

mannerism of the French poets is also present in the *Court of Love* and the *House of Fame*, compositions which probably belong to Chaucer's middle life. Even in the *Legende of Goode Women*, a work of his later years, many passages, particularly the beautiful lines rehearsing his annual worship of the daisy, are significant of the degree in which his mind was still imbued with the graceful and fanciful conceptions of the French poets.

But the sunny south produced in that age other poets beside the French, poets the force and melody of whose writings caused the glory of Lorris and Machault to wax pale in comparison. Chaucer must have become acquainted with Boccaccio at an early age, for in the *Assembly of Fowles*, written when he was only twenty-four or twenty-five, several stanzas are translated from the description, in the *Theseide* of the Italian poet, of the garden of Queen Nature. With Petrarch he is believed on reasonable grounds to have become acquainted during his visit to Italy in 1373; the charming allusion to the "laureat poete," in the prologue to the "Clerke's Tale," is familiar to every reader. Dante, whom he calls "the grete poete of Itaille," supplied him with a vision in the "House of Fame," and with the materials of one of the tragedies in the "Monke's Tale," the story of Count Ugolino. But it was to Boccaccio that his obligations were the largest; from his *Filostrato* he translated, though with many additions and alterations, his *Troilus and Cryseyde*; the "Knight's Tale" is in the main a translation of the *Theseide*, and two or three other *Canterbury Tales* are more or less close renderings of stories in the *Decameron*. Italian was then in a far more advanced stage, one better suited for literary purposes, than English; and it must be set down as undoubtedly due to his Italian studies that in Chaucer's hands our language,—which seventy years before had appeared as a barbarous dialect in the mouth of Robert of Gloucester, and, even as used by Langland, Chaucer's contemporary, is harsh and crabbed,—was proved to be rich in sweetness and harmony, no less than in force.

After all, had Chaucer done no more than has been already indicated, though he would have deserved credit for polishing and regularizing the language, and would have left models of style for later ages to imitate, he would not have earned the praise of a great and immortal poet. In this category, however, he is definitively placed, in virtue of the original portions of the *Canterbury Tales*. Not only is the Prologue the work of a great literary artist, drawing from nature with an incomparable force, sureness, and freedom of hand, but the whole series of linking passages, besides many of the tales, which, though the materials are old, are transfigured by the treatment they receive, attest the presence of a masterly intellect and an unflinching imagination. He "saw life thoroughly and saw it whole;" his somewhat keen and caustic temper opened his eyes to the tricks of hypocrites and pretenders, which his manly straightforwardness made him expose without ceremony; on the other hand, the noble and really superior cast of his character placed him in full sympathy with those who in heroic self-denial were following under his eyes the counsels of perfection. Over against the portraits of Monk, Friar, and Pardoner in the Prologue, may be set the legend of Sainte Cecile, the "Man of Lawe's Tale," and the exquisite opening stanzas of the "Prioress's Tale." In that peculiar combination of great force of handling with grace and versatility, on which the availability and effect of poetic genius so largely depend, Chaucer may be placed in a trio with Shakespeare and Pope, and no fourth name in English literature can, from this point of view, be raised to their level.

Coming to speak of Gower after Chaucer, we descend, as we now clearly see, through an enormous interval; but

this distance was not so apparent to their contemporaries and immediate successors. "Ancient Gower" was a favourite with Richard II., and was also prudent enough to pay his court betimes to the young Duke of Lancaster, soon to be Henry IV. His *Confessio Amantis* is coloured by all the profanity and much of the cynicism which belong to Jean de Meung's portion of the *Roman de la Rose*. It may be observed, in passing, that the *Roman* was the product of a kind of minor renaissance, or revival of ancient learning. The *Somnium Scipionis* of Macrobius gave the dream-form, and Ovid's *Ars Amandi* supplied an abundant store of amatory details. From this last, and from others of his poems, the counsels and warnings to lovers, with which the *Roman*, the *Confessio Amantis*, and many another popular poem of that day was stocked, were, partly by suggestion, partly by direct translation, derived. That the *Ars Amandi* should come to spread so wide an influence was a fact of no good omen to the morals of Europe. Refinement, even when little more than external, seems to exercise an invincible attraction on the human mind. The wit and suppleness of the Greek intellect, the polished luxury of the Roman empire, dazzled more and more the semi-cultivated society of Europe, and created a paganizing fashion, of which the moral results were often deplorable. Numbers even of ecclesiastics were carried away; bishops prided themselves on their elegant *symposia*; abbots, "purple as their wines," thumbed Anacreon instead of their breviaries; and in spite of Savonarola and other reformers from within, no effectual check appeared for these evils till it was supplied by the rude blasts of the Reformation.

