

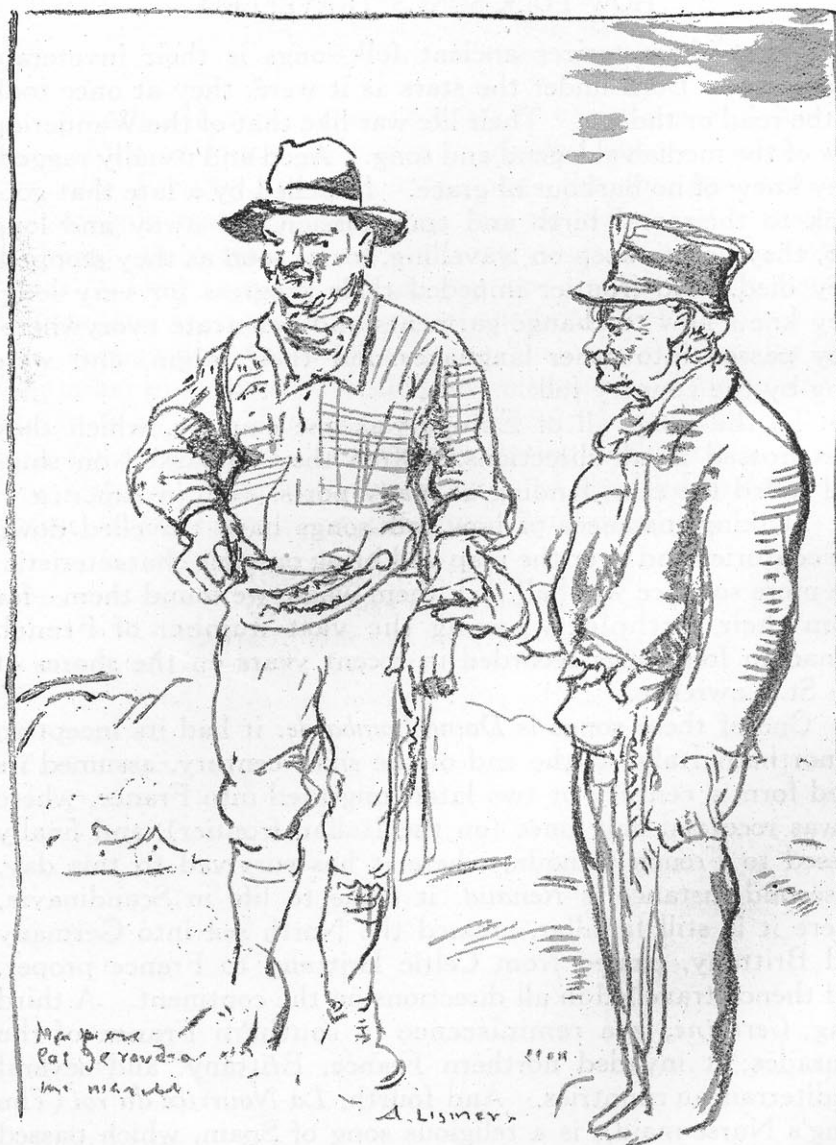
HOW FOLK-SONGS TRAVELLED

What characterizes ancient folk-songs is their inveterate nomadism. Born under the stars as it were, they at once took to the road or the sea. Their life was like that of the Wandering Jew of the mediæval legend and song. Aged and usually ragged, they knew of no harbour of grace. Impelled by a fate that goes back to their oral birth and transmission, far away and long ago, they had to keep on travelling, for as soon as they stopped, they died. No frontier impeded their progress for very long; they knew how to change garments and penetrate everywhere; they passed into other languages, hid their origin, and were sung by the country folk.

To the songs all of Europe was one country, which they criss-crossed in all directions. Often they embarked on ships and sailed the seas, landing at many ports, even in America.

Striking instances of how folk-songs have travelled down the centuries and over the map will bring out this characteristic; the more so since we shall pick them where we found them—far from their birthplace, among the vast number of French Canadian folk-songs recorded in recent years on the shores of the St. Lawrence.

