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The History Of English Poetry

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

Warton, Thomas

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Section XXX. Reign of queen Mary. Mirrour of Magistrates. Its inventor,
Sackville lord Buckhurst. His life. Mirrour of Magistrates continued by
Baldwyn and Ferrers. Its plan and stories.

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S E C T. XXX.

TRUE genius, unfeigned by the cabals and unalarmed by the dangers of faction, defies or neglects those events which destroy the peace of mankind, and often exerts its operations amidst the most violent commotions of a state. Without patronage and without readers, I may add without models, the earlier Italian writers, while their country was shook by the intestine tumults of the Guelfes and Guibelines, continued to produce original compositions both in prose and verse, which yet stand unrivalled. The age of Pericles and of the Peloponnesian war was the same. Careless of those who governed or disturbed the world, and superior to the calamities of a quarrel in which two mighty leaders contended for the prize of universal dominion, Lucretius wrote his sublime didactic poem on the system of nature, Virgil his bucolics, and Cicero his books of philosophy. The proscriptions of Augustus did not prevent the progress of the Roman literature.

In the turbulent and unpropitious reign of queen Mary, when controversy was no longer confined to speculation, and a spiritual warfare polluted every part of England with murders more atrocious than the slaughters of the most bloody civil contest, a poem was planned, although not fully completed, which illuminates with no common lustre that interval of darkness, which occupies the annals of English poetry from Surrey to Spenser, entitled, *A MIRROR FOR MAGISTRATES*.

More writers than one were concerned in the execution of this piece: but its primary inventor, and most distinguished

D d 2

contributor,

contributor, was Thomas Sackville the first lord Buckhurst, and first earl of Dorset. Much about the same period, the same author wrote the first genuine English tragedy; which I shall consider in its proper place.

Sackville was born at Buckhurst, a principal seat of his ancient and illustrious family in the parish of Withiam in Suffex. His birth is placed, but with evident inaccuracy, under the year 1536^a. At least it should be placed six years before. Discovering a vigorous understanding in his childhood, from a domestic tuition he was removed, as it may reasonably be conjectured, to Hart-hall, now Hertford college, in Oxford. But he appears to have been a master of Arts at Cambridge^b. At both universities he became celebrated as a Latin and English poet; and he carried his love of poetry, which he seems to have almost solely cultivated, to the Inner Temple. It was now fashionable for every young man of fortune, before he began his travels, or was admitted into parliament, to be initiated in the study of the law. But instead of pursuing a science, which could not be his profession, and which was unaccommodated to the bias of his genius, he betrayed his predilection to a more pleasing species of literature, by composing the tragedy just mentioned, for the entertainment and honour of his fellow-students. His high birth, however, and ample patrimony, soon advanced him to more important situations and employments. His eminent accomplishments and abilities having acquired the confidence and esteem of queen Elizabeth, the poet was soon lost in the statesman, and negotiations and embassies extinguished the milder ambitions of the ingenuous Muse. Yet it should be remembered, that he was uncorrupted amidst the intrigues of an artful court, that in the character of a first minister he preserved the integrity of a private man, and that his family refused the offer of an apology to his memory, when it was insulted by the mali-

^a Archbishop Abbot, in Sackville's Funeral-fermon, says he was aged 72 when he died, in the year 1608. If so, he was

not twenty years of age when he wrote *GORDONBUCK*.

^b Wood, *ATH. OXON.* i. F. 767.

