THE
BALLAD HISTORY OF THE REIGNS
OF HENRY VII. AND HENRY VIII.

BY
PROFESSOR C. H. FIRTH, LL.D., V.P.

Reprinted from
'THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY'
Third Series. Vol. II.

Printed by
SPOTTISWOODE & CO. LTD., NEW-STREET SQUARE, LONDON
1908
THE BALLAD HISTORY OF THE REIGNS OF HENRY VII. AND HENRY VIII,

By Professor C. H. FIRTH, LL.D., V.P.

Read November 21, 1907.

Ballads are useful as a supplement to graver historical authorities, and throw a light upon the history of the past which we could not derive from other sources. It is generally not difficult to know what the great men of any day—the nobles, and statesmen, and men of letters—thought about the events which happened in their time. We have their letters, or their speeches, or their biographies; but it is difficult to know what the common people who formed the mass of the nation thought, and it is important to know this too. Here the ballads help us, because they were the literature of the populace, composed by men of the people for the people, reflecting popular feeling and helping to shape it. We may divide them roughly into three classes: firstly, there are the long narrative ballads which embody either traditional accounts of some past event or popular versions of some recent event, and show us what people believed to have happened; secondly, there is another class of ballads which express the feelings of the moment about the events of the day, and set forth the joy or sorrow of the people about something which was happening at the time. These are often satirical in their tone, and not easy to distinguish from the regular satirical poems of the period composed by professional writers.

The narrative ballads were for the most part handed down orally or in manuscript; most of those which survive exist in manuscripts dating from the later part of the sixteenth or the early part of the seventeenth century, and were first printed
by antiquarians at a later date. On the other hand, the
expressions of opinion about contemporary events often found
their way into print at once, and were sold and circulated
like any other form of literature at the time when they were
composed. This kind of ballad began to be printed towards
the end of Henry VIII.'s reign, and was published still more
frequently under Edward VI. and Mary, while hundreds of
them issued from the press in the days of Elizabeth.

There is yet a third class of ballads to be mentioned.
At the close of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seven-
teenth century professional ballad-makers sprang up, and
began to produce historical ballads for the market, just as
people produce historical text-books now. They took the
legendary history of England as they found it told by Tudor
chroniclers, such as Hall or Grafton or Holinshed, and put it
into verse for the delectation and instruction of the people.
The three chief of these professional ballad-makers were
Ulpian Fulwell, Thomas Deloney, and Richard Johnson.
They should be classed with popular historians rather than
popular poets, for their prosaic verses show us what sort of
a king people conceived Henry VIII. to be a generation or
two after his death, and what version of his character was
received as true.

A century, however, lies between the accession of the
Tudors and the rise of these professional writers of historical
ballads. At the time when Henry VII. ascended the throne
the men who wrote the ballads were either the minstrels
who sang them or dependents of the great families whose
deeds they celebrated. Judging from the small part of this
literature which has survived, each of the greater and more
famous feudal families seems to have had its bard or its poet.
There are fragments of a cycle of ballads about the Percys,
beginning with 'Chevy Chase,' and of another about the
Howards, and of a third about the Stanleys. The third is
the most important historically, for the Stanleys and their
dependents played the chief part in the events which made
Henry VII. King of England.
BALLAD HISTORY OF HENRY VII. AND HENRY VIII. 23

One ballad of the Stanley cycle is called 'The Rose of England.' It is to some extent allegorical, for each of the leading personages is designated by his cognisance or crest, not by his name. Henry himself is the Rose and Richard is the White Boar. England is pictured as a fair garden with a beautiful tree of red roses in its midst. Then came in 'a beast men call a boar,' and he 'rooted this garden up and down,' and tore asunder the rose-tree, and buried its branches in a clod of clay that they might never bloom or bear again. But a sprig of the rose survived. Henry landed in England to claim his right and Lord Stanley joined him. Stanley is typified in 'the Old Eagle . . . gleaming gay, of all fair birds the best,' and together they overthrew the boar. There are some historical incidents imbedded in the allegory. One is an account of the refusal of the bailiff of Shrewsbury, Master Mitton, to admit Henry and his followers. The other is an account of the skill with which the Earl of Oxford arrayed Henry's army at Bosworth; the Blue Boar, 'wary and wise of wit,' so managed that the Tudor soldiers had both sun and wind in their favour.

Much more interesting than this archaic allegory is another ballad belonging to the same cycle, of which two versions survive, one in a manuscript of Queen Elizabeth's time, the second in a manuscript of Charles II.'s time. 'The Song of the Lady Bessee,' as it is called, is not a short allegory, but a story as long as one of the books of the 'Iliad'—well constructed, vivid, dramatic, and marked by an epic breadth of treatment. The heroine of the ballad is Elizabeth of York, the daughter of Edward IV. The tyrant Richard, who had just lost his wife, Anne Neville, wishes to make Elizabeth

1 Hales and Furnivall, Bishop Percy's Folio MS. iii. 187; Child, English and Scottish Popular Ballads, iii. 331. The quotations given are modernised in this paper.

2 Both are given in The most Pleasant Song of the Lady Bessy, edited by J. O. Halliwell, for the Percy Society in 1847. A third version is given in Bishop Percy's Folio MS., edited by Hales and Furnivall, iii. 319. My quotations, of which the spelling is modernised, are taken from all three versions according to convenience.
his second wife, and distressed at this prospect she turns to Lord Stanley—'father Stanley' as she calls him, because she had been committed to his charge by Edward IV, and had lived for a time in his household. Her royal wooer, she complains, is becoming pressing:

It is not three days past and gone
Since my uncle Richard sent after me,
A bachelor, and a bold baron,
[And] a doctor of divinity.

