the first large translator of the Bible, turning into English the first seven books and part of Job. We owe to him a series of *Homilies*, and his *Colloquy*, afterwards edited by another Ælfric, may be called the first English-Latin dictionary. But this revival had no sooner begun to take root than the Northmen came again in force upon the land and conquered it. During the long interweaving of Danes and English together under Danish kings from 1013 to 1042, no English literature arose. It was not till the quiet reign of Edward the Confessor it again began to live. But no sooner was it born than the Norman invasion repressed, but did not quench its life.

18. **The English Chronicle.**—One great monument, however, of old English prose lasts beyond the Conquest. It is the English Chronicle, and in it our literature is continuous from Ælfred to Stephen. At first it was nothing but a record of the births and deaths of bishops and kings, and was probably a West Saxon Chronicle. Ælfred edited it from various sources, added largely to it from Bæda, and raised it to the dignity of a national history. After his reign, and that of his son Eadward, 901-925, it becomes scanty, but songs and odes are inserted in it. In the reign of Æthelred and during the Danish kings its fulness returns, and growing by additions from various quarters, it continues to be our great contemporary authority in English history till 1154, when it abruptly closes with the death of Stephen. "It is the first history of any Teutonic people in their own language; it is the earliest and the most venerable monument of English prose." In it old English poetry sang its last song, in its death old English prose dies. It is not till the reign of John that English poetry in any extended form appears again in the *Brut* of Layamon. It is not till the reign of Edward the Third that original English prose again begins.

CHAPTER II.

FROM THE CONQUEST TO CHAUCER, 1066—1400.

Layamon's *Brut*, 1205.—Ormin's *Ormulum*, 1215.—Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*, 1356.—William Langland's *Vision concerning Piers the Plowman*, 1362—1378.—John Wyclif's *Translation of the Bible*, 1380.—John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, 1393—4.

Geoffrey Chaucer, born 1340, died 1400.—*Dethe of Blaunche the Duchesse*, 1369.—*Troylus and Creseide.*—*Parlament of Foules.*—*Compleynt of Mars.*—*Anelida and Arcite.*—*Hous of Fame.* 1374—1384.—*Legende of Good Women*, 1385.—*Prose Treatise on Astrolabe*, 1391.—*Canterbury Tales*, 1373 to 1400.

19. **General Outline.**—The invasion of Britain by the English made the island, its speech and its literature, English. The invasion of England by the Danes left our speech and literature still English. The Danes were of our stock and tongue, and we absorbed them. The invasion of England by the Normans seemed likely to crush the English people, to root out their literature, and even to threaten their speech. But that which happened to the Danes happened to the Normans also, and for the same reason. They were originally of like blood to the English, and of like speech; and though during their settlement in Normandy they had become French in manner and language, and their literature French, yet the old blood prevailed in the end. The Norman felt his kindred with the English tongue and spirit, became an Englishman, and left the French tongue to speak and write in English. We absorbed the Normans, and we took into our literature and speech some French elements they had brought with them. It was a process slower in literature than it

was in the political history, but it began from the political struggle. Up to the time of Henry II. the Norman troubled himself but little about the English tongue. But when French foreigners came pouring into the land in the train of Henry and his sons, the Norman allied himself with the Englishman against these foreigners, and the English tongue began to rise into importance. Its literature grew slowly, but as quickly as most of the literatures of Europe, and it never ceased to grow. "The last memoranda of the Peterborough Chronicle are of year 1154. the last extant English Charter can scarcely be earlier than 1155." There are English sermons of the same century, and now, early in the next century, at the central time of this struggle, after the death of Richard the First, the *Brut* of Layamon and the *Ormulum* come forth within ten years of each other to prove the continuity, the survival, and the victory of the English tongue. When the patriotic struggle closed in the reign of Edward I., English literature had risen again through the song, the sermon, and the poem, into importance, and was written by a people made up of Norman and Englishman welded into one by the fight against the foreigner. But though the foreigner was driven out, his literature influenced and continued to influence, the new English poetry. The poetry, we say, for in this revival our literature was only poetical. All prose, with the exception of a few sermons and some religious works from the French, was written in Latin.

