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John Barbour, Father of English Poetry.

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An Afterthought, Yet a Preface.

Many of us—Scotsmen in particular—are too apt to look back and be absorbed in the life and literature of the past, to the exclusion of a needful interest in the present, as well as necessary hopes and strivings for a better future. The best type of student is interested in the past, not as an antiquary nor a romantic dreamer, but largely because of the guidance and encouragement it gives for life in the present and the necessary additions which each age, and if possible every individual, should make to the inheritance to be handed on to posterity. In this view history is not merely the engrossing story of yesterday, but a guide for to-day and to-morrow, indicating what to do and what to avoid, and justifying the person of public spirit by examples of those who dared and achieved under difficulties that must sometimes have seemed overwhelming.

As regards "The Bruce," its quality of "soothfastness" places it very high in value in comparison with "stories that are nought but fable," in our poet's own words. To be a Scotsman living and working in Scotland always was a handicap; but Sir Walter Scott surmounted it, and with Scots at least John Barbour should have honour such as he has not had. All good literature would die if people of taste and enthusiasm did not keep quoting and praising the masters of it. The public really prefers skimble-skamble stuff, provided it be new— 'the spawn of the press on the gossip of the hour' as Emerson has it. And it is because Barbour is a Scot, on a theme which does not commend itself to Englishmen, that he has been so resolutely ignored by a press become steadily anglicised, even dialect Scottish books now appearing from London

John Barbour, Father of English Poetry.

As a matter of all-important chronology, the Father of English poetry is not Geoffrey Chaucer, but John Barbour, of Aberdeen. Chaucer has been modernised by the skilful hands of Tyrwhitt and Cowden Clarke, and Barbour has been modernised by several unnoted editors, and in the end as at the beginning Barbour is a poet more nearly English than is the Southerner. If Barbour is more Scots, Chaucer is more French, and Scots and English have much more in common than French and English.

From Layamon onward there were poets who wrote a kind of English before Chaucer, as in Scotland there were poets, from Thomas the Rhymer onward, who wrote a kind of English before Barbour. But Chaucer is called the Father of English poetry because of the merit and volume of his work; and in quality and quantity Barbour also makes a great figure.

Personalia.

The band is not sent out when a child is born (though in some rural parts they used upon occasion to ring the church bell), and there was no registration of births in the early fourteenth century. The date of Barbour's birth is variously placed in 1316, 1320, and even as late as 1330. As by 1357, however, he was Archdeacon of Aberdeen—that is, chief administrator of the Church's considerable estate—it is hardly likely that he was then a young man of twenty-seven only; so that the earlier dates given for his birth are more feasible. There is the same uncertainty as to the birth-year of Chaucer. It is given as probably 1328. In any case, "The Canterbury Tales" were not begun till 1391. Some of Chaucer's minor poems are said to date from his college days; but this is conjecture. What is assured is that Chaucer was a bustling man of business till he was over 60.

Barbour, on the other hand, himself tells us in his poem that "The Bruce" was fully half-finished by 1375, and a sum of £10 paid to him by the king's order in 1377 is usually regarded as a royal gift made on the completion of his great poem of some 14,000 lines.

City and Shire.

Barbour is sometimes referred to as a native of Aberdeenshire; but that he was an Aberdonian—that is, a native of Aberdeen city—is assumed by the authorities on fairly feasible evidence. The account of St. Ninian in the "Legends of the Saints" is accepted as being from the hand of John Barbour, and in it is a story of Jacques (James) Trampoure who had land in Aberdeen adjoining that of Andrew Barbour. The adventure of James Trampoure is so vivid in detail that the particulars are believed to have come directly and orally from Trampoure himself, and his being a neighbour of the Barbour family would explain how the story found its way into a Life or Legend of St. Ninian. The Andrew Barbour of the story is accepted as being the father or other near relative of John. A charter of David II. shows that an Andrew Barbour owned a tenement in the Castlegate of Aberdeen, from which, in the year 1350, an endowment was granted to the Carmelite Friars; but there is nothing to connect this Andrew with the archdeacon, John. There

have been other attempts to find a father for John Barbour; but in the end the only certainty is that he had a father, and the hypothesis that connects him with Aberdeen is the most probable. In medieval Scotland barbers would most probably be found only in the larger centres, and that the name is derivatively a craft surname is accepted as evidence of the poet's plebeian origin. Be it said, the great poets, from Homer, the blind beggar of Chios, on to Robert Burns, the son of an Ayrshire crofter, mostly have been of plebeian origin. It is not only that they learned in experience and suffering what they taught in song, but they had the abounding interest in life in general which the folk of rank and riches reserve for themselves and their families. The poet pauses to wonder and ponder at the past or passing pageant. The climber, self-regardingly climbing, pauses to ponder only as to the next step in his own ladder: and as he has cared for nobody, in the end nobody cares for him.

