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THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT
IN THE
POPULAR BALLADS

By

Elizabeth Phillips McConathy

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Re-
quirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, in
the University of Louisville.

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PREFACE.

The present study of the religious element in the popular ballads is based largely on Mr. George L. Kittredge's edition of Mr. Francis J. Child's collection of English and Scottish popular ballads, the completeness of which, up to this time, has not been disputed.* Mr. Kittredge has printed in his volume one or more versions of every ballad which Mr. Child has given as an authentic folk ballad (omitting Nos. 33, 279, 281, 290 and 291), besides including a few of somewhat doubtful origin. It has not been judged necessary for the purposes of this article to discuss more than one version of any ballad, except in cases where a significant development of thought or custom is brought out by the different versions; consequently Mr. Kittredge's single volume has been found most convenient and adequate.

The numbers and names of ballads to which this paper refers are those used by both Mr. Child and Mr. Kittredge. The notes of both of these scholars have been consulted and quoted frequently and freely. The present work makes no claim to originality, but purposes to consider the ballads from one standpoint, their relation to the Christian reli-

gion and church, applying to the whole series the same touchstone, and grouping the facts which this test brings out under suitable headings.

Louisville, Kentucky, June 5, 1913.

* English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Edited from the Collection of Mr. Francis James Child, by Helen Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge. Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston.

The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Edited by Francis James Child. Little, Brown and Company, Boston.

INTRODUCTION.

How far Christianity played a part in the literature of the ballads is a matter difficult to determine. Many ballads contain stanzas dealing with Christian ideas and institutions which, on inspection, show that they have been added to or incorporated into the ballad at a different period from the time in which the main stanzas originated. This process of adding to and modifying the first composition naturally and unavoidably attends oral repetition and transmission. Words, phrases, and even stanzas which tell of customs that have died out, or the significance of which has been lost, are supplanted by expressions containing more recent material. In this connection one finds changes of epithets, variations in the way of local color, the substitution of well known names for those which have been forgotten, and, in many cases, a complete working over of the material, so that a heathen or fairy story becomes a Christian Myracle tale with appropriate setting and circumstance.

It is unnecessary in this article to consider or enumerate the Latin or French manuscripts that dealt with religious material of various kinds during the Anglo-Saxon period and following. That learned priests and students wrote in Latin lives of saints, discussions of religious problems, sermons and com-

pendia of sacred anecdotes and exempla is well known.* That the Norman Conquest brought in a scattered library of French material on the same subjects is also granted. The question to be considered here is, how this material reached the people at large, and became so well known as to be worked in course of time into the form of the popular ballad.

One may, in this study, go back as far as the time of Caedmon, when Whitby formed the center from which the religious life of the community emanated. The stories tell us that Caedmon was shamed because he could not do his part toward the entertainment of the household by song or story. As he was an unlearned man, a rough herdsman, according to Bede,* one draws the conclusion that the humble folk of the monastery, and doubtless of the whole neighborhood, were in the habit of gathering, at times, in the hall, for social intercourse. That part, at least, of the entertainment should be of a religious character is to be supposed, and Caedmon's subsequent fame in his paraphrases of the Bible tells of frequent and much enjoyed rehearsals of his work in just such gatherings. Tradition credits Caedmon with the translation and paraphrasing of a very large portion of the Bible, but critical students ascribe the major part of this to contemporaries and followers. If it is a compilation, the fact is even more important, from the widespread knowledge of the Bible that it indicates.

*See Jusserand's Literary Hist. of the Eng. People.

*Bede's Ecclesiastical History.

According to the account of Bede,* there were many at that early time exercising their gifts on the same material. Besides stories or poems based directly on the Bible, innumerable legends of the saints served the purpose of keeping the religious spirit alive among the common people of England. Cynewulf's eighth century verse brings into prominence the value of the legends of the saints for literary material, and his rather free and fanciful account of the life of Christ foreshows the trend of English religious literature in succeeding centuries.

The influence of Whitby in the literary North affords an example of the importance of the monasteries as distributing centres of religious knowledge. It is possible that the priests in the adjoining chapels or churches had even then initiated the telling of the fascinating Bible stories, and perhaps, occasionally, the legends of saints, such as formed so large a part of the later church service.

Bede's translation into Anglo-Saxon of the Gospel of Saint John was the last impulse given by literature to the dissemination of religion in the North, so far as we have any evidence. The spread of the common knowledge of the Bible and religious belief must have continued through the efforts of his many hundreds of pupils, but the besom

of the barbarian invader has swept away all literary

* Bede's Ecclesiastical History.

evidence of their work..

The invasion of the Danes effectually put an end to learning of any kind throughout England. Priest joined with layman to save merely life and limb, and all the Church was able to extract from the wreck was a saint or a martyr who had died in defense of his country.. The English Saint Sebastian, so well beloved in eastern England, met his death in this storm.

When Alfred and his forces arranged the peace that allowed domestic life to be resumed, religious learning had declined to the extent that there was hardly a man, according to Alfred, *south of the Thames, "who could explain his service book in English." Owing to Alfred's indefatigable efforts, schools were established for the education of the people as well as academies for the sons of nobles. The practical value of these schools lay in their aim to teach every free born youth to read his native language. One reads of the learning of priests, or of their ignorance, but the fact of the popularizing of the first steps of education in the instruction in reading Anglo- Saxon, answers, to a limited extent, the question so often propounded as to who made up the reading public for which the mass of early English translations, chronicles,

*

Jusserand's Literary History of England, p.81.

saints' lives and bestiaries were written. From the writings of Asser, the man who was to Alfred what Alcuin had been to Charlemagne, one learns that monastic and episcopal schools were established for the nobility, and that many persons of the inferior classes also attended these schools. Asser, in his discussion of the times, says;

"Every person of rank or substance who, either from age or want of capacity, was unable to learn to read, himself, was compelled to send to school either his son or a kinsman, or, if he had neither, a servant, that he might at least be read to by some one."

The impulse given to education by Alfred was not completely lost in the succeeding centuries. Dunstan and Canute each did his part to further education, and the Confessor had high ideals of national improvement along this line,

In spite of wars and internal disturbances that must have constituted a serious interruption to literary composition, a large mass of Anglo-Saxon writing has come down to us. Among these remains are translations of the Heptateuch, the Pseudo Gospel of Nicodemus, fragments of Judith, various translations of the four Gospels, excerpts from Ecclesiasticus, besides numerous hom-

ilies of Aelfric and others.

Of these works Mr. Morley says; " those who wrote in the mother tongue (after the fourth century) did so for the delight and instruction of the multitude, each using the homely English of the neighborhood in which and for which he wrote." This statement, in itself, tends to the inference that Mr. Morley considers important a reading public not entirely composed of the priesthood. During the time of Aethelwold the people as well as the priests were allowed to read the Scriptures in the native tongue. The anonymous translation of the Bible made in Alfred's time was re-written during Dunstan's rule over the English church in the dialect of the period.*

Although the reading Anglo- Saxon public must not be disregarded, it is nevertheless indisputable that the main instruction of the people came from the Church, and directly from the pulpit. The greater part of the Anglo-Saxon literature, as well as the literature of the early Norman period, consisted of religious writing in the form of homilies or allied material which could be used in the Sunday services, or to enliven the celebration of the various holy days of the Church. The homilies which have been preserved contain masses of extra-

* Jusserand's Lit. Hist. of Eng. People, p.88, N.4.

neous matter, as we should now consider it, such as "legendary information concerning the Holy Land, with minute pictures of the devil and apostles, with edifying tales full of miracles."* Aelfric himself filled his sermons with an extravagant mixture of Christianity and heathen superstition, transformations and enchantments, apparitions and magic disappearances.¹ He also frightened his flock into the narrow road by his dramatic account of the devil and his ways. One infers that the association, in the older ballads, of Christian idea and heathen superstition, of devil and elf, of the Blessed Virgin and the queen of the fairies, of the efficacy of prayer and the magic of spells, received its sanction and perhaps its impetus from the pulpit.

It must be remembered that the English church, so widely removed from the seat of authority at Rome, exercised unusual freedom, being permitted to carry on a large part of its services in the native tongue. Lappenberg states that the mass itself was not entirely in Latin, and that, in his opinion, the wedding form was entirely in Anglo-Saxon.² *

One is led to believe that the various compendia of lives of saints, such as Aelfric compiled, or those translated from Bede's Latin work, were ex-

*Jusserand, p.89.

1 Ibid. p. 90.

2 F.J.Snell's Age of Alfred, p. 227.

tensively used by the priesthood, who were in the habit of refreshing their memories by reading these accounts of martyrs and saints before each saint's day in preparation for the following day's sermon to the people.* One finds in the ballads frequent and familiar mention of the saints, both of apostolic times and of later canonization. St. Peter, St. Paul and St. John are the favorite patrons of the balladists, and besides these, one finds mention of St. Evron and St. Mungo and of Saint Mary Magdalene. The frequent telling of the lives of the saints bears little direct result in the ballads, but the indirect consequences are found in the accounts of crude magic and supernatural achievements that savor strongly of the Sunday homily.

Besides the use of the lives of the saints in the homilies, the Church drew freely upon the apocryphal books which arose in the early centuries of Christianity and inculcated the most astounding ideas concerning the chief characters of the time of Christ.

