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The History Of English Poetry

From The Close of the Eleventh To The Commencement of the Eighteenth
Century

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Section XXVIII. Metrical versions of scripture. Archbishop Parker's Psalms
in metre. Robert Crowley's puritanical poetry.

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S E C T. XXVIII.

THE spirit of verifying the psalms, and other parts of the Bible, at the beginning of the reformation, was almost as epidemic as psalm-singing. William Hunnis, a gentleman of the chapel under Edward the sixth, and afterwards chapel-master to queen Elifabeth, rendered into rhyme many select psalms, which had not the good fortune to be rescued from oblivion by being incorporated into Hopkins's collection, nor to be sung in the royal chapel. They were printed in 1550, with this title, "Certayne Psalmes chosen out of the Psalter of David, and drawn furth into Englysh meter by William Hunnis servant to the ryght honourable syr William Harberd knight. Newly collected and imprinted ^a."

I know not if among these are his *SEVEN SOBS of a sorrowful soul for sin, comprehending the SEVEN PENITENTIAL PSALMS in metre*. They are dedicated to Frances countess of Suffex, whose attachment to the gospel he much extols, and who was afterwards the foundress of Sydney college in Cambridge. Hunnis also, under the happy title of a *HANDFUL OF HONEY-SUCKLES*, published *Blessings out of Deuteronomie, Prayers to Christ, Athanasius's Creed, and Meditations*, in metre with musical notes. But his spiritual nosegays are numerous. To say nothing of his *RECREATIONS on Adam's banishment, Christ his Cribb, and the Lost Sheep*, he translated into English rhyme the whole book of *GENESIS*, which he calls a *HIVE FULL OF HONEY*^b. But his honey-suckles and his honey are now no longer delicious. He was a large contributor to the *PARADISE*

^a I have also seen Hunnis's "Abridge-
ment or brief meditation on certaine of

"the Psalmes in English metre," printed
by R. Wier, 4to.

^b Printed by T. Marthe, 1578. 4to.

OF DAINTY DEVICES, of which more will be said in its place. In the year 1550, were also published by John Hall, or Hawle, a surgeon or physician of Maidstone in Kent, and author of many tracts in his profession, "Certayne chapters taken out of the proverbes of Solomon, with other chapters of the holy Scripture, and certayne Psalmes of David translated into English metre by John Hall." By the remainder of the title it appears, that the proverbs had been in a former impression unfairly attributed to Thomas Sternhold. The other chapters of Scripture are from Ecclesiasticus and saint Paul's Epistles. We must not confound this John Hall with his cotemporary Elifeus Hall, who pretended to be a missionary from heaven to the queen, prophesied in the streets, and wrote a set of metrical visions^d. Metre was now become the vehicle of enthusiasm, and the puritans seem to have appropriated it to themselves, in opposition to our service, which was in prose.

William Baldwyn, of whom more will be said when we come to the *MIRROUR OF MAGISTRATES*, published a *Pbrase-like declaration in English meeter on the CANTICLES OF SONGS OF SOLOMON*, in 1549. It is dedicated to Edward the sixth. Nineteen of the psalms in rhyme are extant by Francis Seagar, printed by William Seres in 1553, with musical notes, and dedicated to lord Russel^e.

Archbishop Parker also versified the psalter; not from any opposition to our liturgy, but, either for the private amusement and exercise of his religious exile, or that the people, whose

^c There is an edition in quarto dedicated to king Edward the sixth with this title, "The Psalmes of David translated into English metre by T. Sternhold, fir T. Wyat, and William Hunnis, with certayne chapters of the Proverbes and select Psalmes by John Hall." I think I have seen a book by Hall called the *COURT OF VIRTUE*, containing some or all of these sacred songs, with notes, 1565. 8vo. He has a copy of verses prefixed to Gale's *ENCHIRIDION OF SURGERY*, Lond.

1563. See John Reade's Preface to his translation of F. Arcaeus's *ANATOMY*.

^d Strype, *ANN.* i. p. 291. ch. xxv. ed. 1725.

^e In quarto. I have seen also "The Ballads or Canticles of Solomon in Prose and Verse." Without date, or name of printer or author.

