

**EDWARD
DOWDEN**

A HISTORY OF
FRENCH
LITERATURE

Edward Dowden
A History of French Literature

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A History of French Literature / Short Histories of the Literatures of the
World: II.:*

Содержание

PREFACE	4
BOOK THE FIRST	8
CHAPTER I	8
I	9
II	13
III	21
IV	24
CHAPTER II	31
I	31
II	35
III	40
IV	42
CHAPTER III	48
I	48
II	52
III	55
CHAPTER IV	68
I	68
II	77
BOOK THE SECOND	90
CHAPTER I	90
CHAPTER II	106
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	120

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PREFACE

French prose and French poetry had interested me during so many years that when Mr. Gosse invited me to write this book I knew that I was qualified in one particular—the love of my subject. Qualified in knowledge I was not, and could not be. No one can pretend to know the whole of a vast literature. He may have opened many books and turned many pages; he cannot have penetrated to the soul of all books from the *Song of Roland* to *Toute la Lyre*. Without reaching its spirit, to read a book is little more than to amuse the eye with printed type.

An adequate history of a great literature can be written only by collaboration. Professor Petit de Julleville, in the excellent *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature Française*, at present in process of publication, has his well-instructed specialist for each

chapter. In this small volume I too, while constantly exercising my own judgment, have had my collaborators—the ablest and most learned students of French literature—who have written each a part of my book, while somehow it seems that I have written the whole. My collaborators are on my shelves. Without them I could not have accomplished my task; here I give them credit for their assistance. Some have written general histories of French literature; some have written histories of periods—the Middle Ages, the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth centuries; some have studied special literary fields or forms—the novel, the drama, tragedy, comedy, lyrical poetry, history, philosophy; many have written monographs on great authors; many have written short critical studies of books or groups of books. I have accepted from each a gift. But my assistants needed to be controlled; they brought me twenty thousand pages, and that was too much. Some were accurate in statement of fact, but lacked ideas; some had ideas, but disregarded accuracy of statement; some unjustly depreciated the seventeenth century, some the eighteenth. For my purposes their work had to be rewritten; and so it happens that this book is mine as well as theirs.

The sketch of mediæval literature follows the arrangement of matter in the two large volumes of M. Petit de Julleville and his fellow-labourers, to whom and to the writings of M. Gaston Paris I am on almost every page indebted. Many matters in dispute have here to be briefly stated in one way; there is no space for

discussion. Provençal literature does not appear in this volume. It is omitted from the History of M. Petit de Julleville and from that of M. Lanson. In truth, except as an influence, it forms no part of literature in the French language.

The reader who desires guidance in bibliography will find it at the close of each chapter of the History edited by M. Petit de Julleville, less fully in the notes to M. Lanson's History, and an excellent table of critical and biographical studies is appended to each volume of M. Lintilhac's *Histoire de la Littérature Française*. M. Lintilhac, however, omits many important English and German titles—among others, if I am not mistaken, those of Birsch-Hirschfeld's *Geschichte der Französischen Litteratur: die Zeit der Renaissance*, of Lotheissen's important *Geschichte der Französischen Litteratur im XVII. Jahrhundert*, and of Professor Flint's learned *Philosophy of History* (1893).

M. Lanson's work has been of great service in guiding me in the arrangement of my subjects, and in giving me courage to omit many names of the second or third rank which might be expected to appear in a history of French literature. In a volume like the present, selection is important, and I have erred more by inclusion than by exclusion. The limitation of space has made me desire to say no word that does not tend to bring out something essential or characteristic.

M. Lanson has ventured to trace French literature to the present moment. I have thought it wiser to close my survey with the decline of the romantic movement. With the rise of

naturalism a new period opens. The literature of recent years is rather a subject for current criticism than for historical study.

I cannot say how often I have been indebted to the writings of M. Brunetière, M. Faguet, M. Larroumet, M. Paul Stapfer, and other living critics: to each of the volumes of *Les Grands Écrivains Français*, and to many of the volumes of the *Classiques Populaires*. M. Lintilhac's edition of Merlet's *Études Littéraires* has also often served me. But to name my aids to study would be to fill some pages.

While not unmindful of historical and social influences, I desire especially to fix my reader's attention on great individuals, their ideas, their feelings, and their art. The general history of ideas should, in the first instance, be discerned by the student of literature through his observation of individual minds.

That errors must occur where so many statements are made, I am aware from past experience; but I have taken no slight pains to attain accuracy. It must not be hastily assumed that dates here recorded are incorrect because they sometimes differ from those given in other books. For my errors I must myself bear the responsibility; but by the editorial care of Mr. Gosse, in reading the proof-sheets of this book, the number of such errors has been reduced.

EDWARD DOWDEN.

DUBLIN, *June* 1897.

BOOK THE FIRST *THE MIDDLE AGES*

CHAPTER I **NARRATIVE RELIGIOUS POETRY** **—THE NATIONAL EPIC—THE** **EPIC OF ANTIQUITY—ROMANCES** **OF LOVE AND COURTESY**

The literature of the Middle Ages is an expression of the spirit of feudalism and of the genius of the Church. From the union of feudalism and Christianity arose the chivalric ideals, the new courtesy, the homage to woman. Abstract ideas, ethical, theological, and those of amorous metaphysics, were rendered through allegory into art. Against these high conceptions, and the overstrained sentiment connected with them, the positive intellect and the mocking temper of France reacted; a literature of satire arose. By degrees the bourgeois spirit encroached upon and overpowered the chivalric ideals. At length the mediæval conceptions were exhausted. Literature dwindled as its sources were impoverished; ingenuities and technical formalities

replaced imagination. The minds of men were prepared to accept the new influences of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

I

NARRATIVE RELIGIOUS POETRY

The oldest monument of the French language is found in the Strasburg Oaths (842); the oldest French poem possessing literary merit is the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, of which a redaction belonging to the middle of the eleventh century survives. The passion of piety and the passion of combat, the religious and the warrior motives, found early expression in literature; from the first arose the Lives of Saints and other devout writings, from the second arose the *chansons de geste*. They grew side by side, and had a like manner of development. If one takes precedence of the other, it is only because by the chances of time *Saint Alexis* remains to us, and the forerunners of the *Chanson de Roland* are lost. With each species of poetry *cantilènes*—short lyrico-epic poems—preceded the narrative form. Both the profane and what may be called the religious *chanson de geste* were sung or recited by the same jongleurs—men of a class superior to the vulgar purveyors of amusement. Gradually the poems of both kinds expanded in length, and finally prose narrative took the place of verse.

The Lives of Saints are in the main founded on Latin originals; the names of their authors are commonly unknown. *Saint Alexis*,

a tale of Syriac origin, possibly the work of Tedbalt, a canon of Vernon, consists of 125 stanzas, each of five lines which are bound together by a single assonant rhyme. It tells of the chastity and poverty of the saint, who flies from his virgin bride, lives among beggars, returns unrecognised to his father's house, endures the insults of the servants, and, dying at Rome, receives high posthumous honours; finally, he is rejoined by his wife—the poet here adding to the legend—in the presence of God, among the company of the angels. Some of the sacred poems are derived from the Bible, rhymed versions of which were part of the jongleur's equipment; some from the apocryphal gospels, or legends of Judas, of Pilate, of the Cross, or, again, from the life of the Blessed Virgin. The literary value of these is inferior to that of the versified Lives of the Saints. About the tenth century the marvels of Eastern hagiography became known in France, and gave a powerful stimulus to the devout imagination. A certain rivalry existed between the claims of profane and religious literature, and a popular audience for narrative poems designed for edification was secured by their recital in churches. Wholly fabulous some of these are—as the legend of St. Margaret—but they were not on this account the less welcome or the less esteemed. In certain instances the tale is dramatically placed in the mouth of a narrator, and thus the way was in a measure prepared for the future mystery-plays.

More than fifty of these Lives of Saints are known, composed generally in octosyllabic verse, and varying in length from some

hundreds of lines to ten thousand. In the group which treats of the national saints of France, an element of history obscured by errors, extravagances, and anachronisms may be found. The purely legendary matter occupies a larger space in those derived from the East, in which the religious ideal is that of the hermit life. The celebrated *Barlaam et Joasaph*, in which Joasaph, son of a king of India, escaping from his father's restraints, fulfils his allotted life as a Christian ascetic, is traceable to a Buddhist source. The narratives of Celtic origin—such as those of the Purgatory of St. Patrick and the voyages of St. Brendan—are coloured by a tender mysticism, and sometimes charm us with a strangeness of adventure, in which a feeling for external nature, at least in its aspects of wonder, appears. The Celtic saints are not hermits of the desert, but travellers or pilgrims. Among the lives of contemporary saints, by far the most remarkable is that of our English Becket by Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence. Garnier had himself known the archbishop; he obtained the testimony of witnesses in England; he visited the places associated with the events of Becket's life; his work has high value as an historical document; it possesses a personal accent, rare in such writings; a genuine dramatic vigour; and great skill and harmonious power in its stanzas of five rhyming lines.

A body of short poems, inspired by religious feeling, and often telling of miracles obtained by the intercession of the Virgin or the saints, is known as *Contes pieux*. Many of these were the work of Gautier de Coinci (1177-1236), a Benedictine monk; he

translates from Latin sources, but with freedom, adding matter of his own, and in the course of his pious narratives gives an image, far from flattering, of the life and manners of his own time. It is he who tells of the robber who, being accustomed to commend himself in his adventures to our Lady, was supported on the gibbet for three days by her white hands, and received his pardon; and of the illiterate monk who suffered shame because he knew no more than his *Ave Maria*, but who, when dead, was proved a holy man by the five roses that came from his mouth in honour of the five letters of Maria's name; and of the nun who quitted her convent to lead a life of disorder, yet still addressed a daily prayer to the Virgin, and who, returning after long years, found that the Blessed Mary had filled her place, and that her absence was unknown. The collection known as *Vies des Pères* exhibits the same naïveté of pious feeling and imagination. Man is weak and sinful; but by supernatural aid the humble are exalted, sinners are redeemed, and the suffering innocent are avenged. Even Théophile, the priest who sold his soul to the devil, on repentance receives back from the Queen of Heaven the very document by which he had put his salvation in pawn. The sinner (*Chevalier au barillet*) who endeavours for a year to fill the hermit's little cask at running streams, and endeavours in vain, finds it brimming the moment one tear of true penitence falls into the vessel. Most exquisite in its feeling is the tale of the *Tombreur de Notre-Dame*—a poor acrobat—a jongleur turned monk—who knows not even the *Pater noster* or the *Credo*, and

can only offer before our Lady's altar his tumbler's feats; he is observed, and as he sinks worn-out and faint before the shrine, the Virgin is seen to descend, with her angelic attendants, and to wipe away the sweat from her poor servant's forehead. If there be no other piety in such a tale as this, there is at least the piety of human pity.

II

THE NATIONAL EPIC

Great events and persons, a religious and national spirit, and a genius for heroic narrative being given, epic literature arises, as it were, inevitably. Short poems, partly narrative, partly lyrical, celebrate victories or defeats, the achievements of conquerors or defenders, and are sung to relieve or to sustain the passion of the time. The French *epopee* had its origin in the national songs of the Germanic invaders of Gaul, adopted from their conquerors by the Gallo-Romans. With the baptism of Clovis at Reims, and the acceptance of Christianity by the Franks (496), a national consciousness began to exist—a national and religious ideal arose. Epic heroes—Clovis, Clotaire, Dagobert, Charles Martel—became centres for the popular imagination; an echo of the Dagobert songs is found in *Floovent*, a poem of the twelfth century; eight Latin lines, given in the *Vie de Saint Faron* by Helgaire, Bishop of Meaux, preserve, in their ninth-century rendering, a fragment of the songs which celebrated Clotaire II.

Doubtless more and more in these lost *cantilènes* the German element yielded to the French, and finally the two streams of literature—French and German—separated; gradually, also, the lyrical element yielded to the epic, and the *chanson de geste* was developed from these songs.

In Charlemagne, champion of Christendom against Islam, a great epic figure appeared; on his person converged the epic interest; he may be said to have absorbed into himself, for the imagination of the singers and the people, the persons of his predecessors, and even, at a later time, of his successors; their deeds became his deeds, their fame was merged in his; he stood forth as the representative of France. We may perhaps regard the ninth century as the period of the transformation of the *cantilènes* into the *chansons de geste*; in the fragment of Latin prose of the tenth century—reduced to prose from hexameters, but not completely reduced—discovered at La Haye (and named after the place of its discovery), is found an epic episode of Carolingian war, probably derived from a *chanson de geste* of the preceding century. In each *chanson* the *gesta*,¹ the deeds or achievements of a heroic person, are glorified, and large as may be the element of invention in these poems, a certain historical basis or historical germ may be found, with few exceptions, in each. Roland was an actual person, and a battle was fought at Roncevaux in 778. William of Orange actually encountered the Saracens at Villedaigne in 793. Renaud de

¹ *Gestes* meant (1) deeds, (2) their history, (3) the heroic family.

Montauban lived and fought, not indeed against Charlemagne, but against Charles Martel. Ogier, Girard de Roussillon, Raoul de Cambrai, were not mere creatures of the fancy. Even when the narrative records no historical series of events, it may express their general significance, and condense into itself something of the spirit of an epoch. In the course of time, however, fantasy made a conquest of the historical domain; a way for the triumph of fantasy had been opened by the incorporation of legend into the narrative, with all its wild exaggerations, its reckless departures from truth, its conventional types of character, its endlessly-repeated incidents of romance—the child nourished by wild beasts, the combat of unrecognised father and son, the hero vulnerable only in one point, the vindication of the calumniated wife or maiden; and by the over-labour of fantasy, removed far from nature and reality, the epic material was at length exhausted.

The oldest surviving *chanson de geste* is the SONG OF ROLAND, and it is also the best. The disaster of Roncevaux, probably first sung in *cantilènes*, gave rise to other chansons, two of which, of earlier date than the surviving poem, can in a measure be reconstructed from the Chronicle of Turpin and from a Latin *Carmen de proditione Guenonis*. These, however, do not detract from the originality of the noble work in our possession, some of the most striking episodes of which are not elsewhere found. The oldest manuscript is at Oxford, and the last line has been supposed to give the author's name—Touroude

(Latinised "Tuoldus")—but this may have been the name of the jongleur who sang, or the transcriber who copied. The date of the poem lies between that of the battle of Hastings, 1066, where the minstrel Taillefer sang in other words the deeds of Roland, and the year 1099. The poet was probably a Norman, and he may have been one of the Norman William's followers in the invasion of England.

More than any other poem, the *Chanson de Roland* deserves to be named the Iliad of the Middle Ages. On August 15, 778, the rearguard of Charlemagne's army, returning from a successful expedition to the north of Spain, was surprised and destroyed by Basque mountaineers in the valley of Roncevaux. Among those who fell was Hrodland (Roland), Count of the march of Brittany. For Basques, the singers substituted a host of Saracens, who, after promise of peace, treacherously attack the Franks, with the complicity of Roland's enemy, the traitor Ganelon. By Roland's side is placed his companion-in-arms, Olivier, brave but prudent, brother of Roland's betrothed, *la belle Aude*, who learns her lover's death, and drops dead at the feet of Charlemagne. In fact but thirty-six years of age, Charlemagne is here a majestic old man, *à la barbe fleurie*, still full of heroic vigour. Around him are his great lords—Duke Naime, the Nestor of this Iliad; Archbishop Turpin, the warrior prelate; Oger the Dane; the traitor Ganelon. And overhead is God, who will send his angels to bear heavenwards the soul of the gallant Roland. The idea of the poem is at once national and religious—the struggle

between France, as champion of Christendom, and the enemies of France and of God. Its spirit is that of the feudal aristocracy of the eleventh century. The characters are in some degree representative of general types, but that of Roland is clearly individualised; the excess of soldierly pride which will not permit him, until too late, to sound his horn and recall Charlemagne to his aid, is a glorious fault. When all his comrades have fallen, he still continues the strife; and when he dies, it is with his face to the retreating foe. His fall is not unavenged on the Saracens and on the traitor. The poem is written in decasyllabic verse—in all 4000 lines—divided into sections or *laissez* of varying length, the lines of each *laisse* being held together by a single assonance.² And such is the form in which the best *chansons de geste* are written. The decasyllabic line, derived originally from popular Latin verse, rhythmical rather than metrical, such as the Roman legionaries sang, is the favourite verse of the older chansons. The alexandrine,³ first seen in the *Pèlerinage de Jérusalem* of the early years of the twelfth century, in general indicates later and inferior work. The *laisse*, bound in one by its identical assonance, might contain five lines or five hundred. In chansons of late date the full rhyme often replaces assonance; but inducing, as it did in unskilled hands, artificial and feeble expansions of the sense,

² *Assonance*, i.e. vowel-rhyme, without an agreement of consonants.

³ Verse of twelve syllables, with cesura after the sixth accented syllable. In the decasyllabic line the cesura generally followed the fourth, but sometimes the sixth, tonic syllable.

rhyme was a cause which co-operated with other causes in the decline of this form of narrative poetry.

Naturally the chansons which celebrated the achievements of one epic personage or one heroic family fell into a group, and the idea of cycles of songs having arisen, the later poets forced many independent subjects to enter into the so-called cycle of the king (Charlemagne), or that of William of Orange, or that of Doon of Mayence. The second of these had, indeed, a genuine cyclic character: it told of the resistance of the south of France to the Mussulmans. The last cycle to develop was that of the Crusades. Certain poems or groups of poems may be distinguished as *gestes* of the provinces, including the *Geste des Lorrains*, that of the North (*Raoul de Cambrai*), that of Burgundy, and others.⁴ Among these may be placed the beautiful tale of *Amis et Amiles*, a glorification of friendship between man and man, which endures all trials and self-sacrifices. Other poems, again, are unconnected with any of these cycles; and, indeed, the cyclic division is more a convenience of classification than a fact in the spontaneous development of this form of art. The entire period of the evolution of epic song extends from the tenth or eleventh to the fifteenth century, or, we might say, from the *Chanson de Roland* to the *Chronique de Bertrand Duguesclin*. The eleventh century produced the most admirable work; in the

⁴ The epopee composed in Provençal, sung but not transcribed, is wholly lost. The development of lyric poetry in the South probably checked the development of the epic.

twelfth century the chansons are more numerous, but nothing was written of equal merit with the Song of Roland; after the death of Louis VII. (1180) the old epic material was rehandled and beaten thin—the decadence was already in progress.

