

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

A SHORT HISTORY OF
FRENCH LITERATURE

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George Saintsbury

A Short History of French Literature

PREFACE

An attempt to present to students a succinct history of the course of French literature compiled from an examination of that literature itself, and not merely from previous accounts of it is, I believe, a new one in English. There will be observed in the parts of this Short History a considerable difference of method; and as such a difference is not usual in works of the kind, it may be well to state the reasons which have induced me to adopt it. Early French literature is to a great extent anonymous. Moreover, even where it is not, the authors were usually more influenced by certain prevalent styles or forms than by anything else. Into these forms they threw without considerations of congruity whatever they had to say. Nothing, for instance, can be less suitable for historical or scientific disquisition than the octosyllabic metre of a satiric poem. But Jean de Meung and one at least of the authors of *Renart le Contrefait*¹ do not think of composing prose

¹ *Note to Third Edition.*— M. Gaston Paris expresses some surprise at my saying 'one of the authors,' and attributes both versions to the Troyes clerk (see pp. 52, 53). I

diatribes. At one moment and place the form of the Chanson de Geste is all-absorbing, at another the form of the Roman d'Aventures, at another the form of the Fabliau. In Book I. I shall therefore proceed by these forms, giving an account of each separately.

After Villon the case changes. Instead of classes of chroniclers, trouvères, jongleurs, we get individual authors of eminence and individuality striking out their own way and saying their own say in the manner not that is fashionable but that seems best to them. During this time, therefore, and especially during that brilliant age of French literature, the sixteenth century, I shall proceed by authors, taking the most remarkable individually, and grouping their followers around them.

From the time of Malherbe the system of schools begins, divided according to subjects. The poet, the dramatist, the historian, have their predecessors, and either intentionally copy them or intentionally innovate upon them. Malherbe and Delille, Corneille and Lemercier, Sarrasin and Rulhière, whatever the difference of merit, stand to one another in a definite relation, and the later writers represent more or less the accepted traditions each of his school. In this part, therefore, I shall proceed by subjects, taking historians, poets, dramatists, etc., together. One difference will be noticed between the third and

can only say that so long as *Renart le Contrefait* is unpublished, if not longer, such a question is difficult to decide: and that the accepted monograph on the subject (that of Wolf) left on my mind the impression of plural authorship as probable.

fourth Books, dealing respectively with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It has seemed unnecessary to allot a special chapter to theological and ecclesiastical writing in the latter, or to scientific writing in the former.

Almost all writers who have attempted literary histories in a small compass have recognised the difficulty, or rather impossibility, of treating contemporary or recent work on the same scale as older authors. In treating, therefore, of literature subsequent to the appearance of the Romantic movement, I shall content myself with giving a rapid sketch of the principal literary developments and their exponents.

There are doubtless objections to this quadripartite arrangement; but it appears to me better suited for the purpose of laying the foundations of an acquaintance with French literature than a more uniform plan.

The space at my disposal does not admit of combining full information as to the literature with elaborate literary comment upon its characteristics, and there can be no doubt that in such a book as this, destined for purposes of education chiefly, the latter must be sacrificed to the former. As an instance of the sacrifice I may refer to Bk. I. Ch. II. There are some forty or fifty *Chansons de Gestes* in print, all of which save two or three I have read, and almost every one of which presents points on which it would be most interesting to me to comment. But to do this in the limits would be impossible. Nor is it easy to enter upon disputed literary questions, however tempting they may be. On such points

as the relations of Northern to Provençal poetry, the origin of the Chansons and the Arthurian romances, the successive versions of Froissart, the authenticity of the last book of Rabelais, it is only possible here to indicate the most probable conclusions. Generally speaking, the scale of treatment will be found to be adjusted to the system of division already stated. In the middle ages, where the importance of the general form surpasses that of the individual practitioners, comparatively small space is given to these individuals, and little attempt is made to follow up the scanty and often conjectural particulars of their lives. In the later books I have endeavoured (departing in this respect from the system of my two former sketches of the subject, the article on 'French Literature' in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and the *Primer* which has preceded this work in the Clarendon Press Series) to deal more fully with the greater names whose work is most instructive, and as to whom most curiosity is likely to be felt.

If, as seems very likely, these explanations should not content some of my critics, I can only say that the passages which they may miss here would have been far easier and far pleasanter for me to write than the passages which they will here find. This volume attempts to be, not a series of *causeries* on the literary history of France, but a Short History of French Literature. Two things only I have uniformly aimed at, accuracy as absolute as I could secure, and completeness as thorough as space would allow. In the pursuit of the former object I have thought it well

to take no fact or opinion at second-hand where the originals were accessible to me. Manuscript sources I do not pretend to have consulted; but any judgment which is passed in this book may be taken as founded on personal acquaintance with the book or author unless the contrary be stated. Some familiarity with the subject has convinced me that nowhere are opinions of doubtful accuracy more frequently adopted and handed on without enquiry than in the history of literature.

Those who read this book for purposes of study will, it is hoped, be already acquainted with the *Primer*, which is, in effect, an introduction to it, and which contains what may be called a bird's-eye view of the subject. But, lest the wood should be lost sight of for the trees, notes or interchapters have been inserted between the several books, indicating the general lines of development followed by the great literature which I have attempted to survey. To these I have for the most part confined generalisations as distinct from facts.

I have, I believe, given in the notes a sufficient list of authorities which those who desire to follow up the subject may consult. I have not been indiscriminately lavish in indicating editions of authors, though I believe that full information will be found as to those necessary for a scholarly working knowledge of French literature. I had originally hoped to illustrate the whole book with extracts; but I discovered that such a course would either swell it to an undesirable bulk, or else would provide passages too short and too few to be of much use. I

have therefore confined the extracts to the mediaeval period, which can be illustrated by selections of moderate length, and in which such illustration, from the general resemblance between the individuals of each class, and the comparative rarity of the original texts, is specially desirable. To avoid the serious drawback of the difference of principle on which old French reprints have been constructed, as many of these extracts as possible have been printed from Herr Karl Bartsch's admirable *Chrestomathie*. But in cases where extracts were either not to be found there, or were not, in my judgment, sufficiently characteristic, I have departed from this plan. The illustration, by extracts, of the later literature, which requires more space, has been reserved for a separate volume.

I had also intended to subjoin some tabular views of the chief literary forms, authors, and books of the successive centuries. But when I formed this intention I was not aware that such tables already existed in a book very likely to be in the hands of those who use this work, M. Gustave Masson's *French Dictionary*. Although the plan I had formed was not quite identical with his, and though the execution might have differed in detail, it seemed both unnecessary and to a certain extent ungracious to trespass on the same field. With regard to dates the Index will, it is believed, be found to contain the date of the birth and death, or, if these be not obtainable, the *floruit* of every deceased author of any importance who is mentioned in the book. It has not seemed necessary invariably to duplicate this information in the text. I

have also availed myself of this Index (for the compilation of which I owe many thanks to Miss S. A. Ingham) to insert a very few particulars, which seemed to find a better place there than in the body of the volume, as being not strictly literary.

In conclusion, I think it well to say that the composition of this book has, owing to the constant pressure of unavoidable occupations, been spread over a considerable period, and has sometimes been interrupted for many weeks or even months. This being the case, I fear that there may be some omissions, perhaps some inconsistencies, not improbably some downright errors. I do not ask indulgence for these, because that no author who voluntarily publishes a book has a right to ask, nor, perhaps, have critics a right to give it. But if any critic will point out to me any errors of fact, I can promise repentance, as speedy amendment as may be, and what is more, gratitude.

(1882.)

Preface to the Second Edition.— In the second edition the text has been very carefully revised. All corrections of fact indicated by critics and private correspondents, both English and French (among whom I owe especial thanks to M. A. Beljame), have, after verification, been made. A considerable number of additional dates of the publication of important books have been inserted in the text, and the Index has undergone a strict examination, resulting in the correction of some faults which were due not to the original compiler but to myself. On the suggestion of several competent authorities a Conclusion,

following the lines of the Interchapters, is now added. If less deference is shown to some strictures which have been passed on the plan of the work and the author's literary views, it is due merely to the conviction that a writer must write his own book in his own way if it is to be of any good to anybody. But in a few places modifications of phrases which seemed to have been misconceived or to be capable of misconception have been made. I have only to add sincere thanks to my critics for the very general and, I fear, scarcely deserved approval with which this Short History of a long subject has been received, and to my readers for the promptness with which a second edition of it has been demanded.

(1884.)

Preface to the Third Edition.— In making, once more, an examination of this book for the purposes of a third edition I have again done my best to correct such mistakes as must (I think I may say inevitably) occur in a very large number of compressed statements about matter often in itself of great minuteness and complexity. I have found some such mistakes, and I make no doubt that I have left some.

In the process of examination I have had the assistance of two detailed reviews of parts of the book by two French critics, each of very high repute in his way. The first of these, by M. Gaston Paris, in *Romania* (XII, 602 *sqq.*), devoted to the mediæval section only, actually appeared before my second edition: but accident prevented my availing myself of it fully,

though some important corrections suggested by it were made on a slip inserted in most of the copies of that issue. The assistance thus given by M. Paris (whose forbearance in using his great learning as a specialist I have most cordially to acknowledge) has been supplemented by the appearance, quite recently, of an admirable condensed sketch of his own², which, compact as it is, is a very storehouse of information on the subject. If in this book I have not invariably accepted M. Paris' views or embodied his corrections, it is merely because in points of opinion and inference as opposed to ascertained fact, the use of independent judgment seems to me always advisable.

The other criticism (in this case of the later part of my book), by M. Edmond Scherer, would not seem to have been written in the same spirit. M. Scherer holds very different views from mine on literature in general and French literature in particular; he seems (which is perhaps natural) not to be able to forgive me the difference, and to imagine (which if not unnatural is perhaps a little unreasonable, a little uncharitable, and even, considering an express statement in my preface, a little impolite) that I cannot have read the works on which we differ. I am however grateful to him for showing that a decidedly hostile examination, conducted with great minuteness and carefully confined to those parts of the subject with which the critic is best acquainted, resulted in nothing but the discovery of about

² *La Littérature Française du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1888).

half a dozen or a dozen misprints and slips of fact³. One only of these (the very unpardonable blunder of letting Madame de Staël's *Considérations* appear as an early work, which I do not know how I came either to commit or to overlook) is of real importance. Such slips I have corrected with due gratitude. But I have not altered passages where M. Scherer mistakes facts or mistakes me. I need hardly say that I have made no alterations in criticism, and that the passage referring to M. Scherer himself (with the exception of a superfluous accent) stands precisely as it did.

Some additions have been made to the latter part of the book, but not very many: for the attempt to 'write up' such a history to date every few years can only lead to confusion and disproportion. I have had, during the decade which has passed

³ A preface is but an ill place for controversy. As however M. Scherer, thanks chiefly to the late Mr. Matthew Arnold, enjoys some repute in England, I may give an example of his censure. He accuses me roundly of giving in my thirty dates of Corneille's plays 'une dizaine de fausses,' and he quotes (as I do) M. Marty-Laveaux. As since the beginning, years ago, of my Cornelian studies, I have constantly used that excellent edition, though, now as always, reserving my own judgment on points of opinion, I verified M. Scherer's appeal with some alarm at first, and more amusement afterwards. The eminent critic of the *Temps* had apparently contented himself with turning to the half-titles of the plays and noting the dates given, which in ten instances do differ from mine. Had his patience been equal to consulting the learned editor's *Notices*, he would have found in every case but one the reasons which prevailed and prevail with me given by M. Marty-Laveaux himself. The one exception I admit. I was guilty of the iniquity of confusing the date of the publication of *Othon* with the date of its production, and printing 1665 instead of 1664. So dangerous is it to digest and weigh an editor's arguments, instead of simply copying his dates. Had I done the latter, I had 'scaped M. Scherer's tooth.

since the book was first planned, rather unusual opportunities of acquainting myself with all new French books of any importance, but a history is not a periodical, and I have thought it best to give rather grudging than free admittance to new-comers. On the other hand, I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to obliterate chronological references which the effluxion of time has rendered, or may render, misleading. The notes to which it seemed most important to attract attention, as modifying or enlarging some statement in the text, are specially headed 'Notes to Third Edition': but they represent only a small part of the labour which has been expended on the text. I have also again overhauled and very considerably enlarged the index; while the amplification of the 'Contents' by subjoining to each chapter-heading a list of the side-headings of the paragraphs it contains, will, I think, be found an advantage. And so I commend the book once more to readers and to students⁴.

⁴ The remarks on M. Scherer in this preface (and I need hardly say still more those which occur in the body of the book with reference to a few others of his criticisms) were written long before his fatal illness, and had been sent finally to press some time before the announcement of his death. I had at first thought of endeavouring to suppress those which could be recalled. But it seemed to me on reflection that the best compliment to the memory of a man who was himself nothing if not uncompromising, and towards whom, whether alive or dead, I am not conscious of having entertained any ill-feeling, would be to print them exactly as they stood, with the brief addition that I have not known a critic more acute within his range, or more honest according to what he saw, than M. Edmond Scherer. (March 20, 1889.)

BOOK I

MEDIAEVAL LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS

Relation of French to Latin.

Of all European literatures the French is, by general consent, that which possesses the most uniformly fertile, brilliant, and unbroken history. In actual age it may possibly yield to others, but the connection between the language of the oldest and the language of the newest French literature is far closer than in these other cases, and the fecundity of mediaeval writers in France far exceeds that of their rivals elsewhere. For something like three centuries England, Germany, Italy, and more doubtfully and to a smaller extent, Spain, were content for the most part to borrow the matter and the manner of their literary work from France. This brilliant literature was however long before it assumed a regularly organized form, and in order that it might do so a previous literature and a previous language had to be dissolved and precipitated anew. With a few exceptions, to be presently noticed, French literature is not to be found

till after the year 1000, that is to say until a greater lapse of time had passed since Caesar's campaigns than has passed from the later date to the present day. Taking the earliest of all monuments, the Strasburg Oaths, as starting-point, we may say that French language and French literature were nine hundred years in process of formation. The result was a remarkable one in linguistic history. French is unquestionably a daughter of Latin, yet it is not such a daughter as Italian or Spanish. A knowledge of the older language would enable a reader who knew no other to spell out, more or less painfully, the meaning of most pages of the two Peninsular languages; it would hardly enable him to do more than guess at the meaning of a page of French. The long process of gestation transformed the appearance of the new tongue completely, though its grammatical forms and the bulk of its vocabulary are beyond all question Latin. The history of this process belongs to the head of language, not of literature, and must be sought elsewhere. It is sufficient to say that the first mention of a *lingua romana rustica* is found in the seventh century, while allusions in Latin documents show us its gradual use in pulpit and market-place, and even as a vehicle for the rude songs of the minstrel, long before any trace of written French can be found.

Influence of Latin Literature.

Meanwhile, however, Latin was doing more than merely furnishing the materials of the new language. The literary faculty of the Gauls was early noticed, and before their subjection had

long been completed they were adepts at using the language of the conquerors. It does not fall within our plan to notice in detail the Latin literature of Gaul and early France, but the later varieties of that literature deserve some little attention, because of the influence which they undoubtedly exercised on the literary forms of the new language. In early French there is little trace of the influence of the Latin forms which we call classical. It was the forms of the language which has been said to have 'dived under ground with Naevius and come up again with Prudentius' that really influenced the youthful tongue. Ecclesiastical Latin, and especially the wonderful melody of the early Latin hymn-writers, had by far the greatest effect upon it. Ingenious and not wholly groundless efforts have been made to trace the principal forms of early French writing to the services and service-books of the church, the chronicle to the sacred histories, the lyric to the psalm and the hymn, the mystery to the elaborate and dramatic ritual of the church. The *Chanson de Geste*, indeed, displays in its matter and style many traces of Germanic origin, but the metre with its regular iambic cadence and its rigid caesura testifies to Latin influence. The service thus performed to the literature was not unlike the service performed to the language. In the one case the scaffolding, or rather the skeleton, was furnished in the shape of grammar; in the other a similar skeleton, in the shape of prosody, was supplied. Important additions were indeed made by the fresh elements introduced. Rhyme Latin had itself acquired. But of the musical refrains which are among the most charming features of

early French lyric poetry we find no vestige in the older tongue.

Early Monuments.

The history of the French language, as far as concerns literature, from the seventh to the eleventh century, can be rapidly given. The earliest mention of the Romance tongue as distinguished from Latin and from German dialect refers to 659, and occurs in the life of St. Mummolinus or Momolenus, bishop of Noyon, who was chosen for that office because of his knowledge of the two languages, Teutonic and Romanic⁵. We may therefore assume that Mummolinus preached in the *lingua Romana*. To the same century is referred the song of St. Faron, bishop of Meaux⁶, but this only exists in Latin, and a Romance original is inferred rather than proved. In the eighth century the Romance eloquence of St. Adalbert is commended⁷, and to the same period are referred the glossaries of Reichenau and Cassel, lists containing in the first case Latin and Romance equivalents,

⁵ 'Fama bonorum operum, quia praevalebat non tantum in Teutonica sed in Romana lingua, Lotharii regis ad aures usque perveniente,' says his life. The chronicler Sigebert confirms the statement that he was made bishop 'quod Romanam non minus quam Teutonicam calleret linguam.' *Lingua Latina* and *Lingua Romana* are from this time distinguished.

⁶ The Latin form of the song is given by Helgaire, Bishop of Meaux, who wrote a life of St. Faron, his predecessor, towards the end of the ninth century. Helgaire uses the words 'juxta rusticitatem,' 'carmen rusticum;' and *Lingua Rustica* is usually if not universally synonymous with *Lingua Romana*.

⁷ 'Si vulgari id est romana lingua loqueretur omnium aliarum putares inscium.'

in the second Teutonic and Romance⁸. By the beginning of the ninth century it was compulsory for bishops to preach in Romance, and to translate such Latin homilies as they read⁹; and to this same era has been referred a fragmentary commentary on the Book of Jonah¹⁰, included in the latest collection of 'Monuments'¹¹. In 842 we have the Strasburg Oaths, celebrated alike in French history and French literature. The text of the MS. of Nithard which contains them is of the tenth century.

We now come to documents less shapeless. The tenth century itself gives us the song of St. Eulalie, a poem on the Passion, a life of St. Leger, and perhaps a poem on Boethius. These four documents are of the highest interest. Not merely has the language assumed a tolerably regular form, but its great division into Langue d'Oc and Langue d'Oil is already made, and grammar, prosody, and other necessities or ornaments of bookwriting, are present. The following extracts will illustrate this part of French literature. The Romance oaths and the 'St. Eulalie' are given in full, the 'Passion' and the 'St. Leger' in extract; it will be observed that the interval between the first and the others is of very considerable width. This interval probably represents a century of active change, and of this unfortunately

⁸ The Reichenau Glossary is at Carlsruhe. It was published in 1863 by Holtzmann. The Cassel Glossary, which came from Fulda, was published in the last century (1729).

⁹ Ordered by the Councils of Tours, Rheims, and Arles (813-851).

¹⁰ In the Library at Valenciennes.

¹¹ *Les plus anciens Monuments de la Langue Française*. Paris, 1875.

we have no monuments to mark the progress accurately.

Les Serments de Strasbourg de 842

Pro deo amur et pro christian poblo et nostro commun salvament, d'ist di in avant, in quant deus savir et podir me dunat, si salvarai eo cist meon fradre Karlo et in aiudha et in cadhuna cosa, si cum on per dreit son fradra salvar dist, in o quid il mi altresi fazet, et ab Ludher nul plaid nunqua prindrai, qui meon vol cist meon fradre Karle in damno sit.

Si Lodhuvigs sagrament, quæ son fradre Karlo jurat, conservat, et Karlus meos sendra de sua part nun los tanit, si io returnar nun l'int pois, ne io ne nëuls, cui eo returnar int pois, in nulla aiudha contra Lodhuwig nun li iv er.

Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie

Buona pulcella fut Eulalia,
bel auret corps, bellezour anima.
Voldrent la veintre li deo inimi,
voldrent la faire dïaule servir.
Elle non eskoltet les mals conselliers,
qu'elle deo raneiet, chi maent sus en ciel,
Ne por or ned argent ne paramenz,
por manatce regiel ne preiement.
Nïule cose non la pouret omque pleier,

la polle sempre non amast lo deo menestier.
E poro fut presentede Maximien,
chi rex eret a cels dis sovre pagiens
El li enortet, dont lei nonque chielt.
qued elle fuiet lo nom christien.
Ell' ent adunet lo suon element,
melz sostendriet les empedementz,
Qu'elle perdesse sa virginitet:
poros furet morte a grand honestet.
Enz enl fou la getterent, com arde tost.
elle colpes non auret, poro nos coist.
A ezo nos voldret concreidre li rex pagiens;
ad une spede li roveret tolir lo chief.
La domnizelle celle kose non contredist,
volt lo seule lazsier, si ruovet Krist.
In figure de colomb volat a ciel.
tuit orem, que por nos deguet preier,
Qued auuisset de nos Christus mercit
post la mort et a lui nos laist venir
Par souue clementia.

La Passion Du Christ

Christus Jhesus den s'en leved,
Gehsesmani vil' es n'anez.
toz sos fidels seder rovet,

avan orar sols en anet.
Grant fu li dois, fort marrimenz.
si condormirent tuit adés.
Jhesus cum veg los esveled,
trestoz orar ben los manded.
E dunc orar cum el anned,
si fort sudor dunques suded,
que cum lo sangs a terra curren
de sa sudor las sanctas gutas.
Als sos fidels cum repadred,
tam benlement los conforted
li fel Judas ja s'aproismed
ab gran cumpannie dels judeus.
Jhesus cum vidra los judeus,
zo lor demandet que querént.
il li respondent tuit adun
'Jhesum querem *Nazarenum*.'
'Eu soi aquel,' zo dis Jhesus.
tuit li felun cadegren jos.
terce ves lor o demanded,
a totas treis chedent envers.

Vie de Saint Léger

Domine deu devemps lauder
et a sus sancz honor porter;

in su' amor cantomps dels sanz
quæ por lui augrent granz aanz;
et or es temps et si est biens
quæ nos cantumps de sant Lethgier.
Primos didrai vos dels honors
quie il auuret ab duos seniors;
apres ditrai vos dels aanz
que li suos corps susting si granz,
et Evvruïns, cil deumentiz,
qui lui a grand torment occist.
Quant infans fud, donc a ciels temps
al rei lo duistrent soi parent,
qui donc regnevet a ciel di:
cio fud Lothiers fils Baldequi.
il le amat; deu lo covit;
rovat que *litteras* apresist.

Dialects and Provincial Literatures.

Considering the great extent and the political divisions of the country called France, it is not surprising that the language which was so slowly formed should have shown considerable dialectic variations. The characteristics of these dialects, Norman, Picard, Walloon, Champenois, Angevin, and so forth, have been much debated by philologists. But it so happens that the different provinces displayed in point of literature considerable idiosyncrasy, which it is scarcely possible to dispute. Hardly a district of France but contributed something special to her

wide and varied literature. The South, though its direct influence was not great, undoubtedly set the example of attention to lyrical form and cadence. Brittany contributed the wonderfully suggestive Arthurian legends, and the peculiar music and style of the *lai*. The border districts of Flanders seem to deserve the credit of originating the great beast-epic of Reynard the Fox; Picardy, Eastern Normandy, and the Isle of France were peculiarly rich in the *fabliau*; Champagne was the special home of the lighter lyric poetry, while almost all northern France had a share in the Chansons de Gestes, many districts, such as Lorraine and the Cambrésis, having a special *geste* of their own.

Beginning of Literature proper.

It is however with the eleventh century that the history of French literature properly so called begins. We have indeed few Romance manuscripts so early as this, the date of most of them not being earlier than the twelfth. But by the eleventh century not merely were laws written in French (charters and other formal documents were somewhat later), not merely were sermons constantly composed and preached in that tongue, but also works of definite literature were produced in it. The *Chanson de Roland* is our only instance of its epic literature, but is not likely to have stood alone: the mystery of *The Ten Virgins*, a medley of French and Latin, has been (but perhaps falsely) ascribed to the same date; and lyric poetry, even putting aside the obscure and doubtful *Cantilènes*, was certainly indulged in to a considerable extent. From this date it is therefore possible

to abandon generalities, and taking the successive forms and developments of literature, to deal with them in detail.

Before however we attempt a systematic account of French literature as it has been actually handed down to us, it is necessary to deal very briefly with two questions, one of which concerns the antecedence of possible ballad literature to the existing *Chansons de Gestes*, the other the machinery of diffusion to which this and all the early historical developments of the written French language owed much.

Cantilenae.

It has been held by many scholars, whose opinions deserve respect, that an extensive literature of *Cantilenae*¹², or short historical ballads, preceded the lengthy epics which we now possess, and was to a certain extent worked up in these compositions. It is hardly necessary to say that this depends in part upon a much larger question – the question, namely, of the general origins of epic poetry. There are indeed certain references¹³ to these *Cantilenae* upon which the theories alluded to have been built. But the *Cantilenae* themselves have, as one of the best of French literary historians, the late M. Paulin Paris, remarks of another debated product, the Provençal epic, only one defect, 'le défaut d'être perdu,' and investigation on the subject

¹² The subject of the *Cantilenae* is discussed at great length by M. Léon Gautier, *Les Epopées Françaises*, Ed. 2, vol. i. caps. 8-13. Paris, 1878.

¹³ These, which are for the most part very vague and not very early, will be found fully quoted and discussed in Gautier, l. c.

is therefore more curious than profitable. No remnant of them survives save the already-mentioned Latin prose canticle of St. Faron, in which vestiges of a French and versified original are thought to be visible, and the ballad of Saucourt, a rough song in a Teutonic dialect¹⁴. In default of direct evidence an argument has been sought to be founded on the constant transitions, repetitions, and other peculiarities of the *Chansons*, some of which (and especially *Roland*, the most famous of all) present traces of repeated handlings of the same subject, such as might be expected in work which was merely that of a *diaskeuast*¹⁵ of existing lays.

Trouvères and Jongleurs.

It is however probable that the explanation of this phenomenon need not be sought further than in the circumstances of the composition and publication of these poems, circumstances which also had a very considerable influence on the whole course and character of early French literature. We know nothing of the rise or origin of the two classes of *Trouveurs* and *Jongleurs*. The former (which it is needless to say is the same word as *Troubadour*, and *Trobador*, and *Trovatore*) is the term for the composing class, the latter

¹⁴ Published by Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1837).

¹⁵ This word (= arranger or putter-in-order) is familiar in Homeric discussion, and therefore seems appropriate. M. Gaston Paris speaks with apparent confidence of the pre-existing *chants*, and, in matter of authority, no one speaks with more than he: but it can hardly be said that there is proof of the fact.

for the performing one. But the separation was not sharp or absolute, and there are abundant instances of Trouvères¹⁶ who performed their own works, and of Jongleurs who aspired to the glories if not of original authorship, at any rate of alteration and revision of the legends they sang or recited. The natural consequence of this irregular form of publication was a good deal of repetition in the works published. Different versions of the legends easily enough got mixed together by the copyist, who it must be remembered was frequently a mere mechanical reproducer, and neither Trouvère nor Jongleur; nor should it be forgotten that, so long as recitation was general, repetitions of this kind were almost inevitable as a rest to the reciter's memory, and were scarcely likely to attract unfavourable remark or criticism from the audience. We may therefore conclude, without entering further into the details of a debate unsuitable to the plan of this history, that, while but scanty evidence has been shown of the existence previous to the *Chansons de Gestes* of a ballad literature identical in subject with those compositions, at the same time the existence of such a literature is neither impossible nor improbable. It is otherwise with the hypothesis of the existence of prose chronicles, from which the early epics (and *Roland* in particular) are also held to have derived their origin. But this subject will be better handled when we come to treat of the beginnings of French prose. For the present it is sufficient to say that, with the exception of the scattered fragments already

¹⁶ The older and in this case more usual form.

commented upon, there is no department of French literature before the eleventh century and the *Chansons de Gestes*, which possesses historical existence proved by actual monuments, and thus demands or deserves treatment here.

CHAPTER II

THE CHANSONS DE GESTES

The earliest form which finished literature took in France was that of epic or narrative poetry. Towards the middle of the eleventh century certainly, and probably some half-century earlier, poems of regular construction and considerable length began to be written. These are the *Chansons de Gestes*, so called from their dealing with the *Gestes*¹⁷, or heroic families of legendary or historical France. It is remarkable that this class of composition, notwithstanding its age, its merits, and the abundant examples of it which have been preserved, was one of the latest to receive recognition in modern times. The matter of many of the Chansons, under their later form of verse or prose romances of chivalry, was indeed more or less known in the eighteenth century. But an appreciation of their real age, value, and interest has been the reward of the literary investigations of our own time. It was not till 1837 that the oldest and the most remarkable of them was first edited from the manuscript found

¹⁷ *Gesta* or *Geste* has three senses: (a) the *deeds* of a hero; (b) the *chronicle* of those deeds; and (c) the *family* which that chronicle illustrates. The three chief gestes are those of the King, of Doon de Mayence, and of Garin de Montglane. Each of these is composed of many poems. Contrasted with these are the 'petites gestes,' which include only a few Chansons.

in the Bodleian Library¹⁸. Since that time investigation has been constant and fruitful, and there are now more than one hundred of these interesting poems known.

Origin of Chansons de Gestes.

The origin and sources of the *Chansons de Gestes* have been made a matter of much controversy. We have already seen how, from the testimony of historians and the existence of a few fragments, it appears that rude lays or ballads in the different vernacular tongues of the country were composed and sung if not written down at very early dates. According to one theory, we are to look for the origin of the long and regular epics of the eleventh and subsequent centuries in these rude compositions, first produced independently, then strung together, and lastly subjected to some process of editing and union. It has been sought to find proof of this in the frequent repetitions which take place in the Chansons, and which sometimes amount to the telling of the same incident over and over again in slightly varying words. Others have seen in this peculiarity only a result of improvisation in the first place, and unskilful or at least uncritical copying in the second. This, however, is a question

¹⁸ *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Fr. Michel, Paris, 1837. The MS. is in the Bodleian Library (Digby 23). Another, of much later date in point of writing but representing the same text, exists at Venice. Of later versions there are six manuscripts extant. The Chanson de Roland has since its *editio princeps* been repeatedly re-edited, translated, and commented. The most exact edition is that of Prof. Stengel, Heilbronn, 1878, who has given the Bodleian Manuscript both in print and in photographic facsimile. The best for general use is that of Léon Gautier (seventh edition), 1877.

rather interesting than important. What is certain is that no literary source of the Chansons is now actually in existence, and that we have no authentic information as to any such originals. At a certain period – approximately given above – the fashion of narrative poems on the great scale seems to have arisen in France. It spread rapidly, and was eagerly copied by other nations.

Definition.

The definition of a *Chanson de Geste* is as follows. It is a narrative poem, dealing with a subject connected with French history, written in verses of ten or twelve syllables, which verses are arranged in stanzas of arbitrary length, each stanza possessing a distinguishing assonance or rhyme in the last syllable of each line. The assonance, which is characteristic of the earlier Chansons, is an imperfect rhyme, in which identity of vowel sound is all that is necessary. Thus *traitor, felon, compaignons, manons, noz*, the first, fourth, and fifth of which have no character of rhyme whatever in modern poetry, are sufficient terminations for an assonanced poem, because the last vowel sound, o, is identical. There is moreover in this versification a regular caesura, sometimes after the fourth, sometimes after the sixth syllable; and in a few of the older examples the stanzas, or as they are sometimes called *laisses*, terminate in a shorter line than usual, which is not assonanced. This metrical system, it will be observed, is of a fairly elaborate character, a character which has been used as an argument by those who insist on the existence of a body of ballad literature anterior to the Chansons. We shall see

in the following chapters how this double definition of a *Chanson de Geste*, by matter and by form, serves to exclude from the title other important and interesting classes of compositions slightly later in date.

Period of Composition.

The period of composition of these poems extended, speaking roughly, over three centuries. In the eleventh they began, but the beginnings are represented only by *Roland*, the *Voyage de Charlemagne*, and perhaps *Le Roi Louis*. Most and nearly all the best date from the twelfth. The thirteenth century also produces them in great numbers, but by this time a sensible change has come over their manner, and after the beginning of the fourteenth only a few pieces deserving the title are written. They then undergo transformation rather than neglect, and we shall meet them at a later period in other forms. Before dealing with other general characteristics of the early epics of France it will be well to give some notion of them by actual selection and narrative. For this purpose we shall take two *Chansons* typical of two out of the three stages through which they passed. *Roland* will serve as a sample of the earliest, *Amis et Amiles* of the second. Of the third, as less characteristic in itself and less marked by uniform features, it will be sufficient to give some account when we come to the compositions which chiefly influenced it, namely the romances of Arthur and of antiquity.

Chanson de Roland.

The *Chanson de Roland*, the most ancient and characteristic of these poems, though extremely popular in the middle ages¹⁹, passed with them into obscurity. The earliest allusion to the Oxford MS., which alone represents its earliest form, was made by Tyrwhitt a century ago. Conybeare forty years later dealt with it in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1817, and by degrees the reviving interest of France in her older literature attracted French scholars to this most important monument of the oldest French. It was first published as a whole by M. F. Michel in 1837, and since that time it has been the subject of a very great amount of study. Its length is 4001 decasyllabic lines, and it concludes with an obscure assertion of authorship, publication or transcription by a certain Tuoldus²⁰. The date of the Oxford MS. is probably the middle of the twelfth century, but its text is attributed by the best authorities to the end of the eleventh. There are other MSS., but they are all either mutilated or of much later date. The argument of the poem is as follows: —

Charlemagne has warred seven years in Spain, but king Marsile of Saragossa still resists the Christian conqueror. Unable however to meet Charlemagne in the field, he sends an embassy with presents and a feigned submission, requesting that prince to return to France, whither he will follow him and do homage.

¹⁹ Wace (Roman de Rou, iii. 8038 Andresen) speaks of the Norman Taillefer as singing at Hastings 'De Karlemaigne et de Rollant.' It has been sought, but perhaps fancifully, to identify this song with the existing *chanson*.

²⁰ 'Ci falt la geste que Tuoldus declinet.' The sense of the word *declinet* is quite uncertain, and the attempts made to identify Tuoldus are futile.

Roland opposes the reception of these offers, Ganelon speaks in their favour, and so does Duke Naimés. Then the question is who shall go to Saragossa to settle the terms. Roland offers to go himself, but being rejected as too impetuous, suggests Ganelon – a suggestion which bitterly annoys that knight and by irritating him against Roland sows the seeds of his future treachery. Ganelon goes to Marsile, and at first bears himself truthfully and gallantly. The heathen king however undermines his faith, and a treacherous assault on the French rearguard when Charlemagne shall be too far off to succour it is resolved on and planned. Then the traitor returns to Charles with hostages and mighty gifts. The return to France begins; Roland is stationed to his great wrath in the fatal place, the rest of the army marches through the Pyrenees, and meanwhile Marsile gathers an enormous host to fall upon the isolated rearguard. There is a long catalogue of the felon and miscreant knights and princes that follow the Spanish king. The pagan host, travelling by cross paths of the mountains, soon reaches and surrounds Roland and the peers. Oliver entreats Roland to sound his horn that Charles may hear it and come to the rescue, but the eager and inflexible hero refuses. Archbishop Turpin blesses the doomed host, and bids them as the price of his absolution strike hard. The battle begins and all its incidents are told. The French kill thousands, but thousands more succeed. Peer after peer falls, and when at last Roland blows the horn it is too late. Charlemagne hears it and turns back in an agony of sorrow and haste. But long before he reaches Roncevaux Roland

has died last of his host, and alone, for all the Pagans have fallen or fled before him.