Inglis.

I call Barbour the father of English poetry because the early Scottish "makkirs" called their medium "Inglis." By this they meant that their language was neither Norman-French nor Anglo-Saxon, as was the language in which the earliest British poems were written, among them Caedmon's Paraphrase and the Romance of Beowulf. It is true that Bishop Gavin Douglas, who was the first to translate an ancient classic into a spoken tongue, called his diction "Scottis"; but that was a century later than Barbour, and at a time when Scotland was specially emphasising its independence in several ways.

Before Chaucer, then; before King James the First of Scotland; before Dunbar, "darling of the Scottish muse," as he has been called, was John Barbour, of Aberdeen, with the greatest theme and the greatest hero that a poet of that age could have chosen. His theme was the making of a nation out of a handful of beaten and almost despairing folk, their natural leaders on the side of the powerful invader. Moses and William the Silent are the only characters to be compared with the Bruce, and neither had his personal prowess. The poet who celebrated Scotland's national deliverer might well have more honour in his native city and in Scotland as a whole.

My old friend William Cadenhead, himself a graceful and pleasing poet, says of Old Aberdeen :

O stilly, grey, auld-farrant toun,
I cannot pace thy ancient street,
But, some quaint corner turnin' roun',
The auld-warld caries I think to meet—
Barbour intent upon the Bruce,
Scougal, that mild and gentle star,
Boece, the learned and abstruse,
Or Elphinstone or Gavin Dunbar.*

**Henry Scougal (1650-78), professor of theology in King's College at the age of 24, and author of the famous treatise "The Life of God in the Soul of Man." Hector Bocce*

(Boethius), a great Latinist, first principal of Kines College. Elphinstone and Gavin Dunbar, bishops of Aberdeen.

Barbour Travelled.

It is a pleasant and a natural fancy; but although Barbour was archdeacon of the diocese and prebendary of Rayne in the Garioch, the probability is that at the time when he was intent upon the Bruce he was a good deal absent from Aberdeen. The offices he held proved his capacity for affairs; but they must have been to some extent sinecures; for on August 13 in the year 1357, when he is first mentioned as archdeacon, he appears as having received a safe-conduct to go with three companions, for purposes of study, to the university of Oxford. There was then no university in Scotland, and scholars desirous of extending their studies under preceptors often went to the English colleges, a practice which even in the time of Edward III. the authorities south of the Border were very willing to encourage.

In 1364 Barbour is again in England with four horsemen (*equitibus*), and the following year he goes to St. Denis, near Paris, this time with six companions on horseback. In 1368-9 he pays a second visit to France, accompanied by two servants (*vallatis*) and two horses, The University of Paris had then a high reputation for the study of philosophy and canon law, and as an administrator Barbour would have to be something of a lawyer.

It is not easy to decide whether these were visits for prolonged study or merely holiday excursions. If they were the sojournings of a student they would suggest that Barbour's archidiaconal duties sat lightly upon him.

Barbour at Court.

That he was by no means closely tied to Aberdeen there is still stronger evidence relating to subsequent years. In 1372 he appears as clerk of the audit of the king's household, the king being Robert II., the first of the Stewart monarchs. In 1373 he is mentioned as an auditor of exchequer. After this date he is evidently busy upon his great poem, which may or may not have been written, in whole or in part, in Aberdeen. If he required access to documents or to be in touch with survivors of the War of Independence, both of these would be more available in the midlands of Scotland; for Aberdeen had not then become "The Oxford of the North," as it was at one time called.

Barbour was certainly a favourite of the Stewarts, and his references to them are affectionate; though it should be remembered that it was not necessary to go south to enjoy Court favour. The Scottish kings travelled the country with their court, the kane contributions to the Crown being collected and consumed in the locality. They used to spend Yuletide in Aberdeen, the Exchequer accounts bearing entries of the King's "lossis at the cartes."

Rewards of Authorship.

"The Bruce" was finished in 1376, and there is a grant of £m, by the King's order, from the customs of Aberdeen entered under date 14th March, 1377, As the £10 would be ten pounds Scots (16/8 in all), it was as well that the poet was otherwise provided for; though 16/8 would be worth at least ten times as much as it is now.

The following year there is a pension—not a gift—of 20 shillings sterling annually, granted to Barbour and his assigns in perpetuity. It is one of the advantages of a celibate clergy that, having no offspring, they are without motives to personal acquisition, and Barbour devised that, on his death, this pension should go the cathedral church of Aberdeen "for a yearly mass for his own soul and for the souls of his relations and all the faithful dead." At the Reformation it would cease.

