

## THE ASSUMPTION IN THE EARLY ENGLISH PULPIT

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THE Church's recent and solemn definition of the Assumption as an article of faith lends new interest to the testimonies we have for the traditional belief of the faithful in the resurrection and translation of the Blessed Virgin's body into heaven. A neglected witness to this tradition is the early English pulpit.<sup>1</sup> It is not generally realized how far the Assumption pervades our early literature. It is firmly established in the pulpit before the Norman Conquest, and in the following centuries reappears among the earliest records of the new vernacular. It passes from the pulpit to the pageants and dramatic cycles of the medieval stage. And it is a characteristic theme of the later lyric, both in the aureate verse of the courtly "makers" and among the songs of the people.<sup>2</sup>

The tradition, however, has longest roots in the literature emanating in various ways from the pulpit. As so often in the history of medieval literature, the pulpit is the most active force in the propagation and development of the theme, and, apart from the accidentals of literary form, in determining its typical features. A doctrine might achieve its definitive shape in the monastery, or schools, or the recesses of the liturgy, but it was from the pulpit that it reached the faithful generally. An adequate study of the medieval pulpit would include the mass of sermon material in Latin, intended either for direct use

<sup>1</sup> The discovery of the English pulpit dates from G. R. Owst's *Preaching in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1926), followed by his *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1933). Both works reveal how much this important subject has been neglected, and with what unhappy consequences in other fields of scholarship. Although Dr. Owst's researches have met with the recognition they deserve, the study is still in its infancy. The same is even truer of English Marian studies in general. As recently as 1928, J. Vriend, S. J. (*The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Medieval Drama of England* [Purmerend, 1928]) complained that "English monographs on the cult of Mary as recorded in Middle English are extremely rare, the list being practically exhausted with *Our Lady's Dowry* by T. E. Bridgett (1st Ed. 1875) and *Pietas Mariana Britannica* by Edmund Waterton (1879), the latter of which hardly touches on the literary side of the subject at all." Unfortunately little has since been done to remedy the deficiency.

<sup>2</sup> For further details see the bibliography.

in the Latin orations delivered before the learned audience of monastery, cathedral chapter, and university, or as a preacher's thesaurus, from which he might draw for his vernacular sermons. It would include also the considerable French literature of instruction and edification, composed in England after the Conquest, during the centuries when French was the language of the nobility and literate class. But even prescinding from sermons in Latin and French, we shall hear the Assumption proclaimed in the English tongue in nearly every century from the ninth to the fifteenth. The one exception is the eleventh, the century of the Conquest, when the records of our vernacular are so meagre that it is not surprising that there should be a brief silence. For the present we are confining our attention to this vernacular tradition. It must be remembered, however, that it is only part of the splendid picture of the English pulpit, which includes as well the Latin and the French tradition, from Bede to Bromyard, from Wace to Gower.<sup>3</sup>

Recent years have seen some discussion among theologians regarding the content of the universal belief in the Assumption. Most commonly the belief had been understood to include, besides the reception of Mary's soul into heaven, the fact of her death, the preservation of her body from corruption, and its resurrection and assumption into heaven in a glorified state. Some few have questioned whether Mary actually died,<sup>4</sup> and whether her body was reunited with her soul in

<sup>3</sup> It will be seen from these names that I have given the term, pulpit literature, a generous interpretation. St. Bede the Venerable (+ 735) in his *Liber retractionis in actus apostolorum*, c. 8 (*PL*, XCII, 1014 f.) was one of the first to criticize the expurgated edition of the apocryphal *Transitus Mariæ* by Pseudo-Melito, which will be the ultimate source of most of the incidental detail in the sermons we are about to consider. The *Summa Predicantium* of the English Dominican, John Bromyard (fl. 1390) was the standard work on pulpit method, not only for England but for Europe generally. The poet of the Conquest, Wace of Jersey (after 1171), in his *L'Etablissement de la fête de la conception Notre-Dame dite la fête aux Normands* may have supplied a source for the Southern Assumption. John Gower (1330?-1408) in his *Mirrouir de l'Omme* is a late witness, not only to the Assumption tradition in Anglo-Norman literature, but to the persistence of the French tongue as the normal medium of one of the leading English poets, as late as the age of Chaucer.

<sup>4</sup> The possibility that Mary did not die is discussed by St. Epiphanius (c. 315-403), *Adversus haereses*, III, 2, haer. 78 (*PG*, XLII, 738). In modern times her preservation from death has been defended, notably by M. Jugie, *La Mort et l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge* (Rome, 1944), at least as a probable opinion. Though St. Epiphanius is cited in the literature under examination and occasionally reasons are given why Mary should have died, the possibility of her having escaped death is not considered.

anticipation of the general resurrection.<sup>5</sup> In the pulpit literature that we are about to consider, the fact of Mary's death is not questioned; nor does anyone seem to have maintained that her body was preserved from corruption without being reunited to her soul. But there is some hesitation in at least a couple of instances as to whether Mary's body escaped the common lot of mankind in any way at all.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE ANGLO-SAXON TRADITION: NINTH AND TENTH CENTURY

##### THE WEST-SAXON MARTYROLOGY: NINTH CENTURY

The earliest specimen of the English Assumption tradition is the entry in the West-Saxon Martyrology for August 15th:

*August 15. Assumption of the Virgin Mary.*

On the fifteenth day of the month is the festival which is that of St. Mary: on this day she departed from the world to Christ, and now she shineth in the heavenly host among the crowd of holy women, as the sun shineth on this world. Angels rejoice there and archangels exult, and all the saints are glad with St. Mary. St. Mary was sixty-four years old when she went to Christ. St. Mary is the daughter-in-law of God the Father and the mother of God's Son and mother-in-law of the holy souls and the noble queen of the dwellers in heaven; she stands on the right side of the great Father and King.<sup>7</sup>

The Martyrology has the interest of being one of the earliest prose-works in the language, and dates back to the middle of the ninth century—Alfred's century. It is impossible, however, to judge from this brief notice whether the author has in mind the assumption of Mary's body as well as that of her soul.

##### THE BLICKLING HOMILIES: TENTH CENTURY

But there is no doubt about the opinion of the author of the earliest Assumption sermon in our literature. This is recorded in a manuscript

<sup>5</sup> About the sixth century there seems to have been doubt among some authors as to the resurrection, or reunion of body and soul, even granted that the body itself was preserved free from corruption. According to the apocryphal account of Pseudo-John, it was preserved incorrupt in paradise; according to Pseudo-Cyril, in the centre of the earth. There may be a hint—though it is certainly no more than a hint—of this tradition in the *Golden Legend*.

<sup>6</sup> *Vespasian Homilies*, No. XVI; *Cursor Mundi* II, 20789–98.

<sup>7</sup> *Old English Martyrology*, p. 147. In this and in subsequent quotations, wherever possible the editor's translation has been used. Where a translation is not required, the spelling and punctuation have been normalised.

once preserved at Blickling Hall, Norfolk.<sup>8</sup> It was written about the seventies of the tenth century—the century that saw the death of Alfred and the reign of Edgar, the first King of England.

The sermon itself is vigorous and severe, in keeping with the Anglo-Saxon temperament. The opening, compared with the later pulpit style, is abrupt:

Dearest men, hear now what is here related in these books concerning the holy virgin St. Mary—how it happened unto her at this time. She was watching, and praying day and night, after our Lord's ascension; then an angel of the Lord came to her and said, "Arise, Mary, and receive this palm-twigg which I have now brought thee; for assuredly, ere three days thou shalt be taken from thy body, and all the Lord's apostles shall be sent to bury thee."

The preacher then goes on to describe how Mary prepared for death. Unfortunately he aims at rhetorical effect at the expense of the logical sequence of events, and at times loses the thread of his narrative. At this point, for instance, Mary is at one moment ascending the hill called Olivet—for no apparent reason—and returning with great joy to wash her body for burial; at the next, the angel is still in her presence reassuring her: "Be not sorrowful, Mary." Presently the apostles appear, miraculously transported to her door. There follows a contest of humility between St. Peter and St. Paul, as to which of them shall pray to the Lord first, to make known why they have been assembled. Peter says to Paul: "Arise and pray first for thou art a pillar of light." But Paul replies: "All those around me are better than I am. And thou art a preceptor in the prayers of the apostles, and thou art full of the grace of the Lord." Then all the apostles rejoice on account of St. Paul's humility; and St. Peter himself, as he has "enjoined upon mankind," stretches forth his hands to God, and says: "Domine, Deus omnipotens qui sedes super cherubin etc." (Ps.79:2) There follows a little homily by St. Peter on the text, to which the apostles answer "Amen"—the subject of the prayer by this time being quite forgotten. St. John, however, enters and they return to the question of their assembly. (At this point a leaf or more of the manuscript has been lost, and the narrative is resumed later, apparently by an eye-witness.) St. Michael the Archangel arrives, and the sister of Our Lady announces to the gathering that Mary will depart on the morrow. Mary is ap-

<sup>8</sup> *Blickling Homilies*, No. XIII, *Assumptio S. Mariae Virginis*, p. 136.

parently distressed at the tidings, and the people begin to doubt in their hearts and say: "Why dreadeth this holy Mary her death, and God's apostles are with her and others who shall bear her to her resurrection." But the apostles reassure them: "She shall be much more strengthened among us by God's promise; and let not this people have doubt of her weakness or of her faith."

The moment at last comes for her departure. Our Lord arrives and addresses the apostles: "Dearest brethren, have no sorrow because ye see that this blessed Mary is called unto death; for she is not called to earthly death, but she shall be favoured by God, wherefore great glory is prepared for her." Presently there is a loud thundering, and all are made to sleep except the apostles and three women, whom Christ has commanded to watch. Christ then reappears, accompanied by St. Michael and other angels. He blesses His Mother, saying: "I bless thee, my holy Mary, and all whatsoever I have promised thee, that will I perform." Mary asks that she may be permitted to dispense His favour. Next Christ receives her soul and entrusts it to St. Michael. And her soul shone seven times brighter than snow, because she was ever preserved from sin (?).<sup>9</sup> Christ gives Peter directions for the burial of the body. Suddenly, however, the body itself cries out: "Be thou mindful, thou glorified King, that I am thy handiwork; and be thou mindful of me, for I keep the treasure-house of thy decrees." To which Our Lord replies: "I will never leave thee, my jewel: for thou art verily the temple of God." When Our Lord has departed, the women wash the body and lay it on the bier. Then Peter lifts up his voice and says: "In exitu Israel ex Aegypto, Alleluia" (Ps.113:1); and so the funeral procession sets out, singing and accompanied by angels, who move in a cloud over the bier.

When the Jews, however, learn what is happening, they begin to say to each other: "Let us now arise and kill the apostles, and seize the body of Mary and consume it with fire, because she did bear that deceiver." But the angels in the cloud smite the Jews and they become blind. Then a leader of the Jews attacks the bier, and straight-

<sup>9</sup> This passage is obscure: "& hie ne gemetton nane swa hwite saule swa þære eadigan Marian waes, forþon heo lufode ma þeostro for hire synnum & heo waes a þeh gehealden fram hire synnum (p. 147)." But it is clear from the context and it is made explicit elsewhere that Mary is free from sin: "& naeron naenige Leahtras gefylde on þinre heortan" (p. 157).

way he is held fast by the right hand, so that he hangs above the earth. He cries to Peter for mercy, in memory of the good deed his father did for Peter, when he was door-keeper. St. Peter bids him believe that Christ is God and Mary is His mother. The Jew is converted and immediately healed. Then Peter gives him the palm-twigg, to restore the sight of those who were blinded, on condition that they in turn believe. The apostles eventually reach the tomb; they bury the body, and set themselves to watch by the door, as they have been commanded. Our Lord orders St. Michael to receive her soul in the clouds, and it is borne at once to paradise. At the third hour of the day, Our Lord reappears to the apostles and asks what He shall do for Mary. St. Peter and the apostles all answer: "Lord, thou didst choose thee that vessel in which to dwell, and she is thy purest virgin before all worlds, and thou art able indeed visibly to manifest thy power on thy servant Mary; and thou didst overcome death and thou art ruling in thy glory, so art thou now able to raise again thy mother's body from the dead." And immediately the Lord in heaven rejoices and says to His apostles: "Be it now according to your decision." Forthwith the angel Gabriel rolls away the stone from the sepulchre, and the Lord says to the body of Mary: "Arise, my kinswoman, my dove, and my habitation of glory; for thou art the vessel of life, and thou art the heavenly temple, and no vices were committed in thy heart; and thou shalt suffer no pain in thy body." Whereupon the body of Mary rises from the tomb. Christ gives the apostles their final commission. Then they raise up Mary into the cloud that is there to receive her, and depart to the various regions of the earth, according as they are appointed by lot, to proclaim her abroad. "And let us now confess the greatness of God," concludes the preacher, "and sing in Mary's name '*Magnificat anima mea.*'" The sermon ends with an explanation, phrase by phrase, of the Latin *Magnificat*, and finally with the pious aspiration: "Let us entreat the Virgin St. Mary to be a merciful advocate with our Lord Jesus Christ of present benefits and of eternal glory: and thereto may our Lord aid us. Amen."

