

Leeds Studies in English

Article:

Bruce Dickins, 'The Ireland Blackburne Manuscript of the Seven Penitential Psalms, the Pricke of Conscience and Lamentacio sancti Anselmi', *Leeds Studies in English*, 3 (1934), 30-36

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=134482&silos_library=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

THE IRELAND BLACKBURNE MANUSCRIPT OF THE SEVEN PENITENTIAL PSALMS, THE PRICKE OF CONSCIENCE AND LAMENTACIO SANCTI ANSELMI.

“The Pricke of Conscience” was the most popular of Middle English devotional works.¹ In *A Register of Middle English Religious and Didactic Verse*, II, 60, 114, 328-333, Professor Carleton Brown listed 99 copies and four fragments; Miss Hope Emily Allen (*Writings ascribed to Richard Rolle*, pp. 372 ff.) noted five MSS. and one fragment which have come to light since Carleton Brown’s *Register* was printed; and to these may now be added the Ireland Blackburne text² which, through the great kindness of Major Gilbert Ireland Blackburne of Hale Hall, Liverpool, was placed at my disposal for some weeks in 1933. This MS. is bound in a vellum wrapper lettered on the spine in a modern³ hand “Rolle— | Hermit | of Hampole | De Morte | Purgatorio | Die Judicii | &c.— | 1340.” There is however no good reason for associating any one of the three works it contains with Richard Rolle. The version in eight-line stanzas rhyming *abababab* of “The Seven Penitential Psalms” is attributed to Rolle in the Bodleian MS. Digby 18; but the Bodleian MS. Rawlinson A. 389 states that it is

“By frere Richarde Maydenstoon,
In Mary ordre of þe Carme.”

Maydenstoon’s authorship is accepted by Carleton Brown (*Register*, II, 182-3, 361).⁴ The evidence for the ascription of

¹ A fine window in the north aisle of All Saints’, North Street, York, has representations of the Fifteen Last Days and at the bottom of each panel is an appropriate couplet derived from “The Pricke of Conscience.” This window is illustrated in colour in the Rev. P. J. Shaw’s *An Old York Church* (York, 1908).

² There is a brief reference to this MS. at p. 70 of the anonymous *Hale Hall: with Notes on the Family of Ireland Blackburne*, Liverpool, 1881. The British Museum ascribes this book, which was printed for private circulation, to C. Blackburne, but the copy in the office of Messrs. John White and Company, of Warrington, agents for the Hale Hall estate, has pencilled on the title-page “by John Paul Rylands.”

³ This hand is not earlier than the ownership of Mr. John Blackburne of Orford (*ob.* 1833), whose bookplate is carried by the MS.

⁴ M. Adler and M. Kaluza, who edited this work in *Anglia* x, 215-254, rightly assign it to the East Midland area but do not think it probable that it is the work of Maydenstoon, who was a Kentishman.

“The Pricke of Conscience” to Rolle has been shown by Miss Allen (*Radcliffe College Monographs*, No. 15, pp. 115-170 and *Writings ascribed to Richard Rolle*, pp. 372-397) to be most unsatisfactory, while neither the language nor the style of the third is that of Rolle. This last is a homiletic poem of 200 octosyllabic verses grouped into stanzas rhyming *ababccbcb*; the rhyme-word usually alliterates with at least one other syllable in the verse. Its first line is not recorded by Carleton Brown, nor have I been able to trace its publication elsewhere.

The manuscript, the parchment pages of which measure $9\frac{1}{2}$ by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches, now comprises sixteen gatherings (the first of three sheets and the rest of four sheets) followed by a single leaf and a single sheet; the last leaf is pasted down to the inside of the back cover. There is no certain trace of foliation in the first two gatherings, but the first surviving leaf of the third bears the appropriate ‘16’ in the top right hand corner of the recto and thence to the end of the fifth gathering the foliation offers no difficulty, though a little muddled in the fifth gathering, so that what is foliated ‘34’ (see below) is really f. 35. It begins again with ‘45’ on the first leaf of the sixth gathering that survives and, though often rendered illegible by damp, is apparently carried through to the end of the volume.⁵ Unless the foliation was in error this allows for the loss of a gathering of six folios only after f. 38—which may suggest that the missing section, as compared with the printed text of “The Pricke of Conscience,” was a good deal abridged. In addition one sheet (ff. 18-19) and six single leaves have been cut out, in most, if not all, cases for the illumination they bore. Red and blue are used to good effect on almost every page, and illuminated initials and floriated borders survive at ff. 26*a*, 34*a*, 45*b* and 132*b* (this last affected by damp). They are of good quality, executed in gold-leaf, blue, red, white and (at f. 34*a* and f. 132*b*) green, and taken along with the hand show that the MS. belongs to the early part of the fifteenth century.

