

CHAPTER III

THE ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD

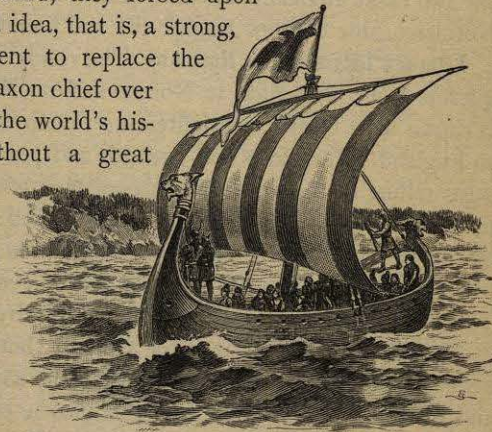
I. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The Normans. The name Norman, which is a softened form of Northman, tells its own story. The men who bore the name came originally from Scandinavia, — bands of big, blond, fearless men cruising after plunder and adventure in their Viking ships, and bringing terror wherever they appeared. It was these same "Children of Woden" who, under the Danes' raven flag, had blotted out Northumbrian civilization in the ninth century. Later the same race of men came plundering along the French coast and conquered the whole northern country; but here the results were altogether different. Instead of blotting out a superior civilization, as the Danes had done, they promptly abandoned their own. Their name of Normandy still clings to the new home; but all else that was Norse disappeared as the conquerors intermarried with the native Franks and accepted French ideals and spoke the French language. So rapidly did they adopt and improve the Roman civilization of the natives that, from a rude tribe of heathen Vikings, they had developed within a single century into the most polished and intellectual people in all Europe. The union of Norse and French (i.e. Roman-Gallic) blood had here produced a race having the best qualities of both, — the will power and energy of the one, the eager curiosity and vivid imagination of the other. When these Norman-French people appeared in Anglo-Saxon England they brought with them three noteworthy things: a lively Celtic disposition, a vigorous and progressive Latin civilization, and a Romance language.¹ We are to think of the conquerors, therefore, as they thought and spoke of themselves in the Domesday Book and all their contemporary literature, not as Normans but as *Franci*, that is, Frenchmen.

¹ A Romance language is one whose basis is Latin, — not the classic language of literature, but a vulgar or popular Latin spoken in the military camps and provinces. Thus Italian, Spanish, and French were originally different dialects of the vulgar Latin, slightly modified by the mingling of the Roman soldiers with the natives of the conquered provinces.

The Conquest. At the battle of Hastings (1066) the power of Harold, last of the Saxon kings, was broken, and William, duke of Normandy, became master of England. Of the completion of that stupendous Conquest which began at Hastings, and which changed the civilization of a whole nation, this is not the place to speak. We simply point out three great results of the Conquest which have a direct bearing on our literature. First, notwithstanding Cæsar's legions and Augustine's monks, the Normans were the first to bring the culture and the practical ideals of Roman civilization home to the English people; and this at a critical time, when England had produced her best, and her own literature and civilization had already begun to decay. Second, they forced upon

England the national idea, that is, a strong, centralized government to replace the loose authority of a Saxon chief over his tribesmen. And the world's history shows that without a great nationality a great literature is impossible. Third, they brought to England the wealth of a new language and literature, and our English gradually absorbed both. For three centuries after Hastings



LEIF ERICSON'S VESSEL

French was the language of the upper classes, of courts and schools and literature; yet so tenaciously did the common people cling to their own strong speech that in the end English absorbed almost the whole body of French words and became the language of the land. It was the welding of Saxon and French into one speech that produced the wealth of our modern English.

Naturally such momentous changes in a nation were not brought about suddenly. At first Normans and Saxons lived apart in the relation of masters and servants, with more or less contempt on one side and hatred on the other; but in an astonishingly short time these two races were drawn powerfully together, like two men of different dispositions who are often led into a steadfast friendship by the attraction of opposite qualities, each supplying what the other lacks. The

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which was continued for a century after Hastings, finds much to praise in the conquerors; on the other hand the Normans, even before the Conquest, had no great love for the French nation. After conquering England they began to regard it as home and speedily developed a new sense of nationality. Geoffrey's popular *History*,¹ written less than a century after the Conquest, made conquerors and conquered alike proud of their country by its stories of heroes who, curiously enough, were neither Norman nor Saxon, but creations of the native Celts. Thus does literature, whether in a battle song or a history, often play the chief rôle in the development of nationality.² Once the mutual distrust was overcome the two races gradually united, and out of this union of Saxons and Normans came the new English life and literature.

Literary Ideals of the Normans. The change in the life of the conquerors from Norsemen to Normans, from Vikings to Frenchmen, is shown most clearly in the literature which they brought with them to England. The old Norse strength and grandeur, the magnificent sagas telling of the tragic struggles of men and gods, which still stir us profoundly, — these have all disappeared. In their place is a bright, varied, talkative literature, which runs to endless verses, and which makes a wonderful romance out of every subject it touches. The theme may be religion or love or chivalry or history, the deeds of Alexander or the misdeeds of a monk; but the author's purpose never varies. He must tell a romantic story and amuse his audience, and the more wonders and impossibilities he relates, the more surely is he believed. We are reminded, in reading, of the native Gauls who would stop every traveler and compel him to tell a story ere he passed on. There was more of the Gaul than of the Norseman in the conquerors, and far more of fancy than of thought or feeling in their literature. If you would see this in concrete form, read the *Chanson de Roland*, the French national epic (which the Normans

¹ See p. 51.