Even in its pre-Conquest days, the Church provided a certain degree of dramatic representation in the services on high days. The liturgical dramas which assumed so elaborate a form in the thirteenth century and afterward, were not the result of spontaneous genius, but a slow and cautious development

* Snell's Age of Alfred, p. 232.

of early pictorial representation in character, which, in time, took on motion, and, at last, speech.

Outside the church and monastery, one finds in the fairs and the moot courts centers from which the knowledge of the Bible and religious lore may have been spread abroad.* Market days and fairs are as old as the social life of the human race, and our ancestors met for exchange at periodical fairs as far back as our accounts take us. At these gatherings all the means of entertainment known to the Teutons were carried on. One could hardly doubt that a good talker, either layman or priest, could here gather his audience (as did the Bishop upon the bridge)¹ who would gladly listen to his stories of sacred history, embellished, as they were, with tales of the most astounding marvels and miracles. A returning pilgrim must have been welcomed with delight, and the fact that the stories told by these men of their travels were as wildly imaginative as those of Sir John Mandeville or Marco Polo of later date, comes down to us in the descriptions extant of Jerusalem and its relics.² Besides this material, the traveler had become acquainted with new versions of the old stories; an added miracle accredited to a saint, a new marvel told of the Infant Jesus, an oriental tale rehabilitated in Christian garments. From these fairs one imagines that the countryman bore

*F. York Powel, in H.D. Trail's Social England, p. 140.

¹Schöfield's History of English Literature, p. 18.

²See extract from the Blicking sermon on Ascension Day given in Snell's Age of Alfred, p. 211, 212.

back to his native village or farm many a tale of saint or martyr which, one may be sure, lost nothing in its rehearsal about the fire, or at the board.

The quarterly or annual courts doubtless partook somewhat of the same social character, whether hall-moot, hundred-moot or shire-moot.* This democratic institution dates as far back, among the Teutons, as the time of Tacitus, we know, and was continued up to the Conquest and on into modern times with changes in name and circumstances, but not in character.

After the Conquest, while the old customs of social intercourse continued, new means of disseminating knowledge arose. The advent of the friars, in 1220, increased greatly the communication among the people. Simple religious knowledge was carried about by these men, who wandered up and down through the land, exhorting the people to religious life. The Normans, moreover, improved the roads by putting them in charge of the monasteries, and travel became constant. Besides the monasteries as houses of entertainment, inns sprang up at the cross roads, and the inn kitchen became a place of social gathering among the middle class travelers. Jusserand, in his Way-faring Life in the Middle Ages, gives an account of the incessant flow of travel in this time, caused, in

* F. York Powell, in Trail's Social England, p. 136.

part, by the Norman policy of bestowing widely separated properties on the feudal lords, thus obliging them to move frequently from place to place in order to maintain their large retinues on their lands.*

The Norman barons, as they moved from castle to castle, carried with them, one may surmise, portions of their libraries; perhaps a massive volume or two containing the most prized tales, or a collection of religious commentaries, with lives of the saints and martyrs. In a short space of time, English translations of the most popular of these French and Latin manuscripts were made and added to the libraries of monastery and hall. For, not only did the Normans bring their books in French and Latin, but they brought what was more valuable, a new impulse toward learning, which bore fruit in the English tongue quite as much as in the French or Latin. Translations of the Gospels were made, and in 1250, a paraphrase of the first books of the Old Testament, by a scholar who thought that the people for whom he wrote "ought to be as fain as are the birds at daybreak when they are told sooth tales in their native speech with small words of the hills of bliss and the dales of sorrow."*

One sees here that the reading Anglo-Saxon public that was not learned was still worth con-

*Jusserand's Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages.

*W.H.Schofield's Hist. of Eng. Lit. from Norman Conquest to Chaucer, p. 375.

sideration. Another book written for the laity who could yet read the English was the Cursor Mundi, which avowed the purpose of giving the public something better to think on than the romantic tales then popular. This poem contains a quantity of legendary material and bases its claim to serious consideration on its purpose of encouraging the adoration of the Virgin Mary.

The practice of including stories of the saints in the church service continued and maintained its importance. But, in the thirteenth century, and perhaps earlier, the church instituted a cult of the Virgin Mary for the purpose of refining some of the coarseness of the age. A romantic tone was given to the worship of both Christ and the Virgin, and the customs and language of chivalry were taken over by the Church, ever ready to adapt its teachings to the trend of the times. While the influence of the saints' lives is only occasional or indirect in the ballad literature, the deep impression made by the Virgin cult is evident in several instances, more especially in the group of Robin Hood ballads, where the adoration of the Virgin is shown to be a potent influence in the every day life of the people.

It is unnecessary , in this discussion, to consider ballads written about an event of historical importance later than the fourteenth century. The ballads can tell us little of the religious life of the later Middle Ages that cannot be investigated more easily through the multiplied documents of contemporary scholars . But , for the earlier period, before the printing press had revolutionized the literary world, the popular ballad affords evidence of unique value in the study of the intimate life and thought of the great English commons.

The mass of material in the older ballads that contains evidences of Christianity may be grouped under four main divisions of which the largest is the cycle of ballads concerning the famous outlaw, Robin Hood. In the second group may be included those ballads, few in number, that are founded directly on Bible stories of the New and Old Testaments. The third group is made up of ballads which show the popular hatred of the Jews, The last division includes all other ballads, scattered throughout the collection, which contain allusions, direct or indirect, to the Christian faith or its ceremonial.

THE ROBIN HOOD BALLADS.

The date of composition and the historical value of the ballads of Robin Hood have long been subjects of controversy. Neither the internal nor the external evidence on the subject has been of a character to locate the date of the poems within a closer period than two hundred years. The first mention of the Robin Hood stories is found in *Piers Plowman*, (1362) in which it is intimated that the Rhymes and Tales of Robin Hood are familiar to the common folk. It would, perhaps, be safe to assign 1300 as the latest date at which these ballads could have had their beginning, but how much farther back they may extend is a question still open, and on which much may yet be said.

Robin Hood's attitude toward the institutions of the Church forms one of the chief interests in the ballads. From the words and actions of their hero, one gains an idea of the popular sentiment toward the Church, and learns something of the ecclesiastical conditions of the time; consequently, the passages on the subject, taken together, throw a light on the vexed question of the date of the ballads by connecting them with certain known facts in the history of the Church.

Robin Hood's relation to the Church may be studied under two heads; (a) his sincerely religious nature and strict observance of his religious duties, connected with which is his romantic devotion to the Virgin; and (b) his fierce scorn and hatred of the dignitaries of the Church.

Beginning with the latter of these phases, one considers the period in which the churchmen had become hated by the English commons for their wickedness and arrogance, "These bishops and these archbishops, you shall them beat and bind," says Robin. That this condition was possible in more than one century is well attested.. Hatred and distrust of churchfunctionaries was common in the days of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066), who brought into England numbers of foreign priests to fill the higher offices of the Church in his vain endeavor to reform the laxities prevailing among the regular clergy. On the other hand, there is nothing in the ballads to give one the impression that these churchmen are foreigners, or that the order of things is in any way new.. There is a certain contempt bred of familiarity, as though the decay were the result of years of evil practice within the body.* This condition of affairs could hardly have come before the Conquest, nor have

* See W.H. Schofield's Hist. of Eng. Lit. from Norman Conquest to Chaucer, pp. 57, 58, 59 for literature on the subject of evils within the Church. The reader may refer directly to Matt. Paris' Chronicles and to Walter Map's Bishop Goliath.

grown up during the vigorous rule of the early Normans. The period at which the Church again fell prey to the rapacity of its heads may be assigned to the time of Henry III, about which much has been written,* and which, in other ways, would well agree with the internal evidence of the earliest of these poems. However old the original stories of Robin Hood may have been, I should say that the thirteenth century would easily hold all the circumstances given in the ballads that have come down to us about this hero. It may well be that these ballads are built on similar lines to certain ballads composed in the previous century, but changed to suit the conditions and temper of the times. It is evident that Robin Hood's name formed a convenient peg upon which to hang innumerable stories of outlawry and adventure.

The ballads of Robin Hood that deal with Robin's attitude toward churchmen are:

- No. 117, The Gest of Robin Hood.
- No. 119, Robin Hood and the Monk.
- No. 120, The Death of Robin Hood.
- No. 123, Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar.
- No. 138, Robin Hood and Allan a Dale.
- No. 140, Robin Hood Rescuing Three Squires.
- No. 143, Robin Hood and the Bishop.
- No. 144, Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford.
- No. 147, Robin Hood's Golden Prize.

* See J.R.Green's Short Hist. of the Eng. People for an account of the misrule in the time of Henry III.

Sum to R. 26
26

The Gest of Robin Hood represents a collection of old ballads that have been subjected to slight changes in order to fit them into a comparatively consecutive story of the outlaw. Prefixed to the collection are several stanzas of an introductory nature, which have a romance touch and will be considered in the second part of this discussion.

The first Fytte of the Gest concerns a knight who is in debt to the Abbot of Saint Mary's for four hundred pounds which he had borrowed to free his son from the penalty of murder. This point may have reference to the old idea that a life had a money value. The price paid for a life, called in pre-Conquest days the "Wergild," became higher and higher after the Conquest, and the laws concerning it became extremely elaborate. According to F.W.Maitland, this custom perished in the twelfth century.*

After receiving the loan of the money from Robin Hood, who is glad to do the Abbot an ill turn, the knight proceeds to the Abbey to pay the debt.

