

**ANTHONY MUNDAY.
THE ENGLISH
ROMAYNE LYFE. 1582**

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Anthony Munday. The English Romyne Lyfe. 1582 by G. B. Harrison

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G. B. HARRISON

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THE BODLEY HEAD QUARTOS

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Note

THE ORIGINAL of this text is in the British Museum (C. 25. c. 16).

The end of each page of the text is marked with / and the number of the page. In the original, only the pages of the text are numbered, the pagination of the preliminary matter being shown by the signatures.

The ornamental initial letters used in this reprint are facsimiles of those in the original text.

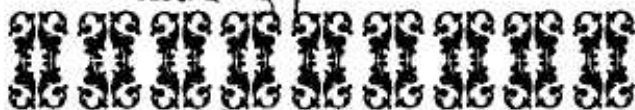
A list of the misprints which have been corrected will be found on page 106.

G. B. H.

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INTRODUCTION

11-30-49
ANTHONY MUNDAY, one of the most prolific and versatile of Elizabethan writers, was born in London in 1553. In 1576 he was apprenticed to John Alde, the Stationer. Two years later he broke his indentures and went abroad with 'one Thomas Nowell.' Soon after leaving Boulogne, they were robbed of all their possessions, but they managed to reach Amiens, where they were looked after by an old English priest named Woodward, who sent them on to Dr. Allen at Rheims. Thence they set out for Rome to join the English College. After some months at Rome, Munday was sent back to England. He had evidently made himself well liked, and was trusted with messages and pictures, hallowed by the Pope, to be delivered to the Catholics in England. After his return (1578-9) he seems to have tried his hand at poetry and ballad-writing.

Two years later the authorities were much alarmed by the activities of Edmund Campion and other Jesuit missionaries who had come over from Rome in disguise. Munday

m.m.

was now able to turn his Roman experiences to profitable account. As he had met many of the principal Jesuits at the English College, he was naturally a most valuable spy, and was taken on the staff of Richard Topcliffe, the notorious anti-recusant agent, as informer and pamphleteer. Topcliffe was a very efficient detective, and before long Campion and his fellows were arrested and brought to trial, Munday being a most important witness for the Crown.

Before a London jury the accused could have but small hope of escape. They were condemned, as Munday notes in his *Discoverie of Edmund Campion*—

To be drawne on Hurdles to the place of execution, where they should be hanged tyll they were halfe dead, then to be cutte downe, their priuie members to be cutte off, and theyr entrayles taken foorth, and to be burned in the fire before theyr eyes: then their heads to be cut off, their bodies parted into foure quarters, to be disposed at her Maiesties pleasure, and the Lord God to receiue theyr soules to his mercie.

(Sig. F4^v)

However, on this occasion, the Queen's mercy was such that this 'beastly, shameless transformation' was not carried out until the accused were quite dead. Munday himself attended all the executions to write up a stop-press account: *A breefe and true reporte*

of the Execution of certaine Traytours at Tiborne, the xxviii, and xxx dayes of Maye, 1582.

On the scaffold, one of the condemned priests, Fr. Luke Kirbie, vehemently protested his innocence and declared that not even Munday knew anything against him. Thereupon the Sheriff called Munday from the crowd, and a most unseemly wrangle ensued. After which Kirbie began (Munday notes)—

‘to talke of my being at *Roome*, what freendshippe he had shewed vnto mee, and had done the lyke vnto a number of English men, whome he well knew, not to be of that Religion, bothe out of his owne purse, as also be freending them to some of the Popes Chamber, he made conueyaunce for them thence, some tyme going fortie miles with them: when (quoth he) had my dealings beene knowne, I should hardlie haue beene well thought off.’

(Sig. C1^v)

As Munday makes no comment, these statements are probably true.

The official minister then joined in and tried to make Kirbie acknowledge his guilt. This led on to another argument on the question of the Pope’s supremacy. But the crowd were now growing impatient, and so Kirbie was turned off.

Munday had no shame in the matter, although he admits that he had fared badly

under cross-examination by the accused. It was perhaps due to this fact that he describes the sufferings of Fr. Campion with a savage exultation which makes the most nauseous reading.

Naturally enough there were many who looked on Munday as a contemptible and discredited witness. Some indeed doubted whether he had ever been to Rome at all. To answer these charges, he wrote the *English Romaine Life*, in which he gives a most vivid description of his adventures, his life in the English Seminary, and the various festivals, antiquities, and churches which he saw.

Munday, of course, ascribes the best of motives to himself. He claims to have kept his faith pure throughout, and all the time to have been in his country's service. But his word is very unreliable. On his own showing, he was a glib and facile liar who served himself well on all occasions. More probably, like many other disappointed 'scholars,'¹ he went to Rheims and Rome to see what he could get out of it. However, he had a strong

¹ See the closing lines of the First Part of *The Returne from Parnassus* :

To Rome or Rheims I'll e hyc, led on by fate,
Where I will end my dayes or mend my state.

sense of humour, and must thoroughly have enjoyed recording some of the unkind things said about Great Persons at home.¹

After 1584, Munday returned to literature and wrote plays, ballads, city pageants, pamphlets, romances, and translations, and, of course, he quarrelled with Ben Jonson. To his contemporaries, he was probably most famous as a ballad writer, though not many of his compositions can now be identified. He is perhaps the 'fat, filthy ballet-maker' mentioned by Kemp in his *Nine Daies Wonder*.²

In later years he became the friend of John Stow, the Antiquary, and after his death continued Stow's work, bringing out a new edition of the *Survey* in 1618.

Munday lived to a very respectable old age and survived all his more famous literary contemporaries. He was buried in the church of St. Andrew, Coleman Street, where a monument was put up to his memory. The tomb was destroyed in the Great Fire, but, according to the 1633 edition of the *Survey*,³ the inscription ran:

¹ See page 21.

² Vol. IV in the *Quartos*, page 31.

³ Page 869.