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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 XXIX. Tye's Acts of the Apostles in rhyme. His merit as a musician.
Early piety of king Edward the sixth. Controversial ballads and plays.
Translation of the Bible. Its effects on our ...

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S E C T. XXIX.

BUT among the theological versifiers of these times, the most notable is Christopher Tye, a doctor of music at Cambridge in 1545, and musical preceptor to prince Edward, and probably to his sisters the princesses Mary and Elisabeth. In the reign of Elisabeth he was organist of the royal chapel, in which he had been educated. To his profession of music, he joined some knowledge of English literature: and having been taught to believe that rhyme and edification were closely connected, and being persuaded that every part of the Scripture would be more instructive and better received if reduced into verse, he projected a translation of the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES into familiar metre. It appears that the BOOK OF KINGS had before been versified, which for many reasons was more capable of shining under the hands of a translator. But the most splendid historical book, I mean the most susceptible of poetic ornament, in the Old or New Testament, would have become ridiculous when clothed in the fashionable ecclesiastical stanza. Perhaps the plan of setting a narrative of this kind to music, was still more preposterous and exceptionable. However, he completed only the first fourteen chapters: and they were printed in 1553, by William Serres, with the following title, which by the reader, who is not acquainted with the peculiar complexion of this period, will hardly be suspected to be serious. "The ACTES OF THE APOSTLES translated into
" Englyshe metre, and dedicated to the kinges most excellent
" maiestye by Cristofer Tye, doctor in musyke, and one of the
" Gentylnen

“ Gentylnen of hys graces most honourable Chappell, with
 “ notes to eche chapter to synge and also to play upon the Lute,
 “ very necessarye for studentes after theyr studye to fyle their
 “ wittes, and alsoe for all christians that cannot synge, to reade
 “ the good and godlye storyes of the lives of Christ his apos-
 “ tles.” It is dedicated in Sternhold’s stanza, “ To the ver-
 “ tuous and godlye learned prynce Edward the sixth.” As this
 singular dedication contains, not only anecdotes of the author
 and his work, but of his majesty’s eminent attention to the
 study of the scripture, and of his skill in playing on the lute,
 I need not apologise for transcribing a few dull stanzas; espe-
 cially as they will also serve as a specimen of the poet’s native
 style and manner, unconfined by the fetters of translation.

Your Grace may note, from tyme to tyme,
 That some doth undertake
 Upon the Psalms to write in ryme,
 The verse plesant to make :

And some doth take in hand to wryte
 Out of the Booke of Kynges ;
 Because they se your Grace delyte
 In fuche like godlye thynges*.

And last of all, I youre poore man,
 Whose doinges are full base,
 Yet glad to do the best I can
 To give unto your Grace,

* Strype says, that “ Sternhold com-
 posed several psalms at first for his own
 solace. For he set and sung them to his
 organ. Which music king Edward vi.
 sometime hearing, for he was a Gentle-

man of the privy-chamber, was much
 delighted with them. Which occasioned
 his publication and dedication of them
 to the said king.” ECCLES. MEMOR.
 B. i. ch. 2. p. 86.

Have thought it good now to recyte
 The stories of the Actes
 Even of the Twelve, as Luke doth wryte,
 Of all their worthy factes.——

Unto the text I do not ad,
 Nor nothyng take awaye;
 And though my style be gros and bad,
 The truth perceyve ye may.——

My callynge is another waye,
 Your Grace shall herein fynde
 My notes set forth to synge or playe,
 To recreate the mynde.

And though they be not curious^b,
 But for the letter mete;
 Ye shall them fynde harmonious,
 And eke pleasaunt and swete.

A young monarch finging the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
 in verse to his lute, is a royal character of which we have
 seldom heard. But he proceeds,

That such good thynges your Grace might move
 Your Lute when ye assaye,
 In stede of songes of wanton love,
 These stories then to play.

So shall your Grace please God the lorde
 In walkyng in his waye,
 His lawes and statutes to recorde
 In your heart night and day.

^b That is, they are plain and unisonous: the established character of this sort of music.

And

And eke your realme shall florish styll,
 No good thyng shall decaye,
 Your subjectes shall with right good will,
 These wordes recorde and faye :

“ Thy lyf, O kyng, to us doth shyne,
 “ As God’s boke doth thee teache;
 “ Thou dost us feede with such doctrine
 “ As God’s elect dyd preache.”

