CHAPTER II.

The Normans.

I.
A century and a half had passed on the Continent since, amid the universal decay and dissolution, a new society had been formed, and new men had risen up. Brave men had at length made a stand against the Norsemen and the robbers. They had planted their feet in the soil, and the moving chaos of the general subsidence had become fixed by the effort of their great hearts and of their arms. At the mouths of the rivers, in the defiles of the mountains, on the margin of the waste borders, at all perilous passes, they had built their forts, each for himself, each on his own land, each with his faithful band; and they had lived like a scattered but watchful army, encamped and confederate in their castles, sword in hand, in front of the enemy. Beneath this discipline a formidable people had been formed, fierce hearts in strong bodies, intolerant of restraint, 

1 See, amidst other delineations of their manners, the first accounts of the first Crusade. Godfrey clove a Saracen down to his waist.—In Palestine, a widow was compelled, up to the age of sixty, to marry again, because no sise could remain without a defender.—A Spanish leader said to his exhausted soldiers after a battle, "You are too weary and too much wounded, but come and fight with me against this other band; the fresh wounds which we shall receive will make us forget those which we have." At this time, says the General Chronicle of Spain, kings, counts, and nobles, and all the knights, that they might be ever ready kept their horses in the chamber where they slept with their wives.
longing for violent deeds, born for constant warfare because steeped in permanent warfare, heroes and rob-
ers, who, as an escape from their solitude, plunged into adventures, and went, that they might conquer a country or win Paradise, to Sicily, to Portugal, to Spain, to Livonia, to Palestine, to England.

II.

On the 27th of September 1066, at the mouth of the Somme, there was a great sight to be seen: four hundred large sailing vessels, more than a thousand transports, and sixty thousand men, were on the point of embarking.\(^1\) The sun shone splendidly after long rain; trumpets sounded, the cries of this armed multitude rose to heaven; as far as the eye could see, on the shore, in the wide-spreading river on the sea which opens out thence broad and shining, masts and sails extended like a forest; the enormous fleet set out wafted by the south wind.\(^2\) The people which it carried were said to have come from Norway, and they might have been taken for kinsmen of the Saxons, with whom they were to fight; but there were with them a multitude of adventurers, crowding from all quarters, far and near, from north and south, from Maine and Anjou, from Poitou and Brittany, from Île-de-France and Flanders, from Aquitaine and Burgundy;\(^3\) and, in short, the expedition itself was French.

\(^1\) For difference in numbers of the fleet and men, see Freeman, *Hist. of the Norm. Conq.*, 3 vols. 1867, iii. 381, 387.—Tr.

\(^2\) For all the details, see *Anglo-Norman Chronicles*, iii. 4, as quoted by Aug. Thierry. I have myself seen the locality and the country.

\(^3\) Of three columns of attack at Hastings, two were composed of auxiliaries. Moreover, the chroniclers are not at fault upon this critical point; they agree in stating that England was conquered by French men.
How comes it that, having kept its name, it had changed its nature? and what series of renovations had made a Latin out of a German people? The reason is that this people, when they came to Neustria, were neither a national body, nor a pure race. They were but a band; and as such, marrying the women of the country, they introduced foreign blood into their children. They were a Scandinavian band, but swelled by all the bold knaves and all the wretched desperadoes who wandered about the conquered country:¹ and as such they received foreign blood into their veins. Moreover, if the nomadic band was mixed, the settled band was much more so; and peace by its transfusions, like war by its recruits, had changed the character of the primitive blood. When Rollo, having divided the land amongst his followers, hung the thieves and their abettors, people from every country gathered to him. Security, good stern justice, were so rare, that they were enough to re-peopled a land.² He invited strangers, say the old writers, "and made one people out of so many folk of different natures." This assemblage of barbarians, refugees, robbers, immigrants, spoke Romance or French so quickly, that the second Duke, wishing to have his son taught Danish, had to send him to Bayeux, where it was still spoken. The great masses always form the race in the end, and generally the genius and language. Thus this people, so transformed, quickly became polished; the composite race showed itself of a

¹ It was a Rouen fisherman, a soldier of Rollo, who killed the Duke of France at the mouth of the Eure. Hastings, the famous sea-king, was a labourer's son from the neighbourhood of Troyes.

² "In the tenth century," says Stendhal, "a man wished for two things: 1st, not to be slain; 2d, to have a good leather coat." See Fontenelle's Chronicle.
ready genius, far more wary than the Saxons across the Channel, closely resembling their neighbours of Picardy, Champagne, and Ile-de-France. "The Saxons," says an old writer,¹ "vied with each other in their drinking feats, and wasted their income by day and night in feasting, whilst they lived in wretched hovels; the French and Normans, on the other hand, living inexpensively in their fine large houses, were besides refined in their food and studiously careful in their dress." The former, still weighted by the German phlegm, were gluttons and drunkards, now and then aroused by poetical enthusiasm; the latter, made sprightlier by their transplantation and their alloy, felt the cravings of the mind already making themselves manifest. "You might see amongst them churches in every village, and monasteries in the cities, towering on high, and built in a style unknown before," first in Normandy, and later in England.² Taste had come to them at once—that is, the desire to please the eye, and to express a thought by outward representation, which was quite a new idea: the circular arch was raised on one or on a cluster of columns; elegant mouldings were placed about the windows; the rose window made its appearance, simple yet, like the flower which gives it its name "rose des buissons;" and the Norman style unfolded itself, original yet proportioned between the Gothic, whose richness it foreshadowed, and the Romance, whose solidity it recalled.

With taste, just as natural, and just as quickly, was developed the spirit of inquiry. Nations are like

¹ William of Malmesbury.
² Churches in London, Sarum, Norwich, Durham, Chichester, Peterborough, Rochester, Hereford, Gloucester, Oxford, etc.—William of Malmesbury.
children; with some the tongue is readily loosened, and they comprehend at once; with others it is loosened with difficulty, and they are slow of comprehension. The men we are here speaking of had educated themselves nimbly, as Frenchmen do. They were the first in France who unravelled the language, regulating it and writing it so well, that to this day we understand their codes and their poems. In a century and a half they were so far cultivated as to find the Saxons "unlettered and rude." That was the excuse they made for banishing them from the abbeys and all valuable ecclesiastical offices. And, in fact, this excuse was rational, for they instinctively hated gross stupidity. Between the Conquest and the death of King John, they established five hundred and fifty-seven schools in England. Henry Beauclerk, son of the Conqueror, was trained in the sciences; so were Henry II. and his three sons: Richard, the eldest of these, was a poet. Lanfranc, first Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, a subtle logician, ably argued the Real Presence; Anselm, his successor, the first thinker of the age, thought he had discovered a new proof of the existence of God, and tried to make religion philosophical by adopting as his maxim, "Crede ut intelligas." The notion was doubtless grand, especially in the eleventh century; and they could not have gone more promptly to work. Of course the science I speak of was but scholastic, and these terrible folios slay more understandings than they confirm. But people must begin as they can; and syllogism, even in Latin, even in theology, is yet an exercise of the mind and a proof of the understanding. Among the continental priests who settled in

\* Ordericus Vitalis.
England, one established a library; another, founder of a school, made the scholars perform the play of Saint Catherine; a third wrote in polished Latin, “epigrams as pointed as those of Martial.” Such were the recreations of an intelligent race, eager for ideas, of ready and flexible genius, whose clear thought was not clouded, like that of the Saxon brain, by drunken hallucinations, and the vapours of a greedy and well-filled stomach. They loved conversations, tales of adventure. Side by side with their Latin chroniclers, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, thoughtful men already, who could not only relate, but criticise here and there, there were rhyming chronicles in the vulgar tongue, as those of Geoffroy Gaimar, Bénôt de Sainte-Maure, Robert Wace. Do not imagine that their verse-writers were sterile of words or lacking in details. They were talkers, tale-tellers, speakers above all, ready of tongue, and never stinted in speech. Not singers by any means; they speak—this is their strong point, in their poems as in their chronicles. They were the earliest who wrote the Song of Roland; upon this they accumulated a multitude of songs concerning Charlemagne and his peers, concerning Arthur and Merlin, the Greeks and Romans, King Horn, Guy of Warwick, every prince and every people. Their minstrels (trouvères), like their knights, draw in abundance from Welsh, Franks, and Latins, and descend upon East and West, in the wide field of adventure. They address themselves to a spirit of inquiry, as the Saxons to enthusiasm, and dilute in their long, clear, and flowing narratives the lively colours of German and Breton traditions; battles, surprises, single combats, embassies, speeches, processions, ceremonies, huntings,
a variety of amusing events, employ their ready and wandering imaginations. At first, in the *Song of Roland*, it is still kept in check; it walks with long strides, but only walks. Presently its wings have grown; incidents are multiplied; giants and monsters abound, the natural disappears, the song of the jongleur grows a poem under the hands of the trouvère; he would speak, like Nestor of old, five, even six years running, and not grow tired or stop. Forty thousand verses are not too much to satisfy their gabble; a facile mind, copious, inquisitive, descriptive, such is the genius of the race. The Gauls, their fathers, used to delay travellers on the road to make them tell their stories, and boasted, like these, "of fighting well and talking with ease."

With chivalric poetry, they are not wanting in chivalry; principally, it may be, because they are strong, and a strong man loves to prove his strength by knocking down his neighbours; but also from a desire of fame, and as a point of honour. By this one word honour the whole spirit of warfare is changed. Saxon poets painted war as a murderous fury, as a blind madness which shook flesh and blood, and awakened the instincts of the beast of prey; Norman poets describe it as a tourney. The new passion which they introduce is that of vanity and gallantry; Guy of Warwick dismounts all the knights in Europe, in order to deserve the hand of the prude and scornful Félice. The tourney itself is but a ceremony, somewhat brutal I admit, since it turns upon the breaking of arms and limbs, but yet brilliant and French. To show skill and courage, display the magnificence of dress and armour, be applauded by and please the ladies,—such
feelings indicate men of greater sociality, more under
the influence of public opinion, less the slaves of their
own passions, void both of lyric inspiration and savage
enthusiasm, gifted by a different genius, because in-
clined to other pleasures.

Such were the men who at this moment were dis-
embarking in England to introduce their new manners
and a new spirit, French at bottom, in mind and speech,
though with special and provincial features; of all the
most matter-of-fact, with an eye to the main chance,
calculating, having the nerve and the dash of our own
soldiers, but with the tricks and precautions of lawyers,
heroic undertakers of profitable enterprises; having
gone to Sicily and Naples, and ready to travel to Con-
stantinople or Antioch, so it be to take a country or
bring back money; subtle politicians, accustomed in
Sicily to hire themselves to the highest bidder, and
capable of doing a stroke of business in the heat of the
Crusade, like Bohémond, who, before Antioch, specu-
lated on the dearth of his Christian allies, and would
only open the town to them under condition of their
keeping it for himself; methodical and persevering
conquerors, expert in administration, and fond of scrib-
bling on paper, like this very William, who was able
to organise such an expedition, and such an army, and
kept a written roll of the same, and who proceeded to
register the whole of England in his Domesday Book.
Sixteen days after the disembarkation, the contrast
between the two nations was manifested at Hastings
by its visible effects.

The Saxons "ate and drank the whole night. You
might have seen them struggling much, and leaping and
singing,” with shouts of laughter and noisy joy. In the morning they packed behind their palisades the dense masses of their heavy infantry, and with battle-axe hung round their neck awaited the attack. The wary Normans weighed the chances of heaven and hell, and tried to enlist God upon their side. Robert Wace, their historian and compatriot, is no more troubled by poetical imagination than they were by warlike inspiration; and on the eve of the battle his mind is as prosaic and clear as theirs. The same spirit showed itself in the battle. They were for the most part bowmen and horsemen, well-skilled, nimble, and clever. Taillefer, the jongleur, who asked for the honour of striking the first blow, went singing, like a true French volunteer, performing tricks all the while. Having arrived before the English, he

1 Robert Wace, Roman du Rou.

Ibid.

Et li Normanz et li Franceiz Tote nuit sirent oreisons, Si com li cler l’orent loé, Unt Normanz a pramis e voé, 
Et furent en afficions. Ke a ce jor mez s’i veseient, Char ni saune ne mangeresent 
De lor péchies conèf’s se sirent Giffrei, éveske de Coustances, A plusors joint lor pénitances. 
As proveires les reghirent, Cli reçut li confessions 
Et qui n’en out proveires prész, Et dona li bénéèçons. 
Pour ço ke samedi estoit 
A son veizin se fist conèfz, 
Pour ço ke samedi estoit 
Ke la bataille estre debveit.