One of these songs is *Dame Lombarde*: it had its inception in northern Italy, at the end of the sixth century, assumed its fixed form a century or two later, migrated into France, where it was recorded only once (on the Italian frontier), and finally passed to French Canada, where it has survived to this day. A second instance is *Renaud*: it came to life in Scandinavia, where it is still familiar, crossed the North sea into Germany and Brittany, passed from Celtic Brittany to France proper, and thence travelled in all directions on the continent. A third song, *Germine*, is a reminiscence in southern France of the Crusades; it invaded northern France, Brittany, and several Mediterranean countries. And fourth, *La Nourrice du roi* (The King's Nurse-maid), is a religious song of Spain, which passed the Pyrenees and settled in France, close to the Swiss frontier. These songs emigrated from France and crossed the Atlantic in the seventeenth century; they are still popular at large among



Vincent-Ferrier de Repentigny and Philéas Bédard singing the song "Mon père, je voudrais me marier".

the country folk of French Canada. The melodies were recorded on the phonograph, and transcribed; and the words written down from dictation, in many versions, at scattered points from Ottawa river down to the Acadian settlements of Nova Scotia.

DAME LOMBARDE (Page 56)

This *complainte* is unique in the folk-song repertory of French Canada. It came to the St. Lawrence, through France, from the south, from Italy, upstream as it were, not down, as is usual for narrative songs: the *complaintes* belong to the north, and they travel southwards, whereas the reverse is true of lyric songs.

This song is also one of the most ancient in our repertory, in historic contents at least. It tells the story of *Dame Lombarde*, the tragic Rosmonde, who tried to poison her husband at Ravenna in the year 573, but was forced to drink death from the cup she herself had filled with wine and with the fluid from the crushed head of a serpent.

The discovery of Dame Lombarde's identity as the principal character in the song is to be credited to Nigra, the Italian traditionist. For several centuries after the event, this ancient story of poisoning was the object of chronicles. George Doncieux (*Romancéro*, 174-204) recently linked it up with the only French record so far discovered, near the Italian frontier, in the French Alps.

Alboin, the king of the Lombard invaders of northern Italy, incurred the hatred of Rosmonde, his wife, when he forced her to drink from her father's empty skull. Bent upon revenge, she seduced Helmichis, an officer, and compelled him to yield to her will. He killed Alboin, his king, and became her second husband. She tried to govern the country, but the Lombards rebelled and forced her to flee at night with Helmichis. At Ravenna she was well received by Longin, a prefect of the town. To regain the crown she had lost, Rosmonde decided to rid herself of Helmichis, who now stood in her way. Once more she used her charms and won Longin to her ambition. He begged her to regain her freedom and marry him, so as to reign over the Lombards again.

This time she resorted to poison. The chronicler, Agnellus of Ravenna, relates how Helmichis, coming out of a steaming bath, received from Rosmonde a "cup filled with a beverage, seemingly to quench his thirst, but really meant to poison him. No sooner had he drunk death from the cup than he tended it to the queen, saying, 'You too drink of it!' She refused; he drew his sword and, threatening her, said, 'If you don't, I stab you!' She drank, and both died instantly."

Paul Diacre and Agnellus, Lombard chroniclers of the eighth century, both recorded the adventures of Rosmonde. The story from the pen of Agnellus resembles our song so closely that Nigra considers them identical. Dame Lombarde is no other than Rosmonde. The Italian *complainte* would be contemporaneous with the event, as songs are born out of real life; they are not derived from parchment and ancient chronicles. In this Nigra is undoubtedly right.

But Doncieux does not accept this theory. The Italian versions of the songs end with a slur upon the "King of France", who is said to be the seducer of Dame Lombarde. François I, Doncieux thinks, is the King; his gallantries were notorious, and he was at Pavia, Italy, with his army, in 1525. Dame Lombarde cries out, "For the love of the King of France I die!" And this line alone, according to Doncieux, gives a date to the whole song, which, for other reasons as well, could not go back to so remote a date as the sixth or the eighth century.