The arrival of Charlemagne, his grief, and his vengeance on the Pagans, should perhaps conclude the poem. There is however a sort of afterpiece, in which the traitor Ganelon is tried, his fate being decided by a single combat between his kinsman Pinabel and a champion named Thierry, and is ruthlessly put to death with all his clansmen who have stood surety for him. Episodes properly so called the poem has none, though the character of Oliver is finely brought out as contrasted with Roland's somewhat unreasoning valour, and there is one touching incident when the poet tells how the Lady Aude, Oliver's sister and Roland's betrothed, falls dead without a word when the king tells her of the fatal fight at Roncevaux. The following passage will give an idea of the style of this famous poem. It may be noticed that the curious refrain *Aoi* has puzzled all commentators, though in calling it a refrain we have given the most probable explanation: —

Rollanz s'en turnet, par le camp vait tut suls
cercet les vals e si cercet les munz;
iloec truvat Ivorie et Ivun,
truvat Gerin, Gerer sun cumpaignun,
iloec truvat Engeler le Gascun
e si truvat Berenger e Orun,
iloec truvat Anseïs e Sansun,
truvat Gérard le veill de Russillun:

par un e un les ad pris le barun,
al arcevesque en est venuz atut,
sis mist en reng dedevant ses genuilz.
li arcevesque ne poet muër n'en plurt;
lievet sa main, fait sa beneïcun;
après ad dit 'mare fustes, seignurs!
tutes voz anmes ait deus li gloriüs!
en pareïs les mete en seintes flurs!
la meïe mort me rent si anguissus,
ja ne verrai le riche emperëur.'
Rollanz s'en turnet, le camp vait recercher;
desoz un pin e folut e ramer
sun cumpaignun ad trued Oliver,
cuntre sun piz estreit l'ad embracet.
si cum il poet al arcevesque en vent,
sur un escut l'ad as altres culchet;
e l'arcevesque l'ad asols e seignet.
idonc agreget le doel e la pitet.
ço dit Rollanz 'bels cumpainz Oliver,
vos fustes filz al bon cunte Reiner,
ki tint la marche de Genes desur mer;
pur hanste freindre e pur escuz pecier
e pur osberc e rompre e desmailler,
[pur orgoillos veintre e esmaier]
e pur prozdomes tenir e conseiller
e pur glutuns e veintre e esmaier
en nule terre n'ot meillor chevaler.'
Li quens Rollanz, quant il veit morz ses pers
e Oliver, qu'il tant poeit amer,

tendrur en out, cumencet a plurer,
en sun visage fut mult desculurez.
si grant doel out que mais ne pout ester,
voeillet o nun, a terre chet pasmet.
dist l'arcevesques 'tant mare fustes, ber.'
Li arcevesques quant vit pasmer Rollant,
dunc out tel doel, unkes mais n'out si grant;
tendit sa main, si ad pris l'olifan.
en Rencesvals ad une ewe curant;
aler i volt, si'n durrat a Rollant.
tant s'esforçat qu'il se mist en estant,
sun petit pas s'en turnet cancelant,
il est si fieble qu'il ne poet en avant,
nen ad vertut, trop ad perdut del sanc.
einz que om alast un sul arpent de camp,
fait li le coer, si est chaeit avant:
la sue mort li vait mult angoissant.
Li quenz Rollanz revient de pasmeisuns,
sur piez se drecet, mais il ad grant dultur;
guardet aval e si guardet amunt:
sur l'erbe verte, ultre ses cumpaignuns,
la veit gesir le nobilie barun,
ço est l'arcevesque que deus mist en sun num;
cleimet sa culpe, si reguardet amunt,
cuntre le ciel amsdous ses mains ad juinz,
si priet deu que pareïs li duinst.
morz est Turpin le guerreier Charlun.
par granz batailles e par mult bels sermons
cuntre paiens fut tuz tens campïuns.

deus li otreit seinte beneïçun! Aoi.
Quant Rollanz vit l'arcevesque qu'est morz,
senz Oliver une mais n'out si grant dol,
e dist un mot que destrenche le cor:
'Carles de France chevalce cum il pot;
en Rencesvals damage i ad des noz;
li reis Marsilie ad sa gent perdut tot,
cuntre un des noz ad ben quarante morz.'
Li quenz Rollanz veit l'arcevesque a terre,
defors sun cors veit gesir la buëlle,
desuz le frunt li buillit la cervelle.
desur sun piz, entre les dous furcelles,
cruisiedes ad ses blanches mains, les belles.
forment le pleint a la lei de sa terre.
'e, gentilz hom, chevaler de bon aire,
hoi te cumant al gloriüs celeste:
ja mais n'ert hume plus volenters le serve.
des les apostles ne fut honc tel prophete
pur lei tenir e pur humes atraire.
ja la vostre anme nen ait doel ne sufraite!
de pareïs li seit la porte uverte!'

Amis et Amiles.

As *Roland* is by far the most interesting of those Chansons which describe the wars with the Saracens, so *Amis et Amiles*²¹ may be taken as representing those where the interest is mainly

²¹ *Amis et Amiles*, ed. Hoffmann. Erlangen, 1852.

domestic. *Amis et Amiles* is the earliest vernacular form of a story which attained extraordinary popularity in the middle ages, being found in every language and in most literary forms, prose and verse, narrative and dramatic. This popularity may partly be assigned to the religious and marvellous elements which it contains, but is due also to the intrinsic merits of the story. The *Chanson* contains 3500 lines, dates probably from the twelfth century, and is written, like *Roland*, in decasyllabic verse, but, unlike *Roland*, has a shorter line of six syllables and not assonanced at the end of each stanza. Its story is as follows: —

Amis and Amiles were two noble knights, born and baptized on the same day, who had the Pope for sponsor, and whose comradeship was specially sanctioned by a divine message, and by the miraculous likeness which existed between them. They were however brought up, the one in Berri, the other in Auvergne, and did not meet till both had received knighthood. As soon as they had joined company, they resolved to offer their services to Charles, and did him great service against rebels. Here the action proper begins. The friends arouse the jealousy of Hardré, a felon knight, of Ganelon's lineage and likeness. Hardré engages Gombaudo of Lorraine, an enemy of the Emperor, to attack the two friends; but the treason does not succeed, and the traitor, to escape unpleasant enquiries, recommends Charles to bestow his own niece Lubias on Amiles. The latter declares that Amis deserves her better, and to Amis she is married, bearing however no good-will to Amiles for his resignation of her and for his

firm hold on her husband's affection. Meanwhile, the daughter of Charles, Bellicent, conceives a violent passion for Amiles, and the traitor Hardré unfortunately becomes aware of the matter. He at once accuses Amiles of treason, and the knight is too conscious of the dubiousness of his cause to be very willing to accept the wager of battle. From this difficulty he is saved by Amis, who comes to Paris from his distant seignory of Blaivies (Blaye), and fights the battle in the name and armour of his friend, while the latter goes to Blaye and plays the part of his preserver. Both ventures are made easier by the extraordinary resemblance of the pair. Amis is successful; he slays Hardré, and then has no little difficulty in saving himself from a forced marriage with Bellicent. This embroglio is smoothed out, and Amiles and Bellicent are happily united. The generous Amis however has not been able to avoid forswearing himself while playing the part of Amiles; and this sin is punished, according to a divine warning, by an attack of leprosy. His wife Lubias seizes the opportunity, procures a separation from him, and almost starves him, or would do so but for two faithful servants and his little son. At last a means of cure is revealed to him. If Amiles and Bellicent will allow their two sons to be slain the blood will recover Amis of his leprosy. The stricken knight journeys painfully to his friend and tells him the hard condition. Amiles does not hesitate, and the following passage tells his deed: —

Li cuens Amiles un petit s'atarja,

vers les anfans pas por pas en ala,
dormans les treuve, moult par les resgarda,
s'espee lieve, ocirre les voldra;
mais de ferir un petit se tarja.
li ainznés freres de l'effroi s'esveilla
que li cuens mainne qui en la chambre entra,
l'anfes se torne, son pere ravisa,
s'espee voit, moult grant paor en a,
son pere apelle, si l'en arraisonna:
'biax sire peres, por deu qui tout forma,
que volez faire? nel me celez vos ja.
ainz mais nus peres tel chose ne pensa.'
'biaux sire fiuls, ocirre vos voil ja
et le tien frere qui delez toi esta;
car mes compains Amis qui moult m'ama,
dou sanc de vos li siens cors garistra,
que gietez est dou siecle.'
'Biax tres douz peres,' dist l'anfes erramment,
'quant vos compains avra garissement,
se de nos sans a sor soi lavement,
nos sommes vostre de vostre engenment,
faire en poëz del tout a vo talent.
or nos copez les chiés isnellement;
car dex de glorie nos avra en present,
en paradis en irommes chantant
et proierommes Jhesu cui tout apent
que dou pechié vos face tensement,
vos et Ami, vostre compaignon gent;
mais nostre mere, la bele Belissant,

nos saluëz por deu omnipotent.'
li cuens l'oït, moult grans pitiés l'en prent
que touz pasmez a la terre s'estent.
quant se redresce, si reprinst hardement.
or orroiz ja merveilles, bonne gent,
que tex n'oïstes en tout vostre vivant.
li cuens Amiles vint vers le lit esrant,
hauce l'espee, li fiuls le col estent.
or est merveilles se li cuers ne li ment.
la teste cope li peres son anfant,
le sanc reciut et cler bacin d'argent:
a poi ne chiet a terre.

No sooner has the blood touched Amis than he is cured, and the knights solemnly visit the church where Bellicent and the people are assembled. The story is told and the mother, in despair, rushes to the chamber where her dead children are lying. But she finds them living and in full health, for a miracle has been wrought to reward the faithfulness of the friends now that suffering has purged them of their sin.

This story, touching in itself, is most touchingly told in the *Chanson*. No poem of the kind is more vivid in description, or fuller of details of the manners of the time, than *Amis et Amiles*. Bellicent and Lubias, the former passionate and impulsive but loving and faithful, the latter treacherous, revengeful, and cold-hearted, give perhaps the earliest finished portraits of feminine character to be found in French literature. Amis and Amiles

themselves are presented to us under so many more aspects than Roland and Oliver that they dwell better in the memory. The undercurrent of savagery which distinguished mediæval times, and the rapid changes of fortune which were possible therein, are also well brought out. Not even the immolation of Ganelon's hostages is so striking as the calm ferocity with which Charlemagne dooms his wife and son as well as his daughter to pay with their lives the penalty of Bellicent's fault; while the sudden lapse of Amis from his position of feudal lordship at Blaye to that of a miserable outcast, smitten and marked out for public scorn and ill-treatment by the visitation of God, is unusually dramatic. *Amis et Amiles* bears to *Roland* something not at all unlike the relation of the *Odyssey* to the *Iliad*. Its continuation, *Jourdain de Blaivies*, adds the element of foreign travel and adventure; but that element is perhaps more characteristically represented, and the representation has certainly been more generally popular, in *Huon de Bordeaux*.

Other principal Chansons.

Of the remaining Chansons, the following are the most remarkable. *Aliscans* (twelfth century) deals with the contest between William of Orange, the great Christian hero of the south of France, and the Saracens. This poem forms, according to custom, the centre of a whole group of Chansons dealing with the earlier and later adventures of the hero, his ancestors, and descendants. Such are *Le Couronnement Loys*, *La Prise d'Orange*, *Le Charroi de Nimes*, *Le Moniage Guillaume*. The series formed

by these and others²² is among the most interesting of these groups. *Le Chevalier au Cygne* is a title applied directly to a somewhat late version of an old folk-tale, and more generally to a series of poems connected with the House of Bouillon and the Crusades. The members of this bear the separate headings *Antioche*²³, *Les Chétifs*, *Les Enfances Godefroy*, etc. *Antioche*, the first of these, which describes the exploits of the Christian host, first in attacking and then in defending that city, is one of the finest of the Chansons, and is probably in its original form not much later than the events it describes, being written by an eye-witness. The variety of its personages, the vivid picture of the alternations of fortune, the vigour of the verse, are all remarkable. This group is terminated by *Baudouin de Sebourg*²⁴, a very late but very important Chanson, which falls in with the poetry of the fourteenth century, and the *Bastart de Bouillon*²⁵. *La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche*²⁶ is the oldest form in which the adventures of one of the most popular and romantic of Charlemagne's heroes are related. *Fierabras* had also a very wide popularity, and contains some of the liveliest pictures of manners to be found in these poems, in its description of the

²² This series is given, sometimes in whole, sometimes in extracts, by Dr. Jonckbloet, *Guillaume d'Orange*. The Hague, 1854.

²³ Ed. P. Paris. Paris, 1848.

²⁴ Ed. Boca. Valenciennes, 1841.

²⁵ Ed. Schéler. Brussels, 1877.

²⁶ Ed. Barrois. Paris, 1842.

rough horse-play of the knights and the unfilial behaviour of the converted Saracen princess. This poem is also of much interest philologically²⁷. *Garin le Loherain*²⁸ is the centre of a remarkable group dealing not directly with Charlemagne, but with the provincial disputes and feuds of the nobility of Lorraine. *Raoul de Cambrai*²⁹ is another of the Chansons which deal with 'minor houses,' as they are called, in contradistinction to the main Carolingian cycle. *Gérard de Roussillon*³⁰ ranks as a poem with the best of all the Chansons. *Hugues Capet*³¹, though very late, is attractive by reason of the glimpses it gives us of a new spirit supplanting that of chivalry proper. In it the heroic distinctly gives place to the burlesque. *Macaire*³², besides being written in a singular dialect, in which French is mingled with Italian, supplies the original of the well-known dog of Montargis. *Huon de Bordeaux*³³, already mentioned, was not only more than usually popular at the time of its appearance, but has supplied Shakespeare with some of the dramatis personae of A

²⁷ There exists a Provençal version of it, evidently translated from the French. The most convenient edition is that of Kroeber and Servois, Paris, 1860. There is an English fourteenth-century version published by Mr. Herrtage for the Early English Text Society, 1879.

²⁸ Published partially by MM. P. Paris and E. du Méril and by Herr Stengel.

²⁹ Ed. Le Glay. Paris, 1840.

³⁰ Ed. Michel. Paris, 1856.

³¹ Ed. La Grange. Paris, 1864.

³² Ed. Guessard. Paris, 1866.

³³ Ed. Guessard et Grandmaison. Paris, 1860.

Midsummer Night's Dream, and Wieland and Weber with the plot of a well-known poem and opera. *Jourdain de Blaivies*, the sequel to *Amis et Amiles*, contains, besides much other interesting matter, the incident which forms the centre of the plot of *Pericles*. *Les Quatre Fils Aymon* or *Renaut de Montauban*³⁴ is the foundation of one of the most popular French chap-books. *Les Saisnes*³⁵ deals with Charlemagne's wars with Witekind. *Berte aus grans Piés*³⁶ is a very graceful story of womanly innocence. *Doon de Mayence*³⁷, though not early, includes a charming love-episode. *Gérard de Viane*³⁸ contains the famous battle of Roland and Oliver. The *Voyage de Charlemagne à Constantinople*³⁹ is semi-burlesque in tone and one of the earliest in which that tone is perceptible.

Social and Literary Characteristics.

In these numerous poems there is recognisable in the first place a distinct family likeness which is common to the earliest and latest, and in the second, the natural difference of manners which the lapse of three hundred years might be expected to occasion. There is a sameness which almost amounts to monotony in the plot of most *Chansons de Gestes*: the hero

³⁴ Ed. Michelant. Stuttgart, 1862.

³⁵ Ed. Michel. Paris, 1839.

³⁶ Ed. Schéler. Brussels, 1874.

³⁷ Ed. Pey. Paris, 1859.

³⁸ Ed. Tarbé. Rheims, 1850.

³⁹ Ed. Michel. London, 1836.

is almost always either falsely accused of some crime, or else treacherously exposed to the attacks of Saracens, or of his own countrymen. The agents of this treachery are commonly of the blood of the arch-traitor Ganelon, and are almost invariably discomfited by the good knight or his friends and avengers. The part⁴⁰ which Charlemagne plays in these poems is not usually dignified: he is represented as easily gulled, capricious, and almost ferocious in temper, ungrateful, and ready to accept bribes and gifts. His good angel is always Duke Naimes of Bavaria, the Nestor of the Carolingian epic. In the earliest Chansons the part played by women is not so conspicuous as in the later, but in all except *Roland* it has considerable prominence. Sometimes the heroine is the wife, daughter, or niece of Charlemagne, sometimes a Saracen princess. But in either case she is apt to respond without much delay to the hero's advances, which, indeed, she sometimes anticipates. The conduct of knights to their ladies is also far from being what we now consider chivalrous. Blows are very common, and seem to be taken by the weaker sex as matters of course. The prevailing legal forms are simple and rather sanguinary. The judgment of God, as shown by ordeal of battle, settles all disputes; but battle is not permitted unless several nobles of weight and substance come forward as sponsors for each champion; and sponsors as well as

⁴⁰ It is very commonly said that this feature is confined to the later Chansons. This is scarcely the fact, unless by 'later' we are to understand all except *Roland*. In *Roland* itself the presentment is by no means wholly complimentary.

principal risk their lives in case of the principal's defeat, unless they can tempt the king's cupidity. These common features are necessarily in the case of so large a number of poems mixed with much individual difference, nor are the Chansons by any means monotonous reading. Their versification is pleasing to the ear, and their language, considering its age, is of surprising strength, expressiveness, and even wealth. Though they lack the variety, the pathos, the romantic chivalry, and the mystical attractions of the Arthurian romances, there is little doubt that they paint, far more accurately than their successors, an actually existing state of society, that which prevailed in the palmy time of the feudal system, when war and religion were deemed the sole subjects worthy to occupy seriously men of station and birth. In giving utterance to this warlike and religious sentiment, few periods and classes of literature have been more strikingly successful. Nowhere is the mere fury of battle better rendered than in *Roland* and *Fierabras*. Nowhere is the valiant indignation of the beaten warrior, and, at the same time, his humble submission to providence, better given than in *Aliscans*. Nowhere do we find the mediæval spirit of feudal enmity and private war more strikingly depicted than in the cycle of the Lorrainers, and in *Raoul de Cambrai*. Nowhere is the devout sentiment and belief of the same time more fully drawn than in *Amis et Amiles*.

Authorship.

The method of composition and publication of these poems was peculiar. Ordinarily, though not always, they were composed

by the Trouvère, and performed by the Jongleur. Sometimes the Trouvère condescended to performance, and sometimes the Jongleur aspired to composition, but not usually. The poet was commonly a man of priestly or knightly rank, the performer (who might be of either sex) was probably of no particular station. The Jongleur, or Jongleresse, wandered from castle to castle, reciting the poems, and interpolating in them recommendations of the quality of the wares, requests to the audience to be silent, and often appeals to their generosity. Some of the manuscripts which we now possess were originally used by Jongleurs, and it was only in this way that the early *Chanson de Geste* was intended to be read. The process of hawking about naturally interfered with the preservation of the poems in their original purity, and even with the preservation of the author's name. In very few cases⁴¹ is the latter known to us.

The question whether the *Chansons de Gestes* were originally written in northern or southern French has often been hotly debated. The facts are these. Only three *Chansons* exist in Provençal. Two of these⁴² are admitted translations or imitations of Northern originals. The third, *Girartz de Rossilho*, is

⁴¹ The Tuoldus of *Roland* has been already noticed. Of certain or tolerably certain authors, Graindor de Douai (revisions of the early crusading *Chansons* of 'Richard the Pilgrim,' *Antioche*, &c.), Jean de Flagy (*Garin*), Bodel (*Les Saisnes*), and Adenès le Roi, a fertile author or adapter of the thirteenth century, are the most noted.

⁴² *Ferabras* and *Betonnet d'Hanstone*. M. Paul Meyer has recently edited this latter poem under the title of *Daurel et Beton* (Paris, 1880). To these should be added a fragment, *Aigar et Maurin*, which seems to rank with *Girartz*.

undoubtedly original, but is written in the northernmost dialect of the Southern tongue. The inference appears to be clear that the *Chanson de Geste* is properly a product of northern France. The opposite conclusion necessitates the supposition that either in the Albigensian war, or by some inexplicable concatenation of accidents, a body of original Provençal Chansons has been totally destroyed, with all allusions to, and traditions of, these poems. Such a hypothesis is evidently unreasonable, and would probably never have been started had not some of the earliest students of Old French been committed by local feeling to the championship of the language of the Troubadours. On the other hand, almost all the dialects of Northern French are represented, Norman and Picard being perhaps the commonest⁴³.

Style and Language.

The language of these poems, as the extracts given will partly show, is neither poor in vocabulary, nor lacking in harmony of sound. It is indeed, more sonorous and stately than classical French language was from the seventeenth century to the days of Victor Hugo, and abounds in picturesque terms which have since dropped out of use. The massive castles of the baronage, with their ranges of marble steps leading up to the hall, where feasting is held by day and where the knights sleep at night, are often

⁴³ There has been some reaction of late years against the scepticism which questioned the 'Provençal Epic.' I cannot however say, though I admit a certain disqualification for judgment (see note at beginning of next chapter), that I see any valid reason for this reaction.

described. Dress is mentioned with peculiar lavishness. Pelisses of ermine, ornaments of gold and silver, silken underclothing, seem to give the poets special pleasure in recording them. In no language are what have been called 'perpetual' epithets more usual, though the abundance of the recurring phrases prevents monotony. The 'clear countenances' of the ladies, the 'steely brands' of the knights, their 'marble palaces,' the 'flowing beard' of Charlemagne, the 'guileful tongue' of the traitors, are constant features of the verbal landscape. From so great a mass of poetry it would be vain in any space here available to attempt to arrange specimen 'jewels five words long.' But those who actually read the Chansons will be surprised at the abundance of fresh striking and poetic phrase.

Later History.

Before quitting the subject of the Chansons de Gestes, it may be well to give briefly their subsequent literary history. They were at first frequently re-edited, the tendency always being to increase their length, so that in some cases the latest versions extant run to thirty or forty thousand lines. As soon as this limit was reached, they began to be turned into prose, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries being the special period of this change. The art of printing came in time to assist the spread of these prose versions, and for some centuries they were almost the only form in which the Chansons de Gestes, under the general title of romances of chivalry, were known. The verse originals remained for the most part in manuscript, but the prose romances

gained an enduring circulation among the peasantry in France. From the seventeenth century their vogue was mainly restricted to this class. But in the middle of the eighteenth the Comte de Tressan was induced to attempt their revival for the *Bibliothèque des Romans*. His versions were executed entirely in the spirit of the day, and did not render any of the characteristic features of the old Epics. But they drew attention to them, and by the end of the century, University Professors began to lecture on old French poetry. The exertions of M. Paulin Paris, of M. Francisque Michel, and of some German scholars first brought about the re-editing of the Chansons in their original form about half a century ago; and since that time they have received steady attention, and a large number have been published – a number to which additions are yearly being made. Rather more than half the known total are now in print.

CHAPTER III

PROVENÇAL LITERATURE

Langue d'Oc.

The Romance language, spoken in the country now called France, has two great divisions, the Langue d'Oc and the Langue d'Oil⁴⁴, which stand to one another in hardly more intimate relationship than the first of them does to Spanish or Italian. In strictness, the Langue d'Oc ought not to be called French at all, inasmuch as those who spoke it applied that term exclusively to Northern speech, calling their own Limousin, or Provençal, or Auvergnat. At the time, moreover, when Provençal literature flourished, the districts which contributed to it were in very loose relationship with the kingdom of France; and when that relationship was drawn tighter, Provençal literature began to wither and die. Yet it is not possible to avoid giving some sketch of the literary developments of Southern France in any history of French literature, as well because of the connection which subsisted between the two branches, as because of the altogether mistaken views which have been not unfrequently held as to that

⁴⁴ *Oc* and *oil* (*hoc* and *hoc illud*), the respective terms indicating affirmation. In this chapter the information given is based on a smaller acquaintance at first hand with the subject than is the case in the chapters on French proper. Herr Karl Bartsch has been the guide chiefly followed.

connection. Lord Macaulay⁴⁵ speaks of Provençal in the twelfth century as 'the only one of the vernacular languages of Europe which had yet been extensively employed for literary purposes;' and the ignorance of their older literature which, until a very recent period, distinguished Frenchmen has made it common for writers in France to speak of the Troubadours as their own literary ancestors. We have already seen that this supposition as applied to Epic poetry is entirely false; we shall see hereafter that, except as regards some lyrical developments, and those not the most characteristic, it is equally ill-grounded as to other kinds of composition. But the literature of the South is quite interesting enough in itself without borrowing what does not belong to it, and it exhibits not a few characteristics which were afterwards blended with those of the literature of the kingdom at large.

Range and characteristics.

The domain of the *Lingue d'Oc* is included between two lines, the northernmost of which starts from the Atlantic coast at or about the Charente, follows the northern boundaries of the old provinces of Perigord, Limousin, Auvergne, and Dauphiné, and overlaps Savoy and a small portion of Switzerland. The southern limit is formed by the Pyrenees, the Gulf of Lyons, and the Alps, while Catalonia is overlapped to the south-west just as Savoy is taken in on the north-east. This wide district gives room for not a few dialectic varieties with which we need

⁴⁵ Essay on Ranke's History of the Popes.

not here busy ourselves. The general language is distinguished from northern French by the survival to a greater degree of the vowel character of Latin. The vocabulary is less dissolved and corroded by foreign influence, and the inflections remain more distinct. The result, as in Spanish and Italian, is a language more harmonious, softer, and more cunningly cadenced than northern French, but endowed with far less vigour, variety, and freshness. The separate development of the two tongues must have begun at a very early period. A few early monuments, such as the Passion of Christ⁴⁶ and the Mystery of the Ten Virgins⁴⁷, contain mixed dialects. But the earliest piece of literature in pure Provençal is assigned in its original form to the tenth century, and is entirely different from northern French⁴⁸. It is arranged in *laisses* and assonanced. The uniformity, however, of the terminations of Provençal makes the assonances more closely approach rhyme than is the case in northern poetry. Of the eleventh century the principal monuments are a few charters, a translation of part of St. John's Gospel, and several religious pieces in prose and verse. Not till the extreme end of this century does the Troubadour begin to make himself heard. The earliest of these minstrels whose songs we possess is William IX, Count of Poitiers. With him Provençal literature, properly so called, begins.

⁴⁶ See chap. i.

⁴⁷ See chap. x.

⁴⁸ The poem on Boethius. See chap. i.

Periods of Provençal Literature.

The admirable historian of Provençal literature, Karl Bartsch, divides its products into three periods; the first reaching to the end of the eleventh century, and comprising the beginnings and experiments of the language as a literary medium; the second covering the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the most flourishing time of the Troubadour poetry, and possessing also specimens of many other forms of literary composition; the third, the period of decadence, including the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and remarkable chiefly for some religious literature, and for the contests of the Toulouse school of poets. In a complete history of Provençal literature notice would also have to be taken of the fitful and spasmodic attempts of the last four centuries to restore the dialect to the rank of a literary language, attempts which have never been made with greater energy and success than in our own time⁴⁹, but which hardly call for notice here.

First Period.

The most remarkable works of the first period have been already alluded to. This period may possibly have produced original epics of the Chanson form, though, as has been pointed out, no indications of any such exist, except in the solitary instance of *Girartz de Rossilho*. The important poem of Auberi of Besançon on Alexander is lost, except the first hundred verses.

⁴⁹ By the school of the so-called *Félibres*, of whom Mistral and Aubanel are the chief.

It is thought to be the oldest vernacular poem on the subject, and is in a mixed dialect partaking of the forms both of north and south. Hymns, sometimes in mixed Latin and Provençal, sometimes entirely in the latter, are found early. A single prose monument remains in the shape of a fragmentary translation of the Gospel of St. John. But by far the most important example of this period is the *Boethius*. The poem, as we have it, extends to 238 decasyllabic verses arranged on the fashion of a Chanson de Geste, and dates from the eleventh century, or at latest from the beginning of the twelfth, but is thought to be a rehandling of another poem which may have been written nearly two centuries earlier. The narrative part of the work is a mere introduction, the bulk of it consisting of moral reflections taken from the *De Consolatione*.

Second Period.

It is only in the second period that Provençal literature becomes of real importance. The stimulus which brought it to perfection has been generally taken to be that of the crusades, aided by the great development of peaceful civilisation at home which Provence and Languedoc then saw. The spirit of chivalry rose and was diffused all over Europe at this time, and in some of its aspects it received a greater welcome in Provence than anywhere else. For the mystical, the adventurous, and other sides of the chivalrous character, we must look to the North, and especially to the Arthurian legends, and the Romans d'Aventures which they influenced. But, for what has been well called 'la

passion souveraine, aveugle, idolâtre, qui éclipse tous les autres sentiments, qui dédaigne tous les devoirs, qui se moque de l'enfer et du ciel, qui absorbe et possède l'âme entière⁵⁰,' we must come to the literature of the south of France. Passion is indeed not the only motive of the Troubadours, but it is their favourite motive, and their most successful. The connection of this predominant instinct with the elaborate and unmatched attention to form which characterises them is a psychological question very interesting to discuss, but hardly suitable to these pages. It is sufficient here to say that these various motives and influences produced the Troubadours and their literature. This literature was chiefly lyrical in form, but also included many other kinds, of which a short account may be given.

Girartz de Rossilho belongs in all probability to the earliest years of the period, though the only Provençal manuscript in existence dates from the end of the thirteenth century. In the third decade of the twelfth Guillem Bechada had written a poem on the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, which, however, has perished, though the northern cycle of the Chevalier au Cygne may represent it in part. Guillem of Poitiers also wrote a historical poem on the Crusades with similar ill fate. But the most famous of historical poems in Provençal has fortunately been preserved to us. This is the chronicle of the Albigensian War, written in Alexandrines by William of Tudela and an anonymous writer. We also possess a rhymed chronicle of the war of

⁵⁰ Moland and Héricault's Introduction to *Aucassin et Nicolette*. Paris, 1856.

1276-77 in Navarre, by Guillem Anelier. In connection with the Arthurian cycle there exists a Provençal Roman d'Aventures, entitled *Jaufré*. The testimony of Wolfram von Eschenbach would appear to be decisive as to the existence of a Provençal continuation of Chrestien's *Percevale* by a certain Kiot or Guyot, but nothing more is known of this. *Blandin de Cornoalha* is another existing romance, and so is the far more interesting *Flamenca*, a lively picture of manners dating from the middle of the thirteenth century. In shorter and slighter narrative poems Provençal is still less fruitful, though Raimon Vidal, Arnaut de Zurcasses, and one or two other writers have left work of this kind. A very few narrative poems of a sacred character are also found, and vestiges of drama may be traced. But, as we have said, the real importance of the period consists in its lyrical poetry, the poetry of the Troubadours. The names of 460 separate poets are given, and 251 pieces have come down to us without the names of their writers. We have here no space for dwelling on individual persons; it is sufficient to mention as the most celebrated Arnaut Daniel, Bernart de Ventadorn, Bertran de Born, Cercamon, Folquet de Marseilha, Gaucelm Faidit, Guillem of Poitiers, Guillem de Cabestanh, Guiraut de Borneilh, Guiraut Riquier, Jaufre Rudel, Marcabrun, Peire Cardenal, Peire Vidal, Peirol, Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, Sordel.

Forms of Troubadour Poetry.

The chief forms in which these poets exercised their ingenuity were as follows. The simplest and oldest was called simply *vers*;

it had few artificial rules, was written in octosyllabic lines, and arranged in stanzas. From this was developed the *canço*, the most usual of Provençal forms. Here the rhymes were interlaced, and the alternation of masculine and feminine by degrees observed. The length of the lines varied. Both these forms were consecrated to love verse; the *Sirvente*, on the other hand, is panegyric or satirical, its meaning being literally 'Song of Service.' It consisted for the most part of short stanzas, simply rhyme, and corresponding exactly to one another. The *planh* or Complaint was a dirge or funeral song written generally in decasyllabics. The *tenso* or debate is in dialogue form, and when there are more than two disputants is called *tornejaments*. The narrative Romance existed in Provençal as well as the *balada* or three-stanza poem, usually with refrain. The *retroensa* is a longer refrain poem of later date, but in neither is the return of the same rhyme in each stanza necessarily observed, as in the French *ballade*. The *alba* is a leave-taking poem at morning, and the *serena* (if it can be called a form, for scarcely more than a single example exists) a poem of remembrance and longing at eventide. The *pastorela*, which had numerous sub-divisions, explains itself. The *descort* is a poem something like the irregular ode, which varies the structure of its stanzas. The *sextine*, in six stanzas of identical and complicated versification, is the stateliest of all Provençal forms. Not merely the rhymes but the words which rhyme are repeated on a regular scheme. The *breu-doble* (double-short) is a curious little form on three rhymes, two of which are

repeated twice in three four-lined stanzas, and given once in a concluding couplet, while the third finishes each quatrain. Other forms are often mentioned and given, but they are not of much consequence.

The prose of the best period of Provençal literature is of little importance. Its most considerable remains, besides religious works and a few scientific and grammatical treatises, are a prose version of the *Chanson des Albigeois*, and an interesting collection of contemporary lives of the Troubadours.

Third Period.

The productiveness of the last two centuries of Provençal literature proper has been spoken of by the highest living authority as at most an aftermath. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Arnaut Vidal wrote a Roman d'Aventures entitled *Guillem de la Barra*. This poet, like most of the other literary names of the period, belongs to the school of Toulouse, a somewhat artificial band of writers who flourished throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, held poetical tournaments on the first Sunday in May, invented or adopted the famous phrase *gai saber* for their pursuits, and received, if they were successful, the equally famous Golden Violet and minor trinkets of the same sort. The brotherhood directed itself by an art of poetry in which the half-forgotten traditions of more spontaneous times were gathered up.

To this period, and to its latter part, the Waldensian writings entitled *La Nobla Leyczon*, to which ignorance and sectarian

enthusiasm had given a much earlier date, are now assigned. There is also a considerable mass of miscellaneous literature, but nothing of great value, or having much to do with the only point which is here of importance, the distinctive character of Provençal literature, and the influence of that literature upon the development of letters in France generally. With a few words on these two points this chapter may be concluded.

Literary Relation of Provençal and French.

Defects of Provençal Literature.

It may be regarded as not proven that any initial influence was exercised over northern French literature by the literature of the South, and more than this, it may be held to be unlikely that any such influence was exerted. For in the first place all the more important developments of the latter, the Epic, the Drama, the Fabliau, are distinctly of northern birth, and either do not exist in Provençal at all, or exist for the most part as imitations of northern originals. With regard to lyric poetry the case is rather different. The earliest existing lyrics of the North are somewhat later than the earliest songs of the Troubadours, and no great lyrical variety or elegance is reached until the Troubadours' work had, by means of Thibaut de Champagne and others, had an opportunity of penetrating into northern France. On the other hand, the forms which finished lyric adopted in the North are by no means identical with those of the Troubadours. The scientific and melodious figures of the Ballade, the Rondeau, the Chant-royal, the Rondel, and the Villanelle, cannot by any ingenuity

be deduced from Canso or Balada, Retroensa or Breu-Doble. The Alba and the Pastorela agree in subject with the Aubade and the Pastourelle, but have no necessary or obvious connection of form. It would, however, be almost as great a mistake to deny the influence of the spirit of Provençal literature over French, as to regard the two as standing in the position of mother and daughter. The Troubadours undoubtedly preceded their Northern brethren in scrupulous attention to poetical form, and in elaborate devices for ensuring such attention. They preceded them too in recognising that quality in poetry for which there is perhaps no other word than elegance. There can be little doubt that they sacrificed to these two divinities, elegance and the formal limitation of verse, matters almost equally if not more important. The motives of their poems are few, and the treatment of those motives monotonous. Love, war, and personal enmity, with a certain amount of more or less frigid didactics, almost complete the list. In dealing with the first and the most fruitful, they fell into the deadly error of stereotyping their manner of expression. Objection has sometimes been taken to the 'eternal hawthorn and nightingale' of Provençal poetry. The objection would hardly be fatal, if this eternity did not extend to a great many things besides hawthorn and nightingales. In the later Troubadours especially, the fault which has been urged against French dramatic literature just before the Romantic movement was conspicuously anticipated. Every mood, every situation of passion, was catalogued and analysed, and the proper method of

treatment, with similes and metaphors complete, was assigned. There was no freshness and no variety, and in the absence of variety and freshness, that of vigour was necessarily implied. It may even be doubted whether the influence of this hot-house verse on the more natural literature of the North was not injurious rather than beneficial. Certain it is that the artificial poetry of the Trouvères went (in the persons of the Rondeau and Ballade-writing Rhétoriqueurs of the fifteenth century) the same way and came to the same end, that its elder sister had already trodden and reached with the competitors for the Violet, the Eglantine, and the Marigold of Toulouse.

CHAPTER IV

ROMANCES OF ARTHUR AND OF ANTIQUITY

The Tale of Arthur. Its Origins.

The passion for narrative poetry, which at first contented itself with stories drawn from the history or tradition of France, took before very long a wider range. The origin of the Legend of King Arthur, of the Round Table, of the Holy Graal, and of all the adventures and traditions connected with these centres, is one of the most intricate questions in the history of mediaeval literature. It would be beyond the scope of this book to attempt to deal with it at length. It is sufficient for our purpose, in the first place, to point out that the question of the actual existence and acts of Arthur has very little to do with the question of the origin of the Arthurian cycle. The history of mediaeval literature, as distinguished from the history of the Middle Ages, need not concern itself with any conflict between the invaders and the older inhabitants of England. The question which is of historical literary interest is, whether the traditions which Geoffrey of Monmouth, Walter Map, Chrestien de Troyes, and their followers, wrought into a fabric of such astounding extent and complexity, are due to Breton originals, or whether their authority is nothing but the ingenuity of Geoffrey working upon

the meagre data of Nennius⁵¹. As far as this question concerns French literature, the chief champions of these rival opinions were till lately M. de la Villemarqué and M. Paulin Paris. In no instance was the former able to produce Breton or Celtic originals of early date. On the other hand, M. Paris showed that Nennius is sufficient to account for Geoffrey, and that Geoffrey is sufficient to account for the purely Arthurian part of subsequent romances and chronicles. The religious element of the cycle has a different origin, and may possibly not be Celtic at all. Lastly, we must take into account a large body of Breton and Welsh poetry from which, especially in the parts of the legend which deal with Tristram, with King Mark, &c., amplifications have been devised. It must, however, still be admitted that the extraordinary rapidity with which so vast a growth of literature was produced, apparently from the slenderest stock, is one of the most surprising things in literary history. Before the middle of the twelfth century little or nothing is heard of Arthur. Before that century closed at least a dozen poems and romances in prose, many of them of great length, had elaborated the whole legend as it was thenceforward received, and as we have it condensed and Englished in Malory's well-known book two centuries and a half later.