The Blickling homily is interesting, not only as an illustration of the pulpit style of the period, but for its presentation of the Assumption theme. We shall find this much the same in the subsequent examples. These may be divided into two classes: the homiletic sermon, or ex-

position of a text after the style of the *Magnificat*, and the legendary or narrative type exemplified in the first part of the Blickling sermon. It is in the legendary class that the resemblance between the early and later examples is most striking. Prescinding from the accidental details of introduction and peroration, we shall find the same story, differing substantially only in the concluding events; the same attempt to explain why Mary's body should have been assumed into heaven; and the same practical conclusion, that we should entreat the Queen of Heaven to be our advocate.

The reason for these resemblances is complex. The sermons of the legendary class may be subdivided into three groups: the early sermons of the tenth and twelfth century, which bear no direct relation to one another or to the later pulpit; the thirteenth-century Southern Assumption and its numerous offshoots; and the latest examples, all of which show the influence of the *Legenda Aurea*. There is, however, little evidence of borrowing between these groups. The resemblances then must be explained by the fact that all the sermons go back ultimately to a common source. Fortunately the source is ready to hand. Around the tradition of the Assumption there had grown up, especially about the fourth century, a mass of legendary detail. This found expression in the apocryphal *Transitus Mariae* by a certain Leucius. The work enjoyed more favour in heretical than in orthodox circles, and was eventually included in the list of apocrypha condemned by Pope Gelasius in 495. After the condemnation, attempts were made to sift the wheat from the chaff in Leucius' account. This was accomplished for the West in the *Transitus* of Pseudo-Melito, written about the middle of the sixth century. The author explicitly acknowledges his dependence on the earlier version, but promises to purge it of error, and that his own account will contain nothing other than "those things which we heard from the apostle John." The *Transitus* of Pseudo-Melito is of the greatest importance in the history of the English pulpit. The Blickling homily is little more than a paraphrase of Pseudo-Melito's account, and the sermons we have still to consider are mostly variations on the same theme. Not all the versions, however, are based on Pseudo-Melito at first hand. Moreover some of the versions show hesitations and accretions due to later influences. Indeed, apart from the variations due to transmission and the addition of new material,

the variations even in the treatment of a single source are considerable. These last can be explained only by the medieval habit of distinguishing between the core of accepted tradition and the historical or pseudo-historical detail, which each writer might treat as mere illustrative matter to be worked up or altered at will—an orator's privilege, of which the English pulpit took most generous advantage.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE MIDDLE-ENGLISH TRADITION: TWELFTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURY

With the Norman Conquest, about a century after the composition of the Blickling Homilies, French replaced Anglo-Saxon as the language of the nobility and literate class. It was only among the lower classes and the conquered people that the old Anglo-Saxon tongue remained in constant use. Whatever literature survived or developed among them was preserved, not in the writing of the learned clerk or the courtly man-of-letters, but in the memory of the people and of the popular entertainer or the popular preacher, his rival and imitator.<sup>11</sup> It is not surprising, then, that we have to wait until the twelfth century for another sermon in English on the Assumption.

#### EARLY PROSE HOMILIES: TWELFTH CENTURY

##### A. THE TRINITY HOMILIES

Two such sermons belong to this century. The first we shall consider is to be found in a collection of twelfth-century homilies, which have come down to us in a single manuscript, now preserved in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, but which probably originated somewhere in the Midlands—perhaps in the vicinity of Essex.<sup>12</sup> It belongs to the homiletic rather than legendary class, being based on fragments of the Office for the day. For his text, the preacher chooses "Maria virgo assumpta est ad aethereum thalamum."

One of the holy epistles that is read herein to-day brings us tidings of a blessed maiden who was espoused to the heavenly king as his wife, and saith that he fetched

<sup>10</sup> For the Latin text of the *Transitus*, see PG, V, 1231-1240, or Tischendorf, *Apocalypses apocryphae* (Leipzig, 1866). An account in English: M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), The Assumption of the Virgin, pp. 194-227.

<sup>11</sup> An authoritative account of recent investigations in this obscure period will be found in R. M. Wilson's *Early Middle English Literature* (London, 1939).

<sup>12</sup> *Trinity College Homilies*, No. XXVII, Assumptio S. Mariae Virginis, p. 158.



her home. [The preacher then promises an orderly account of the event:] Listen now what maiden this is, and what she is called, and where she was fetched, and who led her, and how and whither; and learn, if we may, to follow her, for we are all invited thither.

But despite these good intentions, the preacher rambles down every side-track that he meets, and in fact it is only towards the end that he returns to the main theme. He is first led astray by the name "Mary, 'quod est interpretatum stella maris,' that is, in English, 'sea-star,'" and in true medieval fashion he has soon composed an elaborate allegory, with Mary as the star that sheds its light for seafarers, tossed on the waters of this world. Without any consequence Mary is suddenly depicted anew, as "She was fetched from her desert habitation where she was found, 'scilicet, in terra deserta, in loco horroris et vastae solitudinis,' that is to say in a desert land and in a horrible place." The desert is once more the world: "This world's abode is compared to a desert, because that it has long lain idle without holy tillage."

This brings the preacher to the subject of the idle husbandmen, and provides him with an opportunity for a diatribe against first the clergy and then the laity of the time. At last he returns to his theme with the reflection: "From this desert and horrible place was fetched the maiden of whom I speak." He is reminded by this deliverance of her triple ascension:

Three times this holy maiden ascended—first bodily, when she was three years old, before the temple upon the ladder of fifteen steps, from bottom to top, without man's help. The second time she went up into the temple spiritually from virtue to virtue, until that she beheld the Lord of all virtues, as she wished to. The third time she ascended on this day when angels bore her with soul and body into the heavenly habitation, where she was honourably received.

He then volunteers the astonishing piece of information: "And Solomon the Wise, who was king in Jerusalem many hundred years before this, saw these marvellous ascensions as manifestly as if he lived at this day, and marvelled thereof and said, 'Quae est ista quae ascendit sicut aurora, consurgens pulcra ut luna, electa ut sol?'" The sermon concludes with the conventional prayer and a final Latin flourish: "May our lady St. Mary, as surely as she was on this day exalted 'nto heaven, bear our petition to our Lord Jesus Christ, and may he

give us eternal bliss in heaven. 'Quod ipse praestare dignetur qui vivit et regnat per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen.' "

#### B. THE VESPASIAN HOMILIES

The second series of sermons belonging to this century represents both the legendary and homiletic treatment of the Assumption theme. They are all preserved in the same manuscript, Vespasian D XIV. The first example, which is legendary in form, has the peculiar interest of introducing the doubt of "St. Jerome."<sup>13</sup> The suspicion thrown on Leucius' narrative by the condemnation of Gelasius seems to have been extended by some writers to the main facts of the Assumption tradition itself. No one doubted that the Blessed Virgin's soul was assumed into heaven, where she now rules as Queen by the side of her Son; and, at least in the English tradition, no doubt was cast on the fact of her death. But there was some dispute as to whether or not her body also was assumed into heaven. A writer of the ninth century under the assumed name of St. Jerome gave most currency to this doubt. Many Catholics, he argued, hesitate to affirm that the Blessed Virgin's body was taken up into heaven; though such a miracle is not impossible to God, nor is there any reason for denying that it actually took place, still for lack of conclusive evidence we should regard it as a pious aspiration rather than a truth of faith.<sup>14</sup> The refutation of "St. Jerome's" doubt began almost at once with the reply of another writer, under the assumed name of St. Augustine.<sup>15</sup> The reasoning and authority of "St. Augustine" prevailed. But right through our period we shall meet their names, and in two instances the later writers still incline to the view of "St. Jerome."

The first of these is the author of the present sermon.<sup>16</sup> Without any preliminaries, the preacher tells us that "Jerome, the holy priest, wrote a letter concerning the death of Mary, God's Mother, to a holy maiden, whose name was Eustochium, and to her mother Paula, who was a holy widow." After a brief account of the true St. Jerome and

<sup>13</sup> *Vespasian*, No. XVI, In Assumptione S. Mariae, p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> Pseudo-Jerome, perhaps Radbertus, *Epistola IX, ad Paulam et Eustochium* (PL, XXX, 123 f.).

<sup>15</sup> Pseudo-Augustine, perhaps Ratramnus, *De Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis* (PL, XL, 1146).

<sup>16</sup> *Vespasian*, No. XVII, Homelia, p. 47.

his works, the preacher outlines the contents of the letter. According to the Gospel, Our Lord commended His Mother to St. John on Calvary. After His ascension Mary dwelt with the apostles. Eventually she died like all others, and her sepulchre is still to be seen in the Valley of Jehosaphat. While the preacher denies the resurrection of her body, it is true that the Saviour often sent angels to conduct the souls of His holy ones to heaven. How much more then would He send the heavenly host for His own Mother. It is in this sense that the feast of the Assumption is celebrated by holy Church. This feast excels all others, even as the Mother of God is above all other women. The preacher describes the glory of her assumption, how her soul in its heavenly flight was surrounded with roses and lilies—roses that betoken the martyrdom she underwent when her heart was pierced as with a sword, and lilies that symbolize the whiteness of her virginity. Rejoice then in this festival. Through Eve the gate of heaven was closed; through Mary it is opened for us once more. Let Christian men rejoice, for Mary is our comfort and our help.

The second Vespasian sermon belongs to the homiletic class. The preacher in the previous sermon has told his people about the letter of "St. Jerome"; he now proposes to explain the Gospel that is read on the feast-day itself, "Intravit Jesus in quoddam castellum; et reliqua." He then tells the story of the sisters of Bethany, and how Mary chose the better part. The two sisters are types of the two ways of life, the active and the contemplative, the transitory and the eternal. When we consider other men's needs, we imitate Martha; when we go to God's house, we imitate Mary. In this transitory life, then, let us so live that we may attain the life that is eternal. It is a simple and practical exhortation, but little effort is made to relate the Gospel to the feast as such. In fact the Gospel apparently bears such slight relation to the feast that later it is made the basis of another sermon on the feasts of Our Lady in general (*Sermo in Festis Sanctae Mariae Virginis*) without any particular connection with the Assumption.<sup>17</sup> However, in this latter example, the preacher is more at pains to apply the Scripture to the person of Our Lady. He does this in the form of an allegory, markedly akin to the Assumption sermon of John Mirk, two centuries later. In both the Vespasian and the later sermon, the

<sup>17</sup> *Vespasian*, No. XLIII, *Sermo in Festis S. Mariae Virginis*, p. 134.

story of Martha and Mary is applied to the Blessed Virgin in detail. In both, the stronghold ("castellum") into which Our Lord came betokens the Virgin Mother of God. In both, the gate through which Our Lord came is her faith, which made the Incarnation possible. In both, the two sisters within betoken the two ways of life, each perfectly exemplified in Mary. In her earthly life she suffered the toils of Martha, now she is exalted in heaven and knows only the joys of Mary. God grant that through her intercession we too may become partakers of the better part.

The third sermon that explicitly purports to be on the Assumption scarcely lives up to its title.<sup>18</sup> It is merely the narration of a miracle of Our Lady, which might perhaps be suitably added to the regular sermon on the feast. It describes how Basil, Bishop of Cappadocia, gave the Emperor Julian on his accession three barley loaves as a blessing, but Julian sent him grass in return and threatened to destroy his city. In their need, Basil and all the people offered gifts to the Blessed Virgin, that she might intercede for them. So Mary in answer to their prayer sent the holy martyr Mercurius to slay Julian. Let us pray, then, concludes the preacher, to the Holy Mother of God that she may intercede for us in turn. *Narrationes* of this sort will become a regular feature of the later pulpit. But first we must examine an even more interesting development of the following century.

#### THE SOUTHERN ASSUMPTION AND DERIVATIVES: THIRTEENTH CENTURY

When Cardinal Spellman, on his recent visit to Australia, produced a sheaf of verse to declaim it from the pulpit, his congregation was perhaps a little startled. Actually the Cardinal was reviving one of the most ancient traditions of the English pulpit. He might have quoted as precedent Aldhelm, the seventh-century Bishop of Sherbourne, and "the first considerable figure among the English writers of Latin,"<sup>19</sup> who used to sing to the harp songs which he had composed in the vernacular for the instruction of the people. He might have added the rhythmic sermons of Aelfric, the late contemporary of the author of the Blickling Homilies, and one of the first great names in the history

<sup>18</sup> *Vespasian*, No. XVIII, Assumptio S. Mariae, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> M. R. James, "Latin Writings in England to the Time of Alfred," *Cambridge History of English Literature*, I (Cambridge, 1908), ch. 5, p. 72.

of English vernacular preaching.<sup>20</sup> And in the group of poem-sermons we are about to consider he would have found further example among the earliest literature in our modern English tongue.