² It is interesting to note that all the chroniclers of the period, whether of English or Norman birth, unite in admiration of the great figures of English history, as it was then understood. Brutus, Arthur, Hengist, Horsa, Edward the Confessor, and William of Normandy are all alike set down as English heroes. In a French poem of the thirteenth century, for instance, we read that "there is no land in the world where so many good kings and saints have lived as in the isle of the English . . . such as the strong and brave Arthur, Edmund, and Cnut." This national poem, celebrating the English Edward, was written in French by a Norman monk of Westminster Abbey, and its first heroes are a Celt, a Saxon, and a Dane. (See Jusserand, *Literary History of the English People*, I, 112 ff.)

first put into literary form), in contrast with *Beowulf*, which voices the Saxon's thought and feeling before the profound mystery of human life. It is not our purpose to discuss the evident merits or the serious defects of Norman-French literature, but only to point out two facts which impress the student, namely, that Anglo-Saxon literature was at one time enormously superior to the French, and that the latter, with its evident inferiority, absolutely replaced the former. "The fact is too often ignored," says Professor Schofield,¹ "that before 1066 the Anglo-Saxons had a body of native literature distinctly superior to any which the Normans or French could boast at that time; their prose especially was unparalleled for extent and power in any European vernacular." Why, then, does this superior literature disappear and for nearly three centuries French remain supreme, so much so that writers on English soil, even when they do not use the French language, still slavishly copy the French models?

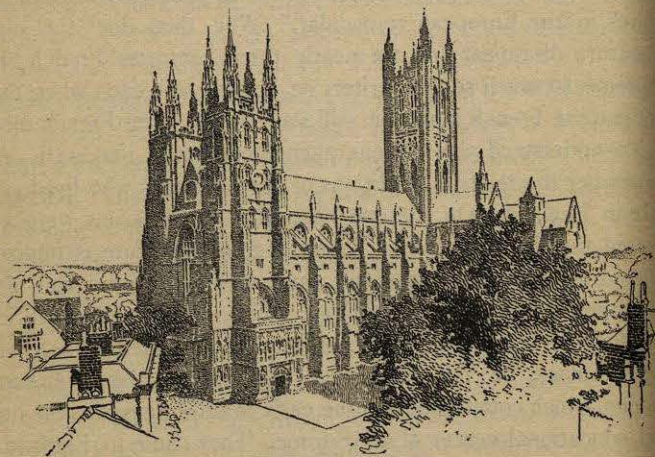
To understand this curious phenomenon it is necessary only to remember the relative conditions of the two races who lived side by side in England. On the one hand the Anglo-Saxons were a conquered people, and without liberty a great literature is impossible. The inroads of the Danes and their own tribal wars had already destroyed much of their writings, and in their new condition of servitude they could hardly preserve what remained. The conquering Normans, on the other hand, represented the civilization of France, which country, during the early Middle Ages, was the literary and educational center of all Europe. They came to England at a time when the idea of nationality was dead, when culture had almost vanished, when Englishmen lived apart in narrow isolation; and they brought with them law, culture, the prestige of success, and above all the strong impulse to share in the great world's work and to join in the moving currents of the world's history. Small wonder, then, that the young Anglo-Saxons felt the quickening of this new life and turned naturally to the cultured and progressive Normans as their literary models.

II. LITERATURE OF THE NORMAN PERIOD

In the Advocates Library at Edinburgh there is a beautifully illuminated manuscript, written about 1330, which gives us an excellent picture of the literature of the Norman period.

¹ *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*.

In examining it we are to remember that literature was in the hands of the clergy and nobles; that the common people could not read, and had only a few songs and ballads for their literary portion. We are to remember also that parchments were scarce and very expensive, and that a single manuscript often contained all the reading matter of a castle or a village. Hence this old manuscript is as suggestive as a modern library. It contains over forty distinct works, the great bulk of them being romances. There are metrical or verse romances of



CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL AS IT WAS COMPLETED LONG AFTER THE CONQUEST

French and Celtic and English heroes, like Roland, Arthur and Tristram, and Bevis of Hampton. There are stories of Alexander, the Greek romance of "Flores and Blanchefleur," and a collection of Oriental tales called "The Seven Wise Masters." There are legends of the Virgin and the saints, a paraphrase of Scripture, a treatise on the seven deadly sins, some Bible history, a dispute among birds concerning women, a love song or two, a vision of Purgatory, a vulgar story with a Gallic flavor, a chronicle of English kings and Norman barons, and a political satire. There are a few other works

similarly incongruous, crowded together in this typical manuscript, which now gives mute testimony to the literary taste of the times.

Obviously it is impossible to classify such a variety. We note simply that it is mediæval in spirit, and French in style and expression; and that sums up the age. All the scholarly works of the period, like William of Malmesbury's *History*, and Anselm's¹ *Cur Deus Homo*, and Roger Bacon's *Opus Majus*, the beginning of modern experimental science, were written in Latin; while nearly all other works were written in French, or else were English copies or translations of French originals. Except for the advanced student, therefore, they hardly belong to the story of English literature. We shall note here only one or two marked literary types, like the *Riming Chronicle* (or verse history) and the *Metrical Romance*, and a few writers whose work has especial significance.

Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. 1154). Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britannicæ* is noteworthy, not as literature, but rather as a source book from which many later writers drew their literary materials. Among the native Celtic tribes an immense number of legends, many of them of exquisite beauty, had been preserved through four successive conquests of Britain. Geoffrey, a Welsh monk, collected some of these legends and, aided chiefly by his imagination, wrote a complete history of the Britons. His alleged authority was an ancient manuscript in the native Welsh tongue containing the lives and deeds of all their kings, from Brutus, the alleged founder of Britain, down to the coming of Julius Cæsar.² From this Geoffrey wrote his history, down to the death of Cadwalader in 689.

The "History" is a curious medley of pagan and Christian legends, of chronicle, comment, and pure invention,—all

¹ Anselm was an Italian by birth, but wrote his famous work while holding the see of Canterbury.

² During the Roman occupancy of Britain occurred a curious mingling of Celtic and Roman traditions. The Welsh began to associate their national hero Arthur with Roman ancestors; hence the story of Brutus, great-grandson of Æneas, the first king of Britain, as related by Geoffrey and Layamon.

recorded in minute detail and with a gravity which makes it clear that Geoffrey had no conscience, or else was a great joker. As history the whole thing is rubbish; but it was extraordinarily successful at the time and made all who heard it, whether Normans or Saxons, proud of their own country. It is interesting to us because it gave a new direction to the literature of England by showing the wealth of poetry and romance that lay in its own traditions of Arthur and his knights. Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* were founded on the work of this monk, who had the genius to put unwritten Celtic tradition in the enduring form of Latin prose.

Work of the French Writers. The French literature of the Norman period is interesting chiefly because of the avidity with which foreign writers seized upon the native legends and made them popular in England. Until Geoffrey's preposterous chronicle appeared, these legends had not been used to any extent as literary material. Indeed, they were scarcely known in England, though familiar to French and Italian minstrels. Legends of Arthur and his court were probably first taken to Brittany by Welsh emigrants in the fifth and sixth centuries. They became immensely popular wherever they were told, and they were slowly carried by minstrels and story-tellers all over Europe. That they had never received literary form or recognition was due to a peculiarity of mediæval literature, which required that every tale should have some ancient authority behind it. Geoffrey met this demand by creating an historical manuscript of Welsh history. That was enough for the age. With Geoffrey and his alleged manuscript to rest upon, the Norman-French writers were free to use the fascinating stories which had been for centuries in the possession of their wandering minstrels. Geoffrey's Latin history was put into French verse by Gaimar (c. 1150) and by Wace (c. 1155), and from these French versions the work was first translated into English. From about 1200 onward

Arthur and Guinevere and the matchless band of Celtic heroes that we meet later (1470) in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* became the permanent possession of our literature.

Layamon's Brut (c. 1200). This is the most important of the English riming chronicles, that is, history related in the form of doggerel verse, probably because poetry is more easily memorized than prose. We give here a free rendering of selected lines at the beginning of the poem, which tell us all we know of Layamon, the first who ever wrote as an Englishman for Englishmen, including in the term all who loved England and called it home, no matter where their ancestors were born.

Now there was a priest in the land named Layamon. He was son of Leovenath — may God be gracious unto him. He dwelt at Ernley, at a noble church on Severn's bank. He read many books, and it came to his mind to tell the noble deeds of the English. Then he began to journey far and wide over the land to procure noble books for authority. He took the English book that Saint Bede made, another in Latin that Saint Albin made,¹ and a third book that a French clerk made, named Wace.² Layamon laid these works before him and turned the leaves; lovingly he beheld them. Pen he took, and wrote on book-skin, and made the three books into one.

The poem begins with the destruction of Troy and the flight of "Æneas the duke" into Italy. Brutus, a great-grandson of Æneas, gathers his people and sets out to find a new land in the West. Then follows the founding of the Briton kingdom, and the last third of the poem, which is over thirty thousand lines in length, is taken up with the history of Arthur and his knights. If the *Brut* had no merits of its own, it would still interest us, for it marks the first appearance of the Arthurian legends in our own tongue. A single selection is given here from Arthur's dying speech, familiar to us in Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*. The reader will notice here two things: first, that though the poem is almost pure

¹ Probably a Latin copy of Bede.

² Wace's translation of Geoffrey.

Anglo-Saxon,¹ our first speech has already dropped many inflections and is more easily read than *Beowulf*; second, that French influence is already at work in Layamon's rimes and assonances, that is, the harmony resulting from using the same vowel sound in several successive lines:

And ich wulle varen to Avalun :	And I will fare to Avalun,
To vairest alre maidene,	To fairest of all maidens,
To Argante there quene,	To Argante the queen,
Alven swithe sceone.	An elf very beautiful.
And heo scal mine wunden	And she shall my wounds
Makien alle isunde,	Make all sound ;
Al hal me makien	All whole me make
Mid haleweiey drenchen.	With healing drinks.
And seothe ich cumen wulle	And again will I come
To mine kineriche	To my kingdom
And wunien mid Brutten	And dwell with Britons
Mid muchelere wunne.	With mickle joy.
Æfne than worden	Even (with) these words
Ther com of se wenden	There came from the sea
That wes an sceort bat lithen,	A short little boat gliding,
Sceoven mid uthen,	Shoved by the waves ;
And twa wimmen ther inne,	And two women therein,
Wunderliche idihte.	Wondrously attired.
And heo nomen Arthur anan	And they took Arthur anon
And an eovste hine vereden	And bore him hurriedly,
And softe hine adun leiden,	And softly laid him down,
And forth gunnen lithen.	And forth gan glide.