In 1382-3-4 Barbour again appears as an auditor of exchequer. But at the end of these three years he perhaps took on another piece of literary work; for in 1386 he has royal gifts of £10 and £6 13/4, and in 1388 receives a fresh pension of £10 for life "for faithful service," to be paid half-yearly in equal portions.

It lasted, however, only seven years. On April 25, 1396, the first legacy payment of 20s. is made to the Dean and Chapter of Aberdeen, so that Barbour must have been dead before April 5, 1395, when the accounts for the year began. The date of his anniversary mass was 13th March, so that this is probably the date of his death in 1395.

Thus, born a few years after Bannockburn, he had lived in the reigns of the Bruce, his son David, and the Stewarts, Robert II. and Robert III.

Other Writings.

Barbour, as already stated, wrote lives or legends of saints, and there are poems on Alexander the Great, and a Trojan Book, which survives only in Lydgate's "Siege of Troy," where parts of it are used to bridge the gaps in Lydgate's MS. They are introduced with the rubric: "Here endis Barbour and beginnis the Monk."

Wyntoun, who admires Barbour greatly, credits him with a metrical genealogy, "The Stewartis Oryginalle," but this is questioned—in any case, it has not survived; and Professor Skeat suggests that another of Barbour's lost pieces is a poem on the mythical colonisation of Britain by the Roman Brutus. One of Barbour's saintly legends deals with St. Machar, a purely Aberdeen saint.

"The Bruce."

But his fame rests upon his poem The Bruce, or, to give it its full title, "The Life and Actes of the Most Victorious Conquerour, Robert Bruce, King of Scotland."

I am a hater of war, and president of the branch of the League of Nations Union in my adopted town; but Barbour's poem on the fighting man Bruce (who was also a wise man and a statesman) is no jingo effusion. The difference between the soldier who attacks and the soldier who defends is as the difference between the madman running amok and the policeman or other stout citizen who arrests his career and brings him down. And that is simply all the difference in the world. War has been repeatedly, solemnly, and publicly

renounced as an instrument of State policy, and all men and women of intelligence and goodwill must wish well to the Kellogg and other similar Pacts.

The Times.

But history has to deal with the past, and I would have you make an effort with me to carry your thoughts back into the early years of the fourteenth century. The Golden Age of Scotland had come to an end with the death of Alexander III., in 1286. During the following quarter of a century Scottish men and women knew all the degradations of a country nominally and weakly governed, first, by the girlish Maid of Norway, and then by the faineant king, Baliol, with a brief interlude of mastery under the rule of Wallace the Guardian. From the cruel death of Wallace in 1385 the garrisons of Scotland were full of Englishmen who robbed, who insulted men, who outraged women, and generally tyrannised over a nation that had almost lost hope if we judge by the support given to alien rule by even Scotsmen themselves.

But in the Bruce came at last a Deliverer. He had hesitated long, had fought against his countrymen, and had tried, as Blind Harry tells us, to persuade Wallace that it was no use trying to make a stand against "proud Edward's power," but that he (Wallace) might become a vassal king under the English overlord. Wallace repelled the suggestion and berated the Bruce in angry terms, calling him

*Thou runnagat that never yet did good,
Schamyst thou not that devourest thine own blood?*

Whereat, we are told by Blind Harry, the Bruce "leuch." But he did ask for a further interview with Wallace, as if he were not quite sure of himself and the advice he had given. Indeed, one account says that he wept at Wallace's denunciation and his determination to hold the field.

Bruce Gets Rid of a Trimmer.

The defeat, betrayal, and death of Wallace, so far from adding to Bruce's acceptance of the apparent permanent conquest of Scotland, left him so ill at ease that the English king, with reason, distrusted him and had him spied upon. Bruce's life was considered to be, at last, so much in danger that on a friendly warning he fled from the English court to Scotland. Here he began his public career as a claimant to the Scottish crown by the murder of his rival John Comyn, the deed being sacrilegiously done on the altar steps of the church of the Minorite Friars in Dumfries. The provocation was that the Bruce had offered to support the Comyn if he would be a king independent of England, or that the Comyn should support him on the same footing, and the rival claimant's answers were so evasive that Bruce lost his temper and dealt the fatal dagger-blow. When we comment adversely on the bloodshed in the revolutions of other nations—as France and Russia—it behoves us to remember how few of the Scottish kings died in their beds and how the struggle for Scottish independence began with this double crime.

Bruce's Good Luck.

But Bruce, despite this rash and angry act, had astonishingly good fortune if we consider what might have been the results in an age when people made up for their lack of morals by being all the more superstitious. Murder was a daily occurrence, but sacrilege was really serious. Although Bruce had to live the life of a hunted outlaw for years, he never lacked for devoted followers of all ranks, and, most notable of all, the heads of the Church in Scotland favoured his cause despite the double crime he had committed. The loyalty to Bruce of the Scottish clergy was so puzzling to the Pope that he sent over two Legates to see what the Scots meant by it. When John of England was excommunicated by the Pope the whole country fell under the ban. Church services were suspended. There was no mass, no marriage in church, no christening, no burial in consecrated ground. In Scotland, however, nothing of that kind took place. The Irish, nearer our own day, have similarly defied the Pope. Forty years ago he denounced the Trish Plan of Campaign; but Ireland, in practice, suggested that he mind his own business, and went on its way.

