

**AN ELIZABETHAN GARLAND:
BEING A DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE
OF SEVENTY BLACK - LETTER
BALLADS, PRINTED BETWEEN THE
YEARS 1559 AND 17597**

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An Elizabethan Garland: Being a Descriptive Catalogue of Seventy Black - Letter Ballads,
printed between the years 1559 and 17597 by George Daniel

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GEORGE DANIEL

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An Elizabethan Garland;

- BLEND A

DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE

OF

SEVENTY

Black-Letter Ballads,

PRINTED BETWEEN THE YEARS 1550 AND 1587.

In the Possession of George Daniel, of Canonbury.

—
"Old Songs, old Tales, and all old Jest
Our stomachs easiest digest."
—

TWENTY-FIVE COPIES PRINTED ONLY FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.

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LONDON, 1856.
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INTRODUCTION.

If any portion of our literature be more generally interesting than another it is ancient ballad lore. How many events historical and domestic do we owe the knowledge of to this source. Battles have been fought, and heroes immortalised in its expressive and inspiring strains; and the sports, pastimes, manners, customs, and traditions of our forefathers have received from it some of their most important and curious illustrations. Scholars, critics, and antiquaries have rendered good service to literature by snatching from oblivion those precious relics of legendary poetry which would have been lost to posterity but for their well directed labours of love. They have made us familiar with the thoughts, sympathies, and language of our ancestors. We follow them to the tournament, the border foray, the public hostelry, and the domestic hearth. We glow with their martial spirit and revel in their rude festivities!

The chief characteristics of an ancient ballad are simplicity and force. With the minstrels of the olden time the impulses of the heart were the inspirations of the muse. Yet in this absence of study and polish, thoughts of exquisite beauty, felicity of expression beyond the reach of art, and rare pathos surprise and delight

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us at every turn. Many ballads quoted by Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher and Samuel Rowlands ("Crew of Kind Gossips") extend not beyond a single verse, yet how suggestive are they! Many (as if to tantalise bibliographical curiosity!) are limited to a line. It was such penny broadsides that composed the marvellous "bunch" of the military mason of Coventry, and that stocked the pedlar's pack of Antiochus; and their power of fascination may be learnt from the varlet's own words when he laughingly brags how nimbly he lightened the gaping villagers of their purses while chanting to them his merry trol-my-dames!

We delight in a Fiddler's Fling full of mirth and pastime! and revel in the exhilarating perfume of those odoriferous chaplets gathered on sunshiny holidays and star-twinkling nights bewailing how beautiful maidens meet with faithless wooers, and how fond shepherds are jilted by deceitful damsels. How despairing Corydons hang, and how despairing Phillidas drown themselves. How ghosts haunt and inflict vengeance. How disappointed lovers go to sea, and how foetern lasses follow them in jackets and trousers! Sir George Ethoridge, in his comedy of "Love in a Tub," says, "Expect at night to see the old man with his paper lantern and crack'd spectacles, singing you woeful tragedies to kitchen-maids, and cobblers' apprentices." Aubrey mentions that his nurse could repeat the history of England, from the Conquest to the time of Charles I. in *ballads*. In Walton's *Angler*, Piscator having caught a chub, conducts Venator to "an honest alehouse where they would find a cleanly room, lavender in the windows, and *twenty ballads* stuck about the wall." "When I travelled," says The Spectator, "I took a particular delight in hearing the songs and fables that are come from father to son, and are most in vogue among the common people of the countries through which I passed."

Verses sweetens toll however rude the sound.

We would not part with those primitive "moralities" "*Goody Two-Shoes*," "*Mother Bunch*," and "*The Cruel Uncle*" that

charmed our childhood for all the dry, hard, husky essays on political economy that utilitarianism ever penned!

Listen to me, my lovely Shepherd's joys,
And thou shalt heare with mirth and mickle glee,
Some pretty tales, which, when I was a boye,
My toothlesse grandams oft hath told to mee.

In these "very proper ditties" and "pleasant poesies" the lady-love was extolled, the Popish priest lampooned, the rebel reviled, the sovereign deified, the shrew shown up, the ham-pecked husband pilloried, and the most rare monster on two legs and on four moralised as a judgment upon the nation, and a warning to the wicked! Winding up with a prayer for the Queen! Even Tyburn's noose had its muse.

The Britons, from an early period, were a ballad-loving people. The ancient English Minstrels who succeeded the Troubadours sang songs of their own composing to the sound of the harp. These were, in part, if not wholly, French or Provençal. Richard I., who was himself a minstrel, wrote verses in that tongue, some of which are extant. For many ages "trumpeters, luteners, harpers, singers, &c.," contributed to the national amusement. No state ceremony or religious festival, no castle or tavern was complete without them. The art of printing was a heavy blow to extemporaneous lyrics chanted by wandering gleemen to drum-tunes. Such careless compositions—though they might satisfy the ear, would not bear the critical ordeal of the press; and a better sort of ballad-mongers and ballad-singers superseded them. "*The Downfall of Thomas Lord Cromwell*," in 1540, is quoted by Ritson as the oldest printed ballad known. It has been reprinted by Dr. Percy, and we believe is now in the library of the Society of Antiquaries.