The style in which the *chansons de geste* are written is something traditional, something common to the people and to the time, rather than characteristic of the individual authors. They show little of the art of arranging or composing the matter so as to produce an unity of effect: the narrative straggles or condenses itself as if by accident; skill in transitions is unknown. The study of character is rude and elementary: a man is either heroic or dastard, loyal or a traitor; wholly noble, or absolutely base. Yet certain types of manhood and womanhood are presented with power and beauty. The feeling for external nature, save in some traditional formulæ, hardly appears. The passion for the marvellous is everywhere present: St. Maurice, St. George, and a shining company, mounted on white steeds, will of a sudden bear down the hordes of the infidel; an angel stands glorious behind the throne of Charlemagne; or in narrative of Celtic origin angels may be mingled with fays. God, the great suzerain, to whom even kings owe homage, rules over all; Jesus and Mary are watchful of the soldiers of the cross; Paradise receives the souls of the faithful. As for earth, there is no land so gay or so dear as *la douce France*. The Emperor is above all the servant and protector of the Church. As the influence of the great feudal lords increased, they are magnified often at

the expense of the monarchy; yet even when in high rebellion, they secretly feel the duty of loyalty. The recurring poetic epithet and phrase of formula found in the *chansons de geste* often indicate rather than veil a defect of imagination. Episodes and adventures are endlessly repeated from poem to poem with varying circumstances—the siege, the assault, the capture, the duel of Christian hero and Saracen giant, the Paynim princess amorous of a fair French prisoner, the marriage, the massacre, and a score of other favourite incidents.

The popularity of the French epepee extended beyond France. Every country of Europe translated or imitated the *chansons de geste*. Germany made the fortunate choice of *Roland* and *Aliscans*. In England two of the worst examples, *Fierabras* and *Otinel*, were special favourites. In Norway the chansons were applied to the purpose of religious propaganda. Italy made the tales of Roland, Ogier, Renaud, her own. Meanwhile the national epepee declined in France; a breath of scepticism touched and withered the leafage and blossom of imagination; it even became possible to parody—as in *Audigier*—the heroic manner. The employment of rhyme in place of assonance, and of the alexandrine in place of the decasyllabic line, encouraged what may be called poetical padding. The influence of the Breton romances diverted the *chansons de geste* into ways of fantasy; "We shall never know," writes M. Léon Gautier, "the harm which the Round Table has done us." Finally, verse became a weariness, and was replaced by prose. The decline had progressed to a fall.

III

THE EPIC OF ANTIQUITY

Later to develop than the national epopee was that which formed the cycle of antiquity. Their romantic matter made the works of the Greco-Roman decadence even more attractive than the writings of the great classical authors to poets who would enter into rivalry with the singers of the *chansons de geste*. These poems, which mediævalise ancient literature—poems often of portentous length—have been classified in three groups—epic romances, historical or pseudo-historical romances, and mythological tales, including the imitations of Ovid. The earliest in date of the first group (about 1150-1155) is the ROMANCE OF THEBES, the work of an unknown author, founded upon a compendium of the Thebaid of Statius, preceded by the story of Oedipus. It opened the way for the vast ROMANCE OF TROY, written some ten years later, by Benoit de Sainte-More. The chief sources of Benoit were versions, probably more or less augmented, of the famous records of the Trojan war, ascribed to the Phrygian Dares, an imaginary defender of the city, and the Cretan Dictys, one of the besiegers. Episodes were added, in which, on a slender suggestion, Benoit set his own inventive faculty to work, and among these by far the most interesting and admirable is the story of Troilus and Briseida, known better to us by her later name of Cressida. Through Boccaccio's *Il*

Filostrato this tale reached our English Chaucer, and through Chaucer it gave rise to the strange, half-heroic, half-satirical play of Shakespeare.

Again, ten years later, an unknown poet was adapting Virgil to the taste of his contemporaries in his *Eneas*, where the courtship of the Trojan hero and Lavinia is related in the chivalric manner. All these poems are composed in the swift octosyllabic verse; the *Troy* extends to thirty thousand lines. While the names of the personages are classical, the spirit and life of the romances are wholly mediæval: Troilus, and Hector, and Æneas are conceived as if knights of the Middle Ages; their wars and loves are those of gallant chevaliers. The *Romance of Julius Cæsar* (in alexandrine verse), the work of a certain Jacot de Forest, writing in the second half of the thirteenth century, versifies, with some additions from the Commentaries of Cæsar, an earlier prose translation by Jehan de Thuin (about 1240) of Lucan's *Pharsalia*—the oldest translation in prose of any secular work of antiquity. Cæsar's passion for Cleopatra in the Romance is the love prescribed to good knights by the amorous code of the writer's day, and Cleopatra herself has borrowed something of the charm of Tristram's Iseult.

If *Julius Cæsar* may be styled historical, the ROMAN D'ALEXANDRE, a poem of twenty thousand lines (to the form of which this romance gave its name—"alexandrine" verse), the work of Lambert le Tort and Alexandre de Bernay, can only be described as legendary. All—or nearly all—

that was written during the Middle Ages in French on the subject of Alexander may be traced back to Latin versions of a Greek compilation, perhaps of the first century, ascribed to Callisthenes, the companion of Alexander on his Asiatic expedition.⁵ It is uncertain how much the *Alexandre* may owe to a Provençal poem on the same subject, written in the early years of the twelfth century, probably by Albéric de Briançon, of which only a short fragment, but that of high merit, has been preserved. From his birth, and his education by Aristotle and the enchanter Nectanebus, to the division, as death approaches, of his empire between his twelve peers, the story of Alexander is a series of marvellous adventures; the imaginary wonders of the East, monstrous wild beasts, water-women, flower-maidens, Amazons, rain of fire, magic mountains, magic fountains, trees of the sun and of the moon, are introduced with a liberal hand. The hero is specially distinguished by the virtue of liberality; a jongleur who charms him by lays sung to the flute, is rewarded with the lordship of Tarsus, a worthy example for the twelfth-century patrons of the poet. The romance had a resounding fame.

Of classical poets, Ovid ranked next to Virgil in the esteem of the Middle Ages. The mythology of paganism was sanctified by the assumption that it was an allegory of Christian mysteries, and thus the stories might first be enjoyed

⁵ Not quite all, for certain borrowings were made from the correspondence of Alexander with Dindimus, King of the Brahmans, and from the *Alexandri Magni iter ad Paradisum*.

by the imagination, and then be expounded in their spiritual meaning. The *Metamorphoses* supplied Chrétien de Troyes with the subject of his *Philomena*; other writers gracefully dealt with the tales of *Piramus* and of *Narcissus*. But the most important work founded upon Ovid was a versified translation of the *Metamorphoses* (before 1305) by a Franciscan monk, Chrétien Legouais de Sainte-Maure, with appended interpretations, scientific, historical, moral, or religious, of the mythological fables. Ovid's *Art of Love*, of which more than one rendering was made, aided in the formation or development of the mediæval theory of love and the amorous casuistry founded upon that theory.

IV

ROMANCES OF LOVE AND COURTESY

Under the general title of the *Épopée courtoise*—the *Epopée of Courtesy*—may be grouped those romances which are either works of pure imagination or of uncertain origin, or which lead us back to Byzantine or to Celtic sources. They include some of the most beautiful and original poems of the Middle Ages. Appearing first about the opening of the twelfth century, later in date than the early *chansons de geste*, and contemporary with the courtly lyric poetry of love, they exhibit the chivalric spirit in a refined and graceful aspect; their marvels are not gross wonders, but often surprises of beauty; they are bright in colour, and

varied in the play of life; the passions which they interpret, and especially the passion of love, are felt with an exquisite delicacy and a knowledge of the workings of the heart. They move lightly in their rhymed or assonanced verse; even when they passed into the form of prose they retained something of their charm. Breton harpers wandering through France and England made Celtic themes known through their *lais*; the fame of King Arthur was spread abroad by these singers and by the *History* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. French poets welcomed the new matter of romance, infused into it their own chivalric spirit, made it a receptacle for their ideals of gallantry, courtesy, honour, grace, and added their own beautiful inventions. With the story of King Arthur was connected that of the sacred vessel—the graal—in which Joseph of Arimathea at the cross had received the Saviour's blood. And thus the rude Breton *lais* were elevated not only to a chivalric but to a religious purpose.

The romances of Tristan may certainly be named as of Celtic origin. About 1150 an Anglo-Norman poet, BÉROUL, brought together the scattered narrative of his adventures in a romance, of which a large fragment remains. The secret loves of Tristan and Iseut, their woodland wanderings, their dangers and escapes, are related with fine imaginative sympathy; but in this version of the tale the fatal love-philtre operates only for a period of three years; Iseut, with Tristan's consent, returns to her husband, King Marc; and then a second passion is born in their hearts, a passion which is the offspring not of magic but of natural attraction, and at a

critical moment of peril the fragment closes. About twenty years later (1170) the tale was again sung by an Anglo-Norman named THOMAS. Here—again in a fragment—we read of Tristan's marriage, a marriage only in name, to the white-handed Iseut of Brittany, his fidelity of heart to his one first love, his mortal wound and deep desire to see the Queen of Cornwall, the device of the white or black sails to announce the result of his entreaty that she should come, his deception, and the death of his true love upon her lover's corpse. Early in the thirteenth century was composed a long prose romance, often rehandled and expanded, upon the same subject, in which Iseut and Tristan meet at the last moment and die in a close embrace.

Le Chèvrefeuille (The Honeysuckle), one of several *lais* by a twelfth-century poetess, MARIE, living in England, but a native of France, tells gracefully of an assignation of Tristan and Iseut, their meeting in the forest, and their sorrowful farewell. Marie de France wrote with an exquisite sense of the generousities and delicacy of the heart, and with a skill in narrative construction which was rare among the poets of her time. In *Les Deux Amants*, the manly pride of passion, which in a trial of strength declines the adventitious aid of a reviving potion, is rewarded by the union in death of the lover and his beloved. In *Yonec* and in *Lanval* tales of love and chivalry are made beautiful by lore of fairyland, in which the element of wonder is subdued to beauty. But the most admirable poem by Marie de France is unquestionably her *Eliduc*. The Breton knight Eliduc is passionately loved by

Guilliadon, the only daughter of the old King of Exeter, on whose behalf he had waged battle. Her tokens of affection, girdle and ring, are received by Eliduc in silence; for, though her passion is returned, he has left in Brittany, unknown to Guilliadon, a faithful wife. Very beautiful is the self-transcending love of the wife, who restores her rival from seeming death, and herself retires into a convent. The lovers are wedded, and live in charity to the poor, but with a trouble at the heart for the wrong that they have done. In the end they part; Eliduc embraces the religious life, and the two loving women are united as sisters in the same abbey.

Wace, in his romance of the *Brut* (1155), which renders into verse the *Historia* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, makes the earliest mention of the Round Table. Whether the Arthurian legends be of Celtic or of French origin—and the former seems probable—the French romances of King Arthur owe but the crude material to Celtic sources; they may be said to begin with CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, whose lost poem on Tristan was composed about 1160. Between that date and 1175 he wrote his *Erec et Enide* (a tale known to us through Tennyson's idyll of Geraint and Enid, derived from the Welsh *Mabinogion*), *Cligès*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, *Le Chevalier au Lion*, and *Perceval*. In *Cligès* the maidenhood of his beloved Fénice, wedded in form to the Emperor of Constantinople, is guarded by a magic potion; like Romeo's Juliet, she sleeps in apparent death, but, happier than Juliet, she recovers from her trance to fly with her lover

to the court of Arthur. The *Chevalier de la Charrette*, at first unknown by name, is discovered to be Lancelot, who, losing his horse, has condescended, in order that he may obtain sight of Queen Guenièvre, and in passionate disregard of the conventions of knighthood, to seat himself in a cart which a dwarf is leading. After gallant adventures on the Queen's behalf, her indignant resentment of his unknighly conduct, estrangement, and rumours of death, he is at length restored to her favour.⁶ While *Perceval* was still unfinished, Chrétien de Troyes died. It was continued by other poets, and through this romance the quest of the holy graal became a portion of the Arthurian cycle. A *Perceval* by ROBERT DE BORON, who wrote in the early part of the thirteenth century, has been lost; but a prose redaction of the romance exists, which closes with the death of King Arthur. The great *Lancelot* in prose—a vast compilation—(about 1220) reduces the various adventures of its hero and of other knights of the King to their definitive form; and here the achievement of the graal is assigned, not to Perceval, but to the saintly knight Sir Galaad; Arthur is slain in combat with the revolter Mordret; and Lancelot and the Queen enter into the life of religion. Passion and piety are alike celebrated; the rude Celtic legends have been sanctified. The earlier history of the sacred vase was traced by Robert de Boron in his *Joseph d'Arimathie* (or the *Saint-Graal*), soon to be rehandled and developed in prose; and he it was who, in his *Merlin*—also presently converted into prose—on

⁶ Chrétien de Troyes is the first poet to tell of the love of Lancelot for the Queen.

suggestions derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth, brought the great enchanter into Arthurian romance. By the middle of the thirteenth century the cycle had received its full development. Towards the middle of the fourteenth century, in *Perceforest*, an attempt was made to connect the legend of Alexander the Great with that of King Arthur.

Beside the so-called Breton romances, the *Épopée courtoise* may be taken to include many poems of Greek, of Byzantine, or of uncertain origin, such as the *Roman de la Violette*, the tale of a wronged wife, having much in common with that novel of Boccaccio with which Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is connected, the *Floire et Blanchefleur*; the *Parténopeus de Blois*, a kind of "Cupid and Psyche" story, with the parts of the lovers transposed, and others. In the early years of the thirteenth century the prose romance rivalled in popularity the romance in verse. The exquisite *chante-fable* of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, of the twelfth century, is partly in prose, partly in assonanced *laisses* of seven-syllable verse. It is a story of the victory of love: the heir of Count Garin of Beaucaire is enamoured of a beautiful maiden of unknown birth, purchased from the Saracens, who proves to be daughter of the King of Carthage, and in the end the lovers are united. In one remarkable passage unusual sympathy is shown with the hard lot of the peasant, whose trials and sufferings are contrasted with the lighter troubles of the aristocratic class.

In general the poems of the *Épopée courtoise* exhibit much of the brilliant external aspect of the life of chivalry as idealised

by the imagination; dramatic situations are ingeniously devised; the emotions of the chief actors are expounded and analysed, sometimes with real delicacy; but in the conception of character, in the recurring incidents, in the types of passion, in the creation of marvel and surprise, a large conventional element is present. Love is independent of marriage, or rather the relation of wedlock excludes love in the accepted sense of the word; the passion is almost necessarily illegitimate, and it comes as if it were an irresistible fate; the first advance is often made by the woman; but, though at war with the duty of wedlock, love is conceived as an ennobling influence, prompting the knight to all deeds of courage and self-sacrifice. Through the later translation of the Spanish *Amadis des Gaules*, something of the spirit of the mediæval romances was carried into the chivalric and pastoral romances of the seventeenth century.

CHAPTER II

LYRICAL POETRY—FABLES, AND RENARD THE FOX—FABLIAUX —THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE

I

LYRICAL POETRY

Long before the date of any lyrical poems that have come down to us, song and dance were a part of the life of the people of the North as well as of the South of France; religious festivals were celebrated with a gaiety which had its mundane side; love and malicious sport demanded an expression as well as pious joy. But in tracing the forms of lyrical verse anterior to the middle of the twelfth century, when the troubadour influence from the South began to be felt, we must be guided partly by conjecture, derived from the later poetry, in which—and especially in the refrains—earlier fragments have been preserved.

The common characteristic which distinguishes the earlier lyrics is the presence in them of an objective element: they do not merely render an emotion; they contain something of a story, or they suggest a situation. In this literature of sentiment, the singer

or imagined singer is commonly a woman. The *chanson d'histoire* is also known as *chanson de toile*, for the songs were such as suited "the spinsters and the knitters in the sun." Their inspiring motive was a girl's joy or grief in love; they lightly outline or suggest the facts of a miniature drama of passion, and are aided by the repeated lyrical cry of a refrain. As yet, love was an affair for the woman; it was she alone who made a confession of the heart. None of these poems are later than the close of the twelfth century. If the author be represented as actor or witness, the poem is rather a *chanson à personnages* than a *chanson d'histoire*; most frequently it is a wife who is supposed to utter to husband, or lover, or to the poet, her complaint of the grievous servitude of marriage. The *aube* is, again, a woman's song, uttered as a parting cry when the lark at daybreak, or the watcher from his tower, warns her lover to depart. In the *pastourelle*—a form much cultivated—a knight and a shepherdess meet; love proposals are made, and find a response favourable or the reverse; witnesses or companions may be present, and take a part in the action. The *rondet* is a dancing-song, in which the refrain corresponds with one of the movements of the dance; a solo-singer is answered by the response of a chorus; in the progress of time the *rondet* assumed the precise form of the modern triolet; the theme was still love, at first treated seriously if not tragically, but at a later time in a spirit of gaiety. It is conjectured that all these lyrical forms had their origin in the festivities of May, when the return of spring was celebrated by dances in which women alone took

part, a survival from the pagan rites of Venus.