Who is right, Nigra or Doncieux? Does the song go back to the eighth century or the sixteenth? The point is of interest, since it bears on the age of folk-songs generally—very old or comparatively recent. The issue here might remain in doubt, were it not for our French-Canadian records, which were not known to the Italian and the French traditionists.

Our nineteen versions of the *complainte* "*Enseignez-moi donc!*" (Oh! teach me!) from the lower St. Lawrence throw a new light on the ultimate origin of *Dame Lombarde*, for they are one and the same. The Canadian records begin in two different ways: a wife is advised to poison her jealous husband by a neighbour, in some versions, and by a bird, the nightingale, in others. Wide variations are also found in our records, both in words and melodies. Two branches of the French song inde-

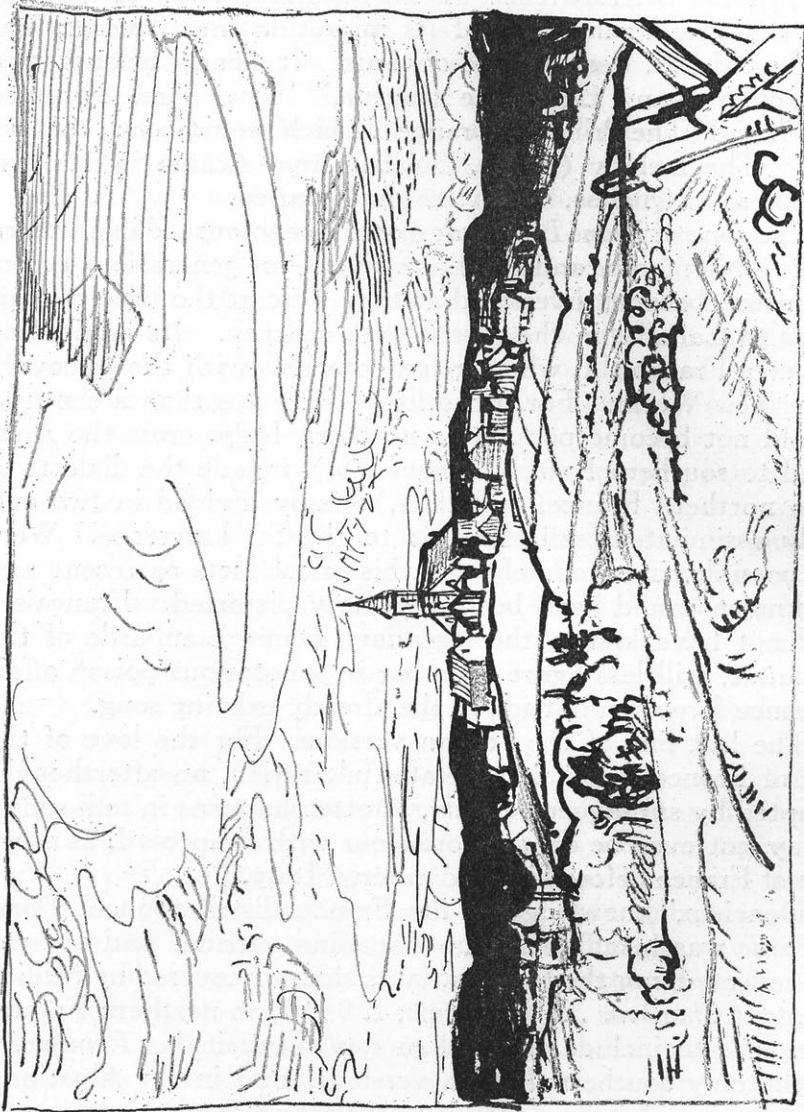
pendently crossed the sea with the early settlers; one of these took root on the Atlantic coast with the Acadians, and the other up the St. Lawrence in the neighbourhood of Quebec. That the song at the time of its migration into America was already old and decadent, is obvious. It clearly belongs to a stock older than "Le Prince Eugène," "The Three Poisoned Roses", and "The Prince of Orange", which are sixteenth century songs. The melody (No. 1, Dorion) from Acadia is different from those of Quebec, which are quite varied.

