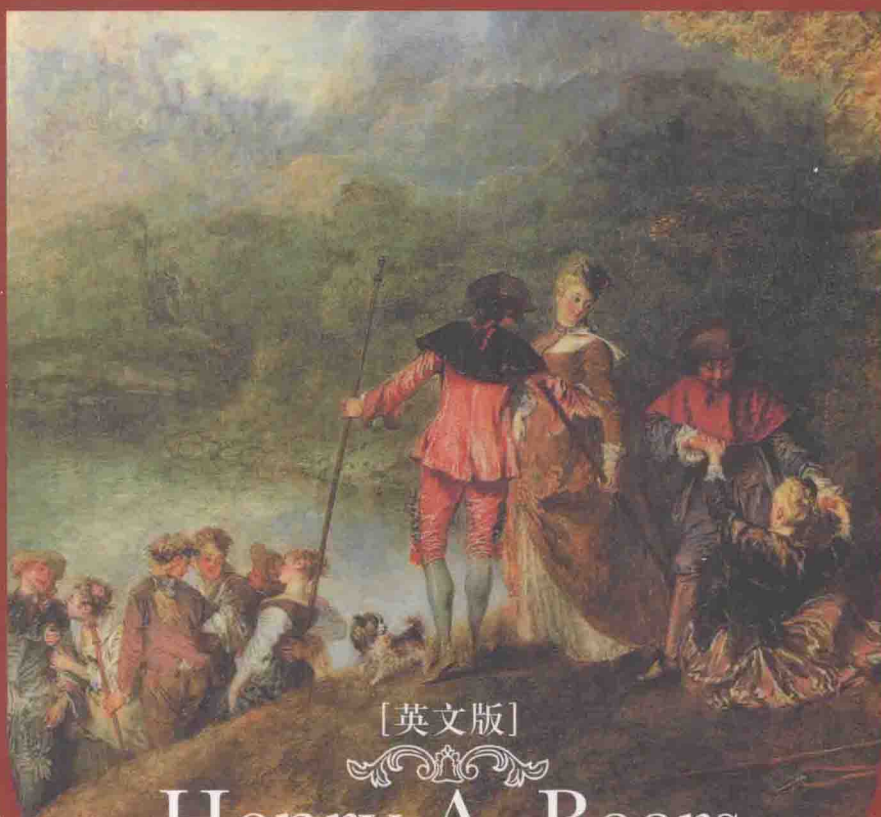


耶鲁大学著名文学教授 Henry A. Beers 编写的文学简史

# BRIEF HISTORY OF English and American Literature

## 美国学生文学简史



[英文版]

Henry A. Beers

[美] 亨利·A·比尔斯 / 著

天津出版传媒集团

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

美国学生文学简史: 英文/(美) 比尔斯著. —天津: 天津人民出版社,  
2013.9

ISBN 978-7-201-08342-1

I. ①美… II. ①比… III. ①文学史—美国—高等学校—教学参考资料—  
英文 IV. ①I712.09

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2013)第202195号

天津出版传媒集团

天津人民出版社出版、发行

出版人: 黄沛

(天津市西康路35号 邮政编码: 300051)

网址: <http://www.tjrmcbs.com>

电子邮箱: [tjrmcbs@126.com](mailto:tjrmcbs@126.com)

北京建泰印刷有限公司

2013年9月第1版 2013年9月第1次印刷

710×1000毫米 16开本 20印张 字数: 400千字

定 价: 45.00元

## INTRODUCTION

At the request of the publishers the undersigned has prepared this Introduction and two Supplementary Chapters on the Religious and Theological Literature of Great Britain and the United States. To the preacher in his preparation for the pulpit, and also to the general reader and student of religious history, the pursuit of the study of literature is a necessity. The sermon itself is a part of literature, must have its literary finish and proportions, and should give ample proof of a familiarity with the masterpieces of the English tongue.

