

Bells Are Ringing, Sailors Singing

By W. Gladstone Fuller

HOW would it be, if, when an ocean liner bound for Europe or South America swings out into the harbor, all the long-shoremen should gather together and sing a rollicking goodbye to the ship and their comrades on board, the sailors on the departing vessel joining in an answering chorus of farewell? And when a ship comes home from her long voyage, suppose she were greeted with songs and cheers from shore. Would not such gay events mark worthily the going and coming of the ships of all nations, hearten and lighten the day's work afloat and ashore, and make our harbors the singing harbors of the world?

Again, let us suppose that every night, their day's work done, the porters in the Grand Central Station should assemble under the great blue arch and sing a song together before going home. So might the bellboys sing together once a day in all the big hotels, and the chambermaids also. And at the stores as many of the employees as cared to stay after closing time might assemble for a few minutes in some central place in each store to try over a song and chorus together (it is not unlikely that Mr. Wanamaker and Messrs. Lord and Taylor themselves would want to join in occasionally).

At first sight these suppositions may seem to be merely fanciful, even absurd. But nevertheless such things might very well come to pass. It isn't only the reasonable and sensible things that happen to us; there's the war in Europe for example, and the other day 75,000 people assembled in the Yale Bowl for the purpose of watching a game of football. It is perhaps hard to imagine the overworked and underpaid workers in modern industry singing happily together in these hard times, singing in the morning as they go to their machines, singing during the day as they tend their machines, and singing in the evening when they leave their machines, to rest and sleep for a few hours. But if they cannot find it in their hearts to sing a happy song, they might comfort themselves with sad songs and laments, or fire

their hearts and imaginations with fine fighting songs of courage and hope.

Such thoughts as these were provoked by a visit to Cooper Union one Sunday evening recently when Dorothy, Rosalind and Cynthia Fuller were singing some old English folk songs to an audience that crowded that vast hall. The audience consisted of workers, men and women who should have been singing with the singers, so eagerly were they listening, so sympathetically, to those old songs of the past.

All ye that love to hear
Music performed in air
Pray listen and give ear,
To what we shall perpend.
Concerning music, who'd
If rightly understood
Not find 'twould do him good
To hearken and attend.

Thus sang those young girls. Their singing carried the conviction that in an ideal state of society people in general would be able to sing as they do, clearly, naturally, intelligently. For that desirable state of affairs we may have to wait awhile, yet it gives at once an ideal and a kind of test for our civilization.

Perhaps singing is largely a question of social manners and customs, like taking snuff or getting drunk. Maybe we shall all be singing together again some day not as we do now, feebly, respectably, apologetically and only in churches, but heartily, self-forgetfully, boldly, in the street, in the subway and in the home.

But what shall we sing? Most of the so-called popular songs are dreary, weak and stupid both as to words and music. A glance at a catalogue of "popular" songs at a cheap music store gives one these titles: Come On and Baby Me, Keep Your Eye on the Girlie You Love, Izzy Get Busy, You May Hold a Million Girlies in Your Arms. Compare these with the names of some old English folk songs: Blow Away the Morning Dew, As I Walked Through the Meadows, O Love Is Hot and Love Is Cold, Fine Flowers in the Valley, She Moved Through the Fair.

An Art Forgotten

BUT in these hard times, the true stone age, when men's hearts, not their tools, are of stone, who is able and willing to sing save a few professional singers, drunken men and gramophones? In times past people of all ranks sang together as a matter of course. Sailors sang at their work and at their play, peasants of the lowlands and the highlands, men and women, shepherds and ploughboys, smiths and carpenters all had their appropriate and favorite songs, and there were the mothers with their lullabies, and the children with their singing games. As Andrew Lang says, "the pastimes and the labors of the husbandman and the shepherd were long ago a kind of natural opera. Each task had its own song – ploughing, seedtime, harvest, marriage, burial – all had their appropriate ballads or dirges. The whole soul of the peasant class breathes in their burdens as the great sea resounds in the shells cast up on the shore."

