

**THE POEMS OF JOHN
AUDELAY: A SPECIMEN OF
THE SHROPSHIRE DIALECT
IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY**

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John Audelay

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JOHN AUDELAY

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PREFACE.

AMONG the *capellani* of the quiet monastery of Haghmon, at the commencement of the fifteenth century, lived one, a truly penitent and righteous monk, who atoned for the excesses of his early life by the devotion of an enthusiast, and called the priesthood to their duty by the voice of literature, even during the afflictions of the blind and the deaf. He was no Lollard. A pious priest, denouncing the opinions of Wickliffe, teaching that dissent and heresy would assuredly lead to damnation, he was yet well aware that the return of the leaders of his religion to their early discipline, was the only chance left for restoring orthodoxy. His name was John Audelay, or Awdlay, as the name is spelt different ways in the same manuscript.

A selection from the poems of this somewhat remarkable writer, is presented to the reader in the following pages. The original MS. formerly belonged to Farmer, and is now in Mr. Douce's

collection. We have printed only a small portion of it; for the MS. is scarcely worthy of being published entire, and is, indeed, principally valuable as exhibiting a faithful specimen of the Salopian dialect at so early a period. The greater portion appears to form part of one work, the MS. being unfortunately imperfect; but the following colophon is found about the middle of it:—

“Finito libro, sit laus et Gloria Christo!
Liber vocatur concilium concieencie sic nominatur,
Aut scala celi et vita salutis eterni.

Iste liber fuit compositus per Johannem Awdelay, capellanum, qui fuit secus et surdus, in sua visitacione, ad honorem Domini nostri Jhesu Christi, et ad exemplum aliorum, in monasterio de Haghmon, anno Domini millesimo cccc.^{mo} vicesimo vi.^{to} cujus anime propicietur Deus. Amen.”

In the following lines, which are found immediately before the colophon, he expresses, somewhat feelingly, the afflictions under which he laboured, and the inspiration of his muse:—

“As I lay seke in my langure,
In an abbay here be west,
This boke I made with gret dolour,
When I myȝt not slep ne have no rest;
Offt with my prayers I me blest,
And sayd hilé to heven kyng,
I knowlache, Lord, hit is the best

Mekelé to take thi vesetyng,
 Ellis wot I wil that I were lorne,
 Of al lordis be he blest !
 Fore al that ze done is fore the best,
 Fore in thi defawte was never mon lost,
 That is here of womon borne.

“ Mervel ze not of this makyng,
 Fore I me excuse, hit is not I ;
 This was the Holé Gost wercheng,
 That sayd these wordis so faythfully ;
 Fore I quoth never bot hye foly,
 God hath me chastyst fore my levyng !
 I thong my God my grace treuly
 Fore his gracious vesityng.
 Beware, seris, I zoue pray,
 Fore I mad this with good entent,
 In the reverens of God omnipotent ;
 Prays fore me that beth present,
 My name is Jon the blynd Awdlay.”

In another place, in nearly the same words, he apparently alludes to the errors of his earlier years :—

“ Mervel ze nojt of this makyng,
 Fore I me excuse, hit is not I,
 Fore this of Godis oun wrytyng,
 That he send down fro heven on hye,
 Fore I couth never bot he foly ;
 He hath me chastist for my levyng.
 I thonk my God my grace treuly,
 Of his gracious vesetyng.”

Nearly all Audelay's poems that have descended

to us are of a religious cast, and partake of much sameness. The following lines on King Henry VI are an exception, and by no means an unfavourable specimen of his poetical talents:—

De rege nostro Henrico sexto.

“ A ! perles pryus, to the we pray,
 Save our kyng both nyxt and day !
 Fore he is ful yong, tender of age,
 Semelé to se, o bold corage,
 Lovelé and lofté of his lenage,
 Both perles prince and kyng veray ;
 His gracious granseres and his grawndame,
 His fader and moderis of kyngis thay came,
 Was never a worthier prynce of name,
 So exelent in al our day.
 His fader fore love of mayd Kateryn,
 In Fraunce he wrojt turment and tene,
 His love hee sayd hit schuld not ben,
 And send him ballis him with to play.
 Then was he wyse in wers withalle,
 And tajt Franchemen to plai at the ball,
 With tenes hold he ferð ham halle,
 To castelles and setis thei floyn away.
 To Harfete a sege he layd anon,
 And cast a bal unto the towne ;
 The Frenchemen swere be se and sun,
 Hit was the fynd that mad that fray !
 Anon thai toke ham to counsele,
 Oure gracious kyng thai wold asayle,
 At Agyncourt at that batayle
 The floure of Frawnce he fel that day.
 The kyng of Frawnce then was agast,

Mesagers to him send in hast,
 Fore wele he west hit was bot wast
 Hem to withstond in honé way ;
 And prayd hym to sese of his outrage,
 And take Kateryn to mareage,
 Al Frawnce to him schuld do homage,
 And croune him kyng aftyr his day.
 Of Frawnce he mad him anon regent,
 And wedid Kateren in his present ;
 Into Englund anon he went,
 And cround our quene in ryal aray.
 Of quen Kateryn our kyng was borne,
 To save our ryzt that was fore-lorne,
 Oure faders in Frawns had won beforne,
 Thai han hit hold moné a day.
 Thus was his fader a conqueroure,
 And wan his moder with gret onoure,
 Now may the kyng here the floure
 Of kyngis and kyngdams in uche cuntré !
 On him schal fal the prophecé,
 That hath ben sayd of kyng Herré,
 The holé cros wyn or he dye,
 That Crist habud on good Fryday ;
 Al wo and werres he schal acese,
 And set alle reams in rest and pese,
 And turne to Christyndam al hevynes,
 Now grawnt him hit so be may !
 Pray we that Lord is Lord of alle,
 To save our kyng his reme ryal,
 And let never myschhip uppon him falle,
 Ne false traytoure him to betray !
 I pray youe, seris, of your gentré,
 Sing this carol reverently,
 Fore hit is mad of kyng Herré,