From this sample of his original vein, my reader will not perhaps hastily predetermine, that our author has communicated any considerable decorations to his ACTS OF THE APOSTLES in English verse. There is as much elegance and animation in the two following initial stanzas of the fourteenth chapter, as in any of the whole performance, which I shall therefore exhibit.

It chaunced in Iconium,
 As they^c oft tymes did use,
 Together they into did come
 The Sinagoge of Jues.

Where they did preache and only seke
 God’s grace them to atcheve;
 That so they speke to Jue and Greke
 That many did bileve.

Doctor Tye’s ACTS OF THE APOSTLES were sung for a time in the royal chapel of Edward the sixth. But they never became popular. The impropriety of the design, and the impotency of the execution, seem to have been perceived even by his own prejudiced and undiscerning age. This circumstance, however, had probably the fortunate and seasonable effect, of

^c Apostles.

turning Tye's musical studies to another and a more rational system: to the composition of words judiciously selected from the prose psalms in four or five parts. Before the middle of the reign of Elizabeth, at a time when the more ornamental and intricate music was wanted in our service, he concurred with the celebrated Tallis and a few others in setting several anthems, which are not only justly supposed to retain much of the original strain of our antient choral melody before the reformation, but in respect of harmony, expression, contrivance, and general effect, are allowed to be perfect models of the genuine ecclesiastic style. Fuller informs us, that Tye was the chief restorer of the loss which the music of the church had sustained by the destruction of the monasteries⁴. Tye also appears to have been a translator of Italian. *The History of Naftagio and Traversari translated out of Italian into English by C. T.* perhaps Christopher Tye, was printed at London in 1569⁵.

It is not my intention to pursue any farther the mob of religious rhymers, who, from principles of the most unfeigned piety, devoutly laboured to darken the lustre, and enervate the force, of the divine pages. And perhaps I have been already too prolix in examining a species of poetry, if it may be so called, which even impoverishes prose; or rather, by mixing the stile of prose with verse, and of verse with prose, destroys

⁴ WORTHIES, ii. 244. Tallis here mentioned, at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth, and by proper authority, enriched the music of Marbeck's liturgy. He set to music the TE DEUM, BENEDICTUS, MAGNIFICAT, NUNC DIMITTIS, and other offices, to which Marbeck had given only the *canto fermo*, or plain chant. He composed a new Litany still in use; and improved the simpler modulation of Marbeck's Suffrages, Kyries after the Commandments, and other versicles, as they are sung at present. There are two chants of Tallis, one to the VENITE EXULTEMUS, and another to the Athanasian Creed.

⁵ In duodecimo.—I had almost forgot to observe, that John Mardiley, *clerk of the king's Mint, called Suffolk-house* in Southwark, translated twenty-four of David's Psalms into English verse, about 1550. He wrote also *Religious Hymns*. Bale, par. post. p. 106. There is extant his *Complaint against the stiffnecked papist in verse*, Lond. by T. Raynold, 1548. 8vo. And, a *Short Resjtal of certyne holie doctors*, against the real presence, *collected in myter* [metre] by John Mardiley. Lond. 12mo. See another of his pieces on the same subject, and in rhyme, presented and dedicated to queen Elizabeth, MSS. REG. 17 B. xxxvii. The Protector Somerset was his patron.

the

the character and effect of both. But in surveying the general course of a species of literature, absurdities as well as excellencies, the weakness and the vigour of the human mind, must have their historian. Nor is it unpleasing to trace and to contemplate those strange incongruities, and false ideas of perfection, which at various times, either affectation, or caprice, or fashion, or opinion, or prejudice, or ignorance, or enthusiasm, present to the conceptions of men, in the shape of truth.

