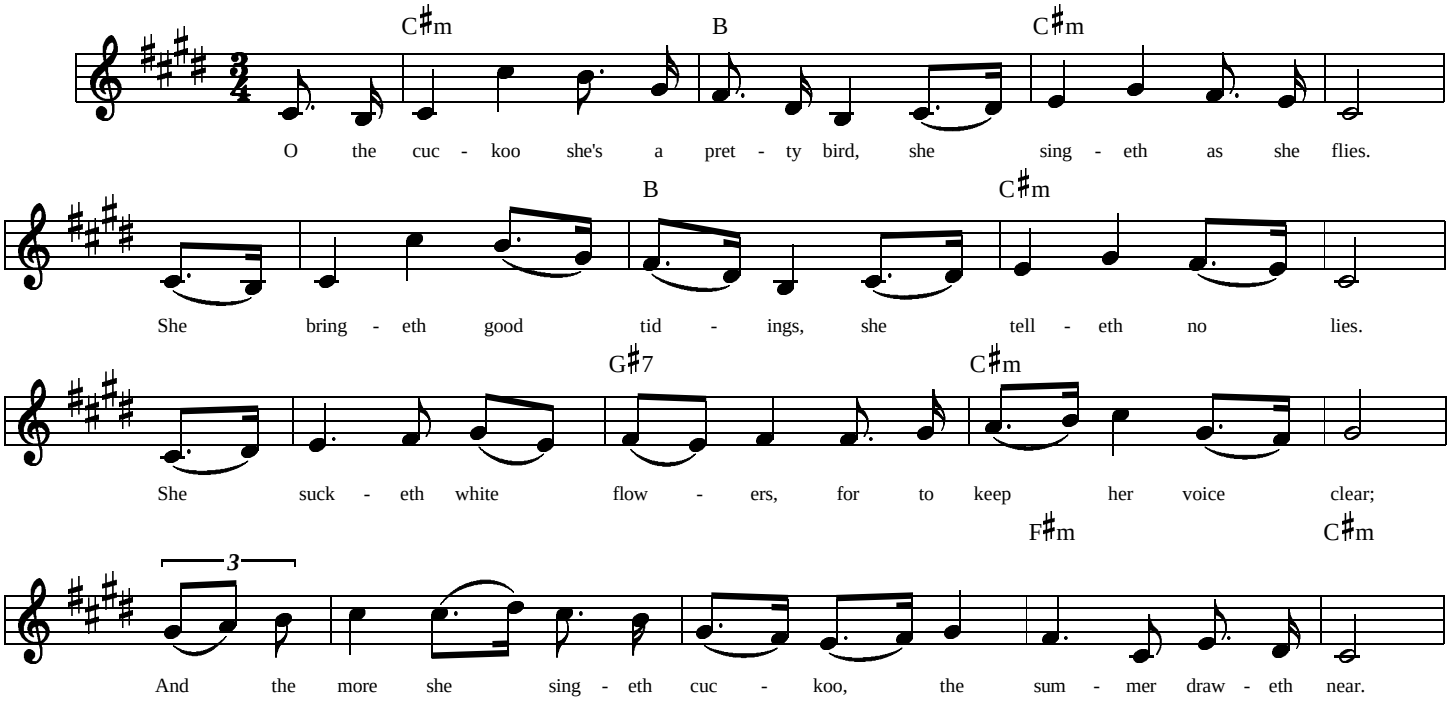
35
THE CUCKOO

Collected by CECIL J. SHARP



1 O the cuckoo she's a pretty bird,
She singeth as she flies.
She bringeth good tidings,
She telleth no lies.
She sucketh white flowers,
For to keep her voice clear;
And the more she singeth cuckoo,
The summer draweth near.

2 As I was a-walking
And a-talking one day,
I met with my own true love,
As he came that way.
O to meet him was a pleasure,
Though the courting was woe,
For I found him false hearted,
He would kiss me and go.

3 I wish I were a scholar
And could handle the pen.
I would write to my lover and to all roving men.
I would tell them of the grief and woe,
That attend on their lies.
I would wish them have pity
On the flower when it dies.

NOTE

For other versions with tunes, see 'Folk Songs from Dorset' (No. 11); Butterworth's 'Folk Songs from Sussex' (No. 6); 'A Garland of Country Song' (No. 1); and Barrett's 'English Folk Song' (No. 42).

I have taken down fifteen different versions of this song, but the tune given in the text is the only one that is modal (Aeolian). This particular tune is usually associated with the words of "High Germany." Halliwell, in his 'Nursery Rhymes' (p. 99), prints a couple of verses in dialect, as follows:

"The cuckoo's a vine bird,
A zengs as a vlies;
A brengs us good tidin's,
And tells us no lies.
A zucks th' smael birds' eggs,
To make his voice clear;
And the mwore a cries 'cuckoo!'
The zummer draws near."

The words in the text are similar to those given in 'A Glasgow Garland,' "The Sailor's Return."