

Classic Poetry Series

Nicholas Breton
- poems -

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Nicholas Breton(1546 - 1626)

Nicholas Brenton gives a new twist to the story of Eve; since she was a part of Adam, "was she any other than himself that deceived himself?"

Between 1575 and his death he published over 30 individual collections of verse, three prose fictions and at least 25 pamphlets and miscellaneous works.

A Cradle Song, The Arbor Of Amorous Devices, 1593-4

COME little babe, come silly soul,
Thy father's shame, thy mother's grief,
Born as I doubt to all our dole,
And to thyself unhappy chief:
 Sing lullaby, and lap it warm,
 Poor soul that thinks no creature harm.

Thou little think'st and less dost know
The cause of this thy mother's moan;
Thou want'st the wit to wail her woe,
And I myself am all alone:
 Why dost thou weep? why dost thou wail?
 And know'st not yet what thou dost ail.

Come, little wretch--ah, silly heart!
Mine only joy, what can I more?
If there be any wrong thy smart,
That may the destinies implore:
 'Twas I, I say, against my will,
 I wail the time, but be thou still.

And dost thou smile? O, thy sweet face!
Would God Himself He might thee see!--
No doubt thou wouldst soon purchase grace,
I know right well, for thee and me:
 But come to mother, babe, and play,
 For father false is fled away.

Sweet boy, if it by fortune chance
Thy father home again to send,
If death do strike me with his lance,
Yet mayst thou me to him commend:
 If any ask thy mother's name,
 Tell how by love she purchased blame.

Then will his gentle heart soon yield:
I know him of a noble mind:

Although a lion in the field,
A lamb in town thou shalt him find:
 Ask blessing, babe, be not afraid,
 His sugar'd words hath me betray'd.

Then mayst thou joy and be right glad;
Although in woe I seem to moan,
Thy father is no rascal lad,
A noble youth of blood and bone:
 His glancing looks, if he once smile,
 Right honest women may beguile.

Come, little boy, and rock asleep;
Sing lullaby and be thou still;
I, that can do naught else but weep,
Will sit by thee and wail my fill:
 God bless my babe, and lullaby
 From this thy father's quality.

Nicholas Breton

A Pastoral

On a hill there grows a flower,
Fair befall the dainty sweet!
By that flower there is a bower
Where the heavenly Muses meet.

In the bower there is a chair,
Fringed all about with gold,
Where doth sit the fairest fair
That did ever eye behold.

It is Phyllis fair and bright,
She that is the shepherds' joy;
She that Venus did despise,
And did blind her little boy.

This is she, the wise, the rich,
That the world desires to see;
This is ipsa quae the which
There is none but only she.

Who would not this face admire?
Who would not this saint adore?
Who would not this sight desire,
Though he thought to see no more?

O fair eyes! yet let me see
One good look, and I am gone;
Look on me, for I am he,
Thy poor silly Corydon.

Thou that art the shepherds' queen,
Look upon thy silly swain;
By thy comfort have been seen
Dead men brought to life again.

Make him live that, dying long,
Never durst for comfort seek:
Thou shalt hear so sweet a song
Never shepherd sung the like.

Nicholas Breton

A Pastoral Of Phyllis And Corydon

On a hill there grows a flower,
Fair befall the dainty sweet!
By that flower there is a bower,
Where the heavenly Muses meet.

In that bower there is a chair,
Fringèd all about with gold,
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Thy poor silly Corydon.

Thou that art the shepherds' queen,
Look upon thy silly swain;
By thy comfort have been seen
Dead men brought to life again.

Nicholas Breton

A Pastoral.

Sweet birds! that sit and sing among the shady valleys,
And see how sweetly Phyllis walks amid her garden alleys,
Go round about her bower, and sing as ye are bidden:
To her is only known his faith that from the world is hidden,
And she among you all that hath the sweetest voice,
Go chirp of him that never told, yet never changed, his voice.

And not forget his faith that lived forever loved
Yet never made his fancy known, nor ever favor moved;
And ever let your ground of all your grace be this-
'To you, to you, to you the due of love and honor is,
On you, on you, on you our music all attendeth,
For as on you our Muse begun, in you all music endeth.'