^f At the end is a poem entitled, "A Description of the Lyfe of Man, the World and Vanities thereof." Princ. "Who on earth can justly rejoyce."

predilection

predilection for psalmody could not be suppressed, might at least be furnished with a rational and proper translation. It was finished in 1557. And a few years afterwards printed by Day, the archbishop's printer, in quarto, with this title, "The whole Psalter translated into English metre, which containeth an hundredth and fifty psalmes. The first Quinquagene^e. *Quoniam omnis terræ deus, psallite sapienter.* Ps. 14. 47. Imprinted at London by John Daye, dwelling over Aldersgate beneath Saint Martyn's. Cum privilegio per decennium^h." Without date of the printerⁱ, or name of the translator. In the metrical preface prefixed, he tries to remove the objections of those who censured versifications of Scripture, he pleads the comforts of such an employment to the persecuted theologift who suffers voluntary banishment, and thus displays the power of sacred music.

The psalmist stayde with tuned songe
The rage of myndes agast,
As David did with harpe among
To Saule in fury cast.

With golden stringes such harmonic
His harpe so sweete did wrest,
That he relieved his phrenesie
Whom wicked sprites possesse^k.

Whatever might at first have been his design, it is certain that his version, although printed, was never published: and notwithstanding the formality of his metrical preface above-

^e The second quinquagene follows, fol. 146. The third and last, fol. 280.

^h In black letter. Among the prefaces are four lines from lord Surrey's ECCLESIASTES. Attached to every psalm is a prose collect. At the end of the psalms are versions of *Te Deum*, *Benedictus*, *Quicumque vult*, &c. &c.

ⁱ Day had a licence, Jun. 3, 1561, to print the psalms in metre. Ames, p. 238.

^k He thus remonstrates against the secular ballads,

Ye songes so nice, ye sonnets all,
Of lothly lovers layes,
Ye worke mens myndes but bitter gall
By phantries peevish playes.
mentioned,

mentioned, which was professedly written to shew the spiritual efficacy or virtue of the psalms in metre, and in which he directs a distinct and audible mode of congregational singing, he probably suppressed it, because he saw that the practice had been abused to the purposes of fanaticism, and adopted by the puritans in contradiction to the national worship; or at least that such a publication, whatever his private sentiments might have been, would not have suited the nature and dignity of his high office in the church. Some of our musical antiquaries, however, have justly conjectured, that the archbishop, who was skilled in music, and had formerly founded a music-school in his college of Stoke Clare, intended these psalms, which are adapted to complicated tunes of four parts probably constructed by himself and here given in score, for the use of cathedrals; at a time, when compositions in counterpoint were uncommon in the church, and when that part of our choir-service called the motet or anthem, which admits a more artificial display of harmony, and which is recommended and allowed in queen Elizabeth's earliest ecclesiastical injunctions, was yet almost unknown, or but in a very imperfect state. Accordingly, although the direction is not quite comprehensible, he orders many of them to be sung by the *rector chori*, or chantor, and the *quier*, or choir, alternately. That at least he had a taste for music, we may conclude from the following not inelegant scale of modulation, prefixed to his eight tunes abovementioned.

“ THE NATURE OF THE EYGH TUNES.

The first is meke, devout to see,
 The second sad, in maiesty:
 The third doth rage, and roughly brayth,
 The fourth doth fawne, and flattery playth:
 The fifth delighth, and laugheth the more,
 The sixt bewayleth, it wepeth full fore.
 The seventh tredeth stoute in froward race,
 The eyghte goeth milde in modest pace.”

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A a

What

What follows is another proof, that he had proposed to introduce these psalms into the choir-service. "The tenor of these partes be for the people when they will syng alone, the other partes put for the greater quiers, or to suche as will syng or play them privately¹."

How far this memorable prelate, perhaps the most accomplished scholar that had yet filled the archbishoprick of Canterbury, has succeeded in producing a translation of the psalter preferable to the common one, the reader may judge from these stanzas of a psalm highly poetical, in which I have exactly preserved the translator's peculiar use of the hemistic punctuation.

To feede my neede : he will me leade
To pastures greene and fat :
He forth brought me : in libertie,
To waters delicate.

My soule and hart : he did conuert,
To me he shewth the path :
Of right wisnes : in holines,
His name such vertue hath.

Yea though I go : through Death his wo
His vale and shadow wyde :
I feare no dart : with me thou art
With rod and staffe to guide.