The second Fytte shows a scene in the Abbey where the Abbot has gathered around him a formidable assembly, apparently for the purpose of robbing the knight whose lands he is eager to hold, for they are worth fully four hundred pounds a year. The knight,

*H.D.Trail's Social England, p. 171.

at Robin's suggestion, one imagines, pretends, at first, that he is unable to pay the money and asks for an extension of the time. The Abbot scornfully refuses the request and claims the land, but agrees, at the justice's insistence, to pay one hundred pounds, no more, to the knight, for a release of all claims. The knight then throws down the whole sum of the debt, claims quittance from the justice, and rides away triumphant, to the exceeding discomfiture of the Abbot.

The fact that there is a necessity for the presence of men of law at the settlement places the date of the poem as distinctly post-Conquest, when the Church courts were separated from the civil courts and a civil justice must decide on matters of civil law. The Sheriff present at the scene was also a Royal officer who had his place in the local courts.

An interesting feature of the poem is the prior's remonstrance in favor of the knight. Although in a monastery ruled by an Abbot the prior was usually his appointee, the fact that the office of prior was elective in many monasteries sets the prior in the class of the common folk with whom he may be supposed to sympathize.

In the fourth Fytte of the Gest Robin's fellows capture the cellarer of the same Abbey of

St. Mary's, the "fat-headed monk" mentioned in the first Fytte, and bring him, with about fifty of his men, to Robin, who is fasting until he shall have found some adventure to begin the day. Robin Hood taunts the monk with mock courtesy. "Robin Hood did adown his hood, the monk when that he see; but the monk was not so courteous, although Robin served him with a good dinner and the best of wine. After dinner when the outlaw finds eight hundred pounds in the monk's chests, he assures his captive that it is the direct gift of St. Mary, for whose sake he had lent half that sum to the knight. That the money comes from the very Abbey concerned in the former transaction makes the chance all the more pleasing to Robin.

After despoiling the monk of his money, Robin sends a mocking message to the Abbot, and releases the monk, who, the ballad says, is on his way to a "mote" in London, where his Abbot is to seek vengeance on the knight. This passage may have reference to the more centralized government established by the Normans, under which disputes about land were referred to the king's court.

In the seventh Fytte of the Gest, the king, named Edward, desiring a meeting with the outlaw who is despoiling his forests, disguises

himself as an Abbot, and, followed by his retinue clothed in the grey gowns of the monastery, rides boldly into the forest. He seems to place his security on the stories of the country folks to the effect that Robin Hood spares the persons of churchmen while he robs their purses. The party is met and halted by the outlaws, who demand money. To their evident surprise, the supposed Abbot hands them over forty pounds, claiming that this sum is all he has left after his recent visit to the king. Robin meets courtesy with courtesy and takes but half the sum for his men, returning the remainder to the monk for his own spending. After a pleasant hour in the woods, during which Robin takes occasion to send his respects to the king, the outlaws try their skill at shooting at the mark. As penalty for missing, Robin receives a lusty buffet from the Abbot, at whom he now looks closely, and whom he recognizes as the king. The conclusion of the Fytte is more romantic than that of the previous stories and seems to point to a later origin, although there is nothing definite on which to base this opinion. Robin asks forgiveness of the king and agrees to enter his service. A very pretty description of the king and his followers in the monkish "weeds"

occurs in stanzas 372, 373, and 374.

The eighth Fytte takes up Robin's life in the king's court, of which he soon grows weary. He obtains seven days' leave of absence from the king on the pretence of making a pilgrimage to a shrine of Mary Magdalene which he seems to have built. He describes the pilgrim's costume, a sheep's skin with the wool turned inward, and proposes to walk there barefoot. The king grants him seven nights' leave, but Robin is never again seen at court. The ballad makes no mention of Robin's ever seeking the shrine; but he is soon back among his fellows, living on the king's deer.

Robin Hood's end, according to the Gest, is through the treachery of a woman, the prioress of Kirkly Abbey. Troubled with a fever, Robin seeks the aid of this prioress who is skilled in leechcraft. At the instigation of an enemy of the outlaw, the prioress allows Robin to bleed to death from the cupping. x

In No. 119, Robin Hood and the Monk, the attitude of the common folk toward the monks is forcibly brought out. While Robin is in church at Nottingham, he is recognized by a "great-headed-monk" who hastens to arouse the sheriff to capture the

outlaw; for Robin, he claims, had formerly robbed him of a hundred pounds. The same Monk, bearing the news of the capture to the king, is waylaid by Little John and brutally killed. Little John expresses no compunction at the deed, which speaks plainly of the popular attitude toward the monks. One can but feel, however, that the more gallant Robin would never have permitted the violent death of the Monk, if he had been on the scene.

That churchwomen share with churchmen the popular distrust is evident in No. 125, Robin Hood's Death, which is a more elaborate version of the story of his death told in the Gest. In this ballad Robin is warned against the prioress, but trusts in her kinship to him. She takes Robin's proffered twenty pounds before bleeding him to death. Robin, however, has his revenge on Red Roger, the instigator of the crime, although he will not allow the nunnery to be burned by his followers.

No. 123, Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar, bears indications of being a ballad of later date than the ones previously dealt with. In this story Robin enters into a trial of strength with a friar who is represented as wearing a headpiece and breastplate. There is an amusing contest between Robin

Hood's followers and the friar's band-dogs, which ends in the friar's agreeing to join Robin's band.

The points of interest in the story are these facts; that the friar is dressed in armor, and that he is stationary at Fountain's Abbey. As to the first point; in the Auchinlech Manuscript a poem "On the Evil Times of Edward II" sets forth the low state of the Church in which the spirit has given place to the body. In this the author says, "Abbots and priors counterfeit knights," which suggests the idea that military equipment might not have been unknown to even the humbler members of the Church body. That the friar had been stationed at Fountain's Abbey for seven years speaks of the degeneracy of the friars, who, at their coming to England in 1220, maintained the rules of their order which commanded a wandering life.. This friar seems to have held the post of guard at the abbey, and was thus allowed to tuck up, or "curtal" his robe in the pursuance of his domestic duties.

"Robin Hood and Allan a Dale", No. 138, may be a later ballad, but it has the characteristic reckless good nature of Robin, though lacking in reverence for the rites of the Church. In this story, Robin and his followers interrupt the bishop in the performance of a marriage ceremony in order to

restore to Allan a Dale his sweetheart, about to be married to a rich old knight.

"Robin Hood pulled off the bishop's coat
And put it upon Little John,"

and adds insult to the injury by his words, "The cloth doth make thee a man," intimating that the prelate was a bishop only by virtue of his coat. Little John carries out the mock wedding by asking the bans seven times in the church, "Lest three times should not be enough."

In No. 143, Robin Hood and the Bishop, the outlaw at first shows fear that he may be captured and hanged by the bishop, who has come into the woods with a great company. By the help of an old woman whom he had formerly assisted, Robin in disguise tricks the bishop and decoys him into the midst of the outlaws. After robbing the bishop of five hundred pounds, Robin ties him to a tree and forces him to sing mass to the outlaws. After the unwilling service, he dismisses the bishop, setting him upon his horse backward, and giving him his horse's tail in his hand.

This rough treatment of a prelate is told again in No. 144, Robin Hood's Golden Prize, which is, according to Mr. Kittredge, a comparatively modern version of an old tale.* In this ballad, Robin Hood, disguised as

* English and Scottish Ballads, p. 347.

a friar, goes through the woods "with hood, gown, beads and crucifix," until he comes upon two priests of whom he begs alms.. At their refusal Robin drags them from their horse, forces them to pray for money for an hour and then searches them. He finds a "good store of gold," of which he gives the priests a share, "cause you prayed so heartily," and makes off with the rest, delighted at the joke he has played.

It is remarkable that in the older and genuine popular ballads of Robin Hood no mention is made of a parish priest. Yet we know that the English parish priest continued his duties in his humble way, while the Frenchmen, or the more influential Englishmen, held the rich offices and lived on the fat of the land. William and his followers had no interest in displacing the Anglo-Saxon priest, but were glad to permit him to continue in his arduous and humble duties. Perhaps the parish priest was too lowly a person, too much one of themselves, for Robin Hood's company to notice. Robin could have no enmity toward them as a class, for they were poor and kin in race to the outlaws, probably sympathizing with them in their struggle against Church and state oppression.

Robin Hood's Religion.

Although Robin Hood evinces scorn and disrespect toward the higher dignitaries of the Church and the regular clergy, he maintains the deepest reverence for the institutions of religion. He must hear mass frequently; in fact, according to the introduction to the Gest, he is in the habit of hearing three masses a day. He is sometimes hard put to it to perform his religious duties, and must resort to dangerous expedients to carry on his devotions. In No. 119, Robin Hood and the Monk, "he bemoans his outcast state on one account only; that he may not attend mass or matins on any solemn day. The fact that a fortnight has passed "Syn I my Savior see", drives him to the desperate resolution of venturing into Nottingham, where he is well known and well hated, to attend mass. The death of the monk who recognized Robin and caused his capture cannot be laid at Robin's door as it was done without his knowledge. However ruthlessly Robin may rob and abuse the prelates that fall into his power, his religion is too sacred a matter with him for him to permit actual injury to a representative of the Church, even though he may deem the churchman unworthy of his office.