But the difference between the new poem-sermons and the earlier prose of the Blickling Homilies and Trinity and Vespasian sermons is more than a matter of literary form. The Trinity and Vespasian sermons are still in keeping with the severe temper of the Blickling Homilies and of Anglo-Saxon literature generally. But a profound change has taken place between the twelfth and thirteenth century. The gravity of the ancient alliterative measure, suited to the beer-hall and the gathering of warriors, where Anglo-Saxon literature has its roots, and which has found its way into the vigorous if rather primitive prose of the earlier pulpit, has been replaced by the facile couplets, racy narrative, and the new language of love and wonder, fit for a tale of dalliance and a lady's bower. Epic, in a word, has given place to romance, and the dignity of the early pulpit to the familiarity and rhetorical devices of the popular missionary, only once removed in manner from the popular entertainer. It is not a coincidence that the first sermon we have in the new style is found, not in a book of homilies, but along with two popular romances, *King Horn* and the love-story of *Floriz and Blauncheflur*. In fact, though their pulpit origin is clear enough, it is often difficult to judge in particular cases whether these poem-sermons were preserved for use in the church or just for entertaining reading in the household circle.<sup>21</sup> The new spirit is, of course, a manifestation of the literary movement which swept Europe in the twelfth century. Beginning in the South of France, it eventually reached England through the fashionable French literature, and soon found its way into the repertoire of the popular minstrel.<sup>22</sup> The process was hastened in the thirteenth century by the arrival of the friars. The latter, following the example of the troubadour-saint, Francis himself,

<sup>20</sup> Aelfric (c. 955–c. 1020), first Abbot of Eynham Abbey, Oxfordshire. "One of the most prominent figures of his time, and undoubtedly the most accomplished prose writer of the O. E. period" (Renwick and Orton, *Beginnings*). He developed a style distinguished by its use of alliteration and rhythm, in imitation of the fashionable Latin prose.

<sup>21</sup> On the *sermones rhythmici*, see Owst, *Preaching*, p. 271 ff.

<sup>22</sup> On the rise of romance in England, see C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936).

took advantage of the new themes and the new vernacular literature, to sing afresh the praises of God and His joy in creation.<sup>23</sup>

#### A. THE SOUTHERN ASSUMPTION: THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Joy is indeed the characteristic feature of the new sermon. The first of the poem-sermons, the ancestor of a long line, most of which show obvious relationship to the original, was composed in the South of England, probably before 1250.<sup>24</sup> The opening lines set the note for the whole poem:

Merie tale telle ihc þis day  
Of seinte Marye þat swete may.  
Al is þe tale and þis lescoun  
Of hire swete assompçioun,  
Hu heo was fram erþe ynome  
In to blisse wiþ hire sone.

Merry tale tell I to-day  
Of St. Maria that sweet may (maid).  
All is the tale and this lessoun  
Of her sweet assumptioun,  
How she was from earth ynome (taken)  
Into blissé with her Son.<sup>25</sup>

"Merry," "sweet," "bliss" are words that now occur with a new insistence. It is true that the preacher is in deadly earnest about the reality of sin, the agony of Calvary, and the dread of Satan and hell-pain. But the two motifs, though in vivid contrast, are resolved with the happy audacity of primitive art. Christ dies, but it is to make men merry; the Blessed Virgin herself fears the common enemy, but only because he stands between her and the bliss of paradise; hell is a reality, but mercy is as prodigal as the danger is proximate and terrible.<sup>26</sup> And in the end the impression is one of joy, only thrown into relief by the darkness of sin and the horror of hell. For as the preacher exclaims at the very moment of Our Lady's death, her chamber was full of bliss, which always is,

In eche place ther Ihesus ys.

In every place where Jesus is.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> On the part played by the friars and the pulpit in the development of the vernacular at this period, see Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*.

<sup>24</sup> For the complete list of versions and adaptations, see Wells, *Manual*, and Brown and Robbins, *Index*. McKnight, *Assumption*, has a description of the MSS in which the Southern Assumption is found.

<sup>25</sup> *Assumption* II, 1-6.

<sup>26</sup> In this and in most of the later versions of the Assumption, Mary's request that she shall not see the devil is granted:

Maiden and moder, euer thu be well;  
thu shalt of sorwe wete no dell.

All the spirettes that meten with the  
Buxom to the shall they be. (II, 407-410.)

<sup>27</sup> *Assumption* I, 370.

The narrative that follows is very similar to that of the Blickling Homily. It opens, however, as in Pseudo-Melito's account, not with the arrival of the angel, but with Mary and St. John at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus entrusts His mother to His beloved disciple. There are also a few minor variations in the course of the story. The principal divergence, both from the Blickling Homily and from Pseudo-Melito, is at the end.<sup>28</sup> Instead of concluding with the bodily assumption of Our Lady in the presence of the apostles, the preacher for the first time introduces the late arrival of St. Thomas of India, whose exploit was to be such a feature of the later pulpit. In this he is following a later *Transitus*, purporting to be the narrative of Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>29</sup> After the apostles have placed the body of Our Lady in the tomb and returned to Jerusalem, St. Thomas arrives late as usual.<sup>30</sup> He is consoled, however, with a vision of the Blessed Virgin, as she glides past him body and soul on her way to heaven. He kneels and asks her for a token, to prove that he has been present at her burial. She graciously grants his request, and lets fall her girdle. St. Thomas, overjoyed, hastens to the town in search of his fellow-apostles. They greet him rather unkindly:

where has thu so long y-bene?  
we haue beried our heuene quene.  
thu lakkest euer at euery nede;  
thu helpst neuer at gode dede.

Where hast thou so long y-been?  
We have buried our heavenly queen.  
Thou lackest ever at every need;  
Thou helpst never at goodly deed.<sup>31</sup>

St. Thomas humbly excuses himself for being absent, then produces his own item of news. Peter and John are bluntly sceptical; if Thomas refused to believe God's word, how can he expect them to believe this?

thu bi-leuest in god right noght;  
soche tales ne kepe we noght.

Thou believ'st in God right nought;  
And so such tales ne keep we nought  
(we cannot accept.)<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Assumption* I, 611 f.

<sup>29</sup> Tischendorf's A text; James, *Apocryphal N. T.*, p. 216.

<sup>30</sup> St. Thomas' late arrival was proverbial. In a later version of the present poem, in the fifteenth century MS, Br. Mus. Addit. 10036, it is expressed in the jingle "thomas of ynde / Euer art þou bi-hynde." We find the same jingle in the Auchinleck *Assumption*: "Thomas of Hinde/Euere more þou art bihinde."

<sup>31</sup> *Assumption* II, 643-46.

<sup>32</sup> *Assumption* II, 659-60.

At this point even the saint's patience gives way, and with pardonable triumph he silences his critics by producing the girdle:

"be stille," he seid, "brother Ichan,  
why chide ye me so, one and one?  
me thenketh ye can litel good,  
for y here saw bothe flesh and blood,  
how oure lady to heuene wend;  
here is the token that she me send."

"Be still," he said, "Brother John,  
Why chide ye me so, everyone?  
Methinketh ye ken little good,  
For I her saw, both flesh and blood,  
How Our Lady t' heaven went,  
Here's the token she me sent."<sup>33</sup>

St. Peter recognizes the girdle, and the apostles hasten to the tomb to verify the story. There, sure enough, they find only a flower called "manna." Whereupon they kneel and praise God. Jesus himself then appears to the apostles, blesses, and dismisses them. A light cloud spreads over the apostles, and each is transported back to the scene of his labours. The tale concludes with a prayer for Christ's benison and His holy grace:

soche workes for to worche,  
thurgh the lore of holy churche,  
that we may to heuene wende,  
that is with out begynnyng and ende.

Amen.

Such godly workes for to work,  
Through the lore of holy Kirk,  
That we may to heaven wend,  
That nor beginning has nor end.

Amen.<sup>34</sup>

#### B. THE CURSOR MUNDI: FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The Southern Assumption was not only popular in the original version, but frequently adapted by other writers for their own pulpit manuals or works of edification. The most important of such borrowing is that by the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, one of the most popular works of the Middle Ages, and indeed one of the most ambitious ever conceived. "Almost it over-runs all," says the author in explanation of his title. In the prologue he dedicates his work to the Blessed Virgin. Men, he asserts, are always ready to hear rhymes and tales of knights of old, some wise, some foolish, and now the fashion is to tell of love and courtly dalliance. But the best lover is Our Lady, and it is of her that men should sing. It is his intention to write a book in her honour, that men may know her and her kin. There follows a poem of between twenty-nine and thirty thousand lines. The work, however, is by no means confined to the Blessed Virgin, but is a comprehensive book of

<sup>33</sup> *Assumption* II, 661-66.

<sup>34</sup> *Assumption* II, 713-16.



instruction and edification based on the progress of mankind from creation to the day of doom. The history of the human race is divided into seven ages. It is only in the fifth and sixth that the Blessed Virgin herself is the centre of interest. The fifth deals with her early years and the childhood of Christ; the sixth with the public ministry and the early history of the Church. The author rounds off the scriptural account with a summary of the traditions concerning the later years and death of the Blessed Virgin and the apostles. He begins with the Blessed Virgin. After a word of acknowledgment, he translates the older Assumption poem from Southern into his own Northern English.<sup>35</sup> However, he freely edits his original and makes it convey something of his own personal feeling.

He prefaces his translation by protesting his own devotion to the Mother of God.<sup>36</sup> Body and soul, he declares, he is her slave. He does not know where to begin her praise. If his tongue were of steel, and he were to speak for a thousand years, he could not tell the tenth part of it. But for all that he will never cease to sing in her honour. Now he will describe her life from the time that Our Lord died on the Cross to her assumption into heaven. Always with an eye to the needs of his listeners, he urges the benefits to be gained from the reading of the old Assumption poem. It has been promised that no woman who reads it will perish of childbirth. Moreover St. Edmund has granted forty days pardon on the same condition. It is probably on the strength of this promise that the adapter ascribes the origin of the poem itself to St. Edmund of Pontenay.<sup>37</sup>

The narrative follows closely the Southern original. Generally, however, the later writer is more conservative in his estimates. For instance, the Southern poet describes the converted Jew as winning twenty thousand of his fellows to the faith, where the canny Northerner allows him only about four thousand.<sup>38</sup> This characteristic caution is most strikingly exemplified at the end of the story. After Our Lady has been buried in the Valley of Jehosaphat, the question arises as to whether her body as well as her soul was assumed into heaven.

<sup>35</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20061–65

<sup>36</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20011–42.

<sup>37</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20043–60. A similar promise of favours to those who read the *Transitus* account is to be found in one of the later Latin versions, Tischendorf C; cf. James, *Apocryphal N. T.*, p. 218.

<sup>38</sup> *Assumption* I, 577; *Cursor Mundi* II, 20763–64.

The Northern writer does not repeat the incident of St. Thomas, but simply records the tradition that Christ afterwards came to her grave with the celestial court, to carry her body to heaven, where she now reigns in flesh and bone. He recalls the arguments in favour of her bodily assumption:

For scho is of al wimmen out-tan,  
 Als scho þar godd and lauerd bar,  
 þat her priuelege war þe mar,  
 Mar als scho þat makles es  
 To be þer bath in saul & fleshe.  
 And þat it sua suld be, þai sai,  
 þat in þe toubm þer scho in lai,  
 Mai naman find na thing bot flur  
 Springand up of suet sauur.

For she is of all women best;  
 As she their God and Master bore,  
 That her privilege were the more;  
 More too because she maiden is  
 And so should be there soul and flesh.  
 And that it so should be, they say  
 That in the tomb wherein she lay  
 May no one find a thing but flower  
 Springing up of sweet savour.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand there is the doubt of "St. Jerome."<sup>40</sup> He concludes therefore that her resurrection is not a subject upon which wise men will dispute, but they will rather leave it to God to decide whether or not He will work such a miracle:

Disput, he sais, es na mister  
 Betuix te wis in swilk a wer,  
 Bot teche til him þat all might  
 Lat him þarof þe reson right,  
 For it es better to be stell,  
 þan raik on reson þat es will.

Dispute, he says, is no mistér (not  
 called for)  
 Between the wise in such a wer (doubt)  
 But leave 't to him that all might  
 Let him thereof the reason right,  
 For it is better to be still  
 Than halt in reason that is will (astray).<sup>41</sup>

For our part it is enough that we know that Our Lady is Queen of heaven and earth and makes continual intercession on our behalf.

The poem ends with a tender picture of the Blessed Virgin in her role of mediatrix for men. She is seated on her throne by her Son, and she ceases not day or night to pray for sinful man. There is no one who stoops to folly, but repents and calls upon her name, that will not enjoy her help. She is foe especially to the devil, who dreads her light; against him she is our shield and spear. May she bring us to the blissful state, where she dwells with her Son.<sup>42</sup> The author computes

<sup>39</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20780-88.