But rather than marry the murderer of her brothers she will be burnt on Tower Hill, drawn by wild horses through the streets of London, or slay herself with a sharp sword. The crown of England is her right by birth, and she will marry no one but the young earl of Richmond, to whom she is betrothed. She entreats Stanley to help her gain both husband and crown. He hesitates, for he fears the tyrant. He were undone if Richard knew of this; both himself and the princess would perish by the executioner, and the child yet unborn would rue the consequences of that day's meeting. But she persists, appealing to his pity for herself, to his gratitude for her father's favours, and at last playing upon his fears. Richard could not be trusted; he would destroy Stanley as he had destroyed Buckingham; once in a moment of confidence Richard had told her that within three years he would extirpate the Stanleys root and branch. . . . So at last Stanley yields to her tears, but still distrustfully; for many a man is brought to great woe through telling his secrets to women. She must be cautious—'fields have eyes and woods have ears.' He cannot write, and no scrivener can be trusted to put on paper such dangerous messages as he must send. But the lady Bessie is accomplished. When she was young her father sent for a scrivener from lovely London, who taught both her and her sister to read and write; she can write, she tells Stanley, not only English, but French and Spanish letters to send to Richmond beyond the seas. The Earl replies, 'You are a proper wench,' and agrees to all she plans. At night,
‘disguised in strange manner,’ he comes to her chamber door; she lets him in herself; ‘they ate the spice and drank the wine,’ and then he dictates the fateful letters to ‘the lady fair and free.’ She writes to his son, Lord Strange, at Lathom, to his brother, Sir William Stanley, at Holt Castle, to his nephew Sir John Savage, and to his friend Gilbert Talbot. A bold esquire indeed is Gilbert Talbot, on the worst of terms with Richard and deep in debt, but

There durst no sergeant him arrest,
He is called so parlous of his body.

The lady finds also a trusty messenger to carry these letters—one Humphrey Brereton, an old servant of King Edward’s, and he sets forth on his errand. Each of the persons he is sent to promises to obey, but each reveals his character by the manner in which he receives the dangerous message. Lord Strange sighs and sheds a tear; Gilbert Talbot laughs with joy; cautious old Sir William Stanley stands and thinks and says nothing, but gnaws the end of his staff, and at last tears the letter into three pieces and throws it into the water. Disguised as merchants the conspirators journey to London and meet Lord Stanley at an inn in the suburbs. Humphrey Brereton is again chosen to bear a message to the Duke of Richmond in Brittany, and with it three mule-loads of gold to equip an expedition to England. He takes ship at Liverpool, escapes the pirate galleys of the Italians which infest the Channel, and makes his way to Beggrames Abbey in Brittany, where Richmond is dwelling. The porter of the abbey is a Cheshire man like Humphrey himself; he lets him in at once, and as Humphrey does not know the Prince of England, describes Henry to him. There he is, shooting at the butts with three lords; he wears a gown of black velvet that reaches to his knees; he has a long visage and a pale one, and a little above his chin he has a wart:

His face is white, the wart is red,
Thereby you may him ken.
All these picturesque and minute personal details seem to bear the stamp of personal observation rather than imagination, and it has been inferred that the author of the ballad was Humphrey Brereton himself. Be that as it may, in August 1485 Henry lands at Milford Haven, the Stanleys and their retainers gather to his banner, and he meets Richard at Bosworth Field. Richard has kept Lord Strange as a hostage for the behaviour of his kin, and sworn that he shall die. A block is made ready on the field for him. 'If I must die,' says Lord Strange, 'alas for my lady that is at home; long may she sit at the table waiting for her lord, but we shall meet at doomsday when the great doom it shall be.' He takes the gold ring from his finger, and gives it to his servant, 'if my kinsmen are vanquished let her take my son and carry him in exile over the seas, that he may come again another time, and wreak vengeance for his father's death.' The battle goes against Richard, and naturally this is due to the prowess of the Stanleys:

There may no man their strokes abide
The Stanleys dints they be so strong,
says a knight to King Richard, and advises him to mount and fly. Richard will not hear of flight:

Give me my battle axe in my hand,
And set my crown on my head so high,
For by him that made both sun and moon,
King of England this day I will die.

He falls fighting; his crown is dashed from his head, his body stripped and tied on a horse. The Lady Bessy meets the body as it enters the gate of Leicester, and taunts the dead man. 'How likest thou now the slaying of my two brethren?' says she. 'Welcome, gentle uncle, home.'

The poetical merit of the ballad is very considerable. The historical interest of it lies in this: historians in general agree that it probably contains a certain number of true facts handed down by tradition, yet at the same time, owing to the scantiness of the other evidence about the conspiracy
against Richard, it is impossible to determine exactly where the fact ends and the fiction begins.¹

In this Stanley cycle, as I venture to call it, there are two more ballads which deserve mention. Both deal with the events of 1513. One is a long rhyming chronicle whose alliterative style shows its antiquity, entitled ‘Scottish Field.’² It begins with the battle of Bosworth, and describes Henry VIII.'s accession, his expedition to France, and the siege of Terouenne. The King of France bribes the Scots to invade England, and the battle of Flodden follows. Many thousands of Lancashire and Cheshire men bear a part in it, all wearing the Stanley badge on their coats:

Every bearne had on his breast broidered full fair
A foot of the fairest fowl that ever flew on wing.

But the Earl of Derby is with the king in France, though James Stanley, Bishop of Ely, and Sir John Stanley are at Flodden, so they fight under the command of Sir Edmund Howard. This discourages them, and they do not win as much glory as usual, 'for they were wont at all wars to wait upon the Stanley.' Hence a second ballad called 'Flodden Field,' was written, evidently with the purpose of vindicating them.³ The Earl of Surrey after the battle has sent a false report to the king, accusing Lord Derby's retainers of misconduct, and Henry upbraids the earl:

How likest thou Lancashire and Cheshire both
Which were counted chief of chivalry?
Falsely are they fled and gone,
And never a one is true to me.

