

**POEMS, CHIEFLY LYRICAL,
FROM ROMANCES
AND PROSE-TRACTS OF
THE ELIZABETHAN AGE**

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Poems, chiefly lyrical, from romances and prose-tracts of the Elizabethan Age by A. H. Bullen

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POEMS,
CHIEFLY LYRICAL,
FROM ROMANCES AND PROSE-TRACTS OF
THE ELIZABETHAN AGE:
WITH CHOSEN POEMS OF NICHOLAS BRETON.

EDITED BY
A. H. BULLEN.



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INTRODUCTION.

IN the present volume I offer yet another collection of Elizabethan verse to the admirers of our old poets. Davison's "Poetical Rhapsody" will follow without delay: and then I have done. *Ne quid nimis.*

When I excused the absence of Greene and Lodge from my anthology, "Lyrics from Elizabethan Dramatists," I announced that I intended to issue a collection of poems from Elizabethan romances. I must confess that, on proceeding to sift the poetry which is so copiously scattered through the old prose romances, I was somewhat disappointed. Much of it is of indifferent value and falls far below the standard of excellence that I have tried to preserve in my other anthologies. So I determined to alter my plan. Instead of devoting a whole volume to the romances, I have divided the anthology into three groups. The first contains

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poems from the romances; in the second I have assembled Nicholas Breton's choicest poems; and the third embraces lyrics from Clement Robinson's "Handful of Pleasant Delights," and from "The Phoenix' Nest." Breton's poems are not readily accessible, and certainly deserve attention. Clement Robinson's collection and "The Phoenix' Nest" are—with the exception of "Tottell's Miscellany"—the most interesting of the miscellanies issued before 1600, the year of the publication of "England's Helicon."

A learned and genial French scholar, M. Jules Jusserand, gave us a year or two ago an excellent account of the Elizabethan novel. He has recently revised and enlarged his essay, which is presently to make its appearance in English dress. As the field is occupied by M. Jusserand, it is unnecessary for me to touch on the history of the early novel. I am concerned only with the poetry of the Elizabethan romances. The old Greek novelists—Heliodorus, Longus, Achilles Tatius, and the rest—did not garnish their stories with verse; and Apuleius stuck to prose. It was from Italy and Spain that our romance-writers caught the habit of mingling verse with prose. Almost invariably they were indebted for their plots to foreign originals; and not seldom the verse with which they sought to relieve the tedium of their narratives was "conveyed" from over-sea. Gervase Markham, in the

preface to his "English Arcadia," remarked that Sir Philip Sidney lay under some obligation to a Spanish romance, once highly esteemed in England, the "Diana" of Jorges de Montemayor, (and he might have added that Sidney was also indebted to Sannazarro's "Arcadia"). A translation of "Diana" was made by Bartholomew Yong, or Young, as early as 1584, but was not published until 1598. Yong did not succeed in rendering the poetry neatly; but the editor of "England's Helicon" devoted many pages of his anthology to Yong's translations. As for the poetry in Sidney's "Arcadia," it is undeniably disappointing. If we want to see how true a poet Sidney really was, we must go to the songs and sonnets of Astrophel and Stella, not to the "Arcadia." In his romance he indulges his fondness for metrical experiments; he sports in hexameters, asclepiads, sapphics, etc.—feats of agility that quickly exhaust the reader's patience.

Thomas Lodge candidly acknowledges at times his indebtedness to foreign originals. In "A Margarite of America," 1589, he gives us renderings of several Italian sonnets, and mentions the authors' names. But he is not always careful to express his obligations. In "Scylla's Metamorphosis," 1589, he has the following dainty poem:—

"The earth late choked with showers,
Is now arrayed in green;

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Her bosom springs with flowers,
 The air dissolves her teen :
 The heavens laugh at her glory,
 Yet bide I sad and sorry.

The woods are decked with leaves,
 The trees are clothed gay ;
 And Flora, crowned with sheaves,
 With oaken boughs doth play ;
 Where I am clad in black,
 The token of my wrack.

The birds upon the trees
 Do sing with pleasant voices,
 And chant in their degrees
 Their loves and lucky choices ;
 When I, whilst they are singing,
 With sighs mine arms am wringing.

The thrushes seek the shade,
 And I my fatal grave ;
 Their flight to heaven is made,
 My walk on earth I have ;
 They free, I thrall ; they jolly,
 I sad and pensive wholly.

These verses have been justly admired, but it has not been noticed that they are closely imitated from the opening stanzas of a longer poem of Philippe Desportes :—

“ La terre, naguère glacée,
 Est ores de vert tapissée,
 Son sein est embelli de fleurs,

L'air est encore amoureux d'elle,
 Le ciel rit de la voir si belle,
 Et moi j'en augmente mes pleurs.

Les bois sont couverts de feuillage,
 De vert se pare le bocage,
 Ses rameaux sont tous verdissants ;
 Et moi, las ! privé de ma gloire,
 Je m'habille de couleur noire,
 Signe des ennuis que je sens.

Des oiseaux la troupe légère
 Chantant d'une voix ramagère,
 S'égaye aux bois à qui mieux mieux :
 Et moi tout rempli de furie
 Je sanglotte, soupire, et crie
 Par les plus solitaires lieux.

Les oiseaux cherchent la verdure :
 Moi je cherche une sépulture,
 Pour voir mon malheur limité.
 Vers le ciel ils ont leur volée :
 Et mon âme trop désolée
 N'aime rien que l'obscurité."

Desportes was widely read in England. Indeed, Lodge, in "A Margarite of America," speaks of his "poetical writings" as "being already for the most part Englished and ordinarily in every man's hands." This seems to be an exaggeration, but there can be no doubt that Desportes had some influence on English poetry. One of the finest poems in the present volume is the passionate address (from "The Phœnix' Nest") beginning :—

“ O Night, O jealous Night, repugnant to my measures !¹
 O Night so long desired, yet cross to my content !
 There's none but only thou that can perform my pleasures,
 And none but only thou that hindereth my intent.”

This first stanza is clearly out of Desportes :—

“ O Nuit, jalouse Nuit, contre moi conjurée,
 Qui renflames le ciel de nouvelle clairté,
 T'ai-je donc aujourd'hui tant de fois désirée
 Pour être si contraire à ma félicité ? ”

But the anonymous English poet confines his imitation to the first stanza. The later stanzas have nothing in common with the French poem ; and I do not hesitate to say that the English verses are far richer and more fervid than anything written by Desportes. The triumphant extravagance of the final stanza is hardly to be found outside of our Elizabethan poets :—

“ And when my will is wrought, then, Cynthia, shine, good
 lady,
 All other nights and days in honour of that night,
 That happy heavenly night, that night so dark and shady,
 Wherein my Love had eyes that lighted my delight ! ”

It seems to me that whenever Lodge imitates Desportes, he greatly improves upon his model. Desportes has a sonnet beginning :—

¹ Old ed. “ pleasures,” which recurs in the third line. The repetition would be intolerable.