

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE ANCREN RIWLE

I

Long before the English language reached the perfection bestowed upon it by the Bard of Avon it went through several stages in its development. The most important of these are marked by significant productions that stand like milestones along the road of progress. Thus, Caedmon sang in the last quarter of the seventh century, Bede taught and wrote and prayed in the early eighth, Layamon composed his metrical chronicles in the thirteenth, and good old kindly Chaucer portrayed and interpreted life in the fourteenth. These are the names around which we generally group our knowledge of the literary antiquities of England.

There is, however, another old monument with which we are less familiar. Its chronological place is just between Layamon and Chaucer. We ought to know it better, and appreciate it, too, for it is an excellent contribution to English in the formative period. It is a book entitled "Ancren Riwle," whose authorship has not as yet been definitely established. Though it is neither story, chronicle, poem nor drama, yet it is as interesting as a story, as important as a chronicle, and as beautiful as any poem or drama. The "Ancren Riwle," or "Anchoress' Rule," is simply a treatise on the spiritual life, a code of rules, written for the guidance of a small community of anchoresses.

In the ages of faith we often find mention made of hermits, solitaries, anchorites, and anchoresses. The hermits and solitaries lived in huts and caves situated in the wilderness or in any place remote from inhabited regions. The anchorites, however, dwelt in towns or villages, in isolated houses or cells known as "recluseria." They did not flee from the crowd, but rather preferred to be "in the world but not of it." Their cells were sometimes located at the walls of a town, sometimes even at the ends of a bridge, but they were generally attached to some church or religious house. At any rate, it was in these situations that they were very numerous in England. Very many village churches in medieval England had a recluse living within or beside them.¹ When thus situated, the cell or cells of the recluserium were so built that one of its two windows opened into the choir of the

¹ Cutts. Scenes and Characters of the Middle Ages, ch. II, *passim*.

church, so that the recluse might assist at Mass and receive Holy Communion. The second window faced the street, and through this the occupant of the cell received food. To this window the poor and the suffering came for alms, advice or spiritual instruction.²

These recluses were not members of any religious Order. They were directly under the jurisdiction of the bishop of the diocese in which they lived. The bishop, before giving permission to anyone to live this solitary life and to erect a reclusorium, had to find out whether there would be adequate support for the recluse. If they were wealthy, the recluses engaged servants to maintain their modest establishments; if not, they lived upon alms. However, they do not seem to have suffered much want, and the reclusoria were not destitute of comfort.³

The cells were narrow, but sufficient for all practical purposes, devoid of all luxury and extravagance, but not wanting in such things as health and comfort demanded. There was a special ceremony for the inclosing of these recluses and they observed the strictest enclosure until death.⁴ This was not at all a "living burial" or an "immuring." It is quite possible, however, that this ceremony has in modern times given rise to the popular Protestant fable of the medieval "immuring of nuns." This mode of life was very much followed in the Middle Ages, both in England and on the Continent. The taint of Protestantism was yet unborn and the recluses were held in high esteem. "The mention of these recluses in medieval wills is sufficient evidence that their life of prayer and mortification was fully appreciated by our forefathers."⁵ "From the twelfth century to the time of the Reformation there seem to have been at least as many women as men following this mode of life in England. Cutts is of the opinion that the majority of these recluses were women."⁶ At any rate, the word "Ancren" was used in Middle English to designate these anchorites of both sexes, and the "Ancren Riwle," or "Ancho-

² Steele. *Anchoresses of the West*, ch. I, *passim*.

³ Cutts. *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁴ Text of "Reclusio Anchoritarum." Steele, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-255.

⁵ Gasquet. Pref. to Herder's Ed. of Morton's Trans. of "Ancren Riwle," p. XVI.

⁶ J. A. McKeon, O. P., M. A. Dissert. C. U. of A., Wash., '18. "Authorship of the Ancren Riwle."

resses' Rule," with which we are here concerned, is the title of a thirteenth century rule of monastic life.