cious

cious insinuations of a rival party. Nor is it foreign to our purpose to remark, that his original elegance and brilliancy of mind sometimes broke forth, in the exercise of his more formal political functions. He was frequently disgusted at the pedantry and official barbarity of style, with which the public letters and instruments were usually framed: and Naunton relates, that his "secretaries had difficulty to please him, he was "so *facete* and choice in his style." Even in the decisions and pleadings of that rigid tribunal the star-chamber, which was never esteemed the school of rhetoric, he practiced and encouraged an unaccustomed strain of eloquent and graceful oratory: on which account, says Lloyd, "so flowing was his invention, "that he was called the star-chamber bell." After he was made a peer by the title of lord Buckhurst, and had succeeded to a most extensive inheritance, and was now discharging the business of an envoy to Paris, he found time to prefix a Latin epistle to Clerke's Latin translation of Castilio's *COURTIER*, printed at London in 1571, which is not an unworthy recommendation of a treatise remarkable for its polite Latinity. It was either because his mistress Elisabeth paid a sincere compliment to his singular learning and fidelity, or because she was willing to indulge an affected fit of indignation against the object of her capricious passion, that when Sackville, in 1591, was a candidate for the chancellorship of the university of Oxford, she condescended earnestly to solicit the university in his favour, and in opposition to his competitor the earl of Essex. At least she appears to have approved the choice, for her majesty soon afterwards visited Oxford, where she was entertained by the new chancellor with splendid banquets and much solid erudition. It is neither my design nor my province, to develope the profound policy with which he conducted a peace with Spain, the address with which he penetrated or baffled the machinations of Essex, and the circumspection and success with which he managed the

* FRAGM. REGAL. p. 70.

* Lloyd's WORTHIES, p. 678.

treasury

treasury of two opulent sovereigns. I return to Sackville as a poet, and to the history of the *MIRROUR OF MAGISTRATES*^e.

About the year 1557, he formed the plan of a poem, in which all the illustrious but unfortunate characters of the English history, from the conquest to the end of the fourteenth century, were to pass in review before the poet, who descends like Dante into the infernal region, and is conducted by *SORROW*. Although a descent into hell had been suggested by other poets, the application of such a fiction to the present design, is a conspicuous proof of genius and even of invention. Every personage was to recite his own misfortunes in a separate soliloquy. But Sackville had leisure only to finish a poetical preface called an *INDUCTION*, and one legend, which is the life of Henry Stafford duke of Buckingham. Relinquishing therefore the design abruptly, and hastily adapting the close of his *INDUCTION* to the appearance of Buckingham, the only story he had yet written, and which was to have been the last in his series, he recommended the completion of the whole to Richard Baldwyne and George Ferrers.

Baldwyne seems to have been graduated at Oxford about the year 1532. He was an ecclesiastic, and engaged in the education of youth. I have already mentioned his metrical version of *SOLOMON'S SONG*, dedicated to king Edward the sixth^f. His patron was Henry lord Stafford^g.

George Ferrers, a man of superior rank, was born at faint Albans, educated at Oxford, and a student of Lincoln's-inn. Leland, who has given him a place in his *ENCOMIA*, informs us, that he was patronised by lord Cromwell^h. He was in par-

^e Many of his Letters are in the *CAPALA*. And in the university register at Oxford, (Mar. 21. 1591.) see his Letter about the Habits. See also Howard's *COLL.* p. 297.

^f See *supr.* 181.

^g *Utr. intr.* He wrote also *Three bookes of Moral Philosophy*. And *The Lives and Say-*

ings of Philosophers, Emperors, Kings, etc. dedicated to lord Stafford, often printed at London in quarto. Altered by Thomas Palfreyman, Lond. 1608. 12mo. Also, *Similies and Proverbs*. And *The Use of Adagies*. Bale says, that he wrote, "Co-mœdias etiam aliquot." pag. 108.

^h Fol. 66.

liament

liament under Henry the eighth; and, in 1542, imprisoned by that whimsical tyrant, perhaps very unjustly, and for some cabal now not exactly known. About the same time, in his juridical capacity, he translated the MAGNA CHARTA from French into Latin and English, with some other statutes of England^b. In a scarce book, William Patten's *Expedition into Scotlande of the most woorthely fortunate prince Edward duke of Somerset*, printed at London in 1548^c, and partly incorporated into Hollinhead's history, it appears from the following passage that he was of the suite of the protector Somerset. "George Ferrers a gentleman of my lord Protector's, and one of the commiffioners of the carriage of this army." He is said to have compiled the history of queen Mary's reign, which makes a part of Grafton's CHRONICLE^k. He was a composer almost by profession of occasional interludes for the diversion of the court: and in 1553, being then a member of Lincolns-inn, he bore the office of LORD OF MISRULE at the royal palace of Greenwich during the twelve days of Christmas. Stowe says, "George Ferrers gentleman of Lincolns-inn, being lord of the disportes all the 12 days of Christmas anno MDLIII^l, at Greenwich: who so pleasantly and wisely behaved himself, that the king had great delight in his pastymes^m." No common talents were required for these festivities. Bale says that he wrote some rhymes, *rhythmos aliquot*ⁿ. He died at Flamstead in Hertfordshire in 1579. Wood's account of George Ferrers, our author, who misled by Puttenham the author of the ARTE OF ENGLISH POESIE, has confounded him with Edward Ferrers a writer of plays, is full of mistakes and inconsistencies^o. Our author

