

**A COMMON-PLACE BOOK OF
THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY,
CONTAINING A RELIGIOUS PLAY
AND POETRY, LEGAL FORMS,
AND LOCAL ACCOUNTS**

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A Common-Place Book of the Fifteenth Century, Containing a Religious Play and Poetry, Legal Forms, and Local Accounts by Lady Caroline Kerrison & Lusy Toulmin Smith

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LADY CAROLINE KERRISON & LUSY TOULMIN SMITH

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OF THE

FIFTEENTH CENTURY,

CONTAINING

*A Religious Play and Poetry, Legal
Forms, and Local Accounts*

Printed from the Original Manuscript at
Brome Hall, Suffolk

BY

LADY CAROLINE KERRISON

Edited with Notes by

LUCY TOULMIN SMITH.

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P R E F A C E .

A SMALL paper manuscript volume was lately put into my hands by Dr. G. H. Kingsley, who found it while turning over the interesting papers connected with the manor of Brome, in the muniment-room attached to the land-agent's office of that place. The owners, Sir E. and Lady Caroline Kerrison, having kindly given free permission to make what use I pleased of the manuscript, I printed two of the pieces, with a short account of the volume, and a few extracts, in Mr. Walter Rye's *Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany*, vol. iii., and in two German periodicals, *Anglia*, 1884, and *Englische Studien*, 1885. Lady Caroline now wishing to put the whole of the little book into print, I willingly undertook, at her request, to see it through the press, and to add some explanatory notes.

Brome Hall and Brome Manor are in Suffolk; there is, however, no mention of Brome in the volume; the local entries chiefly relate to Stuston (or Sturston), a neighbouring Suffolk village, and to Scole, which lies in Norfolk, the shire boundary passing along the river Waveney and between these parishes. Brome Hall was bought by the grandfather of the present owner, Sir Edward Kerrison, Bart., from the Cornwallis family, in whose possession it had

been since early in the fifteenth century. This book, which chiefly concerns Stuston, probably came into the Brome muniment-room in consequence of the united ownership in four neighbouring manors, of which Brome finally became the more prominent.¹ Robert Melton of the accounts was a Stuston man: Mistress Froxmer was a daughter of the Cornwallis family, and Melton, as shown hereafter, was probably steward of the Cornwallis property and the adviser of the family. He wanted to put down his notes of manorial dues and other matters relating to Stuston leet and court baron law, and finding this volume only half filled with poetry, used it for his purpose.

The book is paper, of eighty-one leaves, eight inches long by five-and-a-half wide, with a much-worn parchment cover and flap, stitched to the quires with a piece of cowhide at the back. The contents are of three classes: (1) poems, chiefly of a religious character, for which the volume was apparently originally intended, written in a neat hand of the second half of the fifteenth century, occupy about half the pages; (2) documents of territorial law entered for domestic use on the manor, partly in the same hand, partly in one somewhat later; and (3) a few private accounts on the blank leaves between, which have been utilized for this purpose. The earliest of these accounts is dated from 15th to 19th Henry VII., the latest 23rd Henry VII.

The first three leaves are filled with short pieces or fragments, a prelude to the longer religious poems. The first fac-simile represents the back of the first leaf, containing the curious old puzzles printed on pp. 12, 13. The second fac-simile is of the page which concludes the first of the longer poems, *Epotys*, a curious religious catechism or dialogue between the Emperor Adrian and Christ under

¹ Before 1606 John Cornwallis possessed the manors of Brome, Stuston, Okeley, and Thranston (see p. 6).

the form of a child. Hence the appropriate design of some of the sacred signs, among which it is unusual to find the heart introduced. This poem has never before, I believe, been printed in England. The most interesting of the poems is the play of *Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac*, which differs from others yet known. There is nothing to indicate, unfortunately, whether the play was performed in the splendid old manor-hall at Brome, or, may be, in the neighbouring town of Diss, where the two gilds of St. Nicholas and Corpus Christi may possibly one or both have undertaken to set it forth (for friendly links between Stuston and Diss see after, pp. 126, 127). Imagination has room to speculate alike on the place and the actual actors in the performance, who probably did not differ greatly in their acquirements from those of contemporary plays in other parts of England, such as Coventry, Chester, and York. A single play, requiring but a small body of players, might be more easily set forth in the rural towns of the country-side of East Anglia, than the large collections, which required the combined efforts of the craftsmen in the greater midland cities. It is, however, a fact that this is the first specimen of a mediæval religious play from this part of England. Of the three other long pieces, *Fifteen Signs of Doom*, *Owain Miles*, and *St. Margaret*, the second is most worthy of attention, as a good copy of a somewhat rare version. After the *Carol*, which ends these religious pieces, seemed the fitting place to put the directions for *Prayers* and for a *Trental*, which are found in the MS. before and after it, though in a different and later hand, apparently that of Robert Melton.

Of the second class, the articles of a Court Leet and Court Baron are well known: I do not think these comprise any special local customs. The copies of deeds and grants, though perhaps connected with names or places in the neighbourhood, have been entered as forms or models;