The song of *Dame Lombarde* must have sojourned in northern France—Normandy and the Loire river—for generations before its versions became diversified as they were at the time of their exodus to Canada, in the seventeenth century. Its origin long antedates François I, whose reign coincides with the discovery of the New World. For, in so little time, less than a century, it could not become popular in northern Italy, cross the Alps, spread to southern French (*langue d'oc*), invade the dialects of *oil*, in northern France, and then, already divided in two and widely assimilated, sail the seas to the St. Lawrence. Were that possible, it is unlikely that historical facts as recent and well known would have been so utterly distorted. François I could not have known the legendary Dame Lombarde of the *complainte*, still less figure with her in a notorious poison affair long since forgotten outside of the already existing song.

The last line of the Italian versions "For the love of the King of France I die" is a belated alteration, an afterthought prompted by subsequent events, as often happens in folk-songs. It may not even be contemporaneous with François I, as other kings of France before him had entered Italy.

Doncieux' knowledge of the French distribution of *Dame Lombarde* was insufficient; the Canadian versions had not yet been collected, nor the three variants since discovered by Millien (*Chants et Chansons . . . Nivernais*, I, 94-97) in northern France. His excuse to include the Italian *complainte* in his *Romancéro* was the only southern French version found in the Alps; and the text, which he gives first, is a translation from the Italian.

Our Canadian song does not allude to the French king; it concludes with the words: "Cursed be the neighbour who taught me . . . !" or "the nightingale . . ." In this it stands



Saint-Hilarion, Charlevoix.

closer than the Italian records to the ancient story of Rosmonde which seems to have crossed the mountains northwards and taken root in all of France at an early date. Otherwise it would not have crossed the seas, as it did with the colonists from Normandy and the Loire nearly three hundred years ago.

RENAUD (Page 60)

The *complainte of Roi Renaud* is perhaps the most famous of all the French folk-songs. Its history, like that of *Dame Lombarde*, is remarkable, if not unique. After its obscure birth in Scandinavia, at the end of the Middle Ages, it spread to the northern coasts, landed in Brittany and Germany, and then passed to all of France. From there, it leaped the frontiers into Italy and Spain. It crossed the ocean westward with the settlers of New France, in the seventeenth century. It is deeply rooted on the lower St. Lawrence and in Acadia.

Lost sight of in the lore of several countries, it might have disappeared forever like many others, but it was discovered and revived at the end of the last century among *savants* and artists, and then for the benefit of the public in general. Fascinated by its unusual features, folk-lorists studied it quite thoroughly, and a great artist, Yvette Guilbert, conferred fame upon it on more than one continent. It is a masterpiece that has won universal recognition, particularly in its French form.

The song of *Renaud* already had a long past behind it when it embarked for Quebec and Louisburg with the ancient settlers. Since then it has been preserved in obscurity, by many generations of uneducated folk-singers. It is one of the best known of the traditional repertory, but only on the lower St. Lawrence; it does not seem to have ascended the river far beyond the old town of Quebec.

As late as 1917 it had not been discovered in Canada, where the study of traditions until then had been much neglected. Yet the song had survived, if only among country folk whose recollections are anchored deep in the past. It is still sung in the winter evenings in the semi-Norman districts of L'Islet, Kamouraska, and Temiscouata; more frequently still in Gaspé and around Chaleur bay. Its features have been faithfully preserved, in spite of long peregrinations. The variations in themselves often

have an interesting significance, as, for instance, the beginning of a Jersey version recorded on Chaleur bay: "Good news, O my King Louis: Your wife has given birth to a son." Renaud had thus changed to Louis, to suit other times, already remote.

Scholars discovered this song in Europe a decade or two before 1850. De la Villemarqué published a Breton fragment in his *Barzaz Breiz* in 1839. Gérard de Nerval twice inserted it in his books. Since then it has been the object of numerous studies; Ampère, Rolland, Bladé, and other French traditionists collected many versions, and swelled its bibliography. Writers meanwhile studied its roots in Scandinavia, and followed its development through France, Spain, and Italy.

