

cycle of romance, which till now had breathed only of revenge, slaughter, race-hatreds, unlawful love, magic, and witchcraft, becomes transformed in a few years into a series of mystical legends, symbolizing and teaching one of the profoundest dogmas of the Catholic creed. This strange effect was produced by the infusion into the Arthur legend of the conception of the *Saint Graal*, the holy vessel used by Christ at the Last Supper, and containing drops of his blood, which Joseph of Arimathea was said to have brought into Britain. This transformation seems to have been executed by Walter Map, the remarkable Welshman whose genius decisively colours the intellectual history of the last forty years of the 12th century. Map is said to have written a Latin history of the Graal, which is not now extant; yet from it all the authors of the French prose romances on Arthur and the Saint Graal which appeared between 1170 and 1230—Robert de Borron, his kinsman Hélie, Luc de Gast, and Map himself—profess to have translated their compositions. The chief of these works are the *Saint Graal*, *Merlin*, the *Quest of the Saint Graal*, *Lancelot*, *Tristan*, and *Mort Artur*. In all, to "achieve the Saint Graal," that is, to find or see the holy vessel which, on account of the sins of men, had long since vanished from Britain, is represented as the height of chivalrous ambition; but among all Arthur's knights, only Sir Galahad, the son of Lancelot, is sufficiently pure in heart to be favoured with the sublime vision. English versions, more or less literal, of these romances, among which may be named the works of Lonelich and Sir Thomas Malory, and the alliterative poem of *Joseph of Arimathea*, attest the great and enduring popularity of the Graal form of Arthurian legend.

2. After a long period of silence, the bardic poetry of Wales broke out, just when the independence of the nation was about to be extinguished, into passionate and varied utterance. The princes who struggled successfully against the attacks of Henry II. found gifted bards—Gwalchmai, Elidir, Gwion, &c.—to celebrate in fiercely patriotic strains their imperfect triumphs. A translation of one of Gwalchmai's odes may be found, under the title of the *Triumph of Owen*, among Gray's poems. Supposed "Prophecies of Merlin," a sample of which may be seen in the strange work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, fed the popular belief that Arthur yet lived, and would return one day to Wales as a deliverer. Both the *Triads* and the *Mabinogion* refer in part to Arthur, but from different stand-points. In the *Triads* such mention as there is of him represents him as a British king, doing battle with the foes of his race, and full of a sententious wit and wisdom. In the *Mabinogion* the indigenous Welsh view is overpowered by that of the Norman troubadours; we have the Arthur, not of history or tradition, but of chivalry; the mysterious Saint Graal proves as attractive to the Celtic as to the Teutonic imagination. Three of the romances by Chrétien de Troyes appear in a Welsh dress among the tales of the *Mabinogion*. After the loss of independence under Edward I., the importance and originality of Welsh literature appear to have progressively declined.

3. The English-speaking portion—that is, the great mass—of the population, down to the reign of John, has left few literary traces of its existence. Whoever wished to move amongst the educated and cultured classes, and to associate with persons of rank, authority, or influence, found it necessary, though he might be descended from Alfred himself, to speak French in good society, and to write in French whatever he wished good society to read. From the Conquest to 1200, the industry of the most lynx-eyed antiquary has discovered—with the exception of the continuation of the Saxon Chronicle—no literary record in English beyond a few short fragments, such as the lines

preserved as a part of Canute's song by Thomas of Ely, the prophecy of Here, and the hymn of St Godric. The continuation beyond the Conquest of the Saxon Chronicle was made by the monks of Peterborough. It is not complete for the reign of Stephen, passing over several years *sub silentio*; but it records the accession of Henry II. in 1154, and then ends abruptly. The writer or writers were perhaps unable to stand up any longer against the then universal fashion of employing Latin for any serious prose work. Moreover, as the Anglo-Saxon was no longer taught in schools nor spoken in the higher circles of society, it had lost much of its original harmony and precision of structure; and "when the annalist found himself using one inflexion for another, or dropping inflexions altogether, he may well have thought it high time to exchange a tongue which seemed to be crumbling and breaking up, for one whose forms were fixed and its grammar rational. Little did the down-hearted monk anticipate the future glories which, after a crisis of transformation and fusion, would surround his rude ancestral tongue."<sup>1</sup>

