A STUDY OF BIBLICAL TRANSLATIONS AND PARAPHRASES

IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

PRECEDING AND CONTEMPORANEOUS WITH THE WYCLIFFITE VERSIONS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter   Page

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

The origin of the problem with which this thesis is concerned lies in two observations. First, there is the existence of a mass of religious literature in the English vernacular of the later Middle Ages. The fact that so much has survived suggests the popularity of such literature in its own and succeeding centuries. It is striking that a large part of this religious literature deals with Biblical material, mingled, it is true, with much that is traditional and legendary, but nevertheless an effort to put the Bible stories and Bible teaching in the language of the common man.

Furthermore, this whole body of literature has been generally ignored or passed over lightly by those who record either the history of the English Bible or the genesis of the English Reformation. The story of the English Bible usually begins with Wyclif or passes over the preceding centuries with only slight notice of the metrical versions, prose paraphrases, and legendaries which seem to have been so popular in their day. Movements do not spring up full grown in human soil. They have their periods of seed planting and watering before they even become visible to the naked eye. Such must have been true of the Wycliffite movement in the latter half of the four-teenth century, a movement toward reform, based upon a desire to give the people the Scriptures in their native tongue. The fact that the public welcomed it indicates something in the way of preparation.

In view, then, of these two facts -- the existence of metrical and prose paraphrases and even of translations of parts of the Bible before the time of Wyclif and the general neglect of such

material -- several questions arise:

> What evidence is there that the content or text of the Bible
>   was given to the English people in their native tongue during
>   the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and to what extent?
> In what form was it given to them?
> For what purpose was it given?
> To what kinds of people?
> By what agencies of the church?
> What parts of the Bible were most used?
> What legendary and apocryphal material was mingled with the
>   Biblical?
> Was there any means used to make it attractive or appealing?
> What evidence is there of the popularity of these Bible stories?

These points may be summarized in two general questions which consti-
tute the central problem of the present study: (1) To what extent
were portions of the Bible translated or paraphrased in Middle English
preceding and contemporaneous with the Wycliffite translations and
what were the characteristics of such versions? (2) What evidence
exists as to their use?

Perhaps from such a study certain conclusions may be drawn
as to the preparation of the soil for the overwhelming reception of
the work of Wyclif, Tyndale, Coverdale, and other translators of the
fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Furthermore, light may be thrown
upon the question often discussed and never finally settled to the
satisfaction of both Catholic and Protestant, as to what extent the
church of the later Middle Ages really did give the Scriptures to
its constituency.

B. Delimitation of the Study

A study of the whole of Middle English religious literature
from the point of view of its use of Biblical material might be pro-
fitable and enlightening. But with the mass of extant material such
a study would far exceed the limits of a single thesis. Consequently,
the present study is limited as far as material is concerned to the

actual translations or paraphrases of portions of the Bible. Even there it is sometimes difficult to define the term paraphrase, when the Biblical narrative is so often embellished with legend. The basis of choice, therefore, will be the Scriptural framework of the piece, even though it may have taken on legendary accretions. The Wycliffite Versions will not be considered in the present study except by way of relating them to these earlier and contemporaneous materials. They have been frequently studied as the first complete translations of the Bible into English. This study is concerned with the neglected material, paraphrases only of portions of the Bible and in many cases not really translations at all.

Perhaps it might be well to define the terms "paraphrase," "translation," and "version" as they will be used throughout the study. Webster's Unabridged Dictionary makes the following distinction between them. A paraphrase is a free and commonly amplified rendering of the sense of a passage whether in the same or in a different language. A translation is a more or less close rendering from one language into another. The terms "version" and "translation" are commonly used without distinction, although technically "version" is applied to certain ancient and modern translations of the Bible. In like manner it might be applied to the translation of a part of the Bible, as a "version of the Psalter." Such will be the usage of these terms in the present study. In every case the paraphrases considered will be renderings from one language to another. Usually they will be metrical, though the term "metrical translation" may be legitimately used where the rendering is sufficiently close to warrant it.

The present study is also limited as to period. The fact that there were vernacular versions of the Bible before the Norman Conquest will be recognized by a brief summary. But these versions were in what might be termed another language, so little is Anglo-Saxon or Old English like the language which developed after the Conquest. By 1100 the language and social conditions were sufficiently recovering from the French invasion for a literature in the vernacular to be possible. But very little that was written before the thirteenth century has survived, so that the period 1200-1500 is a natural division in English literature, generally known as the Middle English Period. Such is the meaning of the term in the title of this study. The first two of these centuries are of especial interest here, because by 1400 a complete translation of the Bible was in circulation. In some cases it is impossible to know whether a piece of paraphrase ante-dated or was contemporaneous with the work of the Wycliffite translators. In general, then, the work of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries will be considered, excluding the two known Wycliffite Versions.

Finally, it is necessary to recognize the fact that any conclusions drawn from this study as to the knowledge of the Scriptures in medieval England must be only partial. Some evidence may be furnished. But there were other ways whereby the people of England became familiar with the Bible. There were the numerous ceremonies, services, and litanies of the Church, which in an indirect way brought the laity, the common folk, in contact with the sources of Christianity. There was an abundance of religious literature not based primarily on the Bible but containing a great deal of

Biblical lore. Then, probably the most potent influences were through the sculpture and pictures which adorned medieval cathedrals and through the popular Biblical drama which carried the complete Bible story from one end of England to the other.

Conclusions as to the use of the translations and paraphrases upon which this study is based are also limited. Inferences may be drawn from such things as the author's statement of purpose, the variety and number of manuscripts, the variety and type of dialects represented, and the reflections of contemporary life. But none of these are in themselves conclusive. They simply furnish evidence which might be useful in the consideration of a larger historical problem.

C. Significance of the Problem

Perhaps the chief value of such a study as this lies in its possible contribution to the larger problem of Scriptural knowledge in the Middle Ages. Obviously in itself it can offer nothing conclusive regarding that question. Yet no study of the medieval use of the Bible would be complete without some considerations of the metrical and prose paraphrases of Biblical portions which circulated very generally among those who owned and read manuscript-books. Hence the present study of a limited group of such pieces would seem justifiable.

Furthermore, some light may be thrown upon the religious life of the English people during these two centuries, their ideals, their interests, even their weaknesses and failings. Too often the church historian is content with a record of external events

and ignores the evidence of the actual life and thought of the layman.
A study of the Scripture stories which were popular with these medie-
val English folk should contribute to an understanding of the everyday
religious life of the age.

It may be objected that much of the material is secondhand,
coming from editorial prefaces and simply re-hashing the work already
done by scholars. But where such material is used, it is to supple-
ment the primary sources which are available. The purpose of such
editorial work is purely literary and critical. On the other hand,
the purpose of this thesis is to gather together the results of such
criticism from a different point of view, that of determining the ex-
tent and use of early translations and paraphrases.

Finally, there is significance and value to any study which
throws new light upon the origin of the Reformation. Whether the
present study can offer new evidence remains to be seen, but surely
the attempt is worth making. The part played by Scripture in that
great historic phenomenon is undoubted, and study has been given to it.
But perhaps in these earliest beginnings of the English Bible are some
of the strands of influence which have hitherto been neglected.

D. Method of Procedure

The main body of this study will be an account of the Bibli-
cal translations and paraphrases which have survived from the thirteenth
and fourteenth centuries. These naturally fall into three groups,
according to the three main centers of interest in handling Scriptural
material. Each of these groups will be presented in a chapter as follows:
(1) the Old Testament narrative material; (2) the Psalter and other
liturgical portions; (3) New Testament material, which with one or two

exceptions deals with the gospel story and especially with the Passion
of the Lord. It is evident, then, that because of the nature of the
material the organization will be topical rather than analytical.
Some account will be given of each piece, its author, his revelation
of purpose, his plan, his sources, his handling of the Biblical
material, the number of manuscripts and their dialects, and the value
of the work both from a literary viewpoint and as far as the present
purpose is concerned. The description of the more significant pieces
will necessarily be fuller than that of the less important contribu-
tions. A limited number of quotations will be used to illustrate the
characteristics of each piece of work.

It will be necessary in the final chapter to summarize con-
clusions which may legitimately be drawn as to the central problem of
the thesis, the characteristics and use of Biblical translations and
paraphrases in Middle English.

Since the thesis deals with a problem of general historical
interest and aims to tthrow, if possible, some light upon that problem
and since the material is the literary outgrowth of an age remote and
in many ways incomprehensible to the modern mind -- for these two
reasons it would seem necessary to furnish such a study as this with
some sort of historical background. The purpose of the first chapter,
then, is to sketch the historical, social, and literary background of
the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in England in so far as it
relates to the current knowledge and use of the Bible or contributes
to an understanding of the kind of literary productions with which the
thesis is concerned.

E. Sources of Data

The problem of sources is concerned chiefly with the original literature itself. For metrical material Brown's _Register of Middle English Religious and Didactic Verse_ gives a complete list of all extant manuscripts, with a description of their contents and expert opinion as to their date. Of course, it will not be possible to examine all of these, for many have never been printed and exist only in English libraries. But the evidence of that long list is clear as to the popularity of the Bible as a subject for verse. Moreover, the _Register_ gives information as to printed material, where it does exist, enough to make a study worthwhile. Forshall and Madden in their Preface to _The Wycliffite Versions of the Holy Bible_ give valuable information as to earlier prose translations. Most of the material to be used has been printed by the Early English Text Society. In a few cases where the primary source material is not available, a brief description will indicate the general character of the piece. Full advantage will be taken of the critical work of editors and scholars, although, as indicated earlier, their findings will be adapted to the purpose and viewpoint of the thesis. This study does not pretend to be final or exhaustive. Its purpose is only to break the ground in an intensely interesting and frequently neglected field.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

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Introduction

Religion and literature have this in common: the peculiar flavor of each is to a large extent determined by the social structure out of which it arises. Perhaps no period in history illustrates more clearly this principle than the European Middle Ages. As Christopher Dawson observed in his lectures on medieval religion, "Christianity was not merely a doctrine and a life, it was above all, a society . . ."[1] Moreover, the same changing and complex social structure which gave to medieval Christianity its peculiar cast gave to medieval literature its unique character. It was all one, literature, life, religion; and no study of the Middle Ages is complete without taking all three into consideration. Thus an examination of Biblical paraphrases and translations and a study of their use must be set against the social and cultural background of the age out of which they came, a justification for the present introductory chapter. A description of the social structure of even two centuries out of the ten which comprise the Middle Ages is a rather large order. However, if the central problem of this study is kept in mind, it will be necessary to select only those details in the background which will bring out more strikingly the tones and colors in the literature itself. In other words, an attempt will be made to answer as briefly as possible the following question: What elements in English society

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1. Medieval Religion (the Forwood Lectures, 1934) and Other Essays, p. 7

of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have a direct bearing
upon the current knowledge of the Bible, interest in its stories, and
use of its material in the vernacular literature? Something further
will need to be said regarding the form in which the Bible existed
during those centuries and the current method of interpretation,
and a still further word regarding the literary medium. If this
chapter exceeds the normal limits of an introduction, the reason lies
in the complex character of the society which to our medieval ances-
tors was so normal and to us is so strange.

A. Historical and Social Background

Preliminary to a description of characteristic elements in
the English social scene, the homogeneous character of medieval
Europe should be noted. It is true, to be sure, that the English
development and the English expression was different from that of her
neighbors across the Channel, especially during these centuries when
tendencies toward nationalism were becoming evident. The fact of the
Norman Conquest has very definitely given to English history and
society its own individuality even to the present day. Certainly it
made a difference in the immediately succeeding centuries. Yet, in
spite of certain characteristically English manifestations, life in
the different countries of Western Europe for about five centuries
preceding the Renaissance moved along the same lines. The Church
and the feudal system were, of course, the chief unifying forces.
One who understands the period as thoroughly as does G. G. Coulton
could preface his brief account of medieval life with a sentence
like this:

"Throughout this little book, the examples will be most often drawn from English social history; but, in the default of notice to the contrary the reader may take them as typical of European society in general." 1

Likewise in the following paragraphs only an occasional effort will be made to distinguish English characteristics, but the more general background of Western Europe, of Christendom, will be considered.

1. The Characteristics of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

It would probably be difficult to find two successive centuries during the Middle Ages more entirely different than these two. The thirteenth is the great Catholic century, to the Roman Catholic Walsh the "greatest of centuries."[2] A Protestant summarizes it thus:

"The thirteenth century was an age of great ideas. In it medieval civilization found its best expression; but at the same time it sowed the seed of its own decay. It was the era of new ideals of life, a new philosophy, and in a sense of the dawn of modern Europe."[3]

According to Capes, the English Church historian,

"The thirteenth century was an age of constitutional growth and conflict; an old social order had passed away, and organizing genius was required to build up a new framework within which the vital forces of the nation might act in harmony together."[4]

In the fourteenth century those "seeds of decay" begin to sprout; the new social order is struggling to be born, and the nation suffers in the struggle. Its most characteristic feature is its social unrest, which in England flames out in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, so quickly put down in its outward manifestation and yet smouldering

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1. The Medieval Scene, p. 22
2. See Walsh, James J.: The Thirteenth Greatest of Centuries
3. Foakes-Jackson, F. J.: An Introduction to the History of Christianity, A.D. 590-1314, p. 220
4. Capes, W.: The English Church in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, p. 1

under the surface afterward even as it had smouldered before. The

following quotation, though only one man's interpretation, brings

together the two centuries in a fair comparison:

"The fourteenth century was an age of deception and disappoint-
ment, the age of the Black Death and the Great Schism and the
Hundred Years' War. It saw the partial disruption of the unity
of Christendom and the decline of that movement of spiritual
reform which had been the soul of medieval culture. From the
tenth to the thirteenth century the movement of European culture
under the urge of a powerful religious impulse had been cen-
tripetal, towards unity and towards the ideals of Catholic
universalism. From the beginning of the fourteenth century
this tendency is reversed and a centrifugal movement sets in
which ultimately culminates in the Reformation and the complete
destruction of the religious unity of Christendom." [1]

2. The Structure of Medieval Society

Three factors in the medieval social structure must be

taken into account: (1) the feudal system, which by the thirteenth

century was the fundamental element in the status quo, yet which was

being modified by (2) the rise of nationalism and (3) the rise of

towns and guilds.

a. The Feudal System

H. O. Taylor has called the feudal system a "sprawling
conglomerate fact." [2] It is unnecessary here to indicate its origin

and describe the many changes in its fashions during the Middle Ages.

Nor do the intricacies of its organization have any important bearing

upon the present study. But its central feature, "tenure of fief by

vassal from his lord on condition of rendering faithful military and

other not ignoble service," [3] and its fundamental idea, "that the

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1. Dawson: op. cit., p. 51
2. Taylor, H. O.: The Medieval Mind, Vol. I, p. 558
3. Ibid., p. 539

strong should extend protection over the weak . . . that property
is a trust to be exercised for the benefit of others,"[1] these ideals
color the literature, and when Old Testament stories are retold they
are inevitably in a feudal setting. The Twelve Apostles, too, become
knights with Sir Judas the recreant, and the feudal ideals, valour,
troth, largesse, humility, courtesy, orthodox faith, and obedience
to the Church,[2] appear as Christian virtues in many a homily.
Moreover, under the feudal system there continued to exist a class
bound to the soil, ignorant and unlettered, needing a very simple
kind of religious instruction if they were to be of any value to
either church or state.

b. The Rise of Nationalism

The feudal system had been "founded on relations and sen-
timents arising from a state of turbulence where every man needed
the protection of a lord."[3] But throughout the progress of the
Middle Ages those conditions changed. More and more the Church took
over the functions of the State in maintaining order, administering
justice, and encouraging industry and learning. The earlier anarchy
gave place to a more stable social organization, in which the Church
was a unifying force. But by the thirteenth century, while the
feudal system was still everywhere taken for granted by the average
person, some of the new national states were beginning to emerge.
In England, farther removed from the influences of the continent,
the national tendencies had already appeared. The Magna Carta in

1. Foakes-Jackson: op. cit., p. 61
2. Cf. Taylor: op. cit., p. 546
3. Ibid., p. 538

1215 was England's great Declaration of Independence, an assertion
of national rights against both king and Pope. By the end of the
thirteenth century England was a well-organized national state, and
the Hundred Years' War in the next century strengthened the national
bonds.[1]   This emergence of nationalism first of all weakened the power
of the Pope and the Church hierarchy, but it eventually brought about
the entire disruption of the feudal system with the centralizing of
both government and protection in the national ruler. The bearing
of all this upon the religious literature seems slight, yet definite
evidence of the changing conditions of society and the new political
spirit will be observed even where the material handled is traditional.

   c. The Rise of Towns and Guilds

      One more element in the structure of medieval society must
be noticed, a further evidence that these are centuries of transition.[2]
After the eleventh century towns began to appear on the feudal manors,
but it was not until the next century that the townfolks began to gain
some measure of independence from feudal domination. Usually such
freedom was bought. Thus the power of gold began to be recognized.
Flick says that the rise of cities in England was much more orderly
and of less consequence than on the continent,[3] yet even there such
growth must have changed the complexion of society. The new impor-
tance attached to money, the industrial character of town life, the
practical character of religious life, the "coarse skepticism" which
often prevailed, the customs and institutions which arise in an

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1. Cf. Flick, A.C.: The Decline of the Medieval Church, Vol. I, pp. 8-9
2. Cf. Taylor: op. cit., Vol. I, p. 538
3. Cf. Flick: op. cit., p. 310

urban group, however small -- all these elements are naturally re-
flected in the literary products of the period.[1]   The Franciscans
labored to a great extent in and near the towns, for there they
found the greatest need. No doubt they observed in the town life
many of the vices which they decried and against which they preached
so vehemently. Undoubtedly the friars were the authors of many of
the didactic and homiletic pieces in the vernacular which hold up
for ridicule or praise those same vices. Truly the changing char-
acter of society created new needs for religious instruction.

3. Religious Movements of the Later Middle Ages

Taylor says that "intellectually, the thirteenth century
in Western Europe is marked by three closely connected phenomena:
the growth of Universities, the discovery and appropriation of
Aristotle, and the activities of Dominicans and Franciscans."[2]
The question arises: Did any of these movements contribute anything
to the use of Scripture in the vernacular literature? Another
movement might be considered: the prevalent mysticism of the age.
Each of these aspects of medieval life has a relationship to the use
of the Bible, though often it will be seen the relationship is
negative. Often where it might be expected that a movement would
foster the spread of Biblical knowledge, the tendency lay in an
opposite direction.

a. The Rise of the Mendicant Orders

A full account of the origin and development of the

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1. Cf. Taylor: op. cit., p. 344; Flick: op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 304-12;
   Foakes-Jackson: op. cit., pp. 333-334
2. Taylor: op. cit., Vol. II., p. 408

Franciscans and Dominicans is neither pertinent nor necessary to
this study. As far as the history of the two movements is concerned,
it is sufficient to note the arrival of a band of thirteen Dominicans
in England in the year 1221. Three years later nine penniless Fran-
ciscans landed at Dover. The Dominicans early established themselves
at Oxford and in Blackfriars, London, where the two streets were
given them by the Lord Mayor. The Franciscans began their work in a
humble way in and around London, living at first on chance charity,
but gaining in the estimation of the people so rapidly that within
thirty years after their arrival their number amounted to 1242.[1]
The early fourteenth century saw the corruption of the mendicant
orders, like the monastic orders before them.[2] Little compares the
"intense spiritual fervor which marked the early years of the Fran-
ciscan movement" with the "period of intense intellectual activity"
which followed.[3] Important as were the contributions of both orders
to education and learning, the aspect of their work most closely
related to the present study was their preaching. Indeed the revival
of preaching during these two centuries was largely due to the friars.
The Dominicans preached mainly to the educated and intellectual;
they waged a constant warfare against heresy, basing their arguments
on appeals to reason, to Scripture, and to the traditions of the
Church. On the other hand, the Franciscans ministered to the common
folk, appealing largely to their emotions and seeking to kindle

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1. Cf. Beckett, W. H.: The English Reformation of the Sixteenth
   Century, pp. 23 ff; Stephen, W. R. W.: A History of the English
   Church from the Norman Conquest to the Accession of Edward I,
   p. 305
2. Cf. Capes: op. cit., pp. 11-13
3. Cf. Little, A. G.: Studies in English Franciscan History, p. 221

their zeal.[1] The following excerpt from a letter of Bishop Grosse-
teste to Gregory IX has preserved for us a contemporary comment on
what appears to be a real religious revival:

> "If your Holiness could but see how eagerly and reverently the
> people hasten to the brethren to hear the Word of Life, to
> confess their sins, to be instructed in the rules of Christian
> living, and what profit the clergy and religious derive from
> imitating their ways, you would indeed say that to those who [2]
> dwell in the land of the shadow of death light has sprung up."

With all of this preaching activity, it is difficult to find extant
English sermons that can be attributed surely to friars. But there
is clear evidence of their hand in many collections of materials for
the use of preachers.[3] These are, of course, in Latin; however, in
some of the vernacular pieces the authorship of friars is evident,
where there is a definite aim of instructing the poor and uneducated
and a definite expression of sympathy with the oppressed and condem-
nation of their oppressors.

    b. Education and the Universities

        If in the work of the friars is evident a tendency in the
direction of bringing at least parts of the Gospel story to the
common people, in the formal schooling of the time the tendency seems
to lie in the opposite direction. It was not that education was
entirely lacking in medieval England. Leach says that it is an
error to suppose that there was no education in England during these
centuries beyond learning to read and sing the services.[4] By the

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1. Cf. Foakes-Jackson: op. cit., p. 230
2. Quoted in Stephen: op. cit., p. 307
3. For an account of four extant English collections see ibid.,
   pp. 136 ff
4. Cf. Leach, A. F.: Schools of Medieval England, p. 138

beginning of the fourteenth century the universities, Oxford and Cambridge, were at the height of their medieval influence not only in England but also throughout Europe. The friars took a leading part in the brilliant intellectual movement which flourished early in the fourteenth century. Yet even their influence did not lead scholarship away from their absorption in Aristotelian logic. Capes comments,

> "The friars might train men to be preachers, and encourage the literal study of the Scriptures, but the regent masters chiefly cared for the subtleties of logical disputes, for controversial questions of philosophy which had no immediate relations to the future work of the confessional or pulpit." 1

Thus in spite of the monastic and cathedral schools, the grammar schools, the flourishing universities, it is the concensus of opinion that there were inadequate and meagre educational facilities provided for the training of the average clergy. When the clergy themselves were not required by the bishop to have any other theological knowledge than the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Decalogue, and the Seven Deadly Sins, how was it possible for them to teach the Gospel very adequately to their parishioners? Even in the work of systematic studying and teaching in the Franciscan Order from 1230 on, the subjects taught would undoubtedly fall in the class of practical rather than Biblical theology.

   c. Scholasticism

       The question arises: Did not scholasticism with its emphasis upon theology contribute anything to the spread of Biblical knowledge throughout England? It would seem not. It is true that

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1. Cf. Capes: op. cit., p. 347
2. Cf. Little: op. cit., pp. 159-161
3. Cf. ibid., pp. 162, 165

the schoolmen were making constant appeals to Scripture, but they were also constantly appealing to the Fathers and tradition for interpretation of Scripture, and the Organon of Aristotle was as authoritative as both Scripture and tradition.[1] Their interest in the Bible was not historical, ethical, or even grammatical, but largely allegorical, according to the current method of interpretation. Hoare says that they searched Revelation for a technical and abstract philosophy of the Godhead.[2] Among these schoolmen Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century stands out as unique, not only in his advanced scientific attitude, but also in his contribution along Biblical lines. Taylor finds in Bacon's views of Scripture and patristic authority nothing startling or exceptional, yet his analysis of the errors of his time and his efforts to remedy them indicate a more advanced point of view than that of the other schoolmen of either his own century or the next. All the evils of his age he attributed to ignorance of the Holy Scriptures. He would have the laity able to read and make use of them not only in the Vulgate, which he saw to be full of errors, but also in the original Greek and Hebrew. He seems to have had no idea of a vernacular Bible.[3] Little finds in several manuscripts of the thirteenth century a collection of notes on the Old Testament showing a remarkable knowledge of the principles of textual criticism and of Greek and Hebrew grammar. They resemble Bacon's utterances on the revision of the Bible so closely that they have been attributed to him or to a contemporary closely associated with him.[4] At any rate,

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1. Cf. Hoare, H. W.: The Evolution of the English Bible, p. 50
2. Cf. ibid., p. 49
3. Cf. Neander, Augustus: General History of the Christian Religion and Church, Vol. IV, pp. 423-426; Taylor: op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 521-8
4. Cf. Little: op. cit., p. 214

this sort of thing was rare, and the schoolmen seem to have exerted

no influence upon the dissemination of Scripture among the common

people who could read no Latin, much less Greek and Hebrew.

d. Mysticism

Bishop Hoare points out that the coldness and formality of
scholasticism drove some to mysticism and others to skepticism.[1]
Whether that is true or not, mysticism did flourish especially in
the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was of a type peculiar to
the age, a description of which would be out of place here. The
mystical elements cannot be separated from the dialectic in the minds
of the great schoolmen, so that a description of the great mystics
would be likewise a description of the great schoolmen. Nevertheless,
it is not unusual to find a mystic absorbed in the contemplation and
study of the Scriptures. Many of them wrote commentaries, exhibiting,
of course, the current allegorizing method of interpretation.[2] The
material from commentaries such as these was mingled with the Bible
story in many of the English paraphrases of Scripture. Of signifi-
cance, too, for the study of the early English Bible is the name and
work of Richard Rolle, the hermit of Hampole, the greatest English
mystic of the Middle Ages, who died just about the middle of the
fourteenth century. He is credited with one of the first prose
translations into Middle English, a version of the Psalter with a
commentary on each verse.[3] The commentary, of course, is not original,
but the fact that there are twenty-three manuscripts extant shows the

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1. Cf. Hoare: op. cit., p. 58.
2. Cf. Neander: op. cit., pp. 411 ff.
3. See Mombert, J. I. S.: Handbook of the English Versions of the
   Bible, pp. 34-35; Moulton, W. F.: The History of the English
   Bible, p. 15; cf. Post, p. 97

popularity of the Psalter in Rolle's century. [1]   Thus mysticism is

of particular interest to the historian of the English Bible.

4. Agencies for the Religious Instruction of the People

Life in the Middle Ages was permeated by religion of an

intensely realistic kind, for, according to Stephen,

> "The unlearned multitude were very much like children, simple-
> minded, impulsive, emotional, easily moved to tears or laughter
> or anger; imaginative and credulous but most susceptible to
> impressions conveyed through the senses." [2]

When we remember that the church was the center of the common life

and that the clergy represented a large number of the population, [3]

it is evident that the laity must have received some sort of reli-

gious instruction. What was the character of popular religion, and

what were the agencies which fostered it?

a. The Character of Popular Religion

Of course the people had no interest in the questions

debated in the schools, no "conception of mystical piety, philosophic

theories, or logical methods." [4]   Their religion was simple and emotion-

al, often what might seem today little removed from paganism. They

were taught to believe in one God and in Christ who died for them.

But both God and Christ were far away, and even the great saints did

not bother much about poor people. The Virgin seemed close to them

because of her human relationship to Christ and her tenderheartedness

to the poor. But closer still were the local saints, men and women

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1. Cf. Wells, J. E.: A Manual of Writings in Middle English, p. 401
2. Stephen: op. cit., p. 309
3. Capes estimates that in 1381 one in fifty-two Englishmen was at
   least nominally a cleric. Cf. op. cit., p. 257
4. Foakes-Jackson: op. cit., p. 345

who had lived godly lives in the surroundings most familiar to the
people, who, it was said, had even performed miracles right in their
own village. Thus had grown up the local shrines and the whole cultus
of saint-worship.[1] There were the relics, something tangible for the
ignorant, making their Christianity almost one of talismans. There
was the cult of the Blessed Virgin; in popular theology she was the
mediatrix between God and man. She really shared with God in the
worship of the people. A Psalter and a book of Hours were devoted to
the worship of Mary. The rosary had ten aves to every paternoster.[2]
Superstitions of all kinds were prevalent, belief in witchcraft, magic,
spells, charms, and talismans. Fear was a prominent element in reli-
gion, and hell was more vivid than heaven. The devil himself was a
very real person, the source of all sin. The office of the Virgin and
the saints was to thwart the devil in his evil work. Indeed that
ubiquitous character furnished a good deal of the flavor of medieval
tales.[3] Taylor reminds the modern reader, however, that

> ". . . in estimating the ethical shortcomings of medieval super-
> stitions, one must remember how easily in a simple mind all sorts
> of superstitions may co-exist with a sweet religious and moral
> tone." [4]

b. Worship

There is no doubt that often the Divine Service was a mystery
to a large body of the laity. Holy Communion or the celebration of
the Eucharist was, of course, the center of worship. The service was

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1. Cf. Foakes-Jackson: op. cit., p. 346
2. Cf. Cutts, E. L.: Turning Points in General Church History,
   pp. 394 ff
3. Cf. Stephen: op. cit., Ch. XVI; Taylor: op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 503-6;
   Cutts: op. cit., pp. 392-395
4. Taylor: op. cit., Vol., I, p. 503

in Latin and therefore unintelligible to most of those who attended.
Perhaps that accounts for the frequent irreverence towards the Mass.
The Roman liturgy of the Middle Ages consisted of two parts, two
symbolic acts, around which were gathered a body of prayers and cere-
monial. It has been said to represent a symbolic drama of the cruci-
fixion with the worshipers as the spectators and the priests as the
actors.[1] Aids to an understanding of the services were given to those
who could read, in the vernacular horn books and primers for the laity.
The symbolism of the Mass was explained in the Lay-Folks' Mass Book.
The horn books contained a few simple prayers, the Paternoster, and
the Creed. The two latter with the Decalogue were required to be
taught in the vernacular. The primers often contained the seven
penitential psalms as well as prayers, canticles, the Decalogue, and
the Seven Deadly Sins.[2] It is obvious that in all of this the Scrip-
ture, either in Latin or the vernacular, played a very minor part.
Yet a particular part of the Gospel story, the Passion of Christ, was
continually kept before the worshiping congregation by the very drama
of the Mass, which great bodies of people attended every Sunday. Per-
haps that is the chief reason why in the earliest use of the Bible
in the vernacular literature the life and death of Christ plays such a
prominent part.

c. Preaching

Something has already been said regarding the work of the
friars in the thirteenth century revival of preaching. The secular
clergy were supposed to teach the people by preaching, but they were

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1. Cf. Baldwin, Summerfield: The Organization of Medieval Christian-
ity, pp. 22-24
2. Cf. Stephen: op. cit., pp. 310-311

often lazy and negligent. Hence the friars were welcomed by the people with eagerness, by the parochial clergy with jealousy, and by the bishops with delight as models to be held up before the dilatory priests.[1] The Franciscans laid great stress upon attendance at sermons, considering them of even greater importance than the Mass, hence the complaint of so many thirteenth century priests that the people preferred the short masses of the friars and neglected the ordinary services.[2] It became the custom for the mendicants to hold what might be called preaching missions throughout the country. Lent and Advent were, of course, the natural seasons. On such occasions they preached in parish churches -- for the parochial clergy had orders to receive them kindly -- in cemeteries, streets, and market places. Of course, much of their preaching was in their own churches, which were built in a form of architecture more adapted to the large crowds who attended than to the liturgic processions. They preached not only on Sundays and festivals, but on rainy days when people took shelter in the church.[3] In spite of the jealousy of the parochial clergy the homiletic success of the friars was enough to stir them to action. Even laymen, especially among heretical sects, took to street and field preaching. Flick says that all the heroes of monasticism, scholasticism, and the papal hierarchy were forceful preachers.[4]

Many of the sermons themselves have come down to us, seldom isolated, usually in collections -- and we may be sure that the ones that have survived are the more popular specimens of pulpit oratory.