II

The text of the "Ancren Riwele," together with the modern English translation of the same, was first edited and published in 1853 by the Rev. James Morton, B. D., under the auspices of the Camden Society. This is not a full or final one, but it is looked upon as the standard. There are extant several manuscript copies of the Riwele, besides a Latin and a French version. About one of the five that belong to the British Museum Abbot Gasquet says: "Cleopatra (c) VI would almost appear to be the original text, since it is corrected and words are inserted or struck out apparently at the time of composition, whilst on one page is a list of sings 'put' into this English book." Morton himself argues that the Riwele was originally written in English.

Considered as a literary composition the "Ancren Riwele" is all that can be desired. It is a masterpiece of Middle English. G. C. Macaulay considers it "the most important prose text of the earlier Middle English period."⁸ According to the Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit., the Riwele "stands apart by itself as the greatest prose work of the time and as one of the most interesting of the whole English period."⁹ It is written in a simple, graceful and unadorned style, symbolism, allegory and even puns are used with good effect; images, beautiful, appealing, sublime and apt give it color and clarity; appropriate illustrations from story, life and history are skilfully used to bring points home. The writer is not at all pressed to earth by his learning, and consequently he is never clumsy or dull, but invigorating, easy, sincere, tender, earnest, eloquent, dignified and always interesting. His saintly character is clearly mirrored in his style. He is a man of genuine scholarship; he is familiar with the classics; the richness of his vocabulary is amazing, and his manner is admirably suited to his subject-matter and his purpose in writing. Having said this much there is nothing more that can be added in praise of either the production as a literary composition or the writer as a stylist.

⁷ Gasquet, *op. cit.*, p. XI.

⁸ Macaulay in *Mod. Lang. Review*. (1914) vol. IX, p. 63.

⁹ Cambridge *His. of Eng. Lit.*, p. 255.

The "Ancren Riwe" is no less valuable as a spiritual treatise than as a mere piece of literature. In fact, its ascetical value by far overshadows its esthetic merit. The spiritual food contained therein is in great measure taken from the Sacred Scriptures. There is within the scope of the work not much need for exposition of dogma, but what there is of it is handled in a masterly fashion. The book is largely ethical and, as Fr. Vincent McNabb so pertinently remarks, "the author never slips into untrue psychology or theology." He covers his ground well and thoroughly; with a watchful eye to all the details, he maps out logically and reasonably the mode of life to be followed by anchoresses. The whole work is the product of a mind well stocked with practical theology and thoroughly versed in the Scriptures. "Throughout the book we find the footprints of a wise leader of souls. Not every theologian is a wise one. Learning is something distinct from wisdom; for a good legislator may be a bad judge. Study makes the theologian, but experience makes the wise director. And the author of the 'Ancren Riwe' must have had experience; or else his wisdom is unaccountable."¹⁰

The "Ancren Riwe" opens with an introduction that calls attention to the Inward Rule which governs the heart, and the Outward Rule which pertains to the exterior life. The "Riwe" is divided into eight parts, the first and last of which deal with the Outward Rule, while the Inward Rule is treated in the other six parts. The work contains detailed directions for liturgical functions, meditation and the reception of the sacraments. Excellent advice is given in regard to the solitary's relations with the outside world, food, clothing, sleep, alms, deportment, etc. Caution and counsel is given about mortification, diligence and the observing of monastic silence. The recluses are wisely warned against being over zealous in their austerities, and some very sensible hints are given in regard to household affairs, maid-servants and the useful work with which to occupy leisure moments. On the whole, the "Riwe" is strict and severe; its tone, however, is never harsh but always kindly and suggestive of the writer's eagerness to help and his solicitude for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the recluses. The main idea of the whole Rule is the necessity of a clean heart and mind and a burning, personal love for Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ V. McNabb, O. P., "Who Wrote the Ancren Riwe?" Amer. Eccl. Review, vol. XXXVI, 1907, pp. 54-66.

It will not be inappropriate here to give a few passages from the "Ancren Riwe" by way of exemplifying some things that have been said in praise of its author. In his prologue he says:

"There is a law or rule of grammar, of geometry and of theology; and of each of these sciences there are special rules. We are to treat of the theological law, the rules of which are two: the one relates to the right conduct of the heart; the other to the regulation of the outward life. . . . And ye, my dear sisters, have often sought a rule from me. There are many kinds of rules; but among them all there are two of which, with God's help, I will speak at your bidding. The one rules the heart and makes it even and smooth, without knot or wound-mark of evil or accusing conscience. . . . This rule is always within you and rules the heart. . . . The other rule is all outward and ruleth the body and the deeds of the body. . . . And this is bodily exercise which, according to the Apostle, profiteth little, and is as it were a rule of the science of mechanics which is a branch of geometry and this rule is only to serve the other. The other is as a lady; this is as her handmaid."