<sup>41</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20793-98.

<sup>40</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20789-92.

<sup>42</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20805-20.

her age at the hour of death as sixty-three.<sup>43</sup> He finally recalls his promise, now fulfilled, to speak in her honour. In return he asks her to petition her Son, that her servant may so love her to the end, that whether he sits or stands or goes, neither life nor death, nor weal nor woe may ever turn his heart from her, but being ever true in her service he may come to her at length in paradise. And he prays too that all who hear the sermon may obtain pardon of their sins and a clean ending. Amen.<sup>44</sup>

#### C. THE AUCHINLECK ASSUMPTION: FOURTEENTH CENTURY

A further example of the transformation such a sermon could undergo is provided by a fourteenth-century version, preserved in a single manuscript in the Auchinleck collection. The old Assumption now appears in the fashionable tail-rhyme (aabccb)—the much derided measure of Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*—which for a time rivalled the octo-syllabic couplet in popular favour.<sup>45</sup> The most interesting addition to the old story is the attempt to explain why Mary died at all. When Jesus comes to bear her soul to heaven, His Mother pleads with Him: "Dear Son, if it be possible, let me not die." To which Christ replies: "Dear Mother, it may not be, for all that liveth must die, else shall I have lied." "Then," replies the Blessed Virgin with sweet submission, "Son, as thou wilt, so do I will too."<sup>46</sup>

#### THE GOLDEN LEGEND: FOURTEENTH CENTURY

##### VERSE

#### A. THE BODLEIAN ASSUMPTION: FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Another rhymed sermon of the period, now preserved in the Bodleian Library, forms a link between the Southern Assumption and its numerous offshoots, and the later treatment of the theme. From now on the English legends regularly betray the influence of the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, the medieval Butler.<sup>47</sup> The *Legenda*

<sup>43</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20821–34.

<sup>44</sup> *Cursor Mundi* II, 20835–48.

<sup>45</sup> *Canterbury Tales* II, 1902–2108.

<sup>46</sup> *Auchinleck* II, 325–344.

<sup>47</sup> Jacobus de Voragine (Jacopo de' Varazze), born 1228, entered the Order of Preachers, became Archbishop of Genoa from 1288 till his death in 1298. Composed in Latin prose between 1260 and 1270 a cycle of "legends," or readings, from the lives of the saints, which could be used in church services. It became known because of its excellence as the

was compiled in the second half of the thirteenth century, between 1260 and 1270, but de Voragine's account of the Assumption together with his appendices begins to show its influence long before the fifteenth-century translations. The present poem has the additional interest of introducing the Assumption theme to the great septenary line, or ballad-measure, the staple line of our popular poetry to this day. Moreover, while the English poem follows the Latin prose of the *Legenda* quite closely, for all that, it remains a poem. The adaptor has played Pygmalion to the cold clear marble of de Voragine's Latin, transforming it into breathing flesh. A single instance will reveal the vital power of his poetry. It is in the description of the heavenly palm, which the angel presents to Mary. De Voragine's palm is worthy of the celestial Donor: "Palma autem illa nimia claritate splendebat et erat quidem virgae viriditate consimilis, sed folia ipsius ut stella fulgebant." But the palm of the English poet shines with a light that was never seen on sea or land:

þe aungel went to heuene agen, þat mayde byleued alone.  
 þe braunche chynyd swyþe brygt, and þe leues echone,  
 þe bowis were grene and brygt, þe leues as sterren were,  
 þey chynyd al aboute so lygt, þat merie ioye was þere.

The angel went to heaven again, that maid was left alone,  
 The branch, it shined ever bright, and the leaves shone,  
 The boughs, they were so green and bright, the leaves as starren were,  
 They shined all about so light, that merry joy was there.<sup>48</sup>

#### B. THE SOUTHERN, NORTHERN, AND SCOTTISH SERMON COLLECTIONS

The Bodley sermon reminds us that the poem-sermon on the Assumption has a place in both the great collections of the age: the *Southern Legendary*, to which the Bodley sermon belongs, and the *Northern Homily Cycle*. Apparently the other examples found in these cycles and their various recensions are based on the old Southern As-

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*Legenda Aurea*. A French translation was made by Jehan de Vignay about 1380. An English translation made about 1438 became with the Latin and French the basis of Caxton's version. The latter was printed in 1483 and became the first of a line of English printed editions. The relationship between the principal versions is traced by P. Butler in his *Study of the Legenda Aurea—Legende Doree—Golden Legend* (Baltimore, 1899).

<sup>48</sup> *Bodleian* II, 61-64.

sumption.<sup>49</sup> But the material for a more detailed study is difficult to procure. Perhaps we should have added here, had time proved kindlier, the Life of Mary, to which its devout author refers in his introduction to the *Scottish Collection of Legends*. This earlier Life, now lost, had included the Compassion, Assumption, Coronation, and sixty-six miracles of the Blessed Virgin. Since his later work reveals the influence of the *Legenda Aurea*, perhaps he followed de Voragine also in his version of the Assumption. After enjoying the fluency and zest of the later Legends, we cannot but regret the loss of this earlier work. However, the mere allusion is sufficient witness to the existence of an Assumption tradition in Scotland at the dawn of its literature.<sup>50</sup>

#### PROSE

##### A. MIRK'S FESTIVAL: FIFTEENTH CENTURY

But the poets are not the only preachers to show their debt to de Voragine. Besides the poems we have mentioned, there are two collections of prose sermons, compiled about the beginning of the fifteenth century, which clearly reflect the *Legenda*. The first of these to be considered is the *Festival* of John Mirk.<sup>51</sup> This was only one of several manuals provided by the Austin Canon of Shropshire for the busy parish priest. The *Festival* has been described by a distinguished authority on the medieval pulpit as "the outstanding example of the popular sermon-book." It contains two sermons for the Assumption: one in anticipation of the feast, and a second for the day itself. The first, *De Assumptione Beatae Mariae*,<sup>52</sup> admirably illustrates the practical character of the author's style:

Good men and women, such a day N. ye shall have a high feast in holy church that is called the Assumption of Our Lady, that is in English, the taking-up of Our Lady. For that day she was taken up into heaven, and now is help and succour to all that call to her with full heart. Wherefore ye shall fast on the eve, each

<sup>49</sup> For bibliographical details see Wells, *Manual*; for a general study, G. H. Gerould, *Saints' Legends* (Boston, 1916).

<sup>50</sup> See Wells, *Manual*, p. 304, and Metcalfe, *Legends of the Saints*.

<sup>51</sup> John Mirk (Myrc), fl. 1403, an Austin Canon of Shropshire, author of the *Liber festiualis* (*Festial* or *Festival*), *Instructions for Parish Priests*, and *Manuale Sacerdotis*. The *Festival* was first printed by Caxton in 1483, and there were twelve editions by Caxton and others before 1500. See Owst, *Preaching*, p. 245 ff.

<sup>52</sup> *Festival*, pp. 221-227.

man and woman that is twelve years old, each man as his devotion teacheth him, and as he is bidden to do by his shrift-father. And on the morrow ye shall come to the church, and worship our holy Lady with all your might and cunning.

The sermon which follows is based on the *Legenda Aurea*, though of course it is selective and adapted to the pulpit. To aid the memory of the preacher and congregation, Mirk proposes his matter under three heads: "Then shall ye know well that this Assumption was done worshipful, and joyful, and also wholly, that is, both in body and in soul together."<sup>53</sup> "It was done worshipful." For Christ kept the commandment, that a child should worship his mother, when He took her "out of this world into the bliss that He is in." And Mirk describes the incidents of the Assumption legend, from the arrival of the angel to the burial of the body in Gethsemane. "It was also joyful." On the third day Christ returns with the heavenly court, to raise His Mother's body from the dead. There follow the words of welcome that Christ addresses to His Mother as she rises from the tomb. This salutation runs like a refrain through the whole pulpit tradition even from the time of the Blickling Homilies, and is in time to provide the theme for some of the loveliest of the later lyrics, and to become a feature of the dramatic cycles:<sup>54</sup> "Come, my sweet, come my flower, come my culver (dove), mine own bower; come, my mother, now with me; for Heaven's queen I make thee."<sup>55</sup> And so with mirth and melody the angels bear Our Lady, body and soul, into heaven, where Christ sets her by Him on His throne, and crowns her Queen of Heaven, and Empress of Hell, and Lady of all the World.

And as the sun lighteneth all the day, right so she lighteneth all the court of Heaven. And all that be in heaven be buxom to her and ready at her commandment, and do her worship in honour, as they owe for to do to their Lord's mother and their queen; and (she) is there of one will and one love with the Holy Trinity that granteth her what that ever she asketh, and at her prayer rewardeth all her servants.

<sup>53</sup> For the approved methods of arranging the matter of the sermon, see Owst, *Preaching*, ch. VIII, p. 309.

<sup>54</sup> This heavenly minstrelsy was one of the most inspiring themes for the fifteenth-century lyric-poet. See, for example, the *Song of the Assumption*, C. Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, No. 37, p. 65. The same theme was developed in the drama: *York Plays*, p. 483, and *Ludus Coventriae*, p. 365.

<sup>55</sup> These lines, though quoted as prose, are obviously octo-syllabic couplets—another illustration of the relationship between lyric and pulpit.

"It was done also wholly, that is in body and in soul, putting away the common condition of mankind, that is, for to die; and so (that) the body turneth into corruption and stinking carrion." Mirk then produces arguments from history and reason for his belief that Mary was saved from the corruption of the grave. He presents a new version of the story of St. Thomas. The obstinate apostle is not only late, but refuses to believe in the bodily assumption.

Wherefore right as he spake that word (of doubt), Our Lady let her girdle fall down from heaven into Thomas's hands, as though she had said to him thus: "Right as thou wouldest not believe that my Son was risen from death to life in a veray (true) body, till that thou putttest thy hand into His side and proved the sooth, so by that sonde (message) of my girdle that I send thee, believe well that I am in heaven with my Son, in body and in soul, as He is."

Mirk quotes also the argument of "St. Bernard," that if "Our Lady's body were on earth, all men would seek it" as they do those of the other saints, in order to do her honour. "But for she is bodily in heaven, men seek not her by walking on earth, but by devotion in heaven." He quotes too "St. Augustine"<sup>56</sup> who says "that corruption of sin maketh mankind to turn into corruption of carrion, but God forbid that the body of God's mother should turn into corruption and stinking carrion, that was hallowed in her mother's womb, and always after kept with the Holy Ghost from all manner of corruption." But it is the filial argument which appeals to him most, and on his lips it takes on the character of special pleading:

Then withdraweth he much from the Son's worship that any filth thinketh by His mother; for He that is her Son and well of love, loth He had been for to have seen those paps sucken and gnawn with stinking worms that He before did suck, and had His food full sweet. Loth had He been for to have seen that fair face of His mother to rot or to stink that made Him to laugh, when He looked thereon. . . . Thus for He bade the child worship the mother, He took His mother from all this filth and brought her thither as she shall be in everlasting cleanness and perpetual worship.

He finally adds the testimony of "St. Elizabeth of Spain." The revelation of course is that of St. Elizabeth of Schonau,<sup>57</sup> whom de Voragine

<sup>56</sup> In this and in subsequent allusions, "S. Augustine" is Pseudo-Augustine.

<sup>57</sup> St. Elizabeth of Schonau, professed a nun at the Benedictine monastery of Schonau in 1147. From the age of twenty-three she was subject to supernatural manifestations.

simply describes as "S. Elizabetha." Mirk recalls her vision of a tomb, and how she saw a fair woman brought forth from it by angels. Whereupon a man appeared with a sign of the cross in his hand, and took the woman to heaven. An angel then explained the vision: "God hath shown thee how Our Lady was taken up to heaven, in body and in soul." "Thus clerks prove," Mirk concludes, "how Our Lady was assumed bodily into heaven."

With a shrewd knowledge of his audience, Mirk has appended to his sermon three sensational *narrationes*,<sup>58</sup> illustrating the power and mercy of Mary; just the thing to wake up a drowsy congregation after a long sermon. The first is of the clerk that loved Our Lady and each day used "greet her with the five joys that she had of her Son on earth." When he came to die, "he was adread of God's doom," but Our Lady appeared to comfort him with the words: "My dear servant, be not afraid; but for thou hast gladdened me oft rehearsing to me the joys that I had of my Son in earth, wherefore thou shalt go with me into the joy that ever shall last." The next is of the woman that was grievously tempted by the fiend, who used "come to her in the likeness of a man." When all other remedies had failed, she listened to the advice of a holy hermit, who taught her to say "Saint Mary, help me." When the fiend heard the words, he started aback, crying: "An evil devil go into his mouth that thee that taught." And so she was delivered from the fiend for evermore. Mirk concludes with the story of the Jew who threw his child into the fire. A certain Jew had sent his son to school among Christian children. When the other children went to Mass on Easter day, the boy accompanied them there. At the time for Communion, he "saw a fair lady stand at the altar and reach each man his housel." The child received too. When his father had learnt what had happened he was so angry that he cast

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An account of the visions will be found in the *Acta Sanctorum* (Bollandists) for June 18th, Vol. IV, p. 499 ff. The visions referred to in the text are in her *Vita*, Book IV (*Acta*, p. 525). For their influence on the Assumption tradition, see Jugie, *La Mort et l'Assomption*, p. 576. "She has never been formally canonised or beatified, and widely divergent views have been entertained as to the nature of her visions" (H. Thurston, S. J., *Buller's Lives of the Saints*, June 18, p. 235).