3 Robert Wace, Roman du Rou.

Taillefer ki mout bien cantout Sur un roussain qui tot alout Hui, si vos plaist, me le rendez 
Devant li dus alout cantant Por tout guerredun vos requirer, 
De Kalermaine e de Rolant, Et si vos voil forment preier, 
E d’Oliver et de vassals Otreiez-moi, ke jo n’i faille, 
Ki moururent à Roncevals. Li primier colp de la bataille.” 
Quant ils ont chevalchéi taunt 
K’as Englez vindrant aprisman 
Et li dus répont : “Je l’otret.” 
“Sires ! dist Taillefer, merci ! 
Je vos ai languement servi. 
Et Taillefer point à dearei; 
Devant toz li altres se mist, 
UnEnglez féri, si l’ocist.
cast his lance three times in the air, then his sword, and caught them again by the handle; and Harold’s clumsy foot-soldiers, who only knew how to cleave coats of mail by blows from their battle-axes, "were astonished, saying to one another that it was magic.” As for William, amongst a score of prudent and cunning actions, he performed two well-calculated ones, which, in this sore embarrassment, brought him safe out of his difficulties. He ordered his archers to shoot into the air; the arrows wounded many of the Saxons in the face, and one of them pierced Harold in the eye. After this he simulated flight; the Saxons, intoxicated with joy and wrath, quitted their entrenchments, and exposed themselves to the lances of his horsemen. During the remainder of the contest they only make a stand by small companies, fight with fury, and end by being slaughtered. The strong, mettlesome, brutal race threw themselves on the enemy like a savage bull; the dexterous Norman hunters wounded them adroitly, knocked them down, and placed them under the yoke.

III.

What then is this French race, which by arms and letters makes such a splendid entrance upon the world, and is so manifestly destined to rule, that in the East, for example, their name of Franks will be given to all the nations of the West? Wherein consists this new spirit, this precocious pioneer, this key of all middle-age civilisation? There is in every mind of the kind

De sos le pis, parmi la pance,  Poiz a crié: "Venez, venez!
Li fist passer ulter la lance,  Ke fetes-vos ? Férez, férez !"
A terre estendu l’abati.  Donc l’unt Englez avironé,
Poiz trait l’espée, altre féri.  Al secund colp k’il ou doué.
a fundamental activity which, when incessantly repeated, moulds its plan, and gives it its direction; in town or country, cultivated or not, in its infancy and its age, it spends its existence and employs its energy in conceiving an event or an object. This is its original and perpetual process; and whether it change its region, return, advance, prolong, or alter its course, its whole motion is but a series of consecutive steps; so that the least alteration in the size, quickness, or precision of its primitive stride transforms and regulates the whole course, as in a tree the structure of the first shoot determines the whole foliage, and governs the whole growth.¹ When the Frenchman conceives an event or an object, he conceives quickly and distinctly; there is no internal disturbance, no previous fermentation of confused and violent ideas, which, becoming concentrated and elaborated, end in a noisy outbreak. The movement of his intelligence is nimble and prompt like that of his limbs; at once and without effort he seizes upon his idea. But he seizes that alone; he leaves on one side all the long entangling offshoots whereby it is entwined and twisted amongst its neighbouring ideas; he does not embarrass himself with nor think of them; he detaches, plucks, touches but slightly, and that is all. He is deprived, or if you prefer it, he is exempt from those sudden half-visions which disturb a man, and open up to him instantaneously vast deeps and far perspectives. Images are excited by internal commotion; he, not being so moved, imagines not. He is only moved superficially; he is without large sympathy; he does not perceive an object as it is, complex and combined, but in parts, with

¹ The idea of types is applicable throughout all physical and moral nature.
a discursive and superficial knowledge. That is why no race in Europe is less poetical. Let us look at their epics; none are more prosaic. They are not wanting in number: The Song of Roland, Garin le Lohéran, Ogier le Danois, Berthe aux grands Pieds. There is a library of them. Though their manners are heroic and their spirit fresh, though they have originality, and deal with grand events, yet, spite of this, the narrative is as dull as that of the babbling Norman chroniclers. Doubtless when Homer relates he is as clear as they are, and he develops as they do: but his magnificent titles of rosy-fingered Morn, the wide-bosomed Air, the divine and nourishing Earth, the earth-shaking Ocean, come in every instant and expand their purple bloom over the speeches and battles, and the grand abounding similes which interrupt the narrative tell of a people more inclined to enjoy beauty than to proceed straight to fact. But here we have facts, always facts, nothing but facts; the Frenchman wants to know if the hero will kill the traitor, the lover wed the maiden; he must not be delayed by poetry or painting. He advances nimbly to the end of the story, not lingering for dreams of the heart or wealth of landscape. There is no splendour, no colour, in his narrative; his style is quite bare, and without figures; you may read ten thousand verses in these old poems without meeting one. Shall we open the most ancient, the most original, the most eloquent, at the most moving point, the Song of Roland, when Roland is dying? The narrator is moved, and yet his language remains the same, smooth, accentless, so penetrated by the prosaic spirit, and so void of the poetic! He gives an abstract of motives, a summary of events, a series

1 Danois is a contraction of le d’Ardennois, from the Ardennes.—Tr.
of causes for grief, a series of causes for consolation.¹ Nothing more. These men regard the circumstance or the action by itself, and adhere to this view. Their idea remains exact, clear, and simple, and does not raise up a similar image to be confused with the first, to colour or transform itself. It remains dry; they conceive

¹ Genin, *Chanson de Roland*:

Co sont Rollans que la mort le trespent,
Devers la teste sur le quer li descent;
Deux un pin i est alet curant,
Sur l'herbe verte si est culchet adenz;
Deux lui met l'espée et l'olifan;
Tourant sa teste vers la paîene gent,
Pour ço l'at fait que il veult veirement
Que Carles diet e trestute sa gent,
Li gentilz quens, qu'il fut mort cunquérant.
Cleimet sa culpa, e menut e suvent,
Pur ses pecchez en puroffrid lo guant.

Li quens Rollans se jut deus un pin,
Envers Espaigne en ad touruet sun vis,
De plusieurs choses a remember le prist.
De tantes terres cume li bers cunquist,
De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,
De Carlemagne sun seignor ki l'urrit.
Ne poet muer n'en plurt et ne susprit.
Mais lui meisme ne volt mettre en ubli.
Cleimet sa culpa, si prist Dieu mercit:

"Veire paterne, ki unques ne mentis,
Seint Lazaron de mort resurrexis,
Et Daniel des lions guaresia,
Guaris de mei l'arome de tuz perils,
Por les pecchez que en ma vie fis."

Sun destre guant a Deu en puroffrit.
Seint Gabriel de sa main l'ad pris.
Desur sun bras teneit le chef enclin,
Juntes ses mains est alet a sa fin.
Deus i tramist sun angle cherubin,
Et seint Michel qu'on cleimet del peril
Ensemble ad els seint Gabriel i vint,
L'anme del cunte portent en pareis.
the divisions of the object one by one, without ever collecting them, as the Saxons would, in an abrupt impassioned, glowing semi-vision. Nothing is more opposed to their genius than the genuine songs and profound hymns, such as the English monks were singing beneath the low vaults of their churches. They would be disconcerted by the unevenness and obscurity of such language. They are not capable of such an access of enthusiasm and such excess of emotion. They never cry out, they speak, or rather they converse, and that at moments when the soul, overwhelmed by its trouble might be expected to cease thinking and feeling. Thus Amis, in a mystery-play, being leprous, calmly requires his friend Amille to slay his two sons, in order that their blood may heal him of his leprosy; and Amille replies still more calmly,¹ If ever they try to sing, even in heaven, “a roundelay high and clear,” they will produce little rhymed arguments, as dull as the dullest talk.²

- Mon très-chier ami débonnaire,
  Vous m'avez une chose ditte
  Qui n'est pas à faire petit
  Mais que l'on doit moulent resongnier.
  Et nonpourtant, sans celongnier,
  Puisque garison autrement
  Ne povez avoir vrayennement,
  Pour vostre amour les occiray,
  Et le sang vous apporray.
  Vraix Diez, moulent est excellente,
  Et de grant charité plaine,
  Vostre bonté souveraine.
  Car vostre grace presente,
  A toute personne humaine,
  Vraix Diez, moulent est excellente,
  Puisqu'elle a cuer et entente,
  Et que à ce desir l'amaine
  Que de vous servir se paine.
Pursue this literature to its conclusion; regard it, like that of the Skalds, at the time of its decadence, when its vices, being exaggerated, display, like those of the Skalds, only still more strongly the kind of mind which produced it. The Skalds fall off into nonsense; it loses itself into babble and platitude. The Saxon could not master his craving for exaltation; the Frenchman could not restrain the volubility of his tongue. He is too diffuse and too clear; the Saxon is too obscure and brief. The one was excessively agitated and carried away; the other explains and develops without measure. From the twelfth century the Gestes spun out degenerate into rhapsodies and psalmodies of thirty or forty thousand verses. Theology enters into them; poetry becomes an interminable, intolerable litany, where the ideas, expounded, developed, and repeated ad infinitum, without one outburst of emotion or one touch of originality, flow like a clear and insipid stream, and send off their reader, by dint of their monotonous rhymes, into a comfortable slumber. What a deplorable abundance of distinct and facile ideas! We meet with it again in the seventeenth century, in the literary gossip which took place at the feet of men of distinction; it is the fault and the talent of the race. With this involuntary art of perceiving, and isolating instantaneously and clearly each part of every object, people can speak, even for speaking's sake, and for ever.

Such is the primitive process; how will it be continued? Here appears a new trait in the French genius, the most valuable of all. It is necessary to comprehension that the second idea shall be contiguous to the first; otherwise that genius is thrown out of its course and arrested; it cannot proceed by irregular bounds;
it must walk step by step, on a straight road; order is innate in it; without study, and in the first place, it disjoins and decomposes the object or event, however complicated and entangled it may be, and sets the parts one by one in succession to each other, according to their natural connection. True, it is still in a state of barbarism; yet its intelligence is a reasoning faculty, which spreads, though unwittingly. Nothing is more clear than the style of the old French narratives and of the earliest poems: we do not perceive that we are following a narrator, so easy is the gait, so even the road he opens to us, so smoothly and gradually every idea glides into the next; and this is why he narrates so well. The chroniclers Villehardouin, Joinville, Froissart, the fathers of prose, have an ease and clearness approached by none, and beyond all, a charm, a grace, which they had not to go out of their way to find. Grace is a national possession in France, and springs from the native delicacy which has a horror of incongruities; the instinct of Frenchmen avoids violent shocks in works of taste as well as in works of argument; they desire that their sentiments and ideas shall harmonise, and not clash. Throughout they have this measured spirit, exquisitely refined.¹ They take care, on a sad subject, not to push emotion to its limits; they avoid big words. Think how Joinville relates in six lines the death of the poor sick priest who wished to finish celebrating the mass, and “never more did sing, and died.” Open a mystery-play, Théophilus, or that of the Queen of Hungary, for instance: when they are going to burn her and her child, she says two short lines about “this gentle dew which is so pure an innocent,” nothing more. Take a fabliau,

¹ See H. Taine, La Fontaine and his Fables, p. 15.
even a dramatic one: when the penitent knight, who has undertaken to fill a barrel with his tears, dies in the hermit’s company, he asks from him only one last gift: “Do but embrace me, and then I’ll die in the arms of my friend.” Could a more touching sentiment be expressed in more sober language? We must say of their poetry what is said of certain pictures: This is made out of nothing. Is there in the world anything more delicately graceful than the verses of Guillaume de Lorris? Allegory clothes his ideas so as to dim their too great brightness; ideal figures, half transparent, float about the lover, luminous, yet in a cloud, and lead him amidst all the gentle and delicate-hued ideas to the rose, whose “sweet odour embalms all the plain.” This refinement goes so far, that in Thibaut of Champagne and in Charles of Orléans it turns to affectation and insipidity. In them all impressions grow more slender; the perfume is so weak, that one often fails to catch it; on their knees before their lady they whisper their waggerys and conceits; they love politely and wittily; they arrange ingeniously in a bouquet their “painted words,” all the flowers of “fresh and beautiful language;” they know how to mark fleeting ideas in their flight, soft melancholy, vague reverie; they are as elegant as talkative, and as charming as the most amiable abbés of the eighteenth century. This lightness of touch is proper to the race, and appears as plainly under the armour and amid the massacres of the middle ages as amid the courtsies and the musk-scented, wadded coats of the last court. You will find it in their colouring as in their sentiments. They are not struck by the magnificence of nature, they see only her pretty side; they paint the beauty of a woman by
a single feature, which is only polite, saying, "She is more gracious than the rose in May." They do not experience the terrible emotion, ecstasy, sudden oppression of heart which is displayed in the poetry of neighbouring nations; they say discreetly, "She began to smile, which vastly became her." They add, when they are in a descriptive humour, "that she had a sweet and perfumed breath," and a body "white as new-fallen snow on a branch." They do not aspire higher; beauty pleases, but does not transport them. They enjoy agreeable emotions, but are not fitted for deep sensations. The full rejuvenescence of being, the warm air of spring which renews and penetrates all existence, suggests but a pleasing couplet; they remark in passing, "Now is winter gone, the hawthorn blossoms, the rose expands," and so pass on about their business. It is a light gladsomeness, soon gone, like that which an April landscape affords. For an instant the author glances at the mist of the streams rising about the willow trees, the pleasant vapour which imprisons the brightness of the morning; then, humming a burden of a song, he returns to his narrative. He seeks amusement, and herein lies his power.

