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“A PLEA FOR FOLK-SONG COLLECTING”
W.H. GILL WRITES TO *THE SCRIBBLE* (1917)

Correspondence.

A PLEA FOR FOLK-SONG COLLECTING.

To the Editor of SCRIBBLE.

[9a] DEAR SIR,

My best thanks to you for so kindly bringing under the notice of your readers my recently published book of Folk-Songs.¹ The original intention was to confine the collection to Sussex songs exclusively, but the publishers, Messrs. Curwen, on finding that I had been singing for many years previously in various parts of the kingdom, as well as in the fathomless depths of the British Museum Library, suggested an extension of the title “Sussex Songs” to the fuller one now adopted, namely, “Songs of the British Folk”—the idea being that if this first installment succeeds the material held over is amply sufficient to fill a series of other similar volumes. Some of your readers will doubtless recognise among the songs in this first selection their own contributions. Others, unfortunately, will find that theirs have been altogether omitted; but, if so, it may be to them some consolation to know that their songs have been reserved for subsequent volumes. Meanwhile, I would gladly visit personally any of your readers who may be able to remember if only *bits* of old songs they used to sing as children. I say “bits” by way of encouragement to those lovers of music (and there are many such) who, although unable to sing an entire song in drawing-room fashion, may yet recollect stray bits here and there of either the [9b] music or the words. Our business as collectors consists largely in the gathering of mere fragments to be afterwards carefully fitted together. A folk-song is a thing *sui generis*. It *grows*, and it has *done growing*. Hence the many “variants” of the same song as found in different counties. Eventually only the best of these will survive. Meanwhile, the more the merrier.

Yours faithfully, | W.H. Gill | Anmgring, June 23, 1917.

Source: W.H. Gill, “[Correspondence] A Plea for Folk-Song Collecting,” *Scribble* 1.7 (1917): 9.



¹ W.H. Gill, *Songs of the British Folk* (London: J. Curwen & Sons, 1917).

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2011

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