Throughout these ballads, oaths of Christ, the Trinity, God and the Virgin Mary are frequent, but they are used somewhat reverently. There is a strong

contrast between the tone of the expletives in the genuine Robin Hood ballads and that of the oaths in the later and coarser imitations.

The first ten stanzas of the Gest, which may be taken as introductory, have a romance touch that proclaims the influence, if not the hand, of the artist minstrel. Gentlemen of free-born blood are asked to harken to a tale of a good yeoman. A few stanzas down, Robin himself says that he has no desire to dine until he has performed some strange deed of sport or valor, or has captured and robbed a baron, knight or squire. One is reminded of the scene in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, where Arthur delays to dine until he has been advised of some knightly deed or strange adventure. The strongest characteristic of the Robin Hood ballads that makes for romantic interest is Robin's devotion, genuine and consistent, to the Virgin.

The Cult of the Virgin.

The elevation of the Virgin to a high, almost the highest place, in the estimation of Christians was, in part, the deliberate effort of the Church toward refining and uplifting the great mass of the people. Since the early days of the Christian Church, the softer and gentler aspects of religion had been taught largely through the worship of the Virgin Mary; but the cult of the Virgin encouraged by the Church in the Middle Ages

was of a different nature and inaugurated for a somewhat different purpose..

With the commingling of the races, Norman and Anglo-Saxon, the Saxon ideas with regard to women that had hitherto prevailed had undergone a change. In time women no longer held the position of dignity and importance that they had maintained by right of their Teutonic blood. Chivalry came in to lift women again into prominence, but into a prominence of another kind, where their claim to importance and consideration lay, not in their position as mother and respected partner in the direction of the household, but in their more romantic nature as sweetheart and inspirer of knightly deeds.

It is easy to see what was the outcome of this change of idea in the position of women. When, in course of time, the knightly ideals sank to a lower level, women became no longer the prize of chivalrous deeds, but the prey of strength and rapacity. This sentiment, spreading from high to low, caused great concern to the serious churchmen, who began to devise some means of lifting the minds of men to higher things. They proceeded in a way that seems strange to us, for, instead of endeavoring to improve the conditions of social intercourse between men and women, they set about to

turn men away from human love to the love of the Virgin. Innumerable tales were written for this purpose by monks and clerks, and used in the Sunday service as part of or in place of, the homily. Many of these stories, but only a small part of the whole number, are preserved in the Vernon Manuscript as the so called "Miracles of Our Lady." The benefits promised from the worship of the Virgin are great and numerous; the mere listening to the story of her deeds would bring an indulgence of forty days.

The introduction to the "Cursor Mundi" gives a good idea of the prevailing conception of the worship of the Virgin Mary. In the poem, composed in 1320, the author says, according to Mr. Schofield,* that he will sing of the Virgin, "a lady more true, loyal and constant than any other, more beautiful and ready to reward." Appended to the "Cursor Mundi" is a poem on the same order, "The Assumption of Our Lady," composed about the middle of the thirteenth century and based on an old tale widespread over Europe. The story in the Vernon Manuscript of "A Good Knight and his Jealous Wife," tells of the stirring of jealousy in a wife whose husband admits that he loves another (meaning the Virgin) better than he loves her.

The effect of these stories on the people of

*Schofield's English Lit., p.376.

the time is plainly to be seen in the Robin Hood ballads. The ballads, moreover, take us one step further, for in them the reaction has set in in favor of the women themselves. Robin Hood's devotion to the Virgin, full of sentiment and romance, has produced the result desired by the promulgators of the cult in elevating all other women in Robin's eyes. That the popular hero should hold all women in high respect on account of their relation to the Virgin Mary shows, if not the popular custom, at least the popular ideals, on that subject.

In the introductory stanzas of the Gest of Robin Hood, the religious convictions and observances of the hero are stated in stanzas 8, 9 and 10. He hears three masses daily, one for the Father, one for the Son, and the third for "Our dear Lady," that he loves the most of all. The tenth stanza explains his sentiments:

"Robin loved Our dear Lady,
For doubt of deadly sin,
Would he never do company harm
That any woman was in."

To this determination he adheres even when, in the last Fytte, he has been betrayed by the nun to whom he has gone for assistance in his illness. He stoutly refuses to allow vengeance to be taken on the woman after she has betrayed him to his death, or to permit his men to burn the hall (the nunnery) in which there are widows.

In the last part of the first Fytte of the Gest, Robin takes the pledge of the knight for the re-

payment of the money Robin is to lend him, when the knight calls upon "Our dear Lady," who he says has never failed him. With enthusiasm Robin greets this fellow devotee:

"'By dear worthy God,' said Robin,
'To search all England through,
Yet found I never to my pay,
A much better borrow.'"

The romance touch spoken of in the introduction appears in the fourth Fytte, where Robin expresses fear that Our Lady is wroth with him, as she has not sent him his pay, by which he means some luckless traveler whom he can rob. He feels that he is forgiven and again in favor when his men bring him a monk and his company, whom they have captured on the highroad. Robin insists that the monk has been sent him by the Virgin, whom, by the way, he refers to as "God's Dame," to repay him for the money he has lent to the knight in the Virgin's name. That the captured monk is the cellarer of the Abbey to which the knight owed the money makes the story of still greater point, and confirms Robin in his consciousness of the Holy Virgin's favor.

Passing from the Gest to the separate ballads that have the genuine popular ring, one finds in "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne;" that Robin, who has unluckily stumbled over a root in his fight with Guy, calls upon his Dear Lady, and is soon upon his feet again, fighting with renewed strength. In this connection it

is worthy of note that no direct miracles are ascribed to the Virgin in the Robin Hood Ballads. Although her aid is frequently invoked and her assistance taken for granted in a general way, nothing miraculous, such as one might expect in a tale of the miracle loving folk, occurs to show her direct interposition for the aid of her devoted worshiper.

In No. 119, "Robin Hood and the Monk", Robin hopes to be able to hear mass in Nottingham, the home of his enemies, "with the might of mild Mary". When he reaches the town he prays to Mary to bring him out safely. After his unfortunate capture, Little John bases his hope of effecting a rescue on the known fact that

"He (Robin) has served Our Lady many a day
And yet will surely,
Therefore I trust in her specially
No wicked death shall he die."

With the help, then, of Mild Mary, Little John ensnares and kills the monk who is bearing to the king the news of Robin's capture.

In one of the later ballads, No 123, "Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar," which Mr. Kittredge suggests was made from two older ballads, Robin vows a solemn oath—"It was by Mary free"—that he will meet the sturdy friar and have a bout with him.

The later ballads and broadsides built upon the earlier ones add nothing to the evidence on this subject. They show an increasing levity and a loss of the original seriousness that is characteristic of the real Robin's religious convictions.

Ballads Founded on Biblical Material.

The part played by Christianity in the literature of the ballads, in general, has been discussed in the introduction to this article; for the present division of the subject I shall consider only those ballads which are founded on distinctly Biblical material. In this connection I shall discuss how closely they adhere to the original Bible story, and the nature and sources of any changes in the stories that have come into the metrical form.

The ballads in Mr. Child's collection that are founded on incidents related in the Bible are strangely few. Those based on New Testament stories are:

No. 21, The Maid and the Palmer. ✓

No. 22, St. Steven and Herod. ✓

No. 23, Judas. ✓

No. 54, The Cherry Tree Carol. ✓

No. 55, The Carnal and the Crane. ✓

No. 56, Dives and Lazarus. ✓

The ballad of "The Wandering Jew" may be appended to this list, on account of the firm belief in this character current among the people of Europe for hundreds of years.

Possibly the oldest of these ballads are "Judas" and "St. Steven and Herod." With these is placed "The Maid and the Palmer," which has the old ring and may be of equal age. The other ballads in the group

are of a different type.

St. Steven and Herod.

The ballad of "St. Steven and Herod," No. 22, presents a remarkable mixture of several Bible stories, including the stories of Herod, the Star, Steven's martyrdom, and a cock, which may, in the first place, have had some connection with the story of Peter.

The Herod story was early a part of the common knowledge of the people. The dramatic value of so perfect a type of the villain could not be neglected by the practical moralists of the Church or by the tellers of tales. The foundation of the story is contained only in the Gospel of Matthew (II), in which the wise men, seeing the star, follow it to Herod's court and tell the king of its significance. Herod's treachery in endeavoring to locate the birthplace of the child is foiled by the secret departure of the wise men, but the king's rage and fear lead him to order the ruthless destruction of all the infants in the city. That Herod, as well as Steven, in the ballad, considers the child a future temporal king is, perhaps, only the natural feeling of a usurper on the throne, who fears the loss of his ill-gotten power.

That Steven's death should have been ascribed to Herod arose, doubtless, from the confusion in the

popular mind of the three Herods who ruled in Palestine during Christ's life and immediately afterward. The common mind could more readily understand the martyrdom of Steven as the result of an act of tyranny on the part of a monarch than as a judgment decreed by a dim and little known Sanhedrin.