The world of letters presents to even the casual reader a rich and varied profusion of fascinating and luscious fruit. But to the earnest student who explores with thorough research and sympathetic mind the intellectual products of countries and times other than his own, the infinite variety, so strikingly apparent to the superficial observer, resolves itself into a beautiful and harmonious unity. Literature is the record of the struggles and aspirations of man in the boundless universe of thought. As in physics the correlation and conservation of force bind all the material sciences together into one, so in the world of intellect all the diverse departments of mental life and action find their common bond in literature. Even the signs and formulas of the mathematician and the chemist are but abbreviated forms of writing—the stenography of those exact sciences. The simple chronicles of the annalist, the flowing verses of the poet, clothing his thought with winged words, the abstruse propositions of the philosopher, the smiting protests of the bold reformer, either in Church or State, the impassioned appeal of the advocate at the bar of justice, the argument of the legislator on behalf of his measures, the very cry of inarticulate pain of those who suffer under the oppression of cruelty, all have their literature.

The minister of the Gospel, whose mission is to man in his highest and holiest relations, must know the best that human thought has produced if he would successfully reach and influence the thoughtful and inquiring. Perhaps our best service here will be to suggest a method of pursuing a course of study in literature, both English and American. The following work of Professor Beers touches but lightly and scarcely more than opens these broad and inviting fields, which are ever growing richer and more fascinating. While man continues to think he will weave the fabric of the mental loom into infinitely varied and beautiful designs.

In the general outlines of a plan of literary study which is to cover the entire history of English and American literature, the following directions, it is hoped, will be of value.

1. Fix the great landmarks, the general periods—each marked by some towering leader, around whom other contemporary writers may be grouped. In Great Britain the several and successive periods might thus be well designated by such authors as Geoffrey Chaucer or John Wiclif, Thomas More or Henry Howard, Edmund Spenser or Sir Walter Raleigh, William Shakspeare or Francis Bacon, John Milton or Jeremy Taylor, John Dryden or John Locke, Joseph Addison or Joseph Butler, Samuel Johnson or Oliver Goldsmith, William Cowper or John Wesley, Walter Scott or Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth or Thomas Chalmers, Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Carlyle, or William Makepeace Thackeray.

A similar list for American literature would place as leaders in letters: Thomas Hooker or Thomas Shepard, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, Philip Freneau, Noah Webster or James Kent, James Fenimore Cooper or Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson or Edward Everett, Joseph Addison Alexander or William Ellery Channing, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, or Nathaniel Hawthorne.

2. The prosecution of the study might be carried on in one or more of several ways, according either to the purpose in view or the tastes of the student. Attention might profitably be concentrated on the literature of a given period and worked out in detail by taking up individual authors, or by classifying all the writers of the period on the basis of the character of their writings, such as poetry, history, belles-lettres, theology, essays, and the like.

3. Again, the literature of a period might be studied with reference to its influence on the religious, commercial, political, or social life of the people among whom it has circulated; or as the result of certain forces which have preceded its production. It is well worth the time and effort to trace the influence of one author upon another or many others, who, while maintaining their individuality, have been either in style or method of production unconsciously molded by their confrères of the pen. The divisions of writers may, again, be made with reference to their opinions and associations in the different departments of life where they have wrought their active labors, such as in politics, religion, moral reform, or educational questions.

The influence of the great writers in the languages of the Continent upon the literature of England and America affords another theme of absorbing interest, and has its peculiarly good results in bringing the student into close brotherhood with the fruitful and cultured minds of every land. In fact, the possible applications of the study of literature are so many and varied that the ingenuity of any earnest student may devise such as the exigencies of his own work may require.

JOHN F. HURST,

Washington.

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## CHAPTER 1



### FROM THE CONQUEST TO CHAUCER

1066 ~ 1400.

The Norman conquest of England, in the 11th century, made a break in the natural growth of the English language and literature. The old English or Anglo-Saxon had been a purely Germanic speech, with a complicated grammar and a full set of inflections. For three hundred years following the battle of Hastings this native tongue was driven from the king's court and the courts of law, from parliament, school, and university. During all this time there were two languages spoken in England. Norman French was the birth-tongue of the upper classes and English of the lower. When the latter finally got the better in the struggle, and became, about the middle of the 14th century, the national speech of all England, it was no longer the English of King Alfred. It was a new language, a grammarless tongue, almost wholly stripped of its inflections. It had lost a half of its old words, and had filled their places with French equivalents. The Norman lawyers had introduced legal terms; the ladies and courtiers, words of dress and courtesy. The knight had imported the vocabulary of war and of the chase. The master-builders of the Norman castles and cathedrals contributed technical expressions proper to the architect and the mason. The art of cooking was French. The naming of the living animals, ox, swine, sheep, deer, was left to the Saxon churl who had the herding of them, while the dressed meats, beef, pork, mutton, venison, received their baptism from the table-talk of his Norman master. The four orders of begging friars, and especially the Franciscans or Gray Friars, introduced into England in 1224, became intermediaries between the high and the low. They went about preaching to the poor, and in their sermons they intermingled French with English. In their hands, too, was almost all the science of the day; their medicine, botany, and astronomy displaced the old nomenclature of leechdom, wort-cunning, and star-craft. And, finally, the translators of French poems often found it easier to transfer a foreign word bodily than to seek out a native synonym, particularly



