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IV.—ON THE DIALECT OF WYCLIFFE'S BIBLE.

By the Rev. Prof. SKEAT, Litt.D., Vice-President.

[*Read at the Meeting of the Philological Society on Friday, June 5, 1896.*]

SOME time ago, I was investigating the old spelling of the verb *to build*, and was much surprised to find the spelling *beeld*, with a reference to Wycliffe's Bible. Mätzner gives several references to the 3rd Book of Kings and the Book of Habakkuk in the earlier version: see his Dictionary, s.v. *bulden*. This is a spelling which we should expect to find in Kentish; but these particular books do not appear to be in that dialect, so that the spelling is due to the scribes of those particular portions of the work.

I then set to work to find out what the dialect employed really is; and the task proved to be one of some difficulty, owing to an extraordinary oversight on the part of the editors, who indicate with scrupulous exactness the names of the MSS. which they collate, but practically place many difficulties in the way of the reader who wants to know the name of the MS. which is used as the text. The information can only be obtained by collating three passages in the Preface.

By another curious oversight, not one of the four splendid quarto volumes of which the work consists has any table of contents. Yet this is particularly desirable, on account of two facts. The first is, that a large number of Introductory Prologues accompanies the text; and the other is, that the Apocryphal books are mixed up with the rest in a somewhat puzzling order. It is not every one who knows that the story of Susannah forms a part of Daniel, or that the Epistle to the Laodiceans follows that to the Colossians, whilst both of these come earlier than the Book of Deeds or Acts. Accordingly, I found it absolutely necessary to make a new Table of Contents, as given below.

CONTENTS OF WYCLIFFE'S BIBLE, SHOWING THE TWENTY-ONE MSS.
USED FOR THE TEXT.

N.B.—MSS. denoted by italic capitals all belong to the earlier version; MSS. denoted by roman capitals, to the later. The MSS. are all fully described by Forshall and Madden.

VOL. I.—General Prologue: *a* (as far as p. 57, l. 3); *ε* (the rest). Prefatory Epistles of St. Jerome, in both versions; *A* and *O*. Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, in both versions; *A* and *A*.

Prologues to Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth. All from *M*.

VOL. II.—Earlier version of 1–3 Kings; *A*. 4 Kings—2 Paralipomenon; *B*. 1–3 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Job, Psalms; *C*. Later version; *A*.

PROLOGUES: *First* to 1 Kings; *M*. *Second* and *third* (parallel); *A* and *O*. 2, 3, 4 Kings (sole); *M*. 1 Par.; *first*, *M*. *Second* and *third* (parallel); *B* and *O*. 2 Par. (sole); *B*. 1 Esdras; *first*, *M*; *the others*, *C*. 2 Esdras (sole); *M*. 3 Esdras; *none*. Tobit; *first*, *M*; *the others*, *C*. Judith, Esther, Job, Psalms; *same* as Tobit.

VOL. III.—Contains Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel (including Susannah and Bel); Twelve Minor Prophets; 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Earlier version; Prov. – Baruch, iii, 20 (p. 490); *C*. Baruch, iii, 20–Ezek. i, 26 (p. 503); *K*. Gap in *K* (Ezek. i, 26–xxxii, 23, p. 575); *A*. The rest; *K*. Later version; *A*.

PROLOGUES: Proverbs; *first*, *M*; *second*, *C*. Ecclesiastes (sole); *C*. Song; *none*. Wisdom (parallel); *C* and *R*. Ecclesiasticus (parallel); *C* and *R*. Isaiah; *first*, *C*; *second*, *A*. Jeremiah; *first*, *M*; *the others*, *C*. Lamentations; *none*. Baruch (parallel); *C* and *A*. Ezekiel (sole); *M* *R* (*sic*). Daniel; *same* as Ezekiel. Twelve Minor Prophets; *none*. 1 Mac. (sole); *M*. 2 Mac.; *none*.

VOL. IV.—Contains the four Gospels, Rom., 1 and 2 Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., Col., Laodiceans, 1 and 2 Thes., 1 and 2 Tim., Tit., Philemon, Heb., Deeds (Acts), James, 1 and 2 Pet., 1, 2, 3 John, Jude, Apocalypse, Appendix of extra Prologues.

Earlier Version; as far as Deeds, xxviii, 15; *K*. The rest; *M*. Later version; *A*. Laodiceans (*two texts*); *o*, *w*.