In life, as in literature, it is pleasure he aims at, not sensual pleasure or emotion. He is lively, not voluptuous; dainty, not a glutton. He takes love for a pastime, not for an intoxication. It is a pretty fruit which he plucks, tastes, and leaves. And we must remark yet further, that the best of the fruit in his eyes is the fact of its being forbidden. He says to himself that he is duping a husband, that "he deceives a cruel woman, and thinks he ought to obtain a pope's indulgence for the deed."¹ He wishes

¹ La Fontaine, Contes, Richard Minutolo.
to be merry—it is the state he prefers, the end and aim of his life; and especially to laugh at other people. The short verse of his fabliaux gambols and leaps like a schoolboy released from school, over all things respected or respectable; criticising the church, women, the great, the monks. Scoffers, banterers, our fathers have abundance both of expression and matter; and the matter comes to them so naturally, that without culture, and surrounded by coarseness, they are as delicate in their raillery as the most refined. They touch upon ridicule lightly, they mock without emphasis, as it were innocently; their style is so harmonious, that at first sight we make a mistake, and do not see any harm in it. They seem artless; they look so very demure; only a word shows the imperceptible smile: it is the ass, for example, which they call the high priest, by reason of his padded cassock and his serious air, and who gravely begins “to play the organ.” At the close of the history, the delicate sense of comicality has touched you, though you cannot say how. They do not call things by their names, especially in love matters; they let you guess it; they assume that you are as sharp and knowing as themselves. A man might discriminate, embellish at times, perhaps refine upon them, but their first traits are incomparable. When the fox approaches the raven to steal the cheese, he begins as a hypocrite, piously and cautiously, and as one of the family. He calls the raven his “good father Don Rohart, who sings so well;” he praises his voice, “so sweet and fine.” “You would be the best singer in the world if you

1 Parler lui veut d’une besogne
Oh crois que peu conquerrérons
Si la besogne vous nommois.
kept clear of nuts." Reynard is a rogue, an artist in the way of invention, not a mere glutton; he loves roguery for its own sake; he rejoices in his superiority, and draws out his mockery. When Tibert, the cat, by his counsel hung himself at the bell rope, wishing to ring it, he uses irony, enjoys and relishes it, pretends to wax impatient with the poor fool whom he has caught, calls him proud, complains because the other does not answer, and because he wishes to rise to the clouds and visit the saints. And from beginning to end this long epic of Reynard the Fox is the same; the raillery never ceases, and never fails to be agreeable. Reynard has so much wit, that he is pardoned for everything. The necessity for laughter is national—so indigenous to the French, that a stranger cannot understand, and is shocked by it. This pleasure does not resemble physical joy in any respect, which is to be despised for its grossness; on the contrary, it sharpens the intelligence, and brings to light many a delicate or ticklish idea. The fabliaux are full of truths about men, and still more about women, about people of low rank, and still more about those of high rank; it is a method of philosophising by stealth and boldly, in spite of conventionalism, and in opposition to the powers that be. This taste has nothing in common either with open satire, which is offensive because it is cruel; on the contrary, it provokes good humour. We soon see that the jester is not ill-disposed, that he does not wish to wound: if he stings, it is as a bee, without venom; an instant later he is not thinking of it; if need be, he will take himself as an object of his pleasantry; all he wishes is to keep up in himself and in us sparkling and pleasing ideas. Do we not see here in advance an abstract of
the whole French literature, the incapacity for great poetry, the sudden and durable perfection of prose, the excellence of all the moods of conversation and eloquence, the reign and tyranny of taste and method, the art and theory of development and arrangement, the gift of being measured, clear, amusing, and piquant? We have taught Europe how ideas fall into order, and which ideas are agreeable; and this is what our Frenchmen of the eleventh century are about to teach their Saxons during five or six centuries, first with the lance, next with the stick, next with the birch.

IV.

Consider, then, this Frenchman or Norman, this man from Anjou or Maine, who in his well-knit coat of mail, with sword and lance, came to seek his fortune in England. He took the manor of some slain Saxon, and settled himself in it with his soldiers and comrades, gave them land, houses, the right of levying taxes, on condition of their fighting under him and for him, as men-at-arms, marshals, standard-bearers; it was a league in case of danger. In fact, they were in a hostile and conquered country, and they have to maintain themselves. Each one hastened to build for himself a place of refuge, castle or fortress,¹ well fortified, of solid stone, with narrow windows, strengthened with battlements, garrisoned by soldiers, pierced with loopholes. Then these men went to Salisbury, to the number of sixty thousand, all holders of land, having at least enough to maintain a man with horse or arms. There, placing their hands in William's, they promised him fealty and assistance; and the king's edict declared that they must be all united and bound

¹ At King Stephen's death there were 1115 castles.
together like brothers in arms, to defend and succour each other. They are an armed colony, stationary, like the Spartans amongst the Helots; and they make laws accordingly. When a Frenchman is found dead in any district, the inhabitants are to give up the murderer, or failing to do so, they must pay forty-seven marks as a fine; if the dead man is English, it rests with the people of the place to prove it by the oath of four near relatives of the deceased. They are to beware of killing a stag, boar, or fawn; for an offence against the forest-laws they will lose their eyes. They have nothing of all their property assured to them except as alms, or on condition of paying tribute, or by taking the oath of allegiance. Here a free Saxon proprietor is made a body-slave on his own estate.¹ Here a noble and rich Saxon lady feels on her shoulder the weight of the hand of a Norman valet, who is become by force her husband or her lover. There were Saxons of one sol, or of two sols, according to the sum which they gained for their masters; they sold them, hired them, worked them on joint account, like an ox or an ass. One Norman abbot has his Saxon predecessors dug up, and their bones thrown without the gates. Another keeps men-at-arms, who bring his recalcitrant monks to reason by blows of their swords. Imagine, if you can, the pride of these new lords, conquerors, strangers, masters, nourished by habits of violent activity, and by the savagery, ignorance, and passions of feudal life. “They thought they might do whatsoever they pleased,” say the old chroniclers. “They shed blood indiscriminately, snatched the morsel of bread from the mouth of the wretched, and seized upon all the money, the goods, the land.”² Thus “all the folk in the low country were

¹ A. Thierry, Histoire de la Conquête de l’Angleterre, ii.
² William of Malmesbury. A. Thierry, ii. 20. 128–208
at great pains to seem humble before Ivo Taille-bois, and only to address him with one knee on the ground; but although they made a point of paying him every honour, and giving him all and more than all which they owed him in the way of rent and service, he harassed, tormented, tortured, imprisoned them, set his dogs upon their cattle, ... broke the legs and backbones of their beasts of burden, ... and sent men to attack their servants on the road with sticks and swords.”¹ The Normans would not and could not borrow any idea or custom from such boors;² they despised them as coarse and stupid. They stood amongst them, as the Spaniards amongst the Americans in the sixteenth century, superior in force and culture, more versed in letters, more expert in the arts of luxury. They preserved their manners and their speech. England, to all outward appearance— the court of the king, the castles of the nobles, the palaces of the bishops, the houses of the wealthy—was French; and the Scandinavian people, of whom sixty years ago the Saxon kings used to have poems sung to them, thought that the nation had forgotten its language, and treated it in their laws as though it were no longer their sister.

It was a French literature, then, which was at this time domiciled across the channel,³ and the conquerors tried to make it purely French, purged from all Saxon alloy. They made such a point of this, that the nobles in the reign of Henry II. sent their sons to France, to

¹ A. Thierry.
² “In the year 652,” says Warton, i. 3, “it was the common practice of the Anglo-Saxons to send their youth to the monasteries of France for education; and not only the language but the manners of the French were esteemed the most polite accomplishments.”
³ Warton, i. 6.
preserve them from barbarisms. "For two hundred years," says Higden,¹ "children in scole, ageth the usage and maner of all other nations beeth compelled for to leve hire own langage, and for to construe hir lessons and hire thynges in Frenshe." The statutes of the universities obliged the students to converse either in French or Latin. "Gentilmen children beeth taught to speke Frenshe from the tyme that they bith rokked in hire cradell; and uplandissche men will likne himself to gentylmen, and fonde with greet besynesse for to speke Frenshe." Of course the poetry is French. The Norman brought his minstrel with him; there was Taillefer, the jongleur, who sang the Song of Roland at the battle of Hastings; there was Adeline, the jongleuse, who received an estate in the partition which followed the Conquest. The Norman who ridiculed the Saxon kings, who dug up the Saxon saints, and cast them without the walls of the church, loved none but French ideas and verses. It was into French verse that Robert Wace rendered the legendary history of the England which was conquered, and the actual history of the Normandy in which he continued to live. Enter one of the abbeys where the minstrels come to sing, "where the clereks after dinner and supper read poems, the chronicles of kingdoms, the wonders of the world,"² you will only find Latin or French verses, Latin or French prose. What becomes

¹ Trevisa’s translation of the Polycroneycon.
² Statutes of foundation of New College, Oxford. In the abbey of Glastonbury, in 1247: Liber de excidio Troiae, gesta Ricardi regis, gesta Alexandri Magni, etc. In the abbey of Peterborough: Amye et Amelion, Sir Tristan, Guy de Bourgogne, gesta Otucie, les prophéties de Merlin, le Charlemagne de Turpin, la destruction de Troie, etc. Warton, ibidem.
of English? Obscure, despised, we hear it no more, except in the mouths of degraded franklins, outlaws of the forest, swineherds, peasants, the lowest orders. It is no longer, or scarcely written; gradually we find in the Saxon chronicle that the idiom alters, is extinguished; the chronicle itself ceases within a century after the Conquest. The people who have leisure or security enough to read or write are French; for them authors devise and compose; literature always adapts itself to the taste of those who can appreciate and pay for it. Even the English 2 endeavour to write in French: thus Robert Grosête, in his allegorical poem on Christ; Peter Langtoft, in his Chronicle of England, and in his Life of Thomas à Becket; Hugh de Rotheolland, in his poem of Hippoménlon; John Hoveden, and many others. Several write the first half of the verse in English, and the second in French; a strange sign of the ascendancy which is moulding and oppressing them. Even in the fifteenth century, many of these poor folk are employed in this task; French is the language of the court, from it arose all poetry and elegance; he is but a clodhopper who is inapt at that style. They apply themselves to it as our old scholars did to Latin verses; they are gallicised as those were latinised, by constraint, with a sort of fear, knowing well that they are but schoolboys and provincials. Gower, one of their best poets, at the end of his French works, excuses himself humbly for not having "de Françaïs la faconde. Pardonnez moi," he says, "que de ce je forsvoie; je suis Anglais."

1 In 1154. 2 Warton, i. 72–78. 3 In 1400. Warton, ii. 248. Gower died in 1408; his French ballads belong to the end of the fourteenth century.
And yet, after all, neither the race nor the tongue has perished. It is necessary that the Norman should learn English, in order to command his tenants; his Saxon wife speaks it to him, and his sons receive it from the lips of their nurse; the contagion is strong, for he is obliged to send them to France, to preserve them from the jargon which on his domain threatens to overwhelm and spoil them. From generation to generation the contagion spreads; they breathe it in the air, with the foresters in the chase, the farmers in the field, the sailors on the ships: for these coarse people, shut in by their animal existence, are not the kind to learn a foreign language; by the simple weight of their dulness they impose their idiom on their conquerors, at all events such words as pertain to living things. Scholarly speech, the language of law, abstract and philosophical expressions,—in short, all words depending on reflection and culture may be French, since there is nothing to prevent it. This is just what happens; these kind of ideas and this kind of speech are not understood by the commonalty, who, not being able to touch them, cannot change them. This produces a French, a colonial French, doubtless perverted, pronounced with closed mouth, with a contortion of the organs of speech, "after the school of Stratford-atté-Bow;" yet it is still French. On the other hand, as regards the speech employed about common actions and visible objects, it is the people, the Saxons, who fix it; these living words are too firmly rooted in his experience to allow of being parted with, and thus the whole substance of the language comes from him. Here, then, we have the Norman who, slowly and constrainedly, speaks and understands English, a deformed, gallicised English, yet English, in sap and root;
but he has taken his time about it, for it has required two centuries. It was only under Henry III. that the new tongue is complete, with the new constitution; and that, after the like fashion, by alliance and intermixture; the burgesses come to take their seats in Parliament with the nobles, at the same time that Saxon words settle down in the language side by side with French words.

V.

So was modern English formed, by compromise, and the necessity of being understood. But we can well imagine that these nobles, even while speaking the rising dialect, have their hearts full of French tastes and ideas; France remains the home of their mind, and the literature which now begins, is but translation. Translators, copyists, imitators—there is nothing else. England is a distant province, which is to France what the United States were, thirty years ago, to Europe: she exports her wool, and imports her ideas. Open the *Voyage and Travails of Sir John Maundeville*, the oldest prose-writer, the Villehardouin of the country: his book is but the translation of a translation. He writes first in Latin, the language of scholars; then in French, the

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1 He wrote in 1356, and died in 1372.
2 “And for als moche as it is longe time passed that ther was no generalle Passage ne Vayge over the see, and many Men desiren for to here speke of the holy Lound, and han thereof gret Solace and Comfort, I, John Maundevylla, Knught, alle be it I be not worth, that was born in Englond, in the town of Seynt-Albones, passed the See in the Zee of our Lord Jesu-Crist 1322, in the Day of Seynt Michelle, and hí déreto have been longe tyme over the See, and have seyn and gon thorgh the manye dyverse londes, and manye Provynes, and Kingdome, and Iles. ““And zee shull undirstond that I have put this Boke out of Latyn into Frensche, and translated it azen out of Frensche, into Englysshe, that every Man of my Nacioun may undirstonde it.”—Sir John Maundeville’s *Voyage and Travails*, ed. Halliwell, 1866, prologue, p. 4.
language of society; finally he reflects, and discovers
to his compatriots, by governing the Saxon churls, have ceased to speak their own. Norman, and
that the rest of the nation never knew it; he translates his manuscript into English, and, in addition, takes
care to make it plain, feeling that he speaks to less ex-
panded understandings. He says in French:—"Il
advint une fois que Mahomet allait dans une chapelle où
il y avait un saint ermite. Il entra en la chapelle où il
y avait une petite huisserie et basse, et était bien petite
la chapelle; et alors devint la porte si grande qu'il
semblait que ce fut la porte d'un palais."