⁵¹ Nennius, a Breton monk of the ninth century, has left a brief Latin Chronicle in which is the earliest authentic account of the Legend of Arthur. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *circa* 1140, produced a *Historia Britonum*, avowedly based on a book brought from Brittany by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. No trace of this book, unless it be Nennius, can be found. *See note at end of chapter.*

Order of French Arthurian Cycle.

The probable genesis of the Arthurian legend, in so far as it concerns French literature, appears to be as follows. First in order of composition, and also in order of thought, comes the Legend of Joseph of Arimathea, sometimes called the 'Little St. Graal.' This we have both in verse and prose, and one or both of these versions is the work of Robert de Borron, a knight and *trouvère* possessed of lands in the Gâtinais⁵². There is nothing in this work which is directly connected with Arthur. By some it has been attributed to a Latin, but not now producible, 'Book of the Graal,' by others to Byzantine originals. Anyhow it fell into the hands of the well-known Walter Map⁵³, and his exhaustless energy and invention at once seized upon it. He produced the 'Great St. Graal,' a very much extended version of the early history of the sacred vase, still keeping clear of definite connection with Arthur, though tending in that direction. From this, in its turn, sprang the original form of *Percevale*, which represents a quest for the vessel by a knight who has not originally anything to do with the Round Table. The link of connection between the two stories is to be found in the *Merlin*, attributed also to Robert de Borron, wherein the Welsh legends begin to have more definite influence. This, in its turn, leads to *Artus*, which gives the early history of the great king. Then comes the most famous,

⁵² Department of Seine-et-Marne, near Fontainebleau.

⁵³ Map as a person belongs rather to English than to French history. He lived in the last three quarters of the twelfth century.

most extensive, and finest of all the romances, that of *Lancelot du Lac*, which is pretty certainly in part, and perhaps in great part, the work of Map; as is also the mystical and melancholy but highly poetical *Quest of the Saint Graal*, a quest of which Galahad and Lancelot, not, as in the earlier legends, Percival, are the heroes. To this succeeds the *Mort Artus*, which forms the conclusion of the whole, properly speaking. This, however, does not entirely complete the cycle. Later than Borron, Map, and their unknown fellow-workers (if such they had), arose one or more *trouvères*, who worked up the ancient Celtic legends and lays of Tristram into the Romance of *Tristan*, connecting this, more or less clumsily, with the main legend of the Round Table. Other legends were worked up into the *omnium gatherum* of *Giron le Courtois*, and with this the cycle proper ceases. The later poems are attributed to two persons, called Luce de Gast and Hélié de Borron. But not the slightest testimony can be adduced to show that any such persons ever had existence⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ These various Romances are not by any means equally open to study in satisfactory critical editions. To take them chronologically, M. Hucher has published Robert de Borron's *Little Saint Graal* in prose, his *Percevale*, and the *Great Saint Graal*, with full and valuable if not incontestable notes, 3 vols.; Le Mans, 1875-1878. The verse form of the *Little Saint Graal* was published by M. F. Michel in 1841. An edition of *Artus* was promised by M. Paulin Paris, but interrupted or prevented by his death. The great works of Map, *Lancelot* and the *Quest*, as well as the *Mort Artus*, have never been critically edited in full; and the sixteenth-century editions being rare and exceedingly costly, as well as uncritical, they are not easily accessible, except in M. Paris' Abstract and Commentary, *Les Romans de la Table Ronde*, 5 vols., 1869-1877. *Tristan* was published partially forty years ago by M. F. Michel. *Merlin* was edited in 1886 by M. G. Paris and M. Ulrich. A complete edition of Chrestien de Troyes

These prose romances form for the most part the original literature of the Arthurian story. But the vogue of this story was very largely increased by a *trouvère* who used not prose but octosyllabic verse for his medium.

Chrestien de Troyes.

As is the case with most of these early writers, little or nothing is known of Chrestien de Troyes but his name. He lived in the last half of the twelfth century, he was attached to the courts of Flanders, Hainault, and Champagne, and he wrote most of his works for the lords of these fiefs. Besides his Arthurian work he translated Ovid, and wrote some short poems. Chrestien de Troyes deserves a higher place in literature than has sometimes been given to him. His versification is so exceedingly easy and

has been undertaken by Dr. Wendelin Förster and has preceded to its second volume (*Yvain*). This under its second title of *Le Chevalier au Lyon* has also been edited by Dr. Holland (third edition 1886). Besides this there is the great Romance of *Percevale* (continued by others, especially a certain Manessier), of which M. Potvin has given an excellent edition, 6 vols., Mons, 1867-1872, including in it a previously unknown prose version of the Romance of very early date; *Le Chevalier à la Charrette*, continued by Godefroy de Lagny, and edited, with the original prose from *Lancelot du Lac*, by Dr. Jonckbloet (The Hague, 1850); and *Erec et Énide*, by M. Haupt (Berlin, 1860). This piecemeal condition of the texts, and the practical inaccessibility of many of them, make independent judgment in the matter very difficult. What is wanted first of all is a book on the plan of M. Léon Gautier's *Épopées Françaises*, giving a complete account of all the existing texts – for the entire editing of these latter must necessarily take a very long time. The statements made above represent the opinions which appear most probable to the writer, not merely from the comparison of authorities on the subject, but from the actual study of the texts as far as they are open to him. (*See note at end of Chapter.*)

fluent as to appear almost pedestrian at times; and his *Chevalier à la Charrette*, by which he is perhaps most generally known, contrasts unfavourably in its prolixity with the nervous and picturesque prose to which it corresponds. But *Percevale* and the *Chevalier au Lyon* are very charming poems, deeply imbued with the peculiar characteristics of the cycle – religious mysticism, passionate gallantry, and refined courtesy of manners. Chrestien de Troyes undoubtedly contributed not a little to the popularity of the Arthurian legends. Although, by a singular chance, which has not yet been fully explained, the originals appear to have been for the most part in prose, the times were by no means ripe for the general enjoyment of work in such a form. The reciter was still the general if not the only publisher, and recitation almost of necessity implied poetical form. Chrestien did not throw the whole of the work of his contemporaries into verse, but he did so throw a considerable portion of it. His Arthurian works consist of *Le Chevalier à la Charrette*, a very close rendering of an episode of Map's *Lancelot*; *Le Chevalier au Lyon*, resting probably upon some previous work not now in existence; *Erec et Énide*, the legend which every English reader knows in Mr. Tennyson's *Enid*, and which seems to be purely Welsh; *Cligès*, which may be called the first Roman d'Aventures; and lastly, *Percevale*, a work of vast extent, continued by successive versifiers to the extent of some fifty thousand lines, and probably representing in part a work of Robert de Borron, which has only recently been printed by M. Hucher. *Percevale* is, perhaps, the best example

of Chrestien's fashion of composition. The work of Borron is very short, amounting in all to some ninety pages in the reprint. The *Percevale le Gallois* of Chrestien and his continuators, on the other hand, contains, as has been said, more than forty-five thousand verses. This amplification is produced partly by the importation of incidents and episodes from other works, but still more by indulging in constant diffuseness and what we must perhaps call commonplaces.

Spirit and Literary value of Arthurian Romances.

From a literary point of view the prose romances rank far higher, especially those in which Map is known or suspected to have had a hand. The peculiarity of what may be called their atmosphere is marked. An elaborate and romantic system of mystical religious sentiment, finding vent in imaginative and allegorical narrative, a remarkable refinement of manners, and a combination of delight in battle with devotion to ladies, distinguish them. This is, in short, the romantic spirit, or, as it is sometimes called, the spirit of chivalry; and it cannot be too positively asserted that the Arthurian romances communicate it to literature for the first time, and that nothing like it is found in the classics. In the work of Map and his contemporaries it is clearly perceivable. The most important element in this – courtesy – is, as we have already noticed, almost entirely absent from the *Chansons de Gestes*, and where it is present at all it is between persons who are connected by some natural or artificial relation of comradeship or kin. Nor are there many

traces of it in such fragments and indications as we possess of the Celtic originals, which may have helped in the production of the Arthurian romances. No Carolingian knight would have felt the horror of Sir Bors when the Lady of Hungerford exercises her undoubted right by flinging the body of her captive enemy on the camp of his uncle. Even the chiefs who are presented in the *Chanson d'Antioche* as joking over the cannibal banquet of the Roi des Tafurs, and permitting the dead bodies of Saracens to be torn from the cemeteries and flung into the beleaguered city, would have very much applauded the deed. Gallantry, again, is as much absent from the Chansons as clemency and courtesy. The scene in *Lancelot*, where Galahault first introduces the Queen and Lancelot to one another, contrasts in the strongest manner with the downright courtship by which the Bellicents and Nicolettes of the Carolingian cycle are won. No doubt Map represents to a great extent the sentiments of the polished court of England. But he deserves the credit of having been the first, or almost the first, to express such manners and sentiments, perhaps also of having being among the first to conceive them.

These originals are not all equally represented in Malory's English compilation. Of Robert de Borron's work little survives except by allusion. *Lancelot du Lac* itself, the most popular of all the romances, is very disproportionately drawn upon. Of the youth of Lancelot, of the winning of Dolorous Gard, of the war with the Saxons, and of the very curious episode of the false Guinevere, there is nothing; while the most charming story of

Lancelot's relations with Galahault of Sorelois disappears, except in a few passing allusions to the 'haughty prince.' On the other hand, the *Quest of the Saint Graal*, the *Mort Artus*, some episodes of *Lancelot* (such as the *Chevalier à la Charrette*), and many parts of *Tristan* and *Giron le Courtois*, are given almost in full.

It seems also probable that considerable portions of the original form of the Arthurian legends are as yet unknown, and have altogether perished. The very interesting discovery in the Brussels Library, of a prose *Percevale* not impossibly older than Chrestien, and quite different from that of Borron, is an indication of this fact. So also is the discovery by Dr. Jonckbloet in the Flemish *Lancelot*, which he has edited, of passages not to be found in the existing and recognised French originals. The truth would appear to be that the fascination of the subject, the unusual genius of those who first treated it, and the tendency of the middle ages to favour imitation, produced in a very short space of time (the last quarter or half of the twelfth century) an immense amount of original handling of Geoffrey's theme. To this original period succeeded one of greater length, in which the legends were developed not merely by French followers and imitators of Chrestien, but by his great German adapters, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried of Strasburg, Hartmann von der Aue, and by other imitators at home and abroad. Lastly, as we shall see in a future chapter, come Romans d'Aventures, connecting themselves by links more or less immediate with the Round Table cycle, but independent and often quite separate in

their main incidents and catastrophes.

The great number, length, and diversity of the Arthurian romances make it impossible in the space at our command to abstract all of them, and useless to select any one, inasmuch as no single poem is (as in the case of the *Chansons*) typical of the group. The style, however, of the prose and verse divisions may be seen in the following extracts from the *Chevalier à la Charrette* of Map, and the verse of Chrestien: —

Atant sont venu li chevalier jusqu'au pont: lors commencent à plorer top durement tuit ensamble. Et Lanceloz lor demande pourquoi il plorent et font tel duel? Et il dient que c'est por l'amor de lui, que trop est perillox li ponz. Atant esgarde Lanceloz l'ève de çà et de là: si voit que ele est noire et coranz. Si avint que sa véue torna devers la cité, si vit la tor où la raïne estoit as fenestres. Lanceloz demande quel vile c'est là? — 'Sire, font-il, c'est le leus où la raïne est.' Si li noment la cité. Et il lor dit: 'Or n'aiez garde de moi, que ge dont mains le pont que ge onques mès ne fis, nè il n'est pas si périlleux d'assez comme ge cuidoie. Mès moult a de là outre bele tor, et s'il m'i voloient hébergier il m'i auroient encor ennuit à hoste.' Lors descent et les conforte toz moult durement, et lor dit que il soient ausinc tout asséur comme il est. Il li lacent les pans de son hauberc ensamble et li cousent à gros fil de fer qu'il avoient aporté, et ses manches méésmes li cousent dedenz ses mains, et les piez desoz; et à bone poiz chaude li ont pééz les manicles et tant d'espès comme il ot entre les cuisses. Et ce fu por miauz tenir contre le trenchant de l'espée.

Quant il orent Lancelot atorné et bien et bel si lor prie
que il s'en aillent. Et il s'en vont, et le font naigier outre
l'ève, et il enmainent son cheval. Et il vient à la planche
droit: puis esgarde vers la tor où la raïne estoit en prison, si
li encline. Après fet le signe de la verroie croiz enmi son vis,
et met son escu derriers son dos, qu'il ne li nuise. Lors se
met desor la planche en chevauchons, si se traîne par desus
si armez comme il estoit, car il ne li faut ne hauberc ne
espée ne chaucés ne heaume ne escu. Et cil de la tor qui le
véoient en sont tuit esbahī, ne il n'i a nul ne nule qui saiche
veroiement qui il est; mès qu'il voient qu'il traîne pardesus
l'espée trenchant à la force des braz et à l'enpaînement des
genouz; si ne remaint pas por les filz de fer que des piez et
des mains et des genous ne saille li sanz. Mès por cel péril de
l'espée qui trenche et por l'ève noire et bruiant et parfonde
ne remaint que plus ne resgart vers la tor que vers l'ève, ne
plaie ne angoisse qu'il ait ne prise naient; car se il à cele tor
pooit venir il garroit tot maintenant de ses max. Tant s'est
hertiez et traînez qu'il est venuz jusqu'à terre.

This becomes in the poem a passage more than 100 lines long,
of which the beginning and end may be given: —

Le droit chemin vont cheminant,
Tant que li jors vet déclinant,
Et viennent au pon de l'espée
Après none, vers la vesprée.
Au pié del' pont, qui molt est max,
Sont descendu de lor chevax,

Et voient l'ève félenesse
Noire et bruiant, roide et espesse,
Tant leide et tant espoantable
Com se fust li fluns au déable;
Et tant périlleuse et parfonde
Qu'il n'est riens nule an tot le monde
S'ele i chéoit, ne fust alée
Ausi com an la mer betée.
Et li ponz qui est an travers
Estoit de toz autres divers,
Qu'ainz tex ne fu ne jamès n'iert.
Einz ne fu, qui voir m'an requiert,
Si max pont ne si male planche:
D'une espée forbie et blanche
Estoit li ponz sor l'ève froide.
Mès l'espée estoit forz et roide,
Et avoit deus lances de lonc.
De chasque part ot uns grant tronc
Où l'espée estoit cloffichiée.
Jà nus ne dot que il i chiée.
Porce que ele brist ne ploït.
Si ne sanble-il pas qui la voit
Qu'ele puisse grant fès porter.
Ce feisoit molt desconforter
Les deus chevaliers qui estoient
Avoec le tierz, que il cuidoient
Que dui lyon ou dui liepart
Au chief del' pont de l'autre part
Fussent lié à un perron.

L'ève et li ponz et li lyon
Les metent an itel fréor
Que il tranblent tuit de péor.

* * * * *

Cil ne li sèvent plus que dire,
Mès de pitié plore et sopire
Li uns et li autres molt fort.
Et cil de trespasser le gort
Au mialz que il set s'aparoille,
Et fet molt estrange mervoille,
Que ses piez désire et ses mains.
N'iert mie toz antiers nè sains
Quant de l'autre part iert venuz.
Bien s'iert sor l'espée tenuz,
Qui plus estoit tranchanz que fauz,
As mains nues et si deschauz
Que il ne s'est lessiez an pié
Souler nè chauce n'avanpié.
De ce guères ne s'esmaioit
S'ès mains et ès piez se plaioit;
Mialz se voloit-il mahaïgnier
Que chéoir el pont et baignier
An l'ève dont jamès n'issist.
A la grant dolor con li sist

S'an passe outre et à grant destrece:
Mains et genolz et piez se blece.
Mès tot le rasoage et sainne
Amors qui le conduist et mainne:
Si li estoit à sofrir dolz.
A mains, à piez et à genolz
Fet tant que de l'autre part vient.

Romances of Antiquity. Chanson d'Alixandre.

About the same time as the flourishing of the Arthurian cycle there began to be written the third great division of Jean Bodel, 'la matière de Rome la grant'⁵⁵. The most important beyond all question of the poems which go to make up this cycle (as it is sometimes called, though in reality its members are quite independent one of the other) is the Romance of *Alixandre*. Of the earliest French poem on this subject only a few fragments exist. This is supposed to have been a work of the eleventh or very early twelfth century, composed in octosyllabic verses, and in the mixed dialect common at the time in the south-east, by Alberic or Auberi of Besançon or Briançon. The *Chanson d'Alixandre* is, however, in all probability a much more important work than Alberic's. It is in form a regular Chanson de Geste, written in twelve-syllabled verse, of such strength and grace that the term Alexandrine has cleaved

⁵⁵ This expression occurs in the *Chanson des Saisnes*, i. 6. 7: 'Ne sont que iij matières a nul home atandant, De France et de Bretagne et de Rome la grant.'

ever since to the metre. Its length, as we have it⁵⁶, is 22,606 verses, and it is assigned to two authors, Lambert the Short⁵⁷ and Alexander of Bernay, though doubt has been expressed whether any of the present poem is due to Lambert; if we have any of his work, it is not later than the ninth decade of the twelfth century. Lambert, Alexander, and perhaps others, are thought to have known not Alberic, but a later ten-syllabled version into Northern French by Simon of Poitiers. The remoter sources are various. Foremost among them may undoubtedly be placed the Pseudo-Callisthenes, an unknown Alexandrian writer translated into Latin about the fourth century by Julius Valerius, who fathered upon the philosopher a collection of stories partly gathered from Plutarch, Quintus Curtius, and a hundred other authorities, partly elaborated according to the fashion of Greek romancers. Some oriental traditions of Alexander were also in the possession of western Europe. Out of all these, and with a considerable admixture of the floating fables of the time, Lambert and Alexander wove their work. There is, of course, not the slightest attempt at antiquity of colour. Alexander has twelve peers, he learns the favourite studies of the middle ages, he is dubbed knight, and so forth. Many interesting legends, such as that of the Fountain of Perpetual Youth, make their first

⁵⁶ Ed. Michelant. Stuttgart, 1846.

⁵⁷ *Li Cors*, otherwise *li tors* 'the crooked.' Since this book was first written M. Paul Meyer has treated the whole subject of the paragraph in an admirable monograph, *Alexandre le Grand dans la Littérature Française du Moyen Age*, 2 vols. Paris, 1886.

appearance in the poem, and it is altogether one of extraordinary merit. A specimen *laisse* may be given: —

En icele forest, dont vos m'oëz conter,
nesune male choze ne puet laianz entrer.
li home ne les bestes n'i ozent converser,
onques en nesun tans ne vit hon yverner
ne trop froit ne trop chaut ne neger ne geler.
ce conte l'escripture que hom n'i doit entrer,
se il nen at talent de conquerre ou d'amer.
les deuesses d'amors i doivent habiter,
car c'est lor paradix ou el doivent entrer,
li rois de Macedoine en a oï parler,
qui cercha les merveilles dou mont et de la mer,
et ce fist il meïsmes enz ou fons avaler
en un vessel de voirre, ce ne puet n'on fausser,
qu'il fist faire il meïsmes fort et rëont et cler
et enclorre de fer qu'il ne pëust quasser,
s'il l'estëust a roche ou aillors ahurter,
et si que il poet bien par mi outre esgarder,
por vëoir les poissons tornoier et joster
et faire lor agaiz et sovent cembeler.
et quant il vint a terre, nou mist a oublier:
la prist la sapiënce dou mont a conquerer
et faire ses agaiz et sa gent ordener
et conduire les oz et sagement mener,
car ce fust toz li mieudres qui ainz pëust monter
en cheval por conquerre ne de lance joster,
li gentiz et li larges et ii prex por doner.

la forest des puceles ot oï deviser,
cil qui tot volt conquerre i ot talent d'aler:
souz ciel n'a home en terre qui l'en pëust torner.

While the figure of Alexander served as centre to one group of fictions, most of which were composed in Chanson form, the octosyllabic metre, which had made the Arthurian romances its own, was used for the versification of another numerous class, most of which dealt with the tale of Troy divine.

Roman de Troie.

Here also the poems were neither entirely fictitious, nor on the other hand based upon the best authorities. Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, with some epitomes of Homer, were the chief sources of information. The principal poem of this class is the *Roman de Troie* of Benoist de Sainte More (c. 1160). This work⁵⁸, which extends to more than thirty thousand verses, has the redundancy and the long-windedness which characterise many, if not most, early French poems written in its metre. But it has one merit which ought to conciliate English readers to Benoist. It contains the undoubted original of Shakespeare's Cressida. The fortunes of Cressid (or Briseida, as the French trouvère names her) have been carefully traced out by MM. Moland, Héricault⁵⁹, and Joly, and form a very

⁵⁸ Ed. Joly. Rouen, 1870.

⁵⁹ Moland and Héricault's *Nouvelles du XIVème Siècle*. Paris, 1857. Joly, *Op. cit.* See also P. Stapfer, *Shakespeare et l'Antiquité*. 2 vols. Paris, 1880.

curious chapter of literary history. Nor is this episode the only one of merit in Benoist. His verse is always fluent and facile, and not seldom picturesque, as the following extract (Andromache's remonstrance with Hector) will show: —

Quant elle voit qe nēant iert,
o ses dous poinz granz cous se fiert,
fier duel demaine e fier martire,
ses cheveus trait e ront e tire.
bien ressemble feme desvee:
tote enragiee, eschevelee,
e trestote fors de son sen
court pour son fil Asternaten.
des eux plore molt tendrement,
entre ses braz l'encharge e prent.
vint el palés atot arieres,
o il chauçoit ses genoillieres.
as piez li met e si li dit
'sire, por cest enfant petit
qe tu engendras de ta char
te pri nel tiegues a eschar
ce qe je t'ai dit e nuncié.
aies de cest enfant pitié:
jamés des euz ne te verra.
s'ui assembles a ceux de la,
hui est ta mort, hui est ta fins.
de toi remandra orfenins.
cruēlz de cuer, lous enragiez,
par qoi ne vos en prent pitiez?

par qoi volez si tost morir?
par qoi volez si tost guerpier
et moi e li e vostre pere
e voz serors e vostre mere?
par qoi nos laisseroiz perir?
coment porrons sens vos gerir?
lasse, com male destinee!
a icest not chaï pasmee
a cas desus le pavement.
celle l'en lieve isnelement
qi estrange duel en demeine:
c'est sa seroge, dame Heleine.

Other Romances on Classical subjects.

The poems of the Cycle of Antiquity have hitherto been less diligently studied and reprinted than those of the other two. Few of them, with the exception of *Alixandre* and *Troie*, are to be read even in fragments, save in manuscript. *Le Roman d'Enéas*, which is attributed to Benoist, is much shorter than the *Roman de Troie*, and, with some omissions, follows Virgil pretty closely. Like many other French poems, it was adapted in German by a Minnesinger, Heinrich von Veldeke. *Le Roman de Thèbes*, of which there is some chance of an edition, stands to Statius in the same relation as *Enéas* to Virgil. And *Le Roman de Jules César* paraphrases, though not directly, Lucan. To these must be added *Athis et Prophilias* (Porphyrias), or the Siege of Athens, a work which has been assigned to many authors, and the origin of which

is not clear, though it enjoyed great popularity in the middle ages. The *Protesilaus* of Hugues de Rotelande is the only other poem of this series worth the mentioning.

Neither of these two classes of poems possesses the value of the Chansons as documents for social history. The picture of manners in them is much more artificial. But the Arthurian romances disclose partially and at intervals a state of society decidedly more advanced than that of the Chansons. The *bourgeois*, the country gentleman who is not of full baronial rank, and other novel personages appear.

Note to Third Edition.— Since the second edition was published M. Gaston Paris has sketched in *Romania* and summarised in his *Manuel*, but has not developed in book form, a view of the Arthurian romances different from his father's and from that given in the text. In this view the importance of 'Celtic' originals is much increased, and that of Geoffrey diminished, Walter Map disappears almost entirely to make room for divers unknown French trouvères, the order of composition is altered, and on the whole a lower estimate is formed of the literary value of the cycle. The 'Celtic' view has also been maintained in a book of much learning and value, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail* (London, 1888), by Mr. Alfred Nutt. I have not attempted to incorporate or to combat these views in the text for two reasons, partly because they will most probably be superseded by others, and partly because the evidence does not seem to me sufficient to establish any of them certainly. But having given some years to

comparative literary criticism in different languages and periods, I think I may be entitled to give a somewhat decided opinion against the 'Celtic' theory, and in favour of that which assigns the special characteristics of the Arthurian cycle and all but a very small part of its structure of incident to the literary imagination of the trouvères, French and English, of the twelfth century. And I may add that as a whole it seems to me quite the greatest literary creation of the Middle Ages, except the *Divina Commedia*, though of course it has the necessary inferiority of a collection by a great number of different hands to a work of individual genius.

CHAPTER V

FABLIAUX. THE *ROMAN DU RENART*

Foreign Elements in Early French Literature.

Singular as the statement may appear, no one of the branches of literature hitherto discussed represents what may be called a specially French spirit. Despite the astonishing popularity and extent of the *Chansons de Gestes*, they are, as is admitted by the most patriotic French students, Teutonic in origin probably, and certainly in genius. The Arthurian legends have at least a tinge both of Celtic and Oriental character; while the greater number of them were probably written by Englishmen, and their distinguishing spirit is pretty clearly Anglo-Norman rather than French. On the other hand, Provençal poetry represents a temperament and a disposition which find their full development rather in Spanish and Italian literature and character than in the literature and character of France. All these divisions, moreover, have this of artificial about them, that they are obviously class literature – the literature of courtly and knightly society, not that of the nation at large. Provençal literature gives but scanty social information; from the earlier *Chansons* at least it would be hard to tell that there were any classes but those of nobles, priests, and fighting men; and though, as has been said, a more complicated state of society appears in the Arthurian legends, what may be

called their atmosphere is even more artificial.

The Esprit Gaulois makes its appearance.

It is far otherwise with the division of literature which we are now about to handle. The Fabliaux⁶⁰, or short verse tales of old France, take in the whole of its society from king to peasant with all the intervening classes, and represent for the most part the view taken of those classes by each other. Perhaps the *bourgeois* standpoint is most prominent in them, but it is by no means the only one. Their tone too is of the kind which has ever since been specially associated with the French genius. What is called by French authors the *esprit gaulois*— a spirit of mischievous and free-spoken jocularly — does not make its appearance at once, or in all kinds of work. In most of the early departments of French literature there is a remarkable deficiency of the comic element, or rather that element is very much kept under. The comedy of the Chansons consists almost entirely in the roughest horse-play; while the knightly notion of *gabz* or jests is exemplified in the *Voyage de Charlemagne à Constantinople*, where it seems to be limited to extravagant, and not always decent, boasts and

⁶⁰ The first collection of Fabliaux was published by Barbazan in 1756. This was re-edited by Méon in 1808, and reinforced by the same author with a fresh collection in 1823. Meanwhile Le Grand d'Aussy had (1774-1781) given extracts, abstracts, and translations into modern French of many of them. Jubinal, Robert, and others enriched the collection further, and in vol. xxiii. of the *Histoire Littéraire* M. V. Le Clerc published an excellent study of the subject. A complete collection of Fabliaux has, however, only recently been attempted, by M. M. A. de Montaiglon and G. Raynaud (6 vols., Paris, 1872-1888).

gasconnades. More comic, but still farcical in its comedy, is the curious running fire of exaggerated expressions of poltroonery which the Red Lion keeps up in *Antioche*, while the names and virtues of the Christian leaders are being catalogued to Corbaran. In the Arthurian Romances also the comic element is scantily represented, and still takes the same form of exaggeration and horse-play. At the same time it is proper to say that both these classes of compositions are distinguished, at least in their earlier examples, by a very strict and remarkable decency of language.

In the Fabliaux the state of things is quite different. The attitude is always a mocking one, not often going the length of serious satire or moral indignation, but contenting itself with the peculiar ludicrous presentation of life and humanity of which the French have ever since been the masters. In the Fabliaux begins that long course of scoffing at the weaknesses of the feminine sex which has never been interrupted since. In the Fabliaux is to be found for the first time satirical delineation of the frailties of churchmen instead of adoring celebration of the mysteries of the Church. All classes come in by turns for ridicule – knights, burghers, peasants. Unfortunately this freedom in choice of subject is accompanied by a still greater freedom in the choice of language. The coarseness of expression in many of the Fabliaux equals, if it does not exceed, that to be found in any other branch of Western literature.

Definition of Fabliaux.

The interest of the Fabliaux as a literary study is increased

by the precision with which they can be defined, and the well-marked period of their composition. According to the excellent definition of its latest editor, the Fabliau⁶¹ is 'le récit, le plus souvent comique, d'une aventure réelle ou possible, qui se passe dans les données moyennes de la vie humaine,' the recital, for the most part comic, of a real or possible event occurring in the ordinary conditions of human life. M. de Montaignon, to be rigidly accurate, should have added that it must be in verse, and, with very rare, if any, exceptions, in octosyllabic couplets. Of such Fabliaux, properly so called, we possess perhaps two hundred. They are of the most various length, sometimes not extending to more than a score or so of lines, sometimes containing several hundreds. They are, like most contemporary literature, chiefly anonymous, or attributed to persons of whom nothing is known, though some famous names, especially that of the Trouvère Rutebœuf, appear among their authors. Their period of composition seems to have extended from the latter half of the twelfth century to the latter half of the fourteenth, no manuscript that we have of them being earlier than the beginning of the thirteenth century, and none later than the beginning of the fifteenth. If, however, their popularity in their original form ceased at the latter period, their course was by no means run. They had passed early from France into Italy (as indeed all the oldest French literature did), and the stock-in-

⁶¹ *Fabliau* is, of course, the Latin *fabula*. The genealogy of the word is *fabula*, *fabella*, *fabel*, *fable*, *fabel*, *fableau*, *fabliau*. All these last five forms exist.

trade of all the Italian *Novellieri* from Boccaccio downwards was supplied by them. In England they found an illustrious copyist in Chaucer, whose *Canterbury Tales* are perfect *Fabliaux*, informed by greater art and more poetical spirit than were possessed by their original authors. In France itself the *Fabliaux* simply became farces or prose tales, as the wandering reciter of verse gave way to the actor and the bookseller. They appear again (sometimes after a roundabout journey through Italian versions) in the pages of the French tale-tellers of the Renaissance, and finally, as far as collected appearance is concerned, receive their last but not their least brilliant transformation in the *Contes* of La Fontaine. In these the cycle is curiously concluded by a return to the form of the original.

Subjects and character of *Fabliaux*.

Until MM. de Montaiglon and Raynaud undertook their edition, which has been slowly completed, the study of the *Fabliaux* was complicated by the somewhat chaotic conditions of the earlier collections. Barbazan and his followers printed as *Fabliaux* almost everything that they found in verse which was tolerably short. Thus, not merely the mediaeval poems called *dits* and *débats*, descriptions of objects either in monologue or dialogue, which come sometimes very close to the *Fabliau* proper, but moral discourses, short romances, legends like the *Lai d'Aristote*, and such-like things, were included. This interferes with a comprehension of the remarkably characteristic and clearly marked peculiarities of the *Fabliau* indicated in the

definition given above. As according to this the Fabliau is a short comic verse tale of ordinary life, it will be evident that the attempts which have been made to classify Fabliaux according to their subjects were not very happy. It is of course possible to take such headings as Priests, Women, Villeins, Knights, etc., and arrange the existing Fabliaux under them. But it is not obvious what is gained thereby. A better notion of the *genre* may perhaps be obtained from a short view of the subjects of some of the principal of those Fabliaux whose subjects are capable of description. *Les deux Bordeors Ribaux* is a dispute between two Jongleurs who boast their skill. It is remarkable for a very curious list of Chansons de Gestes which the clumsy reciter quotes all wrong, and for a great number of the sly hits at chivalry and the chivalrous romances which are characteristic of all this literature. Thus one Jongleur, going through the list of his knightly patrons, tells of Monseignor Augier Poupée —

'Qui à un seul coup de s'espee
Coupe bien à un chat l'oreille;'

and of Monseignor Rogier Ertaut, whose soundness in wind and limb is not due to enchanted armour or skill in fight, but is accounted for thus —

'Quar onques ne ot cop feru' (for that never has he struck a blow).

Le Vair Palefroi contains the story of a lover who carries off his beloved on a palfrey grey from an aged wooer. *La Housse Partie*, a great favourite, which appears in more than one form, tells the tale of an unnatural son who turns his father out of doors, but is brought to a better mind by his own child, who innocently gives him warning that he in turn will copy his example. *Sire Hain et Dame Anieuse* is one of the innumerable stories of rough correction of scolding wives. *Brunain la Vache au Prestre* recounts a trick played on a covetous priest. In *Le Dit des Perdrix*, a greedy wife eats a brace of partridges which her husband has destined for his own dinner, and escapes his wrath by one of the endless stratagems which these tales delight in assigning to womankind. *Le sot Chevalier*, though extremely indecorous, deserves notice for the Chaucerian breadth of its farce, at which it is impossible to help laughing. *The two Englishmen and the Lamb* is perhaps the earliest example of English-French, and turns upon the mistake which results in an ass's foal being bought instead of the required animal. *Le Mantel Mautaillié* is the famous Arthurian story known in English as 'The Boy and the Mantle.' *Le Vilain Mire* is the original of Molière's *Médecin malgré lui*. *Le Vilain qui conquist Paradis par Plaist* is characteristic of the curious irreverence which accompanied mediaeval devotion. A villein comes to heaven's gate, is refused admission, and successively silences St. Peter, St. Thomas, and St. Paul, by very pointed references to their earthly weaknesses. As a last specimen may be mentioned the curiously simple word-

play of *Estula*. This is the name of a little dog which, being pronounced, certain thieves take for 'Es tu là?'

Sources of Fabliaux.

Such are a very few, selected as well as may be for their typical character, of these stories. It is not unimportant to consider briefly the question of their origin. Many of them belong no doubt to that strange common fund of fiction which all nations of the earth indiscriminately possess. A considerable number seem to be of purely original and indigenous growth: but an actual literary source is not wanting in many cases. The classics supplied some part of them, the Scriptures and the lives of the saints another part; while not a little was due to the importation of Eastern collections of stories resulting from the Crusades. The chief of these collections were the fables of Bidpai or Pilpai, in the form known as the romance of 'Calila and Dimna,' and the story of Sendabar (in its Greek form Syntipas). This was immensely popular in France under the verse form of *Dolopathos*, and the prose form of *Les sept Sages de Rome*. The remarkable collection of stories called the *Gesta Romanorum* is apparently of later date than most of the Fabliaux; but the tales of which it was composed no doubt floated for some time in the mouths of Jongleurs before the unknown and probably English author put them together in Latin.

The Roman du Renart.

Closely connected with the Fabliaux is one of the most

singular works of mediaeval imagination, the *Roman du Renart*⁶². This is no place to examine the origin or antiquity of the custom of making animals the mouthpieces of moral and satirical utterance on human affairs. It is sufficient that the practice is an ancient one, and that the middle ages were early acquainted with Aesop and his followers, as well as with Oriental examples of the same sort. The original author, whoever he was, of the epic (for it is no less) of 'Reynard the Fox,' had therefore examples of a certain sort before his eyes. But these examples contented themselves for the most part with work of small dimension, and had not attempted connected or continuous story. A fierce battle has been fought as to the nationality of Reynard. The facts are these. The oldest form of the story now extant is in Latin. It is succeeded at no very great interval by German, Flemish, and French versions. Of these the German as it stands is apparently the oldest, the Latin version being probably of the second half of the twelfth century, and the German a little later. But (and this is a capital point) the names of the more important beasts are in all the versions French. From this and some minute local indications, it seems likely that the original language of the epic

⁶² It should be noticed that this title, though consecrated by usage, is a misnomer. It should be *Roman de Renart*, for this latter is a proper name. The class name is *goupil* (vulpes). The standard edition is that of Méon (4 vols., Paris, 1826) with the supplement of Chabaille, 1835. This includes not merely the *Ancien Renart*, but the *Couronnement* and *Renart le Nouvel*. *Renart le Contrefait* has never been printed. Rothe (Paris, 1845) and Wolf (Vienna, 1861) have given the best accounts of it. Recently M. Ernest Martin has given a new critical edition of the *Ancien Renart* (3 vols., Strasburg and Paris, 1882-1887).

is French, but French of the Walloon or Picard dialect, and that it was written somewhere in the district between the Seine and the Rhine. This, however, is a matter of the very smallest literary importance. What is of great literary importance is the fact that it is in France that the story receives its principal development, and that it makes its home. The Latin, Flemish, and German Reynards, though they all cover nearly the same ground, do not together amount to more than five-and-twenty thousand lines. The French in its successive developments amounts to more than ninety thousand in the texts already published or abstracted; and this does not include the variants in the Vienna manuscript of *Renart le Contrefait*, or the different developments of the *Ancien Renart*, recently published by M. Ernest Martin.

The Ancien Renart.