The story of Steven is found in Acts VI-VII, and his martyrdom occurs after the death of Christ. His stoning seems to be a formal execution, and is carried on according to established custom.

In the ballad, Steven is given as a steward in Herod's hall, who serves the king with a boar's head. In his passage from the kitchen to the dining hall he sees above Bethlehem the Star which he had been taught should indicate the coming of the new king. He renounces forthwith his allegiance to Herod in favor of the rightful king of the Jewish prophecies. Herod responds by saying that the new king's coming is as true as that the capon in the dish shall crow, and at once the bird crows, "Christus natus est," in miraculous confirmation. Herod, enraged, orders Steven to be taken by the tormentors out of the town and stoned to death. "Therefore," says the ballad, "is his (Steven's) Even on Christ's own day."

The only point of resemblance between the story of Steven in the Bible and in the ballad, with the

exception of the manner of his death, is his fine spirit of defiance. In the ballad Steven casts down the boar's head with the same exaltation of mind and disregard of consequences with which, in the Bible narrative, he upbraids the council summoned to try him for the stubbornness of their ancestors, and casts in their teeth their own wicked acts against God.

The cock of the ballad story is hard to place. It is an important feature in all folk lore and is even given a semi-miraculous place in the Scriptures in connection with Peter's betrayal of Christ (Matt., Mark, and Luke). According to Mr. Kittredge,* the miracle of the roasted cock occurs in the legend of Steven and Herod in many Scandinavian versions, and is also a part of the legend of the Pilgrims of St. James, besides having a place in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.

Besides reaching the masses by the usual means by which the Bible stories were circulated, in translations, paraphrases, legends and homilies, the story of Herod was placed before the people in a most impressive form in the liturgical drama, as early, on the continent, as the eleventh century, and probably soon afterward in England. It made a part of the Winter Festival, the celebration of the Epiphany, and was variously styled "Tres Reges," "Magi," and "Herodis and Stella."

*English and Scottish Ballads, p. 40.

This act was given in the church with small scenic additions, a throne, in which sat Herod, and a movable star which led the three wise men to the king. * To this foundation was added Rachaël and the slaughter of the Innocents, in which children and a lamb bore a part. The whole was sung in a kind of dialogue or antiphonal chant. This form of church instruction, although given in Latin, could readily be understood by the audience, who were taught, even after the Conquest, by their native priests.

That Steven is found in juxtaposition with these characters is due, possibly, to the fact of St Steven's day's falling in the same season, that of the Winter Festival, celebrated since heathen times and carried into the Church calendar.

Judas.

The ballad of Judas exists in thirteenth century writing, the oldest manuscript of a ballad extant. From the fact that almost all of the ballads that have come down to us are preserved in manuscripts of much more recent date than the evident time of the ballad's origin, it is probable that Judas also was composed sometime before the thirteenth century. It is well known that stories from the Bible and from the apocryphal scriptures were a part of common knowledge from

* E.K. Chamber's History of English Literature.

early times.* Changes in these stories would naturally be greater and of more frequent occurrence when the incidents were learned through oral transmission than when the sources were numerous and accessible.

On the other hand, from apocryphal times down, churchmen themselves spent their time enlarging on the meagre relations of the Bible, and in piecing out from their excited imaginations distorted and marvelous variations on the original themes. In a writing of the same century as the ballad manuscript is the account of the lives of Judas and Pilate in which the most miraculous incidents in the lives of these two men are recounted.*

In the ballad of "Judas," Judas is given thirty pieces of silver by Jesus with which to buy meat for the disciples. On his way through the streets, he is met by his wicked sister, who upbraids him for his allegiance to Jesus. Judas assures his sister that it is well that his lord does not hear her, for he would take vengeance on her for these words. His sister then persuades Judas to take a nap, with his head resting in her lap. When he awakes his sister and the money are both gone, and Judas flees in a frenzy of dismay.

The ballad explains Judas' subsequent conduct most naively. He seems to have felt fear of appearing

* Schofield, p. 377.

*Schofield, p. 378.

before Jesus without accounting for the money committed to his care. In his anxiety to show to advantage before Jesus, Judas obtains the money by selling Jesus himself to Pilate for the thirty pieces of silver, with which he then purchases the food.

There is a most peculiar effect produced by the idea that Judas should have been afraid to face his master without accounting for the money, yet should not have been afraid to sell him to his enemies. The remote is less terrible to him than the imminent, regardless of the proportional gravity of the sin or its probable punishment. At the meal in the evening, Jesus, encouraging his disciples to eat, tells them that he has been bought and sold that day for their meat, at which Judas asks if it is he that his lord suspects. Peter then boasts of his fidelity and receives the rebuke as given in the Bible.

The main facts of the story in the ballad are, of course, taken from the Bible; but at what date the Bible account was changed it is impossible to say. Mr. Kittredge suggests that cupidity was supposed to be a motive for Judas' desiring to sell Jesus, and instances Judas' chagrin at the useless expense of the ointments used by Mary (John XIII, 3-6). * John tells us once again

*

Eng. and Scot. Ballads, p. 41.

that Judas "carried the bag," and gives us to understand that the disciples kept their money in a common fund which Judas dispensed at Jesus' orders.

The Biblical text upon which the story is based is found in John XIII, in which Jesus, after indicating his betrayer, by handing Judas the morsel of bread, bade him go and do quickly that which he was to do. The text goes on to say that the majority of the disciples, not knowing the significance of the words, thought, when Judas left the room, that he had been commissioned to buy provisions for the coming feast, since he carried the bag containing the common funds. Peter's part in the ballad is also taken from this chapter, in which Peter boasted of his fidelity to Jesus, even unto death, and Jesus reproved him saying that Peter should betray him thrice ere cock-crow.

It is rather strange that nothing should have been said of the prophecy concerning the crowing of the cock in this ballad where it would naturally belong, when it is made so important a feature in the ballad of Herod and Steven with which it has no Biblical connection.

The ideas of the early fathers on the character of Judas may be found in the apocrypha to the New Testament, the early treasure house of miraculous stories on Biblical subjects.

The Maid and the Palmer.

(The Samaritan Woman.)

The ballad of "The Maid and the Palmer" tells the story of a maid who has gone to the well to wash when an old palmer comes to the well and asks for a drink. The maid refuses to draw him a drink, saying she has no cup or can with which to draw from this deep well. To this the palmer responds by showing her his knowledge of her evil life. There is a certain similarity here to the ballad of the "Cruel Mother", No. 20, in the accusation made by the palmer that the woman has killed her children and secretly buried them. The maid protests her innocence, swearing by good Saint John, whose Gospel has preserved the original story of the Samaritan woman. The penances imposed by the palmer are of the fantastic nature of the very old stories: that she shall for seven years be a stepping-stone, for seven years a clapper in a bell, and for a third period of seven years she shall lead an ape in hell, after which she shall be forgiven.

The ballad has none of the high spirit and dignity of the Bible version, John IV, 4-30. The main incidents of the request for a cup of water, the refusal, and the miraculous knowledge of the woman's life displayed by the palmer are identical with the Scriptural version; but the tone of the ballad is so differ-

ent as to have made this identity doubtful, if, according to Mr. Kittredge, * it were not for several Scandinavian versions of the same story which name the woman Mary and the man Christ or Jesus. Although the Latin ecclesiastics confuse the three women, Mary, sister of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene and the woman who was a sinner, the addition of the Samaritan woman to the list was an error peculiar to the ballads. It is not within the province of the present discussion to try to distinguish these characters, but one may consider natural and excusable a confusion of these women in the minds of the common folk, whose knowledge of the Bible was obtained largely by ear, and from priests whose scholarship was, in many cases, doubtful.

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* *Eng. and Scot. Ballads, p. 39.

Carols.

Two examples of Carols are given in Mr. Kirtledge's collection, "The Cherry Tree Carol" and "The Carnal and the Crane." Both are built on material from the highly popular book, the Pseudo Gospels of Matthew, the source of many of the medieval stories of the Infant Christ and his contemporaries. The book abounds in marvels and miracles and owes its origin and continuance to the popular love of the marvelous, which its pretended sacred character sanctions. This amazing book contains the account of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the union of Mary with Joseph. The miraculous power of the Infant Christ in instructing his father Joseph and in compelling all things animate and inanimate to bow to his will have frequently been made the subjects of early art and literature.

According to Mr. Duncan's "Story of the Carol," the carol as a form of music was used in the Church in very early times.* "The carol," says Mr. Duncan, "is the celebration of a particular event in song." The Noel, of course, was one of the earliest and most popular of the carol subjects; but carols were numerous and much enjoyed even as early as the sixth century, when Austyn is supposed to have introduced them into England

* The Story of the Carol, Edmondstowne Duncan, Scribners' Sons, 1911. See page 3.

in the elaborate music service of the Church which he encouraged.* Only one carol of English composition before the Conquest has been found, a manuscript of probable ninth century origin, preserved in a Benedictine monastery in Cornwall.

The Cherry Tree Carol.

