



The Dream of the Rood : an Old English Poem Attributed to Cynewulf

Albert S. Cook

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INTRODUCTION

MANUSCRIPT.

THE poem is contained in the Vercelli Book, or Codex Vercellensis, a manuscript volume of the early part of the eleventh century, discovered by Dr. Friedrich Blume in 1822 in the chapter library of the cathedral of Vercelli, where it still remains. It consists of 135 leaves, containing, besides a number of homilies and the life of St. Guthlac in prose, the following poems: Andreas, Fates of the Apostles, Address of the Soul to the Body, Falsehood of Men, Dream of the Rood, Elene.

How the manuscript reached Vercelli is a question upon which two leading hypotheses have been held. According to one, it would have been taken from England / to Italy by Cardinal Guala-Bicchieri, who was Papal Legate in England from 1216 to 1218, who founded the monastery church of St. Andrew at Vercelli after his return from England, had it erected by an Englishman in the Early English style, and bestowed upon it relics of English saints. Moreover, he was the possessor of a library remarkable for that time, which he bequeathed to his monastery, and which contained a copy of the Bible in English handwriting. Finally, the monastery school, which in 1228 became a university, was attended by Englishmen, and, among others, by Adam de Marisco, the first teacher in the school which the Franciscans set up in Oxford; this must have been before 1226, the year of St. Francis's death, since it is expressly

stated that it was he who sent Adam, in company with St. Anthony of Padua, to the Vercelli school. As it is well known that Guala levied large sums upon the clergy before leaving England, there would be nothing surprising in his receiving books as well—perhaps, since he was so zealous a collector, as an equivalent for certain sums of money. Altogether, the considerations here presented would seem to render it probable that the Vercelli Book reached that city through Guala's agency. ⁱ For a fuller presentation of this theory, see my *Cardinal ' Guala and the Vercelli Book*, Library Bulletin No. 10 of the University of California, 1888.

The other hypothesis is that of Wiilker. He was told in Vercelli that at a comparatively early period there was in that city a hospice for Anglo-Saxon pilgrims on their way to and from Rome. There may, he concludes, have been a small library of devotional books attached to the hospice, and from this our manuscript may have passed into the possession of the cathedral library (*Grund-riss der Geschichte der Angelsächsischen Litteratur*, p. 237; *Codex Vercellensis*, p. vi). I can only say that to me the probability of this hypothesis seems of the slenderest.

The poems of this collection were all published for the first time by Thorpe, probably from a transcript by Blume, as Appendix B to a Report on Eymer's Foedera. intended to have been made to the Commissioners on Public Records by Charles Purton Cooper, their secretary. According to Kemble, writing in 1843 (Preface

to The Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis), ' 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.' The same writer says: ' 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.' At last, in 1869, Lord Romilly, as Master of the Rolls, ordered the Appendixes, which had been in store since 1837, to be distributed. The editions of the poems by Kemble (1843, 1856), and of the Andreas and Elene by Grimm (1840), were based upon the text published by Thorpe.

For further details concerning the manuscript, see Wiilker, Grundriss, pp. 237-43, and the remarks prefixed to his photographic facsimile of the poetical parts, under the title Codex Vercellensis (Leipzig, 1894)....

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