Metrical Romances. Love, chivalry, and religion, all pervaded by the spirit of romance,—these are the three great literary ideals which find expression in the metrical romances. Read these romances now, with their knights and fair ladies, their perilous adventures and tender love-making, their minstrelsy and tournaments and gorgeous cavalcades,—as if humanity were on parade, and life itself were one tumultuous holiday in the open air,—and you have an epitome of the whole childish, credulous soul of the Middle Ages. The

¹ Only one word in about three hundred and fifty is of French origin. A century later Robert Mannyng uses one French word in eighty, while Chaucer has one in six or seven. This includes repetitions, and is a fair estimate rather than an exact computation.

Normans first brought this type of romance into England, and so popular did it become, so thoroughly did it express the romantic spirit of the time, that it speedily overshadowed all other forms of literary expression.

Though the metrical romances varied much in form and subject-matter, the general type remains the same,—a long rambling poem or series of poems treating of love or knightly adventure or both. Its hero is a knight; its characters are fair ladies in distress, warriors in armor, giants, dragons, enchanters, and various enemies of Church and State; and its emphasis is almost invariably on love, religion, and duty as defined by chivalry. In the French originals of these romances the lines were a definite length, the meter exact, and rimes and assonances were both used to give melody. In England this metrical system came in contact with the uneven lines, the strong accent and alliteration of the native songs; and it is due to the gradual union of the two systems, French and Saxon, that our English became capable of the melody and amazing variety of verse forms which first find expression in Chaucer's poetry.

In the enormous number of these verse romances we note three main divisions, according to subject, into the romances (or the so-called matter) of France, Rome, and Britain.¹ The matter of France deals largely with the exploits of Charlemagne and his peers, and the chief of these Carolingian cycles is the *Chanson de Roland*, the national epic, which celebrates the heroism of Roland in his last fight against the Saracens at Ronceval. Originally these romances were called *Chansons de Geste*; and the name is significant as indicating that the poems were originally short songs² celebrating the deeds (*gesta*) of well-known heroes.

¹ The matter of Britain refers strictly to the Arthurian, i.e. the Welsh romances; and so another division, the matter of England, may be noted. This includes tales of popular English heroes, like Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwick, Horn Child, etc.

² According to mediæval literary custom these songs were rarely signed. Later, when many songs were made over into a long poem, the author signed his name to the entire work, without indicating what he had borrowed.

Later the various songs concerning one hero were gathered together and the *Geste* became an epic, like the *Chanson de Roland*, or a kind of continued ballad story, hardly deserving the name of epic, like the *Geste of Robin Hood*.¹

The matter of Rome consisted largely of tales from Greek and Roman sources; and the two great cycles of these romances deal with the deeds of Alexander, a favorite hero, and the siege of Troy, with which the Britons thought they had some historic connection. To these were added a large number of tales from Oriental sources; and in the exuberant imagination of the latter we see the influence which the Saracens — those nimble wits who gave us our first modern sciences and who still reveled in the *Arabian Nights* — had begun to exercise on the literature of Europe.

To the English reader, at least, the most interesting of the romances are those which deal with the exploits of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, — the richest storehouse of romance which our literature has ever found. There were many cycles of Arthurian romances, chief of which are those of Gawain, Launcelot, Merlin, the Quest of the Holy Grail, and the Death of Arthur. In preceding sections we have seen how these fascinating romances were used by Geoffrey and the French writers, and how, through the French, they found their way into English, appearing first in our speech in Layamon's *Brut*. The point to remember is that, while the legends are Celtic in origin, their literary form is due to French poets, who originated the metrical romance. All our early English romances are either copies or translations of the French; and this is true not only of the matter of France and Rome, but of Celtic heroes like Arthur, and English heroes like Guy of Warwick and Robin Hood.

¹ An English book in which such romances were written was called a Gest or Jest Book. So also at the beginning of *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1320) we read:

Men yernen jestis for to here
And romaunce rede in diverse manere,

and then follows a summary of the great cycles of romance, which we are considering.

The most interesting of all Arthurian romances are those of the Gawain cycle,¹ and of these the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is best worth reading, for many reasons. First, though the material is taken from French sources,² the English workmanship is the finest of our early romances. Second, the unknown author of this romance probably wrote also "The Pearl," and is the greatest English poet of the Norman period. Third, the poem itself with its dramatic interest, its vivid descriptions, and its moral purity, is one of the most delightful old romances in any language.

In form *Sir Gawain* is an interesting combination of French and Saxon elements. It is written in an elaborate stanza combining meter and alliteration. At the end of each stanza is a rimed refrain, called by the French a "tail rime." We give here a brief outline of the story; but if the reader desires the poem itself, he is advised to begin with a modern version, as the original is in the West Midland dialect and is exceedingly difficult to follow.

On New Year's day, while Arthur and his knights are keeping the Yuletide feast at Camelot, a gigantic knight in green enters the banquet hall on horseback and challenges the bravest knight present to an exchange of blows; that is, he will expose his neck to a blow of his own big battle-ax, if any knight will agree to abide a blow in return. After some natural consternation and a fine speech by Arthur, Gawain accepts the challenge, takes the battle-ax, and with one blow sends the giant's head rolling through the hall. The Green Knight, who is evidently a terrible magician, picks up his head and mounts his horse. He holds out his head and the ghastly lips speak, warning Gawain to be faithful to his promise and to seek through the world till he finds the Green Chapel. There, on next New Year's day, the Green Knight will meet him and return the blow.