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1. Cf. Stephen: op. cit., p. 311
2. Cf. Little: op. cit., p. 133
3. Cf. ibid., Ch. IV
4. Cf. Flick, A. C.: The Rise of the Mediaeval Church and Its Influence on the Civilization of Western Europe from the First to the Thirteenth Century, p. 591

Some are in Latin, some in the vernacular, the latter coming more and more to be used even on important occasions and by important people.[1] Bishop Grosseteste used English frequently in his late years. Usually the sermon was based upon a text or paragraph of Scripture and consisted of a brief exposition with an application to everyday needs and temptations. Such studies as G. R. Owst has made really show how closely related was medieval preaching in England to medieval life.[2] Many of the characteristics of the sermon have no particular relation to the use of Scripture: the realism which depends upon characters and scenes of everyday life and also upon proverbs and sayings;[3] the development of complex and curious allegorical figures such as the 'ship' figure and the 'castle' figure;[4] the stories of saint-miracles and encouragement of saint-worship;[5] the preaching of satire and complaint against social and political evils.[6] But one characteristic of the sermon gives the preacher ample opportunity to instruct the people in at least the stories of Scripture; that is the prominent part in all sermons of the exemplum, or "short narrative used to illustrate or confirm a general statement."[7] This was by no means limited to Biblical story. Material for exempla might be drawn from historical works, from tales, fables, anecdotes, and saints' lives, from the elaborate moral and didactic treatises of the time with their abundant

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1. Schaff, D. S. : History of the Christian Church, Vol. V, Part I, p. 582
2. See Owst, G. R.: Preaching in Medieval England; also Literature and PPulpit in Medieval England
3. Cf. Owst: Literature and Preaching, Ch. I
4. Cf. ibid., Ch. II
5. Cf. ibid., Ch. III
6. Cf. ibid., Chs. V, VI, VII
7. Mosher, J. A.: The Exemplum in England, p. 1

use of illustration, and from the 'example books,' or collections designed for the use of preachers and moralists.[1]   But it also might be and often was drawn from the stories of Scripture. Indeed in the early homilies Biblical exempla were predominant, and their absence in such a piece as the Ormulum of the twelfth century indicates the decline of preaching.[2]   However, in the revival of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Biblical exempla came back into use, though it was by no means the most prominent type.

d. The Biblical Drama

Owst finds a very close relationship between the medieval sermon and the medieval drama.[3] Originally both were designed to instruct, and if the entertainment feature of the drama came to be the most prominent feature in the minds of the people, they were nevertheless familiarized with Scripture story more by means of the drama than by any other aspect of their life, save perhaps by the stone pictures which they gazed upon every time they went to church in one of their great cathedrals. Students agree that the liturgical drama sprang directly out of the service of the Mass as early as the tenth or eleventh century. The two occasions were Christmas and Easter, and so the religious drama was linked closely in its beginnings with the Gospel story. In England Bible plays were always the favorites, rather than the saints' lives which flourished especially in France. By the thirteenth century the plays were outside the church, and the Mysteries, as the Scripture plays are now called, had expanded to include more than simply the manger and open tomb

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1. Cf. Mosher: op. cit., pp. 6-7
2. Cf. ibid., p. 51
3. Cf. Owst: op. cit., Ch. VIII

scenes.[1] Eventually the whole Scripture story was enacted from Creation to the Day of Doom. The Latin had long before been dropped, for with its emergence from the sacred precincts the drama had also left behind its priestly actors. It was carried from one end of England to the other by the guilds, and it was in this stage of development in the fourteenth century that the Scripture cycles were compiled. The cycles themselves were always the same as far as incidents were concerned, but they were humanized by the use of humor and pathos, and they took on differences in mood, tone, language, detail, and versification according to their locality. The important thing as far as the present study is concerned is the fact that in the thirteenth and fourteenth century through the popular religious drama the characters and incidents of Scripture were becoming entirely familiar to the people of England, to whom the Bible itself was for the most part a closed book. Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rachel, Rebecca and the rest down to Herod and Pilate's Wife, who along with Satan furnished most of the comedy, were household names. The drama during these centuries was more a part of life than of literature.[2]

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1. The term Miracle is frequently used to include both the Saints' plays and the Scriptural plays. They are distinguished from the moralities, whose characters were personifications of virtues and vices and whose development was a direct outgrowth of the medieval love of allegory.
2. For further discussion of the religious drama of the Middle Ages, see Legouis and Cazamian: History of English Literature, pp. 184-5; Bates, Katherine Lee: The English Religious Drama; Moore, E. H.: English Miracle Plays and Moralities. The classic work is Chambers, E. K.: The Medieval Stage (2 vols.). For representative pieces see Manly, J. M.: Specimens of Pre-Shakespearian Drama (2 vols.)

e. Art and Architecture

The medieval Christian learned about the Scripture story
by the eye-gate as well as by the ear-gate in another of the charac-
teristic institutions of his age -- the cathedral. The thirteenth
century is, of course, the great period of the Gothic Cathedral,
which was not only a means of instructing the people but also an
expression of the religious life of the people themselves. It was in
the sculpture and in the stained glass windows that the Scripture
story was represented, and that representation was all a part of the
great symbolism of the building as a whole. It is Durandus who has
given us an especially complete description of the allegorical mean-
ing of the medieval church edifice.[1] His detailed catalog of sym-
bolism illustrates the universal habit of allegorizing, which Taylor
summarizes thus:

> "Under sanction of Scriptural interpretation and the sacraments,
> allegory and symbolism became accepted principles of spiritual
> verity, sources of political argument, and modes of transcendent
> truth. They penetrated the Liturgy, charging every sentence and
> ceremonial act with saving significance and power; and as plastic
> influences they imparted form and matter to religious art and
> poetry, where they had indeed been potent from the beginning." [2]

Thus Vincent of Beauvais, a contemporary of Durandus and considered
the greatest encyclopedist in an encyclopedia-minded age, in his
Speculum Majus stores up the allegorical meanings in the subjects of
Gothic sculpture and painted glass. It is true, he was French, but
much that he gives would certainly apply to the cathedrals of thir-
teenth century England. In his "Mirror of History" the chief source
is the Bible. Though Christ is the center, Old Testament incidents

. . . .

1. Cf. Taylor: op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 104 ff
2. Ibid., p. 102

and characters are selected which may be taken as pre-figurements of Christ. Everywhere there is a strong tendency to symbolize, so that parts of the crucifixion scene and many of the parables are only symbolically represented. There is no doubt that the medieval cathedral was one of the most effective educational institutions of the time, for it was the book which everyone could read.[1]

5. Characteristics of the English Church

Miss Underhill in her recent book on worship[2] finds these attributes of the English mind: its tendency to conservatism in respect to the past and passion for freedom regarding the present; its law-abiding faithfulness to established custom but recoil from an expressed dominance; its reverence for the institutions which incorporate its life and inveterate individualism in the living of that life; its moral and practical bent. These qualities were certainly evident to some extent in medieval England according to the following summary of the thirteenth century church-spirit:

> ". . . it is a significant and important circumstance, that up to a period later than the middle of the thirteenth century no sects and divisions had ever arisen in the national church, nor any departures of any sort from the characteristic form of the Church in the West. We find no certain trace to show that during all the medieval centuries, down to that time, any form of native heresy had ever sprung up upon the English soil. Nor even were foreign heretical sects ever able to find a footing in England, however much, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries especially, these sects spread and propagated themselves on the continent. Only two instances are mentioned by the chroniclers of such heretics appearing in England, and in both cases they were immediately put down and extinguished." 3

. . . .

1. Cf. Taylor: op. cit., Vol. II, Ch. XXX, section I; Walsh: op. cit., Ch. VI
2. Underhill, Evelyn: Worship, Harpers, 1937. See especially Ch. XV
3. Lechler, J.: John Wyclif and His English Pre-Cursors, p. 54

Lechler still further analyzes the characteristically national

elements in the fourteenth century:

> "It is no doubt true that in the intellectual, moral, ecclesias-
> tical, and political character of the period in which Wycliffe's
> youth and early manhood fell, there were elements which exercised
> influence upon him, and received from him in turn a further
> development. These, however, were all elements which were com-
> patible with true zeal for the existing Church, and with a sin-
> cere devotion to the Papal See; being, on the one hand, a cer-
> tain national self-inclusion, favored by insular position, but
> fostered still more by the spirit of Saxon nationality, which
> was evoked so powerfully during the thirteenth and fourteenth
> centuries, till it stood out conspicuously in the compact,
> united consciousness of the whole nation; on the other hand, a
> spirit of independence which did not shrink from defending the
> rights and interests of the nation and the National Church,
> even against all the power of the Papal See." 1

These qualities, then, of conservatism, nationalism, independence are

evident in the English church life of the Later Middle Ages, as they

were evident even in Saxon England.

6. The Wycliffite Movement and the Scriptures

Some notice must be taken of the significant movement toward

reform which comes at the close of the two centuries considered in

this study. Most studies of the English Bible begin with a chapter

on John Wyclif, because the translation which bears his name is the

result of the first effort to give the English people a vernacular

version of the book as a whole. There seems to be no doubt of that.

Even though a study of that first translation is not within the scope

of this thesis, it is necessary to give some account of the work of

Wyclif in relation to the Scriptures in order properly to relate the

study to the most significant religious movement of the fourteenth

century.

. . . .

1. Lechler:op. cit., pp. 56-57

a. Wyclif's Convictions Regarding Scripture

Wyclif's effort to give the English people the Bible in their own tongue grew out of a deep-rooted and often expressed conviction as to the authority and value of the Scriptures. Even in his scholastic days, says Workman, he made constant appeal to the authority of the Bible. That feeling deepened with his growing years. He complained of the current scorn of the Bible especially among the scholastic philosophers and the ecclesiastics. He lamented that Bible study was no part of religious life and that church officials were reluctant to spread knowledge of it among the people. His works are full of Biblical quotations, not illustrations, says Workman, as were to a great extent the Biblical allusions of his contemporaries, but rather a recognition of the supreme authority of the Sacred Writings. He was not the only one who asserted the authority of Scripture, but he added a new doctrine, the right of every man to examine it for himself.[1] Some one has estimated that in one volume of Wyclif's work there are over seven hundred direct quotations from Scripture.[2] Quotations could be multiplied to show that in the Bible Wyclif "found not only his standard of truth, and his commission to preach, but also example and inspiration to stand boldly for the truth, against all earthly authority and even unto death if necessary."[3] It was for this loyalty to the guiding principle of his life that his contemporaries named him the "Doctor Evangelicus."

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1. Cf. Workman, H. B.: John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church, pp. 149-151
2. Cf. Capes: op. cit., p. 110
3. Cf. Baird, W. M.: The Pre-Reformation Influence of the Bible in England, pp. 51-54

b. The Wycliffite Versions

There are two fourteenth century versions of the Bible
associated with the name of Wyclif. In 1850 after twenty years of
work and the examination of at least 170 manuscript copies, Rev. J.
Forshall and Sir Frederick Madden published these two versions in
four large quarto volumes. That edition represents the most authori-
tative scholarship upon this earliest English Bible. The conclusion
of these editors is that one Nicholas Hereford, an English ecclesias-
tic and an Oxford disciple of Wyclif, translated the text of the
earlier version from Genesis to Baruch iii.20, his work stopping
suddenly in the middle of the verse, and that the remainder of the
Old Testament and the Apocrypha as well as the New Testament was the
work of Wyclif. This version is dated by Forshall and Madden around
1380-82. The later version was a revision made by Richard Purvey,
the curate of Lutterworth, completed about 1388.[1] To the 1388 Bible
is prefixed a long prologue, supposed to have been written by Purvey
and indicative of the purpose and method of the translators. The fol-
lowing extract has been modernized by Bishop Hoare:

> "Though covetous Clerks are mad through simony, heresy, and many
> other sins, and despise and impede Holy Writ as much as they can,
> yet the unlearned cry after Holy Writ to know it, with great cost
> and peril of their lives. For those reasons, and others, a simple
> creature hath translated the Bible out of Latin into English.
> First this simple creature had much labour, with divers companions
> and helpers, to gather many old Bibles, and other doctors and
> common glosses, and to make a Latin Bible somewhat true, and then
> to study it anew, the text with the gloss, and other doctors. . .
> The third time to counsel with old grammarians and divines, of
> hard words and sentences, how they might best be translated; the
> fourth time to translate as clearly as he could to the sense, and
> to have many good fellows and cunning at the correcting of the
> translation, for the common Latin Bibles have more need to be cor-
> rected than hath the English Bible late translated." [2]

. . . .

1. Cf. Mombert: op. cit., Ch. III; Moulton, op. cit., Ch. II; Hoare:
   op. cit., Ch. IV
2. Quoted from the Prologue in Hoare: op. cit., p. 103

c. The Effect of the Wycliffite Versions

There is no necessity here to enter into any criticism of
these early versions. They were based chiefly upon the Vulgate,
and, in spite of the fact that the errors of the Vulgate were evident
to the translators, they naturally were subject to many of those same
errors. But the most significant thing about them was their instant
popularity. They seem to have met a conscious need on the part of
the English people. In spite of the efforts to suppress them and the
ordinary vicissitudes of manuscripts over a period of centuries, there
remain over a hundred and fifty manuscripts containing either a whole
or part of the Wycliffite versions. Part of their popularity was
due no doubt to Wyclif's method of sending out itinerant preachers
and supplying them with an English Bible to direct their teaching.
These Lollards, or "poor priests," were not illiterate men and did
not at first arouse the suspicion of the Church. They were not to
interfere with the regular clergy but only to give religious in-
struction in the mother-tongue.[1]   But the ire of the authorities
was aroused by the new English Bible and the reforming zeal of the
Lollards, so that the Wycliffite Movement became a "heresy," and
in the early fifteenth century Archbishop Arundel undertook to put
it down in the way heresies are usually put down -- by condemnation
and burning. However, the damage had been done. What followed is
no part of this study. Perhaps as the study proceeds some relation-
ship will become evident between this eager reception of the first
English version and the earlier interest in parts of the Bible story.

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1. Cf. Poole, R. L.: Wyclif and the Movements for Reform, pp. 101-2

B. Biblical Background

1. The Current Form of the Bible: the Vulgate

The authoritative Bible of the Middle Ages was the Latin Vulgate of Jerome, really not one version but a combination of several. Strange to say, it was not officially pronounced "authentic" until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, but throughout the Middle Ages its authority was unquestioned. Jerome's Vulgate of the fourth century contained the following: the Apocrypha in the Old Latin version of the second century entirely unrevised; the New Testament books from Acts to Revelation in the Old Latin version imperfectly revised; the Gospels in the Old Latin version carefully revised; the Old Testament translated directly from the original Hebrew, with the exception of the Psalter, which was partly a revision collating the Old Latin with the Septuagint.[1] Such was the Bible of the Middle Ages, a notable piece of work as far as Jerome was concerned, but needing correction, as Roger Bacon and others discovered as early as the thirteenth century.

2. Current Methods of Interpretation

The medieval insistence upon authority and tradition is nowhere more evident than in the interpretation of Scripture. According to medieval theologians, there were four senses in which the Bible might be interpreted: the literal or historical, the allegorical, the tropological or moral, and the anagogical or mystical.[2] Of these methods the allegorical was by far the favorite, the safest of all,

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1. Cf. Moulton: op. cit., p. 183; Hoare: op. cit., pp. 317-320
2. Cf. quotation from a sermon of Robert Rypon, sub-prior of Durham, ca 1400, in Owst: op. cit., Ch. II

for Biblical literalism was regarded, according to Owst, as the
mother of heresy. The "accumulated body of comment and interpretation
on Scripture," upon which the medieval writers relied, was a heritage
from the Church Fathers, who were held in almost equal respect with
the Word of God itself.[1] Taylor describes the process thus:

> "The Greek and Latin Church Fathers created the mass of doctrine,
> including Scriptural interpretation, upon which mediaeval theo-
> logians were to expend their systematizing and reconstructive
> labours. Through the Middle Ages, the course of allegory and
> symbolism strikingly illustrates the mediaeval way of using the
> patristic heritage -- first painfully learning it, then making
> it their own, and at last creating by means of that which they
> had organically appropriated. Allegory and symbolism were to
> impress the Middle Ages as perhaps no other element of their
> inheritance. The mediaeval man thought and felt in symbols,
> and the sequence of his thought moved as frequently from symbol
> to symbol as from fact to fact."[2]

Thus Christian interpretation took the Old Testament narratives and
gave them special symbolical meanings, making them prefigure the truth
of Christian teachings and Gospel story. Numbers had a peculiar fas-
cination for the theologian. One favorite device was to select a
particular object of the Bible narrative and draw out its allegorical
significance without any regard for the part it played in the original
episode. Owst points to the curious influence of the verse in Psalms:
"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed
each other."[3] Many strange allegories had their origin in that vivid
bit of personification.

One man in the thirteenth century at least made an effort
to tone down this extreme tendency. Bishop Grosseteste, one of medie-
val England's greatest churchmen, Bishop of Lincoln from 1235 to 1253,

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1. Cf. Baldwin: op. cit., p. 20
2. Taylor: op. cit., Vol. II, p. 69
3. Psalm 85:10. Cf. Owst: op. cit., Ch. II

has been characterized by one historian as an intellectual giant with
a wide range of learning and a prolific writer.[1] Lechler records a
notice from a chronicle that

> ". . . once he replied to an earl who had expressed astonishment
> at his noble bearing and manners that it was true he was sprung
> of humble station but from earliest years he had made a study
> of the characters of the best men in the Bible and had formed
> himself upon their model."[2]

Along with his other valuable contributions to English Christianity,
he did much to further the use of logical methods in interpreting
Scripture, in order to bring out the practical and literal meanings
rather than the allegorical and mystical. In his lectures he urged
his pupils to go straight to the original text.[3]

3. Movements toward a Vernacular Bible

The matter of interpreting Scripture concerned chiefly the
theologians and scholars of the day. Even the parochial clergy had
little to do with interpreting the Bible, at least beyond seeing that
their parishioners understood the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the
Ten Commandments. But it might be well to inquire whether there was
anywhere in Europe during the Middle Ages any movement toward a
vernacular Bible for the common person who could not read the Vulgate
and who could not have owned a copy, could he have read it.

a. In Anglo-Saxon England

First, some consideration should be given to England during
the period before the Norman Conquest, that is, during the period
from 597 to 1066, generally known as the Anglo-Saxon period. Among
the few fragments that have survived the wars and ravages of those

. . . .

1. Cf. Stephen: op. cit., p. 325
2. Lechler: op. cit., p. 54
3. Cf. Stephen: loc. cit.

centuries, there seems to be no evidence that the whole Bible was
ever translated into the Saxon tongue, though there is a strong tra-
dition of such a version. Yet there are extant documents which bear
witness to our forefathers' love of God's Word. No one knows to what
extent these pieces were known and read. From the number of copies
some of them must have been rather widely circulated. Others were
obviously intended for private use. The earliest are not really
translations at all, but metrical paraphrases. Then followed inter-
linear versions of the Vulgate or the Old Latin Psalter. It was not
until the tenth or eleventh centuries that any translation seems to
have been made unaccompanied by the Latin. The names chiefly asso-
ciated with these versions are Caedmon, the herdsman poet of Whitby
in the seventh century, Bede, Alfred, Aelfric, and a few others whose
names are not so well known. The parts that have survived comprise
chiefly the four Gospels, the Psalter, the Pentateuch, and some of
the historical books of the Old Testament.[1] Perhaps a short quota-
tion will illustrate the difference between the Old English speech
and our own modern equivalent. The following lines are the first
three verses of Psalm 103 in rather early Saxon:

> "Bletsa, mine sawle, blidhe drihten;
>   and eall min inneran his thaene ecean naman!
> Bletsige, mine sawle, bealde dryhten!
>   ne wylt thu ofergeottul aefre weordhan.
> He thinum mandaedum miltsade eallum;
>   and thine adle ealle gehaelde."[2]

. . . .

1. Cf. Mombert: op. cit., Ch. I; Moulton: op. cit., Ch. I; Hoare: op.
   cit., Ch. II; Canton, William: The Bible and the Anglo-Saxon People,
   ch. I
2. The complete psalm is cited in Mombert: op. cit., p. 9

b. On the Continent

The work of translation in France, Germany, and Italy seems
to have begun at an earlier date than that in England. Perhaps the
cause can be found partly in the Norman Conquest with the setback
which it gave to the English language and literature. Another partial
reason may be the absence of heretical sects in England during the
twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Many of the Continental translations
were related to heretical groups, such as the Waldenses and the group
at Metz. Of course the fashion of verse paraphrases prevailed through-
out Europe and was not restricted to England. Moreover, such books
as Voraigne's Legenda Aurea and Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica
were the common property of Europe and furnished the source of many
religious tales that were at least related to the Bible story. Also
psalters and devotional manuals in the vernacular were generally popu-
lar throughout the Middle Ages everywhere in Christendom. However,
in addition to all these, it is interesting to find activity in
actual translation in Italy in the thirteenth century,[1] in France from
the seventh century on, a complete French Bible being completed about
1250,[2] and in Germany as far back as the seventh and eighth centuries
with especial activity in the thirteenth and fourteenth and a complete
German Bible before the invention of printing.[3] Of this early work
of translation Neander comments:

. . . .

1. Cf. Luzzi, Giovanni: The Struggle for Christian Truth in Italy,
   pp. 119-121; Norlie, O. M.: The Translated Bible, pp. 51-52
2. Cf. Ure, Ruth: The Scriptures of the Early French Protestants,
   pp. 54-42; Norlie: op. cit., p. 52
3. Cf. Ibid., p. 53

"The effect which, in all times, has accompanied the diffusion
of the Scriptures among the people, was observed also in the pre-
sent case; and it is easy to see how much might have been done
for the religious awakening and enlightenment of the people, if
such efforts, growing out of the national life and the religious
need, had been taken advantage of by the church authorities." 1

Of course these translations were not at first opposed by the law.

Hallam says,

"In the eighth and ninth centuries, when the Vulgate had ceased to
be generally intelligible there is no reason to suspect any in-
tention in the church to deprive the laity of the Scriptures
. . . But after the diffusion of heretical opinions, or, what
was much the same thing, of free inquiry, it became expedient to
secure the orthodox faith from lawless interpretation. According-
ly, the council of Toulouse in 1229 prohibited the laity from
possessing the Scriptures; and this precaution was frequently re-
peated upon subsequent occasions." 2

C. Literary Background

A study such as the present one is primarily a literary

study. At least, the central problem is the interpretation of certain

pieces of writing in the light of their purpose and value in the

period in which they were written. In connection with that study there

are certain literary problems relating to the background which need to

be at least indicated in their bearing upon the thesis. First, of

course, is the literary medium, the language of Middle English and

its relationship to both Old and Modern English. Further, there is

the problem involved in the fact that the literature to be considered

was written before the invention of printing and was first available

only in manuscript form. Finally, the literature to be studied must

be considered in relation to the literature of the period as a whole.

. . . .

1. Neander: op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 320
2. Hallam, Henry: View of the State of Europe During the Middle Ages,
   Vol. III, p. 387

1. Linguistic Problem

Dr. Baugh, a recent but sound writer on the history of the English language,[1] finds the evolution of English in the fifteen hundred years of its existence in England to be an unbroken one. Nevertheless, he recognizes three periods of its development: Old English, from 450 to 1150, often called the period of full inflections; Middle English from 1150-1500, when the inflections were becoming greatly reduced, known as the period of leveled inflections; Modern English, from 1500 to the present, when the inflectional system has entirely disappeared.[2] The one event which, more than any other, affected the development of the language is the Norman Conquest in 1066. Since that event took place less than a century and a half before the period with which this study is concerned, it is important to consider just what happened in England, especially to the English language in the two or three centuries immediately following the arrival of William the Conqueror on the British Isles. Of course, French continued to be spoken by the Normans who settled in England, and English by the conquered people. But as there came to be inter-marriage and association between the two peoples, especially among the ruling classes, many must have learned to communicate in either language. Very soon the distinction between those who spoke French and those who spoke English seems to have become social rather than racial. The two races did finally become fused and the two languages diffused, but the process went on for two centuries or more. According to Marsh,

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1. See Baugh, A. C.: A History of the English Language, D. Appleton-Century, 1935
2. Cf. ibid., p. 61

"The welding heat, which finally brought the constituents of English nationality into a consistent and coherent mass, was generated by the Continental wars of Edward III (fourteenth century) . . . Up to this period, the Latin as the official language of the clergy, the Norman-French as that of the court, the nobility, and the multitude of associates, retainers, dependents, and tradesmen whom the Norman Conquest had brought over to the island, and the native English as the speech of the people of Saxon descent, had co-existed without much clashing interference, and without any powerfully active influence upon each other." 1

So then this literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries belongs to the period of transition in the development of the language.

What then are the characteristics of Middle English? It is, of course, a period of great change in both grammar and vocabulary. In the former the change consists largely in the dropping off of the old inflectional endings. In vocabulary it is a period of great borrowing, chiefly, of course, from French. One of the most striking characteristics, however, of Middle English is its diversity of dialects, in both the spoken and written language. Hence in considering a piece of literature the dialect is of primary importance, especially if an attempt is being made to place it both as to time and locality. In general it is customary to distinguish four principal dialects: Northern, East Midland, West Midland, and Southern. However, differences are so great even within one of those four territories that often a piece can be even more closely located. The differences are matters of pronunciation, vocabulary, inflection, and sometimes spelling. There are relics of many of the dialectic differences in Modern English. Any further discussion of dialects is unnecessary here, but throughout the study reference will occasionally be made to them. 2

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1. Marsh, G. P.: The Origin and History of the English Language, p. 146
2. Cf. Baugh: op. cit., Chs. VI and VII; Marsh: op. cit., Lectures IV and V

2. Manuscript Problems

The literature which has survived from the period prior to the invention of printing has, of course, been preserved in manuscript form. That fact creates a great many problems, the most important being the inaccessibility of the material. Much, however, of the literature of the Middle English period has been printed by the Early English Text Society and edited carefully by some of the finest scholars in the world. In the present study no effort will be made to use any material except that which has been printed. Enough is available to make the study worth while. There are other problems involved in the fact that the material has been preserved only in manuscript form. Authorship is uncertain. Where a name is attached to a manuscript, often it is impossible to know whether it belongs to the author or to a scribe. Copyists have made errors, and often it is difficult if not impossible to ascertain the correct text. Manuscripts seem to have circulated throughout England, and the fact that a certain piece has been preserved in a Northern dialect and a Northern hand does not mean that its original authorship was Northern. These are just a few of the problems of scholarship involved in a study of Middle English literature. The present study is not concerned with solving any of them, yet a recognition of their existence is important.

3. The Characteristics of Middle English Literature

One more matter must be considered by way of background. What are the chief characteristics of the literature which has survived from this period of transition? Aside from the Anglo-French literature which flourished during this same period and which was

a literature of chivalric love, the great mass of writing was religious. Legouis explains it thus:

> "To a disinherited people, no longer able to read, the essential Word, which helps man to work out his salvation, had to be carried first. Homilies, sermons in prose and in verse, translation of the Psalms or parts of the Bible, rules for a devout life, lives of the saints and prayers -- these fill the pages which form the mass of what may be called English literature until about the middle of the fourteenth century." 1

Furthermore, this writing was uniformly unoriginal. Where it was not a paraphrase of the Bible it was almost a direct transcription of some popular French or Latin book. Plagiarism was no sin in the Middle Ages. The medieval fondness for compendiums and encyclopedias appears in many of these pieces, in attempts to give the story of the world from Creation to the Day of Judgment or to paraphrase all the Gospels for the Mass throughout the Church year, including the Saints' Days. Credulity and superstition is everywhere, as well as respect for authority and tradition. The medieval love of symbolism is especially prevalent; no occasion for allegorizing is ever lost. Some of the moralizing is unutterably dull, but often it is decidedly practical and livened with homely, realistic details drawn from everyday life. The medieval writers were not alone in their habit of dressing an old story, be it Scriptural or not, in the garb of their own time. The love of classifying and cataloguing is evident in such stock figures as the Seven Deadly Sins and the Five Cardinal Virtues. These are just a few of the literary fashions of the time, the qualities which give this literature of the later Middle Ages its peculiar flavor. [2]

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1. Legouis and Cazamian: A History of English Literature, 1930 Edition, p. 79
2. See Schofield, W. H.: English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer

B. Summary and Conclusions

A study of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries from the viewpoint of their contribution to the development of a vernacular Bible reveals both positive and negative forces at work. In the first place, they were centuries of transition, when the social order was changing and new needs were being felt. The church was attempting to meet those new needs with an increased emphasis upon instruction of the laity. The continued existence of the feudal system colored popular ideals, as it also conditioned the survival of a class unable to read and unlearned in bookish lore. Moreover, the rise of a new nationalism coincided with a rapid interest in and development of the English language as a literary instrument. The rise of towns and a merchant class offered new possibilities for a reading public. Wealth, the ability to buy and own books, came into the hands of a new group. Religion was still the central fact in men's lives, and so a vernacular religious literature had an enormous vogue. Inevitably the Scripture story played a prominent part in a story-telling age. The growth of towns and cities also created new needs for moral teaching, and there, too, the Bible became an instrument.

It would seem that certain religious movements of the period would contribute to the spread of Biblical knowledge, and to some extent they did. The rise of the mendicant orders brought about a revival of preaching, and at first, surely, that preaching was "Bible centered," however corrupt the orders later became. The friars played a part, too, in education, but often the tendency in schools and universities was away from an interest in Scripture to more abstruse subjects. Scholasticism seems to have done little or nothing toward

the advancement of Bible study, in spite of constant appeals to
Scriptural authority. The influence of the schoolmen was in no sense
contributory to the dissemination of Scripture among the common people.
Mysticism in itself also led away from the study of the Bible, though
one of the greatest English mystics was a translator of the Psalter.

There were, however, certain agencies for the religious in-
struction of the people, and through these channels much of the Bible
story was imparted to the laity, though not by way of vernacular
versions. In popular religious life, saint worship played a prominent
part. Also in the Mass there was little suggestive of the Bible
except the symbolic representation of the Passion. That contributed
somewhat to a knowledge of the gospels to the extent that the service
was understood by the laity. The current preaching was, especially
in the early period of the friars, more closely related to Scripture,
and by means of the sermons many Bible stories were made real.
Through the sermons, also, many Bible texts were first heard in English,
not from authorized translations but the preacher's own version of his
Latin Vulgate. The Biblical drama and art and architecture in the
cathedrals were the most potent agencies for spreading knowledge of
Scripture and creating an interest in the Book itself.

Heresies found an unfavorable soil in the naturally conser-
vative and independent English Church, and so during the thirteenth
and fourteenth centuries no bans were necessary upon the vernacular
use of Scripture. It was only when the Wycliffite movement of the
later fourteenth century became so popular that the authorities
showed any hostility to the translation of the Bible.