A few years after the beginning of the 13th century we have to note the appearance of an important and interesting work in English,—Layamon's *Brut*. But it can scarcely be said to belong to English literature, unless *Beowulf* and *Judith* be similarly classified, for the language is almost as purely Teutonic as in these. In the older version of the *Brut* not more than fifty words of Latin or French origin have been found; and of these several were in common use in England before the Conquest. The *Brut* is strictly a monument of the age of transition. We need not, with some writers, call the language "semi-Saxon;" it is certainly English, and, from a particular point of view, purer English than we speak now; but it is not that form of English which, from first to last, has been the instrument employed to build up English literature. That form, as we shall see in the next section, was determined and conditioned by the necessity of effecting a compromise between the speech of the governors and that of the governed, so that the new standard English should remain, as to its grammatical framework, comparatively intact, while admitting to its franchise, and enrolling among its vocabularies, an indefinite number of foreign recruits.

The work of Layamon is a translation, but with very considerable additions, of Wace's *Brut d'Angleterre*. The most interesting of these additions (the sources of which have not been as yet pointed out) constitute an expansion of the legendary history of Arthur. Layamon was the parish priest of Ernley-on-Severn (now Areley Regis), a remote Worcestershire village, far from the capital or any large city. At such a place Norman influence would be at a minimum; the people would go on from one generation to another, living and speaking much as their fathers did before them; and we may suppose that, finding some indications of literary taste and poetic feeling among members of his flock, the good Layamon took this way of gratifying them. But it must be carefully observed that in the *Brut*, although the language is English, the poetical atmosphere, the intellectual horizon, and even the cast of diction, are Norman-French. The rich poetic vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxon poets, traceable as late as the reign of Edgar, has vanished beyond recovery. Not one of the innumerable poetic compounds relating to battle and victory which are found in *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, &c., occurs in the duller pages of the *Brut*. Words expressive of jurisdiction and government, of which the Anglo-Saxon, while the native race was dominant, had a great variety, are in the *Brut*, if used at all, borrowed to a large extent from French.

<sup>1</sup> Arnold's *Manual of English Literature*.

History  
and Philo-  
sophy.

The labours of the clergy and monks during all this period were applied with unwearied diligence and signal success to the building up of a Latin literature. In the list of chroniclers occur the well-known names of Florence of Worcester, William of Malmesbury, and Henry of Huntingdon. Many histories of particular monasteries were written, and have recently to a large extent been made accessible, through the labours of editors employed under the superintendence of the Master of the Rolls. St Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury in the reigns of William II. and Henry I., employed his great metaphysical and dialectical powers in the endeavour to establish a harmony between reason and faith. The scholastic philosophy, technically speaking, began with Peter Lombard and his *Book of Sentences* (1151); from the university of Paris it spread all over Europe; and in the next period it will be seen that several of the most eminent schoolmen were natives of the British Isles. The works of our countryman, John of Salisbury, who studied and resided much at Paris about the middle of the century, throw a curious light on the tenets and mutual relations of the scholastic sects.

