

## A 15th Century Manuscript in St Albans Abbey.

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**A**BOUT a year ago, a small manuscript, once in the possession of the Scottish poet and antiquary, William Motherwell,<sup>1</sup> found its way, through the enterprise of the Cathedral Librarian, Canon G. H. P. Glossop, into an exhibition case in the south aisle of St. Alban's Cathedral, in company with some printed books. Its forty-five diminutive folios of vellum, in a modern binding, contain a didactic treatise<sup>2</sup>, written in English in a bold hand, rubricated but otherwise unadorned, and ascribed, in a modern note within the cover, to the period of the reign of Henry IV.

This typical work for lay instruction, content at the outset with a bare rehearsal of the Pater Noster, Seven Deadly Sins, seven principal virtues, the works of mercy, bodily wits, gifts of the Holy Ghost, conditions of charity, and blessings of God, proceeds from the fifth folio to its close to deal exclusively with an exposition of "the X commaundementis of God." After a concluding statement of considerable interest (fol. 44),—"Thes beutis of this book, the whiche Maister Wiliam Trebilvile, doctoure of decrees, official of Seynt Albons, hath decreed necessarili & bi hovely cristis peple to kunne in her modir tunge,"—followed by a list of the contents, the final page is completed with a tale from the "Gesta Romanorum," that favourite store-house of illustrations for the mediæval moralist.<sup>3</sup>

From the opening pages, the unknown author proves himself a fearless critic of current vice, not only in "lordis," or "comoun peple," but equally in "men of

<sup>1</sup> 1797 to 1835. See Dict. of Nat. Biog., etc.

<sup>2</sup> In the show-case the volume is mistakenly described as a Primer. As a matter of fact it contains no prayers or devotions whatever, distinctive feature of the mediæval Book of Hours or Lay-Folk's Prymer. From the frequency of the typical mode of address,—"A dere frendis!" "worschipful frendis!" etc., it must have been compiled from pulpit discourses, like some other contemporary treatises (cf. "Jacob's Well," MS. Salisbury Cath. Chapter Libr. 103, edited [1st part only] in E.E.T.S., Old Series, 115).

<sup>3</sup> [Beging.—"I rede in the gestis of romaynes" . . . (fol. 45)]. Of the justice who taught the people to swear; of the appearance of the B.V.M., with a bleeding child, and of the ensuing fate of the judge. ["Then anoon in the sigt of al the peple, the erthe openyd, and the justice fel down in to helle."]

hooli church." "Than herebi 3e mowe se hou good lyvyng is away, & al synne & sorowe is usid for the moost part thoruz out al this world. If thu wolt prove this in dede, loke what cumpanye thu comest inne, be thei lordis, bischopis, persounys, vicaries, prestis, or freris, (whiche wolen be holde holi men in lyvyng), and thu schalt se for the moost part, that al her daliaunce schal be of triflis & of iapis, of nycyte, & of othere syche vanytees, & not oo word of God, ne of his commaundementis. And so goddis comaundementis ar not usid, ne lerned, ne set bi, but fouli & schamely put a backe & troden under foote, and antecristis lawes reysid up, al moost thoruz al this lond" (fol. 8b). Elsewhere toward the Pardoner and his penny,<sup>4</sup> as towards the parish priests,— "if thei schewe yvel ensample in her speche, and in her lyvyng"—he displays the relentless scorn of a Jeremiah.

Discussion of the second Commandment leads naturally to the subject of contemporary image-worship. Here the moralist begins by denouncing him "that worschip-ith or preieth to an image mad of man, with that worschipe & praier that is oonli dew to god & to his seyntis" (fol. 10). When more reproof in the same strain follows later, as, for example, against all those "that setten more prise bi ordinaunce & customys mad bi synful men, than bi the trewe lawe of God, & fredom of the holi gospel," (fol. 13b.) the question of authorship seems to demand only one possible solution. It must be the work of a Lollard.

In curious confirmation of this idea, the one further copy of the Treatise which the present writer has been able to trace, among the Laudian MSS., at Oxford,<sup>5</sup> is definitely assigned to John Wycliffe himself, in the Bodleian catalogue. Moreover some more independent varieties in the British Museum,<sup>6</sup> sufficiently alike in date, hand-writing, general appearance, and treatment to necessitate a common source, provide at least one similar ascription. Manuscript Royal, 17.A.xxvi., which was actually displayed by Sir E. Maunde Thompson at the Wycliffe Exhibition of 1884<sup>7</sup> as a typical work of the

<sup>4</sup> Beging.—"Many men weenen, if thei 3even a peny to a pardener, thei schulen be asoylid of the brekinge of alle the commaundementis of God, for the takinge of that peny; and 3it thei ben never the bettir . . ." (fol. 41).

<sup>5</sup> MS. Laud. Misc. 23.

<sup>6</sup> cf. MSS. Ryl. 17.A.xxvi., art. 1; and Harl. 211, fol. 47 to 65.

<sup>7</sup> See "Guide to the Wycliffe Exhib. of 1884," by Sir E. M. Thompson; and compare Shirley's (W.W.) "Catalogue of original works of John Wycliffe," 1865, No. 40.