The only Bible known in the Middle Ages was the Latin Vulgate, and the prevalent method of interpretation was allegorical, based upon patristic authority. Vernacular versions of parts of the Bible had existed in Anglo-Saxon England from the time of Bede and Alfred, both of whom advocated translations for the people. On the continent, too, the movement toward a vernacular Bible had begun even before 1300.

The problem in England was linguistic; the Norman Conquest in 1066 had changed the whole course of development by suppressing for two centuries the native Saxon tongue, until when it emerged it had become another language with a variety of dialects. In a study of the literature of that period of emergence, problems are also created by its survival only in manuscript form. It is very largely a religious literature, unoriginal as far as subject matter is concerned, full of superstition and respect for tradition, highly symbolic and allegorical, moralizing yet often realistic. These characteristics all become evident wherever a writer seeks to paraphrase or translate a portion of the Bible.

Perhaps in spite of the negative tendencies at work in medieval England, the present study will serve in some measure to substantiate the following statement of a modern student of the period:

> "It is hardly too much to say that, in order to gain real insight
> into the life and culture of the Old and Middle English periods,
> in order to appreciate or even to understand the literature of
> these times, we must know the Bible far better than many of
> us do." 1

. . . .

1. Smyth, Mary W.: Biblical Quotations in Middle English Literature before 1350, Yale Studies in English, p. xvi

CHAPTER II

PARAPHRASES OF OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE MATERIAL

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Introduction

It is not suprising that the stories of the Old Testament
should have been popular in the Middle Ages. They had been paraphrased
earlier in Anglo-Saxon times. Caedmon's Hymn, traditionally the
earliest bit of Scriptural material in English, was a version of the
Creation story from the first chapter of Genesis. The earliest long
Anglo-Saxon paraphrases were from Genesis and Exodus. Why should
not a folk who loved tales as did the people of that earlier time
delight in the ever real and living stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and
Abel, Noah and the Flood, Abraham and his patriarchal descendents,
and all the rest down to the return from captivity? It is not to be
supposed that there was ever a time before or after the Norman Con-
quest when those stories were not familiar to all the people of
every social and intellectual class. And so it is not surprising
that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was an effort
to keep alive these stories for those who could not read Latin or
perhaps could not even read English but could listen to a "learned"
person as he re-told what he had read in a manuscript from the near-
est abbey. Nor was this the only way of keeping them alive, for by
the fourteenth century they were being dramatized all over England by
a group not clerical or primarily interested in their religious value.
In the study which follows, the surviving paraphrases of the Old
Testament historical portions, those which are accessible, will be
examined and their editorial introductions studied to determine what
parts of the Bible were thus used, what was the nature of the treatment,
and what was their purpose or function as far as it may be determined.

A. The Genesis and Exodus

Probably the earliest attempt to put the Old Testament story into an English metrical paraphrase has survived in only one manuscript of 4162 lines.[1] It is a verse paraphrase of the principal incidents in Genesis and Exodus with a few portions of Numbers and Deuteronomy inserted to complete the story of Moses and the wanderings of the Israelites.[2] It has been edited by Richard Morris for the Early English Text Society (1865) under the title Genesis and Exodus. The editor's preface summarizes the facts that may be known regarding this early piece of Biblical paraphrase.

1. Manuscript, Date, and Dialect

The Corpus Christi manuscript is described as a small volume of about 8 by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, bound in vellum, written in a hand of about 1300, and consisting of eighty-one leaves. Apparently it was the work of a single efficient scribe, for the writing, according to Rev. W. W. Skeat[3] is clear and regular and the letters large, though often rather close together.[4] Evidently the manuscript which has survived is not the author's copy, as Morris finds evidence in certain orthographical blunders that the language was more or less archaic even at the time the manuscript was written.[5] His conclusion after examining the vocabulary and grammatical forms, taking into consideration the place of composition and comparing other works in

. . . .

1. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 444, f. 1
2. Cf. Wells, J. E.: A Manual of Writings in Middle English 1100-1400, p. 397
3. Cf. Morris: Preface to Genesis and Exodus, p. v, ftn. 1
4. Cf. ibid., p. vi
5. Cf. ibid., p. xiv

the same dialect, is that the original poem was written in the early part of the thirteenth century, not later than 1250. Sir Frederick Madden would assign it to the time of Henry III (1216-1272).[1] Comparing the language of this poem with that of two other poems of about the same time, Morris assigns the Genesis and Exodus[2] to the southern counties of the East Midland district. Hence this verse paraphrase of the first two books of the Old Testament appears to come from the central part of England sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century.

2. The Author and His Purpose

About the author nothing can be known. He must have been a cleric, for only thus would he be likely qualified for the writing of such a poem. His purpose is, of course, religious instruction. That he indicates in his opening lines:

> Man og to luuen þat rimes ren,
> þe wisse wel þe logede men,
> hu man may him wel loken
> þog he be lered on no boken,
> Luuen god and seruen him ay,
> For he it hem wel gelden may,
> And to alle christenei men
> beren pais and luue bi-twen;
> þan sal him almightin luuen,
> Her bi-nethen and þund abuuen,
> And giuen him blisse and soules reste(n)
> þat him sal earuermore lesten.
> Ut of latin þis song is dragen
> on engleis speche, on soþe sagen;
> Christene men ogen ben so fagen
> so fueles arn quan he is sen dagen,
> þan man hem telled soþe tale
> Wid londes speche and wordes smale,
> Of blisses dune, of sorwel dale: [3]

. . . .

1. Cf. Morris: op. cit., p. xiii, also ftns. 1 and 2
2. Cf. ibid., p. xv
3. Lines 1-19. The character þ signifies th.

The preceding passage might be paraphrased as follows:

> Men ought to love those who sing rimes to teach the unlearned
> men how to love God and serve Him always, for it is good for
> Christian men to have peace and love among themselves; then the
> Almighty will love them here on earth and give them bliss and
> rest for their souls in heaven. Out of Latin this song is turned
> into English speech; Christian men ought to be as glad as birds
> at daybreak to have men tell them a true tale in their native
> speech with simple words.

It is interesting to note particularly that the poet writes to instruct the unlearned how he may serve and love God, and to that end he will use the vulgar tongue ("londes speche") and simple language ("wordes smale"). The poet's intention may have been to write a much longer paraphrase including more of the Biblical narrative, for he summarizes his "song" by referring to Lucifer's power over mankind[1] till Christ came and wrought salvation destroying the power of Satan.[2] After invoking the aid of God the poet begins his narrative of creation from the opening chapter of Genesis. His object throughout seems to have been to instruct rather than amuse, for he included to a far less extent than many later writers the numerous sacred legends with which medieval writers liked to embellish their works to make them attractive to their unlearned readers. Chiefly he appears to tell a straightforward narrative, though occasionally such bits of sacred lore appear[3] as that the devil was made on Sunday and fell out of heaven on Monday, that Adam was created in Damascus field,[4] and that Issa was Eve's first name until, when she ate the forbidden fruit, the name Eve was given[5] her by Adam.

. . . .

1. Lines 20-28
2. Lines 29-34
3. Lines 71-72
4. Line 207
5. Line 233

3. Relation to the Scripture Text

If Wells' conclusion is correct that the Genesis and Exodus follows rather closely Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica,[1] then it is not to be expected that it will exhibit any particular faithfulness to the Biblical text, being only a paraphrase of a paraphrase of a translation of Scripture. At any rate, it is not likely that the Latin out of which the unknown author turned his song into English speech is the Latin of the Vulgate, though he was no doubt perfectly familiar with his Latin Bible. Medieval writers generally did not confine themselves to the Vulgate when paraphrasing Scripture. There was too much other interesting available material.

The whole story is, of course, greatly shortened. It is told without the elaboration and comment so often interspersed in Scripture narrative by medieval writers. The following portions of Genesis are omitted: ii. 10-14; ix.20-27; x.2-7; x.10-32; xxiii.2-30; xxx.1-5, 14-16, 37-43; xxxi.1-17; xxxvi; xlviii; xlix.1-27. From Exodus more is omitted. These passages have no part in the poem: xii.40-51; xiii.1-16; xx.20-26; xxi;xxii;xxiii;xxv;xxvi; xxvii; xxviii; xxix; xxx; xxxi; xxxiii.12-23; xxxiv.1-32; xxxv; xxxvi; xxxvii; xxxviii; xxxix; xl.[2] It is easy to see why most of these passages were omitted. Many of them are not narrative, and would add nothing to the completeness of the story. Moreover, they might be confusing to the unlearned reader, whose interest would be largely in the story. On the other hand, for the sake of completeness, it is evident why certain chapters

. . . .

1.Wells: op. cit., p. 397. Cf. Brown, Carleton: Lecture on Middle
  English Literature, New York University, October 10, 1936
2.Cf. Morris: Preface, p. viii, ftn. 1

of Numbers and Deuteronomy were added: Numbers xi; xii; xiii; xiv;
xvi; xvii; xix; xx; xxi; xxii; xxiii; xxiv; xxv; xxvi; xxvii; xxxi;
Deuteronomy xxxiv.[1]

4. Literary Merit and Value

It is necessary to read only a few lines, such as have al-
ready been quoted, to realize that both Wells[2] and Morris[3] were right
when they said that the Genesis and Exodus had no literary value and
slight poetic merit. The meter is a simple four-stressed verse with
an indeterminate number of unaccented syllables, a form which gives
an effect of roughness and crudity. The following description of the
plague of frogs, along with Morris' translation, will illustrate the
unknown author's style and will show something of the manner of
handling the Scripture story:

And aaron held up his hond
to þe water and þe more lond;
þe com þor up swile froskes here
þe ded al folc egipte dere;
Summe woren wilde, and summe tame,
And þe hem ded þe moste same,
In huse, in drinc, in metes, in bed,
It cropen and maden hem for-drede; . . .
Polheuedes, and froskes, & podes spile
Bond hard egipte folc in (vn-)file. [1]

And Aaron held up his hand
To the water and the greater land,
Then came there up such host of frogs
That all did Egypt's folk annoy.
Some were wild and some tame,
And those caused them the most shame;
In house, in drink, in meats, in bed,
They crept and made them for-dread; . . .
Tadpoles and frogs, and toad's venom
Bound hard Egypt's folk in sorrow. [4]

. . . .

1. Cf. Morris: loc. cit., ftn. 2
2. Cf. Wells: op. cit., p. 397
3. Cf. Morris: Preface, p. xii
4. Lines 2967-2978. Cf. Preface, p. xii

If to the Genesis and Exodus can be attributed no literary

significance, surely it is of interest as an early English version of

Old Testament history. Morris finds in it value for the insight given

by pieces of this kind into religious life following the Conquest:

> "The number of religious treatises written in English during the
> thirteenth and fourteenth centuries prove that the dialect of reli-
> gion approached more closely to the speech of the people than did
> the language of history or romance. And it is a curious fact that
> the most valuable monuments of our language are mostly theological,
> composed for the lewd and unlearned, who knew no other language
> than the one spoken by their forefathers, and who clung most tenacious-
> ly to their mother tongue, notwithstanding the changes consequent
> upon the Norman invasion and the oppression of the Norman rule." 1

B. Two Fourteenth Century Alliterative Poems

Cleanness and Patience

In striking contrast to the literary barrenness of the

Genesis and Exodus paraphrases is the poetic skill of two fourteenth

century West Midland alliterative[2] poems written, according to their

editor,[3] "for the purpose of enforcing, by line upon line and precept

upon precept . . . Purity of life as manifested in thought, word, and

deed; Obedience to the divine command; and Patience under affliction."[4]

1. The Manuscript of the Poems

These two poems are found in only one manuscript, the well-

known Nero A X of the Cottonian collection, one of the most interest-

ing and valuable survivals of medieval English literature.

. . . .

1. Morris: Preface, pp. xii-xiii
2. Referring to the Anglo-Saxon alliterative pattern: four accented
   syllables to a line, an indeterminate number of unaccented syllables,
   three or four alliterations in a line, one at the beginning of the
   second half-line and one or two in the first half-line, all occur-
   ring on accented syllables.
3. Richard Morris for the Early English Text Society, Original Series,
   no. 1
4. Ibid., p. ix

The manuscript contains four poems so much alike in style and form that they have been quite generally taken to be the work of one author. Although in the manuscript the poems have no titles, they have been called respectively, in the order in which they appear, Pearl (an expression of a father's grief over the loss of his two-year-old daughter), Purity or Cleanness (a series of illustrations from Scripture to enforce the lesson of purity of heart), Patience (a paraphrase of the book of Jonah to teach obedience and to illustrate the patience of God), and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (a romance of the French sort). This study is, of course, interested only in the second and third poems, though the Pearl is full of Biblical allusions and quotations, especially from the book of Revelation. But it is the framework of the Cleanness and Patience which is Biblical.

Of especial interest in this manuscript are nine illustrations, occupying each a whole page, and four of them serving as illustrations for the two Biblical poems. They seem sufficiently unusual to warrant a brief description here.[1] At the beginning of Cleanness appears a picture of Noah and his family embarked upon perilous waters in a frail, masted boat. One of the five persons in the boat is rowing, a second clinging to the mast, a third, a lady, pointing with interest to the fish in the seething waters, and a fourth in an attitude of prayer. On the following page Daniel in the guise of a monk is interpreting the handwriting on the wall for the king Belshazzar and his terrified queen. Preceding the poem Patience two illuminations show the sailors casting Jonah into the sea, where

. . . .

1. See facsimile of MS Cott. Nero A X, Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 162

a huge fish seems to be awaiting him with interest, and the prophet
later preaching in a circular enclosure to three Ninevites, two of
whom seem to be hearing him to some purpose with their hands clasped
in prayer.

2. The Author

Nothing authoritative has been discovered regarding the
authorship of these interesting poems, though various attempts have
been made to ascribe them to this or that person. The author was
certainly gifted with literary power and was evidently a man of birth
and education. There is good reason to suppose he was a clerk from
the evidence of the poems themselves. Even in Sir Gawain, where the
material is romantic, the moral purpose is prominent. The Pearl is
an intensely personal poem, but the poet's point of view is indicated
in his lesson of resignation to the will of God and in the Biblical
allusions and quotations.[1] Especially, however, in the two poems
with a Scriptural framework, the Cleanness and Patience, does it seem
that the author must belong to the Church. Both are really allitera-
tive homilies based upon the Bible. The introduction of Scripture is,
as in the homilies, purely for the purpose of enforcing a moral
lesson. The Bible is the authority upon which the poet falls back
when he wishes to teach purity, obedience, and patience. The author,
whether a cleric or not, had a decidedly moral and didactic point
of view.

. . . .

1. It is true that the problem of the daughter in the Pearl is a
puzzling one if the father is an ecclesiastic, but there is some
question as to the literalness with which the law of celibacy was
observed, especially in the lower orders.

3. The Didactic Use of Various Old Testament Narratives in <u>Cleanness</u>

In spite of the fact that a number of stories from various parts of the Bible are introduced into <u>Cleanness</u>, the poem is well unified and its purpose clearly indicated in the statement of the theme at the beginning. Whosoever, says the poet, would commend cleanness would find fair forms disclosed and in the contrary sorrow and trouble, for he who made all things is wroth when his followers approach his presence in filth and especially when they are priests and serve at his altar. If the worshiper is pure he receives great reward, but if impure he suffers God's anger. This Christ showed us himself, as Matthew records. Thus is introduced the first Scriptural portion, the parable of the marriage feast, based definitely upon Matthew 22:2-14, but embellished with details added for vividness and set against the social background of the age. The latter characteristic is illustrated in the excuse of the first invited guest:

> On hade boȝt hym a borȝ he sawde by his trawthe,
> Now tne I þeder als tyd, þe touh to behold. 1

Evidently the poet is thinking of a feudal estate with a town as a part of it, rather than merely a field as in the Biblical narrative. Again when the servants are sent out to bring, in place of the invited guests,

> þe wayferande freke, on fote & on hors, [2]

the picture is of medieval wayfaring life such as Jusserand describes. [3] Another medieval touch is in the description of the feast itself,

. . . .

1. One had bought him a burgh he said by his troth,
   Now turn I thither quickly the town to behold. Lines 63-64
2. The wayfaring people on foot and on horseback. Line 79
3. Cf. Jusserand: English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages

where all are entertained

Boþe with menske, & wiþ mete & mynstra(l)sy noble . . . [1]

Illustrations of this use of the medieval background might be multiplied as the stories follow one upon the other, each closely linked with the lesson of purity. The second Biblical illustration is from the Old Testament, as are the stories that follow. The fall of Lucifer and the Angels is taken from Isaiah 14:12 ff, though the story is mixed with apocryphal details. Then follows the description of antediluvian wickedness, the Creator's anger and determination to destroy the earth, and the announcement of that determination to the godly Noah together with the divine command to build the ark. The description of the flood is especially vivid with all the Biblical details as well as those which the poet's fertile imagination supplies. The whole story of the flood, covering Genesis 6-9, is given in about 300 lines. The moral is obvious, though the poet is careful to draw it. Next the destruction of Sodom is used to point out the evils of impurity. The whole of Genesis 18-19 is paraphrased with faithfulness to the text: the visit of the angels, the entertainment provided, the promise of a son with Sarah's incredulous laughter rebuked, the revelation of God's purpose to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham's intercession, the angelic warning of Lot, the departure from Sodom, the final destruction, and the fate of Lot's wife. Homiletic material follows to point the lesson. The final stories have to do with Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem as recorded in II Kings 25 and the first six chapters of Daniel. The following

. . . .

1. Both with honor and with meat and noble minstrelsy. Line 121

passage illustrates the author's method of using Biblical details, yet expanding and enlarging by allowing his imagination to play upon the story, realizing and visualizing it. The lines are a paraphrase of II Kings 25:4-5. A modernized version is given for convenience:

> Then the king of the kingdom a counsel him takes,
> With the best of his men a device for to make;
> They steal out on a still night ere any sound rose,
> And hard hurled through the host ere enemies it wist,
> But ere they could escape the watch without,
> High scattered was the cry the skies thereunder,
> Loud alarm upon land sounded was then;
> Rich roused from their rest, ran to their weeds,
> Hard hats they seized and on horse leapt;
> Clear clarion's crack cried aloft.
> By that (time) was all an heap, hurling fast,
> Following that other fleet (host) and found them soon,
> Overtook them in a trice, tilted them off saddles,
> Till each prince had his peer put to the ground;
> And there was the king caught with crafty princes,
> And all his nobles vanquished on Jericho's plains. 1

This passage illustrates further the poet's habit of putting his Bible story in a medieval setting; for example, one thinks inevitably of a knightly joust when the Jews are "tilted off saddles." At the close of the poem the didactic purpose of these Scriptural paraphrases is evident again when the poet summarizes: Thus in three ways I have showed you thoroughly that uncleanness makes wroth the Lord that dwells in heaven. Cleanness is his comfort, and the seemly shall see his face. May he send us grace to serve in his sight.

4. The Relation of Patience to Jonah

In comparison with Cleanness, which runs to 1812 lines, the poem Patience with 528 lines is comparatively short. It differs also in the fact that the Scriptural basis is the single book of Jonah, which the poet uses not in the usual medieval fashion as a

. . ..

1. Lines 1201-1216

mere wonder book, but to show God's patience with man and the importance of man's obedience in the light of God's patience.[1] As in the poem <u>Cleanness</u> the theme is indicated in the opening lines,

> Patience is a poynt, þaȝ hit displese ofte,
> When hevy herttes ben hurt wyþ heþing oþer elles,
> Suffraunce may aswagend hem & þe swelme leȝe,
> For ho quelles vche a qued, & quenches malyce; [2]

Also in the last line the lesson is drawn,

> þat pacience is a nobel poynt, þaȝ hit displese ofte.

In the homiletic passage on patience at the opening of the poem (lines 1-56) before Jonah is introduced, there is an interesting version of the Beatitudes with patience and poverty linked together. The story of Jonah is given in great detail following the Biblical text in order and including all the incidents of the book. Nothing apocryphal or legendary is added, but the narrative, as in the stories in <u>Cleanness</u>, is expanded and amplified by realistic details. Nowhere is there direct translation, yet details are such as fit in perfectly with the Bible story: Jonah's fear lest the wicked men of Nineveh put him in prison if he takes them God's message, his grumbling as he takes the ship for Tarshish, his joy as he finds himself sailing away in the opposite direction from Nineveh, the raging of the storm with its effect upon the sailors. A few lines of the storm description will illustrate the point:

. . . .

1. Cf. Brown: Lecture, December 19, 1936
2. Patience is a point, though it often displease.
   When heavy hearts are hurt with scorn or otherwise,
   Longsuffering may assuage them, and the boiling cool,
   For it subdues each evil crime and quenches malice.

> Anon out of the north east the noise begins,
> When both breezes did blow upon blue waters
> Rough clouds there arose with thunder there under,
> The sea sobbed full sore great marvel to hear;
> The winds on the wan water so wrastle together,
> That the waves full wild rolled on high,
> And again bent to the abyss that bred fishes;
> Durst it nowhere for rustness rest at the bottom.
> When the breeze and the brook and the boat met,
> It was a joyless engine that Jonah was in,
> For it reeled around upon the rough waves . . .
> Many a lad there forth leapt to lave and to cast,
> To scoop out the scathful water that fain escape would,
> For be man's lot never so bad, the life is ever sweet. 1

The lines beginning Jonah's prayer from the midst of the whale follow

the Scripture more closely. The verses paraphrased are chapter 2:2-4,

which read in the Authorized Version: "I cried by reason of mine

affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell

cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the

deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about; all

thy billows and thy waves passed over me."

> Lord, to thee have I called in sorrow full strong,
> Out of the hole, thou me heard, of hell's womb.
> I called and thou knewest my indistinct voice;
> Thou dippedst me from the deep sea into the black depth,
> The great waves of thy flood folded me about;
> All the streams of thy gulfs and groundless pools,
> And thy striving streams of stronds so many,
> In a dashing stream, drive me over;
> And yet I say as I sit in the sea valley,
> 'Sorrowful am I cast out from thy clear eyes,
> And dissevered from thy sight; yet surely I hope,
> Afterward to tread in thy temple and approach thy worship. 2

5. Evaluation of These Poems

Aside from their unusual literary value, these two poems,

Cleanness and Patience, are significant for two reasons. In the first

. . . .

1. Lines 137-156
2. Lines 305-316

place, they are entirely free from any legendary or apocryphal additions to the Scriptural text, with the exception, perhaps of some slight touches in the account of the fall of Lucifer in Cleanness. In that characteristic they are like the Genesis and Exodus and strikingly different from the Cursor Mundi, a discussion of which follows. However, their later date and greater skill gives them a superiority over the Genesis and Exodus. By the fourteenth century it is more unusual to find a poem free from legend. A further significant characteristic is in their realistic treatment of Scriptural stories and Scriptural characters. Without a study of the current homilies and didactic literature it is difficult to realize how unusual is the handling of Bible stories as real incidents and not allegorical representations. The author of Patience and Cleanness accepts the narrative as it stands in the Bible, relates it as a real happening with real characters and draws from it a lesson not fantastically allegorical but applicable to daily living. This is especially striking in the Jonah story. One cannot help feeling that the poem was written directly from the Vulgate, read and interpreted literally. Certainly the Bible was living literature to the author of these quaint fourteenth century poems.

C. The Cursor Mundi [1]

The medieval fondness for ambitious literary undertakings is exemplified in a long poem entitled in all the manuscripts Cursor Mundi, a Northumbrian product of the fourteenth century, the first long poem distinctly in the Northern dialect. [2]

. . . .

1. Edited by Richard Morris for the Early English Text Society, Original Series, nos. 57, 59, 62, 66, 68
2. Cf. Brown: Lecture, November 14, 1936

1. The Plan of the Poem

The title, which means "Over-runner of the world," suggests the author's plan to rehearse almost all the course of the world's past history, as he himself says,

> Cursur o werld man aght it call,
> For almast it ouer-rennes all. 1

By history of the world he, of course, means sacred history. The poem, which runs to 29,555 lines, is divided into seven parts, according to the "seven ages of the world." The first age covers the period from the creation to the time of Noah; the second from the flood to the Tower of Babel; the third from the time of Abraham to the death of Saul; the fourth from the time of David to the Babylonian captivity; the fifth from the parentage of the Virgin Mary to the time of John the Baptist; the sixth from Jesus' baptism to the finding of the Cross, which the poet calls the "time of grace"; the seventh and last period comprises the Day of Doom and the world after the final judgment. The gaps in the time-division are interesting. It is evident that the first four periods cover Old Testament history; then there is the inter-testament gap, and the next two parts cover New Testament history. The fifth division is largely legendary. This chapter is concerned only with the sections on Old Testament history.

2. The Author

It is to be supposed that the author of so learned and so compendious a work would have attached his name to the poem. But

. . . .

1. Lines 267-268

the author of the _Cursor_, according to the medieval fashion,modestly
withholds such personal information from his readers. Here, however,
as in other medieval poems, in one of the manuscripts a name has been
inserted which has caused some confusion. The difficulty in such
cases arises from the fact that a name attached to a manuscript may
belong to the author, to a scribe, or to an owner of the book.
Certain lines in the Gottingen text of the _Cursor Mundi_, not in any
other version, present a plea which has been paraphrased as follows:

> "And specially do ye pray for me that caused this book to be made,
> John of Lindbergh, I say to you, that is my name full right.
> If it be lost or taken away, truly I pledge my troth whoever
> brings it to me without delay, I shall reward him that very
> night. And whosoever shall hide and withhold it from me, truly
> I tell you, cursed in church shall they be with candle, book,
> and bell." 1

In spite of the assumption by some students that John of Lindbergh was
the author, it would seem obvious that these lines refer to one who
has owned the book, perhaps paid a scribe to "indite it," if that
may be taken as the meaning of his line, "þat þis book gart dight."[2]

Even though John of Lindbergh may not be taken as the author
of the poem and though the poet's name is not revealed, yet certain
facts can be reasonably inferred concerning him. He must have been
a cleric. Morris' judgment that "no layman . . . would be scholar
enough to compile a work involving so wide an acquaintance with
sacred literature, Biblical and legendary, as is shown in the _Cursor_"[3]
seems sound. Toward the end of the poem, however, the poet does have
a few things to say about himself in a part headed in the Fairfax MS

. . . .

1. Morris: Cursor Mundi, Part VII, preface, p. xviii. Cf. lines
   17099-17110
2. Line 17100
3. Part VI, preface, p. xix

"A predicacioun wiþ þe conclusioun þer-a-pon."[1] After a prolonged
exhortation to make the most of life while there is opportunity, to
strive earnestly against the devil and his wiles, the poet continues,

> al are we breþer ȝonge & holde,
> for vs was crist baþ boȝt & salde.
> he has vs in his noumbre talde
> als his shepe for his awen falde.
> þorou hirdes þat þe lordis has sette.
> þat he wil þat his folk be gette.
> he has vs chosin for our mede.
> his hali folk al for to fede.
> a-mang þer hirdis am I. an.
> sa wrecche vn-wor i wate I. nane. 2

The author further informs the reader that God has given him a talent
which must not be allowed to "rot in hoard," but must be "spent in
work and words," a little of which he has here "spent in words."[3]
The author, then, is evidently a member of the secular clergy, a
priest; whether parish priest or not we cannot tell. Certainly such
learning as he exhibits would be exceedingly rare among the parish
priests.

3. The Author's Purpose

The reader is left in no doubt as to the author's purpose,
for he makes known in a prologue of 270 lines the reason for his
writing such a book in the English tongue, in North Country speech.

. . . .

1. Page 1354
2. Lines 23873-23882. The character ȝ may be g, gh, or y in modern
   English. Sometimes it is even used for z.
   Paraphrase: We are all brothers, young and old, for us was Christ
   both bought and sold. He has reckoned us in the number of all the
   sheep for his own fold, through pastors that the Lord has set,
   that his folk may be kept safely. He has chosen us for our meed
   to feed all his holy folk. Among these pastors I am one. Such
   an unworthy wretch know I none.
3. Lines 23885-23898

Many, he says, are eager to hear romances of various kinds, of Alexander the conqueror, of Julius Caesar, the emperor of Greece and Troy and their strong struggle when many thousands lost their lives, of Brutus, the first conqueror of England, of King Arthur, of Gawain and Kay, of King Charlemagne and Roland with the Saracens, of Tristram and Isolde, all stories of princes, prelates, and kings. Each man likes to hear the things that please him best, the wise man, wise lore, and the fool, folly. Man's best lover is the Virgin Mary, for from her Christ took his flesh. Of her should poets make rimes, not of the phantoms of this world. In her worship he will begin a lasting work. Some "gests" he will relate, done in the Old Law, and the events of the birth of Christ. He will touch briefly both the Old and New Testaments and with Christ's help run over all this world and tell some principal stories, for no man could tell all. The work will be founded on steadfast ground, the Holy Trinity. There he will begin and tell of the fall of the angels and the creation of Adam and Eve and their off-spring, of the patriarchs, the kings, and of the coming of Christ and his life and death, ending with the feast of the conception. All this is translated into English for the love of English people in Merry England that they may understand. French rimes are common enough, but they are no good to Englishmen. This story is for unlearned Englishmen who can understand. They lead their lives in trifling and so need to have them amended and obtain pardon for their sin with Christ's[1] blessing.

. . . .

1. Cf. lines 1-270

Such is the purpose of the unknown poet, a purpose thoroughly characteristic of his office and age. It is primarily moral and didactic, yet he seems to have some idea of creating a piece of writing which will compete with the romances of the time.

4. The Manuscripts

Reference has already been made to the various manuscript versions of the Cursor Mundi. In Morris' edition the four versions in parallel columns are from the following manuscripts: Cotton Vespasian A iii in the British Museum; Fairfax 14 in the Bodleian Library; Göttingen MS theol. 107; MS R 3.8, Trinity College, Cambridge. The Fairfax manuscript is interestingly headed:

> þis is the best boke of alle
> þe cours of the werld men dos hit calle.

In addition to the four complete versions Morris includes fragments from five other manuscripts. Dr. Brown in his Register lists nine[1] manuscripts in which all or part of the poem appears. In an essay on the "Filiation and Text of the MSS"[2] Dr. Hupe compares ten different versions. It is not necessary to list all these manuscripts, but it is important to note that the earliest Dr. Hupe dates about the latter half of the thirteenth century,[3] the majority belong to the fourteenth century, and three come from the fifteenth. Nothing very definite can be inferred as to the date of the poem, but it is usually placed shortly after the beginning of the fourteenth century.[4] There are in the different manuscripts evidences of North,

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1. Cf. Brown, Carleton: Register of Middle English Religious and Didactic Verse, Vol. II, no. 1349
2. In Cursor Mundi, Part VII, pp. 59 ff.
3. It is the opinion of later scholars that all the manuscripts are fourteenth century or later
4. The title page of Morris' edition calls the Cursor a xivth century poem.

West, and South Midland dialects, as well as Northumbrian character-
istics.[1] Originally the poem came from the North. Certainly the
variety and number of manuscripts indicate a general popularity,
especially in consideration of the length of the poem. Copying by
hand a poem of nearly 30,000 lines would have been quite an under-
taking even in the Middle Ages.

