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JOHN RASTELL'S PLAYS.

IN the concluding part of an article on 'The Canon of John Heywood's Plays' in the April number of 'THE LIBRARY,' 1918, I referred to a Court of Requests Case that I had come across at the Record Office of the prosecution of John Ravyn, Purser of the 'Barbara,' a seaman of some standing in the navy, by John Rastell, the printer, Heywood's father-in-law. Rastell had set out armed with letters of recommendation from the king, in the summer of 1517, on the 'Barbara,' bound for the New-found-lands. This voyage of discovery was a concerted undertaking, for the depositions contain allusions to the 'rest of the fleet'; and it appears from a reference to it forty years later by Sir Richard Eden, that Sebastian Cabot was one of the organizers. Eden says that it failed through the faint-heartedness of Sir Thomas Perte (Spert), the master of that leviathan of the early Tudor navy, the 'Henri Grace à Dieu.' However that may be, the mariners refused to sail beyond Cork, and it appears that the Lord Admiral, the Earl of Surrey, winked at their misdemeanour, for reports had reached him that the French Navy contemplated adventures in the Channel.'

¹ L. & P. Hen. VIII, ii, 3367.

The case is interesting as a contribution to the story of the early voyagers, but it is made doubly so by Rastell's subsequent references to it in his 'Play of the Four Elements,' in which he records his disappointment :

But they that were the venturers
 Haue cause to curse their maryners

Whiche wolde take no paine to saile farther
 Than their owne lyst and pleasure.

That John Rastell was the author as well as the printer of this Interlude has been very generally accepted, but perhaps even the sceptics will now admit that the case for Rastell is at last overwhelming. There is no reason, however, why we should not take further evidence and see whether it may not lead us to wider conclusions.

The 'Four Elements' has come down to us in a single copy, and that is imperfect. Indeed, if Rastell followed his master Medwall in writing his Interludes in two parts, then we have less than half of the original, and this I think is probable. For, of the ten 'diuers matters,' points of natural philosophy, that are promised in the preface, only the first four are dealt with. The sixth is 'of the generation and cause of well-springs and rivers; and of the cause of hot fumes that come out of the earth; and of the cause of the baths of water in the earth, which be perpetually hot.' Now we may gather some notions as to Rastell's views on fumes and hot baths from the passage in the 'Pastime of People' under Bladud, the founder of Bath ;

a grete nigromancyer, as the story seyth, and by yⁱ craft made there y^e hote bathys, but other clerkis hold opynyon that they come naturally of y^e grounde. . . . Some phylozophers holde that y^e cause thereof is thiss: that whan there is a hote fume etc,

Possibly under the article 'Stones,' he worked in the views on the composition of the 'stones at Stonehenge . . . all of one gryt,' which he gives us under Aurelius Ambrosius. For the most part the 'Pastyme' is an abbreviation of Fabyan, to whose memory Rastell's son William did some amends by printing him in full in 1533, but it is enriched at intervals by characteristic Rastellian excursions; and even the omissions are often illuminating, as when he refrains from repeating that it was for witchcraft that Jeanne d'Arc was burnt.

When we find an aside or critical remark therefore in the 'Pastime' we hear Rastell speaking, and as we know that we are listening to him in the 'Four Elements,' we are prepared for coincidences. If then we find like coincidences occurring in another play printed by Rastell, 'Gentleness and Nobility,' of which he said in the colophon 'Johēs rastell me fieri fecit,' we may consider that the question of authorship is opening to proof.

In the first or Roman section of the 'Pastyme,' under the article 'Publius Valerius Publicola,' Rastell tells us that when a Dictator's term of office was completed, he was answerable to complaints alleged against him and punishable for offences. To this he attributes the high standard

of Roman law and justice and the growth of Rome in riches and power.

Wold God, he adds, it was so used at this day in the realme of England, that euery iugge and other offycers hauyng auctoryte to execute y^e lawis, or to gouern or to rule in any office, shold be remouable at iiij or v yere or lesse and then to answeere to all complayntis that shold be allegid agayns him, and to be ponished for euery offence that he had committid in his rome, and then ther wold not be so mich extorcione and oppressione of the pore people, nor so many iniuries as is now a-days.

Later, under Edward I, he finds an instance of such an inquest into the conduct of officials:

Many complaints were made of his offycers as mayres, sheryffes, baylyffes, exchetours, aud dyuers other. Wherfore he ordayned his justyce to make inquisicyonis therof, whiche after was called Trolbaston; where by forfeytours and fynes, the kynge . . . fylled his coffers agayne.