He stops, corrects himself, wishes to explain himself
better for his readers across the Channel, and says in
English:—"And at the Desertes of Arabye, he wente
into a Chapelle where a Eremyte duelte. And when he
entred in to the Chapelle that was but a lytille and a
low thing, and had but a lytill Dore and a low, than the
Entree began to wexe so gret and so large, and so highe,
as though it had ben of a gret Mynstre, or the Zate of
a Paleys."¹ You perceive that he amplifies, and thinks
himself bound to clinch and drive in three or four times
in succession the same idea, in order to get it into an
English brain; his thought is drawn out, dulled, spoiled
in the process. Like every copy, the new literature is
mediocre, and repeats what it imitates, with fewer merits
and greater faults.

Let us see, then, what our Norman baron gets trans-
lated for him; first, the chronicles of Geoffroy Gaimar

¹ Sir John Maundeville’s Voyage and Travails, ed. Halliwell, 1866,
xii. p. 139. It is confessed that the original on which Wace depended
for his ancient History of England is the Latin compilation of Geoffroy
of Monmouth.
and Robert Wace, which consist of the fabulous history of England continued up to their day, a dull-rhymed rhapsody, turned into English in a rhapsody no less dull. The first Englishman who attempts it is Layamon, a monk of Ernely, still fettered in the old idiom, who sometimes happens to rhyme, sometimes fails, altogether barbarous and childish, unable to develop a continuous idea, babbling in little confused and incomplete phrases, after the fashion of the ancient Saxons; after him a monk, Robert of Gloucester, and a canon, Robert of

1 Extract from the account of the proceedings at Arthur's coronation given by Layamon, in his translation of Wace, executed about 1180. Madden's Layamon, 1847, ii. p. 625, et passim:

Tha the king igeten hafde
And al his mon-woerede,
The bugen ut of burhges
Theines swithe balde.
Alle tha kinges,
And heores here-thringes.
Alle tha biscope,
And alle tha clærckes,
All the eorles,
And alle tha beornes.
Alle tha theines,
Aile the swines,
Feire iscrudle,
Halde geond felde.
Summe heo gunnen seruen,
Summe heo gunnen urnen,
Summe heo gunnen lepen,
Summe heo gunnen soeten,
Summe heo wrestledan
And wither-gome makeden,
Summe heo on uelsa
Pleauwedden under scealdes,
Summe heo driven balles
Wide geond tha feldes.
Monianes kunnes gomen
Ther heo gunnen drian.
And wha swa mihte iwinne
Wurthscipe of his gomene,
Hine me laddel mid songe
At foren than lead kinge;
And the king, for his gomene,
Gaf him geven gode.
Alle tha quene
The icumen weoren there,
And alle tha ladles,
Leoneden ge-walden walles,
To bihalden the dungethem,
And that folc pleale.
This ileaste theo dages,
Swulo gomes and swulo pleges,
Tha, at than veortha dasie
The king gon to speken
And age if his goden cuihten
All heore rihten;
He gef seolver, he gef gold,
He gef hors, he gef lond,
Castles, and clothes eke;
His monnem he iquenda.

2 After 1297.
Brunne, both as insipid and clear as their French models, having become gallicised, and adopted the significant characteristic of the race, namely, the faculty and habit of easy narration, of seeing moving spectacles without deep emotion, of writing prosaic poetry, of discoursing and developing, of believing that phrases ending in the same sounds form real poetry. Our honest English versifiers, like the air preceptors in Normandy and Ile-de-France, garnished with rhymes their dissertations and histories, and called them poems. At this epoch, in fact, on the Continent, the whole learning of the schools descends into the street; and Jean de Meung, in his poem of \textit{la Rose}, is the most tedious of doctors. So in England, Robert of Brunne transposes into verse the \textit{Manuel des Pêchés} of Bishop Grostête; Adam Davie,\textsuperscript{1} certain Scripture histories; Hampole\textsuperscript{2} composes the \textit{Prickes of Conscience}. The titles alone make one yawn: what of the text?

\begin{quotation}
"Mankynde mad ys to do Goddes wylle,
And alle Hys byddynge to fulfile;
For of al Hys makyng more and les,
Man m ost principal creature es.
Al that He made for man hit was done,
As ye schal here after sone."\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quotation}

There is a poem! You did not think so; call it a sermon, if you will give it its proper name. It goes on, well divided, well prolonged, flowing, but void of meaning; the literature which surrounds and resembles it bears witness of its origin by its loquacity and its clearness.

It bears witness to it by other and more agreeable

\textsuperscript{1} About 1312. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{2} About 1349. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{3} Warton, ii. 36.
features. Here and there we find divergences more or less awkward into the domain of genius; for instance, a ballad full of quips against Richard, King of the Romans, who was taken at the battle of Lewes. Sometimes, charm is not lacking, nor sweetness either. No one has ever spoken so bright and so well to the ladies as the French of the Continent, and they have not quite forgotten this talent while settling in England. You perceive it readily in the manner in which they celebrate the Virgin. Nothing could be more different from the Saxon sentiment, which is altogether biblical, than the chivalric adoration of the sovereign Lady, the fascinating Virgin and Saint, who was the real deity of the middle ages. It breathes in this pleasing hymn:

"Blessed beo thu, lavedi,
Ful of hovene bliss;
Swete flur of parais,
Moder of milternisse. . . .
I-blessed beo thu, Lavedi,
So fair and so briht;
Al min hope ws uppon the,
Bi day and bi nacht. . . .
Bricht and scene quen of storre,
So me liht and lere.
In this false fikele world,
So me led and steore."

There is but a short and easy step between this tender worship of the Virgin and the sentiments of the court of love. The English rhymesters take it; and when they wish to praise their earthly mistresses, they borrow, here as elsewhere, the ideas and the very form of French

1 Time of Henry III., Reliquiae Antiquae, edited by Messrs. Wright and Halliwell, i. 102.
verse. One compares his lady to all kinds of precious stones and flowers; others sing truly amorous songs, at times sensual:

"Bytuene Mershe and Aueril,
When spray biginneth to springe,
The hurt foul hath hire wyl
On hyre hud to syngye,
Ich libbe in souelonginge
For semlokest of alle thyng.
He may me blysse bringe,
Icham in hire baundoun.
An hendy hap ichabbe yhent,
Ichot from heuene it is me sent.
From alle wymmen my love is lent,
And lyht on Alisoun."¹

Another sings:

"Swee te lemmon, y preye the, of лове one speche,
Whil y lyue in world so wyde other nulle y seche.
With thy love, my swee leof, mi bliss thou mihte esche
A swee cos of thy mouth mihte be my leche."²

Is not this the lively and warm imagination of the south? they speak of springtime and of love, "the fine and lovely weather," like trouvères, even like troubadours. The dirty, smoke-grimed cottage, the black feudal castle, where all but the master lie higgledy-piggledy on the straw in the great stone hall, the cold rain, the muddy earth, make the return of the sun and the warm air delicious.

"Sumer is i-cumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu:
Groweth sed, and bloweth med,
And springeth the wde nu.

¹ About 1278. Warton, i. 28. ² Ibid. i. 21.
Sing cuccu, cuccu.
Awe bleteth after lomb.
- Liouth after calue cu,
  Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth:
  Murie sing cuccu,
  Cuccu, cuccu.
Wel singes thu cuccu,
Ne swik thu nauer nu.
Sing, cuccu nu,
Sing, cuccu.¹

Here are glowing pictures, such as Guillaume de Lorris was writing, at the same time, even richer and more lifelike, perhaps because the poet found here for inspiration that love of country life which in England is deep and national. Others, more imitative, attempt pleasantry like those of Rutebeuf and the fabliaux, frank quips,² and even satirical loose waggeries. Their true aim and end is to hit out at the monks. In every French country or country which imitates France, the most manifest use of convents is to furnish material for sprightly and scandalous stories. One writes, for instance, of the kind of life the monks lead at the abbey of Cocagne:

"There is a wel fair abbei,
Of white monkes and of grei.
Ther beth bowris and halles:
Al of pasteiis beth the wallis,
Of fleis, of fisse, and rich met,
The likfullist that man may et.
Fluren cakes beth the schingles alle,
Of cherche, cloister, boure, and halle.

¹ Warton, i. 30.
² Poem of the Owl and Nightingale, who dispute as to which has the finest voice.
The pinnes beth fat podinges
Rich met to princes and kinges.

Though paradis be miri and bright
Okaign is of fairir sight.

Another abbei is therbi,
Forsoth a gret fair nunnerie.

When the someris dai is hote
The young nunnes takith a bote.

And doth ham forth in that river
Both with ores and with stere.

And euch monk him takith on,
And snellich berrith forth har prei
To the mochil grei abbei,
And techith the nunnes an oraisun,
With iambleue up and down.”

This is the triumph of gluttony and feeding. Moreover many things could be mentioned in the middle ages, which are now unmentionable. But it was the poems of chivalry which represented to him the bright side of his own mode of life, that the baron preferred to have translated. He desired that his trouvère should set before his eyes the magnificence which he displayed, and the luxury and enjoyments which he has introduced from France. Life at that time, without and even during war, was a great pageant, a brilliant and tumultuous kind of fête. When Henry II. travelled, he took with him a great number of horsemen, foot-soldiers, baggage-wagons, tents, pack-horses, comedians, courtesans, and their overseers, cooks, confectioners, posture-makers, dancers, barbers, go-betweens, hangers-on.¹ In the morning when they start, the assemblage begins to shout, sing, hustle each other, make racket and rout,

¹ Letter of Peter of Blois.
“as if hell were let loose.” William Longchamps, even in time of peace, would not travel without a thousand horses by way of escort. When Archbishop a Becket came to France, he entered the town with two hundred knights, a number of barons and nobles, and an army of servants, all richly armed and equipped, he himself being provided with four-and-twenty suits; two hundred and fifty children walked in front, singing national songs; then dogs, then carriages, then a dozen pack-horses, each ridden by an ape and a man; then equerries with shields and war-horses; then more equerries, falconers, a suite of domestics, knights, priests; lastly, the archbishop himself, with his private friends. Imagine these processions, and also these entertainments; for the Normans, after the Conquest, “borrowed from the Saxons the habit of excess in eating and drinking.”¹ At the marriage of Richard Plantagenet, Earl of Cornwall, they provided thirty thousand dishes.² They also continued to be gallant, and punctiliously performed the great precept of the love courts; for in the middle age the sense of love was no more idle than the others. Moreover, tournaments were plentiful; a sort of opera prepared for their own entertainment. So ran their life, full of adventure and adornment, in the open air and in the sunlight, with show of cavalcades and arms; they act a pageant, and act it with enjoyment. Thus the King of Scots, having come to London with a

¹ William of Malmesbury.
² At the installation-feast of George Nevill, Archbishop of York, the brother of Guy of Warwick, there were consumed, 104 oxen and 6 wild bulls, 1000 sheep, 304 calves, as many hogs, 2000 swine, 500 stags, bucks, and does, 204 kids, 22,802 wild or tame fowl, 800 quarters of corn, 300 tuns of ale, 100 of wine, a pipe of hypocras, 12 porpoises and seals.
hundred knights, at the coronation of Edward I., they all
dismounted, and made over their horses and superb
caparisons to the people; as did also five English lords,
imitating their example. In the midst of war they took
their pleasure. Edward III., in one of his expeditions
against the King of France, took with him thirty fal-
coners, and made his campaign alternately hunting and
fighting. Another time, says Froissart, the knights
who joined the army carried a plaster over one eye,
having vowed not to remove it until they had performed
an exploit worthy of their mistresses. Out of the very
exuberancy of spirit they practised the art of poetry;
out of the buoyancy of their imagination they made a
sport of life. Edward III. built at Windsor a hall and
a round table; and at one of his tourneys in London,
sixty ladies, seated on palfreys, led, as in a fairy tale,
each her knight by a golden chain. Was not this the
triumph of the gallant and frivolous French fashions?
Edward's wife Philippa sat as a model to the artists for
their Madonnas. She appeared on the field of battle;
listened to Froissart, who provided her with moral-plays,
love-stories, and "things fair to listen to." At once
goddess, heroine, and scholar, and all this so agreeably,
was she not a true queen of refined chivalry? Now, as
also in France under Louis of Orleans and the Dukes
of Burgundy, this most elegant and romanesque civilisa-
tion came into full bloom, void of common sense,
given up to passion, bent on pleasure, immoral and
brilliant, but, like its neighbours of Italy and Provence,
for lack of serious intention, it could not last.

