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978-1-108-07725-5 - Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets: Volume 2

Edited by Thomas Percy

Excerpt

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ANCIENT
SONGS AND BALLADS,
&c.

SERIES THE SECOND.
BOOK I.

I.

RICHARD OF ALMAIGNE,

“ *A ballad made by one of the adherents to Simon de
Montfort, earl of Leicester, soon after the battle of Lewes,
which was fought May 14, 1264,*”

—affords a curious specimen of ancient Satire, and shews
that the liberty, assumed by the good people of this realm, of
VOL. II. B abusing

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abusing their kings and princes at pleasure, is a privilege of very long standing.

To render this antique libel intelligible, the Reader is to understand that just before the battle of Lewes which proved so fatal to the interests of Henry III, the barons had offered his brother Richard King of the Romans 30,000l, to procure a peace upon such terms, as would have divested Henry of all his regal power, and therefore the treaty proved abortive.—The consequences of that battle are well known: the king, prince Edward his son, his brother Richard, and many of his friends fell into the hands of their enemies: while two great barons of the king's party John earl of Warren, and Hugh Bigot the king's Justiciary had been glad to escape into France.

In the 1st stanza the aforesaid sum of THIRTY THOUSAND pounds is alluded to, but with the usual misrepresentation of party malevolence, is asserted to have been the exorbitant demand of the king's brother.

With regard to the 2d st. the Reader is to note that Richard, along with the earldom of Cornwall, had the honours of WALINGFORD and Eyre confirmed to him on his marriage with Sanchia daughter of the Count of Provence, in 1243.—WINDSOR castle was the chief fortress belonging to the king, and had been garrisoned by foreigners: a circumstance, which furnishes out the burthen of each stanza.

The 3d st. very humorously alludes to some little fact, which history hath not condescended to record. Earl Richard possessed some large WATER-MILLS near Ifteworth, which had been plundered and burnt by the Londoners: in these perhaps by way of defence he had lodged a party of soldiers.

The 4th st. is of obvious interpretation: Richard, who had been elected king of the Romans in 1256, and had afterwards gone over to take possession of his dignity, was in the year 1259 about to return into England, when the barons raised a popular clamour, that he was bringing with him foreigners to over-run the kingdom: upon which he was forced

AND BALLADS. 3

forced to dismiss almost all his followers, otherwise the barons would have opposed his landing.

In the 5th st. the writer regrets the escape of the Earl of Warren, and in the 6th, and 7th sts. insinuates that if he and Sir Hugh Bigod once fell into the hands of their adversaries, they should never more return home. A circumstance, which fixes the date of this ballad; for in the year 1265 both these noblemen landed in South Wales, and the royal party soon after gained the ascendant. See Holingshed, Rapin, &c.

The following is copied from a very ancient MS. in the British Museum. [Harl. MSS. 2253. f. 23.] This MS. is judged, from the peculiarities of the writing, to be not later than the time of Richard II; th being every where expressed by the character þ; the y is pointed after the Saxon manner; and the i hath an oblique stroke over it.

Prefixed to this ancient libel on government is a small design, which the engraver intended should correspond with the subject. On the one side a Satyr, (emblem of Petulance and Ridicule) is trampling on the ensigns of Royalty; on the other Faction under the masque of Liberty is exciting Ignorance and Popular Rage to deface the Royal Image; which stands on a pedestal inscribed MAGNA CHARTA, to denote that the rights of the king, as well as those of the people, are founded on the laws; and that to attack one, is in effect to demolish both.

SITTETH alle stille, ant herkneth to me ;
The kyng of Alemaigne, bi mi leaute,
Thritti thouſent pound aſkede he
For te make the pees in the countre,
Ant ſo he dude more. 5
Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen ſhalt thou never more.
B 2 Richard
Ver. 2. kyn. MS,

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A N D B A L L A D S. 5

Sire Simond de Mountfort hath fuore bi ys chȳn,
Hevede he nou here the erl of Waryn,
Shuld he never more come to is yn,
Ne with sheld, ne with spere, ne with other gȳn, 35
To help of Wyndefore
Richard, thah thou be ever &c.

Sire Simond de Montfort hath fuore bi ys ‘fot,’
Hevede he nou here Sire Hue de Bigot:
Al he shulde grante here twelfmoneth scot, 40
Shulde he never more with his sot pot
To helpe Wyndefore.
Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.

Ver. 38. top. or cop.
Ver. 40. g'te here. *MS.* i. e, grant their, *Vid. Gloss.*

* * *The SERIES OF POEMS given in this volume will
show the gradual changes of the ENGLISH Language thro'
a succession of FIVE HUNDRED years. This and the fore-
going article may be considered as specimens of it in its most
early state, almost as soon as it ceased to be SAXON. In-
deed the annals of this kingdom are written in the Saxon
language almost down to the end of K. Stephen's reign :
for so far reaches the SAXON CHRONICLE : within little
more than a century of the date of this poem.*

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II.

ON THE DEATH OF K. EDWARD
THE FIRST.

