

**THE POETRY OF THE  
CODEX  
VERCELLENIS WITH AN  
ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

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The Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis with an English Translation by J. M. Kemble

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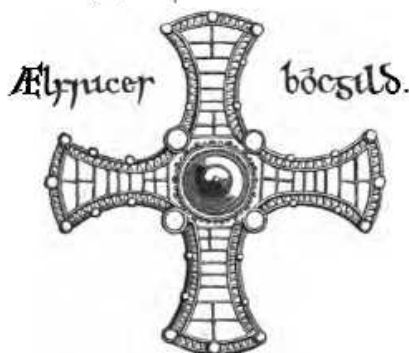
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*Part I.  
The whole of the 14th and 15th pages*



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## PREFACE.

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IN the year 1832 a German man of letters, Dr. Blum, in the course of his inquiries into the contents of the Italian libraries, discovered at Vercelli, in the Milanese, a thick volume of Anglosaxon homilies. The interest which this very unexpected piece of good fortune excited both in England and Germany, was soon increased to the very utmost by the announcement that the Manuscript contained, in addition to and interspersed with the homilies, a collection of sacred poems, hitherto unknown and of great beauty. In the hope of bringing these valuable remains to England, and publishing them here, I set out in the summer of 1834 for Vercelli; but having spent some months in traversing Germany, I found myself, at the commencement of winter, still on this side the Alps, and cut off from all hope of crossing them by the storms which had broken up the passes. On returning to England, however, I found that one portion of my plan was already executed. The then existing Record Commission had employed Dr. Blum to copy the Manuscript, and had caused the poems to be extracted and printed under the care of Mr. Thorpe. Circumstances prevented the publication of the book, but a few copies of it found their way into the hands of persons interested in the subject, both here and in Germany. One of them had been placed at my disposal (through the courtesy of Mr. Cooper), and had furnished important aid during the preparation of the second volume of *Beowulf*; but in general the contents remained inaccessible



and unknown. In 1840 James Grimm, feeling that this was a wrong done to the world of letters at large, and apparently under a mistake respecting the number of copies printed by the Commission, and their intention of ultimately publishing their book, extracted from Dr. Lappenberg's copy the two longest poems, which he published at Cassell under the title of "Andreas und Elene," together with an introduction and very copious notes. It would not be fair to institute a comparison between two works composed with very different aims, or to make Thorpe responsible for the meagre form in which his appeared. It was intended as an Appendix, or rather as part of an Appendix, to another and very different composition, and was consequently compressed into the smallest possible space, without introduction, translation or notes of any description. On the other hand, Grimm's edition, expressly intended to supply a want which was loudly complained of in Germany, was executed with all the skill and care that might have been anticipated from the eminent qualifications of its amiable editor, and forms at this moment one of the most valuable monuments for the student of our ancient tongue.

It may be asked, what is then the necessity for a third edition of these poems? The answer is plain: Thorpe's edition is not to be obtained at all, and, even were it accessible, consists of a mere text, without the slightest attempt to assist the reader. Grimm's book contains only a portion of the Vercelli poems, and, did it even contain the whole, would still be inaccessible to those who could not read the German, in which the notes and introduction are written. Neither editor has thought it necessary to give a translation of the text. In commencing a series of publications which, it is to be hoped, will give to the world of scholars every yet inedited remain of Anglo-Saxon, the Ælfric Society could not close their eyes to the paramount importance of these poems; and knowing that my attention had been long be-



clusion on both these points. Towards the close of the poem of "Elene" the author deserts the epic narrative which he has so long pursued, and runs off into a train of lyrical reflections, having himself and his fortunes for their subject. In the course of these lines occur certain runic characters, which when taken together compose the name *Cynewulf*, which recurs more than once in the Exeter Book under precisely similar circumstances. There cannot be a doubt that this *Cynewulf* was the author of the poem of *Elene*, probably of all the rest, and those likewise which occur in the other collection, and it becomes a matter of much interest to decide who he was. Unhappily this is not an easy task: the name itself is extremely common, and, without any evidence leading us to fix upon any particular individual, it would perhaps be hardly justifiable to select as our author some dignified ecclesiastic merely because he bore that name. James Grimm, who seems to me to attribute too great an antiquity to the poems in their present form, hints that there was a bishop of Lindisfarn named *Cynewulf* who died in A.D. 780; but that bishop could neither have written nor read one word of the poems we possess, which would to him have been nearly as unintelligible as new German to an Englishman. No doubt these *may* be only translations from an earlier Northumbrian version, but this hypothesis has no basis whatever save the name *Cynewulf*, and that has been shown to be totally inadequate. Still less ground is there for another supposition of Grimm's, that *Aldhelm* (who died in 705) may have been their author, and which appears to me to rest upon nothing more than the fact that *Aldhelm* was a poet; for the philological ground, viz. that the author at one period addresses two persons (using the dual *git vos duo*), will certainly not show that *Aldhelm* was that author, even if we admit—which I do not—that *git* in this passage is the dual pronoun in question. There was however a *Cynewulf* who may possibly have a better claim to the honour: he was an abbat of Peter-