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NEW-WORLD ANALOGUES OF THE ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH POPULAR BALLADS

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NEW-WORLD ANALOGUES OF THE
ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH
POPULAR BALLADS

I

I wish to question in this paper, for the second time,¹ two currently accepted affirmations concerning the processes and the development of English popular ballads in the Old and the New World. The first of these affirmations is that a body of folk-song exists in America which supports the theory of "communal" origin for the English and Scottish popular ballads,—an idea which has made considerable headway since it was advanced five or six years ago. The second is that real ballads and ballad-making are extinct. This position is frequently taken in this country, and, being sustained by excellent authority, it has escaped challenge except in stray instances.² It is repeated in text-books and articles without inquiry or qualification; and as this fate seems likely to overtake also the newer position, as to communal origins, it is time both views should be called upon for a more satisfactory account of their support.

We should remind ourselves in advance that in our day attempts to solve the problems of literary history proceed from the concrete to the theoretical. The methods of the transcendentalist yield to those of the scientist, who first gathers, then

¹ See "The Southwestern Cowboy Songs and the English and Scottish Popular Ballads," *Modern Philology*, xi., 1913.

² See "The Relation of Balladry to Folk-Lore," by H. M. Belden, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 1911, and many valuable articles by Phillips Barry in various volumes of the same periodical.

scrutinizes his data. Certainly this is a better method than that which generalizes from an "inner light," looking about for whatever evidence may be found by way of support. A good thing to do before reaching conclusions concerning the processes of the past, is to make sure what is true of the present; to look for parallel contemporary material; and to keep it in mind when examining the older. If the past often casts light upon the present, the present, in its turn, may often cast light upon the past.

Surely then it is advisable, in handling problems of origin, to keep an eye upon the diffusion and establishment of types in the folk-song of our own time, holding in mind changes and parallels in conditions, especially as compared with those surrounding the folk-ballads of mediæval times. Yet this has not been a customary angle of approach in discussions of English and Scottish popular ballads. When considering a lyric type that arose in England in the later middle ages, it should be at least as appropriate as to direct attention always to the anthropological beginnings of poetry. Nevertheless, following the lead of our strongest writer on the subject of balladry, Professor Gummere, the latter approach is usual in this country. By the later middle ages England had been in history for more than ten centuries, and the beginnings of poetry ought, one would think, to lie so far in the remote past as occasionally to deserve elimination from the foreground of the discussion.

II

The first statement which I wish to examine may be made clear from two quotations from a recently published paper by Professor John A. Lomax of the University of Texas, delivered by him when retiring president of the American Folk-Lore Society, at its annual meeting.¹ "There has sprung up in America," says Professor Lomax, "a considerable body of folk-song, called by courtesy 'ballads,' which in their authorship, in the social conditions under which they were produced, in the spirit that gives them life, resemble the genuine ballads sung by our English and Scottish ancestors long before there was an

¹ Published in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, XXVIII., cvii., dated January-March, 1915, but distributed a few months later. See pp. 1 and 16 for the quoted sentences. The address was delivered in 1913.

American people." . . . "The *Ballad of the Boll Weevil* and the *Ballad of the Old Chisholm Trail*, and other songs in my collection similar to these, are absolutely known to have been composed by groups of persons whose community life made their thinking similar, and present valuable corroborative evidence of the theory advanced by Professor Gummere and Professor Kittredge concerning the origin of the ballads from which come those now contained in the great Child collection." Professor Lomax's method, taking into account as it does the materials of the present when dealing with the materials of the past, seems to me commendable, though I am unable to accept the conclusions he draws. The body of American song to which reference is made consists of cowboy, lumberman, and negro songs collected by him. The position taken in the quoted sentences is the same as that advanced in his introduction to *Cowboy Songs* (1910), and accepted there in a foreword by ex-President Roosevelt. It was also accepted by Professor W. W. Lawrence in his *Medieval Story* (1911), who, after sketching the conditions under which the cowboy songs were composed, affirmed: "In an exactly parallel way were composed the English and Scottish popular ballads." It is the belief, then, that certain types of American folk-song support the theory of the "communal" composition of "genuine" English and Scottish popular ballads, as expounded in many places by Professor Gummere and Professor Kittredge, a belief upheld loyally by their Harvard disciples, Professor Lomax, Professor W. W. Lawrence, and Professor Walter Morgan Hart.¹ That ignorant and uneducated people may fairly be said to have composed, or had a part in composing, some of the cowboy, lumberman, and negro songs, is held to be plausible evidence that ignorant and unlearned peasants or villagers composed, or had a part in composing, the English and Scottish popular ballads, and certainly established the type.