But in these days there is a terrible silence of humanity. Machinery makes all the noise. Ingenious for our own destruction, we have created machinery to destroy us body and soul. True it is that "God made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions."

The silent thousands going home every night in the New York subway if they were happier, freer and more natural men and women would sing aloud and drown the rattle and the roar of the trains as they dash through the tunnels. In the moving picture house where people most do congregate there is a gloomy silence so far as the human voice is concerned, a silence of actors and of audience an audience that hears nothing. Even in the churches the most devout are content to praise the Lord vicariously through a thousand-dollar tenor or soprano.

As for the lovers in our midst, what are they to do for songs? If they cannot sing to each other, they must satisfy themselves by buying records of somebody else's love songs and listening to them as the machine winds them off ; or they must go to a formal concert or to a vaudeville show and make the best they can of the vocal gymnastics of an unintelligible profession-

al singer or of a blatant individual tearing the air with some nonsense about "Come On and Baby Me." And yet all [p.455] the time there exists for them, unknown, a simple, heavenly melody to carry such words as:

How gloriously the sun does shine!
How pleasant is the air!
I'd rather rest on my true love's breast
Than any other where.

But it may be said that this old music these old songs are out of date, out of harmony with modern conditions and modern ideas. Such a statement can be met with a flat denial. There is a whole world of strong and living music for all time in the great folk songs of our forebears English, Scottish, Irish, German, French and Russian.

Take the subject of war as treated in English folk song. Where is there to be found a more vigorous condemnation of war, a more faithful expression of the common people's viewpoint than in the old song "High Germanic," which dates back more than two hundred years, to the time when the English and German armies were fighting against French armies:

O cursèd are the cruel wars
That ever they should rise,
And out of merry England
Take man and boy likewise.
They took my Harry from me,
Likewise my brothers three,
And sent them to the cruel wars
In High Germanie.

Or again, where shall we find a more searching indictment of the whole bitter consequence of war than in the old Scottish song, *The Flowers of the Forest*, a song of the women of Scotland after the Battle of Flodden:

I've heard them singing at our ewe-
milking,
Lassies a-singing before the break of day.
But now they are moaning, on every green
lonely,
The flowers of the forest have all passed
away.
At e'en in the gloaming no youngsters are
roaming
Round about stacks with the lassies to play.
But every maid sits dreary, lamenting for
her dearie,

The flowers of the forest have all passed
away.
There'll be no more singing at our ewe-
milking,
Women and bairnies are heartless and sad.
But sighing and moaning on every green
lonely,
The flowers of the forest have all passed
away.

So might the women of England, France
and Germany be singing today after the
Battle of the Somme.

But the outlook is not without hope.
Arthur Farwell and his colleagues are
building up a great community chorus in
New York, as a result of which thousands
are singing songs instead of listening to
them. Every year now in many big cities
the community Christmas Tree is evoking
the popular singing of Christmas carols.
Cecil Sharp, the foremost authority on
English folk song and folk dance, is now
working in this country collecting old
songs from the dwellers in the southern
mountains. Lorraine Wyman has also been
working in this field and is now giving
public recitals of these "lonesome tunes,"
as the mountain people call them. And

that supreme artist, Madame Yvette
Guilbert, is rejoicing us with her demon-
stration of the vitality of the people's songs
of old France.

These great artists, like the Fuller sisters,
are making the old songs live again. They
are bringing our hearts back to an old, for-
gotten, far-off happiness. We must not neg-
lect the opportunity which the presence of
these teachers gives us. With their aid we
may recreate the Singing Man of Josephine
Preston Peabody's poem:

He sang above the vineyards of the world.
And after him the vines with woven hands
Clambered and clung, and everywhere
unfurled
Triumphing green above the barren lands;
Till high as gardens grow, he climbed, he
stood,
Sun crowned with life and strength, and
singing toil,
And looked upon his work; and it was
good:

The corn, the wine, the oil.
When the people are free they will sing,
and when they sing they will be free.
Let us sing.