To this Rastell, himself, adds the comment:

Nevertheless, this kynge did great good within the realme of Englande, for those offenders were well chastyced, and were moche more meker and better, and the pore comons lyued in moche more rest and peace.

Now the stage, like the printing press, was an instrument to Rastell for the mission he so often speaks of, his work for the 'Commonweal.' It is arresting, therefore, to find in the concluding stanzas of 'Gentleness and Nobility' the passage that follows:

But because that men of nature euermore
Be frayle & folowyng sensualyte
Yt is impossyble in a maner therfore
For any gouernours that be in auctoryte

At all tymys Just & indyfferent to be
 Except they be brydelyd & ther to compellyd
 By some strayt laws for them deuysyd

As thus that no man such rome occupye
 But certayn yerys & than to be remouyd
 Yet that whyle bound to attend dylygently
 And yf he offend & surely prouyd
 wyth out any fauour that he be ponyhysshyd
 for the ponysshment of a Juge or offycer
 Doth more good than of thousand other

And untill that such orders be deuysyd
 Substauncyally / and put in execucion
 Loke neuer to see the world amended
 Nor of the gret myschefes the reformation
 But they that be bounde to see the thinges done
 I pray god of his grace put in theyr myndys
 To reforme shortly suche thynges amys.

And though that I myselfe now percase
 Thus myn oppynyon haue publyshed
 Or any of my felowes here in this place
 In any poynt here haue us abused
 we besече you to holde us excused
 And so the auctor hereof requyreth you all
 And thus I comyt you to god eternall

A M E N

Johēs rastell me fieri fecit.

I suppose that it did not occur to John Rastell after that that it was necessary further to claim that he was the 'auctor hereof.' Now, however, that we have so substantial a piece of evidence to step from, we may look about us for others.

We learn from the article Henry IV that the 'Pastyme' was compiled in 1529. In this year

6 JOHN RASTELL'S PLAYS.

Rastell produced another striking work entitled 'A Boke of Purgatory.' He nowhere mentions Simon Fish, with whose general position in 'The Supplication for Beggars' he certainly had much sympathy, but the 'Boke of Purgatory' was written to combat Fish's statement that many men of 'greate litterature and iudgment,' for the love that they have 'unto the trouthe and unto the comen welth . . . declare theyre oppinion . . . that there is no purgatory,' but that it is an invention of the spirituality.

Rastell's brother-in-law, Sir Thomas More, replied to Fish in the same year in his 'Supplication of Souls,' in which the souls in Purgatory appealed against the isolation that threatened them and besought their brethren on earth to think what this action involved.

Rastell bases his proof on 'natural reason and good philosophy' and conducts his case by dialogue; Gynghemyn, a Mohammedan Turk, and Comynge an 'Almayne,' carry the thesis through three books, the 'Almayne' playing the part of listener. It is agreed that no scriptural allusions are to be admitted; on this point there is much emphasis laid:

But yet one thyng I will warne the, says the Turk, consydering that my onely purpose is to proue the thyng (the existence of Purgatory) by reason / that . . . thou aledge no manner text no authoryte neither of the bokys of the olde byble / nor of the newe testament, neyther of no other boke . . . of the deuynite of thy crysten faythe.

We have here a characteristic Rastell attitude. He is the apostle of 'natural reason and good

philosophy.' His faith in the appeal of reason is remarkable. Thus in 'Gentleness and Nobility,' the Ploughman, who is attacking the laws and custom of inheritance, is met by the knight with the text 'tibi dabo terram hanc et semini tuo'; whereon he replies:

Ploughman. Thou answerest me now euen lyke a fole
As some of these fonde clarkes that go to scole
when one putteth to them a subtyll questyon
Of phylozophy to be prouyde by reason

Then they will aledge some auctoryte
Of the lawes or elles of deuynite
whiche in no wyse men may denye
And yet ye knowe well that of phylozophy
The pryncyple oft contraryant be
Unto the very grounds of deuynite

To estimate the value of this coincidence one must remember that this is a very advanced position for the early Tudor mind. As to its dramatic appropriateness, we may recall that outside Chaucer the mediæval ploughman enjoyed literary privileges.

Rastell's central position as the apostle of 'natural reason and good philosophy' is in the warp and weft of the Interlude. The best way to convert the people, he says:

Ys to perswade them by natural reason
For when that a man by hys owne reason
Juggyth hymself for to offend
That grudgyth his conscyens & gyffeth compuncyon
Into hys herte to cause hym amend.

'G. & N.'

Or as he says in the 'Book of Purgatory':

There is nothing in the worlde shall alter and chaunge
a mannes mynde and beleue so well and surely / as shall
the iugement of his owne reason.

'B. of P.' II, Cap. I.

The 'Boke of Purgatory' deals with the Existence of God in Book I, the Immortality of Man's Soul in Book II, and Purgatory in Book III. It is a fascinating book, because it so entirely reflects the singularity of Rastell's mind:

Nobleness (he says in I. 4) is that whyche hath leste
nede of foreyne helpe / that is to saye of helpe of any
other thyng . . . the cause is more noble than the effect
. . . everything that takyth any effect hath nede of the
cawse. . . . God is the most noble thing that can be.

This appears in the Interlude in the following words of the philosophic ploughman:

Ploughman.

Ys not y^t the noblyst thyng in dede
That of all other thynges hath lest nede
As god which reynith etern in blysse
Is not he the noblest thing y^t is . . .
. . . (because he) nedyth the helpe of no nother thyng
To the helpe of his glorious beyng
But euery other thyng hath nede of his ayde.

To this, the reply is made that 'euerie beest
fyssh and other foule' is by this reasoning 'more
noble of birth than a man':

For man hath more nede of bodely coueryng
Than they haue for they nede no thinge
The bestes haue herr & also a thik skin
The fyssh skalys or shells to kepe theyr bodyes in

The foulis fethers & so eueri thing
 Bi nature hath his proper couering
 Saue man himself which is born all nakyd
 And therfore he shuld be than most wrechyd

The Ploughman readily grants that 'consideryng man's body, a beste is more noble & man more wrechyd,' for man must 'dayly labour & swete,' dig, kill beasts for meat, cultivate fruits and herbs for drinks,

Yet this not wythstandyng
 Man is most noble of creatures lyuyng
 Not by hys body for that is impotent
 But by his soule beyng so excellent
 For by reason of his soule intellectuall
 He subdewyth all other bestis alyue
 And compellyth all other bestis that be
 By hys wit to releue his necessitye.

Now this line of thought occurs also in the section of the 'Book of Purgatory' that deals with the immortality of man's soul. After distinguishing souls vegetative (plant life), souls sensitive (animal life), and souls intellective, Gyngemyn, the Turk, replies to Comyngo's question :

Why is the life of man here in yerthe more wretched sorowful & worse than the lyfe of any other brute beste.

Gyn. Thou knowest . . . that the body of man is more feble and tender than the body of any other brute beste / for the bodye of man is all tender and naked . . . for ye fysshes have of theyr nature shelles or skalys to couer and defend theyr bodyes / the bestes be full of here and haue thicke skynnes / the foules haue fethers. . . . Man must take great labour for the obteynyng of his

necessary fode & lyuyng as to tyll the grounde . . . to get hym drynk & fode (II. 5). And also the (soul) of man hath a more noble and a more worthy beyng than the brute best whiche hath but lyfe sensytyue (I. 6).

The same fundamental thoughts occur in the 'Four Elements':

Plantis and herbys growe and be insensate
Brute bestis have memory and their wyttes fyne
But thou hast all those and soule intellectuall
So by reason of thyne understandyng
Thou hast domynyon of other bestes all.

'Four Elements,' A 6.

'He that studieth for the life bestial, as voluptuous pleasure and bodily rest, I account him never better than a beast.' 'The more that thou desirest to know anything, therein thou seemest the more a man to be; for that man desireth no manner cunning, all that while no better than a beast is he.' These two sentences from the speech of Natura Naturata in the 'Four Elements,' occur as follows in the words of the Ploughman:

One cause therof ys for lak of lernyng
They perseyue not the reason of the thyng.
A nother is be cause ther be many
That call them self gentylmen unworthy
Whych lyfe voluptuously & bestyall.

'G. & N.' B. I.

When the Ploughman says that 'each man is born to labour truly as a bird is born to fly naturally' he is uttering one of Rastell's principles, one that got him into trouble in later years when he fought

the clergy about tithes and offerings. It is behind the strong views on the evils of inheritance that he maintains in 'Gentleness and Nobility.' It is expressed just as clearly in the 'Four Elements':

For euery man in reason thus ought to do
To labour for his owne necessary lyuyng
And than for the welth of his neyghbour also.

'Four Elements,' A III.

I have, however, said enough to show that there can be little doubt that the Play of 'Gentleness and Nobility' is the work of John Rastell. A much more exhaustive collection of parallel passages might be made, but it is sufficient to have found typical examples from the 'Pastyme of People,' the 'Boke of Purgatory,' and the 'Four Elements.'

If then in the words 'Johēs rastell me fieri fecit' in the colophon of 'G. & N.,' we are to understand that authorship is implied, what is the meaning of the colophon of 'Calisto and Melebea,' 'Johēs rastell me imprimi fecit'?

It would be an important help to know how Rastell himself rendered the words, and I think that we have this information. The colophon to his edition of Lynacre's 'Progymnasmata' runs:

Empryntyd in London on y^e Sowth syde of Paulys by
John Rastell with y^e priuylege of our most suverayn lord
kyng henry the VIII grauntyd to the compyler therof that
no man in thys hys realm sell none but such as *the same*
compyler makyth pryntyd for y^e space of II yere.

The italics are mine; the words 'Johēs Rastell
me imprimi fecit' may therefore be rendered on

Rastell's authority, 'John Rastell (the compyler) had me put in print.' And they bear the same meaning in the 'Magnum Abbreviamentum' of 1528.

The Interlude of 'Calisto and Melebea' thus vouched for by its colophon as Rastell's, following in the train of Medwall's 'Lucrece,' is a Comedy of romantic intrigue, and like Medwall's play it is a translation. In Mr. H. Warner Allen's edition of Mabbe's translation of 'Celestina' with the Interlude of 'Calisto and Melebea,' we are fortunate in possessing a remarkably comprehensive and methodical treatment of the literary history of this early Spanish picaresque romance. The Interlude, he suggests, was translated directly from the Spanish not earlier than 1502. The translator worked fairly literally on Act I, part of Act II and Act IV of the twenty-one Acts of the original. Then after line 920 the connection with the original suddenly ceases, the coarse intrigues of 'Celestina the bawd' are cut short, the father of Melebea enters under a name new to the romance, 'Danio,' and the play proceeds to an edifying, moral conclusion. Of the 1,088 lines of the Interlude 800 were found by Mr. Allen to be more or less literally translated, 168 belong to the moral ending, and there are 42 lines of introductory dialogue before the translation begins. We are left therefore with only 78 lines of original matter in the body of the play. Some of these are scriptural and conventional substitutions for classical references, Eve for instance takes the place of an erring goddess, a prayer to St. Appoline is substituted for a Cumæan charm, Melebea 'goeth to mass' prettily

in the Interlude, but merely 'goes abroad' in the original. There is not much scope left, therefore, for a search for Rastell's workmanship in the body of the translation.

I hope to show, however, that it is not improbable that his hand is to be detected even there.

To More, Celestina was 'the baude mother or naughtynes,' and the writer of the edifying close was of the same opinion. How was the needful break effected? A few lines of soliloquy are allowed to Celestina, who then departs to inform Calisto, the Romeo of the 'Tragicomedia,' that the plot goes well; and then Danio, father of Melebea, enters, greatly haunted by a horrid dream. Melebea comes on and he relates the dream. She recognises its significance and confesses how near to disaster she has come. At her father's bidding she prays for forgiveness; he raises her up, and then turning to the audience takes upon him the Rastellian office of Philosopher, and begins:

Lo here ye may see what a thyng it is
To bryng up yong people verteously

and we fall back at once into a characteristic vein:

The bryngers up of youth in this region
Haue done gret harme because of theyr neclygens
Not puttyng them to lernyng nor occupacyons
So when they haue no craft nor sciens
And come to mans state ye see the experience
That many of them compelled be
To beg or stele by very necessite,

The same complaint of the evil effects of an idle youth appears in the words of our old friend the Ploughman :

Alas I haue knowen many or thys
 So proude of theyr byrth that all theyr lyffys
 wold gyf them to no labour nor lernyng
 whych brought them to myserable endyng
 That in pouerte wrechydly dyd dye
 Or fallyn to theft & hangyd therfore full hye.

'G. & N.' b. 1.

And having shown the evil results of neglected education and training, the Rastellian Danio calls on the 'heads and rulers' to make good laws, execute them straitly and remove the cause of social ills by seeing to it that young folk are well brought up. Then he concludes :

Wherfore the eternall god that raynyth on hys
 Send his mercefull grace & influens
 To all gouernours that they circumspectly
 May rule theyr inferiours by such prudence
 To bryng them to vertew & dew obedyens
 And that they & we all by his grete mercy
 May be parteners of hys blessyd glory.