The *poésie courtoise*, moulded in form and inspired in its sentiment by the Provençal lyrics, lies within the compass of about one hundred and thirty years, from 1150 to 1280. The Crusade of 1147 served, doubtless, as a point of meeting for men of the North and of the South; but, apart from this, we may bear in mind the fact that the mediæval poet wandered at will from country to country and from court to court. In 1137, Louis VII. married Éléonore of Aquitaine, who was an ardent admirer of the poetry of courtesy. Her daughters inherited her taste, and themselves became patronesses of literature at the courts of their husbands, Henri de Champagne and Thibaut de Blois. From these courts, and that of Paris, this poetry of culture spread, and the earlier singers were persons of royal or noble rank and birth. The chief period of its cultivation was probably from 1200 to 1240. During the half-century before its sudden cessation, while continuing to be a fashion in courts and high society, it reached the wealthy bourgeoisie of the North. At Arras, where Jacques Bretel and Adam de la Halle, the hunchback, were eminent in song, it had its latest moments of splendour.

It is essentially a poetry of the intellect and of the imagination, dealing with an elaborated theory of love; the simple and spontaneous cry of passion is rarely heard. According to the amorous doctrine, love exists only between a married woman and the aspirant to her heart, and the art of love is regulated by a stringent code. Nothing can be claimed by the lover as a

right; the grace of his lady, who is placed far above him, must be sought as a favour; for that favour he must qualify himself by all knightly virtues, and chief among these, as the position requires, are the virtues of discretion and patience. Hence the poet's ingenuities of adoration; hence often the monotony of artificial passion; hence, also, subtleties and curiosities of expression, and sought-out delicacies of style. In the earlier chansons some outbreak of instinctive feeling may be occasionally present; but, as the amorous metaphysics developed, what came to be admired was the skill shown in manipulating a conventional sentiment; the lady became an abstraction of exalted beauty, the lover an interpreter of the theory of love; the most personal of passions lost the character of individuality. Occasionally, as in the poems of the Châtelain de Couci, of Conon de Béthune, of Thibaut de Champagne, and of Adam de la Halle, something personal to the writer may be discerned; but in general the poetry is that of a doctrine and of a school.

In some instances the reputation of the lyrical trouvère was founded rather on his music than his verse. The metrical forms were various, and were gradually reduced to rule; the *ballette*, of Provençal origin, was a more elaborate *rondet*, consisting of stanzas and refrain; the *estampie* (*stampôn*, to beat the ground with the foot) was a dancing-song; the lyric *lai*, virtually identical with the *descort*, consisted of stanzas which varied in structure; the *motet*, a name originally applied to pieces of church music, was freer in versification, and occasionally dealt with popular

themes. Among forms which cannot be included under the general title of chansons, are those in dialogue derived from the Provençal literature; in the *tenson* or *débat* the two interlocutors put forth their opinions on what theme they may please; in the *jeu parti* one of the imagined disputants proposes two contrary solutions of some poetical or amorous question, and defends whichever solution his associate refuses to accept; the earliest *jeu parti*, attributed to Gace Brulé and Count Geoffroi of Brittany, belongs to the second half of the twelfth century. The *serventois* were historical poems, and among them songs of the crusades, or moral, or religious, or satirical pieces, directed against woman and the worship of woman. To these various species we should add the songs in honour of the saints, the sorrows of the Virgin uttered at the foot of the cross, and other devout lyrics which lie outside the *poésie courtoise*. With the close of the thirteenth century this fashion of artificial love-lyric ceased: a change passed over the modes of thought and feeling in aristocratic society, and other forms took the place of those found in the *poésie courtoise*.

II

FABLES, AND RENARD THE FOX

The desire of ecclesiastical writers in the Middle Ages to give prominence to that part of classical literature which seemed best suited to the purpose of edification caused the

fables of Phædrus and Avianus to be regarded with special honour. Various renderings from the thirteenth century onwards were made under the title of *Isopets*,⁷ a name appropriated to collections of fables whether derived from Æsop or from other sources. The twelfth-century fables in verse of Marie de France, founded on an English collection, include apologues derived not only from classical authors but from the tales of popular tradition. A great collection made about 1450 by Steinhoewel, a physician of Ulm, was translated into French, and became the chief source of later collections, thus appearing in the remote ancestry of the work of La Fontaine. The æsthetic value of the mediæval fables, including those of Marie de France, is small; the didactic intention was strong, the literary art was feeble.

It is far otherwise with the famous beast-epic, the ROMAN DE RENARD. The cycle consists of many parts or "branches" connected by a common theme; originating and obscurely developed in the North, in Picardy, in Normandy, and the Isle of France, it suddenly appeared in literature in the middle of the twelfth century, and continued to receive additions and variations during nearly two hundred years. The spirit of the *Renard* poems is essentially bourgeois; the heroes of the *chansons de geste* achieve their wondrous deeds by strength and valour; Renard the fox is powerful by skill and cunning; the greater beasts—his chief enemy the wolf, and others—are no match for his

⁷ The earlier "Romulus" was the name of the supposed author of the fables of Phædrus, while that of Phædrus was still unknown.

ingenuity and endless resources; but he is powerless against smaller creatures, the cock, the crow, the sparrow. The names of the personages are either significant names, such as Noble, the lion, and Chanticleer, the cock, or proper names, such as Isengrin, the wolf, Bruno, the bear, Tibert, the cat, Bernard, the ass; and as certain of these proper names are found in the eastern district, it has been conjectured that a poet of Lotharingia in the tenth century first told in Latin the wars of fox and wolf, and that through translations the epic matter, derived originally from popular tradition, reached the trouvères of the North. While in a certain degree typical figures, the beasts are at the same time individual; Renard is not the representative merely of a species; he is Renard, an individual, with a personality of his own; Isengrin is not merely a wolf, he is the particular wolf Isengrin; each is an epic individual, heroic and undying. Classical fable remotely exerted an influence on certain branches of the Romance; but the vital substance of the epic is derived from the stores of popular tradition in which material from all quarters—the North of Europe and the Eastern world—had been gradually fused. In the artistic treatment of such material the chief difficulty lies in preserving a just measure between the beast-character and the imported element of humanity. Little by little the anthropomorphic features were developed at the expense of verisimilitude; the beast forms became a mere masquerade; the romances were converted into a satire, and the satire lost rather than gained by the inefficient disguise.

The earliest branches of the cycle have reached us only in a fragmentary way, but they can be in part reconstructed from the Latin *Isengrinus* of Nivard of Ghent (about 1150), and from the German *Reinhart Fuchs*, a rendering from the French by an Alsatian, Henri le Glichezare (about 1180). The wars of Renard and Isengrin are here sung, and the failure of Renard's trickeries against the lesser creatures; the spirit of these early branches is one of frank gaiety, untroubled by a didactic or satirical intention. In the branches of the second period the parody of human society is apparent; some of the episodes are fatiguing in their details; some are intolerably gross, but the poem known as the Branch of the Judgment is masterly—an ironical comedy, in which, without sacrifice of the primitive character of the beast-epic, the spirit of mediæval life is transported into the animal world. Isengrin, the accuser of Renard before King Noble and his court, is for a moment worsted; the fox is vindicated, when suddenly enters a funeral cortège—Chanticleer and his four wives bear upon a litter the dead body of one of their family, the victim of Renard's wiles. The prayers for the dead are recited, the burial is celebrated with due honour, and Renard is summoned to justice; lie heaped upon lie will not save him; at last he humbles himself with pious repentance, and promising to seek God's pardon overseas, is permitted in his pilgrim's habit to quit the court. It is this Judgment of Renard which formed the basis of the *Reineke Fuchs*, known to us through the modernisation of Goethe.

From the date of the Branch of the Judgment the Renard

Romances declined. The Judgment was imitated by inferior hands, and the beasts were more and more nearly transformed to men; the spirit of gaiety was replaced by seriousness or gloom; Renard ceased to be a light-footed and ingenious rogue; he became a type of human fraud and cruelty; whatever in society was false and base and merciless became a form of "renardie," and by "renardie" the whole world seemed to be ruled. Such is the temper expressed in *Le Couronnement Renard*, written in Flanders soon after 1250, a satire directed chiefly against the mendicant orders, in which the fox, turned friar for a season, ascends the throne. *Renard le Nouveau*, the work of a poet of Lille, Jacquemart Gelée, nearly half a century later, represents again the triumph of the spirit of evil; although far inferior in execution to the *Judgment*, it had remarkable success, to which the allegory, wearying to a modern reader, no doubt contributed at a time when allegory was a delight. The last of the Renard romances, *Renard le Contrefait*, was composed at Troyes before 1328, by an ecclesiastic who had renounced his profession and turned to trade. In his leisure hours he spun, in discipleship to Jean de Meun, his interminable poem, which is less a romance than an encyclopædia of all the knowledge and all the opinions of the author. This latest *Renard* has a value akin to that of the second part of *Le Roman de la Rose*; it is a presentation of the ideas and manners of the time by one who freely criticised and mocked the powers that be, both secular and sacred, and who was in sympathy with a certain movement or tendency towards

social, political, and intellectual reform.

III

FABLIAUX

The name *fabliaux* is applied to short versified tales, comic in character, and intended rather for recitation than for song. Out of a far larger number about one hundred and fifty have survived. The earliest—*Richeut*—is of the year 1159. From the middle of the twelfth century, together with the heroic or sentimental poetry of feudalism, we find this bourgeois poetry of realistic observation; and even in the *chansons de geste*, in occasional comic episodes, something may be seen which is in close kinship with the *fabliaux*. Many brief humorous stories, having much in common under their various disguises, exist as part of the tradition of many lands and peoples. The theory which traces the French *fabliaux* to Indian originals is unproved, and indeed is unnecessary. The East, doubtless, contributed its quota to the common stock, but so did other quarters of the globe; such tales are ubiquitous and are undying, only the particular form which they assume being determined by local conditions.

The *fabliaux*, as we can study them, belong especially to the north and north-east of France, and they continued to be put forth by their rhymers until about 1340, the close of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century being the period of their greatest popularity. Simple and obvious

jests sufficed to raise a laugh among folk disposed to good humour; by degrees something of art and skill was attained. The misfortunes of husbands supplied an inexhaustible store of merriment; if woman and the love of woman were idealised in the romances, the fabliaux took their revenge, and exhibited her as the pretty traitress of a shameless comedy. If religion was honoured in the age of faith, the bourgeois spirit found matter of mirth in the adventures of dissolute priests and self-indulgent monks. Not a few of the fabliaux are cynically gross—ribald but not voluptuous. To literary distinction they made small pretence. It sufficed if the tale ran easily in the current speech, thrown into rhyming octosyllables; but brevity, frankness, natural movement are no slight or common merits in mediæval poetry, and something of the social life of the time is mirrored in these humorous narratives.

To regard them as a satire of class against class, inspired by indignation, is to misconceive their true character; they are rather miniature comedies or caricatures, in which every class in turn provides material for mirth. It may, however, be said that with the writers of the fabliaux to hold woman in scorn is almost an article of faith. Among these writers a few persons of secular rank or dignified churchmen occasionally appeared; but what we may call the professional rhymers and reciters were the humbler jongleurs addressing a bourgeois audience—degraded clerics, unfrocked monks, wandering students, who led a bohemian life of gaiety alternating with misery. In the early

part of the fourteenth century these errant jongleurs ceased to be esteemed; the great lord attached a minstrel to his household, and poetry grew more dignified, more elaborate in its forms, more edifying in its intention, and in its dignity grew too often dull. Still for a time fabliaux were written; but the age of the jongleurs was over. *Virelais, rondeaux, ballades, chants royaux* were the newer fashion; and the old versified tale of mirth and ribaldry was by the middle of the century a thing of the past.

IV

THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE

The most extraordinary production in verse of the thirteenth century is undoubtedly *Le Roman de la Rose*. It is indeed no single achievement, but two very remarkable poems, written at two different periods, by two authors whose characters and gifts were not only alien, but opposed—two poems which reflect two different conditions of society. Of its twenty-two thousand octosyllabic lines, upwards of four thousand are the work of GUILLAUME DE LORRIS; the remainder is the work of a later writer, JEAN DE MEUN.

Lorris is a little town situated between Orleans and Montargis. Here, about the year 1200, the earlier poet was born. He was a scholar, at least as far as knowledge of Latin extends, and learned above all in the lore of love. He died young, probably before 1230, and during the five years that preceded his death

the first part of *Le Roman de la Rose* was composed. Its subject is an allegorised tale of love, his own or imagined, transferred to the realm of dreams. The writer would fain win the heart of his beloved, and at the same time he would instruct all amorous spirits in the art of love. He is twenty years of age, in the May-morn of youth. He has beheld his beautiful lady, and been charmed by her fairness, her grace, her courtesy; she has received him with gentleness, but when he declares his love she grows alarmed. He gains at last the kiss which tells of her affection; but her parents intervening, throw obstacles between the lovers. Such, divested of ornament, allegory, and personification, is the theme of the poem.

To pluck the rose in the garden of delight is to win the maiden; her fears, her virgin modesty and pride, her kindness, her pity, are the company of friends or foes by whom the rose is surrounded; and to harmonise the real and the ideal, all the incidents are placed in the setting of a dream. Wandering one spring morning by the river-banks, the dreamer finds himself outside the walls of a fair orchard, owned by Déduit (Pleasure), of which the portress is Oiseuse (Idleness); on the walls are painted figures of Hatred, Envy, Sadness, Old Age, Poverty, and other evil powers; but unterrified by these, he enters, and finds a company of dancers on the turf, among whom is Beauty, led by the god of Love. Surrounded by a thorny hedge is the rosebud on which all his desire now centres. He is wounded by the arrows of Love, does homage to the god, and learns his commandments and

the evils and the gains of love. Invited by Bel-Accueil, the son of Courtoisie, to approach the rose, he is driven back by Danger and his companions, the guardians of the blossom. Raison descends from a tower and discourses against the service of Love; Ami offers his consolations; at length the lover is again admitted to the flowery precinct, finds his rosebud half unclosed, and obtains the joy of a kiss. But Jealousy raises an unscalable wall around the rose; the serviceable Bel-Accueil is imprisoned, and with a long lament of the lover, the poem (line 4068) closes.

Did Guillaume de Lorris ever complete his poem, or did he die while it was still but half composed? We may conjecture that it wanted little to reach some dénouement—perhaps the fulfilment of the lover's hopes; and it is not impossible that a lost fragment actually brought the love-tale to its issue. But even if the story remained without an end, we possess in Guillaume's poem a complete mediæval Art of Love; and if the amorous metaphysics are sometimes cold, conventional, or laboured, we have gracious allegories, pieces of brilliant description, vivid personifications, and something of ingenious analysis of human passion. Nevertheless the work of this Middle-Age disciple of Ovid and of Chrétien de Troyes owes more than half its celebrity to the continuation, conceived in an entirely opposite spirit, by his successor, Jean de Meun.

The contrast is striking: Guillaume de Lorris was a refined and graceful exponent of the conventional doctrine of love, a seemly celebrant in the cult of woman, an ingenious decorator of

accepted ideas; Jean de Meun was a passionate and positive spirit, an ardent speculator in social, political, and scientific questions, one who cared nothing for amorous subtleties, and held woman in scorn. Guillaume addressed an aristocratic audience, imbued with the sentiments of chivalry; Jean was a bourgeois, eager to instruct, to arouse, to inflame his fellows in a multitude of matters which concerned the welfare of their lives. He was little concerned for the lover and his rose, but was deeply interested in the condition of society, the corruptions of religion, the advance of knowledge. He turned from ideals which seemed spurious to reason and to nature; he had read widely in Latin literature, and found much that suited his mood and mind in Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* and in the *De Planctu Naturæ* of the "universal doctor" of the twelfth century, Alain de Lille, from each of which he conveyed freely into his poem. Of his life we know little; Jean Clopinel was born at Meun on the Loire about the year 1240; he died before the close of 1305; his continuation of Guillaume's *Roman* was made about 1270. His later poems, a *Testament*, in which he warned and exhorted his contemporaries of every class, the *Codicille*, which incited to almsgiving, and his numerous translations, prove the unabated energy of his mind in his elder years.

The rose is plucked by the lover in the end; but lover and rose are almost forgotten in Jean's zeal in setting forth his views of life, and in forming an encyclopædia of the knowledge of his time. Reason discourses on the dangers of passion, commends

friendship or universal philanthropy as wiser than love, warns against the instability of fortune and the deceits of riches, and sets charity high above justice; if love be commendable, it is as the device of nature for the continuation of the species. The way to win woman and to keep her loyalty is now the unhappy way of squandered largess; formerly it was not so in the golden age of equality, before private property was known, when all men held in common the goods of the earth, and robber kings were evils of the future. The god of Love and his barons, with the hypocrite monk Faux-Semblant—a bitter satirist of the mendicant orders—besiege the tower in which Bel-Accueil is imprisoned, and by force and fraud an entrance is effected. The old beldame, who watches over the captive, is corrupted by promises and gifts, and frankly exposes her own iniquities and those of her sex. War is waged against the guardians of the rose, Venus, sworn enemy of chastity, aiding the assailants. Nature, devoted to the continuance of the race, mourns over the violation of her laws by man, unburdens herself of all her scientific lore in a confession to her chaplain Génius, and sends him forth to encourage the lover's party with a bold discourse against the crime of virginity. The triumph of the lover closes the poem.

The graceful design of the earlier poet is disregarded; the love-story becomes a mere frame for setting forth the views of Jean de Meun, his criticism of the chivalric ideal, his satire upon the monkish vices, his revolutionary notions respecting property and government, his advanced opinions in science, his frank

realism as to the relations of man and woman. He possesses all the learning of his time, and an accomplished judgment in the literature which he had studied. He is a powerful satirist, and passages of narrative and description show that he had a poet's feeling for beauty; he handles the language with the strength and skill of a master. On the other hand, he lacks all sense of proportion, and cannot shape an imaginative plan; his prolixity wearies the reader, and it cannot be denied that as a moral reformer he sometimes topples into immorality. The success of the poem was extraordinary, and extended far beyond France. It was attacked and defended, and up to the time of Ronsard its influence on the progress of literature—encouraging, as it did, to excess the art of allegory and personification—if less than has commonly been alleged, was unquestionably important.

CHAPTER III

DIDACTIC LITERATURE

—SERMONS—HISTORY

I

DIDACTIC LITERATURE

The didactic literature, moral and scientific, of the Middle Ages is abundant, and possesses much curious interest, but it is seldom original in substance, and seldom valuable from the point of view of literary style. In great part it is translated or derived from Latin sources. The writers were often clerks or laymen who had turned from the vanities of youth—fabliau or romance—and now aimed at edification or instruction. Science in the hands of the clergy must needs be spiritualised and moralised; there were sermons to be found in stones, pious allegories in beast and bird; mystic meanings in the alphabet, in grammar, in the chase, in the tourney, in the game of chess. Ovid and Virgil were sanctified to religious uses. The earliest versified Bestiary, which is also a Volucrary, a Herbary, and a Lapidary, that of Philippe de Thaon (before 1135), is versified from the Latin *Physiologus*, itself a translation from the work of an Alexandrian Greek of the second century. In its symbolic zoology the lion

and the pelican are emblems of Christ; the unicorn is God; the crocodile is the devil; the stones "turroboles," which blaze when they approach each other, are representative of man and woman. A *Bestiaire d'Amour* was written by Richard de Fournival, in which the emblems serve for the interpretation of human love. A Lapidary, with a medical—not a moral—purpose, by Marbode, Bishop of Rennes, was translated more than once into French, and had, indeed, an European fame.

Bestiaries and Lapidaries form parts of the vast encyclopædias, numerous in the thirteenth century, which were known by such names as *Image du Monde*, *Mappe-monde*, *Miroir du Monde*. Of these encyclopædias, the only one which has a literary interest is the *Trésor* (1265), by Dante's master, Brunetto Latini, who wrote in French in preference to his native Italian. In it science escapes not wholly from fantasy and myth, but at least from the allegorising spirit; his ethics and rhetoric are derived from Latin originals; his politics are his own. The *Somme des Vices et des Vertus*, compiled in 1279 by Friar Lorens, is a well-composed *trésor* of religion and morals. Part of its contents has become familiar to us through the Canterbury discourse of Chaucer's parson. The moral experience of a man of the world is summed up in the prose treatise on "The Four Ages of Man," by Philippe de Novare, chancellor of Cyprus. With this edifying work may be grouped the so-called *Chastiements*, counsels on education and conduct, designed for readers in general or for some special class—women, children, persons of knightly or

of humble rank; studies of the virtues of chivalry, the rules of courtesy and of manners.⁸ Other writings, the *États du Monde*, present a view of the various classes of society from a standpoint ethical, religious, or satirical, with warnings and exhortations, which commonly conclude with a vision of the last judgment and the pains of hell. With such a scene of terror closes the interesting *Poème Moral* of Étienne de Fougères, in which the life of St. Moses, the converted robber, serves as an example to monks, and that of the converted Thaïs to ladies who are proud of their beauty. Its temper of moderation contrasts with the bitter satire in the *Bible* by Guiot de Provins, and with many shorter satirical pieces directed against clerical vices or the infirmities of woman. The *Besant de Dieu*, by Guillaume le Clerc, a Norman poet (1227), preaches in verse, with eloquence and imaginative power, the love of God and contempt of the world from the texts of two Scripture parables—that of the Talents and that of the Bridegroom; Guillaume anticipates the approaching end of the world, foreshown by wars, pestilence, and famine, condemns in the spirit of Christian charity the persecution of the Albigenses, and mourns over the shame that has befallen the Holy Sepulchre.

Among the preacher poets of the thirteenth century the most interesting personally is the minstrel RUTEBEUF, who

⁸ Two works of the fourteenth century, interesting in the history of manners and ideas, may here be mentioned—the *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour-Landry* (1372), composed for the instruction of the writer's daughters, and the *Ménagier de Paris*, a treatise on domestic economy, written by a Parisian bourgeois for the use of his young wife.

towards the close of his gay though ragged life turned to serious thoughts, and expressed his penitent feelings with penetrating power. Rutebeuf, indeed—the Villon of his age—deployed his vivid and ardent powers in many directions, as a writer of song and satire, of allegory, of fabliaux, of drama. On each and all he impressed his own personality; the lyric note, imaginative fire, colour, melody, these were gifts that compensated the poet's poverty, his conjugal miseries, his lost eye, his faithless friends, his swarming adversaries. The personification of vices and virtues, occasional in the *Besant* and other poems, becomes a system in the *Songe d'Enfer*, a pilgrim's progress to hell, and the *Voie de Paradis*, a pilgrim's progress to heaven, by Raoul de Houdan (after 1200). The *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*—another "way to Paradise"; the *Pèlerinage de l'Âme*—a vision of hell, purgatory, and heaven; and the *Pèlerinage de Jésus-Christ*—a narrative of the Saviour's life, by Guillaume de Digulleville (fourteenth century), have been imagined by some to have been among the sources of Bunyan's allegories. Human life may be represented in one aspect as a pilgrimage; in another it is a knightly encounter; there is a great strife between the powers of good and evil; in *Le Tornoient Antecrist*, by Huon de Méri, Jesus and the Knights of the Cross, among whom, besides St. Michael, St. Gabriel, Confession, Chastity, and Alms, are Arthur, Launcelot, and Gawain, contend against Antichrist and the infernal barons—Jupiter, Neptune, Beelzebub, and a crowd of allegorical personages. But the battles and *débats* of a chivalric

age were not only religious; there are battles of wine and water, battles of fast and feasting, battles of the seven arts. A disputation between the body and the soul, a favourite subject for separate treatment by mediæval poets, is found also in one of the many sermons in verse; the *Débat des Trois Morts et des Trois Vifs* recalls the subject of the memorable painting in the Campo Santo at Pisa.

II

SERMONS

The Latin sermons of the Middle Ages were countless; but it is not until Gerson and the close of the fourteenth century that we find a series of discourses by a known preacher written and pronounced in French. It is maintained that these Latin sermons, though prepared in the language of the Church, were delivered, when addressed to lay audiences, in the vernacular, and that those composite sermons in the macaronic style, that is, partly in French, partly in Latin, which appear in the thirteenth century and are frequent in the fifteenth, were the work of reporters or redactors among the auditory. On the other hand, it is argued that both Latin and French sermons were pronounced as each might seem suitable, before the laity, and that the macaronic style was actually practised in the pulpit. Perhaps we may accept the opinion that the short and simple homilies designed for the people, little esteemed as compositions, were rarely thought

worthy of preservation in a Latin form; those discourses which remain to us, if occasionally used before an unlearned audience, seem to have been specially intended for clerky hearers. The sermons of St. Bernard, which have been preserved in Latin and in a French translation of the thirteenth century, were certainly not his eloquent popular improvisations; they are doctrinal, with crude or curious allegorisings of Holy Scripture. Those of Maurice de Sully, Archbishop of Paris, probably also translated from the Latin, are simpler in manner and more practical in their teaching; but in these characteristics they stand apart from the other sermons of the twelfth century.

It was not until the mendicant orders, Franciscans and Dominicans, began their labours that preaching, as preserved to us, was truly laicised and popularised. During the thirteenth century the work of the pulpit came to be conceived as an art which could be taught; collections of anecdotes and illustrations—*exempla*—for the enlivening of sermons, manuals for the use of preachers were formed; rules and precepts were set forth; themes for popular discourse were proposed and enlarged upon, until at length original thought and invention ceased; the preacher's art was turned into an easy trade. The effort to be popular often resulted in pulpit buffoonery. When GERSON preached at court or to the people towards the close of the fourteenth century, gravely exhorting high and low to practical duties, with tender or passionate appeals to religious feeling, his sermons were noble exceptions to the common practice. And

the descent from Gerson to even his more eminent successors is swift and steep. The orators of the pulpit varied their discourse from burlesque mirth or bitter invective to gross terrors, in which death and judgment, Satan and hell-fire were largely displayed. The sermons of Michel Menot and Olivier Maillard, sometimes eloquent in their censure of sin, sometimes trivial or grotesque, sometimes pedantic in their exhibition of learning, have at least an historical value in presenting an image of social life in the fifteenth century.

A word must be said of the humanism which preceded the Renaissance. Scholars and students there were in France two hundred years before the days of Erasmus and of Budé; but they were not scholars inspired by genius, and they contented themselves with the task of translators, undertaken chiefly with a didactic purpose. If they failed to comprehend the spirit of antiquity, none the less they did something towards quickening the mind of their own time and rendering the French language less inadequate to the intellectual needs of a later age. All that was then known of Livy's history was rendered into French in 1356 by the friend of Petrarch, Pierre Berçuire. On the suggestion of Charles V., Nicole Oresme translated from the Latin the Ethics, Politics, and Economics of Aristotle. It was to please the king that the aged Raoul de Presles prepared his version of St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, and Denis Foulechat, with very scanty scholarship, set himself to render the *Polycraticus* of John of Salisbury. The dukes of

Bourbon, of Berry, of Burgundy, were also patrons of letters and encouraged their translators. We cannot say how far this movement of scholarship might have progressed, if external conditions had favoured its development. In Jean de Montreuil, secretary of Charles VI., the devoted student of Cicero, Virgil, and Terence, we have an example of the true humanist before the Renaissance. But the seeming dawn was a deceptive aurora; the early humanism of France was clouded and lost in the tempests of the Hundred Years' War.

III HISTORY

While the mediæval historians, compilers, and abbreviators from records of the past laboured under all the disadvantages of an age deficient in the critical spirit, and produced works of little value either for their substance or their literary style, the chroniclers, who told the story of their own times, Villehardouin, Joinville, Froissart, Commines, and others, have bequeathed to us, in living pictures or sagacious studies of events and their causes, some of the chief treasures of the past. History at first, as composed for readers who knew no Latin, was comprised in those *chansons de geste* which happened to deal with matter that was not wholly—or almost wholly—the creation of fancy. Narrative poems treating of contemporary events came into existence with the Crusades, but of these the earliest have not

survived, and we possess only rehandlings of their matter in the style of romance. What happened in France might be supposed to be known to persons of intelligence; what happened in the East was new and strange. But England, like the East, was foreign soil, and the Anglo-Norman trouvères of the eleventh and twelfth centuries busied themselves with copious narratives in rhyme, such as Gaimar's *Estorie des Engles* (1151), Wace's *Brut* (1155) and his *Roman de Rou*, which, if of small literary importance, remain as monuments in the history of the language. The murder of Becket called forth the admirable life of the saint by Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, founded upon original investigations; Henry II.'s conquest of Ireland was related by an anonymous writer; his victories over the Scotch (1173-1174) were strikingly described by Jordan Fantosme. But by far the most remarkable piece of versified history of this period, remarkable alike for its historical interest and its literary merit, is the *Vie de Guillaume le Maréchal*—William, Earl of Pembroke, guardian of Henry III.—a poem of nearly twenty thousand octosyllabic lines by an unknown writer, discovered by M. Paul Meyer in the library of Sir Thomas Phillipps. "The masterpiece of Anglo-Norman historiography," writes M. Langlois, "is assuredly this anonymous poem, so long forgotten, and henceforth classic."

Prose, however, in due time proved itself to be the fitting medium for historical narrative, and verse was given over to the extravagances of fantasy. Compilations from the Latin, translations from the pseudo-Turpin, from Geoffrey

of Monmouth, from Sallust, Suetonius, and Cæsar were succeeded by original record and testimony. GEOFFROY DE VILLEHARDOUIN, born between 1150 and 1164, Marshal of Champagne in 1191, was appointed eight years later to negotiate with the Venetians for the transport of the Crusaders to the East. He was probably a chief agent in the intrigue which diverted the fourth Crusade from its original destination—the Holy Land—to the assault upon Constantinople. In the events which followed he had a prominent part; before the close of 1213 Villehardouin was dead. During his last years he dictated the unfinished Memoirs known as the *Conquête de Constantinople*, which relate the story of his life from 1198 to 1207. Villehardouin is the first chronicler who impresses his own personality on what he wrote: a brave leader, skilful in resource, he was by no means an enthusiast possessed by the more extravagant ideas of chivalry; much more was he a politician and diplomatist, with material interests well in view; not, indeed, devoid of a certain imaginative wonder at the marvels of the East; not without his moments of ardour and excitement; deeply impressed with the feeling of feudal loyalty, the sense of the bond between the suzerain and his vassal; deeply conscious of the need of discipline in great adventures; keeping in general a cool head, which could calculate the sum of profit and loss.

It is probable that Villehardouin knew too much of affairs, and was too experienced a man of the world to be quite frank as a historian: we can hardly believe, as he would have us,

that the diversion of the crusading host from its professed objects was unpremeditated; we can perceive that he composes his narrative so as to form an apology; his recital has been justly described as, in part at least, "un mémoire justificatif." Nevertheless, there are passages, such as that which describes the first view of Constantinople, where Villehardouin's feelings seize upon his imagination, and, as it were, overpower him. In general he writes with a grave simplicity, sometimes with baldness, disdaining ornament, little sensible to colour or grace of style; but by virtue of his clear intelligence and his real grasp of facts his chronicle acquires a certain literary dignity, and when his words become vivid we know that it is because he had seen with inquisitive eyes and felt with genuine ardour. Happily for students of history, while Villehardouin presents the views of an aristocrat and a diplomatist, the incidents of the same extraordinary adventure can be seen, as they struck a simple soldier, in the record of Robert de Clari, which may serve as a complement and a counterpoise to the chronicle of his more illustrious contemporary. The unfinished *Histoire de l'Empereur Henri*, which carries on the narrative of events for some years subsequent to those related by Villehardouin, the work of Henri de Valenciennes, is a prose redaction of what had originally formed a *chanson de geste*.

The versified chronicle or history in the thirteenth century declined among Anglo-Norman writers, but was continued in Flanders and in France. Prose translations and adaptations of

Latin chronicles, ancient and modern, were numerous, but the literary value of many of these is slight. In the Abbey of Saint-Denis a corpus of national history in Latin had for a long while been in process of formation. Utilising this corpus and the works from which it was constructed, one of the monks of the Abbey—perhaps a certain Primat—compiled, in the second half of the century, a History of France in the vernacular—the *Grandes Chroniques de Saint-Denis*—with which later additions were from time to time incorporated, until under Charles V. the *Grandes Chroniques de France* attained their definitive form.⁹ Far more interesting as a literary composition is the little work known as *Récits d'un Ménestrel de Reims* (1260), a lively, graceful, and often dramatic collection of traditions, anecdotes, dialogues, made rather for the purposes of popular entertainment than of formal instruction, and expressing the ideas of the middle classes on men and things. Forgotten during several centuries, it remains to us as one of the happiest records of the mediæval spirit.

But among the prose narratives to which the thirteenth century gave birth, the *Histoire de Saint Louis*, by JEAN DE JOINVILLE, stands pre-eminent. Joinville, born about 1224, possessed of such literary culture as could be gained at the Court of Thibaut IV. of Champagne, became a favoured companion of the chivalric and saintly Louis during his six years' Crusade from 1248 to 1254. The memory of the King remained the most

⁹ The *Chroniques* were continued by lay writers to the accession of Louis XI.

precious possession of his follower's elder years. It is probable that soon after 1272 Joinville prepared an autobiographic fragment, dealing with that period of his youth which had been his age of adventure. When he was nearly eighty, Jeanne of Navarre, wife of Philippe le Bel, invited the old seneschal to put on record the holy words and good deeds of Saint Louis. Joinville willingly acceded to the request, and incorporating the fragment of autobiography, in which the writer appeared in close connection with his King, he had probably almost completed his work at the date of Queen Jeanne's death (April 2, 1305); to her son, afterwards Louis X., it was dedicated. His purpose was to recite the pious words and set forth the Christian virtues of the royal Saint in one book of the History, and to relate his chivalric actions in the other; but Joinville had not the art of construction, he suffered from the feebleness of old age, and he could not perfectly accomplish his design; in 1317 Joinville died. Deriving some of his materials from other memoirs of the King, especially those by Geoffroy de Beaulieu and Guillaume de Nangis, he drew mainly upon his own recollections. Unhappily the most authoritative manuscripts of the *Histoire de Saint Louis* have been lost; we possess none earlier than the close of the fourteenth century; but by the learning and skill of a modern editor the text has been substantially established.

We must not expect from Joinville precision of chronology or exactitude in the details of military operations. His recollections crowd upon him; he does not marshal them by power of intellect,

but abandons himself to the delights of memory. He is a frank, amiable, spirited talker, who has much to tell; he succeeds in giving us two admirable portraits—his own and that of the King; and unconsciously he conveys into his narrative both the chivalric spirit of his time, and a sense of those prosaic realities which tempered the ideals of chivalry. What his eyes had rested on lives in his memory, with all its picturesque features, all its lines and colours, undimmed by time; and his curious eyes had been open to things great and small. He appears as a brave soldier, but, he confesses, capable of mortal fear; sincerely devout, but not made for martyrdom; zealous for his master's cause, but not naturally a chaser of rainbow dreams; one who enjoys good cheer, who prefers his wine unallayed with water, who loves splendid attire, who thinks longingly of his pleasant château, and the children awaiting his return; one who will decline future crusading, and who believes that a man of station may serve God well by remaining in his own fields among his humble dependants. But Joinville felt deeply the attraction of a nature more under the control of high, ideal motives than was his own; he would not himself wash the feet of the poor; he would rather commit thirty mortal sins than be a leper; but a kingly saint may touch heights of piety which are unattainable by himself. And, at the same time, he makes us feel that Louis is not the less a man because he is a saint. Certain human infirmities of temper are his; yet his magnanimity, his sense of justice, his ardent devotion, his charity, his pure self-surrender are made so sensible to us as we

read the record of Joinville that we are willing to subscribe to the sentence of Voltaire: "It is not given to man to carry virtue to a higher point."