My own impression from examining such material as Professor Lomax has yet cited or published is to exactly the contrary effect, —namely, that the American pieces which he finds to be communally composed, or at least to have emerged from the ignorant and unlettered in isolated regions, afford ample testimony in

¹ *Ballad and Epic* (1907), Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, ix. See also *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 1906.

structure, technique, style, and quality, that the English and Scottish popular ballads could not have been so composed nor their type so established. Let me repeat, in this connection, in summarizing form, some of the affirmations made earlier¹ when dealing with the same position and the same material.

First. The greater part of Professor Lomax's material in his *Cowboy Songs* did not originate among the cowboys but migrated among them, brought from different parts of the United States, or from the Old World. Especially, the better pieces among them are those most certainly not indigenous to the Southwest.

Second. The pieces which may fairly be said to be of spontaneous cowboy improvisation are not and never will become real ballads, lyric-epics, or stories in verse. They are easily the weakest and most structureless pieces in the collection. They have won and will win no diffusion; and many are probably already dead. Certainly they stand no such chance of survival as do certain pieces, not of communal origin, which have drifted to the Southwest from elsewhere, commended themselves to the folk-consciousness of that region, and retained vitality there as in other parts of the country.

Third. Even the pieces which may be called genuine cowboy pieces are no doubt largely adaptations, echoes of some familiar model, or built on and containing reminiscences of well-known texts or airs. For the most part they may be termed "creations" in a qualified sense only.

Fourth. In general it is my belief that real communalistic or people's poetry, composed in the collaborating manner sketched out by Professor Gummere and Professor Kittredge,² is too crude, too structureless, too unoriginal, too lacking in coherence and in striking or memorable qualities, to have much chance at survival. If a piece is to win wide currency, to become fixed in the folk-memory, or get beyond the locality which produced it, it must have strong impetus behind it. This may come through its peculiar timeliness, or

¹ See article cited *supra*.

² By Professor Kittredge in Introduction to *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, pp. xxiv.-xxvii. 1904. By Professor Gummere in many books and articles.

through its preoccupation with a notable personality.¹ It may come as a result of tunefulness, a memorable story, or striking style, or, again, through some especially potent method of diffusion.² But the impetus must be present if the piece is to get itself remembered, and to make its way over the country as a whole. Most of these qualities are what the well-attested communal improvisations, or creations, those upon which we can place the finger, always lack. They have little chance at securing the momentum necessary to "float" them, as compared with the songs of the old-time itinerant negro-minstrels,—for example, "Old Dan" Emmett's, Buckley's, the Ethiopian Serenaders', the Fisk jubilee Singers',³—or even as compared with such popular parlour airs as *Juanita*, *Lorena*, or to songs borne onward by some notable contemporary event, as was *A Hot Time* by the Cuban War, or *Tipperary* by the present war. Suppose that a piece communally improvised did win stability once in awhile, the instance would be a rare case as over against the folk-songs in established currency which did not so originate. But who (and Professor Lomax has not) has certainly, not conjecturally, pointed out for

¹ Having some currency in American folk-song are pieces on the assassination of Garfield, on the death of Jesse James; on the death of Captain Kidd and on Turpin the highwayman—these last imported from the Old World; and songs on the wreck of the *Lady Elgin* (this by G. F. Root), on the Johnstown Flood, on the burning of the Newhall House at Milwaukee, and the like.

² The Ulster ballad, *Willie Reilly* which has gained considerable diffusion in this country, owed its wide currency to the circumstance that it was adopted as a party song. For the mode of diffusion of the Western piece, *The Little Old Sod Shanty*, see *Modern Language Notes*, January, 1914. The sentimental *After the Ball*, which has shown vitality for twenty years, was sung by May Irwin in New York and afterward introduced into Hoyt's *A Trip to Chinatown*. *Shortened Bread*, which lingers in the South, was one of Blind Boone's songs.

³ Some idea of their vogue may be had from Brander Mat thews's article, "The Rise and Fall of Negro Minstrelsy," *Scribner's Magazine*, June, 1915.

Some of the popular old-time minstrel songs have been ritualized into, or utilized as game-songs, or "play-party" songs, as the now widely diffused *Old Dan Tucker*, by Daniel Emmett, or *Angelina Baker*, by S. C. Foster, or many others. See Mrs. L. D. Ames, "The Missouri Play-Party," Goldy M. Hamilton, "The Play-Party in Northeast Missouri," and E. F. Piper, "Some Play-Party Games of the Middle West," printed respectively in *The Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vols. xxiv., xxvii., and xxviii. It is likely enough that some of the English and Scottish ballads sung in America have been similarly ritualized.