20. **Religious and Story-telling Poetry** are the two main streams into which this poetical literature divides itself. The religious poetry is entirely English in spirit and a poetry of the people, from the *Ormulum* of Ormin, 1215, to the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, in which poem the distinctly English poetry reached its truest expression in 1362. The story-telling poetry is English at its beginning but becomes more and

more influenced by the romantic poetry of France, and in the end grows in Chaucer's hands into a poetry of the court and of high society, a literary in contrast with a popular poetry. But even in this the spirit of the poetry is English, though the manner is French. Chaucer becomes less French and even less Italian, till at last we find him entirely national in the *Canterbury Tales*, the best English example of story-telling we possess. The struggle then of England against the foreigner to become and remain England finds its parallel in the struggle of English poetry against the influence of foreign poetry to become and remain English. Both struggles were long and wearisome, but in both England was triumphant. She became a nation, and she won a national literature. It is the steps of this struggle we have now to trace along the two lines already laid down—the poetry of religion and the poetry of story-telling; but to do so we must begin in both instances with the Norman Conquest.

21. **The Religious Poetry.**— The religious revival of the 11th century was strongly felt in Normandy, and both the knights and Churchmen who came to England with William the Conqueror and during his son's reign were founders of abbeys whence the country was civilized. In Henry I.'s reign the religion of England was further quickened by missionary monks sent by Bernard of Clairvaux. London was stirred to rebuild St. Paul's, and abbeys rose in all the well-watered valleys of the North. The English citizens of London, and the English peasants in the country received a new religious life from the foreign noble and the foreign monk, and both were drawn together through a common worship. When this took place a desire arose for religious handbooks in the English tongue. Ormin's *Ormulum* is a type of these. We may date it, though not precisely, at 1215, the date of the Great Charter. It is entirely English, not five French words

are to be found in it. It is a metrical version of the service of each day with the addition of a sermon in verse. The book was called *Ormulum*, "for this that Orm it wrought," Orm being a contraction for Ormin. It marks the rise of English religious literature, and its religion is simple and rustic. Orm's ideal monk is to be "a very pure man, and altogether without property, except that he shall be found in simple meat and clothes." He will have "a hard and stiff and rough and heavy life to lead. All his heart and desire ought to be aye toward heaven, and his Master well to serve." This was English religion in the country at this date.

22. **Literature and the Friars.**—There was little religion in the towns, but this was soon changed. In 1221 the Mendicant Friars came to England, and they chose the towns for their work. Their influence was great, and they drew Norman and English more closely together on the ground of religion. The first Friars were foreigners, and they necessarily used many French words in their English teaching, and Normans as well as English now began to write religious works in English. In 1303 Robert of Brunne translated a French poem, the Manual of Sins (written thirty years earlier by William of Waddington), under the title of *Handlyng Sinne*. William of Shoreham translated the whole of the Psalter into English prose about 1327, and wrote religious poems. The *Cursor Mundi*, written about 1320, and thought "the best book of all" by men of that time, was a metrical version of the Old and New Testament, interspersed, as was the *Handlyng Sinne*, with legends of saints. Some scattered Sermons, and in 1340 the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (Remorse of Conscience), translated from the French, mark how *English prose* was rising through religion. About the same year Richard Rolle of Hampole wrote in Latin and in Northumbrian English for the "unlearned," a poem called the *Pricke of Conscience*, and some

prose treatises. The poem marks the close of the religious influence of the Friars. They had been attacked before in a poem of 1320; but in this poem there is not a word said against them. It is true the author, living far in the country, may not have been thrown much with them. Twenty years later however all is changed; and in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, the protest its writer makes for purity of life is also a protest against the foul life and the hypocrisy of the Friars. In that poem, as we shall see, the whole of the popular English religion of the time of Chaucer is represented. In it also the natural, unliterary, country English is best represented. It brings us up in the death of its author to the year 1400, the same year in which Chaucer died.

23. **History and the Story-telling Poetry.**—The Normans brought an historical taste with them to England, and created a most valuable historical literature. It was written in Latin, and we have nothing to do with it till story-telling grew out of it in the time of the Great Charter. But it was in itself of such importance that a few things must be said about it.

(1) **The men who wrote it** were called CHRONICLERS. At first they were mere annalists—that is, they jotted down the events of year after year without any attempt to bind them together into a connected whole. But afterwards, from the time of Henry I., another class of men arose, who wrote, not in scattered monasteries, but in the Court. Living at the centre of political life, their histories were written in a philosophic spirit, and wove into a whole the growth of law and national life and the story of affairs abroad. They are our great authorities for the history of these times. They begin with *William of Malmesbury*, whose book ends in 1142, and die out after *Matthew Paris*, 1235—73. Historical literature in England is only represented after the death of Henry III. by a

few dry Latin annalists till it rose again in modern English prose in 1513, when Sir Thomas More's *Life of Edward V. and Richard III.* is said to have been written.