Dan Lydgate, the monk of Bury, was a loyal admirer and follower of Chaucer; and if the practice of poetry could make a perfect poet, he should stand, in virtue of his innumerable compositions, among those of the highest rank. But the language,—already rich and various, but unsettled in form and deficient in precedents,—escaped out of his control; to bend and tame it effectually while in such a condition required the strength of an intellectual giant, such as Chaucer was, but Lydgate certainly was not. We know that Chaucer took the greatest pains with his metre—

"So praye I to God, that none miswrite thee,  
Ne thee mysymetre for default of tonge."

but Lydgate, though, to recommend his mediocre thoughts, he should have taken much greater pains, took in fact much less. Perhaps some crude theory of poetic inspiration misled him, as it misleads poets of our own day, whose roughness and obscurity yield as unsatisfactory results as Lydgate's roughness and mediocrity. The materials for his more important productions were chiefly French and Latin works of his own day, or not much earlier in date. Thus his *Falls of Princes* is from a French metrical version of Boccaccio's Latin prose work, *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*, and his *Troy-book* is founded on the *Historia Trojana* of Guido di Colonna, a Sicilian jurist of the 13th century. Lydgate's admiration for Chaucer was undoubtedly sincere, and he probably attempted to imitate, the best points of Chaucer's style. If yet to a great extent he failed, this was perhaps due, not merely to the carelessness to which we have before adverted, but also to the influence of the barbarous writers of alliterative verse, whose activity at this period we described in the early part of this section. Alliterative rhythm is accentual, heroic rhythm is syllabic. An alliterative verse may have a varying number of syllables, but must have four accents; an heroic verse may have a varying number of accents, but must contain ten, or at most eleven, syllables. Of course the variation in either case is confined within certain limits, and the rules themselves are not without exceptions;

but into these details we have not space to enter. Suffice it to say, that the reason why there is so much halting metre in Lydgate, Hawes, Barclay, Harding, Juliana Berners, and other versifiers of the 15th and 16th centuries, would seem to be that, unlike Chaucer, they indulged in much of the syllabic licence of the alliterators, while yet they were not goths enough to adopt their rhythm altogether. Between the Teutonic and Franco-Latin stools, so to speak, they fell to the ground.

A recent writer, to whose labours the history of English literature is much indebted,<sup>1</sup> desiring to mark picturesquely the appearance of an art which he thought was destined to give the death-blow to mediæval superstition, has said that "in the year of the condemnation of Reginald Pecock for declaring that all truth would bear the test of reason and inquiry, John Fust or Faust and Peter Schœffer printed a magnificent edition of the Psalter." This shows how easily an attractive antithesis may become a trap for the unwary. The statement made in the protasis of the above sentence is untrue, and that in the apodosis irrelevant. Pecock was not condemned for "declaring that all truth would bear the test of reason and inquiry" (which of course his opponents believed as well as he), but for maintaining, along with other novel opinions, that reason was a better guide than authority as to the matter of revealed religion. Doubtless many would agree with him, but this is a very different proposition from the other. Nor again was the appearance of Fust's Psalter an epoch in the history of printing, as the coincidence of dates, to be worth noticing, would require, for it was both preceded and followed by the production of more important works.