Of all these marvels the narrators make display. in

1 These prodigalities and refinements grew to excess under his grand-
son Richard II.
their stories. Here is a picture of the vessel which took the mother of King Richard into England:—

"Swilk on ne seygh they never non;  
All it was whyt of huel-bon,  
And every sayl with gold begrave:  
Off pure gold was the stave,  
Her mast was of yvory;  
Off samyte the sayl wytterly.  
Her ropes wer off tuely sylk,  
Al so whyt as ony mylks.  
That noble schyp was al withoute,  
With cloths of golde spreds abonte;  
And her loof and her wyndas,  
Off asure forsothe it was."¹

On such subjects they never run dry. When the King of Hungary wishes to console his afflicted daughter, he proposes to take her to the chase in the following style:—

"To-morrow ye shall in hunting fare:  
And ride, my daughter, in a chair;  
It shall be covered with velvet red,  
And cloths of fine gold all about your head,  
With damask white and azure blue,  
Well diapered with lilies new.  
Your pommels shall be ended with gold,  
Your chains enamelled many a fold;  
Your mantle of rich degree,  
Purple pall and ermine free.  
Jennets of Spain that ben so light,  
Trapped to the ground with velvet bright.  
Ye shall have harp, sautry, and song,  
And other mirths you among.

Warton, i. 156.
Ye shall have Rumney and Malespine,
Both hipcrocras and Vernage wine;
Montrese and wine of Greek,
Both Algrade and despice eke,
Antioch and Bastarde,
Pyment also and garnerde;
Wine of Greek and Muscadel,
Both clare, pyment, and Rochelle,
The reed your stomach to defy,
And pots of osey set you by.
You shall have venison ybake,
The best wild fowl that may be take;
A leish of harehound with you to streek,
And hart, and hind, and other like.
Ye shall be set at such a tryst,
That hart and hynd shall come to you fist.
Your disease to drive you fro,
To hear the bugles there yblow.
Homeward thus shall ye ride,
On hawking by the river's side,
With gosshawk and with gentle falcon,
With bugle-horn and merlion.
When you come home your menie among,
Ye shall have revel, dance, and song;
Little children, great and small,
Shall sing as does the nightingale.
Then shall ye go to your evensong,
With tenors and trebles among.
Threescore of copes of damask bright,
Full of pearls they shall be light.
Your censors shall be of gold,
Indent with azure many a fold;
Your quire nor organ song shall want,
With contra-note and descant.
The other half on organs playing,
With young children full fain singing.
Then shall ye go to your supper,
And sit in tents in green arber,
With cloth of arras pight to the ground
With sapphires set of diamond.
A hundred knights, truly told,
Shall play with bowls in alleys cold,
Your disease to drive away;
To see the fishes in pools play,
To a drawbridge then shall ye,
Th' one half of stone, th' other of tree;
A barge shall meet you full right,
With twenty-four oars full bright,
With trumpets and with clarion,
The fresh water to row up and down.

Forty torches burning bright
At your bridge to bring you light.
Into your chamber they shall you bring,
With much mirth and more liking.
Your blankets shall be of fustian,
Your sheets shall be of cloth of Rennes.
Your head sheet shall be of pery pight,
With diamonds set and rubies bright.
When you are laid in bed so soft,
A cage of gold shall hang aloft,
With long paper fair burning,
And cloves that be sweet smelling.
Frankincense and olibanum,
That when ye sleep the taste may come;
And if ye no rest can take,
All night minstrels for you shall wake.”

Amid such fancies and splendours the poets delight
and lose themselves; and the woof, like the embroideries
of their canvas, bears the mark of this love of deco-

¹ Warton, i. 176, spelling modernised.
ration. They weave it out of adventures, of extraordinary and surprising events. Now it is the life of King Horn, who, thrown into a boat when a lad, is wrecked upon the coast of England, and, becoming a knight, reconquers the kingdom of his father. Now it is the history of Sir Guy, who rescues enchanted knights, cuts down the giant Colbrand, challenges and kills the Sultan in his tent. It is not for me to recount these poems, which are not English, but only translations; still, here as in France, there are many of them; they fill the imagination of the young society, and they grow in exaggeration, until, falling to the lowest depth of insipidity and improbability, they are buried for ever by Cervantes. What would people say of a society which had no literature but the opera with its unrealities? Yet it was a literature of this kind which formed the intellectual food of the middle ages. People then did not ask for truth, but entertainment, and that vehement and hollow, full of glare and startling events. They asked for impossible voyages, extravagant challenges, a racket of contests, a confusion of magnificence and entanglement of chances. For introspective history they had no liking, cared nothing for the adventures of the heart, devoted their attention to the outside. They remained children to the last, with eyes glued to a series of exaggerated and coloured images, and, for lack of thinking, did not perceive that they had learnt nothing.

What was there beneath this fanciful dream? Brutal and evil human passions, unchained at first by religious fury, then delivered up to their own devices, and, beneath a show of external courtesy, as vile as ever. Look at the popular king, Richard Cœur de Lion, and reckon up his butcheries and murders: "King Richard,"
CHAP. II. THE NORMANS.

says a poem, "is the best king ever mentioned in song." I have no objection; but if he has the heart of a lion, he has also that brute's appetite. One day, under the walls of Acre, being convalescent, he had a great desire for some pork. There was no pork. They killed a young Saracen, fresh and tender, cooked and salted him, and the king ate him and found him very good; whereupon he desired to see the head of the pig. The cook brought it in trembling. The king falls a laughing, and says the army has nothing to fear from famine, having provisions ready at hand. He takes the town, and presently Saladin's ambassadors come to sue for pardon for the prisoners. Richard has thirty of the most noble beheaded, and bids his cook boil the heads, and serve one to each ambassador, with a ticket bearing the name and family of the dead man. Meanwhile, in their presence, he eats his own with a relish, bids them tell Saladin how the Christians make war, and ask him if it is true that they fear him. Then he orders the sixty thousand prisoners to be led into the plain:

"They were led into the place full even.
There they heard angels of heaven;
They said: "Seigneures, tuez, tuez!
Spare them nought, and beheadeth these!"
King Richard heard the angels' voice,
And thanked God and the holy cross."

Thereupon they behead them all. When he took a town, it was his wont to murder every one, even children and women. Such was the devotion of the middle ages, not only in romances, as here, but in history. At the

1 Warton, l. 123:
"In France these rhymes were wroht,
Every Englyshe ne knew it not."
taking of Jerusalem the whole population, seventy thousand persons, were massacred.

Thus even in chivalrous stories the fierce and unbridled instincts of the bloodthirsty brute break out. The authentic narratives show it. Henry II. irritated at a page, attempted to tear out his eyes. John Lackland let twenty-three hostages die in prison of hunger. Edward II. caused at one time twenty-eight nobles to be hanged and disembowelled, and was himself put to death by the insertion of a red-hot iron into his bowels. Look in Froissart for the debaucheries and murders in France as well as in England, of the Hundred Years' War, and then for the slaughters of the Wars of the Roses. In both countries feudal independence ended in civil war, and the middle age founders under its vices. Chivalrous courtesy, which cloaked the native ferocity, disappears like some hangings suddenly consumed by the breaking out of a fire; at that time in England they killed nobles in preference, and prisoners too, even children, with insults, in cold blood. What, then, did man learn in this civilisation and by this literature? How was he humanised? What precepts of justice, habits of reflection, store of true judgments, did this culture interpose between his desires and his actions, in order to moderate his passion? He dreamed, he imagined a sort of elegant ceremonial in order the better to address lords and ladies; he discovered the gallant code of little Jehan de Saintré. But where is the true education? Wherein has Froissart profited by all his vast experience? He was a fine specimen of a babbling child; what they called his poesy, the poésie neuve, is only a refined gabble, a senile puerility. Some rheto-

1 See Lingard's History, ii. 56, note 4.—Tr.
ricians, like Christine de Pisan, try to round their periods after an ancient model; but all their literature amounts to nothing. No one can think. Sir John Maundeville, who travelled all over the world a hundred and fifty years after Villehardouin, is as contracted in his ideas as Villehardouin himself. Extraordinary legends and fables, every sort of credulity and ignorance, abound in his book. When he wishes to explain why Palestine has passed into the hands of various possessors instead of continuing under one government, he says that it is because God would not that it should continue longer in the hands of traitors and sinners, whether Christians or others. He has seen at Jerusalem, on the steps of the temple, the footmarks of the ass which our lord rode on Palm Sunday. He describes the Ethiopians as a people who have only one foot, but so large that they can make use of it as a parasol. He instances one island "where be people as big as gyants, of 28 feet long, and have no cloathing but beasts' skins;" then another island, "where there are many evil and foul women, but have precious stones in their eyes, and have such force that if they behold any man with wrath, they slay him with beholding, as the basilisk doth." The good man relates; that is all: doubt and common sense scarcely exist in the world he lives in. He has neither judgment nor reflection; he piles facts one on top of another, with no further connection; his book is simply a mirror which reproduces recollections of his eyes and ears. "And all those who will say a Pater and an Ave Maria in my behalf, I give them an interest and a share in all the holy pilgrimages I ever made in my life." That is his farewell, and accords with all the rest. Neither public morality nor public knowledge
has gained anything from these three centuries of culture. This French culture, copied in vain throughout Europe, has but superficially adorned mankind, and the varnish with which it decked them, is already tarnished everywhere or scales off. It was worse in England, where the thing was more superficial and the application worse than in France, where foreign hands laid it on, and where it could only half cover the Saxon crust, where that crust was worn away and rough. That is the reason why, during three centuries, throughout the whole first feudal age, the literature of the Normans in England, made up of imitations, translations, and clumsy copies, ends in nothing.

VI.

Meantime, what has become of the conquered people? Has the old stock, on which the brilliant continental flowers were grafted, engendered no literary shoot of its own? Did it continue barren during all this time under the Norman axe, which stripped it of all its buds? It grew very feebly, but it grew nevertheless. The subjugated race is not a dismembered nation, dislocated, uprooted, sluggish, like the populations of the Continent, which, after the long Roman oppression, were given up to the unrestrained invasion of barbarians; it increased, remained fixed in its own soil, full of sap: its members were not displaced; it was simply lopped in order to receive on its crown a cluster of foreign branches. True, it had suffered, but at last the wound closed, the saps mingled. Even the hard, stiff ligatures with which the Conqueror bound it, henceforth contributed to its fixity and vigour. The land was mapped out; every title veri-
fied, defined in writing;¹ every right or tenure valued; every man registered as to his locality, and also his condition, duties, descent, and resources, so that the whole nation was enveloped in a network of which not a mesh would break. Its future development had to be within these limits. Its constitution was settled, and in this positive and stringent enclosure men were compelled to unfold themselves and to act. Solidarity and strife; these were the two effects of the great and orderly establishment which shaped and held together, on one side the aristocracy of the conquerors, on the other the conquered people; even as in Rome the systematic fusing of conquered peoples into the plebs, and the constrained organisation of the patricians in contrast with the plebs, enrolled the private individuals in two orders, whose opposition and union formed the state. Thus, here as in Rome, the national character was moulded and completed by the habit of corporate action, the respect for written law, political and practical aptitude, the development of combative and patient energy. It was the Domesday Book which, binding this young society in a rigid discipline, made of the Saxon the Englishman of our own day.

Gradually and slowly, amidst the gloomy complainings of the chroniclers, we find the new man fashioned by action, like a child who cries because steel stays, though they improve his figure, give him pain. However reduced and downtrodden the Saxons were, they did not

¹ Domesday Book. Frontis's Hist. of England, 1858, p. 13:
"Through all these arrangements a single aim is visible, that every man in England should have his definite place and definite duty assigned to him, and that no human being should be at liberty to lead at his own pleasure an unaccountable existence. The discipline of an army was transferred to the details of social life."
all sink into the populace. Some,¹ almost in every county, remained lords of their estates, on the condition of doing homage for them to the king. Many became vassals of Norman barons, and remained proprietors on this condition. A greater number became socagers, that is, free proprietors, burdened with a tax, but possessed of the right of alienating their property; and the Saxon villeins found patrons in these, as the plebs formerly did in the Italian nobles who were transplanted to Rome. The patronage of the Saxons who preserved their integral position was effective, for they were not isolated: marriages from the first united the two races, as it had the patricians and plebeians of Rome;² a Norman brother-in-law to a Saxon, defended himself in defending him. In those turbulent times, and in an armed community, relatives and allies were obliged to stand shoulder to shoulder in order to keep their ground. After all, it was necessary for the new-comers to consider their subjects, for these subjects had the heart and courage of men: the Saxons, like the plebeians at Rome, remembered their native rank and their original independence. We can recognise it in the complaints and indignation of the chroniclers, in the growling and menaces of popular revolt, in the long bitterness with which they continually recalled their ancient liberty, in

¹ Domesday Book, "tenants-in-chief."
² According to Ailred (temp. Hen. II.), "a king, many bishops and abbots, many great earls and noble knights descended both from English and Norman blood, constituted a support to the one and an honour to the other." "At present," says another author of the same period, "as the English and Normans dwell together, and have constantly, intermarried, the two nations are so completely mingled together, that at least as regards freemen, one can scarcely distinguish who is Norman and who English... The villeins attached to the soil," he says again, "are alone of pure Saxon blood."
the favour with which they cherished the daring and rebellion of outlaws. There were Saxon families at the end of the twelfth century, who had bound themselves by a perpetual vow, to wear long beards from father to son in memory of the national custom and of the old country. Such men, even though fallen to the condition of socagers, even sunk into villains, had a stiffer neck than the wretched colonists of the Continent, trodden down and moulded by four centuries of Roman taxation. By their feelings as well as by their condition, they were the broken remains, but also the living elements, of a free people. They did not suffer the extremities of oppression. They constituted the body of the nation, the laborious, courageous body which supplied its energy. The great barons felt that they must rely upon them in their resistance to the king. Very soon, in stipulating for themselves, they stipulated for all freemen,\(^1\) even for merchants and villains. Thereafter “No merchant shall be dispossessed of his merchandise, no villain of the instruments of his labour; no freeman, merchant, or villain shall be taxed unreasonably for a small crime; no freeman shall be arrested, or imprisoned, or disseised of his land, or outlawed, or destroyed in any manner, but by the lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land.” Thus protected they raise themselves and act. In each county there was a court, where all freeholders, small or great, came to deliberate about the municipal affairs, administer justice, and appoint tax-assessors. The red-bearded Saxon, with his clear complexion and great white teeth, came and sate by the Norman's side; these were franklins like the one whom Chaucer describes:

\(^1\) *Magna Charta, 1215.*
"A Frankelan was in the dayes, 
White was his berd, as is the dayes. 
Of his complexion he was sanguin, 
Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in win. 
To liven in delit was ever his won, 
For he was Epicures owen sone, 
That held opinion that plain delit 
Was veraily velicite parfit. 
An householder, and that a grete was he, 
Seint Julian he was in his contree. 
His brede, his ale, was alway after on; 
A better envyned man was no wher non. 
Withouten bake mete never was his hous, 
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous, 
It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke, 
Of all deinteles that men coude of thinke; 
After the sondry sesons of the yere, 
So changed he his mete and his soupere. 
Ful many a fat pantinich had he in mewe, 
And many a breme, and many a luce in stewe. 
Wo was his coke but if his sause were 
Poinant and sharpe, and reily all his gere 
His table, dormant in his halie alway 
Stode redy covered alle the longe day 
At sessiones ther was he lord and sire 
Ful often time he was knight of the shire. 
An anelace and a gypcier all of silk, 
Heng at his girdle, white as morwe milk. 
A shereve hadde he ben, and a contour. 
Was no wher swich a worthy vavasour." 1

With him occasionally in the assembly, oftencost among the audience, were the yeomen, farmers, foresters, tradesmen, his fellow-countrymen, muscular and resolute.