when the former supplied them with a rhyme. But the innovation reached even to the commonest words in every-day use, so that voice drove out steven, poor drove out earm, and color, use, and place made good their footing beside hue, wont, and stead. A great part of the English words that were left were so changed in spelling and pronunciation as to be practically new. Chaucer stands, in date, midway between King Alfred and Alfred Tennyson, but his English differs vastly more from the former's than from the latter's. To Chaucer Anglo-Saxon was as much a dead language as it is to us.

The classical Anglo-Saxon, moreover, had been the Wessex dialect, spoken and written at Alfred's capital, Winchester. When the French had displaced this as the language of culture, there was no longer a "king's English" or any literary standard. The sources of modern standard English are to be found in the East Midland, spoken in Lincoln, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge, and neighboring shires. Here the old Anglian had been corrupted by the Danish settlers, and rapidly threw off its inflections when it became a spoken and no longer a written language, after the Conquest. The West Saxon, clinging more tenaciously to ancient forms, sunk into the position of a local dialect; while the East Midland, spreading to London, Oxford, and Cambridge, became the literary English in which Chaucer wrote.

The Normans brought in also new intellectual influences and new forms of literature. They were a cosmopolitan people, and they connected England with the continent. Lanfranc and Anselm, the first two Norman archbishops of Canterbury, were learned and splendid prelates of a type quite unknown to the Anglo-Saxons. They introduced the scholastic philosophy taught at the University of Paris, and the reformed discipline of the Norman abbeys. They bound the English Church more closely to Rome, and officered it with Normans. English bishops were deprived of their sees for illiteracy, and French abbots were set over monasteries of Saxon monks. Down to the middle of the 14th century the learned literature of England was mostly in Latin, and the polite literature in French. English did not at any time altogether cease to be a written language, but the extant remains of the period from 1066 to 1200 are few and, with one exception, unimportant. After 1200 English came more and more into written use, but mainly in translations, paraphrases, and imitations of French works. The native genius was at school, and followed awkwardly the copy set by its master.

The Anglo-Saxon poetry, for example, had been rhythmical and alliterative. It was commonly written in lines containing four rhythmical accents and with three of the accented syllables alliterating.

*R\_este hine thâr\_ûm-heort; r\_éced hlifade  
G\_eáp and g\_óld-fâh, gäst inne swäf.*

Rested him then the great-hearted; the hall towered  
Roomy and gold-bright, the guest slept within.

This rude energetic verse the Saxon *scôp* had sung to his harp or *glee-beam*, dwelling on the emphatic syllables, passing swiftly over the others which were of undetermined number and position in the line. It was now displaced by the smooth metrical verse with rhymed endings, which the French introduced and which our modern poets use, a verse fitted to be recited rather than sung. The old English alliterative verse continued, indeed, in occasional use to the 16th century. But it was linked to a forgotten literature and an obsolete dialect, and was doomed to give way. Chaucer lent his great authority to the more modern verse system, and his own literary models and inspirers were all foreign, French or Italian. Literature in England began to be once more English and truly national in the hands of Chaucer and his contemporaries, but it was the literature of a nation cut off from its own past by three centuries of foreign rule.

The most noteworthy English document of the 11th and 12th centuries was the continuation of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle. Copies of these annals, differing somewhat among themselves, had been kept at the monasteries in Winchester, Abingdon, Worcester, and elsewhere. The yearly entries were mostly brief, dry records of passing events, though occasionally they become full and animated. The fen country of Cambridge and Lincolnshire was a region of monasteries. Here were the great abbeys of Peterborough and Croyland and Ely minster. One of the earliest English songs tells how the savage heart of the Danish king Cnut was softened by the singing of the monks in Ely.