The amiable writer's gentle humor is evident when with subdued mirth he says that this outer rule is a "branch of geometry."

He is no hidebound theorist with his head in the clouds, but has a goodly sum of practical experience from which to draw good and sound advice. Here is an admirable example of his wisdom:

"You shall have no beast, my dear sisters, but one cat. An anchoress that hath cattle is a better housewife, as Martha was, than an anchoress; and nowise may she be Mary, with peacefulness of heart. For then she must think of the cow's fodder, and of the herdsman's hire, flatter the heyward, defend herself when her cattle are in the pound and pay the hurt. Christ knoweth, it is a heavy thing when men in the town complain of the anchoress' cattle. . . . Carry ye on no traffic. An anchoress that is a dealer deals her soul to hell's dealer. Take no charge in your house of other men's goods, neither cattle nor clothes. Neither take ye charge of the church vestments, nor the chalice unless by force of great fear, for of such charges cometh much ill oftentimes. . . . Ever am I more pleased the coarser the works ye do. Never make purses to gain friends therewith; nor blodbends of silk; but shape and sew and mend church vestments and poor peoples' clothes. . . . Ye shall have your hair cut four times a year to disburden your head; and be let blood as oft, and oftener if necessary; but if any one can dispense with this, I may well suffer it. When ye are let blood, ye ought to do nothing that is irksome to you for three days, but talk with your maidens and divert yourselves together with instructive tales. Ye may often do so when you feel 'heavy'; or 'be for some world thing sorry or sick.' Thus wisely take care of yourself . . . and hold ye in such rest that long hereafter may in God's service ye the more 'manfully' toil; as also when ye feel any sickness; for it is a great folly for the sake of one day to lose ten or twelve. Wash yourself wheresoever ye have need as oft as ye will."

The saintly author's nobility of thought and ardor of devotional feeling wells up to overflowing in a sublime passage, a very song of divine love:

"Thy love, saith our Lord, is either to be altogether freely given, or it is to be sold, or it is to be stolen and taken by force. If it is to be given, where couldst thou bestow it better than upon Me? Am I not the fairest thing? Am I not the richest King? Am I not of noblest birth? Am I not the wisest of the wealthy? Am I not the most courteous of men? Am I not the most liberal of men? For it is commonly said of a liberal man that he cannot withhold anything—that he has his hands, as Mine are, drilled. Am I not of all things the sweetest and most gentle? Thus thou mayest find in Me all the reasons for which love ought to be given. . . . If thy love is not to be given, but thou wilt by all means that it be bought, do say how. Either with other love, or something else? Love is rightly sold for love; and so love ought to be sold and for nothing else. If thy love is thus to be sold, I have bought it with love over all other. For of the four most loves I have shown towards thee the most of them all. And if thou sayest that thou wilt not set so light a value upon it but that thou wilt yet have more, name what it shall be. Set a price on thy love. Thou never shalt say so much that I will not give thee, for thy love, much more. Wilt thou castles and kingdoms? Wilt thou wield all the world? I will do thee better; I will make thee, with all this Queen of Heaven. Thou shalt be sevenfold brighter than the sun; no ills shall ever harm thee; nothing shall vex thee; no wealth shall be wanting to thee; all thy will shall be wrought in heaven and earth; yea, even in hell. Heart shall never think of such bliss, that I shall not give more for thy love—immeasurably and endlessly more—all Croesus' wealth and Absolom's fair beauty . . . Asoel's swiftness . . . Samson's strength . . . Caesar's liberality; Alexander's renown; Moses' dignity. Would not a man for one of these give all that he possessed? And all of these things against My bid are not worth a needle. And if thou art so very self-willed and so out of thy mind that thou, without losing anything forsakest such gain with every kind of bliss, lo I hold here a sharp sword over thy head to deal life from soul and to sink both into the fire of hell to be there the devil's paramour shamefully and sorrowfully world without end. Answer now! And ward thyself, if thou canst, against Me; or grant Me thy love on which I yearn so strongly; not for My own, but for thy great behoof."