III. *Amalgamation of Races.—Commencements of English Literature, 1215–1350.*—The course of events in this period, as bearing upon literature, may be thus described. The fortunate loss of Normandy in 1204 brought the ruling classes and the commonalty of England closer together, put an end to the transmarine nationality and domicile of the former, and gave a common political interest, in relation to the outside world, to all the dwellers on English soil. Thus two out of the four nations, which we spoke of in the last section as encamped side by side on British territory, were soon in a fair way of being fused into one. The third—the Welsh—losing in 1292 its political independence, lost also with it the pretension, and almost the desire, to maintain a separate literature. Still, however, in spite of common interests, and the ever-growing multiplicity of the ties of blood between the two, Norman and Englishman continued each to speak his own language. Layamon, about 1205, and Ormin, fifteen or twenty years later, write for the English-speaking majority which understands little or no French; from French their language is just as alien as the Flemish of the present day. The first great step towards that blending of tongues which was to crown the blending of families already commenced was taken when the English writers and translators of the 13th century (the terms are almost synonymous), began to admit freely into their writings an unlimited number of those generally intelligible French words of which the stock was, through closer intercourse between the governors and the governed, perpetually on the increase. Of this practice Robert of Gloucester and Robert Manning are conspicuous examples. In spite of this approximation, we shall find that strenuous efforts were made, by or on behalf of the upper classes, to retain French as the common literary language, and keep English in the position of a popular dialect, useful for the common purposes of life, but not vivified by genius or polished by contact with refined lips. Of this effort Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, may be considered the centre. It broke down, however, against the force of circumstances. First, as fast as good French books were produced, Englishmen translated them, and the translations probably found ten readers for one who could enjoy the originals; secondly, the wars between England and France which broke out in 1338, and in which the English-speaking archers—the back-bone of the stout yeomanry, now, alas! no more, which then covered the land—won the chief share of glory, must have greatly tended to discredit among Englishmen of all classes the tongue of their enemies. Trevisa says that the popular

rage for speaking French which had existed before the "grete deth" (the plague of 1348), was since then "somdele changed." Though he naturally refers to a date still fresh in every one's memory, the change could have had nothing to do with the plague; it was probably, as conjectured above, the effect of the French war. By the middle of the 14th century the industry of the translators had produced a great body of English compositions, coloured everywhere by French thought, and studded with French words; the preaching of the friars had for a hundred years been working in the same direction, *i.e.*, to break down the partition not only between the races but between the tongues; the war suddenly gave to English an enormous advantage over its rival in respect of popularity; it need not therefore surprise us to find, as we shall find in the next period, a great native writer choosing English for the instrument of his thought, and founding English literature upon an imperishable basis.

In the last section we saw that Latin, the language of the clerical community, was holding its ground vigorously and successfully against the different forms of vernacular speech current in England. While these last remained in a rude and unsettled condition, it was inevitable that Latin should enjoy this superiority. But the French language was ever growing in importance; its grammatical forms were by this time tolerably settled, and its modes of derivation fixed; it was a spoken tongue, and the Latin was not. Hence, about the date of Magna Charta (1215), French begins to appear in our public instruments, Latin having been the documentary language since the Conquest; about 1270 it begins to supersede Latin as the language of private correspondence. Latin thenceforward was less and less used as the language of poetry, the vehicle of satire, or the voice of piety; French took its place. The theologian, the philosopher, and the annalist alone remained faithful to Latin, the third more out of habit perhaps, and because he had inherited the great works of the past, the histories of Bede, Florence, &c., than because his work could not have been competently performed in French. To this period belong the important chronicle of Matthew Paris, who died in 1259, that of Nicholas Trivet, <sup>Matthew Paris.</sup> and the *Polychronicon* (or at any rate the earlier portion of it) of Ranulf Higden. Great developments of the scholastic theology were made in this period, chiefly by the new orders of friars founded about its commencement, the children of St Francis and St Dominic. Two of the most celebrated of the Franciscan writers, Duns Scotus and William of Occam, were natives of the British isles; they were respectively the chiefs of the realists and nominalists, the parties representing among the schoolmen Platonic and Aristotelian theories. Robert Holcot, a distinguished Dominican writer and a nominalist, was carried off by the plague of 1348.

Philosophy now for the first time, in the person of Roger Bacon, devotes herself systematically to the study of nature and its laws. This great man, the chief part of whose long life was spent in the Franciscan friary at Oxford, died in 1292. The main plan of his principal work the *Opus Majus*, was—in the words of Dr Whewell—"to urge the necessity of a reform in the mode of philosophizing, to set forth the reasons why knowledge had not made a greater progress, to draw back attention to sources of knowledge which had been unwisely neglected, to discover other sources which were yet wholly unknown, and to animate men to the undertaking by a prospect of the vast advantages which it offered." But the subsidiary aids which physical science requires were wanting to him, and in that rude age could only be obtained with extreme difficulty. Mathematical instruments were terribly expensive; tables were scarcely to be had; books were both

rare and costly. That he discovered so much as he did—chiefly in chemistry and optics—is a thing to wonder at. Vague reports of these discoveries circulating among the ignorant populace caused Roger Bacon to be deemed a conjurer or necromancer; the chap-books and low comedies of the reign of Elizabeth represent him exclusively in this light.

