

As I lie sleeping
 In dreams fleeting
 Ever my sweeting
 Is in my mind.
 She is so goodly
 With looks so lovely,
 That no man truly
 Such one can find.

There seems to be little or no authority for the statement that King Henry the Eighth himself wrote these songs; or, if he did, whether they were in celebration of the charms of the "sweetings" whose heads he cut off, or of those whose heads he spared. But, whoever was the author of them, these and similar songs were like the first faint radiance that precedes the dawn. The dawn and the daylight were yet to come. Among the singing birds of the twilight, the most melodious were Sir Thomas Wyatt, whose son was beheaded on Tower Hill, and the unfortunate Earl of Surrey, who himself suffered on the block for alleged complicity in the treasons of an age when it was difficult to know what was treason and what was not. At length, as political affairs became somewhat more settled, the full daylight of poetry burst forth. The Elizabethan dramatists, with Shakespeare at their head, and Edmund Spenser, chief of the non-dramatic poets, inaugurated the new era. It was then that English poetry and song entered into the golden age. In the blaze of that sudden glory the inferior compositions of the ballad-mongers were left entirely to the lower rank of the people; many of them are still in existence, and still sung, such as some of the famous ballads to be found in Percy's "Reliques"—the poacher's song, "'Tis my delight, on a shiny night," "Women are best when they are at rest," "Sweet Nelly, my heart's delight," "Full merrily sings the cuckoo upon the beechen tree," "The frog came to the mill-door" (since modernized into "The frog he would a-wooing go"), "I'll ne'er get drunk

again," and the mariners' glee, "We be three mariners"—probably the oldest sea-song that England can boast. The only two names of note that have reached the present age in connection with this early song-literature are William Tarleton and Martin Parker—both somewhat later than the time of Shakespeare. Martin Parker deserves especial notice as the man who wrote the well-known song "Ye gentlemen of England"—a song, not only excellent in itself, but entitled to double gratitude for having served Thomas Campbell as the model on which he built "Ye mariners of England," one of the noblest songs ever written in any language. Martin Parker's song sets itself to music:—

Ye gentlemen of England
 Who live at home at ease,
 Ah, little do you think upon
 The dangers of the seas!
 Give ear unto the mariners,
 And they will plainly show
 All the cares, and the fears,
 When the stormy winds do blow.

It used to be the fashion of the English peasantry to paste these songs in cupboards, on the lids of trunks, or on the backs of doors—a custom which has been one great cause why so many of them have been lost without hope of recovery. Could they have been preserved, they might have thrown the light of contemporary poetry on the history of manners and afforded us glimpses into the every-day life of our forefathers at a period particularly interesting, when the art of printing was bringing forth its first flowers and fruits, operating important changes in the national character, and preparing the way for the final triumphs of the Reformation. Similar songs are still printed for the use of the rural districts, and sold—humiliating thought to the pride of song writers!—at a halfpenny or a penny a yard.

The song-writers of the age of