

REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

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AT ITS TWENTY-SIXTH GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 14, 1866.

ALSO

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MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

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PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE MEETINGS

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No. XV

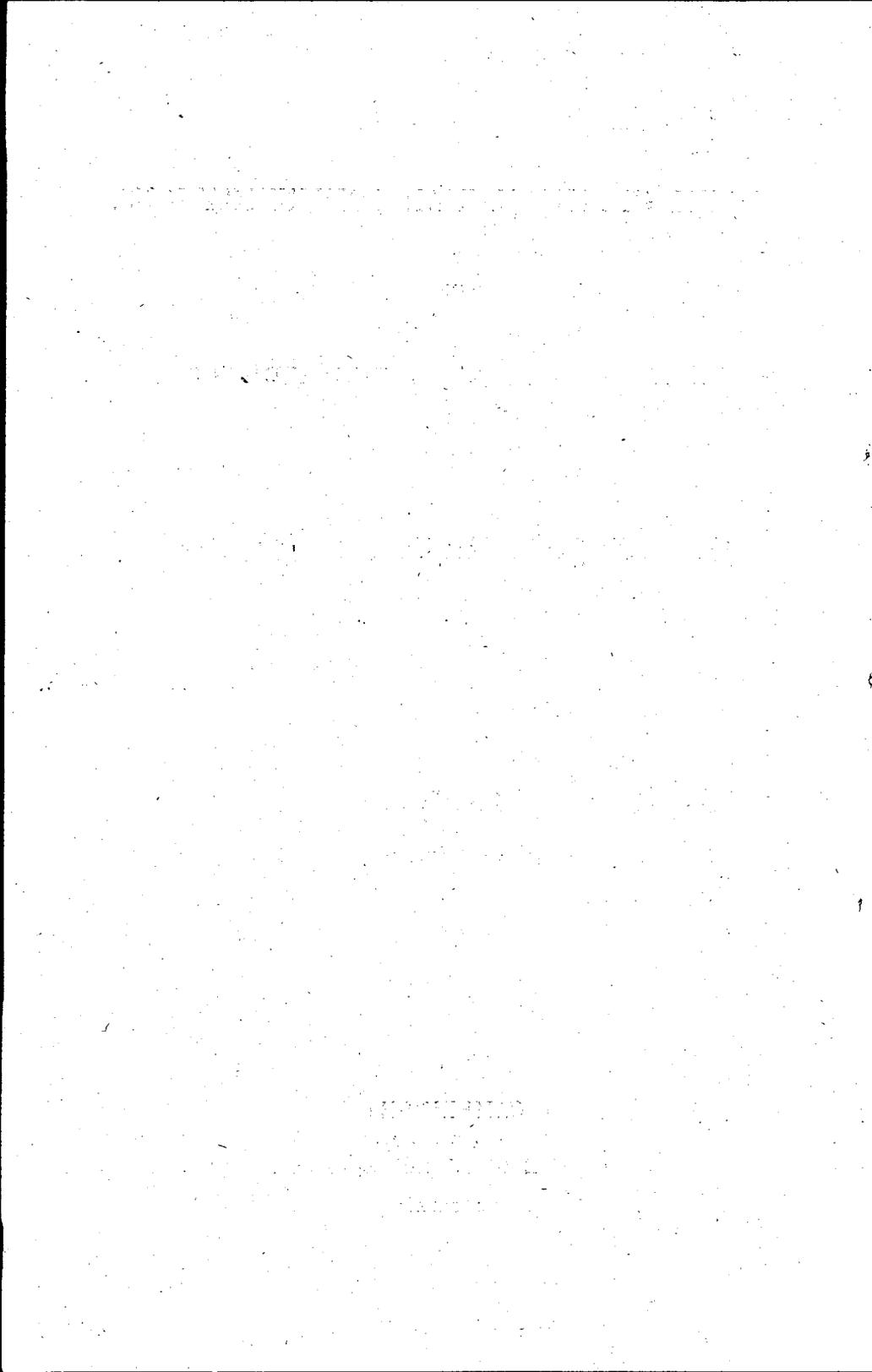
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M.DCCLXVI.



VII. ON TWO HITHERTO UNKNOWN POEMS BY JOHN BARBOUR, Author of the *Brus*. Communicated by HENRY BRADSHAW.

[Read 30 April 1866.]

