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A Manuscript Portion of Barclay's *Life of St. George*

Alexander Barclay's *Life of St. George*¹ is known to exist only in a unique copy of the printed text.² It is therefore of some interest that stanzas from the *Life* can now be identified in manuscript form, especially since the identification necessitates a correction to the *Index of Middle English Verse*,³ and provides another instance of the practice particularly prevalent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of excerpting portions from poems and transcribing them as poems in their own right.⁴

No. 4257 of the *Index* 'Ye that are comouns obey your king and lord' has been edited several times.⁵ It occurs uniquely in British Museum MS Sloane 4031 of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, written on the flyleaf in a sixteenth century hand,⁶ and consisting of ten rhyme royal stanzas. There is a very close correspondence between this poem and 11. 1261-1323 of Barclay's *Life*. The only variants are the following (citing Barclay's completed text first): 1270. more] 10. none; 1274. you] 14. your; 1279. for of] 19. *omits* of; 1281. dede] 21. dedes; 1313. more] 53. nye. The only major divergence between the two texts is the omission in Barclay's completed poem of 11. 57-63 of *Index* no. 4257. I reprint this stanza below:

note well, also, how whan the hedes be
of perfyte lyvyng and vndefyled name,

1. Edited by W. Nelson, EETS, OS 230 (London, 1955). All references to the text of *St. George* are to this edition.

2. In the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. For an account of this copy see Nelson, *op. cit.*, x-xi.

3. C. Brown and R. H. Robbins (New York, 1943); the present discovery is not mentioned in R. H. Robbins and J. L. Cutler, *A Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington, 1965).

4. For discussion of this practice see R. H. Robbins, "A new Lydgate fragment," *E.L.N.*, V (1968), 243-5.

5. Partly by H. Bergen, *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, EETS, ES 124 (London, 1927), 59-60; by R. H. Bowers, "The Middle English, 'Obey Your King and Lord,'" *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, XVI (1952), 223-6; and by R. H. Robbins, *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (New York, 1959), 233-5. All references to the text of *Index* 4257 are to Robbins' edition.

6. On flyleaf poems see R. H. Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Oxford, 1952), xxx-xxxii. Bergen notes (*op. cit.*, p. 59) that this leaf was not part of the original manuscript.

as chastely lyvyng or gyven to eqvyte,
moste comenly the commons are the same;
bvt whan the rvlers ensvyth syne and shame,
the commons fereth the lesse ther-wyth to mell.
for ef the hede be syke, the body es natt well.

The relationship between the Sloane manuscript and the printed text remains conjectural, particularly with regard to this stanza. It does not occur anywhere else in the *Life of St. George* (although a number of stanzas are missing almost immediately after this point in the narrative⁷). But the general accuracy of the scribe when assessed in relation to the printed text suggests a fidelity to his exemplar that makes it at least unlikely that this stanza is an unauthorized interpolation. It seems most probable that the source of the Sloane transcript was a more complete version of Barclay's poem, than is now extant, but one that was textually very close to it.

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7. Lines 1331-1358 have been destroyed as have 1079-1106, 1408-25 and 1506-19.