THE NORMAN CONQUEST

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ENGLISH
DEATH OF THE OLDER LITERATURE
THE PERIOD OF SILENCE

AN Englishman of to-day, knowing no other language but his own, yet fairly educated in that, finds little mystery in the pages of a French, Spanish or Italian book. He can make out the meaning of a great many words; and, by a little patient work, with a dictionary, he can easily arrive at a vague understanding of the structure of sentences. After all, these Latin languages do not seem to him very different from English. But when he takes up a book printed in German, in Swedish or in Danish, he is perfectly helpless. He cannot understand a single sentence and the dictionary does not help him in the least. He thinks to himself that these languages must be extraordinarily different from English — and in this he is altogether wrong. But, as a matter of strict fact, English belongs to the Teutonic family of languages; and it is much more closely related to German, Danish, Swedish, and especially Dutch than it is to French or Italian. But an Englishman can learn to read French or Italian in half the time that it takes him to master one of the Northern tongues to which his own is closely allied.

This is a very curious thing; and the meaning of it is simply that English has been extraordinarily modified in some way by Latin influences. It is for the philologist only to tell you the history of these influences: I have only to remind you of the general fact. The two great influences which made English such a different tongue than other Northern tongues were French literature and the Latin literature. And that is why to the unscholarly eye English to-day looks so much more like French than it looks like either German or Dutch. The change began with the Norman Conquest.

The Norman Conquest took place in the year 1066. From that time until the year 1205, we may say, in a general way, that English literature was silent. The official language and the literary language of the country had been made French—for educated classes at least; and the language of law, of scholarship and of history was Latin. English had no opportunity for expression. As for Latin, its powers of influencing English may be guessed from the long period during which it was an official form of expression. Until the year 1730 all the law records in England were written in Latin. Up to the time of Matthew Arnold—that is to say, almost until our own day, the Professor of Poetry at Oxford and elsewhere was obliged to lecture in Latin. Of course the same kind of Latin influence was at work all through Europe, for an almost equal stretch of time. But in England the influence of Latin was immensely strengthened by the fact that a language derived from Latin had become the language of the cultivated classes. French and Latin each strengthened the moulding power of the other.

The first change in literary feeling might be guessed from the character of the first literature of the Conquerors. No greater contrast could be imagined than that between the Old English poetry—the poetry of *Beowulf*—and the poetry of the *Song of Roland*. And if we can guess something of a character of the people from the character of its literature, then indeed we may say that an equally strong contrast appears between the nature of the Norman—his intellectual nature—and that of the old Anglo-Saxon. And yet, you must remember that the real Normans were themselves originally Scandinavians. Intermarriage and French surroundings had changed them: that was all. No student of English literature should forget the splendid story of the first introduction of French literature into England—I mean the singing of the *Song of Roland* at the battle of Hastings. You will remember that the minstrel Taillefer (whose name means hew-iron) went to Duke William just before the battle and asked for permission, as the sole reward of his services, to strike the first blow of the battle. That of course meant the privilege of going alone to a glorious death.

The permission being given he rode alone toward the English ranks, throwing up his sword in the air to catch it again by the hilt as it fell, and singing the *Song of Roland*. Behind him the Norman lines caught up the song. He did manage to kill three men before being himself struck down. Whether the *Song of Roland*[1] that we have to-day is exactly the same song as that sung by Taillefer, we are not sure. Great critics believe that much of the existent *Song of Roland* was composed in England. But we may be quite sure that the song sung at the battle was very nearly the same thing and formed in the same way. It is a grand epic; but it is so unlike anything English that we must pause for a moment to explain the difference.

The *Song of Roland*, as for its structure, in nothing resembles English verse. It is composed in ten syllable lines with a pause after the 4th syllable of each line. There is no accent; there is no alliteration; and there is no rhyme. All the syllables have about the same value – as a Japanese verse. But there is something that takes the place of rhyme, something that we may call rhyme in the egg-shell, rhyme in the making. Its name in prosody is Assonance—a word that means "sounding together." In assonance the rule is only that *the vowels in the last word shall be the same in sound or nearly the same; the consonants have nothing to do with the matter at all.* To put the rule in the simplest possible way I might say, for example, that if the vowels in the last word of one line had been "U," then the last word in the assonant vowel should also be "U." What is more, there is no pairing of lines: a single series of vowel sounds may stand for 10, 20, 40 or 50 lines. To the unaccustomed eye and ear such poetry gives the impression of blank verse without accent. But, with a little study, the power of the thing comes out:—you begin to understand that this verse was composed for the purpose of singing to the harp; and that the choice of vowels was after all very well suited to the rude music of the time. Perhaps, though we do not know, the tone of the instrument used was changed according to the tone of assonance. There were no stanzas at all—no system-

[1] *Fragment of the Song of Roland* c 1400.

atic division of this tremendous poem into parts. But there were pauses at irregular intervals—marked by the word "*Aoi!*"—of which the real meaning is not known. Possibly this word was shouted.

Very simple but very strong in structure, the *Song of Roland* is equally simple and strong in sentiment and expression. It has been called "sober and stern"—and both adjectives are well used to describe it. But what surprises me is in the whole *Song of Roland* there is only one simile—and that may be a later interpolation. There is no metaphor at all; and you know that old Northern poetry, old English poetry was all metaphor. There was no ornament of any kind in the *Song of Roland*. It is the most stern and the most sober verse indeed in European literature. And there is no tenderness in the *Song of Roland*—nothing of love, nothing of home, nothing of the charm of nature as felt. The sternest Scandinavian poetry is not so stern as this. You may well ask, "How can there be a great poem without accent, without rhyme, without alliteration, without tender sentiment of any sort, without the slightest ornament, either of language or of fancy?" I should like to have the Japanese student ask himself these questions many times; for the answer teaches that certain poverty or alleged weakness of the Japanese language does not offer any obstacles at all to the creation of a great poem, if we have the great emotion to inspire it. The Normans had such emotion. It has been said that the great power of the *Song of Roland* is due to the expression of a very few ideas in a very grand way. But I do not think this is an explanation. It certainly does not explain the matter to me. I rather think that the *Song of Roland* impresses us as grand because of something which was never said, but only suggested—an enormous force of self-restraint, intellectual and moral. Of no other song can it so truly be said that it is a song of soldiers. The absence of ornament in itself is a splendid scorn—like that of the warrior who disdains everything but the necessary. And there is in the absence of sentiment an assurance that the sentiment is very much alive, but has been fettered and disciplined and kept out of sight in

the presence of duty. Discipline, restraint, resolve, and joy of battle — these are the feelings of the song; and indeed they offer material enough for the grandest of epics. But that grandest effect can be produced by the very simplest words—without any ornament to rhythm or alliteration. I may quote a few lines from the modernized text of the *Song of Roland*. After having described, or rather *mentioned*, the storms and lightning and earthquake and hail that visited France at the moment of Roland's death, the singer says thus:—

> Pas une ville dont les murs ne crèvent.
> A midi, il y a grandes ténèbres;
> Il ne fait clair que si le ciel se fend.
> Tous ceux qui voient ces prodiges en sont dans l'épouvante,
> Et plusieurs disent: "C'est la fin du monde,
> "C'est la consommation du siècle."
> Non, non: ils ne le savent pas, ils se trompent:
> C'est le grand deuil pour la mort de Roland!
> (lines 1430-1437)

That is to say: There is not one city of which the walls are not broken. At high noon there is a great darkness; and no light save when the sky splits itself (with lightning). All who behold these prodigies are filled with fear, and some say: "This is the end of the world—this is the end of the century!" No, no,—they do not know—they are mistaken: it is only the great mourning (of the land) for the death of Roland!

In the Norman the lines are very much shorter and more compact than is possible in any translation of it. Now a grander image than this scarcely occurred in epic poetry, though the language is not in the least artistic. What is a finer way of describing the loss of a great hero to his country than by suggesting that the earthquake and tempest and darkness represent the mourning of that country for the son who defended it so bravely? One more fact about the *Song of Roland* is well worth mentioning: it is entirely composed of very short sentences, about one line long. Not one of the Old English poems ever approached such simplicity of form. But not one of the

Old English poems—not even *Beowulf*—has the measured pause of the *Song of Roland*.

Just before the battle of Hastings, you know that there was another and very great battle between the last of the English kings and the Normans—the battle of Stamford Bridge. In that battle also there was a very grand feat of arms. Most of the Normans who went into battle that day knew that the battle was lost; but they fought splendidly about their king, till he was killed. Then they retreated. But one of them stood alone on the bridge to hold the English back. He did much more wonderful things than Horatius of Roman history, for he had no one to help him. With his single hand he killed more than forty of the best English warriors, and though his body was riddled with arrows he kept up the fight until the English army was afraid to attempt any further attack in front. And then he was killed treacherously by somebody who went under the bridge in a boat, and pushed a very long spear up through the planks. Nevertheless the memory of that Northman lives in history for all times. This was the last great illustration of the Northern courage—the old spirit of Odin. But we cannot say that there was any great purpose in it beyond that of obtaining a glorious death. The action of Taillefer in sacrificing himself before two armies in the sight of his lord, was noble in another way. He proposed to set the great example of unselfishness to his comrades, that they might all the better fight and win—you must remember that there was a great deal of superstition in those days about the result of the first blow struck Taillefer died not for his own glory only, nor to cover a retreat, but to teach a grand lesson. And there was something of the same difference of character in the Old English literature and the Norman literature that conquered it. The old literature was grand, strong, noble—but it wanted discipline, restraint. So did the English nation. They had all the qualities that make a nation except discipline. The Normans were able to give them that not only in legislation but in education and in literature; and we can guess very well from the *Song of Roland* what terribly practical people they were.

That practical character almost immediately shows itself in their work of education. What King Alfred had never been able to do and what King Athelstan had never been able to do, what all the religious teachers had not been able to do, the Normans did immediately. They established schools in every part of the country and they made English people go to school, and they made proficiency in certain studies the condition of success by it. Furthermore they encouraged Englishmen everywhere to send their sons to Paris for university training. Just as to-day a certain proportion of the best Japanese scholars go to Europe to finish their studies, so after the Norman Conquest the youth of England went to Paris and also in great numbers to Spain where the Arab learning was still being taught. By scholarship these young men could hope to obtain official positions from the Norman Conquerors - positions that would otherwise have been politically refused. So the Normans forced education upon the English people, but it was French and Latin education and the language of England remained French for about 150 years.

During those years there was indeed a good deal of literature produced in England—French and Latin literature. We may call this collectively the Anglo-Norman literature. As for the Latin literature, strictly speaking, we may dismiss it very briefly — with one important exception. Most of the Latin literature was religious or historical. The religious part of it has nothing to do with our subject; and the historical part of it very little. But, indirectly the Norman Latin historians influenced English literature by teaching the English historians how to produce something much better than mere dry record of fact. Men like William of Malmesbury, and William of Poitiers, and Henry of Huntingdon, besides many others, wrote histories in Latin which even to-day have considerable value as history. You will find their works translated in the Bohn's Library. And though the religious Latin literature need not even be mentioned by its works, it is worth while to remember that it helped to influence future English poetry in a very marked way. I refer especially to the Latin hymns of the Middle

Ages, which the Norman clergy introduced everywhere in England. The early Christian poets of the church had tried, with great success, not only to copy the best Greek and Latin poetical models, but to make their compositions even more melodious by the use of rhyme. It is impossible to doubt that the Latin hymns helped to develop rhyming in English poetry.

