

**UNIVERSITY OF
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IN ENGLISH, VOLUME III. THE
MEDIEVAL POPULAR BALLAD**

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Edward Godfrey Cox

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EDWARD GODFREY COX

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UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH
VOLUME III

THE
MEDIEVAL POPULAR BALLAD

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH OF
PROFESSOR JOHANNES C. H. R. STEENSTRUP

BY

EDWARD GODFREY COX
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Aside from the admirable books of Professor F. B. Gummere on the ballad, I know of no other work whose covers include such a comprehensive and fundamental exposition of the ballad, its origin, nature, subject matter, form, and age, as does the one which appears here in translation. Its peculiar claim to be placed before English students, that which distinguishes it from other works on the subject, is its purpose of making us see what the ballad of the Middle Ages was really like. In other words, using Grundtvig's mammoth collection of Danish ballads as illustrations, it sifts out, chips away, rubs off all impurities, in the shape of diction, metrical items, and ideas which had no legitimate claim to existence before the sixteenth century. In the residue thus purged and restored we have the genuine unalloyed ballad of the Middle Ages.

In another respect also this book merits consideration. While Professor Steenstrup's studies lay bare the make-up of the ballad as a universal form of literature, by the very fact that he uses largely the ballads of Denmark for illustrative material he enriches for English readers the study of the subject, in that they herein make the acquaintance of a ballad literature which, in importance and bulk, surpasses that of all other European nations. Then, too, the circumstance that the ballads constitute the only vernacular literature of early Denmark makes them of peculiar interest in a comparative study of literature.

The extracts from the ballads themselves I have endeavored to turn into suitable ballad measure with as close an adherence to literalness as possible. In many cases the baldness of the English rendering may be excused on the score that the original verse is equally bald. Naturally genuine ballad flavor could best be imparted to the translations by the employment of the Scotch dialect; but for one not to the manner born such a venture is hazardous. Where ballad stanzas are cited as bearing on questions of meter and diction I have given the original also. The numbers following the title refer, except when otherwise indicated, to Grundtvig's collection.

In conclusion I record with pleasure my obligation to Mr. Haldor Hermansson, the librarian of the Icelandic collection at Cornell University, for generous help in looking up references and in explaining passages.

EDWARD GODFREY COX

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In the winter of 1886-1887 I gave a series of lectures in the University on our popular ballads, in which, in addition to elucidating the cultural life manifested in them, I set myself to the task of pointing out what was peculiar to our ballads with respect to their form and their content. By this I thought to arrive at a sharper definition between those ballads and verses which were old and genuine and those which at a later date had come into being or had found their way into Denmark or else had assumed a wholly modern form.

It is this portion of the lectures that I am bringing out here. Our scholars and, after them, our poets, who have had daily recourse to this ever-flowing spring, have not, so it seems to me, rightly understood the style of the old ballads, which in simplicity and naturalness are still unsurpassed. Since we otherwise lay such great stress on finding the proper time coloring, why should we then confound the songs that were sung on gentlemen's estates in the period of the Reformation with those that were current in the feudal castles of the Middle Ages? Why should we be content to look at a blank white wall, when it is possible, by knocking off the plaster, to discover lifelike pictures painted beneath the lime? Now in this work I have attempted in various ways to separate the new from the old, the chance additions from the original, the slips of memory from the poet's own production. And here it

is not a question of demolishing but only of removing the ugly so that the genuine and true coloring can emerge into view. Thus, I believe, those features which are individual and unique can more fully assert themselves.

In my studies I have used not only the ballads that have been published but also the entire great collection of ballads which Grundtvig left behind him, and which one can now find in the Royal Library.

I have sought to make the presentation of the material readable and intelligible to all, and to this end I have added throughout whatever explanation of words was needful. Since the interpretation did not require the old spelling found in the manuscripts, I have modernized the language of the ballads.

JOHANNES STEENSTRUP

COPENHAGEN, 1891

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