

ing those sections of the New Testament which were used in the daily service of the church throughout the ecclesiastical year, the metrical paraphrast renders them into the vernacular English with such additions and modifications as seemed best to him to make. Beginning with Luke, the poet goes back and forth through the Four Gospels and on to the Book of Acts, doing the double office of poet and commentator. Quite devoid of any distinctive poetic merit or literary excellence, it still possesses elements of interest that have always attracted the attention of English students. Appearing just at the opening of the thirteenth century, midway between the old Norman influence and the late national awakening in the days of Chaucer, it not only marks the epoch as transitional but enables us to note and interpret some of the phases of the transition.

In answering the question as to the special objects of the poet and the poem, we call attention to two or three of primary importance. To foster the English Language and Spirit. Written in the same East Midland dialect in which Chaucer himself afterward wrote and in which others before him had already written, he placed himself in line with the rapidly developing interests of the home speech as it tended to break away, more and more specifically, from anything like provincial usage and to assume a national and popular form. Hence, the very large percentage of native First English words as distinct from the Anglo-Norman style and diction. Though living and writing in that part of England especially exposed to Danish invasions, and though on his father's side of possible Danish descent, this Scandinavian influence is not prominent in the verse, nor can the Latin itself be said to have anything more than its proper place and value. He calls the holy book he is translating "thiss Ennglisshe boc"; he is ever telling us of the "Ennglisshe spaeche" and insists, throughout, that he is writing only for "Ennglissh folc." It is for this reason, if for no other, that the devout and patriotic Orm has ever been and ever deserves to be a name of note among all who are, out and out, "Ennglissh folc."

This leads us to a further and controlling purpose of the poet—to teach the common people the Word of God.

As Bede before him, he magnified the teacher and the office of teaching, especially when connected with moral and spiritual interests. He was, in every true sense, an Old English Evangelist, going about with homily in hand if so be he might throw light upon Scripture and instruct the people. The *Ormulum* may thus be called an expository poem. Its aim, method and informing spirit are didactic. Critics of English verse have taken exception to the poem as too dispassionate and prosaic, giving us ethical lessons in metre rather than impassioned outbursts of æsthetic ardor. Orm's design was not to translate or write poetry for the sake of the poetry or for any possible