America a good ballad, *i.e.*, verse-story, which did originate communally and has also obtained widespread diffusion?

Fifth. A hypothesis is surely questionable which sets up as standard-giving for the form, type, and genuineness of the mass of folk-pieces, and as accounting for their quality and diffusion, a mode of origin responsible, not for folk-song in general, but at most for a few highly exceptional instances.

III

It is time to examine a few well-attested "communal" pieces and to note what they are like. That cited by Professor Lomax in his recent article as certainly so composed¹ is *The Old Chisholm Trail*, a text of which was printed in his *Cowboy Songs*.² Here are its final stanzas :

"I went to the wagon to get my roll,
To come back to Texas, dad-burn my soul.

"I went to the boss to draw my roll,
He had it figgered out I was nine dollars in the hole.

"I'll sell my outfit just as soon as I can,
I won't punch cattle for no damned man,

"Goin' back to town to draw my money,
Goin' back home to see my honey.

"With my knees in the saddle and my seat in the sky,
I'll quit punching cows in the sweet by and by."

The rest of the piece is of the same pattern, or at least is no better. Few would dispute its cowboy composition.³ Probably

¹ *Journal of American Folk-lore*, XXVIII., cvii., p. 16.

² It should somewhere be said of *Cowboy Songs* that it was obviously put together rather with an eye to the picturesque and effective than with an eye to affording material for the solution of problems in literary history. Mr. Lomax points this out when he terms it "frankly popular." He seems to have drawn on sources of all kinds for his materials.

³ Usually local individual claims to the authorship of popular pieces of much diffusion should be accepted with especial caution. Those having practical experience in the collection of folk-songs need not be reminded that many pieces are claimed as of individual composition, in outlying regions, which had no such origin—unless for certain added personal tags, insertions, manipulations, or localizings. Mistaken affirmations of authorship are very common. For example, *Starving to Death on a Government Claim*, which has, and has had, considerable currency in the central west, was volunteered, as of his own

it too follows some model; but it is plainly enough the work of some one uneducated and untrained. It is crude, without structure or clearly told story, is flat and vulgar in language, and is without striking or memorable quality. It has not a single mark of the "good," or "genuine" ballads of the Child collection, supposed to have won their type, their peculiar quality and worth, from the very humbleness of their composers.¹ *The Old Chisholm Trail* is not and never will be anything like a Child ballad, or like any other memorable ballad. It is just about what we should expect from cowboy improvisation. No doubt *The Bull-Whacker*, or *Independence Bill*, also in Professor Lomax's *Cowboy Songs*, may have had an origin of the same type, though it is not affirmed especially for these. The same generalizations would be true of them, however, as of *The Old Chisholm Trail*, a piece definitely pointed out as furnishing "corroborative evidence."

The songs in Professor Lomax's collection which do have memorable quality and have shown vitality, which afford the truer analogy for the Old World pieces, are of the type of *Young Charlotte*, *The Dying Cowboy*, *The Lone Prairie*, *The Little Old Sod Shanty*, and for these such composition cannot be claimed.²

Our Western cowboys are at least as intelligent and as generally gifted as the mediæval peasant throngs who are supposed to

recent composition, to a collector by a Dakota lad of fifteen; and his authorship was accepted by his community. Yet all he had contributed was the localizing of a few names. *Breaking in a Tenderfoot*, reported to the present writer as of local composition near Cheyenne, proved to be a rather weak variant of the well-known *The Horse Wrangler*, too weak and garbled to have been by any chance the original text. A teacher once gave the writer of this paper the familiar counting-out formula, "Wire, briar, limberlock, Three geese in a flock," etc. (really an importation from the Old World), as certainly of her own creation in childhood;—this in the sincere belief that it had so originated.

¹ It is well to remember that not all humble composers are by any means either so unskilled or so wholly uneducated that expressions like "artistry" or "conscious authorship" are out of the question when their creations are considered. Burns himself was a ploughboy, the son of a peasant farmer.