The second canto of the poem describes Gawain's long journey through the wilderness on his steed Gringolet, and his adventures with

¹ Tennyson goes farther than Malory in making Gawain false and irreverent. That seems to be a mistake; for in all the earliest romances Gawain is, next to Arthur, the noblest of knights, the most loved and honored of all the heroes of the Round Table.

² There were various French versions of the story; but it came originally from the Irish, where the hero was called Cuchulinn.

storm and cold, with wild beasts and monsters, as he seeks in vain for the Green Chapel. On Christmas eve, in the midst of a vast forest, he offers a prayer to "Mary, mildest mother so dear," and is rewarded by sight of a great castle. He enters, and is royally entertained by the host, an aged hero, and by his wife, who is the most beautiful woman the knight ever beheld. Gawain learns that he is at last near the Green Chapel, and settles down for a little comfort after his long quest.

The next canto shows the life in the castle, and describes a curious compact between the host, who goes hunting daily, and the knight, who remains in the castle to entertain the young wife. The compact is that at night each man shall give the other whatever good thing he obtains during the day. While the host is hunting, the young woman tries in vain to induce Gawain to make love to her, and ends by giving him a kiss. When the host returns and gives his guest the game he has killed Gawain returns the kiss. On the third day, her temptations having twice failed, the lady offers Gawain a ring, which he refuses; but when she offers a magic green girdle that will preserve the wearer from death, Gawain, who remembers the giant's ax so soon to fall on his neck, accepts the girdle as a "jewel for the jeopardy" and promises the lady to keep the gift secret. Here, then, are two conflicting compacts. When the host returns and offers his game, Gawain returns the kiss but says nothing of the green girdle.

The last canto brings our knight to the Green Chapel, after he is repeatedly warned to turn back in the face of certain death. The Chapel is a terrible place in the midst of desolation; and as Gawain approaches he hears a terrifying sound, the grating of steel on stone, where the giant is sharpening a new battle-ax. The Green Knight appears, and Gawain, true to his compact, offers his neck for the blow. Twice the ax swings harmlessly; the third time it falls on his shoulder and wounds him. Whereupon Gawain jumps for his armor, draws his sword, and warns the giant that the compact calls for only one blow, and that, if another is offered, he will defend himself.

Then the Green Knight explains things. He is lord of the castle where Gawain has been entertained for days past. The first two swings of the ax were harmless because Gawain had been true to his compact and twice returned the kiss. The last blow had wounded him because he concealed the gift of the green girdle, which belongs to the Green Knight and was woven by his wife. Moreover, the whole thing has been arranged by Morgain the fay-woman (an enemy of Queen Guinevere, who appears often in the Arthurian romances). Full of shame, Gawain throws back the gift and is ready to atone for his deception; but the Green Knight thinks he has already atoned, and presents the green girdle as a free gift. Gawain returns to Arthur's court, tells the whole

story frankly, and ever after that the knights of the Round Table wear a green girdle in his honor.¹

The Pearl. In the same manuscript with "Sir Gawain" are found three other remarkable poems, written about 1350, and known to us, in order, as "The Pearl," "Cleanness," and "Patience." The first is the most beautiful, and received its name from the translator and editor, Richard Morris, in 1864. "Patience" is a paraphrase of the book of Jonah; "Cleanness" moralizes on the basis of Bible stories; but "The Pearl" is an intensely human and realistic picture of a father's grief for his little daughter Margaret, "My precious perle wythouten spot." It is the saddest of all our early poems.

On the grave of his little one, covered over with flowers, the father pours out his love and grief till, in the summer stillness, he falls asleep, while we hear in the sunshine the drowsy hum of insects and the far-away sound of the reapers' sickles. He dreams there, and the dream grows into a vision beautiful. His body lies still upon the grave while his spirit goes to a land, exquisite beyond all words, where he comes suddenly upon a stream that he cannot cross. As he wanders along the bank, seeking in vain for a ford, a marvel rises before his eyes, a crystal cliff, and seated beneath it a little maiden who raises a happy, shining face,—the face of his little Margaret.

More then me lyste my drede aros,
I stod full styllle and dorste not calle;
Wyth yghen open and mouth ful clos,
I stod as hende as hawk in halle.

He dares not speak for fear of breaking the spell; but sweet as a lily she comes down the crystal stream's bank to meet and speak with him, and tell him of the happy life of heaven and how to live to be worthy of it. In his joy he listens, forgetting all his grief; then the heart of the man cries out for its own, and he struggles to cross the stream to join her. In the struggle the dream vanishes; he awakens to find his eyes wet and his head on the little mound that marks the spot where his heart is buried.

¹ It is often alleged that in this romance we have a very poetical foundation for the Order of the Garter, which was instituted by Edward III, in 1349; but the history of the order makes this extremely doubtful. The reader will be chiefly interested in comparing this romance with *Beowulf*, for instance, to see what new ideals have taken root in England.

From the ideals of these three poems, and from peculiarities of style and meter, it is probable that their author wrote also *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. If so, the unknown author is the one genius of the age whose poetry of itself has power to interest us, and who stands between Cynewulf and Chaucer as a worthy follower of the one and forerunner of the other.