I must not, however, forget, that king Edward the sixth is to be ranked among the religious poets of his own reign. Fox has published his metrical instructions concerning the eucharist, addressed to sir Antony Saint Leger. Bale also mentions his comedy called the WHORE OF BABYLON, which Holland the herologist, who perhaps had never seen it, and knew not whether it was a play or a ballad, in verse or prose, pronounces to be a most elegant performance^f. Its elegance, with some, will not perhaps apologise or atone for its subject: and it may seem strange, that controversial ribaldry should have been suffered to enter into the education of a great monarch. But the genius, habits, and situation, of his age should be considered. The reformation was the great political topic of Edward's court. Intricate discussions in divinity were no longer confined to the schools or the clergy. The new religion, from its novelty, as well as importance, interested every mind, and was almost the sole object of the general attention. Men emancipated from the severities of a spiritual tyranny, reflected with horror on the slavery they had so long suffered, and with exultation on the triumph they had obtained. These feelings were often expressed in a strain of enthusiasm. The spirit of innovation, which had seized the times, often transgressed the bounds of truth. Every change of religion is attended with those ebullitions, which growing more moderate by degrees, afterwards appear eccentric and ridiculous.

^f HEROOLOG. p. 27.

We who live at a distance from this great and national struggle between popery and protestantism, when our church has been long and peaceably established, and in an age of good sense, of politeness and philosophy, are apt to view these effusions of royal piety as weak and unworthy the character of a king. But an ostentation of zeal and example in the young Edward, as it was natural so it was necessary, while the reformation was yet immature. It was the duty of his preceptors, to impress on his tender years, an abhorrence of the principles of Rome, and a predilection to that happy system which now seemed likely to prevail. His early diligence, his inclination to letters, and his seriousness of disposition, seconded their active endeavours to cultivate and to bias his mind in favour of the new theology, which was now become the fashionable knowledge. These and other amiable virtues his cotemporaries have given young Edward in an eminent degree. But it may be presumed, that the partiality which youth always commands, the specious prospects excited by expectation, and the flattering promises of religious liberty secured to a distant posterity, have had some small share in dictating his panegyric.

The new settlement of religion, by counteracting inveterate prejudices of the most interesting nature, by throwing the clergy into a state of contention, and by disseminating theological opinions among the people, excited so general a ferment, that even the popular ballads and the stage, were made the vehicles of the controversy between the papal and protestant communions^a.

The Ballad of LUTHER, the POPE, a CARDINAL, and a HUSBANDMAN, written in 1550, in defence of the reformation, has some spirit, and supports a degree of character in the speakers. There is another written about the same time, which is a lively satire on the English Bible, the vernacular liturgy, and the book of homilies^b. The measure of the last is that of

^a See instances already given, before the Reformation had actually taken place, *supr.* p. 144.

^b See Percy BALL. ii. 102.

PIERCE PLOWMAN, with the addition of rhyme: a sort of versification which now was not uncommon.

Strype has printed a poem called the PORE HELP, of the year 1550, which is a lampoon against the new preachers or gospellers, not very elegant in its allusions, and in Skelton's style. The anonymous satirist mentions with applause *Mayster Huggarde*, or Miles Hoggard, a shoemaker of London, and who wrote several virulent pamphlets against the reformation, which were made important by extorting laboured answers from several eminent divines¹. He also mentions a *nobler clarke*, whose learned *Balad* in defence of the *boly Kyrke* had triumphed over all the raillery of its numerous opponents². The same industrious annalist has also preserved *A Song on bishop Latimer*, in the octave rhyme, by a poet of the same persuasion³. And in the catalogue of modern English prohibited books delivered in 1542 to the parish priests, to the intent that their authors might be discovered and punished, there is the *Burying of the Mass in Eaglish rithme*⁴. But it is not my intention to make a full and formal collection of these fugitive religious pasquinades, which died with their respective controversies.

In the year 1547, a proclamation was published to prohibit preaching. This was a temporary expedient to suppress the turbulent harangues of the catholic ministers, who still composed no small part of the parochial clergy: for the court of augmentations took care perpetually to supply the vacant benefices with the disincorporated monks, in order to exonerate the exchequer from the payment of their annuities. These men, both from inclination and interest, and hoping to restore the church to its antient orthodoxy and opulence, exerted all their powers of declamation in combating the doctrines of protestan-

¹ One of these pieces is, "A Confutation to the answer of a wicked ballad," printed in 1550. Crowley abovementioned wrote, "A Confutation of Miles Hoggard's wicked ballad made in defence of the transubstantiation of the

"Sacrament." Lond. 1548. octavo.

² Strype, ECCL. MEM. ii. APPEND. i. p. 34.

³ Ibid. vol. i. APPEND. xlv. p. 121.