² The origin of *Young Charlotte* and *The Dying Cowboy* has been pointed out by Mr. Phillips Barry in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, xxii., 365-73, and xxiv., 341. *The Lone Prairie* is an adaptation of *Ocean Burial*, a parlour song popular about fifty years ago. For the origin of *The Little Old Sod Shanty* see *Modern Language Notes*, January, 1914. Professor Lomax's *The Rattlesnake* is a somewhat maudlin descendant of *Springfield Mountain* of New England composition in the eighteenth century.

have created the Old World ballads, and they make a more homogeneous community. When we note what they can do and are then asked to believe what the medireval peasants did—for the older the Child ballads the better the quality—we meet insurmountable difficulties. The evidence offered for the supposed communal origin of the Child ballads is not “corroborative” but the contrary. We know definitely what is the best that the cowboys can do; but when we compare their products with the Child ballads there is almost unbelievable discrepancy.

One other piece has been definitely stated by Professor Lomax to be certainly of communal origin, the negro song *The Boll Weevil*. It originated in the last fifteen years, he says, and was composed by plantation negroes. He quotes but one verse of it.

“ If anybody axes you who writ this song
Tell 'em it was a dark-skinned nigger
Wid a pair of blue-duckins on
A-lookin fur a home,
Jes a-lookin fur a home.”

Apparently the *Ballet of the Boll Weevil* is a loose-structured, shifting, drifting sort of piece, having like *The Old Chisholm Trail*, nothing in common with “good” ballads, and not likely to have. It is very much what we should expect of a song which emerged from unlettered negroes. And one would like to inquire whether it still lives, flourishes, and shows promise of improvement,¹ or whether it is already dead?

¹ What songs will persist among the negroes? After hearing the Tuskegee or the Hampton Institute singers, one feels that *My Old Kentucky Home*, *The Suwanee River*, *Old Black Joe*, and some of the comic songs of the older minstrelsy will have a far better chance at lingering among them than will the inconsequent creations emerging from the “communal improvisation” of the negroes themselves.

It is of interest to find among the songs and fragments of songs collected from the country whites and negroes of the South (see “Songs and Rhymes from the South,” by E. C. Perrow, *The Journal of American Folk-Lore*, April-June, 1915), fragments or stray stanzas to be found in, and probably “floated” by, G. W. Dixon’s *Zip Coon* (viii., 69), joined with a verse of T. Rice’s old minstrel song *Clare de Kitchen*, Stephen C. Foster’s *Camptown Races*, or *Gwine to Run All Night* (vi., 16), *De Boatman’s Dance* (vii., 26) sung by the Ethiopian Serenaders, and the former minstrel favourites *Lucy Neal* (viii., 62) and *Lucy Long* (viii., 70). The one-time popular song *I’ll Not Marry at All* is represented in many stanzas, and there are bits of other popular songs, of Mother., Goose rhymes, and of glee club and college songs.

Once more, the very pieces pointed out as giving corroborative evidence are among the weakest in Professor Lomax’s collection. Always those upon which we can place the finger as pieces in the composition of which the folk had part are those relatively weak and flat, giving no promise of a future. The communal pieces generally have no definite narrative element, and they have neither the structure nor the poetic quality of the lyric-epics that constitute the Child collection. If a piece which is of folk-composition may occasionally show this poetic power it is because it adapts or follows closely some good model. But in such case it could hardly be said to be wholly a folk-creation, or to owe its good qualities precisely to the “folk” share in its creation. Once more, too, why should we suppose that human ability has so fallen since the middle ages that untaught throngs could then outdo the best produced by similar throngs upon which we can place the finger nowadays? If we keep our eyes on the evidence, the Child pieces are by far too good to have had their origin in any way parallel to that which produced *The Old Chisholm Trail* and *The Boll Weevil*.

Another consideration to be borne in mind is subject-matter. The real communal pieces, as we can identify them, deal with the life and the interests of the people who compose them. They do not occupy themselves with the stories and the lives of the class above them. The cowboy pieces deal with cattle trails, bar-rooms, broncho riding, not with the lives of ranch-owners and employers; and the negro piece deals with the boll weevil, not with the adventures of the owners of the plantations. Songs well-attested as emerging from the labouring folk-throngs of the Old World deal with the interests of factory life or agricultural life, or with the adventures of those of the social class singing or composing the songs. What then must we think of the English and Scottish ballads, if the people created them? Their themes are not at all of the character to be expected. They are not invariably on the work, or on episodes in the life of the ignorant and lowly. Would they have had so great vitality or have won such currency if they had dealt with labourers, ploughmen, spinners, peasants, common soldiers, rather than with aristocrats?¹ The typical figures in the ballads are kings and princesses,