¹ The ballad, for instance, mentions the use of artillery at Bosworth. 'The schottes of gunnes were so feirce.' This is confirmed by the fact that the balls of 'serpentynes' have been found on the field. On the value of the ballad see Gairdner, Life and Reign of Richard III. ed. 1878, p. 401.
² Hales and Furnivall, Bishop Percy's Folio MS. I. 199.
³ Hales and Furnivall, Percy MS. I. 313; Child, English and Scottish Popular Ballads, iii. 353. There is also a later ballad on Flodden in Deloney's Jack of Newbury published in 1597. See Child, iii. 352, and Thomas Deloney, by Dr. Richard Sievers (Berlin, 1904), pp. 76, 182.
Depressed by the king's taunts, the earl answers that if he might have the men of Lancashire and Cheshire to command he would consent to be hanged if he did not burn up all Scotland, and conquer in France as far as Paris gate 'both comely castles and towers high.' The king says the men of those two counties are cowards, to which the earl answers, 'Who brought your father in at Milford Haven?' Matters are made worse by a yeoman of the king's guard, one of Derby's men, 'Long Jamie Garsed,' who, being taunted by his fellows with cowardice, 'sticked two and wounded three,' and is sentenced to be hanged for it. In the nick of time comes a second messenger, this time from the queen, contradicting the false message sent by the first:

Lancashire and Cheshire, said the messenger,
They have done the deed with their hand,
Had not the Earl of Derby been true to thee
In great adventure had been all England.

With this vindication and with the reward of some of the maligned gentlemen the ballad ends. Here we have an instance of a ballad invented entirely to explain certain facts,¹ a ballad which is as purely historical fiction as the ordinary historical novel. A truthful account of the battle would have been a glorification of the Howards rather than the Stanleys, since Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, his eldest son, Lord Thomas, the Admiral of England, and his third son, Lord Edmund, were the generals of the English army, and Sir Edward Stanley played quite a subordinate part. Skelton, in his 'Ballad of the Scottish King,' begins

¹ The King, says Hall, on receiving news of the victory, 'thanked God, and highly praised the Earle and the Lord Admyrall and his sonne, and all the gentlemen and commons that were at that valiant enterprise: howbeit the kynghe had a secrete letter that the Cheshyre men fledde from Syr Edmond Howarde, whyche letter caused greate harteburnynge and many woordes, but the kyng thankefullly accepted al thynge, and would no man to be disprayed.' This is the story as given in Hall's 'Chronicle,' published in 1548 (ed. 1809, p. 564). 'The Cheshire and Lancashire men never abode stroke, and fewe of the gentlemen of Yorkshire abode, but "fled," says a narrative amongst the State Papers.' These were the facts the ballad had to explain.
by jeering at 'King Jamy' and ends by praise of the Howards:

That noble Earl the White Lion  
Your pomp and pride hath laid adown;  
His son the Lord Admirall is full good,  
His sword hath bathed in the Scottes blood.

Skelton as Henry VIII.'s Poet Laureate is a tolerably impartial witness. If we had any of the ballads written by the Howards we should find the case put more strongly. As it happens, there is a ballad written in praise of the Lord Admiral, though it deals with a different incident in these wars with Scotland. In 1511 Sir Edward and Sir Thomas Howard captured two Scottish ships which had been preying upon English traders. This exploit is celebrated in the ballad of 'Sir Andrew Barton,' so entitled after the name of the Scottish commander, of which we have two versions, one a seventeenth century printed broadside, the other a sixteenth century version in 'Percy's MS.' Probably Percy's version was written in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, as it substitutes for the name of Thomas Howard that of Charles Howard, the Lord Howard of Effingham, who commanded the English fleet against the Armada. Its interest consists largely in its graphic representation of naval tactics. Barton relies upon close fighting, seeks to grapple and board the English ship, and hopes to achieve this by some primitive device designed for that purpose. At least so I read the warning which an English merchant gives Howard before the fight. Barton, he tells him, 'bears beams in his topcastle strong'; he will overcome you if he can let his beams fall down, therefore see you let no man go up to his topcastle while you are fighting. These instructions are carried out; a skilful Bowman called

1 A Ballade of the Scottyshe Kyng, written by John Skelton. Reproduced in facsimile, with an Introduction by John Ashton, London, 1882, p. 96. See also two other poems by the same author, viz. 'Skelton Laureate against the Scottes,' and 'Howe the doughty Duke of Albay lyc a cowarde knyght ran away shamefully.' Dyce's Skelton, i. 182; ii. 68.
2 Child, iii. 334; Percy, iii. 399. Naval Songs and Ballads (Navy Records Society, 1908), pp. xlii., 6, 341.
Horsley shoots down every Scot who tries to climb the mast, including, at last, Sir Andrew himself, and so the victory is won. Now, however this particular battle may have been fought, it is certain that as late as the reign of Queen Elizabeth bows did play an important part in helping Englishmen to win sea-fights. As late as 1563 some Spanish merchantmen complained of being plundered by pirates in the Channel, and the evidence proving that they were English pirates was this: 'The mariners say plainly that they were Englishmen, for that they shot so many arrows they were not able to look out,' and therefore the Spaniards ran below and let their ship be plundered.\(^1\) And the ballad plainly brings out the contrast between the archaic tactics of the Scots, who, like the Spaniards, loved close fighting, and the modern tactics of the English, who preferred to use missile weapons such as guns and bows.

Already, however, in Henry VIII.'s day the decay of English archery was beginning. Ascham, in his 'Toxophilus,' published in 1545, laments over the fact that new weapons were taking the place of the bow. 'Nature and use,' he said had made Englishmen most apt for using the long-bow. 'If I were of authority I would counsel all the gentlemen and yeomen of England not to change it with any other thing, how good soever it seem to be; but that still, according to the old wont of England, youth should use it for the most honest pastime in peace that men might handle it as a most sure weapon in war.'\(^2\) Henry VIII. continually enjoined the use of the long-bow; he passed four statutes encouraging archery and five against cross-bows and hand-guns.

Henry's injunctions and prohibitions could not arrest the decadence. In time past, wrote Harrison in 1587, 'the chief force of England consisted in their long-bows. But now we have in a manner given over that kind of artillery.' Not only were there fewer archers, but a less excellent method of shooting had come in, a kind of archery which could 'never

\(^2\) *English Works of Roger Ascham*, ed. Aldis Wright, p. xii.
yield any smart stroke,' so that French and German soldiers derided the new archery as much as they feared the old.