THE remains of early Scotch literature are so scanty, that I am glad of an opportunity to bring before the notice of our Society two genuine pieces of antiquity, two poems which I have no hesitation in assigning to Master John Barbour Archdeacon of Aberdeen, the author of the *Brus*, which have been lying unclaimed in our University for a hundred and fifty years, and which it has been my good fortune to disinter within the last three weeks. As hardly anything of Scotch literature remains to us earlier than the middle of the fifteenth century, except the *Brus* by Barbour, who died in 1395, Wyntown's Chronicle called the *Orygynale* (about 1420), and the poems of King James the First, who died in 1437; it is a satisfaction to have recovered these two poems of Barbour's, the *Siege of Troy* and the *Lives of Saints*. Of the *Troy-book* only two fragments are forthcoming, comprising about 2200 lines; but the *Lives of Saints* seem to extend to about 40000 lines.

It was on the 11th of this month that I took down from the shelf in the University Library a copy of Lydgate's *Troy-book*. I only knew that it was a Scotch manuscript formerly in the Duke of Lauderdale's collection, which was sold by auction in London in 1692, and that it had been bought with several others

from the same library by Bishop Moore, and transferred with the rest of his books to the University by the munificence of King George in 1715. My immediate object was to see how far Lydgate's southern English had been modified in the process of transcription by a Scotch scribe. The original volume was mutilated both at beginning and end, and the missing parts had been supplied in writing, from the printed edition of 1555, by one Sir James Murray of Tibbermure, who owned the book in 1612. However, on turning over a few leaves near the end of the original scribe's work, I was struck with a line in larger handwriting (that used throughout the volume for rubrics), running as follows:

Her endis the monk and begynnys barbour;

and on turning back, I found a similar rubric near the beginning:

Her endis barbour and begynnys the monk.

It was further apparent that the lines before this note at the beginning, as far as they were preserved (about 600), and after the note at the end (about 1500 or 1600), were not Lydgate couplets of verses of five accents, but Romance couplets of verses of four accents. A few lines were enough to show me that the language was anything but southern English; and I had little doubt that I had stumbled upon some fragments of a large work by the earliest known Scotch poet, of which I did not recollect to have seen any notice. After spending some hours in searching through the various works on Scotch literary history which were to be found in the Library, I wrote to Mr Cosmo Innes to ask for some information about the book, being very slow to believe that it was possible for me to discover anything in such an accessible library as ours, which had escaped the keen and life-long searches of such literary antiquaries as Scotland now possesses. Warton mentions another translation of Guido de Colonna's work, besides Lydgate's, as existing at Oxford among the Laud MSS.; and fortunately that part of the story which he quotes from the

Oxford MS., the account of the arrival of Jason and Hercules at Colchos, also exists in the earlier of the fragments in our *Troy-book*; but though Lydgate's poem, the anonymous one at Oxford, and Barbour's are all translated from the same Latin text, the *Histora Trojana* of Guido de Colonna, they are all clearly different versions.

It is difficult to understand how these fragments come to occupy the place which they hold in the present MS. The only explanation I can suggest is that the Scotch scribe, wishing to make a copy of Lydgate's Story of the Destruction of Troy, was only able to procure for his purpose a copy mutilated at beginning and end; and that, in transcribing, he supplemented his original by taking the missing portions of the story from the antiquated (and in his eyes less refined) translation made by his own countryman in the previous century. King James seems to have carried back with him into Scotland the knowledge of the English poetry of his day. There is ample evidence of the popularity of Chaucer in Scotland in the latter half of the fifteenth century; several of his smaller poems are only known to us from Scotch copies of them; and one indeed is among the earliest productions of the Edinburgh press. It need not then be matter of surprise to us if the great popularity of Lydgate in England had spread his fame across the border. I still thought that anonymous copies of Barbour's *Siege of Troy* might have been preserved either entire or, as here, combined with Lydgate's work, and suggested this to my friends in Scotland; but at present all that I can say is that they know of no poem of the kind lying unclaimed. While, however, so many libraries remain unexplored, it is very probable that a more complete copy may yet be discovered*.

It then occurred to me that our Society might very well print these two fragments of the *Troy-book*, and that, as there were but very few early Scotch manuscripts in the library, a brief description of these might be prefixed to the fragments when printed.

* See note at the end of this paper.