¹ If reference must inevitably be made to the communalistic singing and dancing throng, in connection with the origin of the English and Scottish ballads, it might more plausibly be—not to the primitive anthropological

knights and ladies,—King Estmere, Young Beichan, Young Hunting, Lord Randal, Earl Brand, Edward, Sir Patrick Spens, Edom O’Gordon, Lord Thomas and Fair Annet, Lady Maisry, Proud Lady Margaret, or leaders like the Percy and the Douglas. We learn next to nothing concerning the humbler classes from them; less than from Froissart’s Chronicles, far less than from Chaucer. The life is not that of the hut or the village, but that of the bower and the hall. Nor is the language parallel to that of the cowboy and the negro pieces. It has touches of professionalism, stock poetic formulæ, alliteration, traces of the septenar meter. It is not rough, flat, crude, in the earlier and undegenerated versions; instead there is much that is poetic, telling, beautiful. It is for its time much nearer the poetry coming from professional hands than what might be expected from mediæval counterparts of *The Old Chisholm Trail* and *The Boll Weevil*. No doubt there existed analogues of these pieces, *i.e.*, songs which were sung by and were the creation of ignorant and unlettered villagers, but we may be certain that these mediæval analogues were not the Child ballads!

IV

Before leaving the matter of corroborative evidence, it may be well to bring up more support for the statement that the bulk

throng and the origins of poetry, and not to the mediæval peasant throngs and villagers—but to the dancing throngs of knights and ladies in hall and bower, to the aristocratic, not the humble community. As the “communalistic” products of patrician, not of peasant, gatherings, the subject-matter, the characters, the style, structure, and language, would be far more consistent and explicable, and the “incremental repetition” excellently accounted for. The very name *ballad*, not a vernacular, but a romance term, points to an aristocratic origin for the type of dancing song to which it was early applied. This etymological testimony, though not decisive, should have more weight than is usually given it these days. A creation emerging from and persisting among the folk should have taken to itself a vernacular name. For the Danish, ballads, upper class origin is pretty certain. See Steenstrup’s *The mediæval Popular Ballad*, recently translated from the Danish by E. G. Cox; also W. P. Ker’s papers in *The Scottish Historical Review*. Among European ballads, the Danish are those which most resemble the best Child ballads.

Apropos of communal literary origins, it is of interest to remember the fictive origin of Boccaccio’s *Decamerone*, as the collaboration of a patrician, group; and communalistic patrician origin is definitely set forth by Castiglione for *Il Cortegiano*.

of Professor’s Lomax’s pieces are not of cowboy composition but immigrated among the cowboys. It was noted above that among the Cowboy Songs *Young Charlotte*, *The Dying Cowboy*, *The Lone Prairie*, *The Little Old Sod Shanty*, *The Rattlesnake*, had no such origin. *Bonnie Black Bess* tells of the deeds of Dick Turpin, the highwayman, and is an Old World piece; and so are *Fair Fannie More*, *Rosin the Bow*, *The Wars of Germanie*, and *Love in Disguise*. *The Old Man Under the Hill* is a variant of a Child ballad.¹ *Jack Donahoo* tells of an Australian highwayman and is obviously imported. *A Rambling Cowboy* and *Lackey Bill* seem to be the same piece, and to be identical with E. C. Perrow’s *When I Became a Rover*, also of Old World importation.² As for *The Railroad Corral*, which might seem so certainly a cowboy song, except that it is so well done, Mr. J. M. Hanson, writing from Yankton, South Dakota, to *The Literary Digest*, April 25, 1914, says that it was written by him to the tune of Scott’s *Bonny Dundee*,³ was originally published in *Frank Leslie’s Magazine*, and may be found in republished form in his *Frontier Ballads*. Mr. Hanson was somewhat surprised to find his poem counting as “folk-song.” Another piece well executed for folk-song and dealing apparently with genuine cowboy material is *The Ride of Billy Venero*. But this, with a few localizings and adaptations, is unmistakably *The Ride of Paul Venarez* by Eben E. Rexford. Mr. Rexford also might well feel surprise that his spirited narrative should count as anonymous folk-song. *The Ride of Paul Venarez* had wide currency, after its original publication in *The Youth’s Companion*, and was long a favourite with reciters. Another striking piece is *Freighting from Wilcox to Glebe*, having the burden “And it’s home dearest, home, and it’s home you ought to be,” of W. E. Henley’s *Falmouth is a Fine Town* (*Poems*, 1886), which in turn derived its refrain from a song by Allan Cunningham. *Whoopie-Ti-Yi-Yo, Git Along Little Dogies* owes its melody and the opening lines to *The Cowboy’s Lament* of some pages earlier, which, as Mr. Phillips Barry has pointed out, is an Old World song adapted to plainsmen’s conditions. *Buena Vista Battlefield* was a favourite parlour song, and is not of cowboy composition. *The Boston Burglar*, *Macaffie’s Confession*, *Betsy from Pike*, *Jesse James*, *The Days of*

¹ No. 278.

