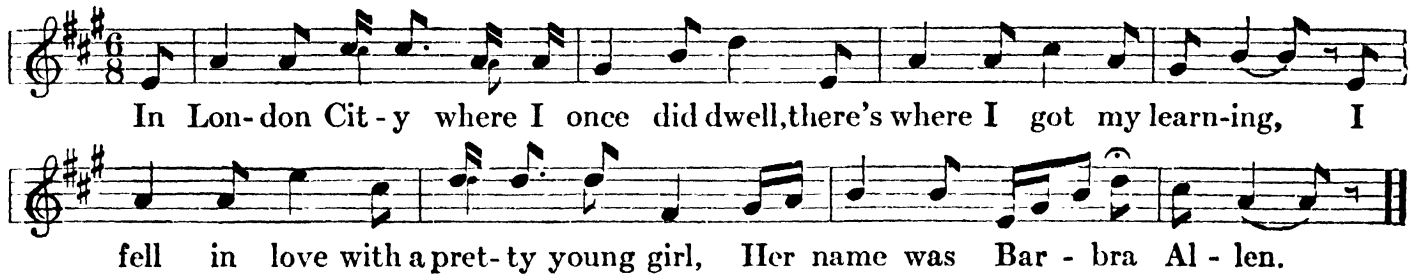


## BARBRA ALLEN

Hard-hearted Barbra Allen is a girl who figures in hundreds of ballads. In nearly all of them Willie dies for love of her and she, with a wasted heart, goes into the grave beside him. That is the story. But the last verse has a sequel. The rose rises from one grave, the briar from the other; the two climb to the top of the old church tower and there intertwine. So ends the story. It has been told and sung in hundreds of dialects. Usually the tune is stale, flat, monotonous. The one given here has long been a favorite of mine and the friend who gave it to me, H. L. Davis, the Oregon poet who came from the mountains of Georgia. The text is from the R. W. Gordon collection. Sometimes, in the singing of this song, I get the feel of old, gnarled, thornapple trees and white crab-apple blossoms printed momentarily on a blue sky, of evanescent things, of the paradox of tender and cruel forces operating together in life. Perhaps something of that paradox working in the hearts of people has kept the Barbra Allen story alive and singing through three centuries and more.



- 1 In London City where I once did dwell, there's where I got my learning,  
I fell in love with a pretty young girl, her name was Barbra Allen.
- 2 I courted her for seven long years, she said she would not have me;  
Then straightway home as I could go and liken to a dying.
- 3 I wrote her a letter on my death bed, I wrote it slow and moving;  
"Go take this letter to my old true love and tell her I am dying."
- 4 She took the letter in her lily-white hand, she read it slow and moving;  
"Go take this letter back to him, and tell him I am coming."
- 5 As she passed by his dying bed she saw his pale lips quivering;  
"No better, no better I'll ever be until I get Barbra Allen."
- 6 As she passed by his dying bed; "You're very sick and almost dying,  
No better, no better you will ever be, for you can't get Barbra Allen."
- 7 As she went down the long stair steps she heard the death bell toning,  
And every bell appeared to say, "Hard-hearted Barbra Allen!"
- 8 As she went down the long piney walk she heard some small birds singing,  
And every bird appeared to say, "Hard-hearted Barbra Allen!"
- 9 She looked to the East, she looked to the West, she saw the pale corpse coming  
"Go bring them pale corpse unto me, and let me gaze upon them.
- 10 Oh, mama, mama, go make my bed, go make it soft and narrow!  
Sweet Willie died today for me, I'll die for him tomorrow!"
- 11 They buried Sweet Willie in the old church yard, they buried Miss Barbra beside him;  
And out of his grave there sprang a red rose, and out of hers a briar.
- 12 They grew to the top of the old church tower, they could not grow any higher,  
They hooked, they tied in a true love's knot, red rose around the briar.