⁴ Burnet, HIST. REF. vol. i. REC. NUM. xxvi. p. 257.

tism, and in alienating the minds of the people from the new doctrines and reformed rites of worship. Being silenced by authority, they had recourse to the stage: and from the pulpit removed their polemics to the play-house. Their farces became more successful than their sermons. The people flocked eagerly to the play-house, when deprived not only of their antient pageant-tries, but of their pastoral discourses, in the church. Archbishop Cranmer and the protector Somers were the chief objects of these dramatic investives". At length, the same authority which had checked the preachers, found it expedient to controul the players: and a new proclamation, which I think has not yet appeared in the history of the British drama, was promulgated in the following terms*. The inquisitive reader will observe, that from this instrument plays appear to have been long before a general and familiar species of entertainment, that they were acted not only in London but in the great towns, that the profession of a player, even in our present sense, was common and established; and that these satirical interludes are forbidden only in the English tongue. "Forasmuch
 " as a great number of those that be COMMON PLAYERS OF
 " ENTERLUDES and PLAYES, as well within the city of Lon-
 " don as elsewhere within the realm, doe for the most part play
 " such ENTERLUDES, as contain matter tending to sedition,
 " and contemning of sundry good orders and laws; whereupon
 " are grown and daily are likely to growe and ensue much dis-
 " quiet, division, tumults and uprores in this realm": the
 " Kinges Majesty, by the advice and consent of his dearest

* Fuller, CH. HIST. B. vii. Cent. xvi. p. 390.

† Dat. 3. Edw. vi. Aug. 8.

‡ It should, however, be remarked, that the reformers had themselves shewn the way to this sort of abuse long before. Bale's comedy OF THE THREE LAWS, printed in 1538, is commonly supposed to be a Mystery, and merely doctrinal: but it is a satirical play against popery, and perhaps the first of the kind in our language. I

have mentioned it in general terms before, under Bale as a poet; but I reserved a more particular notice of it for this place. [See *supr.* p. 78.] It is exceedingly scarce, and has this colophon. "Thus endeth this
 " Comedy concernyng the thre lawes,
 " of Nature, Moses, and Christ, corrupt-
 " ed by the Sodomytes, Pharisees, and
 " Papystes, most wycked. Compyled by
 " Johan Bale. Anno M.D. XXXVIII. And
 " lately impreated per Nicolaum Bambur-
 " gensem."

“uncle Edward duke of Somersfet, and the rest of his high-
 “nesse Privie Councell, straightly chargeth and commandeth
 “all and everie his Majesties subjects, of whatsoever state,
 “order, or degree they be, that from the ninth day of this pre-
 “sent month of August untill the feast of All-saints next com-
 “ming, they nor any of them, openly or secretly PLAY IN
 “THE ENGLISH TONGUE, any kind of ENTERLUDE, PLAY,
 “DIALOGUE, or other matter set forth in form of PLAY, in

“gensem.” duod. It has these direc-
 tions about the dresses, the first I remem-
 ber to have seen, which shew the scope and
 spirit of the piece. SIGNAT. G. “The
 “apparellunge of the fix Vyces or frutes
 “of Infydeyte.—Let Idolatry be decked
 “lyke an olde wytche, Sodomy lyke a
 “monke of all sectes, Ambycyon lyke a
 “byshop, Covetousnesse lyke a Pharisee or
 “spyrituall lawer, False Doctryne lyke a
 “popysh doctour, and Hypocresy lyke a
 “graye fryre. The rest of the partes are
 “easye nough to conjecture.” A scene
 in the second Act is thus opened by INFIDELITAS.—“*Post cantionem, Infidelitas alta*
 “*voco dicat. OREMUS. Omnipotens sem-*
 “*piterne Deus, qui ad imaginem et simi-*
 “*litudinem nostram formasti laicos, da,*
 “*quæsumus, ut sicut eorum sudoribus vi-*
 “*vimus, ita eorum uxoribus, filiabus, et*
 “*domicellis perpetuo frui mereamur, per*
 “*dominum nostrum Papam.”* Bale, a
 clergyman, and at length a bishop in Ire-
 land, ought to have known, that this pro-
 fane and impious parody was more offen-
 sive and injurious to true religion than any
 part of the misall which he means to ridi-
 cule. INFIDELITY then begins in Eng-
 lish verse a conversation with *LEX MOYSIS*,
 containing the most low and licentious ob-
 scenity, which I am ashamed to transcribe,
 concerning the words of a Latin *anteme*,
 between an old *fryre*, or friar, *with specta-*
cles on hys nose, and dame Isabel an old
 nun, who *crowes like a capon*. This is the

most tolerable part of INFIDELITY'S dia-
 logue. SIGNAT. C. iiij.