5. The Sources of the Poem

The editor calls the Cursor Mundi a "store-house of reli-
gious legends."[2] The poet apparently did not write with only his
Latin Vulgate before him, though he certainly used the Scripture as
a basis. Part VII of the Early English Text Society edition includes
an inquiry into the various sources which he must have known and
used.[3] Most of this discussion, however, pertains to the New Testa-
ment sections of the Cursor. For the Old Testament history, lines
1-9222, the chief source, aside from the Vulgate appears to have
been Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica, which was commonly used
as a basis for religious writing. Of course, in the passages in
which the Historia follows the Scripture narrative it is impossible
to tell whether the poet was using the Vulgate or Comestor.

6. The Use of Scriptural and Legendary Material

The Bible stories are in the main the more familiar ones,
beginning with the creation through a brief account of Solomon's
successors. The following summary of the first four "ages" will

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1. Cf. Hope, H.: Cursor Studies, Ch. III, Cursor Mundi, Part VII
2. Morris: Preface, p. 9
3. Dr. Haenisch, Cursor Mundi, Part VII, Vol. I, pp. 3 ff (1893)

indicate just what portions of the Scripture were incorporated in
the Cursor.

    I. Lines 271-1626: Genesis i-vi
    II. Lines 1627-2314: Genesis vii-xi
    III. Lines 2315-7860: Genesis xii-xxxiii; xxxvii; xxxix-l
                          Exodus i-xviii; xix.20-25; xxi-xxiii; xxiv.19;
                          xxxii; Numbers xvii; Deuteronomy xxiv.5-7;
                          Joshua i; iii; xxiv.32; Judges i.12-13;
                          iii.9-11, 15, 31; iv.4,6; vi.11; vii.7,2,5;
                          viii.10; x.1-3; xi.1,6; xii.8,11-14; xiv-xvi;
                          I Samuel vii.6; viii; ix.16; x.1; xvi-xviii
    IV. Lines 7861-9228: II Samuel vii; xi; xii; I Kings iii; v; vi;
                          II Kings xii.42-43   1

The most important stories represented are as follows: Creation; the
fall of Lucifer (partly apocryphal), Paradise; Adam's sin; Cain's
curse; Adam's death and the corruption of the world by man's sin;
building of the ark and the flood; the tower of Babel (Babylon in the
poem); Abraham and Lot; Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Ishmael; Sarah's
death; Isaac's marriage; Jacob and Esau; Jacob's wooing; Joseph's
wooing; Joseph in Egypt; Moses and Pharoah; the plagues; the exodus;
the golden calf; giving of the Law; entrance into Canaan under Joshua;
the rule of the judges, especially Samson; Samuel; Saul; David and
Goliath; Saul's jealousy of David; David's reign; Solomon's choice;
building the temple (a great many legendary additions here); Solomon's
death and a summary of his successors. Even where the main outline
of the Biblical narrative is followed, the legendary additions are
too numerous to mention. The Historia Scholastica seems to have
furnished such legends as Adam's mourning for Abel for a hundred
years, 2 the arrangement of the various rooms of the ark, 3 the

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1. Cf. Cursor Mundi, Part VII, p. 59
2. Cf. ibid., p. 4
3. Cf. ibid., p. 5

phenomenon which occurred when Moses compelled the children of Israel
to drink the golden calf, when the beards of those who had sinned
were immediately gilded.[1]   The legend of the Holy Rood Tree plays a
prominent part throughout the Old Testament narrative. When Adam
died he was buried by Seth, who placed three seed ("pippins" in the
narrative) under his tongue, from which sprang three branches on a
single stock, symbolic of the Trinity, a tree which remained an ell
high till the days of Noah, Abraham, and Moses.[2]   Moses discovered
this tree with the aid of a dream and by means of the three branches
he made the bitter waters of Marah sweet.[3]   Solomon placed it in the
temple, where it remained until it was used by the Romans to crucify
the Lord.[4]   Another legend reflects the medieval ignorance of the
geography of the Bible: Jacob's discovery up in Canaan that there was
corn in Egypt by noticing the chaff floating down the river Nile as
it flowed by his house.[5]   Many other curious legends might be men-
tioned, but these are sufficient to indicate the curious mixture of
Scripture and legend in this compendium of sacred history.

7. Evaluation

It is evident that the Cursor Mundi is of little value as
a straightforward paraphrase of the Vulgate, as it departs further
from the Biblical text than the earlier Genesis and Exodus or than
other fourteenth century versions. Its chief interest is in the
apocryphal and legendary material woven into the story. It is

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1. Cf. Cursor Mundi, Part VII, p. 8
2. Cf. lines 1413-1432
3. Cf. lines 6320-6367
4. Cf. lines 8763-8848
5. Cf. lines 4778-4792

evident, moreover, that the medieval writer made no distinction be-
tween the Biblical and legendary material. The medieval reader, with
no first-hand knowledge of Scripture, would accept it all with equal
faith. Was it not backed by tradition and the authority of the Church?
It is no wonder that the "overloading and distortion of Biblical nar-
rative by apocryphal tales" continued until Wyclif's time when there
seems to have been a reaction.[1] Yet, it must be remembered, too,
that such poems as the Cursor Mundi furnish evidence that the familiar
Old Testament stories were commonly known even in those earlier days.

D. Iacob and Ioseph[2]

An Evidence of the Work of Friars

From around the middle of the thirteenth century comes what
has frequently been called the first ballad, a poem of 538 lines in
couplets recounting the story of Joseph's dream, his selling into
captivity, his stewardship and temptation, imprisonment, elevation
to authority, the visit of his brethren and their reconciliation.
The ballad-like character of the poem is evident in the following
description of Joseph's arrival in Egypt:

> Hi ladden Iosep into þe burჳ, þat riche was ⁊ strong:
> Castles heie ⁊ proute, stretes wide ⁊ long,
> Mani feir halle ⁊ mani feir bour,
> Whit so eni lilie, briჳt so eni flour.
> Muche was þe blisse þat was in þe burჳ,
> Iosep for to sullen hi ladden þurჳ ⁊ þurჳ.
> þider comen kniჳtes ⁊ burgeisful bolde,
> Hi comen into þe strete Iosep to biholde.

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1. Cf. Schofield: English Literature from the Norman Conquest to
   Chaucer, p. 378
2. Edited A. S. Napier, Clarendon Press, 1916

Leuedis of boure ⁊ maidenes fre
Comen into þe strete Iosep to ise.
Ac þer þuȝte muche wonder mani a moder sone,
Hem þu te hit was an angel from heuene icome. 1

The account departs from the Scriptural version in three
particular details: Joseph is tempted by Pharoah's wife rather than
by Potiphar's; Joseph's cup is put in the sack on the first visit in-
stead of the second; when the brothers brought Jacob word that Joseph
was alive the old man threw away his crutch and was able to fly like
an eagle. The last two points agree with the Cursor Mundi. In other
respects it follows rather closely the Biblical text; at least there
seems no attempt to introduce apocryphal and legendary material. It
is a complete unit in itself and has been characterized as vigorous,
full of action and direct speech.[2] The story seems to be told because
of its inherent interest with no direct or obvious theological intent,
and yet there is implied an instructive purpose, especially at the
beginning where the contemporary abuses of the tavern are reproved in
connection with the description of the world before the flood. The
last couplet, which expresses the prayer that "no evil may come to
this house," suggests that it might have been sung at lodging houses
or private homes by some traveling minstrel. Since the instructive
purpose and the material indicate clerical authorship, perhaps its
author was a friar. Certainly the mendicants were the clerics most
likely to be going from house to house in the thirteenth century with
the purpose of instructing the laity. A similar New Testament poem
on the Passion contains a definite statement at the end that the au-
thor is in an order. Dr. Napier points out the likeness between the

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1. Lines 145-156
2. Cf. Wells: Manual, p. 398

two poems in meter, purpose, length, and tone, suggesting that they must have come from the same clerical group.[1]   Both are from the South, where the friars were especially active during the thirteenth century. Only one manuscript of the Iacob and Ioseph survives, in the Bodleian Library, so that the poem would not appear to have had a wide circulation. However, if it was recited, it may have been more generally known than the manuscript evidence suggests.

E. An Unprinted Strophic Version of Old Testament Portions

A paraphrase of Old Testament history, including the Apocryphal Tobias, Judith, and parts of the Maccabees is not so well known as the Genesis and Exodus or the Old Testament section of the Cursor Mundi. In fact, it has never been printed completely; only extracts have appeared in rather inaccessible journals.[2] This particular version is characterized by its strophic arrangement in twelve-line stanzas. Wells considers the verse well handled.[3] Of the two extant manuscripts one excludes Genesis and Leviticus. The date is not definitely settled, but the original appears to have derived from the North in the last half of the fourteenth century.[4] No examination has been made for the present study, but it seems important to mention as a further evidence that a form of the Old Testament story different from the Cursor circulated in the North.

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1. For a discussion of this poem on the Passion see post, p.154 ; cf.
   Brown: Lecture, October 10, 1938, also preface to Napier's edition
   of the Iacob and Ioseph
2. Heuser: Anglia, xxxi. 4-24
3. Cf. Wells: Manual, p. 398
4. Cf. ibid.

F. Old Testament Histories in the

Legendary Collections

1. The General Character of the Two Great Legendaries

An account of the two great English collections of saints'
lives and related material, the South English Legendary and the
Northern Homily Collection, belongs largely to the discussion of New
Testament material,[1] but some mention should be made here of the
sections on Old Testament history which appear in many of the manu-
scripts of both collections. The two cycles are alike in that they
both contain saints' legends and homilies intermixed with Scriptural
material. Both developed over a period of years, and the various
manuscripts in their inclusion and omission of material show the
stages in growth. Both collections appear in part or as a whole in
a great variety of manuscripts from the thirteenth to the sixteenth
centuries, evidence that they were very popular and circulated widely.
The Northern Homily Collection was completed in the fourteenth cen-
tury, whereas the South English Legendary was doubtless complete
before 1300.[2]

2. The Place of the Old Testament Paraphrases in These Collections

Both collections fall into two parts: the Temporale, or
Biblical material with the homilies belonging to the Sundays and
festivals of Christ; and the Sanctorale, or saints' calendar, used
as homilies for the saints' festivals. In the Temporale of each
collection in some, though not all, of the manuscripts are certain

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1. Post, p.147
2. Cf. Wells: Manual, pp. 288, 292

verse versions of Old Testament history. For example, in eight different manuscripts of the South English Legendary[1] the story from Creation through the prophets appears, usually covering about twenty to twenty-five folios of the manuscript.[2] In nine manuscripts of the Northern Homily Collection is the account of the creation of man.[3] Most of this material has not been printed, and its inaccessibility makes it practically impossible to study. There are many problems regarding the relation of the Temporale to the Sanctorale. The Temporale seems to have originated in the Lectio, or reading of an Epistle, Prophecy, or Gospel, first in the Mass and later in the other services. It gradually came to include passages other than the Gospels for the Mass, that is, selections from the commentaries or homilies by the Fathers, stories from the lives of the saints. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the saints' legends, which had rapidly increased in vogue, displaced the Scriptural homilies for the saints' festivals, and, even in the homilies proper for Sundays and the festivals of Christ, legends came to be used instead of Scriptural narratives for illustration. By the end of the fourteenth century, because of the vogue of the legend, the homily was composed chiefly of stories or tales from other than Scriptural sources.[4] This whole development is involved in a study of the part of the Scriptural stories in the South English Legendary and the Northern Homily Collection. The problem is too complicated to be

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1. See Brown: Register of Middle English Verse, Vol. II, no. 2543
2. Cf. ibid., Vol. I, MSS Trin. Coll. Cbg. 605; Stowe 949; Bodl. 3938; Lambeth 223; Egerton 1993 (Brit. Mus.)
3. Cf. ibid., Vol. II, no. 315
4. Cf. Wells: Manual, p. 285, on the development of homilies and legends

settled without a much more detailed study of the material than is now possible. At any rate, it is evident that the Old Testament material in these two great collections is of less importance than the material which developed into the Passions or the Lives of Christ.

3. Evidences of Mendicant Authorship

The use of the material in these two collections seems not especially clear. That its purpose was instruction was obvious. But whether it was meant actually to be read in the church service is doubtful. Gerould[1] does not believe that the pieces in the Northern Homily Collection were intended for such reading, at least in its earliest form.[2] The writer of the Southern Legendary is obviously writing for the laymen, to instruct them in their Christian duties. Dr. Brown points out evidence in favor of authorship by a friar or group of friars. It is unlikely that the author was a parish priest, since priests are referred to as "these clerks." Allusions to monks are respectful but objective. The favorable attitude toward women, moreover, is contrary to the misogyny of the monks. In the Southern Passion, a part of the Legendary, is a rather remarkable passage arguing for a single standard of morality.[3] The interest in the religious education of the laity, the social purpose, the humanitarian and didactic interest, the knowledge of everyday life -- the inside of alehouses, frozen English lanes, folklore -- the scientific and cosmological allusions -- all these suggest to Dr. Brown the

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1. Editor of the Northern Homily Collection, Lancaster, Pa., 1902
2. Cf. Wells: Manual, p. 288
3. Cf. lines 1924-64 in the Southern Passion, Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 169

strong probability that the authorship of the South English Legendary,
[1]
at least, belonged to the friars.

4. Conclusion

Although the Old Testament histories form a very small part
of these collections, it is important to note that Old Testament
paraphrases at least appear in some manuscripts of works so widely
known and used as these two great storehouses of religious lore.

G. Summary and Conclusions

In the preceding discussion four thirteenth and fourteenth
century portions of Old Testament history have been examined, and
some account has been given of four others. All of these are in verse,
indicating more of a tendency to paraphrase than to translate the
Old Testament. In fact no translation of any large portions of the
Old Testament narratives comes from these two centuries before the
work of Wyclif. The literary form suggests, also, an attempt on the
part of the author to make the stories interesting and attractive.
As far as locality is concerned, of these eight pieces two derive from
the West Midland section, one from the Southeast Midland, three from
the North, and two from the South. Hence it would seem that such
paraphrases of the Old Testament story were widespread throughout
England and not confined to any one section. Nothing very conclusive
may be said regarding the popularity of these pieces, though it is
interesting that those which adhere most strictly to the Biblical
narrative -- Genesis and Exodus and the West Midland alliterative
poems -- survive in only one manuscript, whereas those which have the

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1. Cf. Brown: Lecture, October 31, 1936

largest admixture of legendary material -- Cursor Mundi and the
Homily and Legendary Collections -- survive in a large number of
manuscripts. With the exception of the Genesis and Exodus and the
Iacob and Ioseph all these pieces appear to belong to the fourteenth
century, though the earlier material in the South English Legendary
is doubtless late thirteenth century. It is only to be expected that
such work would be more active in the later century. In every case
the authorship is unknown, but it appears to be exclusively clerical,
and in two instances there is particular evidence of the work of
friars. There is no particular evidence of monkish authorship, but
in at least one case the author is a priest. Nevertheless, there is
no indication that the motivation was anything but personal. Nor is
there any suggestion that the author is doing anything which would
bring upon him the condemnation of his superiors. That what he is
doing is right and proper is everywhere taken for granted. The pur-
pose throughout is moral, either to enforce moral lessons or to instruct
in religious teaching. It is most often for those who can read English
but not Latin or French. The source is generally the Latin Vulgate,
with which all the poets seem to be familiar, though because of the
free handling of material it is difficult to make definite conclusions,
other sources being frequently evident. There is an apparent use of
current Latin treatises based on the Vulgate, as in the Cursor Mundi
and the Genesis and Exodus, where without doubt the authors had
before them Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica. There is evidence
in the Cursor and the legendary collections of a tendency to overlay
the Biblical narrative with legendary lore, but no inferences can be
drawn as to the progress of such a tendency, for the West Midland

alliterative poems, which stick closest to the Biblical narrative
are at least no earlier than the Cursor and the Northern Homily
Collection and very little later than the South English Legendary.
Altogether on the basis of the evidence presented in this chapter
it may be concluded that in general outlines the whole of the Old
Testament historical portions to the Captivity was given in English
during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in free paraphrases
with the purpose of teaching or instruction in the vernacular.

CHAPTER III

TRANSLATIONS OF THE PSALTER

AND

OTHER LITURGICAL AIDS

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TRANSLATIONS OF THE PSALTER AND OTHER LITURGICAL AIDS

Introduction

It is not surprising that the earliest translations of any parts of the Bible should have been of those parts most closely related to the service and offices of the Church. The Mass has been spoken of as a great dramatic spectacle in which the clergy were the actors and the worshiping congregation merely spectators. Moreover, it was a drama in a foreign tongue, for the whole service from beginning to end was in Latin, as was every service of the church. Even the sermons seem to have been more often than not in Latin. Therefore it was very natural that quite early some attempts should be made to make intelligible to the large group of common folk who knew no Latin at least some parts of the service. The Pater Noster and the Decalogue along with the Creed, must have been known in the vernacular from the earliest times. Various types of service books appeared in the vernacular by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, their obvious intention being to furnish the laity with aids in worship and devotion: the Prymer, the Lay-Folks' Catechism, the Lay-Folks' Mass Book. But most significant of all, perhaps, is the fact that the first complete book of the Bible to be translated into the vernacular was the Psalter. Not only that, but there seems to have been a good deal of activity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the translation of the Psalter, for several complete versions and numerous translations of individual psalms or groups of psalms have survived. The reason for this early interest in the Psalter lies, no doubt, partly in its close

relation to the service of the church, but perhaps to a greater extent to its devotional character. In the introduction to his edition of the so-called Earliest Complete English Prose Psalter, Karl Bül-bring comments:[1]

> "Of all the books of the Bible none has been Englished so often as the Psalter . . . The reasons for the Psalms getting this preference over the other parts of Scripture are, no doubt, to be found in their poetical language -- which recommended them to the contemplative mind of the monks, -- in their fitness for prayers and singing, and in the fact that they could be detached from the rest of the Bible without any inconvenience." [2]

This interest in translating the Psalter and other aids to worship did not begin in the Middle English period. An Anglo-Saxon version of the Psalter is attributed to Aldhelm, who died in 709. Bede certainly translated the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer, whatever other translation of Scripture he may have done. Alfred set the Decalogue at the head of his laws. Several glosses on the Psalter go back as far as the ninth century. The earliest translations seem to have been in the form of a verbal gloss, that is, an interlinear literal rendering of the Latin text. One of the Middle English Psalters seems to be a metrical version of one of these Anglo-Saxon Psalters; at least it follows both the Latin text and the Anglo-Saxon translation very closely. These Anglo-Saxon versions must have remained at least partially in use after the Norman Conquest, for extant copies were transcribed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Before 1200 the Anglo-Normans had also translated into their own dialect in prose the complete Psalter and the Canticles for use in

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1. Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 97
2. Ibid., Preface, p. v

the service -- the Magnificat, the Nunc Dimittis, and others. Thus the Psalter ante-dated any other Anglo-Norman translations, since their verse history of the Old Testament and prose version of the entire Bible are from the fourteenth century. It would seem that this satisfying of the demand of those who could read Norman-French by giving a knowledge of the Scripture to the higher classes delayed attempts to put the Bible in the hands of the masses.[1]

This background of earlier translation must be kept in mind in the following examination of thirteenth and fourteenth century versions of the Psalter, the Pater Noster, and the Decalogue. Such versions were not complete innovations, though their language differed from the Anglo-Saxon of pre-Conquest times and the Norman-French of the upper classes after the Conquest.

A. The Earliest Complete English Prose Psalter

A version of the Psalter in the West Midland dialect has been called by its editor[2] as well as by Forshall and Madden[3] the earliest version in English prose of any entire book of Scripture. Richard Rolle's Commentary on the Psalter, dating from about the same time, might very well lay claim also to the title "earliest," since it also contains a literal English prose rendering of the whole Psalter, following the Latin and preceding verse by verse the commentary. However, Bülbring defends the title to his edition by indicating that the commentary, not the translation, forms the

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1. Cf. Forshall and Madden: Preface to the Wycliffite Versions of the Holy Bible, pp. i-iii; Lupton, J. H.: Article on English Versions in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, extra vol., p. 237
2. Bülbring: op. cit., p. v
3. Ibid., p. iv

most important part of Rolle's work. Moreover, the oldest manuscript
of the latter is not so early as the manuscript from which the West
Midland Psalter is derived.[1]

1. The Manuscripts

The Psalter has been preserved in two manuscripts, both of
which have been ascribed to the fourteenth century.[2] It is interest-
ing to notice the company in which the Psalter is found in each manu-
script, its associations being somewhat suggestive of the purpose or
at least the use made of the translation. In the earlier Additional
MS 17,376 of the British Museum, the remainder of the "small thick
octavo volume"[3] contains William of Shoreham's religious poems. Both
pieces are written in the same hand, but there are corrections in a
different hand.[4] The second manuscript, which belongs to Trinity
College, Dublin, contains in the first fifty-five leaves the Psalter
and following that Wyclif's commentary on the Apocalypse, a Tale of
Charite, an exposition of the Decalogue, a short Description of
Jerusalem, and the Pricke of Conscience, a didactic poem often er-
roneously attributed to Richard Rolle. All but the last named were
written by the same scribe.[5] Evidently both collectors -- whether
the scribes were the original collectors or whether they were simply
copyists is not clear -- intended to bring together religious pieces.
The fact that the Psalter in the British Museum manuscript is with
a collection of religious songs suggests a devotional use of the

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1. Bülbring: op. cit.,p. v
2. Ibid., p. vii
3. Ibid., p. vi
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. vii-viii

translation. In the Dublin manuscript the use would seem more didactic, judging by the other titles in the collection.

The editor, who has examined both manuscripts, reports a striking contrast in their condition. He finds the British Museum piece in a "bad state," both as to the poems of Shoreham, which have a mixture of Kentish and numerous other dialects,[1] and as to the Psalter, which is almost pure West Midland.[2] There appear to be numerous corruptions, so that the reading of many passages is only nonsensical.[3] On the other hand, the Dublin MS seems to be "very carefully and distinctly written, and there are only very few mistakes in it."[4] Nevertheless, the British Museum MS has been taken as a basis for the text in the printed edition, with corrections from the other manuscript.

2. The Translator

The Psalter has been attributed to both William of Shoreham and John Hyde, in the first case because it is associated with Shoreham's poems in one manuscript,[5] and in the second because of a note at the end of the other manuscript giving Hyde's name.[6] Even if one of these could be proved as the author, little would be accomplished, because nothing of any importance is known regarding either. But the editor of the Psalter rejects both names, Shoreham's

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1. Cf. Bülbring: op. cit., p. vii
2. Cf. ibid., p. ix
3. Cf. ibid., p. vii
4. Ibid., p. 10
5. Cf. ibid., p. viii; Forshall and Madden: Preface, p. iv; Wells: Manual, p. 403
6. Cf. Bülbring: op. cit., p. xiii

because of dialectic differences between the _Psalter_ and the poems
[1]
copied with it, and Hyde's because the note at the end of the Dublin
[2]
manuscript indicates an owner rather than an author or translator.
Who the author really was we cannot know, nor what was his purpose
beyond a desire to set the Psalms into his own native tongue.

3. The Scope of the Translation

The translation is, of course, made from the Vulgate --
from a glossed version. That is, both manuscripts have Latin
glosses following and explaining the Latin text; then follows the
[3]
English rendering verse by verse. The _Psalter_ is complete.
Because of differences in the division of some of the Psalms, ac-
cording to Bülbring, the number of the Psalms as they stand in the
[4]
manuscripts exceeds 150. Psalms 136 and 137 are transposed in
both the manuscripts and the printed edition. In addition to the
complete Psalter there are eleven Canticles and the Athanasian
Creed. The Canticles consist of other prayers and songs used in the
church service, all Biblical with the exception of the Te Deum.
[5]
They are as follows in the order in which they appear.

Psalmus Isaye	Isaiah xii.1-6
Psalmus Ezechie	Isaiah xxxviii.10-20
Psalmus Anne (Hannah)	I Samuel ii. 1-10
Psalmus Moyses et Filiorum Israel	Exodus xv. 1-19

. . . .

1. Cf. Bülbring: op. cit., p. viii
2. Cf. ibid., p. x
3. Cf. ibid., pp. x-xi. The Latin text and glosses are omitted in
   the Early English Text Society edition. Only the English is
   printed.
4. However, in his edition the numbering in the ordinary edition
   of the Vulgate is followed for the convenience of the reader.
5. Earliest Complete English Prose Psalter, pp. 179 ff

Psalmus Abakuk	Habakkuk iii.2-19
Psalmus Moyse	Deuteronomy xxxii.1-43
Psalmus Ananie, Azarie, et Misael	Daniel iii.57-88
Psalmus Zacharie	Luke i.68-79
Te Deum	
Psalmus Marie	Luke i.47-55
Psalmus Simeonis	Luke ii.29-32

4. The Character of the Translation

The translation seems on the whole quite faithful and literal, as the following passage, the 8th Psalm, will indicate:

1. Ha þou, Lord, our Lord, ful wonderful hys þy name in al þerþe.
2. For þy mychelness ys heʒed up þe heuens.
3. Þou madest heryynge of þe mouþe of childer and of þe sukand, for þyne enemys; þat þou destruye þe enemy and þe wrecher of Adam sinne.
4. For ich schal sene þyn heuens, þe werkes of þyn fyngers, þe mone and þe sterres, þat þou settest.
5. What þynge ys man, þat þou ert þenchand on hym? Oþer mannes sone, þat-ou visites hym?
6. Þou madest hym a lyttel lasse þan þyne aungels; þou corouned hym wyþ glorie and honur, and stablist hym vp þe werkes of þyn hondes.
7. Þou laidest alle þynges vnder hys fet, alle shepe and nete and also þe bestes of þe felde;
8. þe briddes of heuen, and þe fisshes of þe see, þat gon by þe bystees of þe se.
9. Ha, Lord, our Lord, ful wonderful ys þy name in alle erþe. 1

But there are passages when, aside from the quaintness of the language, the translation seems very odd. The reason does not appear in the printed edition since the gloss and Latin text are omitted, but Bülbring gives an explanation in the preface. It seems that often the translator uses the words of the gloss as a basis for his translation instead of the Latin text itself. [2] The following illustration from the 79th Psalm is cited as significant of the way the scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages used to explain the Bible.

. . . .

1. Earliest Complete English Psalter, p. 8
2. Bülbring: Preface, p. xi

The Latin text and gloss: (the underscored are the glosses.)
De terra Us, Deus, venerunt gentes sine lege in hereditatem tuam.
i. Judee polluerunt templum sanctum tuum: posuerunt Ierusalem in
quarundum gencium vocatarum pomorum custodiam. 1

The English rendering:
Ha God, folk wiþ-outen lawe come fram þe londe of Vs into þyn
heritage, into Iude, and hij filden þyn holy temple, and sett   2
Ierusalem in þe kepeing of a maner of folk þat was cleped Pomos.

Authorized Version:
O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy
temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.

It is evident that the translator has added certain details which

belong in the commentary or gloss. As a result the heathen are made

to come from the land of Uz and called a people without law. The

phrase "in Iude" is a harmless insertion, but the most curious mis-

take is in supposing that the enemy was "of a maner of folk that

was cleped (called) Pomos." The idea apparently arose from a mis-

understanding of the gloss. The following verses with the gloss

from the 137th Psalm illustrate the habit of allegorizing in such

glosses and the translator's trick of carrying over the idea of the

gloss into the translation:

Latin text and gloss:
1. Super flumina i. insultus Babilonis i. diaboli, illic sedimus
   et glevimus: cum recordaremur Sion i. celi.
2. In salicibus i. transitorijs in medio eius suspendimus organa
   i. gaudia mostra.
3. Quia illic interrogaverunt nos, qui i. diaboli captivas
   duxerunt nos, verba cantionum. 3

Notice how the gloss accounts for the curious references to heaven,

the devil, and transitory joys in the English rendering:

. . . .

1. Bulbring: Preface, p. xiii
2. Psalter, p. 98
3. Bulbring: op. cit., p. xii

1. þer-whiles þat we bi-þou3t vs of þe heuen, we satt & wept
   þer vp þe assautes of þe fende.
2. We heng our ioies in passand þinges in-middes of him.
3. Why hij devels, þat ladden vs chaitifs, asked vs þer wordes
   of songes. 1

5. Evaluation

The chief interest attached to the Earliest Complete Prose
Psalter is the fact that it is the earliest complete version of a
book of the Bible in Middle English. It does not appear to have cir-
culated very widely, and yet one cannot draw any definite conclusions
from the fact that only two manuscripts survive. In those two manu-
scripts, as has been pointed out, it has quite different associations.
As translation it has been marred by the confusion between the Latin
text and gloss and by its stiff literal renderings. Nevertheless, it
is a monument to the desire of an unknown lover of the Psalms to have
them read in his native tongue.

B. The Surtees Psalter

In contrast to the prose psalter known as the "earliest"
but belonging to the same century, the fourteenth, is a metrical
psalter in couplets, generally known as the Surtees Psalter because
it was edited in 1843 for the Surtees Society [2] along with an Anglo-
Saxon interlinear glossed version of the Latin Psalter to which it
seems to bear some relationship. [3]

. . . .

1. Earliest Complete English Prose Psalter, pp. 166-167
2. A society for the study of the antiquities of Northumbria
3. Anglo-Saxon and Early English Psalter, now first printed from
   manuscripts in the British Museum, Joseph Stevenson, ed., 2 vols.,
   London, 1843

1. Manuscripts, Date, and Dialect

The Surtees Society edition is mainly from a Cottonian manuscript,[1] which the editor asserts to be the purest and most correct of those which he examined and which he assigns to about the middle of the reign of Edward II.[2] He has also examined two other manuscripts in the British Museum,[3] one only a little if at all later than the basal text and the other somewhat later; and he has added in the footnotes variant readings and corrections from these two other manuscripts. In addition to the three which Stevenson used in his edition, Wells[4] and Dr. Brown[5] both list three other manuscripts in which this Psalter may be found. These may easily have been discovered since Stevenson's edition of nearly a hundred years ago.

There seems to be little doubt that this version belongs to the fourteenth century, probably the first half.[6] Stevenson and Wells agree that the piece is likely of Northumbrian origin,[7] although Wells suggests that there are some Midland traits in the three earliest manuscripts, the three upon which Stevenson based his edition. It would not be surprising if such a work were copied in an adjoining county, during the process of which some dialectic variations might easily creep in. The evidence of manuscripts and dialect points to a general popularity for the version, especially in its general region.

. . . .