<sup>58</sup> These and other Miracles of the Virgin were part of the preacher's stock in trade, and the same stories occur in different contexts. Some of the stories we shall encounter in the course of the present essay will be found also in the Vernon Miracles. They have been made the subject of special studies. For further particulars see Wells, *Manual*.



his son into "a burning hot oven" that was by. On the cries of the mother the Christians came to the rescue. But when they opened the oven door, they found the child quite unhurt and "playing with the flames of the fire." He told them that the same fair lady who had given him his housel had "come to him in the oven and saved him from the fire with her mantle wrapped about him."<sup>59</sup> The preacher ends with the usual prayer: "Now kneel we all adown, and pray we to Our Lady that she will help us in our need, that we may have the bliss that her Son bought us. Amen."

The second sermon in the *Festival, In Die Assumptionis Beatae Sermo Brevis*, is a plain homily on the gospel of the feast, similar to the Vespasian second Assumption homily and *Sermo in Festis*. Mirk, however, is more at pains to relate the gospel to the feast itself. Having briefly explained the nature and purpose of Mary's "highest" feast, he poses to himself the question, "why the gospel of this day maketh no mention of her, but only of two sisters, Martha and Mary." Mirk outlines once more the story of Christ's visit to the "castle" ("castellum") of the two sisters; then armed with the authority of "St. Anselm," he sets out to show "that this gospel pertaineth all to Our Lady and to the life of her." Mary is the castle that Christ entered into; and so Mirk describes the virtues of the perfect castle and finds them all verified on the spiritual plane in the Mother of God. He then considers the inmates of the castle, Martha, who "received Christ into her house, and was busy for to serve Him and those that came with Him," and "Mary, who sat at Christ's feet, and had great list to hear the words of His mouth." By these two sisters are understood the two ways of life, the active and contemplative. Both are perfectly exemplified in the Blessed Virgin. The active life is described with great tenderness: how Our Lady received Christ into her body; how she fed Him, clothed and nursed Him; how too she suffered with Him, from the flight into Egypt to the torture of Calvary. She fulfils too the higher ideal of the contemplative life, by keeping her Son's words ever in her heart, and after His ascension, by leaving all "her business" and giving herself up to contemplation "until her Son fetched her out of this world." So Mirk concludes triumphantly: "Thus, good men

<sup>59</sup> De Voragine adds the gruesome detail that they threw the Jew into the oven from which they had just rescued the child.

and women, ye that can understand, ye may see that this gospel of this day is conveniently read in holy church."

At the end of the sermon, Mirk recalls the Seven Heavenly Joys of the Blessed Virgin, popularly ascribed to St. Thomas of Canterbury.<sup>60</sup>

Then shall ye know that she had five special joys of her Son here on earth, the which gladden her much, when they be rehearsed to her. But now she hath seven special in heaven, the which she showed to St. Thomas of Canterbury, and bade him greet her with them in this wise, promising him for certain that all those that devoutly each day greet her with these seven joys, he shall see her in his body, ere that he die; and she will bring his soul hither, as it shall come to the joy forever.

Then follows a hymn of the Seven Joys, which the preacher presumably conducts from the pulpit. It is a fairly long hymn in tail-rhyme. One stanza will give sufficient indication of its character:

Be glad and blyþe, lady fre,  
Sittyng by þe Trinite  
In blod and flesche yfere.  
Full of ioy and full of grace,  
God haþe made þer þi place,  
As to hys modyr dere.

Be glad and blithe, Lady free,  
Sitting by the Trinity  
In blood and flesh yfere (together).  
Full of joy and full of grace,  
God hath made there thy place,  
As to His Mother dear.

After the hymn, Mirk tells an amusing "narration," presumably to illustrate St. Thomas' promise.<sup>61</sup> A clerk "that loved Our Lady much" longed to see her once before he died. His prayer was granted on condition that he would be prepared to lose his eyesight, "for the light and clarity of her is so bright, that eyes may not bear the sight thereof." The clerk accepted the vision on these terms, but cunningly said to himself: "I will hide the one eye, and look with mine other eye, so that though that one eye be blind, I shall see with that other." His ruse worked. But "he was so joyed of that one sight, he thought that he should die, but if he had another sight of her." Again his request

<sup>60</sup> Carleton Brown observes: "English tradition down to the end of the fourteenth century uniformly recognized Five Joys of the Virgin, viz.: the Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, and Assumption, whereas on the Continent, the number of Joys is regularly seven, through the addition of the Epiphany and the Purification" (*Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, p. 303). "The Seven Heavenly Joys—which are wholly distinct from the Terrestrial Joys, whether Five or Seven—do not make their appearance in England before the fifteenth century" (p. 304).

<sup>61</sup> This miracle does not occur in the account of the Assumption in the *Legenda Aurea*.

was granted, but before the vision departed, Our Lady asked him did not he regret this time having to lose the sight of his remaining eye. The clerk chivalrously replied, that though he had a "thousand eyes," he would gladly lose them for a sight of her. "Then said Our Lady: 'For thou hast so great liking in the sight of me, I will not bereave thee of thy sight, but see now with both thine eyes, as thou did'st before.'" Mirk then winds up his discourse with the prayer: "Now kneel ye adown, and pray ye to this blessed Queen of Heaven that she will so pray for you to her blessed Son, that ye may worship her so on earth, that ye may have the kingdom that she is in. Amen."

#### B. THE SPECULUM SACERDOTALE: FIFTEENTH CENTURY

About the same time and in the same region, another author, unknown to Mirk, was compiling a similar collection of sermons. Unlike Mirk, however, the author of the *Speculum Sacerdotale* prefaces his work with a word of explanation.<sup>62</sup> After warning his readers not to confuse the worship due to Saints with the worship of "latria," which worship is only proper to the Godhead," the author wholeheartedly commends the custom of Holy Church, "observed in all the churches of the world," by which the parish priests "after reading of the Gospel and of the Offertory at Mass turn them unto the people and show openly unto them all the solemnities and feasts which shall fall and be had in the week following." It is to assist these "priests which be dear and familiar unto me before all other," and in answer to "the instance and prayers which that ye have made unto me for this present work," that the author has "disposed and written after my simpleness of the solemnities of all saints the which should worshipfully each Sunday be shown unto your people that God may be glorified in your churches." They already have these sermons in their "hand in Latin or Roman tongue," but an English adaptation will perhaps prove more useful.

The two books in the Latin tongue on which the author draws for his sermon on "The Assumption"<sup>63</sup> are clearly the *Transitus* of Pseudo-Melito and the *Legenda Aurea*. The *Legenda* itself is based on the *Transitus*, but from the scene on Calvary to the burial of the Blessed Virgin the present sermon follows the source much more closely than

<sup>62</sup> *Speculum*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>63</sup> *Speculum*, pp. 182-191.

de Voragine's account. It is only after Christ's final apparition at the tomb that the author of the *Speculum* strikes out for himself. When Christ has saluted the apostles, "Pax vobis, fratres," instead of listening to their petition, as in Pseudo-Melito and de Voragine, He sends "his angels to bear away and to translate the body of Mary unknowing the apostles." The apostles then learn the secret through no less a person than "St. Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist." It is of course de Voragine's St. Elizabeth of Schonau, whom Mirk has just presented as St. Elizabeth of Spain, and whom the present author has identified with the only Elizabeth he has met in the Gosepls. The account of the vision is the same as in Mirk's sermon, except that the present author adds with de Voragine the angel's command to St. Elizabeth to pass on the revelation:

Then Elizabeth asked him (the angel) whether she should show that vision to the people or she should hide it. And he said it should not be shown to them that live after the flesh nor to them that are misconstruing, and it is not to be hid from them that are true livers.

The author concludes: this day Our Lady was taken up to heaven, where she is now enthroned above all other creatures, and to her we should turn in our need. "And for that we will have this feast of her the more devoutly worshipped, therefore we will declare to you a miracle." He then tells de Voragine's story of the knight who sold his wife to the devil. There was once a "devout" knight, who fell on evil times. When he was unable to give his customary gifts on Our Lady's feast—the present version adds the relevant detail, that it was the feast of the Assumption—he fled to the wilderness to hide his humiliation. There the devil appeared to him and promised him great riches, on condition that he would bring his wife to him on an appointed day. The knight accepted the offer, and the devil was as good as his word. When the day came for the knight to keep his part of the bargain, he bade his wife make ready her horse and come with him. When, however, they were passing a church, the lady made a visit "for the sacrament to be seen and God and Our Lady to be worshipped." While there, she fell asleep, and Our Lady, appearing in the guise of his wife, took her place by the husband's side. When they reached the appointed spot, the devil hastened towards them eager to seize his

prey. But what was his dismay, when he recognized the knight's companion: "Thou art the falsest man that is," he cried. "I bade that thou should bring thy wife to me, and thou hast brought Mary, that shall torment me and send me to hell." Whereupon the knight himself was stricken with remorse, repented and promised to give up his ill-gotten riches. Mary, however, rewarded his penitence, and he and his wife became wealthy once more. The sermon ends with a short but practical exhortation to good works. "And therefore, dear friends, we must cleanse both in flesh and in spirit for this feast of the Assumption to be worthily worshipped." It is not enough for women to abstain for her feast from preparing their linen or teasing their wool, if it is only to spend their time in deeds of unchastity, detraction, or strife; or for men to give up ploughing in the field to spend their holiday at home, in drunkenness and fighting, fornication and adultery, and other such damnable deeds, pleasing to the devil and displeasing to God. Rather "let us decline from evil and work that that is good that we may please Our Lady, Saint Mary, and through the prayers and merits of her have help to come to the joys of heaven."

#### C. FIFTEENTH CENTURY TRANSLATIONS: CAXTON'S GOLDEN LEGEND

These later sermons, as we have seen, are for the most part based on the *Legenda Aurea* of the great Dominican historian, Jacobus de Voragine. The *Legenda*, however, enters into the full current of English literature, only with the fifteenth-century translations, culminating in Caxton's printed edition in the eighties. The *Golden Legend*, to give the *Legenda* its English title, is more than a new force in the literature of the period; it is also a critical summary of much that has gone before. It has indeed little to add to the traditional story of the Assumption, but now for the first time we have the whole array of arguments and authorities drawn up for our consideration. With the *Golden Legend* the medieval tradition reaches its full maturity.

The matter of the *Legend* is arranged in what might be described as an historical essay, outlining the principal events leading up to and following the Assumption, followed by a series of documentary appendices. These consist of the reasons for believing in the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin; a series of stories to illustrate her power of intercession; and finally a number of classical sermons on

the same subject by "St. Cosmo Vestitor," "St. John Damascene," and "St. Austin."

De Voragine's<sup>64</sup> main account is based, as he explicitly states, on Pseudo-Melito: "We find in a book sent to S. John the Evangelist, or else the book, which is said to be apocryphal, is ascribed to him, in what manner the assumption of the blessed Virgin Mary was made."<sup>65</sup> It begins, however, not with the passion, but with the period after Pentecost and the dispersion of the apostles:

The apostles were departed and gone into divers countries of the world for the cause of preaching, and the blessed Lady and Virgin was in a house by the Mount of Sion, and as long as she lived she visited all the places of her son with great devotion.

De Voragine then quotes Epiphanius to the effect that after her Son's death "she lived four-and-twenty years" so that "when she departed out of this world she was seventy-two years old." The rest of the narrative follows the *Transitus* fairly closely with a few notable omissions and additions. For instance, the contest of humility between St. Peter and St. Paul, which is found in some texts of Pseudo-Melito, does not appear in the *Legend*; but on the other hand de Voragine adds the testimony of "Denis, disciple of Paul" to the assembly of the apostles, and how each of them preached a sermon to the "laud of Jesu Christ . . . and his mother."<sup>66</sup> He also adds the legend of St. Thomas, interpreting, however, the gift of the girdle as an attempt to settle the apostle's doubt, rather than to console him for his late arrival.

