

**ENGLISH AND
SCOTTISH
POPULAR BALLADS**

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English and Scottish popular ballads by R. Adelaide Witham

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R. ADELAIDE WITHAM

**ENGLISH AND
SCOTTISH
POPULAR BALLADS**

The Riverside Literature Series

ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH POPULAR BALLADS

SELECTED AND EDITED FOR STUDY UNDER
THE SUPERVISION OF

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BY

R. ADELAIDE WITHAM



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PREFACE

THE present volume is designed to meet the needs of a less advanced class of students than is provided for in the comprehensive collections of the late Professor Child or in the edition by Kittredge and Sargent in the Cambridge Poets series. Those great sources of material and illustration have been drawn upon, as was inevitable, with great freedom; and this selection is to be regarded as an introduction which, it is hoped, may allure students to a more exhaustive study of the subject. With this end in view, the attempt has been made to lay solid foundations for the understanding and appreciation of ballad poetry by making the selection representative, by refraining from any tampering with the texts, either in spelling or in readings, and by supplying abundant references to works in which the study of ballads may be further pursued.

Miss Witham's Introduction seeks to give in concise form the gist of the most recent scholarship concerning the characteristics and the origin of ballads. Here she is naturally chiefly indebted to Professor Gummere, especially in his book on the Popular Ballad, and to Professor Kittredge in the introduction to his volume in the Cambridge Poets series. The notes show similarly a free use of the introductions by Professor Child in his great final collection; and by specific references the reader is constantly reminded of the mass of variants to be found there, a knowledge of which is so essential to a right conception of ballad poetry.

It is not to be supposed, however, that basing the book upon these fundamental authorities makes it any less serviceable to the reader who wishes merely to enjoy. The preservation of the spelling of the texts as Professor Child prints them offers but a slight obstacle to easy intelligibility, and soon comes to be to any lover of ballads almost an essential feature. Modernization is, moreover, impossible without some degree of falsification, and no method at once consistent and innocuous has yet been discovered.

The writing of the Introduction and the compiling of the Notes and Glossary are the work of Miss Witham, the share of the supervising editor having been confined to criticism and advice. Obligations to the works of Professors Child, Gummere, and Kittredge have been specifically recognized wherever possible, and a general acknowledgment is here gratefully rendered.

W. A. NEILSON.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., January 5, 1909.

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INTRODUCTION

OVER a century ago, in Scotland — the land where “every field has its battle and every rivulet its song” — lived a boy who loved nothing so much as to listen to tales of olden times. Especially he loved those told him in verse. What he heard he remembered; retold to his playmates when they would listen; or, lacking that audience, would shout out to the empty air for the sheer joy of their sound. His enthusiasm was no respecter of persons; bursting into his mother’s parlor one day, roaring forth the lines of the ballad *Hardyknute*, he put to rout the parish clergyman, who ended his eall abruptly, exclaiming, “One may as well speak in the mouth of a cannon as where that child is!” A year or so later the same boy came upon a copy of Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. All day he pored over the precious ballads, under the shade of a huge plane tree, forgetful even of dinner until he was sent for. In young manhood “that child” was binding together for himself six volumes of ballads and folk-songs of his own collecting. Over moss and moor, into “shepherd’s hut or minister’s manse,” he had ridden on his quest — an indefatigable ballad-hunter. No distance was too great, no path too rough, that would lead him to those who possessed a ballad he had never heard. And in old age, death staring him in the face, he steadied himself by repeating from the noble *Otterburn*: —

My wound is deep, I fain wad sleep,
Nae mair I’ll fighting see;