During the fourteenth century the higher spirit of feudalism declined; the old faith and the old chivalry were suffering a decay, the bourgeoisie grew in power and sought for instruction; it was an age of prose, in which learning was passing to the laity, or was adapted to their uses. Yet, while the inner life of chivalry failed day by day, and self-interest took the place of heroic self-surrender, the external pomp and decoration of the feudal world became more brilliant than ever. War was a trade practised from motives of vulgar cupidity; but it was adorned with splendour, and had a show of gallantry. The presenter in literature of this glittering spectacle is the historian JEAN FROISSART. Born in 1338, at Valenciennes, of bourgeois parents, Froissart, at the age of twenty-two, a disappointed lover, a tonsured clerk, and already a poet, journeyed to London, with his manuscript on the battle of Poitiers as an offering to his countrywoman, Queen Philippa of Hainault. For nearly five years he was the *ditteur* of the Queen, a sharer in the life of the court, but attracted before all else to those "ancient knights and squires who had taken part in feats of arms, and could speak of them rightly." His patroness encouraged Froissart's historical inquiries. In the *Chroniques* of Jean le Bel, canon of Liège, he found material ready to his hand, and freely appropriated it in many of his most admirable pages; but he also travelled much through England and

Scotland, noting everything that impressed his imagination, and gathering with delight the testimony of those who had themselves been actors in the events of the past quarter of a century. He accompanied the Black Prince to Aquitaine, and, later, the Duke of Clarence to Milan. The death of Queen Philippa, in 1369, was ruinous to his prospects. For a time he supported himself as a trader in his native place. Then other patrons, kinsfolk of the Queen, came to his aid. The first revised redaction of the first book of his Chronicles was his chief occupation while curé of Lestinnes; it is a record of events from 1325 to the death of Edward III., and its brilliant narrative of events still recent or contemporary insured its popularity with aristocratic readers. Under the influence of Queen Philippa's brother-in-law, Robert of Namur, it is English in its sympathies and admirations. Unhappily Froissart was afterwards moved by his patron, Gui de Blois, to rehandle the book in the French interest; and once again in his old age his work was recast with a view to effacing the large debt which he owed to his predecessor, Jean le Bel. The first redaction is, however, that which won and retained the general favour. If his patron induced Froissart to wrong his earlier work, he made amends, for it is to Gui de Blois that we owe the last three books of the history, which bring the tale of events down to the assassination of Richard II. Still the curé of Lestinnes and the canon of Chimai pursued his early method of travel—to the court of Gaston, Count of Foix, to Flanders, to England—ever eager in his interrogation of witnesses. It is believed that he lived

to the close of 1404, but the date of his death is uncertain.

Froissart as a poet wrote gracefully in the conventional modes of his time. His vast romance *Méliador*, to which Wenceslas, Duke of Brabant, contributed the lyric part—famous in its day, long lost and recently recovered—is a construction of external marvels and splendours which lacks the inner life of imaginative faith. But as a brilliant scene-painter Froissart the chronicler is unsurpassed. His chronology, even his topography, cannot be trusted as exact; he is credulous rather than critical; he does not always test or control the statements of his informants; he is misled by their prejudices and passions; he views all things from the aristocratic standpoint; the life of the common people does not interest him; he has no sense of their wrongs, and little pity for their sufferings; he does not study the deeper causes of events; he is almost incapable of reflection; he has little historical sagacity; he accepts appearances without caring to interpret their meanings. But what a vivid picture he presents of the external aspects of fourteenth-century life! What a joy he has in adventure! What an eye for the picturesque! What movement, what colour! What a dramatic—or should we say theatrical?—feeling for life and action! Much, indeed, of the vividness of Froissart's narrative may be due to the eye-witnesses from whom he had obtained information; but genius was needed to preserve—perhaps to enhance—the animation of their recitals. If he understood his own age imperfectly, he depicted its outward appearance with incomparable skill; and though his moral sense

was shallow, and his knowledge of character far from profound, he painted portraits which live in the imagination of his readers.

The fifteenth century is rich in historical writings of every kind—compilations of general history, domestic chronicles, such as the *Livre des Faits du bon Messire Jean le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut*, official chronicles both of the French and Burgundian parties, journals and memoirs. The Burgundian Enguerrand de Monstrelet was a lesser Froissart, faithful, laborious, a transcriber of documents, but without his predecessor's genius. On the French side the so-called *Chronique Scandaleuse*, by Jean de Roye, a Parisian of the time of Louis XI., to some extent redeems the mediocrity of the writers of his party.

In PHILIPPE DE COMMINES we meet the last chronicler of the Middle Ages, and the first of modern historians. Born about 1445, in Flanders, of the family of Van den Clyte, Commynes, whose parents died early, received a scanty education; but if he knew no Latin, his acquaintance with modern languages served him well. At first in the service of Charles the Bold, in 1472 he passed over to the cause of Louis XI. His treason to the Duke may be almost described as inevitable; for Commynes could not attach himself to violence and folly, and was naturally drawn to the counsels of civil prudence. The bargain was as profitable to his new master as to the servant. On the King's death came a reverse of fortune for Commynes: for eight months he was cramped in the iron cage; during two years he remained a prisoner in the

Conciergerie (1487-89), with enforced leisure to think of the preparation of his *Mémoires*.¹⁰ Again the sunshine of royal favour returned; he followed Charles VIII. to Italy, and was engaged in diplomatic service at Venice. In 1511 he died.

The *Mémoires* of Commines were composed as a body of material for a projected history of Louis XI. by Archbishop Angelo Cato; the writer, apparently in all sincerity, hoped that his unlearned French might thus be translated into Latin, the language of scholars; happily we possess the Memoirs as they left their author's mind. And, though Commines rather hides than thrusts to view his own personality, every page betrays the presence of a remarkable intellect. He was no artist either in imaginative design or literary execution; he was before all else a thinker, a student of political phenomena, a searcher after the causes of events, an analyst of motives, a psychologist of individual character and of the temper of peoples, and, after a fashion, a moralist in his interpretation of history. He cared little, or not at all, for the coloured surface of life; his chief concern is to seize the master motive by which men and events are ruled, to comprehend the secret springs of action. He is aristocratic in his politics, monarchical, an advocate for the centralisation of power; but he would have the monarch enlightened, constitutional, and pacific. He values solid gains more than showy magnificence; and knowing the use of astuteness, he knows also the importance of good faith. He has a sense of the balance of European power,

¹⁰ Books I.-VI., written 1488-94; Books VII., VIII., written 1494-95.

and anticipates Montesquieu in his theory of the influence of climates on peoples. There is something of pity, something of irony, in the view which he takes of the joyless lot of the great ones of the earth. Having ascertained how few of the combinations of events can be controlled by the wisest calculation, he takes refuge in a faith in Providence; he finds God necessary to explain this entangled world; and yet his morality is in great part that which tries good and evil by the test of success. By the intensity of his thought Commines sometimes becomes striking in his expression; occasionally he rises to a grave eloquence; occasionally his irony is touched by a bitter humour. But in general he writes with little sentiment and no sense of beauty, under the control of a dry and circumspect intelligence.

CHAPTER IV

LATEST MEDIÆVAL POETS—THE DRAMA

I

LATEST MEDIÆVAL POETS

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries form a period of transition from the true Middle Ages to the Renaissance. The national epopee was dead; the Arthurian tales were rehandled in prose; under the influence of the *Roman de la Rose*, allegory was highly popular, and Jean de Meun had shown how it could be applied to the secularisation of learning; the middle classes were seeking for instruction. In lyric poetry the free creative spirit had declined, but the technique of verse was elaborated and reduced to rule; ballade, chant royal, lai, virelai, rondeau were the established forms, and lyric verse was often used for matter of a didactic, moral, or satirical tendency. Even Ovid was tediously moralised (c. 1300) in some seventy thousand lines by Chrétien Legouais. Literary societies or *puys*¹¹ were instituted, which maintained the rules of art, and awarded

¹¹ *Puy*, mountain, eminence, signifying the elevated seat of the judges of the artistic competition.

crowns to successful competitors in poetry; a formal ingenuity replaced lyrical inspiration; poetry accepted proudly the name of "rhetoric." At the same time there is gain in one respect—the poets no longer conceal their own personality behind their work: they instruct, edify, moralise, express their real or simulated passions in their own persons; if their art is mechanical, yet through it we make some acquaintance with the men and manners of the age.

The chief exponent of the new art of poetry was GUILLAUME DE MACHAUT. Born about 1300, he served as secretary to the King of Bohemia, who fell at Crécy. He enjoyed a tranquil old age in his province of Champagne, cultivating verse and music with the applause of his contemporaries. The ingenuities of gallantry are deployed at length in his *Jugement du Roi de Navarre*; he relates with dull prolixity the history of his patron, Pierre de Lusignan, King of Cyprus, in his *Prise d'Alexandrie*; the *Voir dit* relates in varying verse and prose the course of his sexagenarian love for a maiden in her teens, Peronne d'Armentières, who gratified her coquetry with an old poet's adoration, and then wedded his rival.

In the forms of his verse EUSTACHE DESCHAMPS, also a native of Champagne (c. 1345-1405), was a disciple of Machaut: if he was not a poet, he at least interests a reader by rhymed journals of his own life and the life of his time, written in the spirit of an honest bourgeois, whom disappointed personal hopes and public misfortune had early embittered. Eighty thousand

lines, twelve hundred ballades, nearly two hundred rondeaux, a vast unfinished satire on woman, the *Miroir de Mariage*, fatigued even his own age, and the official court poet of France outlived his fame. He sings of love in the conventional modes; his historical poems, celebrating events of the day, have interest by virtue of their matter; as a moralist in verse he deplores the corruption of high and low, the cupidity in Church and State, and, above all, applies his wit to expose the vices and infirmities of women. The earliest Poetic in French—*L'art de dictier et de fere chançons, balades, virelais, et rondeaulx* (1392)—is the work of Eustache Deschamps, in which the poet, by no means himself a master of harmonies, insists on the prime importance of harmony in verse.

The exhaustion of the mediæval sources of inspiration is still more apparent in the fifteenth-century successors of Deschamps. But already something of the reviving influence of Italian culture makes itself felt. CHRISTINE DE PISAN, Italian by her parentage and place of birth (c. 1363), was left a widow with three young children at the age of twenty-five. Her sorrow, uttered in verse, is a genuine lyric cry; but when in her poverty she practised authorship as a trade, while she wins our respect as a mother, the poetess is too often at once facile and pedantic. Christine was zealous in maintaining the honour of her sex against the injuries of Jean de Meun; in her prose *Cité des Dames* she celebrates the virtues and heroism of women, with examples from ancient and modern times; in the *Livre des Trois Vertus* she

instructs women in their duties. When advanced in years, and sheltered in the cloister, she sang her swan-song in honour of Joan of Arc. Admirable in every relation of life, a patriot and a scholar, she only needed one thing—genius—to be a poet of distinction.

A legend relates that the Dauphiness, Margaret of Scotland, kissed the lips of a sleeper who was the ugliest man in France, because from that "precious mouth" had issued so many "good words and virtuous sayings." The sleeper was Christine's poetical successor, ALAIN CHARTIER. His fame was great, and as a writer of prose he must be remembered with honour, both for his patriotic ardour, and for the harmonious eloquence (modelled on classical examples) in which that ardour found expression. His first work, the *Livre des Quatre Dames*, is in verse: four ladies lament their husbands slain, captured, lost, or fugitive and dishonoured, at Agincourt. Many of his other poems were composed as a distraction from the public troubles of the time; the title of one, widely celebrated in its own day, *La Belle Dame sans Mercy*, has obtained a new meaning of romance through its appropriation by Keats. In 1422 he wrote his prose *Quadrilogue Invectif*, in which suffering France implores the nobles, the clergy, the people to show some pity for her miserable state. If Froissart had not discerned the evils of the feudal system, they were patent to the eyes of Alain Chartier. His *Livre de l'Espérance*, where the oratorical prose is interspersed with lyric verse, spares neither the clergy nor the frivolous and dissolute

gentry, who forget their duty to their country in wanton self-indulgence; yet his last word, written at the moment when Joan of Arc was leaving the pastures for battle, is one of hope. His *Curial (The Courtier)* is a satire on the vices of the court by one who had acquaintance with its corruption. The large, harmonious phrase of Alain Chartier was new to French prose, and is hardly heard again until the seventeenth century.

The last grace and refinements of chivalric society blossom in the poetry of CHARLES D'ORLÉANS, "la grâce exquise des choses frêles." He was born in 1391, son of Louis, Duke of Orleans, and an Italian mother, Valentine of Milan. Married at fifteen to the widow of Richard II. of England, he lost his father by assassination, his mother by the stroke of grief, his wife in childbirth. From the battlefield of Agincourt he passed to England, where he remained a prisoner, closely guarded, for twenty-five years. It seems as if events should have made him a tragic poet; but for Charles d'Orléans poetry was the brightness or the consolation of his exile. His elder years at the little court of Blois were a season of delicate gaiety, when he enjoyed the recreations of age, and smiled at the passions of youth. He died in 1465. Neither depth of reflection nor masculine power of feeling finds expression in his verse; he does not contribute new ideas to poetry, nor invent new forms, but he rendered the old material and made the accepted moulds of verse charming by a gracious personality and an exquisite sense of art. Ballade, rondeau, chanson, each is manipulated with the skill of a goldsmith setting

his gems. He sings of the beauty of woman, the lighter joys of love, the pleasure of springtide, the song of the birds, the gliding of a stream or a cloud; or, as an elder man, he mocks with amiable irony the fatiguing ardours of young hearts. When St. Valentine's day comes round, his good physician "Nonchaloir" advises him to abstain from choosing a mistress, and recommends an easy pillow. The influence of Charles d'Orléans on French poetry was slight; it was not until 1734 that his forgotten poems were brought to light.

In the close of the mediæval period, when old things were passing away and new things were as yet unborn, the minds of men inclined to fill the void with mockery and satire. Martin Lefranc (c. 1410-61) in his *Champion des Dames*—a poem of twenty-four thousand lines, in which there is much spirit and vigour of versification—balances one against another the censure and the praise of women. Coquillard, with his railleries assuming legal forms and phrases, laughs at love and lovers, or at the *Droits Nouveaux* of a happy time when licence had become the general law. Henri Baude, a realist in his keen observation, satirises with direct, incisive force, the manners and morals of his age. Martial d'Auvergne (c. 1433-1508), chronicling events in his *Vigiles de Charles VII.*, a poem written according to the scheme of the liturgical Vigils, is eloquent in his expression of the wrongs of the poor, and in his condemnation of the abuses of power and station. If the *Amant rendu Cordelier* be his, he too appears among those who jest at the follies and extravagance of love. His prose *Arrêts*

d'Amour are discussions and decisions of the imaginary court which determines questions of gallantry.

Amid such mockery of life and love, the horror of death was ever present to the mind of a generation from which hope and faith seemed to fail; it was the time of the *Danse Macabré*; the skeleton became a grim humourist satirising human existence, and verses written for the dance of women were ascribed in the manuscript which preserves them to Martial d'Auvergne.

Passion and the idea of death mingle with a power at once realistic and romantic in the poetry of FRANÇOIS VILLON. He was born in poverty, an obscure child of the capital, in 1430 or 1431; he adopted the name of his early protector, Villon; obtained as a poor scholar his bachelor's degree in 1449, and three years later became a *maître ès arts*; but already he was a master of arts less creditable than those of the University. In 1455 Villon—or should we call him Monterbier, Montcorbier, Corbueil, Desloges, Mouton (aliases convenient for vagabondage)?—quarrelled with a priest, and killed his adversary; he was condemned to death, and cheered his spirits with the piteous ballade for those about to swing to the kites and the crows; but the capital punishment was commuted to banishment. Next winter, stung by the infidelity and insults of a woman to whom he had abandoned himself, he fled, perhaps to Angers, bidding his friends a jesting farewell in the bequests of his *Petit Testament*. Betrayed by one who claimed him as an associate in robbery, Villon is lost to view for three years; and

when we rediscover him in 1461, it is as a prisoner, whose six months' fare has been bread and water in his cell at Meun-sur-Loire. The entry of Louis XI., recently consecrated king, freed the unhappy captive. Before the year closed he had composed his capital work, the *Grand Testament*, and proved himself the most original poet of his century. And then Villon disappears; whether he died soon after, whether he lived for half a score of years, we do not know.

While he handles with masterly ease certain of the fifteenth-century forms of verse—in particular the ballade—Villon is a modern in his abandonment of the traditional machinery of the imagination, its convention of allegories and abstractions, and those half-realised moralisings which were repeated from writer to writer; he is modern in the intensity of a personal quality which is impressed upon his work, in the complexity of his feelings, passing from mirth to despair, from beauty to horror, from cynical grossness to gracious memories or aspirations; he is modern in his passion for the real, and in those gleams of ideal light which are suddenly dashed across the vulgar surroundings of his sorry existence. While he flings out his scorn and indignation against those whom he regarded as his ill-users, or cries against the injuries of fortune, or laments his miserable past, he yet is a passionate lover of life; and shadowing beauty and youth and love and life, he is constantly aware of the imminent and inexorable tyranny of death. The ideas which he expresses are few and simple—ideas common to all men; but

they take a special colour from his own feelings and experiences, and he renders them with a poignancy which is his own, with a melancholy gaiety and a desperate imaginative sincerity. His figure is so interesting in itself—that of the *enfant perdu* of genius—and so typical of a class, that the temptation to create a Villon legend is great; but to magnify his proportions to those of the highest poets is to do him wrong. His passionate intensity within a limited range is unsurpassed; but Villon wanted sanity, and he wanted breadth.

In his direct inspiration from life, co-operating with an admirable skill and science in literary form, Villon stands alone. For others—Georges Chastelain, Meschinot, Molinet, Crétin—poetry was a cumbrous form of rhetoric, regulated by the rules of those arts of poetry which during the fifteenth century appeared at not infrequent intervals. The *grands rhétoriciens* with their complicated measures, their pedantic diction, their effete allegory, their points and puerilities, testify to the exhaustion of the Middle Ages, and to the need of new creative forces for the birth of a living literature.