PROLOGUES: Mat.; *first*, *K*; *second*, *A*. Mark, Luke, John; *same* as Matthew. Romans; *first*, *K*; *second* (above), *k*; *third*

(below), a; *fourth* and *fifth* (parallel), *K* and *A*. 1 and 2 Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., Col. (parallel); *K* and *A*. Laodiceans; o. 1 and 2 Thes. (parallel); *K* and *A*. 1 Tim. (two parallel), *K* and *A*; *third*, o. 2 Tim., Tit., Philemon, Heb., Deeds (all parallel); *K* and *A*. Philemon has a *third* Prologue (only two lines); from *G V* (*sic*). James; *first*, *S*; *second*, *A*. Peter, John, Jude; *none*. Apocalypse; *first*, *S*; *second*, *A*.

Extra Prologues; *from p, y, z*.

List of MSS. mentioned above; a, ε; *A, B, C, G, K, M, S, V*; a, k, o, p, w, y, z; *A, M, O, R*.

Thus, the whole number of MSS. actually used in the text of the earlier version is five, viz. *A, B, C, K*, and *M*. It so happens that *C* and *K* are bound up together in one volume, though they are wholly independent; and this is why the editors say that they have used only *four* manuscripts.

The later version is all printed from *A*; except the Epistle to the Laodiceans, from o and w.

The Prologues exhibit specimens of no less than 21 MSS., viz. a, ε; *A, B, C, G, K, M, S, V*; a, k, o, p, w, y, z; *A, M, O, R*.

Thus, the whole work actually exhibits specimens from no less than *twenty-one* manuscripts; and in many cases it is extremely difficult to find from what MS. any particular quotation is made, without careful and repeated references to the Introduction, where we must search in *three* places before we can be sure of the result. Information is given (1) in the general remarks in the Preface, p. xxxiv; (2) in the list of MSS. on pp. xxxiv-vii; and (3) in the second list of MSS. on pp. xxxix-lxiv, in which the MSS. are denoted by numbers instead of by letters, as in the former list.

The only clue to the MS. used for a prologue is given by the notice that "the source of the Prologues, *if it differ* from that of the book which follows, is noted in the margin." If it does *not* differ, there is no note on it at all.

The list of MSS. does not say that MS. k is used for any part of a text; and so in other cases.

All this trouble might have been saved by the simple and obvious expedient of stating, at the beginning of each piece, the name of the MS. from which it was printed.

This preliminary investigation into the sources of the text was absolutely necessary, before any account of the dialect, or dialects, which it exhibits could be undertaken. It also appears that the first thing to be done is to investigate the dialect of the longest text edited from a single MS. This is that known as the later version, the whole of which, excluding prologues and the Epistle to the Laodiceans, is from MS. A, otherwise called 6, i.e. the MS. in the Old Royal Library, in the British Museum, marked 1 C. viii.

On this MS., written before 1420, the editors bestow high praise; it "presents in the most material points an uniform and accurate text." It is frequently correct where every other MS. is wrong. This version is usually attributed to John Purvey.

The dialect is undoubtedly some form of Midland. I select such examples as are most material; and refer, for further examples, to my 'Remarks on the Language' of this MS. already printed in my Introduction to the reprint of Wycliffe's New Testament, where references are supplied.

In substantives, the final *-e* of the dative case chiefly occurs in phrases, as in *roos fro slep-e* 'arose from sleep'; otherwise it is sometimes dropped. The plural ends in *-is* or *-es*.

In adjectives, the Chaucerian rule of marking the use of the definite adjective by adding *-e*, is seldom observed. Plural adjectives usually take this ending, but not always. The possessive pronoun *his* is usually *his-e* in the plural.

Among pronouns, *hem* is used for 'them,' *her* for 'their,' and even *herne* for 'theirs.'

The infinitive of a verb usually ends in *-e*; as *ber-e* 'to bear.'

The weak verbs regularly employ in the past tense forms ending in *-ide*, *-ede*, *-de*, *-te*, or *-e*, according to the stem: thus we have *clep-ide*, *apper-ide*, *sei-de*, *dwel-te*, *sent-e*. The plural usually adds *-n*, as in *ioy-ed-en*. The past participle ends in *-id*, *-ed*, *-d*, *-t*; as *fulfill-id*, *afrai-ed*, *soid*, *sent*. The present participle has *-ynge*; as *hau-ynge*. In the present tense singular, the ending is *-ith* or *-eth*, as *sped-ith*, *leou-eth*; the plural ending is usually *-en*, as *brek-en*.

The most distinctive marks of the dialect are the frequent use of *-ith* for *-eth*; of *-ide* in the past tense singular, and *-id* in the past participle, of weak verbs; and the very frequent use of *-en* in the plural of both present and past tenses. We may also note *-un* for *-en* in strong past participles, as *bor-un* 'born,' and the occasional use of *-us* in some adverbs, as *thenn-us* 'thence.'

