

A CURIOUS FIND AT BARLOW WOODSEATS HALL.

By JOHN H. HARVEY.

THE fine old stone mansion of Barlow Woodseats, five miles north-west of Chesterfield, Derbyshire, was damaged by enemy action in April, 1941, and considerable repairs had to be undertaken to render it watertight and fit for habitation. On the 17th of December, 1941, during work on the roof, one of the craftsmen employed, George Beresford junior, discovered behind the wall-plate at the top of the east wall a sheet of paper which turned out to be two leaves of a small book, printed in Dutch in black letter, and having on one page four lines of music in the old diamond-shaped notation, as a setting for a short poem of three verses.

The condition of the wall-top at this point appeared to be original, and the leaves had probably been left there at the time of the building of the house in the early 17th century; Barlow Woodseats was built by Arthur Mower who died in 1652.

The fragment consists of the inside pair of leaves from a gathering, and the fourth of the pages is numbered "46," the other numbers being lost. The size of each page is about $6\frac{1}{4}$ by 4 inches, and the width of type 3 inches. On examination it was noticed that the text was divided into sections headed "j. Rijm," and "ij. Prose." a most unusual arrangement, which suggested the alternate chapters of Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*; on comparison with Chaucer's translation which happened to be available, it was clear that the fragment was from a copy of Boethius, and this was proved by reference to

a Dutch dictionary, which showed that the page headings gave the Dutch translation "Vertroosting der Wysheid." The fragment contains parts of Prose I and Prose II, and the whole of Metre I, from the second Book.

Chaucer translates the "metres" by prose, but the Dutch translator has not only cast the original into rhyming verse, but has supplied a musical setting, the plain-song hymn tune still used as a setting of the Epiphany Vesper Hymn "Hostes Herodes impii." In the 16th century Boethius was still an extremely popular author, and many translations were made into different languages all through the Middle Ages and later, for example by Villegas into Spanish as late as 1665. English translators include King Alfred, Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth, but it is difficult to account for the presence of a Dutch version in Derbyshire, though there were Dutch communities in London, Colchester and the Fens. Possibly some Dutch craftsman was engaged on the building, though it does not appear to possess any features of a Dutch type. It seems more likely that the book fell into the hands of an English workman unable to read it, and that it was torn up as scrap paper, which would account for the accidental preservation of this detached sheet.

Owing to the kind exertions of Mr. G. H. Heath-Gracie, B.Mus., F.R.C.O., it is possible to state that the fragment belongs to an edition of 1616; Mr. Heath-Gracie has carefully collated the fragment with a copy in the British Museum (Press-Mark 8409, a. 18), and it proves to be identical. The full title is "Boetius vande Vertroosting der wysheyd: uyt 't Latyn op nieus vertaalt" (by Derek Coornhert, with music adapted to all portions in verse by Christoffel.) voor Pieter Iacobus Paets, Amsterdam, 1616. (212 pp.). The original edition of this version was published by Plantyn: Leyden 1585 (B.M. copy, 8404. c. 13), and a further edition appeared as late as 1722.

Chaucer's version of Metre I. may be of interest for comparison with the Dutch, and is here appended (ed. W. W. Skeat, Oxford Standard Authors, p. 142).

"Metre I. *Hec cum superba uerterit uices dextra.* Whan Fortune with a proud right hand hath torned hir chaunginge stoundes, she fareth lyk the maneres of the boiling Eurype.—Glosa. *Eurype is an arm of the see that ebbeth and floweth; and som-tyme the streem is on o syde, and som-tyme on the other.*—Text. She, cruel Fortune, casteth adoun kinges that whylom weren y-drad; and she, deceivable, enhaunseth up the humble chere of him that is discomfited. Ne she neither hereth ne rekketh of wrecchede wepinges; and she is so hard that she laugheth and scorneth the wepinges of hem, the whiche she hath maked wepe with hir free wille. Thus she pleyeth, and thus she proeveth hir strengthes; and sheweth a greet wonder to alle hir servauntes, yif that a wight is seyn weleful, and overthrowe in an houre."

Thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. Botham of Barlow Woodseats Hall, who have preserved the fragment and permitted it to be photographed, and to Mr. Fred Wass, foreman in charge of the repairs, who supplied full information concerning the discovery; to the staff of Nottingham University College, who confirmed the original identification of the fragment; to Mr. Heath-Gracie, who has clarified the whole problem by attaching to the find a definite date; to Lady Jeans; to Dom Thomas Symons of Downside Abbey, and to Mr. S. J. Garton, who made a preliminary study of the music.