Merie sungen muneches binnen Ely  
Tha Cnut chyning reu ther by;  
Roweth, cnihtes, noer the land,  
And here we thes muneches sang.

It was among the dikes and marshes of this fen country that the bold outlaw Hereward, "the last of the English," held out for some years against the conqueror. And it was here, in the rich abbey of Burch or Peterborough, the ancient Medeshamstede (meadow-homestead) that the chronicle was continued for nearly a century after the Conquest, breaking off abruptly in 1154, the date of King Stephen's death. Peterborough had received a new Norman abbot, Turolde, "a very stern man," and the entry in the chronicle for 1170 tells how Hereward and his gang, with his Danish backers, thereupon plundered the abbey of its treasures, which were first removed to Ely, and then carried off by

the Danish fleet and sunk, lost, or squandered. The English in the later portions of this Peterborough chronicle becomes gradually more modern, and falls away more and more from the strict grammatical standards of the classical Anglo-Saxon. It is a most valuable historical monument, and some passages of it are written with great vividness, notably the sketch of William the Conqueror put down in the year of his death (1086) by one who had “looked upon him and at another time dwelt in his court.” “He who was before a rich king, and lord of many a land, he had not then of all his land but a piece of seven feet. . . Likewise he was a very stark man and a terrible, so that one durst do nothing against his will. . . Among other things is not to be forgotten the good peace that he made in this land, so that a man might fare over his kingdom with his bosom full of gold unhurt. He set up a great deer preserve, and he laid laws therewith that whoso should slay hart or hind, he should be blinded. As greatly did he love the tall deer as if he were their father.”

With the discontinuance of the Peterborough annals, English history written in English prose ceased for three hundred years. The thread of the nation's story was kept up in Latin chronicles, compiled by writers partly of English and partly of Norman descent. The earliest of these, such as Ordericus Vitalis, Simeon of Durham, Henry of Huntingdon, and William of Malmesbury, were contemporary with the later entries of the Saxon chronicle. The last of them, Matthew of Westminster, finished his work in 1273. About 1300 Robert, a monk of Gloucester, composed a chronicle in English verse, following in the main the authority of the Latin chronicles, and he was succeeded by other rhyming chroniclers in the 14th century. In the hands of these the true history of the Saxon times was overlaid with an ever-increasing mass of fable and legend. All real knowledge of the period dwindled away until in Capgrave's *Chronicle of England*, written in prose in 1463-64, hardly any thing of it is left. In history as in literature the English had forgotten their past, and had turned to foreign sources. It is noteworthy that Shakspeare, who borrowed his subjects and his heroes sometimes from authentic English history, sometimes from the legendary history of ancient Britain, Denmark, and Scotland, as in *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, ignores the Saxon period altogether. And Spenser, who gives in his second book of the *Faerie Queene*, a *resumé* of the reigns of fabulous British kings—the supposed ancestors of Queen Elizabeth, his royal patron—has nothing to say of the real kings of early England. So completely had the true record faded away that it made no appeal to the imaginations of our most patriotic poets. The Saxon Alfred had been dethroned by the British Arthur, and the conquered Welsh had imposed their fictitious genealogies

upon the dynasty of the conquerors. In the *Roman de Rou*, a verse chronicle of the dukes of Normandy, written by the Norman Wace, it is related that at the battle of Hastings the French *jongleur*, Taillefer, spurred out before the van of William's army, tossing his lance in the air and chanting of "Charlemagne and of Roland, of Oliver and the peers who died at Roncesvals." This incident is prophetic of the victory which Norman song, no less than Norman arms, was to win over England. The lines which Taillefer sang were from the *Chanson de Roland*, the oldest and best of the French hero sagas. The heathen Northmen, who had ravaged the coasts of France in the 10th century, had become in the course of one hundred and fifty years, completely identified with the French. They had accepted Christianity, intermarried with the native women, and forgotten their own Norse tongue. The race thus formed was the most brilliant in Europe. The warlike, adventurous spirit of the vikings mingled in its blood with the French nimbleness of wit and fondness for display. The Normans were a nation of knights-errant, with a passion for prowess and for courtesy. Their architecture was at once strong and graceful. Their women were skilled in embroidery, a splendid sample of which is preserved in the famous Bayeux tapestry, in which the conqueror's wife, Matilda, and the ladies of her court wrought the history of the Conquest.