The order and history of the building up of this vast composition are as follows. The oldest known 'branches,' as the separate portions of the story are called, date from the beginning of the thirteenth century. These are due to a named author, Pierre de Saint Cloud. But it is impossible to say that they were actually the first written in French: indeed it is extremely improbable that they were so. However this may be, during the thirteenth century a very large number of poets wrote pieces independent of each other in composition, but possessing the same general design, and putting the same personages into play. In what has hitherto been the standard edition of *Renart*, Méon published thirty-two such poems, amounting in the aggregate to

more than thirty thousand verses. Chabaille added five more in his supplement, and M. Ernest Martin has found yet another in an Italianised version. This last editor thinks that eleven branches, which he has printed together, constitute an 'ancient collection' within the *Ancien Renart*, and have a certain connection and interdependence. However this may be, the general plan is extremely loose, or rather non-existent. Everybody knows the outline of the story of Reynard; how he is among the animals (Noble the lion, who is king, Chanticleer the cock, Firapel the leopard, Grimbart the badger, Isengrin the wolf, and the rest) the special representative of cunning and valour tempered by discretion, while his enemy Isengrin is in the same way the type of stupid headlong force, and many of the others have moral character less strongly marked but tolerably well sustained. How this general idea is illustrated the titles of the branches show better than the most elaborate description. 'How Reynard ate the carrier's fish;' 'how Reynard made Isengrin fish for eels;' 'how Reynard cut the tail of Tybert the cat;' 'how Reynard made Isengrin go down the well;' 'of Isengrin and the mare;' 'how Reynard and Tybert sang vespers and matins;' 'the pilgrimage of Reynard,' and so forth. Written by different persons, and at different times, these branches are of course by no means uniform in literary value. But the uniformity of spirit in most, if not in all of them, is extremely remarkable. What is most noticeable in this spirit is the perpetual undertone of satirical comment on human life and its affairs which distinguishes it.

The moral is never obtrusively put forward, and it is especially noteworthy that in this *Ancien Renart*, as contrasted with the later development of the poem, there is no mere allegorising, and no attempt to make the animals men in disguise. They are quite natural and distinct foxes, wolves, cats, and so forth, acting after their kind, with the exception of their possession of reason and language.

Le Couronnement Renart.

The next stage of the composition shows an alteration and a degradation. *Renart le Couronné*, or *Le Couronnement Renart*⁶³, is a poem of some 3400 lines, which was once attributed to Marie de France, for no other reason than that the manuscript which contains it subjoins her *Ysopet* or fables. It is, however, certainly not hers, and is in all probability a little later than her time. The main subject of it is the cunning of the fox, who first reconciles the great preaching orders Franciscans and Dominicans; then himself becomes a monk, and inculcates on them the art of *Renardie*; then repairs to court as a confessor to the lion king Noble who is ill, and contrives to be appointed his successor, after which he holds tournaments, journeys to Palestine, and so forth. It is characteristic of the decline of taste that in the list of his army a whole bestiary (or list of the real and fictitious beasts of mediaeval zoology) is thrust in; and the very introduction of

⁶³ The necessary expression of the genitive by *de* is later than this. Mediaeval French retained the inflection of nouns, though in a dilapidated condition. Properly speaking *Renars* is the nominative, *Renart* the general inflected case.

the abstract term *Renardie*, or foxiness, is an evil sign of the abstracting and allegorising which was about to spoil poetry for a time, and to make much of the literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries tedious and heavy. The poem is of little value or interest. The only chronological indication as to its composition is the eulogy of William of Flanders, killed ('jadis,' says the author) in 1251.

Renart le Nouvel.

The next poem of the cycle is of much greater length, and of at least proportionately greater value, though it has not the freshness and *verve* of the earlier branches. *Renart le Nouvel* was written in 1288 by Jacquemart Gielée, a Fleming. This poem is in many ways interesting, though not much can be said for its general conception, and though it suffers terribly from the allegorising already alluded to. In its first book (it consists of more than 8000 lines, divided into two books and many branches) Renart, in consequence of one of his usual quarrels with Isengrin, gets into trouble with the king, and is besieged in Maupertuis. But the sense of verisimilitude is now so far lost, that Maupertuis, instead of being a fox's earth, is an actual feudal castle; and more than this, the animals which attack and defend it are armed in panoply, ride horses, and fight like knights of the period. Besides this the old familiar and homely personages are mixed up with a very strange set of abstractions in the shape of the seven deadly sins. All this is curiously blended with reminiscences and rehandlings of the older and simpler adventures. Another remarkable feature

about *Renart le Nouvel* is that it is full of songs, chiefly love songs, which are given with the music. Its descriptions, though prolix, and injured by allegorical phrases, are sometimes vigorous.

Renart le Contrefait.

The cycle was finally completed in the second quarter of the fourteenth century by the singular work or works called *Renart le Contrefait*. This has, unfortunately, never been printed in full, nor in any but the most meagre extracts and abstracts. Its length is enormous; though, in the absence of opportunity for examining it, it is not easy to tell how much is common to the three manuscripts which contain it. Two of these are in Paris and one in Vienna, the latter being apparently identical with one which Ménage saw and read in the seventeenth century. One of the Parisian manuscripts contains about 32,000 verses, the other about 19,000; and the Vienna version seems to consist of from 20,000 to 25,000 lines of verse, and about half that number of prose. The author (who, in so far as he was a single person, appears to have been a clerk of Troyes, in Champagne) wrote it, as he says, to avoid idleness, and seems to have regarded it as a vast commonplace book, in which to insert the result not merely of his satirical reflection, but of his miscellaneous reading. A noteworthy point about this poem is that in one place the writer expressly disowns any concealment of his satirical intention. His book, he says, has nothing to do with the kind of fox that kills pullets, has a big brush, and wears a red skin, but with the fox that has two hands and, what is more, two faces under one

hood⁶⁴. Notwithstanding this, however, there are many passages where the old 'common form' of the epic is observed, and where the old personages make their appearance. Indeed their former adventures are sometimes served up again with slight alterations. Besides this there is a certain number of amusing stories and *fabliaux*, the most frequently quoted of which is the tale of an ugly but wise knight who married a silly but beautiful girl in hopes of having children uniting the advantages of both parents, whereas the actual offspring of the union were as ugly as the father and as silly as the mother. Combined with these things are numerous allusions to the grievances of the peasants and burghers of the time against the upper classes, with some striking legends illustrative thereof, such as the story of a noble dame, who, hearing that a vassal's wife had been buried in a large shroud of good stuff, had the body taken up and seized the shroud to make horsecloths of. This original matter, however, is drowned in a deluge not merely of moralising but of didactic verse of all kinds. The history of Alexander is told in one version by Reynard to the lion king in 7000 verses, and is preluded and followed by an account of the history of the world on a scarcely smaller scale. This proceeding, at least in the Vienna version, seems to be burdensome even to Noble himself, who, at the reign of

⁶⁴ This is a free translation of the last line of the original, which is as follows: — Pour renard qui gelines tue, Qui a la rousse peau vestue, Qui a grand queue et quatre piés, N'est pas ce livre communiés; Mais pour cellui qui a deux mains Dont il sont en ce siècle mains, Qui ont sous la chappe Faulx Semblant. Wolf, *Op. cit.* p. 5. The final allusion is to a personage of the *Roman de la Rose*.

Augustus, suggests that Reynard should exchange verse for prose, and 'compress.' The warning cannot be said to be unnecessary: but works as long as *Renart le Contrefait*, and, as far as it is possible to judge, not more interesting, have been printed of late years; and it is very much to be wished that the publication of it might be undertaken by some competent scholar.

Fauvel.

Renart is not the only bestial personage who was made at this time a vehicle of satire. In the days of Philippe le Bel a certain François de Rues composed a poem entitled *Fauvel*, from the name of the hero, a kind of Centaur, who represents vice of all kinds. The direct object of the poem was to attack the pope and the clergy.

Some extracts from the *Fabliau* of the Partridges and from *Renart* may appropriately now be given: —

Por ce que fabliaus dire sueil,
en lieu de fable dire vueil
une aventure qui est vraie,
d'un vilain qui delés sa haie
prist deus pertris par aventure.
en l'atorner mist moult sa cure;
sa fame les fist au feu metre.
ele s'en sot bien entremetre:
le feu a fait, la haste atorne.
et li vilains tantost s'en torne,
por le prestre s'en va corant.

mais au revenir targa tant
que cuites furent les pertris.
la dame a le haste jus mis,
s'en pinça une pelëure,
quar molt ama la lechëure,
quant diex li dona a avoir.
ne bëoit pas a grant avoir,
mais a tos ses bons acomplir.
l'une pertris cort envaïr:
andeus les eles en menjue.
puis est alee en mi la rue
savoir se ses sires venoit.
quant ele venir ne le voit,
tantost arriere s'en retorne,
et le remanant tel atorne
mal du morsel qui remainsist.
adonc s'apenssa et si dist
que l'autre encore mengera.
moult tres bien set qu'ele dira,
s'on li demande que devindrent:
ele dira que li chat vindrent,
quant ele les ot arrier traïtes;
tost li orent des mains retraïtes,
et chascuns la seue en porta.

Tant dura cele demoree
 que la dame fu saoulee,
 et li vilains ne targa mie:
 a l'ostel vint, en haut s'escrie
 'diva, sont cuites les pertris?'
 'sire,' dist ele. 'ainçois va pis,
 quar mengies les a li chas.'
 li vilains saut isnel le pas,
 seure li cort comme enragiés.
 ja li eüst les iex sachiés,
 quant el crie 'c'est gas, c'est gas.
 fuiiés,' fet ele, 'Sathanas!
 couvertes sont por tenir chaudes.'

(He accepts the excuse; bids her lay the table, and goes to sharpen his knife. The priest arrives. She tells him that her husband is plotting outrage against him, and as a proof shows him sharpening his knife. The priest flies, and she tells her husband that he has run off with the partridges. The husband pursues, but in vain, and the Fabliau thus concludes: —)

A l'ostel li vilains retourne,
 et lors sa feme en araisone:
 'diva,' fait il, 'et quar me dis

coment tu perdis les pertris?'
cele li dist 'se diex m'aït,
tantost que li prestres me vit,
si me pria, se tant l'amasse,
que je les pertris li moustrasse,
quar moult volentiers les verroit
et je le menai la tout droit
ou je les avoie couvertes.
il ot tantost les mains ouvertes,
si les prist et si s'en fuï.
mes je gueres ne le sivi,
ains le vous fis moult tost savoir.'
cil respont 'bien pués dire voir
or le laissons a itant estre.'
ainsi fu engingniés le prestre
et Gombaus qui les pertris prist.
par exemple cis fabliaus dist:
fame est faite por decevoir.
mençonge fait devenir voir
et voir fait devenir mençonge.
cil n'i vout metre plus d'alonge
qui fist cest fablel et ces dis.
ci faut li fabliaus des pertris.

(Reynard and Isengrin go a-fishing.)

Ce fu un poi devant Noël
que l'en metoit bacons en sel,
li ciex fu clers et estelez,

et li vivier fu si gelez,
ou Ysengrin devoit peschier,
qu'on pooit par desus treschier,
fors tant c'un pertuis i avoit,
qui des vilains faiz i estoit,
ou il menoient lor atovre
chascune nuit juër et boivre:
un seel i estoit laissez.
la vint Renarz toz eslaissiez
et son compere apela.
'sire,' fait il, 'traïiez vos ça:
ci est la plenté des poissons
et li engins ou nos peschons
les anguiles et les barbiaus
et autres poissons bons et biaux.'
dist Ysengrins 'sire Renart,
or le prenez de l'une part,
sel me laciez bien a la queue.'
Renarz le prent et si li neue
entor la queue au miex qu'il puet.
'frere,' fait il, 'or vos estuet
moult sagement a maintenir
por les poissons avant venir.'
lors s'est en un buisson fichiez:
si mist son groing entre ses piez
tant que il voie que il face.
et Ysengrins est seur la glace
et li sèaus en la fontaine
plains de glaçons a bone estraine.

l'aive commence a englacier
et li sèaus a enlacier
qui a la queue fu noëz:
de glaçons fu bien serondez.
la queue est en l'aive gelee
et en la glace seelee.

This chapter would be incomplete without a reference to the *Ysopet* of Marie de France⁶⁵, which may be said to be a link of juncture between the *Fabliau* and the *Roman du Renart*. *Ysopet* (diminutive of Aesop) became a common term in the middle ages for a collection of fables. There is one known as the *Ysopet of Lyons*, which was published not long ago⁶⁶; but that of Marie is by far the most important. It consists of 103 pieces, written in octosyllabic couplets, with moralities, and a conclusion which informs us that the author wrote it 'for the love of Count William' (supposed to be Long-Sword), translating it from an English version of a Latin translation of the Greek. Marie's graceful style and her easy versification are very noticeable here, while her morals are often well deduced and sharply put. The famous 'Wolf and Lamb' will serve as a specimen.

Ce dist dou leu e dou aignel,
qui beveient a un rossel:
li lox a lo sorse beveit

⁶⁵ Ed. Roquefort, vol. ii. See next chapter.

⁶⁶ By Dr. W. Förster. Heilbronn, 1882.

e li aigniaus aval esteit.
irieement parla li lus
ki mult esteit cuntralïus;
par mautalent palla a lui:
'tu m'as,' dist il, 'fet grant anui.'
li aignez li ad respundu
'sire, eh quei?' 'dunc ne veis tu?
tu m'as ci ceste aigue tourblee:
n'en puis beivre ma saolee.
autresi m'en irai, ce crei,
cum jeo ving, tut murant de sei.'
li aignelez adunc respunt
'sire, ja bevez vus amunt:
de vus me vient kankes j'ai beu.'
'qoi,' fist li lox, 'maldis me tu?'
l'aigneus respunt 'n'en ai voleir.'
lous li dit 'jeo sai de veir:
ce meïсме me fist tes pere
a ceste surce u od lui ere,
or ad sis meis, si cum jeo crei.'
'qu'en retraiez,' feit il, 'sor mei?
n'ere pas nez, si cum jeo cuit.'
'e cei pur ce,' li lus a dit:
'ja me fais tu ore cuntraire
e chose ke tu ne deiz faire.'
dunc prist li lox l'engnel petit,
as denz l'estrangle, si l'ocit.

Moralité

Ci funt li riche robëur,
li vesconte e li jugëur,
de ceus k'il unt en lur justise.
fausse aqoison par cuveitise
truevent assez pur eus cunfundre.
suvent les funt as plaiz semundre,
la char lur tolent e la pel,
si cum li lox fist a l'aingnel.

CHAPTER VI

EARLY LYRICS

Early and Later Lyrics.

The lyric poetry of the middle ages in France divides itself naturally into two periods, distinguished by very strongly marked characteristics. The end of the thirteenth century is the dividing point in this as in many other branches of literature. After that we get the extremely interesting, if artificial, forms of the Rondeau and Ballade, with their many varieties and congeners. With these we shall not busy ourselves in the present chapter. But the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are provided with a lyric growth, less perfect indeed in form than that which occupied French singers from Machault to Marot, but more spontaneous, fuller of individuality, variety, and vigour, and scarcely less abundant in amount.

Origins of Lyric.

Romances and Pastourelles.

Before the twelfth century we find no traces of genuine lyrical work in France. The ubiquitous *Cantilenae* indeed again make their appearance in the speculations of literary historians, but here as elsewhere they have no demonstrable historical existence. Except a few sacred songs, sometimes, as in the case of Saint Eulalie, in early Romance language, sometimes

in what the French call *langue farcie*, that is to say, a mixture of French and Latin, nothing regularly lyrical is found up to the end of the eleventh century. But soon afterwards lyric work becomes exceedingly abundant. This is what forms the contents of Herr Karl Bartsch's delightful volume of *Romanzen und Pastourellen*⁶⁷. These are the two earliest forms of French lyric poetry. They are recognised by the Troubadour Raimon Vidal as the special property of the Northern tongue, and no reasonable pretence has been put forward to show that they are other than indigenous. The tendency of both is towards iambic rhythm, but it is not exclusively manifested as in later verse. It is one of the most interesting things in French literary history to see how early the estrangement of the language from the anapaestic and dactylic measures natural to Teutonic speech began to declare itself⁶⁸. These early poems bubble over with natural gaiety, their refrains, musical though semi-articulate as they are, are sweet and manifold in cadence, but the main body of the versification is either iambic or trochaic (it was long before the latter measure became infrequent), and the freedom of the ballad-metres of England and Germany is seldom present. The Romance differs in form and still more in subject from the Pastourelle, and both differ very remarkably from the form and manner of Provençal poetry. It has been observed by nearly all students, that the love-poems of the latter language are almost always at once personal

⁶⁷ Leipsic, 1870.

⁶⁸ See note at end of chapter.

and abstract in subject. The Romance and the Pastourelle, on the contrary, are almost always dramatic. They tell a story, and often (though not always in the case of the Pastourelle) they tell it of some one other than the singer. The most common form of the Romance is that of a poem varying from twenty lines long to ten times that length and divided into stanzas. These stanzas consist of a certain number (not usually less than three or more than eight) of lines of equal length capped with a refrain in a different metre. By far the best, though by no means the earliest, of them are those of Audefroy le Bastard, who, according to the late M. Paulin Paris, may be fixed at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Audefroy's poems are very much alike in plan, telling for the most part how the course of some impeded true love at last ran smooth. They rank with the very best mediaeval poetry in colour, in lively painting of manners and feelings, and in grace of versification. Unfortunately they are one and all rather too long for quotation here. The anonymous Romance of 'Bele Erembors' will represent the class well enough. The rhyme still bears traces of assonance, which is thought to have prevailed till Audefroy's time: —

Quant vient en mai, que l'on dit as lons jors,
Que Frans en France repairent de roi cort,
Reynauz repaire devant el premier front
Si s'en passa lez lo mes Arembor,
Ainz n'en designa le chief drecier a mont.
E Raynaut amis!

Bele Erembors a la fenestre au jor
Sor ses genolz tient paile de color;
Voit Frans de France qui repairent de cort,
E voit Raynaut devant el premier front:
En haut parole, si a dit sa raison.
E Raynaut amis!

'Amis Raynaut, j'ai ja veu cel jor
Se passisoiz selon mon pere tor,
Dolanz fussiez se ne parlasse a vos.'
'Ja mesfaistes, fille d'Empereor,
Autrui amastes, si obliastes nos.'
E Raynaut amis!

'Sire Raynaut, je m'en escondirai:
A cent puceles sor sainz vos jurerai,
A trente dames que avuec moi menrai,
C'onques nul hom fors vostre cors n'amai.
Prennez l'emmende et je vos baisera.'
E Raynaut amis!

Li cuens Raynauz en monta lo degre,
Gros par espauls, greles par lo baudre;
Blonde ot lo poil, menu, recercele:
En nule terre n'ot so biau bachelier.
Voit l'Erembors, so comence a plorer.
E Raynaut amis!

Li cuens Raynaudz est montez en la tor,
Si s'est assis en un lit point a flors,
Dejoste lui se siet bele Erembors.

* * * * *

Lors recomencent lor premieres amors.
E Raynaut amis!

The Pastourelle is still more uniform in subject. It invariably represents the knight or the poet riding past and seeing a fair shepherdess by his road-side. He alights and woos her with or without success. In this class of poem the stanzas are usually longer, and consist of shorter lines than is the case with the Romances, while the refrains are more usually meaningless though generally very musical. It is, however, well to add that the very great diversity of metrical arrangement in this class makes it impossible to give a general description of it. There are Pastourelles consisting merely of four-lined stanzas with no refrain at all. The following is a good specimen of the class: —

De Saint Quentin a Cambrai
Chevalchoie l'autre jour;
Les un boisson esgardai,
Touse i vi de bel atour.

La colour
Ot freche com rose en mai.
De cuer gai
Chantant la trovai
Ceste chansonnete
'En non deu, j'ai bel ami,
Cointe et joli,
Tant soie je brunete.'

Vers la pastoure tornai
Quant la vi en son destour;
Hautement la saluai
Et di 'deus vos doinst bon jour
Et honour.
Celle ke ci trove ai,
Sens delai
Ses amis serai.'
Dont dist la doucete
'En non deu, j'ai bel ami,
Cointe et joli,
Tant soie je brunete.'

Deles li soir alai
Et li priaï de s'amour,
Celle dist 'Je n'amerai
Vos ne autrui par nul tour,
Sens pastour,
Robin, ke fiencie l'ai.
Joie en ai,

Si en chanterai
Ceste chansonnete:
En non deu, j'ai bel ami,
Cointe et joli,
Tant soie je brunete.'

So various, notwithstanding the simplicity and apparent monotony of their subjects, are these charming poems, that it is difficult to give, by mere citation of any one or even of several, an idea of their beauty. In no part of the literature of the middle ages are its lighter characteristics more pleasantly shown. The childish freedom from care and afterthought, the half unconscious delight in the beauty of flowers and the song of birds, the innocent animal enjoyment of fine weather and the open country, are nowhere so well represented. Chaucer may give English readers some idea of all this, but even Chaucer is sophisticated in comparison with the numerous, and for the most part nameless, singers who preceded him by almost two centuries in France. As a purely formal and literary characteristic, the use of the burden or refrain is perhaps their most noteworthy peculiarity. Herr Bartsch has collected five hundred of these refrains, all different. There is nothing like this to be found in any other literature; and, as readers of Béranger know, the fashion was preserved in France long after it had been given up elsewhere.

Thirteenth Century.

Changes in Lyric.

After the twelfth century the early lyrical literature of France undergoes some changes. In the first place it ceases to be anonymous, and individual singers – some of them, like Thibaut of Champagne, of very great merit and individuality – make their appearance. In the second place it becomes more varied but at the same time more artificial in form, and exhibits evident marks of the communication between troubadour and trouvère, and of the imitation by the latter of the stricter forms of Provençal poetry. The Romance and the Pastourelle are still cultivated, but by their side grow up French versions, often adapted with considerable independence, of the forms of the South⁶⁹. Such, for instance, is the *chanson d'amour*, a form less artfully regulated indeed than the corresponding canzon or sestina of the troubadours, but still of some intricacy. It consists of five or six stanzas, each of which has two interlaced rhymes, and concludes with an *Envoi*, which, however, is often omitted. *Chansonnettes* on a reduced scale are also found. In these pieces the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes, which was ultimately to become the chief distinguishing feature of French prosody, is observable, though it is by no means universal. To the Provençal *tenson* corresponds the *jeu parti* or verse dialogue, which is sometimes arranged in the form of a Chanson. The *salut d'amour* is a

⁶⁹ This miscellaneous lyric for the most part awaits collection and publication. M. G. Raynaud has given a valuable *Bibliographie des Chansonniers Français des XIIIe et XIVe siècles*. 2 vols., Paris, 1884. Also a collection of *motets*. Paris, 1881.

kind of epistle, sometimes of very great length and usually in octosyllabic verse, the decasyllable being more commonly used in the Chanson. Of this the *complainte* is only a variety. Again, the Provençal *sirvente* is represented by the northern *serventois*, a poem in Chanson form, but occupied instead of love with war, satire, religion, and miscellaneous matters. It has even been doubted whether the *serventois* is not the forerunner of the *sirvente* instead of the reverse being the case. Other forms are *motets*, *rotruenges*, *aubades*. Poems called *rondeaux* and *ballades* also make their appearance, but they are loose in construction and undecided in form. The thirteenth century is, moreover, the palmy time of the Pastourelle. Most of those which we possess belong to this period, and exhibit to the full the already indicated characteristics of that graceful form. But the lyric forms of the thirteenth century are to some extent rather imitated than indigenous, and it is no doubt to the fact of this imitation that the common ascription of general poetical priority to the Langue d'Oc, unfounded as it has been sufficiently shown to be, is due in the main. The most courageous defenders of the North have wished to maintain its claims wholly intact even in this instance, but probability, if not evidence, is against them.

Traces of Lyric in the Thirteenth Century.

Quesnes de Bethune.

Thibaut de Champagne.

It has been said that the number of song writers from the end of the twelfth century to the end of the thirteenth is

extremely large. M. Paulin Paris, whose elaborate chapter in the *Histoire Littéraire* is still the great authority on the subject, has enumerated nearly two hundred, to whose work have to be added hundreds of anonymous pieces. It would seem indeed that during a considerable period the practice of song writing was almost as incumbent on the French gentleman of the thirteenth century as that of sonnetteering on the English gentleman of the sixteenth. There are, however, not a few names which deserve separate notice. The first of these in point of time, and not the last in point of literary importance, is that of Quesnes de Bethune, the ancestor of Sully, and himself a famous warrior, statesman, and poet. His epitaph by a poet not usually remarkable for eloquence⁷⁰ is a very striking one. It gives us approximately the date of his death, 1224; and the word *vieux* is supposed to show that Quesnes must have been born at least as early as the middle of the twelfth century. He took part in two crusades, that of Philip Augustus and that which Villehardouin has chronicled. His poems⁷¹ are of all classes, historical, satirical, and amorous, some of last being addressed to Marie, Countess of Champagne; and his Chansons are, in the technical sense, some of the earliest we possess. Contemporary with Quesnes apparently was the personage who is known under the title of Châtelain de Coucy, and whose love for the Lady of Fayel resulted in an interchange

⁷⁰ Philippe Mouskès. This is it: La terre fut pis en cest an Quar li vieux Quesnes estoit mors.

⁷¹ The best edition is in Schéler's *Trouvères Belges*. Brussels, 1876.

of very tender and beautiful verse; the poem known as the lady's own is one of the very best of its kind. Long afterwards lover and lady became the hero and heroine of a romance, which has led some persons to throw doubt upon their historical existence, and the Lady of Fayel has even been deprived of her poem by a well-known kind of criticism. Of more importance is Thibaut de Champagne, King of Navarre, who is indeed the most important single figure of early French lyrical poetry. He was born in 1201, and died in 1253. His high position as a feudal prince in both north and south, the minority of St. Louis, and the intimate relations which existed between the King's mother, Blanche of Castille, and Thibaut, made him the mark for a good deal of satirical invective. There is a tradition that he was Blanche's lover, the only objection to which is that the Queen was thirty years his senior. Thibaut's poems have been more than once reprinted, the last edition being that of M. Tarbé⁷²; this contains eighty-one pieces, not a few of which, however, are probably the work of others. The majority of them are Chansons d'Amour, of the kind just defined. There are, however, a good many Jeux-Partis, and a certain number of nondescript poems on miscellaneous subjects. There is more reason for the common opinion which attributes to Thibaut the marriage of the poetical qualities of northern and southern France, than the mere fact of his having been both Count of Champagne and King of Navarre. His poems have in reality something of the freshness and the

⁷² Rheims, 1851.

individuality of the Trouvères, mixed with a great deal of the formal grace and elegance of the Troubadours. The following may serve as an example: —

Contre le tens qui desbrise
Yvers, et revient este,
Et la mauvis se desguise,
Qui de lonc tens n'a chante
Feraï chanson. Car a gre
Me vient que j'aie en pense
Amor, qui en moi s'est mise.
Bien m'a droit son dart gete.

Douce dame, de franchise,
N'ai je point en vos trove:
S'ele ne s'i est puis mise
Que je ne vos esgarde,
Trop avez vers moi fierte.
Mais ce fait vostre biaute,
Ou il n'i a pas de devise,
Tant en i a grand plante.

En moi n'a point d'astenance
Que je puisse aillors penser,
Pors que la, ou conoissance
Ne merci ne puis trover.
Bien fui fait por li amer;
Car ne m'en puis saoler.
Et quant plus aurai cheance,

Plus la me convendra douter.

D'une riens sui en doutance,
Que je ne puis plus celer,
Qu'en li n'ait un po d'enfance.
Ce me fait deconforter,
Que s'a moi a bon penser
Ne l'ose ele desmontrer.
Si feist qu'a sa semblance
Le poisse deviner.

Des que je li fis priere
Et la pris a esgarder,
Me fist amors la lumiere
Des iels par le cuer passer.
Cil conduit me fait grever:
Dont je ne me soi garder:
Ne ne puet torner arriere
Mon cuer; miex voudrait crever.

Dame, a vos m'estuet clamer,
Et que merci vos requiere.
Diex m'i laist pitie trover!

Minor Singers.

Adam de la Halle.

Besides Thibaut there are not a few other song writers of the thirteenth century, who rise out of the crowd named by

M. Paulin Paris. Some of these, as might be expected, are famous for their achievements in other departments of literature. Such are Adam de la Halle, Jean Bodel, Guyot de Provins. There are, however, two, Gace Brulé and Colin Muset, who survive solely but worthily as song writers. Gace Brulé was a knight of Champagne, Colin Muset a professed minstrel. The former chiefly composed sentimental work; the latter, with the proverbial or professional gaiety of his class, drew nearer to the satirical tone of the Fabliau writers. His best-known and most usually quoted work describes the different welcome which he receives from his family on his return from professional tours, according to the success or ill-success with which he has met. Two other poets, Adam de la Halle and Rutebœuf, are far more prominent in literary history. Adam de la Halle⁷³ bore the surname 'Le Bossu d'Arras,' from his native town, though the term hunchback seems to have had no literal application to him. His exact date is not known, but it must probably have been from the fourth to the ninth decade of the thirteenth century. His dramatic works, which are of signal importance, will be noticed elsewhere. But besides these he has left some seventy or eighty lyrical pieces of one kind or another. Adam's life was not uneventful; he was at first a monk, but left his convent and married. Then he proved as faithless to his temporal as he had

⁷³ The most convenient place to look for Adam's history and work is *Le Théâtre Français au Moyen Age*. Par Monmerqué et Michel. Paris, 1874. There are also separate editions of him by Coussemaker, and more recently by A. Rambeau. Marburg, 1886.

been to his spiritual vows. He lampooned his wife, his family, his townsmen, and, shaking the dust of Arras from his feet, retired first to Douai and then to the court of Robert of Artois, whom he accompanied to Italy. He died in that country about 1288. The style of Adam de la Halle varies from the coarsest satire to the most graceful tenderness. Of the latter the following song is a good specimen: —

Diex!
Comment porroie
Trouver voie
D'aler a chelui
Cui amiete je sui?
Chainturelle, va-i
En lieu de mi;
Car tu fus sieue aussi,
Si m'en conquerra miex.

Mais comment serai sans ti?
Dieus!
Chainturelle, mar vous vi;
Au deschaindre m'ochies;
De mes grietes a vous me confortoie,
Quant je vous sentoie,
Ai mi!
A le saveur de mon ami.
Ne pour quant d'autres en ai,
A cleus d'argent et de soie,

Pour men user.
Mais lasse! comment porroie
Sans cheli durer
Qui me tient en joie?

Canchonnete, chelui proie
Qui le m'envoya,
Puis que jou ne puis aler la.
Qu'il en viengne a moi,
Chi droit,
A jour failli,
Pour faire tous ses boins,
Et il m'orra,
Quant il ert joins,
Canter a haute vois:
Par chi va la mignotise,
Par chi ou je vois.

Rutebœuf

Rutebœuf (whose name appears to be a nickname only) has been more fortunate than most of the poets of early France in leaving a considerable and varied work behind him, and in having it well and collectively edited⁷⁴. Little or nothing, however, is known about him, except from allusions in his own verse. He was probably born about 1230; he was certainly married in 1260; there is no allusion in his poems to any

⁷⁴ By A. Jubinal. 2nd edition. 3 vols. Paris, 1874.

event later than 1285. By birth he may have been either a Burgundian or a Parisian. His work which, as has been said, is not inconsiderable in volume, falls into three well-marked divisions in point of subject. The first consists of personal and of comic poems; the second of poems sometimes satirical, sometimes panegyrical, on public personages and events; the third, which is apparently with reason assigned to the latest period of his life, of devotional poems. In the first division *La Pauvreté Rutebœuf*, *Le Mariage Rutebœuf*, etc., are complaints of his woeful condition; complaints, however, in which there is nearly as much satire as appeal. Others, such as *Renart le Bestourné*, *Le Dit des Cordeliers*, *Frère Denise*, *Le Dit de l'Erberie*, are poems of the Fabliau kind. In all these there are many lively strokes of satire, and not a little of the reckless gaiety, chequered here and there with deeper feeling, which has always been a characteristic of a certain number of French poets. Rutebœuf's sarcasm is especially directed towards the monastic orders. The second class of poems, which is numerous, displays a more elevated strain of thought. Many of these poems are *complaintes* or elaborate elegies (often composed on commission) for distinguished persons, such as Geoffroy de Sargines and Guillaume de Saint Amour. Others, such as the *Complainte d'Outremer*, the *Complainte de Constantinople*, the *Dit de la Voie de Tunes*, the *Débat du Croisé et du Décroisé*, are comments on the politics and history of the time, for the most part strongly in favour of the crusading spirit, and reproaching

the nobility of France with their degeneracy. 'Mort sont Ogier et Charlemagne' is an often-quoted exclamation of Rutebœuf in this sense. The third class includes *La Mort Rutebœuf*, otherwise *La Repentance Rutebœuf*, *La Voie de Paradis*, various poems to the Virgin, the lives of St. Mary of Egypt and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and the miracle play of *Théophile*. Rutebœuf's favourite metres are either the continuous octosyllabic couplet, or else a stanza composed of an octosyllabic couplet and a line of four syllables, the termination of the latter being caught up by the succeeding couplet. In this the *Mariage* is written, of which a specimen may be given: —

En l'an de l'incarnacion,
VIII jors après la nascion
Jhesu qui soufri passïon,
en l'an soissante,
qu'arbres n'a foille, oisel ne chante,
fis je toute la rien dolante
que de cuer m'aime:
nis li musarz musart me clame.
or puis filer, qu'il me faut traime;
mult ai a faire.
deus ne fist cuer tant de pute aire,
tant li aie fait de contraire
ne de martire,
s'il en mon martire se mire,
qui ne doie de bon cuer dire
'je te claim cuite.'

envoier un home en Egypte,
ceste dolor est plus petite
que n'est la moie;
je n'en puis mais se je m'esmoie.
l'en dit que fous qui ne foloie
pert sa saison:
sui je mariëz sanz raison?
or n'ai ne borde ne maison.
encor plus fort:
por plus doner de reconfort
a ceus qui me heent de mort,
tel fame ai prise
que nus fors moi n'aime ne prise,
et s'estoit povre et entreprise,
quant je la pris.
a ci mariage de pris,
c'or sui povres et entrepris
ausi comme ele,
et si n'est pas gente ne bele.
cinquante anz a en s'escuële,
s'est maigre et seche:
n'ai pas paor qu'ele me treche.
despuis que fu nez en la greche
deus de Marie,
ne fu mais tele espouserie.
je sui toz plains d'envoiserie:
bien pert a l'uevre.

Though he has less of the 'lyrical cry' than some others,

Rutebœuf is perhaps the most vigorous poet of his time.

Lais. Marie de France.

There is one division of early poetry which may also be noticed under this head, though it is sometimes dealt with as a kind of miniature epic. This is the *lai*, a term which is used in old French poetry with two different significations. The Trouvères of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries made of it a regular lyrical form. But the most famous of its examples, those which now pass under the name of Marie de France, are narrative poems in octosyllabic verse and varying in length considerably. It is agreed that the term and the thing are of Breton origin; and the opinion which seems most probable is that the word originally had reference rather to the style of music with which the harper accompanied his verse, than to the measure, arrangement, or subject of the latter. As to Marie herself⁷⁵, nothing is known about her with certainty. She lived in England in the reign of Henry III, and often gives English equivalents for her French words. The *lais* which we possess, written by her and attributed to her, are fourteen in number. They bear the titles of *Gugemer*, *Equitan*, *Le Fresne*, *Le Bisclaveret*, *Lanval*, *Les Deux Amants*, *Ywenec*, *Le Laustic*, *Milun*, *Le Chaitivel*, *Le Chèvrefeuille*, *Eliduc*, *Graelent* and *L'Espine*. Mr. O'Shaughnessy

⁷⁵ Ed. Roquefort. 2 vols. Paris, 1820. The first volume contains the lays; the later the fables, which have been noticed in the last chapter. Later edition, Warnke. Halle, 1885. Marie also wrote a poem on the Purgatory of St. Patrick. Three other lays, *Tidorel*, *Gringamor*, and *Tiolet* have been attributed to her, and are printed in *Romania*, vol. viii.

has paraphrased several of these in English⁷⁶; they are all narrative in character. Their distinguishing features are fluent and melodious versification, pure and graceful language – among the purest and most graceful, though decidedly Norman in character, of the time – true poetical feeling, and a lively faculty of invention and description. After Marie there was a tendency to approximate the *lai* to the Provençal *descort*, and at last, as we have said, it acquired rules and a form quite alien from those of its earlier examples. There is a general though not a universal inclination to melancholy of subject in the early lays, a few of which are anonymous.

Note to Third Edition.— M. Gaston Paris has expressed some surprise at my remarks on metre (p. 63). This from so accomplished a scholar is a curious instance of the difficulty which Frenchmen seem to feel in appreciating quantity. To an English eye and ear which have been trained to classical prosody the trochaic rhythm of, for instance, the Pastourelle quoted on p. 65, is unmistakable, and there are anapaestic metres to be found here and there in early poems of the same kind. Indeed, all French poetry is easily scanned quantitatively, though the usual authorities protest against such scansion. Voltaire, it is said, took Turgot's hexameters for prose, and the significance of this is the same whether the mistake, as is probable, was mischievous or whether it was genuine.

⁷⁶ *Lays of France*, London, 1872.

CHAPTER VII

SERIOUS AND ALLEGORICAL POETRY

In consequence of the slowness with which prose was used for any regular literary purpose in France, verse continued to do duty for it until a comparatively late period in almost all departments of literature. By the very earliest years of the twelfth century, and probably much earlier (though we have no certain evidence of this latter fact), documents of all kinds began to be written in verse of various forms. Among the earliest serious verse that was written rank, as we might expect, verse chronicles. It was not till 1200 at soonest that long translations from the Latin in French prose were made, but such translations, and original works as well, were written in French verse long before.