² “Songs and Rhymes from the South,” *The Journal of American Folk-Lore*, April-June, 1915, p. 161.

³ See my conjecture earlier, *Modern Philology*, xi., p. 3.

Forty-Nine, and many other of the most interesting and widely current or memorable pieces, cannot be claimed as indigenous to the Southwest (nor is this claim made for them); nor is there any real proof that any one of them is of communal composition. I myself am not ready to concede such origin for them. The influence of Irish "Come all ye's" and of death-bed confession pieces is strong on pretty much the whole of Mr. Lomax's collection; and there are abundant reminiscences of well-known pieces, as *We'll Go no More A-Ranging* (compare Byron's *We'll Go no More A-Roaming*," itself a reminiscence), or *The Last Longhorn*, reminiscent of *Bingen on the Rhine*.¹

¹Adaptation of something familiar is the first instinct in popular improvisation. Two recent examples from Nebraska may be cited. Well-known among the homesteaders of the Sandhill region is *The Kinkaid's Song*, which tells of their life, and celebrates Congressman Moses P. Kinkaid, the author of the homestead law. The piece is built on and sung to the tune of *My Maryland*. For a second example, let me quote from an Omaha paper of July 7, 1915:

"Joe Stecher, like the heroes of old, is now depicted in ballad. True, it is ragtime, and parody, at that, but ballad nevertheless it is. Here's one they're singing around cafes, using the music of *I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier*:

Ten thousand fans out to Rourke Park went ;
They will never go there again.
Ten thousand mat bugs' hearts are aching
From the sight of Cutler's gizzard breaking.

They all saw Joe Stecher,
They all dough had bet.
So through their sobs
We heard them cry:

They didn't raise Kid Cutler to be a wrestler :
They brought him up to be a real guy's toy.
Who dares to place a foot on the mattress
And spill our darling Joe-y?

Let would-be wrestlers arbitrate their troubles.
It's time to can that tiresome Bull.
There'd be no punk bouts today, now that the bunch can see
That they can't produce a guy to throw our Steche-r-r-r.

There is also a song to the tune of *Ballin' the Jack*, and another to *Wrap Me in a Bundle*."

The Kinkaid's Song and *Joe Stecher* afford quite typical examples of songs

Among the pieces cited by Professor Lomax in his address before the Folk-Lore Society is *Unreconstructed* (included in *Cowboy Songs* under the title *I'm a Good Old Rebel*), which he cites as a "rebel war song," with the suggestion that the rebel songs were perhaps superior to those of the same class which were of Yankee origin. But this "rebel war song," or "cowboy song," is one of the best poems of Innes Randolph (1837–1887) who was for a time connected with the *Baltimore American*. Mr. Randolph wrote the song to satirize the attitude of some of his elders. A text of his poem, from which Professor Lomax's folk-piece has lost but a few lines, is accessible in *The Humbler Poets*.¹ A volume of Mr. Randolph's verse was published after his death, edited by his son Harold Randolph.

Another piece cited which is of high quality is *Silver Jack*; and it tells a complete story dramatically; but *Silver Jack*² sounds, as Professor Lomax points out, suspiciously like newspaper verse. It is not the work of some one crude and uneducated but of an author trained and skilful. Similarly with a second piece, which is of better quality; it shows skilful use of dialect spelling and relative sophistication.

"I've been in rich men's houses and I've been in jail,
But when it's time for leavin' I jes hits the trail;
I'm a human bird of passage and the song I trill
Is 'Once you git the habit why you can't keep still.'"

which are, more or less, of folk-composition. The former is the more creditable, and was made by some one of better education, while the Joe Stecher pieces are of the same general character and quality as *The Old Chisholm Trail* and *The Boll Weevil*. But is it likely that any of these pieces will live, or win foothold in other regions?

¹ A collection of newspaper and periodical verse, 1886–1910, edited by Wallace and Frances Rice. Chicago, 1911. See p. 322.