The Scottish stoutness, however, was shown six centuries earlier, and it was shown in an age when a great emperor, Charlemagne, had done penance out of doors in his shirt on a snowy day at the bidding of the Church.

The Passion for Independence.

The explanation is that the Scottish people were transported beyond all other considerations by the passion for independence and getting rid of the alien invader whose domineering had driven Wallace, James Douglas, and many another spirited Scot into rebellion and the wild places.

The successes of the Bruce had indeed worked up this passion to fever heat, but it had burned for Wallace just a few years before, and after Bannockburn the flame continued. At the Parliament of Arbroath in 1320 a remonstrance was drawn up by the assembled notables that still stirs the blood. After recounting the oppressions and cruelties of the English in Scotland, this eloquent document, which would of course be drafted in Latin, proceeds:—

But at length it pleased God . . . to restore to us liberty from these innumerable calamities by our most valiant Prince and King, Lord Robert, who, for the delivering of his people and his own rightful inheritance from the enemies' hand, like another Jonia, hath most cheerfully undergone all manner of toil, fatigue, hardship, and hazard. The Divine Providence, the right of succession, and the customs and laws of the kingdom, which we will maintain till death, and the due and lawful consent and assent of all the people, make him our king and prince. To him we are obliged and resolved to adhere in all things, both on account of his right and his merit, as the person who hath restored the people's safety in defence of their liberties. But after all, if this prince shall leave those principles which he hath so nobly pursued, and consent that we or our kingdom be subjected to the king or people of England, we will immediately endeavour to expel him as our enemy and the subverter of both his own and our rights, and will choose another king who will defend our liberties; for so long as one hundred of us remain alive we will

never consent to subject ourselves to the English. For it is not glory, it is not riches, neither is it honour, but it is liberty alone that we fight for, which no honest man will lose but with his life.

This resolute talk to Pope John had the desired effect. The pontifical interdict was removed.

It was to a people imbued with this fiery zeal that Barbour belonged and for whom he wrote. It was not aggressive or aggrandising zeal, as of Spanish conquistadores out for loot, but the defensive pride and resolution which turned back the conquistadores of England.

The Great Poem.

"The Bruce" is in eight-syllabled verse, and has knightly prowess, frankly, as its theme, albeit including wise generalship, and a great deal of human nature, both good and bad. This poem, written before Chaucer, has the true method, skill, and spirit of poetry. Writers have claimed that its theme is freedom, and indeed its notable paean to freedom is the most frequently quoted of Barbour's lines.

Ah, freedom is a noble thing!
Freedom makes man to have liking,
Freedom all solace to men gives,
He lives at ease that freely lives.
A noble heart may have none ease,
Nor nought else that may it please,
If freedom fail; for free liking
Is yarned o'er all other thing.
Nay, he that aye has lived free
May not know well the propertie,
The anger, nor the wretched doom,
That coupled is to foul thralldom.
But if he had assayed it,
Then all perquer he should it wit,
And should think freedom more to prize
Than all the gold in world that is.

The poet himself states his theme in the opening passages of the poem, and, as will be seen, they contain no reference to freedom. He begins :

Stories to read are delectable,
Suppose that they be nought but fable;
Then should stories that soothfast were,
If they were said in good manner,
Have double pleasance in hearing.
The first pleasance is the carping,
And the other the soothfastness,
That shows the thing right as it was.
And soothfast things that are likand,
To men's hearing are most pleasand.
Therefore I would fain set my will,

If my wit might suffice theretil,
To put in writ a soothfast story,
That it last aye forth in memory,
So that no length of time it let,
Nor gar it haily be forget.
For old stories that men reads,
Represents to them the deeds
Of stalwart folk that lived air,
Right as they then in presence were.
And certes they should well have prise
That in their time were wight and wise,
And led their life in great travel,
And oft in hard stour of battel
Wan right great prize of chevalry,
And voided were of cowardy.
As was King Robert of Scotland,
That hardy was of heart and hand,
And good Sir James of Douglas,
That in his time so worthy was,
That of his price and his bounty,
Into far lands renowned was he.
Of them I think this book to ma;
Now God give grace, that I may swa
Treat it, and bring it to ending,
That I say nought but soothfast thing.

Freedom the Underlying Spirit.

