

A MEDIEVAL ENGLISH POEM  
ON THE PASSION

*Edited by I.E. and A.R.*

THERE was recently discovered in the library of Llanarth Court, Raglan, a Book of Hours of the early fifteenth century which is of more than usual interest. The chief contents of the book are those customary in a Book of Hours of the Sarum Use, namely, the Little Office of Our Lady, the Penitential Psalms, the Office of the Dead, a collection of prayers to our Lord, and one to a Guardian Angel. A considerable number of leaves is missing from the MS., which in its present state begins at once with Lauds and lacks part of Prime and the whole of Terce and Sext. There are no miniatures, but there are a number of elaborately decorated initials, with floriated designs in gold, blue and red, some of which have been damaged by a later binder's trimming of the upper margins. Twenty leaves have been heavily annotated in the lower margins by a sixteenth century Protestant owner of the book. Presumably the same owner was responsible for the erasure of the commemoration of St Thomas of Canterbury at Lauds, in conformity with Henry VIII's suppression of liturgical honour to that saint.

In the Litany of the Saints there are included Saints Swithun, Birinus, Edward, Richard, Edith, which points to the probable Southern English origin of the MS. Nothing is certainly known of the history of the MS., but the Protestant annotations suggest that it has not always been in the possession of the Herbert family, who have at Treowen and Llanarth maintained an unbroken Catholic continuity.

The principal interest of the book lies in the last two leaves, which contain forty lines of an English poem on the Passion. It was not unusual in the later Middle Ages for Books of Hours to contain a supplementary section of vernacular devotions. The considerable number of leaves missing at the end of the Llanarth MS. presumably formed such a supplement. The incomplete poem which remains, and a transcript of which appears below, is typical of the spirituality which developed in England in the course of the 14th century. This will be at once evident to those familiar with the poems printed by Professor Carleton Brown in his *Religious Lyrics of the 14th Century*. One poem especially (No. 7) has not only a strong general likeness to the Llanarth poem, but is sometimes verbally identical. However, it seems that the present poem has not hitherto been printed, and apart from its linguistic interest, its beauty and spontaneity of religious fervour give it a right to be better known.

Jhu sweet ihu lorde myne  
 My lyve my saul & al is thyne  
 Undo my hert and lyght therine  
 And save me lord fro hell pyne<sup>1</sup>

Jhu swete upon the roode  
 For me thu blede thi swete bloode  
 Out of thi herte ther come a floode  
 Thi modyr it sawe wit drery moode<sup>2</sup>

Jhu swete bryght and scheene<sup>3</sup>  
 To the lord my moon i meene<sup>4</sup>  
 For mary loue that myeld iebeene  
 Lat thi endeles mercy on me be scene

Jhu swete my saules foode  
 All thi warkes be full goode  
 Thou bought us upon the roode  
 And shed theron thin hert bloode

Jhu swete of al thyng best  
 In thi loue mak me stedfest  
 That wher so i go est or weste  
 Euer in thi loue that i fynde reste

Jhu sweet wele may he be  
 That the in thi ioy shal se  
 With loue cordys drawe thu me  
 That i may come and wone<sup>5</sup> wit the

Jhu no sange may so swete be  
 Ne no joy in this worlde ne gle<sup>6</sup>  
 Swete lorde as is the loue of the  
 Kyng of heuene thu grant it me

Jhu thi loue was so fre  
 That from heuene it broutht the  
 For gret loue & pete<sup>7</sup>  
 Upon the cros thu hongyst for me

Jhu to thi discipiles deer  
 Thou sayd wit a drer cheer<sup>8</sup>  
 As they say all in feer  
 A litill before thu taken weer

Jhu thu went upon thi feete  
 To the mount of oleuete  
 And to thi fadyr ther thu leete<sup>9</sup>  
 Fayr wordis wyth hert sweete

<sup>1</sup> Pains of Hell.    <sup>2</sup> Melancholy mood.    <sup>3</sup> Fair.    <sup>4</sup> I make my complaint.

<sup>5</sup> Dwell.    <sup>6</sup> Gladness.    <sup>7</sup> Pity.    <sup>8</sup> With a sad countenance.    <sup>9</sup> Uttered.