This national taste for decoration expressed itself not only in the ceremonious pomp of feast and chase and tourney, but likewise in literature. The most characteristic contribution of the Normans to English poetry were the metrical romances or chivalry tales. These were sung or recited by the minstrels, who were among the retainers of every great feudal baron, or by the *jongleurs*, who wandered from court to castle. There is a whole literature of these *romans d'aventure* in the Anglo-Norman dialect of French. Many of them are very long—often thirty, forty, or fifty thousand lines—written sometimes in a strophic form, sometimes in long Alexandrines, but commonly in the short, eight-syllabled rhyming couplet. Numbers of them were turned into English verse in the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries. The translations were usually inferior to the originals. The French *trouvere* (finder or poet) told his story in a straight-forward, prosaic fashion, omitting no details in the action and unrolling endless descriptions of dresses, trappings, gardens, etc. He invented plots and situations full of fine possibilities by which later poets have profited, but his own handling of them was feeble and prolix. Yet there was a simplicity about the old French language and a certain elegance and delicacy in the diction of the *trouveres* which the rude, unformed English failed to catch.

The heroes of these romances were of various climes: Guy of Warwick,

and Richard the Lion Heart of England, Havelok the Dane, Sir Troilus of Troy, Charlemagne, and Alexander. But, strangely enough, the favorite hero of English romance was that mythical Arthur of Britain, whom Welsh legend had celebrated as the most formidable enemy of the Sassenach invaders and their victor in twelve great battles. The language and literature of the ancient Cymry or Welsh had made no impression on their Anglo-Saxon conquerors. There are a few Welsh borrowings in the English speech, such as *bard* and *druid*; but in the old Anglo-Saxon literature there are no more traces of British song and story than if the two races had been sundered by the ocean instead of being borderers for over six hundred years. But the Welsh had their own national traditions, and after the Norman Conquest these were set free from the isolation of their Celtic tongue and, in an indirect form, entered into the general literature of Europe. The French came into contact with the old British literature in two places: in the Welsh marches in England and in the province of Brittany in France, where the population is of Cymric race and spoke, and still to some extent speaks, a Cymric dialect akin to the Welsh.

About 1140 Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Benedictine monk, seemingly of Welsh descent, who lived at the court of Henry the First and became afterward bishop of St. Asaph, produced in Latin a so-called *Historia Britonum* in which it was told how Brutus, the great grandson of Aeneas, came to Britain, and founded there his kingdom called after him, and his city of New Troy (Troynovant) on the site of the later London. An air of historic gravity was given to this tissue of Welsh legends by an exact chronology and the genealogy of the British kings, and the author referred, as his authority, to an imaginary Welsh book given him, as he said, by a certain Walter, archdeacon of Oxford. Here appeared that line of fabulous British princes which has become so familiar to modern readers in the plays of Shakspeare and the poems of Tennyson: Lear and his three daughters; Cymbeline, Gorboduc, the subject of the earliest regular English tragedy, composed by Sackville and acted in 1562; Locrine and his Queen Gwendolen, and his daughter Sabrina, who gave her name to the river Severn, was made immortal by an exquisite song in Milton's *Comus*, and became the heroine of the tragedy of Locrine, once attributed to Shakspeare; and above all, Arthur, the son of Uther Pendragon, and the founder of the Table Round. In 1155 Wace, the author of the *Roman de Rou*, turned Geoffrey's work into a French poem entitled *Brut d'Angleterre*, "brut" being a Welsh word meaning chronicle. About the year 1200 Wace's poem was Englished by Layamon, a priest of Arley Regis, on the border stream of Severn. Layamon's *Brut* is in thirty thousand lines, partly alliterative and partly rhymed, but written in pure

