, and in consequence fills his work with redundancies. Percy understood the characteristics of the older ballads, and explained the difference between the two classes of ballads in his *Essay on the Ancient Minstrels*,[13] but unfortunately he did not bear the distinction in mind when he altered some of the ballads in the folio MS. So that we find it to have been his invariable practice to graft the prettinesses and redundancies of the later writers upon the

simplicity of the earlier. For instance, in his version of *Sir Cauline* he inserts such well-worn saws as the following:—

> "Everye white will have its blacke,
> And everye sweete its sowre:
> This founde the ladye Cristabelle
> In an untimely howre."[14]

Ritson also remarks upon the distinctive styles of the ancient and modern writers, but, as observed above, he had the bad taste to prefer the work of the later ballad-writer. His opinion is given in the following passage:—"These songs [of the minstrels] from their wild and licentious metre were incapable of any certain melody or air; they were chanted in a monotonous stile to the harp or other instrument, and both themselves and the performers banished by the introduction of ballad-singers without instruments, who sung printed pieces to fine and simple melodies, possibly of their own invention, most of which are known and admired at this day. The latter, owing to the smoothness of their language, and accuracy of their measure and rime, were thought to be more poetical than the old harp or instrument songs; and though critics may judge otherwise, the people at large were to decide, and did decide: and in some respects, at least, not without justice, as will be evident from a comparison of the following specimens.

"The first is from the old *Chevy Chase*, a very popular minstrel ballad in the time of Queen Elizabeth:—

> 'The Persé owt of Northombarlande,
> And a vowe to God mayd he,' &c.[15]

How was it possible that this barbarous language, miserably chanted 'by some blind crowder with no rougher

voice than rude stile,' should maintain its ground against such lines as the following, sung to a beautiful melody, which we know belongs to them?—

> 'When as king Henry rul'd the land,
> The second of that name,
> Besides the queen he dearly lov'd,
> A fair and comely dame,' &c.[16]

The minstrels would seem to have gained little by such a contest. In short, they gave up the old *Chevy Chase* to the ballad-singers, who, desirous, no doubt, to avail themselves of so popular a subject, had it new written, and sung it to the favourite melody just mentioned. The original, of course, became utterly neglected, and but for its accidental discovery by Hearne, would never have been known to exist."[17]

Percy held the view, which was afterwards advocated by Scott, that the Borders were the true home of the romantic ballad, and that the chief minstrels originally belonged either to the north of England or the south of Scotland;[18] but later writers have found the relics of a ballad literature in the north of Scotland. The characteristics of the ballad doubtless varied to some extent in different parts of the country, but there is no reason to believe that the glory of being its home can be confined to any one place. Unfortunately this popular literature was earlier lost in the plains than among the hills, while the recollection of the fatal fields of Otterburn, Humbledon, Flodden, Halidon, Hedgeley, Hexham, &c., would naturally keep it alive longer among the families of the Border than elsewhere.

Before proceeding further, it may be as well to say a few words upon the word *ballad*. The strong line of demarcation

that is now drawn between an ordinary song and a ballad is a late distinction, and even Dr. Johnson's only explanation of the word "ballad" in his *Dictionary* is "a song." One of his quotations is taken from Watts, to the effect that "ballad once signified a solemn and sacred song, as well as trivial, when Solomon's Song was called the ballad of ballads; but now it is applied to nothing but trifling verse." The "balade" as used by Chaucer and others was a song written in a particular rhythm, but later writers usually meant by a ballad a song that was on the lips of the people.

It is not necessary to enlarge here upon the change of meaning that the word has undergone, nor to do more than mention the relation that it bears to the word ballet. As a *ballad* is now a story told in verse, so a *ballet* is now a story told in a dance. Originally the two were one, and the ballad was a song sung while the singers were dancing.

When Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun wrote, "I knew a very wise man, so much of Sir Christopher's sentiment that he believed if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation," he referred to the popular songs of the people, but, in point of fact, a nation makes its own ballads, which do not become current coin until stamped with public approval. No song will change a people's purpose, but the national heart will be found written in a country's songs as a reflection of what has happened.

The successful ballad-writer requires a quick eye and ear to discern what is smouldering in the public mind, and then if his words fall in with the humour of the people his productions will have a powerful influence, and may set the country in a blaze. *Ça ira* and the *Carmagnole* had much influence on the progress of the great French Revolution, as *Mourir pour la Patrie* had upon that of 1848. *Lilliburlero* gave

the finishing stroke to the English Revolution of 1688, and its author (Lord Wharton) boasted that he had rhymed King James out of his dominions.

The old ballad filled the place of the modern newspaper, and history can be read in ballads by those who try to understand them; but the type is often blurred, and in attempting to make out their meaning, we must be careful not to see too much, for the mere fact of the existence of a ballad does not prove its popularity or its truth.

Literature is often presumed to assert a larger influence over a nation than it really does, and there is little doubt that literature is more a creation of the people than the people are a creation of literature. Where a healthy public opinion exists, people are less affected to action by what is written than is sometimes supposed, but still there is an important reflex action, and—

> "Words are things, and a small drop of ink
> Falling like dew upon a thought, produces
> That which makes thousands, perhaps
> millions, think."

