

IV. *Two English Poems of the time of Richard II. Communicated by the Rev. J. J. CONYBEARE, M. A. Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford, in a Letter to HENRY ELLIS, Esq. F. R. S. Secretary.*

(Read 3d March, 1814.)

MY DEAR SIR,

Oxford, August 12, 1813.

THE two short Poems annexed, independently of the superiority they possess over most of the minstrel productions of their age, appear to present so lively a picture of the popular feeling towards the commencement of the weak and disastrous government of Richard the Second, that I am persuaded they will not be altogether unacceptable to the admirers of our ancient literature.

Both of them occur in the latter part of an immense manuscript volume of English Poetry preserved in the Bodleian Library, and usually stiled, from the name of its donor, the Vernon Manuscript. The contents of this remarkable volume are chiefly of a religious or moral nature. All the more prominent parts of the Old and New Testament, and the lives of most of the saints of the Romish Calendar, intermixed with a few tales of classical origin,^a one metrical romance of a religious nature,^b one pious treatise in prose, and the well-known poem of Pierce Plowman, appear (for the last article is imperfect towards the conclusion) to have formed the first and largest division of the volume. The second consists, for the greater part, of short poems on

^a One of these, the well-known story of Damon and Pithias, commences with an entertaining specimen of the versifier's attainments in history and geography :

“ Sum time men reden that ther was
In a *cuntre* clept *Pitagoras*.”

^b The King of Tars and the Soudan of Damas. Published by Mr. Ritson.

moral or religious subjects, usually in the metre of those now submitted to the Society, terminating, like them, in a *Refrain*, and much superior both in point of imagination and expression to those contained in the former part. One of the poems in this volume, a composition for its age of very singular pathos and beauty, has been published by Mr. Ritson in his *Ancient Songs*.^c I have little doubt, from the similarity of style, that the whole contents of the section from which it is extracted proceeded from the same hand.

Believe me,

Dear Sir,

With much esteem,

Your's, &c.

J. J. CONYBEARE.

HENRY ELLIS, Esq.

ELEGY

ON THE

Death of King Edward III.

A! Dere God! what mai this be
 That alle thing weres & wasteth awai.
 Ffrendschip is but a vanyte,
 Unnethe hit dures al a day.^d
 Thei beo so sliper at assai,
 So leof to han & loth to lete,^e
 And so fikel in heore fai,
 That selden I-seize is sone forgete.^f
 I sei hit not withouten a cause,
 And th'fore taketh riht good hede,
 Ffor gif ye construwe wel this clause,
 I puit you holly out of drede,^g

^c It will be found in the first part of his curious volume, and commences "Nou br̄nes
 " buirdes bolde & blythe."

^d Unless it be durable.

^e So ready to take, and so lothe to forego.

^f That which is no longer seen is soon forgotten.

^g Doubt.

That for puire shame ȝor herte wol blede,
And ȝe this matere wysli trete,
He that was ur moste spede
Is selden I seȝe and sone forȝete.

Sum tyme an Englisch schip we had,
Nobel hit was & heih of tour,
Thorw al Cristendam hit was drad,
And stif wolde stande in uch a stour.^a
And best dorst byde a scharp schour
And other stormes smale & grete.
Now is that schip that bar the flour
Selden seȝe & sone forȝete.

Into that schip ther longed a Roothur,
That steered the schip, & governed hit:
In al this world nis such a nothur
As me thinketh in my wit.
Whyl schip and Rothur togeder was knit,
Thei dredde nouthur tempest driȝe nor wete.
Nou be thei both in synder flit,
That selden seȝe is sone forȝete.

Scharpe wawesⁱ that schip has sayled,
And sayed all sees at aventur,
For wynd ne wederes never hit fayled,
Whyl the Rothur mihte enduir.
Thouȝ the sees were rouȝ or elles dimuir
Gode havenes that schip wolde ȝete.
Nou is that schip, I am wel suir,
Selden I seȝe & sone forȝete.

This goode schip, I may remene^k
To the Chilvalrye of this londe,
Sum time thei counted nouȝt a bene.^l
Beo al Ffrance Ich understonde

^a In every danger.

ⁱ So the MS. waves?

^k So the MS. Quære, if "*semene*," compare.

^l They valued not France a single bean. (Vid. Bene. in Glossary to Tyrwhitt's Chaucer.)

This expression, which appears to have been proverbial, is, I believe, now quite obsolete.

Elegy on the Death of

Thei tok & slouȝ hem with heore honde
 The power of Ffrance both smal and grete,
 And brouȝt ther Kyng hider to bide her bonde.^a
 And nou riȝt sone hit is forȝete.

That schip had a ful sikerⁿ mast,
 And a sayl strong and large,
 That made the gode schip never agast
 To undertake a thyng of charge.
 And to that schip ther longed a barge,
 Of al Ffrance ȝaf nouȝt a clete.^o
 To us hit was a siker targe.
 And now riht clene hit is forȝete.

The Rothur was nouthur Ok ne Elun,
 Hit was Edward the thridde the noble kniht :
 The Prince his Sone bar up his helm,
 That never 'sconfited was in fiht.
 The Kyng him rod & rouwed ariht,
 The prince drad nouthur stok nor strete,
 Nou of hym we lete ful liht.
 That selde is seȝe is sone forȝete.

The swift barge was Duk Henri
 That noble kniht & wel assayed,
 And in his leggance worthili
 He abod mony a bitter braid.
 Gif that his enemys ouȝt outrayed
 To chastis hem wolde he not lete.
 Nou is that Lord ful lowe ileyd.
 That selde is seȝe is sone forȝete.

This ȝode communes, by the Rode,
 I likne hem to the schipes mast,
 That with heore catel and heore gode
 Meynteyned the werre both furst & last.

