

Archæologia Cantiana.

JAMES RYMAN—A FORGOTTEN KENTISH POET.

BY A. G. LITTLE, D.LITT., LITT.D., F.B.A.

JAMES RYMAN is not mentioned in the *D.N.B.*, nor in *Archæologia Cantiana*, nor in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, and his connection with the Franciscans of Canterbury was discovered too late for inclusion in Dr. Cotton's *Grey Friars of Canterbury*.

He was a friar of the Franciscan house at Canterbury when he was ordained acolyte (March 31st) and sub-deacon (September 21st) in 1476 in Canterbury Cathedral (Bourchier's Register). His poetical works are preserved in one MS. in the Cambridge University Library, partly written in his own hand, where they are described as "the book of hymns and songs composed by friar James Ryman of the Order of Minors to the praise of almighty God and of his most holy mother Mary and of all Saints, A.D. 1492." They are printed in Herrig's *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Litteraturen*, Vol. 89 (1892), pp. 167-338. The poems number 166, of varying length. They are all in English, often with Latin refrains; they are almost all of a religious character and have little originality either in form or matter, though the author shows some ingenuity in his rimes. The most moving seem to be a number of poems in the form of dialogues between Christ and his mother (Nos. 62-67 and elsewhere)—a form of dramatic lyric popular in the fifteenth century. There are several poems in honour of St. Francis (Nos. 69, 109, 142, 143); in one he is described as "witty and wise," unexpected epithets in this connection; in another, more naturally, as "Of goode maners the rule

moost right." Henry VI is praised (No. 96) as "full of mercy without vengeance," which reminds one that the ruthless atrocities of the Wars of the Roses must have been among Friar Ryman's early recollections. Two poems are in lighter vein: one (No. 111) is on the fox and geese, the other (No. 70) is a Farewell to Advent, and shows a humorous appreciation of the lay attitude to fasts ordained by the Church. This follows:

Fare wele, advent : cristemas is cum.
Fare wele fro us both alle and sume.

1

With paciens thou hast us fedde
And made us go hungrie to bedde :
For lak of mete we were nyghe dedde.
Fare wele fro us both alle and sume.

2

While thou haste be within oure howse,
We ete no puddyngis ne no sowce,
But stynking fisse not worth a lowce.
Fare wele [etc.].

3

There was no fresshe fisse ferre ne nere,
Salt fisse and samon was to dere,
And thus we have had hevy chere.
Fare wele [etc.].

4

Thou hast us fedde with plaices thynne,
Nothing on them but bone & skynne ;
Therefore our love thou shalt not wyne.
Fare wele [etc.].

5

With muskilles gaping afture the mone
 Thou hast us fedde at nyght and none
 But ones a wyke and that to sone
 Fare wele [etc.].

6

Oure brede was browne, oure ale was thynne ;
 Oure brede was musty in the bynne,
 Oure ale soure or we did begynne.
 Fare wele [etc.].

7

Thou art of grete ingratitude
 Good mete fro us for to exclude ;
 Thou art not kyende, but verey rude.
 Fare wele [etc.].

8

Thou dwellest with us ayenst oure wille,
 And yet thou gevest us not oure fille ;
 For lak of mete thou woldest us spille.
 Fare wele [etc.].

9

Above alle thinge thou are a meane
 To make oure chekes both bare and leane ;
 I wolde, thou were at Boughton Bleane.¹
 Fare wele [etc.].

10

Come thou nomore here nor in Kent ;
 For, yf thou doo, thou shalt be shent ;
 It is ynough to faste in lent.
 Fare wele [etc.].

¹ Boughton-under-Blean. I do not know why Ryman had a grudge against the place.

11

Thou maist not dwelle with none eastate ;
 Therefore with us thou playest chekmate :
 Go hens, or we will breke thy pate.
 Fare wele [etc.].

12

Thou maist not dwell with knyght nor squier ;
 For them thou maiste lye in the myre ;
 They love not thee nor lent thy sire.
 Fare wele [etc.].

13

Thou maist not dwell with labouring man ;
 For on thy fare no skille he can ;
 For he must ete bothe now and then.
 Fare wele [etc.].

14

Though thou shalt dwell with monke and frere,
 Chanon and nonne ones every yere,
 Yet thou shuldest make us better chere.
 Fare wele [etc.].

15

This tyme of Cristis feest natall
 We will be mery, grete and small,
 And thou shalt goo oute of this halle.
 Fare wele fro us both alle and sume.

16

Advent is gone, cristemas is cume ;
 Be we mery now alle and sume.
 He is not wise that wille be dume
In ortu regis omnium.