Verse Chronicles.

The rhymed Chronicles were numerous, but, with rare exceptions, they cannot be said to be of any very great literary importance. Whether they were imitated directly from the *Chansons de Geste*s, or *vice versa*, is a question which, as it happens, can be settled without difficulty. For they are almost all in octosyllabic couplets, a metre certainly later than the assonanced decasyllabics of the earliest *Chansons*. The latter form and the somewhat later dodecasyllable or Alexandrine are

rarely used for Verse Chronicles, the most remarkable exception being the spirited *Combat des Trente*⁷⁷, which is however very late, and the *Chronique de du Guesclin* of the same date. There are earlier examples of history in Alexandrines (some are found in the twelfth century, such as the account of Henry the Second's Scotch Wars by Jordan Fantome, Chancellor of the diocese of Winchester), but they are not numerous or important. It is not unworthy of notice that the majority of the early Verse Chronicles are English or Anglo-Norman. The first of importance is that of Geoffrey Gaymar, whose Chronicle of English history was written about 1146. Gaymar was followed by a much better known writer, the Jerseyman Wace⁷⁸, who not only, as has been mentioned, versified Geoffrey of Monmouth into the *Brut*⁷⁹, but produced the important *Roman de Rou*⁸⁰, giving the history of the Dukes of Normandy and of the Conquest of England. The date of the *Brut* is 1155, of the *Rou* 1160. This latter is the better of the two, though Wace was not a great poet. It consists chiefly of octosyllabics, with a curious insertion of Alexandrines in rhymed not assonanced *laissez*. Wace was followed by Benoist de Sainte-More, who extended

⁷⁷ This is an account of the battle of thirty Englishmen and thirty Bretons in the Edwardian wars.

⁷⁸ There is, it appears, no authority for the Christian name of Robert which used to be given to Wace.

⁷⁹ Wace's *Brut* is not the only one. The title seems to have become a common name.

⁸⁰ The old edition of the *Roman de Rou*, by Pluquet, has been entirely superseded by that of Dr. Hugo Andresen. 2 vols. Heilbronn, 1877-1879.

his Chronicle of the Dukes of Normandy to more than forty thousand verses. The 'Life of St. Thomas' (Becket), by Garnier de Pont St. Maxence, also deserves notice, as does an anonymous poem on the English wars in Ireland. But the most interesting of this group is probably the history⁸¹ of William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, who died in 1219 and who during his life played a great part in England. It abounds in passages of historical interest and literary value. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the practice of writing history in verse gradually died out, yet some of the most important examples date from this time. Such are the Chronicles of Philippe Mouskès⁸², a Fleming, in more than thirty thousand verses, extending from the Siege of Troy to the year 1243. Mouskès is of some importance in literary history, because of the great extent to which he has drawn on the Chansons de Gestes for his information. In 1304 Guillaume Guiart, a native of Orleans, wrote in twelve thousand verses a Chronicle of the thirteenth century, including a few years earlier and later. There are a large number of other Verse Chronicles, but few of them are of much importance historically, and fewer still of any literary interest.

History, however, was by no means the only serious subject which took this incongruous form in the middle ages. The amount of miscellaneous verse written during the period

⁸¹ Discovered recently in the Middlehill collection, and known chiefly by an article in *Romania* (Jan. 1882), giving an abstract and specimens.

⁸² Ed. Reiffenberg. Brussels, 1835-1845.

between the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the fifteenth century is indeed enormous. Only a very small portion of it has ever been printed, and the mere summary description of the manuscripts which contain it is as yet far from complete. If it be said generally that, during the greater part of these three hundred years, the first impulse of any one who wished to write, no matter on what subject, was to write in verse, and that the popular notion of the want of literary tastes in the middle ages is utterly mistaken, some idea may be formed of the vast extent of literature, poetical in form, which was then produced. Much no doubt of this literature is not in the least worthy of detailed notice; much, whether worthy or not, must from mere considerations of space and proportion remain unnoticed here. What is possible, is to indicate briefly the chief forms, authors, and subjects, which fall under the heading of this chapter, and to give a somewhat detailed account of the great serious poem of mediæval France, the *Roman de la Rose*. Peculiarities of metre and so forth will be indicated where it is necessary, but it may be said generally that the great mass of this literature is in octosyllabic couplets.

Miscellaneous Satirical Verse.

It has already been observed in discussing the Fabliaux that the first enquirers into old French literature were led to include a very miscellaneous assortment of poems under that head; and it may now be added that this miscellaneous assortment with much else constitutes the *farrago* of the present chapter. The two

great poems of the *Roman du Renart* and the *Roman de la Rose* stand as representatives of the more or less serious poetry of the time, and everything else may be said to be included between them. Beginning nearest to the *Roman du Renart* and its kindred Fabliaux, we find a vast number of half-satirical styles of poetry, many, if not most of them, known (according to what has been noted in the preface as characteristic of mediaeval literature) by distinctive form-names. Of these *dits* and *débats* have already been noticed, but it is not easy to give a notion of the number of the existing examples, or of the extraordinary diversity of subjects to which both, and especially the *dits*, extend. Perhaps some estimate may be formed from the fact that the *dits* of three Flemish poets alone, Baudouin de Condé, Jean de Condé, and Watriquet de Couvin, fill four stout octavo volumes⁸³. The subjects of these and of the large number of *dits* composed by other writers and anonymous are almost innumerable. The earliest are for the most part simple enumerations of the names of streets, of street cries, of guilds, of coins, and such-like things. By degrees they become more definitely didactic, and at last allegorical moralising masters them as it does almost every other kind of poetry in the fourteenth century. The *débat*, sometimes called *dispute*, or *bataille*, is an easily understood variety of the *dit*. Rutebœuf's principal *débat* has been named; another in a less serious spirit is that between *Charlot et le Barbier*. There is a *Bataille des Vins*, a *Bataille de Carême et de Charnage*, a

⁸³ Ed. Schéler. Brussels, 1866-1868.

Débat de l'Hiver et l'Été, etc., etc. Another name much used for half-satirical, half-didactic verse was that of *Bible*, of which the most famous (probably because it was the first known) is that of Guyot de Provins, – a violent onslaught on the powers that were in Church and State by a discontented monk. An extract from it will illustrate this division of the subject as well as anything else: —

Des fisiciens me merveil:
de lor huevre et de lor conseil
rai ge certes mont grant merveille,
nule vie ne s'apareille
a la lor, trop par est diverse
et sor totes autres perverse.
bien les nomme li communs nons;
mais je ne cuit qu'i ne soit hons
qui ne les doie mont douter.
il ne voudroient ja trover
nul home sanz aucun mehaing.
maint oingnement font e maint baing
ou il n'a ne senz ne raison,
cil eschape d'orde prison
qui de lor mains puet eschaper.
qui bien set mentir et guiler
et faire noble contenance,
tout ont trové fors la créance
que les genz ont lor fait a bien.
tiex mil se font fisicien

qui n'en sevent voir nes que gié.
li plus maistre sont mont changié
de grant ennui, n'il n'est mestiers
dont il soit tant de mençongiers.
il ocïent mont de la gent:
ja n'ont ne ami ne parent
que il volsissent trover sain;
de ce resont il trop vilain.
mont a d'ordure en ces liens.
qui en main a fisiciens,
se met par els. il m'ont ëu
entre lor mains: onques ne fu,
ce cuit, nule plus orde vie.
je n'aim mie lor compaignie,
si m'aït dex, qant je sui sains:
honiz est qui chiet en lor mains.
par foi, qant je malades fui,
moi covint soffrir lor ennui.

Testaments of the satirical kind, chiefly noteworthy for the brilliant use which Villon made of the tradition of composing them, *resveries* and *fatrasies* (nonsense poems with a more or less satirical drift), parodies of the offices of the Church, of its sermons, of the miracle plays, are the chief remaining divisions of the poetry which, under a light and scoffing envelope, conceals a serious purpose.

Didactic verse. Philippe de Thaun.

Such things have at all times been composed in verse, and the reason is sufficiently obvious. In the first place, the intention of the writers is to a certain extent masked, and in the second, the reader's attention is attracted. But the middle ages by no means confined the use of verse to such cases. Downright instruction was, as often as not, the object of the verse writer in those days. The earliest, and as such the most curious of didactic poems, are those of Philippe de Thaun, an Englishman of Norman extraction, who wrote in the first quarter of the twelfth century. His two works are a *Comput*, or Chronological Treatise, dedicated to an uncle of his, who was chaplain to Hugh Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, and a *Bestiary*, or Zoological Catalogue, dedicated to Adela of Louvain, the wife of Henry the First. Written before the vogue of the versified Arthurian Romances had consecrated the octosyllable, these poems are in couplets of six syllables. Their great age, and to a certain extent their literary merit, deserve an extract: —

Monosceros est beste,
un corn ad en la teste,
pur çeo ad si a nun.
de buc ele ad façun.
par pucele eat prise,
or oëz en quel guise,
quant hom le volt cacer
et prendre et enginner,
si vent horn al orest

u sis repaires est;
la met une pucele
hors de sein sa mamele,
e par odurement
monosceros la sent;
dune vent a la pucele,
si baiset sa mamele,
en sun devant se dort,
issi vent a sa mort;
li hom survent atant,
ki l'ocit en dormant,
u trestut vif le prent,
si fait puis sun talent.
grant chose signefie,
ne larei nel vus die.

Monosceros griu est,
en franceis un-corn est:
beste de tel baillie
Jhesu Crist signefie;
un deu est e serat
e fud e parmaindrat;
en la virgine se mist,
e pur hom charn i prist,
e pur virginited,
pur mustrer casteed,
a virgine se parut
e virgine le conceut.
virgine est e serat
e tuz jurz parmaindrat.

ores oëz brefment
le signefiement.
Ceste beste en verté
nus signefie dé;
la virgine signefie,
sacez, sancte Marie;
par sa mamele entent
sancte eglise ensement;
e puis par le baiser
çeo deit signefier,
que hom quant il se dort
en semblance est de mort:
dés cum home dormi,
ki en cruiz mort sufri,
ert sa destructiun
nostre redemptiun,
e sun traveillement
nostre reposement.
si deceut dés diable
par semblant cuvenable;
anme e cors sunt un,
issi fud dés et hum,
e içeo signefie
beste de tel baillie.

Bestiaries and *Computs* (the French title of the Chronologies) were for some time the favourites with didactic verse writers, but before long the whole encyclopædia, as it was then understood, was turned into verse. Astrology, hunting, geography, law,

medicine, history, the art of war, all had their treatises; and latterly *Trésors*, or complete popular educators, as they would be called nowadays, were composed, the best-known of which is that of Walter of Metz in 1245.

Moral and Theological verse.

All, or almost all, these works, written as they were in an age sincerely pious, if somewhat grotesque in its piety, and theoretically moral, if somewhat loose in its practice, contained not only abundant moralising, but also more or less theology of the mystical kind. It would therefore have been strange if ethics and theology themselves had wanted special exponents in verse. Before the middle of the twelfth century Samson of Nanteuil (again an Englishman by residence) had versified the Proverbs of Solomon, and in the latter half of the same century vernacular lives of the saints begin to be numerous. Perhaps the most popular of these was the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat, of which the fullest poetical form has been left us by an English trouvère of the thirteenth century named Chardry, by whom we have also a verse rendering of the 'Seven Sleepers,' and some other poems⁸⁴. Somewhat earlier, Hermann of Valenciennes was a fertile author of this sort of work, composing a great *Bible de Sapience* or versification of the Old Testament, and a large number of lives of saints. Of books of Eastern origin, one of the most important was the *Castoiment d'un Père à son Fils*,

⁸⁴ Well edited by Koch. Heilbronn, 1879.

which comes from the *Panchatantra*, though not directly. The translated work had great vogue, and set the example of other *Castoiements* or warnings. The monk Helinand at the end of the twelfth century composed a poem on 'Death,' and a vast number of similar poems might be mentioned. The commonest perhaps of all is a dialogue *Des trois Morts et des trois Vifs*, which exists in an astonishing number of variants. Gradually the tone of all this work becomes more and more allegorical. *Dreams, Mirrors, Castles*, such as the 'Castle of Seven Flowers,' a poem on the virtues, make their appearance.

Allegorical verse.

The Roman de la Rose.

The question of the origin of this habit of allegorising and personification is one which has been often incidentally discussed by literary historians, but which has never been exhaustively treated. It is certain that, at a very early period in the middle ages, it makes its appearance, though it is not in full flourishing until the thirteenth century. It seems to have been a reflection in light literature of the same attitude of mind which led to the development of the scholastic philosophy, and, as in the case of that philosophy, Byzantine and Eastern influences may have been at work. Certain it is that in some of the later Greek romances⁸⁵, something very like the imagery of the *Roman de la Rose* is discoverable. Perhaps, however, we need not look further

⁸⁵ See especially *Hysminias and Hysmine*.

than to the natural result of leisure, mental activity, and literary skill, working upon a very small stock of positive knowledge, and restrained by circumstances within a very narrow range of employment. However this may be, the allegorising habit manifests itself recognisably enough in French literature towards the close of the twelfth century. In the *Méragis de Portlesguez* of Raoul de Houdenc, the passion for arguing out abstract questions of lovelore is exemplified, and in the *Roman des Eles* of the same author the knightly virtues are definitely personified, or at least allegorised. At the same time some at all events of the Troubadours, especially Peire Wilhem, carried the practice yet further. *Merçi, Pudeur, Loyauté*, are introduced by that poet as persons whom he met as he rode on his travels. In Thibaut de Champagne a still further advance was made. The representative poem of this allegorical literature, and moreover one of the most remarkable compositions furnished by the mediaeval period in France, is the *Roman de la Rose*⁸⁶. It is doubtful whether any other poem of such a length has ever attained a popularity so wide and so enduring. The *Roman de la Rose* extends to more than twenty thousand lines, and is written in a very peculiar style; yet it maintained its vogue, not merely in France but throughout Europe, for nearly three hundred years from the date of its commencement, and for more than two hundred from that of its conclusion. The history of the composition of the poem is singular. It was begun by William of Lorris, of whom little or

⁸⁶ Ed. F. Michel. 2 vols. Paris, 1864.

nothing is known, but whose work must, so far as it is easy to make out, have been done before 1240, and is sometimes fixed at 1237. This portion extends to 4670 lines, and ends quite abruptly. About forty years later, Jean de Meung, or Clopinel, afterwards one of Philippe le Bel's paid men of letters, continued it without preface, taking up William of Lorris' cue, and extended it to 22,817 verses, preserving the metre and some of the personages, but entirely altering the spirit of the treatment. The importance of the poem requires that such brief analysis as space will allow shall be given here. Its general import is sufficiently indicated by the heading, —

Ci est le Rommant de la Rose
Où l'art d'amors est tote enclose;

though the rage for allegory induced its readers to moralise even its allegorical character, and to indulge in various far-fetched explanations of it. In the twentieth year of his age, the author says, he fell asleep and dreamed a dream. He had left the city on a fair May morning, and walked abroad till he came to a garden fenced in with a high wall. On the wall were portrayed figures, Hatred, *Félonnie*, *Villonie*, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, Sadness, Old Age, *Papelardie* (Hypocrisy), Poverty — all of which are described at length. He strives to enter in, and at last finds a barred wicket at which he is admitted by Dame Oiseuse (Leisure), who tells him that Déduit (Delight) and his company

are within. He finds the company dancing and singing, Dame Liesse (Enjoyment) being the chief songstress, while Courtesy greets him and invites him to take part in the festival. The god of love himself is then described, with many of his suite – Beauty, Riches, etc. A further description of the garden leads to the fountain of Narcissus, whose story is told at length. By this the author, who is thenceforth called the lover, sees and covets a rosebud. But thorns and thistles bar his way to it, and the god of love pierces him with his arrows. He does homage to the god, who accepts his service, and addresses a long discourse to him on his future duties and conduct. The prospect somewhat alarms him, when a new personage, Bel Acueil (Gracious Reception), comes up and tenders his services to the lover, the god having disappeared. Almost immediately, however, Dangier⁸⁷ makes his appearance, and drives both the lover and Bel Acueil out of the garden. As the former is bewailing his fate, Reason appears and remonstrates with him. He persists in his desire, and parleys with Dangier, both directly and by ambassadors, so that in the end he is brought back by Bel Acueil into the garden and allowed to see but not to touch the rose. Venus comes to his aid, and he is further allowed to kiss it. At this, however, Shame, Jealousy, and

⁸⁷ *Dangier* is not exactly 'danger.' To be 'en dangier de quelqu'un' is to be 'in somebody's power.' *Dangier* is supposed to stand for the guardian of the beloved, father, brother, husband, etc. This at least has been the usual interpretation, and seems to me to be much the more probable. M. Gaston Paris, however, and others, see in *Dangier* the natural coyness and resistance of the beloved object, not any external influence.

other evil agents reproach Dangier. Bel Accueil is immured in a tower, and the lover is once more driven forth.

Here the portion due to William of Lorris ends. Its main characteristics have been indicated by this sketch, except that the extreme beauty and grace of the lavish descriptions which enclose and adorn the somewhat commonplace allegory perforce escape analysis. It is in these descriptions, and in a certain tenderness and elegance of general thought and expression, that the charm of the poem lies, and this is very considerable. The deficiency of action, however, and the continual allegorising threaten to make it monotonous had it been much longer continued in the same strain.

It is unlikely that it was this consideration which determined Jean de Meung to adopt a different style. In his time literature was already agitated by violent social, political, and religious debates, and the treasures of classical learning were becoming more and more commonly known. But prose had not yet become a common literary vehicle, save for history, oratory, and romance, nor had the duty of treating one thing at a time yet impressed itself strongly upon authors. Jean de Meung was satirically disposed, was accomplished in all the learning of his day, and had strong political opinions. He determined accordingly to make the poem of Lorris, which was in all probability already popular, the vehicle of his thoughts.

In doing this he takes up the story as his predecessor had left it, at the point where the lover, deprived of the support of Bel

Acueil, and with the suspicions of Dangier thoroughly aroused against him, lies despairing without the walls of the delightful garden. Reason is once more introduced, and protests as before, but in a different tone and much more lengthily. She preaches the disadvantages of love in a speech nearly four hundred lines long, followed by another double the length, and then by a dialogue in which the lover takes his share. The difference of manner is felt at once. The allegory is kept up after a fashion, but instead of the graceful fantasies of William of Lorris, the staple matter is either sharp and satirical views of actual life, or else examples drawn indifferently from sacred and profane history. One speech of Reason's, a thousand lines in length, consists of a collection of instances of this kind showing the mobility of fortune. At length she leaves the lover as she found him, 'melancolieux et dolant,' but unconvinced. Amis (the friend), who has appeared for a moment previously, now reappears, and comforts him, also at great length, dwelling chiefly on the ways of women, concerning which much scandal is talked. The scene with Reason had occupied nearly two thousand lines; that with Amis extends to double that length, so that Jean de Meung had already excelled his predecessor in this respect. Profiting by the counsel he has received, the lover addresses himself to Riches, who guards the way, but fruitlessly. The god of love, however, takes pity on him (slightly ridiculing him for having listened to Reason), and summons all his folk to attack the tower and free Bel Acueil. Among these Faux Semblant presents himself, and, after some

parley, is received. This new personification of hypocrisy gives occasion to some of the author's most satirical touches as he describes his principles and practice. After this, Faux Semblant and his companion, Contrainte Astenance (forced or feigned abstinence), set to work in favour of the lover, and soon win their way into the tower. There they find an old woman who acts as Bel Accueil's keeper. She takes a message from them to Bel Accueil, and then engages in a singular conversation with her prisoner, wherein the somewhat loose morality of the discourses of Amis is still further enforced by historical examples, and by paraphrases of not a few passages from Ovid. She afterward admits the lover, who thus, at nearly the sixteen-thousandth line from the beginning, recovers through the help of False Seeming the 'gracious reception' which is to lead him to the rose. The castle, however, is not taken, and Dangier, with the rest of his allegorical company, makes a stout resistance to 'Les Barons de L'Ost' – the lords of Love's army. The god sends to invoke the aid of his mother, and this introduces a new personage. Nature herself, and her confidant, Genius, are brought on the scene, and nearly five thousand verses serve to convey all manner of thoughts and scraps of learning, mostly devoted to the support, as before, of questionably moral doctrines. In these five thousand lines almost all the current ideas of the middle ages on philosophy and natural science are more or less explicitly contained. Finally, Venus arrives and, with her burning brand, drives out Dangier and his crew, though even at this crisis of the action the writer

cannot refrain from telling the story of Pygmalion and the Image at length. The way being clear, the lover proceeds unmolested to gather the longed-for rose.

Popularity of the Roman de la Rose.

It is impossible to exaggerate, and not easy to describe, the popularity which this poem enjoyed. Its attacks on womanhood and on morality generally provoked indeed not a few replies, of which the most important came long afterwards from Christine de Pisan and from Gerson. But the general taste was entirely in favour of it. Allegorical already, it was allegorised in fresh senses, even a religious meaning being given to it. The numerous manuscripts which remain of it attest its popularity before the days of printing. It was frequently printed by the earliest typographers of France, and even in the sixteenth century it received a fresh lease of life at the hands of Marot, who re-edited it. Abroad it was praised by Petrarch and translated by Chaucer⁸⁸; and it is on the whole not too much to say that for fully two centuries it was the favourite book in the vernacular literature of Europe. Nor was it unworthy of this popularity. As has been pointed out, the grace of the part due to William of Lorris is remarkable, and the satirical vigour of the part due to Jean de Meung perhaps more remarkable still. The allegorising and the length which repel readers of to-day did not disgust generations whose favourite literary style was the allegorical, and who had

⁸⁸ Chaucer's authorship of the existing translation has been denied. It is, however, certain that he did translate the poem.

abundance of leisure; but the real secret of its vogue, as of all such vogues, is that it faithfully held up the mirror to the later middle ages. In no single book can that period of history be so conveniently studied. Its inherited religion and its nascent free-thought; its thirst for knowledge and its lack of criticism; its sharp social divisions and its indistinct aspirations after liberty and equality; its traditional morality and asceticism, and its half-pagan, half-childish relish for the pleasures of sense; its romance and its coarseness, all its weakness and all its strength, here appear.

Imitations.

The imitations of the *Roman de la Rose* were in proportion to its popularity. Much of this imitation took place in other kinds of poetry, which will be noticed hereafter. Two poems, however, which are almost contemporary with its earliest form, and which have only recently been published, deserve mention. One, which is an obvious imitation of Guillaume de Lorris, but an imitation of considerable merit, is the *Roman de la Poire*⁸⁹, where the lover is besieged by Love in a tower. The other, of a different class, and free from trace of direct imitation, is the short poem called *De Venus la Déesse d'Amors*⁹⁰, written in some three hundred four-lined stanzas, each with one rhyme only. Some passages of this latter are very beautiful.

⁸⁹ Ed. Stehlich. Halle, 1881.

⁹⁰ Ed. Förster. Berne, 1880.

Three extracts, two from the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*, and one from the second, will show its style: —

En iceli tens déliteus,
Que tote riens d'amer s'esfroie,
Sonjai une nuit que j'estoie,
Ce m'iert avis en mon dormant,
Qu'il estoit matin durement;
De mon lit tantost me levai,
Chauçai-moi et mes mains lavai.
Lors trais une aiguille d'argent
D'un aguiller mignot et gent,
Si pris l'aiguille à enfiler.
Hors de vile oi talent d'aler,
Por oïr des oisiaus les sons
Qui chantoient par ces boissons
En icele saison novele;
Cousant mes manches à videle,
M'en alai tot seus esbatant,
Et les oiselés escoutant,
Qui de chanter moult s'engoissoient
Par ces vergiers qui florissoient,
Jolis, gais et pleins de léescé.
Vers une rivière m'adresce
Que j'oï près d'ilecques bruire.
Car ne me soi aillors déduire
Plus bel que sus cele rivière.
D'un tertre qui près d'iluec ière
Descendoit l'iaue grant et roide,

Clere, bruïant et aussi froide
Comme puiz, ou comme fontaine,
Et estoit poi mendre de Saine,
Mès qu'ele iere plus expandue.
Onques mès n'avoie véue
Tele iaue qui si bien coroit:
Moult m'abelissoit et séoit
A regarder le leu plaisant.
De l'iaue clere et reluisant
Mon vis rafreschi et lavé.
Si vi tot covert et pavé
Le fons de l'iaue de gravele;
La praérie grant et bele
Très au pié de l'iaue batoit.
Clere et serie et bele estoit
La matinée et atemprée:
Lors m'en alai parmi la prée
Contreval l'iaue esbanoiant,
Tot le rivage costoiant.

* * * * *

Une ymage ot emprès escrite,
Qui sembloit bien estre ypocrite,
Papelardie ert apelée.
C'est cele qui en recelée,

Quant nus ne s'en puet prendre garde,
De nul mal faire ne se tarde.
El fait dehors le marmiteus,
Si a le vis simple et piteus,
Et semble sainte créature;
Mais sous ciel n'a male aventure
Qu'ele ne pense en son corage.
Moult la ressembloit bien l'ymage
Qui faite fu à sa semblance,
Qu'el fu de simple contenance;
Et si fu chaucie et vestue
Tout ainsinc cum fame rendue.
En sa main un sautier tenoit,
Et sachiés que moult se penoit
De faire à Dieu prières faintes,
Et d'appeler et sains et saintes.
El ne fu gaie ne jolive,
Ains fu par semblant ententive
Du tout à bonnes ovres faire;
Et si avoit vestu la haire.
Et sachiés que n'iere pas grasse.
De jeuner sembloit estre lasse,
S'avoit la color pale et morte.
A li et as siens ert la porte
Dévée de Paradis;
Car icel gent si font lor vis
Amegrir, ce dit l'Évangile,
Por avoir loz parmi la vile,
Et por un poi de gloire vaine,

Qui lor toldra Dieu et son raine.

* * * * *

*Comment le traistre Faulx-Semblant
Si va les cueurs des gens emblant,
Pour ses vestemens noirs et gris,
Et pour son viz pasle amaisgris.*
'Trop sai bien mes habiz changier,
Prendre l'un, et l'autre estrangier.
Or sui chevaliers, or sui moines,
Or sui prélas, or sui chanoines,
Or sui clers, autre ore sui prestres,
Or sui disciples, or sui mestres,
Or chastelains, or forestiers:
Briément, ge sui de tous mestiers.
Or resui princes, or sui pages,
Or sai parler trestous langages;
Autre ore sui viex et chenus,
Or resui jones devenus.
Or sui Robers, or sui Robins,
Or cordeliers, or jacobins.
Si pren por sivre ma compaignie
Qui me solace et acompaignie,
(C'est dame Astenance-Contrainte),
Autre desguiséure mainte,

Si cum il li vient à plesir
Por acomplir le sien désir.
Autre ore vest robe de fame;
Or sui damoisele, or sui dame,
Autre ore sui religieuse,
Or sui rendue, or sui prieuse,
Or sui nonain, or sui abesse,
Or sui novice, or sui professe;
Et vois par toutes régions
Cerchant toutes religions. Mès de religion, sans faille,
G'en pren le grain et laiz la paille;
Por gens avulger i abit,
Ge n'en quier, sans plus, que l'abit.
Que vous diroie? en itel guise
Cum il me plaist ge me desguise;
Moult sunt en moi mué li vers,
Moult sunt li faiz aux diz divers.
Si fais chéoir dedans mes pièges
Le monde par mes privilèges;
Ge puis confesser et assoldre,
(Ce ne me puet nus prélas toldre,)
Toutes gens où que ge les truisse;
Ne sai prélat nul qui ce puisse,
Fors l'apostole solement
Qui fist cest establissement
Tout en la faveur de nostre ordre.'

CHAPTER VIII

ROMANS D'AVENTURES

Distinguishing features of Romans d'Aventures.

The remarkable fecundity of early French literature in narrative poetry on the great scale was not limited to the Chanson de Geste, the Arthurian Romance, and the classical story wrought into the likeness of one or the other of these. Towards the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century a new class of narrative poems arose, derived from each and all of these kinds, but marked by important differences. The new form immediately reacted on the forms which had given it birth, and produced new Chansons de Gestes, new Arthurian Romances, and new classical stories fashioned after its own image. This is what is called the Roman d'Aventures, of which the first and main feature is open and almost avowed fictitiousness, and the second the more or less complete abandonment of any attempt at cyclic arrangement or subordination to a central theme.

Looser application of the term.

Classes of Romans d'Aventures.

Until quite recently it was not unusual to apply the term Roman d'Aventures with less strictness, and to make it include the Romances of the Round Table. There can, however, be no doubt that it is far better to adopt Jean Bodel's three classes

as distinguishing into separate groups the epic poetry of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and to restrict the title Romans d'Aventures to the later narrative developments of the thirteenth and fourteenth. For the second distinguishing mark which we have just indicated is striking and of more or less universal application. In these later poems the ambition of the writer to class his work under and with some precedent work is almost entirely absent. He allows himself complete freedom, though he may sometimes, in order to give his characters greater interest, connect them nominally with some famous personage or event of the earlier cycles. This tendency to shake off the shackles of cyclicism is early apparent. There are episodes even in the Chansons de Gestes which have little or no reference to Charlemagne or his peers: the Arthurian Romances in prose and verse contain long digressions, holding but very loosely to the Table Round, such as the adventures of Tristram and Percivale, and still more the singular episode of Grimaud in the *Saint Graal*. As for the third class, the Trouvères almost from the beginning assumed the greatest licence in their handling of the classical legends. These accordingly were less affected than any others by the change. It is possible to divide the Romans d'Aventures themselves under the three headings. It is further possible to indicate a large class of Chansons de Gestes over which the influence of the Roman d'Aventures has passed. But the Chanson having a special formal peculiarity – the assonanced or rhymed tirade – survived the new influence better than the other two,

and keeps its name, and to some extent its character, while the Romances of Arthur and antiquity are simply lost in the general body of tales of adventure. These tales are for the most part written in octosyllabic couplets on the model of Chrestien, but a very few, such as *Brun de la Montaigne*, imitate the exterior characteristics of the Chanson.

It is further to be noticed that while the earlier poems are mostly anonymous, the Romans d'Aventures are generally, though not always, signed, and bear characteristics of particular authorship. In some cases, notably in those of Adenès le Roi and Raoul de Houdenc, we have a body of work signed or otherwise identified, which enables us to attribute a definite literary character and position to its authors. This, as we have noted, is impossible in the case of the national epics, and not too easy in that of the Arthurian Romances. Until quite recently however the Roman d'Aventures has had less of the attention of editors than its forerunners, and the works which compose the class are still to some extent unpublished.

Adenès le Roi.

Adenès or Adans le Roi perhaps derived his surname from the function of king of the minstrels, if he performed it, at the court of Henry III, duke of Brabant. He was, most likely, born in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, and the last probable allusion to him which we have occurs in the year 1297. The events of his life are only known from his own poems, and consist chiefly of travels in company with different

princesses and princes of Flanders and Brabant. His literary work is however of great importance. It consists partly of refashionings of three Chansons de Gestes, *Les enfances Ogier*, *Berte aus grans Piés*, and *Bueves de Commarchis*⁹¹. In these three poems Adenès works up the old epics into the form fashionable in his time, and as we possess the older versions of the first and last, the comparison of the two forms affords a literary study of the highest interest. His last, longest, and most important work is the Roman d'Aventures of *Cléomadès*⁹², a poem extending to 20,000 verses, and not less valuable for its intrinsic merit than as a type of its class. Its popularity in the middle ages was immense. Froissart gives it the place occupied in the *Inferno* by *Lancelot* in his description of his declaration of love to his mistress, and allusions to it under its second title of *Le Cheval de Fust*⁹³ are frequent. The most prominent feature in the story is the introduction of a wooden horse, like that known to everybody in the Arabian Nights, which, started and guided by means of pegs, transports its rider whithersoever he will. Its great length allows of a very long series of adventures, all of which are told in spirited and flowing verse, though with considerable prolixity and a certain abuse of stock descriptions. These two faults characterise all the Romans d'Aventures and the Chansons which were remodelled in their style. The merits of *Cléomadès* are not so universally

⁹¹ Ed. Schéler. Brussels, v. d.

⁹² Ed. van Hasselt. Brussels, 1866.

⁹³ *The wooden horse.*

found, but its extreme length is not common. Few other Romans d'Aventures exceed 10,000 lines. An extract from this poem will well illustrate the manner of this important class of composition:

Cleomadés vit un chastel
encoste un plain, tres fort et bel,
ou il ot mainte bele tour.
bos et rivieres vit entour,
vignes et praeries grans.
mult fu li chastiaus bien sêans.
la façon dou castel deïsse,
mais je dout mult que ne meïsse
trop longement au deviser:
pour ce m'en voel briément passer.
Du chastel vous dirai le non:
miols sêant ne vit aine nus hom,
lors l'apieloit on Chastel-noble.
n'ot tel dusque en Constantinoble,
ne de la dusque en Osterice
n'ot plus bel, plus fort ne plus rice.
carmans a cel point i estoit
que Cleomadés vint la droit.
forment li sambloit li chastiaus
de toutes pars riches et biaux.
Cleomadés lors s'avisa
que viers le chastel se trera.
bien pensoit qu'en tel liu manoient
gent qui de grant afaire estoient.

che fu si qu'apriés l'ajournee
mult faisoit bele matinee,
car mais estoit nouviaux entrés:
c'est uns tans ki mult est amés
et de toutes gens conjoïs;
pour çou a non mais li jolis.
une tres grant tour haute et forte
avoit asés priés de la porte,
ki estoit couverte de plon,
plate deseure, car adon
les faisoit on ensi couvrir
pour engins et pour assallir.
Cleomadés a avisee
la tour ki estoit haute et lee;
lors pense qu'il s'arestera
sor cele tour tant qu'il savra,
se il puet, la certainté
quel païs c'est la verité.
lors a son cheval adrechîé
viers la tour de marbre entaillié.
les chevillettes si tourna
que droit sour la tour aresta.
si coiemment s'est avalés
que sour aighe coie vait nés.

Raoul de Houdenc.

Raoul de Houdenc is an earlier poet than Adenès, and represents the Roman d'Aventures in its infancy, when it still

found it necessary to attach itself to the great cycle of the Round Table. His works, besides some shorter poems⁹⁴, consist of the *Roman des Eles* (Ailes), a semi-allegorical composition, describing the wings and feathers of chivalry, that is to say, the great chivalrous virtues, among which Raoul, like a herald as he was, gives Largesse the first place; of *Méragis de Portlesguez*, an important composition, possessing some marked peculiarities of style; and possibly also of the *Vengeance de Raguidel*, in which the author works out one of the innumerable unfinished episodes of the great epic of *Percevale*. Thus Raoul de Houdenc occupies no mean place in French literature, inasmuch as he indicates the starting-point of two great branches, the Roman d'Aventures and the allegorical poem, and this at a very early date. This date is not known exactly; but it was certainly before 1228, when the Trouvère Huon de Méry alludes to him, and classes him with Chrestien as a master of French verse. He has in truth some very noteworthy peculiarities. The chief of these, which must soon strike any reader of *Méragis*, is his tendency to *enjambement* or overlapping of couplets. It is a curious feature in the history of French verse that the isolation of the couplet has constantly recurred in its history, and that as constantly reformers have striven to break up the monotony so produced by this process of *enjambement*. Perhaps Raoul is the earliest who thus, as an

⁹⁴ The *Songe d'Enfer* and the *Voie de Paradis*, published by Jubinal, as the *Roman des Eles* has been by Schéler, *Méragis* by Michelant, and the *Vengeance de Raguidel* by Hippeau.

indignant critic put it at the first representation of *Hernani*, 'broke up verses, and threw them out of window.' Besides this metrical characteristic, the thing most noteworthy in his poems (as might indeed have been expected from his composition of the *Roman des Eles*) is a tendency to allegorising, and to scholastic disquisitions on points of amatory casuistry. The whole plot of *Méragis* indeed turns on the enquiry whether physical or metaphysical love is the sincerest, and on the quarrel which a difference on this point brings on between the hero and Gorvein Cadrus his friend and his rival in the love of the fair Lidoine.

Chief Romans d'Aventures.

Many other Romans d'Aventures deserve mention, both for their intrinsic merits and for the immense popularity they once enjoyed. Foremost among these must be mentioned *Partenopex de Blois*⁹⁵ and *Flore et Blanchefleur*⁹⁶. The former (formerly ascribed to Denis Pyramus and now denied to him, but said to date from the twelfth century) is a kind of modernised *Cupid and Psyche*, except that Cupid's place is taken by the fairy Melior, and Psyche's by the knight Parthenopeus or Parthenopex. This poem has great elegance and freshness of style, and though the author is inclined to moralise (as a near forerunner of the *Roman de la Rose* was bound to do), his moralisings are gracefully and naively put. *Flore et Blanchefleur* is perhaps even

⁹⁵ Ed. Crapelet. Paris, 1834.