^b For Robert Redman. No date. After 1540. At the end he is called George Ferrerz. In duodecimo. Redman printed MAGNA CHARTA in French, 1529. Duodecim. oblong.

^c Dedicated to sir William Paget. Duodecimo. Compare Leland, ut supr. fol. 66.

^k Stowe, CHRON. p. 632.

^l Hollinhead says 1552. fol. 1067.

^m CHRON. p. 608. [See supr. vol. ii. p. 382.]

ⁿ p. 108. SCRIPT. NOSTR. TEMP.

^o ATH. OXON. i. 193. The same mistake is in Meres's WITS TREASURY, printed in 1598. In reciting the dramatic poets of those times he says, "Maister Edward Ferris the authour of the MIRROR FOR MAGISTRATES." fol. 282.
None

wrote the epitaph of his friend Thomas Phayer, the old translator of the *Eneid* into English verse, who died in 1560, and is buried in the church of Kilgarran in Pembrokeshire.

Baldwyne and Ferrers, perhaps deterred by the greatness of the attempt, did not attend to the series prescribed by Sackville; but inviting some others to their assistance, among which are Churchyard and Phayer, chose such lives from the newly published chronicles of Fabyan and Hall, as seemed to display the most affecting catastrophes, and which very probably were pointed out by Sackville. The civil wars of York and Lancaster, which Hall had compiled with a laborious investigation of the subject, appear to have been their chief resource.

These legends with their authors, including Sackville's part, are as follows. Robert Tresilian chief Justice of England, in 1388, by Ferrers. The two Mortimers, surnamed Roger, in 1329, and 1387, by Baldwyne. Thomas of Woodstock duke of Gloucester, uncle to Richard the second, murdered in 1397, by Ferrers. Lord Mowbray, preferred and banished by the same king in 1398, by Churchyard. King Richard the second, deposed in 1399, by Baldwyne. Owen Glendour, the pretended prince of Wales, starved to death in 1401, by Phayer. Henry Percy earl of Northumberland, executed at York in 1407, by Baldwyne. Richard Plantagenet earl of Cambridge, executed at Southampton in 1415, by Baldwyne. Thomas Montague earl of Salisbury, in 1428, by Baldwyne. James the first of Scotland, by Baldwyne. William de la Poole duke of Suffolk,

None of his plays, which, Puttenham says, "were written with much skill and magnificence in his meter, and wherein the king had so much good recreation that he had thereby many good rewards," are now remaining, and as I suppose were never printed. He died and was buried in the church of Badlesley-Clinton in Warwickshire 1564. He was of Warwickshire, and educated at Oxford. See Philips's *THEATR. POET.* p. 221. SUPPL. Lond. 1674. 12mo. Another Ferris [Richard]

wrote *The dangerous adventure of Richard Ferris and others who undertooke to rowe from Tower wharfe to Brisfowe in a small wberry-boate*, Lond. 1590. 4to. I believe the names of all three should be written FERRERS.