Now for that one exception of which I spoke a moment ago. It is a very important exception. While the Norman Latin historians were trying to make truthful history to the best of their ability, one man dared to produce an apocryphal history which he offered as a real discovery. This man was a Welsh priest called Geoffrey of Monmouth.[1] He must have been a man of exceptional genius; for he was able to influence the whole literature of Europe in after time up to the days of Tennyson and beyond. He said that he had found a Welsh history of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table; and that he had translated it into Latin under the title of *Historia Britonum*.[2] The other historians, greatly astonished, asked him to show them the Welsh original, or at least to tell them something definite about it. He never did either. Then they said that he was a great liar. Perhaps he was a liar, but only in the same way that Macpherson, the author of *Ossian*, was a liar. The lie would have been in any case an innocent one and Geoffrey, who afterwards became Bishop of St. Asaph, must have been a wonderful poet by nature. I do not mean that he wrote poetry but that he felt and saw things like a great poet. Some years ago it was made clear that he got his inspiration from the old Welsh book called the *Mabinogion*. But whoever reads the *Mabinogion* will at once see that it contains very little which Geoffrey could have drawn from—the stories there are altogether different. Of course you will find it said also that Geoffrey got something from two old Latin writers, respectively called Nennius and Gildas. But literary criticism shows us that he must have worked quite independently of all these stories. The probable truth is that he got

[1] Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100 ?-1154).
[2] *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

Welsh poets to tell him their legends (for he knew the Welsh language very well) and that he re-wrote what they told him, changing everything to suit the Norman feeling of the time. Macpherson, in Johnson's day, did very much the same thing. And in both cases the success was enormous—not because of the literary deceit practised, but because the men who practised it were by temperament and fancy great poets. In spite of all that the historians of the time could say in the way of protest, Geoffrey's book became immediately popular everywhere. The exact date at which it appeared is not known. But it must have been between the years 1130 and 1154 which was the year of Geoffrey's death. Two years later a translation of it had been made into French verse by another Geoffrey — Geoffrey Gaimar, whose work has been lost, but the great Anglo-Norman production which it inspired was *The Brut*,[1] of a poet called Wace of Guernsey,[2] who turned the whole thing into verse, adding much to what Geoffrey had originally given. And then there was a Welshman called Walter Mapes,[3] who obtained in some unknown way and wrote down the legends of *The Holy Grail*. (Grail is a corruption probably of the Latin word *cratera* meaning a small cup.) By the work of Geoffrey, of Wace and of Mapes, the whole Arthurian legend came into existence. At first it existed only in Latin and in French; but very soon it appeared in modern languages. One thing more about Geoffrey. What he wrote about King Arthur was only a part of his wonderful book. It was also he who first gave us that story of King Lear, which inspired what is perhaps the very greatest tragedy of Shakespeare, so that he must have been a very wonderful person.

Before going any further I must say something about the name "Brut" which Wace first gave to his rendering of the Arthurian legend, and which was afterwards adopted by the English poets. Of course this word is only a shortened form of "Brutus" in one sense. No doubt that was the meaning first attached to it. The original histories of Britain were

[1] *Le roman de Brut*.
[2] Robert Wace (fl. 1170).
[3] Walter Map *or* Mapes (fl 1200).

mostly full of myths; and one of the myths was that the British people, the original Celts, were all descended from a certain Brutus. But, although the coincidence appears to explain a great deal, it may have been only a coincidence. For in Welsh, the word "Brut" means history or chronicle. So it is very possible that some of the first writers of mythological British history confused the Welsh words with the name of "Brutus."

Another influence, more important than Latin perhaps, was the influence of French romances. After the Norman Conquest, the taste for French romances was introduced into England and there quickly extended. There were four great cycles of romances in medieval Europe; and the Normans introduced something of each cycle into England. But we shall have more occasion to speak of this subject in the next division of the lecture. At the present time I want to say only a final word, by way of introduction to the subject of the revival of English. English had slept for a hundred and fifty years also, when it awoke again in the utterance of the great poet Layamon. But it was not exactly the same English. We may say that there were altogether three great periods of English. The first was old Anglo-Saxon—and that lasted from the year 450 up to the time of the Conquest. For purposes of philologic study the period has been divided into three sub-periods:—

1. Old Anglo-Saxon.
2. Anglo-Saxon.
3. Late Anglo-Saxon.

The English that appeared after the Conquest was a little different from anything that had appeared before; and from the time of Layamon really begins the period of Middle English. But for the sake of convenience the next period—from 1205 to 1400—may be divided into three divisions as follows:—

I. Old English, or Early Middle English.
II. Middle English Proper.
III. Late Middle English.

But you must remember that in all these statements of

change, and statements of period, absolute exactness is quite impossible. Remember that everything grows,—that we cannot fix the exact moment of a budding or branching or ripening;—that there can be really no precise dates, therefore, for the ending of one kind of English and the beginning of another. The dates are only approximations. In the same way we can speak with approximate truth about the great hush of English literature for 150 years after the Conquest. But there was not really a dead silence, no more than there is absolute silence anywhere in the life of nature. Some voices still sang. But there are only one or two very short things of literary interest belonging to the English utterance of the period. One we may quote. It is not quite certain when it was written; but the best authorities concur in attributing it to this time. It is a poem about the grave and Longfellow has made the best translation of it. It is worth quoting, not as grim poetry, but as especially exhibiting the gloomy side of Anglo-Saxon feeling.

THE GRAVE

For thee was a house built
Ere thou wast born,
For thee was a mould meant
Ere thou of mother camest.
But it is not made ready,
Nor its depth measured,
Nor is it seen
How long it shall be.
Now I bring thee
Where thou shalt be;
Now I shall measure thee,
And the mould afterwards.

Thy house is not
Highly timbered,
It is unhigh and low;
When thou art therein,
The heel-ways are low,
The side-ways unhigh.

The roof is built
Thy breast full nigh,
So thou shalt in mould
Dwell full cold,
Dimly and dark.

Doorless is that house,
And dark it is within;
There thou art fast detained
And Death hath the key.
Loathsome is that earth-house,
And grim within to dwell,
There thou shalt dwell,
And worms shall devide thee.

Thus thou art laid,
And leavest thy friends;
Thou hast no friend,
Who will come to thee,
Who will ever see
How that house pleaseth thee;
Who will ever open
The door for thee,
And descend after thee;
For soon thou art loathsome
And hateful to see.

This is very horrible; but it is very powerful. And it is very English. The translator has preserved something of the alliteration, but you must remember that in the original the alliteration was irregular. Of course each line in the translation represents but one half line of Anglo-Saxon metre. Still, in some cases, this way of arranging the poem by half lines is certainly advantageous.

THE FIRST PERIOD OF MIDDLE ENGLISH

THE NEW TONGUE

I HAVE told that when English really revived again it was not the same English that it was before. The first great example of Midland English of the early period is the *Brut*[1] of Layamon. This is a vast poem of 32,000 lines all written in the old alliterated way—the same way as that poem on the grave which I just quoted. Layamon was a priest. From the French version of the Arthurian story, by Wace, he made his English epic. But he did not merely paraphrase, or imitate. He added a great deal; and he expanded a great deal; and there can be no question at all but that he improved upon Wace. In fact there was nothing better done on the subject of King Arthur and his Knights after or before Layamon, until the days of Malory;—and Malory wrote in prose.

But Layamon's English is not like the old Anglo-Saxon. One can read it without very great difficulty. The grammar has been changed very much under the influence, no doubt, of Latin and French, and there are Latin and French words in it. Not so many French words, however, as we should expect—only 80 in 32,000 lines. I mean, of course, 80 different words, each used repeatedly. But the change is evidently in progress;—we feel that English is preparing to absorb a great deal of French. The probable date of this poem, at least of the earlier manuscript,—for there are two manuscripts—is 1205. Within another 50 years the English language will have been both Latinized and Frenchified; and 50 years is a very short time. As I said before, dates must not be too implicitly trusted; but it is customary to reckon the first period of Middle English from the year 1205 to the year 1250: that is to say, during the half

[1] *Layamon's Brut, or Chronicle of Britain c* 1205, *c* 1275.

century that the English tongue was absorbing its rich store of Latin and French words.

It is quite useless for the student to try to remember the names of all the authors, and all the books produced during any particular period of English literature. To do so during the earlier period would be easy; but as literature grows, the task becomes much less easy. I do not say that it could not be done; there are memories capable of miracles. But I mean to say that even if you can do it, it can be of no use to you at first. It is all important not to overload the memory with the details at the beginning, but to make only a clear outline in memory of the literary movement as represented by its most important productions. Now during the period of which we are speaking there were only about half a dozen books of such importance that we need remembering them. Each of these books can be identified with a distinct literary change or tendency. Therefore try to remember them.

The next noteworthy book written after Layamon's *Brut* was called *The Ormulum*[1] or *Book of Orm*. Orm was probably a monk, very much interested in popularizing church literature. In his time the service books used at church by the people were in Latin. But all the people could not read Latin; so he thought of turning the whole thing into English verse for them. *The Ormulum* represents this effort. It contained a metrical version of the church service for every day in the year, together with a metrical commentary. It is not good poetry; it is not interesting at all as literature, in regard to sentiment or expression. But it is a very important book because of the fact that it shows a new attempt in poetry. The writer must have felt that the language was changing to such a degree that the old alliterative method was not suited to it. He dropped alliteration altogether, and tried to make a kind of unrhymed blank verse of the same length. He was not successful, but he shows a new tendency. Therefore his books represent a landmark in literature.

The next book of which the Latin *Poema Morale* is gener-

[1] *The Ormulum* c 1200.

ally rendered by *Moral Ode*[1] shows a very great advance upon *The Ormulum.* Its authorship is not quite certain. Its subject is the folly of youth as viewed by the experience of old age. It is a little heavy, but not exactly dull. However, the important thing about the book has nothing to do with its subject or its authorship; but only with the fact that it is written in rhymed couplets. The lines are very long and clumsy—14 and 15 syllables; but here we have, for the first time, a really successful attempt at the rhymed distitch. There are some rhymes in Layamon as well as alliteration—but so little that it seems to have got there almost by accident, like the chance rhyme in a Japanese poem. The rhymed couplet may better be said to date from the *Moral Ode.*

Very much more of a surprise does the next book offer us, *probably* dated about 1210. This is a version in verse of the Books of *Genesis* and *Exodus* — biblical paraphrases, but not biblical paraphrases like those of Cædmon. Nothing could be more difficult. These paraphrases are written in rhyme, but with rhymes alternating most artistically; and the measure and the form is the measure and the form of Scott's *Marmion* or Coleridge's *Christabel.* Not quite so artistic indeed. But here is the fact that English genius discovers the worth of this kind of octosyllabic verse even before the English language had taken a definite form. And for this reason no student should forget the name of the book, the *Moral Ode.*

But everybody knows that the rhyme of 10 syllables is particularly suited to English poetry, owing to the natural laws of the language—just as the line of 12 syllables has proved to be especially suited to the language of French poetry. But the English did not discover the 10 syllable line for some time. It first appears in a rhymed prayer to the Virgin Mary, called, the *Orison to the Virgin.* This was a great discovery indeed,—a splendid discovery. Nevertheless a long time elapsed before English poets generally recognized the value of this form. Before they did that, they experimented with lines of almost every length, but especially with lines of 14 or more syllables. It

[1] *A moral ode* (Versions) *a* 1200, *c* 1200, *c* 1259, *c* 1275.

was not until several hundred years after that the value of the iambic decasyllable became fully recognized. But you should remember the *Orison to the Virgin* as representing the first attempt at what we now call "heroics" in the English language. Among the books of this first Middle English period there is one which is not poetry as to form, but prose, and which nevertheless deserves our attention. It marks something altogether new in English prose and altogether new in English literature. It is a religious book. There are a few—only a few religious books in the world, outside of the Scriptures and hymns—which have been written with such sincerity of purpose and such tenderness of feeling that their emotional value must be recognized even by people who do not believe in any religion at all. Such a book is the famous *Little Flowers of Saint Francis* written in the Italian Middle Ages; and such is the book of which I am now going to speak, called the *Rule for Anchoresses*, or in Midland English, the *Ancren Riwle*.[1] I think you know the word "anchorite" as signifying a man-hermit; the word "anchoress" represents the feminine form of the term,—very rarely used. There was, during the first half of the 13th century, a community of religious women in England who were not nuns. They had a kind of convent and devoted their lives to works of benevolence and teaching; but they did not belong to any religious order, nor did they practise asceticism. They wanted a Rule of Life, nevertheless; and some priest or learned clerk wrote one poem for them. This is an admirable book and shows the author to have been far beyond his time in breadth of mind and breadth of religion. He taught these ladies that true religion does not consist in making one's body suffer—not in practising fasts and eschewing all comfort. On the contrary he declared that we should be glad for all the good things which heaven has given us and should know how to enjoy them without doing wrong. Also he speaks of outward forms of worship as being merely of secondary importance. All true religion, he says, must be of the heart, and if the heart be good and pure, there is no reason for injuring or starving the body.