Doncieux recently compiled those scattered data for an impressive monograph in his *Romançéro* (VII, 84-124). He derives his final text from fifty-nine versions from France and eight from Piemont (Italy); and he mentions that it was sung in Paris when Henry IV entered it, in 1594; also in Brittany, in the second third of the sixteenth century.

The number of French versions has since grown by at least thirty. Millien has published five main variants for Nivernais (France), and he quotes other sub-variants; Rossat has brought out three versions for Switzerland (Suisse romande); and our Canadian collection includes twenty-two versions. In all, there are about ninety French records.

This is only a fraction of the grand European total, since the Latin countries alone contain five songs closely related to *Renaud*: an Armorican *gwerz*, a Basque song, a Venetian *canzone*, a Catalan song, and a Spanish romance familiar in all the peninsula. This group alone, exclusive of France proper, is represented by sixty-seven songs.

The song is still more important in the Scandinavian countries, where it found its birth: the *vise* of the Knight Olaf, which is one of the finest and best known in the north. Gruntvig compiled sixty-nine versions for Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Faroe island. The oldest written record, from Denmark, dates back to 1550.

The total list of versions is large: 90 French versions; 67 from the other Latin countries; 69 Scandinavian records. In all, 226. And there may be still more.

The Scandinavian song is said to have originated in Denmark, where it was first recorded in writing, before the middle of the sixteenth century.

A folk theme widely familiar in the Germanic countries long ago, was embodied in a poem, on the Rhine; that of the "*Knight of Staufenberg*," which was known in Scandinavia and gave birth to the folk-song. This song travelled widely and grew into three branches: a Scottish ballad, a Slavonic song, and a *gwerz* in Celtic Brittany. The French song originated from the *gwerz* and developed into several adaptations: Basque, Venetian, Catalan, and Hispano-Portuguese.

The nine songs of this series, in as many languages, are not all of the same importance, according to Doncieux. Six of them follow the Scandinavian or the French forms closely, when they are not awkward adaptations. But three of them are authentic compositions with distinct individuality: "Sire Olaf", "The Count Nann", and "Renaud". Linked as they are through descent from the same theme, they constitute a lineage of masterpieces in traditional literature that may be considered unique. They bear equally the stamp of creative genius. If a Dane first used the folk theme, a Breton transferred it to a *gwerz*, and a Frenchman of genius made of it a song that is hardly surpassed anywhere for power and beauty.

The encounter of the knight with a fairy is the outstanding feature of the Danish song. To the folk theme the poet adds the flight on horseback at dawn, which he drew from his powerful imagination, the dance of the elves on the hillside, and the invitation to join in when the fairy shows her passion for the knight. The vivid charm of this scene wherein legend and truth mingle, belongs wholly to Scandinavia; it is hardly transposed into the Breton song; it is not even hinted at in the French. The plot in the Danish *vise* moves on rhythmically, with growing anguish and terror, from the moment when the knight meets the fairy to that of his death, after he arrived home. The fiancée's three questions about the sound of the bells, the women weeping, and the absence of her beloved, are included but undeveloped. The Breton *gwerz* and the French *complainte* alone make full use of them.

The dialogue on the secret death of the absent, only vestigial in the Scandinavian song, is enlarged upon in the Breton *gwerz* to the point of becoming the central theme. Here the knight was not proceeding to the home of his virginal fiancée, but to his own, where his wife had given birth to a son. Fantastic and dreamy, the Scandinavian story here becomes realistic and intensely dramatic. The French song omits the episode of the elves and the fairy, and consists almost wholly of a dialogue between the knight's mother and his wife. It confers upon the story fresh beauty and inspiration. Its master strokes reach the sublime. The wife, discovering the terrible truth, dies of a broken heart and is buried with her husband.