It was a good world, when we had sech
 wholsome storyes
 Preached in our church, on sondayes and
 other feryes^a.

With us was it merye
 When we went to Berye^b,
 And to our Lady of Grace;
 To the Bloud of Hayles
 Where no good chere fayles,
 And other holye place.

When the prests myght walke,
 And with yonge wyves talke,
 Then had we chyl dren plentye;
 Then cuckoldes myght leape
 A score on a heape,
 Now is there not one to twentye.
 When the monkes were fatte, &c.

In another place, the old philosophy is
 ridiculed. SIGNAT. E. v. Where HYPO-
 CRISY says,

And I wyll rays up in the unyversitees
 The seven sleepers there, to advance the
 pope's decrees:
 As Dorbel, and Dans, Durande, and Tho-
 mas of Aquyne,
 The Mastre of Sentens, with Bachon the
 great devyne:
 Henricus de Gandavo: and these shall read
ad Clerum
 Aristotle, and Albert *de secretis mulierum*:
 With the commentaries of Avicen and
 Averoyes, &c.

^a Holidays.

^b Bury Saint Edmunds.

“ any place publick or private within this realm, upon pain, that
 “ whosoever shall PLAY in ENGLISH any such PLAY, ENTER-
 “ LUDE, DIALOGUE, or other MATTER, shall suffer impris-
 “ onment, or other punishment at the pleasure of his Majes-
 “ tie.” But when the short date of this proclamation expired,
 the reformers, availing themselves of the stratagems of an enemy,
 attacked the papists with their own weapons. One the comedies
 on the side of reformation still remains’. But the writer,
 while his own religion from its simple and impalpable form was
 much less exposed to the ridicule of scenic exhibition, has not
 taken advantage of that opportunity which the papistic ceremonies
 so obviously afforded to burlesque and drollery, from their
 visible pomp, their number, and their absurdities: nor did he
 perceive an effect which he might have turned to his own use,
 suggested by the practice of his catholic antagonists in the drama,
 who, by way of recommending their own superstitious solemnities,
 often made them contemptible by theatrical representation.

This piece is entitled, *An Enterlude called LUSTY JUVENTUS: lively describing the Frailtie of youth: of Nature prone to Vyce: by Grace and Good Councell traynable to vertue*’. The author, of whom nothing more is known, was one R. Wever, as appears from the colophon. “ Finis, quod R. Wever. Imprinted at
 “ London in Paules churche yarde by Abraham Vele at the
 “ signe of the Lambe.” Hypocrisy is its best character: who laments the loss of her superstitions to the devil, and recites a long catalogue of the trumpery of the popish worship in the metre and manner of Skelton’. The chapter and verse of Scripture are often announced: and in one scene, a personage, called GOD’S MERCYFULL PROMISES, cites Ezekiel as from the pulpit.

^a Fuller, *ibid.* p. 391. See also STAT. 2, 3. Edw. vi. A. D. 1548. Gibf. COD. i. p. 261. edit. 1761.

^b See *supr.* vol. i. 241. ii. 378. 397. And Gibf. COD. i. p. 191. edit. 1761.

^c See Hawkins’s OLD PLAYS, i. p. 135.

^d From Bale’s THREE LAWS above-mentioned, SIGN. B. v.

Here have I praye gynnes,
 Both brouches, beades, and pynnes,
 With foch as the people wynnes
 Unto idolatrye, &c.

The

The Lord by his prophet Ezekiel sayeth in this wise playnlye,
As in the xxiii chapter it doth appere :
Be converted, O ye children, &c ^t.

From this interlude we learn, that the young men, which was natural, were eager to embrace the new religion, and that the old were unwilling to give up those doctrines and modes of worship, to which they had been habitually attached, and had paid the most implicit and reverential obedience, from their childhood. To this circumstance the devil, who is made to represent the Scripture as a novelty, attributes the destruction of his spiritual kingdom.

The old people would beleve stil in my lawes,
But the yonger sort lead them a contrary way ;
They wyll not beleve, they playnly say,
In old traditions as made by men,
But they wyll 'leve as the Scripture teacheth them".