There is life, however, in the work of one remarkable prose-writer of the time—ANTOINE DE LA SALLE. His residence in Rome (1422) had made him acquainted with the tales of the Italian *novellieri*; he was a friend of the learned and witty Poggio; René of Anjou entrusted to him the education of his son; when advanced in years he became the author certainly of one masterpiece, probably of three. If he was the writer of the *Quinze*

Joies de Mariage, he knew how to mask a rare power of cynical observation under a smiling face: the Church had celebrated the fifteen joys of the Blessed Virgin; he would ironically depict the fifteen afflictions of wedded life, in scenes finely studied from the domestic interior. How far the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* are to be ascribed to him is doubtful; it is certain that these licentious tales reproduce, with a new skill in narrative prose, the spirit of indecorous mirth in their Italian models. The *Petit Jehan de Saintré* is certainly the work of Antoine de la Salle; the irony of a realist, endowed with subtlety and grace, conducts the reader through chivalric exaltations to vulgar disillusion. The writer was not insensible to the charm of the ideals of the past, but he presents them only in the end to cover them with disgrace. The anonymous farce of *Pathelin*, and the *Chronique de petit Jehan de Saintré*, are perhaps the most instructive documents which we possess with respect to the moral temper of the close of the Middle Ages; and there have been critics who have ventured to ascribe both works to the same hand.

II

THE DRAMA

The mediæval drama in France, though of early origin, attained its full development only when the Middle Ages were approaching their term; its popularity continued during the first half of the sixteenth century. It waited for a public; with the

growth of industry, the uprising of the middle classes, it secured its audience, and in some measure filled the blank created by the disappearance of the *chansons de geste*. The survivals of the drama of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are few; the stream, as we know, was flowing, but it ran underground.

The religious drama had its origin in the liturgical offices of the Church. At Christmas and at Easter the birth and resurrection of the Saviour were dramatically recited to the people by the clergy, within the consecrated building, in Latin paraphrases of the sacred text; but, as yet, neither Jesus nor His mother appeared as actors in the drama. By degrees the vernacular encroached upon the Latin and displaced it; the scene passed from the church to the public place or street; the action developed; and the actors were priests supported by lay-folk, or were lay-folk alone.

The oldest surviving drama written in French (but with interspersed liturgical sentences of Latin) is of the twelfth century—the *Représentation d'Adam*: the fall of man, and the first great crime which followed—the death of Abel—are succeeded by the procession of Messianic prophets. It was enacted outside the church, and the spectators were alarmed or diverted by demons who darted to and fro amidst the crowd. Of the thirteenth century, only two religious pieces remain. Jean Bodel, of Arras, was the author of *Saint Nicholas*. The poet, himself about to assume the cross, exhibits a handful of Crusaders in combat with the Mussulmans; all but one, a supplicant of the saint, die gloriously, with angelic applause

and pity; whereupon the feelings of the audience are relieved by the mirth and quarrels of drinkers in a tavern, who would rob St. Nicholas of the treasure entrusted to his safeguard; miracles, and general conversion of the infidels, conclude the drama. The miracle of *Théophile*, the ambitious priest who pawned his soul to Satan, and through our Lady's intercession recovered his written compact, is by the trouvère Rutebeuf. These are scanty relics of a hundred years; yet their literary value outweighs that of the forty-two *Miracles de Notre Dame* of the century which followed—rude pieces, often trivial, often absurd in their incidents, with mystic extravagance sanctifying their vulgar realism. They formed, with two exceptions, the dramatic repertory of some mediæval *puy*, an association half-literary, half-religious, devoted to the Virgin's honour; their rhymed octosyllabic verse—the special dramatic form—at times borders upon prose. One drama, and only one, of the fourteenth century, chooses another heroine than our Lady—the *Histoire de Grisélidis*, which presents, with pathos and intermingling mirth, those marvels of wifely patience celebrated for other lands by Boccaccio, by Petrarch, and by Chaucer.

The fifteenth-century Mystery exhibits the culmination of the mediæval sacred drama. The word *mystère*,¹² first appropriated to tableaux vivants, is applied to dramatic performances in the royal privilege which in 1402 conferred upon the association known

¹² Derived from *ministerium* (*métier*), but doubtless often drawing to itself a sense suggested by the *mysteries* of religion.

as the *Confrérie de la Passion* the right of performing the plays of our Redemption. Before this date the Blessed Virgin and the infant Jesus had appeared upon the scene. The Mystery presents the course of sacred story, derived from the Old and the New Testaments, together with the lives of the saints from apostolic times to the days of St. Dominic and St. Louis; it even includes, in an extended sense, subjects from profane history—the siege of Orleans, the destruction of Troy—but such subjects are of rare occurrence during the fifteenth century.

For a hundred years, from 1450 onwards, an unbounded enthusiasm for the stage possessed the people, not of Paris merely, but of all France. The *Confrères de la Passion*, needing a larger repertoire, found in young ARNOUL GREBAN, bachelor in theology, an author whose vein was copious. His *Passion*, written about the middle of the fifteenth century, embraces the entire earthly life of Christ in its thirty-four thousand verses, which required one hundred and fifty performers and four crowded days for the delivery. Its presentation was an unprecedented event in the history of the theatre. The work of Greban was rehandled and enlarged by Jean Michel, and great was the triumph when it was given at Angers in 1486. Greban was not to be outdone either by his former self or by another dramatist; in collaboration with his brother Simon, he composed the yet more enormous *Actes des Apôtres*, in sixty-two thousand lines, demanding the services of five hundred performers. When presented at Bourges as late as 1536, the

happiness of the spectators was extended over no fewer than forty days. The Mystery of the Old Testament, selecting whatever was supposed to typify or foreshadow the coming of the Messiah, is only less vast, and is not less incoherent. Taken together, the Mysteries comprise over a million verses, and what remains is but a portion of what was written.

Though the literary value of the Mysteries is slight, except in occasional passages of natural feeling or just characterisation, their historical importance was great; they met a national demand—they constituted an animated and moving spectacle of universal interest. A certain unity they possessed in the fact that everything revolved around the central figure of Christ and the central theme of man's salvation; but such unity is only to be discovered in a broad and distant view. Near at hand the confusion seems great. Their loose construction and unwieldy length necessarily endangered their existence when a truer feeling for literary art was developed. The solemnity of their matter gave rise to a further danger; it demanded some relief, and that relief was secured by the juxtaposition of comic scenes beside scenes of gravest import. Such comedy was occasionally not without grace—a passage of pastoral, a song, a naïve piece of gaiety; but buffoonery or vulgar riot was more to the taste of the populace. It was pushed to the furthest limit, until in 1548 the Parlement of Paris thought fit to interdict the performance of sacred dramas which had lost the sense of reverence and even of common propriety.

They had scandalised serious Protestants; the Catholics declined to defend what was indefensible; the humanists and lovers of classical art in Renaissance days thought scorn of the rude mediæval drama. Though it died by violence, its existence could hardly have been prolonged for many years. But in the days of its popularity the performance of a mystery set a whole city in motion; carpenters, painters, costumiers, machinists were busy in preparation; priests, scholars, citizens rehearsed their parts; country folk crowded to every hostelry and place of lodging. On the day preceding the first morning of performance the personages, duly attired—Christians, Jews, Saracens, kings, knights, apostles, priests—defiled through the streets on their way to the cathedral to mass. The vast stage hard by the church presented, with primitive properties, from right to left, the succession of places—lake, mountain, manger, prison, banquet-chamber—in which the action should be imagined; and from one station to another the actors passed as the play proceeded. At one end of the stage rose heaven, where God sat throned; at the other, hell-mouth gaped, and the demons entered or emerged. Music aided the action; the drama was tragedy, comedy, opera, pantomime in one. The actors were amateurs from every class of society—clergy, scholars, tradesmen, mechanics, occasionally members of the *noblesse*. In Paris the Confraternity of the Passion had almost an exclusive right to present these sacred plays; in the provinces associations were formed to carry out the costly and elaborate performance. To the *Confrères de*

la Passion—bourgeois folk and artisans—belonged the first theatre, and it was they who first presented plays at regular intervals. From the Hospital of the Trinity, originally a shelter for pilgrims, they migrated in 1539 to the Hôtel de Flandres, and thence in 1548 to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Their famous place of performance passed in time into the hands of professional actors; but it was not until 1676 that the Confrérie ceased to exist.

Comedy, unlike the serious drama, suffered no breach of continuity during its long history. The jongleurs of the Middle Ages were the immediate descendants of the Roman mimes and histrions; their declamations, accompanied by gestures, at least tended towards the dramatic form. Classical comedy was never wholly forgotten in the schools; the liturgical drama and the sacred pieces developed from it had an indirect influence as encouraging dramatic feeling, and providing models which could be applied to other uses. The earliest surviving *jeux* are of Arras, the work of ADAM DE LA HALLE. In the *Jeu d'Adam* or *de la Feuillée* (c. 1262) satirical studies of real life mingle strangely with fairy fantasy; the poet himself, lamenting his griefs of wedlock, his father, his friends are humorously introduced; the fool and the physician play their laughable parts; and the three fay ladies, for whom the citizens have prepared a banquet under *la feuillée*, grant or refuse the wishes of the mortal folk in the traditional manner of enchantresses amiable or perverse. The *Jeu de Robin et Marlon*—first performed at Naples in 1283—is a pastoral comic opera, with music, song, and dance; the

good Marion is loyal to her rustic lover, and puts his rival, her cavalier admirer, to shame. These were happy inventions happily executed; but they stand alone. It is not until we reach the fifteenth century that mediæval comedy, in various forms, attained its true evolution.

The Moralities, of which sixty-five survive, dating, almost all, from 1450 to 1550, differed from the Mysteries in the fact that their purpose was rather didactic than religious; as a rule they handled neither historical nor legendary matter; they freely employed allegorical personification after the fashion of the *Roman de la Rose*. The general type is well exemplified in *Bien-Avisé, Mal-Avisé*, a kind of dramatic Pilgrim's Progress, with two pilgrims—one who is instructed in the better way by all the personified powers which make for righteousness; the other finding his companions on the primrose path, and arriving at the everlasting bonfire. Certain Moralities attack a particular vice—gluttony or blasphemy, or the dishonouring of parents. From satirising the social vices of the time, the transition was easy to political satire or invective. In the sixteenth century both the partisans of the Reformation and the adherents to the traditional creed employed the Morality as a medium for ecclesiastical polemics. Sometimes treating of domestic manners and morals, it became a kind of bourgeois drama, presenting the conditions under which character is formed. Sometimes again it approached the farce: two lazy mendicants, one blind, the other lame, fear that they may suffer a cure and lose their trade through the

efficacy of the relics of St. Martin; the halt, mounted on the other's back, directs his fellow in their flight; by ill luck they encounter the relic-bearers, and are restored in eye and limb; the recovered cripple swears and rages; but the man born blind, ravished by the wonders of the world, breaks forth in praise to God. The higher Morality naturally selected types of character for satire or commendation. It is easy to perceive how such a comic art as that of Molière lay in germ in this species of the mediæval drama. At a late period examples are found of the historical Morality. The pathetic *l'Empereur qui tua son Neveu* exhibits in its action and its stormy emotion something of tragic power. The advent of the pseudo-classical tragedy of the Pléiade checked the development of this species. The very name "Morality" disappears from the theatre after 1550.

The *sottie*, like the Morality, was a creation of the fifteenth century. Whether it had its origin in a laicising of the irreverent celebration of the Feast of Fools, or in that parade of fools which sometimes preceded a Mystery, it was essentially a farce, but a farce in which the performers, arrayed in motley, and wearing the long-eared cap, distributed between them the several rôles of human folly. Associations of *sots*, known in Paris as *Enfants sans Souci*, known in other cities by other names, presented the unwisdom or madness of the world in parody. The *sottie* at times rose from a mere diversion to satire; like the Morality, it could readily adapt itself to political criticism. The *Gens Nouveaux*, belonging perhaps to the reign of Louis XI., mocks

the hypocrisy of those sanguine reformers who promise to create the world anew on a better model, and yet, after all, have no higher inspiration than that old greed for gold and power and pleasure which possessed their predecessors. Louis XII., who permitted free comment on public affairs from actors on the stage, himself employed the poet Pierre Gringoire to satirise his adversary the Pope. In 1512 the *Jeu du Prince des Sots* was given in Paris; Gringoire, the *Mère-Sotte*, but wearing the Papal robes to conceal for a time the garb of folly, discharged a principal part. Such dangerous pleasantries as this were vigorously restrained by François I.

A dramatic monologue or a *sermon joyeux* was commonly interposed between the *sottie* and the Morality or miracle which followed. The sermon parodied in verse the pulpit discourses of the time, with text duly announced, the customary scholastic divisions, and an incredible licence in matter and in phrase. Among the dramatic monologues of the fifteenth century is found at least one little masterpiece, which has been ascribed on insufficient grounds to Villon, and which would do no discredit to that poet's genius—the *Franc-Archer de Bagnolet*. The francs-archers of Charles VII.—a rural militia—were not beloved of the people; the *miles gloriosus* of Bagnolet village, boasting largely of his valour, encounters a stuffed scarecrow, twisting to the wind; his alarms, humiliations, and final triumph are rendered in a monologue which expounds the action of the piece with admirable spirit.

If the Mystery served to fill the void left by the national epopee, the farce may be regarded as to some extent the dramatic inheritor of the spirit of the fabliau. It aims at mirth and laughter for their own sakes, without any purpose of edification; it had, like the fabliau, the merit of brevity, and not infrequently the fault of unabashed grossness. But the very fact that it was a thing of little consequence allowed the farce to exhibit at times an audacity of political or ecclesiastical criticism which transformed it into a dramatised pamphlet. In general it chose its matter from the ludicrous misadventures of private life: the priest, the monk, the husband, the mother-in-law, the wife, the lover, the roguish servant are the agents in broadly ludicrous intrigues; the young wife lords it over her dotard husband, and makes mockery of his presumptive heirs, in *La Cornette* of Jean d'Abondance; in *Le Cuvier*, the husband, whose many household duties have been scheduled, has his revenge—the list, which he deliberately recites while his wife flounders helpless in the great washing-tub, does not include the task of effecting her deliverance.

Amid much that is trivial and much that is indecent, one farce stands out pre-eminent, and may indeed be called a comedy of manners and of character—the merry misfortunes of that learned advocate, *Maître Pierre Pathelin*. The date is doubtless about 1470; the author, probably a Parisian and a member of the Basoche, is unknown. With all his toiling and cheating, Pathelin is poor; with infinite art and spirit he beguiles the draper of the cloth which will make himself a coat and his faithful Guillemette

a gown; when the draper, losing no time, comes for his money and an added dinner of roast goose, behold Maître Pathelin is in a raging fever, raving in every dialect. Was the purchase of his cloth a dream, or work of the devil? To add to the worthy tradesman's ill-luck, his shepherd has stolen his wool and eaten his sheep. The dying Pathelin unexpectedly appears in court to defend the accused, and having previously advised his client to affect idiocy and reply to all questions with the senseless utterance *bée*, he triumphantly wins the case; but the tables are turned when Master Pathelin demands his fee, and can obtain no other response than *bée* from the instructed shepherd. The triumph of rogue over rogue is the only moral of the piece; it is a satire on fair dealing and justice, and, though the morals of a farce are not to be gravely insisted on, such morals as *Maître Pathelin* presents agree well with the spirit of the age which first enjoyed this masterpiece of caricature.

The actors in mediæval comedy, as in the serious drama, were amateurs. The members of the academic *puy*s were succeeded by the members of guilds, or *confréries*, or *sociétés joyeuses*. Of these societies the most celebrated was that of the Parisian *Enfants sans Souci*. With this were closely associated the Basochiens, the corporation of clerks to the *procureurs* of the Parlement of Paris.¹³ It may be that the *sots* of the capital were only members of the *basoche*, assuming for the occasion

¹³ This corporation, known as the *Royaume de la Basoche (basilica)*, was probably as old as the fourteenth century.

the motley garb. In colleges, scholars performed at first in Latin plays, but from the fifteenth century in French. At the same time, troupes of performers occasionally moved from city to city, exhibiting a Mystery, but they did not hold together when the occasion had passed. Professional comedians were brought from Italy to Lyons in 1548, for the entertainment of Henri II. and Catherine de Médicis. From that date companies of French actors appear to become numerous. New species of the drama—tragedy, comedy, pastoral—replace the mediæval forms; but much of the genius of French classical comedy is a development from the Morality, the *sottie*, and the farce. To present these newer forms the service of trained actors was required. During the last quarter of the sixteenth century the amateur performers of the ancient drama finally disappear.

BOOK THE SECOND

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

The literature of the sixteenth century is dominated by two chief influences—that of the Renaissance and that of the Reformation. When French armies under Charles VIII. and Louis XII. made a descent on Italy, they found everywhere a recognition of the importance of art, an enthusiasm for beauty, a feeling for the æsthetic as well as the scholarly aspects of antiquity, a new joy in life, an universal curiosity, a new confidence in human reason. To Latin culture a Greek culture had been added; and side by side with the mediæval master of the understanding, Aristotle, the master of the imaginative reason, Plato, was held in honour. Before the first quarter of the sixteenth century closed, France had received a great gift from Italy, which profoundly modified, but by no means effaced, the characteristics of her national genius. The Reformation was a recovery of Christian antiquity and of Hebraism, and for a time the religious movement made common cause with the Renaissance; but the grave morals, the opposition of grace to

nature, and the dogmatic spirit of theology after a time alienated the Reforming party from the mere humanism of literature and art. An interest in general ideas and a capacity for dealing with them were fostered by the study of antiquity both classical and Christian, by the meeting of various tendencies, and by the conflict of rival creeds. To embody general ideas in art under a presiding feeling for beauty, to harmonise thought and form, was the great work of the seventeenth century; but before this could be effected it was necessary that France should enjoy tranquillity after the strife of the civil wars.