The older of the two carols in the ballad collection, "The Cherry Tree Carol," No. 54, tells a story of Joseph's roughly refusing to pluck a cherry for Mary, at which the unborn Infant cries out, commanding the tree to bow down for his mother's convenience, so that she can obtain the fruit. Mr. Baring Gould says that this incident is the "lingering of a very old tradition common to the whole race of man, that the eating of the fruit of Eden was the cause of the descendant of Eve becoming the mother of Him who was to wipe away that old transgression." *

The other incidents in the carol, the predictions made by the newly born Child of his death and resurrection are added to give a Scriptural touch, and are "probably founded on the angel's words to the shepherds in Luke II, and on Jesus' prediction in the authentic Gospels." - Mr. Kittredge. They may, however, have been taken directly from the Apocrypha, which says: "Jesus even from the cradle said to his mother, 'Mary, I am Jesus the son of God.'"

*The Story of the Carol, Duncan, p. 29.

*Ibid. , p. 122.

The carol bears out the tendency of the Apocrypha to disparage Joseph. His attitude toward Mary is contemptuous until after the miracle, when he expresses remorse. The idea seems to be that the holy nature of Mary and Christ are emphasized by contrast with the purely mundane character of Joseph.

The Carnal and the Crane.

No. 55, "The Carnal and the Crane," has a significance as being the nearest approach in the ballad collection to the very popular form of literature called the "Beast Fable," which had its vogue from Anglo-Saxon days to the time of Fontaine as literary material, and which, even now, is revived periodically. * The older forms followed the Physiologi, a style of literature ascribing the properties, or "natures" of persons, particularly of Scriptural characters or those connected with religious teachings, to various animals. The Physiologi are said to have had their origin "in a religious document that arose among the Christians of Alexandria in the second century."* Copies and translations were spread throughout Europe and reached England at an early date. "The carnal and the Crane" retains little of the early popular nature of the beast fable, and is a remnant only in the fact of the Carnal's, or Crow's, hav-

* Jusserand's Lit. Hist. of Eng. People, p.76.

* Schofield's Hist. of Eng. Lit., p.335.

ing his well established character of wisdom, and in his instructing the ignorant Crane in sacred history.

According to Mr. Kittredge,*although the present form of the carol is of eighteenth century origin, the internal evidence points to a much earlier date. There is reason to suppose that this carol, like many of the ballads, was long in circulation before it was committed to writing. This form of narration was extremely popular for several centuries, and its use of apocryphal material may be taken as a sign of early composition in one form or another.

The points taken up in the story are derived from the same apocryphal gospel that was the source of "The Cherry Tree Carol," and concern the nativity of Mary and Christ, the lowly birth of Jesus, the star and the wise men's visit, Herod's wrath, connected with the testimony of the roasted cock, Herod's slaughter of the children and his pursuit of the Holy Family into Egypt. In the course of the pursuit occurs the adoration of the beasts and the miracle of the accelerated harvest, the main incidents in the carol.

The harvest miracle is a favorite subject for popular poetry for the reason that it has sufficient sequence to form the basis of a good story. The Holy Family, in their flight, come upon a husbandman sowing

*Kittredge's Eng. and Scot. Ballads, preface to No. 55.

his grain. The Infant Jesus commands him to fetch his wagon to carry off the ripened grain, and sure enough, the harvest is miraculously ripened. The Child then instructs the farmer to answer the inquiries of their pursuers by telling them that Jesus had passed while he was sowing his grain. Herod and his train are thus deceived and the capture of the Infant is averted.

The incident of the testimony of the roasted cock is the same as that given in the ballad "St. Steven and Herod." The cock, known as a sacred bird in many legends, has a place in the Zend Avesta of the fourth century. An old wood-cut on a sheet of carols gives the scene in the stable at Bethlehem in which the various barnyard animals are speaking, and the cock is represented as saying "Christus natus est," as in the ballad of St. Steven and Herod.* Steven, however, has no part in the carol which follows the Apocryphal author, carefully.

*Duncan's Story of the Carol, pp. 64, 65.

Dives and Lazarus.

The ballad of "Dives and Lazarus" does not show evidence of great age. It is not known when the word Dives came to be used in England as the name of the person in the parable. This name was used by Chaucer and in Piers Plowman, but the traditional name was Nineusis.* The ballad is built directly on the Bible narration, Luke XVI, 19-24, but is slightly altered in the details. In the ballad, Dives sends his servants to whip the beggar away from the gates, but the whips fall from their hands; the dogs are sent to bite him, but, instead, fall to licking his sores. At Lazarus' death two angels carry him to heaven where he is to sit on an angel's knee, instead of resting in Abraham's bosom, as the original has it. When Dives dies, the ballad gives him two serpents to guide him to hell, whence he looks up and sees Lazarus' bliss and asks in vain for a drop of water.

Although the ballads are strong in the matter of miracles, they fail in impressiveness. Like "The Maid and the Palmer," the ballad of "Dives and Lazarus" cannot attain to the heights of the Bible account, Luke 25-31, in which Dives' repentance is so wonderfully portrayed. The ballad Dives bewails the terrible limitlessness of eternity, and bemoans the fact that he cannot return to earth and re-live his life.

* Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. II, p. 1618.

The Wandering Jew.

The ballad of "The Wandering Jew" is not included in Mr. Kittredge's edition, but is contained in Vol. VIII of Mr. Child's and comes originally from the Percy collection. It is in ballad meter but in eight lined stanzas.

The first mention of the Wandering Jew in English is found in the Chronicles of the Abbey of St. Albans, copied and continued by Matthew Paris, 1228.* A visiting Armenian bishop tells the story of the Wandering Jew to a member of the monastery, affirming the existence of the man Cartaphilus, baptized "Joseph" by Ananias, who baptized Paul. Cartaphilus, he said, was the door-keeper in the judgment hall of Pilate. He is said to have struck Jesus as He was passing, crying, "Get on faster, Jesus!" Thereupon the Man of Sorrows replied, "I am going, but tarry thou till I come (again)!" This man lived on, having his youth renewed every hundred years, always returning to the age of thirty, his age at the time of Christ's death.

This story was widely circulated, and was incorporated into Phillippe Mouskes' rhymed chronicle. The Wandering Jew is said to have re-appeared in the sixteenth century at Hamburg, calling himself Ahasuerus, formerly a shoemaker at Jerusalem. Mr. Child states that

*See The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, p. 126 ff.

the ballad was founded upon some narrative of this event. Mr. Duncan in his Story of the Carols publishes an old carol called "The Wandering Jew."*

It seems strange, considering the interest and prevalence of the story, that no early popular ballad was originated on the subject; but perhaps the material is too subjective to yield to the ordinary ballad treatment.

*Story of the Carols, Edmondstone Duncan.

Ballads on Old Testament Subjects.

Mr. Child includes in the eighth and last volume of his work two out of the numerous later ballads on Old Testament subjects, "Jephtha, Judge of Israel," p.198, and "Samson," p.201. The ballads are of individual composition, following the Bible accounts very accurately, and having no pretense to popular origin. Mr. Child refers to several ballads of equal worth, among them, "The Constancy of Susannah," cited in "Twelfth Night."

The ballad of Jephtha is doubtless the one quoted by Hamlet, Act II, sc. ii.

Ham. "O Jephtha, judge of Israel,-
 What a treasure hadst thou!"
 Polonius. "What treasure had he, my lord?"
 Ham. "Why-
 'One fair daughter, and no more,
 The which he loved passing well.'"

and later:

Ham. "'As by lot, God wot,
 It came to pass, as most like it was!"

The first stanza of the ballad reads:

"I have read that many years ago,
 When Jephtha, judge of Israel,
 Had one fair daughter and no more,
 And by lot, God wot,
 It came to pass, most like it was,
 Great wars there should be,
 And who should be the chief but he, but he."

This ballad is known to have existed in the first half of the sixteenth century, and is probably of not much earlier origin.

Bonnie Annie.

The only genuinely old ballad given by Mr. Kittredge, which may have been founded on an incident related in the Old Testament, is "Bonnie Annie," No. 24. This quaint and touching ballad tells the story of a young woman who flies with her lover to Ireland, taking with her treasures and gold stolen from her parents. The voyage is unlucky; the ship refuses to obey the rudder in the heavy storm, and the crew suspect that a wicked person is on board. Like the story of Jonah, they cast lots "twice six and forty times," to see which is the guilty person, and invariably the black bullet falls to Annie. She herself, then, overcome by remorse, asks to be thrown into the sea to save the others. The lover, constrained to agree, throws her overboard and follows her body, which floats before the ship to the coast of Ireland. There he buries her in a gold coffin made from the stolen treasure.

Although there is no reference made to Jonah, the idea of the ballad so closely resembles the Bible incident that one may suppose a connection. On the other hand, both stories may have a like foundation in the common superstition among sailors that an evil or unlucky person on board ship is the cause of a bad voyage.

Hatred of the Jews.

The religious side of the life in the days of the ballads comes to the surface in another class of ballads in which the popular hatred toward the Jews is expressed. Mr. Kittredge's edition gives but one of these, No. 155, "Sir Hugh, or the Jew's Daughter," but he refers to twenty-one versions of the same ballad, which deals with the persecution of Christians by Jews. Mr. Child's collection gives two ballads, "Gernutus, the Jew of Venice," and "The Northern Lord and the Cruel Jew," both founded on the subject of the cruelty of Jewish usurers. The first, "Sir Hugh, or the Jew's Daughter," is old and typical of its period, but the two latter are of more recent origin.