It is evident, then, that whoever wrote the "Ancren Riwele" must have been a man in whom sanctity, wisdom and "humaneness" were blended into an admirable character and a very lovable personality. "Certainly whoever wrote the 'Rule' deserved to obtain high office in the Church, for he combined in a remarkable degree devotional feeling, wisdom, and a sense of humor."¹¹

¹¹ Chambers' Cycloped. of Eng. Lit., p. 39.

III

It is quite natural that we wonder how it happens that the "Ancren Riwele" has come down to us unsigned. In our efficient age, every book has the author's name, pseudonym or other distinguishing mark on its title page, and we cannot understand how an individual in the thirteenth century could have been so negligent as to omit signing his name to his work. He could have had a little consideration for us and saved us a lot of trouble by giving at least a pen name, or some vague reference to himself. But we must remember that besides the "Riwele" many other documents dating from the "Dark Ages" have nothing more definite on their title pages than the puzzling words "Anonymous" or "Author Unknown." Then, too, the writer of the "Riwele" was probably an humble man in spite of his learning, and therefore he saw no reason for the affixing of his signature. Besides, he wrote his work merely for a little private community of pious women, and as such he never intended it for the public. He was certainly a saintly man, and saintly men are always humble and self-effacing.

The "Ancren Riwele" has been attributed to Simon of Ghent, Bishop of Salisbury from 1297 until his death in 1315. This claim is based upon a note prefixed to a Latin manuscript translation of the "Riwele" at Magdalen College, Oxford (MS. No. 67, fol. 50). This note reads: "Hic incipit prohemium venerabilis patris magistri Simonis de Gandavo, Episcopi Sarum, in librum de vita solitaria, quem scripsit sororibus suis anchoritis apud Tarente."¹² But Bishop Simon could not have written the original Middle-English "Riwele," which dates back to the early thirteenth century. The original must have been composed before his birth. At most he may have made a Latin version.

"It is further to be noted that this heading is the only evidence connecting the "Riwele" with Tarente in Dorsetshire. But this connection may only be assumed with regard to the Latin version, and not to either the English or the French texts."¹³ Macaulay holds that inasmuch as the convent at Tarante be-

¹² Morton, James. *The Ancren Riwele. A Treatise on the Rules and Duties of the Monastic Life.* Ed. and trans. from a Semi-Saxon MS. of the thirteenth century. London, 1853, p. XV. (B. Herder has published an edition of Morton's translation.)

¹³ J. A. McKeon. *op. cit.*, ch. III.

longed to the Cistercians it cannot be identified with the small community of three recluses for whom the "Ancren Riwele" was written. He thinks that Simon's Sisters may have been nuns in this convent at Tarante, and that Simon made his Latin version for their use.¹⁴

On the strength of this supposed connection of the "Riwele" with Tareante, the work has also been attributed to Richard Poor, who was one of Simon's predecessors in the episcopal see of Salisbury, and who died in 1237. This prelate was born and died at Tarente. He built a chapel for the reclusorium in his birth-place and his sister is said to have been a recluse there. These facts account for the attribution of the "Ancren Riwele" to him. But the assumption falls for the want of further evidence. As Eckenstein says, Poor's claim to the authorship of the "Riwele" rests upon no other ground than his interest in the foundation at Tarente.¹⁵

IV

Internal evidence taken from the "Ancren Riwele" itself utterly destroys the supposition that either Simon of Ghent or Richard Poor wrote the work.

"Our lay brethren say thus their hours. . . . If any of you will do this, she followeth here as in other observances much of our Order and I earnestly advise it. . . (Morton's edit., pp. 25-27. Herder's edit. of Morton's transl., p. 20.)

