

CÆDMON, THE FIRST ENGLISH POET

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Cædmon, the First English Poet by Robert Spence Watson

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ROBERT SPENCE WATSON

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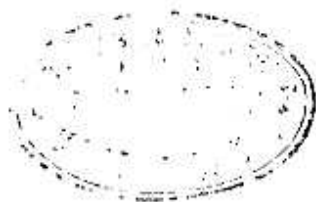
CÆDMON

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THE FIRST ENGLISH POET

BY

ROBERT SPENCE WATSON



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1875

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PREFACE.

THIS attempt to make the life and works of the First English Poet more widely known springs from the interest taken in the subject by an English Language and Literature Class of Men and Women which I conducted for some years at the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Lecturing upon 'Cædmon' afterwards to the members of the Society, I found that the idea of an English Literature prior to Chaucer was new to many of my hearers. It is not creditable to us that we should know so little about the Founders of our Literature. I am conscious of the imperfections of my work, which has had to be completed in the rare and brief intervals of a busy professional life. I trust, however, that the interest of the subject will atone in some measure for the

inability of the writer. I wish to express my warm acknowledgments to the men who have preceded me in this matter, and to none more than to Professor Henry Morley, of University College, London.

MOSS CROFT, GATESHEAD-ON-TYNE:

October 9, 1875.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFACE	V
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTORY	1
II. ENGLAND IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY	11
III. CEDMON	23
IV. CEDMON'S METRICAL PARAPHRASE—THE INTRO- DUCTION	33
V. THE HISTORY OF THE EARLY WORLD	57
VI. ISRAEL IN EGYPT	69
VII. THE CAPTIVITY	74
VIII. THE SECOND BOOK OF THE PARAPHRASE	80
IX. POEMS ATTRIBUTED TO CEDMON	87
X. THE RISE OF MODERN VERNACULAR POETRY IN WESTERN EUROPE	102

APPENDIX	PAGE
A. RADBOND, THE FRISIAN PRINCE	121
B. STREONESHALH	121
C. WHITBY ABBEY	122
D. CEDMON	122
E. MILTON AND CEDMON	123
F. ULPHILAS'S BIBLE	193

CÆDMON AND HIS WORKS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

BEFORE I proceed to speak of CÆDMON and his Works, I shall endeavour briefly to explain the position of that portion of the world which specially interests us Western peoples during the period of his life,—the seventh century. I shall speak first of the political situation, and shall then show the intellectual condition of the then existing nations, in order that we may more truly estimate the precise place which the Father of English Poetry holds in general literary history.

The old Roman Empire had fallen before the repeated attacks of the barbarians. By the middle of the fifth century the Western Empire had ceased to exist. It had long been moribund. The true Roman people had steadily decreased in numbers.