There are recorded instances of the powerful influence of ballads, and we know how much Dibdin's sea songs did for the British navy, when they placed before the sailor an ideal of his own feelings, and painted men he wished to be like.

The songs of a country are the truly natural part of its poetry, and really the only poetry of the great body of the people. Percy, in the dedication to his *Reliques*, calls ballads the "barbarous productions of unpolished ages." Nevertheless they are instinct with life, and live still, while much of the polished poetry of his age, which expelled nature from literature, is completely dead. Nature is the salt

that keeps the ballad alive, and many have maintained a continuance of popularity for several centuries.

A good ballad is not an easy thing to write, and many poets who have tried their hand at composition in this branch of their art have signally failed, as may be seen by referring to some of the modern pieces in this book, which Percy hoped would "atone for the rudeness of the more obsolete poems."

The true ballad is essentially dramatic, and one that is to make itself felt should be all action, without any moralizing padding, for it is a narrative in verse meant for the common people. James Hogg, himself a successful ballad-writer, has something to say about a good song: "A man may be sair mista'en about many things, sic as yepics, an' tragedies, an' tales, an' even lang set elegies about the death o' great public characters, an' hymns, an' odes, an' the like, but he canna be mista'en about a sang. As sune as it's down on the sclate I ken whether it's gude, bad, or middlin'. If any of the two last I dight it out wi' my elbow; if the first, I copy it o'er into writ and then get it aff by heart, when it's as sure o' no' being lost as if it war engraven on a brass plate. For though I hae a treacherous memory about things in ordinar', a' my happy sangs will cleave to my heart to my dying day, an' I should na wonder gin I war to croon a verse or twa frae some o' them on my deathbed."

All ballads are songs, but all songs are not ballads, and the difference between a ballad and a song is something the same as that between a proverb and an apophthegm, for the ballad like the proverb should be upon many lips. A poet may write a poem and call it a ballad: but it requires the public approval before it becomes one in fact.

The objects of the minstrel and the ballad-singer were essentially different: thus the minstrel's stock of ballads

usually lasted him his lifetime, and as his living depended upon them they were jealously guarded by him from others. Nothing he objected to more than to see them in print. The chief aim of the ballad-singer, on the other hand, was to sell his collection of printed broadsides, and to obtain continually a new stock, so as to excite the renewed attention of his customers.

Henry Chettle mentions in his *Kind Hart's Dream*, 1592, the sons of one Barnes, who boasted that they could earn twenty shillings a day by singing ballads at Bishop's Stortford and places in the neighbourhood. The one had a squeaking treble, the other "an ale-blown bass."

One of the most popular singers of the early time was a boy named Cheeke, and nicknamed "Outroaring Dick." He was originally a mechanic, but renounced that life for ballad-singing, by which occupation he earned ten shillings a day. He was well known in Essex, and was not missed for many years from the great fair at Braintree. He had a rival in Will Wimbars, who sung chiefly doleful tragedies. Mat Nash, a man from the "North Countrie," made the Border ballads his own by his manner of singing them, in which he accompanied his voice by dramatic action. *Chevy Chase* was his *tour de force*. Lord Burghley was so pleased with his singing that he enabled him to retire from his occupation. The gipsies have furnished many female singers, and one of them, named Alice Boyce, who came to London in Elizabeth's reign, paid the expenses of her journey up to London by singing the whole way. She had the honour of singing, "O, the broom" and "Lady Green Sleeves" before the queen. Gravelot, the portrait painter in the Strand, had several sittings from ballad-singers; and Hogarth drew the famous "Philip in the Tub" in his Wedding of the *Industrious Apprentice*.

Street singing still continues, and one of the songs of thirty years ago tells of "the luck of a cove wot sings," and how many friends he has. One of the verses is as follows:—

"While strolling t'other night,
I dropped in a house, d'ye see;
The landlord so polite,
Insisted on treating me;
I called for a glass of port,
When half-a-bottle he brings;
'How much?'—'Nothing of the sort,'
Says he, 'you're a cove wot sings.'"

Mr. Chappell gives a large number of early quotations relating to ballad-singing, in his interesting *History of Ballad Literature*, and observes that "some idea of the number of ballads that were printed in the early part of the reign of Elizabeth may be formed from the fact that seven hundred and ninety-six ballads left for entry at Stationers' Hall remained in the cupboard of the Council Chamber of the Company at the end of the year 1560, to be transferred to the new Wardens, and only forty-four books."[19] Some of the old writers, like Shakspere's Mopsa, loved "a ballad in print;" but more of them disliked the new literature that was rising up like a mushroom, and took every opportunity of having a fling at it.

Webbe, in his *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), refers to "the un-countable rabble of ryming ballet-makers and compylers of senseless sonnets;" and Chettle complains in *Kind Hart's Dream* (1592), that "now ballads are abusively chanted in every street; and from London, this evil has overspread Essex and the adjoining counties. There is many a tradesman of a worshipful trade, yet no stationer, who