The next question of interest is, how many of these peculiarities occur in the MSS. of the earlier version, in which we might perhaps expect some forms of a more northern character, owing to Wycliffe's birth in a northern county?

First, as to MS. *A*, otherwise 94, otherwise MS. No. 4 in the library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, which supplies the earlier text of Genesis. In the course of the two first chapters of Genesis, we find nearly all the dialect-marks which I have already mentioned.

Thus we find the definite adjectives *the first-e*, *the firth-e*, with final *-e*, and *the fyueþ* without one. The pronouns *hem* and *her* occur for 'them' and 'their.' Infinitives are *worch-e*, *yyu-e*. Weak past tenses are *clepide*, *comaundide*, *restide*, *deuydid*, *fourmede*, *yede*, *broughte*, *putte*; with the plural *shameden*. Past participles are *fulfillid*, *plautid*, *fourmed*, *multiplyed*, *maad*. A pres. part. is *makyng*. The present tense has *moueth* in the singular, and *mouen* in the plural.

We even find *-un* in the pp., as *grow-un*, *found-un*; and *-us* for *-es*, in the gen. sing. *mann-us*. Hence the dialect of this MS. (*A*) is indistinguishable from that of the former (*A*).

This is on the assumption that the MS. is in one hand throughout. Several of the MSS. are in many hands, but *A* appears to be uniform.

Next, as to MS. *B*, otherwise 88, otherwise MS. Douce 370 in the Bodleian Library. It is used for the text of the fourth Book of Kings.

Here, once more, nearly all the characteristics recur in the first chapter of the fourth of Kings. For we find there the definite adjective *the thridd*; plurals of substantives in *-es* or *-is*, as *word-is*, *liju-es*, and the pronoun *hem*. Infinitives in *-e*, or *-en*, or *-n*, as *lyve*, *dyen*, *seyn*. Weak past tenses: *deuouride*, *deuoured*, *trespasside*, *preyede*, *sentle*; plurals, *steiyiden*, *answerden*, *seyden*. Past participles: *turned*, *counseled*; *commen*, *writen*. Pres. part. *sayinge*, *answeryng*. Pres. tense singular, *seith*; pl. *shuln*. So that this MS. appears to be in a similar Midland dialect. Unfortunately, it is said to be written by two or more hands, with corrections and erasures throughout.

If we turn to the last chapter in which this MS. is represented, viz. the last chapter of the second Book of Chronicles, we at once see that we have to do with a different scribe, who freely introduces some varieties of spelling; but the dialect still seems to be much

the same. We still find such past tenses as *translat-ide*, *regnede*; plurals of substantives in *-is*, as *prest-is*; the past tense plural *scorn-eden*; the pp. *scap-id*; the pres. pl. *dreed-en*; and pres. participles in *-inge*.

Thirdly, let us consider MSS. *C* and *K*: these two MSS. happen to be bound together; their number in the list is 87, and their common name is MS. Douce 369.

MS. *C* is written, with marginal corrections throughout, in three different hands, all before 1390. The *first* hand extends from Numbers xx, 2 to Judith vi; the *second*, to Esther ii, 4; and the *third*, to Baruch iii, 20; where it ends abruptly in the middle of a verse, with the following note—*Explicit translacioun. Nicholay de herfurd*. We are told that the *third* hand in this MS. is the same as the *fifth* hand in MS. Bodley 959; and our attention is drawn to several more Northern forms.

This MS. is not used for the text till we come to 1 Esdras; nevertheless, all three hands occur in the part of the text that is taken from it. So it is necessary to look at each of these separately.

I first turn to the first two chapters of 1 Esdras, in the *first* hand. Here we still find that the dialect is, formally, Midland, if we go by the rule that the present plural ends in *-en* or *-e*; we find *dwell-en*, *offr-e* at once. We also find the pt. t. *comaund-ede*, *bild-e*, the pt. t. pl. *help-iden*, the pp. *offr-id*; the plural sbs. *knyu-es*, *cupp-is*, and other marks found in MS. A. But we also notice such forms as the pres. pt. in *-ende*, as *sei-ende*; and the pl. sb. in *-us*, as *thing-us*, *son-us*; hence we must be prepared to find some variations from A throughout this portion of the MS.

As a specimen of the *second* hand, we may take Judith, ch. vii. Here I still find the pt. t. s. *comaundide*, the pt. t. pl. *maden*, the pl. sbs. *son-es*, *ask-is*; the pr. s. *goth*, the pr. pl. *defenden*, and the like. But we again find the pres. part. *putt-ende*, *tak-ende*, *kep-ende*; and the pl. sbs. *son-us*, *knyght-us*.