Nicholas Breton

A Prayer

Oh, with thy grace my heart inspire,
To bring forth fruites of thy desire.
Give me thy Peters penitence,
Paul's faith, and Job his patience,
And Marie's grace, and John his loue,
That in my heart I may approue.
When all these graces meete in mee,
What ioy my soule shall have in thee:
But oh, my God ! my heart cloth ake,
My soule with trembling fear doth quake,
That sinne hath brought me in such plight
As makes me ouglie in thy sight;
And I (O wretch !) am one of those
Whom thou hast reckoned for thy foes,
And that thy mercie will not heare me,
Nor comfort euer shall come near mee ;
My prayer turned into sinne,
No gate of grace shall enter in ;
But all my thoughts are farre amisse,
Shall banisht be from hope of blisse ;
And my poore soule, by sinne's desart,
Condemn'd vnto eternall smart.
And yet again, meethinks, I see
How thy great mercie lookes on mee,
And tels me faith may be victorious,
While grace will be in mercie glorious,
And what true hartes do truelie proue,
That turne to thee in teares of loue;
In which vnfaigned faithfull teares,
Wherein the wofull spirit weares,
I humbly fall at mercie's feete,
Where grace, and loue, and glorie meete;
And in teares of true contrition
Thus makes my wofull soule's petition :
In mercie looke on me, deare God ;
Forgive my sinnes, forbear thy rod;
Behold my grieffe and ease my paine,
And take me to thy grace againe,
That I may see that bright Sunne shine,

Whose glorie neuer can decline ;
Where I with Simeon's ioy may sing
When I embrace my holy King,
And sinne and sorrowes cease,
As my soule may rest in peace.

Nicholas Breton

A Quarrel With Love

Oh that I could write a story
Of love's dealing with affection!
How he makes the spirit sorry
That is touch'd with his infection.

But he doth so closely wind him,
In the plaits of will ill-pleased,
That the heart can never find him
Till it be too much diseased.

'Tis a subtle kind or spirit
Of a venom-kind of nature,
That can, like a coney-ferret,
Creep unawares upon a creature.

Never eye that can behold it,
Though it worketh first by seeing;
Nor conceit that can unfold it,
Though in thoughts be all its being.

Oh! it maketh old men witty,
Young men wanton, women idle,
While that patience weeps, for pity
Reason bite not nature's bridle.

What it is, in conjecture;
Seeking much, but nothing finding;
Like to fancy's architecture
With illusions reason blinding.

Yet, can beauty so retain it,
In the profit of her service,
That she closely can maintain it
For her servant chief on office?

In her eye she chiefly breeds it;
In her cheeks she chiefly hides it;
In her servant's faith she feeds it,
While his only heart abides it.

Nicholas Breton

A Report Song In A Dream, Between A Shepherd And His Nymph

Shall we go dance the hay? _The hay?_
Never pipe could ever play
Better shepherd's roundelay.

Shall we go sing the song? _The song?_
Never Love did ever wrong.
Fair maids, hold hands all along.

Shall we go learn to woo? _To woo?_
Never thought came ever to[o](?)
Better deed could better do.

Shall we go learn to kiss? _To kiss?_
Never heart could ever miss
Comfort where true meaning is.

Thus at base they run, _They run,_
When the sport was scarce begun;
But I waked, and all was done.

Nicholas Breton

A Shepherd's Dream

A silly shepherd lately sat
Among a flock of sheep;
Where musing long on this and that,
At last he fell asleep.
And in the slumber as he lay,
He gave a piteous groan;
He thought his sheep were run away,
And he was left alone.
He whoop'd, he whistled, and he call'd,
But not a sheep came near him;
Which made the shepherd sore appall'd
To see that none would hear him.
But as the swain amazèd stood,
In this most solemn vein,
Came Phyllida forth of the wood,
And stood before the swain.
Whom when the shepherd did behold
He straight began to weep,
And at the heart he grew a-cold,
To think upon his sheep.
For well he knew, where came the queen,
The shepherd durst not stay:
And where that he durst not be seen,
The sheep must needs away.
To ask her if she saw his flock,
Might happen patience move,
And have an answer with a mock,
That such demanders prove.
Yet for because he saw her come
Alone out of the wood,
He thought he would not stand as dumb,
When speech might do him good;
And therefore falling on his knees,
To ask but for his sheep,
He did awake, and so did leese
The honour of his sleep.