¹ As the singing-psalms were never a part of our liturgy, no rubrical directions are any where given for the manner of performing them. In one of the PREFACES, written about 1550, it is ordered, "Whereas heretofore there hath been great diversitie of saying and singing in churches within this realm, some following Salisbury use, some Hereford use, some the use of Bangor, some of York, some of Lincoln; now from henceforth all the whole realm shall have but one use." But this is said in reference to

the chants, responds, suffrages, versicles, introites, kyrie-eleeysons, doxologies, and other melodies of the Book of Common Prayer, then newly published under lawful authority, with musical notes by Marbeck, and which are still used; that no arbitrary variations should be made in the manner of singing these melodies, as had been lately the case with the Roman missal, in performing which some cathedrals affected a manner of their own. The Salisbury missal was most famous and chiefly followed.

Thou

Thou shalt provyde : a table wyde,
 For me against theyr spite :
 With oyle my head : thou hast bespred,
 My cup is fully dight^m.

I add, in the more sublime character, a part of the eighteenth psalm, in which Sternhold is supposed to have exerted his powers most successfully, and without the interruptions of the pointing which perhaps was designed for some regulations of the music, now unknown.

The earth did shake, for feare did quake,
 The hils theyr bases shooke ;
 Removed they were, in place most fayre,
 At God's ryght fearfull looke.

Darke smoke rose to hys face therefro,
 Hys mouthe as fire consumde,
 That coales at it were kyndled bright
 When he in anger fumde.

The heavens full lowe he made to bowe,
 And downe dyd he ensueⁿ ;
 And darknes great was underfete
 His feete in cloudy hue.

He rode on hye, and dyd so flye,
 Upon the Cherubins ;
 He came in fight, and made his flight
 Upon the wyng of wyndes.

The Lorde from heaven sent downe his leaven
 And thundred thence in ire ;
 He thunder cast in wondrous blast
 With hayle and coales of fyre^o.

^m Fol. 13.ⁿ Follow.^o Fol. 35.

Here is some degree of spirit, and a choice of phraseology. But on the whole, and especially for this species of stanza, Parker will be found to want facility, and in general to have been unpractised in writing English verses. His abilities were destined to other studies, and adapted to employments of a more archiepiscopal nature.

The industrious Strype, Parker's biographer, after a diligent search never could gain a sight of this translation: nor is it even mentioned by Ames, the inquisitive collector of our typographical antiquities. In the late Mr. West's library there was a superb copy, once belonging to bishop Kennet, who has remarked in a blank page, that the archbishop permitted his wife dame Margaret to present the book to some of the nobility. It is certainly at this time extremely scarce, and would be deservedly deemed a fortunate acquisition to those capricious students who labour only to collect a library of rarities. Yet it is not generally known, that there are two copies in the Bodleian library of this anonymous version, which have hitherto been given to an obscure poet by the name of John Keeper. One of them, in 1643, appears to have been the property of bishop Barlow: and on the opposite side of the title, in somewhat of an antient hand, is this manuscript insertion. "The auctor of this booke is one John Keeper, who was brought upp in the close of Wells." Perhaps Antony Wood had no better authority than this slender unauthenticated note, for saying, that John Keeper, a native of Somersetshire, and a graduate at Oxford in the year 1564, and who afterwards studied music and poetry at Wells, "translated *The whole Psalter into English metre which containeth 150 psalms, etc. printed at London by John Day living over Aldersgate, about 1570, in quarto: and added thereunto The Gloria Patri, Te Deum, The Song of the three Children, Quicumque vult, Benedictus, &c. all in metre. At the end of which, are musical notes set in four parts to severall psalms. What other things, he adds, of poetry, music, or other faculties, he has published, I know*"

"not;

“not, nor any thing more; yet I suppose he had some dignity “in the church of Wells^p.” If this version should really be the work of Keeper, I fear we are still to seek for archbishop Parker’s psalms, with Strype and Ames^q.

