

THE SONGS OF ALL THE AGES

Special to the "Record"

by

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QUEEN MARIE ANTOINETTE.

... She sang "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"
to the French Dauphin.

ORIGINS of "immortal" melodies make a fascinating study for anyone interested in the real music of the people—the music that becomes as intrinsic a part of national expression as any war or revolt in history.

Here, for instance, are the strange, far-off beginnings of a few of our best-known, best-loved English songs:—

"Home Sweet Home" immortalises an old Sicilian folk-song.

"Yankee Doodle" is a tune that grew out of a 1000-year-old chant sung in the churches of Italy.

"For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" was a new ditty for Europe when the Crusaders brought it from the East.

"John Brown's Body" began as a camp-meeting hymn in the southern States of America and only achieved fame through a practical joke.

What is it that has made these songs live while nations that seem as haunting are forgotten and lost? Let us seek the clue in a closer examination of their histories.

The plaintive lilt of "Home Sweet Home" is known almost the world over, although for years it went unsung and unrecognised. The words were written by an obscure American named John Howard Payne, who apparently benefited little from their creation.

Many years afterward, Charles Kemble—actor and dabbler in the arts—bought a batch of manuscript at an auction sale and in it found Payne's song. Quick to realise its possibilities, he handed it on to Sir Henry Bishop, the English composer, who gave it a setting based on an old Sicilian folk-song.

"Home Sweet Home" leapt into fame at Covent Garden, London. In less than a month 100,000 copies were sold. Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale" used it frequently as an encore, and Albani, another famous singer, took it into her repertoire. She told the story of how she once met Lord Kitchener at a dinner at Government House, Calcutta, and how he asked her to sing.

"What would you like me to sing?"

"Home Sweet Home," please," answered Kitchener after a moment. When she had finished, he thanked her quietly and then for a time fell silent.

NOT far removed in appeal from "Home Sweet Home" is the sweet and simple air of "Kathleen Mavourneen,"

SOME songs win popularity overnight and are sung to death within a few months by every dance band, gramophone, and radio in the world. Other melodies are born obscurely, yet linger in the hearts of men for hundreds or thousands of years after those who first knew them are dead.

Why?

favourite in Dame Clara Butt's repertoire. It was composed by one F. Nicholls Crouch, who wrote innumerable songs during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The words were written by Mrs. Julia Crawford, an Irishwoman. The publisher made over £15,000 profit on "Kathleen Mavourneen," while Crouch received £10 for his share—some say it was only £5. He died in abject poverty in a miserable garret, old and lonely, his inspiration a mockery. Yet he still had faith in his "Kathleen Mavourneen," and sang it in public at the age of 80.

MANY of the most famous negro plantation songs have a very different history, although their composer, also, died poor and unrecognised. Stephen Foster probably wrote more songs destined for immortality than any other man on earth. He took them from the negro slaves on the plantations of the southern American States, using the lyrics as foundation for 125 such favourites as "Old Black Joe" and "Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground." Often he

used to spend long, idle hours, watching the negroes at work, singing as they worked.

Foster realised the negroes were natural musicians, so deeply susceptible to the rhythm of sound that often their masters used to hire song-leaders to set the choruses going and so speed the work in the fields. One day, as Foster lay watching the slaves, the inspiration of "Old Kentucky Home" came to him in a flash. Immediately his indolence dissolved in a burst of energy, and in less than 20 minutes he had composed both the words and music for this treasure of all time.

"Swanee River" he also wrote under inspiration. When almost finished, he searched his atlas for the name of a river which would fit the notes of music, finally choosing an insignificant little stream in Florida. So, by mere chance, Swanee River became a paradise. (Contd. on p. 40.)