Now, these words from the text do not at all fit in with the theory that Simon or Richard is the author, because neither of these prelates was a member of any religious order. This, and the further fact that the list of prayers which the author of the "Riwele" gives as being in use among the lay brothers of his order, is nearly the same as those prescribed by the rule of St. Dominic for the lay brothers, led Fr. Dalgairns, the eminent Oratorian, to say in regard to the "Riwele": "The only thing that is certain is that it was written by a Dominican, for the list of prayers which the writer enumerates as having been in use among the laybrothers of his order is nearly identical with those ordered by the Rule of St. Dominic."¹⁶

¹⁴ Macaulay, *op. cit.*, 473-474.

¹⁵ Eckenstein. *Women under Monasticism*, p. 315.

¹⁶ Dalgairns. "An Essay on the Spiritual Life of Medieval England." Prefixed to Walter Hilton's *Scale, or Ladder of Perfection*, p. IX.

The correspondences between certain passages in the "Ancren Riwle" on the one hand and in the Dominican Constitutions on the other, are numerous and very striking. Indeed, they are so abundant that only a few can be cited here.

The "Riwle," like the Rule of St. Augustine, begins with charity. (Morton p. 3. Herd. p. 1.) It quotes from St. Augustine's Rule:

"An immodest eye is the messenger of the impure heart." (Morton, p. 61. Herd., p. 47.)

In regard to the bath, St. Augustine says: "The bath is not to be denied when necessity demands it." The "Riwle" says:

"Wash yourself wheresoever ye have need ,as oft as ye will." (Morton, p. 423. Herd., p. 320.)

The only Rule quoted in the "Ancren Riwle" is the Rule of St. Augustine. The above passages are taken at random from the "Riwle" and are just a few of the points wherein it resembles St. Augustine's Rule. The close of the "Ancren Riwle," from page 425 to page 431, is little else than a simple commentary on the Rule of St. Augustine.

The resemblances, however, of more value and pointing to Dominican authorship are those passages in the "Riwle" which accurately correspond to similar passages found in the Dominican Constitutions. They are minute and detailed.

1. The "Riwle" says:

"Our lay brethren say thus their hours: for Uhtsong (Matins) on 'Werkedawes' (ferial days) eight and twenty Pater nosters; on 'Holidawes' (feast days) forty; for Evensong fifteen; for every other time, seven."

Hence we have:

Ancren Riwle	Dominican Rule
Matins—ferial days.. 28	28
feast days... 40	40
Vespers..... 15	14
Little Hours..... 7	7

In regard to the one discrepancy, Fr. McNabb remarks: "It will be seen that the only difference is in Vespers, where the "Riwle" has fifteen and the Dominican Rule has fourteen. But it is not unlikely that fifteen is a misprint for XIV, seeing that 28 (Matins) and 14 (Vespers) are multiples of 7 (Little Hours)."¹⁷

¹⁷ V. McNabb, *op. cit.*

The above number of prayers was in use among Dominican lay brothers from the foundation of the Order until 1551, when the Chapter of Salamanca relieved the lay brothers and lay sisters from saying so many prayers because of their manual labor.¹⁸

2. The "Riwele" says:

"Ye should be, as our lay brothers are, partakers of Holy Communion only fifteen times a year." (Morton, p. 413. Herd., p. 312.)

This was the original custom among Dominican lay brothers.¹⁹ Hence we have:

Ancren Riwele	Dominican Rule
1. Midwinter.	1. Christmas.
2. Candlemas.	2. Between Christmas and Purification.
3. Twelfth-day.	3. Purification.
4. Sunday half way between that and Easter, or Our Lady's Day, if it is near the Sunday.	4. Between Purification and Easter.
5. Holy Thursday.	5. Holy Thursday.
6. Easter day.	6. Between Easter and Whitsunday.
7. Third Sunday thereafter.	7. Between Whitsunday and the feast of SS. Peter and Paul.
8. Whitsunday.	8. Whitsunday.
9. Midsummer day.	9. SS. Peter and Paul.
10. St. Mary Magdalen.	10. St. Mary Magdalen.
11. Assumption.	11. Assumption.
12. Nativity.	12. Birth of Our Lady.
13. St. Michael.	13. St. Denis.
14. All Saints.	14. All Saints.
15. St. Andrew.	15. St. Andrew.