The devil then, in order to recover his interest, applies to his son Hypocrisy, who attempts to convert a young man to the antient faith, and says that the Scripture can teach no more, than that *God is a good man* ^w, a phrase which Shakespeare with great humour has put into the mouth of Dogberry ^x. But he adds an argument in jest, which the papists sometimes seriously used against the protestants, and which, if we consider the poet's ultimate intention, had better been suppressed.

The world was never so mery,
Since children were so bolde :
Now every boy will be a teacher,
The father a foole, the chylde a preacher ^y.

^t Ibid. p. 159.
^w Ibid. p. 133.
^y Ibid. 141.

^x Much Ado. iii. 8.
^y Ibid. p. 143.

It was among the reproaches of protestantism, that the inexperienced and the unlearned thought themselves at liberty to explain the Scriptures, and to debate the most abstruse and metaphysical topics of theological speculation. The two songs in the character of YOUTH, at the opening and close of this interlude, are flowery and not inelegant ^z.

The protestants continued their plays in Mary's reign: for Strype has exhibited a remonstrance from the Privy-council to the lord President of the North, representing, that "certain lewd [ignorant] persons, to the number of six or seven in a company, naming themselves to be servants of sir Francis Lake, and wearing his livery or badge on their sleeves, have wandred about those north parts, and representing certain Plays and Enterludes," reflecting on her majesty and king Philip, and the formalities of the mass^s. These were family-minstrels or players, who were constantly distinguished by their master's livery or badge.

When the English liturgy was restored at the accession of Elizabeth, after its suppression under Mary, the papists renewed their hostilities from the stage; and again tried the intelligible mode of attack by ballads, farces, and interludes. A new injunction was then necessary, and it was again enacted in 1559, that no person, but under heavy forfeitures, should abuse the Common Prayer in "any Enterludes, Plays, songs or rimes ^b." But under Henry the eighth, so early as the year 1542, before the reformation was fixed or even intended on its present liberal establishment, yet when men had begun to discern and to repro-

^z Ibid. p. 121. 153.

^a ECCL. MEM. iii. APPEND. iii. p. 185. Dat. 1556. Sir Francis Lake is ordered to correct his servants so offending.

One Henry Nicholas a native of Amsterdam, who imported his own translations of many enthusiastic German books into England, about the year 1550, translated and published, "COMOEDIA, a worke" in rhyme, conteyning an interlude of

"Myndes witnessing man's fall from God and Cryst, set forth by H. N. and by him newly perused and amended. Translated out of base Almayne into English." Without date, in duodecimo. It seems to have been printed abroad. Our author was the founder of one of the numerous offsets of calvinistic fanaticism, called the FAMILY OF LOVE.

^b Ann. i. Eliz.

bate many of the impostures of popery, it became an object of the legislature to curb the bold and seditious spirit of popular poetry. No sooner were the Scriptures translated and permitted in English, than they were brought upon the stage: they were not only misinterpreted and misunderstood by the multitude, but profaned or burlesqued in comedies and mummeries. Effectually to restrain these abuses, Henry, who loved to create a subject for persecution, who commonly proceeded to disannul what he had just confirmed, and who found that a freedom of enquiry tended to shake his ecclesiastical supremacy, framed a law, that not only Tyndale's English Bible, and all the printed English commentaries, expositions, annotations, defences, replies, and sermons, whether orthodox or heretical, which it had occasioned, should be utterly abolished; but that the kingdom should also be *purged* and *cleansed* of all religious plays, interludes, rhymes, ballads, and songs, which are equally *pestiferous* and *noysome* to the peace of the church^c.

Henry appears to have been piqued as an author and a theologian in adding the clause concerning his own INSTITUTION OF A CHRISTIAN MAN, which had been treated with the same sort of ridicule. Yet under the general injunction of suppressing all English books on religious subjects, he formally excepts, among others, some not properly belonging to that class, such as the CANTERBURY TALES, the works of Chaucer and Gower, CRONICLES, and STORIES OF MENS LIVES^d. There is also an exception added about plays, and those only are allowed which were called MORALITIES, or perhaps interludes of real character and action, "for the rebuking and reproaching of vices and the setting forth of virtue." MYSTERIES are totally rejected^e. The reservations which follow, concerning the use of a corrected English Bible, which was permitted, are curious for their quaint partiality, and they shew the embarrassment

^c STAT. Ann. 34, 35. Henr. viii. Cap. i. Tyndale's Bible was printed at Paris 1536.