Great Reformer, has a note against the contents table, in an 18th century hand.—“ Thus far, I believe, belongs to Wickleffe ” (fol. 1). It is the first item of all here which deals with the Commandments.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of these enquiries, our first tendency, then, is to associate the little St. Albans booklet with that dissemination of heretical vernacular literature, for which our town gains a certain notoriety in the records of the early fifteenth century. Earliest mention of such Wycliffite propaganda in St. Albans would seem to occur under the year 1417, when “ poisonous Lollard tracts ” are said to have been distributed “ in every house or inn.”<sup>9</sup> About the same time, Sir John Oldcastle himself, “ Dux Lollardorum,” as the chronicler calls him, had come thither into hiding, in a friend’s house; and when he decamped, besides fine illuminated volumes with portraits of Saints rudely defaced, “ certain other books, written in English ” were left behind, together with writings full of blasphemy against the Blessed Virgin.—“ which for sheer horror, I refrain from describing ! ”<sup>10</sup>

Ten years later, there is a picturesque scene in St. Peter’s Church, St. Albans, in which the “ libelli ” play a still more striking part.<sup>11</sup> A Synod gathered therein to deal with the reputed heresy of the district, by order of Abbot Wheathamstead, proceeds to issue ordinances against “ pseudo-predicadores,” who preach without license, also against owners of books in the popular tongue. After Celebration and an admonitory sermon by the Abbot himself, attending in state, certain suspect persons are produced, “ infected,” so we are informed later, “ with the pestilent doctrines of the rector of Tatarygg, (Totteridge) dwelling near Barnet,” to wit, William Redhed, maltster of Barnet,—“ et pergaminarius de Sancto Albano ”—to be identified with one John Galeway, parchment-maker, a trade which, by the way, furnished

<sup>8</sup> This particular version includes an interesting reference to Archbishop Richard Fitzralph of Armagh as popularly canonized after his death [fol. 12, “ As expouneth Seynt Richard Armachan. . . ”] Dr. Workman tells me that Wycliffe himself is definitely known to use the expression.

<sup>9</sup> Walsingh. “ Hist. Angl. ” (Rolls S.), vol. ii., p. 317.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., ii. 326. A justification of such defacement from the Lollard point of view is suggested in an interesting Treatise in MS. Add. 24202 (fol. 26): Saints who lived in poverty, despising the world, are misrepresented as well as blasphemed by those who paint them in rich robes, etc !

<sup>11</sup> cf. Amund., “ Annales ” (Rolls S.), vol. i., p. 13, p. 222 et seq. (1426-7).

more than one recruit to the new movement.<sup>12</sup> Accused of possessing "certain books and writings, full of heresies," they were now to be given the opportunity to make full renunciation, while confessing their belief "secundum sanctam matrem ecclesiam." Redhed, "receiver of the most abominable book," at all events, appears to have made good use of the occasion. Raising the said book aloft in both his hands, to impress the onlookers with the sincerity of his repentance, he proceeded from the first scene of humiliation to the Town Cross, where the bailiff of St. Albans and his men had already kindled a fire, and flung it down, to be reduced to ashes.<sup>13</sup> "In cineres redactum"—this time only an insignificant pamphlet blazing before the crowds that jostle beneath lofty belfry<sup>14</sup> and gable-fronts. Not as when subsequently the Abbey chronicler shouts his pious huzzas—"ad confusionem infidelium, et exultationem Catholice credentium"—over the burning of flesh and blood, Lollard priests and laymen in Norwich!<sup>15</sup>

Amundesham's Register happens to give us a tolerably good idea of the kind of "poison" Redhed's manual contained. In the first chapter a characteristic attack is made on the prohibiting of unlicensed preachers. Then the Pope is compared to Anti-Christ, especially in his dispensation of indulgences, confirming of pilgrimages, refusal to allow lay reading of the Scriptures, his interdicts and suspensions. In Chapter X., the spiritual equality of the priesthood, and the folly of Absolution and Prayers for the Dead are emphasised. Finally veneration of images is called a superstition, and those who adore them idolaters.

This last point seems to bring us back to the text of our St. Albans manuscript. However, the comparison breaks down upon closer examination. Images, after all, for its author are to remain "lewid mennes bokes, to lerne bi

<sup>12</sup> cf. Gairdner (Lollardy & the Ref.), vol. i., p. 93. This helps, I think, to account for the ease with which such heretical MSS. were circulated.