Nicholas Breton

A Sweet Contention Between Love, His Mistress, And Beauty

Love and my mistress were at strife
Who had the greatest power on me:
Betwixt them both, oh, what a life!
Nay, what a death is this to be!

She said, she did it with her eye;
He said, he did it with his dart;
Betwixt them both (a silly wretch!)
'Tis I that have the wounded heart.

She said, she only spake the word
That did enchant my peering sense;
He said, he only gave the sound
That enter'd heart without defence.

She said, her beauty was the mark
That did amaze the highest mind;
He said, he only made the mist
Whereby the senses grew so blind.

She said, that only for her sake,
The best would venture life and limb:
He said, she was too much deceiv'd;
They honour'd her because of him.

Long while, alas, she would not yield,
But it was she that rul'd the roost;
Until by proof, she did confess,
If he were gone, her joy was lost.

And then she cried, 'Oh, dainty love,
I now do find it is for thee,
That I am lov'd and honour'd both,
And thou hast power to conquer me.'

But, when I heard her yield to love,
Oh! how my heart did leap for joy!

That now I had some little hope
To have an end to mine annoy!

But, as too soon, before the field
The trumpets sound the overthrow,
So all too soon I joy'd too much,
For I awaked, and nothing saw.

Nicholas Breton

A Sweet Lullaby

Come, little babe; come, silly soul,
Thy father's shame, thy mother's grief,
Born, as I doubt, to all our dole
And to thyself unhappy chief:
Sing lullaby, and lap it warm,
Poor soul that thinks no creature harm.

Thou little think'st and less dost know
The cause of this thy mother's moan,
Thou want'st the wit to wail her woe,
And I myself am all alone.
Why dost thou weep? why dost thou wail?
And knowest not yet what thou dost ail.

Come, little wretch - ah, silly heart,
Mine only joy, what can I more?
If there be any wrong thy smart,
That may the destines implore,
'Twas I, I say, against my will;
I wail the time, but be thou still.

And dost thou smile? Oh, thy sweet face,
Would God himself he might thee see;
No doubt thou wouldst soon purchase grace,
I know right well, for thee and me,
But come to mother, babe, and play,
For father false is fled away.

Sweet boy, if it by fortune chance
Thy father home again to send,
If death do strike me with his lance,
Yet mayst thou me to him commend;
If any ask thy mother's name,
Tell how by love she purchased blame.

Then will his gentle heart soon yield;
I know him of a noble mind.
Although a lion in the field,
A lamb in town thou shalt him find.

Ask blessing, babe, be not afraid;
His sugared words hath me betrayed.

Then mayst thou joy and be right glad,
Although in woe I seem to moan,
Thy father is no rascal lad,
A noble youth of blood and bone;
His glancing looks, if he once smile,
Right honest women may beguile.

Come, little boy, and rock asleep,
Sing lullaby, and be thou still;
I that can do nought else but weep
Will sit by thee and wail my fill.
God bless my babe, and lullaby,
From this thy father's quality.

Nicholas Breton

A Sweet Pastoral

Good Muse, rock me asleep
With some sweet harmony;
The weary eye is not to keep
Thy wary company.

Sweet Love, begone awhile,
Thou knowest my heaviness;
Beauty is born but to beguile
My heart of happiness.

See how my little flock,
That loved to feed on high,
Do headlong tumble down the rock,
And in the valley die.

The bushes and the trees
That were so fresh and green,
Do all their dainty colour leese,
And not a leaf is seen.

The blackbird and the thrush
That made the woods to ring,
With all the rest are now at hush,
And not a note they sing.

Sweet Philomel, the bird
That hath the heavenly throat,
Doth now, alas! not once afford
Recording of a note.

The flowers have had a frost,
Each herb hath lost her savour,
And Phyllida the fair hath lost
The comfort of her favour.

Now all these careful sights
So kill me in conceit,
That now to hope upon delights,
It is but mere deceit.

And therefore, my sweet Muse,
Thou knowest what help is best;
Do now thy heavenly cunning use,
To set my heart at rest.

And in a dream bewray
What fate shall be my friend,
Whether my life shall still decay,
Or when my sorrow end.

