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EARLY ENGLISH POEMS
AND
LIVES OF SAINTS,
(WITH THOSE OF THE WICKED BIRDS PILATE AND JUDAS.)

COPIED AND EDITED FROM MANUSCRIPTS IN THE LIBRARY
OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

BY

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EDITOR OF LONELICH'S AND DE BORON'S 'SEYNT GRaal'; ROBERD
OF BRUNNE'S 'HANDLYNG SYNNE', AND WILLIAM OF WADINTON'S
'MANUEL DES PECHIEZ'.

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1862.
THE chief grievance of an Honorary Secretary is, that certain Members of his Society will not send him for press the Papers they have read at the Society's Meetings. Beg for them as he will,—by letter, word of mouth, through mutual friends, by special visits,—out of some Members no Papers can be got. What then is left for the unhappy Official, but to write Papers himself, or copy MSS. to fill the volume that his refractory friends have left vacant? The former branch of the alternative was out of my reach, so I grasped the latter, and the reader must not blame me if he thinks my basket of fruit a bad substitute for the second course of strong meat that he expected and ought to have had.

Sir Frederick Madden, the keeper of the Manuscripts at the British Museum, kindly directed me to the earliest unprinted English MSS. under his charge. Of these Roberd of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* was the most important, but it was too long for our Society, and I have therefore edited it for the Roxburghe Club. Next came the short Poems that stand first in the present volume, all before 1300; and then the Lives of the Saints (Harleian MS. No. 2277, about 1305-10 A. D.) of which I took a few whose titles or contents caught my fancy, including those of the two accursed ones, Pilate and Judas Iscariot. These not making a sufficient number of pages in our close print, I added, 1. a few songs from the incomplete and later duplicate of the noble Vernon MS. in the Bodleian Library,—having time to collate one only with the earlier copy—; 2. the fragment on the Corrupt state of the Nunnery (p. 138-148) from a Cotton MS. temp. Hen. VI; 3. three Poems on Old Age, Earth, and the Faults of the Monks and People of Kildare (which I had, after copying, set aside as
having been printed in the *Reliquiae Antiquae*), and lastly the twice-printed 'Land of Cokaygne', the airiest and cleverest piece of satire in the whole range of Early English, if not of English, poetry. A short abstract of the Poems the reader will find in the Contents', and he will see that however uninteresting the titles of 'Sarmun', 'Moral Ode', 'Lives of Saints' may appear, information and amusement are yet to be drawn from the pieces themselves. He can get a lesson in the Geography and Ecclesiastical divisions of England (p. 48-9), hear about going to school at Oxford (p. 41), and studying there art, Arsmetrike—'a lore pat of sigours al is, and of draughtes as me drawpe in poudre and in numbre iwis'—and Divinity (p. 77); of the heriot beast being paid on a tenant's death (p. 83); of preachers for the Crusades (p. 79); of the pomp, bell-ringing, and show of horses and squires at Bishops' progresses to consecrate new Churches (p. 44, l. 43-6), and many an other scene of English life. He will find too the Old-Englishman's special sin of Envy¹ denounced (p. 20), his Greed, and Pride², and other faults; will hear Sunday-trading condemned (p. 16), and see the rough mason running from his work to catch and kiss the country-girls coming to market with their eggs (p. 45), which of course get broken in the struggle. If the reader should doubt whether the Saint—mightier than 'all the king's horses and all the king's men'—'can set Humpty-Dumpties together again', he will at least not object to the poet's reflection, that if egg-mongers now could so get their broken eggs made whole, 'they might hop over ditches where they would, and both wrestle and fight' (p. 45, l. 69, 70). The treatment of the 'puir deil' in those days too was hard,—to be talked to pleasantly by a blacksmith-saint till he had heated his tongs redhot, and then to be treacherously caught and 'tungle and schok' by the nose till the trustful being yelled and hopped

¹ And Englys men namely
    Are purgh e kynde of herte hy.
    A forbyseyn ys tolde pys,
    Seyde on Frenshe men and on Englys.
    *Frenshe men synne yn lechery*
    *And Englys men yn enuye.*

Roberd of Brunnes *Handlyng Synne*, p. 131, l. 4150-5.