In the reign of Henry III. a strong effort was made to make French the exclusive literary language of the English people. It was a struggle between the tongue of the upper class and the tongue of the middle class. Robert Grosseteste, the admired and venerated bishop of a great see, was surrounded by ecclesiastics of rank, and in constant intercourse with earls and barons. All such persons would speak French; those that were laymen would stand in great need of spiritual and moral instruction, and this could not well be conveyed to them in any language but their own; it was quite natural, therefore, that the bishop should encourage the writing of French treatises; and it is probable that he sincerely thought the English tongue not to be worth cultivating for the purposes of literature. He may be excused for holding this opinion, if the only specimens of it which he had seen on paper were such as the *Ormulum*, or even as Layamon's *Brut*. A French work, the *Manuel de Pêche*, treating of the decalogue and the seven deadly sins, which are illustrated with many legendary stories, was formerly ascribed to Grosseteste—it is now known to have been the work of William of Waddington; yet if the statement be true, that it is a version of a little known Latin treatise, there remains a probability that the bishop, in pursuance of a general plan of action, encouraged Waddington to make his version. To the *Chastel d'Amour*, a work of devotion dwelling on the mode of the miraculous incarnation of the Redeemer, Grosseteste's claim seems to be better founded; if he did not write it, he certainly caused it to be written. The same despair of making anything of English, or the same connexion with a circle of readers in the upper ranks of society, led Peter Langtoft, a canon of Bridlington, in spite of his unmistakably English name, to write in French a rhyming chronicle of English history, which he brings down to 1307. Other cases might be mentioned; in fact, as Warton says, "anonymous French pieces both in prose and verse, and written about this time, are innumerable in our manuscript repositories." There were French originals of *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hamtoun*, and many other romances, although few of them are now extant.

But if the attack was vigorous, the defence was sturdy and persistent, with a tenacity which spoke of final victory. Ormin's rhythmic gospels (supposed to have been written about 1225), though the orthography proceeds upon a theory, and is so far interesting, presents, it must be admitted—owing to the strangeness of the spelling, the want of rhyme, and the paucity of words of Latin origin—a barbarous, almost repulsive, aspect to the reader. The war of the barons in Henry III.'s reign, in which the cause of Leicester and other French-speaking aristocrats was taken up by the mass of the people with unmeasured enthusiasm, certainly had the effect of introducing a number of French words into the popular speech. This may be gathered from the remarkable English ballad on the battle of Lewes (1264), written by a partisan of Leicester, the phraseology of which is marked by almost the same proportion of words of French origin as prevails in modern English. Moreover, the movement of the verse is vigorous and free, and such as befits a language that is fast rising into importance, and has a great destiny before it. In the reign of Edward I. appeared the English rhyming chronicle of Robert of Gloucester. The early portion of it is founded on Wace's *Brut*, but the author continues the history down to 1272,

the date of Edward's accession. Robert is a plodding dull writer, but his work proves that he knew of a considerable class of persons who knew no French, yet were capable of deriving pleasure from literature; it is for this class that his somewhat ponderous poem was intended. The pretty poem describing a contest between an owl and a nightingale (date about 1270) is in the dialect of the south of England. It is no translation, but seems to have been suggested by passages in the *Roman de la Rose*. Many English romances, e.g., *Havelok*, *King Horn*, *King Alexander*, *Richard I.*, *Guy of Warwick*, &c., date from the reign of Edward I., or, say, from the last twenty years of the 13th century. Most of these are translations from the French; in the case of *Havelok*, however, this remains to be proved, no French version (other than the sketch, much earlier in date, given in Gaimar's *Estorie*) being now extant. There is a French version of *King Horn*, but it differs greatly from the English romance, and there is good reason for believing that the English poem is the earlier of the two. Both *Havelok* and *King Horn* are founded on Anglo-Danish traditions current in the east of England; on this account, and in consideration of the long intellectual blight which the Danish invasions produced in those parts of the country, they are extremely interesting and valuable. They abound in French words, and on reading them we feel that a language which has become so fluent, flexible, and accommodating cannot but make its way and attain to predominance.