There are a number of marginal notes of no great interest

⁵ It was certainly carried out before the excision of the leaves specified below.

in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century hands. Of greater interest and probably earlier in date are the "Ihus mercy" (top margin of f. 33*b*), apparently in the same hand as "Wyllm. Wilkyns" (fore-edge of f. 34*a*—according to the correct numbering), and the inscription written vertically in a single line on the fore-edge of f. 89*a*, "Rycharde Halter ys my name And withe my hande I wrote This same. Franciscus Quawden ow this boke &c."—which gives the name of an early owner of the manuscript.

The first and second gatherings, which were apparently copied independently of the rest, contain the greater part of "The Seven Penitential Psalms," though the Latin rubric at the head of each stanza is reduced to a single line, as

"Laborau in gemitu meo lauabo *per* singulas noctes," except at the beginning of the psalm where two lines in rubric are allowed. F. 1 is cut away except for a narrow strip at the top with traces of illumination; this is pasted down to the inside of the cover. The remainder of the first gathering corresponds to vv. 43-395. The first leaf of the second gathering has also been cut out, but ff. 8-14 cover from v. 467 to the end of the work, which has the colophon in red "Here endip the Seuene Psalmis." The bottom quarter of the page is left vacant and there is no catchword. Moreover the gatherings that follow are written in a hand certainly similar but not identical.

The first, fourth and fifth leaves of the third gathering have also been cut out; but ff. 16-17 and 20-38 correspond to vv. 78-237 and 404-1959 of the printed text of "The Pricke of Conscience."⁶ After f. 38 comes the lacuna I have described above. The sixth and seventh gatherings that survive correspond to vv. 2629-3915. F. 61 has been cut out; but ff. 62-90 (comprising the remainder of the eighth, the ninth, the tenth

⁶ The text presented by this MS. has passed through the hands of a Midland scribe who has removed many of the Northern characteristics of the language and in places modified his original. I hope that my pupil Mr. Joseph Lightbown, who is working on the "Pricke of Conscience," will be able to examine this text and discuss it in greater detail.

and the first six leaves of the eleventh gathering) correspond to vv. 3996-6353. F. 91 has been cut out; but ff. 92-104 (comprising the last leaf of the eleventh, the twelfth and the first four leaves of the thirteenth gathering) correspond to vv. 6437-7494. F. 105 has been cut out; but ff. 106-132*a* (comprising the last three leaves of the thirteenth, the fourteenth, the fifteenth and all but the last page of the sixteenth gathering) cover from v. 7560 to the end of "The Pricke of Conscience." The colophon in red runs "Explicit Tractatus qui dicitur Stimulus consciencie."

The third poem occupies ff. 132*b*-134*b*, which have been affected by damp and are in places very difficult or impossible to decipher. The poem, which I should say was originally written in a Central- to North-East Midland dialect of the fourteenth century, has as title in red "Incipit lamentacio sancti Anselmi." It opens:—

Qwhan drihten dere his doom schal dresse

And alle oure dedys demen on a day

Oure owyn werkys schuln bere wisse

How we han went in wylsum way

And how we han wrount azens his wil

5

Þe prince þat may vs spare and spil

And fere vs with þe fendis fray

Þanne schal be schiftyd al with skil

Good for good and ille for il

And put in no lengere delay.

10

S. Anselm⁷ is introduced in Stanza V and the 'lamentacio' proper begins in Stanza VII. It is clearly based on S. Anselm of Canterbury's "Deploratio male amissæ virginitatis" which forms the third of his "Meditationes" (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, CLVIII, 725-729). Stanzas VII, VIII, IX and XX may be given as specimens, followed by the corresponding passages from S. Anselm:—

⁷ S. Anselm is twice cited by name in the "Pricke of Conscience"—vv. 2424 ff. and 8303 ff. in Morris.

And þanne he gan to grede and grone
 And syzed for his synnis sere
 And on þis wyse he mad his mone
 With his sowle as 3e schuln here
 A sowle he seyde wrecche of wrecchis 65
 Pat deuelys alday with synne drecchis
 Sum tyme þow was clensyd ful clere
 Of ryzt rewle nowght now þow recchis
 Tene schal turne vs fro⁸ for þin tecchis
 Be dom of drightin dere. 70
 A slepende soule sleke out þin slewthe
 And deseuere þe from synne
 And in þin þout turne þin trewthe
 How loþ lif þow leuyst inne
 And in þin herte tak good hede 75
 Of þin dispytowsful mysdede
 And of þin bryggows baret blynne
 Now wayte wrecche wers þan wede
 ffor þin defaute droupe and drede
 Of mornyng wel þanne myzt þou mynne. 80
 Whyzt was þow waschin þow it wost
 In baptem aftir þow was born
 Enduyd with grace of þe holygost
 To crystendom profest and sworn
 And as a mayde þow were maryzed 85
 To cryst þat neuere kendenesse contraryed
 And for þe corownd was with thorn
 But now werkys wylde and waryzed
 Þere þow was virgyne þow art varyzed
 And loue of þin lele lemman lorn. 90