De Voragine then enters on a criticism of the foregoing account. He first proceeds to "S. Jerome's"<sup>67</sup> reflections on the apocryphal narrative. He records the critic's verdict, that while some words be "worthy of faith," "many other things be put there more at fantasy and sim-

<sup>64</sup> In this and all the later references to de Voragine, it would be more accurate to write de Voragine-Caxton, since the English translator's rendering does not always do justice to the precision of de Voragine's Latin, and in any case Caxton has left the imprint of his personality and the vernacular idiom on his rendering.

<sup>65</sup> Compare the opening words of Pseudo-Melito: "We therefore at your petition have written those things which we heard from the apostle John."

<sup>66</sup> *In Divinis Nominibus*, quoted by St. John Damascene, second sermon on the Dormition, PG, XCVI, 748. The authenticity of the passage has been called in doubt; see Jugie, *La Mort et l'Assomption*, p. 92.

<sup>67</sup> This and subsequent references to "St. Jerome" are all to Pseudo-Jerome, *Epistola IX, ad Paulam et Eustochium*, (PL, XXX, 122).

ulation than at truth." But, apparently oblivious of the fact that "S. Jerome" clearly excludes the bodily assumption from the former category, he includes among the words "worthy of faith" that Mary "was assumpt into heaven, body and soul." Among the things, however, that "S. Jerome" regarded as simulated, he mentions the legend of St. Thomas. He imagines that "S. Jerome's" difficulty was not on account of the apostle's testimony to what "S. Jerome" considered the doubtful fact of the bodily assumption, but because the story of the girdle would seem incompatible with the presence of Our Lady's garments, "left in her tomb, to the comfort of good christian men." And in proof of the fact that such relics still exist, de Voragine cites the miracle of Our Lady's coat. "When the Duke of Normandy had as-sieged the city of Chartres," the bishop of the city bore the coat of Our Lady as a banner against the enemy, and in that sign the citizens conquered. But they abused their victory by slaying too many of their foe; "the which thing displeased much the virgin S. Mary, as it was proved by that that her coat vanished away, and the duke, their enemy, found it in his lap." To the testimony of "S. Jerome" he adds the "revelations of S. Elizabeth." We have already had some account of these visions. De Voragine adds some chronological details:

It is said in the same revelation that it was showed to her that the fortieth day after the soul departed from her body she was so assumpt into heaven, and also that when our blessed Lady spake to her, she said: After the Ascension of our Lord a whole year, and as many days more as be from the Ascension unto her assumption, she overlived.

De Voragine now approaches the whole subject of the Assumption afresh, and promises to treat it under three heads: "It is to be noted that the glorious Virgin Mary was assumpt and lifted up into heaven entirely joyously and gloriously." Later he adds "she was received excellently." (We see at once the source of the triple division in Mirk's first Assumption sermon.) "She was received entirely," that is in body and soul. So de Voragine takes up once more the question of the bodily assumption. He begins with the argument of St. Bernard, that if her body were on earth, it would be honoured at least as much as "the bodies of other saints." He returns to "S. Jerome" for the date of the Assumption, which the latter assigns to "the eighteenth calends of September." He recalls "S. Jerome's" doubt once more, but focuses

it on the explanation rather than on the fact of "the assumption of the body of Mary"—"the church will rather debonairly believe it, than rashly to explain it"—and even cites his arguments in its favour, without mentioning, however, "S. Jerome's" refutation of the same arguments:

It is to be believed that they that arose with our Lord have accomplished their perdurable resurrection. Wherefore should not we say then that it is done in the Blessed Virgin Mary. And also many believe that S. John the Evangelist is glorified in heaven, both body and soul, which saith: Worship thy father and mother, and he came not to break the law but to fulfil it, and therefore he honoureth his mother above all other.

Three reasons are then quoted from "S. Austin":

And the first reason is the unity and assembly of the flesh of our Lord and of our Lady, and saith thus: Putrefaction and worms is the reproach of condition human, which Jesus never touched, and the flesh of Jesu is out of this reproof, the nature of Mary is out thereof, for it is proved that Jesu Christ hath taken his flesh of her. The second reason is the dignity of the body of her to whom himself saith: This is the siege (throne) of God, the chamber of our Lord of heaven, and the tabernacle of Christ. She is worthy to be where he is, so precious a treasure is more worthy to be kept in heaven than in earth. The third reason is perfect entireness of her virginal flesh, and saith thus: Enjoy thou Mary of honourable gladness in body and in soul. In thy proper son, and by thy proper son, thou oughtest to have no harm of corruption, and live entirely, which bearest entire him that is perfect of all, and that she be with him whom she bare in her womb, and that she be at him whom she childed, gave suck and nourished.

"S. Austin's" view is supported by the author of the *Transit ad aethera*: "The virgin that childed mounted into heaven, the little rod of Jesse, not without body, but without time, she entendeth to be there, virgin pure and net (chaste)."

De Voragine briefly disposes of the other headings of his sermon. "Secondly, she was assumpt and taken up gladly"; and he quotes the words of "Gerard, bishop and martyr," that the angels rejoiced to receive the Blessed Virgin, "bringing her with thankings and lauds unto the siege of the divine and sovereign majesty." "Thirdly, she was lifted up in heaven so honourably that Jesu Christ himself with all the strength of the heavenly company came against her." "Fourthly, she was received excellently," that is, she "was honoured gloriously,



sitting next unto Christ." To elaborate both the third and fourth point, he borrows from the Epistle of "S. Jerome" the latter's description of the reception of the Blessed Virgin's soul into heaven. He completes the picture with a magnificent passage from "Gerard the bishop"—the most eloquent in the *Legend* account, and one which deserves to be quoted in full:

Our Lord Jesu Christ alone may praise this blessed Virgin his mother as he did, and magnify, so that she be continually praised of that majesty, and honoured and environed of the company of angels, enclosed with the turmes of archangels, possessed of the thrones and girt about of the dominations, environed with the service of the potestates, beclipped with the embracements of the principates, enjoyed with the honours of the virtues, obeyed with lauds and praising of the cherubins, and possessed on all parts with not recountable songs of the seraphins. And the over great and ineffable Trinity enjoyeth in her perdurable gladness, and his grace redoundeth all in her and maketh all other to entend and await on her. The overshining order of the apostles honour her with ineffable laud. The honourable multitude of martyrs beseech her in all manner as one so great a lady. The fellowship of confessors innumerable continue their song to her, the right noble and white company of virgins make noble carolling of the glory of her. Hell, full of malice, howleth, and the cursed devils cry unto her and dread her.

De Voragine concludes his main account of the Assumption with a series of miracles wrought by the Blessed Virgin and proving her power of intercession. Some of these we have met already: the clerk who used to recite the five joys, the knight who sold his wife to the devil, the child of the Jew, and the woman that suffered many griefs of a devil. But there are three we have not yet heard. There is the miracle of the monk saved from drowning. "There was a monk much jolly and light of his living but devout to our Lady, which on a night went to do his folly accustomed, but when he passed before the altar of our Lady, he saluted the virgin and so went forth out of the church. And as he should pass a river he fell into the water and drowned, and the devils took the soul." Our Lady notwithstanding claimed the soul as her own. "And when they strove tofore Our Lord of this matter, it pleased him that the soul should return again to the body and repent him of his sins." Next morning when the brethren sought the monk and found him drowned, "suddenly he came again to life, and told what he had done, and after finished his life in good works." The next miracle, that of the "man which was ravished in judgement tofore

God," might have provided a suggestion for *Everyman*, and is in fact a morality in miniature. When standing before his Judge, the man was claimed by the devil as his own because of the sin of our first parents as well as the personal sins of the accused. Before passing judgement, God gave the sinner eight days to find an answer to the devil's claims. Presently he met two other men, one called Verity and the other Righteousness, who promised to defend him before the throne of God. When the eighth day arrived, Verity cleared him of the first charge, by recalling the redemption wrought by Christ; and Righteousness of the further charge of having served the devil. But when they came to the final weighing of his "good and evil," it looked as though there were no hope for the accused; "and then Truth and Righteousness said to the sinner: Run with all thy thought unto the Lady of mercy which sitteth by the judge, and study to call her to thine help. And when he had so done, the Blessed Virgin Mary came in to his help and laid her hand upon the balance whereas were but few good deeds. And the devil enforced him to draw on the other side, but the mother of mercy won and obtained and delivered the sinner. And then he came again to himself and amended his life." The third is the story of the idle monks. "There were certain monks tofore day standing by a river and talked and jangled there of fables and idle words." Presently a boatload of devils rowed by, bearing the soul of an apostate monk to hell. The other monks in their terror cried out: "S. Mary, pray for us! And the devils said: Well have ye called Mary, for we would have disjoined you and drowned you because of your dissolute and out of time jangling. And then the monks returned to their convent, and the devils went in to hell."

De Voragine adds three final appendices. First he begins: "Here followeth yet of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady." And he produces "a sermon made and ordained of divers sayings of saints, the which is read solemnly in many churches, and therein is contained all that I can find in the world, in narrations of holy fathers, of the departing out of this life of the glorious virgin Mary, mother of God." He first quotes "S. Cosmo, which had to surname Vestitor," who "saith he hath learned of his foregoers which did that ought not to be forgotten." The narrative that follows agrees substantially with that of Pseudo-Melito, though it is more sensational and contains a few

interesting variations. The angel, in delivering the message of Christ, first suggests the familiar motives for the resurrection of her body:

Give to the earth without trembling that which is his. None shall ravish thee out of mine hands, for in my hands be all the ends of the world; deliver to me thy body, for I have put in thee my deity or godhead. The death shall never have joy on thee . . . for thou hast deserved to be my vessel.

Mary is then presented with the palm of paradise "in token of the victory against corruption of death" and also with "the clothes of immortality." The arrival of the apostles is melodramatic: "And anon after came a great noise of thunder, and a whirlwind brought a cloud whiter than snow, in which the apostles were brought tofore the gate of our Blessed Lady, like as it had rained, so fell they down one after another." At which, not unnaturally, "they marvelled." When St. John had explained the cause of their coming and they had recovered from their grief, "they dried their eyes and entered in to the Blessed Virgin, and saluted her honourably and adored her," addressing her thus:

Right honourable Lady and Virgin, we in beholding thee, be greatly comforted like as we should be in our Lord and master, and we have only comfort in ourselves because we hope that thou shalt be mediatrix for us unto God. And then she saluted Paul by name: God save thee, expositor of my comfort, howbeit that thou hast not seen Jesu Christ in his flesh. Nevertheless I am comforted, said S. Paul, that I may see thee in the flesh. And unto this day I have preached to the people that thou hast borne Jesu Christ. And now I shall preach that thou art borne up to heaven to him.

De Voragine is at his usual pains to prove "that all the apostles were assembled at the passing of the blessed Virgin Mary"—except perhaps St. Thomas—and calls to witness "the blessed archbishop of Constantinople" (S. Germain) who adds:

Blessed Lady, mother of God, thou hast received of the nature human the death which may not be eschewed, yet shalt thou not sleep, ne the eye shall not slumber that keepeth thee. Thy departing hence ne thy dormition shall not be without witness. . . . The angels shall preach the service of life done in thee by the apostles which were assembled with thee in Jerusalem.

And de Voragine further recalls, as earlier, the witness of "S. Denis, Areopagite." St. Cosmo then resumes the narrative. He prefaces his

description of the final series of miracles with the warning: "For all things that be said of the glorious virgin, mother of God be marvellous above nature and be more to doubt than to enquire." He then goes on to describe the concluding events in the manner of Pseudo-Melito, but he adds the witness of the apostle who was absent, and makes it fit in quite plausibly with the preceding account.

When he (the apostle) heard so great miracles, he marvelled and required with great desire that her sepulchre might be opened for to know the truth of all these things. And the apostles denied it to him. All said that it ought enough to suffice the witness of so great persons, to the end that lest peradventure the misbelieved men should say that the body were stolen away or drawn by theft. And he then, which was angry, said: Why defend ye to me that which am semblable to you in your common treasures? And at the last they opened the sepulchre and found not the body, but they found only but the vestments and the sudary (shroud).

De Voragine concludes the sermon by recalling the tradition recorded in the "History Euthimiata," that as early as the time of St. Helena it was known in Jerusalem that Our Lady's body had been assumed into heaven.

S. Germain, Archbishop of Constantinople, saith that he found written in the History Euthimiata in the third book of the fortieth chapter, and the same witnesseth the great Damascene, that as the noble empress Helen in mind of holy church had made many churches in Constantinople, among all other she edified in the time of Marcian the emperor at Balthernas a marvellous church in the honour of the Virgin Mary, and called Juvenal Archbishop of Jerusalem and all the other bishops of Palestine which dwelled then in the city royal for the cene (council) which had been holden in Chalcedon, and she said to them: We have heard say that the body of the right virgin our Lady is in such a place, in such a tomb in the Vale of Jehosaphat; we will then that for the guard of this city, that the body of that Blessed Virgin be transported hither with due honour and reverence. And Juvenal answered to her, like as he had found in ancient histories, that the body was borne into glory, and was not in the monument, for there was nothing left but the vestments and the sudary only. And those vestments Juvenal sent then into Constantinople, and were there laid honourably.

