



Select English Songs
and Dialogues

of the 16th and 17th Centuries

Book I

Edited by ARNOLD DOLMETSCH

The Ninth Song.

Words by
Robert Herrick

Set by
William Lawes

Published 1652.

mf

Gather your Rosebuds while you may, Old

mf

Time is still a flying; And that same Flow'r that smiles to day, to mor-row

f

will be dying. The glorious Lamp of Heav'n the Sun, the higher he is a

getting; The soon-er must his race be run, And near-er he's to set-ting.

p

That age is best that is the first, while

youth and blood are warmer, Expect not the last and worst, Time still suc-

f

-ceeds the former Then be not coy, but use your time, While you may go

marry, For having once but lost your prime, you may for e - ver tarry.

PREFACE

SUCH editions as this ought not to be required. If the musicians of our time were able, as they should be, to perform from texts which, in the golden age of English Music, everybody could understand, the mere printing of unpublished works, or reprinting of the published ones would be sufficient. But we live in a period of transition; interest in secular music older than the eighteenth century is only just awakening, and whilst very few as yet can read the originals written in Lute tablature, or with accompaniments to be filled up according to rules whose practical application is rarely understood, there are many who thoroughly enjoy this music, when they hear it properly performed. This edition, it is hoped, will prove useful, since it very faithfully represents the mode of performance adopted by one who has devoted much of his energy to the study of this early music with the object of presenting it in accordance with the intentions of its composers.

The Lute is the best instrument to accompany these songs, specially the earlier ones; but a real sixteenth or seventeenth century Lute is now so rare that the average musician need hardly hope to meet with one. The Virginals, Spinet and Harpsichord are, however, no longer impossible to procure in playable condition, and when a Lute cannot be obtained they are the best instruments to use in accompaniment. A Harp, a Guitar or an early Piano will also do tolerably well, but a modern Piano is the worst possible instrument to use, its heavy, dull tone being quite out of sympathy with the music. Still, even on a modern piano, those who have never had an opportunity of hearing this music upon the instruments for which it was written will find it well worthy of their interest.

The words, always beautiful, sometimes perfect examples of what songs should be, ought to be foremost in the performer's mind. They should be clearly pronounced and intelligently spoken. This being done will greatly help to discover the right style of the music, which is, mostly, only an illustration of the words.

The first song, '*My lyttell prety one,*' is from a MS. in the British Museum, where it is given with its accompaniment fully written for the Lute in tablature. It has been here left practically untouched, the chords having only been made a little fuller, as they naturally would be when performed upon a keyed instrument. Before and after the words '*with a beck she com'st anon,*' a very characteristic figure of two several bars in duple time is given to the accompaniment, which charmingly illustrates the gait of the '*lyttell prety one*' coming to the beck. This exquisite little song was printed in Chappell's '*Old English Popular Music*'; but, even in the revised edition of that work, published as recently as 1893, the editor has not scrupled to remove the two bars alluded to above. He has also replaced the perfect original accompaniment by commonplace four-part harmony, thereby rendering his version useless to those who wish to get a correct impression of the composer's meaning.

No. 2, '*As I walk't forth,*' was first published in '*Select Musickall Ayres and Dialogues,*' printed in London by John Playford, in 1652; but, from its style, it is certainly older, and must

date from the beginning of the century. The words are very beautiful and touching in their sadness; to sing them with the deep expression, coupled with the perfect simplicity they demand, is no easy task.

No. 3, '*Have you seen but a whyte lillie grow,*' is from a MS. in the British Museum, where, like No. 1, it appears with a complete Lute accompaniment in tablature. It is now published for the first time. The words occur in Ben Jonson's play '*The Devil's an Ass,*' first acted in 1614. In the first edition of that play, published in 1631, this particular stanza is not given. It appears first in 1640, after Ben Jonson's death. One version, however, differs in one important word from the published text, which gives '*Have you seen but a BRIGHT lillie grow,*' instead of '*a WHYTE lillie grow.*' The last line of the poem proves '*whyte*' to be the correct reading.

The single full chords of the accompaniment sound very unlike the counterpoint of three or more parts usual at that time in England, and recall the figured basses of Caccini's '*Nuove Musiche,*' which had been published a few years previously in Italy.

Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 are all taken, like No. 2, from the first edition of Playford's Ayres, where they are given with a single bass note, upon which the accompaniment has to be built.

In the first verse of No. 5, '*Bid me but live,*' the published version of Herrick's words gives '*thy PROTESTANT to be,*' instead of '*thy Votary,*' found in Playford's. The words of this song, and of No. 9, '*Gather your Rosebuds,*' have been set to music by many composers, up to our own time. A study of the best of these later settings will show how inferior they are, from an artistic point of view, to the original ones; there, music and words, prompted by a similar feeling, faithfully reflect the mood of the time at which they were written, and exemplify the style which gave to that mood its most perfect expression.

ARNOLD DOLMETSCH

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