

**LYRICS FROM THE
DRAMATISTS OF THE
ELIZABETHAN AGE**

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Lyrics from the Dramatists of the Elizabethan Age by A. H. Bullen

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INTRODUCTION.

THE scattered lyrical poetry of the Elizabethan age is as voluminous as it is excellent. I attempted to collect a portion of it in an anthology entitled *Lyrics from Elizabethan Song-books*; and I now add another chapter to the story. It is only by a patient and minute examination that we gradually become aware of the extent and wealth of this fruitful tract of English literature; if we advance too rapidly our survey must needs be defective. In the present volume I have gathered together the lyrics dispersed among the plays, masques, and pageants of the Elizabethan age,—allowing myself the usual privilege of construing the word “Elizabethan” in an elastic sense, so as to include all who “trafficked with the stage” in the days of James I. and Charles I. I advance from Lyly and Peele to Shirley and Sir William Davenant.¹

¹ The ground had been traversed before by the late Robert Bell in his *Songs from the Dramatists*. My predecessor's labour covered a wider area than mine, Sheridan being the last name in his anthology. My collection, within the limits

It will be noticed that, though I have called this anthology *Lyrics from the Dramatists of the Elizabethan Age*, some dramatists are not represented. The most notable absentee is Robert Greene, whose lyrical poetry is of singular beauty. His exclusion is due to the fact that his lyrics are only found in his romances, not in his plays. Thomas Lodge stands in the same position. Both will be fully represented hereafter in a volume of *Lyrics from Elizabethan Romances*; but I am now concerned solely with the drama.

Adopting chronological order, I give the first place to John Lyly, who (unlike Greene) plentifully garnished his comedies with songs, while he never struck a lyrical note in his romance, *Euphues*. We are indebted to Edward Blount, the enterprising publisher who in 1632 issued a collective edition of Lyly's plays, for the preservation of these songs. They were not included in the original editions of Lyly's plays. In those days publishers frequently omitted songs when they put plays to press.¹ Marston's plays, for instance, have come down without any of the songs, though the stage-directions show that songs were provided in abundance.² There

that I have prescribed to myself, is somewhat fuller than Bell's.

¹ The late Mr. Hain Friswell in 1867 excised all the poetry from his edition of Sidney's *Arcadia*!

² Yet I can hardly believe that these lost songs were by

is in Lyly's songs a fairy lightness that presents a most refreshing contrast to the pedantic finery of *Euphues*. Where shall we find a conceit more neatly turned than in those delightful verses, frequently imitated but never equalled, "Cupid and my Campaspe played"? It must be remembered that Lyly's songs were written at a time when our English lyrics were doubtfully feeling their way. Lodge and Breton frequently relapse into the tedious long-winded measures employed by the elder poets; and Greene's touch is not always sure. But there is no fault to be found with Lyly's songs. Would that he had devoted himself to song-writing instead of toiling at his ponderous romance! "Sing to Apollo, God of day," and "O Cupid, monarch over kings," are jewels that "from each facet flash a laugh at time."

Though Peele's plays have but a dusty antiquarian interest, his songs are as fresh as the flowers in May. He was a rogue and sharper, according to the traditional account; but the author of *The Arraignment of Paris* and of the noble song in *Polyhymnia* must surely have been a man of

Marston, and suspect that the players had to procure them from some other quarter. Where plays were represented by companies of boy-actors (as in the case of Lyly and Marston) songs were usually introduced, for the boys had been carefully trained in singing, and opportunities had to be afforded to them of displaying their accomplishment.