Nicholas Breton

Aglaia: A Pastoral

Sylvan Muses, can ye sing
Of the beauty of the Spring?
Have ye seen on earth that sun
That a heavenly course hath run?
Have ye lived to see those eyes
Where the pride of beauty lies?
Have ye heard that heavenly voice
That may make Love's heart rejoice?
Have ye seen Aglaia, she
Whom the world may joy to see?
If ye have not seen all these,
Then ye do but labour leese;
While ye tune your pipes to play
But an idle roundelay;
And in sad Discomfort's den
Everyone go bite her pen;
That she cannot reach the skill
How to climb that blessed hill
Where Aglaia's fancies dwell,
Where exceedings do excell,
And in simple truth confess
She is that fair shepherdess
To whom fairest flocks a-field
Do their service duly yield:
On whom never Muse hath gazèd
But in musing is amazèd;
Where the honour is too much
For their highest thoughts to touch;
Thus confess, and get ye gone
To your places every one;
And in silence only speak
When ye find your speech too weak.
Blessèd be Aglaia yet,
Though the Muses die for it;
Come abroad, ye blessèd Muses,
Ye that Pallas chiefly chooses,
When she would command a creature
In the honour of Love's nature,
For the sweet Aglaia fair

All to sweeten all the air,
Is abroad this blessed day;
Haste ye, therefore, come away:
And to kill Love's maladies
Meet her with your melodies.
Flora hath been all about,
And hath brought her wardrobe out;
With her fairest, sweetest flowers,
All to trim up all your bowers.
Bid the shepherds and their swains
See the beauty of their plains;
And command them with their flocks
To do reverence on the rocks;
Where they may so happy be
As her shadow but to see:
Bid the birds in every bush
Not a bird to be at hush:
But to sit, and chirp, and sing
To the beauty of the Spring:
Call the sylvan nymphs together,
Bid them bring their musicks hither.
Trees their barky silence break,
Crack yet, though they cannot speak
Bid the purest, whitest swan
Of her feathers make her fan;
Let the hound the hare go chase;
Lambs and rabbits run at base;
Flies be dancing in the sun,
While the silk-worm's webs are spun;
Hang a fish on every hook
As she goes along the brook;
So with all your sweetest powers
Entertain her in your bowers;
Where her ear may joy to hear
How ye make your sweetest quire;
And in all your sweetest vein
Still Aglaia strike her strain;
But when she her walk doth turn,
Then begin as fast to mourn;
All your flowers and garlands wither
Put up all your pipes together;
Never strike a pleasing strain

Till she come abroad again.

Nicholas Breton

An Assurance

Say that I should say I love ye,
Would you say 'tis but a saying?
But if love in prayers move ye,
Will ye not be moved with praying?

Think I think that love should know ye,
Will you think 'tis but a thinking?
But if love the thought do show ye,
Will ye lose your eyes with winking?

Write that I do write you blessed,
Will you write 'tis but a writing?
But if truth and love confess it,
Will ye doubt the true inditing?

No, I say, and think, and write it,
Write, and think, and say your pleasure;
Love, and truth, and I indite it,
You are blessed out of measure.

Nicholas Breton

An Odd Conceit

Lovely kind, and kindly loving,
Such a mind were worth the moving;
Truly fair, and fairly true-
Where are all these, but in you?

Wisely kind, and kindly wise;
Blessed life, where such love lies!
Wise, and kind, and fair, and true-
Lovely live all these in you.

Sweetly dear, and dearly sweet;
Blessed, where these blessings meet!
Sweet, fair, wise, kind, blessed, true-
Blessed be all these in you!

Nicholas Breton

Another Of The Same (A Report Song In A Dream)

Say that I should say I love ye,
Would you say 'tis but a saying?
But if Love in prayers move ye,
Will ye not be moved with praying?

Think I think that Love should know ye,
Will you think 'tis but a thinking?
But if Love the thought do show ye,
Will ye loose your eyes with winking?

Write that I do write you blessed,
Will you write 'tis but a writing?
But if Truth and Love confess it,
Will ye doubt the true inditing?

No, I say, and think, and write it,
Write, and think, and say your pleasure;
Love, and truth, and I indite it,
You are blessèd out of measure.