1. MS Vespasian D VII, Cottonian Collection, British Museum
2. 1307-1327
3. MSS Egerton 614 and Harley 1770
4. Wells: Manual, p. 401
5. Brown: Register, Vol. II, no. 1982
6. Wells: loc. cit.
7. Cf. ibid.; Stevenson: Preface, p. i

2. The Related Anglo-Saxon and Latin Texts

The Latin text with the interlinear Anglo-Saxon gloss, which Stevenson printed on the opposite pages to the Middle English metrical Psalter, did not come from the same manuscript as the Middle English version.[1] The Latin text, according to Stevenson, varies considerably from the received text of the Vulgate and as originally written departed more frequently.[2] The latter conclusion is drawn from the apparent attempt made to produce an approximation of the received text at a later period by erasures and alterations.[3] The manuscript appears to be from about the eighth century, though the interlinear gloss is somewhat later.[4] Such glosses were popular especially in the ninth and tenth centuries, the period of the Rushworth and Lindisfarne Gospels;[5] probably this gloss belongs to the ninth century, though it is impossible to place it exactly. Just what is the relation between the Anglo-Saxon gloss and the Middle English metrical version is not clear. If both are Northumbrian, as they appear to be, perhaps the likeness between them is evidence that the earlier Anglo-Saxon versions persisted after the Conquest and that there was no real break in the use of the Psalter, no time when it was not known in either the Anglo-Saxon or the Middle English version, at least in Northumbria. Of course the Middle English version may have been made from a manuscript of the

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1. MS Vespasian A 1, Cottonian Collection, British Museum
2. Cf. Moulton's statement that the Latin text in Stevenson's edition represents Jerome's Roman Psalter instead of the received text of the Vulgate. See History of the English Bible, p. 8
3. Cf. Stevenson: op. cit., p. i
4. Cf. ibid.
5. Cf. Moulton: op. cit., p. 10; Forshall and Madden: op. cit., p. ii

Roman Psalter without the Anglo-Saxon Gloss. The following excerpt
is inserted to illustrate the difference between the Anglo-Saxon and
Middle English versions in form and language, as well as the close
relationship among all three in content and diction. The passage is
the 8th Psalm, chosen in order that the metrical translation in the
Surtees Psalter may be compared with the prose rendering of the
Earliest Complete Prose Psalter.[1]

Anglo-Saxon and Latin text:

dryht'	dryht'	ur	hu	wunder-lic	is	noma	þin
Domine	Dominus	noster	quam	ammirabile	est	nomen	tuum

in	alra	eorþan!
in	universa	terra!

for-þan	up-ahefen	is	micelnis	þin	ofer	heofenas
Quoniam	elevata	est	magnificentia	tua	super	caelos

of	muþe	cilda	7	milc-deondra	þu	ge-fremedes	lof
ex	ore	infantium	et	lactantium		perfecisti	laudem

fore	feondum	þinum	þaet	þu	to-weorþe	feond	7
Propter	inimicos	tuos	ut	destruas		inimicum	et

ge-schildend.
defensorem.

for-þon	ic	ge-sie	heofene	werc	fingra	þinra	monam
Quoniam	videbo		caelos	opera	digitorum	tuorum	lunam

7	steorran	þa	þu	ge-steaþulades,
et	stellas	quas	tu	fundasti,

hwet	is	mon	þaet	ge-mydig	þu	sie	his	oþþe	sunu
Quid	est	homo	quod	memor		es	ejus	aut	filius

monnes	for-þon	þu	neosas	hine?
hominis	quoniam		visitas	eum?

þu ge-wonedes	hine	hweone	laessan	from	englum	mid wuldre
Minuisti	eum	paulo	minus	ab	angelis	gloria

7	mid are	þu	ge-begades	hine	7	ge-settes	hine	ofer
et	honore		coronasti	eum	et	constituisti	eum	super

werc	hona	þinra,
opera	manum	tuarum,

. . . .

1. Cf. ante, p. 88

all	þu under-deodes	under	fotum	his	scep	7	oxan
Omnia	subjecisti	sub	pedibus	ejus	oves	et	boves

all	ec	on	7	netora	feldes,
universa	in	super	et	pecora	campi,

fuglas	heofenes	7	fisces	saes	þa	geond-ga
Volucres	caeli	et	pisces	mafis	qui	perambulant

stige	saes.
semitas	maris.

dryht'	dryht'	ur	hu	wonder-lic	is	noma	þin
Domine	Dominus	noster	quam	ammirabile	est	nomen	tuum

in	alra	eorþan.
in	universa	terra.

Middle English Metrical Version:

Laverd, our Laverd, how selkouth is
Name þine in alle land þis.

For upe-hovene es þi mykel-hede
Over hevens þat ere brade;

Of mouth of childer and soukand
Made þou lof in ilka land,
For þi faes; þat þou for-do
þe fai, þe wreker him unto.

For I sal se þine hevenes hegh,
And werkes of þine fingres slegh;
þe mone and sternes mani ma,
þat þou grounded to be swa.

What is man, þat þou mines of him?
Or sone of man, for þou sekes him?

þou liteled him a litel wight
Lesse fra þine aungeles bright;
With blisse and mensk þou crouned him yet,
And over werkes of þi hend him set.

þou under-laide alle þinges
Vnder his feet þat ought forth-bringes;
Neete and schepe bathe for to welde,
In-over and beestes of þe felde.

Fogheles of heven and fissches of se,
þat forth-gon stihes of þe se.

Laverd, our Laverd, how selkouth is
Name þine in alle land þis.

The order of words and phrases throughout suggest that the versifier must had had the Anglo-Saxon version before him as well as the Latin. Notice, for instance, that he chooses "fogheles" corresponding with the Anglo-Saxon "fuglas" in the next to the last verse, whereas the prose version[1] uses " e briddes of heuen" in the same verse. The fifth verse is also much closer to the Anglo-Saxon and Latin text than is the prose version:

> What is man þat þou mines of him?
> Or sone of man, for þou sekes him?

> Latin: Quid est homo quod memor es ejus aut filius hominis
> quoniam visitas eum?

> Anglo-Saxon: hwet is mon þaet ge-mydig þu sie his oþþe sunu
> monnes for-þon þu neosas hine?

> Prose Version:[2] What þynge ys man, þat þou ert þenchand on hym?
> Oþer mannes sone, þat-ou visites hym?

These two illustrations are sufficient to show the close relationship between the Middle English metrical Psalter and the Anglo-Saxon interlinear gloss.

3. The Middle English Metrical Translation

The preceding illustration shows something of the general character of the translation in this Middle English version of the Psalter. The fact that it is in verse necessitates sometimes an awkwardness of expression which a prose rendering would not have, an inverted word order, perhaps, due to the exigencies of the rime, or an increased number of unaccented syllables in order to find a place for every phrase in the text. However, it is necessary to remember in criticizing the crudity of the verse that the poet's ear in the

. . . .

1. Cf. ante, p. 88
2. Cf. ibid.

Early and Middle English periods was not so offended by extra unac-
cented syllables as is our modern ear. If there were the proper num-
ber of strongly stressed syllables to a line, four in this case, it
did not much matter how many were unaccented. These four lines from
the first verse of Psalm 51[1] would probably not have seemed so rough
to the one who copied it in the manuscript as it does today. Notice
that it is quite a literal translation.

> God, þou have mercy of me,
> After mikel mercy of þe
> And after of þi reuthes þe mickelnes
> þou do awai mi wickenes.

In spite of the metrical form it would appear that the Surtees
Psalter represents a more accurate version than the Earliest English
Prose Psalter, because of the confusion in the latter between the
text and the explanatory gloss.[2] Compare, for example, the following
translation of Psalm 137:1-3 with the version quoted on page 90:

> Stremes of Babilon, þar sat we on,
> And wepe while we mined of Syon.
>
> In selihes in mid of it,
> Our organes hong we yhit.
>
> For þider asked us þat wrecches swa
> Led us, wordes of sanges ma;
> And þat out-led us, Ympne sing yhe
> Til us of sanges of Syon be.

The metrical version seems closer to the literal meaning of Scrip-
ture than the spiritualized prose rendering.

4. Possible Use of the Surtees Psalter

It is interesting to compare the later metrical version of

. . . .

1. Numbered 50 in the Psalter
2. Cf. ante, p. 90

the Scotch Psalter with this early attempt to put the Psalter in English verse. The same awkwardness is evident in certain places where the poet must fit his words into the metrical form. Perhaps the later metrist laboured under more difficulty, since he must limit the number of syllables in the line. Certainly the earlier version would be impossible for singing, nor was there any need to provide a version to be sung. The Latin psalter was continually sung in services and more than likely in private devotion. It would be interesting to know whether an English psalter was ever sung, but there seems to be no evidence at hand. Although no indication is given of the purpose of the Surtees Psalter, the reason for its being put in verse, it would seem fair to infer that it was an attempt to put the Roman Psalter in a form that would be easy and pleasant for devotional reading. Such a version would be only for private use. It would be entirely out of place in any public worship because it was in English and because it was in metrical form. It might easily have been used in some monastery by monks who knew little Latin, or it might have been the property of some pious nobleman or rich burgher who could afford to have a few manuscripts and who could read them with pleasure. That there were at least six such copies in circulation is evident, and how many more have been destroyed or have worn out it is impossible to say.

C. Richard Rolle's Psalter and Commentary

It is interesting to turn from the work of unknown lovers of the Bible to the contribution of a man so influential in his own time and later as was Richard Rolle or Richard Hermit, as he was called in the Middle Ages. He was without doubt the greatest

medieval mystic which England produced in an age when mysticism was
extremely popular. Indeed his is one of the greatest names in medie-
val English literary annals. It is surprising that amid the general
anonymity of Middle English literature there should be one about whose
life and work so much is known and that he should have been so en-
thusiastically interested in his later life in the interpretation of
Scripture and in the literary use of his own native speech rather than
the more customary Latin.

1. The Author: the Great English Mystic

It is not important here to give a full account of his
life and the character of his mysticism,[1] but some details may serve
to indicate the value and importance of his Psalter. He was born
around 1300 in Yorkshire, the son of a small householder, went to
Oxford under the patronage of a Neville, one of the wealthiest and
most famous of English families, left Oxford at eighteen disgusted
with the theological and scholastic controversies which raged there,
fled from home to lead the life of an obscure hermit, first in the
household of a newly rich knight, Dalton, who befriended him and
gave him a "cell," and later in other "cells" until finally he
died, probably a victim of the Black Death in 1349 at Hampole,
where for some time he had been the spiritual adviser of a group
of nuns.[2] He was never really in orders and suffered some eccle-
siastical persecution because of his out-spoken criticism of pre-
lates. It appears that he gave up a rather unsatisfactory mission

. . . .

1. See Allen, Hope Emily: Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle, Her-
   mit of Hampole, and Materials for His Biography, N. Y. and
   London, 1927; also The English Writings of Richard Rolle
2. Cf. Allen: English Writings, pp. xiv-xxxiv; Schofield: op. cit.,
   pp. 105-108

of preaching his doctrines of love and devotion to the Name of Jesus,
of purity and chastity, of the dangers of worldliness and pride, and
set himself to spread his ideas through his writings, first largely
in Latin and then toward the end of his life in English.[1]

His mysticism grew out of his own spiritual experience as
a hermit in the home of Dalton, the knight who first befriended him.
It consisted of three stages characterized respectively by experiences
of heat, sweetness, and song, which he said were indescribable but
which he interpreted through sensory experience.[2] The type of mys-
tical experience which Rolle describes is characteristic of the mys-
ticism of his time. The striking thing about his mysticism is his
exclusive preoccupation with Jesus rather than with the Blessed Virgin.
There is nothing of the cult of the Virgin in his writings, except
in the early Canticum Amoris. He seems to have been practising de-
votion to the Mother at a time when he had an experience of being
saved from temptation by invoking the Saviour's name. As a result
he turned in his devotion from the Mother to the Son. Miss Allen
speaks of that devotion to Jesus "which runs like a signature through
all Rolle's writings except the Canticum Amoris."[3] That concentration
of the affections on the Saviour Miss Allen regards as the most dis-
tinctive part of his message and quotes his declaration that his
devotion to the Holy Name had brought him the miracle of his mysti-
cism. Certainly his influence was the most important in the develop-
ment of the cult of the Holy Name in England.[4] The particular direction

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1. Cf. Allen: loc. cit.
2. Cf. ibid., pp. xxiv ff containing quotations from the Incendium
   Amoris translated
3. Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv
4. Cf. ibid., pp. ix-x, also ftn. 1, p. 10

which his mysticism took no doubt bears some relation to his interest in Scripture and especially to his work on the Psalter. Those mystics who concentrated upon the cult of the Virgin were more likely to compose hymns to her modeled upon the Psalter than to be concerned with explaining the Scriptural Psalter itself.

The great influence of his mysticism is evident in the popularity and wide circulation of both his Latin and English works. After a thorough study for the Modern Language Association of America Miss Allen makes the following statement:

> "For any satisfactory study of his writings we must go to the manuscripts, and, in spite of all losses, over four hundred recorded volumes contain his work, of which forty are on the Continent, and four in California. Some Latin pieces were translated early, and the English works appear in all the Middle English dialects. Probably there are still unrecorded manuscripts in English country houses and uncatalogued libraries abroad. No extant copy goes back farther than the fourteenth century, and earlier ones were probably read to destruction. But Rolle had become a classic before his autographs had disappeared, for (though none survive) five or six were preserved during the later Middle Ages." 1

Printed editions of his work began to appear in 1483 at Oxford and have continued until 1931, when Miss Allen's English Writings was published as the ninth. [2] The first biography was the Office of St. Richard Hampole, compiled by the Hampole Priory toward the end of the fourteenth century in the hope of his canonization. It is considered to be authentic in its general outlines and has never been convicted of serious mis-statement. [3]

2. The Purpose of the Psalter

The Psalter was probably the first of Rolle's English

. . . .

1. Allen: op. cit., p. x
2. Cf. ibid., ftn. 2
3. Cf. ibid., p. xii

works.[1]   It seems, according to the verse prologue to a fifteenth

century copy to have been written for a "dame Merget Kyrkby," a nun

of Hampole until she was enclosed as an anchoress at the end of 1348,

according to the episcopal registers.[2]   Since she could evidently not

read Latin it was natural that the translation should be given verse

by verse following the Latin text. Then after each verse Rolle added

explanatory notes based upon the commentary to his Latin Psalter which

he had prepared in his own youth. Miss Allen concludes that ". . .

since it was written in English and almost certainly for a woman, the

English Psalter was written with the purpose of passing to an amateur

of theology, as it were, all that suited her needs in the varied

interpretations stored in the library of theological specialists."[3]

In the Prologue Rolle himself indicates something of the

purpose of his work and his attitude toward the Psalms. A few sen-

tences will illustrate the spiritual value which he attaches to them.

> "Grete habundans of gastly conforth and ioy in God comes in þe
> hertes of þaime þat says or synges devotly þe psalmes in lovynge
> of Jhesu Crist. þai drop swetnes in mans saule and helles (pours
> forth) delites in þaire thoghtes and kyndelis þaire willes with
> þe fire of luf, makand þam hate and brynmand within, and faire
> and lufly in Cristes eghen (eyes). . . Sothely þis shinand boke
> es a chosen sange bifor God, als laumpe lyghtenand oure lyf,
> hele of a seke hert, huny til a bitter saule, dignite of gastly
> persones, tunge of prive vertus. . ."[4]

4. The Use Made of the Psalter

Evidently the English Psalter fulfilled something of the

author's purpose. Certainly it circulated widely, as around twenty

manuscripts of the original version exist in all the Middle English

. . . .

1. Cf. Allen: op. cit., p. 1
2. Cf. ibid., also Forshall and Madden: op. cit., p. v, where the
   verses are quoted
3. English writings, p. 2
4. Ibid., p. 4

dialects.[1] According to Miss Allen it was owned by "officials of religious houses, by private persons who used it, as a family Bible might be used, for their obits."[2] The various copies differ widely, especially in the commentary. The text of the Psalter itself seems to agree in general, though there are changes in single words.[3] There are Lollard interpolations in about fifteen of the manuscripts, indicating a general use of the Psalter among the followers of Wyclif. Indeed Rolle's prologue is attached to four other English Psalters, all probably Wycliffite.[4] Miss Everett also finds other interpolations, but most of them seem not to have been heretical, and some are simply devotional. Miss Allen testifies to the orthodox use of the Psalter up to the Reformation. She has discovered a reference in the Mirror of Our Lady, written for the nuns of Syon Monastery in the middle of the fifteenth century to "Richard Hampole's drawing" of the psalms as an authorized English Version -- at a time when the license of a diocesan bishop was needed for the use of a vernacular Scripture.[5] The verse prologue to the fifteenth century manuscript of the Psalter mentioned previously[6] indicates that the nuns of Hampole kept Rolle's autograph copy on view chained in their priory, in order to offset the Lollard use of his name in their propaganda

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1. Forshall and Madden give 19 (ftn. k, p. iv of Preface) and Wells cites 23 (Manual, p. 401). Cf. Miss Allen's statement, English Writings, p. 3
2. Ibid.
3. Cf. Forshall and Madden: Preface, p. iv
4. Cf. Allen: English Writings, p. 3. Miss Dorothy Everett and Miss A. C. Paues have both made a study of the Lollard interpolations. See especially Paues: The Bible in the Fourteenth Century
5. Cf. Allen: op. cit., pp. 3-4
6. Cf. ante, p. 101

as a precedent for the translation of Scripture. Thus it appears
that Rolle was claimed by the two hostile camps in the later four-
teenth and fifteenth century England.

4. The Relation of Psalter and Commentary

The commentary which Rolle wrote in Latin in his youth and
used extensively in the English Psalter was based largely on the
twelfth century Commentarium in Psalmos of Peter the Lombard, although
Rolle, after the true medieval fashion, does not mention his original
but gives the impression that it is made up of passages from the
Fathers.[1] However, there seems to be much in it which could only
belong to Rolle, so characteristic is it of his mysticism. The com-
mentary follows the English verse which in turn follows the Latin
text. An illustration may be cited to show the arrangement.

> Voce mea ad dominum clamaui et exaudiuit me de monte sancto suo.
> 'With my voyce I cried til oure Lord and he me herd fra his haly
> hille.' Voyce of hert, þat es, grete ʒernynge of Goddes luf,
> sounes bifore Crist. His praier he calles cryinge, for the force
> of fire of luf es in his saule, þat makis his prayer to thrille
> heuen. And so he herd hym fro his haly hille, þat es, of his
> rightwisnes, for it es rightwise byfor God to help hym þat es in
> angys for his luf. [2]

5. The Character of the Translation

Important as is the part played by the commentary, the
translation is of chief concern here. Miss Everett has found a
close relation between Rolle's translation and that of the Surtees
metrical Psalter.[3] Rolle must certainly have been familiar with such
a version which circulated in his own Northumbrian district. Miss
Everett's suggestion is that "a partially modernized form of the

. . . .

1. Cf. Allen: loc. cit.; Forshall and Madden: op. cit., p. v
2. English Writings, p. 8, lines 36 ff
3. Cf. Allen: op. cit., p. 1.

Old English Glosses" was the common source. Rolle's own expression[1]

of a point of view in translating is at the close of his Prologue.

> "In þis werk I seke no strange Inglis, bot lightest and comunest
> and swilke þat es mast like vnto þe Latyn, so þat þai þat knawes
> noght Latyn, be þe Inglis may cum tille many Latyn wordes. In þe
> translacioun I folow þe letter als mekil als I may, and þare I
> fynde na propir Inglys I folow þe witte of þe word, so þat þai þat
> sal rede it, þam thar noght dred errynge."[2]

Miss Allen thinks that the English of the translation, in

spite of excellent bits, sounds like an experiment, although "various

circumstances often give it interest even when it is clumsy: colloquial

phrases and occasional proverbs come to remind us that it was addressed

to an intimate friend, and the close relation of the author with his

subject often gives it fervour: he is here passing on to his friend

not only his mysticism and his Scriptural interpretations, which also

he considers due to Divine inspiration, but, as well, the personal

and devotional sense in which during long years of spiritual endeavor

he has used the eloquent phrases of the psalms in his own spiritual

life."[3]

The following verses illustrate the more felicitous bits of

translation:[4]

56:2 And in the schadow of þi wynges I sal hope, till wicked-
nes passe.

23:1 The erth is the Lordis, and the fulnes of it; the warld
and all that wones tharin.

1:5 Noght swa, wicked, noght swa, bot as the dost, the whilk
wynd fer kastis fra the face of the erth.

118:124 Do with Thi seruant eftire Thi mercy, and lere me Thi
rightwisyngis.
. . . .

1. Allen: op. cit., p. 1
2. English Writings, p. 7, lines 91-97
3. Allen: op. cit., pp. 2-3
4. The numbering is Rolle's, not that of the Authorized Version.

On the contrary, the following verses show his frequent awkwardness
in slavishly following the Latin:

3:2   Many says til my saule, þare es na hele till it in God of him

3:5   I slepe and I am soken (asleep), and I rase, for oure Lord
       vptoke me.

56:3   I sal crye til God heghest, til God þat wele did til me.

D. Translations of Psalms and Canticles in the _Prymer_

In view of the liturgical use of the Psalter from the earliest
times the question arises: Did the medieval layman have any sort of
prayer book either for private devotional use or as an aid to follow-
ing the service? Furthermore, did such a book exist in the vernacular
or in Latin and did it contain any parts of the Psalter? Of course
the use of a book of that kind would be limited to the upper classes,
as the poor man could not afford to own manuscripts and often could
not read them. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however,
the growing middle class with its newly acquired wealth would certain-
ly be able to own and read a few books. The existence of a kind of
prayer book for the laity is well attested. It was generally known
as simply the _Prymer_ and is found in Latin as well as in the various
vernaculars. The Early English Text Society has printed the text of
such a book in Middle English, from a fifteenth century manuscript,
it is true, but with evidence that the origin of the book in English
goes back to the latter part of the fourteenth century.[1] The fact
that this _Prymer_ contains in English, scattered throughout its ser-
vice, fifty-two different psalms with other Scripture portions

. . . .

1. The _Prymer_ or Lay-Folks' Prayer Book, Early English Text Society,
   Original Series, nos. 105 and 109. No. 105 contains the text
   and no. 109 the critical introduction. Cf. no. 109, p. xxxvii.

warrants a discussion of it here.

1. The Development of the Prymer

      The Prymer did not develop in the fourteenth century. It is
not surprising, however, to find it translated into the vernacular in
that century, when England was becoming increasingly conscious of the
importance of developing her native tongue and putting especially
religious works at the disposal of those people who knew no French
or Latin. The development of this popular service book was begun
about five centuries earlier, and it was at first in Latin. Accord-[1]
ing to Edmund Bishop, who traces the development in his essay the
origin was in the monasteries of the tenth century, when devotional
additions were prescribed in reforming the discipline of the house,
for example the recitation of fifteen psalms before matins, of the
penitential psalms and litany after prime, and other additional
prescriptions to the service. Mr. Bishop summarizes the development
thus:

> ". . . the Prymer consisted of those devotional accretions to the
> Divine Office itself, invented first by the piety of individuals
> for the use of monks in their monasteries, which accretions were
> gradually voluntarily adopted in the course of two or three cen-
> turies by the secular clergy so generally, that by the fourteenth
> century they had, by virtue of custom, come to be regarded as
> obligatory, and practically a part of the public daily (or only
> Lenten) office itself." 2

The accretions mentioned are of two types: (1) mere special psalms, the
graduals, the penitentials, and the commendations; (2) the offices --
of the dead and of the Blessed Virgin -- framed on and following the

. . . . . .

1. The Origin of the Prymer, Early English Text Society, Original
   Series, no. 109
2. Ibid., p. xxxvii

hours of the Divine Office.[1] In answer to the questions why these particular accretions were taken as a basis, Bishop gives several reasons. For one thing there is a "popular instinct" which "always seizes on the devotional and if possible the latest devotional accessory," a continual desire on the part of a certain set of lay folk to imitate the clergy. Furthermore, the Breviary was too intricate to be possible for such a use, with its varying texts, its size, and its complicated character. The accretions in the _Prymer_ were, on the other hand, invariable, except the office of the Blessed Virgin. In answer to the question whether a man might take his _Prymer_ to church and hear the same service or set of services in Latin, Bishop states that he would hear those items which were in the _Prymer_ but not the whole service. Moreover, those items would be said with less solemnity than the old office.[2]

2. The Use of the _Prymer_

Littlehales in his "Historical Notes"[3] gives further evidence as to the common use of one prayer book in the Middle Ages, chiefly the fact that "almost all medieval prayer books in MS or in print agree in containing a definite series of devotions with or without certain varying additions."[4] He believes this book to have been known as the _Prymer_, judging by the almost invariable allusions to it by that name or by its Latin equivalent _Primarium_. He has found the book in Latin, in English, and in both, and in the manuscript copies

. . . .

1. Bishop: op. cit., p. xxxvii
2. Cf. ibid., p. xxxviii
3. Early English Text Society, no. 109, pp. xxxix ff
4. Ibid., p. xxxix

has found almost invariably, though often with some additional
material the following:[1]

1. The Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary
2. The Seven Penitential Psalms
3. The Fifteen Gradual Psalms
4. The Litany
5. The Office for the Dead
6. The Commendations

The frequent legacy of a _Prymer_ without any further explanation of
the book points to its general use and common knowledge of it.[2]
Mr. Littlehales suggests that the existence of medieval pews still
retaining book rests is evidence of the use of the _Prymer_ in church.[3]
Furthermore, he mentions the thumb-marks so often found in the lower
corners of the leaves as vivid evidence of "long and continued hold-
ing, which can only have been for devotional purposes."[4] There are
sufficient manuscripts of the _Prymer_ to indicate its wide circulation.
Although no list is given in the Early English Text Society edition,
reference is made to so many different extant manuscripts that there
is no doubt that here is one of the most popular books of the Middle
Ages. Most of the manuscripts, it is true, belong to the fifteenth
century, but it is natural that with a book so continually used the
earlier manuscripts should have worn out. That the book was known
and used at least early in the fourteenth century is evident from
a reference in Gibbon's Early Lincoln Wills under the date 1323, where
a lady bequeathes a "Prymer which was my sister Margaret's."[5]

. . . .

1. Littlehales: op. cit., p. xxxix
2. Cf. quotations from wills, ibid., pp. xlii-xliii
3. Cf. ibid., p. xliv
4. Ibid., p. xlv. He cites especially the Prymer, British Museum MS
   Sloane 2474
5. Cf. ibid., p. xliii

Whether Sister Margaret's Prymer was in Latin or in English does not appear.

3. The Arrangement of the Prymer and the Use of Biblical Portions

As has already been suggested, the Prymer is divided into six parts. Besides the psalms there are in the Hours of the Virgin orisons, aves, alleluias, praises of Mary, pater nosters, hymns, glorias. The litany is brief with its invocation to the Trinity and to the saints and its short prayers. There are no psalms in the litany. The Office for the Dead consists entirely of the psalms and prayers along with a few portions from other parts of the Bible. Except for the final "Tibi, domine, comendamus" the Commendations are entirely psalms.

The question arises: Just how much Biblical material was there actually in the Prymer? Most of the passages were from the Psalter; in the Office for the Dead there were portions from Job, Isaiah, and the first chapter of Luke. The actual passages are listed below with their arrangement in the Prymer according to their devotional use:

> In the Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary
> Matyns: Psalm 95 (with an Ave between every two verses)
>   Psalms 8, 19, 24
> Lauds: Psalms 93, 63, 67, 148, 150, 100
> Prime: Psalms 54, 117, 118
> Tierce: Psalms 120, 121, 122
> Sext: Psalms 123, 124, 125
> None: Psalms 126, 127, 128
> Evensong: The Magnificat, Psalms 122, 123, 124, 125, 126
> Compline: Psalms 13, 43, 129, 131, Nunc Dimittis
> Concluding devotions: Psalm 130
>
> The Seven Penitential Psalms: 6, 32, 51, 38, 102, 130, 143
>
> The Fifteen Gradual Psalms: Psalms 120-134

In the Office for the Dead
Placebo (Vespers): Psalms 116, 120, 121, 130, 138, 146
Dirige
First Nocturne: Psalms 5, 6, 7, Job vii.16-21; x.1-7; 8-12
Second Nocturne: Psalms 23, 25, 27, Job xiii. 23-28; xiv.1-6,13-16
Third Nocturne: Psalms 40, 41, 42, Job xvii. 1-3,11-15; xix.20-27;
            x.18-22
In Laudibus: Psalms 51, 65, 63, 67, Isaiah xxxviii.10-20
          Psalms 148, 149, 150, Luke i.68-79

Commendations: Psalms 119, 139

It may be observed that there is repetition of certain psalms. In
the Prymer the text of these psalms is given only once. After that
they are indicated by their number and the opening lines. It is
evident that the psalms used are the universal favorites, such as the
8th, 19th, 24th, 32nd, 51st, and others. As the editor of the Prymer
has observed,

> "What could appeal more directly to the devout and pious mind than
> these psalms of degrees, these psalms of penitence, or that won-
> derful 118th Psalm which constituted . . . the day hours prime
> and tierce, and sext and none, said in every secular church, said
> by every secular priest, day by day and all the year round
> throughout England?" 1

4. The Translation in the Prymer

The translations in the Prymer are quite literal and often,
for that reason rather awkward, as the following illustration indi-
cate:

Psalm 8:2   Of the mouth of ȝonge children not speking and
           soukynge mylk, thou madist perfitli heriyng (praise)
           for thine enemyes; that thou distrie the enemye and
           avengere.

Psalm 24:4   The innocent in hondis & in clene herte, which took
           not his soule in veyn, nether swore in gile to his
           neiȝhbore.

. . . .

1. Bishop: op. cit., p. xxxviii

Psalm 51:8   Ʒyve þou ioie & gladnesse to myn heryng; & bones
maad meke schulen ful out make ioie.

Psalm 51:10 God! make þou a clene herte in me; & make þou newe
a riʒtful spirit in myn entrailes.

In some verses the translation is more felicitous and surprisingly

like the Authorized Version in both diction and cadence.

Psalm 51:7   Lord! sprynge þou me wiþ isope, & y schal be clensed;
waische þou me, & y schal be maad whiyt more þan
snowe.

Psalm 27:6   The lord is my liʒtnyng & myn heelþe; whom schal y
drede? The lord is defender of my liyf; for whom
shal y tremble?

Psalm 23:4   For whi, þouʒ y schal go in þe myddis of schadewe
of deeþ, ʒ schal not drede yuelis; for þou art wiþ
me: Thi ʒerde & þi staf, þo han comfortid me.

Psalm 139:6 Whidur schal y go fro þi spirit & whidur schal y
flee fro þi face?

Psalm 24:8   Who is þis kyng of glorie? þe lord stronge & miʒti,
þe lord myʒti in batel.

5. Conclusion

      It appears, then, that there was a general circulation by

the fourteenth century of a prayer book containing large portions of

the Psalter for private devotional use as well as for use in public

worship and that such a book was naturally translated into English

for those who knew no Latin and desired to follow the general scheme

of worship. Evidently the aim was not chiefly to provide a trans-

lation of the Psalter, but to provide an aid to worship. But it is

striking that so large a portion of the Prymer is Scriptural.

E. Translations of Individual Psalms or Groups of Psalms

      In addition to the complete psalters and such a book as

the Prymer, there are scattered throughout Middle English literature

translations and paraphrases both in verse and prose of various indi-
vidual psalms and groups of psalms. It is impossible to make any com-
plete study of such pieces here, but some mention will be made briefly
of a few of them. By far the most popular psalms were the seven peni-
tential psalms -- 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143 -- and of these the one
which appears to have been most often rendered into English was the
51st. Dr. Brown in his Register lists seven manuscripts of Mayde-
stone's version of the Penitential Psalms[1] and twelve manuscripts of
a variant version.[2] Another name is attached to a version of these
same psalms, that of Thomas Brampton, and of his there are in all six
manuscripts listed.[3] For translations of individual psalms the Regis-
ter lists the following: a version of the De Profundis in 12-line
stanzas,[4] a paraphrase of the 51st Psalm,[5] another of the same in
6-line stanzas,[6] Lydgate's paraphrase of Psalm 103 in twenty-two
8-line stanzas, found in three manuscripts,[7] Maydestone's paraphrase
of the 51st Psalm in five manuscripts separate from the Penitential
Psalms,[8] and Psalm 54 by Lydgate, which appears in four manuscripts.[9]
All these are in verse. There is no such Register where the prose
pieces have been listed, but throughout the homilies and moral pieces
there are frequent quotations from individual psalms.[10]

. . . .