^p Hall's *Union of the two noble and illustrious families of Yorke and Lancaster* was printed at London, for Berthelette, 1542. fol. Continued by Grafton the printer, from Hall's manuscripts, Lond. 1548. fol.

banished

banished for destroying Humphry duke of Gloucester in 1450, by Baldwyne. Jack Cade the rebel in 1450, by Baldwyne. Richard Plantagenet duke of Yorke, and his son the earl of Rutland, killed in 1460, by Baldwyne. Lord Clifford, in 1461, by Baldwyne. Tiptoft earl of Worcester, in 1470, by Baldwyne. Richard Nevil earl of Warwick, and his brother John lord Montacute, killed in the battle of Barnet, 1471, by Baldwyne. King Henry the sixth murdered in the Tower London, in 1471, by Baldwyne. George Plantagenet, third son of the duke of York, murdered by his brother Richard in 1478, by Baldwyne. Edward the fourth, who died suddenly in 1483, by Skelton¹. Sir Anthony Woodville, lord Rivers and Scales, governor of prince Edward, murdered with his nephew lord Gray in 1483, by Baldwyne². Lord Hastings betrayed by Catesby, and murdered in the Tower by Richard duke of Gloucester, in 1483³. Sackville's INDUCTION. Sackville's Duke of Buckingham. Collingbourne, *cruelly executed for making a foolish rhyme*, by Baldwyne. Richard duke of Gloucester, slain in Bosworth field by Henry the seventh, in 1485, by Francis Seagers⁴. Jane Shore, by Churchyard⁵. Edmund duke of Somersfet killed in the first battle of Saint Albans in 1454, by Ferrers. Michael Joseph the blacksmith and lord Audely, in 1496, by Cavyl.

It was injudicious to choose so many stories which were then recent. Most of these events were at that time too well known

¹ Printed in his WORKS. But there is an old edition of this piece alone, without date, in duodecimo.

² The SECONDE PARTE begins with this Life.

³ Subscribed in Niccols's edition, "Master D." that is, John Dolman. It was intended to introduce here The two Princes murdered in the tower, "by the lord Vaulx, who undertooke to penne it, says Baldwyne, but what he hath done therein I am not certaine." fol. cxiii. b. Dolman abovementioned was of the Middle-temple.

He translated into English Tully's TUSCULANE QUESTIONS, dedicated to Jewel bishop of Salisbury, and printed in 1561, duodecimo.

⁴ A translator of the PSALMS, see *supr.* p. 181.

⁵ In the Prologue which follows, Baldwyne says, he was "exhorted to procure Master Churchyarde to undertake and to penne as many more of the remaynder, as myght be attayned, &c." fol. clvi. a.

to become the proper subject of poetry, and must have lost much of their solemnity by their notoriety. But Shakespeare has been guilty of the same fault. The objection, however, is now worn away, and age has given a dignity to familiar circumstances.

This collection, or set of poems, was printed in quarto, in 1559, with the following title. "A MYRROVRE FOR
" MAGISTRATES, Wherein may be seen by example of
" others, with howe greuous plages vices are punished, and
" howe frayl and vnstable worldly prosperitie is founde, euen of
" those whom Fortvne seemeth most highly to favour. *Felix*
" *quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum.* Anno 1559. Londini, in
" ædibus Thomæ Marthe." A *Mirroure* was a favorite title of
a book, especially among the old French writers. Some anecdotes of the publication may be collected from Baldwyne's DEDICATION TO THE NOBILITIE, prefixed. "The wurke was
" begun and parte of it prynted in Queene Maries tyme, but
" hyndred by the Lord Chancellour that then was": never-
" theles, through the meanes of my lorde Stafford^v, the fyrst
" parte was licenced, and imprynted the fyrst yeare of the
" raygne of this our most noble and vertuous queene^x, and de-
" dicated then to your honours with this preface. Since whych
" time, although I have been called to another trade of lyfe,
" yet my good lord Stafford hath not ceased to call upon me
" to publyshe so much as I had gotten at other mens hands, so
" that through his lordshyppes earnest meanes I have now also
" set furth another parte, conteyning as little of myne owne
" as the fyrst parte doth of other mens^y."

The plan was confessedly borrowed from Boccace's *DE CASI-*

^v This chancellor must have been bishop Gardiner.