Now the strange thing is this, that just at the moment when this process of decay was beginning, the ballads in which the bow was glorified found their way into print. The two popular epics of archery belong to the early part of Henry VIII.'s reign, namely, 'The Gest of Robin Hood,'¹ a compilation of about 1800 lines put together from four or more older ballads, and the 'Ballad of Adam Bell,' which is nearly 700 lines long.² Robin Hood was printed by Wynken de Worde before 1534, Adam Bell by John Byddell about 1536. The heroes of both ballads are such great archers that they disdain to shoot at ordinary butts, and use a hazel wand for a mark:

I hold him never a good archer
That shooteth at butts so wide,

says Adam's companion, William of Cloudesley, and fixes a couple of wands in the ground 400 paces apart. Like William Tell, Cloudesley cleaves with his arrow an apple set on his son's head at a distance of six score paces.

Though these good archers are all outlaws they have one common characteristic. All are religious, even devout, men, especially Robin Hood:

A good manner had Robin
In londe where that he were:
Every day or he would dine
Three masses he would hear.
The one in worship of the Father,
The other of the Holy Ghost,
The other of our dear Lady,
That he loved all the most.

¹ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, iii. 39, reprints this, and supplements it by the best accessible collection of later Robin Hood ballads. ² For the various texts of Adam Bell, see Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, iii. 14. The earliest printed version extant appears to have been published in 1536, but only a fragment of it has survived.
Robin loved our dear Lady;
For doubt of deadly sin
Would he never do company any harm
That any woman was in.¹

When he was an outlaw dwelling in the forest his enforced absence from the great feasts of the Church weighed heavy on his mind:

‘Yea, one thing grieves me,’ said Robin,
‘And does my heart much woe,
That I may not no solemn day
To mass nor matins go.’²

It is because he insists on attending one of these festivals at Nottingham that he is betrayed into the hands of his enemy the sheriff. In the last stage of his life, when he has made his peace and dwells in honour at the king’s court, it is in order to go upon a pilgrimage that he leaves it:

I made a chapel in Bernysdale,
That seemly is to see,
It is of Mary Magdalene,
And thereto would I be.³

Barefooted and clad in a sheepskin he must set forth thither to pay his vow. Just in the same way William of Cloudesley and his two companions when they are received into grace by the king will not take up the places offered them in the royal household till they have made a pilgrimage to Rome, to be assoiled by the Pope’s own hand of all the sins they have committed.⁴

All this reflects the spirit, not of the time when the ballads were printed, but of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, when they were composed, when England was still Catholic and Lutheranism was unborn. This characteristic did not escape the seventeenth-century continuators and imitators

¹ Child, iii. 57.
² Child, iii. 97. From a Manuscript of about 1450.
³ Child, iii. 77.
⁴ Child, iii. 30.
of the Robin Hood ballads. One of them, Martin Parker, thinks it necessary to comment on the unsatisfactory nature of Robin's views about justification by works as being one of the few faults of his character:

With wealth which he by robbery got
   Eight almshouses he built,
Thinking thereby to purge the blot
   Of blood that he had spilt.
Such was their blind devotion then
   Depending on their works,
Which if 'twere true, we Christian men
   Inferior were to Turks.¹

On the other hand, while Robin and the other outlaws are religious they are anti-clerical. When Robin's men go forth on an expedition they ask their master whom they shall attack. 'Look that you harm no husbandman, and no good yeoman, and no knight or squire that will be a good fellow. Assault only the clergy and the lawyers:

These bishops and these archbishops
   Ye shall them beat and bind;
The High Sheriff of Nottingham
   Him hold ye in your mind.²

When the outlaws meet a rich abbot with his train of monks, or rather the king disguised as an abbot, they look on him as their legitimate prey. Courteously they bid him light down from his mule, and say:

We be yeoman of this forest
   Under the greenwood tree;
We live by our kinges deer,
   Other shift have not we;
And ye have churches and rentes both
   And gold full great plentie,
Give us some of your spending
   For St. Charitye.³

¹ 'A True Tale of Robin Hood,' 1632; Child, iii. 230.
² 'A Gest of Robin Hood,' Child, iii. 57.
³ *Ibid.* iii. 74. The anti-clerical side is emphasised in seventeenth-century ballads such as 'Robin Hood and the Bishop,' and 'Robin Hood's Golden Prize,' Child, iii. 191, 193, 208; *Roxburghe Ballads*, ii. 449; viii. 509.
This envy of the wealth of the clergy, and the discontent with the existing social system, which are so plainly revealed in the Robin Hood ballads, were a part of the legacy bequeathed by the fifteenth to the sixteenth century. The same feelings reappear, more violent in expression and more various in shape, in the collection of 'Ballads from Manuscript,' written during the early part of the sixteenth century, which Dr. Furnivall has edited for the Ballad Society. What the evils were which afflicted English society, and were slowly undermining the fabric of the commonwealth, is set forth in that wonderful discourse which Sir Thomas More prefixed to his vision of a perfect state. On the one side, poverty and discontent amongst peasantry and yeomen from end to end of England, raising of rents, enclosure of commons, turning of corn land into pasture, a multitude of beggars and thieves kept under by inhuman laws; on the other side were abbots and noblemen, like 'covetous and insatiable cormorants,' plucking down villages, and driving out the husbandmen in order to find larger pastures for their sheep. Over these evils and their remedies that much-travelled sailor, Raphael Hythloday, and the layman learned in the law, had talked at Cardinal Morton's table, in the house where Sir Thomas More was brought up.

The manuscript collection of ballads I have referred to reiterates all these complaints. 'Envy,' says one of them, entitled 'Nowadays':

Envy waxeth wondrous strong,
The rich doth the poor wrong,
God of his mercy suffereth long
    The devil his works to work.
The towns go down, the land decays,
Great men maketh nowadays
    A sheepcote in a church.

The unusual discontent caused by these real social evils broke out at first in one manifestation then in another. At one time it turned against the foreign merchants, who were
charged with impoverishing the realm. 'Aliens,' says the ballad,

Have here their way,
And Englishmen clean decay;
Other lands advanced be
And buy and sell amongst us free,
And thus our own commodity
Doth clean undo ourself.¹

So there came in 1517 the rising of the London 'prentices and craftsmen against French and Flemish and Italian merchants, known from the severity of its punishment as 'Ill May Day.'²

In 1525 discontent took the shape of a rising against the forced loan imposed by the king, not so much for constitutional reasons as on account of the crushing burden of taxation. In Suffolk the working population rose in a body and threatened the tax-collectors with death. When the Duke of Norfolk asked the assembly for their captain that he might set forth their grievances, an old man rose up to answer him. 'My Lord,' said he, 'since you ask who is our captain forsooth, his name is Poverty, for he and his cousin Necessity hath brought us to this doing.' The king yielded to the opposition and withdrew his demand. There was an end of the forced loan, but 'not an end,' says the chronicler, 'of inward grudge and hatred which the commons bore' to Cardinal Wolsey.