 Wel may þow morne for þat myscheef
 Þat þow þin lele loue hast for lete
 Now is lucifer þin owyn leef
 Lo whiche a lemman þow hast gete

⁸ fro is 'under-dotted' to indicate omission.

A carful chaungyng men may calle 195
 To chaungyn hony for bittir galle
 Pis marchaundise a mys is mete
 Of alle thrallis he þat is thralle
 Vn to his font now art þow falle
 And crystis forward fowle f[or]zete. 200

[Anima mea, anima æumnosa, anima, inquam, misera miseri homunculi, excute torporem tuum, et discute peccatum tuum, et concute mentem tuam; reduc ad cor enorme delictum, et produc de corde immanem rugitum. Intende, infelix, intende sceleris tui horrorem, et protende horrificum terrorem, et terrificum dolorem. Tu, inquam, quæ quondam candidata cœlesti lavacro, dotata Spiritu sancto, in Christiana professione jurata, virgo fuisti Christo desponsata. Tu illa olim desponsata Regi cœlorum, ardentem facta es scortum tortoris tartarorum. Heu, abjecta a Deo, projecta diabolo, imo abiciens Deum, amplectens diabolum. Tu enim, tu misera anima mea, meretrix obstinata, fornicatrix impudens, tu prior amatori et creatori tuo Deo repudium obtulisti, et ad insidiatorem et perditorem tuum dæmonem te sponte contulisti. O miserrima commutatio !]

The poem, if of no very striking merit, does not attempt to reproduce the rhetorical devices of its source, which is freely paraphrased and expanded. For example, the comparison in Stanza XVIII of a soul in torment with a bear at the stake has no counterpart in S. Anselm's "Meditationes":—

Pow schalt stande as bere at stake
 ffor sorwe to swelle and neuere to swage
 Pow schalt be beytyd as a bere.⁹ 175

Stanzas VII-XX correspond however to two only of the seven paragraphs of the "Deploratio," and XX ends rather

⁹ It may have been influenced by the East Midland recension of the "Pricke of Conscience." Bodl. 2322 has in place of Morris, vv. 3294-5:

And som þat dethe sodeynely dothe take

In dedely synne beþe jbound as bere to þe stake.

(cf. C. D' Evelyn, *PMLA* xlv, 182). The Ireland Blackburne text has however

Some þat death here · sodeynly sleth

In deedly sinne · streȝt to helle geth

—which is merely a transposition of the Northern original into East Midland dialect.

abruptly without 'Explicit' or colophon in English. F. 135*a*, though left blank by the scribe, has the vertical rules of the foregoing pages, and it is possible that he has copied part only of a poem which may have been continued at some length. The "Lamentacio sancti Bernardi" edited by G. Kribel (*Anglia* viii, 67-114) runs to 97 eight-line stanzas.

The following words of lexicographical interest are found in the printed and unprinted stanzas of the poem:—

bryggows (77), 'factious' (*NED.* brigous).

contraryed (86), 'thwarted' (*NED.* contrary, *v.*).

dispytowsful (76), 'malicious' (not in *NED.*).

enduyd (83,=dotata), 'endowed' (prob. earlier than any example cited under *NED.* endow *or* endue).

fyle (Thow fornicacioun þow fyle 151), 'rascal' (*NED.* file, *sb.*⁴).

mystecchis (oure mystecchis Schal turne vs þanne to treyze and tene 33), 'bad habits' (*NED.* mistetch, *sb.*).

pleizende (in pleizende pych 26), 'boiling' (*NED.* play, *v.*).

recuryngge (in recuryngge of his right 20), 'recovery' (not in *NED.*).

sleke out (71), 'shake off' (sense not recorded under *NED.* sleak, *v.*¹).

specyal (He þat was þin lemman lele þin spowse and al þin specyal 92), 'male lover' (*NED.* special).

stake (173), 'post to which a bear is fastened to be baited' (much earlier in this precise sense than any example in *NED.*).

treyze (oure mystecchis Schal turne vs þanne to treyze and tene 34; to tray and tene 39), 'affliction' (*NED.* tray, *sb.*¹).

varyzed (90), 'maculate' (sense not recorded under *NED.* varied).

BRUCE DICKINS.