^x Henry lord Stafford, son and heir of Edward last duke of Buckingham, a scholar and a writer. See Wood, *ATH. OXON.* i. 108. One of his books is dedicated to the Protector Somerset. Aubrey gives us a rhyming epitaph in Howard's chapel in Lambeth church, written by this noble-

man to his sifter the duchess of Norfolk. *SURREY*, vol. v. p. 236. It is subscribed "by thy most bounden brother Henry lord Stafford." Bale says that he was "vir multarum rerum ac disciplinarum notitia ornatus," and that he died in 1558. par. post. 112.

^y Elisabeth.

^z SIGNAT. C ii.

BUS PRINCIPUM, a book translated, as we have seen, by Lydgate, but which never was popular, because it had no English examples. But Baldwyne's scope and conduct, with respect to this and other circumstances, will best appear from his Preface, which cannot easily be found, and which I shall therefore insert at large. "When the printer had purposed with himselfe to printe Lydgate's booke of the FALL OF PRINCES, and had made pryvye therto many both honourable and worshipfull, he was counsayled by dyvers of them, to procure to have the story contynewed from where as Bochas left, unto this present time; chiefly of such as Fortune had dalyed with in this ylande.—Which advyse lyked him so well, that he quyred me to take paines therein. But because it was a matter passyng my wit and skyll, and more thankles than gaineful to meddle in, I refused utterly to undertake it, except I might have the help of suche, as in wit were apte, in learnyng allowed, and in judgement and estymacyon able to wield and furnysh so weighty an enterpryse, thinkyng even so to shift my handes. But he, earnest and diligent in his affayres, procured Atlas to set under his shoulder. For shortly after, divers learned men, whose manye giftes nede fewe prayfes, consented to take upon them parte of the travayle. And when certaine of them, to the numbere of seven, were through a general assent at an appoynted tyme and place gathered together to devyse thereupon, I resorted unto them, bearing the booke of Bochas translated by Dan Lidgate, for the better observation of his order. Which although we liked wel, yet would it not cumly serve, seeing that both Bochas and Lidgate were dead; neither were there any alive that meddled with like argument, to whom the UNFORTUNATE might make make their mone. To make therefore a state mete for the matter, they all agreed that I should usurpe Bochas rowme, and the WRETCHED PRINCES complayne unto me: and take upon themselves every man for his parte to be fundry personages, and in their behalves to bewaile unto ME their

“ greevous chances, heavy destinies, and wofull misfortunes,
 “ This done, we opened such bookes of Cronicles as we had
 “ there present. And maister Ferrers, after he had found where
 “ Bochas left, which was about the ende of kinge Edwarde the
 “ thirde raigne, to begin the matter sayde thus.”

“ I marvayle what Bochas meaneth, to forget among his
 “ MISERABLE PRINCES such as wer of our nacion, whose
 “ nombre is as great, as their adventures wunderfull. For to
 “ let passe all, both Britons, Danes, and Saxons, and to come
 “ to the last Conquest, what a sorte are they^a, and some even
 “ in his [Boccace's] owne time! As for example, king Richard
 “ the fyrst, slayne with a quarle^b in his chyefe prosperitie.
 “ Also king John his brother, as sum saye, poysoned. Are not
 “ their histories rufull, and of rare example? But as it should
 “ appeare, he being an Italian, minded most the Roman and
 “ Italike story, or els perhaps he wanted our countrey Croni-
 “ cles. It were therefore a goodly and a notable matter, to
 “ search and discourse our whole story from the first beginning
 “ of the inhabiting of the yle. But seeing the printer's minde
 “ is, to have us folowe where Lidgate left, we will leave that
 “ great labour to other that may intend it, and (as blinde Bayard
 “ is alway boldest) I will begyn at the time of Rychard the
 “ second, a time as unfortunate as the ruler therein. And for-
 “ asmuch, frend Baldwyne, as it shal be your charge to note
 “ and pen orderlye the whole proces, I will, so far as my
 “ memorie and judgemente serveth, sumwhat further you in
 “ the truth of the storye. And therefore omittinge the ruffle
 “ of Jacke Strawe and his meyney^c, and the murther of manye
 “ notable men which therby happened, for Jacke, as ye knowe,
 “ was but a *poore prynce*; I will begin with a notable example
 “ which within a while after ensued. And although he be
 “ no Great Prynce, yet sithens he had a princely office, I will
 “ take upon me the miserable perfon of syr ROBERT TRESI-

^a How many they are.
 titude. Crew.