Nicholas Breton

Astrophel's Song Of Phyllida And Corydon

Fair in a morn (O fairest morn!),
Was never morn so fair,
There shone a sun, though not the sun
That shineth in the air.
For the earth, and from the earth,
(Was never such a creature!)
Did come this face (was never face
That carried such a feature).
Upon a hill (O blessèd hill!
Was never hill so blessèd),
There stood a man (was never man
For woman so distressed):
This man beheld a heavenly view,
Which did such virtue give
As clears the blind, and helps the lame,
And makes the dead man live.
This man had hap (O happy man!
More happy none than he);
For he had hap to see the hap
That none had hap to see.
This silly swain (and silly swains
Are men of meanest grace):
Had yet the grace (O gracious gift!)
To hap on such a face.
He pity cried, and pity came
And pitied so his pain,
As dying would not let him die
But gave him life again.
For joy whereof he made such mirth
As all the woods did ring;
And Pan with all his swains came forth
To hear the shepherd sing;
But such a song sung never was,
Nor shall be sung again,
Of Phyllida the shepherds' queen,
And Corydon the swain.
Fair Phyllis is the shepherds' queen,
(Was never such a queen as she,)
And Corydon her only swain

(Was never such a swain as he):
Fair Phyllis hath the fairest face
That ever eye did yet behold,
And Corydon the constant'st faith
That ever yet kept flock in fold;
Sweet Phyllis is the sweetest sweet
That ever yet the earth did yield,
And Corydon the kindest swain
That ever yet kept lambs in field.
Sweet Philomel is Phyllis' bird,
Though Corydon be he that caught her,
And Corydon doth hear her sing,
Though Phyllida be she that taught her:
Poor Corydon doth keep the fields
Though Phyllida be she that owes them,
And Phyllida doth walk the meads,
Though Corydon be he that mows them:
The little lambs are Phyllis' love,
Though Corydon is he that feeds them,
The gardens fair are Phyllis' ground,
Though Corydon is he that weeds them.
Since then that Phyllis only is
The only shepherd's only queen;
And Corydon the only swain
That only hath her shepherd been,--
Though Phyllis keep her bower of state,
Shall Corydon consume away?
No, shepherd, no, work out the week,
And Sunday shall be holiday.

Nicholas Breton

Corydon's Supplication To Phyllis

Sweet Phyllis, if a silly swain
May sue to thee for grace,
See not thy loving shepherd slain
With looking on thy face;
But think what power thou hast got
Upon my flock and me;
Thou seest they now regard me not,
But all do follow thee.
And if I have so far presumed,
With prying in thine eyes,
Yet let not comfort be consumed
That in thy pity lies;
But as thou art that Phyllis fair,
That fortune favour gives,
So let not love die in despair
That in thy favour lives.
The deer do browse upon the briar,
The birds do pick the cherries;
And will not Beauty grant Desire
One handful of her berries?
If it be so that thou hast sworn
That none shall look on thee,
Yet let me know thou dost not scorn
To cast a look on me.
But if thy beauty make thee proud,
Think then what is ordain'd;
The heavens have never yet allow'd
That love should be disdain'd.
Then lest the fates that favour love
Should curse thee for unkind,
Let me report for thy behoof,
The honour of thy mind;
Let Corydon with full consent
Set down what he hath seen,
That Phyllida with Love's content
Is sworn the shepherds' queen.

Nicholas Breton

Country Song

Shall we go dance the hay, the hay?
Never pipe could ever play
Better shepherd's roundelay.

Shall we go sing the song, the song?
Never Love did ever wrong,
Fair maids, hold hands all along.

Shall we go learn to woo, to woo?
Never thought ever came to,
Better deed could better do.

Shall we go learn to kiss, to kiss?
Never heart could ever miss
Comfort, where true meaning is.

Thus at base they run, they run.
When the sport was scarce begun.
But I waked-and all was done.

Nicholas Breton

Invective: The Hate Of Treason

O the sweet sence of love's humilitie !
Which feares displeasure in a dearest friend,
The onely note of Truth's nobilitie,
Whose worthy grace is graced without end;
For who wants faith, wants little of a friend;
While faithfull love, in humble truth approved,
Doth euer Hue, of God and man beloued.

Alas ! the little time of Nature's leave,
To runne the course of her allotted care,
Where idle shadowes the eie deceaue,
That onely hunteth after Fortune's show,
And bad must leaue it, ere it be aware:
Looke, looke at heauen, and let the world go by,
Better to die to Hue, than Hue to die.

