

**A BOOK OF AIRS, AS
WRITTEN TO BE SUNG
TO THE LUTE AND VIOL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9781760573652

A book of airs, as written to be sung to the lute and viol by Thomas Campion

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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Peter Pauper Press
MOUNT VERNON
NEW YORK

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5.12.44

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A Book of Airs

TO THE READER

WHAT epigrams are in poetry, the same are airs in music: then in their chief perfection when they are short and well seasoned. But to clog a light song with a long prelude, is to corrupt the nature of it. Many rests in music were invented, either for necessity of the fugue, or granted as an harmonical licence in songs of many parts: but in airs I find no use they have, unless it be to make a vulgar and trivial modulation seem to the ignorant, strange; and to the judicial, tedious. A naked air without guide, or prop, or colour but his own, is easily censured of every ear; and requires so much the more invention to make it please. And as MARTIAL speaks in defence of his short epigrams; so may I say in the apology of airs: that where there is a volume, there can be no imputation of shortness. The lyric poets among the Greeks and Latins were first inventors of airs, tying themselves strictly to the number and value of their syllables: of which sort, you shall find here, only one song in Sapphic verse; the rest are after the fashion of the time, ear-pleasing rhymes, without art. The subject of them is, for the most part, amorous: and why not amorous songs, as well as amorous attires? Or why not new airs, as well as new fashions?

For the note and tablature, if they satisfy the most, we have our desire; let expert masters please themselves with better. And if any light error hath escaped us, the skilful may easily correct it, the unskilful will hardly perceive it. But there are some who, to appear the more deep and singular in their judgement, will admit no music but that which is long, intricate, baited with fugue, chained with syncopation, and where the nature of every word is precisely expressed in the note: like the old exploded action in comedies, when if they did pronounce Memini, they would point to the hinder part of their heads; if Video, put their finger in their eye. But such childish observing of words is altogether ridiculous: and we ought to maintain, as well in notes as in action, a manly carriage; gracing no word, but that which is eminent and emphatical. Nevertheless, as in poesy we give the preeminence to the Heroical Poem; so in music we yield the chief place to the grave and well invented Motet: but not to every harsh and dull confused Fantasy, where, in multitude of points, the harmony is quite drowned.

Airs have both their art and pleasure: and I will conclude of them, as the poet did in his censure of CATULLUS the Lyric, and VIRGIL the Heroic writer:

Tantum magna suo debet Verona CATULLO,
Quantum parva suo Mantua VIRGILIO.

Part One

I

My sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love;
And though the sager sort our deeds reprove,
Let us not weigh them: heaven's great lamps do dive
Into their west, and straight again revive:
But soon as once set is our little light,
Then must we sleep one ever-during night.

If all would lead their lives in love like me,
Then bloody swords and armour should not be;
No drum nor trumpet peaceful sleeps should move,
Unless alarm came from the camp of love:
But fools do live, and waste their little light,
And seek with pain their ever-during night.

When timely death my life and fortune ends,
Let not my hearse be vext with mourning friends;
But let all lovers, rich in triumph, come
And with sweet pastimes grace my happy tomb:
And, Lesbia, close up thou my little light,
And crown with love my ever-during night.

II

THOUGH you are young, and I am old,
Though your veins hot, and my blood cold,
Though youth is moist, and age is dry;
Yet embers live, when flames do die.

The tender graft is easily broke,
But who shall shake the sturdy oak?
You are more fresh and fair than I;
Yet stubs do live when flowers do die.

Thou, that thy youth doth vainly boast,
Know buds are soonest nipt with frost:
Think that thy fortune still doth cry,
"Thou fool! to-morrow thou must die!"

I CARE NOT for these ladies,
That must be wooed and prayed:
Give me kind Amarillis,
The wanton country maid.
Nature art disdaineth,
Her beauty is her own.

Her when we court and kiss,
She cries, "Forsooth, let go!"
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say "No!"

If I love Amarillis,
She gives me fruit and flowers:
But if we love these ladies,
We must give golden showers.
Give them gold, that sell love,
Give me the nut-brown lass,

Who, when we court and kiss,
She cries, "Forsooth, let go!"
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say "No!"

These ladies must have pillows,
And beds by strangers wrought;
Give me a bower of willows,
Of moss and leaves unbought,
And fresh Amarillis,
With milk and honey fed;

Who when we court and kiss,
She cries, "Forsooth, let go!"
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say "No!"

FOLLOW thy fair sun, unhappy shadow!
Though thou be black as night,
And she made all of light,
Yet follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow!



Follow her whose light thy light depriveth;
Though here thou livest disgraced,
And she in heaven is placed,
Yet follow her whose light the world reviveth!

Follow those pure beams whose beauty burneth,
That so have scorched thee,
As thou still black must be,
Till her kind beams thy black to brightness turneth.

Follow her! while yet her glory shineth:
There comes a luckless night,
That will dim all her light;
And this the black unhappy shade divineth.

Follow still! since so thy fates ordained;
The sun must have his shade,
Till both at once do fade;
The sun still proved, the shadow still dislained.

v

My love hath vowed he will forsake me,
And I am already sped;
Far other promise he did make me
When he had my maidenhead.
If such danger be in playing
And sport must to earnest turn,
I will go no more a-maying.

Had I foreseen what is ensued,
And what now with pain I prove,
Unhappy then I had eschewed
This unkind event of love:
Maids foreknow their own undoing,
But fear naught till all is done,
When a man alone is wooing.

Dissembling wretch, to gain thy pleasure,
What didst thou not vow and swear?
So didst thou rob me of the treasure
Which so long I held so dear.
Now thou provest to me a stranger: