Old English Ballads, 1553-1625, Chiefly from Manuscripts by Hyder E. Rollins

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REVIEWS.

Old English Ballads, 1553–1625, chiefly from Manuscripts. Edited by HYDER E. ROLLINS. Cambridge, at the University Press, 1920. 8vo. pp. xxxi + 423. 18s. 6d.

‘Ballads’ of the Tudor and earlier Stuart period are about as heterogeneous a class of literature as could well be; indeed, their chief apparent unity lies in the not very essential fact that they are pieces of verse printed on single sheets of paper and hawked about the country by pedlars, and are therefore now exceedingly rare. In subject they range from the forerunners of the booklets that Pepys was to call ‘Penny Godlinesses’ and ‘Penny Merriments’ to those of modern journalism, effusions upon the rebellion, the execution, or the monstrosity of the moment. But ballads, however diverse, have a more important unity than that of their form in the fact that they were popular; for only popular literature attains the honours of broadside publication. And here lies their value to us. Considered as literature they are almost universally negligible; but for understanding the thoughts and feelings of a period which had no journalism they are the best guide we can have.

Three large collections survive: (1) the Helmingham-Daniel-Huth-British Museum; (2) the Helmingham-Heber-Britwell-Huntington; and (3) the Society of Antiquaries. They have all been described, and the first two have been reprinted, though the reprints are not very accessible. We are still waiting for a description of those in the Pepys collection, which may prove to be like the Roxburghe Ballads, almost entirely later than those we are now considering. But of the earlier ballads, i.e. those up to about 1620, there are also a considerable number extant in printed sheets and MS. volumes in the Museum, the Bodleian, and other libraries. If all that survive were reprinted in one chronological series (or even thoroughly catalogued with generous extracts and notes such as those in the British Museum Catalogue of the Huth Bequest, Mr H. H. Collmann’s Roxburghe Club *Ballads and Broadsides*, Mr Andrew Clark’s *Shirburn Ballads*, or the volume before us), there would result a notable addition to our knowledge of the period.

Professor Rollins has attempted nothing of this kind. Not that that would be a fair criticism if he had selected some definite section of ballad-territory, and worked it thoroughly. But this is just what he has not done, with the result that the learning and industry which are everywhere apparent in his book bear far less fruit than they might. From the hundreds of ballads that are extant he has selected 75, upon no apparent principle. Most (and this is a real merit) are from in-

edited MS. sources, but some (such as 'the Marygold') are printed elsewhere. Nor do they belong to any one class, historical, religious or other. Add. MS. 15,225, however, which is here reprinted practically entire, is a collection of Catholic ballads. Professor Rollins rightly sees in them 'the chief interest of this volume'; and it may be added that the section of the Introduction which deals with them is much the most valuable. They are a real addition to accessible ballad-texts, and afford a striking contrast to the triumphant Protestant ballad-writers, such as Elderton, Deloney and Parker, shewing once again that poetry flourishes best in adversity, like Euphues' camomile, which 'the more it is trodden and pressed down, the more it spreadeth.' Unfortunately these Catholic ballads occupy but a small part of the book.

Much of any collection of early ballads is bound to be very dull and pedestrian; the exceptions are correspondingly welcome. We are glad to see again Forrest's 'Marygold,' and the celebrated 'Querister's song of York,' or 'Hierusalem, my happy home'; with these may be welcomed 'Who is my love? I shall you tell,' and a few more, which have not been printed before.

Professor Rollins' introductory notes shew much reading and care. No doubt some points have escaped him. For example, he notices that there is a version of 'The happy end exceedeth all' (no. 39, pt 2) in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, but does not add that this refrain is originally the last line of a fine eight-line poem by an unknown author in *Tottel's Miscellany* (ed. Arber, p. 177). Again, in no. 43, 'Why should not mortal men awake?' by R. D., stanza 8 relates the story of the daughter of a merchant of Italy,

Whose ruffles to sett none plesed her sight,
She was so Coye a dame,
Tyll Satan had her for his right,
Unto her parents shame.

Professor Rollins might well have referred to the delectable version of this story, told at length by Philip Stubbes in *The Anatomy of Abuses* (ed. Furnivall, New Sh. Soc., pt i, pp. 71-3).

On the other hand, many of the notes, such as those explaining St. Laurence's gridiron, and interpreting such archaic spellings as 'the' (= 'thee') 'filde' (= 'filled'), which the context renders obvious, and still more 'deathes,' are gratuitous. And too much of the Introduction is given up to rather elementary reflections on the spirit of religious persecution illustrated by the ballads. If this volume is intended for those who are familiar with the period, all this is unnecessary; if for the general reader, the poor fellow would need far more commentary than he gets here.

I should be unwilling to end on a carping note. Professor Rollins (as I have reason to know from some notes and extracts on the vogue of *Troilus* which he has kindly communicated to the Chaucer Society) has read Elizabethan literature with extraordinary thoroughness, and his accuracy is hardly less remarkable. He has clearly got the whole ballad literature of the century from 1540 to 1640 at his fingers' ends in the

course of adding this rather haphazard selection to our store of printed texts. Will he not take the desideratum expressed above, of a ballad-corpus, as a friendly challenge? I do not know anyone who could do it better.

ARUNDELL ESDAILE.

LONDON.

English Madrigal Verse 1588-1632. Edited from the Original Song Books by E. H. FELLOWES. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1920. 8vo. pp. xx + 640. 12s. 6d.

The collection is divided into two parts: I. The Madrigalists, II. The Lutenists. The Editor's task in transcribing this enormous mass of songs from the song-books and reducing them to something like their original form has been a very arduous one: and our gratitude is due to him for the vast number of practically unknown lyrics, some of very fine quality, which he has made at last accessible to all.

A song as it appears in the song-books follows the music. The composer has for his own purposes omitted a word or phrase here, and added one there: he is fond of repetition. That it is not easy to recover the true form of the lyric as written may be shown in the case of the first madrigal in Thomas Morley's *Canzonets* (1593), which Dr W. Bolle gives as follows:

See, myne owne sweet iewell,
What I have for my darling:
A Robin red brest and a Starling.
These I give both in hope to move thee,
And yet thou sayst, I doe not love thee.

This is Mr Fellowes' version:

See, see what I have for mine own sweet darling,
A little robin redbreast and a starling!
Both these I give in hope at length to move thee,
And yet thou sayest that I do not love thee.

Our gratitude to Mr Fellowes is therefore hardly diminished, when on turning his pages we find poems given in a form which we suspect not to have been the author's. Where the lyric is otherwise known to us, we may find that the musician whom Mr Fellowes follows has corrupted the text, or used a text already corrupted. In other cases, error has arisen very naturally from some misunderstanding or inadvertence on Mr Fellowes' part. A few examples will make these remarks clearer:

p. 20, xvi, l. 2. 'Tear up thoughts, tomb a numbed heart.' Query 'Tear up thought's tomb, a numbed heart.'

p. 26, xv, l. 6. 'Infernal cares.' Query 'Infernal caves.'

p. 40, xvii, l. 10. 'Scorning after reason to follow will.' Query 'Scorning their master reason' etc.

p. 52, xii, l. 7. 'for' should be 'far.' (Bolle has 'farre.')

p. 57, xxxiii, l. 8. 'Though' seems to be a corruption of 'Through.' 'Through my parting' is still a variant of the text 'After parting.' Cp. p. 456 'By thy absence.'