^b Quarell. The bolt of a cross-bow.

^c Mul-

“ LIAN chyefe justyce of England, and of other which suf-
 “ fered with him. Therby to warne all of his authoritye and
 “ profession, to take hede of wrong judgements, misconstruyng
 “ of lawes, or wresting the same to serve the princes turnes,
 “ which ryghtfully brought theym to a miserable ende, which
 “ they may justly lament in manner ensuing.” Then follows
 fir ROBERT TRESILIAN’S legend or history, supposed to be
 spoken by himself, and addressed to Baldwyne.

Here we see that a company was feigned to be assembled,
 each of which, one excepted, by turns personates a character of
 one of the great Unfortunate: and that the stories were all con-
 nected, by being related to the silent person of the assembly,
 who is like the chorus in the Greek tragedies, or the Host in
 Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. The whole was to form a sort of
 dramatic interlude, including a series of independent soliloquies.
 A continuity to this imagined representation is preserved by the
 introduction, after every soliloquy, of a prose epilogue, which
 also serves as a prologue to the succeeding piece, and has the air
 of a stage-direction. Boccace had done this before. We have
 this interposition, which I give as a specimen, and which ex-
 plains the method of the recital, between the tragedies of king
 RICHARD THE SECOND and OWEN GLENDOUR. “ Whan he
 “ had ended this so wofull a tragedye, and to all PRINCES a
 “ right worthy instruction, we paused: having passed through a
 “ miserable tyme, full of pyteous tragedyes. And seyng the
 “ reygne of Henry the fourth ensued, a man more ware and
 “ prosperous in hys doynge, although not untroubled with
 “ warres both of outforthe and inward enemyes, we began to
 “ serch what Pyers [peers] were fallen therein, wherof the
 “ number was not small: and yet because theyr examples were
 “ not mucche to be noted for our purpose, we passed over all the
 “ Maskers, of whom kynge Rycharde’s brother was chiefe:
 “ whych were all slayne and put to death for theyr trayterous

* SIGNAT. A. ii.

“ attempt.

“ attempt. And fyndyng Owen Glendoure next one of Fortune’s owne whelpes, and the Percyes his confederates, I thought them unmete to be overpassed, and therefore sayd thus to the sylent cumpany, What, my maysters, is every one at once in a browne study, and hath no man affection to any of these storyes? You mynd so much some other belyke, that those do not move you. And to say the trowth, there is no special cause why they should. Howbeyt Owen Glendoure, becaus he was one of Fortune’s daslynges, rather than he should be forgotten, I will tel his tale for him, under the privelidge of Martine hundred. Which OWEN, cuming out of the wilde mountains lyke the Image of Death in al pointes, (his darte onlie excepted,) so fore hath famyne and hunger consumed hym, may lament his folly after this maner.” This procefs was a departure from Sackville’s idea: who supposes, as I have hinted, the scene laid in hell, and that the unfortunate princes appeared to him in succession, and uttered their respective complaints, at the gates of Elysium, under the guidance of SORROW.

Many stanzas in the legends written by Baldwyne^o and Ferrers, and their friends, have considerable merit, and often shew a command of language and versification^f. But their performances have not the pathos which the subject so naturally suggests. They give us, yet often with no common degree of elegance and perspicuity, the chronicles of Hall and Fabyan in verse. I shall therefore, in examining this part of the *MIRROR OF MAGISTRATES*, confine my criticism to Sackville’s *INDUCTION* and Legend of Buckingham.

^o That is, Baldwyne had previously prepared and written his legend or monologue, and one of the company was to act his part, and assume this appearance. fol. xviii. b.

^f These lines in *COLLINGBOURNE’S* legend are remarkable, fol. cxliiii. a.

Like Pegasus a poet must have wynges,
To flye to heaven, or where him liketh
best;

He must have knowledge of eternal
thynges,

Almightie Jove must harbor in his brest.