(2) **A distinct English feeling** soon sprang up among these Norman historians. English patriotism was far from having died among the English themselves. The *Sayings of Ælfred* about 1200, were written in English by the English. These and some ballads, as well as the early English war songs, interested the Norman historians and were collected by them. William of Malmesbury, who was born of English and Norman parents, has sympathies with both peoples, and his history marks how both were becoming one nation. The same welding together of the conquered and the conquerors is seen in the others till we come to Matthew Paris, whose view of history is entirely that of an Englishman. When he wrote, Norman noble and English yeoman, Norman abbot and English priest, were, and are in his pages, one in blood and one in interests.

24. **English Story-telling** grew out of this historical literature. There was a Welsh priest at the court of Henry I., called GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, who took upon himself to write history. He had been given, he said, an ancient Welsh book to translate which told in verse the history of Britain from the days when Brut, the great grandson of Æneas, landed on its shores, through the whole history of King Arthur and his Round Table down to Cadwallo, a Welsh king who died in 689. The Latin translation he made of this he called a history. The real historians were angry at the fiction, and declared that throughout the whole of it "he had lied saucily and shamelessly." It was indeed only a clever putting together of a number of Welsh legends, but it was *the beginning of story-telling* in our land. Everyone who read it was delighted with it; it made, as

we should say, a sensation, and as much on the Continent as in England. In it the Welsh had in some sort their revenge, for in its stories they invaded English literature, and their tales have never since ceased to live in it. They charm us as much in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* as they charmed us in the days of Henry I. But the stories Geoffrey of Monmouth told were in the Latin tongue. They were put first into French verse by Geoffrey Gaimar. They got afterwards to France and, added to from Breton legends, were made into a poem and decked out with the ornaments of French romance. In that form they came back to England as the work of *Wace*, a Norman trouveur, who called his poem the *Brut*, and completed it in 1155, shortly after the accession of Henry II.

25. **Layamon's "Brut."**—In this French form the story drifted through England, and at last falling into the hands of an English priest in Worcestershire, he resolved to tell it in English verse to his countrymen, and doing so became the author of our first English poem after the Conquest. We may roughly say that its date is 1205, ten years or so before the *Ormulum* was written, ten years before the Great Charter. It is plain that its composition, though it told a Welsh story, was looked on as a patriotic work by the writer. "There was a priest in the land," he writes of himself, "whose name was Layamon; he was son of Leovenath: May the Lord be gracious unto him! He dwelt at Earnley, a noble church on the bank of Severn, near Radstone, where he read books. It came in mind to him and in his chiefest thought that he would tell the noble deeds of England, what the men were named, and whence they came, who first had English land." And it was truly of great importance. The poem opened to the imagination of the English people an immense past for the history of the island they dwelt in, and made a common bond

of interest between Norman and Englishman. Though chiefly rendered from the French, there are not fifty Norman words in its more than 30,000 lines. The old English alliterative metre is kept up with a few rare rimes. As we read the short quick lines in which the battles are described, as we listen to the simple metaphors, and feel the strong, rude character of the poem, it is as if we were reading Cædmon; and what Cædmon was to early English poetry, Layamon is to English poetry after the Conquest. He is the first of the new singers.

26. **Story-telling grows French in form.**—After an interval the desire for story-telling increased in England. The story of *Genesis and Exodus* was versified about 1250, and in it and some others about the same date rimes are used. Many tales of Arthur's knights, and other tales which had an English origin, such as the lays of *Havelok the Dane* and of *King Horn* (about 1280) were translated from the French; Robert of Gloucester wrote his *Riming Chronicle*, 1298, and the *Romance of King Alexander*, about 1280, originally a Greek work, was adapted from the French into English. As the dates grow nearer to 1300, seven years before the death of Edward I., the amount of French words increases, and the French romantic manner of telling stories is more and more marked. In the *Lay of Havelok* the spirit and descriptions of the poem still resemble old English work; in the *Romance of Alexander*, on the other hand, the natural landscape, the conventional introductions to the parts, the gorgeous descriptions of pomps, and armour, and cities, the magic wonders, the manners, and feasts, and battles of chivalry, the love passages, are all steeped in the colours of French romantic poetry. Now this romance was adapted by a Frenchman in the year 1200. (?) It took therefore nearly a century before the French romantic manner of poetry could be naturalized in English; and it was naturalized, curious to

say, at the very time when England as a nation had lost its French elements and become entirely English. Finally, the influence of this French school in England is seen in the earlier poems of Chaucer, and in poems, such as the *Court of Love*, attributed to him. It came to its height and died in the translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, the last and crowning effort also of French romance. After that time the story-telling of England sought its subjects in another country than France. It turned to Italy.