[1] *Ancren riwle a* 1255.

It is very surprising to find such a book as this written at such a time; but what is more surprising is the wonderful warmth and simplicity of its emotion. Take, for example, the following little sentence from it describing the relation of the soul, as he conceived it, to God; there is nothing of religious gloom in this conception, but joy only:—

> The comfort is that our Lord, when he permits that we be tempted, plays with us as the mother with her young darling: she flies from it and hides herself and lets it sit alone and look about anxiously, and cry, 'Dame! Dame!'—and weep awhile, and then she leaps forth laughing with outspread arms and embraces and kisses it and wipes its eyes. Just so the Lord sometimes leaves us alone, and withdraws his comforts and his support—so that we find no sweetness in anything we do well nor any satisfaction of heart. And yet he loves us at the same time, our dear Father.

This is both human and pretty—and quite outside of simile—interests us as showing that the English mother of the Middle Ages playing with the child was very much like the English mother of to-day, and that again reminds us that the mother is the same in all countries, and in all ages. This little bit of mother love, which glows so in those quaint pages, is but one gleam of thousands which illuminate the book. All of it is written with a surprising tenderness and grace and sincerity; and we cannot but feel some wonder at the fact when we remember how cruel an age it was. No doubt there never was an age so cruel that plenty of human goodness could not be found in it. This book should be remembered chiefly because of its true place in emotional literature. It was too much in advance of the time to have a direct influence on Middle English prose. But hundreds of years afterwards in the age of the great preacher, that little book was found again and studied again, and inspired some of the very best of English sermons.

The English language appears to have been greatly changed by the time that this book appeared. Now the French and Latin words are very numerous, and we may turn to the next period of Middle English.

THE SECOND PERIOD OF MIDDLE ENGLISH

THE second Middle English period—roughly dating from the middle of the 13th century to something more than the middle of the 14th, that is to say, from 1250 to about 1380—is very confusing to study. If you look at the various histories of English literature now accessible, you will find that none of the historians agree with each other either as to dates of production, literary values or literary characteristics. The chief reason is that the study of this part of English literature is comparatively recent. The Germans and the French anticipated English scholarship here; and the men of England who made the study great are of our own time, still alive and working hard — men like Skeat and men like Sweet. In another generation all the confusion will have become disentangled and everything simplified, then you will find this period just as easy to memorize as any other. But for the present I should advise you to try to remember only a few great names and a few large movements. In the last section of the lectures I quoted to you the names of the poets that mark the advance in the metrical development. In this section I shall speak only of—

1. Lyric poetry.
2. Metrical and alliterative romance.
3. The beginning of another change in the English language as exemplified by the work of Langland and Wyclif.

After that we come to Chaucer and then we come to the later Middle English period.

In the previous section we did not say anything about lyrical poetry—though lyrical poetry probably began to take light again a little earlier than 1250. But for the sake of clearness it is much better to begin at 1250 and to consider the

lyrical renovation altogether. The very first of the nine pieces quoted in the Oxford Anthology as belonging to this period is emblematic in an interesting way. It is the song of *Cuckoo*—therefore a song of spring, describing the budding of vegetation and the joy of animal life. And we might say that this is indeed the cuckoo song of the English poetical renovation—the first merry lyrical cry of this period of Middle English. For in the first period what lyrical there may have been was not at all of the same kind. Here is the *Cuckoo Song;* and as its date is 1250, we may say that it is 650 years old—yet we can read it very easily, in spite of the queer spelling:—

> Sumer is icumen in,
>   Lhude sing cuccu!
> Groweth sed, and bloweth med,
>   And springth the wude nu—
>   Sing cuccu!
>
> Awe bleteth after lomb,
>   Lhouth after calve cu;
> Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth,
>   Murie sing cuccu!
>
> Cuccu, cuccu, well singes thu, cuccu:
>   Ne swike thu naver nu;
> Sing cuccu, nu, sing cuccu,
>   Sing cuccu, sing cuccu, nu!

Here there is scarcely a word which we do not know, except "verteth" about which the best authorities are still in doubt. It probably refers to a change in the horns of the male deer. "Awe" is recognizably our modern "ewe," a female sheep. "Cu" is cow, pronounced just as the Scotch pronounce it to-day. A pronunciation like that of Scotch appears also in the syllable "nu" for now. "Swike" for staff is now literary English; but the word still exists in dialect. However, I am not attempting anything philological; and I have quoted this only that you may notice how very readable this old English has become since the time of the Conquest. We could not have read a song of the time of Harold unless we had studied

Anglo-Saxon. But this we can read just about as easily as we can read a peasant ballad of to-day, which it resembles in form.

Several of the other eight lyrics of the period are religious and have not much claim to attention except for the excellence of their form. But there is one thing, a love song, certainly not written later than the end of the century, called *Alysoun* which is as pretty as anybody could wish, and of which the form is startlingly modern. The date ordinarily accepted is 1300. It will not be necessary to quote it to you with the extraordinary old spelling; for Ten Brink has given a modern rendering so close to the original that it is almost a literal translation. In the original form the only thing that might puzzle an unaccustomed reader is the use of certain words which look very much like German. For example: I is "ich"; and there is a German ending to many of the verbs. But see how pretty it is, though 600 years old: —

Between soft March and April showers,
  When sprays of bloom from branches spring,
And when the little bird 'mid flowers
  Doth song of sweetness loudly sing:
  To her with longing love I cling,
  Of all the world the fairest thing,
  Whose thrall I am, who bliss can bring,
    And give to me life's crown.
A gracious fate to me is sent;
Methinks it is by Heaven lent;
From women all, my heart is bent,
    To light on Alysoun.

Her sheeny locks are fair to see,
  Her lashes brown, her eyes of black;
With lovely mouth she smiles on me;
  Her waist is slim, of lissom make.
  Unless as mate she will me take,
  To be her own, my heart will break;
  Longer to live I will forsake,
    And dead I will fall down.
A gracious fate, etc.

All for thy sake I restless turn,
And wakeful hours sigh through at night;
For thee, sweet lady, do I yearn;
My cheeks wax wan in woeful plight.
No man so wise that can aright
Her goodness tell, her beauty bright;
Her throat is than the swan's more white,
The fairest maid in town.
A gracious fate, etc.

Weary as water in the weir,
With wooing I am spent and worn;
Lest any reave me, much I fear;
And leave me mateless and forlorn.
A sharp, short pain is better borne,
Than now and evermore to mourn.
My love, O fair one, do not scorn,
No longer on me frown!
A gracious fate to me is sent;
Methinks it is by Heaven lent;
From women all, my heart is bent,
To light on Alysoun.

Notice the variations in the metre, the totally new tricks of line, the artistic use of a burden; and last, but not least, the passionate sincerity of the whole thing. It is very ordinary—the theme: a mere declaration of love by one who threatens to kill himself if this love be not returned. But it is in the utterance of the very common things, that genius best shows itself; and this man whose name we do not know, was a genius. I suppose that you have seen modern poems very like this—that the thought is not enough to impress you much. But remember that it was written 600 years ago; and nothing at all like it had been written in English before. Where, then, did the man get his lyric form from — the form of this very complicated stanza? He could not have invented it:—such things cannot be invented by anybody—they must grow. I think we have good reason to suppose on the authority of scholarly critics, that the author of *Alysoun* must have been familiar with

certain lyric forms of southern French poetry. There were not then any other compositions of this kind which he could have seen.

There are very few lyrics equal to *Alysoun*, but it is not the only lyric that shows Provençal influence. There were also some 9 or 10 battle songs of this period, written by Laurence Minot[1] —you will find one or two quoted in the anthology—which show also a study of southern French forms of verse. That is the main thing to remember about the briefer lyrical work of the time,—at least as to its place in English literature. In this lyrical work we have proved that the mastery of form is rapidly progressing.

Religious poetry has given a few things that require and deserve attention for other reasons. This religious poetry of which I speak, may be called lyrical; but it is not brief—the shortest specimen being 500 lines long. Nobody knows who wrote it. It includes three compositions[2] respectively entitled *Cleanness* (Chastity), *Patience* (Endurance) and *The Pearl*. The first-mentioned poem is a kind of poetical commentary upon the virtue of sexual restraint in all ages; but it is not at all fanatically religious. There is nothing puritanical about it;—it is rather in the nature of a contrast between lawful love and illegitimate love in the relation between men and women. Even so severe a critic as Professor Saintsbury says of one part of this poem that even the work of Milton on the same subject in *Paradise Lost* is coarse and common-place beside it. Now that is extraordinary praise for any poem of the Middle English period. But the man who wrote *Cleanness* was a natural poet and a man of very delicate genius. The poem of *Patience* is rather in the nature of a homily, and every line begins with a word "patience." All that we need say of it here is that it is excellent verse with occasional flashes of admirable sentiment. But the third of these poems is the masterpiece of this forgotten author. It is the story of a father's dream about his dead child.

[1] Laurence Minot (1300?-1352).

[2] *Early English alliterative poems in the west-midland dialect.* A. *Pearl.* B. *Cleanness.* C. *Patience.* 13 . . (E.E.T.S. 1864-69).

He called her the Pearl; and from this fact it is supposed that her real name was Margaret. The name Margaret is derived from a Persian word meaning "pearl," or "child of light." You know that this name in its French form, Marguerite, was afterwards given to the daisy,—the "pearl flower": and the author of the poem plays with the two meanings of the name, as jewel and blossom. But it is a sad and tender play. The father has lost his daughter—so he calls himself a jeweller who has lost a matchless pearl. Long and vainly he looks for it;—he wanders to the place where he dropped it,—which we must suppose to be the graveyard; and there he mourns with exceeding grief. At last exhausted by sorrow he sleeps; and in a dream there appears before him an exquisite girl, all radiant like an angel of light, who wears on her bosom the identical lost pearl. Then, in his dream, he calls out, "Are you not my pearl?"—and she answers mystically and sweetly, that she was, that she is not now, but that she will soon again be his pearl. And she passes to a palace of light, across a river which flows through his dream. Wishing to follow her he tries to cross the river—and suddenly awakes. From this admirable ending we may suppose that the river of the dream is the River of Death. The whole poem is really beautiful, both as to form and fancy. The form is worth talking about. All the poem is both alliterative and rhymed;—the two varieties of artistic construction being admirably blended together. Moreover it is all divided into regular stanzas, with a kind of modifiable burden at the end of each stanza—varying very much in the way that Rossetti modifies his refrains,—and this is quite a new thing—the stanzas are also grouped into divisions, such as we to-day call "Cantos." Therefore that poem marks a great advance in metrical construction.

We need not say more about the lyrical poetry, but turn to the subject of the great romances—which began, you remember, with the English work of Layamon. There are enough Middle English romances to fill a large library. Although a great number have been edited and published, a great many more remain in manuscript. The enormity of the work can

only be known by those scholars who have succeeded in the tremendous work of reading them all through. I told you that Layamon's poem represents about 32,000 lines. Now to form an idea of what a mass of verse the Middle English romances represent you must imagine about 50 immense books, with poems almost as long as the work of Layamon. The mere sight of one of these books almost frightens a modern reader; and he cannot help marvelling how the people of the 13th and 14th century had patience to read so vast a composition. But much of this romance is really good; and if it is not more appreciated to-day, and more known than it used to be—that is because very few of the texts have been republished in cheap and convenient reading form. Moreover a number of them ought to be translated into modern English in order to be fairly judged. About twenty or twenty-five of these great romances are in rhymed verse and about ten are in alliterative form. Besides, there are a number in which both forms of poetry are used.