The sermon ends with a noble vindication of the author's integrity: "And let no man ween that I have made this of my proper head and engine, but I have set it here which I have by doctrine and study learnt of the lesson of them, which by tradition and learning of their foregoers have received it." Would that all his predecessors had shared the same ideal!

De Voragine's second appendix is a summary of the sermons of St. John Damascene on the Dormition of Our Lady. It is composed with all the passion and effusion of eastern eloquence. Indeed the sense is almost lost beneath the wealth of imagery and rhetorical apostrophe.

This day the right holy and sumptuous ark which bare within her her maker was brought and set in the temple which was not made of hands. On this day the right holy culver or dove, innocent and simple, fled from the ark, that is to say from the body in which God received and found rest. On this day the virgin that conceived, not knowing the passions earthly, but induced by the entendments celestial shall not fail, but shall be called very heaven, soul dwelling in the celestial tabernacles.

Damascene then goes on to explain why her "holy dormition or sleeping is not called death":

The death of other saints may well be said death, for that death maketh them blessed, but he hath no place in thee. For thy death . . . maketh thee not ne giveth thee surety to be blessed. . . . Thy surety, thy very perfection, and thy conception without seed, and thy divine habitation have made thee blessed.

Indeed, she "has ennobled the death in taking away the heaviness and sorrow thereof, converting it into joy." She is the second Eve, bringing life into the world, where the first Eve brought death:

Eve stretched her ear to the serpent, of whom she took the venom mortal, and because she did it for delight, she was subdued to bearing and bringing forth children in sorrow and pain, and was condemned with Adam. But this Blessed Virgin that inclined her ear to the word of God, whom the Holy Ghost replenished, which bare in her womb the mercy of God; which conceived without knowledge of man, and childed without pain and sorrow, how durst death swallow her? How might anything have corruption that bare life?

There follows Damascene's actual account of the Assumption. It is substantially the same as the account of Pseudo-Melito, with a few interesting variations. Adam and Eve now add their voices to the heavenly summons: "Come to us, right holy and wholesome celyer (dove), which fulfillest our desire." Her last words are interesting, for they hint at a third possible state in which her body might be preserved without being assumed into heaven: "And I commend my body to the earth for to keep it whole, or where it shall please thee to enhabit it." The series of miracles accompanying her death are also a

new feature:

And by the blessing and holiness of the holy body, whosoever touched the bier devoutly were healed of whatsoever sickness they had. Devils were chased from demoniacs, the air and the heaven were purified by the assumption of the soul, and the earth by the deposition of the body. And the water was sanctified by the washing of the body.

In conclusion the arguments are resumed for her bodily assumption:

And they said that she was the well which never was digged, the field not eared, the vine not cut, the olive bearing fruit which shall not be holden in the bosom of the earth. For it appertaineth that the mother be enhanced with the son. And that she mount to him, like as he descended in to her. And that she that hath kept her virginity in her childing ought to see no corruption. And she that bare the creator of all the world in her belly ought to dwell in divine tabernacles. And that she whom the Father had taken to espouse, were kept in the chambers celestial. And those things that long to the son, ought to be possessed of the mother.

De Voragine's third and final appendix is "Yet of the Assumption of our Lady, after S. Austin." It is a digest of the *De Assumptione* of Pseudo-Augustine. "The Scripture remembereth nothing" of Mary's death and assumption, he argues, so we have to discover the truth from reason. As for her death, if "we remember the condition human: we doubt not to say that surely she went to temporal death." On the other hand it does not follow from this that she suffered corruption: rather "it behoveth us to weigh and think such thing as appertaineth to the seignory of such a chamber of God." Though "it was said to the first father: Thou art powder, and into powder thou shalt return, the flesh of Jesu Christ escaped from this condition," so then may "the nature taken by the virgin." Again, though "God said to the woman Eve: I shall multiply thy diseases and thou shalt bring forth children with pain and sorrow," "Mary childed without sorrow," so she need "not to have part of diseases, ne of corruption." If Our Lord then could keep His mother from corruption, surely He would do so "which was not come to break the law (i.e., Honour thy father and thy mother) but to accomplish it." Further Mary is united to her Son in the order of nature; but Christ is in heaven, so she should be there with Him too. She is also united to Him by grace more closely than any other; but Christ said of those who were united to Him by grace: "Father, I will that where I am they be with me"; how much

more then will He desire to have His Mother with Him, body and soul. In a word, "so right precious treasure is more worthy to be in heaven than in earth." Other arguments follow from "the consideration of many scriptures": "God saith sometime to his ministers: Whereas I am there shall be my ministers. If this sentence be general to all them that have ministered Jesu Christ by faith and by work, how is there any more special than Mary?" And he recites her faith and her works from the Annunciation to Calvary. The same may be shown from other places in Scripture:

If the divine volunity vouchsafed to keep the vestments of the children from hurting among the flames of fire, why should not he keep in his mother the which he kept in a strange vesture? It pleased him to keep Jonas in the belly of the whale without corruption. Should not he then keep his mother not corrupt? He kept Daniel alive in the pit of lions from their distempered hunger. Ought he not to keep Mary for so many gifts of merits and dignities?

From all of which "S. Austin" concludes that Mary escaped the corruption of the grave. Not anticipating, however, the definition of the Church, he prudently adds: "And then if I have said as I ought to say, Jesu Christ approve it, thou and thine; and if I have not said as I ought to say, I pray thee to pardon me, thou and thine."

#### LATER SERMONS AND WORKS OF DEVOTION: FIFTEENTH CENTURY

##### A. THE ROYAL SERMONS

The lyrical quality of certain elements in the sermons we have so far considered finds full expression in the last two works we have yet to examine. The first is a sermon from a collection of prose homilies (MS. Royal 18 B xxiii)<sup>68</sup> by various authors, perhaps compiled at Oxford between 1375 and 1415, as models for sermons to be preached to the laity. The Assumption is in the homily tradition. The preacher chooses for his text the words of the Canticle: "*Quam pulchra es, et quam decora carissima in deliciis*":

These words were said to Our Lady of God's own mouth, and be thus much to say in English to your understanding, "Thou most gracious in pleausance, how comely art thou of person, and of what beauty in soul." [He then divides up his subject in the approved fashion:] In these words be moved four questions, the which toucheth Our Lady. The first is of her comeliness—*Quam pulchra*; the second

<sup>68</sup> Royal 18 B xxiii.

is of spiritual beauty—*decora*; the third is of ghostly delights—*deliciis*; the fourth is of her charity—*carissima*.

As the theme develops the aureate epithets spring spontaneously to the preacher's lips. She is the moon "among the stars of heaven"; "the sun, the which is chosen the chief of all the seven planets." She is the sign and token which "appeared in heaven, a woman clothed in the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars":

Almighty God gave this sign and token . . . [stretching] down into the deepness of hell; for all the devils there dread the name of this glorious Virgin and be subdued to her power. . . . This token also stretcheth into heaven; for she is there empress, sitting above all orders of angels . . . and also by her heavenly conversation she maketh earthly men to be the citizens of heaven.

Finally she leaves our sight in a blaze of glory: "The going of this maid was measured without dissolution, her eyes declaring all chastity, her face full of delights and amiable to angels. The words that she spake were full sweet and full easy, ever sounding to the thanking of God."

#### B. THE MIRROR OF OUR LADY

Our survey, however, ends, as it began, not with a sermon, but with a vernacular service-book, designed for reading in a religious house. We began with the Martyrology of a West-Saxon monastery; now we conclude with *The Mirror of Our Lady*, a devotional commentary on their Mass and Office, composed sometime in the first half of the fifteenth century for the Sisters of the Brigittine Monastery of Syon at Isleworth. The history of the convent itself is in keeping with its place at the end of this survey. It was founded by Henry V on his accession, for sixty nuns and twenty-five priests, deacons, and brothers, all under the rule of an abbess, and became one of the most flourishing and venerated of the later religious houses. The convent was suppressed by Henry VIII, and the sisters, after a brief attempt at restoration under Mary, eventually settled at Lisbon. Subsequently the convent served as a prison for Queen Katharine Howard; it was here that the body of Henry VIII rested on its way from Whitehall to Windsor and the prophecy was said to have been fulfilled, that the dogs would lick his blood as they did that of Achab; here too Lady Jane Grey was



residing, when she was persuaded to become a nine-day queen. The services and their interpretation in such a house must provide an authentic picture of the faith and piety of later medieval England at its best.<sup>69</sup>

The author of the *Mirror* is unknown, though Dr. Thomas Gascoign, Chancellor of Oxford in the forties, has been suggested as a possible name. In the prologue,<sup>70</sup> the author explains why he undertook the work. He takes for his text the words of the Canticle: "Viderunt eam Filiae Syon, et beatissimam praedicaverunt," and applies it to the daughters, or nuns, of Syon and the praising of Our Lady. But to praise their Lady well, especially in their holy service, the sisters must "have first sight thereof by inward understanding":

But forasmuch as many of you, though ye can sing and read, yet ye cannot see what the meaning thereof is: therefore to the only worship and praising of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of his most merciful mother Our Lady and to the ghostly comfort and profit of your souls, I have drawn your legend and all your service into English, that ye should see by the understanding thereof how worthy and holy praising of our glorious Lady is contained therein, and the more devoutly and knowingly sing it, and read it, and say it to her worship. . . . And for as much as ye may see in this book as in a mirror, the praisings and worthiness of our most excellent Lady, therefore I name it "Our Lady's Mirror."

The author, to begin with, suggests that the sisters should take for their meditations an appropriate subject for each day of the week: for Saturday he proposes the Assumption.

On Saturday ye may see the holy life of Our Lady, namely from the time of her Son's passion unto her assumption, and how she was taken up into heaven both soul and body, and set most nigh the Blessed Trinity above all creatures. And so the joy that the same Blessed Trinity had of the same glorious Lady, endlessly ere she was made, as ye read on Sunday, was fulfilled in her effectually indeed, in her assumption, as ye read on Saturday.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> That the *Mirror* was intended for public reading, and so comes within the scope of the present study, is clear from the author's own words, "when thys seconde parte ys redde openly in the Couente" (p. 70). It was intended too for private use: "And also when youre legende ys redde at mattyns, yf eny wolde in the meane tyme haue the englysshe before her and fede her mynde therewyth. then the latyn that ys wryten in the begynnynge of eche clause of the englysshe shulde helpe her moche, & dyrecte her that she may go forthe with the reder clause by clause" (p. 71). The historical details just recalled are taken from the very full account of the convent and its history by the editor of the *Mirror*.

<sup>70</sup> *Mirror*, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Mirror*, p. 5.

The allusion to the Sunday Office is made clearer when he comes to consider the Offices of the week. Commenting on the Sunday Chapter for Tierce—"Ab initio et ante saecula creata sum, et usque ad futurum saeculum non desinam"—he places the words on the lips of Our Lady, and applies the last clause especially to the assumption of her body: " 'And I shall never fail, neither in soul by any sin, ne in body by any corruption.' For Our Lady's holy body is not turned to corruption in earth, but taken up and knit to the soul in the glory of heaven."

But it is on the Saturday that the Assumption receives the fullest attention, the whole Office being devoted to that mystery.<sup>72</sup> The Invitatory states the theme: "*In honore*, In worship of the Virgin Mary, taken up into heaven, joy we in the Lord." The Hymn, *O Gloriosa*, and the Anthem, *Exaltata es*, are paraphrased and explained:

As to understanding of this anthem, it is to wit that the gates of paradise and of heaven were shut to mankind by the sin of Adam and of Eve, and by Our Lady they were opened, for she brought forth Our Lord Jesus Christ, which by His passion and His ascension opened heaven gates. And therefore our glorious Lady in her assumption entered these gates as an overcomer, as this anthem telleth.

The commentator then goes on to explain what is meant by entering a city as an overcomer, or in triumph. He describes a victor and his triumph as "it was wont to be used in Rome," then applies the details in the form of an allegory to the reception of the Blessed Virgin into heaven:

Therefore as the people of Rome came against such a victor, so all the company of heaven came joyfully to welcome our glorious Lady in her assumption. And as his prisoners followed bound after him, so all fiends are as thrall prisoners to Our Lady, and follow after her so sore bound, that they dare nothing do against her bidding. And also as this victor was clad in a god's clothing, so was the glorious soul of Our Lady endued with and clad with three dowries of joy of the Blessed Trinity above all other creatures. And as he was set in a chair drawn of four white horses, so the chair of Our Lady's soul, that is her holy body, was taken up and glorified with the soul in four dowries, that belong to the body. And as he was led thus to that highest place of Rome, so our most reverent Lady was set highest in heaven next unto God.

