



*HESPERIDES:*  
OR,  
**THE WORKS**  
BOTH  
HUMANE & DIVINE  
OF  
ROBERT HERRICK *Esq.*

OVID.

*Effugient avidos Carmina nostra Rogos.*



L O N D O N,

Printed for *John Williams*, and *Francis Eglesfield*,  
and are to be sold by *Tho: Hunt*, Book-seller  
in *Exon.* 1648.

*The Frontispiece and title page of Hesperides, sold in Exeter in 1648*

I sing of Brooks, of Blossomes, Birds, and Bowers:  
Of April, May, of June, and July-Flowers.  
I sing of May-poles, Hock-carts, Wassails, Wakes,  
Of Bride-grooms, Brides, and of their Bridall-cakes.  
I write of Youth, of Love, and have Accessse  
By these, to sing of cleanly-Wantonnesse.

I sing of Dewes, of Raines, and piece by piece  
Of Balme, of Oyle, of Spice, and Amber-Greece.  
I sing of Times trans-shifting; and I write  
How Roses first came Red, and Lillies White.  
I write of Groves, of Twilights, and I sing  
The Court of Mab, and of the Fairie-King.  
I write of Hell; I sing (and ever shall)  
Of Heaven; and hope to have it after all.

*Robert Herrick*  
(1591 – 1674)

Born in London, Robert Herrick took Holy Orders at the age of 39 and became Vicar of Dean Prior, a small Devon village near Buckfastleigh. (You pass within a few yards of his church driving down the A38.)

In his wonderful book **In Praise of Devon** (Green Books, 1998), John Lane points out that, although he ministered at the church for 31 years, Herrick himself made no attempt to sing the praises of his adopted county.

“There are two poems full of sour and painful words about ‘this dull Devon-shire’, ‘the drooping West’ and the ‘warty incivility’ of Dean and its people: ‘churlish as the seas/And rude (almost) as rudest Savages’. In all his poems, only one Devon place-name is to be found.

Nonetheless his chief work, **Hesperides**, a collection of some 1,400 poems, is deeply informed by the county’s sylvan genius and the old rural culture that went back to a time before the first Christians came to Britain. Herrick was a traditionalist, a Royalist and, in one sense, a pagan – a celebrant of the maypole, decorated with green boughs in honour of the gods of vegetation and fertility.

“This poem (printed above) hymns the twilights of a Devon summer, its delicate scents and breaths of air, its stillness and the beauty of its shaded hedgerow flowers. Much as the church carvers of stone and wood had celebrated its prolific vegetation in their pulpits, rood screens and capitals less than a few centuries before, so it is always to the summer’s flowers that he returns – ‘to the lilly, the strawberrie, the rose, the violet, the primrose, the jasmine, the couslip and the daffadil.’”