1. Brown, Carleton: Register of Middle English Religious and Didactic
    Verse, Vol. II, no. 2421
2. Ibid., no. 1215
3. Ibid., nos. 964 and 232
4. Ibid., no. 1550
5. Ibid., no. 1212
6. Ibid., no. 616
7. Ibid., no. 1583
8. Ibid., no. 1352
9. Ibid., no. 590. A description of all of these manuscripts is given
    in Vol. I
10. Cf. Smyth, Mary: Biblical Quotations in Middle English Literature
    before 1350

1. Richard Maydestone's Version of the Penitential Psalms

The version of the penitential psalms attributed to Richard Maydestone[1] is found with a great deal of variation in a number of manuscripts. The differences, according to Miss Day, are due probably in some cases to "individual devotional taste," in other to "scribal errors and misinterpretations."[2] At least they testify to the popularity of the version. The dialects of the various manuscripts also suggest the use of the poem throughout the Southern and Southeast Midland sections.[3] The "Richard Maydestone" to whom the version is universally attributed was born, according to Miss Day, at Maidstone in Kent, became Bachelor and Doctor of Divinity at Oxford, was a well-known theological writer, the Confessor of John of Gaunt and the reputed author of a collection of Latin sermons, and died in 1396.[4] The paraphrase of the penitential psalms is in 119 8-line stanzas, with no indication of the transition between psalms, except an occasional "Amen."[5] The versions of the different psalms appear as one poem. Each stanza has the Latin verse at the head, followed by the metrical paraphrase. In the first stanza the poet indicates the devotional purpose of the paraphrase:

> To Goddis worschipe, þat dere us bouȝte,
> To whom we owen to make our mone
> Of alle þe synnes at we haue wrouȝt
> In ȝouþe (youth), in elde, many oone;
> In þese psalmys þei ben þoruȝ souȝt,
> And in to Englische þei ben brouȝt,
> For synne in man to be fordon. [6]

. . . .

1. The attribution is in the opening verses of MS Rawlinson A 389. Cf. Day, Mabel: The Wheatley MS, Early English Text Society, Original Series, no 155, introduction, p. xvi and note 1, p. 103
2. Cf. ibid., p. xiii
3. Cf. ibid., pp. xv-xvi
4. Cf. ibid., p. xvi
5. Cf. Wheatley MS, pp. 19-59
6. Ibid., p. 19

The stanzas of the poem not only paraphrase the verse of the psalm but in many cases put it in Christian terms, as in the following from Psalm 51:

> For, yif thow woldist haue had offryng
> I had it ʒeuen with herte fre;
> Bot thow schal haue noon lykyng
> In sacrifice of that degree;
> For thow were offrid vp honging
> For mannes sake on rode tree,
> And of thin hert gan bloode out sprynge,
> Wherfore my hert I offre the. 1

Nearly every stanza contains some sort of explanatory comment. Thus the paraphrase is exceedingly free.

2. Thomas Brampton's Version

A second version of the penitential psalms ascribed to a Thomas Brampton is dated 1402, but belongs here as it came evidently just at the turn of the century -- if, indeed, the date is correct.[2] The inscription speaks of Doctor Thomas Brampton, Confessor of the Frere Minors, but beyond that little seems to be known about him.[3] The introduction of six stanzas[4] represents the author as restless, rising at midnight from his bed, saying an antiphone from his breviary, then going to his Confessor, from whom he receives directions how he may relieve his conscience, one instruction being to repeat "these seven Psalms." This he proceeds to do verse by verse, making the first words of his favorite antiphone -- ne reminiscaris Domine -- the refrain of each stanza of meditation upon the verse. The para-

. . . .

1. Wheatley MS, p. 41, stanza 65
2. Cf. ibid., p. xvii. See also A Paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms, W. H. Black, ed, Percy Society Publications, VII, introduction, pp. vi-vii
3. Cf. ibid.
4. Cf. ibid., pp. 2-3

phrase proper is of the same sort as Maydestone's -- a verse of the Latin text with an 8-line stanza in English following and with no break between the psalms. Miss Day finds Brampton's version more ecclesiastical in tone than Maydestone's, which seems purely devo-
tional in character.[1] Confession, absolution, penance, discipline, purgatory, the immaculate conception, and the notion of a guardian angel all appear in the paraphrase of Brampton. The necessity of penance is very prominent.[2] A comparison of the two following corresponding stanzas will illustrate the difference in tone between Maydestone's and Brampton's version:

> Latin text: Dixi: Confitebor aduersum me in-iusticiam mean
> Domino; & tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei. 3

Maydestone's paraphrase:
> "To God I schal," I seide, "knowlech
> Agayns my-self my wrong with inneȝ"
> And thow, Lord, as louely lech,
> Forg(a)f the trespas of my synne.
> þanne spedith it noght to spare speche,
> To cry on Crist wil I not blynne (cease)
> That he ne take on me no wreche
> For wordes ne werkes þat I begynne.

Brampton's paraphrase:
> Ȝyf thou, with good avysement,
> Of thi synnes wilt the schryve,
> Thi soul in helle schal neuer be schent,
> Whil thou wilt here thi penaunce dryve.
> Amende thi lyif (I rede the blyve)
> Er euere thi wittes fro the fle;
> And thynke wel, whil thou art on lyve,
> On "Ne reminiscaris, Domine!"

The editor in the Percy Society edition of Brampton's poem suggests that "probably the author designed his book for the instruction of his 'ghostly children', being a <u>confessor</u> himself . . ."[4] Brampton

. . . .

1. Day: op. cit., p. xvii
2. Cf. stanzas 22, 84, 71, 48
3. Psalm 32:5
4. Black: op. cit., p. ix

seems also concerned with the duties of knights, kings, and priests.
No mention of these is found in Maydestone's paraphrase.[1]

3. Evaluation

These two paraphrases illustrate what must have been very
common uses of the psalms in Middle English verse -- the personal
expression of the poet's devotional life and a means of instructing
and encouraging others spiritually. The popularity of the penitential
psalms is natural with the emphasis which the church placed upon
confession and penitence. As translations, however, these poems are
of little value. They depart too far from the original text.

F. Translations and Expositions
of the Pater Noster and the Decalogue

Middle English literature is full of paraphrases and expo-
sitions of the Pater Noster and the Decalogue. If the common people
knew anything about religion they knew these two and the Creed, all
three no doubt from the earliest times in their own vernacular. The
saying of the Pater Noster was a familiar and frequent part of both
public and private worship. In the Lay-Folks' Mass Book,[2] which
gives directions for the manner of hearing Mass, rubrics, and de-
votions for the people, innumerable pater nosters are prescribed.
Evidently the part of the people in much of the service of Mass was
simply to repeat pater nosters over and over again. It seems to
have been generally known both in Latin and in English, as the

. . . .

1. Cf. stanzas 87-96
2. The Lay-Folks' Mass Book, according to the Use of York, from
   MSS of the 10th to the 15th centuries, T. F. Simmons, ed., Early
   English Text Society, Original Series, no. 71 (1879)

following indicates:

> When þis is done, say priuely
> Other prayer none þer-by.
> Pater-noster first in Laten,
> And sithen in englische als here is wryten.
>
> Fader oure, þat is in heuen,
> blessid be þi name to neuen (to utter or name)
> Come to vs þi kyngdome.
> In heuen & erthe þi wille be done.
> oure ilk day bred graunt vs to day.
> and oure mysdedes forgyue vs ay,
> right so haue merci vp-on vs.
> and lede vs in no foundynge,   1
> bot shild vs fro al wicked þinge. Amen.

Notice that the last clause of the prayer, as it is used in Protestant churches today, is omitted. That seems to have been customary in the medieval versions. It is not important here to give more than a brief notice to these Middle English versions of the Pater Noster and Decalogue. One other version of the former, however, may be cited, a version which was also widely used, for it appears in the Prymer.[2]

> Oure fadir þat art in heuenes, halewid be þi name; come to þi kingdom; þi wille be don in erþe, and as it is in heuene; oure eche daies breed ȝyve us to-dai; and forȝyve us oure dettes, as & we forȝyuen to oure dettouris; and lede us not into temptacioun; but delyuere us from yuel. amen.

Dr. Brown in his Register lists sixteen different versions of the Pater Noster in verse.[3] The chief purpose of a metrical rendering would naturally be to aid the memory, to give a form more pleasing perhaps to the ear.

Versions of the Ten Commandments are also scattered through Middle English literature, appearing in both prose and verse. Of the

. . . .

1. Lay-Folks' Mass Book, p. 46
2. Cf. ante, p. 105
3. Register, Vol. II, nos. 130, 164, 494, 1660, 1558, 1661-1669, 1673, 2217

latter Dr. Brown lists fifteen different versions,[1] one at least in eighteen different manuscripts. Many prose versions occur in sermons, usually with some explanation of their meaning for everyday living. Usually the preacher puts the commandments in his own words in an abbreviated form. One difference between these and the Scriptural form is in the numbering. Apparently the medieval versions telescoped the first two commandments into one, and divided the tenth into two. Dan Jon Gaytrynge in a fourteenth century sermon summarized the first commandment (our first two) thus: "The firste comandement charges vs and teches vs þat we leue (love) ne lowte (worship) na false goddes."[2] Thus he summarizes each of the other commandments and explains the meaning of each for his supposedly unlearned listeners. Another fourteenth century sermon renders the first commandment in this way: "Thou sall wirchippe bot a Goddi þi Lord, and till hym anely þou sall serue."[3] The same preacher puts the third (our fourth) in medieval terms: "Vmbythynke þe þat þou kepe þi haly-dayes."[4] Richard Rolle has a prose explanation of the Decalogue.[5] His version of the first commandment is "Thy Lorde God þou sall loute, and til Hym anely þou sall serue," and he explains it as forbidding witchcraft, sorcery, divining, and astrology. He adds, however, that men may reverence holy crosses and images "ffor thay are in synge of

. . . .

1. Register, Vol. II, nos. 903, 136, 694, 748, 845, 1241, 1651, 2083, 2140, 2377-2381, 2406
2. Dan Gaytryge's Sermon, in Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse, George G. Perry, ed., Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 26
3. Fourteenth Century Translation of the Speculum of St. Edmund, ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle, pp. 9-11

Cryste crucyfiede."[1] Two illustrations may be given of the Decalogue in verse, both obviously as aids to the memory. The first is from a manuscript of the thirteenth century.[2] Its editor notes a resemblance in language to the <u>Genesis and Exodus</u>.[3]

> þu salt hauen na god buten An
> idel adh ne swere þu Nan
> þe halidayes þu shalt þieme (keep)
> ffader and moder þu shalt queme (please)
> Loke þat tu ne sla na man.
> Leccherie do þu nan.
> Be na þef. ne þeuef fere.
> ffals witnesse þu ne bere.
> þierne (desire) þu nout þin nethtebure hus.
> Nooh þat his is. ne his spus.

The second metrical version mentioned is in twelve quatrains.[4] The first stanza shows the versifier's purpose and suggests the use that must have been made of these metrical paraphrases:

> Every man schulde teche þis lore
> To hise children with good entent,
> And do it himsilf euermore,
> To kepe weel goddis comaundement.

The second stanza is an illustration of how the commandments were handled:

> Fals goddis þou schalt noon haue,
> But worschipe god omnipotent;
> Make no þi god þat man haþ graue:
> þis is þe firste comaundement.

The final stanza is a prayer that we may have grace to keep these ten laws of God.

These illustrations are simply an indication of the fact

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1. English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle, p. 10
2. Printed in An Old English Miscellany, Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 49
3. Cf. ibid., Introduction, p.
4. In Hymns to the Virgin and Christ, Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 24, p.

that the Pater Noster and the Decalogue were commonly known and used in the English vernacular of the Middle Ages, more often probably in a paraphrase than in a literal translation. Indeed it is to be supposed that the people of England, no matter how ignorant, knew and used the Lord's Prayer in their own tongue.

G. Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to show chiefly that the Psalter was known and used in the English tongue during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and that it was known completely. It has been found that there were three versions of the complete Psalter, two in a literal prose translation and a third in almost as literal a verse rendering. Two of these come from the North, and the third from the Midland section. The author of one was a man of great literary fame both in his own time and since, a man whose writings have been spread over England and the Continent. These Psalters appear to have been used for devotional purposes. It is significant that with these Psalters the actual translation of the Scripture into the vernacular has begun, not from the original tongues, it is true, but like Wyclif's versions from the Latin Vulgate. In addition to these complete Psalters notice has been given to a translation of large portions of the psalms in the medieval prayer book, the Prymer. The use here is more definitely liturgical in connection with regular services. The liturgical use of the Psalter doubtless explains, as has been seen, why this book of the Bible was the earliest translated. Finally, brief notice has been given to the numerous versions of the Pater Noster and the Decalogue.

CHAPTER IV

TRANSLATIONS AND PARAPHRASES

OF

NEW TESTAMENT PORTIONS

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TRANSLATIONS AND PARAPHRASES OF NEW TESTAMENT PORTIONS

Introduction

There remain to be examined the Middle English paraphrases and translations of New Testament material. Several difficulties immediately present themselves. The material cannot be very easily organized. Most of it has to do with the life of Christ, though not quite all. A version of the Pauline Epistles belonging to the late fourteenth century must be included. Even where the material has to do with the four gospels there are several tendencies at work. Certain pieces deal with the whole life of Christ and others only with the Passion. Yet even in these complete "lives" the passion plays the most prominent part. And in the regular "Passions" there is always some brief summary of the preceding events. Moreover, it is difficult to draw the line between paraphrase and translation, and it is correspondingly difficult to separate the canonical from the apocryphal and legendary. There is a final difficulty, that of distinguishing the late fourteenth century translations which are related to the work of Wyclif from those which are independent of his versions.

Nevertheless, in this chapter eight prose and poetic pieces will be examined, and some attempt will be made to evaluate their handling of Biblical material in the light of their date, their geographical location, their sources, their purpose, and their use. The results may be even less complete than in the preceding chapters, for six of these eight pieces warrant a study at least equal in scope to the present chapter.

. . . .

A. Metrical Paraphrases of the Life of Christ

The life of Christ seems to have been a particularly popular subject for poetry in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Perhaps there was some relationship to the mysticism which concerned itself with the contemplation of Jesus. But a closer association is evident with the growth of the body of legendary material, such as is found in Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica, in Higden's Polychronicon, and in the Legenda Aurea. It is natural that in connection with the festivals of Christ there should have developed a body of material for use in instruction and preaching. Some of those Latin works would need to be turned into English for the benefit of those who preached to the common people. In Middle English two verse paraphrases of the life of Christ have survived, both of which seem to have some significance for the present study. In many ways they are quite different, and yet they both have some bearing upon the presentation of the gospel story in the vernacular.

1. The Stanzaic Life of Christ

It might seem, after a study of the sources of the so-called Stanzaic Life of Christ [1] that such a poem would have no place in this thesis, compiled as it is from medieval Latin sources rather than paraphrased directly from the Vulgate. Yet the piece does have a Scriptural framework, and the author's purpose appears to justify its inclusion here. The piece survives in three British Museum manuscripts, [2] all belonging to the fifteenth century, yet with

. . . .

1. Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 166, Frances Foster, ed., 1926
2. Harley 3909, Additional 3866, and Harley 2250

evidence that the composition goes back a century earlier.[1]   The

name Stanzaic has been given to it because it has been written in

eight-syllable lines grouped in four-line stanzas linked with a cross

rime abab.   The dialect, according to Miss Foster,[2] is West Midland.

a. The Sources

The two Latin works from which the Life of Christ appears

to have been compiled are Higden's Polychronicon and Voraigne's

Legenda Aurea.   The latter was a compilation of legends related to

the seasons of the church year, composed in Italy about the middle of

the thirteenth century by Jacobus Voraigne.[3]   It became immediately

very popular throughout Europe, and contributed to the growth of

interest in saints' legends in the later Middle Ages.   An English

prose version was made in 1438, and earlier manuscripts contain

portions of it translated into English.   It was so popular that it

was one of the works chosen by Caxton for printing in 1483.[4]   Higden's

Polychronicon was a sort of encyclopedia of geography, history, and

science compiled by a monk of St. Werburgh's Abbey in Chester some-

time around the second quarter of the fourteenth century.[5]   Of course

sacred history would be prominent in such a work.   The author of the

English Life of Christ seems to have used material from Books I and

IV of the Polychronicon mainly at three points in the story: at the

beginning of the poem; following the slaughter of the innocents,

. . . .

1. Foster, Frances: Introduction to Stanzaic Life of Christ, p. xiv
2. Cf. ibid., p. xv
3. Cf. Wells, Minnie E.: The South English Legendary in Its Relation
   to the Legenda Aurea, P.M.L.A., Vol. 51, pp. 337 ff
4. A modern version of Caxton's Golden Legend has been published by
   the Temple Classics, London, in 7 vols., 1900
5. Schofield: op. cit., p. 45

giving the events of Jesus' boyhood; and following Ember Days, giving
the events of the ministry. From the <u>Legenda</u> the poet seems to have
used almost all of the sections of the Temporale that have to do with
the life of Christ.[1] Furthermore, he has inserted some of the Old
Testament passages by way of explanation, so that the result is near-
ly a complete Temporale.[2] Miss Foster has discovered that he omitted
such passages of the <u>Legenda</u> as illustrations from the church Fathers
and explanations, and that he also added Biblical narratives or quota-
tions of a Scripture verse.[3] At the close of his prologue he attempts
to forestall any ecclesiastical criticism by asserting his intention
to name his "authorities."

> By-fore euery mater, and I may,
> The Auctor shal, by my bone
> That Clerkus shal not after say   [4]
> þese newe fables wrote a fonne (fool)

Following that intention he inserts such sectional headings as

> Petrus in Historiis Scolasticis de incarnatione Christi[5]

> Lucas in euangelis suo quod sic incipit: Exurgens Maria abiit
>   in montana [6]

> Eutropius in cronicis suis[7]

> Hec in Historiis Scholasticis[8]

It is characteristic of a medieval poet that he should omit any
mention of the two works that he used as a basis and name only the
authorities cited in the corresponding passages of those two works.

. . . .

1. Cf. ante, p. 75
2. Cf. Foster: op. cit., p. xxii
3. Cf. ibid., p. xxvii
4. Lines 29-32
5. Stanzaic Life of Christ, p. 2
6. Ibid., p. 7
7. Ibid., p. 12
8. Ibid., p. 14

In addition to these two primary sources Miss Foster has found evidence that the poet must have had at hand a dictionary to help him explain words that might be unfamiliar to his readers -- probably the <u>Catholicon</u> of Joannes de Balbis, of the thirteenth century.[1] For instance, he defines the word legion in two stanzas:

> Now wil I tell, þe know moun,
> Quat a legion is to say,
> An ost it is to bataile boun
> Of certayn noumber, nys no nay,
>
> Sex thousande men of gret renoun,
> six hundredth sixty 7 sex in fay (in faith)
> was callide þat time a legioun [2]
> of knyȝtes kyd (well-known) in god aray.

He explains the four feasts of the Jews,[3] gives an account of the seven ages of the world and their parallel in the life of man.[4] These passages and others Miss Foster has traced to de Balbis' <u>Catholicon.</u>[5] Such explanatory passages indicate that the author was writing for those to whom it was necessary to give elementary religious instruction, evidently laymen.

b. The Author and His Purpose

The suggestion has been made that the author of the <u>Stanzaic Life of Christ</u> was a monk of St. Werburgh's Abbey, as Higden had been before him -- a purely speculative suggestion.[6] That he was a clerk is evident from his prologue, in which he tells the reasons for his composition. The inference is that a layman, not familiar with Latin,

. . . .

1. Foster: loc. cit.
2. Lines 529-536
3. Lines 4817-4996
4. Lines 101-144
5. Foster: op. cit., p. xxvii
6. Cf. ibid., p. xiv

saw the account of Christ's life in the _Polychronicon_ and asked for

a trustworthy English version. Notice the following lines from the

prologue:[1]

> A worthy wycht wylned at me
> Sertayn þyngus for to showe,
> þat in Latyn wrytun saw he,
> In Englissh tonge, for to knowe
>
> Of Ihesu Cristes Natiuite
> And his werkus on a rowe,
> to the whiche by good Auctorite
> He myghte triste ⁊ fully knowe.

Miss Foster observes that at times the poet seems to have thought of

a layman as actually reading his work.[2] At other times he seems to

have implied an audience of both learned and "lewet" listening as

someone read the poem aloud.[3] Laymen are definitely addressed in

certain stanzas near the end of the poem, one on confession and one

on the qualifications of a good judge.[4]

The author's purpose, then, was to tell the life of Christ

for the lay reader or listener who knew no Latin and so could not

read either the Evangelists in the Vulgate or the contemporary com-

pilations of gospel and legendary material. The fact that he refers

to both readers and listeners suggests that the poem must have been

read aloud to those who perhaps could not even read English, or at

least such must have been the poet's intention.

c. The Contents and Arrangement

The choice of material and its arrangement is a further

indication of the use to which the _Stanzaic Life of Christ_ was at

. . . .

1. Lines 9-16
2. Lines 5564-5568
3. Lines 1173-1176
4. Lines 10045-10056 and 10625-10631

least intended to be put. The stories seem to be those which the church ordinarily chose for lay instruction probably because of their relation to the church calendar of seasons. Miss Foster remarks upon their close resemblance to the subjects in church sculpture and glass, and quotes M. Male's comment upon French art in the thirteenth century:

> "The cycles of the childhood, the public life, and the Passion as presented in both sculpture and glass consist of the following scenes: -- the Nativity, the Announcement to the shepherds, the Massacre of Innocents, the Flight into Egypt, the Presentation in the Temple, the Adoration of the Magi, the Baptism, the Marriage at Cana, the Temptation, the Transfiguration, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the Washing of the disciples' feet, the different scenes of the Passion, the Crucifixion, the Entombement, the Resurrection, the Appearances after death, and last of all the Ascension, . . . just those mysteries celebrated by the Church at Christmas, the Epiphany, and during Lent, Holy Week, and the weeks that follow." 1

This long quotation is given in full here because it applies not only to the Stanzaic Life of Christ but also to the other accounts of the Passion to be discussed later. It seems a definite indication of the orthodox character of these pieces and the use to which they were put. Notice that the Scriptural purpose is subordinate to the ecclesiastical. In addition to these New Testament stories certain Old Testament characters were introduced at appropriate places in the Stan-zaic Life: Adam in connection with the Temptation;[2] Cain and Abel, Abraham, and Melchisedek in the story of the Purification;[3] Balaam in the Epiphany account.[4]

. . . .

1. Foster: op. cit., pp. xvii-xviii. Quotation from E. Male: Religious Art in France, XIII Century, translated D. Nussey, N. Y., 1913, p. 179. Cf. p. 176
2. Lines 5261-5288
3. Lines 2329-2468. Much of this is legendary, though the Biblical basis is used. The account is attributed to Jerome.
4. Lines 1601-1728. The account of Balaam is largely Biblical, but the three wise men are made the descendents of Balaam.

The arrangement, as indicated above, is according to the seasons of the Church year, beginning with Advent and continuing through Pentecost. The order is as follows: Incarnation, Visitation of Elizabeth, Nativity, Circumcision, Ephiphany, Purification, Innocents, Boyhood, Septuagesima, Sexagesima, Quinquagesima, Quadragesima, Ember Days, Ministry, Passion, Resurrection, Litanies Major and Minor (containing purely legendary material), Ascension, and Pentecost. There is much explanation of the various seasons.[1]   In fact, the explanation seems often to crowd out the Scriptural story.

The following quotation indicates just how the material is handled when the poet is dealing with the Bible story rather than with legend.   The reference is to the three wise men.

> Anone quen þai comen wer
> to Ierusalém with gret meyne,
> thay enqverit in meke maner
> qver kyng of Iewes born shuld be. . .
>
> 'We seȝen his sterre,' saiden þai,
> 'In þe 'Est quen þat we wer,
> And comen hider we ben to-day,
> to honour hym in meke maner. . . .
>
> Kynge Heroude, quen he herde þis þing,
> trovblide he was þen with tene (anger)
> And all Ierusalem old 7 ȝeng
> Stonyet wer, as was sene.' [2]

Thus it is evident that as far as contents are concerned, while the Stanzaic Life of Christ appears to give the gospel story, the actual Biblical material is very meager and the legendary and instructional sections loom very large.   It is striking that so little space is given to the actual ministry of Christ, only 271 lines[3] out of the

. . . .

1. Lines 3937 ff; 3665 ff; 4725 ff; etc.
2. Lines 1785-88, 1793-96, 1813-16. The omitted stanzas are legendary.
3. Lines 5117-5388

10840 lines of the poem. Events are frequently summarized. [1] "In other words," concludes Miss Foster, "the poem contains the main Bible stories that the church wished the layman to know." [2] And it contains in addition a wealth of extra-Biblical material which the Church evidently considered of at least equal importance with the Biblical incidents.

d. The Use of the Poem in the Chester Plays

One other matter deserves brief notice here, for it throws light upon the popularity and use of such poems as the Stanzaic Life of Christ. It may be recalled that the author has been associated with Chester. Miss Foster has unearthed evidence that the author of the Chester Cycle of Mystery plays borrowed liberally from the poem in his Nativity and Purification Plays, as well as in others. [3] It is true that the borrowings are of legendary rather than Biblical incidents (after all, those came mostly from the Vulgate), but the fact remains that such a poem as the Stanzaic Life of Christ was generally known in its own district and was no doubt spread through the use in the plays. Miss Foster remarks that the "knowledge of the poem that the playwright shows is what would come, not from setting the English text beside him as he worked, but from a more intimate acquaintance with half-memorized phrases." [4]

2. The Middle English Evangelie

In 1892 Horstmann included in his edition of the Minor Poems of the Vernon MS a fragment of 396 lines which he entitled "La Estorie

. . . .

1. Lines 5337-5348
2. Cf. Foster: op. cit., p. xviii
3. Cf. ibid., p. xlii
4. Ibid., p. xliii

del _Euangelis_," following the Old French heading in the manuscript.[1]
The substance of the manuscript heading is that in this book is writ-
ten the story of the gospel (la estorie del euangelie) in English like
that which is written in Latin about the Annunciation of our Lord, his
Nativity, his Passion, his Resurrection, his Ascension, and his Glori-
fication, as well as his coming for Judgement. In 1915 in the publi-
cation of the Modern Language Association were printed variant versions
from two additional manuscripts of whose existence Horstmann had been
unaware when he published the contents of the Vernon MS.[2] Evidently
these were only three of a great variety of versions in which the poem
was known during the Middle Ages.[3] Its chief significance for the pre-
sent study lies in the fact that, unlike the Stanzaic Life of Christ,
its main interest seems to be a retelling of the gospel narrative of
the life of Christ rather than a collecting of legends or a giving of
instruction about the church seasons.

a. The Relation of the Manuscripts

It may be safely concluded from Miss Campbell's study of the
three manuscripts in which this poem is found either in whole or in
part, that the Evangelie was extremely popular and circulated widely.
In addition to the Vernon MS fragment of 396 lines, written in the lat-
ter part of the fourteenth century, the two other texts are as follows:
(1) in the Dulwich Collection[4] a fragment of 519 lines written about

• • •

1. Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 98
2. Campbell, Gertrude: The Middle English Evangelie, P.M.L.A., Vol. 30,
   pp. 529 ff
3. Cf. Ibid., op. cit., p. 543
4. MS XXII

1300;[1] (2) in a Bodleian MS[2] a complete text written between 1410-1420.[3] The latter manuscript is especially valuable, as it is the only one in which the story is complete, although it may be observed that the title of the Vernon fragment indicates the full scope of the poem. As Miss Campbell has printed the Dulwich and Bodleian texts in parallel columns, it is easy to see that the latter is an abridged version and that the poem would have extended to some 3000 lines[4] if the scale of the Dulwich version had been followed. As a matter of fact, the Bodleian version, the complete story, has only 1879 lines. The fragment in the Vernon MS also seems to be an abridged form. Miss Campbell concludes from her study of the manuscripts that no one of these three versions was the original and that no one of the three had any direct connection with the others. She conceives of an original version belonging to the latter half of the thirteenth century from which each of the three extant versions derive through several intermediate versions, in some cases oral.[5] The Vernon fragment especially seems to come from an oral version. The Dulwich fragment being older and fuller than the others appears to be closer to the original, though even in that case there must have been an intermediate stage. All of this is significant in showing the widespread circulation of such a poem as the Evangelie, and that is borne out by the variety of dialects evident in the three extant versions. Miss Campbell has found in the Dulwich fragment chiefly an East Midland dialect with

• • •

1. Cf. Campbell: op. cit., pp. 529 and 530
2. Additional C 38
3. Cf. Campbell: loc. cit.
4. Cf. Ibid., p. 530
5. Cf. Campbell: op. cit., pp. 532-533. See diagram, p. 544

some Southern forms and distinct Northern traces which she considers
due to the efforts of a foreign scribe to copy a Northern manuscript
in the East Midland dialect.[1]   The Bodleian text is South Midland,[2]
and the Vernon fragment Southern with traces of West Midland forms.[3]
All of this points, says Miss Campbell, to an East Midland original.[4]
Finally, the evidence of an oral intermediate version presents an in-
teresting suggestion as to the use of such poems as this gospel story,
recited perhaps by some friar to a group of laymen who either could
not read or could not have access to a manuscript, but who could re-
member enough to re-tell the story to others.

b. The Author's Purpose

Who was the author of the unknown original of this popular
Evangelie it is impossible to know, but he gives at the beginning of
the poem a little bit of self-revelation. In the first twenty-five
or thirty lines in all three manuscripts he tells the reader that he
was bound in sin, doing ill night and day in word and deed and "wikked
wille," until he understood that Jesus for him shed His blood and he
turned from his folly to "swete Ihesu." Even then he feared that the
devil would lead him back to sinful thought or foolish deed, and so
he fixed his mind on Jesus, for there he knew that he would find rest.
Thus the _Evangelie_ is a poem growing out of a personal religious ex-
perience. Unlike many other medieval religious poems it seems to have
been written primarily for the benefit of the author and only seconda-
rily to instruct others in the gospel story. In the lines which follow

. . . .