A word here about this romance literature in general. Remember that it was being produced all through Europe at the same time it was produced in England—in Iceland and Norway and Denmark and Sweden—in Germany and France and Italy and Spain. It is an enormous branch of the literature of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless the most of it can be bulked into four vast groups—or cycles, as scholars call them. The first cycle includes all romances written about King Arthur and his Round Table. The second includes all romances upon the subject of Charlemagne and his Twelve Peers. The third cycle includes all romances written about the Eastern legend of King Alexander — Alexander the Great. (We may call this third division the Oriental cycle.) And the fourth cycle embraces all the romances on the subject of the story of the Siege of Troy.

Of these four cycles the cycle of the Arthurian legend is the especially English cycle. Celtic in origin, and evolved into literary form by Anglo-Norman genius, its importance to English literature is almost incalculable. We have already placed the history of its beginning in England. Spreading through-

out Europe—through France and Italy especially—it gave rise to a vast number of romances, songs and lyrical effusions in many languages. Coming back to England again, through French channels,—it came back prodigiously enriched—to be again and again translated, and to serve as a fountain of inspiration for the poets of succeeding ages.

The romance of Charlemagne probably arose in Northern France. It gave birth to a great number of minor romances attaching to Charlemagne as the central figure,—each of his Twelve Peers being the hero of a separate romance. Of the Charlemagne cycle, English literature has several fine examples in alliterative verse and in rhymed verse as well. I need scarcely say that Roland belongs to this cycle. However, the story of Charlemagne is just as mythical, from a historic point of view, as the story of King Arthur;—for example, the Emperor is represented as undertaking a Crusade; and you know that the Crusades were not of his time. In the same way, the story of Arthur is full of anachronisms. The mediæval romances are all, in this respect, "medley,"—using the term as Tennyson used it; and they are all the more interesting for that very reason.

The romance of Alexander is, as I have said, probably much coloured by Oriental influence. It belongs to a cycle which we may call the Oriental cycle. But the history of it, so far as is known, deserves especial consideration. You know that in the train of the real Alexander, there was a Greek philosopher and teacher, Callisthenes, — to whom Alexander was, at one time, much attached. He accompanied the Greek army upon all its expeditions. When Alexander began to adopt Persian customs, Callisthenes boldly protested, although Alexander was a very dangerous person to provoke. Still later, when Alexander demanded that he should be worshipped as a God, according to Eastern custom, Callisthenes again protested—declaring that such servile worship was unworthy of Greek freedmen. And Alexander became so angry that he caused the old man to be put to death. This Callisthenes wrote a history of Alexander's conquests; but the history has been

lost. Well, in the decline of Greek literature, there suddenly appeared a book, which pretended to be the very book that Callisthenes had written. It is known to scholars as the "Pseudo-Callisthenes"—or false Callisthenes. It is something of a wild romance, though there is real history as well to be found in it. It was translated into Latin, and this translation became the foundation, in part, of the Alexander romance of the Middle Ages, but not altogether. We have glimpses here of another Alexander — unknown to European writers; the fabulous and wonderful Iskandar of the Arabian story-teller. For at some very early time the legend of Alexander, spreading through the Arabian world, had there given rise to a story quite as marvellous as anything in *The Thousand and One Nights.* Indeed, I must tell you that the Arabian traditions speak of two Iskandars—one a pre-Adamite king and the other the Greek conqueror of India. Somebody who learned—probably during the Crusades—the legend of Iskandar, brought it to Europe; and there it became mixed up with the story of the false Callisthenes and so gave to the Alexander cycle that very strange colour which marks it as not of European fancy. As for the story, it is only a long story of adventures, intrigues and battles, ending with the poisoning of Alexander. The adventures are of the particularly Oriental features. Here we have, for the first time, the glorious story of the fountain of youth, which has since inspired thousands of poets; and here we have the story of a forest of trees whose flowers changed into beautiful girls—"flower-women" they are called. The legend of the "flower-women" is certainly Indian in origin; and from India the Arabs learned it. What is also probably Indian thought, though it must have entered into the story through an Arabian channel, is the legend of the desert haunted by monsters who could separate the upper part of their bodies from the lower part.

The cycle of romances relating to the siege of Troy was based upon two volumes of Low-Latin literature—one of which may have been written about the 3rd century and the other about the 12th. So that all this cycle, like the Alexander cycle, was founded upon a kind of literary forgery — somewhat re-

sembling the literary forgery of Geoffrey of Monmouth with his Welsh legends, or the literary forgeries of Macpherson in the 18th century with the prose poems of Ossian. Apparently, imaginative literature has much to be grateful for to falsifiers of this description, who happened also to be men of genius. For, in every case they helped to make some literary material accessible to the minds of their age — material which would not have been then prized in the original form. The Middle Ages could not have appreciated the real poetry of Homer, the Norman of Geoffrey's time would not have cared for the original Welsh poetry that Geoffrey loved; and the literary taste of the 18th century would not have tolerated the real Gælic poetry from which Macpherson drew his inspiration. Now, what Homer could not have given to mediæval imagination, two Low-Latin writers could give; and they helped prodigiously in the development of mediæval romance.

Their names (not their real names in all probability), were Dares and Dictys,—very easy to remember. One wrote a book which pretended to be an account of the Trojan War as written by a man who had fought upon the Trojan side. And the other wrote a book which pretended to be the work of a man who had fought on the Greek side. Both writers had probably read Virgil, and something of Homer; but their age was an age of literary degeneration — so they thought themselves able to tell the story of Troy over again better than it had been done before. In England there was a period at which people did exactly the same thing — the time of the Restoration, when authors of small ability actually set to work to rewrite Shakespeare's plays, imagining that they could improve upon him. But the indifferent work of Dares and Dictys really proved a very great gift to the Middle Ages, before the studies of classic Greek and classic Latin could have been fully revived. Out of those two books were formed a host of romantic stories, which inspired all Europe for generations. The best proof of their value is that both Chaucer and Shakespeare drew from them. Thus even the disintegration of great literature may help eventually towards the growth of a future new literature,—just as

the decomposition of old fallen trees and leaves helps to make a rich soil out of which a new forest will rise.

There are two reasons for which it is not necessary to dwell long here upon the character of English mediæval romances. One is that nearly all—though not quite all—of the Middle English romances were inspired by French models. They are little more than translations. The other is that to do the subject any justice would require a special series of lectures; and those lectures would have to be to some extent philological. It is much more important, at this part of our study, that the student should have a correct and generous idea about mediæval romances in general—and that we shall talk about presently. But something in regard to the English romances must be learned. As I have said before there were at least thirty of considerable importance in their way; and about twenty of the thirty were written in rhymed verse. Among these are such compositions as *Sir Tristrem, King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Arthur and Merlin, King Alisaunder, The Seven Sages, Sir Beves of Hamtoun, Guy of Warwick, Sir Isumbras, Richard Cœur de Lion,* and a number of shorter productions, each embracing the adventures of some one knight. Among the other romances which are not in this kind of verse are such compositions as *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight, The Adventures of Arthur,* and the very curious *Pistill (*or *Epistill) of Susan.*

Now in the natural order of things, we might suppose that alliterative romances would prove to be the oldest, because alliteration was the primitive form of English composition. But such is not the case; the alliterative romances are later than the others;—and the reason is that in the latter part of the 14th century, and a little before it there was a strong reaction. The English poets made a tremendous effort to restore the old form of English poetry, in spite of French and Latin influence; and for a time they succeeded. You can easily remember this by recollecting that Langland wrote his *Vision* in alliterative, not in rhymed, verse; and he was the last who did anything great in this direction. After him came Chaucer; and Chaucer, who did so much to fix the English language, also proved that

there was nothing to be gained, but a great deal to be lost, by keeping to alliteration. For alliteration is really much more of a fetter upon expression than is rhyme. It is very much easier to make two lines rhyme effectively, than it is to shape them that there shall be in the first two identical sounds to correspond with one in the second. It is almost three times more difficult. And at last the English found this out and gave it up.

Now about the two classes of English romances, something remains to be said concerning the value of "the story." Unless you are at some future time extraordinarily favoured by circumstances as well as by inclination, you are not likely to think of reading them all. There are really very few people in the modern world who have read them all. The interest of them to us should chiefly be an interest in reference to their influence upon later literature. The first that I mentioned, *Sir Tristrem*,[1] is worth remembering by name, for this is the *Tristram* of Tennyson, the *Tristram* of Swinburne and of Matthew Arnold — a mediæval romance of the Arthurian cycle which has influenced literature in every country of Europe, and still supplies inspiration to poets.

It is not so in the case of *King Horn*[2] and *Havelok*[3]—though these were once very famous. But I may mention one thing, namely, that the adventures of Havelok serving in a kitchen for food and drink, may have supplied not a little of that material so admirably used by Tennyson in his idyll of *Gareth and Lynnette*. The Alexander Saga, if we may so call it, seems to have died away from memory a long time ago. Perhaps one reason is that the real Arabian stories helped to supplant it when modern poets wanted to ransack mediæval romances again for inspiration. Most of the others which I name to you have also little or no relation to the book which we now read —though William Morris used a few of them in making up his *Earthly Paradise*. But there are some which outside of any modern relation require mention for special reason. A student should at least remember such a title as that of *The Seven*

[1] *Sir Tristrem* c 1320 (ed. Sir W. Scott 1804, 1811; S.T.S. 1886).
[2] *King Horn* a 1300, 13 . . (in Ritson, Metrical romances II. 1802; E.E.T.S. 1866).
[3] *The lay of Havelok the Dane* c 1300 (E.E.T.S. 1868; Skeat 1902).

Sages;[1] because this romance is one of the earliest Oriental romances in the English language. We have now most of its history. It was first told in India where it figures in Sanscrit literature, then it passed through Arabian and Syrian versions, then into Low-Greek, then into Low-Latin, then into French, and so through all the languages of Europe. The story of *The Seven Sages*, even as to plan, immediately reveals its origin to a modern reader. A young Prince, who is being educated by seven wise men, has a wicked step-mother, who tries to ruin him by falsely accusing him of attempted adultery. He is brought up for trial, before the King his father. Then each of his seven wise teachers tells a story to the King, in which story there is contained some warning about the danger of trusting to unsupported ill-report. Everytime one of the teachers tells such a story, the wicked Queen answers it by another story, illustrating the ingratitude and treachery of which bad sons are capable. Finally the Prince tells a story; the evidence clears him from the charge and the Queen is sentenced to be burned alive. It makes no difference that the story is laid in Rome; it was first laid in India; and in Turkey it was laid in the Persian capital. The Turkish version, probably from the Arabic originally, has been lately translated and it is remarkably close to the English narrative.

The romance of *King Richard of the Lion Heart*,[2] on the other hand, is particularly English, deriving very little from other sources; and it is considered to be the very best of all the "fighting romances." Of course the subject is a splendid one —since the life of Richard I. was really the most romantic life possible to imagine. But the poet certainly made the most of his grand subject and he has furnished material to numbers of novelists and poets of modern times. The first to call attention to the excellence of this old romance in modern times was Sir Walter Scott;—he obtained from it much of the material used in his *Talisman*—which I have always thought to be the very best of his romances. In that book Scott gave a number of

[1] *The seven sages. The proces of the seuyn sages* 13 . . (Weber, Metrical romances III. 1810).

[2] *Richard Coeur de lion* 13 . . (Weber, Metrical romances II. 1810).

quotations from the original poem. It is scarcely worth while to say that romances like those of *Sir Perceval*[1] inspired much of Tennyson's work. I believe that I did not mention the title, *Amis and Amiloun*[2] (the English form of a better known French title *Amis et Amile*—which again is but another rendering of the Latin title *Amicus et Amelius.*) But this, which is perhaps, as a mere story, the most beautiful romance of the Middle Ages, does not appear to the best advantage in its English dress; and I want to make it the subject of a separate lecture at some other time.[3] The English poem did not have any particular influence upon native literature; the foreign versions have had considerably more.