This brings us to the Lessons. The First Lesson recalls how "when her blessed Son ascended up to His glorious kingdom, the Virgin Mary

<sup>72</sup> *Mirror*, Saturday Service, pp. 257-76.

was suffered to abide in this world to the comfort of the good and to the correction of them that erred." The Second Lesson "telleth of the assumption of Our Lady's soul, how it was set next unto God, and what sovereignty God gave her above all the world, and angels, and fiends," so "that she should be partner of all the goods that might be given of God." Eventually the Third Lesson "telleth of the assumption and glory of Our Lady's most holy body." The author states his argument for the bodily assumption at some length:

*Quia ipsa veritas*, For as much as the self truth that is the Son of God and of the Virgin hath counselled all to yield good for evil, with how many goods is the same God to be trusted that He rewarded by Himself the doers of good deeds. *Et quia*, And for He hath behote (promised) by His gospel to give a hundredfold for each good work, who may think with how great gifts of reward He hath made rich His most reverent Mother, which soothly never did the least sin and whose good works also most acceptable to God hath no number. *Nam sicut*, For as the will of the same Virgin's soul was the beginner of all good deeds, right so also her most honest body was an instrument most able and continually pliable to the perfect doing of the same deeds. *Unde sicut vere*, Wherefore as we believe verily that of the righteousness of God all men's bodies shall arise in the last day and take reward with their souls as their works ask, because that as each man's soul was the beginner of all his works by putting to of will, right so the body joined thereto fulfilled them all by itself bodily in deed. *Sicut igitur*, Therefore as it is to believe without any doubt that as the body of the Son of God that never sinned arose from death and is glorified together with the soul, right so also the body of His most worthy Mother, that never did sin, a few days after it was taken up with the most holy soul of the same virgin by the virtue and power of God into heaven, and with all worship it was glorified together with the same soul. *Et sicut*, And as it is impossible to any man's understanding in this world to comprehend the fairness and glory of that crown wherewith it seemed Christ the Son of God to be worshipped and made glorious for His passion, right so also may no man think the fairness of that crown with which the Virgin Mary is worshipped in body and in soul for her godly obedience.

A beautiful application of the mystery of the Assumption is then made for men in their everyday needs:

*Sed quia*, But as much as we know verily that the blessed body of the Virgin was lifted up into heaven with the soul; therefore it is wholesomely counselled to deadly men, offenders of God, that they hastily ascend up unto her by veray repentance of their sins, that are daily broken with divers tribulations in this vale of wretchedness, and doubt not but that this woeful life shall be ended by death of their bodies. *Et si ex huius*, And if men desire to be fed of Christ, that is

the fruit of this tree, labour they first with all strength to bow the small branches of this tree, that is to say to greet with charity the same His Mother. . . . *Tunc enim*, For then shall the same Virgin lightly be bowed unto them, giving them the suffrage of her help to receive the fruit of the tree of life, that is the most worthy Body of Christ, which is sacred with you in the hands of men. *Quod quidem*, And which is life and food to you sinners in the world and to angels in heaven.

The relationship between the Host and the body of Mary is made more explicit in the Hymn in Lauds, and becomes another reason for the preservation of her body from corruption: "*Non passus est*, The King of Bliss hath not suffered His Mother's body to rot, whereof He took the Host by which He showed sovereign grace. *Immo vexit*, But He hath borne it with the soul into the palace of heaven to receive endless joys with the Trinity."

The cry of joy raised in Matins and Lauds is prolonged throughout the day, anthem and hymn answering anthem and hymn in paeon after paeon of joy until by Compline the very universe rocks in an ecstasy of bliss, as the celestial nuptials rise to their climax:

*Trina coeli*, The three hierarchies of heaven, the sun, the stars, the moon, the settings together of stars must praise God for thee, O Mary Virgin and Mother. *Aer cum volatilibus*, The air with all that flieth, the sea with all that swimmeth, the earth with all that creepeth and with all that hath life. *Nix imbrium*, The snow, the drops of rain, flowers, fruits, and grass must give divers gifts of praisings to God for thy glory. *Omne genu*, Each knee of all that are in heaven, and in hell, and in earth must be bowed to the Lord of Heaven that hath set thee in joy. . . . *O jucundissimam*, O most joyful joy. God the Father halseth (embraces) His Spouse, the Son His Mother, the Holy Ghost His sacrary; all the chivalry of heaven praiseth their most worthy Lady, the Virgin Mary with unspeakable praising.

Besides the Offices for each day of the week, the *Mirror* treats briefly the special Offices of Our Lady's feasts.<sup>73</sup> For the Feast of the Assumption, the author, commenting on the Chapter of Evensong, *Quasi cedrus*, explains the cedar as a type of Our Lady:

The Cedar is a tree that groweth high and it is so durable that it rotteth never. So our most reverend Lady was highest in virtue in earth, and now is highest in bliss. And she never rotted ne was corrupt in soul by any manner sin, ne in body in her life ne after death. For the body with the soul is in endless bliss. And therefore she saith that she is raised as a Cedar in Lebanon.

<sup>73</sup> *Mirror*, Feast of the Assumption, pp. 282-86.

The Orison again recalls the mystery of her preservation from corruption: on this day "the holy Mother of God passed under temporal death and yet she might not be borne down with the bonds of death that begat of herself . . . Our Lord that became man." At Sext the familiar lines of the Canticle are given a new interpretation:

*Tota pulchra es*, Thou art all fair, my friend, and spot is none in thee. Come from the Lebanon, my spouse, come from the Lebanon. Come thou shalt be crowned. . . . Lebanon is a mountain and it is as much to say as white, and therefore it betokeneth the highness of virtue and of grace. From this Lebanon Our Lady was called on this day, for from the most highness of grace and of virtue that might be had in earth of any creature, she passed to the most highness of glory. And that not only in soul, but also afterwards in body. And therefore is it said here to her twice: Come from the Lebanon. Once for the assumption of her soul, another for the assumption of her holy body. For first was her glorious soul called to bliss and then her body. And both body and soul to be crowned in endless reward, and therefore it followeth for both: Come thou shalt be crowned.

The *Mirror* ends with a commentary on the Masses of Our Lady.<sup>74</sup> Though the Mass of the Assumption bears no direct testimony to Our Lady's bodily assumption, it has caught the note of joy and triumph that characterises the Assumption tradition as a whole. The Mass is a hymn of joy.

*Gaudeamus*, Joy we all in the Lord, hallowing a feastful day under worship of Mary Virgin, of whose assumption angels joy and praise the Son of God. . . . *Quam splendida*, How bright shineth the Virgin Mother in heaven . . . which hath begotten the light of all stars, men and spirits. . . . Queen of Heaven, this little people worship thee with meek souls. . . . And one with angels lifteth thee up above the heavens with melodious songs.

And it is on this note that we conclude our survey of seven centuries of English piety. To close the *Mirror* is like shutting the door on some old and fragrant garden. We are grateful indeed that this final record should have brought us to the fair Convent of Syon, which even Henry VIII's creatures found beyond reproach; and that we should find it more effective perhaps in opening the gates of the past than the keys of iron, which the sisters preserved during their centuries of exile against the day when they would open the gates of their true home in England, and the Daughters of Syon would see their Lady once

<sup>74</sup> *Mirror*, Mass of the Assumption, pp. 325-27.

more beneath an English sky and in their praising show her most blessed.

#### EPILOGUE

After this consideration of seven centuries of vernacular tradition, one may ask what bearing it could have on the modern question of the definition of the Assumption. Its interest is that of a witness to the extent and continuity of the tradition. It would of course be unwise to exaggerate the testimony of the humble vernacular pulpit. To begin with, the texts we have examined are only a fraction of the pulpit literature, much of which is preserved in Latin or French. Moreover it is in the liturgy, the monastic school, and the university, that the arguments and traditions for and against the Assumption were best preserved and developed. Still seven centuries of almost unbroken and almost unanimous teaching throughout the length and breadth of one of the great realms of Christendom are not unworthy of consideration. The reasons, too, propounded in the pulpit carry their weight to this day. At least they have taken from the preacher a colour and a warmth often absent from the more scientific treatises. Indeed, even apart from its witness to the continuity of tradition and its eloquent defence of doctrine, the English Assumption tradition should be precious to all who speak the English tongue and profess the ancient faith, for the window it opens upon the lives and aspirations of those who built the faith and made the speech of England. For it is no small thing to turn over records as old as the prose that shapes our daily thought, and to recognize reasons of the mind and heart as true to-day as five hundred or a thousand years ago; and to feel oneself at home anywhere in those seven centuries of England, when England's proudest boast was that she of all the nations was privileged to bear the title of "Our Lady's Dowry."

#### APPENDIX

(SOURCE MATERIAL ON THE ASSUMPTION IN THE VERNACULAR)

##### THE ANGLO-SAXON TRADITION: NINTH AND TENTH CENTURY

THE WEST-SAXON MARTYROLOGY: composed about 850; four MSS. Ed. G. Herzfeld, *An Old English Martyrology* (Early English Text Society, O.S. 116), London, 1900. Critical apparatus and translation.

THE BLICKLING HOMILIES: composed about 970. Ed. R. Morris (E.E.T.S., O.S. 58), London, 1874. Glossary and translation.

# THE MIDDLE-ENGLISH TRADITION: TWELFTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURY

## *Early Prose Homilies: Twelfth Century*

TRINITY COLLEGE HOMILIES: probably composed in twelfth century (?) London dialect. Ed. R. Morris, *Old English Homilies*, Series II (E.E.T.S., O.S. 53), London, 1873. With translation.

VESPASIAN HOMILIES: composed twelfth century. Ed. R. Warner, *Early English Homilies from the 12th c. MS. Vesp. DXIV* (E.E.T.S., O.S. 152), London, 1917.

## *Southern Assumption and its Derivatives: Thirteenth Century*

SOUTHERN ASSUMPTION: not later than 1250, four-stress couplets, six MSS., four as late as fifteenth century. Ed. J. R. Lumby, 1866; revised G. H. McKnight, *King Horn, Floriz and Blanchflur, The Assumption of Our Lady* (E.E.T.S., O.S. 14), London, 1901.

CURSOR MUNDI: 1300-1325, seven MSS., Northern. Ed. R. Morris (E.E.T.S., O.S. 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99), London, 1877, 1878, 1892. Full apparatus.

AUCHINLECK COLLECTION OF ROMANCES: 1330-1340, tail-rime. Ed. M. Schwarz, *Englische Studien*, VIII, 448. Heilbronn, 1885.

(Other versions are listed in the NORTHERN HOMILY and the SOUTHERN LEGENDARY CYCLES. For further details, see the bibliographies cited below.)

## *The Golden Legend: Fourteenth Century*

### (Verse)

BODLEY 779 ITEM 57: a late copy of a metrical version, verses of seven stress, in the SOUTHERN LEGENDARY. *Englische Studien*, VIII, 461.

THE SCOTTISH COLLECTION OF LEGENDS: in metrical form, late fourteenth century. Ed. W. M. Metcalfe, *Legends of the Saints* (Scottish Text Society), Edinburgh, 1896.

### (Prose)

FESTIVAL OF JOHN MIRK: Shropshire, c. 1400. Ed. T. Erbe (E.E.T.S., E.S. 46), London, 1905.

SPECULUM SACERDOTALE: originally produced in the southern part of the West Midland district, early fifteenth century. Ed. E. H. Weatherly (E.E.T.S., O.S. 200), London, 1936.

GOLDEN LEGEND: first English translation, 1438; Caxton's edition, 1483. Ed. F. S. Ellis, London, 1900. Spelling normalised.

*Later Sermons and Works of Devotion: Fifteenth Century*

ROYAL 18 B xxiii: sermons by various authors, perhaps Oxford, between 1375 and 1415. Ed. Ross (E.E.T.S. 209).

THE MIRROR OF OUR LADY: seven copies extant, first half of fifteenth century. Ed. J. H. Blunt (E.E.T.S., E.S. 19), London, 1873.

(Drama)

YORK CRAFT PLAYS: 14th to 15th century. Ed. L. T. Smith, Oxford, 1885.

LUDUS COVENTRIAE: 15th to 16th century. Ed. K. S. Block (E.E.T.S., E.S. 120), London, 1922.

(Lyric)

ENGLISH LYRICS OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY, RELIGIOUS LYRICS OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY, RELIGIOUS LYRICS OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: C. Brown, Oxford, 1932, 1924, 1939.

THE EARLY ENGLISH CAROL: R. L. Greene, Oxford, 1935.

For further details, see J. E. Wells, *Manual of Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400*, New Haven, 1916, with supplements, and *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, 1940; C. Brown, *Register of Middle English Religious and Didactic Verse*, Oxford, 1916-20, and in collaboration with R. H. Robbins, *Index of Middle English Verse*; W. L. Renwick and H. Orton, *The Beginnings of English Literature to Skelton*, London, 1939; and the very full bibliographies of the *Oxford History of English Literature*, as it is appearing.