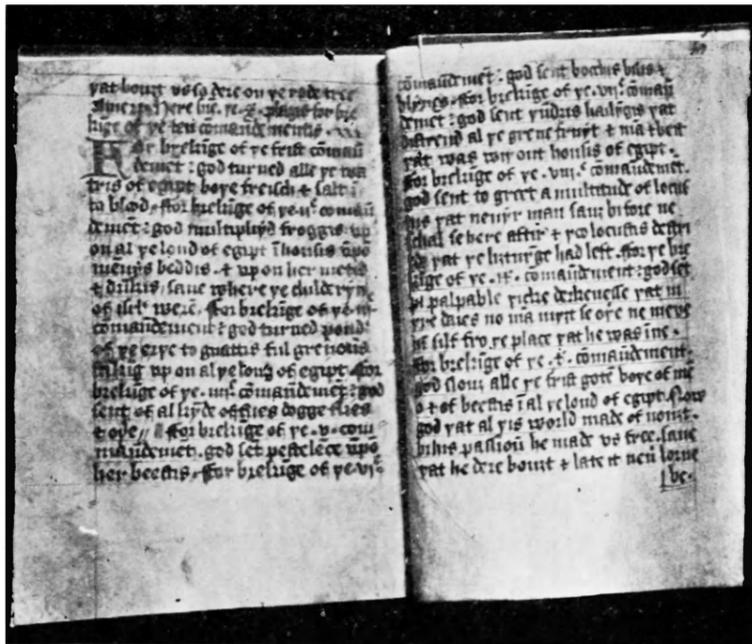
<sup>13</sup> Amund., i. 13, and 229.

<sup>14</sup> A monument of the times, completed about 15 years before this incident (1403-1412), it still stands in St. Albans.

<sup>15</sup> (1428) Amund. i. 29. No further mention of the "libelli" occurs in connection with St. Albans. But the chronicler observes for the year 1431, that Lollards are busy again scattering thier "billae" in the larger towns. This activity is to be identified with one Jack Sharpe of Wygmoreland. (For references see Gairdner (op. cit.), vol. i. p. 160; D.N.B. etc.)

hem hou thei schulden worschipe the seyntis in hevene, aftir whom these dede ymages ben mad," according to the best orthodox opinion of the day.<sup>16</sup> It is only such popular misuse, as the ascription to them of extravagant miraculous powers that belong to the Deity alone, that is actually forbidden.

Thus again, when the suggestive phrase occurs, "Rede goddis lawe, & the exposicioun of holi doctouris ther uppon; studie it, learne it, and kepe it" (fol. 21), the writer is not to be caught advocating any open Bible for the laity. The remark is carefully qualified by the context, "an if thou be a prest."



A 15TH CENTURY MANUSCRIPT IN ST. ALBANS ABBEY.

To discover anything really comparable to Redhed's booklet one must turn to a work like the "Lanterne of lizt," a little Lollard composition which we happen to know was examined at the trial of John Claydon in the year 1415,<sup>17</sup> a copy of which is extant among the Harleian manuscripts.<sup>18</sup>

In spite, then, of its highly critical temper, the St. Albans treatise gives no definite support from within to the charge of a Wycliffite origin. But, in addition, there

<sup>16</sup> (fol. 10). cf. here the works of Bishop Brunton, Dr. Bromyard, Walter Hilton, John Myrc, etc., etc., and many anonymous tracts.

<sup>17</sup> See Wilkins' "Concilia," vol. iii., p. 374.

<sup>18</sup> MS. Harl. 2324. Printed in E. Eng. Text Soc., Old S., No. 151.

is the remarkable and apparently unique phenomenon of the "Trebilvile" passage to be accounted for. Difficult it is to believe that any Official and Doctor of Decrees of England's leading monastery, which had proved itself so persistently hostile, both in its disciplinary measures<sup>19</sup> and in the learned arguments of its theologians<sup>20</sup>, would lend the authority of his name in this fashion to a tract by the Arch-heretic himself.

Two alternative explanations, therefore, are left open to us. If the Lollard tradition of authorship is to be maintained, one must believe that the concluding statement is in the nature of a deliberate fraud. The sanctified reputation of Richard Rolle appears indeed to have been appropriated by the heretics in much the same manner, for their propaganda. So now the name and influence of "Master Trebilvile," some prominent worthy of the district, no doubt, who "hath decreed necessarili & bi hovely cristis peple to kunne" their Commandments and the rest, are employed by them to give weight and respectability to one of their own insolent expositions.

Another, and it is believed a more accurate course, is to reject the Wycliffite hypothesis altogether, where actual heresy is unproven, and to accept for the work a comparatively orthodox origin.<sup>21</sup> Even apart from the well-known fact that more than one treatise, like the "Pore Caitiff," for example, can no longer be attributed to the Reformer, as was once the case, this step is no very rash undertaking. For the relentless criticism of fellow clergy, like the general programme itself here offered in the vulgar tongue, is a characteristic feature of orthodox English homiletic literature throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to those who are acquainted with it.

In the first place, if we go back in the history of lay instruction no further than the year 1289, such a pro-

<sup>19</sup> In addition to the above-quoted incidents, note (1) another visitation at St. Peter's, St. Albans, 1429; (2) another at Hertford, 1431; (3) a special commission for examination of heretics, 1464, etc.

<sup>20</sup> cf. Nicholas Radcliffe, Archdeacon of St. Albans and sometime Prior of Wymondham (Treatises in B.M., MSS., Ryl. 6.Dx, and 10.Dx, also Harl. 635); William of Bynham; and Simon de Southereia; all monks of the Abbey, and "Sacrae Paginae Professores." [See Amund. ii., 305 etc.]