Saxon English with hardly any French words. The style is rude but vigorous, and, at times, highly imaginative. Wace had amplified Geoffrey's chronicle somewhat, but Layamon made much larger additions, derived, no doubt, from legends current on the Welsh border. In particular the story of Arthur grew in his hands into something like fullness. He tells of the enchantments of Merlin, the wizard; of the unfaithfulness of Arthur's queen, Guenever; and the treachery of his nephew, Modred. His narration of the last great battle between Arthur and Modred; of the wounding of the king—"fifteen fiendly wounds he had, one might in the least three gloves thrust—"; and of the little boat with "two women therein, wonderly dight," which came to bear him away to Avalun and the Queen Argante, "sheenest of all elves," whence he shall come again, according to Merlin's prophecy, to rule the Britons; all this left little, in essentials, for Tennyson to add in his *Death of Arthur*. This new material for fiction was eagerly seized upon by the Norman romancers. The story of Arthur drew to itself other stories which were afloat. Walter Map, a gentleman of the Court of Henry II., in two French prose romances, connected with it the church legend of the Sangreal, or holy cup, from which Christ had drunk at his last supper, and which Joseph of Arimathea had afterward brought to England. Then it miraculously disappeared and became thenceforth the occasion of knightly quest, the mystic symbol of the object of the soul's desire, an adventure only to be achieved by the maiden knight, Galahad, the son of the great Launcelot, who in the romances had taken the place of Modred in Geoffrey's history, as the paramour of Queen Guenever. In like manner the love-story of Tristan and Isolde was joined by other romancers to the Arthur-Saga. This came probably from Brittany or Cornwall. Thus there grew up a great epic cycle of Arthurian romance, with a fixed shape and a unity and vitality which have prolonged it to our own day and rendered it capable of a deeper and more spiritual treatment and a more artistic handling by such modern English poets as Tennyson in his *Idyls of the King*, by Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, and many others. There were innumerable Arthur romances in prose and verse, in Anglo-Norman and continental French dialects, in English, in German, and in other tongues. But the final form which the Saga took in mediaeval England was the prose *Morte Dartur* of Sir Thomas Malory, composed at the close of the 15th century. This was a digest of the earlier romances and is Tennyson's main authority.

Beside the literature of the knight was the literature of the cloister. There is a considerable body of religious writing in early English, consisting of homilies in prose and verse, books of devotion, like the *Ancren Riwe* (Rule of Anchoresses), 1225; the *Ayenbite of Inwyte* (Remorse of Conscience), 1340,



both in prose; the *Handlyng Sinne*, 1303; the *Cursor Mundi*, 1320; and the *Pricke of Conscience*, 1340, in verse; metrical renderings of the Psalter, the Pater Noster, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, the Gospels for the Day, such as the *Ormulum*, or Book of Orm, 1205; legends and miracles of saints; poems in praise of virginity, on the contempt of the world, on the five joys of the Virgin, the five wounds of Christ, the eleven pains of hell, the seven deadly sins, the fifteen tokens of the coming judgment, and dialogues between the soul and the body. These were the work not only of the monks, but also of the begging friars, and in smaller part of the secular or parish clergy. They are full of the ascetic piety and superstition of the Middle Age, the childish belief in the marvelous, the allegorical interpretation of Scripture texts, the grotesque material horrors of hell with its grisly fiends, the vileness of the human body and the loathsome details of its corruption after death. Now and then a single poem rises above the tedious and hideous barbarism of the general level of this monkish literature, either from a more intensely personal feeling in the poet, or from an occasional grace or beauty in his verse. A poem so distinguished is, for example, *A Luve Ron* (A Love Counsel) by the Minorite friar, Thomas de Hales, one stanza of which recalls the French poet Villon's *Balade of Dead Ladies*, with its refrain.

"Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?"

"Where are the snows of yester year?

Where is Paris and Heleyne

That weren so bright and fair of blee<sup>①</sup>

Amadas, Tristan, and Idéyne

Yseudë and allë the,<sup>②</sup>

Hector with his sharpë main,

And Caesar rich in worldës fee?

They beth yglichen out of the reign<sup>③</sup>

As the shaft is of the dee."<sup>④</sup>

A few early English poems on secular subjects are also worthy of mention, among others, *The Owl* and the *Nightingale*, generally assigned to the reign of Henry III. (1216-1272), an *Estrif*, or dispute, in which the owl represents the ascetic and the nightingale the aesthetic view of life. The debate is conducted with much animation and a spirited use of proverbial wisdom. *The Land of Cokaygne* is an amusing little poem of some two hundred lines, belonging

① Hue.

② Those.

③ Realm.

④ Bowstring.

to the class of *fabliaux*, short humorous tales or satirical pieces in verse. It describes a lubber-land, or fool's paradise, where the geese fly down all roasted on the spit, bringing garlic in the bills for their dressing, and where there is a nunnery upon a river of sweet milk, and an abbey of white monks and gray, whose walls, like the hall of little King Pepin, are "of pie-crust and pastry crust," with flouren cakes for the shingles and fat puddings for the pins.