"Renaud" closely resembles "The Count Nann", its Breton parent. It differs in one point—unity—which makes it perhaps the best of the three songs. The *gwerz* is made of two separate themes, that of the fairy and of the secret death, which are consecutive. Thus it is divided in two halves, one legendary, the other actual and poignantly human. Lack of unity is its only fault. But all that is exotic is swept aside in the French song, which begins with the tragedy of the knight arriving home to meet his mother on the threshold. He dies in her arms, and the dialogue between the mother and the wife forms the whole drama. Narrative verse, introduced here and there, enhances the intensity of the plot and hastens it to a climax—the funeral bells, the tomb, and the oath at an open grave.

GERMINE (Page 65)

The splendid *complainte* of *Germine* or *Germaine* takes us back to the Middle Ages. It is a lyrical reminiscence of the Crusades.

The Crusader returning home here is ostensibly the Prince of Ambroise, or better still, Guilhem de Beauvoir, who sailed the seas, and was absent for a long time, while his young wife met with adversity and remained true to her pledge of fidelity.

The song begins at the moment when the Crusader arrives home. The scene opens with a dialogue. After so many years the Crusader is not recognized. He has to plead for hospitality. Before *Germine* will believe him, he must furnish proofs, and there lies the plot, and its intense dramatization.



Road to the school house - 1914.

Road to the school near Baie-Saint-Paul, Charlevoix.

Its treatment insistently resembles that of *Renaud*. Their inception must be related in some way. One perhaps was known to the composer of the other, and *Germine* presumably was the first.

Both themes are epic: their birth goes back to ancient legends and traditions. In *Renaud*, a knight comes back home with a wound, to die on the threshold before his wife has seen him; in *Germine*, he is recognized at last and the years of waiting and trial are over. There ends the resemblance of the story. But the treatment is the same. The poet dramatizes his story, unfolds it in a few strokes and swiftly proceeds to the end, one fatal, the other blissful. Here we find in brief form and in simple though transcendent melodies, two of the finest creations of the French genius, now weather-beaten and broken with age, but still magnificent in their decay. They resemble cathedrals gnawed by the winds and the rains; in the shadow of these ancient temples they were born in the years long since forgotten.

The "Return of the Crusader" became a literary theme at the time of the Crusades, the last of which took place in the thirteenth century. Very early it was sundered into two folk-songs which have come down to us: *La Porcheronne* (The Swineherd) and *Germine*.

Their story is fundamentally the same, but the form is different. "The Swineherd" originated in southern France, whereas *Germine* is from north of the Loire. In their long independent careers they travelled widely, sometimes side by side, often sojourning under the same roof.

Germine seems better known in French Canada than in France, whereas in France "The Swineherd" is more familiar. Seventeen versions of *Germine* were recently recorded along the St. Lawrence and in Acadia. "The Swineherd" has hardly survived in Canada, where the writer recovered only two fragments, one in Temiscouata and the other in Gaspé. The Crusader, in Canada, bears the name of "The Arabian" (*l'Arabe*), which comes from his peregrinations in Moslem countries.

The contrast between the two is marked. In *Germine*, the young wife awaits her long-absent husband in her castle. Surrounded by her maids, she refuses to open the door, even to

the knight who claims to be the most handsome in the land. She is a grand lady, haughty and respected. But the Swineherd undergoes more severe trials than *Germine*, in her long abstinence. Her husband's mother persecutes her and degrades her to the rank of a serf keeping herds in the fields, where she weeps for sorrow.

"The Swineherd" originated in southern France, according to Doncieux; more precisely, in Provence, near Beauvoir-de-Marc (Isère). From there it spread to all of France, to Catalonia (Spain), where it is familiar, and to Pimont (Italy). It crossed the ocean into New France, in the seventeenth century, but never developed on this side.

The Crusader of the song seems to be Guilhem de Beauvoir, an historical figure of the thirteenth century, one of the most powerful barons of Dauphiné. Beauvoir's long adventures abroad ended after his return home, and he died leaving his will dated 1277.