<sup>21</sup> Miss M. Deanesley's estimate of the MS. Laud. Misc. 23 Version, in her "Lollard Bible" (Camb. Univ. Press), agrees with this opinion. She says (p. 345), "The author was not a Lollard, but had a grudge against the religious orders."

gramme is to be found prescribed in the constitutions of John Peckham, Franciscan friar, and Archbishop of Canterbury—the Commandments included—which priests are to teach four times a year, in the vernacular, and laymen are to know.

In 1357 John Gattrige, a monk of St. Mary's Abbey, York, was commissioned by the Archbishop of his province to translate this body of instruction from Latin into English, for the benefit of ignorant priests.<sup>22</sup> From that day to the eve of the Reformation, Peckham's epoch-making ordinance was re-affirmed in Synod after Synod, and all manner of hand-books, both great and small, Latin and vernacular, were multiplied to carry out the task of exposition. This truly remarkable output of popular tracts, inspired for the most part by the preaching and writing of thirteenth-century friars, must be credited in the main to a group of hermits, monks, and seculars, in Yorkshire and the North, of whom Rolle, the mystic, was destined to become the most famous. Against this somewhat dim background of figures, our tiny St. Albans manuscript must be viewed, a background which includes upon the one canvas orthodox and unorthodox together. For Gattrige's own "Sermon" was expanded and re-issued by Lollard hands.<sup>23</sup>

As for the Decalogue in particular, in an age of wide spread pessimism and moral decay, its stern injunctions seem to have commended themselves with peculiar force to the stern ascetic moralists of the North. The expositions abound. A practically unknown example of the 15th century, in Latin, among some mediæval volumes in the Library of the Society of Gray's Inn, contains interesting personal reminiscences used by the author, "brother Staunton," by way of illustrations.<sup>24</sup> At St. John's College, Oxford, is a specimen in the vernacular, of about the year 1434, which bids the reader pray "for the saul of frere Jon Lacy, anchor (i.e. anchorite), in the New Castel upon Tynde, the wiche that wrooth this

<sup>22</sup> For the several versions see E. Eng. Text Society, Old S., No. 118.

<sup>23</sup> cf. MS. Lambeth 432. So too there seem to have been Wycliffite editions of Hampole,—cf. MS. Ryl. 18.C.xxvi.

<sup>24</sup> MS. Gray's Inn Library 15. Can this Staunton be identified with the hermit friar Henry Staunton, in Yorkshire, attendance at whose preaching was forbidden? *Fasti Ebor.* p. 421. (1334).

book.<sup>25</sup> Yet another anonymous variety in the Harleian Collection,<sup>26</sup> might well be associated with a certain Thomas Bradley, or Scrope, an earnest Carmelite ascetic, who, we are told, even as a suffragan bishop, in his old age, still wandered with bare feet, after the apostolic practice, through the fields and villages, "preaching to the unlettered the commandments of God."<sup>27</sup> Finally, it is worth recalling that the famous Coventry Miracle-Play itself included the same kind of subject-matter in one of its pageants, put appropriately into the mouth of Moses;<sup>28</sup> while the dialogue "Dives et Pauper"<sup>29</sup> deals exclusively with the Mosaic precepts throughout, in a semi-dramatic fashion.

But secondly, as regards the censure of the clergy, sermons and treatises of leading orthodox churchmen of the epoch are often full of the bitterest indictment and scorn as much for clerical as for lay shortcomings,—so full, indeed, that it is almost impossible to distinguish their language from that of the fiercest heretical attack.<sup>30</sup> After all, this evidence merely lends fresh weight to an English Archbishop's complaint to the Pope in 1412 that nearly the whole church was now infected in some form with the poison of Lollardy. How complete could become the confusion of tongues in expository literature is illustrated by the fact that Rolle's commentary on the Psalms was invariably attributed to John Wycliffe in Bodleian catalogues up to the year 1697.<sup>31</sup>

To such types then as Rolle and Gattrige and their fellows, to some unknown Catholic prophet, crying per-

<sup>25</sup> MS. St. John's Coll., Oxford, 94 [fol. 1 adds—"de ordine fratrum predicatorum" (i.e. Dominican)].

<sup>26</sup> MS. Harl. 2398, fol. 73-106. [cf. (fol. 74), "Prestes scholde teche the commandmentes of God and publische hem with al here myzt to the commune peple. . . . Bot I drede me that we beo bailleys of erreure for the commandmentes."]

<sup>27</sup> cf. Bale in MS. Harl. 3838, fol. 107b. Curiously enough Scrope's name occurs twice in an "Orate pro anima" inscribed (fols. 174 & 191b) on the pages of the MS. (Harl. 211) which contains one of our varieties of the St. Albans Treatise, aforementioned.

<sup>28</sup> See E. Eng. Text Soc., Ext. Series, No. 120 (1922), pp. 53 to 57.

<sup>29</sup> This work appears in a list of books written by order of Abbot Whethampsted for the Abbey (Amund. ii., p. 269). Printed editions are Pynson, 1493; and 1536.

<sup>30</sup> Notable examples of this are provided by the "Summa Predicantium" of the Dominican doctor, Bromyard, and the Sermons of Bishop Brunton, both of whom took part in the Council of Lambeth, in 1382, which sat in judgment on Wycliffe, and condemned his errors.