^d Ibid. Artic. vii.

^e Ibid. Artic. ix.

of administration, in the difficult business of confining that benefit to a few, from which all might reap advantage, but which threatened to become a general evil, without some degrees of restriction. It is absolutely forbidden to be read or expounded in the church. The lord chancellor, the speaker of the house of commons, *captaines of the wars*, justices of the peace, and recorders of cities, may quote passages to enforce their public harangues, *as has been accustomed*. A nobleman or gentleman may read it, in his house, *orchards*, or *garden*, yet quietly, and without disturbance "of good order." A merchant also may read it *to himself privately*. But the common people, who had already abused this liberty to the purpose of division and dissensions, and under the denomination of *women*, artificers, apprentices, journeymen, and servingmen, are to be punished with one month's imprisonment, as often as they are detected in reading the Bible either privately or openly.

It should be observed, that few of these had now learned to read. But such was the privilege of peerage, that ladies of quality might read "to themselves and alone, and not to others," any chapter either in the Old or New Testament¹. This has the air of a sumptuary law, which indulges the nobility with many superb articles of finery, that are interdicted to those of inferior degree². Undoubtedly the duchesses and countesses of this age, if not from principles of piety, at least from motives of curiosity, became eager to read a book which was made

¹ Ibid. Artic. x. seq.

² And of an old DIETARIE FOR THE CLERGY, I think by archbishop Cranmer, in which an archbishop is allowed to have two swans or two capons in a dish, a bishop two. An archbishop six blackbirds at once, a bishop five, a dean four, an archdeacon two. If a dean has four dishes in his first course, he is not afterwards to have custards or fritters. An archbishop may have six snipes, an archdeacon only two. Rabbits, larks, pheasants, and partridges, are allowed in these

proportions. A canon residentiary is to have a swan only on a Sunday. A rector of sixteen marks, only three blackbirds in a week. See a similar instrument, Strype's PARKER, APPEND. p. 65.

In the British Museum, there is a beautiful manuscript on vellum of a French translation of the Bible, which was found in the tent of king John, king of France, after the battle of Poitiers. Perhaps his majesty possessed this book on the plan of an exclusive royal right.

inaccessible

inaccessible to three parts of the nation. But the partial distribution of a treasure to which all had a right could not long remain. This was a MANNA to be gathered by every man. The claim of the people was too powerful to be overruled by the bigotry, the prejudice, or the caprice of Henry.

I must add here, in reference to my general subject, that the translation of the Bible, which in the reign of Edward the sixth was admitted into the churches, is supposed to have fixed our language. It certainly has transmitted and perpetuated many antient words which would otherwise have been obsolete or unintelligible. I have never seen it remarked, that at the same time this translation contributed to enrich our native English at an early period, by importing and familiarising many Latin words^b.

These were suggested by the Latin vulgate, which was used as a medium by the translators. Some of these, however, now interwoven into our common speech, could not have been understood by many readers even above the rank of the vulgar, when the Bible first appeared in English. Bishop Gardiner had therefore much less reason than we now imagine, for complaining of the too great clearness of the translation, when with an insidious view of keeping the people in their antient ignorance, he proposed, that instead of always using English phrases, many Latin words should still be preserved, because they contained an inherent significance and a genuine dignity, to which the common tongue afforded no correspondent expressions of sufficient energyⁱ.

To the reign of Edward the sixth belongs Arthur Kelton, a native of Shropshire or Wales. He wrote the CRONICLE OF

^b More particularly in the Latin derivative substantives, such as, *divination, perdition, adoption, manifestation, consolation, contribution, administration, consummation, reconciliation, operation, communication, retribution, preparation, immortality, principality, &c. &c.* And in other words, *frustrate, inexorable, transfigure, concupiscence, &c. &c.*

ⁱ Such as, *Idololatria, contritus, holocausta, sacramentum, elementa, humilitas, satisfactio, ceremonia, absolutio, mysterium, penitentia, &c.* See Gardiner's proposals in Burnet, *HIST. REF.* vol. i. B. iii. p. 315. And Fuller, *CH. HIST. B. v. Cent. xvi.* p. 238.