Itinerant vocalism had its pains and penalties. In 1537 one John Hogen was arrested for singing publicly a political ballad contrary to the proclamation of 1533 for the suppression of "fond books, ballads, rhymes, &c." And ten years afterwards, owing to

their increasing circulation, the legislature passed an act against "printed ballads, plays, rhimes, songs and other fantasies." The government of Edward VI. was tolerant to this popular literature; but Queen Mary, a month after her accession to the throne, reopened the penal fire, and "printers and stationers" with "an evil zeal for lucre, and covetous of vile gain" were warned by royal edict to abandon their unlawful calling.

Propitious to the Smithfield Muse was the reign of Elizabeth! Ballad singing was in all its glory! Then flourished Tarleton, Antony Munday, Johnson, Delony, and Elderton. The latter lyricist was wont to "arm himself with ale when he balladed," and upon him was written the following epitaph:—

*Hic situs est siccus atque siccus Eldertonus,
Quid dico, hic situs est? hic potius stitit est.*

Which is thus translated by OMys:—

Dead drunk here Elderton doth lie;
Dead as he is, he still is dry:
So of him it may well be said,
Here he, but not his thirst is laid.

Skelton, at an earlier period, had kept the press alive with his merry ballads, but these sweet singers literally inundated it. So profitable was their calling, that Henry Chetile, in his "Kind-Hart's Dreams," circa 1502, says, "There is many a tradesman of a worshipfull trade, yet no stationer, who after a litle bringing uppe apprentices to singing brokerie, takes into his shoppe some freshmen, & trastes his olde servantes of a two months standing with a dosen of ballads. In which, if they prove thrifis, he makes them prety chapmen, able to speed more pamphlets by the stafe forbidden, than all the booksellers in London."

Nicholas Breton ("Faequil's Night-Cap," 1600) advises proesmen to take up the more thriving trade of writing penny ballads. Every London street had its vocalist; and Essex (where Dick and Wat Wimbers two celebrated trebles are said to have got twenty shillings a day by singing at Braintree fair) and the adjoining counties

would seem in particular to have patronised this "upstart generation of ballad-singers." This peripatetic harmony however had its jarring notes of discord. Phillip Stubbes the puritan, in his "Anatomy of Abuses," denounces fiercely "Songs, filthy ballads, and scurvy rhymes." Bishop Hall (see *Virgidedmiarum*, 1597) lashes the "drunken rimer" (probably the "peerless Elderton"!) who

See his handelle have such faire successe,
Sung to the wheele, and sang unto the peeple.

Chettle gives no quarter to certain licentious ballads, viz., "*Watkins Aie, The Carman's Whistle, Chopping Knives, and Frier Fox-taile,*" and Shakespeare has his satirical hit at "metre balladmongers."

The Carman of ancient times made "the welkin dance," and "roused the night-owl" with their uproarious catches, which *Justice Shallow*, "ever in the rear-ward of the fashion," palmed upon "the over-scutcht huswives" as his own "*fancies, or his good nights.*"

The Spinsters and the knitters in the sun,

and the milk-maids were chanters of ancient ballads. So too were the weavers. In *Dalony's History of Jack of Newbery* the *Weavers song* is thus introduced: "Then came his highness, (Henry VIII., who was upon a visit to Jack) where he saw a hundred looms standing in one room, and two men working in every one, who pleasantly *sung in this sort.*" Whether the carmen of the present day are as musical as of yore we know not. But this we know that the song of the spinster, the milkmaid, and the knitter, "pillow and bobbins all her little store," is still to be heard in the remote, retired and rural village that the railroad has not yet invaded, and in daisy-dappled fields respited for a season from a brick-and-mortar end!

In the succeeding reign "*ballad-bratery*" continued in full bearing!

Knights and dames, and gobias hairy,
Giants rude and gentle fairy,

were as plentiful and as popular as ever. But in process of time the old metre-men passed away, and when Charles I. became King a new race succeeded to their titles, though they maintained very indifferently their honors. The most prolific of these was Martin Parker a Grub-street scribbler, to whom our much-abused friend "*J'fonde Elderton*" was a Swan of Helicon to a Tailor's Goose. And in his wake followed an inferior fry (Price, Wade, Climal, and Guy) to whom even Martin himself was a Triton of the minnows! In fondness they kept pace with their predecessors, and poured forth merry medicines for melancholy. During the Usurpation, the people, who had been arbitrarily deprived of their amusements by the iron hand of treason and fanaticism, found refuge in the penny ballad, in which the cupidity, hypocrisy, and cant of their oppressors were happily exposed and ridiculed. And while the stage, that had been trodden by Shakespeare and his "fellows," was solemnly prohibited, the well-graced actor silent and pining in poverty, and the maypole and its flowery garlands prostrate and withered, the dark narrow streets and low-roofed dingy hostleries and houses of ancient London rang with these mirth-moving madrigals!

The Restoration brought back with it Theatres and May-games, and England joyfully resumed her ancient title of "*Merric*." But the old-fashioned minstrelsy of the million had seen its best days, and diversions more generally attractive put ballad-singing somewhat in abeyance. Old songs were now gathered into Garlands, and reprinted as Chap Books adorned with "new and proper sculptures," and in this more permanent shape were fortunately preserved to posterity. The Pepysian and Bodleian Libraries are rich in these interesting tiny tomes, and in that of the writer there are many curious specimens. St. Bartlemy and Frost Fairs, Party Politics and Tyburn Tree still found congenial occupation for a goodly host of garretteers—