The Latin Gospels of Deer, with the Gaelic charters at the beginning (the only Scottish Gaelic charters in existence), are already in the hands of Mr Joseph Robertson for publication, and may soon be expected; Stewart's Metrical Chronicle, from the Lauderdale Library, has been edited for the Master of the Rolls. The volumes containing the Scottish laws, and the Romance of Lancelot, &c., are already well-known; the volume of Lydgate had just yielded the two fragments of Barbour's poem, which I have noticed; and almost the only other Scotch manuscript was an anonymous collection of *Lives of Saints*, which I had long known by sight, and which I have shown to all my Edinburgh friends in the hope of their recognising it as a well-known work, even if not by a known author. Having never obtained any satisfaction on the subject, I set to work to look carefully through it. It must have some definite place in its own class of literature; and for the last few years the necessity has become more and more apparent to me of trying to assign not merely to every composition but to every volume, whether written or printed, its definite place (however roughly defined) in our early literature. It is only by some systematic method of proceeding that we can ever hope to clear away the mass of confusion which exists in our knowledge of our national literature, especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

But to give some little account of this volume of *Lives of Saints*: it consists of nearly 400 leaves, with about 50 lines on a page, so that the series of lives must extend to nearly forty thousand lines. The writing seems to be of the latter half of the fifteenth century, and the binding must be contemporary, one of the few specimens of early binding, which remain in the library. One of the quires is guarded by a slip of parchment containing part of a document beginning: "Jacobus dei gratia rex Scottorum.....," enough to show where the book was bound. The unnamed author begins his prologue by saying that, as Cato and the author of the *Rose* justly say that idleness is the root of all evil,

“Yarfore sene I ma not wirk
 “As mynistre of haly kirke
 “For gret eld and febilnes,”

he employs himself in translating the lives of many of the saints. After the lives of the Apostles and several others, he closes the first portion of the work with the lives of Saint Nicholas (who, Mr Innes reminds me, is the patron saint of the City of Aberdeen), and Saint Morice or Macharius, the patron saint of the Church of the same place. At the beginning of his life of Saint Morice, he says:

“Bot before vthir I wald fayne
 “And I had cunnyng set my mayne
 “Something to say of saint Moryse
 “Yat in his tyme was ware and wis
 “And in the erd of sic renown
 “And als in hewine sa hye patron
 “Of Abirden in ye cite.”

* * *

There are fifty lives in all, and the second portion contains twenty-three of these; among them that of Saint Ninian the Apostle of Galloway. Unfortunately two leaves are wanting at the end of this life; but enough remains to afford us material help in tracing out the author. After the translation of the Latin legend, the writer gives several narratives in illustration. The first of these he begins thus:

“Of saint Niniane zet I zu tel
 “A ferly yat *in my time* befel
 “In Galoway til a nobil knycht
 “Yat Sir Fargus Magdonel * hycht.
 “And hardy was of hart and hand
 “And had the leding of the land
 “In worshiye and slachtyr bath
 “One Inglis men to do skath.”

* * *

* Query so, or Magdouel?

This ends thus:

“ For thi honour be til hewynis kyng
 “ And to saint Niniane honouryng
 “ En al tyme of lyfand men.
 “ Yarto say we al Amen.
 “ Yis wes done but lessing
 “ *Quhen Sir Davi bruys wes king.*”

After several further narratives, he begins another (now defective at the end) thus:

“ A lytil tale zit herd I tel
 “ Yat *in to my tyme* befel
 “ Of a gudman in Murrefe borne
 “ In Elgyne and his kynd beforne
 “ And callit wes a faithful man
 “ With al yame yat him knewe yan
 “ And yis mare trastely I say
 “ For I kend hyme weile mony day
 “ John Balormy wes his name
 “ A man of ful gud fame.”