The Jews came to England after the Conquest in search of plunder and the fruits of such disturbance as the new regime must, for a time, provoke. They were the bankers and merchants of exchange for Europe, and they alone were allowed to practice usury. On the other hand, they were confined in Jewries, not subject to the law of the land, but directly responsible to the king, mere chattels at his absolute disposal.* The Norman kings found the Jews their most useful subjects when it came to a matter of financing a war, and, up to the time

*Green's History of the English People, Chap. II.

of Edward I, they protected the Jews against the popular hatred. The antipathy of the people toward the Jews on account of the difference of race, religion, and political status, was aggravated by the attitude of the Jews themselves, whose arrogance grew with their increasing wealth. Comparatively secure in the protection afforded by the king, the Jews allowed themselves to show their contempt for the ignorance and superstition prevailing about them, even jeering at the religious processions which passed their gates. Riots and massacres of the Jews became more and more frequent. The Jews were accused of perpetrating horrible crimes against the Christians, notably crucifying Christian boys for their blood, which was said to be a necessary part of the Paschal rites. This outrageous charge, so contrary to the character of the Jewish religion, is first recorded in 1144, given in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as 1137, when William of Norwich is said to have been crucified by the Jews. Various similar stories are told in the following hundred years and more.

Outbreaks against the Jews increased in violence, in spite of the protection afforded them by the kings, and the support given them by the friars, who, in some places, established their convent houses in the Jewries to assist them.* The Church must, in the main,

*Green's Hist. of Eng. People, Chap. IV.

be exonerated from the suspicion of having instigated or encouraged these riots. On the contrary, the records show that the influence of the Church was often exerted to save the Jews from persecution, and to suppress accusations of murdering children and poisoning wells that the populace brought against them. Whatever impulse the Church gave to the natural fanaticism of the people was probably from the lower ranks of the priesthood, where ignorance and superstition had its strongest foothold.

The ballad, "Sir Hugh, or the Jew's Daughter," is founded on an occurrence in 1255 or 1256, which is recorded in The Annals of Waverly, of Burton, and in Matthew Paris' Chronicle. The three stories agree in the main points, which comprise the following:*

A boy, Hugh of Lincoln, was said to have been tortured and crucified by the Jews in contempt of Christ. The stream into which the dead body was thrown refused to receive it and restored it to the bank. The body was then buried, but was cast up by the earth. It was then thrown into a well, but the brilliant light and sweet odor that emerged made known its presence and apprised everyone of a miracle. Upon investigation the body was found floating on the water. When it was drawn up, wounds on the hands and feet showed that the

*See Kittredge's Eng. and Scot. Ballads, p. 368.

death had been through crucifixion, and the murder was ascribed to the Jews. Many miracles were performed by the body, such as restoring sight, etc. Eighteen Jews, convicted of the crime and confessing it with their own mouths, were hanged. Trail's Social England, note, p.287, gives an account in which the statement is made that one hundred and two Jews were brought, in 1256, from Lincoln to Winchester, charged with having crucified a Christian child. Eighteen were hanged and the remainder lay long in prison.

The ballad gives a somewhat different account, perhaps confused with some other reported crime, such as that on which Chaucer's Prioress' Tale is founded. There is no point made in the ballad of a reason for the murder, and crucifixion does not enter into the story.

A boy, playing ball with his comrades, knocks the ball into a Jew's window. Seeing the Jew's daughter at the window, the boy, Hugh, asks her to toss it down to him. She refuses, and entices Hugh into the house by offering him a red and green apple. When he yields, she leads him to a table where she murders him by sticking a knife into him. Having wrapped the body in a sheet of lead, she throws it into the well, fifty fathoms deep. When, at evening, the other boys come home from school, Hugh's mother becomes anxious at the non-arrival of her son, and sets out to find him. After a search she comes

to the well and calls aloud for Hugh. The boy's voice answers from below, telling his mother to prepare his winding sheet. The next morning the ghost of Hugh comes for his burial, which is celebrated with miraculous ringing of bells and reading of books.

The prevalence of such stories gave rise to a belief in a number of boy martyrs, and Saint Hugh was "canonized by popular reverence."* Most historians agree in estimating these stories as pure fabrications, forming a disgraceful chapter in the history of England. The persecution of the Jews eventually led up to their summary expulsion in 1290, when sixteen thousand Jews were sent out of the country.

"Gernutus " and "The Northern Lord and the Cruel Jew."

The ballads of "Gernutus" and "The Northern Lord and the Cruel Jew" contain, in part, the same material. The Jew story of "The Merchant of Venice" with which Shakespeare has made us familiar forms the basis of both stories. Mr. Child states that , although the story of the cruel usurer is of oriental origin, the earliest European forms were in the Gesta Romanorum and in an Italian and a French manuscript of the fourteenth century. There is no reason to suppose that

*Green's Hist. of Eng. People, Chap. IV.

there was an English ballad of much earlier composition than this comparatively late one, which may or may not have preceded Shakespeare's play. There must have been a close connection between Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" and "Gernutus", or both must have been derived from the same source.

The second ballad is a strange mixture of stories, one of which resembles the story of "Cymbeline." The wager, the stealing of the ring, the supposed death of the wife and her re-appearance disguised as a youth, bear out the likeness. Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" is suggested, not only by the Jewish usurer story, but also by the incident of the rescue of the knight from the usurer's clutches through the wisdom of a bystander, who turns out to be the wronged and much regretted wife. Without evidence to the contrary, I should judge the ballad of "The Northern Lord and the Cruel Jew" to be a later and much garbled version of Shakespeare's two plays, turned into popular rhyme.

Other Religious Material.

The main groups of ballads that contain evidences of the Christian faith have been considered. There remains, however, scattered throughout the collection, a limited quantity of Biblical and religious material that may be treated under fairly distinct headings:

- (a) Ballads containing mention of various Church officials.
- (b) Riddles containing religious material.
- (c) Ballads presenting the custom of Church rites in burials, weddings and other sacraments.
- (d) Miraculous interventions of the Virgin or of Christ.
- (e) Ballads showing a confusion of heathen and Christian superstition.

The frequency of oaths that owe their origin to the Christian religion needs not be considered seriously, as such expressions, used mainly as expletives, could have been inserted at any period in the life of the ballad. The same is true with regard to the dating of an event by a Church day of celebration, such as Martinmas or Christmas. The Yule season is mentioned in the same way and has no significance in placing the ballad.

Church Officials.

The ballads contain mention of the more common Church officials, mainly bishops, priests, and an occasional abbot. Few of these persons, however, are necessary to the plot of the story. In those which include church ceremonies, a priest, sometimes called a mass priest, is required." King John and the Bishop" No. 45, which is treated in this article under the head of Riddle Ballads, is founded upon the intercourse of a king and a bishop. It is not essential to the story that the characters should be a king and a bishop; but the exalted titles are doubtless for the purpose of lending dignity and importance to the story.

No. 156, "Queen Eleanor's Confession," is based upon the story of a false wife, called Queen Eleanor, who sends to her native France for two friars to hear her confession. Her husband, named King Henry, learning of her intention, disguises himself and a courtier, Earl Martial, as two friars, and thus hears his wife's confession of her misdeeds. The fact of the confession to two friars is a point of interest. Mr. Kittredge's note on this matter in his introduction to this ballad says:

"This ballad seems first to have got into print in the latter part of the seventeenth century,

but was no doubt circulating orally some time before that, for it is in the truly popular tone. The fact that two friars hear the confession would militate against a much earlier date."

Palmer's come into the ballad stories in several instances: in No. 21, treated in this article under the head of Bible Stories; in No. 30, in which King Arthur and his knights use the palmer's dress as a disguise; in No. 114, in which men ask an old palmer for news; and in No. 226, which takes up one of the Solomon Stories, but in so degraded a form as hardly to be recognizable, and in which the husband effects a disguise by using a palmer's dress.

The comparative frequency of the mention of palmer's is almost the only sign in this literature of the crusading movement, with the exception of "Old Robin of Portingale," No. 80. In this ballad the husband, after punishing his wife for her unfaithfulness, places the white and red cross on his shoulder,

"And he went him into the Holy Land,
Wheras Christ was quicke and dead."

While palmer's are met with often, they are not referred to with the degree of reverence that one might expect, but are usually spoken of as "old" and of no importance. Palmer's were, as a rule, men self-condemned to poverty and to continual wandering from one shrine to

another until death. The custom did not have its beginning in the great crusading movement, but was known some centuries before. Mr. Sidney Heath states that "during the tenth and eleventh centuries men were sometimes ordered to become palmers as a penance for their sins." * Their name was acquired from their custom of wearing palm branches or emblems of palm leaves brought from the Holy Land. One surmises that the custom of holy mendicancy, such as palmers and friars maintained, soon lost its appeal to the people who were called upon to support its votaries.

Riddles.

The ballads present a favorite mode of diversion among the Anglo-Saxons and their successors in several series of riddles, of which a few are included in the collection of Mr. Kittredge. These show either Christian origin, or, what is more probable, the insertion of a few verses of Christian material in an old series, or the adaptation of an ancient riddle series to a more modern story and setting.

In No. 1, there are two verses of plainly Christian origin;

(8) "What is better than the bread?"

with its answer;

*Mr. Sidney Heath's Pilgrim Life in the Middle Ages, p.99. Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston 1912.

(18) "God's flesh is better than is the bread."

and-

(19) "What is richer than is the king?"

answered by-

(20) "Jesus is richer than is the king."

