

**THE LIFE AND DEATH OF  
MARY MAGDALENE. A  
LEGENDARY POEM IN TWO  
PARTS, ABOUT A.D. 1620**

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The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene. A Legendary Poem in Two Parts, about A.D. 1620 by  
Thomas Robinson & H. Oskar Sommer

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**THOMAS ROBINSON & H. OSKAR SOMMER**

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1899.

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OF  
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A LEGENDARY POEM IN TWO PARTS,  
ABOUT A.D. 1080,

BY  
**THOMAS ROBINSON.**

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EDITED FROM THE ONLY KNOWN MANUSCRIPTS IN THE  
BRITISH MUSEUM AND BODLEIAN LIBRARIES,

WITH AN  
**Introduction, a Life of the Author, and Notes,**

BY  
**H. OSKAR SOMMER.**

LONDON

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## INTRODUCTION.

## I. THE MANUSCRIPTS AND THE AUTHOR.

*The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* exists in two MSS. of the first quarter of the 17th century, Harleian 6211 (p. 56—94),<sup>1</sup> and Rawlinson 41 in the Bodleian. The latter MS. contains the author's name, "Thomas Robinson," plainly at full length; the former his initials "T. R.," and his full name blotted out, but still legible. The Rawlinson MS.<sup>2</sup> contains another legend of another writer, entitled *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*,<sup>3</sup> and has the following dedication to its *Mary Magdalene*:

<sup>1</sup> A small part of the poem, altered and modernised, appeared in 1869 (February and March), in a monthly periodical called *The Westminster Abbey Magazine, or Reminiscences of Past Literature*, which lived but three months. At the beginning is a foot-note: "This poem, which now for the first time sees light of day in print, was probably written by Sir Philip Sidney—it is thoroughly Spenserian in style, and will recommend itself in a very marked manner to the poetic mind."

<sup>2</sup> The Curators of the Bodleian Library were good enough to send the Rawlinson Manuscript to London for me, after Mr. E. M. Thompson, the Keeper of the Manuscripts in the British Museum, had declared his readiness to take charge of it.

<sup>3</sup> On the cover of the volume are written the following lines, by Edw. Umfraville, who has described several of the Bodleian Manuscripts: "Mr. Robinson's *Life and Death of M. Magdalene*, I have seen and read years since in MS. It is a very pretty little thing of about 100 years old, and, I believe, never printed—its age may be found by inquiring the time when W. Taylor was fellow of Trinity College." I did enquire, but without result. The Wood Manuscript (vol. 8400, f. 172), Ashmolean Library, Oxford, which contains a list of the fellows of Trinity College, does not mention the name of Taylor at all, nor could the College library give any other information from the archives on the subject, than that a man of this name entered the College in 1670 as a commoner. The words "To the Worshippeful," etc., seem to imply that Taylor was then an old man, possibly one of the senior fellows. There is no certainty that Wood's list is complete, which would account for its omission of Taylor's name. Moreover, the dedicatory lines do not specify whether Trinity College, Oxford or Cambridge, was meant. But the list of the college of that name at Cambridge (Brit. Mus. Coll. of Cambr. and Miscell., Vol. xiv., Add. 5846, p. 230) does not mention the name of Taylor.

"To the Worshippful, his very kinde  
Friend, and quondam Tutor,  
Mr. W. Taylour, Bachelor of Divinity,  
and fellowe of Trin. Coll.

T. R.

Wisheth health, and Happinesse.

When Socrates his scholars ev'ry yeare,  
Brought gifts, and presents to their Master deare,  
Among the rest 't was Machines's device,  
To give himselfe, instead of greater price:  
My selfe (Kinde S<sup>r</sup>) I can not nowe present  
To your acceptance, sith I rest ypent  
In Northern climat: but my Image true,  
The offspring of my braine, I give in lieu,  
Deign but to cherriish this yong birth of mine,  
A Muse it may be, though no Muse divine,  
And thus much I wish Machines will saye,  
In commendation of my ruder lay:  
They that give much, more for themselves doe save,  
But this is all I give, and all I have.

Yours in all duty to  
command

THOMAS ROBINSON."

The Harleian MS. has, before the Magdalene legend, a Prologue<sup>1</sup> in heroic couplets in the same handwriting as the sidenotes to *Mary Magdalene*. Its last ten verses are addressed to a "great Lord," who is styled the poet's grace, and who is identified by the four lines prefixed to this poem, and scrawled over with ink, but reading as follows: "To the right honourable and truly noble gentleman and Lord, Henry Chifford, Lord-Lieutenant of the middle shires of Westmoreland, Cumberland and Northumberland, T. R. wisheth all happinesse and increase of honour."<sup>2</sup>

At the end of this poem are the words: "Your Honours in all duty and service to commaund," and underneath, instead of a name, is a long rectangular inkblot, from which some strokes of writing

<sup>1</sup> It is of course printed below.

It begins with some reflections on the difficulties that poets have in finding a patron, and also in choosing the subjects of their compositions. The various subjects of poetry are then analysed, and some complaints made, that poetry is not so much liked and patronised as in former days, for people are rather ashamed to call themselves poets. Then follows an enumeration of many Greek, Latin, and English poets, and, finally, the profit that arises from poetry is commended.

<sup>2</sup> Thus the author dedicated the two different copies of his poem to different persons, as Norden did two copies of his *Description of Essex*: compare the Camden Society's print of it with the MS. in the Granville collection.

project. By using a powerful magnifying-glass, I was enabled to read, through the blot, the name "Thomas Robinson," and thus confirm the suggestion of the Harleian Catalogue.<sup>1</sup>

To fix the date of the MS. it was natural to inquire the time when either of the two dedicatees was living. The inquiry after W. Taylour, which Umfreville suggests, proved entirely fruitless, as I have above stated; and the result which the inquiry after Lord Clifford afforded left the matter in so far undetermined, as the Clifford family had several members of the Christian name "Henry." Mr. E. Maunde Thompson, the Keeper of the MSS. in the British Museum, was kind enough to decide the point for me, after I had myself gone wrong, by showing that the watermark of the paper on which the Legend is written is such as was used in the year 1621. Perhaps it was also used some few years earlier or later, but the difference is certainly not great, as Mr. Thompson says that the watermarks about this time change very rapidly. We may therefore reasonably date the poem "about A.D. 1621." This date falls within the lifetime of Lord Henry Clifford, the fifth and last Earl of Cumberland.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the poem contains (Part II. 1132) the line,

"There stood y<sup>e</sup> Monarche of this tripple Isle," etc.,

which is internal evidence to its date, as referring to King James I., to whom this epithet was first given; for he was the first monarch who united under his sceptre the three islands of England, Ireland, and Scotland.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The author's name at the end has been more carefully blotted out, but seems to have been 'Thomas Robinson.'"—p. 243, col. 2. The Harleian Catalogue, moreover, mentions the two poems separately, as if they had nothing to do with one another. This fact has misled the editor in the *Westminster Magazine*, so that he did not find Robinson's name, and supposed it to be written by Sir Philip Sidney.

<sup>2</sup> (a.) Sir B. Burke's *Extinct Peerage of England*, etc. (b.) Dugdale *English Baronage*, vol. i. p. 346: Henry, Lord Clifford, Earl of Cumberland succeeded to his father's title in 1640. He was the last Earl of Cumberland, and at his death, in 1643, this peerage became extinct, as he only left one daughter.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Shakspeare's *Macbeth*, IV. i. 120, 121:

"And some I see

That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry."

This is an allusion to the union of the two islands of Great Britain and Ireland, and the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, which took place at the accession of James I.