1. Cf. Campbell, op. cit., p. 537
2. Cf. ibid., p. 539
3. Cf. ibid., p. 541
4. Cf. ibid., p. 544

the account of the author's spiritual experience, the purpose is
stated quite specifically:

> Thi love to winne i wolde fonde,
> ℥if I me mihte wel understonde,
> Sum thing of the to write and rede,
> Therthorwh of the to winnen mede.
> And heo that scholden hit iheren,
> Of the Gospel mowe sumwhat leren
> That writen is ther-Inne of the,   1
> On Englisch tong thorwh swynk (labor) of me.

c. The Sources and Scope of the Poem

The main source of the poem is, of course, the Gospel narra-
tive of the life of Christ, which it follows rather closely. However,
Miss Campbell does not think that the author drew the material di-
rectly from the Vulgate text, but used some compilation of Biblical
material, such as a gospel harmony -- like Victor of Capua's or
Clement of Llanthony's -- or perhaps a breviary. There seems to be
no compilation which gives the material in just the form in which it
is found here; some incidents are omitted which would surely be in
a gospel harmony, for example, the Last Supper, the cutting off of
Malchus' ear, and the service of Simon the Cyrenian. [2]   It is curious
that in the ministry only the Sermon on the Mount is mentioned. [3]
Although the material in the main sticks closer to the gospel narra-
tive than in other accounts, such as the Stanzaic Life of Christ,
still it would be too much to expect of a medieval poet not to intro-
duce some apocryphal incidents. The author of the Evangelie recounts
Herod's journey to Rome and the burning of the ships at Cilicia [4]

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1. Lines 31-38 in the Vernon text, Minor Poems of the Vernon MS
2. Cf. Campbell: op. cit., p. 534
3. Cf. lines 990-1028, Bodleian MS, ibid.
4. Cf. lines 753-761, ibid.

the downfall of the idols of Egypt at the coming of the infant Jesus,[1] the presence of the devil at the Crucifixion.[2]   Miss Campbell suggests Peter Comestor as the source of these incidents.[3]   Other moralizations and homiletic passages must have come from the Church Fathers through a compilation.[4]

d. The Biblical Incidents

In the Vernon fragment the story breaks off with the angelic salutation to the shepherds. The incidents recounted are the annunciation, the visit to Elizabeth, the angelic announcement to Zacharias, the birth of John the Baptist, the Magnificat, Joseph's dream, the birth of Jesus, and the Angel's Song. The following version of the angelic announcement shows that the poet follows the Biblical language rather closely:

> The aungel seide: 'nouȝt þe ne drede!
> Ich wole ow telle a blisful dede:
> A child is boren for oure nede,
> That schal this folk of pyne lede.
> And (that) ich on the sothe bringe,
> That ich ȝive ow to tokenynge:
> In Bethlehem he liht, i-wounde   5
> In clothus, and in a Crubbe i-bounde.'

The Dulwich text, though it exceeds the Vernon fragment by a little over a hundred lines, breaks off earlier in the story, when Joseph and Mary start to Bethlehem. It does not, however, contain any additional Biblical material. The complete version in the Bodleian manuscript continues the story where the Vernon fragment breaks off.

. . . .

1. Cf. lines 774-783, Bodleian text
2. Cf. lines 1584-1587, ibid.
3. Cf. Campbell: op. cit., p. 534
4. Cf. ibid., p. 535
5. Lines 385-392, Vernon text

The following additional incidents are related: the three kings of the
East; the purification in the temple; the flight to Egypt; the slaugh-
ter of the Innocents; the childhood in Nazareth; the preaching of
John the Baptist; the baptism; the temptation; the beginning of the
ministry; the call of the apostles; the Sermon on the Mount; the
triumphal entry into Jerusalem; Gethsemane; the betrayal and capture;
the three trials including Peter's denial and Judas' suicide; the
mockery; the crucifixion ; the burial; the resurrection; the appear-
ances; the ascension; Pentecost. Some of the incidents are told in
great detail; for instance, the temptation covers seventy-six lines,[1]
some of which is, of course, moralization. On the other hand the
ministry in Galilee is summarized in these lines:

> Þan ihu ʒeode in Þat cuntree,
> preching Þe folc of galilee.
> And who sö was in sekenes falle,
> with his worde he heled hem alle.
> Halt croken wode & blynde,
> & alle at he ere myght fynde.
> Þe folc him folwed al aboute,
> of Þe cuntree with greet route.
> Som were wikke & som were goed,
> Som him folwed for her fode.
> Som of her sekenes to have rightyng,
> som of him to se tokenyng.
> Som of him som thing to here,
> & som of hem som thing to lere,
> Wherethown Þei might on him lye,
> & him to Þe iewes bewrie. [2]

    e. Conclusion

The Middle English _Evangelie_ is significant, then, for
several reasons. In the first place, its purpose was purely devo-
tional; it appears to have grown out of the author's own spiritual

. . . .

1. Cf. lines 870-946, Bodleian text, op. cit.
2. Lines 975-990, Bodleian text

experience and was an "offering" of love from himself to Christ.
Thus there is a mystical element in the aim of the poet. Then,
further, it was extremely popular and circulated widely. Finally,
it followed the Biblical narrative very closely, introducing a
minimum of legend and apocryphal incident. In this respect it stands
in contrast to the Stanzaic Life of Christ. Important also is the
fact that it was early, its original belonging without doubt to the
thirteenth century.

3. Life of Christ in the Cursor Mundi

Brief mention should be made here of the New Testament sec-
tions of the Cursor Mundi, a poem extremely important for its use of
Biblical paraphrase. The date and dialect of the poem, its plan,
its authorship, its purpose, its manuscripts, its sources, and its
use of Old Testament material have already been discussed in detail,[1]
and no repetition is necessary here. However, it is important to
note that, beginning with lines 9229-30 to the end of the poem, the[2]
Biblical material is largely from the New Testament, and the frame-
work of the poem is the life of Christ and the stories of the Apostles
and the early church. Following the condensed account of Solomon's
successors at the close of the fourth "age" of the world's history,[3]
the poet skips four hundred years and fittingly begins his story of
Christ's life with the parentage of the Lord, an account of Joseph
and Mary taken partly from Matthew 1. Then follow some prophecies
from Isaiah and Jeremiah, mingled with allegorical parables, and a

. . . .

1. Cf. ante, pp. 63-72
2. Line 24,968
3. Cf. ante, p. 70

further account of the birth, childhood, and marriage of Mary, all from legendary sources. In this section, however, is also the canonical story of the annunciation, the birth of John the Baptist, the birth of Christ with all the attendant circumstances described in Scripture. Again the account becomes apocryphal when miracles of the childhood are related.[1] The sixth "age" which is the age of "grace" begins with the baptism of Christ and comprises the canonical story of the ministry, death, and resurrection, continuing even after Pentecost and the conversion of Paul. This follows the Biblical account in the framework of the story, but it is full of apocryphal and legendary material and ends with traditional incidents in the later lives of the Apostles and the finding of the "Holy Cross."[2] This long, compendious poem concludes with a prophetic view of the last days:[3] the arrival of Anti-Christ and then Christ Himself, the "fifteen signs" before Doomsday, the Judgment itself, a contrast between the "nine pains" of Hell and the "seven gifts of the blessed" in Heaven, and the state of the world after Doomsday. Of course, there is the author's exhortation and a prayer to "our Lady," which suggests a final account of the sorrows of Mary and the Festival of the Conception.

Altogether the New Testament part of the Cursor is further removed from the Biblical account than the Old Testament sections. There are fewer strict paraphrases and the apocryphal plays a very prominent part. It seems to belong to the fourteenth century tendency to link the legendary and traditional stories with the Biblical account of the life of Christ to such an extent that eventually the Scriptural parts were entirely overshadowed by the legendary.

. . . .

1. Lines 9229-12,740 cover the fifth age
2. Cf. lines 12,752-21,846
3. Cf. lines 21,847-24,968

B. Metrical Paraphrases of the Passion

It is perhaps difficult to separate the medieval versions
of the life of Christ from the accounts of the Passion. They all be-
long to the same tendency to emphasize the seasons of the church year
and to familiarize the laity with those parts of the life of Christ
which center about those seasons, especially Advent and Lent. It has
been seen that both the Stanzaic Life of Christ and the Evangelie
tend to give in detail the stories connected with the advent and the
passion and pass over briefly the events of Christ's ministry. The
Northern and the Southern Passions are both confined entirely to the
stories of the last week of the ministry, the resurrection, appear-
ances, and ascension. Yet the collections from which these Passions
are taken both contain in their Temporale lives of Christ which would
correspond somewhat with the two already discussed. However, the
Passion accounts are units in themselves, and so they are here
grouped together, separate from the complete "lives of Christ."[1]

1. The Northern Passion

The character of the Northern Homily Collection has already
been discussed.[2] It represents a rather different type of pulpit
discourse from the accounts in the two Passions; the homilies proper
are narratives "from the Gospel, explanation and exhortation based
thereon, and a tale to point the moral . . . in a series of discourses
for the Sundays of the Church Year."[3] The Passion represents a type

. . . .

1. The lives of Christ in the legendary collections are not readily
   accessible.
2. Cf. ante, p. 75
3. Foster, Frances: Introduction to the Northern Passion, Early
   English Text Society, Original Series, no. 147, pp. 2-3

of sermon which is a connected story of the death and resurrection of Christ with the moralizations brought in wherever they are pertinent. Yet the Northern Passion and the Northern Homily Collection are closely associated, not only geographically, but by inclusion in the same manuscripts and by similar expansions and revisions. It is clear that at least in part the same authors worked upon both.

a. The Manuscript Evidence of Popularity

Like the Homily Collection the Northern Passion is found in two versions, an original from the first part of the fourteenth century and an expanded version from about 1350. Of the original version there are eleven manuscripts, only three of which go back to the fourteenth century. Yet the variety of dialects testify to the circulation of the poem throughout England; of these eleven manuscripts three derive from the South, one from the Midland proper, two from the East Midland, two from the South Midland, one from the West Midland, and two from the North, where the poem originated. Of the expanded version three manuscripts survive, one only from the four-teenth century and all three from the North.[1] It is evident, then, that the Northern Passion enjoyed great popularity both in its own and in succeeding centuries.

b. The Sources

Miss Foster in her study of the Northern Passion for the Early English Text Society[2] has traced the poem chiefly to an Old

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1. Cf. Foster: op. cit., pp. 9-18
2. The text in four parallel columns, no. 145; a critical introduction and the text of the French Passion, no. 147; a supplement, no. 183

French version of the Passion composed by an unknown author at the close of the twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth century and enjoying such great popularity that it was often copied separately, introduced into French compilations of sacred history, or used in the French drama.[1] Ultimately, of course, the Bible is the basis for the poem, yet it is far from being a close rendering of the Vulgate text in spite of the author's assertion,[2]

> Thys passion I wald ʒhowe tell
> Þare on me must a stund dwell,
> Als Mathew, Marke, luke & Iohn
> Þare in acordys in tyll one.

Miss Foster suggests an interesting list of works which a poet of about the year 1300, sitting down to write an account of the Passion might be likely to use to supplement the Vulgate text. This available material would be of four types: gospel harmonies; Biblical commentaries; narratives of the Passion; shorter works such as sermons, treatises, and hymns.[3] Even though the author of the Northern Passion did not go directly to the Vulgate for his material but to the French Passion, using suggestions from these other available sources, it is probable, according to Miss Foster, that the chief source of the French Passion was the Bible itself, since no intermediate work will account for its arrangement and since the text is in the main a paraphrase of the Vulgate.[4] So this Middle English account of the Passion is but another illustration of a second hand paraphrase of Scripture.

. . . .

1. Cf. Foster: op. cit., p. 49
2. Lines 7-10, Northern Passion
3. Cf. Foster: op. cit., pp. 47-49
4. Cf. ibid., p. 59

However, Miss Foster points out that the reviser in the expanded version has shown not only an acquaintance with the Bible but a desire to make his poem harmonize with it. As an illustration she cites the following passage:

From the Vulgate
Matthew 26:29 -- Dico autem vobis, no bibam amodo de hoc genimine vitis, usque in diem illum cum illud bibam vobis-cum novum in regno Patris mei.

From the Northern Passion, original version
           With ʒow sall I ete no more
           Tyll þat I hafe bene wyde whare
           þare agayn may noman stryfe   1
           ffor I sall sone be broght of lyfe.

From the expanded version
           With ʒow now sall I ett no mare
           Vntill I have bene wide whare,
           Ne of þis drink I sall noght taste
           Till I have walked waies waste
           And till I drink with ʒow ful euyn
           In þe kingdom of my fader in heuyn. 2

Thus the reviser seems to use the Bible to supplement the account in the original version, which being a translation of a paraphrase is often far away from the text of the Vulgate. Miss Foster also finds that the Bible is used in the re-arrangement of certain incidents and so concludes that "the amplified version is much nearer the Bible than the original poem."3

c. The Use of Apocryphal and Legendary Material

In the main outline of the poem three legends familiar in medieval literature have been incorporated: the story of the Cross, lines 1295-1438; the story of the wandering Jew, lines 1520a-h; and the Vernacle legend, lines 1550,*1-54.

. . . .

1. Cambridge University MS Gg 5.31, lines 239-242
2. Harleian MS 4196, lines 239-242b
3. Foster: op. cit., p. 76. Cf. ibid., pp. 74-76

The Cross story is in the main the one common to French and English poems of the period. It has already been referred to in the discussion of the Cursor Mundi.[1] The version of the Rood-story in the Northern Passion is very similar to the account in the Cursor, both being Northern poems. The Wandering Jew was the man standing at the door of the council hall who struck Jesus with his hand and called him traitor and whom Jesus bade in punishment to "stand still in snow and rain" until the Second Coming. He was apparently mentioned first by Roger of Wendover (d. 1237) and was called through the Middle Ages by various names, Cartaphilus, Johannes Buttadaeus, Giovannin Boutadeo, Jean Boutedieu or John Puttedieu, as he appears in the Northern Passion[2] The Vernacle legend is briefly this: as the maiden Sydonye, cured by Jesus of blindness, is carrying to market a cloth which she has made, she meets Jesus stooping under the cross; at his command she lays on his face the cloth, which receives his image and with which she afterward works miracles. The use of these three legends is illustrative of the type of extra-Biblical material which found its way into the Scriptural poems.

Other apocryphal details appear throughout the story. The source of these details is not always evident. At the last supper Judas sat next to Jesus and stole the best morsel of his fish.[3] When John leaned on Jesus' breast he fell asleep; an angel took his spirit up to heaven, where he saw God Himself and the details which he later remembered and wrote in the Apocalypse.[4] In the high priest's palace

, ...

1. Cf. ante, p. 71
2. Cf. Foster: op. cit., pp. 72-73. Cf. Brown, Carleton: Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale of Chaucer
3. Cf. lines 209-214
4. Cf. lines 271-292

the third person to whom Peter denied Christ was Malchus, whose ear

he had cut off in the garden.[1]   Satan inspired the dream of Pilate's

wife, for he knew that if Jesus died the souls in his own "bailliwick"

would be saved.[2]   The blacksmith to whom the Jews went for nails for

the cross pretends to have a sore hand; by God's grace it looks sore

to the Jews, so that they excuse him, but his wife makes the nails.[3]

Jesus' words from the cross include the traditional "All ye that pass

by, stop and look on my face, and see if any pain may be bitterer than

mine."[4]   When Jesus called "Hely, Hely, lama abatany" (Eloi, Eloi,

lama sabachtani), the Jews thought he called Hely, a man whom they

knew.[5]   These are just a few of the apocryphal incidents and details

included in the Northern Passion. One of its most striking charac-

teristics is this very inclusion of picturesque legendary material.

d. The Handling of Biblical Material

Reference has already been made to the evident desire of the

poet to render faithfully the Scriptural account in the expanded

version.[6]   Even in the original passion the Biblical narrative is

followed in general outline from the triumphal entry and the begin-

ning of the Holy Week. However, events are frequently transposed

from the Biblical order. For example, the raising of Lazarus is

included in the events of Passion Week, placed, of course, after the

entry into Jerusalem. The poem opens with the Jews' conspiracy and

. . . .

1. Cf. lines 711-732
2. Cf. lines 1061-1108
3. Cf. lines 1443-1502
4. Cf. lines 1755-1764
5. Cf. lines 1785-1796
6. Cf. ante, p. 142

Caiaphas' prophecy; then follows the triumphal entry. There is no
need to enumerate here the various incidents related; no important
incident from the Biblical account is omitted. A brief quotation
will illustrate the poet's method of handling the Biblical narrative.
The incident is the Last Supper, and Jesus has just washed his dis-
ciples' feet.

> He sett him doun þam al bitwene.
> When he was sett þan said he sone
> 'Noght ȝe knaw what I have done,
> Ne noght ȝe wate (know) what will bifall.
> Maister and lord now ȝe me call
> And wele ȝe say, for I am so.
> And ȝit I have kneled ȝow vnto
> And wasschen ȝoure fete all on raw,
> So þat þe sall ensample knaw
> Meke and bowsun (obedient) forto be,
> Ilkone (each one) till oþer with hert fre,
> And serue ilkone vntill oþer,
> Als to ȝoure fader or ȝoure broþer. 1

One more interesting characteristic should be mentioned:
the poet's habit of clothing even the Biblical material in a medieval
garb. All the medieval poems do this to a certain extent, and yet
the <u>Northern Passion</u> is especially full of interesting anachronisms.
Reference has already been made to the "fish" of which the disciples
partook on Maunday Thursday and the "bailly" of Satan which he did
not wish disturbed. [2]   Other details show that for the medieval reader
the events of Scripture took place under conditions very like those
in the England of his own time. Soldiers are always "knights." The
soldiers who guard the tomb are armed in iron and steel, and they
swear by "god Mahound" in good crusading fashion. [3]   Jesus appears
before "Sir Pilate" and "Bishop Caiaphas." [4]

. . . .

1. Lines 354-364, Harleian MS
2. Cf. ante, p. 143 and p. 144
3. Cf. lines 1949 ff
4. Cf. lines 746, 816b

e. Relation to Drama

Reference has been made to the relationship established by Miss Foster between the Midland Stanzaic Life of Christ and the Chester cycle of Scripture plays.[1] Here, too, in the North Miss Foster has shown a similar relationship between the Passion and the "mysteries" by discovering parallels in the case of three different cycles, the York, the Towneley, and the Hegge plays (the latter frequently called the Ludus Coventriae).[2] Of course, there is agreement in content between the plays and the Passion in the general similarity due to common Scriptural origin, and in the use of incidents which, though non-Biblical, are drawn from a common store of medieval tradition. But Miss Foster's study has revealed a more significant agreement in incidents which are not found elsewhere in Middle English and either rarely or not at all in Latin or French. Such incidents as the following are common to the York Cycle and the Passion:[3] the combination of the disciples' strife on the way to Jerusalem with the strife at the last supper;[4] the identification of the soldier whose ear Peter cut off with the third man to whom Peter denied Christ;[5] the identification of Mt. Calvary with the Field of Blood bought with the thirty pieces of silver.[6] Another type of evidence which Miss Foster brings forth is parallel phrasing. She has found nineteen illustrations of parallels between the York Cycle and the Passion, occurring in all three stages of the cycle's

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1. Cf. ante, p. 130
2. Foster: The Northern Passion and Drama, op. cit., pp. 81 ff
3. Cf. ibid.
4. Cf. lines 297-308
5. Cf. lines 715-726
6. Cf. lines 885-900

development, [1] seven illustrations of verbal parallels with the
Towneley Cycle, [2] and a series of forty-two parallels which establish
the _Passion_ as a source for the Hegge plays. [3] As far as the purpose
here is concerned this is simply an indication of the fact that such
a poem as the _Northern Passion_ did reach the common people and was
influential outside clerical circles.

2. The Southern Passion

Of an entirely different character is the second great
Middle English poem on the passion, even as the South English Legend-
ary in which it is incorporated is different from the Northern Homily
Collection, to which the _Northern Passion_ is perhaps less closely re-
lated.

The use of picturesque legendary incident in the _Northern
Passion_ has already been noted, and the dramatic character of the
poem may be inferred from its influence on the religious plays. Its
characteristics have been summarized thus:

> "The Northern Passion represents the loose practices of fourteenth
> century preaching. From a French poem the events of Christ's life
> are refashioned into an absorbing story, demanding from the
> hearers the same emotional reaction as any other romance: . . .
> Legends of doubtful origin are encrusted on the Biblical story
> . . . all in full confidence that the eager and uncritical
> audience will ask only for excitement, not for a well-authenti-
> cated history." [4]

On the other hand, the _Southern Passion_, like the South English
Legendary is more definitely didactic, more obviously a sermon. It
follows more closely the Biblical narrative, and, while its purpose

. . . .

1. Cf. Foster: op. cit., pp. 84-85
2. Cf. ibid., pp. 87-88
3. Cf. ibid., pp. 90-95
4. Foster: Northern Passion Supplement, p. viii

is to make vivid to the layman the Bible story, it aims also to arouse in the reader or listener some quality of feeling regarding the events. There is, moreover, a definite attempt to apply the incidents to contemporary life and to turn the emotional reaction of the hearer into channels of Christian living. In a word, the purpose is definitely homiletic. Miss Foster expresses amazement that "before 1300 an Englishman could be telling the same story of Christ's life, not with the loose embroidery of legend, but closely in accord with the Bible; and that along with this conservatism in matter was a clear appreciation of the bearing of these incidents on contemporary life."[1] Mention has already been made of the evidence that the friars were responsible for the South English Legendary.[2] Perhaps it is true that the Southern Passion shows the "new spirit which the friars breathed into English preaching."[3]

a. Its Relation to the South English Legendary

The Southern Passion is the name given to the narrative poem dealing with the passion, resurrection, and ascension which is incorporated in ten manuscripts of the South English Legendary.[4] In its complete form the poem has 2550 lines, and it usually appears in the Legendary as a unit. There is a similar piece, a life of Christ, which stands in a few manuscripts of the Legendary in both a longer and shorter version, but which must be distinguished from the

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1. Foster: Supplement, p. ix
2. Cf. ante, pp. 77-78
3. Foster: Supplement, p. x
4. For a description of these manuscripts see Brown, B. D.: Manuscripts of the Southern Passion, Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 169, pp. viii ff. Cf. Brown, Carleton: Register, Vols. I and II

Passion, the two never being confused in the manuscripts. There is also a set of verses on the Resurrection which occurs independently in several manuscripts of the Legendary and which is also a part of every text of the Passion.[1] Mrs. Brown concludes that the Southern Passion was originally written to fill a place in the Legendary for the following reasons: (1) all extant texts except one variant are preserved in manuscripts of the Legendary Collection; (2) though not always included, the Passion appears in several early manuscripts of the Legendary; (3) there is a marked resemblance in style and vocabulary between the Passion and the Legendary; (4) the attitude toward the church and society is the same in both; (5) the relation implied between writer and audience is also the same.[2] There is no warrant for assuming the same author, for there is evidence that many hands worked upon the legendary as it circulated.[3] There is, indeed, in the Legendary a highly involved problem of structural development which has never been solved and which does not seem likely to be solved until more of the manuscripts have been printed. Mrs. Brown suggests two structural principles evidently at work in the arrangement of the Biblical material, the Temporale: (1) the construction of a consecutive biography of Christ and (2) the collection of appropriate narratives about the two nucleii of Christmas and Easter.[4] The question is: Which came first? Moreover, is it possible to see in those two principles the conflict between a desire to give the content of Scripture to the people and the intention to instruct them regarding ecclesiasti-

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1. Brown, B. D.: Introduction to the Southern Passion, Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 169, p. viii
2. Cf. ibid., pp. ix-x
3. Cf. ibid., p. x
4. Cf. ibid., p. viii, ftn. 6

cal and liturgical matters? Altogether the relationship between the _Passion_ and the Legendary is highly important in establishing the aim, date, authorship, and popularity of the shorter piece.

b. Its Date and Dialect

If, as seems likely, the _Southern Passion_ is the work of friars, it is an evidence of their early aims and purposes, for the date of the poem must be put back in the thirteenth century. It is pretty well established now that the South English Legendary must have been compiled, originally, between 1275 and 1285.[1] The fact that the _Passion_ appears in the earliest texts of the Legendary has already been noted.[2] Mrs. Brown records an observation which establishes the latest possible date for the _Passion:_ there is in some earlier texts a reference to the Jews living in England, and the expulsion of the Jews took place in 1290.[3]

The dialect of both the Passion and the Legendary is obviously Southern from the titles which have been given to them. The early texts are almost exclusively Southern, and there are innumerable allusions to the local saints of the Southern and Southwestern counties.[4] Mrs. Brown suggests that the language points to the Southwest as the original home of the Legendary.[5]

c. Its Use of Scriptural Material

So closely does the poet of the _Southern Passion_ follow the

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1. Cf. Wells, Minnie E.: op. cit., p. 337
2. Cf. ante, p. 149
3. Cf. Brown, B. D.: op. cit., p. xi
4. Cf. ibid., pp. xxxi-xxxvi
5. Cf. ibid., p. xxxvi

accounts of the four Evangelists, especially in regard to the words
and acts of Jesus and Mary that his version may be called a metrical
translation rather than a paraphrase. Even the phrasing corresponds
to the Latin text, according to the editor.[1] Reference is made to the
skill with which the poet has woven the four accounts into a single
continuous narrative, his "grave restraint" and "almost austerely
canonical temper, specially noteworthy in an age which allowed wide
imaginative liberty in writing upon sacred themes."[2] Especially in
the parts of the poem based on New Testament material, he carefully
avoids mixing apocryphal incident; he does add legendary lore, as has
been observed, but he keeps such material carefully separate from the
Scripture story. Mrs. Brown's tabulation of passages from the Vulgate[3]
indicates how the Scripture material falls in blocks in the poem.
There are seventy-two passages from Matthew, twenty-one from Mark,
forty-eight from Luke and Acts, and forty-nine from John, so that the
distribution among the four Evangelists seems to have been fairly even.
The poet does, indeed, take liberty with the order of Biblical events,
as when he introduces some of the parables of Matthew 13 during Holy
Week,[4] and toward the end several chapters are abridged in order to
summarize events.[5] Yet a passage such as the following, based obvious-
ly upon John 13, shows the writer's feeling for the quality of his
material:

> Byffore þe ffeste of Ester day, Ihesus wuste ȝare (knew well)
> þat his tyme was ney ycome, þa he sholde hennes ffare

. . . .

1. Cf. Brown, B. D.: op. cit., p. lv
2. Ibid., p. xii
3. Cf. ibid., pp. lvi-lvii
4. Cf. lines 345-384
5. Cf. lines 2467 ff

out of þis wordle to his ffader, he was so ȝere
þat he louede his owe men þat in þe world were. 1

d. Its Relation to Other Sources

In spite of the fact that the poet of the Southern Passion
follows the Vulgate closely in substance and to a large extent in
phrasing, it would be too much to expect of a medieval writer that he
should use no other "authorities." There was the large bulk of expo-
sitory material, for the Passion was essentially a sermon -- the in-
terpretation of parables, the descriptive details, the picturesque
analogues, the emotional apostrophes. Mrs. Brown has attributed the
bulk of the expository material, except the interpretation of para-
bles, to the Historia Scholastica of Peter Comestor, already mentioned
here as a favorite source. [2] Such details as the name of the pit to
which Peter fled weeping [3] and the miraculous character of the spot of
ground from which Jesus ascended [4] may be traced to Comestor. A number
of the explanations of parables have been found to correspond with the
interpretations in Hugo of St. Victor's Allegoriae in Novum Testamentum. [5]
The poet's view of the part played by the devil has been traced to
Bernard of Clairvaux's theology, and the rhetorical and lyrical feeling
of Bernard and the poets who imitated him must have influenced to some
extent the emotional quality of the Passion. [6] The influence of the
Legenda Aurea upon the whole of the South English Legendary has been
pretty well established; thus its influence upon the Southern Passion

. . . .

1. Lines 867-871
2. Cf. Brown, B. D.: op. cit., pp. lx-lxxi. Note especially the list
   of parallels, pp. lxii-lxx
3. Cf. lines 1257-1258
4. Cf. lines 2411-2412a-f
5. Cf. Brown, B. D.: op. cit., p. lxx
6. Cf. ibid., pp. lxxii-lxxv

is undoubted. Mrs. Brown has presented evidence to show that the Lignum Vitae of Bonaventura and the Meditationes Vitae Christi, formerly attributed to him, while they have not contributed subject matter, have left an impress upon the purpose, method, and temper of the Passion.[2] The significance of this array of sources lies in the fact that it shows the Passion to have been the work of no ignorant clerk in an isolated corner of the world, but the contribution of one thoroughly at home in his field and entirely familiar with what had already been written. Mrs. Brown points out that the poem "incorporates material from Scriptures and patristic writings at a period when this material had not yet become diffused and conventionalized in the vernacular," thus illustrating the "primary stage of a process through which the spirit and substance of medieval theology were transfused into the popular literature of devotion."[3]

e. Its Permanent Values

There seems to have been no evidence that the Southern Passion influenced the popular drama in any such way as the companion Passion of the North. Indeed the dramatic elements were not particularly striking in this Southern Passion. Thus it did not pass immediately into popular literature. Yet its widespread use is shown by the number of extant texts preserved. It must have been read from many pulpits in that age when preaching was revived by the friars, and many a common man who knew no Latin must have heard its Scripture story with delight and listened to its exhortations with profit.

. . . . . .

1. Wells, Minnie E.: loc. cit.
2. Brown, B. D.: op. cit., pp. lxxviii-xcii. Cf. pp. liii-liv
3. Ibid., p. lii

Its values, aside from the faithfulness of its translation, lie in two or three characteristics. For one thing, there are touches of realism which strengthen the evidence for friar authorship, the mendicants being familiar with everyday life in a way not possible to the monks.[1] Moreover, the poet shows an unusually keen judgment in his expressions of social justice. There is a passage on the single standard of morality which is remarkable in the thirteenth century.[2] Finally, the poem has a remarkably fine appeal to feeling. Mrs. Brown comments on the "controlled treatment of the Crucifixion in an age saturated with physical horrors in its literature."[3] That sense of restraint is evident in the three following lines:

> 'My fader,' Ihesus sede þo, myd wel softe breþe,
> 'Ich by-take my gost in þin hond' and þo closed his eye,   [4]
> And his heued (head) heng a-doun, and my þat word gan to deye.

3. The Passion of Our Lord

Brief mention should be made of one other version of the passion, an early poem coming from the thirteenth century, preserved in a Jesus College, Oxford, MS and printed by Morris in his Old English Miscellany.[5] It is relatively brief, containing only 706 lines of verse and recounting mainly the story of Holy Week, with a short introduction summarizing the ministry of Jesus. There is neither homiletic nor legendary amplification to the story. The author's aim seems to have been to present the gospel story as told by the four Evangelists. There is little doubt that the material came from the

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1. Cf. lines 1959-1962
2. Cf. lines 1925-1982
3. Brown, B. D.: op. cit., p. xvi
4. Lines 1580-1582
5. Early English Text Society, Original Series, no. 49, pp. 37-57

the Vulgate. The first lines suggest that it might have been given

orally or intended for oral use:

> Ihere now one lutele tale, þat ich eu wille telle,
> As we vyndeþ hit i write, in þe godspelle.
> Nis hit nouht of karlemeyne ne of þe Duzeper,
> Ac of cristes þrewinge, þet he þolede (suffered) her.

Evidently the pious writer would substitute the gospel story for the

entertaining tales of the minstrels. He may have been suggesting by

his poem sermon material to please the popular ear. There is a

didactic purpose, too, for the poet further adds that we may enjoy

bliss with Christ if we keep ourselves from deadly sins and do his

commandments.[1] The story proper begins with an invocation to the

Lady Mary, yet she is not praised for her own virtue but because she

gave us " at beste child at euer wes ibore."[2] The simplicity of the

poet is seen in such lines as these following the Gethsemane account:

> He wes of-dred of þe deþ, þet is god and mon,
> Wel ouhte we beon aferd if we wyse were. 3

These lines also indicate that the poem might have had a homiletic

purpose. There is no doubt that such pieces were often used as

pulpit discourses, and were indeed written for that purpose. At any

rate, the influence of this Passion poem must not have been very

widespread, and its significance is slight.

C. Prose Versions of New Testament Parts

In the last half of the fourteenth century the movement

toward popularization of religious knowledge seems to have gained in

strength. The part played by paraphrases of the life of Christ and

. . . .

