

**A POEM ON THE TIMES OF
EDWARD II: FROM A MS.
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ST. PETER'S COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE**

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C. HARDWICK

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ON
THE TIMES OF EDWARD II,

FROM A
MS. PRESERVED IN THE LIBRARY
OF
ST. PETER'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

EDITED BY THE
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PREFACE.

THIS curious relic of our earlier poetry is preserved at the end of a folio volume of Homilies, by Radulphus Acton, or Achedon, who flourished, according to Pits, about the year 1320. (*De Scriptoribus*, s. 474.) The volume was presented to St. Peter's College, Cambridge, by Thomas Beaufort, half-brother to King Henry IV, and afterwards Duke of Exeter; the use of it being reserved (as we gather from a note at the commencement) to one Mr. John Savage, "ad terminum vitæ suæ duntaxat." The donor was appointed Lord Chancellor of England in the year 1410, and died in the year 1425 (*Lord Campbell's Lives*, i. p. 316); by which dates we can approximate with sufficient accuracy to the time when the manuscript reached its present resting-place.

The hand-writing of the *Poem* belongs to the same period as that of the *Homilies*, and is possibly

the work of the same scribe. It may be assigned to the reign of Edward III, or perhaps of Edward II. This opinion, however, as to the execution of the manuscript, is quite independent of the age of the *Poem*; and since nothing has survived respecting the author, his date can only be ascertained by the internal evidence of language and historical intimations.

With respect to the language of the *Poem*, it will be found (speaking generally) to resemble the old English of *Piers Ploughman's Creed and Vision*, so that we shall not far misdate its composition, if on a *prima facie* view we consider it *not later* than 1350. On the contrary, it will appear to be still more ancient. For, first, it contains allusion to certain calamities very prevalent in England at the time of its publication. Thus in stanza 1 :

Why werre and wrake in londe
 And manslaught is y-come:
 Why hongre and derthe on erthe
 The pour hath ouer-nome;
 Wy bestes beth i-storve
 And why corne is so dere,
 ȝe that wyl abyde,
 Lystyn and ȝe mow here.

And similarly in stanza 78; both which passages furnish proof that the country was then, or had been very recently, suffering from war, famine,

and a grievous murrain; and that the price of corn was immoderately high. Now these various historical phases will, I think, be found to synchronize with that portion of the reign of Edward II, which is included between the years 1311-1320. The allusion to war and domestic divisions may be dismissed, by referring to the troubles connected with Piers Gaveston, and the unsuccessful expedition to Scotland. The other topics, which are of a less ordinary character, will be illustrated by the following extract from Stow's *Chronicle*.*

"The king, in a Parliament at London, gave the rod and office of marshall vnto Thomas of Brotherton, Earle of Norfolk, his brother. Hee also reuoked the provisions† before made for selling of victuals, and permitted all men to make the best of that they had; neuerthelesse the dearth increased through the abundance of raine that fell in harvest, so that a quarter of wheate, or of salt was solde before mid-sommer for thirty shillings, and after forty shillings. There followed [A.D. 1316] this famine a grievous mortality of

* Pp. 217, 218, Lond. 1632.

† These are probably the dietary provisions published in *Leland's Collectanea*, vi, 36, ed. Hearne. The date is 1315. A second visitation of the same kind is placed by Walsingham in the year 1319. Scotland and Ireland were equally afflicted. See *Carte*, ii, 337, 340.

people, so that the quick might unneath bury the dead. . . . The beasts and cattall also, by the corrupt grasse whereof they fed, dyed, whereby it came to passe that the eating of flesh was suspected of all men; for flesh of beastes not corrupted was hard to finde. Horse-flesh was counted great delicates; the poor stole fatte dogges to eate. Some (as it was sayd), compelled through famine, in hidden places, did eate the flesh of their own children, and some stole others which they deuoured. Theeues that were in prisons did pluck in peeces those that were newly brought amongst them, and greedily deuoured them, halfe aline. A gallon of small ale was at twopence, of the better threepence, and the best fourpence."

Another allusion, of a character more specific, will place our Poem about the same period, *i.e.*, between 1311 and 1320. In stanza 35, the following lecture is read to the order of the Hospitalers:—

An other religion ther is
 Of the Hospital;
 They ben lords and sires
 In contrey over al:
 Ther is non of hem all
 That ne awt to ben a-drad,
 Whan thei bethenken
 How the Templars have i-sped
 For pride: