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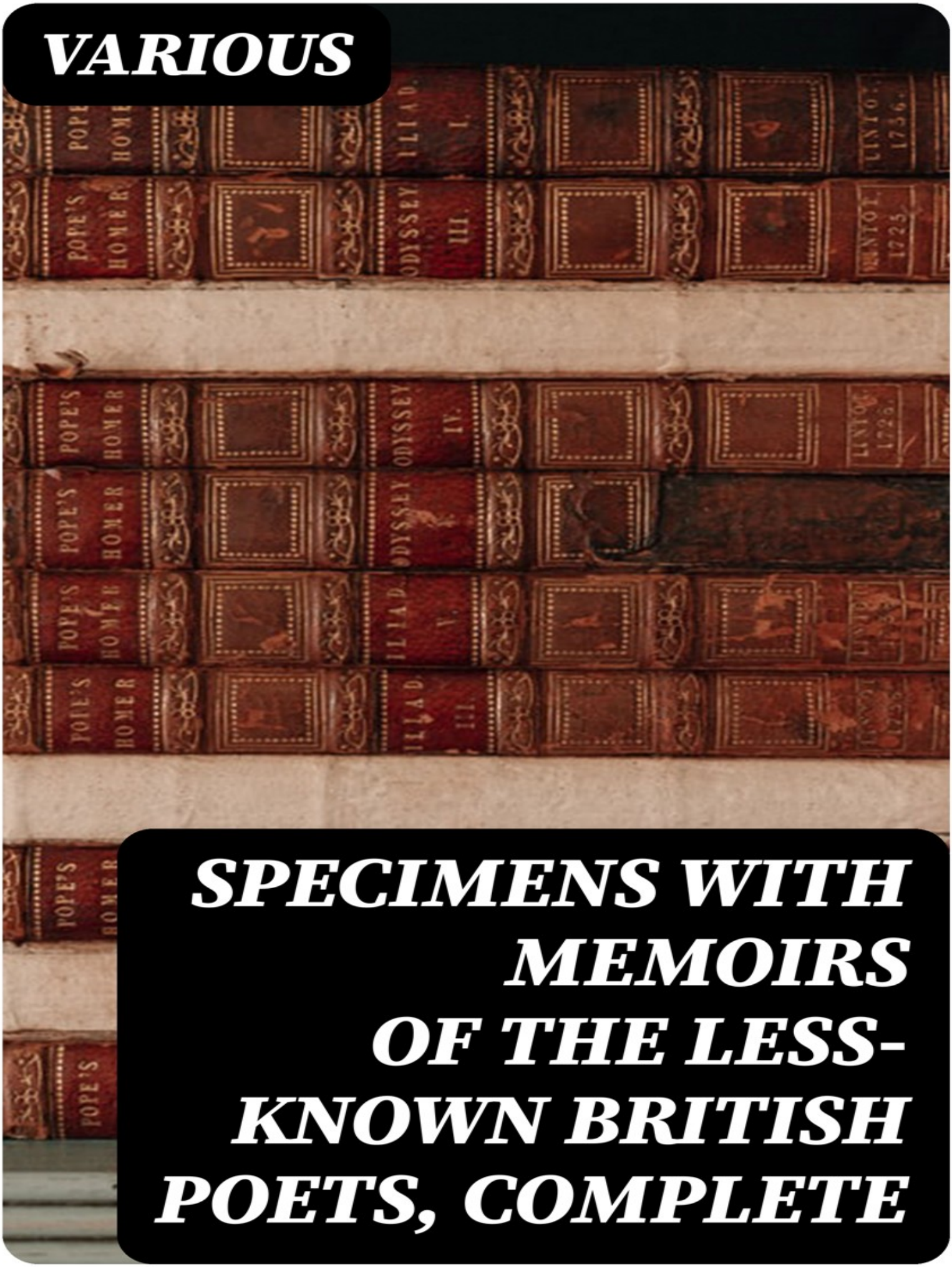

SPECIMENS WITH MEMOIRS OF THE LESS-KNOWN BRITISH POETS, COMPLETE

Various

Specimens with Memoirs of the Less-known British Poets, Complete

EAN 8596547306658

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

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We propose to introduce our 'Specimens' by a short Essay on the Origin and Progress of English Poetry on to the days of Chaucer and of Gower. Having called, in conjunction with many other critics, Chaucer 'the Father of English Poetry,' to seek to go back further may seem like pursuing antenatal researches. But while Chaucer was the sun, a certain glimmering dawn had gone before him, and to reflect that, is the object of the following pages.

Britain, when the Romans invaded it, was a barbarous country; and although subjugated and long held by that people, they seem to have left it nearly as uncultivated and illiterate as they found it. 'No magnificent remains,' says Macaulay, 'of Latian porches and aqueducts are to be found in Britain. No writer of British birth is to be reckoned among the masters of Latin poetry and eloquence. It is not probable that the islanders were, at any time, generally familiar with the tongue of their Italian rulers. From the Atlantic to the vicinity of the Rhine the Latin has, during many centuries, been predominant. It drove out the Celtic—it was not driven out by the Teutonic—and it is at this day the basis of the French, Spanish, and Portuguese languages. In our island the Latin appears never to have superseded the old Gaelic speech, and could not stand its ground before the German.' It was in the fifth century that that modification of the German or Teutonic speech called the Anglo-Saxon was introduced into this country. It soon asserted its superiority over the British tongue, which seemed to retreat before it, reluctantly and proudly, like a lion, into the mountain-fastnesses of Wales or to the rocky sea-beach of Cornwall. The triumph was not completed all at once, but from the beginning it was secure. The bards of Wales continued to sing, but their strains resembled the mutterings of thunder among their own hills, only half heard in the distant valleys, and exciting neither curiosity nor awe. For five centuries, with the exception of some Latin words added by the preachers of Christianity, the Anglo-Saxon language continued much as it was when first introduced. Barbarous as the manners of the people were, literature was by no

means left without a witness. Its chief cultivators were the monks and other religious persons, who spent their leisure in multiplying books, either by original composition or by transcription, including treatises on theology, historical chronicles, and a great abundance and variety of poetical productions. These were written at first exclusively in Latin, but occasionally, in process of time, in the Anglo- Saxon tongue. The theology taught in them was, no doubt, crude and corrupted, the history was stuffed with fables, and the poetry was rough and bald in the extreme; but still they furnished a food fitted for the awakening mind of the age. When the Christian religion reached Great Britain, it brought necessarily with it an impulse to intellect as well as to morality. So startling are the facts it relates, so broad and deep the principles it lays down, so humane the spirit it inculcates, and so ravishing the hopes it awakens, that, however disguised in superstition and clouded by imperfect representation, it never fails to produce, in all countries to which it comes, a resurrection of the nation's virtue, and a revival, for a time at least, of the nation's political and intellectual energy and genius. Hence we find the very earliest literary names in our early annals are those of Christian missionaries. Such is said to have been Gildas, a Briton, who lived in the first part of the sixth century, and is the reputed author of a short history of Britain in Latin. Such was the still more apocryphal Nennius, also called, till of late, the writer of a small Latin historical work. Such was St Columbanus, who was born in Ireland in 560; became a monk in the Irish monastery of Benchor; and afterwards, at the head of twelve disciples, preached Christianity, in its

most ascetic form, in England and in France; founded in the latter country various monasteries; and, when banished by Queen Brunehaut on account of his stern inflexibility of character, went to Switzerland, and then to Lombardy, proselytising the heathen, and defending, by his letters and other writings, the peculiar tenets of the Irish Church in reference to the time of the celebration of Easter and to the popular heresies of the day. He died October 2, 615, in the monastery of Bobbio; and his religious treatises and Latin poetry gave an undoubted impulse to the age's progress in letters.

About this period the better sort of Saxons, both clergy and laity, got into the habit of visiting Rome; while Rome, in her turn, sent emissaries to England. Thus, while the one insensibly imbibed new knowledge as well as devotion from the great centre, the other brought with them to our shores importations of books, including copies of such religious classics as Josephus and Chrysostom, and of such literary classics as Homer. About 680, died Caedmon, a monk of Whitby, one of the first who composed in Anglo-Saxon, and some of whose compositions are preserved. Strange and myth-like stories are told by Bede about this remarkable natural genius. He was originally a cow-herd. Partly from want of training, and partly from bashfulness, when the harp was given him in the hall, and he was asked, as all others were, to raise the voice of song, Caedmon had often to abscond in confusion. On one occasion he had retired to the stable, where he fell into a sound sleep. He dreamed that a stranger appeared to him, and said, 'Caedmon, sing me something.' Caedmon replied that it was his incapacity to

sing which had brought him to take refuge in the stable. 'Nay,' said the stranger, 'but thou hast something to sing.' 'What shall I sing?' rejoined Caedmon. 'Sing the Creation,' and thereupon he began to pour out verses, which, when he awoke, he remembered, repeated, and to which he added others as good. The first lines are, as translated into English, the following:—

Now let us praise
The Guardian of heaven,
The might of the Creator
And his counsel—
The Glory!—Father of men!
He first created,
For the children of men,
Heaven as a roof—
The holy Creator!
Then the world—
The Guardian of mankind!
The Eternal Lord!
Produced afterwards
The Earth for men—
The Almighty Master!'

Our readers all remember the well-known story of Coleridge falling asleep over Purchas's 'Pilgrims'; how the poem of 'Kubla Khan' came rushing from dreamland upon his soul; and how, when awakened, he wrote it down, and found it to be, if not sense, something better—a glorious piece of fantastic imagination. We knew a gentleman who, slumbering while in a state of bad health, produced, in the course of a few hours, one or two thousand rhymed lines,

some of which he repeated in our hearing afterwards, and which were full of point and poetry. We cannot see that Caedmon's lines betray any weird inspiration; but when rehearsed the next day to the Abbess Hilda, to whom the town-bailiff of Whitby conducted him, she and a circle of learned men pronounced that he had received the gift of song direct from heaven! They, after one or two other trials of his powers, persuaded him to become a monk in the house of the Abbess, who commanded him to transfer to verse the whole of the Scripture history. It is said that he was constantly employed in repeating to himself what he had heard; or, as one of his old biographers has it, 'like a clean animal ruminating it, he turned it into most sweet verse.' In this way he wrote or rather improvised a vast quantity of poetry, chiefly on religious subjects. Thorpe, in his edition of this author, has preserved a speech of Satan, bearing a striking resemblance to some parts of Milton:—

'Boiled within him
His thought about his heart,
Hot was without him,
His due punishment.
"This narrow place is most unlike
That other that we formerly knew
High in heaven's kingdom,
Which my master bestowed on me,
Though we it, for the All-Powerful,
May not possess.

* * * * *

That is to me of sorrows the greatest,
That Adam,

Who was wrought of earth,
Shall possess
My strong seat;
That it shall be to him in delight,
And we endure this torment,
Misery in this hell.

* * * * *

Here is a vast fire,
Above and underneath.
Never did I see
A loathlier landscape.
The flame abateth not
Hot over hell.
Me hath the clasping of these rings,
This hard-polished band,
Impeded in my course,
Debarred me from my way.
My feet are bound,
My hands manacled;
Of these hell-doors are
The ways obstructed,
So that with aught I cannot
From these limb-bonds escape.
About me lie
Huge gratings
Of hard iron,
Forged with heat,
With which me God
Hath fastened by the neck.
Thus perceive I that he knoweth my mind,

And that he knew also,
The Lord of hosts,
That should us through Adam
Evil befall,
About the realm of heaven,
Where I had power of my hands."'

Through these rude lines there flashes forth, like fire through a thick dull grating, a powerful conception—one which Milton has borrowed and developed—that of the Evil One feeling in his dark bosom jealousy at young Man, almost overpowering his hatred to God; and another conception still more striking, that of the devil's thorough conviction that all his plans and thoughts are entirely known by his great Adversary, and are counteracted before they are formed—

'Thus perceive I that he knoweth my mind.'

Compare this with Milton's lines—

'So should I purchase dear
Short intermission, bought with double smart.
This knows my Punisher; therefore as far
From granting he, as I from begging peace.'

Caedmon saw, without being able fully to express, the complex idea of Satan, as distracted between a thousand thoughts, all miserable—tossed between a thousand winds, all hot as hell—'pale ire, envy, and despair' struggling within him—fury at man overlapping anger at God—remorse and reckless desperation wringing each other's miserable hands—a sense of guilt which will not confess, a fear that will not quake, a sorrow that will not weep, a respect for God which will not worship; and yet, springing out of all these

elements, a strange, proud joy, as though the torrid soil of Pandemonium should flower, which makes 'the hell he suffers seem a heaven,' compared to what his destiny might be were he either plunged into a deeper abyss, or taken up unchanged to his former abode of glory. This, in part at least, the monk of Whitby discerned; but it was reserved for Milton to embody it in that tremendous figure which has since continued to dwindle all the efforts of art, and to haunt, like a reality, the human imagination.

Passing over some interesting but subordinate Saxon writers, such as Ceolfrid, Abbot of Wearmouth; Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury; Felix of Croyland; and Alcuine, King Egbert's librarian at York, we come to one who himself formed an era in the history of our early literature—the venerable Bede. This famous man was educated in the monastery of Wearmouth, and there appears to have spent the whole of his quiet, innocent, and studious life. He was the very sublimation of a book-worm. One might fancy him becoming at last, as in the 'Metamorphoses' of Ovid, one of the books, or rolls of vellum and parchment over which he con- stantly pored. That he did not marry, or was given in marriage, we are certain; but there is little evidence that he even ate or drank, walked or slept. To read and to write seemed the 'be all and the end all' of his existence. Important as well as numerous were his contributions to literature. He translated from the Scriptures. He wrote religious treatises, biographies, and commentaries upon portions of Holy Writ. Besides his very valuable Ecclesiastical History, he composed various pieces of Latin poetry. His works in all were forty-four in number: and it is

said that on the very day of his death (it took place in 735) he was dictating to his amanuensis, and had just completed a book. His works are wonderful for his time, and not the less interesting for a fine cobweb of fable which is woven over parts of them, and which seems in keeping with their venerable character. Thus, in speaking of the Magi who visited the infant Redeemer, he is very particular in describing their age, appearance, and offerings. Melchior, the first, was old, had gray hair, and a long beard; and offered 'gold' to Christ, in, acknowledgment of His sovereignty. Gaspar, the second, was young, and had no beard; and he offered 'frankincense,' in recognition of our Lord's divinity. Balthasar, the third, was of a dark complexion, had a large beard, and offered 'myrrh' to our Saviour's humanity. We should, we confess, miss such pleasant little myths in other old books besides Bede's Histories. They seem appropriate to ancient works, as the beard is to the goat or the hermit; and the truth that lies in them is not difficult to eliminate. The next name of note in our literary annals is that of the great Alfred. Surely if ever man was not only before his age, but before 'all ages,' it was he. A palm of the tropics growing on a naked Highland mountain-side, or an English oak bending over one of the hot springs of Hecla, were not a stranger or more preternatural sight than a man like Alfred appearing in a century like the ninth. A thousand theories about men being the creatures of their age, the products of circumstances, &c., sink into abeyance beside the facts of his life; and we are driven to the good old belief that to some men the 'inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding;' and that

their wisdom, their genius, and their excellency do not proceed from them-selves. On his deeds of valour and patriotism it is not necessary to dwell. These form the popular and bepraised side of his character, but they give a very inadequate idea of the whole. On one occasion he visited the Danish camp—a king disguised as a harper; but he was, all his life long, a harper disguised as a king. He was at once a warrior, a legislator, an architect, a shipbuilder, a philosopher, a scholar, and a poet. His great object, as avowed in his last will, was to leave his people 'free as their own thoughts.' Hence he bent the whole force of his mind, first, to defend them from foreign foes, by encouraging the new naval strength he had himself established; and then to cultivate their intellects, and make them, as well as their country, worth defending. Let us quote the glowing words of Burke:—'He was indefatigable in his endeavours to bring into England men of learning in all branches from every part of Europe, and unbounded in his liberality to them. He enacted by a law that every person possessed of two hides of land should send their children to school until sixteen. He enterprised even a greater design than that of forming the growing generation—to instruct even the grown, enjoining all his sheriffs and other officers immediately to apply themselves to learning, or to quit their offices. Whatever trouble he took to extend the benefits of learning among his subjects, he shewed the example himself, and applied to the cultivation of his mind with unparalleled diligence and success. He could neither read nor write at twelve years old, but he improved his time in such a manner, that he became one of the most knowing men of his age, in geometry, in

philosophy, in architecture, and in music. He applied himself to the improvement of his native language; he translated several valuable works from Latin, and wrote a vast number of poems in the Saxon tongue with a wonderful facility and happiness. He not only excelled in the theory of the arts and sciences, but possessed a great mechanical genius for the executive part. He improved the manner of shipbuilding, introduced a more beautiful and commodious architecture, and even taught his countrymen the art of making bricks; most of the buildings having been of wood before his time—in a word, he comprehended in the greatness of his mind the whole of government, and all its parts at once; and what is most difficult to human frailty was at the same time sublime and minute.'

Some exaggeration must be allowed for in all this account of Alfred the Great. But the fact that he left a stamp in his age so deep,—that nothing except what was good and great has been ascribed to him,—that the very fictions told of him are of such *vraisemblance* and magnitude as to FIT IN to nothing less than an extraordinary man,—and that, as Burke says, 'whatever dark spots of human frailty may have adhered to such a character, are entirely hid in the splendour of many shining qualities and grand virtues, that throw a glory over the obscure period in which he lived, and which is for no other reason worthy of our knowledge,'—all proclaim his supremacy. Like many great men,—like Julius Caesar, with his epilepsy—or Sir Walter Scott and Byron, with their lameness—or Schleiermacher, with his deformed appearance,—a physical infirmity beset Alfred most of his life, and at last carried him off at a comparatively early age.

This was a disease in his bowels, which had long afflicted him, 'without interrupting his designs, or souring his temper.' Nay, who can say that the constant presence of such a memento of weakness and mortality did not operate as a strong, quiet stimulus to do with his might what his hand found to do—to lower pride, and to prompt to labour? If Saladin had had for his companion some such faithful hound of sorrow, it would have saved him the ostentatious flag stretched over his head, in the hour of wassail, with the inscription, 'Saladin, Saladin, king of kings! Saladin must die!'

Alfred wrote little that was original, but he was a copious translator. He rendered into the Anglo-Saxon tongue—which he sought to enrich with the fatness of other soils—the historical works of Orosius and of Bede; nay, it is said the Fables of Aesop, and the Psalms of David—desirous, it would seem, to teach his people morality and religion, through the fine medium, of fiction and poetry.

Alfric, Archbishop of Canterbury, is the name of another important contributor to Saxon literature. He wrote a grammar of his native language, which procured him the name of the 'Grammarian,' besides a collection of homilies, some theological treatises, and a translation of the first seven books of the Old Testament. In imitation of Alfred, he devoted all his energies to the instruction of the common people, constantly writing in Anglo-Saxon, and avoiding as much as possible the use of compound or obscure words. After him appeared Cynewulf, Bishop of Winchester, Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, and others of some note. There was also slowly piled up in the course of ages, and by

a succession of authors, that remarkable production, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.' This is thought to have commenced soon after the reign of Alfred, and continued till the times of Henry II. Previous, however, to the Norman invasion, there had been a decided falling off in the learning of the Saxons. This arose from various causes. Incessant wars tended to conserve and increase the barbarism of the people. Various libraries of value were destroyed by the incursions of the Danes. And not a few bishops, and other ecclesiastical dignitaries, began to consider learning as prejudicial to piety-and grammar and ungodliness were thought akin. The effect of this upon the subordinate clergy was most pernicious. In the tenth century, Oswald, Archbishop of Canterbury, found the monks of his province so grossly ignorant, not only of letters, but even of the canonical rules of their respective orders, that he required to send to France for competent masters to give them instruction.

At length came the Conqueror, William, and one battle gave England to the Normans, which had cost the Romans, the Saxons, and the Danes so much time and blood to acquire. The people were not only conquered, but cowed and crushed. England was as easily and effectually subdued as was Ireland, sometime after, by Henry II. But while the Conquest was for a season fatal to liberty, it was from the first favourable to every species of literature, art, and poetry. 'The influence,' says Campbell, 'of the Norman Conquest upon the language of England was like that of a great inundation, which at first buries the face of the landscape under its waters, but which, at last subsiding, leaves behind it the elements of new beauty and fertility. Its

first effect was to degrade the Anglo- Saxon tongue to the exclusive use of the inferior orders, and by the transference of estates ecclesiastical benefices, and civil dignities to Norman possessors, to give the French language, which had begun to prevail at court from the time of Edward the Confessor, a more complete predominance among the higher classes of society. The native gentry of England were either driven into exile, or depressed into a state of dependence on their conqueror, which habituated them to speak his language. On the other hand, we received from the Normans the first germs of romantic poetry; and our language was ultimately indebted to them for a wealth and compass of expression which it probably would not have otherwise possessed.'

The Anglo-Saxon, however, held its place long among the lower orders, and specimens of it, both in prose and verse, are found a century after the Conquest. Gradually the Norman tongue began to amalgamate with it, and the result was, the English. At what precise year our language might be said to begin, it is impossible to determine. Throughout the whole of the twelfth century, great changes were taking place in the grammatical construction, as well as in the substance of the Anglo-Saxon. Some new words were imported from the Norman, but, as Dr Johnson remarks, 'the language was still more materially altered by the change of its sounds, the cutting short of its syllables, and the softening down of its terminations, and inflections of words.' Somewhere between 1180 and 1216, the majestic speech in which Shakspeare was to write 'Macbeth' and 'King Lear,' Lord Bacon his 'Advancement of Learning,' Milton his

'Paradise Lost' and 'Areopagitica,' Burke his 'Reflections,' and Sir Walter Scott the Waverley Novels, and whose rough, but manly accents were to be spoken by at least a hundred million tongues, commenced its career, and not since Homer,

> "on the Chian strand,
> Beheld the Iliad and the
> Odyssee Rise to the swelling
> of the voiceful sea,"

had a nobler era been marked in the history of literature. For here was a tongue born which was destined to mate even with that of Greece in richness and flexibility, to make the language of Cicero and Virgil seem stiff and stilted in comparison, and, if not to vie with the French in airy grace, or with the Italian in liquid music, to excel them far in teeming resources and robust energy. Memorable and hallowed for ever be the hour when the 'well of English undefiled' first sparkled to the day!

Previous to this the chief of the poets, after the Conquest, were Normans. The country whence that people came had for some time been celebrated for poetry. France was, as to its poetic literature, divided into two great sections—the Provençal and the Northern. The first was like the country where it flourished—gay, flowery, and exuberant; it swam in romance, and its rhymers delighted, when addressing large audiences under the open skies of their delightful climate, to indulge in compliment and fanfaronade, to sing of war, wine, and love.

The Normans produced a race of simpler poets. That some of them were men as well as singers, is proved by the

fact that it was a bard named Taillefer who first broke the English ranks at the battle of Hastings. After him came Philippe de Thaun, who tried to set to song the science of his day; Thorold, the author of a romance entitled 'Roland;' Samson de Nauteuil, the translator of Solomon's Proverbs into French verse; Geoffrey Gaimar, who wrote a Chronicle of the Saxon kings; and one David, a minstrel of no little note and power in his day. But a more remarkable writer succeeded, and his work, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up all the productions of these clever but petty poets. This was Wace, commonly called Maistre Wace, a native of Jersey. In 1160, or as some say 1155, Wace finished his 'Brut d'Angleterre' which is in reality a translation into French of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who wrote a History of Britain from the imaginary Brutus of Troy down to Cadwallader in 689. Literature owes not a little to Wace's poem. He collected into a permanent shape a number of traditions and legends —many of them interesting—which had been floating through Europe, just as Macpherson preserved in Ossian not a few real fragments of the songs of Selma. And, as we shall see immediately, Wace's production became the basis of the earliest of English poems.