All these discontents swelled the cry against the king's all-powerful minister. If we want a picture of Wolsey at the height of his power we must go to the professional satirists rather than the ballad-makers, to John Skelton and William Roy rather than the nameless minstrels. Skelton pictures the Cardinal's pride. We see him 'in the Chamber of Stars' presiding over the Council like a schoolmaster over his class,

Clapping his rod on the board,
No man dare speak a word.

¹ Ballads from MSS. i. 97.
² 'The Story of Ill May Day' was the subject of a later ballad reprinted in Johnson's Crown Garland of Golden Roses, part ii. p. 39 (Percy Society, 1845), and in A Collection of Old Ballads, 1738, iii. 54.
He tells the lords their wits are dull; 'they have no brain their estate to maintain'; the judges that they understand nothing about law; and all tremble like sheep before him. Roy pictures Wolsey's pomp; he appears in public 'more like a god celestial than any creature mortal.' Two priests bearing crosses go before him, gaping in every man's face; two laymen follow bearing long pillars of silver. Then comes my Lord Cardinal himself on a mule with golden trappings:—

A great carle he is, and a fat,
Wearing on his head a red hat,
Procured with angels subsidy,
And as they say, in time of rain
Four of his gentlemen are fain
To hold over it a canopy.

On his feet, too sacred to touch the ground, he wears shoes decked with gold and precious stones costing many thousand pounds. The contrast between Wolsey's pomp and pride and the lowness of his birth sharpens the indignation of both satirists. Skelton calls him 'the butcher's dog'; Roy, 'the mastiff cur bred in Ipswich town.' They taunt him with 'his base progeny' and 'his greasy genealogy.' The ballad-makers echo these invectives with less literary skill but equal virulence, and warn him of his approaching fate.

'Thomass, Thomas,' says a ballad written about 1527,

Remember one Thomas of Canterbury,
Which made all England glad and merry,
And thou hast made it sad.
Him men do worship with prayers and light,
Thee people do curse both day and night,
This is the common voice.
With abbeys good thy college thou builst,
With poor men's good thy palace thou gildest,
How canst thou thus rejoice?

1 See 'Why Come ye Nat to Courte,' Dyce's Skelton, ii. 26, 32, 42.  
2 Roy's ' Rede Me and be nott Wrothe,' reprinted in Harleian Miscellany, ed. Park, ix. p. 30.  
3 Furnivall, Ballads from MSS. i. 352.
'Remember the falls of Lucifer, and Simon Magus; remember Mortimer and the Despensers and repent in time.'

When Wolsey fell the storm which had been so long gathering broke upon the Church. Roy's 'Rede me and be not Wroth' had embodied a comprehensive attack on Catholicism as well as on the Cardinal. The feeling which prompted it took shape in polemical dialogues and polemical plays,¹ in prose treatises satirical or serious, and, as was natural, in popular ballads. Minstrels who sang 'pestilent and abominable songs' were among the favourite instruments of the Reformers. Wolsey's successor knew their value. 'Lord Cromwell,' says Fox, 'seeking all means and ways to beat down false religion and to advance the true,' among others kept in his household 'divers fresh and quick wits'... 'by whose industry and ingenious labours divers excellent ballads and books were contrived and set abroad concerning the suppression of the pope and all Popish idolatry.' Among these one specially notable was 'The Fantasie of Idolatrie,' which contained in it 'as in a brief sum the great mass of idolatrous pilgrimages, for posterity hereafter to understand what then was used in England.'² Written evidently about the year 1538, when the rood of Boxley, and the image of Our Lady of Walsingham, and many other images once held sacred were publicly burnt in Smithfield or at Chelsea, the ballad was a savage cry of triumph over the work of destruction. The devotion men had paid them, said the ballad, was all delusion—feigned miracles and lies invented by the devil and his doctors to blind the people's eyes.

The Muses, however, were not all on one side. As early as 1526 a ballad was circulated against 'The Blaspheming

¹ See Professor Herford's The Literary Relations of England and Germany in the Sixteenth Century, pp. 33-148.
² See Fox's Martyrs, ed. Townsend and Cattley, v. 403. The ballad was printed in the first edition of Fox's book but suppressed in the later ones. Its author was one William Gray, on whom see also Ballads from MSS. i. 414. See Maitland's Essays on Subjects connected with the Reformation in England, 1849, p. 237.
English Lutherans.' A poisonous dragon, it said, and his young serpents had infected England. Luther is his name, in Germany is his den:

There he swelleth, he bloweth,
He burneth, he gloweth,
Against all true Christian men.¹

Outraged Catholic feeling found vent in the rising of the North in 1536, known as the Pilgrimage of Grace. Local prejudices as well as religious motives fanned the revolt. The Northern people, said one ballad, in time long past hath been but little regarded of the austral nation, but now 'the southern heretics void of all virtue' should be overthrown. 'The faithful people of the boreal region' were champions chosen by Divine Providence to make reformation of the great mischief done by those who sought to overthrow Christ's law.² The banner under which the Northern army marched bore on it a representation of the five wounds of Christ.³ 'Christ crucified,' ran their song,

For thy woundes wide
Us commons guide
Which pilgrims be.

Holy Church, they complained, was 'stripped and spoiled and shorn, fast in bonds.' It was against God's laws, and would bring his vengeance on the realm. The poor commons must stand up to defend their abbeys, for no tongue could tell how they would miss their charity:

For there they had
Both ale and bread
At time of need
And succour great
In all distress
And heaviness.