1 Chaucer's Works, ed. Sir H. Nicholas, 6 vols., 1845, Prol. to the Canterbury Tales, II. p. 11, l. 383
GEOFFREY CHAUCER.
men, not slow in the defence of their property, and in supporting him who would take their cause in hand, with voice, fist, and weapons. Is it likely that the discontent of such men to whom the following description applies could be overlooked?

"The Miller was a stout earl for the none,
Ful big he was of braun and eke of bones;
That proved well, for over all ther he came,
At wrastling he wold bere away the ram.
He was short shuldered brode, a thikke gnaerre,
Ther n's no dore, that he n'olde heve of barre,
Or breke it at a renning with his bode.
His bode as any sowe or fox was rede,
And therto brode, as though it were a spade.
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A wert, and thereon stode a tuft of heres,
Rede as the bristles of a sowes eres:
His nose-thirles blacke were and wide.
A sword and bokeler bare he by his side.
His mouth as wide was as a fornais,
He was a jangler and a goliardeis,
And that was most of sinne, and harlotries.
Wel coude he stelen corne and tullen thries.
And yet he had a thomb of gold pardes.
A white cote and a blew hode wered he.
A baggepipe wel coude he blowe and sounes,
And therwithall he brought us out of toune."

Those are the athletic forms, the square build, the jelly John Bulls of the period, such as we yet find them, nourished by meat and porter, sustained by bodily exercise and boxing. These are the men we must keep before us, if we will understand how political liberty

1 Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, ii. p. 17, l. 547.
has been established in this country. Gradually they find the simple knights, their colleagues in the county court, too poor to be present with the great barons at the royal assemblies, coalescing with them. They become united by community of interests, by similarity of manners, by nearness of condition; they take them for their representatives, they elect them.¹ They have now entered upon public life, and the advent of a new reinforcement, gives them a perpetual standing in their changed condition. The towns laid waste by the Conquest are gradually repopulated. They obtain or exact charters; the townsfolk buy themselves out of the arbitrary taxes that were imposed on them; they get possession of the land on which their houses are built; they unite themselves under mayors and aldermen. Each town now, within the meshes of the great feudal net, is a power. The Earl of Leicester, rebelling against the king, summons two burgesses from each town to Parliament,² to authorise and support him. From that time the conquered race, both in country and town, rose to political life. If they were taxed, it was with their consent; they paid nothing which they did not agree to. Early in the fourteenth century their united deputies composed the House of Commons; and already, at the close of the preceding century, the Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking in the name of the king, said to the pope, “It is the custom of the kingdom of England, that in all affairs relating to the state of this kingdom, the advice of all who are interested in them should be taken.”

¹ From 1214, and also in 1225 and 1254. Guizot, Origin of the Representative System in England, pp. 297–299.
² In 1264.
VII.

If they have acquired liberties, it is because they have obtained them by force; circumstances have assisted, but character has done more. The protection of the great barons and the alliance of the plain knights have strengthened them; but it was by their native roughness and energy that they maintained their independence. Look at the contrast they offer at this moment to their neighbours. What occupies the mind of the French people? The fabliaux, the naughty tricks of Reynard, the art of deceiving Master Isengrin, of stealing his wife, of cheating him out of his dinner, of getting him beaten by a third party without danger to one's self; in short, the triumph of poverty and cleverness over power united to folly. The popular hero is already the artful plebeian, chaffing, light-hearted, who, later on, will ripen into Panurge and Figaro, not apt to withstand you to your face, too sharp to care for great victories and habits of strife, inclined by the nimbleness of his wit to dodge round an obstacle; if he but touch a man with the tip of his finger, that man tumbles into the trap. But here we have other customs: it is Robin Hood, a valiant outlaw, living free and bold in the green forest, waging frank and open war against sheriff and law.1 If ever a man was popular in his country, it was he. "It is he," says an old historian, "whom the common people love so dearly to celebrate in games and comedies, and whose history, sung by fiddlers, interests them more than any other." In the sixteenth century he still had his commemoration day, observed by all the people in the small towns and in the country. Bishop Latimer, making his pastoral tour, announced

1 Aug. Thierry, iv. 56. Ritson's Robin Hood, 1832.
one day that he would preach in a certain place. On
the morrow, proceeding to the church, he found the
doors closed, and waited more than an hour before they
brought him the key. At last a man came and said to
him, "Syr, thys ys a busye day with us; we cannot
heare you: it is Robyn Hooes Daye. The parishe
are gone abrode to gather for Robyn Hoode. . . . I was
fayne there to geve place to Robyn Hoode." 4 The
bishop was obliged to divest himself of his ecclesiasti-
cal garments and proceed on his journey, leaving his
place to archers dressed in green, who played on a
rustic stage the parts of Robin Hood, Little John, and
their band. In fact, he was the national hero. Saxon
in the first place, and waging war against the men of
law, against bishops and archbishops, whose sway was
so heavy; generous, moreover, giving to a poor ruined
knight clothes, horse, and money to buy back the land
he had pledged to a rapacious abbot; compassionate too,
and kind to the poor, enjoining his men not to injure
yeomen and labourers; but above all rash, bold, proud,
who would go and draw his bow before the sheriff's eyes
and to his face; ready with blows, whether to give or
take. He slew fourteen out of fifteen foresters who
came to arrest him; he slays the sheriff, the judge, the
town gatekeeper; he is ready to slay as many more as
like to come; and all this joyously, jovially, like an
honest fellow who eats well; has a hard skin, lives in
the open air, and revels in animal life.

"In somer when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and long,
Hit is fulle mery in fayre foreste
To here the foulys song."

That is how many ballads begin; and the fine weather which makes the stags and oxen butt with their horns, inspires them with the thought of exchanging blows with sword or stick. Robin dreamed that two yeomen were thrashing him, and he wants to go and find them, angrily repelling Little John, who offers to go first:

“Ah John, by me thou settest no store,
And that I farley finde:
How oft sent I my men before,
And tarry myselfe behinde?

“It is no cunning a knave to ken,
An a man but heare him speake,
An it were not for bursting of my bowe,
John, I thinke head wold breake.”

He goes alone, and meets the robust yeoman, Guy of Gisborne:

“'He that had neyther beene kythe nor kin,
Might have seen a full fayre fight,
To see how together these yeomen went
With blades both browne and bright,

“To see how these yeomen together they fought
Two howres of a summer’s day;
Yett neither Robin Hood nor sir Guy
Them settled to flye away.”

You see Guy the yeoman is as brave as Robin Hood; he came to seek him in the wood; and drew the bow almost as well as he. This old popular poetry is not the praise of a single bandit, but of an entire class, the yeomanry. “God haffe mersey on Robin Hodys solle,

1 Ritzou, Robin Hood Ballads, i. iv. v. 41-48.
2 Ibid. v. 145-152.
and saffe all god yemanry." That is how many ballads end. The brave yeoman, inured to blows, a good archer, clever at sword and stick, is the favourite. There were also redoubtable, armed townsfolk, accustomed to make use of their arms. Here they are at work:

"‘O that were a shame,' said jolly Robin,
‘We being three, and thou but one,'
The pinder1 leapt back then thirty good foot,
’Twas thirty good foot and one.

"He leaned his back fast unto a thorn,
And his foot against a stone,
And there he fought a long summer’s day,
A summer’s day so long.

"Till that their swords on their broad bucklers
Were broke fast into their hands." 2

Often even Robin does not get the advantage:

"‘I pass not for length," bold Arthur reply’d,
‘My staff is of oke so free;
Eight foot and a half, it will knock down a calf,
And I hope it will knock down thee.'

"Then Robin could no longer forbear,
He gave him such a knock,
Quickly and soon the blood came down
Before it was ten a clock.

"Then Arthur he soon recovered himself,
And gave him such a knock on the crown,
That from every side of bold Robin Hood’s head
The blood came trickling down.

1 A pinder’s task was to pin the sheep in the fold, cattle in the penfold or pound (Richardson).—Tr.
"Then Robin raged like a wild boar,
As soon as he saw his own blood:
Then Bland was in hast, he laid on so fast,
As though he had been cleaving of wood.

"And about and about and about they went,
Like two wild bores in a chase,
Striving to aim each other to main,
Leg, arm, or any other place.

"And knock for knock they lustily dealt,
Which held for two hours and more,
Till all the wood rang at every bang.
They ply'd their work so sore.

"'Hold thy hand, hold thy hand,' said Robin Hood,
And let thy quarrel fall;
For here we may thrash our bones all to mesh,
And get no coyn at all.

"'And in the forrest of merry Sherwood,
Hereafter thou shalt be free.'
'God a mercy for nought, my freedom I bought,
I may thank my staff, and not thee.'" 1

Who are you, then?" says Robin:

"'I am a tanner,' bold Arthur reply'd,
'In Nottingham long I have wrought,
And if thou'lt come there, I vow and swear,
I will tan thy hide for nought.'" 2

"'God a mercy, good fellow,' said jolly Robin,
'Since thou art so kind and free;
And if thou wilt tan my hide for nought,
I will do as much for thee.'" 2

1 Ritson, ii. 6, v. 58-89.  
2 Ibid. v. 94-101.
With these generous offers, they embrace; a free exchange of honest blows always prepares the way for friendship. It was so Robin Hood tried Little John, whom he loved all his life after. Little John was seven feet high, and being on a bridge, would not give way. Honest Robin would not use his bow against him, but went and cut a stick seven feet long; and they agreed amicably to fight on the bridge until one should fall into the water. They fall to so merrily that "their bones ring." In the end Robin falls, and he feels only the more respect for Little John. Another time, having a sword with him, he was thrashed by a tinker who had only a stick. Full of admiration, he gives him a hundred pounds. Again he was thrashed by a potter, who refused him toll; then by a shepherd. They fight to wile away time. Even now-a-days boxers give each other a friendly grip before setting to; they knock one another about in this country honourably, without malice, fury, or shame. Broken teeth, black eyes, smashed ribs, do not call for murderous vengeance: it would seem that the bones are more sound and the nerves less sensitive in England than elsewhere. Blows once exchanged, they take each other by the hand, and dance together on the green grass,

"Then Robin took them both by the hands,
   And danced round about the oke tree.
   'For three merry men, and three merry men,
   And three merry men we be.'"

Moreover, these people, in each parish, practised the bow every Sunday, and were the best archers in the world; from the close of the fourteenth century the general emancipation of the villeins multiplied
their number greatly, and you can now understand how, amidst all the operations and changes of the great central powers, the liberty of the subject survived. After all, the only permanent and unalterable guarantee, in every country and under every constitution, is this unspoken declaration in the heart of the mass of the people, which is well understood on all sides: "If any man touches my property, enters my house, obstructs or molests me, let him beware. I have patience, but I have also strong arms, good comrades, a good blade, and, on occasion, a firm resolve, happen what may, to plunge my blade up to its hilt in his throat."

VIII.

Thus thought Sir John Fortescue, Chancellor of England under Henry VI., exiled in France during the Wars of the Roses, one of the oldest prose-writers, and the first who weighed and explained the constitution of his country. He says:

"It is cowardise and lack of hartes and corage that kepeth the Frenchmen from rysynge, and not poverty, which corage no Frencsmen hath like to the English man. It hath ben often seen in Englonde that iij or iv theses, for povertie, hath sett upon vij or viij true men, and robbyd them al. But it hath not ben seen in Fraunce, that vij or viij theses have ben hardy to robbe iij or iv true men. Wherfor it is right seld that Frenchmen be hangyd for robberye, for that they have no hartys to do so terryble an acte. There be therfor mo men

1 The Difference between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy—A learned Condemnation of the Politic Laws of England (Latin). I frequently quote from the second work, which is more full and complete.