There are a few songs dating from about 1300, and mostly found in a single collection (Harl, MS., 2253), which are almost the only English verse before Chaucer that has any sweetness to a modern ear. They are written in French strophic forms in the southern dialect, and sometimes have an intermixture of French and Latin lines. They are musical, fresh, simple, and many of them very pretty. They celebrate the gladness of spring with its cuckoos and throstle-cocks, its daisies and woodruff.

"When the nightingale sings the woodës waxen green

Leaf and grass and blossom spring in Averil, I ween,

And love is to my hertë gone with a spear so keen,

Night and day my blood it drinks my hertë. doth me tene."<sup>①</sup>

Others are love complaints to "Alysoun" or some other lady whose "name is in a note of the nightingale;" whose eyes are as gray as glass, and her skin as "red as rose on ris."<sup>②</sup> Some employ a burden or refrain.

"Blow, northern wind,

Blow thou me, my sweeting.

Blow, northern wind, blow, blow, blow!"

Others are touched with a light melancholy at the coming of winter.

"Winter wakeneth all my care

Now these leavës waxeth bare.

Oft I sigh and mournë sare

When it cometh in my thought

Of this worldes joy, how it goeth all to nought"

Some of these poems are love songs to Christ or the Virgin, composed in the warm language of earthly passion. The sentiment of chivalry united with the ecstatic reveries of the cloister had produced Mariolatry and the imagery of the Song of Solomon, in which Christ woos the soul, had made this feeling of divine love familiar. Toward the end of the 13th century a collection of lives of saints, a sort of English *Golden Legend*, was prepared at the great abbey of Gloucester for use on saints' days. The legends were chosen partly from

① Pain.

② Branch.



the hagiology of the Church Catholic, as the lives of Margaret, Christopher, and Michael; partly from the calendar of the English Church, as the lives of St. Thomas of Canterbury, of the Anglo-Saxons, Dunstan, Swithin—who is mentioned by Shakspeare—and Kenelm, whose life is quoted by Chaucer in the *Nonne Presto's Tale*. The verse was clumsy and the style monotonous, but an imaginative touch here and there has furnished a hint to later poets. Thus the legend of St. Brandan's search for the earthly paradise has been treated by Matthew Arnold and William Morris.

About the middle of the 14th century there was a revival of the Old English alliterative verse in romances like *William and the Werewolf*, and *Sir Gawayne*, and in religious pieces such as *Clannesse* (purity), *Patience* and *The Perle*, the last named a mystical poem of much beauty, in which a bereaved father sees a vision of his daughter among the glorified. Some of these employed rhyme as well as alliteration. They are in the West Midland dialect, although Chaucer implies that alliteration was most common in the north. "I am a sotherne man," says the parson in the *Canterbury Tales*. "I cannot geste rom, ram, ruf, by my letter." But the most important of the alliterative poems was the *Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*. In the second half of the 14th century French had ceased to be the mother-tongue of any considerable part of the population of England. By a statute of Edward III., in 1362, it was displaced from the law courts. By 1386 English had taken its place in the schools. The Anglo-Norman dialect had grown corrupt, and Chaucer contrasts the French of Paris with the provincial French spoken by his prioress, "after the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe." The native English genius was also beginning to assert itself, roused in part, perhaps, by the English victories in the wars of Edward III. against the French. It was the bows of the English yeomanry that won the fight at Crecy, fully as much as the prowess of the Norman baronage. But at home the times were bad. Heavy taxes and the repeated visitations of the pestilence, or Black Death, pressed upon the poor and wasted the land. The Church was corrupt; the mendicant orders had grown enormously wealthy, and the country was eaten up by a swarm of begging friars, pardoners, and apparitors. The social discontent was fermenting among the lower classes, which finally issued in the communistic uprising of the peasantry, under Wat Tyler and Jack Straw. This state of things is reflected in the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, written as early as 1362, by William Langland, a tonsured clerk of the west country. It is in form an allegory, and bears some resemblance to the later and more famous allegory of the Pilgrim's Progress. The poet falls asleep on the Malvern Hills, in Worcestershire, and has a vision of a "fair field full of