^a To remain as their captive.

ⁿ Firm, secure.

^o This expression I do not understand. It may possibly be an error of the transcriber.

The wynd that bleug the schip with blast
 Hit was gode preyers, I sei hit a trete,^p
 Now is devoutnes out i-cast,
 And mony gode dedes be clen forȝete.

Thus be this Lordes i-leid ful lowe.
 The stok is of the same rote.
 An ympe biginnes for to growe
 And ȝit I hope shal ben ur bote.
 To hold his fomen underfote,
 And as a Lord be set in sete.
 Crist leve that he so mote,
 That selden i-seȝe be not forȝete.

Weor that Impe ffully growe,
 That he had sarr^a sap & pith.
 I hope he shulde be kud & knowe
 Ffor Conquerour of moni a kith.
 He is ful lyflich in lim & lith
 In armes to travayle & to swete,
 Crist leeve we so fare him with,
 That selden seȝe be never forȝete.

And therfore holliche, I ou rede,
 Til that this Impe beo ffully growe,
 That uch a mon up with the hede,
 And mayntene him both heize & lowe.
 The Ffrenchmen cūe both boste & blowe
 And with heore scornes us to threte.
 And we beoth both unkuynde & slowe
 That selden seȝe is sone forȝete.

And therfore, gode Sires, taketh reward
 Of ȝor douhti kyng that dyȝede in age,
 And to his son Prince Edward
 That welle was of al corage.

^p A trait. (Fr.) In my discourse, in earnest ?

^a Sarr.—I am unacquainted with this word. Can it be a corruption of savour? (Vid. "Sareless," in Jamieson's Scottish Dict.)

Such two Lords of heigh parage
 In ^r not in eorthe whon we schal gete.
 And nou heore los biginneth to swage.
 That selde i-sege is sone forȝete.

P O E M

ON THE

*Disturbances and Calamities of the earlier part of the Reign of
 King Richard II.*

YET is God a curteis Lord,
 And mekeliche con schewe his miht.
 Ffayne he wolde bring til acord
 Monkuynde to live in treuthe ariht.
 Allas! whi set we that Lord so liht,
 And al to foule with him we fare?
 In World is no so wys no wiht,
 That thei ne have warning to beware.

We may not sege but if we lyze
 That God wol vengeaunce on us stele.
 Ffor openly we seo with eye
 This warnynges beoth wonder & fele.^a
 But nou this wrecched worldes wele
 Maketh us lyve in sunne & care,
 Of mony merveyles I may of mele,^b
 And al is warnyng to beware.

Whon the Comuynes bigan to ryse,
 Was non so gret Lord as I gesse
 That thei in herte bigon to gryse,^c
 And leide her Jolyte in presse.
 Wher was thene heore wwrthinesse?
 Whon thei made lordes droup & dare.^d
 Of all wyse men I take wytnesse,
 This a warnyng to beware

^r So the MS.^a Many.^b To speak.^c To tremble.^d Q. As to this usage of dare?

Bifore gif Menhedde had a graas,^y
 Lordes miht wonder weel
Han let the rysing that ther was.
 But that God thogte hit sum del
That Lordes schulde his Lordschup feel,
 And of heore Lordschipe make hem bare.
Trust therto as trewe as steel,
 This was a warnyng to beware.

And also whon this eorthe quok,
 Was non so proud he n'as agast,
And al his Jolite forsok
 And thought on God' whyl that hit last.
And alsone as hit was overpast
 Men wox as wel as thei dude are.
Uche mon in his herte mai cast
 This was a warnyng to beware.

Fforsoth this was a Lord to drede
 So sodeynly mad mon aghast.
Of gold & selver thei tok non hede
 But out of the houses ful sone thei past.
Chaumbres, chimeneys, al to barst,
 Chirches & castels foul gon fare,
Pinacles, steples, to ground hit cast.
 And al was warnyng to beware.

The mevyng of this Eorthe, I wys,
 That schulde by cuynde ^{*} be ferm & stabele,
A pure veray toknyng hit is
 That menes hertes ben chaṅgable.
And that to falshud thei ben most abul,
 Ffor with good feith wul we not fare.
Leef hit wel withouten fabel,
 This was a warnyng to beware.

^y This line appears capable of two interpretations :

1. " If men had had favour shewn them by the Deity.
2. If men had had benevolent and kind dispositions (towards their inferiors.)

^{*} Naturally, by kind.

Poem on the Disturbances, &c.

The rysing of the comuynes in Londe,
 The pestilens, & the Eorthequake,
 Theose threo thynges, I understonde,
 Beo tokenes the grete vengeaũce & wrake
 That schulde fall for synnes sake,
 As this clerkes con declare.
 Now mai we chese to leve or take,
 For warnyng have we to ben ware

Ever I drede, be my trouthe
 Ther mai no warnyng stande in stede,
 We ben so ful of synne & slouthe
 The schame is passed the sched of hed.
 And we liggen riht hevy as led
 Cumbred in the Ffendes snarè.
 I leeve this beo ur beste red,
 To thenke on this warnyng to beware.

Sikerliche I dar wel saye
 In such a plyt thys world is in.
 Many for wynnynge wolde bitraye
 Father & Moder & all hys kyn.
 Nou were heih tyme to begin
 To amende ur mis & wel to fare.
 Ur bagge hongeth on a sliper pyn,
 Bote we of this warning prepare.

Bewar for I con sey no more,
 Bewar for vengauunce of trespas,
 Bewar & thenk upon this lore,
 Bewar of this sodeyn cas.
 And git bewar while we have spas,
 And thonke that child that Marie bare,
 Of his gret goodnesse & his gras,
 Sende us such warnyng to beware.