

OLD SONGS AND AIRS.

Melodies Once Popular in Yorkshire.

up sharp IX.
THE FLITCH OF BACON.

Since Dick and Nell were man and wife They lov'd each
other dearly, Their ways had all been free from strife, And
time had glid-d cheer-ly. The, thought of all the
wedded throng, Their plea must first be ta-ken. So
cheek by jowl they jogged along To claim the flitch of bacon.

Since Dick and Nell were man and wife
They lov'd each other dearly,
Their ways had all been free from strife
And time had glided cheerly.
They thought of all the wedded throng
Their plea must first be taken,
So cheek by jowl they jogged along
To claim the Flitch of Bacon.

Now on the road, says Dick to Nell,
"If things are managed fairly,
In future we'll do passing well,
Ods, bobs, we'll guttle rarely.
We ne'er have quarrelled day or night,
So faith I'm much mistaken
If e'er a pair have had more right
To claim the Flitch of Bacon."

"My dear," says Nell, "to sell the flitch,
Do let me now persuade ye,
I will serve to make you mainly rich
And me so fine a lady.
So say no more, but let the prize
Up market straight be taken,
For sure 'twill make us monstrous wise
To sell the Flitch of Bacon."

Now both persisting plain and flat
In their respective cases,
They fought at last like dog and cat,
And scratched each other's faces.
Thus, those who try to gut their fish
Before 'tis fairly taken,
Like Dick and Nell, oft spoil the dish
Who lost the Flitch of Bacon.

The ceremony of a flitch of bacon being given annually at Little Dunmow, in Essex, to the couple who could swear they had not once repented of their marriage nor quarrelled during the year is, of course, well known. It has formed the subject of a novel by Ainsworth, and in 1779 an opera, entitled "The Flitch of Bacon," was composed by William Shield. The first recorded instance of the flitch being claimed was in the days of Henry VI. A similar custom was observed at Winchenor, in Staffordshire, where corn as well as bacon was given to the happy couple.

The above song was a great favourite at one time, and records the laughable circumstance of the pair of claimants quarrelling as to the disposal of the flitch. The present copy is taken from a manuscript collection of songs written down in 1797, and it is there attributed to Captain Morris, who was doubtlessly really the author, although in song-books of a later date it is either put anonymously or fathered on some other writer. The MS. copy is earlier in date than any other the writer has seen, and the song is there directed to be sung to the tune "The Girl I left behind me," to which it is accordingly here set as being the most likely for the original song to have been written to. There is, however, another air, composed by James Hook (the grandfather of our old Vicar), to which the song is set—see the "Linnet," circa 1830—but this is not generally so pleasing as the old marching tune above mentioned.

Having stated the little that is known about the song, it will be perhaps of interest if it is followed up with a history of the celebrated tune.

"The Girl I left behind me" has been the tune played for more than a century by military bands upon the regiments leaving a town. Its origin and the date of its first appearance is very uncertain. The reference to it in the manuscript volume (1797) now before the writer, is an early one, but there is no doubt that it had been popular long before this time. From its appearance in the seventh number of Moore's "Irish Melodies," Thomas Moore using it for his song "As slow our ship," and its being contained in Bunting's Irish Music, 1840, it is frequently marked as being Irish in origin; but certainly as the tune now stands it is English in every bar. Edward Bunting had no more Irish claim for it than that he had heard it from O'Neill, an Irish harper, in 1800, after it was well known in England. He probably inserted it in his collection on account of the variation in the second part, which is rich and very beautiful, but has apparently been grafted upon the original tune by a harper. Moore's version of the air published in 1818 is not so good, while a copy published in Smith's "Irish Minstrel" (1825) is as now known. In the "Gentlemen's Amusement," vol. iii., circa 1810, the air is called "Brighton Camp," from the original words of the song. The present version as here printed is taken from a north country manuscript collection of airs noted down for the fiddle written shortly after 1815.

Chappell in his "Popular Music" thinks that the song of "The Girl I left behind me" is of the date of the threatened invasion from France in 1758, when troops were stationed at Brighton and other places on the south coast. David Garrick's popular song "Hearts of Oak" was written upon this occasion. FRANK KIDSON.