Freedom, however, is the motive implicit in and underlying the whole movement of which Bruce was the head and inspiration. And this freedom was not a negation—the mere absence of restraint, but the power to enjoy the peace and privileges of home and country, of property and independence under the law, to all of which the presence of an invader is a constant menace and actual daily abrogation. When Caliban utters his "Heyday, freedom; freedom, heyday!" Shakespeare meant to show a mentally and physically deformed wretch exulting in the removal of wholesome restraints. But the comparison does not apply to the normal inhabitants of any invaded country. The British Tommy, in occupation of German territory, did not domineer, but made friends of German men, and he married German women. His English forebears in Scotland were not restrained by law and were not restrained by natural amiability. William Wallace, returning from the river with his catch of fish, a boy carrying the basket, is asked to stand and deliver. How he dealt with the three insolent soldiers who made this demand is a matter of history, and the incident is typical of what the occupation of Scotland by an English garrison meant to the people over whom they were set, When Barbour called it foul thralldom he was uttering the general sentiment of all Scotsmen of spirit, and that there were districts of the country, such as Galloway and Buchan, where this sentiment was not shared, may have its explanation, but I have never seen it given.

The celebration of martial prowess and chivalry is, as we have seen, Barbour's declared theme; but the poet who in that remote day sang the praise of freedom and the foulness of thralldom as he did had more in view than the dealing of hard knocks and the exploits of individual swordsmen. This would not be worth stating if the contrary view had not been put forward.

Cleric as he is, he has an ardent admiration for the Bruce as a paladin who held at bay in a narrow pass 300 of the men of Galloway, his own countrymen, but in arms against him. Barbour pictures his followers gathering around him after an exploit of this kind, marvelling at and worshipping him for his prowess., When on the eve of Bannockburn, Sir Henry de Bohun, fully armed and mounted on a heavy charger, rides against Bruce, the lively Aberdeen cleric glories in the cool deftness with which the King turns his pony from the deadly lance, and, as the knight passes him, rises in his stirrups and sends his battleaxe crashing through helmet and skull. When the Bruce is chided by his lords for endangering his person, handicapped as he is, he has for sole answer that he has broken his good battleaxe. The risk proved worth the price; for—

This was the first stroke of the fight,
That was performed doughtily.
And when the king's men so stoutly
Saw him right, it the first meeting, .
For outen doubt or abasing,
Have slain a knight so at a strike,
Sik hardiment thereat they take
That they came on right hardily,
When Englishmen saw them stoutly
Come on, they had great abasing,
And specially for that the king
So smartly that good knight has slain
That they withdrew them e'erilkane,
And durst not one abide to fight,
So dread they for the king his might.

Hard Knocks the Price of Liberty.

As the world has gone, hard knocks have been the price of liberty. The English yoke sat sorely upon the Scottish people, and there was only this way of ending it. It has been so many times since then. In 1914 Germany was the Mad Dog of Europe, as Japan is now the Mad Dog of Asia, and so of the world. There is, unfortunately, only one way of dealing with mad dogs.

The economic boycott of Japan has done much to curb her aggression, and this has been backed by the adverse public opinion of the world. May the world's opinion wax in efficacy! It could not have served in 1314. Nay, what public opinion there was ranked itself behind England. The army of Edward II. was probably only a fifth of the number of 100,000 usually given, and the Scottish army was probably only a fifth of the thirty thousand usually credited to it—18 to 20 thousand on the one side and six to eight thousand on the other. But even so, the English king had Irish, French, and even Scottish

allies fighting on his side for the worse cause. Perhaps it was because they came unwillingly to the muster that they were so willing to "turn and flee." Anyhow, here was a simple people, small in numbers, but with the best of causes and the greatest of leaders; and, however little delight a civilised human being can take in the slaughter of his fellow-men, the result of Bannockburn is an encouragement to all who fight in a good cause against heavy odds, whatever the nature and scale of the struggle. Truth and right have often failed, and will fail again; but here was one supreme occasion when they triumphed gloriously.

Moral Values.

All law rests finally upon force. It is little use passing laws unless you have the power to enforce them, though this pressure, of course, takes many forms, not all of them lethal. The moral of this great poem—great in scale, in subject, and in execution—is still valid for us. It is that the virtue of courage is the keeper of all the other virtues. It matters not how sound our principles may be if we have not the courage to stand by them. One every day sees men bend and bear for want of the stalk of cart hemp in their moral make-up. And the great value of a poem such as "The Bruce" is that it fortified the Scottish nation for the centuries of recurring struggle which were to follow, in the Reformation, the Covenanting struggle, and the centuries during which, without a great leader, they had to preserve their independence against a rich and populous neighbour, who, after the manner of power, grudges all rivalry, and especially the rivalry of those nearest. There have been those who, like Sir Herbert Maxwell, were prepared to declare that they regarded Bannockburn as a calamity which merely deferred for four centuries the inevitable union of the northern and southern halves of this island. The answer is that a free union preserved the self-respect of the smaller nation, whereas a forced union would not only have been evil in itself, but in its lasting consequences, as in the cases of Ireland, Poland, Bohemia, and other conquered peoples have proved.