² A newspaper clipping of this piece, having as title *Jack the Evangelist*, is pasted in a scrap-book of newspaper verse made between 1885 and 1900 by N. K. Griggs of Lincoln. Mr. Griggs was the author of *Lyrics of the Lariat*, *Hell's Canyon*, and later unpublished verse, and it is possible that he composed *Silver Jack*. His wife and his daughter, Mrs. H. B. Alexander, recall his frequent recitation of it, but hesitate to pronounce it his, since the newspaper verses in the scrap-book are unsigned. *Silver Jack* has been found in Iowa, according to E. F. Piper of Iowa City, as well as in Michigan and Texas. He says that he has heard it attributed to the late John Percival Jones, United States Senator from Nevada. To Professor Piper I am indebted for the identification of *The Ride of Billy Venero* with Eben E. Rexford's poem.

That is verse of the school of the newspaper or dialect poet, not of the composition of the unlettered.

That a song is current in a certain community, or liked by a certain class, is not testimony that it originated among those who sing it, but pretty nearly the contrary.¹ It may have found its way among them in some such manner as *The Railroad Corral* and *The Little Old Sod Shanty* found their way among the cowboys; or as *Casey Jones* and *Life's Railway to Heaven* have been adopted by railway people.

To reiterate, in the body of Western American folk-song, the pieces of proved vitality, most compact in structure and affording the truest analogy to the Child ballads, are not those which are the work of uneducated people of the Middle West or the South, in spontaneous collaboration. The few rough improvisations which we can identify as emerging from the folk themselves,—which we actually know to be the work of unlettered individuals or throngs,—are those farthest from the Child ballads in their general characteristics. The pieces cited specifically as “corroborative” are inferior, will soon be extinct, and offer no dependable evidence.

V

Little, but perhaps sufficient, space is left me for the discussion of the second affirmation which I set out to contest,—namely, that there “will be no more ballads,” that “ballad-making is a closed account.” The following, added to a careful and excellently written discussion of the mediæval ballads, is a recent typical statement²: “True ballads lasted long after the middle

¹ The songs of a new community usually enter by way of immigration. See, as a random example, *Jamaican Song and Story*, collected and edited by Walter Jekyl. Appendices, *Traces of African Melody in Jamaica*, C. S. Myers, *English Airs and Motifs in Jamaica*, Lucy E. Broadwood, London, 1907. The testimony of Mr. Myers (p. 284) is that: “The majority of Jamaican songs are of European origin. The negroes have learned them from hearing sailor’s chanties, or they have adapted hymn tunes.” And Miss Broadwood (p. 285) writes to the same effect. “By far the greater part of the Jamaican tunes and song-words seem to be reminiscences or imitations of European sailor’s chanties of the modern class; or of trivial British nursery jingles, adopted as all such jingles become adopted.”

² Charles Sears Baldwin, *English Mediæval Literature*, p. 243. 1914. And so Professor Kittredge in his introduction to the *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1904: “Ballad-making, so far as English-speaking nations

age, but mainly by repetition or modification of those already made. With every century the chances for a new ballad were fewer, until now the ballad has been long extinct as a form of composition. There will be no more ballads; for the conditions under which they are produced are long past.”

The making of ballads, *i.e.*, short verse-narratives of singable form, is not a closed account, and there is no reason why it ever should be such. Nor are “popular” or “folk” ballads extinct, meaning by this short lyric-tales, apparently authorless, preserved among the people, and having an existence which has become purely oral and traditional. The mode in ballad-making has changed, and will change. There will be no more Child ballads; for they preserve a style established in bygone centuries. Their style is more memorable than that of present-day ballads; for they were composed for the ear, and modern song is usually addressed to the eye also. But styles change in folk-poetry as in book-poetry. Folk-poetry is not a fixed thing, to rise and die, but a shifting thing. The test of folk-songs and folk-ballads should not be their style, and certainly it should not be some hypothetical communal-mystic origin. They are folk-pieces if the people have remembered them and sung them, and have given them, through a fair period of years, oral preservation. Folk-ballads of the Child type may be extinct; but folk-balladry itself is not.

Already there are in America many short narrative pieces, current over the countryside, lyric-epic in character, the authorship and the mode of origin of which are lost; and it is these, not the transient creations of cowboys or negroes, which form the real analogues for the English and Scottish popular ballads. From them a selection of texts and variant versions, with notation of parallels and Old World relationships, could be built up that would be of formidable and instructive proportions.¹ I refer to

are concerned, is a lost art; and the same may be said of ballad-singing.” In 1915, Professor Kittredge wrote that if he were again summing up the facts he would modify his statement that ballad-singing is a lost art, either in Great Britain or in the United States, evidence for its survival having come in in the last decade. See the quoted paragraph in Professor C. Alphonso Smith’s “Ballads Surviving in the United States,” *The Musical Quarterly*, January, 1916.

