

Song-love, if we may so express it, is a home feeling—Aoidé, a household deity. The maiden sings among her flowers, or at her daily tasks. The mother sings to the infant on her breast; and again, the little children, as they grow up around her, sing at their merry play. But by-and-bye, all of a sudden perhaps, one young voice is hushed! and the mother weeps to hear the same song warbled by other lips; and then smiles again in the trusting faith of her meek heart, to think that that little one, through the merits of the Redeemer, may be singing still—in heaven. The young wife sings to her husband, and he is a lover once again. The daughter sings to her father and mother when the toils of the day are over, and they gather round the hearth, some ancient ditty for the hundredth time, to which the old people listen with tears in their eyes; she thinking the while of other things; for that song has no charm for her, save that they love to listen to it. They calling to mind the scenes and hopes of the Past, and hearing in imagination the voices of those who had been resting in the quiet grave years ago, the mother remembers how she used to sing it when a girl, gathering wild flowers in her native wood, and the father that memorable day when he heard it for the first time. It was a bright epoch in both their lives.

Mrs. Ellis imagines a sweet scene, which may not be altogether ideal—of a brother, a prodigal—an alien from the paths of peace—a dweller in distant lands, still haunted by this fireside music, telling him, as it were, to return, until he exclaims at length, in the beautiful language of Scripture, "I will arise, and go to my father!" How readily—how joyfully is he received and forgiven. Nevertheless, a feeling of estrangement steals over them almost imperceptibly—the inevitable result of a long absence. Presently the sister sits down to the instrument; she touches a few chords, and begins to sing. It is the evening hymn. How often have they sang it together years ago, and now once again their voices blend; but his has grown manly since then, and yet, when he first began, it trembled like that of a little child. The whole family join in the sacred melody—heart and voice united, as of old. That hymn has broken down the barriers of time and change, and made them all one again.

We have known the memory of a hymn, under the blessing of God, to be more powerful even than this in recalling the wanderer back to penitence and peace, and realizing the cry of the returning prodigal, in its true and Scriptural sense;—a sweet and touching reminiscence, but scarcely suited to the character of our present paper.

How exquisitely simple and natural is Burns' description of "Bonnie Jean:"—

"And aye she wrought her mammie's wark,
And aye she sang sae merrilie;
The blithest bird upon the bush
Had ne'er a lighter heart than she."

We knew just such a one, years ago. Her real name was Margaret, but we have called her Jean, ever since we read it. Thus would she go about the house, always busy, and always merry; working and singing, so that it did one's heart good to hear her. She was not rich or accomplished—having been brought up at home, under the eye of a kind and judicious parent, who took care not to sacrifice the useful to the ornamental. Jean possessed no instrument, and we are not sure that she could have played above half-a-dozen tunes on it if she had; but her ear was quick, and her voice sweet and expressive. The old father thought that no one in the world sang like his Margaret, and was never tired of asking her for "My ain Fireside," "John Anderson my Jo," "The Banks o'Doon," and many others of the same kind—all of which she sang without music, generally as she sat at work, in a soft, plaintive voice, that was irresistibly touching. We can remember hearing her sing "Auld Robin gray" once, and weeping like a child. The recollection of "Bonnie Jean" is inseparably connected with these old songs.

Lucy Grey had a voice like a bird—not powerful but full of sweetness and expression. Whether it was that sweet voice, or

her fair, gentle face, we know not, but wherever she went she won all hearts, and dearer than all to her—that of her brave cousin, Walter Graham. Scarcely an evening passed but he was sure to find some excuse for making his appearance at her mother's house, where Lucy never wearied of playing his favorite songs, which became hers also from the moment he admired them. Singing did not, however, hinder more serious matters; and when Walter Graham was forced at length to rejoin his regiment, it was as the betrothed husband of his cousin Lucy. But he never returned again!

Years passed away, and the sorrow-stricken girl arose up at length from her sick couch, to mingle in that world which seemed a dreary wilderness to her without him. We can fancy her sitting alone, and singing once more those well-remembered songs, pausing between each, as though the low, praiseful whisper of her dead lover could ever come again, save in memory. Poor Lucy! And yet there are others more to be pitied—when old songs bring back the *changed*! Thy grief is sweet compared to the agony—the bitterness—the wounded pride, and blighted affection, connected with such reminiscences.

The poet bows down his lofty head to listen to the simple melodies of his childhood, and hold communion with the household spirits that come back at their call, as though it were but yesterday. What changes have passed over him since then! From a song-lover, he has become, by the most natural transition in the world, a song writer. All true poets must needs be, more or less, admirers of old ballads; it is a part of their sweet creed, as worshippers of the Beautiful! Hope whispers—what those songs are to him now, his may be to others years hence; while the heart of the poet burns within him at the thought.

"Of all my compositions," said a veteran author, as he sat tranquil and gray-headed, beneath the shade of his well-earned laurels, "nothing perhaps has ever afforded me more real happiness than a song written years ago, at the commencement of my literary career, and before I became so completely absorbed in more abstruse studies. The world has claimed all else, but the song still makes music in my heart and home. My children sing it to me every night; and sometimes in the day as well I hear them humming it; and they little think how it pleases me to listen. And they will sing it still, with tears may be," added the old man, "when I am dead and gone!"

Two sisters sat together in their humble apartment; one wore a widow's cap; both were pale and sorrow-stricken. They worked on in silence, until a woman's clear voice arose up all of a sudden from the narrow street beneath, and commenced singing an old ballad, while the widow's tears fell fast.

"Do you remember, Anne, where we last heard that song?" asked she. But her sister had forgotten. There were many tearful reminiscences, and a few sun-bright links in the chain of association, but this was not one of them for her. She had been sewing placidly on, the song and the singer alike unheeded, except once, when it just crossed her mind that it was a bitter day to be abroad in, and so thinly clad as that poor ballad-singer—somehow ballad-singers always do come out on wet days.

"It was at the Isle of Wight," continued the young widow, following out the train of her own tangled thoughts. "Surely you must recollect, dear Anne, how you and I and Frank set out to visit the new light-house, leaving the rest of our party comfortably established at the little cottage adjoining the Sand-rock Hotel, and how we grew tired when little more than half-way, and sat down to rest. It was a still, moonlight evening, and Frank sang that very song to us. I have never heard it since, save in my dreams, until now. What a happy night that was! We never got as far as the light-house after all, but remained talking, and planning out a long future that was not to be. Ah! I little thought then of losing him so soon!"

"God's will be done!" said Anne gently. "He sendeth sorrow in love, lest our hearts should cling over-much to earth."

The ballad-singer passed on, and the sisters were left alone again, with the memory of the past.

[To be concluded in our next.]