2 Thé courage which finds utterance here is coarse; the English instincts are combative and independent. The French race, and the Gauls generally, are perhaps the most reckless of life of any.
hangyd in Englond, in a yere, for robberye and manslaughter, than ther be hangid in Fraunce for such cause of crime in vij yers.”

This throws a startling and terrible light on the violent condition of this armed community, where sudden attacks are an everyday matter, and every one, rich and poor, lives with his hand on his sword. There were great bands of malefactors under Edward I, who infested the country, and fought with those who came to seize them. The inhabitants of the towns were obliged to gather together with those of the neighbouring towns, with hue and cry, to pursue and capture them. Under Edward III, there were barons who rode about with armed escorts and archers, seizing the manors, carrying off ladies and girls of high degree, mutilating, killing, extorting ransoms from people in their own houses, as if they were in an enemy’s land, and sometimes coming before the judges at the sessions in such guise and in so great force that the judges were afraid and dared not administer justice. Read the letters of the Paston family, under Henry VI. and Edward IV., and you will see how private war was at every door, how it was necessary for a man to provide himself with men and arms, to be on the alert for defence of his property, to be self-reliant, to depend on his own strength and courage. It is this excess of vigour and readiness to fight which, after their victories in France, set them against one another in England, in the butcheries of the Wars of

1 The Difference, etc., 3d ed. 1724, ch. xiii. p. 98. There are nowadays in France 42 highway robberies as against 788 in England. In 1843, there were in England four times as many accusations of crimes and offences as in France, having regard to the number of inhabitants (Moutou de Jonné).
2 Statute of Winchester, 1285; Ordonnance of 1376.
the Roses. The strangers who saw them were astonished at their bodily strength and courage, at the great pieces of beef "whilst feed their muscles, at their military habits, their fierce obstinacy, as of savage beasts." They are like their bulldogs, an untameable race, who in their mad courage "cast themselves with shut eyes into the den of a Russian bear, and get their head broken like a rotten apple." This strange condition of a militant community, so full of danger, and requiring so much effort, does not make them afraid. King Edward having given orders to send disturbers of the peace to prison without legal proceedings, and not to liberate them, on bail or otherwise, the Commons declared the order "horribly vexatious;" resist it, refuse to be too much protected. Less peace, but more independence. They maintain the guarantees of the subject at the expense of public security, and prefer turbulent liberty to arbitrary order. Better suffer marauders whom they could fight, than magistrates under whom they would have to bend.

This proud and persistent notion gives rise to, and fashions Fortescue's whole work:

"Ther be two kynds of kyngdomys, of the which that one ys a lordship callid in Latyne Dominium regale, and that other is callid Dominium politicum et regale."

The first is established in France, and the second in England.

"And they dyversen in that the first may rule his people by such lawys as he makyth hymself, and therefore he may set upon them talys, and other impositions, such as he wyl hymself, with-

"* Benvenuto Cellini, quoted by Froude, i. 20, Hist. of England. Shakespeare, Henry V.: conversation of French lords before the battle of Agincourt."
out their assent. The second may not rule bys people by other laws than such as they assenten unto; and therfore he may set upon them non impositions without their own assent." ¹

In a state like this, the will of the people is the prime element of life. Sir John Fortescue says further:

"A king of England cannot at his pleasure make any alterations in the laws of the land, for the nature of his government is not only regal, but political."

"In the body politic, the first thing which lives and moves is the intention of the people, having in it the blood, that is, the prudential care and provision for the public good, which it transmits and communicates to the head, as to the principal part, and to all the rest of the members of the said body politic, whereby it subsists and is invigorated. The law under which the people is incorporated may be compared to the nerves or sinews of the body natural. . . . And as the bones and all the other members of the body preserve their functions and discharge their several offices by the nerves, so do the members of the community by the law. And as the head of the body natural cannot change its nerves or sinews, cannot deny to the several parts their proper energy, their due proportion and aliment of blood, neither can a king who is the head of the body politic change the laws thereof, nor take from the people what is theirs by right, against their consents. . . . For he is appointed to protect his subjects in their lives, properties, and laws, for this very end and purpose he has the delegation of power from the people."

Here we have all the ideas of Locke in the fifteenth century; so powerful is practice to suggest theory! so quickly does man discover, in the enjoyment of liberty, the nature of liberty! Fortescue goes further; he contrasts, step by step, the Roman law, that inheritance of all

¹ The Difference, etc., p. 1.
Latin peoples, with the English law, that heritage of all Teutonic peoples: one the work of absolute princes, and tending altogether to the sacrifice of the individual; the other the work of the common will, tending altogether to protect the person. He contrasts the maxims of the imperial jurisconsults, who accord "force of law to all which is determined by the prince," with the statutes of England, which "are not enacted by the sole will of the prince, . . . but with the concurrent consent of the whole kingdom, by their representatives in Parliament, . . . more than three hundred select persons." He contrasts the arbitrary nomination of imperial officers with the election of the sheriff, and says:

"There is in every county a certain officer, called the king's sheriff, who, amongst other duties of his office, executes within his county all mandates and judgments of the king's courts of justice: he is an annual officer, and it is not lawful for him, after the expiration of his year, to continue to act in his said office, neither shall he be taken in again to execute the said office within two years thence next ensuing. The manner of his election is thus: Every year, on the morrow of All-Souls, there meet in the King's Court of Exchequer all the king's counsellors, as well lords spiritual and temporal, as all other the king's justices, all the barons of the Exchequer, the Master of the Rolls, and certain other officers, when all of them, by common consent, nominate three of every county knights or esquires, persons of distinction, and such as they esteem fittest qualified to bear the office of sheriff of that county for the year ensuing. The king only makes choice of one out of the three so nominated and returned, who, in virtue of the king's letters patent, is constituted High Sheriff of that county."

He contrasts the Roman procedure, which is satisfied
with two witnesses to condemn a man, with the jury, the three permitted challenges, the admirable guarantees of justice with which the uprightness, number, repute, and condition of the juries surround the sentence. About the juries he says:

"Twelve good and true men being sworn, as in the manner above related, legally qualified, that is, having, over and besides their moveables, possessions in land sufficient, as was said, wherewith to maintain their rank and station; neither inspected by, nor at variance with either of the parties; all of the neighbourhood; there shall be read to them, in English, by the Court, the record and nature of the plea." 1

Thus protected, the English commons cannot be other than flourishing. Consider, on the other hand, he says to the young prince whom he is instructing, the condition of the commons in France. By their taxes, tax on salt, on wine, billeting of soldiers, they are reduced to great misery. You have seen them on your travels.

"The same Commons be so impoverishe and destreyded, that they may unner lyve. They drink water, they eate apples, with bred right brown made of rye. They eate no flesh, but if it be selden, a litill larde, or of the entrails or heds of besta sclayne for the nobles and merchants of the land. They weryn no wolyn, but if it be a pore cote under their uttermost garment, made of grete canvas, and cal it a frok. Their hosyn be of like canvas, and passen not their knee, wherfor they be gartrid and their thyghs bare. Their wifes and children gone bare fot." 1

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1 The original of this very famous treatise, De Laudibus Legum Angliae, was written in Latin between 1464 and 1470, first published in 1537, and translated into English in 1775 by Francis Gregor. I have taken these extracts from the magnificent edition of Sir John Fortescue's works published in 1869 for private distribution, and edited by Thomas Fortescue, Lord Clermont. Some of the pieces quoted, left in the old spelling, are taken from an older edition, translated by Robert Mulcaster in 1567.—Tu
... For sum of them, that was wonte to pay to his lord for his tenement which he kyrithe by the yeare a scute payth now to the kyng, over that scute, fyve skuts. Wher throughe they be artyd by necessite so to watch, labour and grub in the ground for their sustenance, that their nature is much wasted, and the kynd of them brought to nowght. Thy gone croyed and ar feeble, not able to fight nor to defend the realm; nor they have wepon, nor monye to buy them wepon withal. ... This is the frute first of lyre Jus regale. ... But blessed be God, this land ys rulid under a better lawe, and therfor the people therof be not in such penurye, nor therby hurt in their persons, but they be wealthie and have all things necessarie to the sustenance of nature. Wherefore they be myghty and able to resyste the adversaries of the realmes that do or will do them wrong. Loo, this is the frut of Jus politicum et regale, under which we lyve.1 "Everye inhabiter of the realme of England useth and enjoyeth at his pleasure all the fruites that his land or cattel beareth, with al the profits and commodities which by his owne travayle, or by the labour of others, has gaineth; not hindered by the injurie or wrong deteinemnt of anye man, but that hee shall bee allowed a reasonable recompence.2 ... Hereby it commeth to passe that the men of that lande are riche, havyng aboundance of golde and silver, and other things necessarie for the main- tenance of man's life. They drinke no water, unless it be so, that some for devotion, and uppon a zeale of penaunce, doe abstaine from other drinks. They eate plentifully of all kindes of fleshe and fishe. They weare fine woollen cloth in all their apparel; they have also aboundance of bed-coveringes in their houses, and of all other woollen stuffe. They have greate store of all hustlementes and implementes of householde, they are plentifully furnished with al instruments of husbandry, and all other things that are requisite to the accomplishment of a quiet and wealthy lyfe, according to their estates and degrees. Neither

1 Of an Absolute and Limited Monarchy, 3d ed., 1724, ch. iii. p. 16.
2 Commines bears the same testimony.
are they sued in the lawe, but onely before ordinary judges, where by the lawes of the lande they are justly intreated. Neither are they arrested or impleaded for their moveables or possessions, or arraigned of any offence, bee it never so great and outrageous, but after the lawes of the land, and before the judges aforesaid.”

All this arises from the constitution of the country and the distribution of the land. Whilst in other countries we find only a population of paupers, with here and there a few lords, England is covered and filled with owners of lands and fields; so that “therein so small a thorpe cannot bee founde, wherein dwelleth not a knight, an esquire, or suche a householder as is there commonly called a franklayne, enryched with greate possessions. And also other freeholders, and many yeomen able for their livelodes to make a jurye in fourme aforesmentioned. For there bee in that lande divers yeomen, which are able to dispay by the yeare above a hundred poundes”

1 De Laudibus, etc, ch xxxvi
2 “The might of the realm most stondyth upon archers which be not rich men” Compare Hallam, ii. 482 All this takes us back as far as the Conquest, and farther. “It is reasonable to suppose that the greater part of those who appear to have possessed small freeholds or parcels of manors were no other than the original nation. . . . A respectable class of free socage, having in general full right of alienating their lands, and holding them probably at a small certain rent from the lord of the manor, frequently occurs in the Domesday Book.” At all events, there were in Domesday Book Savons “perfectly exempt from villenage.” This class is mentioned with respect in the treatises of Glanvil and Braden. As for the villeins, they were quickly liberated in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, either by their own energies or by becoming copyholders. The Wars of the Roses still further raised the commons; orders were frequently issued, previous to a battle, to slay the nobles and spare the commoners
3 Description of England, 275.
"This sort of people, have more estimation than labourers and the common sort of artificers, and these commonlie live wealthilie, keeps good houses, and travell to get riches. They are for the most part farmers to gentlemen," and keep servants of their own. "These were they that in times past made all France afraid. And albeit they be not called master, as gentlemen are, or sir, as to knights appertaineth, but onelie John and Thomas, etc., yet have they beene found to have done verie good service; and the kings of England, in foughten battels, were wont to remaine among them (who were their footmen) as the French kings did among their horsemen: the prince thereby showing where his chiefe strength did consist."

Such men, says Fortescue, might form a legal jury, and vote, resist, he associated, do everything wherein a free government consists: for they were numerous in every district; they were not down-trodden like the timid peasants of France; they had their honour and that of their family to maintain; "they be well provided with arms; they remember that they have won battles in France." 1 Such is the class, still obscure, but more

1 The following is a portrait of a yeoman, by Latimer, in the first sermon preached before Edward VI., 8th March 1549: "My father was a yeoman, and had no lands of his own; only he had a farm of £3 or £4 by year at the uttermost, and hercapon he till-ed so much as kept half-a-dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find the king a harness, with himself and his horse; while he came to the place that he should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his harness when we went unto Blackheath field. He kept me to school, or else I had not been able to have preached before the King's Majesty now. He married my sisters with £5 or 20 nobles a-piece, so that he brought them up in godliness and fear of God; he kept hospitality for his poor neighbours, and some alms he gave to the poor; and all this did he of the said farm. Where he that now hath it payeth £16 by the year, or more, and is not able to do anything for his prince, for himself, nor for his children, or give a cup of drink to the poor."

This is from the sixth sermon, preached before the young king, 12th
rich and powerful every century, which, founded by the
down-trodden Saxon aristocracy, and sustained by the
surviving Saxon character, ended, under the lead of the
inferior Norman nobility, and under the patronage of
the superior Norman nobility, in establishing and settling
a free constitution, and a nation worthy of liberty.

IX.