Maistre Wace is the author also of a History of the Normans, which he calls 'Roman de Rou;' or, 'The Romance of Rollo.' He was a great favourite with Henry II., who bestowed on him a canonry in the Cathedral of Bayeux. Besides Wace, there flourished about the same time Benoit, who wrote a History of the Dukes of Normandy; and Guernes, a churchman of Pont St Maxence in Picardy, who wrote in verse a Life of St Thomas à Becket.

At the beginning of the century following the Conquest, the chief authors, such as Peter of Blois, John of Salisbury, Joseph of Exeter, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, all wrote in Latin. Layamon, however, a priest of Ernesley- upon-Severn, used the vernacular in a poem which, as we have already hinted, was essentially a translation of Wace's 'Brut d'Angleterre.' The most remarkable thing about Layamon's poem is the language in which it is written-language in which you catch English in the very act of chipping the Saxon shell, or, as Campbell happily remarks, 'the style of Layamon is as nearly the intermediate state of the old and new languages as can be found in any ancient specimen — something like the new insect stirring its wings before it has shaken off the aurelia state.'

Between Layamon and Robert of Gloucester a good many miscellaneous strains—some of a satirical, others of an amatory, and others again of a legendary and devout style —were produced. It was customary then for minstrels, at the instance of the clergy, to sing on Sundays devotional strains on the harp to the assembled multitudes. At public entertainments, during week-days, gay ditties were common. One of these is extant, but is too coarse for quotation. It is entitled 'The Land of Cokayne,' an allegorical satire on the luxury and vice of the Church, given under the description of an imaginary paradise, in which the nuns are represented as houris, and the black and grey monks as their paramours. 'Richard of Alemaine' is a ballad, composed by an adherent of Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, after the defeat of the Royal party at the battle of Lewes in 1264. In the year after that battle the Royal cause

rallied, and the Earl of Warren and Sir Hugh Bigod returned from exile, and helped the King in his victory. In the battle of Lewes, Richard, King of the Romans, his brother Henry III., and Prince Edward, with many others of the Royal party, were taken prisoners. [Note: See 'Richard of Alemaine,' Percy's Reliques, vol. ii., p. 2.]

The spirit and the allusions of this song shew that it was composed by Leicester's party in the moment of their victory, and not after the reaction which took place against their cause, and it must therefore belong to the thirteenth century. To this period, too, probably belongs a political satire, published by Ritson, and which Campbell thus charac- terises:—'It is a ballad on the execution of the Scottish patriots, Sir William Wallace and Sir Simon Frazer. The diction is as barbarous as we should expect from a song of triumph on such a subject. It relates the death and treatment of Wallace very minutely. The circumstance of his being covered with a mock crown of laurel in Westminster Hall, which Stow repeats, is there mentioned, and that of his legs being fastened with iron fetters "*under his horse's wombe*" is told with savage exultation. The piece was probably indited in the very year of the political murders which it celebrates, certainly before 1314, as it mentions the skulking of Robert Bruce, which, after the battle of Bannockburn, must have become a jest out of season.'

Campbell quotes a love-ditty of this period, which is not devoid of merit:—

'For her love I cark and cave,
For her love I droop and dare,

For her love my bliss is bare,
And all I wax wan.
'For her love in sleep I slake,[1]
For her love all night I wake,
For her love mourning I make
More than any man.'

[1] 'In sleep I slake:' am deprived of sleep.

And another of a pastoral vein:—

'When the nightingale singës the woods waxen green,
Leaf, grass, and blossom springs in Avril I ween,
And love is to my heart gone, with one spear so keen,
Night and day my blood it drinks, my heart doth me teen.'

About a hundred years after Layamon (in 1280) appeared a poet not dissimilar to him, named Robert of Gloucester. His surname is unknown, and so are the particulars of his history. We know only that he was a monk of Gloucester Abbey, that he lived in the reigns of Henry III. and Edward I., and that he translated the Legends of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and continued the History of England down to the time of Edward I. This work is wonder- fully minute, and, generally speaking, accurate in its topography as well as narrative, and was of service to Selden when he wrote his Notes to Drayton's 'Polyolbion.' It is more valuable in this respect than as a piece of imagination.

