

## Contributions.

### POPULAR SONGS.

"Let me write the songs of a people, and I care not who makes the laws." There is sound philosophy in that saying, but I am afraid we cannot accept it from the mouth of the popular song-writer of the present day.

The minstrels of old, sang the glorious deeds of heroes, the troubadours and minnesingers warbled of the loves of fair ladies and gallant knights, the Celtic bands kept alive patriotism and nationality among their countrymen with thoughts that breathed and words that burned in the lispig verse. Singers of softer age celebrated the beauty of Phyllis and Chloë prettily enough, the sturdier ballad-makers of the last century tuned their harps to the roar of the sea, and glorified Britannia, Nelson, and hearts of oak. The song-writer of the present recounts, in shambling doggerel the kitchen cupboard-love of the cook and the policeman. The decline and fall of the popular song has been sudden and rapid. A generation ago we were still singing *My Pretty Jane*, the *Maids of Merry England*, and *Phyllis is my only Joy*. We rarely hear songs of this character sung now, and there are no new songs of the same class to take their place.

"*My Pretty Jane*" was a foolish thing, to be sure, and if we did press her to meet us—Meet us in the evening when the bloom was on the rye, she did not outrage our feelings by taking too much to drink and running away with a chap that drives an ugly donkey-cart. Phyllis was a very different young woman from *Jemima Brown*. The pretty, pleasing (though foolish) sentimental ballad has almost entirely disappeared, and instead of celebrating woman's loveliness and grace, we sing of her ugliness and disgrace with, "Now, then, altogether," and she stabbed herself with a carving-knife, and a "right-fol-de-riddle-lol-de ray." Murder and suicide have become exceedingly comic in these days. The carving-knife and the water-butt are the modern dagger and bowl, and their mortal

effects are invariably celebrated in a chorus of jubilation.

The earliest so-called negro songs which initiated the present comic era were inoffensive enough, and some of them were united to very pretty music. Uncle Ned was a stupid old nigger, and scarcely worthy the attention of the white folks; yet there was pathos in his little history. It was truly pitiful to hear that the old man musical had got no teeth to eat the oat-cake, and got no eyes for to see. And there was a touch of poetry in his fiddle hanging up silent for evermore, because old Uncle Ned was dead, and

"Gone where the good niggers go."

"The old folks at home," originating in the streets, found an echo in many a drawing-room, and genteel young ladies, singing in unison, brought tears into the eyes of their auditors with

"Way down upon the Swance river,  
Far, far away,  
There's where my heart is turning ever,  
There's where the old folks stay."

Even old Joe, with that idiotic propensity of his for kicking up behind and before, when he went with his old banjo to court Dinah, was a decent sort of nigger and might be heard of in the best society, while Sally's only fault was that she would "twist her head around," and come up and down the middle when her master's back was turned.

Managers of theatres still act upon the faith that the lower classes like something deep and sentimental, but the managers of the music-halls, which are now the academies of popular music, take an opposite view of their likings and give them the broadest comicalities. The popular comic singer who sings such songs as "*Slap-bang*," "*The Cure*," "*Costermonger Joe*," "*The Old Kent Road*," etc., is better paid than many of the artistes at the Opera. He is the idol of the audiences at the music halls, though in most cases he cannot sing a note, and is utterly devoid of humour. How is it that this noisy unartistic performer has suddenly become