27. **English Lyrics.**—In the midst of all this story-telling, like prophecies of what should afterwards be so lovely in our poetry, rose, no one can tell how, some lyric poems, country idylls, love songs, and, later on, some war songs. The English ballad, sung from town to town by wandering gleemen, had never altogether died. A number of rude ballads collected round the legendary *Robin Hood*, and the kind of poetic literature which sung of the outlaw and the forest, and afterwards so fully of the wild border life, gradually took form. About 1280 a beautiful little idyll, called *The Owl and the Nightingale*, was written in Dorsetshire, in which the author, Nicholas of Guildford, judges between the rival birds. In 1300 we meet with a few lyric poems, full of charm. They sing of springtime with its blossoms, of the woods ringing with the thrush and nightingale, of the flowers and the seemly sun, of country work, of the woes and joy of love, and many other delightful things. They are tinged with the colour of French romance, but they have an English background. We read nothing like them, except in Scotland, till we come to the Elizabethan time. After this, in 1352, the war lyrics of *Laurence Minot* sing the great deeds and battles of Edward III.

28. **The King's English.**—We have thus traced the rise of our English literature to the time of Chaucer. We must now complete the sketch by a word or two

on the language in which it was written. The literary English language seemed at first to be destroyed by the Conquest. It lingered till Stephen's death in the English Chronicle; a few traces of it are still found about Henry III.'s death in the *Brut* of Layamon. But, practically speaking, from the 12th century till the middle of the 14th there was no standard of English. The language, spoken only by the people, fell back into that broken state of anarchy in which each part of the country has its own dialect, and each writer uses the dialect of his own dwelling-place. All the poems then of which we have spoken were written in dialects of English, not in a fixed English common to all writers. French or Latin was the language of literature and of the literary class. But towards the middle of Edward the Third's reign English got the better of French. After the Black Death in 1349 French was less used; in 1362 English was made the language of the courts of law. At the same time a standard English language was born. It did not overthrow the dialects, for the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* and Wyclif's *Translation of the Bible* are both in a dialect; but it stood forth as the literary language in which all future English literature had to be written. It had been growing up in Robert of Brunne's work, and in the *Romance of King Alexander;* but it was fixed into clear form by Chaucer and Gower. It was in fact the English language talked in the Court and in the Court society to which these poets belonged. It was the King's English, and the fact that it was the tongue of the best and most cultivated society, as well as the great excellence of the works written in it by these poets, made it at once the tongue of literature.

29. **Religious Literature in Langland and Wyclif.**—We have traced the work of "transition English," as it has been called, along the lines of popular religion and story-telling. The first of these, in the realm of poetry, reaches its goal in the work of

William Langland; in the realm of prose it reaches its goal in Wyclif. In both these writers, the work differs from any that went before it, by its extraordinary power, and by the depth of its religious feeling. It is plain that it represented a society much more strongly moved by religion than that of the beginning of the fourteenth century. In Wyclif, the voice comes from the university, and it went all over the land in the body of preachers whom, like Wesley, he sent forth. In Langland's *Vision* we have a voice from the centre of the people themselves; his poem is written in a rude English dialect, in alliterative English verse, and in the old English manner. The very ploughboy could understand it. It became the book of those who desired social and Church reform. It was as eagerly read by the free labourers and fugitive serfs who collected round John Ball and Wat Tyler.

30. **Causes of the Religious Revival.**—It was originally due to the preaching of the Friars in the last century and to the noble example they set of devotion to the poor. When the Friars however became rich, though pretending to be poor, and impure of life, though pretending to goodness, the religious feeling they had stirred turned against themselves, and its two strongest cries, both on the Continent and in England, were for Truth, and for Purity, in life and in the Church.

Another cause common to the Continent and to England in this century was the movement for the equal rights of man against the class system of the middle ages. It was made a religious movement when men said that they were equal before God, and that goodness in His eyes was the only nobility. And it brought with it a religious protest against the oppression of the people by the class of the nobles.

There were two other causes, however, special to England at this time. One was the utter misery of the people owing to the French wars. Heavy taxation