When, as here, men are endowed with a serious
character, have a resolute spirit, and possess independent
habits, they deal with their conscience as with their
daily business, and end by laying hands on church
as well as state. Already for a long time the ex-
actions of the Roman See had provoked the resistance
of the people, and the higher clergy became unpopular.
Men complained that the best livings were given by
the Pope to non-resident strangers; that some Italian,
unknown in England, possessed fifty or sixty benefices
in England; that English money poured into Rome;
and that the clergy, being judged only by clergy, gave
themselves up to their vices, and abused their state
of immunity. In the first years of Henry III.'s reign
there were nearly a hundred murders committed by
priests then alive. At the beginning of the four-
teenth century the ecclesiastical revenue was twelve

April 1549: "In my time my poor father was as diligent to teach me
to shoot as to learn (me) any other thing; and so, I think, other men
did their children. He taught me how to draw, how to lay my body
in my bow, and not to shoot with strength of arms, as other nations do,
but with strength of the body. I had my bows bought me according
to my age and strength; as I increased in them, so my bows were
made bigger and bigger; for men shall never shoot well except they be
brought up in it. It is a goodly art, a wholesome kind of exercise, and
much commended in physic."

1 In 1246, 1378. Thierry, iii. 79.
times greater than the civil; about half the soil was in the hands of the clergy. At the end of the century the commons declared that the taxes paid to the church were five times greater than the taxes paid to the crown; and some years afterwards,\(^1\) considering that the wealth of the clergy only served to keep them in idleness and luxury, they proposed to confiscate it for the public benefit. Already the idea of the Reformation had forced itself upon them. They remembered how in the ballads Robin Hood ordered his folk to spare the yeomen, labourers, even knights, if they are good fellows, but never to let abbots or bishops escape. The prelates were grievously oppressing the people by means of their privileges, ecclesiastical courts, and tithes; when suddenly, amid the pleasant banter or the monotonous babble of the Norman versifiers, we hear the indignant voice of a Saxon, a man of the people and a victim of oppression, thundering against them.

It is the vision of Piers Ploughman, written, it is supposed, by a secular priest of Oxford.\(^2\) Doubtless the traces of French taste are perceptible. It could not be otherwise: the people from below can never quite prevent themselves from imitating the people above; and the most unshackled popular poets, Burns and Béranger, too often preserve an academic style. So here a fashionable machinery, the allegory of the Roman de la Rose, is pressed into service. We have Do-well, Covetousness, Avarice, Simony, Conscience, and a whole world of talking abstractions. But, in spite of these

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\(^1\) 1404–1409. The commons declared that with these revenues the king would be able to maintain 15 earls, 1600 knights, 6200 squires, and 100 hospitals; each earl receiving annually 300 marks; each knight 100 marks, and the produce of four ploughed lands; each squire 40 marks, and the produce of two ploughed lands

\(^2\) About 1862.
vain foreign phantoms, the body of the poem is national, and true to life. The old language reappears in part; the old metre altogether, no more rhymes, but barbarous alliterations; no more jesting, but a harsh gravity, a sustained invective, a grand and sombre imagination, heavy Latin texts, hammered down as by a Protestant hand. Piers Ploughman went to sleep on the Malvern hills, and there had a wonderful dream:

"Thanne gan I meten—a merveillous swevene,
That I was in a wildernes—wiste I nevere where;
And as I biheeld into the east,—an heigh to the sonne,
I seigh a tour on a toft,—trieliche y-maked,
A deep dale bynethe—a dungeon thereinne
With depe diches and derke—and dreadfulls of sichte.
A fair feeld ful of folk—fond I ther bitwene,
Of alle manere of men,—the meene and the riche,
Werchynge and wandrynge—as the world asketh.
Some putten hem to the plough,—pleiden ful selde,
In settyng and sowynge—swonken ful harde,
And wonnen that wastours—with glotonye dystruyeth." ¹

A gloomy picture of the world, like the frightful dreams which occur so often in Albert Durer and Luther. The first reformers were persuaded that the earth was given over to evil; that the devil had on it his empire and his officers; that Antichrist, seated on the throne of Rome, displayed ecclesiastical pomp to seduce souls and cast them into the fire of hell. So here Antichrist, with raised banner, enters a convent; bells are rung; monks in solemn procession go to meet him, and receive with congratulations their lord and father.² With seven

¹ *Piers Ploughman’s Vision and Creed*, ed. T. Wright, 1856, i. p. 3, l. 21–44.
² The Archdeacon of Richmond, on his tour in 1216, came to the priory of Bridlington with ninety-seven horses, twenty-one dogs, and three falcons.
great giants, the seven deadly sins, he besieges Con-
sience; and the assault is led by Idleness, who brings
with her an army of more than a thousand prelates:
for vices reign, more hateful from being in holy places,
and employed in the church of God in the devil’s service:

"As now is Religiou a rydere—a romere aboute,
A leedere of love-dayes—and a lond-buggere,
A prikere on a palfrey—fro manere to manere. . . .
And but if his knave knele—that shal his coppe brynge,
He loureth on hym, and asketh hym—who taughte hym
curteisie."¹

But this sacrilegious show has its day, and God puts
His hand on men in order to warn them. By order of
Conscience, Nature sends forth a host of plagues and
diseases from the planets :

"Kynde Conscience tho herde,—and cam out of the planetes,
And sente forth his forreyours—feveres and fluxes,
Coughes and carciacles,—crampes and tooth-aches,
Reumes and radegundes,—and roynous scabbes,
Biles and bocches,—and brennynges agues,
Freneses and foule yveles,—forageres of kynde . . .
There was 'Harrow! and Help!—Here cometh Kynde!'
With Deeth that is dredful—to undo us alle!'
The lord that lyved after lust—tho aloud cryde. . . .
Deeth cam dryvyng after,—and al to duste passhed
Kynges and knyghtes,—kaysers and popes, . . .
Manye a lovely lady—and lemmans of knyghtes,
Swowned and swelte'd for sorwe of hise dyntes."²

Here is a crowd of miseries, like those which Milton
has described in his vision of human life; tragic pictures

and emotions, such as the reformers delight to dwell upon. There is a like speech delivered by John Knox, before the fair ladies of Mary Stuart, which tears the veil from the human corpse just as coarsely, in order to exhibit its shame. The conception of the world, proper to the people of the north, all sad and moral, shows itself already. They are never comfortable in their country; they have to strive continually against cold or rain. They cannot live there carelessly, lying under a lovely sky, in a sultry and clear atmosphere, their eyes filled with the noble beauty and happy serenity of the land. They must work to live; be attentive, exact, keep their houses wind and water tight, trudge doggedly through the mud behind their plough, light their lamps in their shops during the day. Their climate imposes endless inconvenience, and exacts endless endurance. Hence arise melancholy and the idea of duty. Man naturally thinks of life as of a battle, oftener of black death which closes this deadly show, and leads so many plumed and disorderly processions to the silence and the eternity of the grave. All this visible world is vain; there is nothing true but human virtue,—the courageous energy with which man attains to self-command, the generous energy with which he employs himself in the service of others. On this view, then, his eyes are fixed; they pierce through worldly gauds, neglect sensual joys, to attain this. By such inner thoughts and feelings the ideal model is displaced; a new source of action springs up—the idea of righteousness. What sets them against ecclesiastical pomp and insolence, is neither the envy of the poor and low, nor the anger of the oppressed, nor a revolutionary desire to experimentalise abstract truth, but conscience. They tremble lest they should not work out their salvation if
they continue in a corrupt church; they fear the menaces of God, and dare not embark on the great journey with unsafe guides. "What is righteousness?" asked Luther anxiously, "and how shall I obtain it?" With like anxiety Piers Ploughman goes to seek Do-well, and asks each one to show him where he shall find him. "With us," say the friars. "Contra quath ich, Septies in die cadit justus, and ho so syngeth certys doth nat wel;" so he betakes himself to "study and writing," like Luther; the clerks at table speak much of God and of the Trinity, "and taken Bernarde to witnesse, and putteth forth presompcion... ac the carful mai crye and quaken atte gate, bothe a fyncred and a furst, and for defante spille ys non so hende to have hym yn Clerkus and knyghtes carpen of God ofte, and haveth hym muche in hure mouthe, ac mene men in herte;" and heart, inner faith, living virtue, are what constitute true religion. This is what these dull Saxons had begun to discover. The Teutonic conscience, and English good sense too, had been aroused, as well as individual energy, the resolution to judge and to decide alone, by and for one's self. "Christ is our hede that sitteth on hie, Heddis ne ought we have no mo," says a poem, attributed to Chaucer, and which, with others, claims independence for Christian consciences.  

``We ben his membres bothe also,  
Father he taught us call him all,  
Maisters to call forbad he thu,  
Al maisters ben wickid and fals.''

No other mediator between man and God. In vain the doctors state that they have authority for their words;

1 Piers Plowman's Credo; the Plowman's Tale, first printed in 1550. There were three editions in one year, it was so manifestly Protestant
there is a word of greater authority, to wit, God's. We hear it in the fourteenth century, this grand "word of God." It quitted the learned schools, the dead languages, the dusty shelves on which the clergy suffered it to sleep, covered with a confusion of commentators and Fathers. Wyclif appeared and translated it like Luther, and in a spirit similar to Luther's. "Cristen men and wymmen, olde and yonge, shulden studie fast in the Newe Testament, for it is of ful autorite, and opyn to understonding of simple men, as to the poynit that be moost nedeful to salvacioun." Religion must be secular, in order to escape from the hands of the clergy, who monopolise it; each must hear and read for himself the word of God: he will then be sure that it has not been corrupted; he will feel it better, and more, he will understand it better; for

"ech place of holy writ, both opyn and derk, techith mekenes and charite; and therfore he that kepith mekenes and charite hath the trewe understondyng and perfection of al holi writ. . . . Therfore no simple man of wit be afor indiscripabil to studie in the text of holy writ . . . and no clerk be pride of the verrey understondyng of holy writ, for whi understonding of hooly writ with outen charite that kepith Goddis heestis, makith a man depper dampned . . . and pride and covetise of clerkis is cause of her blinides and eresie, and priveth them fro verrey understondyng of holy writ."  

1 Knighton, about 1400, wrote thus of Wyclif: "Transtultt de Latino in anglicam lingum, non angelicam. Unde per ipsum fit vulgare, et magis apsumptum laici et mulieribus legere scientibus quam solet esse clericis admodum litteratis, et bene intelligentibus. Et sic evanglica margarita spargitur et a porci concuncatur . . . (ita) ut laici commune aeternum quod anto fuerat clericis et ecclesias doctoribus talentum supernum."


3 Ibid.
These are the memorable words that began to circulate in the markets and in the schools. They read the translated Bible, and commented on it; they judged the existing Church after it. What judgments these serious and untainted minds passed upon it, with what readiness they pushed on to the true religion of their race, we may see from their petition to Parliament.¹ One hundred and thirty years before Luther, they said that the pope was not established by Christ, that pilgrimages and image-worship were akin to idolatry, that external rites are of no importance, that priests ought not to possess temporal wealth, that the doctrine of transubstantiation made a people idolatrous, that priests have not the power of absolving from sin. In proof of all this they brought forward texts of Scripture. Fancy these brave spirits, simple and strong souls, who began to read at night in their shops, by candle-light; for they were shopkeepers—tailors, skinners, and bakers—who, with some men of letters, began to read, and then to believe, and finally got themselves burned.² What a sight for the fifteenth century, and what a promise! It seems as though, with liberty of action, liberty of mind begins to appear; that these common folk will think and speak; that under the conventional literature, imitated from France, a new literature is dawning; and that England, genuine England, half-mute since the Conquest, will at last find a voice.

She had not yet found it. King and peers ally themselves to the Church, pass terrible statutes, destroy books, burn heretics alive, often with refinement of torture,—one in a barrel, another hung by an iron chain.

¹ In 1395.
² 1401, William Sawtre, the first Lollard burned alive.
round his waist. The temporal wealth of the clergy had been attacked, and therewith the whole English constitution; and the great establishment above crushed out with its whole weight the revolutionists from below. Darkly, in silence, while the nobles were destroying each other in the Wars of the Roses, the commons went on working and living, separating themselves from the established Church, maintaining their liberties, amassing wealth, but not going further. Like a vast rock which underlies the soil, yet crops up here and there at distant intervals, they barely show themselves. No great poetical or religious work displays them to the light. They sang; but their ballads, first ignored, then transformed, reach us only in a late edition. They prayed; but beyond one or two indifferent poems, their incomplete and repressed doctrine bore no fruit. We may well see from the verse, tone, and drift of their ballads, that they are capable of the finest poetic originality, but their poetry is in the hands of yeomen and harpers. We perceive, by the precocity and energy of their religious protests, that they are capable of the most severe and impassioned creeds; but their faith remains hidden in the shop-parlours of a few obscure sectaries. Neither their faith nor their poetry has been

1 Commines, v. ch. 19 and 20: "In my opinion, of all kingdoms of the world of which I have any knowledge, where the public weal is best observed, and least violence is exercised on the people, and where no buildings are overthrown or demolished in war, England is the best; and the ruin and misfortune falls on them who wage the war. . . . The kingdom of England has this advantage beyond other nations, that the people and the country are not destroyed or burnt, nor the buildings demolished; and ill-fortune falls on men of war, and especially on the nobles."

2 See the ballads of Chevy Chase, The Nut-Brown Maid, etc. Many of them are admirable little dramas.
able to attain its end or issue. The Renaissance and the Reformation, those two national outbreaks, are still far off; and the literature of the period retains to the end, like the highest ranks of English society, almost the perfect stamp of its French origin and its foreign models.