Later versions of the same series give different riddles on Christian subjects.

No.45, "The King and the Bishop," is an example of the adaptation of a very old series in which a man must answer three hard questions correctly or suffer a severe and quite disproportional penalty. No.47 is adapted to a Christian audience by the addition of the idea that the riddles propounded by the haughty lady are answered by her brother, who has returned from the grave for the purpose of teaching his sister the Christian virtue of humility.*

Church Rites.

As a development similar to that of the riddles one may consider the many verses and stanzas in the ballads which relate to Church rites. These, in many cases, bear evidence of being stereotyped forms that have been added by the later balladist or scribe. Stanzas narrating churchyard burials are a favorite form of closing affecting stories in which one or both lovers meet

* For Anglo-Saxon Riddles, see Jusserand's Hist. of Eng. Lit., p.. 72, note 2.

death. Such endings, which show the childlike desire of simple folk to bring the story to its full conclusion, are found in Nos. 7, 64, 74, 75, 76, 85, and 87. A few lines from No. 7 will serve as an example of these stanzas:

"Lord William was buried in Saint Mary's kirk,
Lady Margaret in Mary's choir;
Out of the lady's grave grew a bonny red rose,
And out of the knight's a briar."

Church marriages, burials, christenings, and the regular mass are frequent in the ballads, but form an essential part of but few; notably of No. 41, in which the children of an unequal union -- probably the remnant of one of the numerous old fairy and mortal stories -- are desirous of being christened with the full rites of the Church. The Norse and German versions of the ballad, to which Mr. Kittredge refers, have also this idea of Christian ceremonial, but much confused with the heathen figures of elves and dwarfs.* The softening influence of Christianity is observable in the change which this story has undergone, for, in the older dwarf stories, the breaking of the spell by pronouncing the name of the lover is followed by immediate disaster to the woman, but in the Christian version, the naming of the lover, followed by the proper ceremonies at the church, restores the husband to his family, and all ends happily.

* Kittredge's Eng. and Scot. Ballads, p. 70.

Nos. 49 and 77 mention burial in the churchyard; Nos. 48 and 73 speak of marriage at the church door, and in No. 63, Child Waters promises a bridal and churching on the same day. In No. 49, the dying brother request that his Bible be laid at his head and his chaunter at his feet.

A variation of these stories is found in No. 96 in which a woman, in order to avoid marriage with one whom she does not love, feigns that she is dying, and as a parting request, begs that her body be carried past three Scots kirks with the customary ringing of bells and chanting. It is presumed that she is to be buried at the fourth church. Her brothers carry out the dying prayer of their sister; but at the third kirk the girl's true lover, hearing the bells, approaches the bier, and recognizes his sweetheart. At once the girl returns to consciousness, and the lovers are united.

A similar instance of a sham death is told in No. 25, in which the lover thus succeeds in winning his bride.

Miracles of the Virgin and Christ.

No. 57, "Brown Robin's Confession," is worthy of special attention from its significance as having a touch of the Jonah story and being the only ballad extant that deals with a direct miracle of the Virgin. The subject of the Cult of the Virgin is treated in this article under the head of "Robin Hood Ballads," and the

story of Jonah is discussed with the Old Testament Stories, but this apparent combination of the two stories is unique.

The crew of a ship which has met with rough weather cast "kevels" to discover which is the evil person who is causing the ill luck. The lot falls to Brown Robin, who, struck with remorse, confesses two crimes, and offers no resistance to being thrown into the sea. Tied to a "plank o' wood," he is thrown into the sea and left to his fate. His straightforward confession of his evil deeds has meanwhile gained him the favor of the Virgin Mary, who, coming by with her "dear son," takes Robin with her to the High Heaven.*1

No. 59, "Sir Aldingar," is also of unusual importance. In Mr. Kittredge's note to this ballad, he says that William of Malmsbury, undoubtedly following ballad authority, tells a similar story of the emperor Henry III and Gunhild, daughter of Cnut and Emma. In the ballad of Sir Aldingar, the queen, condemned to the flames for infidelity on the false testimony of the steward, is saved by the intervention of a wonderful child, who overcomes the false steward in the combat. This child, who appears to be about four years old, presents a confusion of the elf idea with that of the Christ Child in the Apocryphal stories of the Infant Jesus' miraculous achievements.*2

2* See No. 29, Eng. and Scot. Popular Ballads for an example of the "wonderful child."

1* See Bonnie Annie, No. 24, and A Gest Of Robin Hood, No. 117, Fourth Fytte, Eng. and Scot. Ballads.

Confusion of Heathen and Christian Superstition.

Perhaps the most interesting phase of the religious element in the ballads is the intermingling of heathen and Christian beliefs and superstitions. The fact that some of the ancient superstitious beliefs and practices have persisted to this day, in the distrust of an undertaking begun on Friday, and the half playful following out of Hallowe'en rites, besides innumerable customs of lesser importance, shows the strength of the faith in its beginning and the place it must have held in the early life of the race.

It would be impossible to innumerate every instance of this confusion in the earlier ballads. Only a few of the most important examples can be touched upon. In the ballad last quoted, Sir Aldingar, No. 59, the nature of the marvelous child is partly that of Christ and partly that of an elf. The sword he wields emits a wonderful light, which the ballad explains is caused by its gilded surface. This is plainly a corruption of the magic sword idea of the old stories, as in N^o. 60, where the swords are enabled to bite sorely "Through the help of gramarye," or magic.

No. 4, "Lady Isabelle and the Elf-Knight," is, in its earlier versions, a pure fairy story, but in the "H" version given by Mr. Kittredge, the elf-knight lover

has become a priest, in either case having a more than ordinary character. The lover of the still later versions is a mere False Sir John, whose Blue-Beard propensity for killing his wives finally meets its proper punishment. The substitution of a priest for the elf-knight leads to the question of ~~the~~ period at which celibacy among the priesthood was established. The fact that the priest's wooing, in the ballad, was unusual and forbidden is evident. Although the celibacy of the clergy was enjoined in the third century and thence on, and even commanded by successive popes, it was not enforced with vigor until the time of Gregory VII, whose decrees in 1074 positively forbade the ordination of a married priest.

All the superstition of heathendom, an elf, a magic horn, a bewitched horse, and a magic sword enter into the ballad of "Arthur and King Cornwall," No. 30. In the midst of this magic is placed a bit of early Christian superstition in the miraculous power of a Holy Book, which Mr. Kittredge suggests is the book of the Evangelists. In the story, Arthur and his knights, undertaking an expedition against King Cornwall, assume the disguise of palmers, make their vows to the Holy Trinity, and depend for protection upon a little book which the Lord had written with his own hands and sealed with his blood.

This curious jumble of superstition may have

arisen as early as the twelfth century. Arthurian romance and the idea of chivalrous love had their growth in France and were not planted in England until the late eleventh or early twelfth century. The ballad itself, according to its form and style, is judged to be of comparatively late composition.

Similar minglings of elf and fairy lore and Christian ideas are met with all through the older ballads. One may note particularly No. 39, "Thomas Rhymer," in which Thomas mistakes the elfin queen for the Queen of Heaven. The elf queen adds to the confusion by pointing out to Thomas the roads to heaven and hell.

In No. 39 the witchery of Hallowe'en and the efficacy of christening as a protection against evil or the elfin spell appear side by side. No. 41, in which christening removes the ban from the elf knight is a similar story. In No. 34 a spell is not to be removed until St. Mungo comes over the sea. No. 40, a fragment, contains the story of the fairies' spiriting away the mother of a young child to obtain a nurse for their own fairy children. The mother mourns for her babe and for Christendom, and seems to have a vision of the roads to heaven and hell.

CONCLUSION.

No ballads have been discussed in this article which concern historical events of known date. A few have been studied that contain mention of events of which the approximate date can be ascertained by references in the ballad to historical matter, such as those connected with the Jews. Apart from these, and from the ballads dealing with Bible stories, or based on essentially Church material, making in all but a small group, the ballad material, as a mass, may be regarded as traditional from a very remote past.

The comparatively small quantity of Christian or Bible material in the ballads may be due to two, or possibly more, causes. The origin of the ballads may antedate the spread of Christian faith among the Teutonic people; or, religious subjects may not lend themselves to ballad composition so readily as they do to a longer and more sustained style of poetry, and to prose. The very nature of the ballad demands complete familiarity with the subject, and the condition of being at ease, and free to tell in simple and accustomed phrase a story without complication of ideas or events.

The ballads deal with the fundamental emotions of men and women, their love and hate, their domestic

life, their social and race customs. Many are pervaded by the fear of the mysterious, unknown shadow world of the supernatural. The evidence of the transition from the old forms of religion to the new faith, a process so slow that even now it is not yet fully accomplished, constitutes one of the chief charms of these ballads. The student feels himself transported back to the childhood of the race as he reads these simple yet vivid pictures of the life of the people.

The ballads teach no lesson. Even in the later groups there is no tendency to moralize after the style of the homilists. There is no striving after effect, no attempt at allegory, and no evidence, throughout this literature, of an ulterior motive in the telling. In a verse suited by its simplicity to the nature of its subjects, all the strength, the unrestrained emotions, the love of the glittering and the marvelous that characterize a young race find their expression.