Invention of printing

Yet it would not be easy to overrate the effect produced by the invention of printing on the development of literature, and the diffusion of those complex influences and arrangements which we call civilization. Language and its devices, as Horne Tooke showed in his *Diversions of Purley*, exist but to promote the rapid interchange of ideas between man and man; and the device of printing is a further long step in the same march, and a part of the same endeavour. By means of it, books reached in five years countries which before they had not reached in twenty, and readers were multiplied a hundred fold. Through it the speculations of scholars and the theories of philosophers could be quickly brought before the whole body of learned men and philosophers in Europe; hence arose counter speculations and adverse theories, which again obtained publicity with the same rapidity as the first, and to this process there was no limit. Poetry, as being one of the more spontaneous growths of the human mind,—the child of passion and imagination, not of controversy,—owed comparatively little to the new invention. The literary annals of Spain furnish us with the names of more than a hundred poets who adorned the long reign of John II. of Castile, ere printing came into being; while for a century after the discovery, the poetic art was in a feeble and inert condition, both in Spain and England. On the other hand, historical studies of all kinds, since they flourish in proportion to the facilities given of collecting facts and materials,—and printing greatly enhanced these facilities—received a sudden and highly beneficial impulse.

The first book certainly known to have been printed in England is the *Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, a translation from the French; this was printed by Caxton in 1477, within the precincts of the abbey of Westminster. The monks of St Alban's soon set up a printing-press in their great monastery; and Oxford and Cambridge quickly

<sup>1</sup> Prof. H. Morley.

followed suit. For fifteen years more Caxton laboured diligently in his vocation, and at his death in 1492 left the art of printing firmly established in England. An examination of the list of works which he printed shows what branches of literature were most in esteem in the English society of his day. Professor Craik enumerates forty-five works, which comprise all Caxton's more important typographical performances. Of these, thirteen are religious and devotional, twelve are works of romance and chivalry or other prose fiction, seven are historical or legal works, five are English versions of classical authors, five handbooks or didactic works, and three editions of English poets. To the first class belong the *Golden Legend* (a translation of the collection of lives of saints under that name compiled by Jacobus de Voragine), a *Liber Festivalis*, or guide to church festivals, a *Life of Saint Wynnefrid*, and several pious books translated from the French. Under the second head fall Malory's English version of the great French prose romances of Arthur, the *Royal Book*, a "Troy-book" translated from the French of Raoul Le Fevre, the *Book of Feats of Arms*, and the *Historie of Reynard the Foxe*, translated from the Flemish. To the historical section belong Trevisa's version of Higden's *Polychronicon*, the *Chronicles of England* by Fabyan, and the statutes passed in the first year of Richard III. Among the classics offered to the English public were versions of the *Æneid* and of Cicero *De Senectute* and *De Amicitia*, translated from French versions, and Chaucer's rendering of Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*. The handbooks contain the *Moral Proverbs of Christine de Pisan*, a *Boke of Good Manners*, a *Boke for Travellers*, &c. The English poets, editions of parts of whose works were printed by Caxton, were, as was to be expected, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate.

In the period ending with 1350, we saw that the plant of English literature, though putting out some vigorous offshoots, in the poems of Nicolas of Guildford and Robert Manning, was still struggling with great linguistic difficulties, so that it remained uncertain whether, like Flemish literature in Belgium, it would not have to content itself with appealing to the humbler classes of the people, and leave to France the office of ministering to the intellectual and imaginative wants of all cultivated persons. In 1470 this doubt remained no more; the question had been finally settled in favour of native genius. England had now a literature in her own speech of which she might be proud,—authors whose manner and phraseology supplied models to allied but less advanced nationalities. James I. of Scotland, who was killed in 1436, speaks in the *King's Quhair* of the trio of English poets in terms of reverence comparable to those which Chaucer himself, in *Troilus and Cryseyde*, had used of the great poets of antiquity. But this success had only been gained by the wise exercise of that talent for compromise which we English, even to this day, are said to possess almost to a fault. English literature was to employ a language which in its structure and grammar indeed was Teutonic, but was to admit without scruple into its vocabulary thousands of French words which the upper classes, the descendants of the Norman invaders, were in the habit of using. It seemed as if both language and people were destined to hold a position midway between the European nations of Teutonic and those of Latin origin, to be interpreters between the one and the other, and thus to facilitate, for the numerous communities which in due time the English race was to plant over the world, the comprehension of the thoughts and the appreciation of the ideals of both.