² cp. A npur Mon proudep. as dop a pou. p. 129, l. 18.
and brayed, and had to fly home through the lift, shouting in all men’s ears ‘Out! What hath the baldpate done! What hath the baldpate done!’—was manifestly unfair. The punishment of lustful young women also was judicious (p. 73); the Virgin had odd cases brought before her for decision (p. 59); and Judas murders his father—‘smot hym with a ston bilynde in the pate’—marries his mother, hangs himself, his womb bursts amid atwo, ‘his gyttes’ fall to ground, and through the hole goes out his ‘liper gost’. But it is not for the oddities of subject or phrase that one values these poems; it is for their language that the student, and for their earnestness that the man, holds them of worth. The words first used in most of them were registered by our lost friend Herbert Coleridge, in his Glossarial Index to the Printed English Literature of the Thirteenth Century, and most of the new words in the remainder of them will be found at the end of the present Selection. For the deeper feeling in some of the Poems, I need only refer to the simple and touching confession of shortcomings and sins in the ‘Moral Ode’, to the trust and joy of the Songs of ‘Merci’ and ‘Deo gracias’ (p. 118-130), the self-abasement shown in the ‘Sarmun’ (p. 1-7), the tender love of the ‘Christ on the Cross’ (p. 20-1), and the triumphant faith of the Martyrs who gave up their lives for God (p. 101-6).

Of Rhyme, the text contains one noteworthy specimen, ‘the Rhyme-beginning Fragment’ (p. 21-2), of which the man most capable to speak in England—whose hand we have, alas, so long missed from our pages—writes as follows:

My dear Furnivall,

I am on my rambles, and your letter of the 20th has been following me.

The rhyme which has attracted your attention belongs to the kind, which is called “inverse rhyme”. You will find something about it in the History of English Rhythms—in the chapter on rhyme.

I do not however remember to have seen so ancient or so elaborate a specimen as the one you have sent me. It is very curious, and to me interesting.—With all best wishes I am

Yours truly

E. Guest.
The proofs of the text I have read with the MSS., and endeavoured to make them accurate copies of the originals, though with expansions of the ordinary contractions for er, ri &c., and insertions of commas occasionally. Some final es in italics, to help out the rhythm, I inserted in the first few pages, as noticed in the note to p. 1, but soon gave this up; and the later final es represent the flourish of the scribe at the end of certain of his words ending in i. In the lines whose rhythm cannot be in any way made good without the insertion of a final e at the end of a word, there the reader may insert it (as erroneously omitted by the scribe), but not otherwise. The doctrine of the critic of Dr. Pauli's edition of Gower's Confessio Amantis as to the final e in Early English¹; is not strictly borne out by any MS., or any un-doctored edition of one, that I have ever read; and far more experienced readers and better judges than I, have condemned the attempt to impose on a language constantly changing in words, inflexions, and spelling, written often by half-lettered men, a rigid rule applicable only to the well settled speech and literature of a cultivated nation.

3 Old Square, Lincoln's Inn,
Dec. 17, 1861.

¹ In the grammatical system of the 14th century, the final e invariably marked the objective case singular... In adjectives, both the objective in the singular, and all the cases in the plural, are marked by the final e... In verbs the final e marked invariably the infinitive mood, and the plurals of all the tenses, when the final -en was discontinued... The final e also marked the adverbial form of words, and distinguished the adverb from the preposition. Gentleman's Magazine, Third Series, vol. 2, p. 647-9, June, 1857.
CONTENTS.