Learning had received the distinction of court patronage when Louis XII. appointed the great scholar Budé his secretary. Around Francis I., although he was himself rather a lover of the splendour and ornament of the Renaissance than of its finer spirit, men of learning and poets gathered. On the suggestion of GUILLAUME BUDÉ he endowed professorships of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, to which were added those of medicine, mathematics, and philosophy (1530-40), and in this projected foundation of the Collège de France an important step was made towards the secularisation of learned studies. The King's sister, MARGUERITE OF NAVARRE (1492-1549), perhaps the most accomplished woman of her time, represents more admirably than Francis the genius of the age. She studied Latin, Italian, Spanish, German, Hebrew, and, when forty, occupied herself with Greek. Her heart was ardent as well as her intellect; she was gay and mundane, and at the same time she was serious

(with even a strain of mystical emotion) in her concern for religion. Although not in communion with the Reformers, she sympathised with them, and extended a generous protection to those who incurred danger through their liberal opinions. Her poems, *Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses* (1547), show the mediæval influences forming a junction with those of the Renaissance. Some are religious, but side by side with her four dramatic Mysteries and her eloquent *Triomphe de l'Agneau* appears the *Histoire des Satyres et Nymphes de Diane*, imitated from the Italian of Sannazaro. Among her latest poems, which remained in manuscript until 1896, are a pastoral dramatic piece expressing her grief for the death of her brother Francis I.; a second dramatic poem, *Comédie jouée au Mont de Marsan*, in which love (human or divine) triumphs over the spirit of the world, over superstitious asceticism, and over the wiser temper of religious moderation. *Les Prisons* tells in allegory of her servitude to passion, to worldly ambition, and to the desire for human knowledge, until at last the divine love brought her deliverance. The union of the mundane and the moral spirit is singularly shown in Marguerite's collection of prose tales, written in imitation of Boccaccio, the *Heptaméron des Nouvelles* (1558).

These tales were not an indiscretion of youth; probably Marguerite composed them a few years before her death; perhaps their licence and wanton mirth were meant to enliven the melancholy hours of her beloved brother; certainly the writer is ingenious in extracting edifying lessons from narratives which do

not promise edification. They are not so gross as other writings of the time, and this is Marguerite's true defence; to laugh at the immoralities of monks and priests was a tradition in literature which neither the spirit of the Renaissance nor that of the Reformation condemned. A company of ladies and gentlemen, detained by floods on their return from the Pyrenean baths, beguile the time by telling these tales, and the pious widow Dame Oisille gives excellent assistance in showing how they tend to a moral purpose. The series, designed to equal in number the tales of the Decameron, is incomplete. Possibly Marguerite was aided by some one or more of the authors of whom she was the patroness and protector; but no sufficient evidence exists for the ascription of the *Heptaméron* to Bonaventure des Périers.

Among the poets whom Marguerite received with favour at her court was CLÉMENT MAROT, the versifier, as characterised by Boileau, of "elegant badinage." His predecessors and early contemporaries in the opening years of the sixteenth century continued the manner of the so-called *rhétoriciens*, who endeavoured to maintain allegory, now decrepit or effete, with the aid of ingenuities of versification and pedantry of diction; or else they carried on something of the more living tradition of Villon or of Coquillard. Among the former, Jean le Maire de Belges deserves to be remembered less for his verse than for his prose work, *Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troie*, in which the Trojan origin of the French people is set forth with some feeling for beauty and a mass

of crude erudition. Clément Marot, born at Cahors in 1495 or 1496, a poet's son, was for a time in the service of Francis I. as *valet de chambre*, and accompanied his master to the battle of Pavia, where he was wounded and made prisoner. Pursued by the Catholics as a heretic, and afterwards by the Genevan Calvinists as a libertine, he was protected as long as was possible by the King and by his sister. He died at Turin, a refugee to Italy, in 1544.

In his literary origins Marot belongs to the Middle Ages; he edited the *Roman de la Rose* and the works of Villon; his immediate masters were the *grands rhétoriciens*; but the spirit of the Renaissance and his own genius delivered him from the oppression of their authority, and his intellect was attracted by the revolt and the promise of freedom found in the Reforming party. A light and pleasure-loving nature, a temper which made the prudent conduct of life impossible, exposed him to risks, over which, aided by protectors whom he knew how to flatter with a delicate grace, he glided without fatal mishap. He did not bring to poetry depth of passion or solidity of thought; he brought what was needed—a bright intelligence, a sense of measure and proportion, grace, gaiety, *esprit*. Escaping, after his early *Temple de Cupido*, from the allegorising style, he learned to express his personal sentiments, and something of the gay, bourgeois spirit of France, with aristocratic distinction. His poetry of the court and of occasion has lost its savour; but when he writes familiarly (as in the *Épître au Roi pour avoir été dérobé*), or tells a short tale

(like the fable of the rat and the lion), he is charmingly bright and natural. None of his poems—elegies, epistles, satires, songs, epigrams, rondeaux, pastorals, ballades—overwhelm us by their length; he was not a writer of vast imaginative ambitions. His best epigrams are masterpieces in their kind, with happy turns of thought and expression in which art seems to have the ease of nature. The satirical epistle supposed to be sent, not by Marot, but by his valet, to Marot's adversary, Sagon, is spirited in its insolence. *L'Enfer* is a satiric outbreak of indignation suggested by his imprisonment in the Châtelet on the charge of heresy. His versified translation of forty-nine Psalms added to his glory, and brought him the honour of personal danger from the hostility of the Sorbonne; but to attempt such a translation is to aim at what is impossible. His gift to French poetry is especially a gift of finer art—firm and delicate expression, felicity in rendering a thought or a feeling, certainty and grace in poetic evolution, skill in handling the decasyllabic line. A great poet Marot was not, and could not be; but, coming at a fortunate moment, his work served literature in important ways; it was a return from laboured rhetoric to nature. In the classical age his merit was recognised by La Bruyère, and the author of the *Fables* and the *Contes*—in some respects a kindred spirit—acknowledged a debt to Marot.

From Marot as a poet much was learned by Marguerite of Navarre. Of his contemporaries, who were also disciples, the most distinguished was MELIN DE SAINT-GELAIS, and on the master's death Melin passed for an eminent poet. We

can regard him now more justly, as one who in slender work sought for elegance, and fell into a mannered prettiness. While preserving something of the French spirit, he suffered from the frigid ingenuities which an imitation of Italian models suggested to him; but it cannot be forgotten that Saint-Gelais brought the sonnet from Italy into French poetry. The school of Marot, ambitious in little things, affected much the *blason*, which celebrates an eyebrow, a lip, a bosom, a jewel, a flower, a precious stone; lyrical inspiration was slender, but clearness and grace were worth attaining, and the conception of poetry as a fine art served to lead the way towards Ronsard and the *Pléiade*.

The most powerful personality in literature of the first half of the sixteenth century was not a poet, though he wrote verses, but a great creator in imaginative prose, great partly by virtue of his native genius, partly because the sap of the new age of enthusiasm for science and learning was thronging in his veins—FRANÇOIS RABELAIS. Born about 1490 or 1495, at Chinon, in Touraine, of parents in a modest station, he received his education in the village of Seuillé and at the convent of La Baumette. He revolted against the routine of the schools, and longed for some nutriment more succulent and savoury. For fifteen years he lived as a Franciscan monk in the cell and cloisters of the monastery at Fontenay-le-Comte. In books, but not those of a monastic library, he found salvation; mathematics, astronomy, law, Latin, Greek consoled him during his period of uncongenial seclusion. His criminal companions—books which

might be suspected of heresy—were sequestered. The young Bishop of Maillezais—his friend Geoffroy d'Estissac, who had aided his studies—and the great scholar Budé came to his rescue, and passing first, by favour of the Pope, to the Benedictine abbey of Maillezais, before long he quitted the cloister, and, as a secular priest, began his wanderings of a scholar in search of universal knowledge. In 1530-31 he was at Montpellier, studying medicine and lecturing on medical works of Hippocrates and Galen; next year, at Lyons, one of the learned group gathered around the great printers of that city, he practised his art of physic in the public hospital, and was known as a scientific author. Towards the close of 1532 he re-edited the popular romance *Chroniques Gargantuines*, which tells the adventures of the "enormous giant Gargantua." It was eagerly read, and brought laughter to the lips of Master Rabelais' patients. Learning, he held, was good, but few things in this world are wholesomer than laughter. The success of the *Chroniques* seems to have moved him to write a continuation, and in 1533 appeared *Pantagruel*, the story of the deeds and prowess of Gargantua's giant son, newly composed by Alcofribas Nasier, an anagram which concealed the name of François Rabelais. It forms the second of the five books which make up its author's famous work. A recast or rather a new creation of the Chronicles of Gargantua, replacing the original *Chroniques*, followed in 1535. It was not until 1546 and 1552 that the second and—in its complete form—the third books of *Pantagruel* appeared, and the authorship was acknowledged. The

last book was posthumous (1562 in part, 1564 in full), and the inferiority of style, together with the more bitter spirit of its satire, have led many critics to the opinion that it is only in part from the hand of the great and wise humourist.

Rabelais was in Rome in 1534, and again in 1535, as physician to the French ambassador, Jean du Bellay, Bishop of Paris. He pursued his scientific studies in medicine and botany, took lessons in Arabic, and had all a savant's intelligent curiosity for the remains of antiquity. Some years of his life were passed in wandering from one French university to another. Fearing the hostility of the Sorbonne, during the last illness of his protector Francis I., he fled to the imperial city of Metz. He was once again in Rome with Cardinal du Bellay, in 1549. Next year the author of *Pantagruel* was appointed curé of Meudon, near Paris, but, perhaps as a concession to public opinion, he resigned his clerical charges on the eve of the publication of his fourth book. Rabelais died probably in 1552 or 1553, aged about sixty years.

On his death it might well have been said that the gaiety of nations was eclipsed; but to his contemporaries Rabelais appeared less as the enormous humourist, the buffoon Homer, than as a great scholar and man of science, whose bright temper and mirthful conversation were in no way inconsistent with good sense, sound judgment, and even a habit of moderation. It is thus that he should still be regarded. Below his laughter lay wisdom; below his orgy of grossness lay a noble ideality; below the extravagances of his imagination lay the equilibrium of a

spirit sane and strong. The life that was in him was so abounding and exultant that it broke all dikes and dams; and laughter for him needed no justification, it was a part of this abounding life. After the mediæval asceticism and the intellectual bondage of scholasticism, life in Rabelais has its vast outbreak and explosion, he would be no fragment of humanity, but a complete man. He would enjoy the world to the full, and yet at the same time there is something of stoicism in his philosophy of life; while gaily accepting the good things of the earth, he would hold himself detached from the gifts of fortune, and possess his soul in a strenuous sanity. Let us return—such is his teaching—to nature, honouring the body, but giving higher honour to the intellect and to the moral feeling; let us take life seriously, and therefore gaily; let us face death cheerfully, knowing that we do not wholly die; with light in the understanding and love in the heart, we can confront all dangers and defy all doubts.

He is the creator of characters which are types. His giants—Grandgousier, Gargantua, Pantagruel—are giants of good sense and large benevolence. The education of Pantagruel presents the ideal pedagogy of the Renaissance, an education of the whole man—mind and body—in contrast with the dwarfing subtleties and word-spinning of the effete mediæval schools. Friar John is the monk whose passion for a life of activity cannot be restrained; his violence is the overflow of wholesome energy. It is to his care that the Abbey of Thelema is confided, where young men and maidens are to be occupied with every noble

toil and every high delight, an abbey whose rule has but a single clause (since goodness has no rule save freedom), "Do what you will." Of such a fraternity, love and marriage are the happiest outcome. Panurge, for whom the suggestion was derived from the macaronic poet Folengo, is the fellow of Shakespeare's Falstaff, in his lack of morals, his egoism, his inexhaustible wit; he is the worst and best of company. We would dispense with such a disreputable associate if we could, but save that he is a "very wicked lewd rogue," he is "the most virtuous man in the world," and we cannot part with him. Panurge would marry, but fears lest he may be the victim of a faithless wife; every mode of divination, every source of prediction except one is resorted to, and still his fate hangs threatening; it only remains to consult the oracle of La Dive Bouteille. The voyaging quest is long and perilous; in each island at which the adventurers touch, some social or ecclesiastical abuse is exhibited for ridicule; the word of the oracle is in the end the mysterious "Drink"—drink, that is, if one may venture to interpret an oracle, of the pure water of wisdom and knowledge, and let the unknown future rest.

The obscenity and ordure of Rabelais were to the taste of his time; his severer censures of Church and State were disguised by his buffoonery; flinging out his good sense and wise counsels with a liberal hand, he also wields vigorously the dunghill pitchfork. If he is gross beyond what can be described, he is not, apart from the evil of such grossness, a corrupter of morals, unless morals be corrupted by a belief in the goodness

of the natural man. The graver wrongs of his age—wars of ambition, the abuse of public justice, the hypocrisies, cruelties, and lethargy of the ecclesiastics, distrust of the intellectual movement, spurious ideals of life—are vigorously condemned. Rabelais loves goodness, charity, truth; he pleads for the right of manhood to a full and free development of all its powers; and if questions of original sin and divine grace trouble him little, and his creed has some of the hardihood of the Renaissance, he is full of filial gratitude to *le bon Dieu* for His gift of life, and of a world in which to live strongly should be to live joyously.

The influence of Rabelais is seen in the writers of prose tales who were his contemporaries and successors; but they want his broad good sense and real temperance. BONAVENTURE DES PÉRIERS, whom Marguerite of Navarre favoured, and whose *Nouvelles Récréations*, with more of the tradition of the French fabliaux and farces and less of the Italian manner, have something in common with the stories of the *Heptaméron*, died in desperation by his own hand about 1543. His Lucianic dialogues which compose the *Cymbalum Mundi* show the audacity of scepticism which the new ideas of the Renaissance engendered in ill-balanced spirits. With all his boldness and ardour Rabelais exercised a certain discretion, and in revising his own text clearly exhibited a desire to temper valour with prudence.

It is remarkable that just at the time when Rabelais published the second and best book of his *Pantagruel*, in which the ideality and the realism of the Renaissance blossom to the

full, there was a certain revival of the chivalric romance. The Spanish *Amadis des Gaules* (1540-48), translated by Herberay des Essarts, was a distant echo of the Romances of the Round Table. The gallant achievements of courtly knights, their mystical and platonic loves, were a delight to Francis I., and charmed a whole generation. Thus, for the first time, the literature of Spain reached France, and the influence of *Amadis* reappears in the seventeenth century in the romances of d'Urfé and Mdlle. de Scudéry.

If the genius of the Renaissance is expressed ardently and amply in the writings of Rabelais, the genius of the Reformation finds its highest and most characteristic utterance through one whom Rabelais describes as the "demoniacle" of Geneva—JEAN CALVIN (1509-64). The pale face and attenuated figure of the great Reformer, whose life was a long disease, yet whose indomitable will sustained him amid bodily infirmities, present a striking contrast to the sanguine health and overflowing animal spirits of the good physician who reckoned laughter among the means of grace. Yet Calvin was not merely a Reformer: he was also a humanist, who, in his own way, made a profound study of man, and who applied the learning of a master to the determination of dogma. His education was partly theological, partly legal; and in his body of doctrine appear some of the rigour, the severity, and the formal procedures of the law. Indignation against the imprisonment and burning of Protestants, under the pretence that they were rebellious

anabaptists, drew him from obscurity; silence, he thought, was treason. He addressed to the King an eloquent letter, in which he maintained that the Reformed faith was neither new nor tending towards schism, and next year (1536) he published his lucid and logical exposition of Protestant doctrine—the *Christiana Religionis Institutio*. It placed him, at the age of twenty-seven, as leader in the forefront of the new religious movement.

But the movement was not merely learned, it was popular, and Calvin was resolved to present his work to French readers in their own tongue. His translation—the *Institution*—appeared probably in 1541. Perhaps no work by an author of seven-and-twenty had ever so great an influence. It consists of four books—of God, of Jesus as a Mediator, of the effects of His mediatorial work, and of the exterior forms of the Church. The generous illusion of Rabelais, that human nature is essentially good, has no place in Calvin's system. Man is fallen and condemned under the law; all his righteousness is as filthy rags; God, of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity predestinated some men to eternal life and others to eternal death; the Son of God came to earth to redeem the elect; through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the gift of faith they are united to Christ, are justified through His righteousness imputed to them, and are sanctified in their hearts; the Church is the body of the faithful in every land; the officers of the Church are chosen by the people; the sacraments are two—baptism and the Lord's Supper. In his spirit of system, his clearness, and the logical enchainment of his ideas,

Calvin is eminently French. On the one side he saw the Church of Rome, with—as he held—its human tradition, its mass of human superstitions, intervening between the soul and God; on the other side were the scepticism, the worldliness, the religious indifference of the Renaissance. Within the Reforming party there was the conflict of private opinions. Calvin desired to establish once for all, on the basis of the Scriptures, a coherent system of dogma which should impose itself upon the minds of men as of divine authority, which should be at once a barrier against the dangers of superstition and the dangers of libertine speculation. As the leaders of the French Revolution propounded political constitutions founded on the idea of the rights of man, so Calvin aimed at setting forth a creed proceeding, if we may so put it, from a conception of the absolute rights of God. Through the mere good pleasure of our Creator, Ruler, Judge, we are what we are.

It is not perhaps too much to say that Calvin is the greatest writer of the sixteenth century. He learned much from the prose of Latin antiquity. Clearness, precision, ordonnance, sobriety, intellectual energy are compensations for his lack of grace, imagination, sensibility, and religious unction. He wrote to convince, to impress his ideas upon other minds, and his austere purpose was attained. In the days of the pagan Renaissance, it was well for France that there should also be a Renaissance of moral rigour; if freedom was needful, so also was discipline. On the other hand, it may be admitted that Calvin's reason is

sometimes the dupe of Calvin's reasoning.

His *Life* was written in French by his fellow-worker in the Reformation, Théodore de Bèze, who also recorded the history of the Reformed Churches in France (1580). Bèze and Viret, together with their leader Calvin, were eminent in pulpit exposition and exhortation, and in Bèze the preacher was conjoined with a poet. At Calvin's request he undertook his translation of the Psalms, to complete that by Marot, and in 1551 his sacred drama the *Tragédie Française du sacrifice d'Abraham*, designed to inculcate the duty of entire surrender to the divine will, and written with a grave and restrained ardour, was presented at the University of Lausanne.