V. *Period of the Renaissance and the Reformation, 1477-1579.*—The decline of the scholastic philosophy in England in the 15th century, as indeed in every other

country of Europe, was noticed in the last section. A new interest seized upon all the more lively intelligences,—that of recovering what, having passed into oblivion, might still be recoverable of the works of the ancients, as well as of appropriating thoroughly what was already known. In Latin literature the chief works had long been known; Virgil, Ovid, and even many of the works of Cicero, had for ages been the delight of scholars and the food of poets. But even in respect of these, the greater publicity which the multiplication of copies by the printing-press gave to them led to innumerable questions being stirred, which till then had lain comparatively dormant. The problems of textual, philological, and literary criticism, which the careful study of an author suggested to an acute mind, were taken up with eagerness by a large and ever-increasing circle of students. But it was Greek learning, because of the comparative newness of the field, and the inconceivable value of the treasures which it hid, that awakened the most intense and passionate interest. The story of the revival of Greek studies in Italy, towards the end of the 14th century, is as exciting to a sensitive intellect as any romance. Gradually the contagion of the learned frenzy which created a hundred academies and literary societies in the Italian cities spread itself across the Alps. England was but a very little, if at all, behind France. The steps by which a change of so much importance to literature was effected seem to be worth tracing with some minuteness. Without lingering over the names of Gray, Pheas, and Vitelli, by each of whom something was done towards promoting Greek study at Oxford, we will begin with Linacre's master, William Selling. An Oxonian, and a monk of Christ Church, Canterbury, Selling conceived a fervent desire to partake of the intellectual banquet provided in the schools of Florence, where the great Lorenzo was then ruling the republic; and about the year in which Sir Thomas More was born (1480) he travelled into Italy, and attended for some time the lectures of that prodigy of learning and talent, Angelo Politiano. While in Italy he learnt to read and speak Greek, and collected a number of Greek MSS.; but unluckily, soon after his return with these to England, they were destroyed by an accidental fire. Thomas Linacre, a Derbyshire boy, had Selling for his master at the Canterbury school; his capacity and zeal for study were great, and when Selling was sent on a mission into Italy by Henry VII. in 1486 or 1487, he took Linacre with him, and left him studying Greek under Politiano at Bologna. In these studies William Grocyn, an older man than Linacre, is mentioned by contemporaries as his "sodalis." Having been for many years a fellow of New College, he visited Italy between 1480 and 1490, and studied chiefly at Florence, under Demetrius Chalcondyles and Politiano. "Grocyn," says George Lilye, "was the first who publicly lectured on Greek literature at the university of Oxford, to crowded audiences of young men." Grocyn was a somewhat hard, dry man; an Aristotelian, not a Platonist. Plato he regarded as a man who multiplied words, but in Aristotle he saw the founder of real science. His lectures seem to have been delivered between 1491 and 1500. Grocyn left no works behind him; but Linacre, who probably began to lecture in Greek when Grocyn ceased to do so, was a voluminous author and editor. To him we owe editions of the principal works of some of the Greek medical writers, and a Latin grammar, which was superseded in a few years by the more symmetrical *Breviarium* of William Lilye, commonly called *Lily's Grammar*. An anecdote related of Linacre illustrates the enthusiasm for letters, mingled with a dash of pedantic absurdity, which characterized the age. When about to leave Italy and return to his native country, he erected at Padua an altar, which he dedicated to the genius

of Italy; he crowned it with flowers, and burned incense upon it. More, born in 1480, learnt Greek under Linacre at Oxford, in about the years 1496 and 1497. His *Pro gymnasmatibus* and *Epigrams* (the latter written conjointly with William Lilye) are the work of a man deeply imbued and inflamed with the classical spirit. The celebrated Dean Colet, whose eminent services to literature and education have been of late years examined and recorded by Seebohm, Lupton, and others, studied Greek in Italy a few years later than Grocyn and Linacre. He lectured at Oxford after 1497 on the epistles of St Paul (in Greek), and at St Paul's, London, of which he was dean, on the *Hierarchies* of Dionysius. The letters of Erasmus present in the clearest light the "perferendum ingenium" of this remarkable man, who, as the founder of St Paul's school, may be said still to live and work among us. This school he opened in 1510, appointing William Lilye its first headmaster. Lilye himself was no common man. In youth he had travelled to the Holy Land, and on his return took up his abode at Rhodes, and made himself master of the Greek language. Polydore Vergil even says that Lilye was the first Englishman who ever taught publicly "perfectas literas," by which he appears to mean the Greek authors, but this is certainly a mistake. For the scholars of St Paul's school, Richard Pace, another Oxford man, wrote, at Colet's request, a pleasant discursive treatise called *De Fructu qui ex Doctrina percipitur* (1518), in which are introduced some interesting details respecting the learned men of that day. William Latimer, a priest and an Oxford man, is continually mentioned in the letters of Erasmus and his contemporaries as a scholar of vast erudition and especially conversant with Greek. But he was diffident, and perhaps indolent, and declined the task of teaching Fisher Greek, which Erasmus urged him to undertake.