¹ Professor H. M. Belden has urged the publication of such a collection in extenso (“Balladry in America,” *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, xxv., 1912, p. 23); and it is to be hoped that this may some time be carried out.

pieces like *Poor Lorella* (known as *Poor Floella*, or *Floe Ella*, *Lurella*, *Lorla*, *Lora*, *Loretta*, *The Jealous Lover*, *Pearl Bryn*), *Young Charlotte*, *Springfield Mountain*, *The Boston Burglar*, *Texas Rangers*, *Silver Dagger*, *The Death of Garfield*, *Jesse James*.¹ There will always be, I think, a body of short narrative poems, their authorship and origin lost, preserved in outlying regions. They will shift in style but they will ever be behind contemporary song-modes by a generation or more. The style of the present-day folk-song of the central west, judging from my own collections, is, on the average, about fifty years behind that of the present-day popular poetry. In eighteenth-century England and Scotland, the discrepancy was naturally much greater—a mediæval style still lingered. The older style is the more memorable; it was of higher quality and it persisted longer than will its successors, for it arose when differences in manner of origin and in method of presentation made for this distinction. But it should not be a test of the genuineness of a piece as folk-song, that it is written in the style of the fifteenth or sixteenth century,—any more than some conjectural manner of origin should be such a test.

Why, as a general proposition, should something vague or romantic be so liked, when the origin of folk-poetry is in question? Is it a heritage from the romanticism of the period when interest in ballads arose and their origin was first made the subject of discussion? Here are some typical sentences from Andrew Lang:

“No one any longer attributes them to this or that author, to this or that date . . . its birth [the ballad’s] from the lips and heart of the people may contrast with the origin of art poetry. . . . Ballads sprang from the very heart of the people, and flit from age to age, from lip to lip of shepherds, peasants, nurses, of all that continue nearest to the natural state of man. . . . The wholesoul of the peasant class breathes in their burdens, as the great sea

¹ See in general the collections of folk-song in the Harvard library; the texts printed in *The Journal of American Folk-Lore; A Syllabus of Kentucky Folk-Song*, by H. G. Shearin and J. H. Coombs (1911); the *Bulletin of the Missouri Folk-Lore Society* (1910); the collections of Mr. Phillips Barry for New England; of Professor Lomax for the Southwest; and my own *Folk-Song of Nebraska and the Central West: A Syllabus*; Publications of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences, Ethnology, and Folk-Lore Series, 1914.

resounds in the shells cast up from its shores. Ballads are a voice from secret places, from silent places, and old times long dead.”¹

Yet more typical is this from Theodor Storm’s *Immensee* (1851), read so often in our schools that the view it presents is brought before thousands of student readers each year :

“[These songs] were not made; they grow; they fall out of the air. They fly over the land like gossamer, hither and thither, and are sung in a thousand places at once. Our inmost doings and sufferings we find in these songs; it is as though we had helped in composing them.”²

It is often difficult to find oneself on much solid ground than is indicated in these citations, even in the discussions of Professor Gummere, scholarly as they are; and more than one reader has at times felt himself befogged among them. In Germany the type of criticism reflected in the passage from Storm has been given up long since, and so, for the most part, in England, where Lang’s views are now that of a minority. Its present stronghold is the United States. It seems to the present writer to have emerged from and to belong to a period which deliberately preferred the vague and the mystical, for all problems of literary and linguistic history-mythological explanation of the Beowulf story, multi-handed composition of the Homeric poems, theories of the origin of language like those of Professor Heyse and of Noiré, adopted by Max Müller; and it is out of key in a distinctly anti-romantic period like our own.

To what degree, one is tempted to ask, is the scholarly and critical enthusiasm for ballads of the last hundred years, or more, due to this romantic attitude? But for their fascinating mystery, would the learned world have preoccupied itself, in the same measure, with ballads? Perhaps when the cloud of romanticism overhanging it has vanished utterly, we may again come to look on balladry as did the cultivated world in the days of humanism.

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¹ Article on Ballads in *Encyclopædia Britannica*. For a somewhat modified statement of his earlier views, see Lang’s “Notes on Ballad Origins,” *Folk-Lore*, lii., 147, 1903; also his rewritten article in the last edition of the *Britannica*.

² Compare Mr. Lomax’s “They seem to have sprung up as quietly and mysteriously as does the grass on the plains.”