

American Song Makers Seek War Tune of the "Tipperary" Kind

THE American "Tipperary" has not been written, so far as can be ascertained by an uncensored inquiry along Tin Pan Alley. Publishers and composers admit it. Makers of popular songs are an honest lot at heart. They are like the rest of us in that they want attention drawn to their own modest efforts. At first blush an investigator into the present condition of the patriotic song market will gather the impression that, if the truth were told, each writer of patriotic songs is absolutely certain he has written the patriotic song to which our marching armies will react throughout the war.

But this is only a little human weakness on view. The composer doesn't really think his song is the one for which the country is waiting. He says he does when informed that the writer of such a song is wanted for purposes of the interview, and he sings it while you wait with vigor and yours-sincerely gestures; but if he is asked a moment later for his honest opinion he will confide, a little weariedly, that no one has yet turned the trick.

Ever since the earth's first war, the militant representatives of combating powers have had their battle songs and their camp ditties. Up to date, leaving out several hundred other titles of contemporaneous vaudeville interest, we have "What Kind of An American Are You?" "Yankee Doodle," "The Man Behind the Hammer and the Plow," "If We Had a Million More Like Teddy," "Yankee Doodle," "Let's All Be Americans Now," and again "Yankee Doodle."

General Grant is said to have known only two tunes, one of which was "Yankee Doodle" and the other wasn't.

Several hours spent in the song studios of Forty-fifth, Forty-sixth, and Forty-seventh Streets listening to the loudly accompanied efforts of the tune poets have led to the conclusion that, although a great deal of strength is going into the making of patriotic harmonies night and day in these thoroughfares with the result that hundreds of jingling and inspiriting tunes are making themselves felt at theatres and recruiting stations throughout the country, there has yet to be let loose the kind of a song that set the British soldiers marching in 1914 and has kept them at the proper pitch for doing the day's work.

It's a trick, the song writers say. A song may have nobility, exaltation, and spiritual valor and not cause a single foot to move in the direction of the enemy. Sentiment is not the thing, apparently. What could be further from the great war than the "Tipperary" song? Yet it captured the whole British Army just because it had a lilt and hit the public at the psychological moment. So it was with our own men in the war that made "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town" famous. That early and vigorous example of ragtime was a real marching song, and the subject matter counted not at all.

Publishers and composers will relate with vehemence how such and such a song is "stopping the show" wherever sung, one reason being that "it has a wallop in every line." A favorite way of demonstrating that there is a great deal

of restraint in such a statement is for the publisher to call for the composer of the song and for a piano player and then lead the way into a soundproof and airproof room where the product is sung straight at the heart and patriotic impulses of the visitor.

The big song is not going to be a patriotic song, however. So the energy exerted by writers who rhyme rally with dally, and o'er the sea with liberty, and fray with day, and so on, will probably find that the melody hit of the war will be written by some hitherto unknown person who will chance to send forth a swinging song in which, doubtless, there will be no reference to war. Harry von Tilzer, who has written hits almost without interruption for thirty years, and whose "The Man Behind the Hammer and the Plow" is, perhaps, at least as popular as anything that has as yet come out, says the American soldiers' marching song will most likely be a freak little thing with a girl in it.

"I wrote a song this morning," continued Mr. von Tilzer, "called 'When the Boys Come Marching By.' I may be wrong, but I rather think there is a chance that it will strike twelve. Suppose the silly little thing called 'Row, Row, Row' were to come out now and make the hit that it did make a few years ago?—it would, in all probability, be the marching song for the American Army. I wrote it and can, therefore, call it a silly little thing; nothing to it except a catchy air. 'Bedelia' is the kind of thing I mean. Jean Schwartz wrote it more than a dozen years ago. Let such another hit be made now, and, re-

gardless of the words, it will be the American 'Tipperary.'

"'Tipperary,' written at any other time, would have been a total flivver. But there is no doubt about it that the British Tommy goes into battle to it with a lot more dash than he would to 'God Save the King.' When this country's hit is made, it will be through some actor on the stage."

A regiment in California has adopted "What Kind of An American Are You?" written by Albert von Tilzer, as its official song, and another melody which helps recruiting Sergeants in their work is Irving Berlin's "It's Your Country and My Country." Cliff Hess, writer of hits on his own account and "arranger" of Berlin's successes, (Berlin gets the thing and plays it on the piano with two fingers, and then Hess writes it out,) is another capable workman who believes none of the composers has hit the American mark in the present war.

"They are all trying too hard," said Mr. Hess. "The result is that the songs are all too mushy and patriotic. Now, I believe I have a little thing that will do the trick. Of course, you can't tell. But my idea is that the people are tired hearing about what they must do in this war. I mean to take the other angle, and my song will be called 'There's Nothing Too Good for the Soldier.' Get what I mean? 'Don't get in a whirl, if he steals your girl, there's nothing too good for the soldier.'"

A day in Tin Pan Alley should be followed by a month in Northern France, where the attack is suspended now and then.