A considerable contributor to the metrical theology was Robert Crowley, educated in Magdalene college at Oxford, where he obtained a fellowship in 1542. In the reign of Edward the sixth, he commenced printer and preacher in London. He lived in Ely-rents in Holborn: “where, says Wood, he “sold books, and at leisure times exercised the gift of preaching in the great city and elsewhere^r.” In 1550 he printed the first edition of PIERCE PLOWMAN’S VISION, but with the ideas of a controversialist, and with the view of helping forward the reformation by the revival of a book which exposed the absurdities of popery in strong satire, and which at present is only valuable or useful, as it serves to gratify the harmless researches of those peaceable philosophers who study the progression of antient literature. His pulpit and his press, those two prolific sources of faction, happily cooperated in propagating his principles of predestination: and his shop and his sermons were alike frequented. Possessed of those talents which qualified him for captivating the attention and moving the passions of the multitude, under queen Elisabeth he held many dignities in a church, whose doctrines and polity his undiscerning zeal had a tendency to destroy. He translated into popular rhyme, not only the psalter, but the litany, with hymns, all which he printed together in 1549. In the same year, and in the same measure, he published *The Voice of the last Trumpet blown by the seventh angel*. This piece contains twelve several lessons, for the instruction or amendment of those who seemed at that time chiefly to need advice; and among whom he enumerates *lewd* priests, scholars, physicians, beggars, yeomen, gen-

^p ATH. OXON. i. 181.

^q There is a metrical English version of the Psalms among the Cotton manuscripts

about the year 1320, which has merit. See also *supr.* Vol. i. 23.

^r ATH. OXON. i. 235.

tlemen,

tlemeu, magistrates, and women. He also attacked the abuses of his age in thirty-one EPIGRAMS, first printed in 1551. The subjects are placed alphabetically. In his first alphabet are *Abbayes, Alehouses, Alleys, and Almshouses*. The second, *Bailiffs, Bawds, Beggars, Bear-bayting, and Brawlers*. They display, but without spirit or humour, the reprehensible practices and licentious manners which then prevailed. He published in 1551, a kind of metrical sermon on Pleasure and Pain, Heaven and Hell. Many of these, to say nothing of his almost innumerable controversial tracts in prose, had repeated editions, and from his own press. But one of his treatises, to prove that Lent is a human invention and a superstitious institution, deserves notice for its plan: it is a Dialogue between Lent and Liberty. The personification of Lent is a bold and a perfectly new prosopopeia. In an old poem of this age against the papists, written by one doctor William Turner a physician, but afterwards dean of Wells, the Mass, or mistress MISSA, is personified, who, arrayed in all her meretricious trappings, must at least have been a more theatrical figure*. Crowley likewise wrote, and printed in 1588, a rhyming manual, *The School of Vertue and Book of good Nurture*. This is a translation into metre, of many of the less exceptionable Latin hymns antiently used by the catholics, and still continuing to retain among the protestants a degree of popularity. One of these begins, *Jam Lucis orto sydere*. At the end are prayers and graces in rhyme. This book, which in Wood's time had been degraded to the stall of the ballad-singer, and is now only to be found on the shelf of the antiquary, was intended to supersede or abolish the original Latin hymns, which were only offensive because they were in Latin, and which were the recreation of scholars in our universities after dinner on festival days. At an archiepiscopal visitation of Merton college in Oxford, in the year 1562, it was a matter of enquiry, whether the *superstitious* hymns appointed to

* See Strype, ECCLES. MEM. ii. p. 138. gainst the Pope, englished by Poynt, printed in 1549. Strype, *ibid.* 198.

be sung in the Hall on holidays, were changed for the psalms in metre: and one of the fellows is accused of having attempted to prevent the singing of the metrical Te Deum in the refectory on All-faints day¹.

It will not be foreign to our purpose to remark here, that when doctor Cofins, prebendary of Durham, afterwards bishop, was cited before the parliament in 1640, for reviving or supporting papistic usages in his cathedral, it was alledged against him, that he had worn an embroidered cope, had repaired some ruinous cherubims, had used a consecrated knife for dividing the sacramental bread, had renovated the blue cap and golden beard of a little image of Christ on bishop Hatfield's tomb, had placed two lighted tapers on the altar which was decorated with emblematic sculpture, and had forbidden the psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins to be sung in the choir².

¹ Strype's Parker, B. 11. Ch. ii. pag. 116, 117. Compare LIFE OF SIR THOMAS POPE, 2d edit. p. 354.

² Neale's HIST. PURIT. vol. ii. ch. vii. pag. 387. edit. 1733. Nalson's COLLECTIONS, vol. i. pag. 789.

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