


1928

An Early Poem on Florida

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AN EARLY POEM ON FLORIDA

In the Bodleian Library at Oxford, there is to be found in Ashmolean Manuscript 48, ff. 140b, 141, a poem on Florida. The penmanship suggests the early part of the seventeenth century; certain stanzas are of prior origin. In *The Stationers' Register* (ed. Arber, i. 237), "a ballet intituled the preme Rose in the grene forest" was entered by Thomas Colwell, about June or July, 1564. Stanzas six, one, two, and three of the seven given below. were printed by C. H. Firth in his *American Garland*, Oxford, 1915. The same had already been printed by Thomas Wright in *Songs and Ballads Chiefly of the Reign of Philip and Mary* (Roxburghe Club, 1860), p. 213. Evidently stanzas four and five belong to the middle of the sixteenth century. They contain no mention of Florida; and in all probability they have been telescoped into another ballad, with a different refrain and local application. The poem is submitted as a whole, as it is one of the first poetical descriptions of this part of the New World in the English language. The scribe wrote in a free, bold hand; he omitted obvious words and suffered several lapses of versification to enter. The stanzas have been made uniform and regular punctuation has been introduced, but the old spelling is retained. The full refrain at the end of the third stanza was probably sung after every one.

| | | |
|-------|------------|------------|
| EDGAR | LEGARE | PENNINGTON |
| CLARK | SUTHERLAND | NORTHUP |

THE POEM

(Possibly an initial stanza has been lost)

And as I walked toward s poles ¹
I met a frend of myne,
Who toke [me] by the hand and sayde,
“Com drynk a pynt of wyne,
Wher you shall here
Such news, I fere, ²
As you abrode wyll compell.
with hy!

“Have you not hard of floryda,
A coontre far bewest,
Where savage pepell planted are
By nature and by hest,
Who in the mold
Fynd glysterynge gold
And yt for tryfels sell?
with hy!

“Ye all alonge the watere syde,
Where yt dothe eb and flowe,
Are turkeyse founde and where also
Do perles in oysters growe,
And on the land
Do cedars stand
Whose bewty do[th] excell.
with hy!
trysky, trym, go trysky, wun not a wallet do well?

¹ St. Paul's.

² in company.

“The prymerose in the greene forest,
 The vyolets the ³ grow gaye,
 The Dubbell Dayeses with the rest
 So merryly deks the waye
 To moove my Sprytes
 Through fond delyghts
 Lyke pretty wons as the ³ be.
 with hy!

“The sweete record, the nytyngale,
 The leveret and the thrushe,
 Which whyps & skysps & wages ⁴ there tales
 From every bank to busshe
 And chyrrpyngly
 Do pas the day
 Like prety wons as the ³ be.

“Have over the water to floryda,
 Farwell, gay lundon, nowe,
 Throw long deles ⁵ by land and sese,
 I am brawght, I cannot tell howe,
 To plymwoorthe towne
 In a thredbare goowne
 And mony ⁶ never Dele
 with hy!
 wunnot a wallet do well?

“When Aprell sylver showers so sweet
 Can make may flowers to sprynge
 And every pretty byrd prepares
 Her wystlyng throte to synge,
 The nyghtyngale
 In every Dale
 They dothe ther duty well.
 with hy!”

³ they. ⁴ wags. ⁵ delays. ⁶ money.