

**SONGS FROM
THE DRAMATISTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649357253

Songs from the dramatists by Robert Bell

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EDITED BY ROBERT BELL



THIRD EDITION.

LONDON

GRIFFIN, BOHN, AND COMPANY

STATIONERS' HALL COURT.

1861.

HOFFER

LONDON:

T. HARRILD, PRINTER, SHOE LANE,

FLEET STREET.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS volume contains a collection of Songs from the English Dramatists, beginning with the writer of the first regular comedy, and ending with Sheridan. The want of such a collection has long been felt, and that it has never been supplied before must occasion surprise to all readers who are acquainted with the riches we possess in this branch of lyrical poetry.

The plan upon which the work is arranged furnishes the means of following the course of the drama historically, and tracing in its progress the revolutions of style, manners, and morals that marked successive periods. The songs of each dramatist are distributed under the titles of the plays from which they are taken; and the plays are given in the order of their production. Short biographical notices, and explanatory notes, have been introduced wherever they appeared necessary or desirable; but all superfluous annotation has been carefully avoided.

The orthography of the early songs has been modernized, in no instance, however, to the loss or injury of a phrase essential to the coloring of the age, or the structure of the verse. The old spelling is not sacred; nor can it be always fixed with certainty. It was generally left to the printers, who not only differed

from each other, but sometimes from themselves. By adopting a uniform and familiar orthography, the enjoyment of the beauties of these poems, the most perfect of their class in any language, is materially facilitated.

In the preparation of this volume, all known accessible sources have been explored and exhausted. The research bestowed upon it cannot be adequately estimated by its bulk. The labour which is *not* represented in the ensuing pages considerably exceeded the labour which has borne the fruit and flowers gathered into this little book. Many hundreds of plays have been examined without yielding any results, or such only as in their nature were unavailable. Some names will be missed from the catalogue of dramatic writers, and others will be found to contribute less than might be looked for from their celebrity; but in all such cases a satisfactory explanation can be given. Marlowe's plays, for example, do not contain a single song, and Greene's only one. Southerne abounds in songs, but they are furnished chiefly by other writers, and are of the most commonplace character. Etherege has several broken snatches of drinking rhymes and choruses dancing through his comedies, full of riotous animal spirits soaring to the height of all manner of extravagance, and admirably suited to ventilate the profligacy of the day; but for the most part they are either unfit for extract from their coarseness, or have not substance enough to stand alone. Wycherley's songs are simply gross, and Tom Killigrew's crude and artificial.

On the other hand, some things will be found here that might not have been anticipated. A few plays with nothing else in them worth preservation have supplied an excellent song; and others that had long been consigned to oblivion by their dulness or depravity, have unexpectedly thrown up an occasional stanza of permanent value.

The superiority in all qualities of sweetness, thoughtfulness, and purity of the writers of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century over their successors is strikingly exhibited in these productions. The dramatic songs of the age of Elizabeth and James I. are distinguished as much by their delicacy and chastity of feeling, as by their vigour and beauty. The change that took place under Charles II. was sudden and complete. With the Restoration, love disappears, and sensuousness takes its place. Voluptuous without taste or sentiment, the songs of that period may be said to dissect in broad daylight the life of the town, laying bare with revolting shamelessness the tissues of its most secret vices. But as this species of morbid anatomy required some variation to relieve its sameness, the song sometimes transported the libertinism into the country, and through the medium of a sort of Covent-garden pastoral exhibited the fashionable delinquencies in a masquerade of Strephons and Chlorises, no better than the Courtalls and Loveits of the comedies. The costume of innocence gave increased zest to the dissolute wit, and the audiences seem to

have been delighted with the representation of their own licentiousness in the transparent disguise of verdant images, and the affectation of rural simplicity. It helped them to a spurious ideal, which rarely, however, lasted out to the end of the verse. The subsequent decline of the drama is sensibly felt in the degeneracy of its lyrics. The interval, from the end of the seventeenth century to the close of the eighteenth, presents a multitude of songs, chiefly, however, in operas which do not come strictly within the plan of this volume; but, with a few solitary exceptions, they are trivial, monotonous, and conventional. The brilliant genius of Sheridan alone shines out with conspicuous lustre, and terminates the series with a gaiety and freshness that may be regarded as a revival of the spirit with which it opens.

R. B.

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