CHAPTER II FROM THE PLÉIADE TO MONTAIGNE

The classical Renaissance was not necessarily opposed to high ethical ideals; it was not wholly an affair of the sensuous imagination; it brought with it the conception of Roman virtue, and this might well unite itself (as we see afterwards in Corneille) with Christian faith. Among the many translators of the sixteenth century was Montaigne's early friend—the friend in memory of all his life—ÉTIENNE DE LA BOÉTIE (1530-63). It is not, however, for his fragments of Plutarch or his graceful rendering of Xenophon's Economics (named by him the *Mesnagerie*) that we remember La Boétie; it is rather for his eloquent pleading on behalf of freedom in the *Discours de la Servitude Volontaire* or *Contr'un*, written at sixteen—revised later—in which, with the rhetoric of youth, he utters his invective against tyranny. Before La Boétie's premature death the morals of antiquity as seen in action had been exhibited to French readers in the pages of Amyot's delightful translation of Plutarch's Lives (1559), to be followed, some years later, by his *OEuvres Morales de Plutarque*. JACQUES AMYOT (1513-93), from an ill-fed, ragged boy, rose to be the Bishop of Auxerre. His scholarship, seen not only in his Plutarch, but in his rendering of the *Daphnis et*

Chloé of Longus, and other works, was exquisite; but still more admirable was his sense of the capacities of French prose. He divined with a rare instinct the genius of the language; he felt the affinities between his Greek original and the idioms of his own countrymen; he rather re-created than translated Plutarch. "We dunces," wrote Montaigne, "would have been lost, had not this book raised us from the mire; thanks to it, we now venture to speak and write; . . . it is our breviary." The life and the ideas of the ancient world became the possession, not of scholars only, but of all French readers. The book was a school of manners and of thought, an inspirer of heroic deeds. "To love Plutarch," said the greatest Frenchman of the century, Henry of Navarre, "is to love me, for he was long the master of my youth."

It was such an interest in the life and ideas of antiquity as Amyot conveyed to the general mind of France that was wanting to Ronsard and the group of poets surrounding him. Their work was concerned primarily with literary form; of the life of the world and general ideas, apart from form, they took too little heed. The transition from Marot to Ronsard is to be traced chiefly through the school of Lyons. In that city of the South, letters flourished side by side with industry and commerce; Maurice Scève celebrated his mistress *Délie*, "object of the highest virtue," with Petrarchan ingenuities; and his pupil LOUISE LABÉ, "la belle Cordière," sang in her sonnets of a true passion felt, as she declares, "en ses os, en son sang, en son âme." The Lyonese poets, though imbued with Platonic ideas,

rather carry on the tradition of Marot than announce the Pléiade. PIERRE DE RONSARD, born at a château a few leagues from Vendôme, in the year 1524, was in the service of the sons of Francis I. as page, was in Scotland with James V., and later had the prospect of a distinguished diplomatic career, when deafness, consequent on a serious malady, closed for him the avenue to public life. He threw himself ardently into the study of letters; in company with the boy Antoine de Baïf he received lessons from an excellent Hellenist, Jean Daurat, soon to be principal of the Collège Coqueret. At the College a group of students—Ronsard, Baïf, Joachim du Bellay, Remi Belleau—gathered about the master. The "Brigade" was formed, which, by-and-by, with the addition of Jodelle and Pontus de Thyard, and including Daurat, became the constellation of the Pléiade. The seven associates read together, translated and imitated the classics; a common doctrine of art banded them in unity; they thought scorn of the vulgar ways of popular verse; poetry for them was an arduous and exquisite toil; its service was a religion. At length, in 1549, they flung out their manifesto—the *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française* by Du Bellay, the most important study in literary criticism of the century. With this should be considered, as less important manifestoes, the later *Art Poétique* of Ronsard, and his prefaces to the *Franciade*. To formulate principles is not always to the advantage of a movement in literature; but champions need a banner, reformers can hardly dispense with a definite creed. Against the popular conception of the ignorant

the Pléiade maintained that poetry was a high and difficult form of art; against the pedantry of humanism they maintained that the native tongue of France admitted of literary art worthy to take its place beside that of Greece or Rome. The French literary vocabulary, they declared, has excellences of its own, but it needs to be enriched by technical terms, by words of local dialects, by prudent adoptions from Greek and Latin, by judicious developments of the existing families of words, by the recovery of words that have fallen into disuse.

It is unjust to the Pléiade to say that they aimed at overloading poetic diction with neologisms of classical origin; they sought to innovate with discretion; but they unquestionably aimed at the formation of a poetic diction distinct from that of prose; they turned away from simplicity of speech to ingenious periphrasis; they desired a select, aristocratic idiom for the service of verse; they recommended a special syntax in imitation of the Latin; for the elder forms of French poetry they would substitute reproductions or re-creations of classical forms. Rondeaux, ballades, virelais, chants royaux, chansons are to be cast aside as *épiceries*; and their place is to be taken by odes like those of Pindar or of Horace, by the elegy, satire, epigram, epic, or by newer forms justified by the practice of Italian masters. Rich but not over-curious rhymes are to be cultivated, with in general the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes; the cæsura is to fall in accordance with the meaning. Ronsard, more liberal than Du Bellay, permits, on the ground of classical example, the

gliding from couplet to couplet without a pause. "The alexandrine holds in our language the place of heroic verse among the Greeks and Romans"—in this statement is indicated the chief service rendered to French poetry by Ronsard and the rest of the Pléiade; they it was who, by their teaching and example, imposed on later writers that majestic line, possessing the most varied powers, capable of the finest achievements, which has yielded itself alike to the purposes of Racine and to those of Victor Hugo.

Ronsard and Du Bellay broke with the tradition of the Middle Ages, and inaugurated the French classical school; it remained for Malherbe, at a later date, to reform the reformation of the Pléiade, and to win for himself the glory which properly belongs to his predecessors. Unfortunately from its origin the French classical school had in it the spirit of an intellectual aristocracy, which removed it from popular sympathies; unfortunately, also, the poets of the Pléiade failed to perceive that the masterpieces of Greece and Rome are admirable, not because they belong to antiquity, but because they are founded on the imitation of nature and on ideas of the reason. They were regarded as authorities equal with nature or independent of it; and thus while the school of Ronsard did much to renew literary art, its teaching involved an error which eventually tended to the sterilisation of art. That error found its correction in the literature of the seventeenth century, and expressly in the doctrine set forth by Boileau; yet under the correction some of the consequences of the error remained. Ronsard and his followers, on the other hand,

never made the assumption, common enough in the seventeenth century, that poetry could be manufactured by observance of the rules, nor did they suppose that the total play of emotion must be rationalised by the understanding; they left a place for the instinctive movements of poetic sensibility.

During forty years Ronsard remained the "Prince of Poets." Tasso sought his advice; the Chancellor Michel de l'Hospital wrote in his praise; Brantôme placed him above Petrarch; Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart sent him gifts; Charles IX. on one occasion invited him to sit beside the throne. In his last hours he was still occupied with his art. His death, at the close of 1585, was felt as a national calamity, and pompous honours were awarded to his tomb. Yet Ronsard, though ambitious of literary distinction, did not lose his true self in a noisy fame. His was the delicate nature of an artist; his deafness perhaps added to his timidity and his love of retirement; we think of him in his garden, cultivating his roses as "the priest of Flora."

His work as a poet falls into four periods. From 1550 to 1554 he was a humanist without discretion or reserve. In the first three books of the *Odes* he attempted to rival Pindar; in the *Amours de Cassandre* he emulates the glory of Petrarch. From 1554 to 1560, abandoning his Pindarism, he was in discipleship to Anacreon¹⁴ and Horace. It is the period of the less ambitious odes found in the fourth and fifth books, the period of the *Amours de Marie* and the *Hymnes*. From 1560 to 1574 he was a poet of the court

¹⁴ *i.e.* the Anacreontic poems, found, and published in 1554, by Henri Estienne.

and of courtly occasions, an eloquent declaimer on public events in the *Discours des Misères de ce Temps*, and the unfortunate epic poet of his unfinished *Franciade*. During the last ten years of his life he gave freer expression to his personal feelings, his sadness, his gladness; and to these years belong the admirable sonnets to Hélène de Surgères, his autumnal love.

Ronsard's genius was lyrical and elegiac, but the tendencies of a time when the great affair was the organisation of social life, and as a consequence the limitation of individual and personal passions, were not favourable to the development of lyrical poetry. In his imitations of Pindar a narrative element checks the flight of song, and there is a certain unreality in the premeditated attempt to reproduce the passionate fluctuations and supposed disorder of his model. The study of Pindar, however, trained Ronsard in the handling of sustained periods of verse, and interested him in complex lyrical combinations. His Anacreontic and Horatian odes are far happier; among these some of his most delightful work is found. If he was deficient in great ideas, he had delicacy of sentiment and an exquisite sense of metrical harmony. The power which he possessed as a narrative poet appears best in episodes or epic fragments. His ambitious attempt to trace the origin of the French monarchy from the imaginary Trojan Francus was unfortunate in its subject, and equally unfortunate in its form—the rhyming decasyllabic verse.

In pieces which may be called hortatory, the pulpit eloquence, as it were, of a poet addressing his contemporaries on public

matters, the utterances of a patriot and a citizen moved by pity for his fellows, such poetry as the *Discours des Misères de ce Temps* and the *Institution pour l'Adolescence du Roi, Charles IX.*, Ronsard is original and impressive, a forerunner of the orator poets of the seventeenth century. His eclogues show a true feeling for external nature, touched at times by a tender sadness. When he escapes from the curiosities and the strain of his less happy Petrarchism, he is an admirable poet of love in song and sonnet; no more beautiful variation on the theme of "gather the rosebuds while ye may" exists than his sonnet *Quand vous serez bien vieille*, unless it be his dainty ode *Mignonne, allons voir si la Rose*. Passionate in the deepest and largest sense Ronsard is not; but it was much to be sincere and tender, to observe just measure, to render a subtle phase of emotion. In the fine melancholy of his elegiac poetry he is almost modern. Before all else he is a master of his instrument, an inventor of new effects and movements of the lyre; in his hands the entire rhythmical system was renewed or was purified. His dexterity in various metres was that of a great virtuoso, and it was not the mere dexterity which conquers difficulties, it was a skill inspired and sustained by the sentiment of metre.

Of the other members of the Pléiade, one—Jodelle—is remembered chiefly in connection with the history of the drama. Baïf (1532-89), son of the French ambassador at Venice, translated from Sophocles and Terence, imitated Plautus, Petrarchised in sonnets, took from Virgil's *Georgics*

the inspiration of his *Météores*, was guided by the Anacreontic poems in his *Passe-Temps*, and would fain rival Theognis in his most original work *Les Mimes*, where a moral or satiric meaning masks behind an allegory or a fable. He desired to connect poetry more closely with music, and with this end in view thought to reform the spelling of words and to revive the quantitative metrical system of classical verse.¹⁵ REMI BELLEAU (1528-77) practised the Horatian ode and the sonnet; translated Anacreon; followed the Neapolitan Sannazaro in his *Bergerie* of connected prose and verse, where the shepherds are persons of distinction arrayed in a pastoral disguise; and adapted the mediæval *lapidary* (with imitations of the pseudo-Orpheus) to the taste of the Renaissance in his *Amours et Nouveaux Échanges des Pierres Précieuses*. These little myths and metamorphoses of gems are ingenious and graceful. The delicate feeling for nature which Belleau possessed is seen at its best in the charming song *Avril*, included in his somewhat incoherent *Bergerie*. Among his papers was found, after his death, a comedy, *La Reconnue*, which, if it has little dramatic power, shows a certain instinct for satire.

These are minor lights in the poetical constellation; but the star of JOACHIM DU BELLAY shines with a ray which, if less brilliant than that of Ronsard, has a finer and more penetrating influence. Du Bellay was born about 1525, at Liré, near Angers,

¹⁵ The "Baïfin verse," French not classical, is of fifteen syllables, divided into hemistichs of seven and eight syllables.

of an illustrious family. His youth was unhappy, and a plaintive melancholy haunts his verse. Like Ronsard he suffered from deafness, and he has humorously sung its praises. *Olive*, fifty sonnets in honour of his Platonic or Petrarchan mistress, Mlle. de Viole (the letters of whose name are transposed to Olive), appeared almost at the same moment as the earliest *Odes* of Ronsard; but before long he could mock in sprightly stanzas the fantasies and excesses of the Petrarchan style. It was not until his residence in Rome (1551) as intendant of his cousin Cardinal du Bellay, the French ambassador, that he found his real self. In his *Antiquités de Rome* he expresses the sentiment of ruins, the pathos of fallen greatness, as it had never been expressed before. The intrigues, corruption, and cynicism of Roman society, his broken health, an unfortunate passion for the Faustina of his Latin verses, and the longing for his beloved province and little Liré depressed his spirits; in the sonnets of his *Regrets* he embodied his intimate feelings, and that lively spirit of satire which the baseness of the Pontifical court summoned into life. This satiric vein had, indeed, already shown itself in his mocking counsel to *le Poète courtisan*: the courtier poet is to be a gentleman who writes at ease; he is not to trouble himself with study of the ancients; he is to produce only pieces of occasion, and these in a negligent style; the rarer and the smaller they are the better; and happily at last he may cease to bring forth even these. Possibly his *poète courtisan* was Melin de Saint-Gelais. As a rural poet Du Bellay is charming; his *Jeux Rustiques*, while

owing much to the *Lusus* of the Venetian poet Navagero, have in them the true breath of the fields; it is his *douce* province of Anjou which inspires him; the song to *Vénus* in its happiest stanzas is only less admirable than the *Vanneur de Blé*, with which more than any other single poem the memory of Du Bellay is associated. The personal note, which is in general absent from the poetry of Ronsard, is poignantly and exquisitely audible in the best pieces of Du Bellay. He did not live long enough to witness the complete triumph of the master; in 1560 he died exhausted, at the age of thirty-five.

The Pléiade served literature by their attention to form, by their skill in poetic instrumentation; but they were incapable of interpreting life in any large and original way. In the hands of their successors poetry languished for want of an inspiring theme. PHILIPPE DESPORTES (1546-1606) was copious and skilful in his reproduction and imitation of Italian models; as a courtier poet he reduced literary flattery to a fine art; but his mannered graces are cold, his pretence of passion is a laboured kind of *esprit*. A copy of his works annotated by the hand of Malherbe survives; the comments, severe and just, remained unpublished, probably because the writer was unwilling to pursue an adversary whom death had removed from his way. Jean Bertaut, his disciple, is a lesser Desportes. Satire was developed by Jean Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, and to him we owe an *Art Poétique* (1575) which adapts to his own time the teaching of Aristotle and Horace. More interesting than these is JEAN

PASSERAT (1534-1602), whose spirit is that of old France in its mirth and mockery, and whose more serious verse has the patriotism of French citizenship; his field was small, but he tilled his field gaily and courageously. The villanelle *J'ai perdu ma tourterelle* and the ode on May-day show Passerat's art in its happiest moments.

The way for a reform in dramatic poetry had been in some degree prepared by plays of the sixteenth century, written in Latin—the work of Buchanan, Muret, and others—by translations from Terence, Sophocles, Euripides, translations from Italian comedy, and renderings of one Spanish model, the highly-popular *Celestina* of Fernando de Rojas. The Latin plays were acted in schools. The first performance of a play in French belonging to the new tendency was that of Ronsard's translation of the *Plutus* of Aristophanes, in 1549, by his friends of the Collège de Coqueret. It was only by amateurs, and before a limited scholarly group of spectators, that the new classical tragedies could be presented. Gradually both tragedy and comedy came to be written solely with a view to publication in print. The mediæval drama still held the stage.

JODELLE'S *Cléopâtre* (1552), performed with enthusiasm by amateurs, was therefore a false start; it was essentially literary, and not theatrical. Greek models were crudely imitated, with a lack of almost everything that gave life and charm to the Greek drama. Seneca was more accessible than Sophocles, and his faults were easy to imitate—his moralisings, his declamatory

passages, his excess of emphasis. The so-called Aristotelian dramatic canons, formulated by Scaliger in his *Poetic*, were rigorously applied. Unity of place is preserved in *Cléopâtre*; the time of the action is reduced to twelve hours; there are interminable monologues, choral moralities, a ghost (in Seneca's manner), a narration of the heroine's death; of action there is none, the stage stands still. If Jodelle's *Didon* has some literary merit, it has little dramatic vitality. The oratorical energy of Grévin's *Jules César*, the studies of history in *La Mort de Daire* and *La Mort d'Alexandre*, by Jacques de La Taille, do not compensate their deficiency in the qualities required by the theatre. One tragedy alone, *La Sultane*, by Gabriel Bounin (1561), amid its violences and extravagances, shows a feeling for dramatic action and scenic effect.

Could the mediæval mystery and classical tragedy be reconciled? The Protestant Reformer Bèze, in his *Sacrifice d'Abraham*, attempted something of the kind; his sacred drama is a mystery by its subject, a tragedy in the conduct of the action. Three tragedies on the life of David—one of them admirable in its rendering of the love of Michol, daughter of Saul—were published in 1556 by Loys Des-Masures: the stage arrangements are those of the mediæval drama, but the unity of time is observed, and chorus and semi-chorus respond in alternate strains. No junction of dramatic systems essentially opposed proved in the end possible. When Jean de La Taille wrote on a biblical subject in his *Saül le Furieux*, a play remarkable for

its impressive conception and development of the character of Saul, he composed it *selon l'art*, and in the manner of "the old tragic authors." He is uncompromising in his classical method; the mediæval drama seemed inartificial to him in the large concessions granted by the spectators to the authors and actors; he would have what passes on the stage approximate, at least, to reality; the unities were accepted not merely on the supposed authority of Aristotle, but because they were an aid in attaining verisimilitude.

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