Miscellaneous Literature of the Norman Period. It is well-nigh impossible to classify the remaining literature of this period, and very little of it is now read, except by advanced students. Those interested in the development of "transition" English will find in the *Ancren Riwele*, i.e. "Rule of the Anchoresses" (c. 1225), the most beautiful bit of old English prose ever written. It is a book of excellent religious advice and comfort, written for three ladies who wished to live a religious life, without, however, becoming nuns or entering any religious orders. The author was Bishop Poore of Salisbury, according to Morton, who first edited this old classic in 1853. Orm's *Ormulum*, written soon after the *Brut*, is a paraphrase of the gospel lessons for the year, somewhat after the manner of Cædmon's *Paraphrase*, but without any of Cædmon's poetic fire and originality. *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1320) is a very long poem which makes a kind of metrical romance out of Bible history and shows the whole dealing of God with man from Creation to Domesday. It is interesting as showing a parallel to the cycles of miracle plays, which attempt to cover the same vast ground. They were forming in this age; but we will study them later, when we try to understand the rise of the drama in England.

Besides these greater works, an enormous number of fables and satires appeared in this age, copied or translated from the French, like the metrical romances. The most famous of these are "The Owl and the Nightingale," — a long debate between the two birds, one representing the gay side of life, the other the sterner side of law and morals, — and "Land

of Cockayne," i.e. "Luxury Land," a keen satire on monks and monastic religion.¹

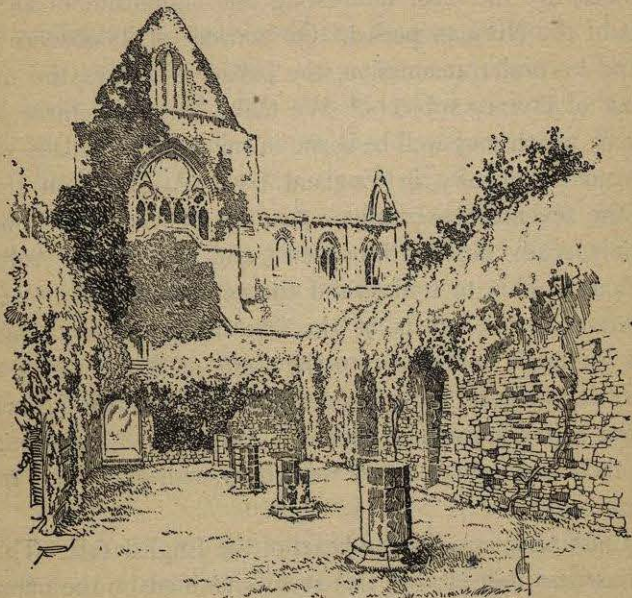
While most of the literature of the time was a copy of the French and was intended only for the upper classes, here and there were singers who made ballads for the common people; and these, next to the metrical romances, are the most interesting and significant of all the works of the Norman period. On account of its obscure origin and its oral transmission, the ballad is always the most difficult of literary subjects.² We make here only three suggestions, which may well be borne in mind: that ballads were produced continually in England from Anglo-Saxon times until the seventeenth century; that for centuries they were the only really popular literature; and that in the ballads alone one is able to understand the common people. Read, for instance, the ballads of the "merrie greenwood men," which gradually collected into the *Geste of Robin Hood*, and you will understand better, perhaps, than from reading many histories what the common people of England felt and thought while their lords and masters were busy with impossible metrical romances.

In these songs speaks the heart of the English folk. There is lawlessness indeed; but this seems justified by the oppression of the times and by the barbarous severity of the game laws. An intense hatred of shams and injustice lurks in every song; but the hatred is saved from bitterness by the humor with which captives, especially rich churchmen, are solemnly lectured by the bandits, while they squirm at sight of devilish

¹ Originally Cockayne (variously spelled) was intended to ridicule the mythical country of Avalon, somewhat as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* later ridicules the romances of chivalry. In Luxury Land everything was good to eat; houses were built of dainties and shingled with cakes; buttered larks fell instead of rain; the streams ran with good wine; and roast geese passed slowly down the streets, turning themselves as they went.

² Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* is the most scholarly and complete collection in our language. Gummere's *Old English Ballads* is a good short work. Professor Kittredge's Introduction to the Cambridge edition of Child's *Ballads* is the best summary of a very difficult subject. For an extended discussion of the literary character of the ballad, see Gummere's *The Popular Ballad*.

tortures prepared before their eyes in order to make them give up their golden purses; and the scene generally ends in a bit of wild horse-play. There is fighting enough, and ambush and sudden death lurk at every turn of the lonely roads; but there is also a rough, honest chivalry for women, and a generous sharing of plunder with the poor and needy. All literature



REMAINS OF THE SCRIPTORIUM OF FOUNTAINS ABBEY

(Fourteenth century)

is but a dream expressed, and "Robin Hood" is the dream of an ignorant and oppressed but essentially noble people, struggling and determined to be free.

Far more poetical than the ballads, and more interesting even than the romances, are the little lyrics of the period, — those tears and smiles of long ago that crystallized into poems, to tell us that the hearts of men are alike in all ages. Of these, the best known are the "Luv Ron" (love rune or letter) of Thomas de Hales (c. 1250);

Lyrics

"Springtime" (c. 1300), beginning "Lenten (spring) ys come with luv to toun"; and the melodious love song "Alysoun," written at the end of the thirteenth century by some unknown poet who heralds the coming of Chaucer:

Bytuene Mersh and Averil,
 When spray biginneth to springe
 The lutel foul¹ hath hire wyl
 On hyre lud² to syng.
 Ich libbe³ in love longinge
 For semlokest⁴ of all thinge.
 She may me blisse bringe;
 Icham⁵ in hire baundoun.⁶
 An hendy hap ichabbe yhent,⁷
 Ichot⁸ from hevne it is me sent,
 From alle wymmen mi love is lent⁹
 And lyht¹⁰ on Alysoun.