⁹⁶ Ed. Du Ménil. Paris, 1856.

superior. Its theme is the love of a young Christian prince for a Saracen girl-slave, who has been brought up with him. She is sold into a fresh captivity to remove her from him, but he follows her and rescues her unharmed from the harem of the Emir of Babylon. The delicacy of the handling is very remarkable in this poem, and it has some links of connection with *Aucassin et Nicolette*. *Le Roman de Dolopathos*⁹⁷ has a literary history of great interest which we need not touch upon here. Its versification has more vigour than that of almost any other Roman d'Aventures. *Blancandin et l'Orgueilleuse d'Amour*⁹⁸ is more promising at the beginning than in the sequel. A young knight, hearing of the pride and coyness of a lady, accosts and kisses her as she rides past with a great following of knights. Her coldness is of course changed to love at first sight, and the audacious suitor afterwards delivers her from her enemies; but the working out of the story is rather dully managed. *Brun de la Montaigne*⁹⁹, as has been already mentioned, is written in Chanson form, and deals with the famous Forest of Broceliande in Brittany. *Guillaume de Palerne*¹⁰⁰ is a still more interesting work. It introduces the favourite mediaeval idea of lycanthropy, the hero being throughout helped and protected by a friendly were-wolf, who is before the end of the poem freed from the

⁹⁷ Ed. Brunet et Montaiglon. Paris, 1856.

⁹⁸ Ed. Michelant. Paris, 1867.

⁹⁹ Ed. Meyer. Paris, 1875.

¹⁰⁰ Ed. Michelant. Paris, 1876.

enchantment to which he is subjected. This Romance was early translated into English. Of the same class is the *Roman de l'Escouffle*, where a hawk carries away the heroine's ring, as in a well-known story of the Arabian Nights. *Amadas et Idoine*¹⁰¹ is one of the numerous histories of the success of a squire of low degree, but is distinguished from most of them by the originality of its conception and the vigour of its style. The scenes where the hero is recovered of his madness by his beloved, and where, keeping guard over her tomb, he fights with ghostly enemies, after a time of trial of his fidelity, and rescues her from death, are unusually brilliant. *Le Bel Inconnu*¹⁰², which (from a curious misunderstanding of its older form *Li Biaus Desconnus*) occurs in English form as *Lybius Diasconus*, tells the story of a son of Gawain and the fairy with the white hands, and thus is one of the numerous secondary Romances of the Round Table. So also is the long and interesting *Roman du Chevalier as Deux Espées*¹⁰³; this extends to more than 12,000 lines, and, though the adventures recorded are of the ordinary Round Table pattern, there is noticeable in it a better faculty of maintaining the interest and a completer mastery over episodes than usual. A still longer poem (also belonging to what may be called the outer Arthurian cycle) is *Durmart le Gallois*¹⁰⁴, which contains almost 16,000

¹⁰¹ Ed. Hippeau. Paris, 1863.

¹⁰² Ed. Hippeau. Paris, 1860.

¹⁰³ Ed. Förster. Halle, 1877.

¹⁰⁴ Ed. Stengel. Tübingen, 1873.

verses. The loves of the hero and Fenise, the Queen of Ireland, are somewhat lengthily handled; but there are passages of merit, especially one most striking episode in which the hero, riding through a forest by night, comes to a tree covered from top to bottom with burning torches, while a shining naked child is enthroned on the summit. These touches of mystical religion are rarer in the later Romans d'Aventures than in the Arthurian Romances proper, but with them one of the most remarkable elements of romance disappears. Philippe de Rémy, Seigneur de Beaumanoir (who has other claims to literary distinction) is held to be author of two Romans d'Aventures¹⁰⁵, *La Manekine* (the story of the King of Hungary's daughter, who cut off her hand to save herself from her father's incestuous passion) and *Blonde d'Oxford*, where a young French squire carries off an English heiress. *Jouffrois de Poitiers*¹⁰⁶, which has not come down to us complete, is chiefly remarkable for the liveliness of style with which adventures, in themselves tolerably hackneyed, are handled. Other Romans d'Aventures, which are either as yet in manuscript or of less importance, are *Ille et Galeron* and *Eracle*, both by Gautier d'Arras, *Cristal et Larie*, *La Dame à la Licorne*, *Guy de Warwike*, *Gérard de Nevers* or *La Violette*¹⁰⁷, *Guillaume de Dole*, *Elédus et Séréna*, *Florimont*.

¹⁰⁵ Both edited in extract by Bordier. Paris, 1869. Complete edition begun by Suchier. Paris, 1884.

¹⁰⁶ Ed. Hofmann and Muncker. Halle, 1880.

¹⁰⁷ Ed. Michel.

General Character.

Like most kinds of mediaeval poetry, these Romans d'Aventures have a very considerable likeness the one to the other. It may indeed be said that they possess a 'common form' of certain incidents and situations, which reappear with slight changes and omissions in all or most of them. Their besetting sins are diffuseness and the recurrence of stock descriptions and images. On the other hand, they have their peculiar merits. The harmony of their versification is often very considerable; their language is supple, picturesque, and varied, and the moral atmosphere which they breathe is one of agreeable refinement and civilisation. In them perhaps is seen most clearly the fanciful and graceful side of the state of things which we call chivalry. Its mystical and transcendental sides are less vividly and touchingly exhibited than in the older Arthurian Romances; and its higher passions are also less dealt with. The Romans d'Aventures supply once more, according to the Aristotelian definition, an Odyssey to the Arthurian Iliad; they are complex and deal with manners. Nor ought it to be omitted that, though they constantly handle questions of gallantry, and though their uniform theme is love, the language employed on these subjects is almost invariably delicate, and such as would not fail to satisfy even modern standards of propriety. The courtesy which was held to be so great a knightly virtue, if it was not sufficient to ensure a high standard of morality in conduct, at any rate secured such a standard in matter of expression. In this respect the Court

literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries stands in very remarkable contrast to that which was tolerated, if not preferred, from the time of Louis the Eleventh until the reign of his successor fourteenth of the name.

Last Chansons. Baudouin de Sebourc.

Reference has already been made to the influence which these poems had on the Chansons de Gestes. Few of the later developments of these are worth much attention, but what may be called the last original Chanson deserves some notice. *Baudouin de Sebourc*¹⁰⁸ and its sequel the *Bastard of Bouillon*¹⁰⁹ worthily close this great division of literature, and, setting as they do a finish to the sub-cycle of the *Chevalier au Cygne*, hardly lose except in simplicity by comparison with its magnificent opening in the *Chanson d'Antioche*. They contain together some 33,000 verses, and the scene changes freely. It is sometimes in Syria, where the Crusaders fight against the infidel, sometimes in France and Flanders, where Baudouin has adventures of all kinds, comic and chivalrous, sometimes on the sea, where among other things the favourite mediaeval legend of St. Brandan's Isle is brought in. Not a little of its earlier part shows the sarcastic spirit common at the date of its composition, the beginning of the fourteenth century. The length of the two poems is enormous, as has been said; but, putting two or three masterpieces aside, no

¹⁰⁸ Ed. Boca. 2 vols. Valenciennes, 1841.

¹⁰⁹ Ed. Schéler. Brussels, 1877.

poem of mediaeval times has a more varied and livelier interest than *Baudouin de Sebourc*, and few breathe the genuine Chanson spirit of pugnacious piety better than *Le Bastart de Bouillon*.

CHAPTER IX

LATER SONGS AND POEMS

The Artificial Forms of Northern France.

Not the least important division of early French literature, in point of bulk and peculiarity, though not always the most important in point of literary excellence, consists of the later lyrical and miscellaneous poems of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. By the end of the thirteenth century the chief original developments had lost their first vigour, while, on the other hand, the influence of the regular forms of Provençal poetry had had time to make itself fully felt. There arose in consequence, in northern France, a number of artificial forms, the origin and date of which is somewhat obscure, but which rapidly attained great popularity, and which continued for fully two centuries almost to monopolise the attention of poets who did not devote themselves to narrative. These forms, the Ballade, the Rondeau, the Virelai, etc., have already been alluded to as making their appearance among the later growths of early lyrical poetry. They must now be treated in the abundant development which they received at the hands of a series of poets from Lescurel to Charles d'Orléans.

General Character. Varieties.

The principle underlying all these forms is the same, that is

to say, the substitution for the half-articulate refrain of the early Romances, of a refrain forming part of the sense, and repeated with strict regularity at the end or in the middle of stanzas rigidly corresponding in length and constitution. In at least two cases, the *lai* and the *pastourelle*, the names of earlier and less rigidly exact forms were borrowed for the newer schemes; but the more famous and prevailing models¹¹⁰, the Ballade, with its modification the Chant Royal, and the Rondel, with its modifications the Rondeau and the Triolet, are new. It has

¹¹⁰ The following is an account of these forms, in their more important developments. The *ballade* consists of three stanzas, and an *envoy*, or final half-stanza, which is sometimes omitted. The number of the lines in each stanza is optional, but it should not usually be more than eleven or less than eight. The peculiarity of the poem is that the last line of every stanza is identical, and that the rhymes are the same throughout and repeated in the same order. The examples printed at the end of this chapter from Lescurel and Chartier will illustrate this sufficiently. There is no need to enter into the absurdity of *ballades équivoquées, emperières*, etc., further than to say that their main principle is the repetition of the same rhyming word, in a different sense, it may be twice or thrice at the end of the line, it may be at the end and in the middle, it may be at the end of one line and the beginning of the next. The *chant royal* is a kind of major ballade having five of the longest (eleven-lined) stanzas and an envoy of five lines. The *rondel* is a poem of thirteen lines (sometimes made into fourteen by an extra repetition), consisting of two quatrains and a five-lined stanza, the first two lines of the first quatrain being repeated as the last two of the second, and the first line of all being added once more at the end. The *rondeau*, a poem of thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen lines, is arranged in stanzas of five, four, and four, five, or six lines, the last line of the second and third stanzas consisting of the first words of the first line of the poem. The *triolet* is a sort of rondel of eight lines only, repeating the first line at the fourth, and the first and second at the seventh and eighth. Lastly, the *villanelle* alternates one of two refrain lines at the end of each three-lined stanza. These are the principal forms, though there are many others.

been customary to see in the adoption of these forms a sign of decadence; but this can hardly be sustained in face of the fact that, in Charles d'Orléans and Villon respectively, the Rondel and the Ballade were the occasion of poetry far surpassing in vigour and in grace all preceding work of the kind, and also in presence of the service which the sonnet – a form almost if not quite as artificial – has notoriously done to poetry. It may be admitted, however, that the practitioners of the Ballade and the Rondeau soon fell into puerile and inartistic over-refinements. The forms of Ballade known as *Équivoquée*, *Fratrisée*, *Couronnée*, etc., culminating in the preposterous *Emperière*, are monuments of tasteless ingenuity which cannot be surpassed in their kind, and they have accordingly perished. But both in France and in England the Ballade itself and a few other forms have retained popularity at intervals, and have at the present day broken out into fresh and vigorous life.

Jehannot de Lescurel.

Guillaume de Machault.

Eustache Deschamps

The chief authors of these pieces during the period we are discussing were Jehannot de Lescurel, Guillaume de Machault, Eustache Deschamps, Jean Froissart, Christine de Pisan, Alain Chartier, and Charles d'Orléans. Besides these there were many others, though the epoch of the Hundred Years' War was not altogether fertile in lighter poetry or poetry of any kind. Jehannot

de Lescurel¹¹¹ is one of those poets of whom absolutely nothing is known. His very name has only survived in the general syllabus of contents of the manuscript which contains his works, and which is in this part incomplete. The thirty-three poems – sixteen Ballades, fifteen Rondeaux¹¹², and two nondescript pieces – which exist are of singular grace, lightness, and elegance. They cannot be later and are probably earlier than the middle of the fourteenth century, and thus they are anterior to most of the work of the school. Guillaume de Machault was a person sufficiently before the world, and his work is very voluminous. As usual with all these poets, it contains many details of its author's life, and enables us to a certain extent to construct that life out of these indications. Machault was probably born about 1284, and may not have died till 1377. A native of Champagne and of noble birth, he early entered, like most of the lesser nobility of the period, the service of great feudal lords. He was chamberlain to Philip the Fair, and at his death became the secretary of John of Luxembourg, the well-known king of Bohemia. After the death of this prince at Cressy, he returned to the service of the court of France and served John and Charles V., finally, as it appears, becoming in some way connected with Pierre de Lusignan, king of Cyprus. His works were very numerous, amounting in all to some 80,000 lines, of which until recently nothing but a few extracts was in print. In the last few years, however, *La Prise*

¹¹¹ Ed. Montaiglon. Paris, 1855.

¹¹² The Rondeau is not in Lescurel systematised into any regular form.

*d'Alexandrie*¹¹³, a rhymed chronicle of the exploits of Lusignan, and the *Voir Dit*¹¹⁴, a curious love poem in the style of the age, have been printed. Besides these his works include numerous ballades, etc., and several long poems in the style of those of Froissart, shortly to be described. On the other hand, the works of Eustache Deschamps, which are even more voluminous than those of Machault, his friend and master, are almost wholly composed of short pieces, with one notable exception, the *Miroir de Mariage*, a poem of 13,000 lines¹¹⁵. Deschamps has left no less than 1175 ballades, and as the ballade usually contains twenty-four lines at least, and frequently thirty-four, this of itself gives a formidable total. Rondeaux, virelais, etc., also proceeded in great numbers from his pen; and he wrote an important 'Art of Poetry,' a treatise rendered at once necessary and popular by the fashion of artificial rhyming. The life of Deschamps was less varied than that of Machault, whose inferior he was in point of

¹¹³ Ed. L. de Mas Latrie. Société de l'Orient Latin, Geneva, 1877. This is a poem not much shorter than the *Voir Dit*, but continuously octosyllabic and very spirited. The final account of the murder of Pierre (which he provoked by the most brutal oppression of his vassals) is full of power.

¹¹⁴ Ed. P. Paris. Société des Bibliophiles, Paris, 1875. This is a very interesting poem consisting of more than 9000 lines, mostly octosyllabic couplets, with ballades, etc. interspersed, one of which is given at the end of this chapter. It is addressed either to Agnes of Navarre, or, as M. P. Paris thought, to Péronelle d'Armentières, and was written in 1362, when the author was probably very old.

¹¹⁵ Deschamps is said to have been also named Morel. A complete edition of his works has been undertaken for the Old French Text Society by the Marquis de Queux de Saint Hilaire.

birth, but he held some important offices in his native province, Champagne. Both Deschamps and Machault exhibit strongly the characteristics of the time. Their ballades are for the most part either moral or occasional in subject, and rarely display signs of much attention to elegance of phraseology or to weight and value of thought. In the enormous volume of their works, amounting in all to nearly 200,000 lines, and as yet mostly unpublished, there is to be found much that is of interest indirectly, but less of intrinsic poetical worth. The artificial forms in which they for the most part write specially invite elegance of expression, point, and definiteness of thought, qualities in which both, but especially Deschamps, are too often deficient. When, for instance, we find the poet in his anxiety to discourage swearing, filling, in imitation of two bad poets of his time, one, if not two ballades¹¹⁶ with a list of the chief oaths in use, it is difficult not to lament the lack of critical spirit displayed.

Froissart.

Froissart, though inferior to Lescurel, and though far less remarkable as a poet than as a prose writer, can fairly hold his own with Deschamps and Machault, while he has the advantage of being easily accessible¹¹⁷. The later part of his life having been given up to history, he is not quite so voluminous in verse as his two predecessors. Yet, if the attribution to him

¹¹⁶ Ballades, 147, 149. Ed. Queux de St. Hilaire.

¹¹⁷ Ed. Schéler. 3 vols. Brussels, 1870-1872.

of the *Cour d' Amour* and the *Trésor Amoureux* be correct, he has left some 40,000 or 50,000 lines. The bulk of his work consists of long poems in the allegorical courtship of the time, interspersed with shorter lyrical pieces in the prevailing forms. One of these poems, the *Buisson de Jonece*, is interesting because of its autobiographical details; and some shorter pieces approaching more nearly to the *Fabliau* style, *Le Dit du Florin*, *Le Débat du Cheval et du Lévrier*, etc., are sprightly and agreeable enough. For the most part, however, Froissart's poems, like almost all the poems of the period, suffer from the disproportion of their length to their matter. If the romances of the time, which are certainly not destitute of incident, be tedious from the superabundance of prolix description, much more tedious are these recitals of hyperbolical passion tricked out with all the already stale allegorical imagery of the *Roman de la Rose* and with inappropriate erudition of the fashion which Jean de Meung had confirmed, if he did not set it.

Christine de Pisan.

Christine de Pisan, who was born in 1363, was a pupil of Deschamps, as Deschamps had been a pupil of Machault. She was an industrious writer, a learned person, and a good patriot, but not by any means a great poetess. So at least it would appear, though here again judgment has to be formed on fragments, a complete edition of Christine never having been published, and even her separate poems being unprinted for the most part, or printed only in extract. Besides a collection of Ballades,

Rondeaux, and so forth, she wrote several *Dits* (the *Dit de la Pastoure*, the *Dit de Poissy*, the *Dittié de Jeanne d'Arc*, and some *Dits Moraux*), besides a *Mutation de Fortune*, a *Livre des Cent Histoires de Troie*, etc., etc.

Alain Chartier.

Alain Chartier, who was born in or about 1390, and who died in 1458, is best known by the famous story of Margaret of Scotland, queen of France, herself an industrious poetess, stooping to kiss his poetical lips as he lay asleep. He also awaits a modern editor. Like Froissart, he devoted himself to allegorical and controversial love poems, and like Christine to moral verse. In the former he attained to considerable skill, and a ballade, which will presently be given, will show his command of dignified expression. On the whole he may be said to be the most complete example of the scholarliness which tended more and more to characterise French poetry at this time, and which too often degenerated into pedantry. Chartier is the first considerable writer of original work who Latinises much; and his practice in this respect was eagerly followed by the *rhétoriqueur* school both in prose and verse. He himself observed due measure in it; but in the hands of his successors it degraded French to an almost Macaronic jargon.

In all the earlier work of this school not a little grace and elegance is discoverable, and this quality manifests itself most strongly in the poet who may be regarded as closing the strictly

mediaeval series, Charles d'Orléans¹¹⁸. The life of this poet has been frequently told. As far as we are concerned it falls into three divisions. In the first, when after his father's death he held the position of a great feudal prince almost independent of royal control, it is not recorded that he produced any literary work. His long captivity in England was more fruitful, and during it he wrote both in French and in English. But the last five-and-twenty years of his life, when he lived quietly and kept court at Blois (bringing about him the literary men of the time from Bouciqualt to Villon, and engaging with them in poetical tournaments), were the most productive. His undoubted work is not large, but the pieces which compose it are among the best of their kind. He is fond, in the allegorical language of the time, of alluding to his having 'put his house in the government of Nonchaloir,' and chosen that personage for his master and protector. There is thus little fervency of passion about him, but rather a graceful and somewhat indolent dallying with the subjects he treats. Few early French poets are better known than Charles d'Orléans, and few deserve their popularity better. His Rondeaux on the approach of spring, on the coming of summer and such-like subjects, deserve the very highest praise for delicate fancy and formal skill.

Of poets of less importance, or whose names have not been preserved, the amount of this formal poetry which remains to

¹¹⁸ Ed. Héricault. 2 vols. Paris, 1874. Charles d'Orléans was the son of the Duke of Orleans, who was murdered by the Burgundians, and of Valentina of Milan. He was born in 1391, taken prisoner at Agincourt, ransomed in 1449, and he died in 1465. His son was Louis XII.

us is considerable. The best-known collection of such work is the *Livre des Cent Ballades*¹¹⁹, believed, on tolerably satisfactory evidence, to have been composed by the famous knight-errant Bouciqualt and his companions on their way to the fatal battle of Nicopolis. Before, however, the fifteenth century was far advanced, poetry of this formal kind fell into the hands of professional authors in the strictest sense, *Grands Rhétoriciens* as they were called, who, as a later critic said of almost the last of them, 'lost all the grace and elegance of the composition' in their elaborate rules and the pedantic language which they employed. The complete decadence of poetry in which this resulted will be treated partly in the summary following the present book, partly in the first chapter of the book which succeeds it.

Meanwhile this frail but graceful poetry may be illustrated by an irregular *Ballade* from Lescurel, a *Chanson Balladée* from Machault, a *Virelai* from Deschamps, a *Ballade* from Chartier, and a *Rondel* from Charles d'Orléans.

Jehannot de Lescurel

Amour, voules-vous acorder
Que je muire pour bien amer?
Vo vouloir m'esteut agreer;
Mourir ne puis plus doucement;

¹¹⁹ Ed. Queux de St. Hilaire. Paris, 1868.

Vraiment,
Amours, faciez voustre talent.

Trop de mauvais portent endurer
Pour celi que j'aim sanz fausser
N'est pas par li, au voir parler,
Ains est par mauparliere gent.
Loiaument,
Amours, faciez voustre talent.

Dous amis, plus ne puis durer
Quant ne puis ne n'os regarder
Vostre doue vis, riant et cler.
Mort, alegez mon grief torment;
Ou, briefment,
Amours, faciez voustre talent.

Guillaume de Machault

Onques si bonne journee
Ne fu adjournee,
Com quant je me departi
De ma dame desiree
A qui j'ay donnee
M'amour, & le cuer de mi.

Car la manne descendi
Et douceur aussi,
Par quoi m'ame saoulee
Fu dou fruit de Dous ottri,
Que Pite cueilli
En sa face coulouree.
La fu bien l'onnour garde
De la renommee
De son cointe corps joli;
Qu'onques villeine pensee
Ne fu engendree
Ne nee entre moy & li.
Onques si bonne journee, &c.

Souffisance m'enrichi
Et Plaisance si,
Qu'onques creature nee
N'ot le cuer si assevi,
N'a mains de sousci,
Ne joie si affinee.
Car la deesse honnouree
Qui fait l'assemblee
D'amours, d'amie & d'ami,
Coppa le chief de s'espee
Qui est bien tempree,
A Dangier, mon anemi.
Onques si bonne journee, &c.

Ma dame l'enseveli

Et Amours, par fi
Que sa mort fust tost plouree.
N'onques Honneur ne souffri
(Dont je l'en merci)
Que messe li fu chantee.
Sa charongne trainee
Fu sans demouree
En un lieu dont on dit: fi!
S'en fu ma joie doublee,
Quant Honneur l'entree
Ot dou tresor de merci.
Onques si bonne journee, &c.

Eustache Deschamps

Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?
Il me semble, a mon avis,
Que j'ay beau front et doulz viz,
Et la bouche vermeilette;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

J'ay vers yeulx, petit sourcis,
Le chief blond, le nez traitis,
Ront menton, blanche gorgette;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle, etc.

J'ay dur sain et hault assis,
Lons bras, gresles doys aussis,
Et, par le faulx, sui greslette;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

J'ay piez rondes et petiz,
Bien chaussans, et biaux habis,
Je sui gaye et foliette;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

J'ay mantiaux fourrez de gris,
J'ay chapiaux, j'ay biaux proffis,
Et d'argent mainte espinglette;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

J'ay draps de soye, et tabis,
J'ay draps d'or, et blanc et bis,
J'ay mainte bonne chosette;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

Que quinze ans n'ay, je vous dis;
Moult est mes tresors jolys,
S'en garderay la clavette;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

Bien devra estre hardis
Cilz, qui sera mes amis,
Qui ora tel damoiselle;
Dictes moy se je sui belle?

Et par dieu, je li plevis,
Que tres loyal, se je vis,
Li seray, si ne chancelle;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

Se courtois est et gentilz,
Vaillains, apers, bien apriés,
Il gaignera sa querelle;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

C'est uns mondains paradiz
Que d'avoir dame toudiz,
Ainsi fresche, ainsi nouvelle;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

Entre vous, acouardiz,
Pensez a ce que je diz;
Cy fine ma chansonnette;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

Alain Chartier

O folz des folz, et les folz mortelz hommes,
Qui vous fiez tant es biens de fortune
En celle terre, es pays ou nous sommes,

Y avez-vous de chose propre aucune?
Vous n'y avez chose vostre nes-une,
Fors les beaulx dons de grace et de nature.
Se Fortune donc, par cas d'adventur
Vous toult les biens que vostres vous tenez,
Tort ne vous fait, aincois vous fait droicture,
Car vous n'aviez riens quant vous fustes nez.

Ne laissez plus le dormir a grans sommes
En vostre lict, par nuict obscure et brune,
Pour acquester richesses a grans sommes.
Ne convoitez chose dessoubz la lune,
Ne de Paris jusques a Pampelune,
Fors ce qui fault, sans plus, a creature
Pour recouvrer sa simple nourriture.
Souffise vous d'estre bien renommez,
Et d'emporter bon loz en sepulture:
Car vous n'aviez riens quant vous fustes nez.

Les joyeux fruitz des arbres, et les pommes,
Au temps que fut toute chose commune,
Le beau miel, les glandes et les gommess
Souffisoient bien a chascun et chascune:
Et pour ce fut sans noise et sans rancune.
Soyez contens des chaulx et des froidures,
Et me prenez Fortune doulce et seure.
Pour vos pertes, griefve dueil n'en menez,
Fors a raison, a point, et a mesure,
Car vous n'aviez riens quant vous fustes nez.

Se Fortune vous fait aucune injure,
C'est de son droit, ja ne l'en reprenez,
Et perdissiez jusques a la vesture:
Car vous n'aviez riens quant vous fustes nez.

Charles D'orléans

Le temps a laissie son manteau
De vent, de froidure et de pluye,
Et s'est vestu de brouderie,
De soleil luyant, cler et beau.
Il n'y a beste, ne oyseau,
Qu'en son jargon ne chante ou crie:
Le temps a laissie son manteau
De vent, de froidure et de pluye.
Riviere, fontaine et ruisseau
Portent, en livree jolie,
Gouttes d'argent d'orfavrerie,
Chascun s'abille de nouveau:
Le temps a laissie son manteau.

CHAPTER X

THE DRAMA

Origins of Drama.

The origins of the drama in France, like most other points affecting mediaeval literature, have been made the subject of a good deal of dispute. It has been attempted, on the one hand, to father the mysteries and miracle-plays of the twelfth and later centuries on the classical drama, traditions of which are supposed to have been preserved in the monasteries and other homes of learning. On the other hand, a more probable and historical source has been found in the ceremonies and liturgies of the Church, which in themselves possess a considerable dramatic element, and which, as we shall see, were early adapted to still more definitely dramatic purposes. Disputes of this kind, if not exactly otiose, are not suited to these pages; and it is sufficient to say that while Plautus and Terence at least retained a considerable hold on mediaeval students, the natural tendencies to dramatic representation which exist in almost every people, assisted by the stimulus of ecclesiastical traditions, ceremonies, and festivals, are probably sufficient to account for the beginnings of dramatic literature in France.

Earliest Vernacular Dramatic Forms.

Mysteries and Miracles.

It so happens too that such historical evidence as we have entirely bears out this supposition. The earliest compositions of a dramatic kind that we possess in French, are arguments and scraps interpolated in Latin liturgies of a dramatic character. Earlier still these works had been wholly in Latin. The production called 'The Prophets of Christ' is held to date from the eleventh century, and consists of a series of utterances of the prophets and patriarchs, who are called upon in turn to bear testimony in reference to the Messiah, according to a common patristic habit. By degrees other portions of Old Testament history were thrown into the dramatic or at least dialogic form. In the drama or dramatic liturgy of *Daniel*, fragments of French make their appearance, and the Mystery of *Adam* is entirely in the vulgar tongue. Both these belong to the twelfth century, and the latter appears to have been not merely a part of the church services, but to have been independently performed outside the church walls. It is accompanied by full directions in Latin for the decoration and arrangement of stage and scenes. Another important instance, already mentioned, of somewhat dubious age, but certainly very early, is the Mystery of *The Ten Virgins*. This is not wholly in French, but contains some speeches in a Romance dialect. These three dramas, *Daniel*, *Adam*, and *The Ten Virgins*, are the most ancient specimens of their kind, which, from the thirteenth century onward, becomes very numerous and important. By degrees a distinction was established between

mystery and miracle-plays, the former being for the most part taken from the sacred Scriptures, the latter from legends and lives of the Saints and of the Virgin. Early and interesting specimens of the miracle are to be found in the *Théophile* of Rutebœuf and in the *Saint Nicholas* of Jean Bodel d'Arras, both belonging to the same (thirteenth) century¹²⁰. But the most remarkable examples of the miracle-play are to be found in a manuscript which contains forty miracles of the Virgin, dating from the fourteenth century. Selections from these have been published at different times, and the whole is now in course of publication by the Old French Text Society¹²¹. As the miracles were mostly concerned with isolated legends, they did not lend themselves to great prolixity, and it is rare to find them exceed 2000 lines. Their versification is at first somewhat licentious, but by degrees they settled down into more or less regular employment of the octosyllabic couplet. Both in them and in the mysteries the curious mixture of pathos and solemnity on the one side, with farcical ribaldry on the other, which is characteristic of mediaeval times, early becomes apparent. The mysteries, however, as they became more and more a favourite employment of the time, increased and grew in length. The narrative of the Scriptures being more or less continuous, it was natural that the

¹²⁰ These, as well as *The Ten Virgins* and many other pieces soon to be mentioned, are to be found in Monmerqué and Michel, *Théâtre François au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1874, last ed.; Adam, ed. Luzarches, 1854.

¹²¹ Vols. 1-6. Paris, 1876-1881.

small dramas on separate subjects should by degrees be attracted to one another and be merged in larger wholes. It was another marked characteristic of mediaeval times that all literary work should be constantly subject to *remaniement*, the facile scribes of each day writing up the work of their predecessors to the taste and demands of their own audience. In the case of the mysteries, as in that of the *Chansons de Gestes*, each *remaniement* resulted in a lengthening of the original. It became an understood thing that a mystery lasted several days in the representation; and in many provincial towns regular theatres were constructed for the performances, which remained ready for use between the various festival times. In the form which these representations finally assumed in the fifteenth century, they not only required elaborate scenery and properties, but also in many cases a very large troop of performers. It is from this century that most of the mysteries we possess date, and they are all characterised by enormous length. The two most famous of these are the *Passion*¹²² of Arnould Gréban, and the *Viel Testament*¹²³, due to no certain author. The *Passion*, as originally written in the middle of the fifteenth century, consisted of some 25,000 lines, and thirty or forty years later it was nearly doubled in length by the alterations of Jean Michel. The *Mystère du Viel Testament*, of which no manuscript is now known, but which was printed in the last year of the fifteenth century, is now being reprinted,

¹²² Ed. G. Paris and G. Raynaud. Paris, 1878.

¹²³ Ed. J. de Rothschild. Vols. i-iii. Paris, 1878-1881.

and extends to nearly 50,000 verses. Additions even to this are spoken of; and Michel's *Passion*, supplemented by a *Résurrection*, extended to nearly 70,000 lines, which vast total is believed to have been frequently acted as a whole. In such a case the space of weeks rather than days, which is said to have been sometimes occupied in the performance of a mystery, cannot be thought excessive.

Heterogeneous Character of Mysteries.

The enormous length of the larger mysteries makes analysis of any one of them impossible; but as an instance of the curious comedy which is intermixed with their most serious portions, and which shocked critics even up to our own time, we may take the scene of the Tower of Babel in the *Mystère du Viel Testament*¹²⁴. Here the author is not content with describing Nimrod's act in general terms, or by the aid of the convenient messenger; he brings the actual masons and carpenters on the stage. *Gaste-Bois* (Spoilwood), *Casse-Tuileau* (Breaktile), and their mates talk before us for nearly 200 lines, while Nimrod and others come in from time to time and hasten on the work. The workmen are quite outspoken on the matter. They do not altogether like the job; and one of them says,

On ne peut en fin que faillir.

Besongnons; mais qu'on nous paie bien.

¹²⁴ *Mystère du Viel Testament*, i. 259-272.

A little further on and they are actually at work. One calls for a hod of mortar, another for his hammer. The labourers supply their wants, or make jokes to the effect that they would rather bring them something to drink. So it goes on, till suddenly the confusion of tongues falls upon them, and they issue their orders in what is probably pure jargon, though fragments of something like Italian can be made out. In the very middle of this scene occurs a really fine and reverently written dialogue between Justice and Mercy pleading respectively to the Divinity for vengeance and pardon. Instances such as this abound in the mysteries, which are sometimes avowedly interrupted in order that the audience may be diverted by a farcical interlude.

Argument of a Miracle Play.

Of the miracles, that of *St. Guillaume du Désert* will serve as a fair example. It is but 1500 lines in length, yet the list of *dramatis personae* extends to nearly thirty, and there are at least as many distinct scenes. William, count of Poitiers and duke of Aquitaine, has rendered himself in many ways obnoxious to the Holy See. He has recognised an anti-pope, has driven a bishop from his diocese for refusing to do likewise, and has offended against morality. An embassy, including St. Bernard, is therefore sent from Rome to warn and correct him. William is not proof against their eloquence, and soon becomes deeply penitent. He quits his palaces, and retires to the society of hermits in the wilderness. These enjoin penances upon him. He is to have a heavy hauberk immovably riveted on his bare flesh, and

with sackcloth for an overcoat to visit Rome and beg the Pope's forgiveness. He does this, and the Pope sends him to the patriarch of Jerusalem, William taking the additional penance as a proof of the heinousness of his sin. After this he retires by himself into a solitary place. Here, however, a knight of his country seeks him out, represents the anarchy into which it has fallen in his absence, and implores him to return. But this is not William's notion of duty. He refuses, and to be free from such importunities in future, retires to the island of Rhodes, and there lives in solitude. Irritated at the idea of his escaping them, Satan and Beelzebub attack him and beat him severely; but he recovers by the Virgin's intervention, and serves as a model to young devotees who seek his cell, and like him become hermits. At last a chorus of saints descends to see his godly end, which takes place in the presence of the neophytes. The events, of which this is a very brief abstract, are all clearly indicated in the short space of 1500 verses, many of which are only of four syllables¹²⁵. There is of course no attempt at drawing any figure, except that of the saint, at full length, and this is characteristic of the class. But as dramatised legends, for they are little more, these miracles possess no slight merit.

The general literary peculiarities of the miracle and mystery plays do not differ greatly from those of other compositions in verse of the same time which have been already described. Their great fault is prolixity. In the collection of the *Miracles de la*

¹²⁵ *Miracles de la Vierge*, ii. 1-54.

Vierge, the comparative brevity of the pieces renders them easier to read than the long compositions of the fifteenth century, and the poetical beauty of some of the legends which they tell is sufficient to furnish them with interest. Even in these, however, the absence of point and of dignity in the expression frequently mars the effect; and this is still more the case with the longer mysteries. Of these latter, however, the work of the brothers Gréban – for there were two, Arnould and Simon, concerned – contains passages superior to the general run, and in others lines and even scenes of merit occur.

Profane Drama.

Adam de la Halle.

Although the existence of the drama as an actual fact was for a long time due to the performance and popularity of the mysteries and miracles, specimens of dramatic work with purely profane subjects are to be found at a comparatively early date. Adam de la Halle, so far as our present information goes, has the credit of inventing two separate styles of such composition¹²⁶. In *Li Jus de la Feuillie* he has left us the earliest comedy in the vulgar tongue known; in the pastoral drama of *Robin et Marion* the earliest specimen of comic opera. Independently of the improbability that the drama, once in full practice, should be arbitrarily confined to a single class of subject, there were many germs of dramatic composition in mediaeval literature which wanted but a

¹²⁶ See Monmerqué and Michel, *op. cit.*

little encouragement to develop themselves. The verse dialogues and *débats*, which both troubadours and trouvères had favoured, were in themselves incompletely dramatic. The *pastourelles*, an extremely favourite and fashionable class of composition, must have suggested to others besides the Hunchback of Arras the idea of dramatising them; and the early and strongly-marked partiality of the middle ages for pageants and shows of all kinds could hardly fail to induce those who planned them to intersperse dialogue.

The plot of *Robin et Marion* is simple and in a way regular. The ordinary incidents of a *pastourelle*, the meeting of a fair shepherdess and a passing knight, the wooing (in this case an unsuccessful one) and the riding away, are all there. The piece is completed by a kind of rustic picnic, in which the neighbouring shepherds and shepherdesses join and disport themselves. Marion is a very graceful and amiable figure; Robin a sheepish coward, who is not in the least worthy of her. In Adam's other and earlier drama he is by no means so partial to the feminine sex, and his work, though equally fresh and vigorous, is more complex and less artistically finished. It is in part autobiographic, and introduces Adam confessing to friends with sufficient effrontery his intention of going to Paris and deserting his wife. This part contains a very pretty though curiously unsuitable description of the wooing, which has such an unlucky termination. Suddenly, however, the author introduces his father, an old citizen, who is quite ready to encourage his son

in his evil ways provided it costs him nothing, and the piece loses all regularity of plot. Divers citizens of Arras, male and female, are introduced with a more or less satiric intention, and the last episode brings in the personages of Morgue la Fée and of the *mesnie* (attendants) of a certain shadowy King Hellequin. There is a doctor, too, whose revelations of his patients' affairs are sufficiently comic, not to say farcical. Destitute as it is of method, and approaching more nearly to the Fabliau than to any other division of mediaeval literature in the coarseness of its language, the piece has great interest, not merely because of its date and its apparent originality, but because of numerous passages of distinct literary merit. The picture of the neglected wife in her girlhood is inferior to nothing of the kind even in the thirteenth century, that fertile epoch of early French poetry. The father, too, Maître Henri, the earliest of his kind on the modern stage, has traits which the great comic masters would not disown.