It is a lamentable fact that after this brilliant opening of the study of the humanities at Oxford, the dawn was overcast, and a dismal reaction set in. Erasmus tells us that, about 1518, a body of brutal obscurantists appeared in the university, who, calling themselves Trojans, attempted by ridicule and petty persecution to discourage the study of Greek. It was on this occasion that More wrote his *Epistle to the University* (1519), complaining that the party of the barbarians was not put down. The king was induced to interfere, and the nuisance was after a while suppressed. At Cambridge, though the study of Greek appears to have been introduced later than at Oxford, it was carried on without check or discouragement, and was supported by endowments at an earlier period than at the sister university. The excellent Fisher, bishop of Rochester, who was chancellor of the university of Cambridge from 1501 to 1517, and in that time founded, or helped to found, the colleges of Christ's and St John's, promoted Greek learning with all his energy. He invited Erasmus down to Cambridge in 1511, and procured for him, first, the Lady Margaret professorship of divinity, and afterwards the chair of Greek. He was succeeded by a scholar of some celebrity, Richard Croke, who, after being educated for twelve years at foreign universities, at the expense of Archbishop Warham, returned a most accomplished Grecian, and settled at Cambridge. The archbishop just named, the last before the change of religion, was a prelate of great enlightenment and unflinching generosity. Erasmus, who received from him an annual pension and frequent gifts, is never weary of extolling to his correspondents the "sanctissimi mores," the love of letters, integrity, and piety of the English primate. Towards the middle of the century Sir John Cheke, as Milton says, "taught Cambridge and King Edward Greek;" his friend Sir Thomas Smith was also a great promoter of learning.

From the suppression of the monasteries in 1536 to

the end of his reign, the violence and brutality of Henry VIII. exercised a baneful effect on the progress of learning. Instead of conferring together about the Greek particles, Oxford men were obliged to consider what they should think and say about the king's divorce. The fate of More, the finest scholar at Oxford, and a writer of European reputation, of whom Charles V. said to the English ambassador, "We would rather have lost the best city of our dominions than such a worthy councillor," dispirited and alarmed all English men of letters. In such dangerous times wariness, quietness, unobtrusiveness, must have seemed to be the one way of safety. When the tyrant died, men breathed indeed more freely; but the rapacity and indifference to letters of Protector Somerset's government must have filled all university men with the feeling that the tenure of their endowments was anything but secure, and such a state of mind is not good for the pursuits of learning. Under Mary there was some revival of literary activity; a collection was made and published of the English works of Sir Thomas More; and new editions of Gower and Lydgate were printed. Warton truly observes, that "when we turn our eyes from [this reign's] political evils to the objects which its literary history presents, a fair and flourishing scene appears." On the other hand, the compulsory revival of the scholastic philosophy at the universities, which involved, as we are told, the depreciation of the new learning, was an unpleasant feature of the times. There is a well-known passage in Ascham's *Schoolmaster*, where, speaking of Cambridge in Mary's time, he says, that "the love of good learning began suddenly to wax cold, the knowledge of the tongues was manifestly contemned; the truth being," he goes on to say, "that plans were laid by the university authorities to bring back the works of Duns Scotus, and all the rabble of barbarous questionists," into the academical course, in the place of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, and Demosthenes. To throw contempt on the schoolmen,—though it was not confined to the Protestants, for More, Erasmus, Colet, Pace, and many other Catholics had expressed more or less of a similar aversion,—yet was characteristic of them, for their theologians without exception rejected the *Scholæ*. Therefore Gardiner and Bönner appear to have resolved to force scholasticism on the young men of their day, simply because they did not like it.