THE BRUTES in English verse. It is dedicated to the young king, who seems to have been the general patron; and was printed in 1547^k. Wood allows that he was an able antiquary; but laments, that he “being withall poetically given, must for-
 “sooth write and publish his lucubrations in verse; whereby,
 “for rhyme’s sake, many material matters, and the due timing
 “of them, are omitted, and so consequently rejected by histo-
 “rians and antiquarians^l.” Yet he has not supplied his want of genealogical and historical precision with those strokes of poetry which his subject suggested; nor has his imagination been any impediment to his accuracy. At the end of his CRONICLE is the GENEALOGY OF THE BRUTES, in which the pedigree of king Edward the sixth is lineally drawn through thirty-two generations, from Osiris the first king of Egypt. Here too Wood reproaches our author for his ignorance in genealogy. But in an heraldic enquiry, so difficult and so new, many mistakes are pardonable. It is extraordinary that a Welshman should have carried his genealogical researches into Egypt, or rather should have wished to prove that Edward was descended from Osiris: but this was with a design to shew, that the Egyptian monarch was the original progenitor of Brutus, the undoubted founder of Edward’s family. Bale says that he wrote, and dedicated to sir William Herbert, afterwards earl of Pembroke, a most elegant poetical panegyric on the Cambro-Britons^m. But Bale’s praises and censures are always regulated according to the religion of his authors.

The first CHANSON à BOIRE, or DRINKING-BALLAD, of any merit, in our language, appeared in the year 1551. It has a vein of ease and humour, which we should not expect to have been inspired by the simple beverage of those times. I believe I shall not tire my reader by giving it at length; and am only afraid that in this specimen the transition will be thought

^k Lond. Octavo. Pr. “In the golden
 “time when all things.”

^l ATH. OXON. i. 73.
^m Bale, xi. 97.

too violent, from the poetry of the puritans to a convivial and *ungodlie* ballad.

I cannot eat, but little meat,
 My stomach is not good;
 But sure I think, that I can drink
 With him that weares a hood^a.
 Though I go bare, take ye no care,
 I nothing am a colde;
 I stuffe my skin so full within,
 Of joly goode ale and olde.
Backe and side go bare, go bare,
Booth foot and hand go colde;
But, belly, God fend thee good ale inoughe,
Whether it be new or olde!

I love no rost, but a nut-browne toste,
 And a crab laid in the fire;
 A little bread shall do me stead,
 Moche bread I noight desire.
 No frost no snow, no winde, I trowe,
 Can hurt me if I wolde,
 I am so wrapt, and throwly lapt
 Of joly good ale and olde.
Backe and side, &c.

And TIB my wife, that as her life
 Loveth well good ale to seeke,
 Full oft drinks shee, till ye may see
 The teares run downe her cheeke.
 Then doth she trowle to me the bowle
 Even as a mault-worm sholde;
 And°, "faith, sweet heart, I tooke my part
 "Of this joly good ale and olde."
Backe and side, &c.

^a A monk.

[°] Having drank she says.

Now let them drinke, till they nod and winke,
 Even as good fellows should do :
 They shall not misse to have the blisse
 Good ale doth bringe men to.
 And al goode fowles that have scoured bowles,
 Or have them lustely trolde,
 God save the lives, of them and their wives,
 Whether they be yong or olde !
Backe and side, &c.

This song opens the second act of GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE, a comedy, written and printed in 1551^p, and soon afterwards acted at Christ's College in Cambridge. In the title of the old edition it is said to have been written "by Mr. S. "master of artes," who probably was a member of that society. This is held to be the first comedy in our language: that is, the first play which was neither Mystery nor Morality, and which handled a comic story with some disposition of plot, and some discrimination of character^q. The writer has a degree of jocularly which sometimes rises above buffoonery, but is often disgraced by lowness of incident. Yet in a more polished age he would have chosen, nor would he perhaps have disgraced, a better subject. It has been thought surprising that a learned audience could have endured some of these indelicate scenes. But the established festivities of scholars were gross and agreeable to their general habits: nor was learning in that age always accompanied by gentleness of manners. When the sermons of Hugh Latimer were in vogue at court, the university might be justified in applauding GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE.

^p On the authority of MSS. Oldys. A valuable black-letter copy, in the possession of Mr. Steevens, is the oldest I have seen. ^q See *supr.* vol. ii. p. 378.