The classes of later secular drama may be thus divided, – the monologue, the farce, the morality, the *sotie*, the profane mystery. The first four of these constitute one of the most interesting divisions of early French literature; and it is to be hoped that before long easy access will be afforded to the whole of it. The last is only interesting from the point of view of literary history.

Monologues.

The monologue is the simplest form of dramatic composition and needs but little notice, though it seems to have met with some

favour from playgoers of the time. By dint also of adroit changes of costume and assistance from scenery, etc., the monologue was sometimes made more complicated than appears at first sight possible, as for instance, in the *Monologue du Bien et du Mal des Dames*, where the speaker plays successively the parts of two advocates and of a judge. The monologue, however, more often consisted in a dramatisation of the earlier *dit*, in which some person or thing is made to declare its own attributes. Of very similar character is the so-called *sermon joyeux*, which, however, preserves more or less the form of an address from the pulpit, of course travestied and applied to ludicrous subjects.

Farces.

The farce, on the other hand, is one of the most important of all dramatic kinds in reference to French literature. It is a genuine product of the soil, and proved the ancestor of all the best comedy of France, on which foreign models had very little influence. Until the discovery and acquisition by the British Museum of a unique collection of farces the number of these compositions known to exist was not large, and such as had been printed were difficult of access. It is still not easy to get together a complete collection, but the reimpression of the British Museum pieces in the *Bibliothèque Elzévirienne*¹²⁷ with M. Ed. Fournier's *Théâtre avant la Renaissance*¹²⁸ contains ample materials for judgment.

¹²⁷ *Ancien Théâtre Français*, vols. 1-3. Paris, 1854.

¹²⁸ Paris, n. d.

In all, we possess about a hundred farces, most of which are probably the composition of the fifteenth century, though it is possible that some of them may date from the end of the fourteenth. The most famous of all early French farces, that of *Pathelin*, belongs, it is believed, to the middle or earlier part of the fifteenth, and speaking generally, this century is the most productive of theatrical work, at least of such as remains to us. The subjects of these farces are of the widest possible diversity. In their general character they at once recall the Fabliaux, and no one who reads many of them can doubt that the one *genre* is the immediate successor of the other. The farce, like the Fabliau, deals with an actual or possible incident of ordinary life to which a comic complexion is given by the treatment. The length of these compositions is very variable, but the average is perhaps about five hundred lines. Their versification is always octosyllabic and regular. But a curious peculiarity is found in most of them as well as in a few contemporary dramas of the serious kind. From time to time the speeches of the characters are dovetailed into one another so as to make up the Triolet (or rondeau of eight lines with triple repetition of the first and double repetition of the second), a form which in the fifteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth centuries has been a favourite with French poets of the lighter kind. The number of personages is never large; it sometimes falls as low as two (in which case the farce might in strictness be called, as it sometimes is, a *débat* or dialogue), and rarely, if ever, rises above four or five. From what has already

been said it will be seen that it is not easy to give any general summary of the subjects of this curious composition. Conjugal differences of one kind and another make up a very large part of them, but by no means the whole, and there are few aspects of contemporary bourgeois life which do not come in for treatment. As an example we may take the *Farce du Pasté de la Tarte*¹²⁹. The characters are two thieves, a pastry-cook, and his wife. The farce opens with a lamentable Triolet, in which the two thieves bewail their unhappy state. Immediately afterwards, the pastry-cook, in front of whose shop the scene is laid, calls to his wife and tells her that an eel-pie is to be kept for him, and that he will send for it later, as he intends to dine abroad. The two thieves overhear the conversation, and the token which is to be given by the messenger, and after trying in vain to beg a dinner, determine to filch one. Thief the second goes to the pastry-cook's wife, gives the appointed token, and easily obtains the pie, upon which both feast. Unluckily, however, this does not satisfy them, and the successful thief, remembering a fine tart which he has seen in the shop, decides that the possession of it would much improve their dinner. He persuades his companion to try and secure it. Meanwhile, however, the enraged pastry-cook has come home hungry and demands his eel-pie. His wife in vain assures him that she has sent it by the messenger who brought his token. Her husband disbelieves her; words run high, and are followed by blows. At this juncture the first thief appears and demands

¹²⁹ *Ancien Théâtre Français*, ii. 64-79.

the tart, whereupon the irate pastry-cook turns his rage upon him. The stick makes him confess the device, and smarting under the blows, he is easily induced to make his companion a sharer in his own sorrows. This is effected by an obvious stratagem. The pastry-cook thus avenges himself of both his enemies, who however, with some philosophy, console themselves with the fact that, after all, they have had an excellent dinner without paying for it.

This piece serves as a fair example of the more miscellaneous farces, in almost all of which the stick plays a prominent part, a part which it may be observed retained its prominence at least till the time of Molière. Of the farces dealing with conjugal matters, one of the most decent, and perhaps the most amusing of all, is the *Farce du Cuvier*, which has nothing to do with the story under the same title which may be found (possibly taken from Apuleius) in Boccaccio, and in the *Fabliaux*. In the farce a hen-pecked husband is obliged by his wife to accept a long list of duties which he is to perform. Soon afterwards she by accident falls into the washing-tub, and to all her cries for help he replies 'cela n'est point à mon rollet' (schedule). Not a few also are directed against the clergy, and these as a rule are the most licentious of all. It is, however, rare to find any one which is not more or less amusing; and students of Molière in particular will find analogies and resemblances of the most striking kind to many of his motives. It is, indeed, pretty certain that these pieces did not go out of fashion until Molière's

own time. The titles of some of the early and now lost pieces which his company for so many years played in the provinces are immediately suggestive of the old farces to any one who knows the latter. The farce was moreover a very far-reaching kind of composition. As a rule the satire which it contains is directed against classes, such as women, the clergy, pedants, and so forth, who had nothing directly to do with politics, and it is thus, more or less directly, the ancestor of the comedy of manners. It is never, properly speaking, political, even indirect allusions to politics being excluded from it. It relies wholly upon domestic and personal interests. Not a few farces, such as that of which we have given a sketch, turn upon the same subject as the *Repues Franches* attributed to Villon, and deal with the ingenious methods adopted by persons who hang loose upon society for securing their daily bread. Others attack the fertile subject of domestic service, and furnish not a few parallels to Swift's *Directions*. Every now and then however we come across a farce, or at least a piece bearing the title, in which a more allegorical style of treatment is attempted. Such is the farce of *Folle Bobance*, in which the tendency of various classes to loose and light living is satirised amusingly enough. A gentleman, a merchant, a farmer, are all caught by the seductive offers of Folle Bobance, and are not long before they repent it. Such again is the *Farce des Théologastres*, in which the students of the Paris theological colleges are ridiculed, the *Farce de la Pippée*, and many others.

Moralities.

In strictness, however, those pieces where allegorical personages make their appearance are not farces but moralities. These compositions were exceedingly popular in the later middle ages, and their popularity was a natural sequence of the rage for allegorising which had made itself evident in very early times, and had in the *Roman de la Rose* dominated almost all other literary tastes. The taste for personification and abstraction has always lent itself easily enough to satire, and in the fifteenth century pieces under the designation of moralities became very common. We do not possess nearly as many specimens of the morality as of the farce, but, on the other hand, the morality is often, though not always, a much longer composition than the farce. The subjects of moralities include not merely private vices and follies, but almost all actual and possible defects of Church and State, and occasionally the term is applied to pieces, the characters of which are not abstractions, but which tell a story with a more or less moral turn. Sometimes these pieces ran to a very great length, and one is quoted, *L'Homme Juste et l'Homme Mondain*, which contains 36,000 lines, and must, like the longer mysteries, have occupied days or even weeks in acting. A morality however, on the average, consisted of about 2000 lines, and its personages were proportionally more numerous than those of the farce. Thus the *Moralité des Enfants de Maintenant* contains thirteen characters who are indifferently abstract and concrete; Maintenant, Mignotte, Bon Advis, Instruction, Finet,

Malduit, Discipline, Jabien, Luxure, Bonté, Désespoir, Perdition, and the Fool. This list almost sufficiently explains the plot, which simply recounts the persistence of one child in evil and his bad end, with the repentance of the other. The moralities have the widest diversity of subject, but most of them are tolerably clearly explained by their titles. *La Condamnation de Banquet* is a rather spirited satire on gluttony and open housekeeping. *Marchebeau* attacks the disbanded soldiery of the middle of the fifteenth century. *Charité* points out the evils which have come into the world for lack of charity. *La Moralité d'une Femme qui avait voulu trahir la Cité de Romme* is built on the lines of a miracle-play. *Science et Asnerye* is a very lively satire representing the superior chances which the followers of *Asnerye*—ignorance—have of obtaining benefices and posts of honour and profit as compared with those of learning. *Mundus, caro, daemonia*, again tells its own tale. *Les Blasphémateurs*, which is very well spoken of, but has not been reprinted, rests on the popular legend upon which *Don Juan* is also based. In short, unless a complete catalogue were given, there is no means of fully describing the numerous works of this class.

Soties.

The Sotie is a class of much more idiosyncrasy. Although we have very few Soties (not at present more than a dozen accessible to the student), although the contents of this class are as a rule duller even than those of the moralities, and infinitely inferior in attraction to those of the farces, yet the Sotie has

the merit of possessing a much more distinct and peculiar form. It is essentially political comedy, and it has the peculiarity of being played by stock personages, like an Italian comedy of the early kind. The Sotie, at least in its purely political form, was, as might be expected, not very long lived. Its most celebrated author was Gringore, and his Sotie, which forms part of *Le Jeu du Prince des Sots et Mère Sotte*, is still the typical example of the kind. Besides these two characters (who represent, roughly speaking, the temporal and spiritual powers), we have in this piece, Sotte Commune, the common people; Sotte Fiance, false confidence; Sotte Occasion, who explains herself; and a good many other allegorical personages, such as the Seigneur de Gayeté, etc. These pieces, however, are for the most part so entirely occasional that their chief literary interest lies in their curious stock personages. It should, however, be observed that of the few Soties which we possess by no means all correspond to this description, some of them being indistinguishable from moralities. A curious detail is that the various pieces we have been mentioning were sometimes, in representation, combined after the fashion of a regular tetralogy. First came a monologue or *cry* containing a kind of proclamation. This was followed by the Sotie itself; then followed the morality, and lastly a farce. The work of Gringore, just noticed, forms part of such a tetralogy.

Profane Mysteries.

The profane mysteries may be briefly despatched. They were the natural result of the vogue of the mysteries proper, with

which they vie in prolixity. Some of them were based on history or romance, such as, for instance, the Mystery of *Troy*. Others corresponded pretty nearly to the history plays of our own dramatists at a later period. Such is the Mystery of the *Siege of Orleans* which versifies and dramatises, at a date very shortly subsequent to the actual events, the account of them already made public in different chronicles.

Societies of Actors.

Of considerable interest and importance in connection with these early forms of drama is the subject of the persons and societies by whom they were represented, a subject upon which it is necessary to say a few words. At first, as we have seen, the actors were members or dependents of the clergy. As the mysteries increased in bulk and demanded larger companies, their representation fell more and more into the hands of the laity, even women in not a few cases acting parts, though this was rather the exception than the rule. It became not unusual for the guilds, which play such an important part in the social history of the middle ages, to undertake the task, and at last regular societies of actors were formed. The most famous of these, the *Confrérie de la Passion* (whose first object was to play the mystery, or rather cycle of mysteries, known by that name), was licensed in 1402, and in the course of the fifteenth century a very large number of rival bodies were more or less formally constituted. The clerks of the Bazoche, or Palace of Justice, had long been dramatically inclined, but it was not till this time that they were

recognised as, so to speak, the patentees of a peculiar form of drama which in their case was the morality. The *Enfants sans Souci*, young men of good families in the city, devoted themselves rather to the Sotie, and the stock personages of that curious form correspond to the official titles of the officers of their guild. Besides these, many other similar but less durable and regularly constituted societies arose, whose heads took fantastic titles, such as Empereur de Galilée, Roi de l'Epinette, Prince de l'Etrille, and so forth. No one of these, however, attained the importance of the Confraternity of the Passion. This was chiefly composed of tradesmen and citizens of Paris, and for a hundred and fifty years it continued to play for the most part mysteries, sacred and profane alike, but the latter, according to its name and profession, less commonly. In 1548 a curious example of the change of times and manners took place, owing in all probability to the influence, direct or indirect, of the Reformation. The Confraternity had its charter renewed, but it was expressly forbidden to play the sacred dramas which it had been originally constituted to perform. Thenceforward secular plays only were lawful in Paris, but the older dramas continued for a long time to be performed in the provinces, and in Brittany have been acted within the last half century. The Confraternity became regular actors of ordinary farces, and as time went on were known under the title of the Comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, a name which brings us at once into the presence of Molière. In these last sentences we have a little outstripped the mediaeval period proper, but in dramatic

matters there is no gap between the ancient and modern theatre until we arrive at the *Pléiade*.

It is not very easy to illustrate the manner of the ancient French drama by citations within ordinary compass; but the following passages, the first from the *Mystery of the Passion*, the second from the original form of *Pathelin*, may serve the purpose: —

Ici deschargent Jesus de la croix.

Simon. or avant donc, puis que ainsi va.
je ferai vostre voulenté;
mais il me poise en verité
de la honte que vous me faictes.
o Jesus, de tous les prophettes
le plus saint et le plus begnin,
vous venés a piteuse fin,
veue vostre vie vertüeuse
quant vostre croix dure et honteuse
pour vostre mort fault que je porte.
se c'est a tort, je m'en rapporte
a ceulx qui vous ont forjugé.

Ici charge la croix a Simon.

Nembroth. Messeigneurs, il est bien chargé;
cheminons, depeschons la voie.

Salmanazar. j'ai grant désir que je le voie

fiché en ce hault tabernacle,
a sçavoir s'il fera miracle,
quant il sera cloué dessus.

Jéroboam. seigneurs, hastés moi ce Jesus
et ces deux larrons aux coustés.
s'ilz ne vuellent, si les battez
si bien qu'il n'y ait que redire.

Claquedent. a cela ne tiendra pas, sire.
nos en ferons nostre pover.

*Ici porte Simon une partie de la croix et
Jesus l'autre et le battent les sergens.*

Dieu le pere. Pitié doit tout cueur esmouvoir
en lamenter piteusement
le martyre et le gref tourment
que Jesus, mon chier filz, endure.
il porte détresse tant dure,
que, puis que le monde dura,
homme si dure n'endura,
laquelle ne peult plus durer
sans la mort honteuse endurer,
et n'aura son saint corps duree
tant qu'il ait la mort enduree,
il appert, car plus va durant,
et plus est tourment endurant,
sans quelque confort qui l'alege.

si convient que la mort abrege
et de l'exécuter s'apreste,
pour satiffaire a la requeste
de dame Justice severe,
qui pour requeste ne priere
ne veult rien de ses drois quitter.
Michel, allés donc conforter
en ceste amere passion
mon filz, plain de dilection,
qui veult dure mort en gré predre
et va sa douce chair estrandre
ou puissant arbre de la croix.

Sainct Michel. pere du ciel et roi des rois,
humblement a chere assimplie
sera parfaicte et acomplie
vostre voulement juste et bonne.
Ici descendent les anges de paradis.

* * * * *

Path. ce bergier ne peut nullement
resondre aux fais que l'on propose,
s'il n'a du conseil; et il n'ose
ou il ne scet en demander.
s'il vous plaisoit moy commander

que je fusse a luy, je y seroye.

Juge. avecques luy? je cuideroye
que ce fust trestoute froidure:
c'est peu d'acquest. *Path.* mais je vous jure
qu'aussi n'en veuil rien avoir:
pour dieu soit. or je voys sçavoir
au pauvret qu'il voudra me dire,
et s'il me sçaura point instruire
pour respondre aux fais de partie.
il auroit dure departie
de ce, qui ne le secourroit.
vien ça, mon amy. qui pourroit
trouver? entens. *Berg. bee. Path.* quel bee, dea!
par le saint sang que dieu crëa,
es tu fol? dy moy ton affaire.

Berg. bee. Path. quel bee! oys tu tes brebis braire?
c'est pour ton prouffit; entens y.

Berg. bee. Path. et dy ouÿ ou nenny,
c'est bien faict. dy tousjours, feras?

Berg. bee. Path. plus haut, ou tu t'en trouveras
en grans depens, ou je m'en doute.

Berg. bee. Path. or est plus fol cil qui boute
tel fol naturel en procès.
ha, sire, renvoyez l'en a ses

brebis; il est fol de nature.

Drapp. est il fol? saint sauveur d'Esture!
il est plus saige que vous n'estes.

Path. envoyez le garder ses bestes,
sans jour que jamais ne retourne.
que maudit soit il qui adjourne
tels folz que ne fault adjourner.

Drapp. et l'en fera l'en retourner
avant que je puisse estre ouÿ?

Path. m'aist dieu, puis qu'il est foul, ouÿ.
pour quoy ne fera? *Drapp.* he dea, sire,
au moins laissez moy avant dire
et faire mes conclusïons.
ce ne sont pas abusïons
que je vous dy ne mocqueries.

Juge. ce sont toutes tribouilleries
que de plaider a folz ne a folles.
escoutez, a moins de parolles
la court n'en sera plus tenue.

Drapp. s'en iront ilz sans retenue
de plus revenir? *Juge.* et quoy doncques?

Path. revenir? vous ne veistes oncques

plus fol ne en faict ne en response:
et cil ne vault pas mieulx une once.
tous deux sont folz et sans cervelle:
par sainte Marie la belle,
eux deux n'en ont pas un quarat¹³⁰.

¹³⁰ A history of the mediaeval theatre has been undertaken by M. Petit de Julleville, of which two volumes, containing an excellent account of the Mysteries, have appeared (Paris, 1880). Information on other points is rather scattered, but it will be found well summarised in Aubertin, *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature Française au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1876-8), i. 372-570. A complete collection of farces, *soities*, etc. is hoped for from the Old French Text Society.

CHAPTER XI

PROSE CHRONICLES

Beginning of Prose Chronicles.

Grandes Chroniques de France.

In all countries the use of prose for literature is chronologically later than the use of poetry, and France is no exception to the rule. The *Chansons de Gestes* were in their way historical poems, and they were, as we have seen, soon followed by directly historical poems in considerable numbers. It was not, however, till the prose Arthurian romances of Map and his followers had made prose popular as a vehicle for long narratives, that regular history began to be written in the vulgar tongue. The vogue of these prose romances dates from the latter portion of the twelfth century; the prose chronicle follows it closely, and dates from the beginning of the thirteenth. It was not at first original. The practice of chronicle writing in Latin had been frequent during the earlier centuries, and at last the monks of three monasteries, St. Benoit sur Loire, St. Germain des Prés, and St. Denis, began to keep a regular register of the events of their own time, connecting this with earlier chronicles of the past. The most famous and dignified of the three, St. Denis, became specially the home of history. The earliest French prose chronicles do not, however, come from this place. They

are two in number; both date from the earliest years of the thirteenth century, and both are translations. One is a version of a Latin compilation of Merovingian history; the other of the famous chronicle of *Turpin*¹³¹. These two are composed in a southern dialect bordering on the Provençal, and the first was either written by or ascribed to a certain Nicholas of Senlis. The example was followed, but it was not till 1274 that a complete vernacular version of the history of France was executed by a monk of St. Denis – Primat – in French prose. This version, slightly modified, became the original of a compilation very famous in French literature and history, the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, which was regularly continued by members of the same community until the reign of Charles V, from official sources and under royal authority. The work, under the same title but written by laics, extends further to the reign of Louis XI. The necessity of translation ceased as soon as the example of writing

¹³¹ The chronicle of the pseudo-Turpin is of little real importance in the history of French literature, because it is admitted to have been written in Latin. The busy idleness of critics has however prompted them to discuss at great length the question whether the *Chanson de Roland* may not possibly have been composed from this chronicle. The facts are these. Tilpin or Turpin was actually archbishop of Rheims from 753-794, but nobody pretends that the chronicle going under his name is authentic. All that is certain is that it is not later than 1165, and that it is probably not earlier than the middle, or at most the beginning, of the eleventh century, while the part of it which is more particularly in question is of the end of that century. *Roland* is almost certainly of the middle at latest. Curiosity on this point may be gratified by consulting M. Gaston Paris, *De pseudo-Turpino*, Paris, 1865, or M. Léon Gautier, *Epopées Françaises*, Paris, 1878. But, from the literary point of view, it is sufficient to say that, while *Turpin* is of the very smallest literary merit, *Roland* is among the capital works of the middle ages.

in the vernacular had been set, though Latin chronicles continued to be produced as well as French.

Villehardouin.

Long, however, before history on the great scale had been thus attempted, and very soon after the first attempt of Nicholas of Senlis had shown that the vulgar tongue was capable of such use, original prose memoirs and chronicles of contemporary events had been produced, and, as happens more than once in French literature, the first, or one of the first, was also the best. The *Conquête de Constantinople*¹³² of Geoffroy de Villehardouin was written in all probability during the first decade of the thirteenth century. Its author was born at Villehardouin, near Troyes, about 1160, and died, it would seem, in his Greek fief of Messinople in 1213. His book contains a history of the Fourth Crusade, which resulted in no action against the infidels, but in the establishment for the time of a Latin empire and in the partition of Greece among French barons. Villehardouin's memoirs are by universal consent among the most attractive works of the middle ages. Although no actually original manuscript exists, we possess a copy which to all appearance faithfully represents the original. To readers, who before approaching Villehardouin have well acquainted themselves with the characteristics of the *Chansons de Gestes*, the resemblance of the *Conquête de Constantinople* to these latter is exceedingly striking. The form, putting the

¹³² Ed. N. de Wailly. Paris, 1874.

difference between prose and verse aside, is very similar, and the merits of vigorous and brightly coloured language, of simplicity and vividness of presentation, are identical. At the same time either his own genius or the form which he has adopted has saved Villehardouin from the crying defect of most mediaeval work, prolixity and monotony. He has much to say as well as a striking manner of saying it, and the interest of his work as a story yields in nothing to its picturesqueness as a piece of literary composition. His indirect as well as direct literary value is moreover very great, because he enables us to see that the picture of manners and thought given by the *Chansons de Gestes* is in the main strictly true to the actual habits of the time – the time, that is to say, of their composition, not of their nominal subjects. Villehardouin is the chief literary exponent of the first stage of chivalry, the stage in which adventure was an actual fact open to every one, and when Eastern Europe and Western Asia offered to the wandering knight opportunities quite as tempting as those which the romances asserted to have been open to the champions of Charlemagne and Arthur. But, as a faithful historian, he, while putting the poetical and attractive side of feudalism in the best light, does not in the least conceal its defects, especially the perpetual jarring and rivalry inevitable in armies where hundreds of petty kings sought each his own advantage.

Minor Chroniclers between Villehardouin and Joinville.

The Fourth Crusade was fertile in chroniclers. Villehardouin's work was supplemented by the chronicle of Henri de

Valenciennes, which is written in a somewhat similar style, but with still more resemblance to the manner and diction of the Chansons, so much so that it has been even supposed, though probably without foundation, to be a rhymed Chanson thrown into a prose form. This process is known to have been actually applied in some cases. Another historian of the expedition whose work has been preserved was Robert de Clari. Baldwin Count of Flanders, who also accompanied it, was not indeed the author but the instigator of a translation of Latin chronicles which, like the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, was continued by original work and attained, under the title of *Chronique de Baudouin d'Avesnes*, very considerable dimensions.

The thirteenth century also supplies a not inconsiderable number of works dealing with the general history of France. Guillaume de Nangis wrote in the latter part of the century several historical treatises, first in Latin and then in French. An important work, entitled *La Chronique de Rains* (Rheims), dates from the middle of the period, and, though less picturesque in subject and manner than Villehardouin, has considerable merits of style. Normandy, Flanders, and, the Crusades generally, each have groups of prose chronicles dealing with them, the most remarkable of the latter being a very early French translation of the work of William of Tyre, with additions¹³³. Of the Flanders

¹³³ Ed. P. Paris. 2 vols., 1879-80. It is characteristic of the middle ages that this work usually bore the title of *Roman d'Eracle*, for no other reason than that the name of Héraclius occurs in the first sentence.

group, the already mentioned chronicle called of Baudouin d'Avesnes is the chief. It is worth mentioning again because in its case we see the way in which French was gaining ground. It exists both in Latin and in the vernacular. In other cases the Latin would be the original; but in this case it appears, though it is not positively certain, that the book was written in French, and translated for the benefit of those who might happen not to understand that language.

Joinville.

As Villehardouin is the representative writer of the twelfth century, so is Joinville¹³⁴ of the thirteenth, as far as history is concerned. Jean de Joinville, Sénéchal of Champagne, was born in 1224 at the castle of Joinville on the Marne, which afterwards became the property of the Orleans family, and was destroyed during the Revolution. He died in 1319. He accompanied Saint Louis on his unfortunate crusade in 1248, but not in his final and fatal expedition to Tunis. Most of the few later events of his life known to us were connected with the canonisation of the king; but he is known to have taken part in active service when past his ninetieth year. His historical work, a biography of St. Louis, deals chiefly with the crusade, and is one of the most circumstantial records we have of mediaeval life and thought. It is of much greater bulk than Villehardouin's *Conquête*, and is composed upon a different principle, the author being somewhat

¹³⁴ Ed. N. de Wailly. Paris, 1874. Besides the *Histoire de St. Louis*, Joinville has left an interesting *Credo*, a brief religious manual written much earlier in his life.

addicted to gossip and apt to digress from the main course of his narrative. It has, however, to be remembered that Joinville's first object was not, like Villehardouin's, to give an account of a single and definite enterprise, but to display the character of his hero, to which end a certain amount of desultoriness was necessary and desirable. His style has less vigour than that of his countryman and predecessor, but it has more grace. It is evident that Joinville occasionally set himself with deliberate purpose to describe things in a literary fashion, and his interspersed reflections on manners and political subjects considerably increase the material value of his work. It is unfortunate that nothing like a contemporary manuscript has come down to us, the earliest in existence being one of the late fourteenth century, when considerable changes had passed over the language. With the aid of some contemporary documents on matters of business which Joinville seems to have dictated, M. de Wailly has effected an exceedingly ingenious conjectural restoration of the text of the book, but the interest of this is in strictness diminished by the fact that it is undoubtedly conjectural. The period of composition of Joinville's book was somewhat late in his life, apparently in the first years of the fourteenth century, and about 1310 he presented it to Louis le Hutin, though it does not appear what became of the manuscript.

The period between Joinville and Froissart is peculiarly barren in chronicles. Besides the serial publications already noticed, the *Chroniques de France* and the *Chroniques de Flandre*, there are

perhaps only two which are worth mentioning. The first is a *Chronique des Quatre Premiers Valois*, written with exactness and careful attention to authentic sources of information. The other is the *Chronique* of Jean Lebel, canon of Liège. This is not only a work of considerable merit in itself, but still more remarkable because it was the model, and something more, of Froissart. That historian began by almost paraphrasing the work of Lebel; and though by degrees he worked the early parts of his book into more and more original forms according to the information which he picked up, these parts remained to the last indebted to the author from whom they had been originally compiled.

Froissart.

Froissart was born in 1337 and did not die till after 1409, the precise date of his death being unknown. There are few problems of literary criticism which are more difficult than that of arranging a definitive edition of his famous *Chroniques*¹³⁵. In most cases the task of the critic is to decide which of several manuscripts, all long posterior to the author's death, deserves most confidence, or how to supply and correct the faults of a single document. In Froissart's case there is, on the contrary, an

¹³⁵ Ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove. 20 vols., Brussels. Ed. S. Luce, Paris, in course of publication. The edition of Buchon, 3 vols., Paris, 1855, is still the best for general use. Froissart's poems give many biographical details which are interesting, but unimportant. He wandered all his life from court to court, patronised and pensioned by kings, queens, and princes. He was successively *curé* of Lestines and canon of Chimay. In early life he was much in England, being specially patronised by Edward III. and Philippa.

embarrassing number of seemingly authentic texts. During the whole of his long life, Froissart seems to have been constantly occupied in altering, improving, and rectifying his work, and copies of it in all its states are plentiful. The early printed editions represent merely a single one of these; Buchon's is somewhat more complete. But it is only within the last few years that the labours of M. Kervyn de Lettenhove and M. Siméon Luce have made it possible (and not yet entirely possible) to see the work in all its conditions. M. Kervyn de Lettenhove's edition is complete and excellent as far as it goes. That of M. Luce is still far from finished. The editor, however, has succeeded in presenting three distinct versions of the first book. This is the most interesting in substance, the least in manner and style. It deals with a period most of which lay outside of Froissart's own knowledge, and in treating which he was at first content to paraphrase Jean Lebel, though afterwards he made this part of the book much more his own. It never, however, attained to the gossiping picturesqueness of the later books (there are four in all), in which the historian relies entirely on his own collections. Although Cressy, Poitiers, and Najara may be of more importance than the fruitless *chevauchée* of Buckingham through France, the gossip of the Count de Foix' court, and the kite-and-crow battles of the Duke de Berri and his officers with Aymerigot Marcel and Geoffrey Tête-Noire, they are much less characteristic of Froissart. The literary instinct of Scott enabled

him (in a speech of Claverhouse¹³⁶) exactly to appreciate our author. Some of his admirers have striven to make out that traces of political wisdom are to be found in the later books. If it be so, they are very deeply hidden. A sentence which must have been written when Froissart was more than fifty years old puts his point of view very clearly. Geoffrey Tête-Noire, the Breton brigand, 'held a knight's life, or a squire's, of no more account than a villain's,' and this is said as if it summed up the demerits of the free companion. Beyond knights and ladies, tourneys and festivals, Froissart sees nothing at all. But his admirable power of description enables him to put what he did see as well as any writer has ever put it. Vast as his work is, the narrative and picturesque charm never fails; and in a thousand different lights the same subject, the singular afterglow of chivalry, which the influence of certain English and French princes kept up in the fourteenth century, is presented with a mastery rare in any but the best literature. He is so completely indifferent to anything but this, that he does not take the slightest trouble to hide the misery and the misgovernment which the practical carrying out of his idea caused. Never, perhaps, was there a better instance of a man of one idea, and certainly there never was any man by whom his one idea was more attractively represented. To this day it is difficult even with the clearest knowledge of the facts to rise from a perusal of Froissart without an impression that the earlier period of the Hundred Years' War was a sort of golden

¹³⁶ *Old Mortality*, chap. 35.

age in which all the virtues flourished, except for occasional ugly outbreaks of the evil principle in the Jacquerie, the Wat Tyler insurrection, and so forth. As a historian Froissart is, as we should expect, not critical, and he carries the French habit of disfiguring proper names and ignoring geographical and other trifles to a most bewildering extent. But there is little doubt that he was diligent in collecting and careful in recording his facts, and his extreme minuteness often supplies gaps in less prolix chroniclers.

Fifteenth-Century Chroniclers.

The last century of the period which is included in this chapter is extremely fertile in historians. These range themselves naturally in two classes; those who undertake more or less of a general history of the country during their time, and those who devote themselves to special persons as biographers, or to the recital of the events which more particularly concern a single city or district. The first class, moreover, is more conveniently subdivided according to the side which the chroniclers took on the great political duel of their period, the struggle between Burgundy and France.

The Burgundian side was particularly rich in annalists. The study and practice of historical writing had, as a consequence of the Chronicle of Baudouin, and the success of Lebel and Froissart, taken deep root in the cities of Flanders which were subject to the Duke of Burgundy, while the magnificence and opulence of the ducal court and establishments naturally attracted men of letters. Froissart's immediate successor,

Enguerrand de Monstrelet, belongs to this party. Monstrelet¹³⁷, who wrote a chronicle covering the years 1400-1444, is not remarkable for elegance or picturesqueness of style, but takes particular pains to copy exactly official reports of speeches, treaties, letters, etc. Another important chronicle of the same side is that of George Chastellain¹³⁸, a busy man of letters, who was historiographer to the Duke of Burgundy, and wrote a history of the years 1419-1470. Chastellain was a man of learning and talent, but was somewhat imbued with the heavy and pedantic style which both in poetry and prose was becoming fashionable. The memoirs of Olivier de la Marche extend from 1435 to 1489, and are also somewhat heavy, but less pedantic than those of Chastellain. Dealing with the same period, and also written in the Burgundian interest, are the memoirs of Jacques du Clerq, 1448-1467, and of Lefèvre de Saint Rémy, 1407-1436; as also the Chronicle of Jehan de Wavrin, beginning at the earliest times and coming down to 1472. Wavrin's subject is nominally England, but the later part of his work of necessity concerns France also.

The writers on the royalist side are of less importance and less numerous, though individually perhaps of equal value. The chief of them are Mathieu de Coucy, who continued the work of Monstrelet in a different political spirit from 1444 to 1461; Pierre

¹³⁷ Ed. Buchon. Paris, 1858.

¹³⁸ Chastellain has been fortunate, like most Flemish writers, in being excellently and completely edited (by M. Kervyn de Lettenhove. 8 vols., Brussels).

de Fenin, who wrote a history of part of the reign of Charles VI; and Jean Juvenal des Ursins¹³⁹, a statesman and ecclesiastic, who has dealt more at length with the whole of the same reign. Of these Juvenal des Ursins takes the first rank, and is one of the best authorities for his period; but from a literary point of view he cannot be very highly spoken of, though there is a certain simplicity about his manner which is superior to the elaborate pedantry of not a few of his contemporaries and immediate successors.

The second class has the longest list of names, and perhaps the most interesting constituents. First may be mentioned *Le Livre des Faits et bonnes Mœurs du sage roi Charles V.* This is an elaborate panegyric by the poetess Christine de Pisan, full of learning, good sense, and sound morality, but somewhat injured by the classical phrases, the foreign idioms, and the miscellaneous erudition, which characterise the school to which Christine belonged. Far more interesting is the *Livre des Faits du Maréchal de Bouciqualt*¹⁴⁰, a book which is a not unworthy companion and commentary to Froissart, exhibiting the kind of errant chivalry which characterised the fourteenth century, and in part the fifteenth, and which so greatly assisted the English in their conflicts with the French. Joan of Arc was made, as might have been expected, the subject of numerous chronicles and memoirs which have come down to us under the names

¹³⁹ Ed. Michaud et Poujoulat.

¹⁴⁰ Ed. Michaud et Poujoulat.

of Cousinot, Cochon, and Berry. The Constable of Richemont, who had the credit of overthrowing the last remnant of English domination at the battle of Formigny, found a biographer in Guillaume Gruel.

Lastly have to be mentioned three curious works of great value and interest bearing on this time. These are the journals of a citizen of Paris¹⁴¹ (or two such), which extend from 1409 to 1422, and from 1424 to 1440, and the so-called *Chronique scandaleuse* of Jean de Troyes covering the reign of Louis XI. These, with the already-mentioned chronicle of Juvenal des Ursins, are filled with the minutest information on all kinds of points. The prices of articles of merchandise, the ravages of wolves, etc., are recorded, so that in them almost as much light is thrown on the social life of the period as by a file of modern newspapers. The chronicle of Jean Chartier, brother of Alain, that of Molinet in continuance of Chastellain, and the short memoirs of Villeneuve, complete the list of works of this class that deserve mention.

Examples of the three great French historians of the middle ages follow: —

Villehardouin

La velle de la saint Martin vindrent devant Gadres en

¹⁴¹ Ed. Michaud et Poujoulat, in whose collection most of the many authors here mentioned will be also found.

Esclavonie, si virent la cité fermee de halz murs et de haltes torz, et pour noiant demandissiés plus bele ne plus fort ne plus riche. et quant li pelerin la virent, il se merveillerent mult et distrent li uns a l'autre 'coment porroit estre prise tel vile par force, se diex meïsmes nel fait?' Les premieres nés vindrent devant la vile et aëncrerent et atendirent les autres et al matin fist mult bel jor et mult cler, et vinrent les galies totes et li huissier et les autres nés qui estoient arrieres, et pristrent le port par force et rompirent la chaaine qui mult ere forz et bien atornee, et descendirent a terre, si que li porz fu entr'aus et la vile. lor veïssiez maint chevalier et maint serjant issir des nés et maint bon destrier traire des huissiers et maint riche tref et maint pavellon.

Einsine se loja l'oz et fu Gadres assegie le jor de la saint Martin. a cele foiz ne furent mie venu tuit li baron, ear encor n'ere mie venuz li marchis de Montferrat qui ere remés arriere por afaire que il avoit. Estiennes del Perche fu remés malades en Venise et Mahis de Monmorenci, et quant il furent gari, si s'en vint Mahis de Monmorenci après l'ost a Gadrez; mes Estienes del Perche ne le fist mie si bien, quar il guerpi l'ost et s'en ala en Puille sejourner. avec lui s'en ala Rotrox de Monfort et Ives de la Ile et maint autre, qui mult en furent blasmé, et passerent au passage de marz en Surie.

L'endemain de la saint Martin issirent de cels de Gadres et vindrent parler le duc de Venise qui ere en son paveillon, et li distrent que il li rendroient la cité et totes les lor choses sals lor cors en sa merci. et li dus dist qu'il n'en prendroit mie cestui plet ne autre, se par le conseil non as contes et as barons, et qu'il en iroit a els parler.