¹ Ballads from MSS. i. 287.
² 'An Exhortacyon to the Nobylles and Commons of the Northe,' Ballads from MSS. i. 301.
³ Cf. Froude, ii. 518.
All should go well again if the commons stood together for the cause of the Church:

God that rights all
Redress now shall
And what is thrall
Again make free
By this voyage
And Pilgrimage
Of young and sage
In our country.¹

The wrath of the rebels was directed against the king’s agents, not against the king. On the one hand they denounced Cranmer and the heretical English bishops, on the other Cromwell and his cursed company. Cromwell was the second Haman, and they promised that he should hang as high as the first. In the State Papers we get glimpses of the part which the wandering minstrels played, and fragments of their songs. A certain John Hogon was accused in 1537, after the insurrection had been suppressed, of going about the country singing seditious ballads. One of these was aimed at the Duke of Suffolk, Charles Brandon, and charged him with preventing the Lincolnshire men from joining their brethren in Yorkshire, and with promising the insurgents their pardon and failing to keep his word. The Duke of Suffolk might have made England Merry England again if he had been true. Like another nobleman, who declared that it ‘was never merry in England since the new learning came up,’ the minstrel attributed all the trouble to the progress of education:

The masters of Art and doctors of Divinity
Have brought this realm out of good unity.²

Another minstrel was either of different opinions or afraid of the Government. Master Alexander, as he was called, was making merry in a Westmoreland alehouse, when Isaac Dickson, one of the company, ordered him to sing a popular ballad against the king’s minister, which he refused to do.

¹ Eng. Hist. Review, 1890, p. 344. ² Ballads from MSS. i. 311.
Then, says the deposition, 'the said Isaac commanded the said minstrel again in a violent manner to sing the song called "Cromwell," and the said minstrel said he would sing none such; and then the said Isaac pulled the minstrel by the arm, and smote him on the head with the pummel of a dagger, and the same song the said minstrel would not sing to die for. . . . Then did Isaac call for a cup of ale, and bade the minstrel sing again, which he always denied; then Isaac took the minstrel by the beard and dashed the cup of ale in his face; also he drew his dagger and hurt Master William, being the host of the house, sore and grievously in the thigh, in rescuing the said minstrel.'

Few men in England would have borne so much for Cromwell. In 1536 the Lincolnshire rebels caught one of Cromwell's servants, fastened him up in a bull's hide and baited him to death with dogs, using language which showed they would gladly have treated his master in the same way. The popular hatred to Cromwell never altered, and in June 1540 his fall was welcomed with universal joy. Bishop Percy's Manuscript contains a fragment of a traditional ballad on his fall. A lady whom King Henry loved, apparently Catherine Howard, asked the king for a boon. The king granted it, 'if it be not touching my crown, and hurt not my poor commons.' 'It is the head of that false traitor, Thomas Cromwell,' said she. Then the king sent the Earl of Shrewsbury and the Earl of Derby to fetch Cromwell to him. Thomas had been wont to carry his head high, but when he came he hung it down to his knee. 'How now, Thomas?' said the king; 'how is it with thee?' But the traitor made no petition for mercy:

'Hanging and drawing, O king,' he said,
'You shall never get more from me.'

The ballad is not true history. As a matter of fact, the king had no personal interview with Cromwell after his arrest, and Cromwell wrote two letters to Henry imploring mercy in abject terms. But the facts had to be fitted to the popular

1 Froude, iii. 53.  
2 Child, iii. 377; Hales and Furnivall, i. 129.
conception of Cromwell's character, and dramatic effect required a meeting between the fallen minister and his master.

More interesting, because it does not attempt to relate what happened, but simply to express the feeling of the moment, is another ballad actually printed in 1540. It is entitled, 'A new Ballad made of Thomas Cromwel called "Trolle on away."'¹ 'Trolle on away' is the beginning of the chorus, and it continues with the refrain 'Heave and ho rumbelow,' so popular in sea-songs. Both man and child, it says, is glad to hear tell of that false traitor's overthrow. Then it addresses Cromwell himself, and taunts him with plundering the realm:

When Fortune looked thee in thy face,
Thou hadst fair time but lackedst grace,
Thy coffers with gold thou filledst apace.
Both plate and chalice came to thy fist,
Thou lockedst them up where no man wist,
Till in the King's treasure such things were missed.

Besides this, Cromwell had misled his virtuous and orthodox master, and misrepresented his master's intentions. 'His grace was ever of gentle nature,' and England hated Cromwell because he had been false to this 'redolent rose':

Thou did not remember, false heretic,
One God, one faith, one King Catholic,
For thou hast been so long a schismatic.
Thou wouldest not learn to know these three,
But ever wast full of iniquity,
Wherefore all this land hath been troubled with thee.

Better for Cromwell if he had remained a woolcomber all his life instead of seeking to climb so high:

Thou mightest have learned thy cloth to flock
Upon thy greasy fuller's stock,
Wherefore lay down thy head upon this block.
Yet save that soul that God hath bought,
And for thy carcasse care thou nought;
Let it suffer pain as it hath wrought.

This was answered in another ballad telling the author that he was to blame for railing against dead men, and led to a controversy in which some nine ballads were published.¹

Were it not for this ballad controversy one might say that Thomas Cromwell fell unpitied and unlamented, and that it was not till the reign of Queen Elizabeth that he came to be regarded as a Protestant hero rather than a tyrant.² His great work was the destruction of the monastic houses, and the generation which witnessed their destruction had doubts about the advantage of that work. It was not, in many cases, that they regretted the monks, but that the squandering of so much wealth, the destruction of so many splendid buildings, and the character of the men into whose hands they passed caused some searchings of heart. Some of these find expression in the verse of the reign of Elizabeth. 'The abbeys,' wrote a poet called Stephen Batman, 'went down because of their pride,'

And made the more covetous rich for a time.

The goods that were given for good intent are plundered,

But what shall become of those that be gay
In the goods of the clergy flaunting about?

They shall lose, he prophesies, their stolen buildings and lands; though 'they think that to heaven they shall go for their brags,' yet their houses of pomp shall not save them.³

In 1754, when Dr. Johnson was at Oxford, he and Thomas Warton, during one of the walks they took in the neighbourhood, viewed the ruins of the abbeys of Oseney and Rewley. 'After at least half an hour's silence,' writes Warton, 'Johnson said: "I viewed them with indignation."