Turning now to that class of romances composed in alliterative metre, there is something also to be said about the value of the story in them. The best of all is *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight.*[4] You are familiar with the name of Gawayne from reading Tennyson; but Tennyson otherwise has nothing to do with the story of the romance in question — and it is rather a pity, for he might have made a magnificent modern idyll out of it. Perhaps the length of the story discouraged him. But it can be told very briefly in prose, and it is worth remembering. One day there rode into the great hall of King Arthur, a knight of gigantic stature, dressed all in green, and wearing no armour. And he cried out with a loud voice:— "Is there any one here brave enough to give me one blow, on condition that I shall afterwards give him another? I shall be willing to wait for one whole year before returning the blow." Everybody is stricken except King Arthur and Gawayne—not because of the apparent strength of the Green Knight, but because there is something uncanny about him. But at last, Gawayne, by permission of the King, cuts off the Green Knight's head with a single blow. The Green Knight quietly picks up his own head, and puts it on again, and says to Gawayne—

[1] *The romance of Sir Perceval of Galles a* 1400 (Thornton romance, Camden Soc. [1844).
[2] *Amis and Amiloun c* 1330 (Weber 1810; Kölbing 1884).
[3] See *On Art, Literature and Philosophy*, Ch. xxx. "The Most Beautiful Romance of the Middle Ages."
[4] *Sir Gawayne and the green knight, an alliterative romance-poem* 13 . . (E.E. T.S. 1864, 1869).

"That was a good blow: now you must come to me next year, and I shall return your courtesy." Then indeed everybody is frightened; for they see that the whole thing is a goblin trick, by which one of Arthur's knights is doomed to perish. However, the next year Gawayne bravely goes to the place appointed, and finds the Green Knight living in a splendid castle, and served by a remarkably beautiful wife. And the Knight says to Gawayne—"There is no hurry about the matter of the blow—we can settle that later on. For the present let us eat, drink, hunt and be merry." Gawayne is very handsomely treated. Next day the Green Knight makes this agreement with him: "I am going to hunt, but I like to hunt alone. If you wish to hunt, my horses will be at your service. But I want you to agree that whatever you catch or find that is good the half of it shall be given to me;—I, on the other hand, will give you half of anything good that I obtain." Then the Knight goes hunting; but Gawayne stays in the castle;—and the beautiful wife comes to him and makes love to him, quite shamelessly. But Gawayne is a virtuous knight; and he only allows her to kiss him once, being, as a gentleman, obliged to return the kiss. Presently the Green Knight comes back with plenty of game; he gives half to Gawayne, and asks him, "What have you to give me to-day?" Gawayne says, "Only this," and kisses him. The Green Knight returns the kiss and makes no remark.

Next day the same thing occurs; and the wife tempts Gawayne more than before. But he yields only so far that he has to give the Green Knight two kisses in the evening. Still the Green Knight does not seem to suspect anything.

The third day comes, and Gawayne is so much tempted by the wife, that he is almost on the point of losing his own honour. But, by a desperate effort he restrains himself; then the woman says: "Tomorrow my husband is going to give you the blow, and I am very much afraid that he will cut you in two. But because I love you very greatly, I am going to give you a magical girdle, which will keep you from being hurt. Let me put it round you." Gawayne ought not to have allowed her to put the girdle around him,—but he was really anxious not

to die. So he let her do as she proposed. When the Green Knight came home, Gawayne truthfully gave him three kisses; but, untruthfully, he did not give him the girdle—or at least half of it—according to the agreement.

And in the morning he has to go out to receive his blow. The Knight lifts up his sword to strike; and Gawayne winks and shrinks. "Ha! Are you a coward?" asks the Green Knight. "I was," answered Gawayne, "for a moment, but the fear is gone." "Very well," the Knight answers, and brings his sword on Gawayne's neck. Blood follows, but the wound is slight. "Now," the Green Knight says, "your trial is over. I could not have wounded you at all but for the fact that you told me one lie. I ordered my wife to tempt you, and you proved yourself a man of honour in regard to her. But you allowed yourself for a little time to be afraid of death—and that fear made you conceal the girdle and made you tell me a lie. Nevertheless, I see that you are a good man! Let us be friends!" So ends the story which, in the romance, is very beautifully told.

Perhaps this is the best of the romances for which a really English origin can be claimed. It belongs, of course, to the Arthurian cycle; and there are two other alliterative romances belonging to the same cycle which must be mentioned. *The Adventures of Arthur*[1] (commonly spelled *Awntyrs*) and the *Morte Arthure*.[2] These are in part derived from French originals—but only in part; the English poets adding much new matter. Both of these were used by Tennyson, as well as by many others before him. Slight mention only need be made of the great poem, entitled *The Destruction of Troy*[3]—a poem no less than 15,000 lines long. As I told you before, the material for this Trojan story was not derived directly from Homer, but from writers who belonged to the age of the decline of Greek literature. You need remember the title only in connection with the fact that this great alliterative poem chiefly represents the Trojan cycle in English romantic literature.

[1] *Arthur? a* 1400 (E.E.T.S. 1864).
[2] *Morte Arthure, or the death of Arthur? a* 1400 (E.E.T.S. 1865, revised 1871).
[3] *The gest hystoriale of the destruction of Troy: an alliterative romance translated from Guido de Colonna's Hystoria Troiana c* 1400 (E.E.T.S. 1869-74).

Now we come to some romances of the same group, which do not belong to any cycle at all, but are interesting in another way. One of these is called *William and the Werwolf*[1] — a story represented also in the romantic literature of many other nations. It appears to have come to England through a French channel; but it can be traced to an Italian authorship. The story is too complicated for repetition here; and it does not contain, as the story of the *Green Knight* does, some startling moral which would make it worth telling in the class. It is simply a story of wonderful adventures, many of which are magical. But the strangeness of the subject deserves some consideration. Perhaps you do not know what a werwolf is. The superstition of the werwolf was one of the most horrible beliefs current in the Middle Ages. It was then supposed that a man might have the power to change himself into, or the misfortune to be changed into, a wolf, in which shape he was obliged to devour other human beings. Generally speaking, the werwolf was a werwolf only by night;—in the day-time he was a man like other men, and engaged in ordinary occupations. The only way to find out whether a man was a werwolf or not was to skin him alive; then, if he were a werwolf, it would be found that his skin was really a wolfskin with the hair turned inside instead of outside. And so firmly at one time was this metamorphosis believed in, that many persons were burned alive or skinned alive, on suspicion of being werwolves. Now in the romance of which we are speaking, the poet imagines a new kind of werwolf,—a good werwolf, who in his animal shape, only endeavours to help the right and punish the wrong. This werwolf became a werwolf only through the jealousy and hatred of a wicked step-mother. After many terrible adventures, he recovers human form. It was only in the Middle Ages that such a romance could have been conceived—at least in Europe.

The other alliterative romance that I mentioned was *The Pistill* (or *Epistill*) *of Susan.*[2] The title might startle some of

[1] *The romance of William of Palerne: otherwise known as the romance of William and the Werwolf c* 1350 (Rox. Club 1832; E.E.T.S. 1867, 1881).

[2] *The Pistill of Susan a* 1400 (in D. Laing, Select remains of the ancient popular poetry of Scotland, 1822; Scott. allit. poems, S.T.S. 1897).

you, who remember that in the time when that romance was written, no such thing as a pistol had yet been invented, and the only other signification possible at first sight to attach to the queerly spelled name is "pistil"—the scientific name for a portion of a flower, and equally unknown in those days. But this title is really only a corruption of the words "The Epistle of Susanna." Here we have a romance written from a Bible story, or rather from a Bible text which once formed part of the English church-service. The story is in a part of *The Book of Daniel* which in modern times has been declared apocryphal, and therefore left out of the modern versions of the Bible. For that reason, it may be unfamiliar to some of you; and I may tell it. There was a beautiful married woman called Susanna, who one day went to take a bath in her own garden. While she was bathing, two wicked old men made their way to her by stealth and impudently told her that if she would not satisfy their wishes they would accuse her of adultery. She was not afraid, but loudly cried out for help; and when help came those two old rascals said that they had really only been trying to prevent wrong,—that they had seen her with a young man under a tree and had interrupted the converse of the two, and that Susanna had falsely accused them out of revenge. Now those old men were very respectable persons in the city—men of great power and authority; and what they said weighed much more in public opinion than what Susanna said. She was therefore charged with adultery and seemed about to be condemned, when a young man named Daniel unexpectedly assumed her defence. He was given the right to cross-question the two old men; and he separated them so that one could not hear what the other said. And to the first he said, "Under what kind of tree was it that you saw Susanna and the young man?" And the first old man said, under such a kind of tree. But the other old man answered, under another kind of tree. Thus they were both proved to be liars and Susanna was honourably freed from the charge against her. The story is told in the Bible merely to illustrate the wisdom of Daniel, who afterwards became a famous prophet. Now the English

romancer took this old story and made a really very powerful poem with it. He does not in this poem paraphrase the Bible story;—he does much more than that. He represents with great pathos and vividness what would be the natural emotions and fear of a good woman falsely accused of such a crime. And in doing this he has beautifully drawn the character of a good English woman of his own time and of a good English husband. It is chiefly as a fine study of true character that this romance takes a high place. Some good judges think that it was written by the same person who wrote the romance of the *Green Knight* and whose name may have been Huchoun[1] (which would be spelled to-day Hutcheon), but this is not at all certain.

You might ask whether there were no prose romances. Not exactly. English prose was very slow indeed in development after the Conquest; and a few books that represent it before the time of Chaucer, we shall speak of later on in a separate section. The art of writing romances in prose had yet been really developed nowhere but in Iceland where the English poetry revived. However, there grew up collections of short stories, both in verse and prose, which we must mention here, because it all represents so much romantic material. It is not necessary to say much about the short stories in verse; and the short stories in prose were in Latin. But notwithstanding this last fact, there is one collection of stories, made in England—probably about the time of Edward I.—which had an immense effect upon subsequent literature, even up to our own time;—the poet Rossetti, and the poet Swinburne, having both drawn upon it. This is the wonderful *Gesta Romanorum*[2] —which title might be rendered as "The Great Deeds of the Romans." However, that is not the meaning which the writer probably intended. The word "gesta," though originally signifying something very like the Japanese word *Shiwaza*, was so often given by professional minstrels as a title to their romances, that it eventually came to signify rather "romantic history." The French word "geste," you know, meant this in the Middle

[1] Huchoun *or* Huchown (fl. 14th cent.).
[2] *The Gesta Romanorum* c 1400 (Roxb. Club 1838; E.E.T.S. 1879).

Ages. So we might better translate the name of this work as meaning "Wonderful Stories about the Romans."

It is now translated into every Western language; and it will always be found good reading. Really it has nothing to do with the Romans, any more than with the man in the moon. Indeed it is very much more nearly related to the latter than to the former. The collection began in this way;—at a very early time in the history of the Church, clever preachers found out that the best way to interest their audience was to tell them good stories. Buddhist priests in Eastern countries had found out the very same thing thousands of years before; and in East and West, the preaching was managed in the same way,—the preachers always keeping in view the necessity of being interesting. In order to get stories, however, the Western monks and priests did not have so rich a literature of fiction to draw from as the Indian preachers had. There were no great collections of magical romances in Greek or Latin literature, such as existed in Sanscrit literature, and even the best of the Greek stories were not then accessible to Western learning. So the monks did the best they could, inventing a great deal, and borrowing right and left whatever material they could find. They read all the Latin histories obtainable, and the Latin chronicles of kings and dukes and barons, and also of councils. They searched also through the whole literature of hagiography, and the writings of the fathers of the Church. And out of all that they composed an extraordinary mass of fabulous stories—every story being so composed as to convey a mystical or didactic meaning. A general fact of their policy of authorship is worth mentioning especially. To the early Christian Church the Gods of the Greeks and Romans were not any time mere images of stone or wood or brass. Christianity never denied in those times the reality of the Heathen Gods. Quite the contrary. It taught that those Gods really existed; but that they were devils, wicked spirits—not beneficient divinities. And that accounts for the extraordinary hatred that the monks showed to the remains of Greek and Roman art—brutally destroying priceless statues, and casting

into the fire inestimable treasures of literature. The monks really thought that the statues broken or the books burned represented something supernaturally dangerous, magical and malevolent. And the authors of *The Gesta Romanorum* wrote their wonderful book according to this belief. There are plenty of extraordinary stories about devils and evil spirits; and many of those evil spirits have the names of Greek and Roman Gods, especially Roman. By transforming all classical mythology into demonology, the monks obtained a rich fund of imaginative materials to work on. And they worked really well. Of course many hundreds of writers may have helped to make the book. There is a great difference in method. Some stories are very horrible and horribly told, some are very tender and beautiful—as you may infer from the fact that Rossetti got the tale of his *Staff and Scrip* out of this work.