Summary of the Norman Period. The Normans were originally a hardy race of sea rovers inhabiting Scandinavia. In the tenth century they conquered a part of northern France, which is still called Normandy, and rapidly adopted French civilization and the French language. Their conquest of Anglo-Saxon England under William, Duke of Normandy, began with the battle of Hastings in 1066. The literature which they brought to England is remarkable for its bright, romantic tales of love and adventure, in marked contrast with the strength and somberness of Anglo-Saxon poetry. During the three centuries following Hastings, Normans and Saxons gradually united. The Anglo-Saxon speech simplified itself by dropping most of its Teutonic inflections, absorbed eventually a large part of the French vocabulary, and became our English language. English literature is also a combination of French and Saxon elements. The three chief effects of the conquest were (1) the bringing of Roman civilization to England; (2) the growth of nationality, i.e. a strong centralized government, instead of the loose union of Saxon tribes; (3) the new language and literature, which were proclaimed in Chaucer.

At first the new literature was remarkably varied, but of small intrinsic worth; and very little of it is now read. In our study we have noted: (1) Geoffrey's History, which is valuable as a source book of literature, since it contains the native Celtic legends of Arthur. (2) The work of the French writers, who made the Arthurian legends popular. (3) Riming Chronicles, i.e. history in doggerel verse, like Layamon's *Brut*. (4) Metrical Romances, or tales in verse. These were numerous, and of four classes: (a) the Matter of France, tales centering about Charlemagne and his peers, chief of which is

¹ little bird. ² in her language. ³ I live. ⁴ fairest. ⁵ I am. ⁶ power, bondage.
⁷ a pleasant fate I have attained. ⁸ I know. ⁹ gone. ¹⁰ lit, alighted.

the Chanson de Roland; (b) Matter of Greece and Rome, an endless series of fabulous tales about Alexander, and about the Fall of Troy; (c) Matter of England, stories of Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwick, Robin Hood, etc.; (d) Matter of Britain, tales having for their heroes Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. The best of these romances is Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. (5) Miscellaneous literature, — the Ancren Riwele, our best piece of early English prose; Orm's Ormulum; Cursor Mundi, with its suggestive parallel to the Miracle plays; and ballads, like King Horn and the Robin Hood songs, which were the only poetry of the common people.

Selections for Reading. For advanced students, and as a study of language, a few selections as given in Manly's English Poetry and in Manly's English Prose; or selections from the Ormulum, Brut, Ancren Riwele, and King Horn, etc., in Morris and Skeat's Specimens of Early English. The ordinary student will get a better idea of the literature of the period by using the following: Sir Gawain, modernized by J. L. Weston, in Arthurian Romances Series (Nutt); The Nun's Rule (Ancren Riwele), modern version by J. Morton, in King's Classics; Aucassin and Nicolette, translated by A. Lang (Crowell & Co.); Tristan and Iseult, in Arthurian Romances; Evans's The High History of the Holy Grail, in Temple Classics; The Pearl, Osgood's prose version in Belles Lettres Series, or Jewett's excellent metrical version (Crowell & Co.); The Song of Roland, in King's Classics, and in Riverside Literature Series; Evans's translation of Geoffrey's History, in Temple Classics; Guest's The Mabinogion, in Everyman's Library, or S. Lanier's Boy's Mabinogion (i.e. Welsh fairy tales and romances); Selected Ballads, in Athenæum Press Series, and in Pocket Classics; Gayley and Flaherty's Poetry of the People; Bates's A Ballad Book.

Bibliography.¹ *History.* Text-book, Montgomery, pp. 58-86, or Cheyney, pp. 88-144. For fuller treatment, Green, ch. 2; Traill; Gardiner, etc. Jewett's Story of the Normans (Stories of the Nations Series); Freeman's Short History of the Norman Conquest; Hutton's King and Baronage (Oxford Manuals of English History).

Literature. General Works. Jusserand; Ten Brink; Mitchell, vol. 1, From Celt to Tudor; The Cambridge History of English Literature.

Special Works. Schofield's English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer; Lewis's Beginnings of English Literature; Ker's Epic and Romance; Saintsbury's The Flourishing of Romance and the Rise of Allegory; Newell's King Arthur and the Round Table; Maynadier, The Arthur of the English Poets; Rhys's Studies in the Arthurian Legends.

Ballads. Child's English and Scottish Popular Ballads; Gummere's Old English Ballads (one volume); Hazlitt's Early Popular Poetry of England; Gayley and Flaherty's Poetry of the People; Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, in Everyman's Library.

Texts, Translations, etc. Morris and Skeat's Specimens of Early English; Morris's Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, in Early English Text Series.

¹ For titles and publishers of reference books see General Bibliography at the end of this book.

Madden's Layamon's Brut, text and translation (a standard work, but rare); The Pearl, text and translation, by Gollancz; the same poem, prose version, by Osgood, metrical versions by Jewett, Weir Mitchell, and Mead; Geoffrey's History, translation, in Giles's Six Old English Chronicles (Bohn's Antiquarian Library); Morley's Early English Prose Romances; Joyce's Old Celtic Romances; Guest's The Mabinogion; Lanier's Boy's Mabinogion; Arthurian Romances Series (translations). The Belles Lettres Series, sec. 2 (announced), will contain the texts of a large number of works of this period, with notes and introductions.

