

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.