A M E N

Johēs rastell me imprimi fecit.

The resemblance of the moralizing addresses at the conclusion of 'Gentleness and Nobility' and 'Calisto and Melebea' with their exhortations to 'gouernors,' are altogether too striking to set aside. We are listening still to John Rastell 'singing again

his old song,' the song of which we are told in 1536 that Cranmer was 'aweary.'

But if Rastell created the 'Danio' close, he must have invented the dream; and here again the 'Boke of Purgatory' helps us. Rastell had views on dreams and visions which he sets forth at length in the sixth chapter of Book II. It is a long chapter, and we learn from it some unexpected things, such as that dogs and hogs do not dream in spite of their noises; but for our present purpose I will select a short passage:

Many a man in his dreame hath had dyuers vysyons /
and hath forseen & had knowlege of thynges to come /
whych hath afterwarde fallen playnly and truely accordyng
to his vysyon.

Assuming therefore that we have good reason for attributing the unexpected dénouement and moral ending of the Comedy to Rastell, is there any of his handiwork in the body of the play, that is, in the translation? There is one passage at least that is striking; Calisto is complaining of the consuming fire of his love, when the translation ceases and we find the following passage intruded:

- C. And yf the tyre of purgatory bren in such wyse
I had leuer my spirite in brute bestes shuld be
Than to go thydyr and than to the deyte
S. Mary Sir that is a spyce of heryse
C. why so / S. For ye speke lyke no crystynman.

A similar reference to heresy occurs in 'G. & N.':

- Kt. Beware what ye sey sir now I aduyse you
for it is treason or herysy that ye spek now.

But it is the possible reference to the Purgatory controversy and the Rastellian allusion to brute beasts that arrest us; for Rastell has much to say in the 'Boke of Purgatory' on the souls of brute beasts. He holds that they are not immortal. We are not, in that case, dealing with a Pythagorean allusion, but with an evidence of Rastell's influence.

Another case, which is equally striking, occurs in the translation itself. The Spanish (1502) reads:

No has leydo el filosofo do dize Assi como la materia apetece ala forma: assi la muger al varõ.

which Mabbe renders, 'Did you never read of that philosopher, where he tells you that, as the matter desires the form, so woman desires man?'¹

Now we have already seen that Rastell's view of nobility or worthiness was that it implied absence of dependence, need or desire (p. 8). So he changes the obvious translation to square with his own theory, and instead of woman desiring man, he renders it woman is less worthy or noble than man.²

Rastell doubtless had friends in the circle of More and Vives, as well as in Queen Katherine's household, who might do the translation, but the passage suggests that he revised it in his capacity as adapter.

¹ The proposition is common in scholastic philosophy. Chaucer has 'As matier apiteteth form alwey,' L. G. W., 1582. And Hoby's 'Courtier' has 'It is the opinion of most wise men that man is likened to the Form, the woman to the Matter.'

² Phylozophers say the matter is less worthy
Than the forme: so is woman to man surely (Cal. A. 4.)

The conclusion of my argument therefore is that John Rastell was certainly the author of the 'Four Elements,' and 'Gentleness and Nobility,' and I believe that he was the adapter or compiler of 'Calisto and Melebea.' Mr. Allen's argument that the Comedy was translated from the Spanish is well supported, but no one has yet, apparently, compared it with the French version of 1527. We have no evidence as to Rastell's knowledge of Spanish, but his French was good enough for anything. Baskervill's stimulating and suggestive little article on Rastell's Dramatic Activities (*Mod. Phil.* xiii, 1916)¹ comes near to stating my results. Rastell's stage in Finsbury Fields is a fact to be reckoned with.

It is, I think, becoming apparent that the break with the tradition of the allegorical morality and the rise of the freer forms of imaginative drama are connected in a remarkable way with that group of whom I have written in 'John Heywood and his Friends,' the circle of the Rastells, More and Heywood, and I think that it will be possible to show that the movement towards dramatic freedom began in the household in which More was brought up, the household of Cardinal Morton.

ARTHUR W. REED.

¹ The Rastell authorship of 'G. & N.' is ably maintained by Miss E. C. Dunn of Bryn Mawr (*Mod. Lang. Rev.* 1917).