Endementiers que il ala parler as contes et as barons, icele partie dont vos avez oï arrieres, qui voloient l'ost depecier, parlerent as messages et lor distrent 'por quoi volez vos rendre vostre cité? li pelerin ne vos assaldront mie ne d'aus n'avez vos garde, se vos vos poëz defendre des Venisiens, dont estes vos quites.' et ensi pristrent un d'aus meïsmes qui avoit non Robert de Bove, qui ala as murs de la vile et lor dist ce meïsmes. Ensi entrerent li message en la vile et fu li plais remés. Li dus de Venise com il vint as contes et as barons, si lor dist 'seignor, ensi voelent cil de la dedanz rendre la cité sals lor cors a ma merci, ne je ne prendroie cestui plait ne autre se per voz conseil non' et li baron li respondirent 'sire, nos vos loons que vos le preigniez et si le vos prïon.' et il dist que il le feroit. Et il s'en tornerent tuit ensemble al paveillon le duc por le plait prendre, et troverent que li message s'en furent alé par le conseil a cels qui voloient l'ost depecier. E dont se dreça uns abes de Vals de l'ordre de Cistials, et lor dist 'seignor, je vos deffent de par l'apostoile de Rome que vos ne assailliez ceste cité, quar ele est de crestïens et vos iestes pelerin.' Et quant ce oï li dus, si en fu mult iriez et destroiz et dist as contes et as barons 'seignor, je avoie de ceste vile plait a ma volonté, et vostre gent le m'ont tolu et vos m'aviez convent que vos le m'aideriez a conquerre, et je vos semoing que vos le façoiz.'

Maintenant li conte et li baron parlerent ensemble et cil qui a la lor partie se tenoient, et distrent 'mult ont fait grant outrage cil qui ont cest plait desfet, et il ne fu onques jorz que il ne meïssent paine a cest ost depecier. or somes

nos honi, se nos ne l'aidons a prendre.' Et il vient al duc et li dient 'sire, nos le vos aiderons a prendre por mal de cels qui destorné l'ont.' Ensi fu li consels pris; et al matin alerent logier devant les portes de la vile, et si drecierent lor perrieres et lor mangonials et lor autres engins dont il avoient assez; et devers la mer drecierent les eschieles sor les nés. lor commencerent a la vile a geter les pieres as murz et as lors. Ensi dura cil asals bien por v jors et lor si mistrent lors trenchëors a une tour, et cil commencerent a trenchier le mur. et quant cil dedenz virent ce, si quistrent plait tot atretel com il l'avoient refusé par le conseil a cels qui l'ost voloient depecier.

Joinville

Au mois d'aoust entrames en nos neis a la Roche de Marseille: a celle journée que nous entrames en nos neis, fist l'on ouvrir la porte de la nef, et mist l'on touz nos chevaus ens, que nous deviens mener outre mer; et puis reclost l'on la porte et l'enboucha l'on bien, aussi comme l'on naye un tunnel. pour ce que, quant le neis est en la grant mer, toute la porte est en l'yaue. Quant li cheval furent ens, nostre maistres notonniers escrïa a ses notonniers qui estoient ou bec de la nef et lour dist 'est aree vostre besoingne?' et il respondirent 'oïl, sire, vieingnent avant clerc et li provere.' Maintenant que il furent venu, il lour escrïa 'chantez de par dieu'; et il s'escrïerent tuit a une voiz '*veni creator spiritus.*' et il escrïa a ses notonniers 'faites voile de par dieu'; et il si

firent. et en brief tens li venz se feri ou voile et nous ot tolu la vëue de la terre, que nous ne veïsmes que ciel et yaue: et chascun jour nous esloigna li venz des païs ou nous avions estei neiz. et ces choses vous moustre je que cil est bien fol hardis, qui se ose mettre en tel peril atout autrui chatel ou en pechié mortel; ear l'on se dort le soir la ou on ne set se l'on se trouvera ou font de la mer au matin.

En la mer nous avint une fiere merveille, que nous trouvames une montaigne toute ronde qui estoit devant Barbarie. nous la trouvames entour l'eure de vespres et najames tout le soir, et cuidames bien avoir fait plus de cinquante lieues, et lendemain nous nous trouvames devant icelle meïsmes montaigne; et ainsi nous avint par dous foiz ou par trois. Quant li marinnier virent ce, il furent tuit esbahi et nous distrent que nos neis estoient en grant peril; ear nous estiens devant la terre aus Sarrazins de Barbarie. Lors nous dist uns preudom prestres que on appeloit doyen de Malrut, ear il n'ot onques persecucion en paroisse. ne par defect d'yaue ne de trop pluie ne d'autre persecucion, que aussi tost comme il avoit fait trois processions par trois samedis, que diex et sa mere ne le delivrassent. Samedis estoit: nous feïsmes la premiere procession entour les dous maz de la nef; je meïsmes m'i fiz porter par les braz, pour ce que je estoie grief malades. Onques puis nous ne veïsmes la montaigne, et venimes en Cypre le tiers samedi.

Froissart

Je fuis adont infourmé par le seigneur d'Estonnevort, et me dist que il vey, et aussi firent plusieurs, quant l'oriflambe fut desploiee et la bruïne se chey, ung blanc coulon voller et faire plusieurs volz par dessus la baniere du roy; et quant il eut assez volé, et que on se deubt combatre et assamblar aux ennemis, il se print a sêoir sur l'une des bannieres du roy; dont on tint ce a grant signiffiance de bien. Or approchierent les Flamens et commenchièrent a jetter et a traire de bombardes et de canons et de gros quarreaux empenez d'arain; ainsi se commença la bataille. Et en ot le roy de France et ses gens le premier encontre, qui leur fut moult dur; ear ces Flamens, qui descendoient orgueilleusement et de grant volenté, venoient roit et dur, et boutoient en venant de l'espaule et de la poitrine ainsi comme senglers tous foursenez, et estoient si fort entrelachiés tous ensemble qu'on ne les povoit ouvrir ne desrompre. La fuirent du costé des François par le trait des canons, des bombardes et des arbalestres premierement mort: le seigneur de Waurin, baneret, Morelet de Halwin et Jacques d'Ere. Et adont fut la bataille du roy reculee; mais l'avantgarde et l'arrieregarde a deux lez passerent oultre et enclouïrent ces Flamens, et les misrent a l'estroit. Je vous diray comment sur ces deux eles gens d'armes les commencerent a pousser de leurs roides lances a longs fers et durs de Bourdeaulx, qui leur passoient ces cottes de maille tout oultre et les perchoient

en char; dont ceulx qui estoient attains et navrez de ces fers se restraingdoient pour eschiever les horïons; ear jamais ou amender le peuïssent ne se boutoient avant pour eulx faire destruire. La les misrent ces gens d'armes a tel destroit qu'ilz ne se sçavoient ne poyoient aidier ne ravoïr leurs bras ne leurs plançons pour ferir ne eulz deffendre. La perdoient les plusieurs force et alaine, et la tresbuchaient l'un sur l'autre, et se estindoient et moroient sans coup ferir. La fut Phelippe d'Artevelle encloz et pousé de glaive et abatu, et gens de Gand qui l'amoient et gardoient grant plenté atterrez entour luy. Quant le page dudit Phelippe vey la mesadventure venir sur les leurs, il estoit bien monté sur bon coursier, si se party et laissa son maistre, ear il ne le povoit aidier; et retourna vers Courtray pour revenir a Gand.

(A)insi fut faitte et assamblee celle bataille; et lors que des deux costez les Flamens furent astrains et encloz, ilz ne passerent plus avant, ear ilz ne se poyoient aidier. Adont se remist la bataille du roy en vigueur, qui avoit de commencement ung petit branslé. La entendoient gens d'armes a abatre Flamens en grant nombre, et avoient les plusieurs haches acerees, dont ilz rompoient ces bachinets et eschervelloient testes; et les aucuns plommees, dont ilz donnoient si grans horrïons, qu'ilz les abatoient a terre. A paines estoient Flamens chëuz, quant pillars venoient qui entre les gens d'armes se boutoient et portoient grandes coutilles, dont ilz les partüoient; ne nulle pitié n'en avoient non plus que se ce fuissent chiens. La estoit le clicquetis sur ces bacinets si grant et si hault, d'espees, de haches, et de plommees, que l'en n'y ouoit goutte pour la noise. Et ouÿ

dire que, se tous les heaumiers de Paris et de Brouxelles estoient ensemble, leur mestier faisant, ilz n'euïssent pas fait si grant noise comme faisoient les combatans et les ferans sur ces testes et sur ces bachinets. La ne s'espargnoient point chevalliers ne escuïers ainchois mettoient la main a l'euvre par grant volenté, et plus les ungs que les autres; si en y ot aucuns qui s'avancerent et bouterent en la presse trop avant; ear ilz y furent encloz et estains, et par especial messire Loÿs de Cousant, ung chevallier de Berry, et messire Fleton de Revel, filz au seigneur de Revel; mais encoires en y eut des autres, dont ce fut dommage: mais si grosse bataille, dont celle la fut, ou tant avoit de pueple, ne se povoit parfurnir et au mieulx venir pour les victoriëns, que elle ne couste grandement. Car jeunes chevalliers et escuïers qui desirent les armes se avancent volentiers pour leur honneur et pour acquerre loënge; et la presse estoit la si grande et le dangier si perilleux pour ceulx qui estoient enclos ou abatus, que se on n'avoit trop bonne ayde, on ne se povoit relever. Par ce party y eut des François mors et estains aucuns; mais plenté ne fut ce mie; ear quant il venoit a point, ilz aidoint l'un l'autre. La eut ung molt grant nombre de Flamens occis, dont les tas des mors estoient haulx et longs ou la bataille avoit esté; on ne vey jamais si peu de sang yssir a tant de mors.

Quant les Flamens qui estoient derriere veirent que ceulx devant fondoient et chëoient l'un sus l'autre et que ilz estoient tous desconfis, ilz s'esbahirent et jetterent leurs plançons par terre et leurs armures et se misrent a la fuite vers Courtray et ailleurs. Ilz n'avoient cure que pour eulx

mettre a sauueté. Et Franchois et Bretons après, quy les chassoient en fossez et en buissons, en aunois et an marés et bruieres, cy dix, cy vingt, cy trente, et la les recombatoient de rechief, et la les occïoient, se ilz n'estoient les plus fors. Si en y eut ung moult grant nombre de mors en la chace entre le lieu de la bataille et Courtray, ou ilz se retraioient a saulf garant. Ceste bataille advint sur le Mont d'Or entre Courtray et Rosebeque en l'an de grace nostre seigneur, mil iijc. iiijxx. et II., le jeudi devant le samedi de l'advent, le xxviije. jour de novembre, et estoit pour lors le roy Charles de France ou xiiije. an de son èage.

CHAPTER XII

MISCELLANEOUS PROSE

General use of Prose.

It was natural, and indeed necessary, that, when the use of prose as an allowable vehicle for literary composition was once understood and established, it should gradually but rapidly supersede the more troublesome and far less appropriate form of verse. Accordingly we find that, from the beginning of the thirteenth century, the amount of prose literature is constantly on the increase. It happens, however, or, to speak more precisely, it follows that this miscellaneous prose literature is of much less importance and of much less interest than the contemporary and kindred literature in verse. For in the nature of things much of it was occupied with what may be called the journey-work of literature, – the stuff which, unless there be some special attraction in its form, grows obsolete, or retains a merely antiquarian interest in the course of time. There was, moreover, still among the chief patrons of literature a preference for verse which diverted the brightest spirits to the practice of that form. Yet again, the best prose composition of the middle ages, with the exception of a few works of fiction, is to be found in its chronicles, and these have already been noticed. A review, therefore, much less minute in scale than that which in the first

ten chapters of this book has been given to the mediaeval poetry of France, will suffice for its mediaeval prose, and such a review will appropriately close the survey of the literature of the middle ages.

Prose Sermons. St. Bernard.

Maurice de Sully.

Later Preachers. Gerson.

It has already been pointed out in the first chapter that documentary evidence exists to prove the custom of preaching in French (or at least in *lingua romana*) at a very early date. It is not, however, till many centuries after the date of Mummolinus, that there is any trace of regularly written vernacular discourses. When these appear in the twelfth century the Provençal dialects appear to have the start of French proper. Whether the forty-four prose sermons of St. Bernard which exist were written by him in French, or were written in Latin and translated, is a disputed point. The most reasonable opinion seems to be that they were translated, but it is uncertain whether at the beginning of the thirteenth or the middle of the twelfth century. However this may be, the question of written French sermons in the twelfth century does not depend on that of St. Bernard's authorship. Maurice de Sully, who presided over the See of Paris from 1160 to 1195, has left a considerable number of sermons which exist in manuscripts of very different dialects. Perhaps it may not be illegitimate to conclude from this, that at the time such written sermons were not very common, and that preachers of

different districts were glad to borrow them for their own use. These also are thought to have been first written in Latin and then translated. But whether Maurice de Sully was a pioneer or not, he was very quickly followed by others. In the following century the number of preachers whose vernacular work has been preserved is very large; the increase being, beyond all doubt, partially due to the foundation of the two great preaching orders of St. Francis and St. Dominic. The existing literature of this class, dating from the thirteenth, the fourteenth, and the early fifteenth centuries, is enormous, but the remarks made at the beginning of this chapter apply to it fully. Its interest is almost wholly antiquarian, and not in any sense literary. Distinguished names indeed occur in the catalogue of preachers, but, until we come to the extreme verge of the mediaeval period proper, hardly one of what may be called the first importance. The struggle between the Burgundian and Orleanist, or Armagnac parties, and the ecclesiastical squabbles of the Great Schism, produced some figures of greater interest. Such are Jean Petit, a furious partisan, who went so far as to excuse the murder of the Duke of Orleans, and Jean Charlier, or Gerson, one of the most respectable and considerable names of the later mediaeval literature. Gerson was born in 1363, at a village of the same name in Lorraine. He early entered the Collège de Navarre, and distinguished himself under Peter d'Ailly, the most famous of the later nominalists. He became Chancellor of the University, received a living in Flanders, and for many years preached in

the most constantly attended churches of Paris. He represented the University at the Council of Constance, and, becoming obnoxious to the Burgundian party, sought refuge with one of his brothers at Lyons, where he is said to have taught little children. He died in 1429. Gerson, it should perhaps be added, is one of the numerous candidates (but one of the least likely) for the honour of having written the *Imitation*. He concerns us here only as the author of numerous French sermons. His work in this kind is very characteristic of the time. Less mixed with burlesque than that of his immediate successors, it is equally full of miscellaneous, and, as it now seems, somewhat inappropriate erudition, and far fuller of the fatal allegorising and personification of abstract qualities which were in every branch of literature the curse of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Yet there are passages of real eloquence in Gerson, though perhaps the chief literary point about him is the evidence he gives of the insufficiency of the language in its then condition for serious prose work.

Moral and Devotional Treatises.

Translators.

Political and Polemical Works.

This is indeed the lesson of most of the writing which we have to notice in this chapter. Next to sermons may most naturally be placed devotional and moral works, for, as may easily be imagined, theology and philosophy, properly so called, did not condescend to the vulgar tongue until after the close of the period. Only treatises for the practical use of the unlearned

and ignorant adopted the vernacular. Of such there are manuals of devotion and sketches of sacred history which date from the thirteenth century, besides numerous later treatises, among the authors of which Gerson is again conspicuous. The most popular, perhaps, and in a way the most interesting of all such moral and devotional treatises, is the book of the Chevalier de la Tour Landry¹⁴², written in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. This book, destined for the instruction of the author's three daughters, is composed of Bible stories, moral tales from ordinary literature and from the writer's experience, precepts and rules of conduct, and so forth; in short, a *Whole Duty of Girls*. Most however of the works of this sort which were current were, as may be supposed, not original, but translated, and these translations played a very important part in the history of the language. The earliest of all are translations of the Bible, especially of the Psalms and the book of Kings, the former of which may perhaps date from the end of the eleventh century. Translations of the fathers, and of the *Lives of the Saints*, followed in such numbers that, in 1199, Pope Innocent III. blamed their indiscriminate use. The translation of profane literature hardly begins much before the thirteenth century. In this it becomes frequent; and in the following many classical writers and more mediaeval authors in Latin underwent the process. But it was not till the close of the fourteenth century that the most important translations were made, and

¹⁴² Ed. Montaignon. Paris, 1854.

that translation began to exercise its natural influence on a comparatively unsophisticated language, by providing terms of art, by generally enriching the vocabulary, and by the elaboration of the peculiarities of syntax and style necessary for rendering the sentences of languages so highly organised as Latin and Greek. Under John of Valois and his three successors considerable encouragement was given by the kings of France to this sort of work, and three translators, Pierre Bersuire, Nicholas Oresme, and Raoul de Presles, have left special reputations. The eldest of these, Pierre Bersuire or Bercheure, a friend of Petrarch, was born in 1290, and towards the end of his life, about 1352, translated part of Livy. Nicholas Oresme, the date of whose birth is unknown, but who entered the Collège de Navarre in 1348, and is likely to have been at that time thirteen or fourteen years old, and who became Dean of Rouen and Bishop of Lisieux, translated, in 1370 and the following years, the *Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Economics* of Aristotle (from the Latin, not the Greek). He died in 1382. Oresme was a good writer, and particularly dexterous in adopting neologisms necessary for his purpose. Raoul de Presles executed translations of the Bible and of St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. All these writers furnished an enlarged vocabulary to their successors, the most remarkable of whom were the already mentioned Christine de Pisan and Alain Chartier. The latter is especially noteworthy as a prose writer, and the comments already made on his style and influence as a poet apply here also. His *Quadriloge Invectif* and *Curial*, both

satirical or, at least, polemical works, are his chief productions in this kind. Raoul de Presles also composed a polemical work, dealing chiefly with the burning question of the papal and royal powers, under the title of *Songe du Verger*.

Codes and Legal Treatises.

It might seem unlikely at first sight that so highly technical a subject as law should furnish a considerable contingent to early vernacular literature; but there are some works of this kind both of ancient date and of no small importance. England and Normandy furnish an important contingent, the 'Laws of William the Conqueror' and the *Coutumiere Normandie* being the most remarkable; but the most interesting document of this kind is perhaps the famous *Assises de Jérusalem*, arranged by Godfrey of Bouillon and his crusaders as the code of the kingdom of Jerusalem in 1099, and known also as the *Lettres du Sépulcre*, from the place of their custody. The original text was lost or destroyed at the capture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187; but a new *Assise*, compiled from the oral tradition of the jurists who had seen and used the old, was written by Philippe de Navarre in 1240, or thereabouts, for the use of the surviving Latin principalities of the East. This was shortly afterwards enlarged and developed by Jean d'Ibelin, a Syrian baron, who took part in the crusade of St. Louis. These codes concerned themselves only with one part of the original *Lettres du Sépulcre*, the laws affecting the privileged classes; but the other part, the *Assises des Bourgeois*, survives in *Le Livre de la Cour des*

Bourgeois, which has been thought to be older than the loss of the original. These various works contain the most complete account of feudal jurisprudence in its palmy days that is known, for the still earlier Anglo-Norman laws represent a more mixed state of things. It was especially in Cyprus that the Jerusalem codes were observed. The chief remaining works of the same kind which deserve mention are the *Établissements de St. Louis* and the *Livre de Justice et de Plet*, which both date from the time of Louis himself; the *Conseil*, a treatise on law by Pierre de Fontaines, who died in 1289, and the *Coutumes du Beauvoisis* of Philippe de Beaumanoir, who wrote in 1283. The legal literature of the fourteenth century is abundant, but possesses considerably less interest.

Miscellanies and Didactic Works.

Last of all, before coming to prose fiction, a vast if not very interesting class of miscellaneous prose work must be mentioned. The word class has been used, but perhaps improperly, for classification is almost impossible. Books of accounts and domestic economy of all sorts (generally called *livres de raison*) were very common; treatises of all kinds of more general character on household management abounded. We have a *Ménagier de Paris*, a *Viandier de Paris*, both of the fourteenth century. But much earlier the orderly and symmetrical spirit which has always distinguished the French makes itself apparent in literature. The *Livre des Métiers de Paris* of Étienne Boileau, dating from the thirteenth century, gives a complete

idea of the organisation of guilds and trades at that time. An innumerable multitude of treatises on the minor morals, on love, on manners, exists in manuscript, and in rare instances in print. The *Trésors*, or compendious encyclopædias, which have already been noticed in verse, began in the thirteenth century to be composed in prose, the most remarkable being that of Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, who avowedly used French as his vehicle of composition, because it was the most commonly read of European languages. This book was written apparently about or before 1270. Nor did the separate arts lack illustration in prose. Medicine and alchemy, astronomy and poetry, war and chess, had their treatises, while Bestiaries and Lapidaries are almost as numerous in prose as in verse. Finally, there is the important category of books of travel. There are a certain number of voyages to the Holy Land¹⁴³; some miscellaneous travels mostly, though not universally, translated from the Latin; and last, but not least, the great book of Marco Polo, which seems to have been written originally in French, the author, when in captivity at Genoa, having dictated it to Rusticien of Pisa, who also figures as a compiler of late versions of the Arthurian legend, and who thus had some skill in French composition.

Fiction

The prose fiction of the period has been kept to the last, because it expresses a different order of literary endeavour from

¹⁴³ A good example of these is the *Saint Voyage de Jérusalem* of the Seigneur d'Anglure (1385), edited by MM. Bonnardot and Longnon. Paris, 1878.

those divisions which have hitherto been treated. The language of the middle ages was ill-suited for work other than narrative; for narrative work it was supremely well adapted. Yet the prose fiction which we have is not on the whole equal in merit to the poetry, though in one or two instances it is of great value. The medium of communication was not generally known or used until the period of decadence had been reached, and the peculiar defects of mediaeval literature, prolixity and verbiage, show themselves more conspicuously and more annoyingly in prose than in verse. We have, however, some remarkable work of the later periods, and in the latest of all we have one writer, Antoine de la Salle, who deserves to rank with the great chroniclers as a fashioner of French prose.

The French prose fiction of the middle ages resolves itself into several classes: the early Arthurian Romances already noticed; the scattered tales of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which are chiefly to be studied in two excellent volumes of the *Bibliothèque Elzévirienne*¹⁴⁴; the versions of such collections of legends, chiefly oriental in origin, as the *History of the Seven Wise Men* and the *Gesta Romanorum*; the longer classical romances in prose; the late prose *remaniements* of the great verse epics and romances of the twelfth century; and the more or less original work of the fifteenth century, when prose was becoming an independent and coequal literary exponent. The first class requires no further mention; of the third, the editions

¹⁴⁴ *Nouvelles du 13e et du 14e siècle*. Ed. Moland et Héricault. 2 vols. Paris, 1856.

of the *Roman des Sept Sages*, by M. Gaston Paris¹⁴⁵, and of the *Violier des Histoires Romaines*, by M. Gustave Brunet¹⁴⁶, may be referred to as sufficient instances; of the fourth a very interesting specimen has been made accessible by the publication of the prose *Roman de Jules César* of Jean de Tuim¹⁴⁷, a free version from Lucan made apparently in the course of the thirteenth century, and afterwards imitated by the author of the verse romance; the fifth, though very numerous, are not of much value, though the great romance of *Perceforest* and a few others may be excepted from this general condemnation. The second and the last deserve a longer mention.

The tales of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as published by MM. Moland and Héricault, are eight in number. Those of the second volume are on the whole inferior in interest to those of the first. They consist of *Asseneth*, a graceful legend of the marriage of Joseph with the daughter of the Egyptian high-priest; *Troilus*, interesting chiefly as a prose version of Benoist de Ste. More's legend of *Troilus and Cressida*, through the channel of Guido Colonna and Boccaccio; and a very curious English story, that of the rebel Fulk Fitzwarine. The thirteenth-century tales consist of *L'Empereur Constant*, the story with which Mr. Morris has made English readers familiar under the title of the 'Man born to be King;' of a prose version of the ubiquitous legend

¹⁴⁵ Paris, 1876.

¹⁴⁶ Paris, 1858.

¹⁴⁷ Ed. Settegast. Halle, 1881.

of *Amis et Amiles*; of *Le roi Flore et la belle Jehanne*, a kind of version of *Griselda*, though the particular trial and exhibition of fidelity is quite different; of the *Comtesse de Ponthieu*, the least interesting of all; and lastly, of the finest prose tale of the French middle ages, *Aucassin et Nicolette*. In this exquisite story Aucassin, the son of the count of Beaucaire, falls in love with Nicolette, a captive damsel. It is very short, and is written in mingled verse and prose. The theme is for the most part nothing but the desperate love of Aucassin, which is careless of religion, which makes him indifferent to the joy of battle and to everything, except 'Nicolette ma très-douce mie,' and which is, of course, at last rewarded. But the extreme beauty of the separate scenes makes it a masterpiece.

Antoine de la Salle.

Antoine de la Salle is one of the most fortunate of authors. The tendency of modern criticism is generally to endeavour to prove that some famous author has been wrongly credited with some of the work which has made his fame. Homer, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Rabelais, have all had to pay this penalty. In the case of Antoine de la Salle, on the contrary, critics have vied with each other in heaping unacknowledged masterpieces on his head. His only acknowledged work is the charming romance of *Petit Jean de Saintré*¹⁴⁸. The first thing added to this has been the

¹⁴⁸ Ed. Guichard. Paris, 1843.

admirable satire of the *Quinze Joyes du Mariage*¹⁴⁹, the next the famous collection of the *Cent Nouvelles*¹⁵⁰, and the last the still more famous farce of *Pathelin*¹⁵¹. There are for once few or no external reasons why these various attributions should not be admitted, while there are many internal ones why they should. Antoine de la Salle was born in 1398, and spent his life in the employment of different kings and princes; – Louis III of Anjou, King of Naples, his son the good King René, the count of Saint Pol, and Philip the Good of Burgundy, who was his natural sovereign. Nothing is known of him after 1461. Of the three prose works which have been attributed to him – there are others of a didactic character in manuscript – the *Quinze Joyes du Mariage* is extremely brief, but it contains the quintessence of all the satire on that honourable estate which the middle ages had elaborated. Every chapter – there is one for each 'joy' with a prologue and conclusion – ends with a variation on this phrase descriptive of the unhappy Benedict, 'est sy est enclose dans la nasse, et à l'aventure ne s'en repent point et s'il n'y estait il se y mettroit bientôt; la usera sa vue en languissant, et finira misérablement ses jours.' The satire is much quieter and of a more humorous and less boisterous character than was usual at the time. The *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* are to all intents and purposes prose *fabliaux*. They have the full licence of that class

¹⁴⁹ Ed. Jannet. Paris, 1853; 2nd ed. 1857.

¹⁵⁰ Ed. Wright. Paris, 1858.

¹⁵¹ Ed. Fournier, *Théâtre Français avant la Renaissance*. Paris, n. d.

of composition, its sparkling fun, its truth to the conditions of ordinary human life. Many of them are taken from the work of the Italian novelists, but all are handled in a thoroughly original manner. In style they are perhaps the best of all the late mediaeval prose works, being clear, precise, and definite without the least appearance of baldness or dryness. *Petit Jehan de Saintré* is, together with the *Chronique de Messire Jacques de Lalaing*¹⁵² of Georges Chastellain (a delightful biography, which is not a work of fiction), the hand-book of the last age of chivalry. Jehan de Saintré, who was a real person of the preceding century, but from whom the novelist borrows little or nothing but his name, falls in love with a lady who is known by the fantastic title of 'la dame des belles cousines.' He wins general favour by his courtesy, true love, and prowess; but during his absence in quest of adventures, his faithless mistress betrays him for a rich abbot. The latter part of this book exhibits something of the satiric intention, which was never long absent from the author's mind; the former contains a picture, artificial perhaps, but singularly graceful, of the elaborate religion, as it may almost be called, of chivalry. Strikingly evident in the book is the surest of all signs of a dying stage of society, the most delicate observation and sympathetic description joined to sarcastic and ironical criticism.

As examples of this prose literature we may take a fragment of one of the sermons attributed to St. Bernard (twelfth century), an extract from *Aucassin et Nicolette* (thirteenth century), and one

¹⁵² Ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, viii. 1-259.

from the *Curial* of Alain Chartier (early fifteenth century): —

St. Bernard

Granz est ceste mers, chier frere, et molt large, c'est ceste presente vie ke molt est amere et molt plaine de granz ondes, ou trois manieres de gent puyent solement trespeseir, ensi k'il delivreit en soient, et chascuns en sa maniere. Troi homme sunt: Noë, Daniël et Job. Li primiers de cez trois trespesset a neif, li seconz par pont et li tierz par weit. Cist troi homme signifient trois ordenes ki sunt en sainte eglise. Noë conduist l'arche par mei lo peril del duluve, en cui je reconois aparmenmes la forme de ceos qui sainte eglise ont a gouvernir. Daniël, qui apeleiz est bers de desiers, ki abstinens fut et chastes, il est li ordenes des penanz et des continanz ki entendent solement a deu. Et Job, ki droituriers dispensiers fut de la sustance de cest monde, signifiet lo fëaule peule qui est en marïaige, a cuy il loist bien avoir en possession les choses terrienes. Del premier et del secont nos covient or parler, ear ci sunt or de present nostre frere, et ki abbeït sunt si cum nos, ki sunt del nombre des prelaiz; et si sunt assi ci li moine ki sunt de l'ordene des penanz dont nos mismes, qui abbeït sommes, ne nos doyens mies osteir, si nos par aventure, qui jai nen avignet, nen avons dons oblieit nostre profession por la grace de nostre office. Lo tierz ordene, c'est de ceos ki en marïaige sunt, trescorrai ju or briément, si cum ceos qui tant nen apartienent mies a nos cum li altre. c'est cil ordenes ki a vveit trespesset ceste grant

meir; et cist ordenes est molt peneuous et perillous, et ki vait par molt longe voie, si cum cil ki nule sente ne quierent ne nule adrece. En ceu appert bien ke molt est perillouse lor voie, ke nos tant de gent i vëons perir, dont nos dolor avons, et ke nos si poc i vëons de ceos ki ensi trespessent cum mestiers seroit; ear molt est griés chose d'eschuïr l'abysme des vices et les fossés des criminals pechiez entre les ondes de cest seule, nomeyement or en cest tens ke li malices est si enforciez.

AUCASSIN ET NICOLETTE

Aucasins fu mis en prison si com vos avés, oï et entendu, et Nicolette fu d'autre part en le canbre. Ce fu el tans d'esté, el mois de mai, que li jor sont caut, lonc et cler, et les nuis coies et series. Nicolette jut une nuit en son lit, si vit la lune luire cler par une fenestre, et si oï le lorseilnol canter en garding, se li sovint d'Aucasin son ami qu'ele tant amoit. ele se comença a porpenser del conte Garin de Biaucaire qui de mort le haoit; si se pensa qu'ele ne remanroit plus ilec, que s'ele estoit acusee et li quens Garins le savoit, il le feroit de male mort morir. ele senti que li vielle dormoit qui aveuc li estoit. ele se leva, si vesti un bliäut de drap de soie que ele avoit molt bon; si prist dras de lit et touailes, si noua l'un a l'autre, si fist une corde si longe conme ele pot, si le noua au piler de le fenestre, si s'avala contreval le gardin, et prist se vesture a l'une main devant et a l'autre deriere; si s'escorça por le rousee qu'ele vit grande sor l'erbe, si s'en ala aval le

gardin. Ele avoit les caviaus blons et menus recerçelés, et les ex vairs et riens, et le face traitice et le nés haut et bien assis, et les levretes vermelletes plus que n'est cerisse ne rose el tans d'esté, et les dens blans et menus, et avoit les mameletes dures qui li souslevoient sa vestëure ausi com ce fuissent II nois gauges, et estoit graille parmi les flans, qu'en vos dex mains le pëusciés enclorre; et les flors des margerites qu'ele ronpoit as ortex de ses piés, qui li gissoient sor le menuisse du pié par deseure, estoient droites noires avers ses piés et ses ganbes, tant par estoit blanche la mescinete. Ele vint au postic; si le deffrema, si s'en isci par mi les rues de Biaucaire par devers l'onbre, ear la lune luisoit molt clere, et erra tant qu'ele vint a le tor u ses amis estoit. Li tors estoit faël de lius en lius, et ele se quatist delés l'un des pilers. si s'estraint en son mantel, si mist sen cief par mi une crevëure de la tor qui vielle estoit et ancienne, si oï Aucasin qui la dedens pleuroit et faisoit mot grant dol et regretoit se douce amie que tant amoit. et quant ele l'ot assés escouté, si comença a dire.

Alain Chartier

La court, affin que tu l'entendes, est ung couvent de gens qui soubz faintise du bien commun sont assemblez pour eulx interrompre; ear il n'y a gueres de gens qui ne vendent, achaptent ou eschangent aucunes foiz leurs rentes ou leurs propres vestemens; ear entre nous de la court nous sommes marchans affectez qui achaptons les autres gens et autresfoiz pour leur argent nous leur vendons nostre

humanité precieuse. Nous leur vendons et achaptons autruy par flaterie ou par corrupcions; mais nous sçavons tres bien vendre nous mesmes a ceulx qui ont de nous a faire. Combien donc y peus tu acquerir qui es certain sans doubte et sans peril? veulx tu aller a la court vendre ou perdre ce bien de vertu, que tu as acquis hors d'icelle court? Certes, frere, tu demandes ce que tu deusses reffuser, tu te fies en ce dont tu te deusses deffier et fiches ton esperance en ce que te tire a peril. Et se tu y viens, la court te servira de tant de mensonges controverses d'une part, et de l'autre de bailler tant de tours et de charges que tu auras dedans toy mesmes bataille continuëlle et soussiz angoisseux et pour certain homme qui pourra bonnement dire que ceste vie fust bieneuree qui par tant de tempestes est achatee et en tant de contrarietez esprouvee.

INTERCHAPTER I

SUMMARY OF

MEDIAEVAL LITERATURE

In the foregoing book a view has been given of the principal developments of mediaeval literature in France. The survey has extended, taking the extremest chronological limits, over some eight centuries. But, until the end of the eleventh, the monuments of ancient French literature are few and scattered, and the actual manuscripts which we possess date in hardly any case further back than the twelfth. In reality the history of mediaeval literature in France is the history of the productions of the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries with a long but straggling introduction, ranging from the eighth or even the seventh. Its palmy time is unquestionably in the twelfth and the thirteenth. During these two hundred years almost every kind of literature is attempted. Vast numbers of epic poems are written; one great story, that of Arthur, exercises the imagination as hardly any other story has exercised it either in ancient or in modern times; the drama is begun in all its varieties of tragedy, comedy, and opera; lyric poetry finds abundant and exquisite expression; history begins to be written, not indeed from the philosophic point of view, but with vivid and picturesque presentment of fact; elaborate codes are drawn;

vernacular homilies, not mere rude colloquial discourses, are composed; the learning of the age, such as it is, finds popular treatment; and in particular a satiric literature, more abundant and more racy if less polished than any that classical antiquity has left us, is committed to writing. It is often wondered at and bewailed that this vigorous growth was succeeded by a period of comparative stagnation in which little advance was made, and in which not a little decided falling off is noticeable. Except the formal lyric poetry of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and the multiplied dramatic energy of the latter, nothing novel or vigorous appears for some hundred and forty years, until the extreme verge of the period, when the substitution of the prose tale, as exemplified in the work attributed to Antoine de la Salle, for the verse Fabliau, opens a prospect which four centuries of progress have not closed. The early perfection of Italian, a language later to start than French, has been regretfully compared with this, and the blame has been thrown on the imperfection of mediaeval arrangements for educating the people. The complaint is mistaken, and almost foolish. It is not necessary to look much further than Italian itself to see the Nemesis of a too early development. French, like English, which had a yet tardier literary growth, has pursued its course unhasting, unresting, to the present hour. Italian since the close of the sixteenth century has contributed not a single masterpiece to European literature, and not much that can be called good second-rate. It is not impossible that the political

troubles of France – the Hundred Years' War especially – checked the intellectual development of the country, but if so, the check was in the long run altogether salutary. The middle ages were allowed to work themselves out – to produce their own natural fruit before the full influx of classical literature. What is more, a breathing time was allowed after the exhaustion of the first set of influences, before the second was felt. Hence the French renaissance was a far more vigorous growth than the renaissance of Italy, which displays at once the signs of precocity and of premature decay. But we are more immediately concerned at the present moment with the literary results of the middle ages themselves. It is only of late years that it has been possible fully to estimate these, and it is now established beyond the possibility of doubt that to France almost every great literary style as distinguished from great individual works is at this period due. The testimony of Brunetto Latini as to French being the common literary tongue of Europe in the thirteenth century has been quoted, and those who have read the foregoing chapters attentively will be able to recall innumerable instances of the literary supremacy of France. It must of course be remembered that she enjoyed for a long time the advantage of enlisting in her service the best wits of Southern England, of the wide district dominated by the Provençal dialects, and of no small part of Germany and of Northern Italy. But these countries took far more than they gave: the *Chansons de Gestes* were absorbed by Italy, the Arthurian Romances by Germany; the *Fabliaux*

crossed the Alps to assume a prose dress in the Southern tongue; the mysteries and miracles made their way to every corner of Europe to be copied and developed. To the origination of the most successful of all artificial forms of poetry – the sonnet – France has indeed no claim, but this is almost a solitary instance. The three universally popular books (to use the word loosely) of profane literature in the middle ages, the epic of Arthur, the satire of Reynard the Fox, the allegorical romance of the Rose, are of French origin. In importance as in bulk no literature of these four centuries could dare to vie with French.

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