So much for *The Gesta Romanorum* which I hope you will try to read some day, as it is almost a necessary part of every student's reading. But I mention also another kind of work in the same direction that was done by the monks—or at least begun by them. In collecting materials of a romantic character for their sermons, they also found a variety of little fables or stories which could be used in another way—for popular teaching outside of the Church. With these little stories or fables they made verses, embodying some moral truths, which verses were to be learned by heart. For example, they would take a Latin fable or a Greek fable and turn it into a material allegory. For this object they especially preferred fables or stories about animals. And in this way, what is called the *Bestiary* in English, and the *Physiologus* in Latin, came into Western literature. The *Bestiary*[1] was a book of beast-fables, or stories about beasts—every animal mentioned being an emblem of something moral or divine. For example, the panther (then supposed to be a very gentle and fragrant creature) signified Christ; the whale signified Hell; the fabulous phœnix also sometimes signified Christ, at other times the doctrine of the resurrection. This work began very early; and we have fragments of it even

[1] *Bestiary c* 1220 (in O.E. Misc., E.E.T.S. 1872).

in Anglo-Saxon literature, long before the Conquest. With the revival of English it came into general favour again; and a number of Bestiaries were produced. We shall have to refer again to the Beast-Fable,—for it leads up to the subject of that greatest of all Beast-Fables, the mediæval story of *Reynard the Fox.*

It is here that something general must be said about the immense value of the literature of mediæval romance.

In order to imagine what mediæval literature meant to modern literature, — not only in England, but all through Europe—it is well to remember that the old Greek and Roman literature had very little of what we would call romance. In this respect classic literature in Europe was probably much poorer even than old Egyptian literature, or old Assyrian literature,—not to speak of the highly romantic literature of India and the farther East. Of course, much Greek and Roman literature has been lost; and we do not know everything that was written. But from the artistic principles which govern classic literature, we may be tolerably sure that romance had not yet been developed among classic peoples in the really classic age. You have heard of "early Greek novels"; but these really were not early novels at all—they appeared only in the time of the decline of Greek literature and then very sparingly. You have heard of *The Romance of the Golden Ass* and books of that sort, but such literature was developed only in the time when the Roman Empire was decaying and the language becoming corrupt. Notwithstanding exceptions, we may generally say that, in Europe, romantic literature was not a product of the classic ages at all. And yet the material existed for it. But great subjects usually took the form of drama or of epic in ancient poetry; and such branches of literature were regulated by severe conservatism. I am not learned enough even to try to explain why this was the case; but one thing is certain—that the thoughts of men during the classic ages were quite different from the thoughts of men in after ages. There was no real freedom in the lives of the old Greeks and of the old Romans; —the action of every individual was regulated by custom which

it was impossible to break;—the society was everything, the personality nothing. Now romantic literature really requires imaginative freedom of the most extended kind; and in any community where persons were not free to act or to think, romantic literature could scarcely have been evolved by any natural process.

Of course we know that in the Middle Ages also there was little or no religious freedom. But religious freedom and personal freedom had then become entirely different things. In the Middle Ages you would have been burned alive for publicly denying a doctrine of the Church; but the Church did not pretend to tell you how you should eat or drink or marry or travel or tell story, or fight or make friends. Except as to the matter of faith people had as much freedom as the feudal condition allowed of—and that was considerable. But the Greek or the Roman of early time had no such freedom. He could not go where he pleased, or choose a wife where he pleased, or embark in any business that he pleased, or act in any way outside of social convention. So, even to leave one's own city was to leave behind one all rights of citizenship, and all claim to kindly treatment. Entering a foreign land you were a person to be regarded with suspicion; and you could not move hand or foot without permission.

So that really the Middle Ages, ignorant as they were, and cruel as they were, and barbarous as they were in many ways, allowed greater freedom to human action and to human imagination. It was a kind of barbarian liberty — this liberty gained from the rude conquerors of the North. But it was a great assistance to the evolution of European literature. Men were still much too ignorant then to do any literary work comparable to the literary work of the Greeks—indeed we are not yet able to equal them. But men could attempt literary work in an entirely different way from the Greeks, with great liberty to imagine and to play with facts; and the result was the production of romance.

Now all the work of the Middle Ages in literature was a kind of gathering and storing up of romantic material for future

literary use. Out of the wild imaginations of the time were developed beauties of fancy and feeling never before known in Europe. Remember that the work was not well done. It could not have been well done;—all the European languages were still imperfect and the new European nations much too ignorant. But in their imperfect work there was the richest of ores from which the purest of literary gold could afterwards be extracted. And there were two veins of a specially rich material in the mass. One represents the sense of the supernatural; the other that of tenderness. In regard to both, we may say that they were of an entirely novel sort. There was great faith in the Greek and Roman time; but it was not at all of the same kind—the kind that created the sense of awe. And there was tenderness in the literature of the Greeks as well as passion, but it was not, and could not have been, of the same sort as the tenderness of the mediæval feeling, which regarded love in a totally different way.

And that is why, at every period in English literature, when men's imagination became barren, and when literature, in all its branches, began to grow dry and hard and threatened to crystallize into unchangeable shape, writers went back to the literature of the Middle Ages for new inspiration. In recent centuries the reaction showed itself first about the age of Dr. Johnson. The so-called romantic revival which then began was but one of the several to follow. The work of Wordsworth and his school and of Coleridge and even of Keats, represent another phase of the revival. Lastly the Pre-Raphaelites, with Rossetti and others, revived the spirit of the Middle Ages as it had never been revived before. Every time that learning goes back to that magical well of the Middle Ages, literature obtains strange refreshment—as if from the elixir of life. And to-day, when the English poets have almost ceased to sing,—and when English fiction is showing every sign of exhaustion,—it is a significant fact that the old romances are being reprinted, re-edited, and re-studied as they never were before. Even now, inspiration is being thus sought for; and very possibly it will be found.

So, that is the way, I imagine, in which we ought to think about mediæval romances. To admire them in themselves, in their original and wearisome form, is very hard indeed. It requires much patience and considerable scholarship. But when the patience and the scholarship analyses the mass of that old work and separates the gold from the rubbish, the result is always extraordinary. All the English poetry and the French poetry and the German poetry of the last one hundred years has been vitalized and changed by those very great influences which we were formerly taught to despise as the superstitions of an age of ignorance. The meaning of the romantic revival in every European country is the same. And almost certainly another revival will come, drawing its life from the very same sources.

THE LAST PERIOD OF MIDDLE ENGLISH

The Fixation of Standard English, Commonly Called the King's English

Now these romances about which we have been talking, whether in rhyme or in alliterative verse, were not written according to any generally established form of English. They were written in different dialects — some in northern dialect, some in southern dialect, some in the dialect of the middle provinces. Gradually there grew up a struggle between these different dialects for the mastery;—and the strongest and richest dialect won. This was the Midland dialect. You must understand that three dialects even to this day exist in England — not to mention sub-dialects which exist in almost every shire. One of these three is the northern — represented in modern times by the language of Burns and commonly called Lowland Scotch. But the term Lowland Scotch is not good—because the dialect extends further south into Yorkshire, and becomes, in a modified form, the dialect of Tennyson's *Northern Farmer*. And there is a southern dialect too — weakly represented by some modern volumes of poetry written in it. But this southern dialect is so unimportant to literature that we need speak only of the two great divisions of English, Northern or Scotch and the King's English. Why the King's English? Simply because it was a form of English adopted at the King's court as a standard during the 14th century. Why was it adopted in preference to others? Why did it win? Because it was richer and stronger; it had absorbed a greater number of Latin and French words than the other dialect; and it had kept most of the strong Danish and Scandinavian words. So people found that they could write better prose and better poetry in Midland than in Northern English and that it was better adapted for school use.

Until 1362 English had not been taught in the schools so much as French; but after that English again became not only the language of instruction but the language in which ordinary cases might be tried in courts.

Now a few years ago philologists tried to insist upon a division of Midland dialect into East Midland and West Midland; but it seems that they must give up this division. There were differences, of course, between the speech of the Western and of the Eastern countries; but these differences have not proved to be so fundamental as could justify the establishment of separate dialects. They are only differences of sub-dialects; and the student will do well to pay no attention to them except so far as philology may be concerned. It used to be said that Wyclif and Langland wrote in West Midland and Chaucer in East Midland. But it will be quite sufficient for you to accept the simple fact that all of them wrote in Midland dialect and that dialect became the King's English.

There are a few names now to be memorized—the names of the men who really fixed the standard of Middle English, who laid the foundations of modern English. These were Chaucer, Gower, Langland, Wyclif and the quaint and delightful "Sir John Mandeville." Try to remember these five names and something of the work of each man. Three were poets; two were prose writers. And the prose writers are now for the first time quite as important as the poets—indeed even more so. For no writing influenced the English language so much as the Bible and Wyclif's translation of the Bible into Middle English had an immense influence upon the speech of the people. For this reason he is more important in the history of English literature even than Chaucer; and I shall begin with some remarks about his work.

Wyclif[1] was an Oxford student, who by reason of his great talents in the direction of logic and philosophy rose to high honour in Balliol College and eventually became Master or Director of that College. A trying time in politics gave him occasion to display his power upon a larger stage. The Pope

[1] John Wyclif (1324-1384).

had demanded tribute from the English Government; — and Parliament refused the tribute, and looked about for some scholar to represent its views in the controversy impending. Wyclif was the man thought to be the best man in the University for that purpose; and he represented the Government so well, that he covered himself and his University with honour. But Wyclif came for honour only as a means of helping himself to speak more powerfully at a later day against the Church of Rome for other than political reasons. He was a great and very daring Protestant. You must remember that this was long before Luther's time,—that it was a time when the religion of England was still Roman Catholic, and when a man ran the risk of being burned alive for publicly denying any doctrine of the Church. Now everything that Luther afterwards did in Germany, Wyclif did long before him in England. Like Luther he publicly attacked the sale of indulgences and the corruption of the religious orders;—like Luther he denied the doctrine of transubstantiation, and he denied also the right of the Pope to exercise temporal power. If they could have got him to Rome, they would have burned him. But in England he was protected by a powerful party of Nobles, headed by John of Gaunt. Probably this was not because John of Gaunt and his followers had not any great religious feeling on the subject: the hatred of the English nobility for the Church in that time was not a hatred of conviction but of politics. They wanted to push the religious orders out of the country and to seize upon their wealth. And Wyclif therefore seemed to them an instrument to be used and to be protected. But at last the opposition to Wyclif became too strong even for the nobility. After a long and glorious fight—for you must remember that he was a purely sincere man—he was forced out of the University and obliged to retire into private life. But he was not further annoyed. He was only checked in his purpose of religious reform. He had been born about 200 years too soon. What he wanted to do could not have been done until the time of Henry VIII, and even then it required all the obstinacy and force of the most obstinate and the most forceful

of English Kings to do it. So much for Wyclif's life: now about his work in literature.

We need speak here only of his translation of the Bible[1] — not from the Hebrew, but from the Latin. It appeared about 1380, and immediately began to influence the English language all over the country. Of course a perfect translation of the original text could not have been made in those days;—the translation containing many obvious errors just as the original Latin does, the Vulgate Version. But the Vulgate Version from a literary point of view is a grand work—full of sonorous words; and Wyclif made an admirable literary rendering. Nothing is more interesting for a person who loves quaint language than to read some of the more poetical parts of the Bible in Wyclif's version and to compare them with the modern text. I shall give you a short extract from the description of a horse in *The Book of Job* (xxxix).