* * *

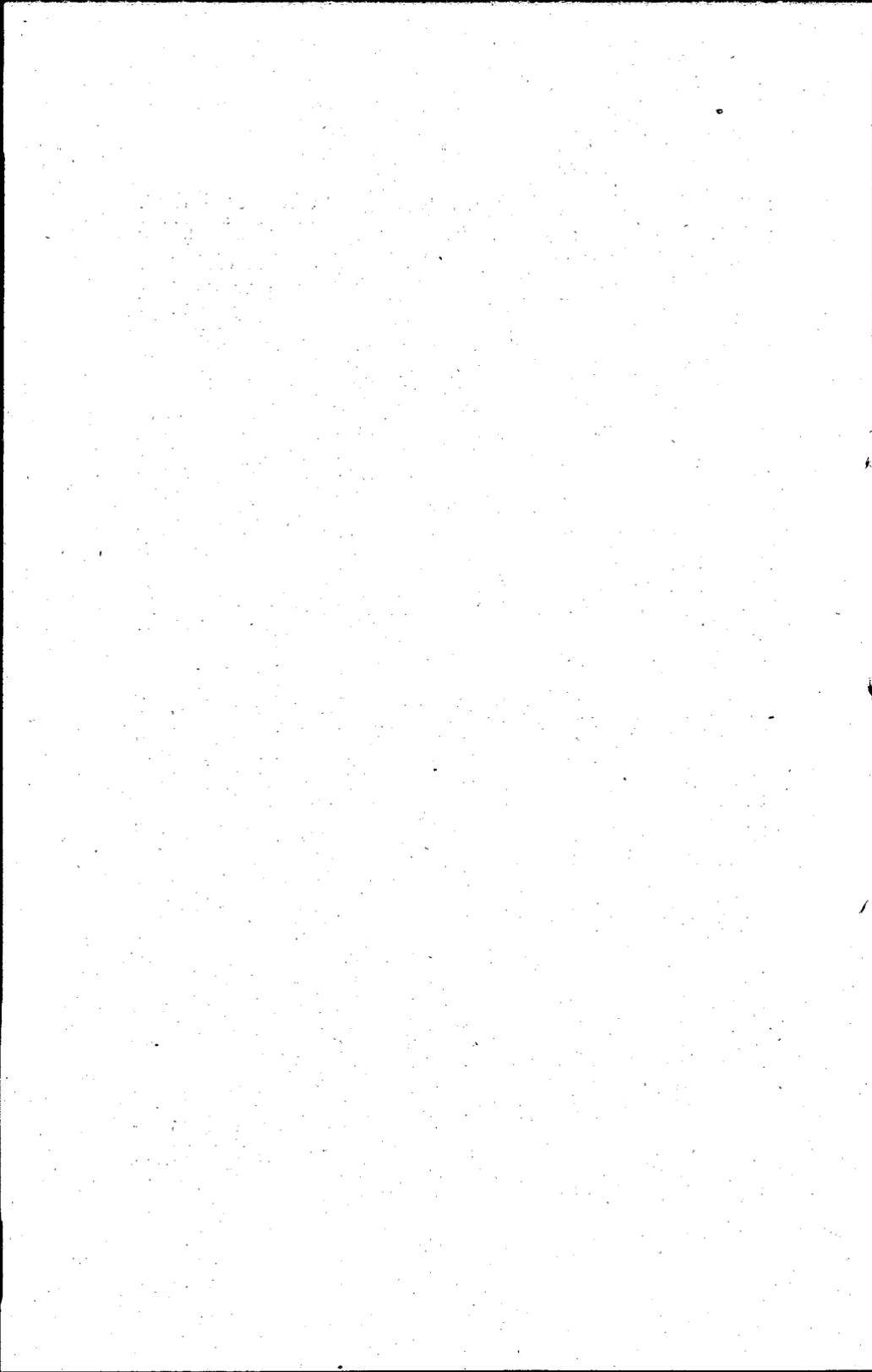
I find one Thomas Balhormy witness to a charter early in the fifteenth century, in the *Registrum Moraviense*, and other persons of the name appear in that part of the country. After Saint Ninian follow other saints, and the book closes with a life of Saint Katherine.