He narrates the grandest events—such as the first crusaders bursting into Asia, with a sword of fire hung in the firmament before them, and beckoning them on their way—as coolly as he might the emigration of a colony of ants. Yet, although there is little animation or poetry in his general

manner, he usually succeeds in riveting the reader's attention; and the speeches he puts into the mouths of his heroes glow with at least rhetorical fire. And as a critic truly remarks—'Injustice to the ancient versifier, we should remember that he had still only a rude language to employ, the speech of boors and burghers, which, though it might possess a few songs and satires, could afford him no models of heroic narration. In such an age the first occupant passes uninspired over subjects which might kindle the highest enthusiasm in the poet of a riper period, as the savage treads unconsciously in his deserts over mines of incalculable value, without sagacity to discover or inplements to explore them.' We give the following extracts from Robert of Gloucester's poem:—

THE SPOUTS AND SOLEMNITIES WHICH FOLLOWED KING ARTHUR'S CORONATION.

The king was to his palace, tho the service was ydo,[1]
Yled with his meinie,[2] and the queen to her also.
For they held the old usages, that men with men were
By themselve, and women by themselve also there.
When they were each one yset, as it to their state become,
Kay, king of Anjou, a thousand knightës nome[3]
Of noble men, yclothed in ermine each one
Of one suit, and served at this noble feast anon.
Bedwer the botyler, king of Normandy,
Nome also in his half a fair company
Of one suit for to serve of the hotelery.

Before the queen it was also of all such courtesy,
For to tell all the nobley that there was ydo,
Though my tongue were of steel, me should nought dure thereto.
Women ne kept of no knight in druery,[4]
But he were in arms well yproved, and atte least thrye.[5]
That made, lo, the women the chaster life lead,
And the knights the stalwarder, and the better in their deed.
Soon after this noble meat, as right was of such tide,
The knights atyled them about in eachë side,
In fields and in meadows to prove their bachlery,[6]
Some with lance, some with sword, without villany,
With playing at tables, other attë chekere,[7]
With casting, other with setting,[8] other in some other mannere.
And which so of any game had the mastery,
The king them of his giftës did large courtesy.
Up the alurs[9] of the castle the ladies then stood,
And beheld this noble game, and which knights were good.
All the three extë dayës[10] ylastë this nobley,
In halle's and in fieldës, of meat and eke of play.
These men come the fourth day before the kingë there,
And he gave them large gifts, ever as they worthy were.
Bishoprics and churches' clerks he gave some,
And castles and townës knights that were ycome.

[1] 'Tho the service was ydo:' when the service was done. [2] 'Meinie:' attendants. [3] 'Nome': brought. [4] 'Druery.' modesty, decorum. [5] 'Thrye:' thrice. [6] 'Bachlery:' chivalry, courage, or youth. [7] 'Chekere:' chess. [8] 'With casting, other with setting:' different ways of

playing at chess. [9] 'Alurs:' walks made within the battlements of the castle. [10] 'Extë dayës:' high, or chief days.

AN OLD TRADITION.

It was a tradition invented by the old fablers that giants brought the stones of Stonehenge from the most sequestered deserts of Africa, and placed them in Ireland; that every stone was washed with juices of herbs, and contained a medical power; and that Merlin, the magician, at the request of King Arthur, transported them from Ireland, and erected them in circles on the plain of Amesbury, as a sepulchral monument for the Britons treacherously slain by Hengist. This fable is thus delivered, without decoration, by Robert of Glocester:—

'Sir king,' quoth Merlin then, 'such thingë's ywis
Ne be for to shew nought, but when great need is,
For if I said in bismare, other but it need were,
Soon from me he would wend, the ghost that doth me lere.'[1]
The king, then none other n'as, bid him some quaintise
Bethink about thilk cors that so noble were and wise.[2]
'Sir King,' quoth Merlin then, 'if thou wilt here cast
In the honour of men, a work that ever shall ylast,
To the hill of Kylar[3] send in to Ireland,
After the noble stonës that there habbet[4] long ystand;
That was the treche of giants,[5] for a quaintë work there is
Of stonës all with art ymade, in the world such none is.
Ne there n'is nothing that me should myd[6] strength