Wyclif	Wyclif (*modernized*)	King James' Version
Whether thou schalt ȝyue strengthe to an hors, ether schal ȝyue neiyng aboute his necke? Whether thou schalt reyse hym as locustis? The glorie of hise nosethirlis *is* drede. He diggith erthe with the foot, he fulli ioieth booldli; he goith aȝens armed men. He dispisith ferdfulnesse, and he ȝyueth not stide to swerd. An arowe-caas schal sowne on hym; a spere and scheeld schal florische. He is hoot, and gnas-	Whether thou shalt give strength to an horse, either shall give neiyng about his neck? Whether thou shalt raise him as locusts? The glory of his nostrils *is* dreadful. He diggeth earth with the foot, he fully joyeth boldly; he goeth against armed men. He despiseth fearfulness, and he giveth not stide to sword. An arrow-case shall sound upon him; a spear and shield shall flourish. He is hot, and gnasheth and swal-	Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils *is* terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in *his* strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swal-

[1] *The Holy Bible, made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wyclif and his followers* 1382, 1388 (ed. J. Forshall and Sir F. Madden 1850).

tith, and swolewith the erthe; and he arettith not that the crie of the trumpe sowneth. Whanne he herith a clarioun, he seith, Joie! he smellith batel afer; the excityng of duykis, and the ȝellyng of the oost.

loweth the ground; and he aretteth not that the cry of the trump soundeth. When he heareth a clarion, he saieth, Joy! He smelleth battle afar, — the exciting of dukes, and the yelling of the host.

loweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that *it is* the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

How much finer, you may say, is the King James' Version than Wyclif's! Yes,—but it took the united labour of hundreds of scholars working through hundreds of years, always improving, always bettering, to make the English of the modern version; and Wyclif was the pioneer. The interesting thing is that we can read him even now with pleasure and find beauty in his language. Of course he could not give us a line so splendid as that famous phrase about "the thunder of the captains, and the shouting." But after all what a very vivid picture is brought before us by his equivalent part;—"the exciting of the dukes, and the yelling of the host." Here you have the difference between the idea of battle formed by a man of the 14th century and the idea of a man about battle many hundreds of years later. Each tries to render a foreign text by a familiar image, by a picture;—and if the modern is so very much stronger, so also is the modern experience.

Langland,[1] like Wyclif, was a reformer. We do not know much about him. All that has been written about his life in literary fragments and histories of literature has been proved to be untrustworthy. We do not even know whether his first name was William, or something else. The best study about his work has been made by a French Professor of English Literature, M. Jusserand; and even that splendid work of investigation tells us nothing definite about the writer's personality. But from his poems we know that he must have been a good scholar; and his mastery of language is not inferior to

[1] William Langland (1330?-1400?).

that of Chaucer. We know also from his work that he was a very sincere and zealous Protestant—though not quite of the same degree as Wyclif. The great difference, however, in the utterance of the two men may have been due to difference in position and circumstances. Wyclif could dare a great deal; he was known as the first scholar in England; he was a Master in Oxford University; he was protected by powerful nobles; and he had the ear of the King. Langland was a comparatively obscure person; and he had to be very careful indeed as to what he wrote or said—for a simple charge of heresy might have brought him to the stake.

His great work, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*,[1] is an alliterative poem of great length, attacking existing evil in Church and State, under the form of an allegory. As I told you he had to be very careful not to make his allegory offensively clear in certain directions; and the consequence is that to-day no mortal man can understand the whole of that poem. Even Professor Saintsbury, who declared that Browning had no obscurity for him, is obliged to confess that he can make nothing out of part of Langland. But in the time of Langland himself—he lived with Wyclif and Chaucer—the allusions of *The Vision* were perfectly understood; and the composition had an immense success. Several editions were called for in the author's own lifetime—and that was before the time of printing. I do not think that you could possibly be interested in *The Vision* as a whole. It opens with a description of the country as seen from the Malvern Hills; and in the middle of the landscape the poet beholds the vision of a tower, a prison and many allegorical figures. The Church is represented under the figure of a beautiful lady; conscience under that of another; and there are figures called Meed or Merit, Reason, Fraud, etc. The whole thing reminds us now of the stage of a Miracle play upon which the virtue and vices take the roles of actors. After a wedding ceremony or at least the preparations for it and a court trial held before the King, the scene suddenly changes;

[1] *The vision of William concerning Piers Plowman.* A. text 1362; B. text 1377; C. text 1393 (ed. Skeat; E.E.T.S. 1867-85).

and we are introduced into another series of allegorical pictures having scarcely anything to do with the first. But here at least, there is something that we can understand and admire. There is, for example, a set of studies, taken from real life, representing the seven deadly sins — Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy and Sloth. Now these studies have been really made from the London life of the 14th century. The most famous is a description of a drunkard's drinking in a tavern; and that description shows that Langland could paint reality almost as well as Chaucer. If you want to read extracts from the best part of Langland, you had better look at Jusserand's work with the title of *L'Épopée Mystique.* But we need not delay further with Langland; suffice to say that his poem, through its popularity, helped to fix the standard of Middle English.

Another writer, with whose work we need not much trouble ourselves, though he must be mentioned, is John Gower. In the latter part of the 14th century there seemed to have been many Englishmen capable of doing what perhaps no Englishman could do to-day (except Mr. Swinburne)—namely, of writing poetry equally well in three languages. John Gower[1] was one of these. He wrote three vast compositions—one in Latin, one in French, and one in English; — and these were respectively called *Vox Clamantis*, *Speculum Meditantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*[2] or. *Lover's Confession*, by which Gower belongs to English literature in an important way—a vast poem of nearly 40,000 lines or, perhaps we had better say, a vast collection of poems.

A fact not often noted but very important to notice, is that Gower happened to have exactly the same idea as Chaucer, and even somewhat earlier; but he was much less successful in carrying it out, like Chaucer. There are differences in the plan, of course; but the general idea, the fundamental idea of both poets was to put together a great collection of romantic stories, uniting all by a single thread of narrative. Gower's

[1] John Gower (1325 ?-1408).
[2] *Confessio amantis* 1390 (R. Pauli 1857; Eng. Works. E.E.T.S. 1900).

thread of narrative was this:—a lover goes to the temple of the goddess Venus, and confesses his love for a certain girl to the priest of that temple. He tells the priest that he woos in vain; that he cannot win and does not know what to do. And then the priest, in order to console him, relates all the stories of unhappy lovers, recounted either by the classic writers or by the writers of romance. And when all the stories have been told, the goddess Venus comes and heals the heart of the unhappy lover with a magical balm. There is no doubt that Gower wrote good verse; but it is quite certain that he did not write good poetry. His work speedily fell into oblivion, and remained forgotten until the new interest in Middle English caused it to be reprinted about a year ago. But even now I am pretty sure that nobody will read it except for philological reasons. On the contrary Chaucer always kept public favour; and his reputation continued to grow through the centuries.

Now there is something wrong about the character of John Gower, which probably accounts for his failure in poetry. I told you long ago that no bad man ever could write good poetry; and I am afraid that we must believe Gower to have been something of a bad man. He used to be called a brave reformer, and an outspoken patriot—and all that sort of thing. But we know a little more about his private history; and he appears to have been a very insincere and disloyal person. His book of Latin poetry *Vox Clamantis*[1] ("The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness") was chiefly an attack upon the corruptions and follies of society in the days of King Richard II,—the King himself being attacked. This was the book that made for Gower a reputation as patriot; but we must now suppose that he wrote it merely for a cunning purpose. King Richard had been his friend, had kept him in high position, had made him rich gifts and had even encouraged him to write English poetry. It was then that he wrote his *Lover's Confession* (*Confessio Amantis*). But the moment that King Richard's authority became weak, John Gower deserted his King, went over to the side of the usurper, and abused his benefactor. Poetry re-

[1] *Vox clamantis* ? *c* 1382

quires a sincere character, and somehow Nature never allows a perfectly insincere man to produce a good poem. Gower could write perfect verse in three languages; — he could rise to high position in the State by his talent and by his cunning — he could even become the intimate friend of a proud and passionate king. But he could not write good poetry in any language—simply because his character unfitted him to utter truth. There is something repulsively cold and dead about all his work. The form may be praised;—and that form helped to fix Middle English, but after all the poem is a corpse and its beauty is only like that of a dead face.

It was very different with Chaucer—Geoffrey Chaucer[1] — the greatest poet of the 14th century, and one of the greatest in the history of English literature. The stories written about him now seem to have been mostly imaginary. We do not know much about his life; and what we do know depends almost altogether upon the entries made in Court Records, and in the accounts of the City of London. There we find mention of the fact that he had a pension, and gifts from successive Governments; and there is a record of salary paid him as an officer of customs — showing that he once held a good civil position. We also know that he was at one time a soldier in France, and that he was taken prisoner by the French, and ransomed. We know that he was employed on some Government missions in different parts of Europe. Finally we know that he was married and that he had a little son, whom he wrote about in a very beautiful way. But we do not know what his wife's name was, and nobody knows what became of his son; and you must not believe the stories about Chaucer's life which used to appear in literary histories. They are simply made of moonshine. We can only guess the real history of the man.

How so? From the records of which I have spoken in part —but much more from his work. Both his poetry and his prose teach us a good deal about his character. They show us that he must have been a sympathetic and kindly person; and the

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340 ?-1400).

financial records assure us that he must have been sincerely liked, — for in spite of all the changes of Governments that occurred in his time, he never lost good will in high places. Sometimes, indeed, when new Governments came to power, he was thrown out of his position. But that seems to have been only a momentary lot, the new king or the new party soon recognizing the merit of the old servant who never spoke unkindly about anybody. One thing more may be worth mentioning—that he was the son of a London wine-merchant, that he was employed, almost from boyhood, at the court of King Edward III. This shows that his family must have been greatly esteemed, in spite of being common people.

There is even a primer of Chaucer to-day, in which it is attempted to classify and analyse and group and chronicle his work almost as elaborately as has been done in the case of Shakespeare. But you may be sure that the primer itself was only a phenomenon of passing fashion in literature when the study of Middle English temporarily became the "rage." It is quite unnecessary and would be mere waste of time for you to study Chaucer after the fashion of an English classic—unless you are doing so in connection with a special branch of English philology. Enough to say that Chaucer's place in English literature has been established altogether by the *Canterbury Tales;* and that we need not dwell upon anything except these for the present. Of course it may be worth while to know that Chaucer was first influenced by French literature, when he translated *The Romaunt of the Rose;* [1]—that he was influenced by Italian literature when he rendered into English from Boccaccio the story of *Troilus and Criseyde;*[2]—that at last he turned altogether to English subjects and wrote free from the influence of foreign literatures of any kind. But it is not in the least necessary to know those things and there is nothing of Chaucer's work which need concern us here except his really English studies. So we shall speak of the *Canterbury Tales* [3] only. Like Gower, Chaucer wanted to write a great number

[1] *The romaunt of the rose a* 1366.
[2] *Troilus and Criseyde c* 1374.
[3] *Canterbury Tales c* 1386.

of romantic stories, together in one scheme; but his idea of the scheme was quite original and incomparably better than Gower's. In Chaucer's time, religious pilgrimages were very much in fashion, and the shrine of Canterbury especially attracted great numbers of pilgrims from all parts of the country. The pilgrims were not by any means the poorer classes only; even noblemen joined the pilgrim parties, with a numerous retinue, for it was an age of great faith. And Chaucer had observed that all classes of society were sometimes represented in a single procession of pilgrims. It occurred to him that the assembling and ordering of one of these pilgrimages would therefore admirably serve him as an incident upon which to base his personal narrative. There was an inn in London, where parties were often arranged for such pilgrimages; and Chaucer represents himself as having joined such a party at the inn. The landlord undertakes to act as guide and leader to the pilgrims; and in order that the time may be passed pleasantly, it is agreed that on the journey each of the pilgrims shall tell two good stories and that on the way back each shall tell two stories more. Such was the general plan.

