

WILL YOU COME TO THE BOWER?

*“Will you come to the Bower o’er the free boundless ocean,
Where the stupendous waves roll in thunder and motion?
Where the mermaids are seen and the fierce tempest gathers,
To loved Erin, the green, the dear land of our fathers?
Will you come, Will you, Will you, will you come to the Bower?”*

*“Will you come to the land of O’Neill and O’Donnell
of Lord Lucan of old and immortal O’Connell?
Where Brian drove the Danes and St. Patrick the vermin.
And whose valleys remain still most beautiful and charming?
Will Will you come, Will you, Will you come to the bower?”*

“Will you come to the Bower” is both a patriotic Irish song and a song of romance.

As a patriotic song, it dates back to the early 19th century. In some sources, its author is said to be unknown but another source gives credit to the musician Joshua Gibbons (1778-1871). The song is thought to have been a rallying call to Irish exiles across Europe and America. Many had left to escape the rebellions of 1798 and the Robert Emmet rebellion of 1803 which involved the United Irishmen. Many more left over the next 50 years owing to their part in Nationalist activities and campaigns for Irish independence.

The word “bower” refers to Ireland and the song encourages the exiles to return home to help Ireland assert its independence. The phrase “Will you come to the Bower” was a kind of code urging people to return without stating it openly and arousing the suspicions of authorities.

*Will you come and awake our lost land from its slumber?
And her fetters we’ll break, links that long are encumbered,
And the air will resound with hosannas to greet you.
On the shore will be found gallant Irishmen to greet you.
Will you come, Will you come, Will you come to the Bower?”*

The lyrics tug at the emotions of the exiles, reminding the exiles of the beauty of Ireland:

*“You can see Dublin City and the fine groves of Blarney,
The Bann, Boyne, the Liffey, the Lakes of Killarney.
You may ride on the tide on the broad majestic Shannon,
You may sail round Loch Neagh and see storied Dungannon.
“Will you come, Will you, Will you, Will you come to the bower?”*

The words appeal to the exiles’ sense of patriotism: “You can visit New Ross, gallant Wexford and Gorey where green was last seen by proud Saxon.” Ireland, the song says to the exiles, is home!

Mostly patriotic, the song has a romantic part, such as this verse written by Thomas Moore.

*Will you come to the bower I have shaded for you?
Our bed shall be roses all spangled with dew.
Will you, Will you, Will you, come to the Bower?
There under the bower on roses you'll lie.
With a blush on your cheek but a smile in your eye.
"Will you, Will you, Will you, Will you smile my beloved?"*

The tune crossed the Atlantic to become a part of American history.

According to tradition, the tune was played by two fiddlers, father and son, Daniel and George Washington Davis, in the Army of Sam Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836. General Houston's strategy was to draw the Mexican Army, under the command of Santa Anna, by parading his men as if on a non-aggressive drill. "Come to the Bower" was part of Houston's trap. He had the fiddlers play the romantic melody of the popular love song over and over with the Texans marching to the tune, until Houston ordered his Army to charge. The trap worked. We remember the Alamo—a great victory for Houston's Army!

There is an historical marker erected in 1936 by the Texas Highway Department at the site of the battle with a plaque reading **"WILL YOU COME TO THE BOWER"** and **"REMEMBER THE ALAMO."**

"Come to the Bower" is still in the playlist of contemporary musical groups like the Dubliners, Planxty, the Pogues, Shane McGowan and Andy Irvine. Perhaps they sing in the hope that the Bower will be united!

(Written by Jim Hawkins)