We have here an early attempt at Elegy. EDWARD I. died July 7, 1307, in the 35th year of his reign, and 69th of his age. This poem appears to have been composed soon after his death. According to the modes of thinking peculiar to those times, the writer dwells more upon his devotion, than his skill in government, and pays less attention to the martial and political abilities of this great monarch, in which he had no equal, than to some little weaknesses of superstition, which he had in common with all his contemporaries. The king had in the decline of life vowed an expedition to the holy land, but finding his end approach, he dedicated the sum of 32,000l. to the maintenance of a large body of knights (140 say historians, 80 says our poet,) who were to carry his heart with them into Palestine. This dying command of the king was never performed. Our poet, with the honest prejudices of an Englishman, attributes this failure to the advice of the king of France, whose daughter Isabel our young monarch immediately married. But the truth is, Edward and his destructive favourite Piers Gaveston spent the money upon their pleasures.—To do the greater honour to the memory of his hero, our poet puts his elege in the mouth of the POPE; with the same poetic licence, as a more modern bard would have introduced Britannia, or the Genius of Europe pouring forth his praises.

This antique Elegy is extracted from the same MS volume, as the preceding article; is found with the same peculiarities of writing and orthography; and tho' written at near the distance of half a century contains little or no
varia-

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A N D B A L L A D S. 7

variation of idiom: whereas the next following poem by Chaucer, which was probably written not more than 50 or 60 years after this, exhibits almost a new language. This seems to countenance the opinion of some antiquaries that this great poet made considerable innovations in his mother tongue, and introduced many terms, and new modes of speech from other languages.

A LLE, that beoth of huerte trewe,
 A flounde herkneth to my song
 Of duel, that Deth hath diht us newe,
 That maketh me fyke, ant forewe among;
 Of a knyht, that wes so strong, 5
 Of wham God hath don ys wille;
 Me-thuncheth that deth hath don us wrong,
 That he so fone shall ligge stille.

 Al Englond ahte for te knowe
 Of wham that song is, that y syng; 10
 Of Edward kyng, that lith so lowe,
 Zent al this world is nome con springe;
 Trewest mon of alle thinge,
 Ant in werre war ant wys,
 For him we ahte oure honden wrynge, 15
 Of Cristendome he ber the prys.

 Byfore that oure kyng wes ded,
 He spek afe mon that wes in care,
 “ Clerkes, knyhtes, barons, he sayde,
 “ Y charge ou by oure sware, 20
 B 4 “ That

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“ That ye to Engelonde be trewe.
 “ Y deze, y ne may lyven na more ;
 “ Helpeth mi sone, ant crouneth him newe,
 “ For he is nest to buen y-core.

“ Ich biqueth myn herte aryht, 25
 “ That hit be write at mi devys,
 “ Over the see that Hue * be diht,
 “ With fourscore knyhtes al of prys,
 “ In werre that buen war ant wys,
 “ Azein the hethene for te fyhte, 30
 “ To wynne the croiz that lowe lys,
 “ Myself ycholde zef that y myhte.”

Kyng of Fraunce, thou hevedest ‘finne,’
 That thou the counsail woldest fonde,
 To latte the wille of ‘Edward kyng’ 35
 To wende to the holy londe :
 That oure kyng hede take on honde
 All Engeland to zeme ant wyffe,
 To wenden in to the holy londe
 To wynnyn us heveriche blisse. 40

The messager to the pope com,
 And seyde that oure kyng wes ded :
 Ys oune hond the lettre he nom,
 Ywis his herte wes ful gret :

The

* *This is probably the name of some person, who was to preside over his business. Ver. 33. finne. MS. Ver. 35. kyng Edward. MS. Ver. 43. ys is probably a contraction of in hys or yn his.*

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A N D B A L L A D S.	9
The Pope him self the lettre redde,	45
Ant spec a word of gret honour.	
“ Alas ! he seid, is Edward ded ?	
“ Of Cristendome he ber the flour.”	
The Pope to is chaumbre wende,	
For dol ne mihte he speke na more ;	50
Ant after cardinals he fende,	
That mucche couthen of Cristes lore,	
Bothe the lasse, ant eke the more,	
Bed hem bothe rede ant synge :	
Gret deol me myhte se thore,	55
Mony mon is honde wrynge.	
The Pope of Peyters stod at is masse	
With ful gret solempnetè,	
Ther me con the foule bleffe :	
“ Kyng Edward honoured thou be :	60
“ God love thi fone come after the,	
“ Bringe to ende that thou hast bygonne,	
“ The holy crois y-mad of tre,	
“ So fain thou woldest hit hav y-wonne.	
“ Jerusalem, thou hast i-lore	65
“ The flour of al chivalrie	
“ Now kyng Edward liveth na more :	
“ Alas ! that he zet shulde deye !	
z	“ He

Ver. 55. Me, i. e. M. n. so in Robert of Gloucestre passion.

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10 A N C I E N T S O N G S

“ He wolde ha rered up ful heyze
 “ Oure banners, that bueth broht to grounde ;
 “ Wel! longe we mowe clepe and crie 70
 “ Er we a fuch kyng han y-founde.”

Nou is Edward of Carnarvan
 King of Engeland al aplyht,
 God lete him ner be worfe man
 Then is fader, ne lasse of myht, 75
 To holden is pore men to ryht,
 And understonde good counfail,
 Al Engelong for to wyffe ant dyht ;
 Of gode knyhtes darh him nout fail.

Thah mi tonge were mad of stel, 80
 Ant min herte yzote of bras,
 The godnes myht y never telle,
 That with kyng Edward was :
 Kyng, as thou art cleped conquerour,
 In uch bataille thou hadest prys ; 85
 God bringe thi soule to the honour,
 That ever wes, ant ever ys.*

* Here follow in the original three lines more, which, as evidently spurious, we chuse to throw to the bottom of the Page, viz.

That lasteth ay withouten ende,
 Bidde we God, ant oure Ledy to thilke blisse
 Jefus us sende. Amen,

III. AN