The work opens with *The Prologue*, in which the gathering of the pilgrims at the Tabard Inn is recounted and each of the pilgrims described. There are about thirty in the party and these thirty represent almost every class of the English society of that time. There was a Knight, for example, who had been to the Crusades, and his son, a handsome Squire; these two represented the feudal chivalry of the 14th century. There was a Yeoman,—who attended upon the Knight, representing that sturdy class of feudal retainers, drawn from the peasantry, who afterwards won so many splendid victories by their terrible archery. There were monks of different orders also, and nuns and priests. There were tradespeople, sailors, a miller,—various people of the artisan class. The manufacturing class was represented by a city-dame who owned a large cloth factory; this person being the famous Wife of Bath. The gentry were also represented by a Franklin, that is to say, a free-holder, or landed proprietor, who acted both as ruler and

magistrate in his country parish, much as the English "country-squire" does to-day. A very motley gathering indeed; but certainly according to the time and drawn from life.

Now there is nothing in the *Canterbury Tales* more valuable and more interesting than this *Prologue.* And the more that we know about the English history of the period between 1300 and 1400, the more pleasure you will find in studying that *Prologue.* Every figure in it is drawn with the accuracy of a portrait, and with every detail of costume, and every eccentricity of action and every particularity of manner. All these people are intensely alive. From looking at Chaucer's word pictures, we know exactly how people ate, drank, dressed, spoke, and generally conducted themselves in that era. You see the Yeoman, for example, in his green coat and hood, with his leather belt about his waist and the sword hanging thereto —you see the bow in his hand, the arrows in his quiver. Anybody might show you that, but Chaucer takes care that you shall see something more—namely, how the character of the man is indicated by the care that he takes of his weapons. Chaucer tells you to look at the arrows in the arrow-case; they are feathered with peacock's feathers,—and he bids you observe that not a single feather is in the least frayed. That is proof that the archer knows his business: badly feathered or carelessly kept arrows indicated a bad marksman. Again we have the Wife of Bath described for us in her riding costume—booted and spurred and wearing an immense hat wide enough to protect her shoulders as well as her head from wind and sun. Every detail of her dress is told us. Now from this sketch we know that in Chaucer's time English women still rode in the same way as men—straddling the horse and wearing spurs. The custom of riding "side-saddle," as it is called, did not come into vogue until some time later. Another fact is interesting to observe,—namely, that the character of the gentleman, as understood in the 14th century, was at least as noble as the best ideas of our own time upon the same subject. The Knight, we are told, fought in a great many battles, travelled in a great many countries, won a great many prizes at tournaments, and

was highly esteemed as a warrior and leader; — but he had never been known to speak one unkind word to any man, of any rank, or even to speak evil of his enemies. This is very much the identical definition of a gentleman as given by Charles Kingsley: a person who minds his own business, and never speaks unkindly. Yet one more detail of *The Prologue* may be noticed—the extreme vividness with which the character of the Abbess is drawn for us. She represents the religious gentility of her time; and we are told to observe how nicely she eats and drinks. Always before drinking she wipes her lips very carefully so that she never leaves a stain upon the edge of the glass;—she cuts her meat finely, never putting a large piece of food into her mouth and never letting a crumb or a drop fall while she is eating. English children are still taught to behave at table like the Abbess of the *Canterbury Tales*. As I have said, every figure is alive; and the vulgar figures are drawn quite as vividly and as truthfully as the genteel ones. But they are also drawn very sympathetically. The most vulgar of the pilgrims is not less kindly treated than the Knight or the Franklin. Chaucer makes us laugh at them occasionally, but he also makes us like them for the most part, — and so proves himself a man above every kind of prejudice.

Before saying anything further about the *Canterbury Tales*, I want very much to impress upon your mind one fact about them—a fact which is not sufficiently insisted upon in most histories of English literature. I mean the fact that they were never finished at all. By this I do not mean merely to say that Chaucer could not carry out his original plan: everybody knows that. I mean to say that probably not even one of all stories in the *Canterbury Tales* was really finished, in the literary sense, at the time of Chaucer's death. *The Prologue* was probably quite finished—rewritten and improved and made as perfect as he could make it. But the rest of the work appears to have been only half finished or three-quarters finished—and in some cases the story does not appear even to have been fully planned. Remember that all this was before the age of printing. Chaucer was really published only long after his death.

As for the stories, there are altogether about 24, including fragments of stories. Between the stories, there are shorter prologues and bits of conversation,—accounts of disputes between members of the party, and of peace-making,—also, little narratives told by various persons concerning their own experience of life. Four of the stories are old-fashioned romances; a large number of the remainder are tales of a very light kind —such as the French would call, if written in prose, *nouvelles*, and if written in verse, *fabliaux*. These remind us of the Italian and French love-tales of a similar sort—tales of deceived husbands, tales of tricks played upon unfortunate lovers, and a few tales of a rather loose kind. Altogether, it would appear as if considerably less than one half of the original plan had been carried out. Many of Chaucer's pilgrims do not speak at all;—for example, none of the mechanics in the party tells a story. The work ends with the account of the ascent of the slope leading to Canterbury — the pilgrims are nearing their goal, but they never reach it, and vanish away into the night of the past. The effect of the whole thing is that of an exceedingly vivid dream in which voices are heard and faces are seen with astonishing distinctness,—a dream which we never forget, but which we cannot help regretting the incompleteness of;—we have been too soon and too suddenly awakened. Something prevented Chaucer from even half completing his undertaking; and what that something was we shall never know.

The best critics all agree in calling *The Prologne to the Tale of the Wife of Bath* the best thing in the *Canterbury Tales* —because it is the most accurate study of nature. The Wife of Bath, who is one of the pilgrims, is a woman who married five husbands, expects to marry one or two more. She is a good-hearted, merry, somewhat vulgar, and exceedingly talkative woman — that kind of woman who cannot help saying everything that she feels and telling everything that she knows, — and of course she thinks herself a little cleverer than she really is. Somebody in the party starts her to talking about her husband; and she then relates the whole story of her married

life. In some way or other, she says, she had always been able to master her husband and to rule the house. Sometimes she managed it by making the husband jealous, sometimes she managed it because the husband was old and she young and pretty enough to impose upon him through his affectionate side. There was but one husband whom she could not easily master: he treated her badly. In another case she got the better of her husband by provoking him to beat her, and then pretending to be dead. By this trick she succeeded in getting all the property into her hand. For all she did she justifies herself to the party by quoting text from the Bible in the most extraordinary way and with the most extraordinary comments. But of course she makes herself appear a worse woman than she really is. She is not bad at all; but she is vain enough to think that, by making herself appear bad, people would think her clever. Everybody, however, sees through her innocent disguise, and likes her all the same. She is a good creature and very original. Another fact worth noticing is that the romance which she tells is perhaps the best in the book. In the story of the knight who saved himself from death by answering the riddle, "What is the thing that women most desire in this world?," the answer is, "To have their own way;" —and that is indeed true of the Wife of Bath herself. It is worth remembering also that no original of this story is known. Where Chaucer got it from has not yet been discovered. The strange marriage scene in the romance where the withered old wife is suddenly transformed into a beautiful girl,—that scene is indeed the subject of several old English ballads. But the ballads are much later than Chaucer's work—so the mystery remains.

Chaucer is now made accessible to students in excellent scholarly editions which are cheap and which are furnished with glossaries and accent points. Probably the finest example of an edition for students is that of Skeat in one volume—abridged from the grand edition in four volumes. But it is less handy than the Macmillan edition of one volume—edited by four different scholars; and this Macmillan edition has the

great advantage of being furnished with particular accents to indicate the Middle English pronunciation of the final "e." Unless you know how to pronounce this "e" you cannot scan Chaucer, and cannot hear the quiet music of his verse. To read him for amusement is quite possible: it only requires a little patience. His importance to English literature must not be thought of as only philological. Even the poets of the Victorian period were greatly influenced by his charm—a charm which affected the later as well as the earlier romantic movement. And the plan which he followed has inspired almost as many 19th century poets as it did 15th century poets. Two noteworthy examples are afforded by Longfellow and by William Morris. Longfellow composed his delightful *Tales of a Wayside Inn* after the teaching of Chaucer, and William Morris built his vast poem—*The Earthly Paradise*—upon the same foundation.

One more name awaits our attention—a name of very importance in the history of English literature; not the literature of poetry but of prose. I mean *Sir John Mandeville.*

Sir John Mandeville[1] is still read by three classes of persons—by children, for amusement; by philologists, for the study of late Middle English; by men of letters, for the pure delight of the fancy and style of the book. If you read it when very young—before the love of fairy tales is dead within you—then you will like it very much. Later on, after you have learned a great deal about geography and other modern things, you may consider it childish. But that is a mistake of yours. When you become an old man, then, providing that you have some literary taste, you will be able to find a new pleasure—pleasure of quite a new kind—in *Sir John Mandeville.*

The book is, you know, a book of travel;—it really professes to be a kind of guide-book to the Holy Land. Its author was said to be an English knight who left his home in the first half of the century, about 1322, to travel to the Holy Land, and travelled much farther—even to the Border of China—and

[1] *The buke of John Maundeuill being the travels of Sir J. Mandeville knight 1322-56 c* 1400 (Roxburghe Club 1889).

came back at last after thirty years' absence. The book describes kingdoms that never existed, realms as shadowy and as charming as Horai;—potentates not less wonderful than the Merlin of the Arthurian legend: for example, the mystical Prester John. But that has nothing to do with the reason of the book's value. It is not a great book either because it describes what is, or because it describes what is not: it is a great book because it is a great romance. It is the very first example of a grand romantic style in English prose;—it is the first prose romance in English which we can still read. When I say "grand style," I refer rather to the emotional quality of the book than to any artistic devices of language. Indeed, there are no devices at all: the book is written in the simplest imaginable way—all in short sentences. It is the very ideal of a simple style. Nevertheless, it is a most romantic style, by reason of the charm that it has, and by the reason that it is not written according to any fixed rule of composition. How did Mandeville obtain such a style? Remember that he had no predecessors in prose to teach him—I mean no English writers. Of course the author of the *Ancren Riwle* had a style; I gave you a specimen of it. But that was very early English, almost Anglo-Saxon; and Mandeville could not have learned much from it: his style is utterly different. Undoubtedly his model was the Bible; but even the Bible he studied was probably not English. It seems to have been the Latin Vulgate. And remember that this book appeared in three different languages—in Latin, in French and last of all in English.

If you study the text of the Bible a little, you will observe that all the sentences are very short; and that a great many of them begin with the word "and." That is exactly the manner in which Sir John writes;—all his sentences are short; and a great number of them begin with "and" or with "for." This, of course, gives an effect of quaintness. And this quaintness joined with the delightful imagination of the book, with its love of wonder and mystery, and its sympathy with all good and beautiful things—produces a charm of a very extraordinary kind. As for the author—the real author—nothing is

known about him. It is quite possible that there never was any Sir John Mandeville, but the name is nothing and the work is everything.

English prose thus found a very considerable development in the 14th century. Nevertheless there are very few representing it;—Wyclif's Bible, Chaucer's prose tales and translations, together with his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*[1] (the astrolabe was an instrument formerly used for the same purpose as the modern sextant); — Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*: these are the principal. We might also mention a translation by John Trevisa[2] into English prose of Higden's *Polychronicon*[3]—a kind of general history, written by a monk. But Trevisa did not have the romantic imagination of the person called Sir John Mandeville, and he did not have the good education of Chaucer. So that his English is not of much value. It does not represent anything particular in style. But the Bible of Wyclif and the prose of Chaucer, and, above all, the prose of Mandeville, represent style — real style. If Chaucer had not been chiefly a translator, he would probably have written like Sir John. If Sir John had not written in the 14th century, Sir Thomas Malory would not have written, perhaps, in the 15th century. To sum up everything:—

I. Most of the form of modern English poetry were discovered and tested in English literature before the end of the 14th century.

II. English prose of two kinds was also developed during this period—the plain style and the romantic style, which gives the effect of poetry without verse.

[1] *A treatise on the Astrolabe c* 1931 (E E.T.S., Chaucer Soc. 1872).
[2] John de Trevisa (1326-1412).
[3] *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden* tr. 1387 (Rolls series 1865-86).