OLD ENGLISH SONGS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649099306

Old English songs from various sources by Hugh Thomson & Austin Dobson

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

HUGH THOMSON & AUSTIN DOBSON

OLD ENGLISH SONGS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

Trieste

A JOURNEY TO EXETER.

OLD ENGLISH SONGS

FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

With Illustrations by

HUGH THOMSON

And an Introduction by

AUSTIN DOBSON

London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK
1894

RICHARD CLAY AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BUNGAY.

INTRODUCTION

"We, that are very old"—to borrow a phrase from the immortal Isaac Bickerstaff—must remember how, over thirty years ago, followed to Robert Browning's "Men and Women" the same author's single volume of "Dramatis Personæ." It was a brief collection, but it included the Master in all his moods. For those who looked for "something craggy to break their minds upon," there were "James Lee's Wife" and "Dis Aliter Visum"; for the mere lovers of poetry, there were "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "Abt Vogler," the curious speculations of Caliban upon Setebos, the magnificent narrative, "supposed of Pamphylax, the Antiochene," entitled "A Death in the Desert." Other pieces there were again in that slender list of twenty, which have since become household words in English Literature. But among the lighter efforts was one in particular which lingers in the mind of the present preface-writer. It was the fancy called "A Likeness." In the critical record its part is only a modest one. Eight lines are all that Mrs. Sutherland Orr

devotes to it in her excellent manual, yet it has haunted one idle brain for a quarter of a century and more. And it is not so much its central idea which endures, as the skilful presentment of that idea, with its revel of rhyme—its "mark ace" and "cigar-case," its "alas! mine" and "jasmine," its "keepsake" and "leaps, ache" (surely this last is as neat as Calverley's historical "dovetail" and "love tale"!)—tours de force *which, to minds then less familiar with such dexterities, seemed scarcely short of miraculous. Perhaps, in the present day, it might be hinted that—for the modern rules of the game—the license of rhyming on proper names was used too freely. But this is to seek knots in a reed: and the lines at once regain their ancient charm to the votary who renews his study of them:—*

> "I keep my prints, an imbroglio,
> Fifty in one portfolio.
> When somebody tries my claret,
> We turn round chairs to the fire,
> Chirp over days in a garret,
> Chuckle o'er increase of salary,
> Taste the good fruits of our leisure,
> Talk about pencil and lyre,
> And the National Portrait Gallery:
> Then I exhibit my treasure."

"Talk of the National Portrait Gallery," only necessary in Browning's case for the fitter exhibition of his leading idea, would not, by the way, be ill-timed at the present moment, when, at last, there is some nearing prospect of the transfer, at

least to "an ampler ether," if not to "a diviner air," of the art-treasures so long buried in a corner at Bethnal Green. But it is not of Mr. George Scharf's portraits, or of their new Valhalla at Trafalgar Square, that we now purpose to speak: it is rather of the "pencil and lyre" in the poet's preceding line. The lyre here is the lyre of Gay, of Swift, of Fielding—of that supreme "inheritor of unfulfilled renown," the imperishable "Anon.": the pencil is one already exercised successfully on "Cranford," and "Our Village," and Goldsmith's "Vicar"—the pencil of Mr. HUGH THOMSON. *If the reader cannot "chuckle with us over increase of salary," or (in retrospect) "chirp over days in a garret," he can certainly pause for a space while we "exhibit our treasure"; and, as from a visionary portfolio, draw forth the pictures and poems which follow. Only, seeing that the accomplished Artist may read this "Introduction," we shall spare his blushes by letting his pleasant sketches speak for themselves, confining our office in the main to running comment on the verses he has chosen for embellishment.*

Coridon's Song, pp. 1–17.

Integros accedere fontes, atque haurire—*seems to have been Mr. Thomson's motto in his earliest selections, for it is in Walton's "Angler" that he finds his first sources of inspiration. Of the author of the song which Coridon the Country man sings to Piscator and Master Peter, we know but little, so little that it has even been profanely suggested that his name should be Harris rather*

than John Chalkhill, that reputed "Acquaintant of Edmund Spenser," and assumed composer of the "Pastoral History in smooth and easie Verse" which Walton put forth in 1683 *under the title of "Thealma and Clearchus." Indeed, in some aids to learning, the book is roundly ascribed to Walton himself. But the modern investigator—who must always be meddling—has discovered there was actually existent in Walton's day a "Jo. Chalkhill, Gent.," who probably wrote verse, easy and otherwise; and who, in spite of insinuations to the contrary, may really have been the inventor of this most desirable carol with its artless—*

"heigh trololliе lollie loe,
heigh trololliе lee,"

and its new-old, old-new variation upon that time-honoured and delusive contrast between the Country and the Town which hath ever been the dream of those who "study to be quiet":—

"For Courts are full of flattery,
As hath too oft been tried;
heigh trololliе lollie loe,
heigh trololliе lee,
The City full of wantonness,
and both are full of pride:
Then care away,
and wend along with me."

"I shall love you for it as long as I know you," says honest Piscator. "I would you were a brother of the Angle, for a companion that is cheerful and free from swearing and scurrilous discourse, is