Perhaps the works of no single writer contributed so much to this result as those of Robert Manning, or, as he is also called, Robert of Brunne. Robert was a monk of the order founded by St Gilbert of Sempringham; his monastery was in South Lincolnshire. He belongs to the reigns of Edward II. and Edward III.; the date of his death is unknown; but it was probably about 1340. He executed a new version of Wace's *Brut* in octosyllabic rhyming verse, and added to it a translation of the French rhyming chronicle of Peter Langtoft, mentioned in a previous paragraph. He also translated Waddington's *Manuel des Pêchés*, adding many characteristic and lively passages which make his version much more entertaining than the original work. To all these labours the good monk was impelled, not by the love of fame, which would have been more easily gratified if he had written in French, but by the benevolent desire to give his lay friends and acquaintances something pleasant to read and talk about,—

"For to haf solace and gamen,  
In feilauschip when tha sit samen [together]."

We have found that by degrees men of better, or at least equal, mark have taken to writing in English, as compared with those who preferred French; for instance, Robert Manning is at least equal as a versifier to Peter Langtoft. In the next section will be described the rise of Chaucer, Langland, and Gower, and the final victory of the native speech.

IV. *Early English Literature, 1350-1477*—The period at which we have arrived comprises about 120 years, ending at the date of the introduction of printing into England. During all this time the scholastic philosophy reigned undisturbed at the universities. Wickliffe, so far as his methods of argument and reliance on logic were concerned, was as much a schoolman as the friars who contended with him. The time was not yet come when a churchman would be found, like Colet, to decry the scholastic methods, and rely on literature rather than on logic. Wickliffe's first attacks upon the established order were directed, not against doctrine, but against the encroachments of the church upon the state, against the holding of temporal "lordship" or authority by ecclesiastical persons, and

against the claim asserted by the Pope to receive "Peter's pence," or an equivalent, from the English nation. These views he was said to have borrowed from Marsilius of Padua and John of Gaudun; but in truth such Ghibeline sentiments were so common in France and Germany, as well as Italy, that it is needless, in Wickliffe's case, to attempt to trace them to particular authors. Afterwards he broached some singular opinions on several abstruse points of metaphysics, which led to "determinations" or treatises being published against him by John Kynningham, a Carmelite, and John Tyssington, a Franciscan. Lastly, he aroused a theological storm, about 1380, by reviving something like the condemned heresy of Berengarius on the mode of the presence of Christ in the sacrament. Replies were written by Wynterton, Wells, Berton, and others. A synod met in London and condemned Wickliffe's doctrine; he died at Lutterworth soon afterwards. The whole complex controversy which he had stirred up was taken in hand, some years later, by a man of vast ability and learning, Thomas Walden the Carmelite, one of the English theologians who took part in the council of Constance. Walden's *Doctrinale Fidei* has been more than once printed on the Continent.

All the writings hitherto described were in Latin. But Wickliffe, on the principle "Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo," resolved to carry the conflict into a more spacious arena, and to appeal to popular sympathy by writing in the language of the people. He preached and circulated many English sermons; he organized his "pore priestes" as a body of itinerant preachers; assisted by his followers he put into circulation an incredible number of English tracts, directed against abuses in discipline, and what he deemed errors in doctrine. Lastly, he caused to be made a complete English translation of the Vulgate Bible, and himself, in all probability, took a considerable share in the work. His efforts, seconded by those of his principal adherents, such as Herford, Repington, Purvey, &c., gave rise to the sect of the Lollards, which must have rapidly grown into importance, since it received marked notice in the poetry (written probably between 1380 and 1390), of both Chaucer and Gower. The famous Act "De heretico comburendo" of 1401, and the rigid inquisitorial measures instituted by Archbishop Arundel, and carried on by Chicheley, drove Lollardism beneath the surface of society and from the pages of avowed literature. Yet, though repressed, the spirit of discontent survived. Many Lollards were burnt so late as in the first year of Henry VIII.; and the rain of pamphlets and ballads against the church and the clergy, which burst forth as soon as the king was ascertained to be hostile to them, was a sufficient indication of the pent-up hatred which filled the breasts of thousands.