<sup>31</sup> The works of Rolle and Wycliffe are sometimes found together in XV. century MSS.; cf. MSS. Bodl. 52 & 938, etc.

haps out of a Northern wilderness, authorship of the St. Albans tractate may henceforth be ascribed. One passage, indeed, plaintive appeal to the sufferings of the Passion, is sufficiently characteristic of the Yorkshire school<sup>32</sup> to be worth reproducing: "A dere God! worschiful freendis, bethinke moost herteli of the wondirful kyndenes of God, that was & now is so hiz & worschiful in hevne, & that he wolde come so louz, & be borne of the blessid maide Marie, & become oure brother, to azenbi us fro the thraldom of the devell by his pascioun. He was betun & buffetid, scorned & scourgid, that unnethis was ther left ony hoole platte of his skyn, fro the top to the too, that a man myzte have sette in the point of a nedil. But al his body rane out as a strem of blood. He was crowned with a crowne of thornes for dispite; & whanne the crowne, as clerkis seien, wolde not stikfast and iust doun on his heed for the longe thornes & stronge, thei toke staves & betun it doun, til the thornes thrilliden the brayne panne. He was naylyd hond & foot with scharp nailis & ruggid, for his peyne schulde be the more; and so at the last he sufferid moost peynful deeth, hanginge ful schamefulli on the cros . . . A dere freendis, se ze thus redeli the grete kindnessis that God hath doon for man, & leve thi greet unkindnessis therebi!" (fol. 20).

Nor, in conclusion, can it be argued that such popular works in the vulgar idiom, fruit of less regular ministries, would be beneath the concern of learned dignitaries of a great Benedictine House, with its cloister tradition of Latin. For, a whole century earlier, the so-called "South-English Legendary" was produced by Gloucester Benedictines; and in the record of a 15th century copy of Rolle's famous commentary,<sup>33</sup>—"Iste est liber domini Hugonis Eyton, supprioris monasterii Sancti Albani Anglorum protomartyris,"—we may behold a sub-prior of our own Abbey, busily poring over a volume of the outspoken mystic, for himself.

A further problem remains. Who then is Master Wiliam Trebilvile? The attempt has been made on a show-card to identify him with Abbot William Wallingford, on the mere ground that while Archdeacon, he is mentioned in a certain narrative of Whethampsted's

<sup>32</sup> Recalling St. Bernard.

<sup>33</sup> MS. Bodl. 467.

Register as Official-General about the year 1453. Wallingford, however, he certainly is not. In marked contrast to other dignitaries of St. Albans, sometimes mentioned along with him, no single case presents itself in which his name is even graced with the title of a University "Master," much less that of "Doctor of Decrees."<sup>34</sup> The term "official," employed, of course, in its strict ecclesiastical sense to denote the presiding officer of a prelate's court, would here apply to the St. Albans Archdeaconry, an exempt jurisdiction controlled by an archdeacon appointed by the Abbot from his monks. No such name, however, appears in this connection in the Abbey Registers. All that the present writer has been able to trace, so far, is the mention of one, Master Robert Tourbervyle, in a Rental of the House, or Hospital of St. Julian at St. Albans, for the year 1506, in the time of Abbot Ramryge.<sup>35</sup> A Master William Tankerville, who figures alongside a clerk of the Archdeacon, in a List of Abbey Benefactors<sup>36</sup> relating apparently to a period about 1416, might assuredly be the official we are seeking. But unfortunately all we learn from the entry is that the gentleman in question gave a certain sum of money towards the making of the new gate, and the work in the Cloister.

Those who persist in trying to identify Turbervile with one of the prominent convent rulers of the past might conceivably suggest with better hope of success the name of Master William Albon (St. Albans), Doctor of Decrees. Wallingford's predecessor in the highest office of all, ruling as Abbot from 1465 to the day of his death in "Le Clokchambre" in 1476, Albon possesses, in the first place, both requisite degrees. Secondly, he is definitely associated with the Archdeacon in the oversight of laity within the jurisdiction, but a year before his reception of the mitre.<sup>37</sup> Thirdly, as a native of our city, it is quite possible that his local and family name was Turbervile,<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> cf. the "Commissio pro hereticis examinandis" of 1464; Magister Wm. Albone, Decretorum Doctor, *Frater* Wm. Walyngford ejusdem loci Archidiaconus, ac venerabilis vir, Magister Johannes Werdale, Legum Doctor. (Wheth. ii., 22), etc.

<sup>35</sup> MS. Claud. D. i., fol. 169. Printed at the end of Amundesham's Annals (vol. ii. p. 248). [De magistro Roberto Tourbervyle, pro mansione ibidem, cum terris, domibus, ac pro decimis ejusdem domus, in parochiis Sanctorum Michaelis et Stephani sibi dismissis ad firmam . . . " etc.]

<sup>36</sup> Trokelowe & Blaneford, Annal. (Rolls S.), p. 457.

<sup>37</sup> See note 34 above.

