The fact that one of the marching songs of the British army in the current war begins “My eyes are dim, I cannot see,” is of interest as we believe it to be the first instance of an ophthalmic sentiment being made use of in this connexion. In the Great War “Tipperary” held the field; in the present “Roll out the barrel”, bids fair to be as popular. The Marseillaise must, we think, be the most famous marching song in history, though “John Brown’s body” runs it close. The fact that Uncle Toby was addicted to whistling half-a-dozen bars of “Lillibullero” leads one to the conclusion that those British soldiers, who swore so terribly in Flanders, got rid of some of their superfluous energy with this tune. The French are said to have used “Malbrouk s’en va-t’en guerre” during the Revolution. Brewer, in his Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, says that this song dates from the Crusades and has nothing to do with the Duke of Marlborough; and it is now chiefly memorable for Thackeray’s ridiculous drawing of Duchess Sarah taking leave of her husband. Was Kipling’s “Absent minded beggar” much used in the South African war of 1899-1902? Our Scottish readers, if any chance upon this note, will doubtless hum “Hey Johnny Cope”; and it is common knowledge that Cromwell’s Ironsides went into action singing psalms. Napoleon gave orders that French troops in the Peninsula should be supplied with at least three different songs, and for all we know to the contrary William the Conqueror may have countenanced a marching song at Hastings. Marching songs are probably as old as armies themselves.

We have even heard of an example of ophthalmic humour in the eye ward of one of the London Hospitals where the children greeted the dawn with the roundelay “Dancing with tears in my eyes.”