

# OUR FIRST ANTHOLOGY OF NATIVE SONG

*By Ernest Thompson Seton*

In "The Path on the Rainbow" we have a remarkable and valuable mass of poems selected from original collections by our best investigators of native song. At the outset it strikes one that a classification into poems, songs, ballads, and sagas would have been extremely helpful. The differences between these have not always been recognized by the compiler. Nevertheless, such a mode of handling would not have been easy without full possession of the originals; and it seems obvious that the editor's point of view is purely literary, with chief reference to the English translations.

In some respects this is bound to be unfair to the material—for example, the mourning song of the Kagwantan (page 177):

It is his own fault  
that this man of the wolf people died.  
Do not lay the blame on anyone else.

This is the song—the whole of it as given. Considered as poetry in this form it is valueless, but shrilled or chanted to the tom-tom in rhythmic rendition and native expression with many repeats, it might easily rank high as a song.

Similarly, one is tempted to doubt the wisdom of including such a song as "Dead-slave's Song" (page 172):

I used to make fun  
of this poor little girl at Wrangell  
When she was very small.

The qualities which gave value to the original are surely not here.

On the other hand, the Micmac "Vengeance Song" (page 7) is obviously of true song construction, with its incisive statements interlarded with repeated rhythmic vocables that

are there to develop and vent enthusiasm.

A song-poem of exquisite beauty even in translation is the Paiute "Song of Beautiful Women" (page 222). Apparently it should be "of a Beautiful Woman":

Go thy way in comeliness!  
Strong sun across the sod doth make  
Such quickening as thy countenance.  
Pursue thy unguessed errand and pass by;  
I am more worth for what the passing  
wakes  
Great races in my loins to thee that cry!  
My blood is redder for thy loveliness—  
Prosper; be fair; pass by!

If there is anything finer in our own literature of the kind, I do not know where to look for it.

The Navaho also have made some noble contributions. The "Prayer to the Mountain Spirit" (page 221) is equal to the finest passages of Ossian and strangely akin to them in thought. So also the Wabanaki love-song or chant (page 5) and the Iroquois "Ritual of Fire and Darkness" would do credit to the literature of any people. On the other hand, "The Song My Paddle Sings" strikes me as foreign and less inspired than most in the volume.

Amid such an abundance of good things one is tempted to launch out at great length, especially since this is the first anthology of its kind. As a piece of book-making it is high class. Printers' errors are few. I note one, however (maybe not by the printer), that should be corrected: the name of Tekahionwake is misspelled each time—I give it here as she herself gave it. The collection is blessed with a true and discriminating introduction by Mary Austin, and as a whole is of such value that it will at once take a permanent place in our libraries.

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The Path on the Rainbow. Edited by George W. Cronyn. Boni and Liveright.