So much for the theme of "The Bruce" and the man and the conditions that inspired it. What of the treatment—the texture and quality of the poem itself?

II

I confess that I prefer to read the less archaic versions of "The Bruce," and the confession is made without apology. Who that really cares for Shakespeare wants to read the First Folio, with its long esses, omissions, and all the gross errors that Theobald corrected only after they had been current for centuries?

Lord Hailes, writing in the eighteenth century, said that Blind Harry's "Wallace" and Barbour's "Bruce" formed the Bible of the Scottish people. If that was true in his day it is very far from true now.

Bibliographical.

But there was undoubtedly much truth in what Lord Hailes wrote. Hugh Miller tells us that when he was about ten years of age he first read Blind Harry from a common stall edition of the poem, and straightway became conscious of his nationality. He certainly could not pick up a common stall edition of the "Wallace" now. I had been on the outlook for it all my life, and it is less than ten years since I acquired my black letter copy of it, with "The Bruce" bound in, from an Edinburgh bookseller's catalogue and at a fairly long price. Hugh Miller's copy was the Hamilton modernised version; and the point of chief interest in his remarks is his reference to the intense enjoyment with which, at ten years of age, he read it. This means that "The Bruce" is not difficult to understand.

"The Bruce" as a book it much easier to pick up than "Wallace"; but I find that even Blind Harry's poem must have been in fairly popular demand. A bibliography of the scarcer poem gives over fifty separate reprints of it, apart altogether from manuscript copies that must have been in circulation, or at any rate in existence, since at least 1488, the date of the only known manuscript copy of Blind Harry's poem, which is in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh. It was first printed at Edinburgh in 1570, and long enjoyed great popularity among the Scottish peasantry. Some of the reprints were made in smallish Scots towns such as Ayr, Perth, Hawick, Falkirk, and other places not ordinarily to be regarded as publishing centres except for the ballads and chapbooks vended by the old-time hawker. My double volume is dated Edinburgh, 1758. It bears no publisher's name, and appears to be the edition printed by Robert Freebairn in 1715 or 1716, but issued (probably re-issued) with a false title-page forty-two years later. It includes the "Arnaldi Blair Relationes," Arnold Blair having been a monk of Dunfermline and Wallace's chaplain.*

**John Major, who was born about 5469, says: "Henry the Minstrel, who was blind from his birth, composed in the time of my youth the whole book of William Wallace, and embodied all the traditions about him in the ordinary measure, in which he was well skilled. By the recitation of these [stories of Wallace] in the presence of the great, he procured, as indeed he deserved, food and clothing." The only Manuscript copy of Henry's works is that in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, dated 1488. It was first printed at Edinburgh in 1570. In his "Tales of Scottish Worthies," Patrick Fraser Tytler (Lord Woodhouselee) claims for it a certain historical worth as "the work of an ignorant man, who was yet in possession of valuable and authentic materials." On account of its glorification of the national hero it has enjoyed a long popularity among the Scottish peasantry, but it possesses no poetical merit except a certain rude fire and energy....Encyclopedia Britannica, 9th Ed., Vol. X., Blind Harry.*

There is said to be no copy extant of Barbour's original manuscript of "The Bruce." A manuscript of the poem is preserved in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, which was penned by John Ramsay in 1489. This Ramsay is stated to have been afterwards prior of the Carthusian monastery at Perth. In the library of St. John's College, Cambridge, is a manuscript dated 1487, and from the similarity of the writing to that of the Advocates' Library Manuscript, and from the fact that the initials of the transcriber are J. R., it is supposed to be another copy made by the monk Ramsay.

The Common Man Enjoyed the Book.

These details as to the one-time popularity of "The Bruce" are given to show that the wayfaring man enjoyed the poem, and enjoyment without comprehension is unthinkable. So that, despite words that are archaic, and stresses of accentuation that are artificial, the voice of John Barbour still speaks to us sincerely and vividly over the gulf of six centuries of time.

His language was in his day no jargon, but the speech of the people in all the northern midlands from York to the Highland line. Such words as "gar" for compel, "waur" for worse, "teem" for pour or empty, are still current, albeit fading in usage, in parts of Yorkshire where I have lived. Barbour and Blind Harry both use the word "while" for "until," and this is still the common form in the midlands of England, although it has died out in Scotland.