Which of the two songs, "The Swineherd" or *Germine* is the older, no one can tell. Perhaps it is "The Swineherd". The home of this song is nearer its birthplace, and the story follows closely the historical facts that seem to have inspired the composition. The verses are better preserved than those of *Germine*, which are in an advanced state of decay, and there are traces of a southern origin in *Germine*. In some of the versions, the Crusader is named Beauvoir, or Beaucère—from Beauvoir, in "The Swineherd". And a town mentioned is Lyon ("Mes chiens de Lyon" and "Le pont de Lyon").

"The Swineherd" is quite different from *Germine* in treatment. It is episodic, and relates several episodes of a long adventure. *Germine* holds only one, which it vitalizes and transfigures. One is legend or history, the other is art, and a masterpiece.

These songs after their birth, one in the south and the other in the northwest, travelled the whole country, even crossed the frontiers and the seas, and halted only on our very doorstep. The seventeen Canadian versions of *Germine* were recorded on the St. Lawrence from Montreal down to Chaleur bay; they belong mostly to the districts where the settlers are predominantly Norman. One version was found among the Acadians of

Prince Edward Island. It is not so well remembered in France. "The Swineherd" was more popular there, although it cannot have been familiar to many of the northern colonists who settled in the New World; otherwise it would have survived here more than it has, in scattered fragments.

Only a few records of *Germine* can be found in the published collections of France, mostly from the northern provinces and perhaps without the melody, whereas thirteen versions of "The Swineherd" are listed by Doncieux.

The occurrence of these two songs outside of France proper is quite extensive. "The Swineherd" was first published by de la Villemarqué for Celtic Brittany in 1839 (*Barzaz Breiz*, XIX). And de Puymaigre, who first discovered *Germine*, compared it to *Don Guillermo* of Catalogna (Spain). He indicated its distribution in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Bohemia, Germany, Holland, Flanders, and England.

Crane, in his *Chansons populaires de France* (267-8), connects it with "Hind Horn" and "The Lass of Loch Royal" published by Child (*The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 213, 111, 187). And Nigra (*Canti popolari del Piemonte*) shows how this southern French song spread to Spain and Italy, and from there invaded Greece and even the Slavonic countries.

It is also possible that it may go back to an earlier date than the last Crusade. De la Villemarqué believes that it originated in Brittany after the first Crusade, in the eleventh century, and that it dramatizes the return of Alain, one of the Breton chiefs who spent five years in Palestine. If that were true, a Breton *gwerz* would be at the root of all that poetic growth, which later spread to all of Europe by way of France and Italy.

LA NOURRICE DU ROI (Page 69)

The only Canadian version of this folk canticle was found among the Acadians of Prince Edward Island, in the Maritimes. The eight or ten versions recorded in France belong mostly to the central provinces, the east and the southeast. As they are all much the same, their common origin is not very ancient. The song is a few hundred years old.

Before its migration to America, presumably with the early settlers, it had already travelled in Europe and become ramified.

The Acadian refrain differs from most of the French versions, but a Provençal form closely resembles the Canadian. There are also other differences. This nursery song, according to Doncieux, was composed in French proper, probably in the neighbourhood of Saint-Nicolas-du-Port, where Saint Nicholas is the popular patron saint.

In the local tradition, however, no trace can be found of this miracle of the saint, but a well-known song of Catalogna (Spain) contains a similar miracle which, there, is attributed to the Virgin, not Nicholas. If one of the two songs issued from the other, as is likely, the Spanish version probably is the original. Its details seem more authentic and the plot more logical. Catalogna, besides, has a sanctuary of Notre Dame, which is famous in all Christendom: the abbey of Montserrat, near Barcelona, where a black Virgin holding the Infant Jesus has drawn, since the thirteenth century, many pilgrims from everywhere. The Catalan canticle must have originated here and spread to other parts with the pilgrims.

A French visitor is likely to have introduced it at Saint-Nicolas-du-Port, after returning from Montserrat. Then it was adapted to the worship of the patron saint of the locality without robbing the Virgin of her credit: Saint Nicholas is only a party to the miracle. Other instances of such miracles attributed to various saints are familiar elsewhere. The fame of miraculous shrines travelled far and wide, like the folk-songs of other days.