The days assigned in both Rules are almost identical. Where the author made changes he must have had some reason. In regard to these alterations Fr. McNabb says that the English tone of the writer of the "Riwele" is manifested in the substitution of the feast of St. Michael for that of St. Denis, the patron of France.²⁰

3. The similarities between the fast days assigned in the "Ancren Riwele" and those prescribed in the Dominican Constitutions are very striking. The "Riwele" says:

"Ye shall eat twice every day from Easter and the Holyrood day, the latter, which is in harvest; except on Fridays, and Ember days, and

¹⁸ Constitut. Ord. Praed. pp. 600-603.

¹⁹ Analecta Ord. Praed., vol. III, p. 50.

²⁰ V. McNabb in Mod. Lang. Review, vol. XI (1916). No. I, p. 3.

Procession days, and Vigils. On those days, and in Advent, ye shall not eat anything white, except necessity require it. The other half year ye shall fast always except only on Sundays." (Morton, p. 413, Herd., p. 313.)

The Dominican Constitutions read: "From Easter to the feast of the Holy Cross (Holyrood), the Brethren may eat twice, except on Rogation Days and Fridays, and the Vigil of Pentecost, Ember Days, etc. From the feast of the Holy Cross to Easter, an uninterrupted fast must be held, except on Sundays. (In the "Riwe" (the other half year). Throughout Advent, Lent, etc., the Quadragesimal fast is to be followed, unless necessity demand otherwise."²¹ There is no doubt that the fast from the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross to Easter, and on all Fridays of the year originated with St. Dominic. His Order was in its infancy in England when the "Ancren Riwe" was written. Therefore, no one outside the Order could have been so well informed about the Dominican Constitutions, and so able to embody them in another rule of life.

4. It seems that the anchoresses recited the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. This was said in the Dominican way, i. e., with an Ave Maria at each hour.

"At all seven hours say Pater Noster and Ave Maria, both before and after." (Morton, pp. 21-23. Herd., p. 17.)

This was strictly a Dominican custom at the time the "Riwe" was written.

5. The author of the "Riwe" gives a famous Dominican devotion to our Blessed Lady, first published by Blessed Jordan of Saxony, second Master General of the Order (1222-1237). This devotion consisted of five psalms or canticles beginning with the five letters M-A-R-I-A, viz:

Magnificat,
Ad Dominum cum tribularer clamavi;
Retribuere servo tuo
In convertendo
At te levavi,

"Whoso pays attention to this word 'Maria' may find in it the first letters of these five Psalms aforesaid... (Morton, p. 43. Herd., p. 34.)

6. Concerning mistakes made in choir the "Riwe" says:

"If you blunder in words or mistake a verse, make your venia." (Morton, p. 47.)

²¹ Constitut. Ord. Praed. p. 84.

"Facere veniam," to make the venia, is today as it always was the technical word among Dominicans.

7. The *Corpus Christi* (Cambridge) MS. f. 16, says:

"If any one is among you that goeth in singularity and followeth not the convent, but goeth out of the flock that is as in a cloister over which Jesus Christ is high Prior, etc."

The writer does not use the word Abbot (Benedictine) or Guardian (Franciscan) but the word Prior, the title of the highest superior in a Dominican Convent.

8. The author of the "Riwele" insists that its contents are not to bind under vow or pain of sin. (Morton pp. 7-9; 413. Herder pp. 4-7.) The Dominican Constitutions, to which is prefixed the Rule of St. Augustine, do not, with the exception of a very few commands, bind under sin. St. Dominic is considered to be the originator of such a legislative policy.

With such evidence before us we may consider the Dominican authorship of the "Ancren Riwele" proven beyond possibility of reasonable doubt.

V

The question now arises: Who was this Dominican? Fr. Vincent McNabb, O. P., thinks there is enough evidence to show that the famous Dominican Doctor, Robert Bacon, wrote the "Ancren Riwele." It is an interesting theory and well merits the attention and consideration of scholars.

There is no adequate life of Robert Bacon. He was born about 1160-1170.²² Matthew of Paris tells us that Robert was a Dominican in 1233.²³ Robert Bacon took the habit of St. Dominic about 1229 and died in 1248. It is thought that he was clothed when Blessed Jordan of Saxony visited Oxford. We are likewise told that he was an elderly man on his entrance to the Order, that he was the first English Dominican to write books, the first Dominican to lecture at Oxford,²⁴ the first Englishman to join the Order in England.²⁵ Matthew of Paris, who was not at all

²² Dict. Nat. Biog., vol. II.