¹ They are preserved in the collection of the Society of Antiquaries (Lemon's Catalogue of Broadsides, pp. 2-5). Facsimiles of all the nine are given in Mr. J. A. Kingdon's Incidents in the Lives of Thomas Payns and Richard Grafton, 1895, p. 84.
² See Schelling, Chronicle Plays, p. 215, the play entitled The History of the Life and Death of Thomas Lord Cromwell, published in 1602, and Drayton's poem entitled 'The Legend of Great Cromwell.'
³ Ballads from MSS. i. 292.
Similarly, when Johnson was in Scotland, Boswell records that he viewed the ruins of St. Andrews 'with strong indignation.' 'I happened to ask,' says Boswell, 'where John Knox was buried. Dr. Johnson burst out: "I hope in the highway. I have been looking at his reformations."' ¹

If this was the effect of the sight of the ruins two hundred years later on a man who had no particular sympathy for the form of religious faith they represented, imagine the feelings which that sight produced upon men attached to the old faith, who would remember when the ruins had been houses of prayer instead of solitary heaps of stone—'bare, ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.'

There is a ballad on the ruins of the abbey of Walsingham, written apparently in Elizabeth's reign, which expresses these feelings: ²

In the wrackes of Walsingam
   Whom should I chuse
But the Queen of Walsingam,
   To be guide to my muse?
Then thou Prince of Walsingam
   Graunt me to frame
Bitter plaints to rewre thy wronge,
   Bitter wo for thy name.

Bitter was it, oh ! to see
   The seely sheepe
Murdred by the raueninge wolues
   While the sheeppardes did sleep!
Bitter was it, oh ! to vewe
   The sacred vyne,
Whiles the gardiners plaied all close,
   Rooted up by the swine.

Bitter, bitter, oh ! to behould
   The grasse to growe
Where the walles of Walsingam
   So statly did sheue.

¹ Hill's Boswell, i. 273.
² Earl of Arundel MS. among Rawlinson MSS. in the Bodleian. Printed by Hales and Furnivall, iii. 470.
Such were the workes of Walsingam
While shee did stand!
Such are the wrackes as now do shewe
Of that holy land!

Levell, Levell with the ground
The towres doe lye,
Which with their golden glitteringe tops
Pearsed once to the skye!
Wher weare gates, no gates ar nowe;
The waies vknownen
Wher the presse of peares did passe,
While her fame far was blowen.
Oules do scrike wher the sweetest himnes
Lately weer songe;
Toades and serpentes hold ther dennes
Wher the Palmers did thronge.

Weepe, weepe, o Walsingam!
Whose dayes are nightes,
Blessinge turned to blasphemies,
Holy deedes to dispites!
Sinne is wher our Ladie sate,
Heauen turned is to hell!
Sathan sittes wher our Lord did swaye.
Walsingham, oh! farewell!

The feeling which this poem on Walsingham expresses was so widespread that a very popular ballad writer of the later part of the sixteenth century composed a ballad on purpose to prove that this regret was foolish, and that the work of Henry VIII. and Thomas Cromwell was wise and just. He put it in the form of a dialogue between Plain Truth and Blind Ignorance—Ignorance being embodied in the shape of an old countryman who talks the dialect of Somersetshire, and Plain Truth being represented by an

1 ‘A pleasant song between Plain Truth and Blind Ignorance,’ Deloney’s Garland of Goodwill, Percy Society, 1851, p. 89. The ballad appears to have been first published in 1588. Arber, Stationers’ Register, ii. 227.
enlightened dweller in towns. Ignorance is caught contemplating the ruins of an abbey. 'Why,' says Truth,

Why keep up such a gazing
On this decayed place,
The which for superstition
Good princes down did raze?

It was once a goodly abbey, says the old countryman, and I remember seeing it full of holy friars. I tell you, father, answers the other, those friars were great hypocrites deceiving the simple with lies. The old man does not reply directly to this argument: he prefers, he says, the Psalter to the Bible, and admits that he did not understand the Latin prayers, but he liked the service:

The noise was passing trim
To hear the friars singing
As we did enter in,

and the rood-loft 'bravely set with saints' was a fine sight. Moses, replies the other, spoiled the golden calf, Baal's priests were brought to confusion, and the friars deserved their fate. All this rather fails to convince the old countryman. He declines theological controversy: his argument is that the world went very well then, and that times are hard now:

When that we had the old law
A merry world was then.
And everything was plenty
Amongst all sorts of men.
I tell thee what, good fellow,
Before the friars went hence
A bushel of the best wheat
Was sold for fourteen pence,
And forty eggs a penny
Which were both good and new,
And this I say myself have seen
And yet I am no Jew.

The dialogue ends like all polemical dialogues, in the crushing defeat of the man of straw. Blind Ignorance avows
himself convinced, and renounces 'the subtle papists' and all their works. Yet there was something in his argument of real historical significance. The sentimental regret for the fall of the old order was strengthened by a well-grounded belief that the economic evils of the new order were partly due to the wasteful and unnecessary destructiveness with which the changes of the Reformation had been effected.

It is somewhat curious to note how little King Henry VIII. himself appears in the ballads written during his reign. He is introduced, as we have seen, in 'Flodden Field,' also in the beginning of 'Sir Andrew Barton,' and in the ballad on the fall of Cromwell, but he is nowhere made the leading figure in the story. It is easy to understand the absence of hostile ballads. Henry VIII. was extremely sensitive to attacks on his policy, and would have punished severely the author who wrote one or the minstrel who sung it. We know that such ballads were circulated in Scotland, and that Henry, through the President of the Council of the North and the Wardens of the Marches, complained to James V. of their circulation. James V. promised to suppress them, adding that since he had never heard of such things before he suspected them to be imagined and devised not by Scots, but by Englishmen and subjects of Henry VIII. himself. 1 But though James prohibited the Scots from reading or publishing such 'un-honest, displeasant, and despiteful ballads, rhymes, and makings,' yet a year later Sir Thomas Wharton, Warden of the West Marches, complained of 'a ballad lately made in Scotland of great derision against all Englishmen for our living in the true Christian faith, which they take to be the contrary.' Wharton stated 'it goeth much abroad, and, as I am also informed, the bishops are the setters forth thereof.' 2