The career of Pecoock, bishop of Chichester, may be regarded as an incident of Lollardism. Feeling sore and uneasy under the attacks which men, many of whom were undeniably earnest and moral, were making on the clergy and their doings, Pecoock wrote in English *The Repressor of over-much wytyngie [blaming] of the Clergie*. He thought that the time for appealing to authority was gone by, and that the Lollards could only be reconciled to the church by proving that her precepts and her ritual were in themselves reasonable. In short, he made the reason of the individual the judge of the goodness, or otherwise, of what the church did and commanded. On this ground his brother bishops could not follow him; his books were condemned at a synod held in 1457, and he was deposed from his bishopric.

English literature in the full and proper sense, of which we saw the beginnings in the cumbrous alexandrinism of Robert of Gloucester, and the more pleasing

and successful writings of Manning, asserts itself in this period as a growth of time, destined to have thenceforward an independent being and a powerful influence. It is interesting to note that two distinct and rival tendencies now make their appearance, which may be described as the Teutonic affinity and the Franco-Latin affinity. The sturdiness and self-reliance of the old Saxon blood led many Englishmen to undervalue the culture of the day, which came from the South, and to look lovingly towards the old Teutonic rock from which they were hewn, in the faith that true light and deliverance were to be found there. Of this tendency Langland is the chief representative in the 14th century. He employs the old rhythm of the Teutonic nations,—alliteration; he rejects French models, and studies not French poets; the homely kindly life of the English lower and lower-middle classes is what he loves to depict; the covetousness and ambition of the foreign ecclesiastics who absorb English prelates he is never tired of denouncing. The whole body of alliterating poets,—and recent investigation has shown that their number was considerable even down to the 16th century, the last known alliterative piece is by Dunbar,—represent, with Langland, this Teutonic affinity. Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and the writers who formed themselves upon them, represent the Franco-Latin affinity. Endowed with a more receptive temper and finer perceptions than the men of the opposite school, Chaucer opened his large heart and capacious intelligence to all forms of excellence within his reach; and a man so minded could not fail to see that what had been written in French and Italian far outweighed what had hitherto been written in English or German. Neither could his more cultivated ear fail to prefer the rhyme of the South to the alliteration of the North. "I am a Southron man," he says under the mask of the Personne—

"I cannot geste, rom, ram, ruf, by my letter;"

that is, I cannot write alliterative poems like Langland. Wherever good words were to be had, Chaucer appropriated them, whether their origin were Saxon or Romance; wherever he found a good poem, he imitated it, often bettering the instruction. This veracity of the intellect, this large-mindedness, were the cause that our early literature was laid on broad foundations, and contributed not a little to the many-sided and sympathetic character of our language.

The labours of Tyrwhitt and Warton, and in our own day of Sandras and Ten-Brink, have laid bare the sources whence the genius of Chaucer drew its materials and derived its kindling suggestions. The old notion that his earliest writings show the influence of the Provençal poetry has been abandoned on more accurate inquiry. The *Complaynt of the Dethe of Pite*, which is among the earliest, if not the earliest, of the extant compositions, is saturated with the French spirit. The great work of his early youth was the translation of the *Roman de la Rose* of Lorrin and Meung,—a poem, be it remembered, not the growth of Normandy, but of France proper, not the work of trouveres, but of French poets. This transformation and sublimation of the romance of the earlier into the dream and allegory of the later Middle Ages, originated by the genius of Lorrin, was eagerly adopted by Chaucer, most of whose pieces, prior to the great work of his life, the *Canterbury Tales*, were cast in the allegorical mould. This is the case with the *Assembly of Foules*, where the gentle "formel eagle" is believed to represent Isabel, daughter of Edward III., betrothed in 1364 to Engelram de Couci, as the formel is in the poem to the "royal tercel." Again the *Boke of the Duchesse*, on the death of Blanche, duchess of Lancaster, in 1369, is, in form, a vision seen in a dream; it is also full of actual borrowings from the French poets Lorrin, Meung, and Machault. The