As a specimen of the *third* hand, we may take Esther, ch. iii, where all the same characteristics recur. Hence the change of hand does not materially affect the dialect, and we may take the note of the editors to refer to the whole of MS. *C*. They observe that the present participles end in *-ende* or *-ande*; that the infinitives commonly end in *-en*, retaining the *n*; and that *them* and *ther* occur, generally, for *hem* and *her*. These are signs of a Western dialect, not unlike that of William of Palerne. I do

not know whether they are characteristic of Herefordshire; as the name "Nicholas of Herford" seems to suggest.

MS. *K*, the second part of the same volume, is in two hands. The first hand extends to Mark v, after which follows "a thicker and clumsier hand, which same hand has corrected the former part." There is a gap in the MS. in the Book of Ezekiel, which has been supplied from MS. *A*.

This MS. first comes to our notice in the text of the latter part of the 20th verse of the third chapter of Baruch, and goes on (except in the gap) to Deeds xxviii, 15. It therefore supplies an important part of the text, viz. the four gospels and the epistles of St. Paul, in the earlier part of vol. iv.

Wherever we open this volume near the beginning we observe that this text coincides very closely with that in the later version. The characteristic suffixes *-ide* in the past tense and *-ith* in the present occur repeatedly. Practically the dialect agrees very closely with that of *A* (the later text), and it is not much affected by the change of hand in Mark v.

MS. *M* supplies the last part of the earlier text, from Deeds xxviii, 15, onwards. This is MS. No. 4, named 1 B. vi in the Royal Library in the British Museum. It is written with great care and neatness, and its date is about 1400. It is best to examine the first chapter of James, which follows the Book of Deeds. We observe in it all the usual characteristics, such as the pres. t. sing. in *-ith*, the pres. pl. in *-en*, the pt. t. s. in *-ide*, the weak pp. in *-id* or *-ed*, and the strong pp. in *-un*.

The sum of the whole matter is that, as far as the Texts are concerned, i.e. excluding the Prologues, nearly all the MSS. agree in exhibiting one uniform dialect of a Midland character, the chief characteristics of which are the pt. t. s. in *-ide*, the pp. in *-id*, the pres. t. s. in *-ith*, and the occasional strong pp. in *-un*. The one clear exception is MS. *C*, of the earlier version, which presents several curious variations, as already noted, and extends from 1 Esdras to Baruch iii, 20. This is the MS. which contains the name of Nicholas de Hurford.

The conclusion to be drawn from the facts is, that there must have existed a rather large school of professional scribes in some Midland town; and I think we may go so far as to say that this town was not London, because the familiar suffixes of *-ede* in the past tense, *-eth* in the present, and *-ed* in the past participle, are comparatively scarce. I should be glad to learn to what part

of the Midland district the peculiarities to which I have referred are to be attributed.

It is of some importance to observe that the earlier version is not, generally speaking, distinguished from the later one by any difference of dialect. A full investigation of the dialect of the Prologues might perhaps prove tedious, owing to the great variety of the MSS. employed. Nevertheless, after a rather hurried examination, I believe I am right in saying that the MSS. marked *a*, *e*, *M*, *O*, *R*, *G*, *V*, *a*, *k*, *o*, *p*, *w*, *y*, and *z* all agree, in their general characteristics, with those which have already been considered; and that only *one* MS., viz. that marked *S*, varies from them. Moreover, the chief variation in *S* is the use of present participles in *-ende*, a variation which has already been noted in the case of MS. *C* above.

Hence we have, finally, the remarkable result that no less than nineteen MSS. all exhibit the same variety of Midland; and that only two, viz. *C* and *S*, offer any important variation; and even these are also Midland, but from another locality. Not one of all the nineteen MSS. used in the texts or in the prologues can be pointed out as possessing decided marks either of a Northern or a Southern dialect. We find, in fact, a uniformity quite beyond anything that we might expect; and it would be very interesting and instructive to find the exact cause of this close agreement.

It would be very useful to fix the locality of this weak past tense in *-ide*, which characterizes nearly every one of these Wycliffite MSS. The only text in which I have noticed them as yet is Pecok's "Repressor," which reproduces nearly every peculiarity of the Wycliffite dialect, except that its forms are a little later; i.e. it only differs in date, and not in locality. Pecok has the weak pt. pl. *preisiden*, pl. sbs. in *-is* and *-es*, the pp. in *-id* or *-od*, the pr. pl. in *-en*, the pr. s. in *-ith* or *-eth*; and so on. Pecok was a long while at Oxford, being for some years a Fellow of Oriel, and it is notorious that he was a diligent student of Wycliffite literature; so that, as at present advised, I incline to hazard the guess that the locality of the scriptorium whence the Wycliffite MSS. were issued may actually have been that famous city. It will be remembered that there is a scriptorium there at the present day.