The ballads which created these international difficulties seem to have perished. The survival of the productions of the professional ballad-makers of Queen Elizabeth's time

1 See Ellis, *Original Letters*, series i. vol. ii. p. 103; and *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*. vol. xiv. part i. pp. 54, 62, 63, 92, 96, 166.
is a poor compensation, yet they too have their value as embodying traditional or popular impressions about events and persons. Ulpian Fulwell published in 1575 a tract, half prose, half verse, called 'The Flower of Fame,' and 'containing the bright renown and most fortunate reign of King Henry the Eighth.' In it there are verses on the defeats of James IV. and James V., on the winning of Terouenne and Boulogne, and 'a manifest description of King Henry's noble virtues.' He is styled:

A Solomon for godly wit,
A Solon for his constant mind;
A Samson when he list to hit
The fury of his foes unkind.

In 1612 appeared Richard Johnson's collection of historical ballads called 'A Crown Garland of Golden Roses.' It begins with 'A Princely Song made of the Red Rose and the White royally united together by King Henry VII. and Elizabeth Plantagenet,' celebrating the sons and daughters of Henry VII. as well as that king. In later editions there were added the 'Story of Ill May-Day,' and 'The Princely Song of the Six Queens that were married to Henry the Eighth.'

Six royal Queens you see,
Gallant dames! gallant dames!
At command married he
Like a great monarch.
Yet lives his famous name
Without spot or defame;
From royal kings he came,
Whom all the world feared.

Catherine of Aragon in these later ballads was pitied and praised. She was represented as a gracious and kindly figure. In one of the Robin Hood ballads she obtains the pardon of the outlaw from the king. In the 'Story of Ill

1 Harleian Miscellany, ed. Park, ix. 337.
3 Ibid. p. 60. 4 Hales and Furnivall, Percy MS. i. 37; Child, iii. 195.
May-Day' it is her intercession which saves the lives of the guilty apprentices of London.

'What if,' quoth she, 'by Spanish blood
Have London's stately streets been wet,
Yet will I seek this country's good,
And pardon for these young men get.'

Anne Boleyn was more difficult to treat, at all events while her daughter was reigning. From Ulpius Fulwell's 'Commemoration' and 'Epitaph' one gathers that Anne was a model of all the virtues, and died peacefully in her bed. Richard Johnson, writing in the reign of James I., could be more frank. After three years, he says,

In the King's royal head
Secret displeasure bred
Which cost the Queen her head.

There is one remarkable ballad, written apparently about the time of Anne's fall, which shows she did not die unpitied. When she was crowned poets had celebrated her under the similitude of a white falcon (it being her device), which descended from a cloud to settle upon a rose. When she fell it was as 'a falcon fair of flight' that she was represented in the lament which Dr. Furnivall styles 'Anne Boleyn's Fortune.' Its keynote is the slipperiness of Fortune. Anne is humble and resigned to her fate: she is not guiltless, but penitent. According to the poet:

Consider you all, though she wilfully did offend,
Consider you also how she made her end:
It is not we that can her amend
By judging her fortune.

Let us pray to God, of His mercy and bliss,
Her to forgive where she hath done amiss,
That He may be hers, and she may be His,
And send us good fortune.

1 Crown Garland, p. 42. 2 Harleian Miscellany, ix. 365.
3 Crown Garland. 4 Ballads from MSS., i. 390.
5 Ballads from MSS., i. 409, 413. The quotation is modernised.
Only one of the later consorts of Henry VIII. appears to have attracted ballad-makers, and that was Jane Seymour.1 As the mother of Edward VI. his popularity was reflected back upon her. Richard Johnson included in his 'Crown Garland' a prosaic lament on 'The Woeful Death of Queen Jane,' but there are no less than nine versions of a very popular traditional ballad recording the death and the funeral of the queen and the birth of her son. Some of them have been orally handed down for generations, and are still recited to-day.2

DISCUSSION.

DR. FURNIVALL said that he was long ago convinced of the importance of fifteenth and sixteenth century English ballads as an historical source, and this conviction had been strengthened by his experience of their value as published texts. He agreed with Professor Firth that this source should be fully utilised by historians, especially in connection with the social history of this country.

DR. GAIRDNER, referring to the political significance of certain ballads of the period, observed that in addition to the information that we already possess regarding their authorship and local associations, further information would be desirable as to their political provenance. One would like to know, for instance, if they were written to order, and by whom the bard was remunerated. They are none the less valuable when we recognise their partisan character; but details multiplied not infrequently in later editions. 'Lady Bessy' and some other ballads show a confusion of historical events; yet they contain vivid pictures of the times. Some even furnish interesting details, as in the case of the ballad of 'Flodden Field.'

MR. MALDEN gave as an instance of information not found in the chroniclers the allusion in the ballad of 'Bosworth Field' to the number of pieces of artillery employed. It is noticeable that though this ballad was written in the Stanley interest, sympathy is shown

---

1 Perhaps Catherine Parr should be excepted. See Harleian Miscellany, ix. 366; Crown Garland, p. 60.
2 All nine are reprinted by Child, iii. 372, v. 245; Crown Garland, p. 29. Fulwell is so vague that it is impossible to make out whether he is lamenting Jane Grey or Jane Seymour. Harleian Miscellany, ix. 366.

T.S.—VOL. II.

E
for the fate of Richard III. Possibly Shakespeare derived his well-
known line—

A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!

from this ballad. In the ballad of 'Flodden Field' the account of
Lord Maxwell's defeat at Millfield is interesting. So, too, is the
evidence afforded of the strength of feudal attachment existing in
the north of England.

Professor Pollard, referring to the allegation that the Stanleys
kept a 'tame bard,' reminded the meeting of this family's well-known
patronage of letters and the drama in later times. Wolsey's dis-
turbance of the wool trade in 1528 through his Spanish policy
was undoubtedly the cause of great distress, and the unpopularity of
the Cardinal was largely due to this policy. The long-bow was
regarded by some as the true national weapon as late as the end of
the sixteenth century, and its disuse was regarded equally as a sign
of national decay.