1. Lines 17-19
2. Line 21
3. Lines 152-153

of the passion has already been noted, as well as the association in these versions of a wealth of apocryphal and legendary incident. The survival of another type of material seems to point more definitely in another direction -- toward actual vernacular translations. It is difficult to know whether many of these have any particular connection with Wyclif's work. No doubt there have been attributed to him some with which he actually had little or nothing to do. But it is evident from a study of these surviving pieces that there was a sort of movement, orthodox in origin rather than Lollard, to put large portions of the New Testament in the vernacular for the benefit of the clergy or possibly the upper classes of the laity. Forshall and Madden have taken these into account in tracing the steps leading to the Wyclif- fite versions.[1] Notice will be taken here of two such translations which were not done by Wyclif or any of his followers -- a harmony of the Gospels discovered by Miss Paues in a Pepysian manuscript and a version of the Pauline Epistles.[2]

1. The Pepysian Gospel Harmony

There are a number of manuscripts of a harmony of the Gospels in English which has generally been attributed to Wyclif because it differs very little from his earlier version of the gospels and because its prologue follows so closely the prologue to Wyclif's exposition of Matthew.[3] It is a translation of the twelfth century harmony made by Clement of Llanthony Priory in Monmouthshire. Of the

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1. Cf. Forshall and Madden: Preface, pp. x ff
2. Cf. ibid. See also Paues: A Fourteenth Century English Biblical Version, (1902) Introduction, pp. xxi ff
3. Cf. Forshall and Madden: op. cit., pp. x-xi; Wells: Manual, p. 407

seven manuscripts of this version mentioned by Forshall and Madden [1]
none is the Pepys 2498, discovered in the library of Magdalene College,
Cambridge. Its real contents had been overlooked because it was er-
roneously catalogued and labelled as a collection of Wyclif's sermons. [2]
Miss Paues discovered the real contents to be a Middle English harmony
of the four gospels distinct from the version of Clement of Llanthony
always attributed to Wyclif.

a. The Pepys Manuscript

The Pepys MS was found to contain in addition to the har-
mony of the gospels, which covers the first forty-three folios,
several pieces entitled as follows: a litel tretis of diuinite, etc.;
Here bigynnen good techings; apocalips on englissh; of þe sauter on
englissh (this is the psalter contained also in British Museum
Additional 17,376 and in Trinity College, Dublin, A 44 [3]); the Recluse;
Of oure lefdy Marie; the Gospel of Nicodemus. It may be observed that
two other pieces in the collection are Biblical translations, one of
the Apocalypse, probably the one most often attributed to Wyclif as
his first work of translation, and the other a Psalter. [4] The compiler
of this manuscript showed, then, some interest in preserving transla-
tions of parts of the Bible, whether canonical or apocryphal as in the
case of the Gospel of Nicodemus. The manuscript has been dated around
1400, which would suggest that the originals belonged to the late

. . . .

1. Cf. op. cit., p. x
2. Cf. The Pepysian Gospel Harmony, Early English Text Society, Ori-
   ginal Series, no. 157, Margery Goates, ed., 1923, p. xi
3. Cf. ante, p. 85
4. Cf. Forshall and Madden: op. cit., p. vii

fourteenth century.[1]

b. The Characteristics of the Harmony

Miss Goates distinguishes two kinds of gospel harmonies:
the type in which the four accounts are woven into a continuous
narrative and the type in which the four texts are arranged in parallel
columns.[2] Either kind may be found today. The former is more primi-
tive, dating back to Tatian's Diatesseron in the second century. This
is also the type of the Pepysian Harmony, as it seems to be of most
medieval harmonies. Here the omissions are few: the genealogies,
Luke's preface to Theophilus, most of Matthew's quotations from the
Old Testament. The material added is mostly for explanation. For
example, the Pharisees are defined as "þe folk of religioun in þat
tyme,"[3] the publicans as "þe heþene baylives (bailiff's) servaunt,"[4]
the Samaritans as "those þat in one half weren Jewes & in anoþer half
hij weren payens."[5] Sometimes the deviation is merely verbal, for the
sake of clearness, the use of some homely parallel, as when John the
Baptist is said to have eaten, not locusts and wild honey but "garlic
and bryony."[6] In the account of the marriage at Cana the stone water-
pots are described as "sexe boketes þat þe gode man and al þe meigne
wesshen of, everilch of þe mesure of þre galouns."[7] In the verse about
all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, "glory" becomes

. . . .

1. Cf. Goates: Introduction, pp. xii-xiii
2. Cf. ibid., p. xlv
3. Section 9.6
4. Section 9.17
5. Section 15.10-11
6. Section 9.4
7. Section 12.12-13

"wodes and feldes and tounes."[1] The high priest is a "bisshop"; the Passover is called the "fest of ester," the Holy of Holies in the Temple, the "hei‍ʒe auter," and evening "evensong tyme." These anachronisms may have been unconscious; they may have been consciously used to make the terms more intelligible to fourteenth century readers.

Paragraph headings are also added to the text. The whole is divided into 113 paragraphs, each with a separate title, brief and to the point, such as the following chosen at random:

Hou þat Jhesus raised þe wedewes douʒtter from deþ to lyue.[2]

Hou Jesus blissed þe children and biclippede hem.(called them to him) [3]

Hou Jesus ches hym sixty and twelue deciples.[4]

Paragraphs 94-100 deal with the Passion. Here the headings indicate not so much events as the time of the events. The word passioun according to medieval usage covered what was regarded as the supreme and almost a separate portion of Christ's life. In the Pepysian Harmony the paragraphs describe events from Holy Wednesday to Good Friday.

c. The Purpose of the Harmony

The Pepysian Harmony seems designed for private devotional reading rather than reading aloud in service or in small groups. Miss Goates suggests that it was probably intended as a guide to meditation on the gospel story.[5] The numerous explanations and definitions of terms suggests that it was aimed for lay-reading, though such explana-

. . . .

1. Section 10.27-28
2. Section 29
3. Section 73
4. Section 32
5. Cf. Goates: op. cit., p. xlix

tions might be helpful to nuns or more ignorant groups of clergy.
The headings of sections 81 and 95 suggest something as to the devo-
tional purpose:

81. Here bigynne þe secounde meditacioun by þe þursday

95. Here bigynne þe sexte meditacioun vpon þe friday

The fact that it is a complete and chronologically arranged life of
Christ with divisions into short sections would enhance the value of
the Harmony for daily reading and meditation. Certainly it would
have an appeal as a book of devotion either for the clergy or for the
laity of the upper class.

d. The Relation of the Harmony to the Vulgate

It seems evident that the Harmony came, not directly from
the Vulgate but rather from an unknown French source. Evidence pre-
sented for a French rather than a Latin source is in the vocabulary and
phraseology: curious verbal errors which are likely mistranslations
of a French original; occasional retention of French gender, as in the
use of "he" instead of "it" with reference to the temple; idiomatic
phrases suggesting a French source; a strong French element in the
vocabulary.[1] This evidence is interesting in pointing to the general
circulation of such harmonies elsewhere than in England.

e. The Character of the Translation

There are, of course, many flaws in the actual translation,
as is to be expected of a second or third hand rendering. Miss Goates
remarks upon the technical faults, the tendency to add together rather

. . . .

1. Goates: op. cit., p. xv

than harmonize apparently contradictory accounts.[1]   The translation is

often awkward. Its chief interest is in its quaintness and picturesque-

ness illustrated by the following quotations:

The Pharisewes gruchcheden that he baptized so mychel folk.[2]

For it behoved nedes that Jesus wex and that he (John the Baptist)
unwex. 3

& Jesus ledde them (John and Andrew) hom to his jn (inn) and her-
berewed (harbored) them that nizth. 4

And whan thai herden this, hij wexen all wrothe and stirten up
and caccheden hym out of the toun, and ladden him upon the anged
side of the heiz mounteyne and wolden have done hym tumble adoune. 5

(The blind man of John 9 told the Pharisees that Jesus had healed
him.) He seide it hem so swetelich and so dignelich for Jesus sake,
that for pure ire hij dryven hym away. 6

2. The Pauline Epistles

There are various fourteenth century renderings of parts of

the New Testament in English, all but one in the North and none of them

apparently the work of Wyclif's translators. They seem to be largely

verse by verse commentaries based on the Church Fathers, following an

English translation of the Vulgate. Most of these are not available

for study, as they have never been printed except in excerpts.[7] There

are, for example, commentaries on the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and

Luke, the Acts and Catholic Epistles, the Apocalypse, and the Pauline

. . . .

1. Goates: op. cit., p. xlix
2. Section 13.5
3. Section 12.15
4. Section 9.20
5. Section 16.35
6. Section 59.5
7. Specimens are printed in the footnotes in Forshall and Madden's
   Preface. An account of them is also given in the Preface. See also
   Miss Paues' A Fourteenth Century English Biblical Version, which was
   not available for the present study.

Epistles. Of all of these the most accessible is the version of the Pauline Epistles found in MS Parker 32, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and published by the Early English Text Society,[1] with a critical introduction by Miss Margaret Powell. A few points regarding this translation will be mentioned here. It is striking that there seems to be only one other version of the Pauline Epistles from this period, and that also exists in only one manuscript.[2] A brief account of it is given in Forshall and Madden's Preface.[3]

a. The Parker MS 32

Parker MS 32 belongs to the latter half of the fourteenth century, according to Forshall and Madden, a view to which Miss Powell agrees on the basis of language.[4] It contains three items, all Biblical translation and commentary. First is a gloss and commentary upon Mark's gospel, consisting of a passage from the Latin Vulgate text, translated into English with a commentary on the passage based on Bede, Jerome, and Augustine, according to the marginal reference.[5] The second item is a gloss and commentary upon Luke's gospel similar to that of Mark. The third part of the manuscript consists of a version of the Pauline Epistles in which there is no commentary but only a few short glosses and alternative readings. The Latin epistle to the Laodiceans is included but not translated. The contents of the Epistles are as follows: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians,

. . . .

1. Extra Series, no. CXVI
2. MS Selwyn Collection 108. L. I printed by Miss Paues. Cf. Powell: Introduction to Pauline Epistles
3. Cf. p. xii
4. Cf. Powell: op. cit., pp. liii-lxvii
5. The commentary and translation of Matthew is also found in MSS Cambridge University Ii.2.12 and British Museum Egerton 842

Philippians, Colossians, epistle to the Laodiceans, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews.

b. The Origin and Purpose of the Translation

In Section VI of her introduction Miss Powell has made a study of the origin and purpose of this particular version of the Pauline Epistles. Since there is no prologue or introduction by the translator, any conclusions regarding authorship or purpose must be inferred from internal evidence. It is necessary here only to summarize the results of Miss Powell's study. In the first place, the Parker 32 MS seems to have been the work of an orthodox hand. There are few references to indicate that the translator was even aware of the current Wycliffite heresies. It must be remembered that this is a Northern version and the Wycliffite movement flourished especially in the South. As far as original purpose is concerned it seems evident that this version was made, not for general reading by all, nor particularly for the private reading of an educated person, but "for the author's personal use in expounding Pauline arguments or in basing sermons upon them," and it would perhaps be equally well adapted "for the use of a teacher in a school addressing an audience composed of students who were capable of following, more or less, the passages in Latin as he read them."[1] The translation would have been made by an ecclesiastic, not a friar, since Miss Powell points out that no friar would have translated "in falsis fratribus" by "in false freris."[2] As far as date is concerned the evidence points to the latter part of the fourteenth century, either preceding or immediately following the Wycliffite

. . . .

1. Powell: op. cit., pp. lxv-lxvi
2. Cf. ibid., p. lxvi

1
versions.

c. The Character of the Translation

The following faults may be found in the translation of the Pauline Epistles: a labored style with little feeling for words, abundance of Latin constructions and Latin word order, a reflection of the Vulgate original; monotonous repetition of words and phrases; failure to distinguish shades of meaning in relation to the context; actual mistranslations; omissions of parts of verses; additions to the text.
2
All of these indicate the difficulties which medieval theologians had with the intricacies of Pauline thought. Such faults are found pretty generally in the early translations, Wycliffite included. Altogether there is, in this case, however, little indication of high quality of work, though it must be remembered that the presence of the Latin text with the English indicates that the translator had no intention of giving an independent version. Miss Powell's conclusion is that

> ". . . for the most part the translator conscientiously attempts
> to make the text clear by the narrow light of a very simple
> morality and dogma . . . although hampered by an indifferent
> knowledge of Latin and the lack of any real mastery over his own
> language." 3

Since I Corinthians 13 is a sort of touchstone for felicitous translation in the New Testament, perhaps no better illustration can be given of the faults of this fourteenth century translator than the quotation of that famous chapter. The Latin text is, of course, omitted. The translator seems to have added no commentary to this chapter.

. . . .

1. Cf. Powell: op. cit., pp. lxvi-lxvii
2. Cf. discussion of the English text, ibid., Section V
3. Ibid., p. lxxvi

Ʒif I speke with aungelys tunge and mannys and hafe not forsoþe
charyte I am maad as sownande brass or as a cymballe chymbande.
If I hafe had prophecye; and hafe knowyn alle priuytees and alle
kunnyng, and if I hafe had alle feiþ so þat I bere ouer hylles,
and hafe not forsoþe charyte I am nought; and if I hafe dalt alle
my facultees in to þe metys of þe poere men and I hafe betakyn
my body so þat I brenne and hafe not charitee; no thyng to me
profitys. Charytee is pacyent; he is benygne; charyte has none
enuye; he dose not ouerthwertly; he is not bolned with pride; he
is not coueytous; he seekys not þat hyse ben; he is not wrathed;
he thenkys not euyl; he has not ioye ouer wyckednesse; he ioyes
forsoþe to veryte; alle thyng he suffres; alle thyng he beleuys;
alle thyng he hopis; alle thyng he susteynes. Charitee neuer
fallys; of prophecyes schal be voydyd or tungys schal cese; or
kunnyng schal be destryed. Of partye þerfore we knowyn; and of
partye we prophecyen. When þat schal come þat is parfyte, þat
schal be voyded þat is unparfit; when I was a lytyl chyld; I spac
as a lytil child and sauerd as a lytil chyld and thoghte as a
litil childe. When forsoþ I am maad a man; I voydede þas thynges
þe whylke were of þe chyld. Now forsoþe we seen by þe myrour in
þe licnesse; þenne forsoþe we schal see, face to face. Now I
knowe of partye; þenne forsoþe I schal knowen as I am knowen.
Now forsoþe dwellyn þise þre; feith, hope, charite; þe more for-
soþe of þise is charytee.

D. Summary and Conclusions

It is evident, then, that in thirteenth and fourteenth
century England there were both verse and prose translations and
paraphrases of parts of the New Testament. Most of the paraphrases
and all of the translations are products of the fourteenth century.
However, it has been seen that the verse paraphrases from the thir-
teenth century are closer to the Bible in at least two cases -- the
Middle English Evangelie and the Passion of Our Lord -- than are those
of the later period, when legendary additions seem to be the fashion.

The authorship of these versions is universally unknown.
The author's purpose, however, seems to have been either didactic and
homiletic or devotional. Where the homiletic aim is predominant the
preacher's desire is to instruct the listener regarding the various
festivals of the church year, at least those relating to Christ, to

to give him the Bible story of Christ's life and all the legends that
have been associated with it, or to apply the story of Christ's life
to the situations of contemporary existence. There is strong evidence
that much of this material was intended to be used and was actually
used as sermons delivered from the pulpits of the day. Where the
pieces show primarily a devotional purpose, the assumption is that
they were used either by the author alone or by others of the clergy
or upper class laity for private devotional reading. The homiletic
material shows the widest circulation and the greatest popularity.

Two tendencies seem to have been at work in the fourteenth
century of Scripture portions. There is the tendency to relate the
four gospels to the church festivals with a gradual subordination of
the Scripture story to the apocryphal and legendary incidents. This
takes place in the homilies. Then there are the first beginnings of
actual vernacular translations, usually with the Latin text and a
commentary based on the Fathers, and presumably circulating only
among ecclesiastics or the better class of the laity. Most of the
New Testament seems to have been translated in such a fashion even
before the time of Wyclif or at least contemporaneous with his work.
This was done in the North largely and was entirely orthodox in origin.
Wyclif's purpose differed in that he aimed to give the whole Bible,
not just portions here and there, to the whole people of England, not
just to ecclesiastics and the upper class of the laity, and to give
it separate from either the Vulgate text or patristic commentary.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As has been evident throughout the foregoing study, it is very difficult to draw final conclusions on the basis of the material here examined. Too little is known about the authorship and use of most of these early paraphrases and translations of Scripture portions. The only legitimate conclusions are in the nature of observations on the basis of internal evidence. Such observations have been suggested throughout the study. Yet in spite of the difficulties it would seem that a large body of material such as the present study comprises would reveal interesting and valuable points regarding the religious life of the later Middle Ages. It may be recalled that the central problem of the thesis was stated in two questions: (1) To what extent were portions of the Bible translated or paraphrased in Middle English preceding and contemporaneous with the Wycliffite translations and what were the characteristics of such versions? (2) What evidence exists as to their use? It was also suggested that some light might be thrown upon two questions of general historical interest: (1) the extent to which the medieval church actually gave the Bible to its constituency and (2) the preparation of the English soil for the work of Wyclif and later for the Reformation. The purpose of this final chapter is to focalize what has been suggested throughout the thesis regarding these specific and general questions.

A. The Extent and Use of Middle English Biblical Translations and Paraphrases

The charts on the following pages indicate the scope of the

CHART I

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

REGARDING PARAPHRASES OF OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE MATERIAL

Piece	Century	Location	Number of Manuscripts	Length
Genesis and Exodus	First half of thirteenth	Southeast Midland	1	4162 lines
Cleanness	Fourteenth	West Midland	1	1812 lines
Patience	Fourteenth	West Midland	1	528 lines
Cursor Mundi (Both Old Testament and New Testament material)	Fourteenth	Northumbrian	4 complete 5 fragmentary (in all dialects)	29555 lines
Iacob and Ioseph	Middle Thirteenth	Southern	1	538 lines
Strophic Version	Last half Fourteenth	Northern	2	?
Old Testament Material in the Northern Homily Collection	Fourteenth (complete by 1350)	Northern	about 9 (all dialects)	?
Old Testament Material in the South English Legendary	1275-1285	Southern	about 8	about 25 folios of MSS

ber of scripts	Length	Type	Sources	Authorship	Purpose
1	4162 lines	Verse paraphrase	Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica, Vulgate (indirect)	Clerical	Religious instruction
1	1812 lines	Verse paraphrase	Vulgate	Clerical (man of birth and education)	Homiletic (Moral and didactic instruction)
1	528 lines	Verse paraphrase	Vulgate	Clerical (man of birth and education)	Homiletic (Moral and didactic instruction)
omplete ragment- ary all alects)	29555 lines	Verse paraphrase	Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica, Vulgate	Priest	Religious instruction and entertainment
1	538 lines	Verse paraphrase	Chiefly Vulgate	Probably a friar	Narrative interest and implied instruction
2	?	Verse paraphrase	?	?	?
bout 9 dia- ects)	?	Verse paraphrase	Vulgate and Contemporary compilations	Clerical	Sermon material
bout 8	about 25 folios of MSS	Verse paraphrase	Vulgate and Legenda Aurea	Friars	Sermon material

CHART II

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

REGARDING TRANSLATIONS OF THE PSALTER

Piece	Century	Location	Number of Manuscripts	Length
Earliest Complete English Prose Psalter	Before the middle of fourteenth	West Midland	2	Complet Psalter
Surtees Psalter	First half of fourteenth	Northumbria	6	Complet Psalter
Richard Rolle's Psalter and Commentary	Second quarter of fourteenth	Hampole in Yorkshire (Northern)	about 23	Comple Psalter
Translation of Psalms in the Prymer	Fourteenth	Found in all dialects -- origin unknown	Unknown (a great number)	52 Psalms and other Cantiol
Maydestone's Version of the Penitential Psalms	Late fourteenth	Southern and Southeast Midland	19 (including variants)	7 Penitenti Psalms
Brampton's Version of the Penitential Psalms	At the close of the fourteenth	Southern and Midland	6 (including variants)	7 Penitenti Psalms

r of cripts	Length	Type	Sources	Authorship	Purpose
2	Complete Psalter	Prose translation	Glossed version of the Vulgate	Clerical (unknown)	Probably devotional
3	Complete Psalter	Metrical translation (couplets)	Probably a Roman Psalter with an Anglo-Saxon interlinear translation	Clerical (unknown)	Probably devotional
it 5	Complete Psalter	Prose translation with Commentary	Vulgate and Church Fathers	Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole (ca 1300-1349)	Devotional -- for a nun of Hampole
wn eat er)	52 Psalms and other Canticles	Prose translation	Vulgate	Unknown -- probably many hands	Devotional and liturgical
uding ants)	7 Penitential Psalms	Verse paraphrase (very free)	Vulgate and perhaps Breviary	Richard Maydestone (d. 1396)	Devotional (personal)
uding ants)	7 Penitential Psalms	Verse paraphrase (very free)	Vulgate and Breviary	Thomas Brampton (Confessor of Freres Minor)	Devotional (personal -- perhaps designed for instruction of spiritual children)

CHART III

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REGARDING

TRANSLATIONS AND PARAPHRASES OF NEW TESTAMENT PORTIONS

Piece	Century	Location	Number of Manuscripts	Length
Stanzaic Life of Christ	Fourteenth	West Midland	3	10840 lines
Evangelie	Latter Thirteenth	East Midland original	3	396, 519, and 1879 lines
Northern Passion	First half fourteenth	Northern original (circulated in all dialects)	11 original version 3 expanded version	2090 lines
Southern Passion	1275-1290	Southern -- probably South-west	10	2546 lines
Passion of Our Lord	Thirteenth	Southern	1	706 lines
Pepysian Gospel Harmony	Fourteenth	?	1	113 sections
Pauline Epistles	Latter fourteenth	Northern	1 (one other of different version)	all Pauline Epistles

er of scripts	Length	Type	Sources	Authorship	Purpose
3	10840 lines	Verse paraphrase (very free)	Higden's Polychronicon, Legenda Aurea, Vulgate	Probably a monk	Religious instruction of unlettered laymen
3	396, 519, and 1879 lines	Verse paraphrase (close)	Vulgate or Gospel Harmony, Breviary, Patristic compilations	Clerical	Devotional (personal)
original ersion xpanded ersion	2090 lines	Verse paraphrase (much legendary material)	Old French Passion, Vulgate (indirectly), harmonies, sermons, treatises, etc.	Clerical	Homiletic (interest in dramatic story)
10	2546 lines	Verse paraphrase (close)	Vulgate mainly, Comestor, Legenda Aurea, Hugo of St. Victor, Bonaventura, etc.	Probably friars	Homiletic (emotional appeal)
1	706 lines	Verse paraphrase (close)	Vulgate	Clerical (perhaps friar)	Homiletic (pulpit use)
1	113 sections	Prose translation	Vulgate through unknown French source	Clerical	Devotional (private reading)
1 other ifferent sion)	all Pauline Epistles	Prose translation with Latin text	Vulgate	Clerical	Private reading of educated person or cleric

material used throughout the study. It should be noted that, while the study is not exhaustive, it has aimed to examine all available material which may be considered as paraphrase or translation of substantial Scripture portions. Where pieces have not been available for examination, brief secondhand account has been given of them. Some interesting and significant observations may be made with reference to the various points.

1. The Scope of the Pieces

In general, it will be observed, the central points of interest are Old Testament stories, the Psalter, and the life of Christ, especially the story of the Passion. The Old Testament material covers with fair thoroughness the narratives from Genesis through II Kings. Prophecy is not touched upon, with the exception of the book of Jonah, which is, after all, an interesting story and so treated in the poem Patience. The philosophical and poetical portions, such as Ecclesiastes, Songs of Solomon or Proverbs, are also neglected, although there are brief paraphrases of the lamentations of Job in a number of manuscripts not mentioned in the present study because of their brevity. The Psalter is, significantly, the earliest complete book of the Bible translated in prose, and it seems to have been generally known in various English versions by the middle of the fourteenth century. Its relation to the liturgy and its devotional character would account for its popularity.

As for the New Testament, the life of Christ is by far the most popular portion. There again the narrative interest predominates, though the central place of the Mass, which is a symbolic drama of the death of Christ, would account for the popularity of the

Passion poems and the predominance of the Passion story over the
narratives of the ministry even in the complete "lives of Christ."
Very significant is the scarcity of versions of the epistles. Even
the history of the early church made little appeal. The Pentecost
story concludes most of the lives of Christ, but beyond that Acts is
given very little attention in the paraphrases. As to the epistolary
writings, it is not surprising that the medieval mind had some diffi-
culty when it attempted to wrèstle with Pauline thought and theology.
There is evidence of that struggle in the early translations of the
epistles. It may be noted that the only two versions of the Pauline
epistles in Middle English are from the latter half of the fourteenth
century, when the Wycliffite translations were already being made.

2. The Time of the Translations and Paraphrases

Of the pieces listed on the chart a slight majority are
from the fourteenth century. However, there is so little difference
in the numbers that any conclusions as to the growing interest in such
a movement to translate or paraphrase Scripture are impossible. Appar-
ently it was no more unusual to base a poem upon a Biblical story in
the fourteenth than in the thirteenth century. This suggests, and
there is other evidence regarding the point, that the stream of
Biblical paraphrase and translation was unbroken from Anglo-Saxon times,
the changes in the language following the Norman Conquest being the
only hindrance to a continuous interest in the Bible as a subject for
poetry. There is evidence, however, that the tendency to add legendary
and apocryphal material increased from 1300. Many of the thirteenth
century paraphrases are closer to the Biblical original than are those
of the following century.

3. The Geographical Distribution

Little need be said by way of explanation regarding the geography of the pieces studied. Obviously an interest in Biblical paraphrases and translations was general and not confined to any one locality. It is interesting to note also that the most popular pieces, for instance, the legendary and homiletic collections circulated throughout England, being copied often from one dialect into another.

4. The Manuscript Evidence of Popularity

The number of surviving manuscripts varies from one to twenty-three. No conclusions regarding popularity can be made from the fact that only one manuscript exists; a dozen other may have been lost. On the other hand, if a large number survive, it is safe to conclude that the piece did circulate and did enjoy some measure of popularity. Of the pieces studied those showing widest circulation are the Psalter of Rolle and the two legend and homily collections. The name and weight of the author would account for the former. In the case of the latter, it is evident that the church favored and the people liked those treatments of Bible story which had a strong element of the legendary and apocryphal, and that such a tendency to overlay the story with legend grew and spread in the fourteenth century. The homiletic use of these pieces would also partially account for their circulation.

5. The Length of the Pieces

General statements regarding the length of the pieces studied are of little significance. The verse paraphrases vary from a fragment of 396 lines to the compendious Cursor Mundi with its

29,555 lines. The longer poems are more likely to be those with a great deal of legendary addition, often so much so that the Biblical element is almost lost sight of. Of the prose pieces the translations of complete books of the Bible are few, three versions of the Psalter and two of the Pauline Epistles, with commentated versions of the gospels, Acts, the Apocalypse, and the Catholic epistles. All of the Psalters, however, are quite late in the fourteenth century.

6. Literary Types and Sources

It is evident that metrical paraphrases, and very free ones at that, were more common and more popular than literal prose translations. Except for the psalters prose translations were unknown until late in the fourteenth century. Even then they were made alongside the Latin version and the actual translation subordinated to the commentary. One limitation to prose translations was the Vulgate itself, which was the only Biblical source possible. Furthermore, the fact that patristic writing bore authority almost equal to that of Scripture allowed a mixture of sources, patristic and contemporary. There was no need to stick to the Bible when such mines of information as Comestor's Historia or the Legenda Aurea were at hand.

7. Authorship

Several observations may be made regarding authorship. In the first place, it is obvious that in most cases the author is entirely unknown. Universally, however, the pieces are the work of clerics -- priests, monks, or friars. Evidently there was no

ecclesiastical objection to anything of this sort. Apparently all
this literary work was entirely orthodox in origin. There seems to
have been no prohibitions which the poets and translators are attempt-
ing to evade. And when one studies the character of these pieces one
is impressed with the emphasis on the orthodox doctrines of penance,
confession, absolution, purgatory, hereditary depravity, the imma-
culate conception and the rest. Nowhere is there evidence of a de-
sire to reform. The part played by the friars, especially in the
thirteenth century, in disseminating the gospel story has already
been mentioned. Perhaps if the friars had continued with their early
spiritual fervor, the story of the Reformation might have been dif-
ferent. But they became involved in the scholasticism of the univer-
sities, where the tendency was certainly away from Scriptural theology.

8. The Purpose and Use of the Pieces

The authors' statements of purpose indicate, almost univer-
sally, an interest in instructing the common layman in religious
matters. The didactic aim is by far the most prominent, and the
evidence undoubtedly favors the view that individual clergymen, monks,
priests, and friars, felt the need of the laity for religious instruc-
tion, especially regarding the Bible stories, and attempted in some
way to meet that need. They recognized the fact that much which the
common man needed to know was tied up in an unknown tongue. The
language was developing rapidly through these two centuries, and it
is significant that such pieces as these had a prominent part in that
linguistic development. The pulpit use of much of this material
would place it within reach of large groups of men and women who
themselves could not even read.

The indications are that the actual translations, such as the versions of the Psalter, were more devotional than didactic in their purpose. They were evidently to be read, and so they could not have been widely circulated except among the upper classes and the clergy.

B. The Attitude of the Church

Altogether it would seem that through sermons, on formal and informal occasions, most of the narrative portions of the Bible were given to the ignorant laity, with a great deal of legendary admixture and moral admonition. Actual translations of parts of the Bible were available for those who could own and read manuscripts. Thus it may be concluded that as far as the English medieval church was able to give and as far as the people were able to receive, the Bible was made available. Certainly there was no attempt to withhold it in England before the time of the Lollards. It was a different matter on the Continent, where heresies were springing up more often. The English medieval church was singularly free from such movements until the time of Wyclif, and so there was no ban placed upon vernacular translations until that of Bishop Arundel in 1408. The hindrances were rather those of the age: an unlettered laity whose religion must necessarily be concrete and realistic; a narrow and traditional theology; a tendency on the part of the best minds to go off into vague speculation or mystical absorption; a scarcity of books and a small reading public; a rapidly changing social order with an almost frantic attempt on the part of the hierarchy to keep at any cost their own position in the face of these changes. It is no wonder that not until the fifteenth century was England really ready for a vernacular Bible. The fault

of the Church was that she tried to crush the movement when it did come, when she saw that it would interfere with her prestige and that it stimulated thought that led to a questioning of her doctrines, her dogma, and her traditions.

C. The Relation to the Reformation

What has all this to do with the Reformation? Little directly, it is true, but it serves to throw into relief the need for just the thing which the Reformation crystallized. The failure of these early translators to handle adequately Pauline thought shows that it was those very doctrines of justification and grace which the medieval church had all but lost. The negative influence of scholasticism, which might have served to open up the Scripture, had its development taken another course, only emphasizes the value of the Reformers' work. Yet the Reformation was possible because the people had before them during those medieval centuries, the essential of their religion, the cross of Jesus Christ with its redeeming power as set forth in the Mass, in the drama, in Cathedral sculpture and stained glass, and in the popular versions of the Passion preached from one end of England to the other.

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