Yet at Oxford things cannot have been so bad, for it was in this reign that Trinity College was founded by Sir Thomas Pope, a zealous Catholic, "in the constitution of which the founder principally inculcates the use and necessity of classical literature, and recommends it as the most important and leading object in that system of academical study, which he prescribes to the youth of the new society. For, besides a lecturer in philosophy appointed for the ordinary purpose of teaching the scholastic sciences, he establishes in this seminary a teacher of humanity." The accession of Elizabeth brought another change. The schoolmen were again ejected, and with contumely, from English seats of learning. By a singular irony of fate, the name of the owner of one of the brightest and most penetrating intellects ever given to man, Duns Scotus, came to be used, in England, as a synonym for a blockhead. Polite literature was now so exclusively cultivated that it destroyed philosophy. The old systems were discredited, but no new system was adopted in their place. Nor has philosophical speculation ever recovered in England that high place in the hierarchy of the sciences which is its due. In the first twenty years of the reign of Elizabeth though exact scholarship did not flourish much, there was a great and very beneficial activity in the work of making

<sup>1</sup> Warton.

translations from the classics. The names of Golding, North, Phaier, Marlowe, and Stanhurst indicate the authors of the chief of these. Fairfax and Harrington translated the master-pieces of Tasso and Ariosto. But for the ample store of fresh materials thus supplied, the genius of Shakespeare, who had not a university education, must have displayed itself under comparatively restricted forms.

Little need be said of those inferior descriptions of poetry which this period produced. Stephen Hawes, in his *Pastime of Pleasure*, endeavoured, but with very imperfect success, to effect that blending of allegory with romance which was to be the brilliant achievement of Spenser. The mind of Alexander Barclay seems to have been swayed by that Teutonic affinity of which we spoke in a former section; he turned to Sebastian Brandt rather than to Petrarch, and preferred the grotesque humour of the *Narrenschiffe* to the sonnets on *Laura*. In Skelton, almost the only poet of the first twenty years of Henry VIII.'s reign, the coarser fibres of the English nature are offensively prominent. His fondness for alliteration, and indifference to the syllabic regularity of his verse, show that he too belonged to the Teutonizing party among the English writers, and that he may be affiliated to Langland and the other alliterators of an earlier age. He occasionally wrote some pretty little lyrics,—witness the musical lines *To Maistress Margary Wentworth*,—but buffoonery and a coarse kind of satire were what his nature prompted him to, and in these he excelled. His attacks on Wolsey's pride, luxury, and sensuality are well known, nor can it be said that they were not deserved; still, as proceeding from an incontinent priest, they remind us unpleasantly of "Satan reproving sin." The macaronic verse in which this poet delighted, a farrago of Latin words, classical and barbarous, French words, cant expressions, and English terms clipped or lengthened at pleasure, was called by our ancestors, for many years after his death, "Skeltonical;" but Warton has shown that he did not invent it, but that it was in common use in his time both in Italy and in France. The end of the reign of Henry VIII. was illustrated by the poetry of Surrey and Wyatt. Surrey

These two writers, having resided long in Italy, and learnt, like Chaucer, justly to appreciate the greatness of Italian literature, which none of their countrymen since Chaucer seemed able to do, "greatly polished," as Puttenham says, "our rude and homely manner of vulgar poeie from that it had been before, and for that cause may justly be said the first reformers of our English metre and style." To Chaucer's heroic verse Surrey restored the syllabic regularity which it had lost in inferior hands, and stripping it of rhyme, he for the first time produced English blank verse. Into this rhythm he translated part of the *Aeneid*. He shares with Wyatt the credit of having naturalized the sonnet in English literature. In Scotland there arose in this period several poets of considerable mark, all of whom, in respect of their turn of thought and the best features of their style, may be properly affiliated to Chaucer. Henryson wrote in "rhyme royal"—Chaucer's favourite metre—the *Testament of Faire Creyseide*, a sort of supplement to Chaucer's *Troilus and Creyseide*. In the poetical remains of Gawain Douglas, bishop of Dunkeld, there is much melody and sweetness. In the poems of Dunbar the influence of Chaucer is especially noticeable. *The Thistle and the Rose* and the *Golden Terge* are poems of the same class as the *Assembly of Foules* and the *Court of Love*; the allegoric form, and the machinery of dream and vision, are employed in both. Sir David Lyndsay began by being a great admirer and imitator of Chaucer, but the Teutonic affinities of his mind waxed ever stronger, and he ended by gaining great