Language. Marsh's Lectures on the English Language; Bradley's Making of English; Lounsbury's History of the English Language; Emerson's Brief History of the English Language; Greenough and Kittredge's Words and their Ways in English Speech; Welsh's Development of English Literature and Language.

Suggestive Questions. 1. What did the Northmen originally have in common with the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes? What brought about the remarkable change from Northmen to Normans? Tell briefly the story of the Norman Conquest. How did the Conquest affect the life and literature of England?

2. What types of literature were produced after the Conquest? How do they compare with Anglo-Saxon literature? What works of this period are considered worthy of a permanent place in our literature?

3. What is meant by the Riming Chronicles? What part did they play in developing the idea of nationality? What led historians of this period to write in verse? Describe Geoffrey's History. What was its most valuable element from the view point of literature?

4. What is Layamon's *Brut*? Why did Layamon choose this name for his Chronicle? What special literary interest attaches to the poem?

5. What were the Metrical Romances? What reasons led to the great interest in three classes of romances, i.e. Matters of France, Rome, and Britain? What new and important element enters our literature in this type? Read one of the Metrical Romances in English and comment freely upon it, as to interest, structure, ideas, and literary quality.

6. Tell the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. What French and what Saxon elements are found in the poem? Compare it with *Beowulf* to show the points of inferiority and superiority. Compare Beowulf's fight with Grendel or the Fire Drake and Sir Gawain's encounter with the Green Knight, having in mind (1) the virtues of the hero, (2) the qualities of the enemy, (3) the methods of warfare, (4) the purpose of the struggle. Read selections from *The Pearl* and compare with *Deor's Lament*. What are the personal and the universal interests in each poem?

7. Tell some typical story from the Mabinogion. Where did the Arthurian legends originate, and how did they become known to English readers? What modern writers have used these legends? What fine elements do you find in them that are not found in Anglo-Saxon poetry?

8. What part did Arthur play in the early history of Britain? How long did the struggle between Britons and Saxons last? What Celtic names and elements entered into English language and literature?

9. What is a ballad, and what distinguishes it from other forms of poetry? Describe the ballad which you like best. Why did the ballad, more than any other form of literature, appeal to the common people? What modern poems suggest the old popular ballad? How do these compare in form and subject matter with the Robin Hood ballads?

CHRONOLOGY

HISTORY	LITERATURE
912. Northmen settle in Normandy	
1066. Battle of Hastings. William, king of England	1086. Domesday Book completed
1087. William Rufus	
1093. Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury	1094(<i>cir.</i>). Anselm's <i>Cur Deus Homo</i>
1096. First Crusade	
1100. Henry I	1110. First recorded Miracle play in England (see chapter on the Drama)
1135. Stephen	1137(<i>cir.</i>). Geoffrey's <i>History</i>
1147. Second Crusade	
1154. Henry II	
1189. Richard I. Third Crusade	
1199. John	1200(<i>cir.</i>). Layamon's <i>Brut</i>
1215. Magna Charta	
1216. Henry III	1225(<i>cir.</i>). Ancren <i>Riwle</i>
1230(<i>cir.</i>). University of Cambridge chartered	
1265. Beginning of House of Commons. Simon de Montfort	1267. Roger Bacon's <i>Opus Majus</i>
1272. Edward I	
1295. First complete Parliament	1300-1400. York and Wakefield Miracle plays
1307. Edward II	1320(<i>cir.</i>). <i>Cursor Mundi</i>
1327. Edward III	
1338. Beginning of Hundred Years' War with France	1340(?). Birth of Chaucer 1350(<i>cir.</i>). <i>Sir Gawain. The Pearl</i>

CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF CHAUCER

THE NEW NATIONAL LIFE AND LITERATURE

History of the Period. Two great movements may be noted in the complex life of England during the fourteenth century. The first is political, and culminates in the reign of Edward III. It shows the growth of the English national spirit following the victories of Edward and the Black Prince on French soil, during the Hundred Years' War. In the rush of this great national movement, separating England from the political ties of France and, to a less degree, from ecclesiastical bondage to Rome, the mutual distrust and jealousy which had divided nobles and commons were momentarily swept aside by a wave of patriotic enthusiasm. The French language lost its official prestige, and English became the speech not only of the common people but of courts and Parliament as well.

The second movement is social; it falls largely within the reign of Edward's successor, Richard II, and marks the growing discontent with the contrast between luxury and poverty, between the idle wealthy classes and the overtaxed peasants. Sometimes this movement is quiet and strong, as when Wyclif arouses the conscience of England; again it has the portentous rumble of an approaching tempest, as when John Ball harangues a multitude of discontented peasants on Black Heath commons, using the famous text:

When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?

and again it breaks out into the violent rebellion of Wat Tyler. All these things show the same Saxon spirit that had won its freedom in a thousand years' struggle against foreign enemies, and that now felt itself oppressed by a social and industrial tyranny in its own midst.

Aside from these two movements, the age was one of unusual stir and progress. Chivalry, that mediæval institution of mixed good and evil, was in its Indian summer, — a sentiment rather than a practical system. Trade, and its resultant wealth and luxury, were increasing