<sup>38</sup> As that of Abbot Whethamsted was Bostok (of Wheathampstead).

a name, indeed, which we have seen connected with a residence in St. Albans, in all likelihood extending back into the 15th century. Finally, the little that we know of his character and tastes is not inappropriate. Albon "was reputed a gifted and cultivated man, generous in character and works," and not uninterested in the promotion of religious knowledge.

So much then for all that can be guessed of the author, authoriser, and religious environment of our manuscript. Its actual contents, prepared on the simplest lines for rustic or bourgeois households, and the half-lettered parson, involve, therefore, no ponderous arguments, no straining after any literary effect. In the words of a similar compilation of the day, it is "ywryte in englysche tunge for lewede men, that conneth nouzt understonde latyn ne frensh, & ys y drawe out of holy wryt by techynge of holy doctors that haveth yben before this tyme."<sup>39</sup> The recognisable quotations from the aforesaid holy doctors or "greet clerkes" are here appropriately few and simple. Prominent among these authorities, however, are three of the four great doctors of the Church, Gregory, Augustine,<sup>40</sup> and Ambrose, above all St. Bernard, that undying influence in mediæval homiletics.

Chrysostom, Isidore, and Bishop Grossetête<sup>41</sup> must also be added to the list, and there appears to be a passage drawn from the "Secreta Secretorum," beginning, "the philosopher saith."<sup>42</sup> . . .

But even so slender a stock of references as this involves of necessity no direct acquaintance with the original works on the part of our unknown author. Such quotations would be borrowed and re-borrowed, again and again, from the mass of popular manuals already in circulation. In one passage, however, it would appear that he was familiar with the renowned vision of Piers Plowman, and God's Bull of Pardon.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from the usual, though not more than usual, pessimism, morbidity, and general appeals to fear, the

<sup>39</sup> (MS. Harl. 2398).

<sup>40</sup> cf. "A dere God! what seith Austyn hereto?" (fol. 39).

<sup>41</sup> Bp. of Lincoln, 1235-1253, himself author of a tract on the Decalogue.

<sup>42</sup> Intended for the Pseudo-Aristotle, of course.

<sup>43</sup> (fol. 41b), "And if thou kepe wel these commandements to thi lyves cende, thouz thou have neither peny ne halpeny (i.e. to give for an Indulgence), thou schalt have goddis pardon, and everlastinge ioye and blisse in hevene."

writer displays now and then a surprising spirit of common sense and breadth of interpretation, which is too often overlooked in such treatises by critics apt to dwell over much upon the many crudities and "superstitions" of mediæval Catholic religion. Penance, without the making of due satisfaction to the injured, "after one's power," will bring no deliverance to the guilty. Killing may be done as well by tongue as by hand, "bi staf, or knyf, daggar, or eny other wepen." Thieves include those who defraud their servants of just hire, or servants wasting their master's goods.

Nothing could be more highly suggestive of that naïve spirit which continued in turn to inspire, or be inspired by the mural paintings and carved grotesques of the churches than our moralist's remarks upon death, doomsday and hell. Concerning these three undying horrors, the voice of the preacher had never been silent since the time of the first Saxon homilists. They are an integral part of English folk-religion. A typical reminder that the "bodi in schort time schal stynke, & rote, & turne into wormys mete" looks back to St. Bernard's warning, and forward to a later multitude of skeletons and corpses, on tomb, and brass, and moulding. "Thinke evermore," cries the prophet of darkness, "on thi wrecchid & lotheli careyn—what it is whanne it hath leyne iii daies or iiii, in the grave!" After the struggle and humiliations of Death comes "the dredfull day of Doom," and then—"have inwardli mynde of the innoumerable peynes of helle," to follow for the accursed!

As though to justify completely the parallel between popular religious art and instruction here suggested, our author does not even fail to notice the current popularity of the Saints, whose lives and miracles were the unceasing delight of "Festival" audiences, whose quaint figures stared down upon them from every panelled screen and pulpit. "Thanne what schal we wrecchis seie, that heeren red the lyves of seintis, whiche weren brent with fier, & roostid, and virgyns the brestis drawn of, & in many othere turmentis; of which turmentis thei wente to God ioiyng & syngyng, & in herteli taukyngis?" (fol. 43). The whole range of his emotional appeal—to fear and to sympathy—might well be summed up in this commentator's quaint prescription "for the putting away

of foule thou3tis":—"Have freisch mynde of the hard pascioun of Jesu Crist . . . Rede wel . . . the reed boke of cristis pascioun, . . . & the black book of the filthe & of the abhomynacioun of synne, & of derknessis, & brennyng fier of helle" (fol. 33).

