

cold ground ' ! England has no tunes 'so tender and so touching." In this case also, the fair critic was as much at fault as Napoleon and Rossini. The tune is old English ; and Ireland has no other claim to it than the assertion of Thomas Moore, unsupported by a tittle of evidence.

As songs are compositions that may be sung, it is necessary to show that a people have good melodies before it can be admitted that they have good songs. So far from being an unmusical, the English are pre-eminently a musical nation. Long before the invention of printing, long before the age of Chaucer, England, from her love of singing and music, was called "Merry England ;" and to hear the minstrels sing, and to join in their choruses, was the favourite amusement both of the nobles and the people. Chaucer, in his "Canterbury Tales," makes frequent allusions to the love of the English of that period for music and song. At and before Chaucer's time, the education of an English gentleman was held to be incomplete if he could not read music at sight ; and in the public schools it was compulsory on every boy, and a necessary portion of his studies, to learn part-singing.

The English glees, catches, rounds, canons and madrigals are thoroughly national, and are admired by musicians of every country for their graceful complications both of melody and harmony. The English dance music is equally spirited, and her country jigs and sailors' hornpipes are known all over the world. Some of the most ancient popular melodies of the English are fortunately preserved in a little manuscript of the age of Queen Elizabeth, called "Queen Elizabeth's Virginal Book," containing airs that are still popular among the peasantry—such as "The Carman's Whistle," or "The Jolly Miller," and Shakespeare's favourite melody, of which

he makes honourable mention, "Sing it to the air of 'Light o' Love.'" Those exquisitely pathetic tunes sung by Ophelia in Hamlet are admired by all musicians, and are far older than history can trace. So famous were the English for their proficiency in singing, that before the Reformation the churches of Belgium, Holland and France sent to England for choristers ; and one of the most valuable collections of popular English music that exists was published in Amsterdam at the commencement of the seventeenth century.

Such noble tunes as "The King shall enjoy his own again," "Cropped Roundheads," "The girl I left behind me," "Farewell, Manchester!" "Balance a straw," "Packington's pound," "The British Grenadiers," "Drink to me only with thine eyes," "Down among the dead men," "The Vicar of Bray," "The man who will not merry be," "The miller of Dee," "Begone, dull care," "'Tis my delight on a shiny night," and others, may be cited as fair specimens of English popular and traditional music. Its general characteristics are strength and martial energy. It has a dashing, impulsive, leaping, frolicsome spirit, occasionally overshadowed by a touch of sadness. It has not the tender melancholy of the music of Ireland, nor the light, airy grace, delicate beauty, and heart-wrung pathos of the songs of Scotland, but it has a lilt and style of its own. In one word, the music of England may be described as "merry ;" and her national songs partake of the same character, and are jovial, lusty, exultant, and full of life and daring.

There are no authentic records of the earliest song-writers of England. It is known that among the ancient Britons, the bard was next in rank to the Druid, and that his character and functions were invested with a high degree of veneration, if not of sanctity.