There is no classic Scots. The differences between the speech of one county and another are so marked that south country folk cannot readily follow our north-country speech, and I should say that the novels of George MacDonald and William Alexander would be read with more appreciation in the north of England than in the south of Scotland. The poems of Edwin Waugh and Tim Bobbin in the Lancashire dialect show more deviation from standard English than does the verse of Barbour or the prose of Scott and Stevenson. What do you make of this, which I heard uttered by a Yorkshire baker :—

"There's tricks i' all trades, but none i' yars; though they do say as we gets uz mael from Jere Kaye's."

The translation is :

There are tricks in all trades, but none in ours; though they do say that we get our oatmeal from Jere Kaye's.

Jere Kaye's was a sawmill, and the libel on the trade was that the oatmeal was really sawdust.

In a popular Lancashire song, much sung in public houses, Edwin Waugh says?—

Aw've just mended th' fire wi' a cob,
Owd Swaddle has browt thi new shoon,
There's some nice bacon collops o' th' ob,
An' a quart o' ale posset th' oon,

Aw've browt thi topcwoat, dosta know,
For the rain's cumin' dahn very dree,
An' the har'stone's as white as new snow—
Come w'oam to the childer an' me.

Is "wioam" or is "flame," I ask, nearer to the actual word "home"?

Barbour has many useful words that are no longer current in English speech or writing; and in a less degree the same may be said of Chaucer, though there the uncommon words are often obsolete. French forms such as the negative *ne*;

and then there is all the tribe of *y-clads* and *y-mades*, with the stressing of the final . Apart from his frequent stressing of the participial *ing*, which Barbour works very hard, he is much more truly an English poet than Chaucer. With the help of a glossary or Jamieson's "Dictionary or of the Scottish Language" no reader who cares to try to enjoy Barbour need have any continued difficulty. It is not in the least a case of having to learn a new language.

This relates to the medium; but what of the quality? Barbour fulfils the Miltonic standard that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, passionate." The *douce cleric* is not very passionate, it is true. His theme is so moving in itself that he can allow the details to arouse excitement without writing up. Quietly graphic and affectionately garrulous, he is also, as old man Chaucer was, silyly witty.

Of Greeting.

Thus in the outlaw stage, when the Bruce, with 200 of a following, has to make for Cantyre as a rendezvous for the winter, it becomes necessary to cross Loch Lomond. This is done in a single, small, leaky boat which the foraging Douglas has found in the loch. When they had been transported there three at a time they were hunting on the other side with some clamour. The Earl of Lennox and his men, hearing the din, concluded that it must be the Bruce's company. Each had given the other up for lost, perhaps dead or prisoners, and they had great joy in meeting thus, and there was much weeping and kissing among these great hearted companions-in-arms, On this Barbour has these bantering lines.

And all the Lordis that were there
Right joyful of their meeting were,
And kissed him in great daintie.
It was great pity for to see
How they for joy and pity grat
When that they with their fellows met,
That they weened had been dead; for thy
They welcom'd him more heartfully,
And he for pity grat again,
That never of meeting was so fain.
Though I say that they grat soothly,
It was not greeting properly;
For I trow traistly that greeting
Comes unto men through misliking,
And that none may but angry greet,
But it be women, that can weet
Their cheeks, whene'er they list, with tears,
The where well of them nothing dears.
But I wot well, without leeing,
Whate'er men say of sik greeting,

That meikle joy or yet pitie
 May gar men so amoved be
 That water from the heart will rise,
 And wet the e'en on sik a wise
 That it is like to be greeting,
 Though it be not so in all thing;
 For when men greets inkerly,
 The heart is sorrowful or angry.
 But for pity I trow greeting
 Be nothing but an opening
 Of heart, that shows the tenderness
 Of ruth that in it closed is.

As a cleric Barbour may have officiated at weddings or baptisms where the women wept, since there are tears of joy as well as of sorrow.

Bruce's Compassion.

One of the very creditable incidents in the career of the Scottish king occurred when he was helping his redoubtable brother Edward in an attempt to win Ireland for a kingdom. The Scottish army has just fought a successful action against an Irish and English force, of greatly superior numbers, and is about to resume the march, when, as Barbour says—

The King has heard a woman cry.
 He asked what that was in hy.
 "it Is the layndar, sir," said ane,
 "That her child-ill right now has tane,
 And mon leave now behind us here,
 Therefore she makes yon evil cheer."
 The King said, "Certes, it were pitie
 That she in that point left should be;
 For certes, I trow there's no man
 That he will not rue woman than."
 His host all there arrested he,
 And gart a tent soon stented be,
 And gart her gang in hastily,
 And other women to be her by
 While she was delivered, he bade,
 And sync forth on his wayis rade,
 And how she forth should carried be
 Or ere he forth Pure, ordain'd he.
 This was a full great courtesy
 That sik a king, and so mighty,
 Gart his men dwell in this manere
 But for a poor lavender.

Feeling for Nature.