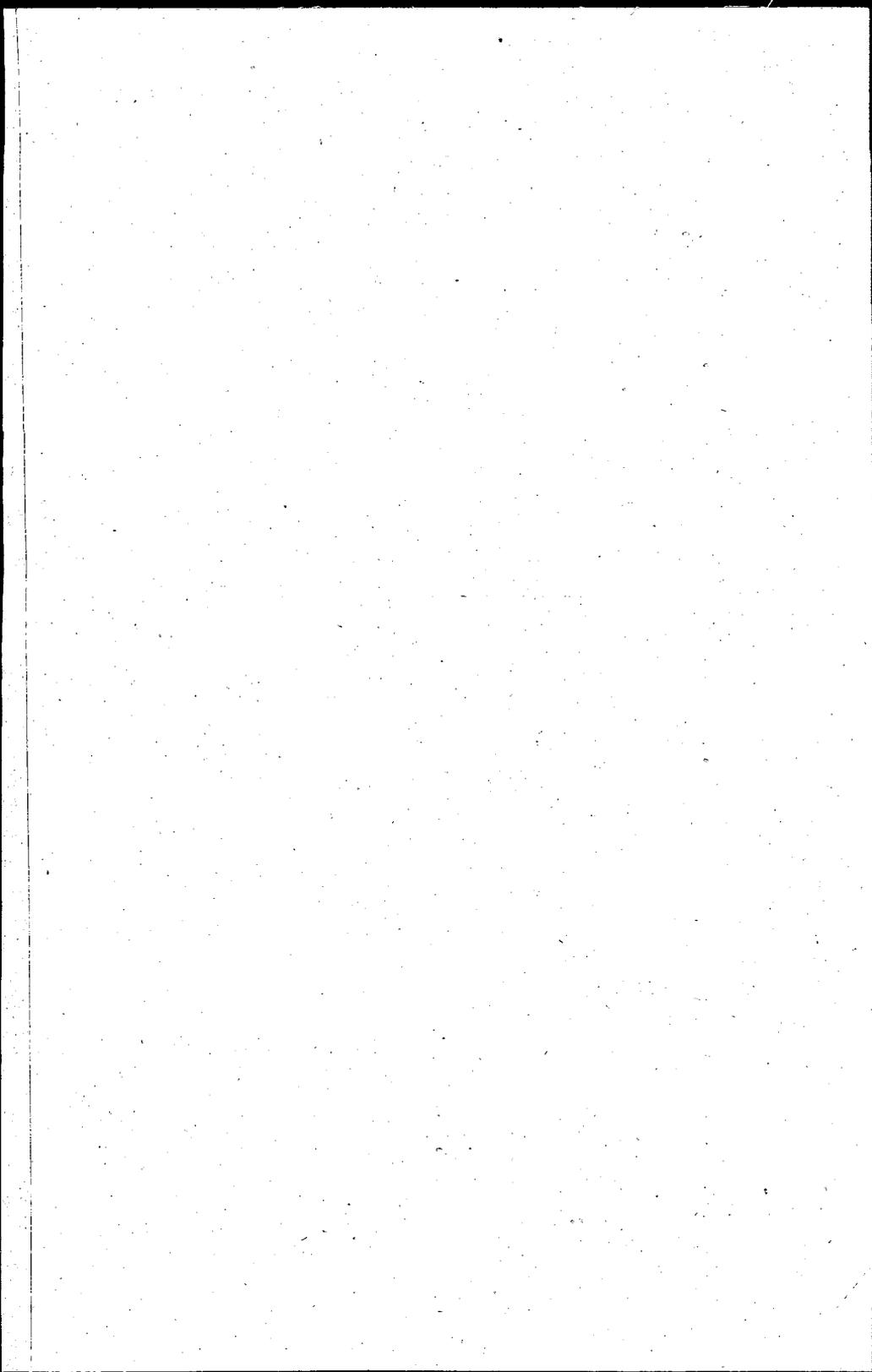
From the brief extract of these few passages you will see that the writer was an ecclesiastic, past work from old age, that he feels specially bound to sing the praises of Saint Machar, the patron of Aberdeen, that the story of the Galloway Knight happened in the author's own time, and during the reign of King David Bruce, who died in 1370; and, further, after relating stories of events which happened in Galloway, he mentions one of an Elgin man, an old friend of his own, as one which he can tell with more confidence of its truth than he can assert of the Galloway stories.

When we consider that John Barbour the Archdeacon of Aberdeen, was engaged from 1375 onwards in writing the *Brus*,

and that he lived till 1395, and apparently at Aberdeen, I think there can hardly be a doubt that this poem should also be added to the meagre list of the productions of the father of Scotch poetry. Scotchmen have grieved over the loss of Barbour's poem on the Genealogy of the Stewarts, which is so often referred to by Wyntown, in his Chronicle; and therefore, though not of course of equal interest with the author's peculiarly national poems, they will no doubt be glad to have restored to them two such undoubted pieces as even from a philological point of view must be of considerable value and interest. To myself it is a peculiar satisfaction to think that such treasures as the Gospels of Deer and these two poems have been found in our own University Library; as it shows that however long and however shamefully it has been neglected, there is yet sufficient lying undiscovered to lead the keepers of the library to turn their attention to the books committed to their charge.

P. S. My conjecture has been verified to some extent. I have since had the good fortune to discover in the Douce Collection, a copy which furnishes about 1200 additional lines towards the close of the poem. Being at Oxford for some weeks this summer, I was enabled, thanks to the unequalled kindness of Mr Coxe, to explore at my leisure whole departments of the Bodleian Library. I was searching for printed books; but seeing a MS. of Lydgate's *Troy-book* in an adjoining book-case, I was tempted to take it down, although I knew that all the Bodleian Lydgates had been just recently examined with great care for the committee of the Early English Text Society. It is a Scotch MS. and was probably copied from the Cambridge MS. before ours was so much mutilated. The beginning is Lydgate, the volume closes with the last few lines of Lydgate's poem, and the rubrics about Barbour and the Monk are omitted; so that it is not to be wondered at that even Mr Douce himself should have overlooked it, to say nothing of more recent investigators.





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