It is in the homely, intimate description of everyday social life, however, the popular amusements, failings, excuses, some brief family scene—"in halle, & in chambre, in chirche, & in chepinge"—as our manuscript has it, that the average reader of to-day will take most delight. Here one speaks in the common phrases of the period of little familiar things that everybody recognises and understands. Men that wrangle with each other are just "houndis & cattis"—cats and dogs. As for the liar, "if a man hilde open his mouth & suffrid foule thing to fal ther yn, & flies to make her nest ther yn, his mouth schulde be abhomynable to men. Myche more the mouth that lieth is abomynable to God." For simple audiences, who could do better than that? The very first page of the book brings to life again the old English "Crystymas games, about the fier." Later, we catch glimpses of the domestic interior where a mother watches beside her "ful litil childe," wrapped in "swathing cloutis," where boys and girls are "doynge off of hodis, & knelinge"<sup>43a</sup> to salute their elders, and many an evil squabble is wont to take place, not without blows and curses. In the larger world of the streets and market-places without, we gaze on the gay fashions of lords and ladies as they go by to church, late, from their "long ligging in bed," or their extravagant toilet. Here is the multitude of beggars, "pore crokid & pore lame," as well as "strong & myt3ti men that ben beggaris wel araied," even "lewid prestis or freris!" The busy gossips and "bacbyters" are ever at their work—in the 15th century as in any other—"the wheche be hateful to God. Ffor men and women also now on dayes if they heren a sclandre of a man, be it soth be it les, thei wil iangle therof largeli over al aboute, behynde his bak, & make it more & wel wers than it was bifore. And whanne they comen before hym that is ther sclandryd, to hym wolen they say nevere a word therof, to warn hym of his harm & of hys schame; but flateren

<sup>43a</sup> This scene is charmingly depicted in miniature, in an illuminated Treatise on the Decalogue, occurring in a contemporary French MS., Fitzwilliam Mus., 22, fol. 179. (Cambridge). See also fol. 177 to 182.

hym and glosyn hym. & as to the syȝt schewyȝt hym gret frendchipe & love. And somme gon abouȝt here neyȝboris fro hous to hous, & tellen sleveles talis & apposyn her neyȝboris sutely & undirgropyn hem slili, & comyn in with a flaterynge and seyeng :—" I aske not this for hindring of ony man, & that that thou tellist me schal be conseile;" and al this is to seche out sum yvel tale of hem that thei haten. And whanne that thei drawn out of hem a yvel tale, anon be the backe turned, thei sclatren out to alle that wolen here hem, so far forth that if thei myȝten do her neyȝboris to hange & to drawen with oo fals lesing, it schulde be blowen out anon. And here of comyn mony debatis & stryvynge, foule chiding,"<sup>44</sup> etc. Neither do the " fals slithis in bynge & in sillinge . . . bi mette or bi mesure, or bi weȝte," and a hundred other tricks of contemporary merchants and profiteers escape the vigilant eye of our commentator. " The iust weȝtis & mesures ben yvel weied & fillid, as tapsteris don, that fillen the mesure with frothe. As myche as thei withdrawn of the mesure, so myche thei drawn to hem of the wraȝte of God!" he cries.

No better than these deceivers of poor men are the " fals questmongeres " in the Courts, " that ben hirid for mede & for ziftis, that beren fals witnes, to make men to lese her goodis, londis, rentis, & hir eritage, & othere worldeli goodis." Indeed this sin of greed has now invaded all classes of the community with the most disastrous results: " As ȝe seen weel, coveitise makith debate bitwene rewme, toun & toun, man & man; & comounly alle stryves & debatis in erthe comen of coveitise & of unleeful love of worldli goodis."

As for the clergy, the writer shows that he expects his clerk or village parson to swear and commit immoralities like any other member of society.<sup>45</sup>

Among evil customs of the times, something is said of the primitive superstition and witchcraft which still linger about these picturesque old English homesteads,— " fals bileve in any ymage mad of a man, in fals conjurynges, in tilling of children, in fals experimentis, in redinge of

<sup>44</sup> The page which should provide most of this picturesque description is actually missing from the St. Albans MS. I supply it from MS. Laud. Misc. 23, fol. 14b, et seq. In MS. St. Albans, part appears on fol. 27.

<sup>45</sup> cf. " Unnethis preest ne frere, widdid ne single, in mony placis, may kepe hem fro this synne of lecherie " (fol. 34b), etc., etc. For swearing, see fol. 14.

dremes, as it is usid now a daies, in writtis havynge about neckis, & othere wicche craftis" (fol. 13). Much more is added concerning the dreadful contemporary habit of swearing. Indeed "the iiii lewde excusacions" that great swearers put forward, "that disembre crist, sweringe by his y3en, armys, naylis, boonys, herte, blode & soule,"<sup>46</sup> too long to quote, are amongst the most vivid and entertaining sidelights on current life that this manuscript provides.<sup>47</sup> It is a sad world, indeed, for the conscientious moralist, and to his eyes full of the very faults that are said to characterize our own. What could be more "modern" than his loud-voiced complaint that children are now allowed to do as they please, that the age of strict and pious upbringing is past, and the example of most parents is calculated to make them still worse? "But alasse for sorowe that fadris now a daies, ther (where) thei schulden teche her children cristis lore . . . thei teche hem the develles lore of helle,—to schrewe the modir, to curse & to smyte, & to suffre no man that thei mow overcome. And thouz thei seen & heeren her children breke the commandmts of god, fro morowe til even, thei chargen not a pese, but lauzen, & iapen, & ioien ther inne, & conforte hem there to. But if thei seen her children have a *worldeli* schame or velany, thanne thei wepen & maken sorowe ynou3, & cheryse hem & glosen hem, & suffren to be as nyce & as wontowne in halle, and in chambre, in chirche & in chepinge, as hem lust hemsilf. Certis suche fadris & modris ben more cruel to hemsilf & to her children thanne thouz thei alto hackiden her zong children, whanne thei weren newe cristened, as fleisch to the pot . . . For now if thei folewen tho wickid techingis & tho yvel ensamplis of fadir & modir, thei schulen go to helle" (fol. 24).<sup>47a</sup>