Let pride be hatefull vnto euery state,—
It is a vice with vertue not allowed;
And such a vice as vertue hath in hate,
For vertue neuer makes the spirit prowde,
And in aduancement of nobilitie
Gives greatest graces, Truth's humilitie.

Which grace is gracious in the sight of God,
Makes men as saints and women angells seeme,
Makes sinne forgotten, mercy vse no rod,
And constant faith to prooue in great esteeme;
While wisdom's care can neuer truth misdeem,
But is in some a blessing of the highest,
And to the nature of himself the nighest.

Nicholas Breton

Love

Foolish love is only folly;
Wanton love is too unholy;
Greedy love is covetous;
Idle love is frivolous;
But the gracious love is it
That doth prove the work of it.

Beauty but deceives the eye;
Flattery leads the ear awry;
Wealth doth but enchant the wit;
Want, the overthrow of it;
While in Wisdom's worthy grace,
Virtue sees the sweetest face.

There hath Love found out his life,
Peace without all thought of strife;
Kindness in Discretion's care;
Truth, that clearly doth declare
Faith doth in true fancy prove,
Lust the excrements of Love.

Then in faith may fancy see
How my love may constru'd be;
How it grows and what it seeks;
How it lives and what it likes;
So in highest grace regard it,
Or in lowest scorn discard it.

Nicholas Breton

Phillida And Coridon

IN the merry month of May,
In a morn by break of day,
Forth I walk'd by the wood-side
When as May was in his pride:
There I spied all alone
Phillida and Coridon.
Much ado there was, God wot!
He would love and she would not.
She said, Never man was true;
He said, None was false to you.
He said, He had loved her long;
She said, Love should have no wrong.
Coridon would kiss her then;
She said, Maids must kiss no men
Till they did for good and all;
Then she made the shepherd call
All the heavens to witness truth
Never loved a truer youth.
Thus with many a pretty oath,
Yea and nay, and faith and troth,
Such as silly shepherds use
When they will not Love abuse,
Love, which had been long deluded,
Was with kisses sweet concluded;
And Phillida, with garlands gay,
Was made the Lady of the May.

Nicholas Breton

Pretty Twinkling Starry Eyes

Pretty twinkling starry eyes!
How did Nature first devise
Such a sparkling in your sight
As to give Love such delight
As to make him, like a fly,
Play with looks until he die?

Sure you were not made at first
For such mischief to be cursed,
As to kill affection's care
That doth only truth declare.
Where worth's wonders never wither
Love and Beauty live together.

Blessed eyes! then give your blessing
That, in passion's best expressing,
Love, that only lives to grace ye,
May not suffer to deface ye;
But in gentle thoughts directions,
Show the praise of your perfections.

Nicholas Breton

Sonnet

The worldly prince doth in his sceptre hold
A kind of heaven in his authorities;
The wealthy miser, in his mass of gold,
Makes to his soul a kind of Paradise;
The epicure that eats and drinks all day,
Accounts no heaven, but in his hellish routs;
And she, whose beauty seems a sunny day,
Makes up her heaven but in her baby's clouts.
But, my sweet God, I seek no prince's power,
No miser's wealth, nor beauty's fading gloss,
Which pamper sin, whose sweets are inward sour,
And sorry gains that breed the spirit's loss:
No, my dear Lord, let my Heaven only be
In my Love's service, but to live to thee.

Nicholas Breton

The Passionate Shepherd

Who can live in heart so glad
As the merry country lad?
Who upon a fair green balk
May at pleasure sit and walk,
And amid the azure skies
See the morning sun arise;
While he hears in every spring
How the birds do chirp and sing;
Or before the hounds in cry
See the hare go stealing by;
Or along the shallow brook
Angling with a baited hook,
See the fishes leap and play
In a blessed sunny day;
Or to hear the partridge call
Till she have her covey all;
Or to see the subtle fox,
How the villain plies the box,
After feeding on his prey
How he closely sneaks away
Through the hedge and down the furrow,
Till he gets into his burrow;
Then the bee to gather honey,
And the little black hair'd coney
On a bank for sunny place
With her forefeet wash her face:
Are not these, with thousands more
Than the courts of kings do know,
The true pleasing-spirits sights
That may breed true love's delights?

Nicholas Breton

Who Can Live In Heart So Glad

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