It is said that Barbour shows little feeling for the beauties of Nature, being in this very unlike most of the Scots and English poets who followed him. A feeling for Nature is not likely to be very pronounced in men who are sieging and fighting and foraging, and it is natural that the poet who sings their deeds should share their mood.

But when the artful necessity arises for a dramatic pause in the narrative, Barbour can open with a graceful description of the springtide, as being the season when the Bruce leaves his winter home in Arran for the memorable Carrick exploit.

This was in Ver, when wintertide,
With his blasts hideous to bide,
Was overdriven, and birdis small
As throstle and the nightingale,
Began right merrily to sing,
And for to make in their singing
Sweet notes and also sounds so seer
And melodies pleasant to hear;
And als the trees begouth to ma
Burgeons, and bright blossoms alswa
To win the healing of their head,
That wicked winter had them made,
And all grasses begouth to spring.

I do not know if Chaucer had read these lines and other passages of a like kind, such as the charming prelude to the Bruce's Irish campaign in the month of May. They were written fifteen years before the English poet sat down to compose the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, with its well-known similar opening about *Aprile with his shoures sote, that had perced to the rote, the smalle foules makes melody, and the rest of it*. I am not decrying good Dan Chaucer, whose art and large humanity I alike admire; but John Barbour was first, and the distance between the two, in merit as in time, is not so great as to justify the advancement of the one and the comparative declassing of the other. Barbour, I repeat, was the earlier. Easy to improve upon another man's model.

Barbour shows his classical scholarship in the tales he puts into the mouth of the Bruce, of whom the tradition is that he loved to encourage his small following with heartening stories of pagan bravery. As the stories he told had not then appeared in any spoken language, it is good to think of the Bruce as a scholar as well as a paladin.

And, Catholic though John Barbour was, and living in the dark ages at that, he indulges in a long argument against astrology. It is fine to believe and admire and also to be sceptical, always in the right place.

Human Nature.

I have said there is a good deal of human nature in "The Bruce," meaning by that human frailty. The wild-blood of the story is the king's brother Edward—brave, rash, and headlong. It is he who encourages Robert to remain and fight it out when it is discovered that the beacon fire which has lured them to the Carrick shore has not been lit by friends, but by enemies. And if it be Edward who has made a rash bargain as to the relief of Stirling Castle, it is Edward who boldly inspires the King to accept the position and make it good. He offends once again in Ireland, when, with his vanguard, he gets ahead and out of touch with the main body, who have to bear a formidable attack from which better

scouting might have saved them. He is scolded by the King, and is indeed hopelessly incapable of the canny course supposed to be so characteristic of his countrymen.

The Bruce brothers were obviously no Galahads; and Barbour's truthfulness compels him – loyal man and cleric though he be – to admit that Edward is living apart from his wife, and has as his paramour the sister of Sir Walter Ross. Edward Bruce's slighted wife Isobel is the sister of the Earl of Athol, and as the Earl's own wife is Johanna, daughter of the slain Comyn, it is not wonderful if the Earl, with his double grievance against the Bruces, should be on the side of the King, and even after Bannockburn remained so.

Having a Great Story to Tell.

The great advantage John Barbour had over poets such as Chaucer and Dunbar was that while they had to tell little stories, he had a great story to tell.

It is very natural that Aberdeen city should have provided the Bruce and his cause with a poet-biographer. Bruce had enemies in Buchan as he had enemies in the south of Scotland. But Aberdeen city and district were loyal, and it was at Inverurie and Oldmeldrum that the king, hardly recovered from a great sickness, took the field against his enemies, and, routing them in battle, burned Buchan in revenge for its support of his enemy the Comyn. At the same time he rewarded Aberdeen for its fidelity, not only by assigning it the motto of 'Bon-Accord' which it still bears, but by granting it the royal forest of Stocket, endowing the hospital of Turriff with the lands of Petty in perpetuation of the memory of his murdered brother Nigel, and compelling the recalcitrant Bishop Cheyne to expiate his disloyalty by building a bridge over the Don at Balgownie.

We should do well to keep green and fragrant the memory of John Barbour of Aberdeen, the first notable singing-bird of a nation of singers. The most material thing about a nation is not its lands, its minerals, its machines or its populous towns, but the soul and spirit of its people. Granted courage, resolution, and the 'engine' of which Barbour's countrymen have shown throughout the ages, all good things may be at their command. When the captains and the kings have departed they are mostly forgotten; but the name and fame of a true poet is in sooth immortal. Empires and systems may rise and decay, but so long as a single copy of a great piece of literature remains it can be reproduced and perpetuated to a life beyond life. The poet may have been blind and poor, a wandering minstrel, a beggar, or a measurer of ale-barrels; but when the great ones of the moment are forgotten, he will be remembered and honoured with the homage that men in the last resort always pay to man's highest attribute, mind.

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