²³ *Chronica Majora* IV, p. 244.

²⁴ *Scriptores Ord. Praed.*, p. 118.

²⁵ De Paravicini. *Life of St. Edmund of Abingdon*, p. 68.

given to much enthusiasm in regard to the Friars,²⁶ says of Robert Bacon and his friend Fishacre, that no contemporary writers, in the judgment of that age, surpass or even equal these two, in theology or in other branches of learning.²⁷

G. C. Macaulay thinks the dialect of the "Riwle" is South-western, and James Morton, the editor and translator, thinks it is Western. Roger Bacon, the famous Grey Friar, and generally supposed nephew of Robert Bacon, was, according to tradition, born about 1214, at or near Ilchester in Somersetshire. Robert was very likely born there, too. The "Riwle" has always been associated with the diocese of Salisbury, where Robert Bacon was not at all unknown. According to the "Dictionary of National Biography," Robert succeeded St. Edmond Rich of Abingdon (also known as St. Edmond of Canterbury) as treasurer of the Cathedral of Salisbury. History tells us that Robert Bacon was first a pupil and later the familiar friend of St. Edmond. It is thought likely that the example of that prelate, in writing his "Mirror" for the guidance of certain religious women in whose lives he had a deep interest, may have influenced Robert Bacon to compose the "Ancren Riwle."²⁸ There is a passage in the "Riwle" which reads:

"Yet I know a man who weareth at the same time both a heavy cuirass and haircloth bound with iron about the middle too, and his arms with broad and thick bands, etc." (Morton, p. 383. Herd., p. 289.)

This is similar to a passage in the MS. Life of St. Edmond, which Fr. Wilfred Wallace, O. S. B., staunchly holds was written by Robert Bacon. The passage in question runs thus: "A military cuirass, armed with which his mother often withstood the wiles of the tempter and the uprisings of the flesh, he, too, wore under his clothes in order to bring the like conflict to a like end. . . . He had a hair shirt such as the world had not seen. . . . Moreover, he bound the upper part of this hair shirt with a thick three-fold band. Very often he put on a leaden scapular of great weight and discomfort."²⁹ We are well nigh forced to acknowledge the

²⁶ Mortier. *Histoire des Maitres Generaux de l'ordre des Freres Precheurs*, p. 241.

Turon. *Hist. des Hommes Illustres de l'ordre de Saint Dominique*, p. 143.

²⁷ *Chronica Majora*, op. cit. ad annum 1248.

²⁸ McKeon, op. cit. ch. IV.

²⁹ Wallace. *Life of St. Edmond of Canterbury*, p. 602.

weight of such accurate, interchangeable passages. In their light the man of austerity mentioned in the "Riwle" is very probably the saintly Archbishop of Canterbury, and the author of the "Riwle" may very legitimately be identified with Robert Bacon. "Robert Bacon showed his attachment to Blessed Jordan of Saxony and to St. Edmond of Canterbury by copying the Salutation of the one and writing the life of the other. From both he would have learned a certain chrivalrous reverence and—if we may use the word—devotion to nuns. The Master General was always their champion: the Archbishop wrote his "Mirror" for "his dear Sisters."³⁰

These considerations are amply sufficient to show that the claims in behalf of Simon of Ghent and Richard Poor as the authors of the famous "Ancren Riwle" are merely speculative, unsustained by any evidence, and not even so very interesting. The internal evidence derived from diligent comparison of the contents of the "Ancren Riwle" with the Dominican Constitutions lead us very powerfully to the conclusion that an English Dominican wrote the "Ancren Riwle." The evidence adduced in favor of Robert Bacon, O. P., is of course not conclusive. One argument helps out the other, and the whole weight of evidence when summed up is quite strong and well merits the consideration of all scholars who interest themselves in the history of the English language.

³⁰ V. McNabb. Amer. Eccl. Review, 1907. op. cit.

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—Bro. Nicholas Ehrenfried, O. P.