Or what again more "up-to-date" than this picture of Sunday enormities, and Sabbath breaking, with its tale of late rising, vanity in dress, contempt of divine service,

<sup>46</sup> cf. my excerpt a story of the swearing gentleman of Standon, from Whitforde's "Werke for Housholders"—printed in the "Hertfordshire Mercury," for Sat., June 23, 1923.

<sup>47</sup> See fol. 14b et seq.

<sup>47a</sup> The remarkable agreement of this section of the work with a Lollard Treatise in MS. Add. 24202, fol. 31, et seq. (espec. fol. 32-32b), makes me still doubtful about the character of our St. Albans Treatise.

extravagant midday dinners, and afternoon frivolities, and secular amusements? :—" But allas, unnethis is ther ony man that settith ony priis bi his soule, but loke on the holy day more than othere daies,—hou he may plese his wrecchid bodi, in al his synful lustis; in long ligging in bed, with myche pryde in gay clothing, myche wast in iaggid & dagging; in late commynge to chirche, and, ovyr this, *more* to be seen there, than for ony soule heelthe: yvel to be ocupied whan thei come in thedir with myche ianglyng & iapinge & many othere vanytees. settinge nouzt bi prechinge & techinge of goddis word, but wenyng that it is an ydil thinge, not heerynge goddis servyce devoutly, as thei weren not in goddis danger, ne hadden no nede of goddis helpe. And at her mete meche more waast, myche cost, myche gloteny, mony idil oothis, lecherous wordis & othere vycious wordis. Soone aftir, at the ale, bollynge and synginge, with many idil wordis, as lesynges, bacbitingis, & scornyngis, sclaudris, yvil castingis, with al the countenance of lecherie, chidingis, & fiztingis, with many othere synnes making the holi daye a synful daye." " And so it semeth now a daies," adds the indignant man, " that the holi daye may be clepid (called) the sory day; for of all the daies in the 3eer the holidayes ben moost cursidli dispensid in the develis servyce, in dispite of God, & alle his seyntis in hevne . . . It is wondre that God suffrith the peple to lyve up on erthe!" (fol. 19 etc.)

Like every orthodox churchman of his time, who fought for his faith, the writer was a Puritan before Puritanism. The ideal Sabbath which he proceeds to sketch would hardly fail to satisfy the strictest Sabbatarian of the 17th century. " First, rise as eerli on the holi daie as thu doist on the werkedaie." Then to church, with devout prayer and meditation; " and, worschiful freendis, bifore al othere thingis or bisynes, mekeli here 3e the lawe of God, if it be red or prechid!" Afterwards follows the Sunday repast, eaten " with honest wordis," not ribaldry, and with thanks to the Giver. Then, not gambols on the green, but a round of district visiting and relief :—" And aftir 3oure mete, visite hem that ben sike, & in myschef, & speciali tho that God hath mad nedi, other bi age, or bi syknes . . . Hem thou schalt releve with thi goodis, aftir thi power, & aftir her nede . . . So men

schulde not be idil, but as besi on the holi day about the soule, as men ben on the werkday about the bodi."

With one last picture of the priestly ideal, so akin to the spirit of Chaucer's immortal "persoun," the present sketch of the St Albans treatise must be brought to a close. Thankful we well may be, that in a naughty world, so little changing from century to century as our manuscript reveals, every age has its pure and heroic examples, like him of whom it was said:

"But Cristes lore, & his apostles twelve  
He taughte, and first he folwed it himselve."<sup>48</sup>

"And if thou be a prest, to be a trewe lanterne to the peple, bothe in spekinge, in doynge al thingis that longen to a prest; and seche wiseli thi grounde & the trewe office of presthode, & be not ledde blindli bi the lewid custummys of the worldil (i.e. worldly). But rede goddis lawe & the exposicioun of holi doctouris ther uppon, studie it, learne it, & kepe it; and whanne thou canste preche it, than teche it to hem that ben unkunynge. And loke evermore that thi dedis be so riȝtful, that no man may blame him bi resoun." (fol. 21).

\* \* \* \*

"Now God that al this world made of nouȝt,  
Bi his passioun he made us free,  
Save that he dere bouȝt,  
And late it never lorne be."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Cant. Tales, Prol. ll. 527-8. The phrase "Cristis lore" occurs in our MS. on fol. 24.

<sup>49</sup> (fol. 44). With this little verse the tract on the Commandments ends.

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[The present writer desires to thank the Rev. Canon Glossop for his kind permission to peruse the manuscript, and make transcripts. A reproduction, from a photograph by Mr. Ernest Woolley, F.S.A., of folios 43b-44 (The X Plagues, "for breaking of the Commandments," etc.) appears on another page.]