I. A SARMUN ............................. Pages 1-7
That we ought to fear, for the Dead are loathly to see; to dust we go, louse and flea are on our skin (6). If we are proud of our flesh, what is it but worm’s meat; and our skin a sack of dirt and dung: of such the gentleman is too (8). See thy proud neighbour in his grave, he is stench and worms (10), and has no silk or purple. If we are proud of wealth, it comes, it goes, and is but guile (13): spend it well while thou hast it (15). Some are blinded by covetousness (16) and become the devil’s thralls; they shall die and go to the devil (20): and the rich shall die too, and we all shall give account (24). If we have spent goods and time ill, we shall go to hell (25), and see Christ’s wounds, and the Cross and the Elements shall cry for vengeance on us (29-33). In hell it will be too late to cry for mercy; here, then, believe; undo thy heart (35), or thou shalt rue it sore (37). Man’s life is but a shadow (38). What brought he here but a stinking skin (39)? The same wretched garb he shall take away (40); when the soul is once out of it, no viler carrion is there (42). Don’t think to save for your heir (43); he shall waste your hoard (44). Keep God in your thoughts (45), help the needy, and gain heaven (46). Its joy no tongue can tell (47); the soul shall be brighter than the sun (49), the body fair and strong (50), feeling no hunger or thirst; it is well merry to dwell there (51), with many angels (53). We shall see our friends and kin (54), Our Lady bright (55), the Trinity, and Christ (56), the sight of Whom is our food and drink (57). Pray we Him to give us joy everlasting (58). You who have come to hear this ‘sarmun’, have pardon for seven years.

II. XV SIGNA ANTE IUDICIIUM.1 (A fragment. See two other versions, note, p. 162-4.) .......... Pages 7-12
May the grace of Jesu alight among us (1)! Take heed of

1 After the text was printed I found that Mr. Wright had this poem in his notes to the 2nd volume of the Chester Plays, for the Shakspere Society.
the wonders before the Judgment (5-8) which Isaiah told by the Holy Ghost (10). At these Tokens children unborn shall shudder, and cry for mercy (25). The First is: the stars shall become as black as coal (42) and be cast down to earth (40), and terror shall fall on all living (45-52) [The Second is,] the dead too shall arise, and for fear look like witless beasts (53-6). The Third: the sun shall turn green and wan (62), and then coal-black (66). The Fourth: the sun shall become red (70). The Fifth: all beasts shall quake and cry for mercy, though they cannot speak (80). The Sixth: the mountains and hills shall fill up the dales (85-6), castles shall fall (89-92), and trees be torn up by the roots (93-6). The Seventh: the trees shall grow again, with their roots in the air (97-100), iron shall bleed (101), and poor and rich alike shall die (105-8); no castle or steed shall save them (109-10). The Eighth: the sea shall draw together, and stand up as a wall (117), the rivers shall cry to God (118), the fishes shall think He is dead (121-4); and then the waters shall return to their own place (125-8). The Ninth: the skies shall speak like a man (134-6), and pray that they shall not be punished for man’s sin (144); [The Tenth] all saints in heaven, and cherubin and seraphin, shall quake (152); the angels shall hold their peace (164), and the fiends of hell shall moan with great din (158) and pray for shelter (167); so, man, live a good life here (163). The Eleventh: four winds shall rise, the rainbow shall fall, and the fiends shall be driven back to hell. The Twelfth: the four elements shall cry for mercy to Christ.... [Incomplete.]

III. THE FALL AND PASSION .............. .............. .............. .............. 12-15

God give us his grace, me to speak and you to learn, that I may show you His uprising (1-6). Lucifer fell seven days and nights like snow, from heaven to hell (9-14), and man was created to fill his place (17). God made Adam master of all Paradise but one tree (23), and the devil as a serpent tempted Eve with an apple to make herself as ‘witti’ as God (31). When the apple was eaten, they were driven out into the vale of Eboir to work hard (37); after 900 years Adam died and went to hell (39); and the devil took all men, though God sent prophets to them (43). Then He took flesh ‘of maid mari’ (49), and suffered for thirty years and more (53). Judas sold him for thirty pence, and he suffered death upon the tree (68). Joseph of Arimathea (71) buried Him in a fair place (76). His mother wept four bitter tears of blood (82)—who speaks of sorrow against that sorrow?—The third day He arose (90), bringing the patriarchs and prophets out of hell