



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The History Of English Poetry

From The Close of the Eleventh To The Commencement of the Eighteenth
Century

Warton, Thomas

London, 1774

Section I. State of Language. Prevalence of the French language before
and after the Norman conquest. Specimens of Norman-Saxon poems.
Legends in verse. Earliest love-song. Alexandrine verses. ...

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-51377](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-51377)

T H E

H I S T O R Y

O F

E N G L I S H P O E T R Y .

S E C T. I.

THE Saxon language spoken in England, is distinguished by three several epochs, and may therefore be divided into three dialects. The first of these is that which the Saxons used, from their entrance into this island, till the irruption of the Danes, for the space of three hundred and thirty years^a. This has been called the British Saxon: and no monument of it remains, except a small metrical fragment of the genuine Caedmon, inserted in Alfred's version of the Venerable Bede's ecclesiastical history^b. The

^a The Saxons came into England A. D. 450.

^b Lib. iv. cap. 4. Some have improperly referred to this dialect the HARMONY OF THE FOUR GOSPELS, in the Cotton library: the style of which approaches in purity and antiquity to that of the CODEX ARGENTINUS.

It is Frankish. See Brit. Mus. MSS. Cotton. CALIG. A. 7. membran. octavo. This book is supposed to have belonged to king Canute. Eight richly illuminated historical pictures are bound up with it, evidently taken from another manuscript, but probably of the age of king Stephen.

B

second

second is the Danish Saxon, which prevailed from the Danish to the Norman invasion^c; and of which many considerable specimens, both in verse^d and prose, are still preserved: particularly, two literal versions of the four gospels^e, and the spurious Caedmon's beautiful poetical paraphrase of the Book of Genesis^f, and the prophet Daniel. The third may be properly styled the Norman Saxon; which began about the time of the Norman accession, and continued beyond the reign of Henry the second^g.

The last of these three dialects, with which these Annals of English Poetry commence, formed a language extremely barbarous, irregular, and intractable; and consequently promises no very striking specimens in any species of composition. Its substance was the Danish Saxon, adulterated with French. The Saxon indeed, a language subsisting on uniform principles, and polished by poets and theologians, however corrupted by the Danes, had much perspicuity, strength, and harmony: but the French imported by the Conqueror and his people, was a confused jargon of Teutonic, Gaulish, and vitiated Latin. In this fluctuating state of our national speech, the French predominated. Even before the conquest the Saxon language began to fall into contempt, and the French, or Frankish, to be substituted in its stead: a circumstance, which at once facilitated and foretold the Norman accession. In the year 652, it was the common practice of

^c A. D. 1066.

^d See Hicel, Thef. Ling. Vett. Sept. P. i. cap. xxi. pag. 177. And Prefat. fol. xiv. The curious reader is also referred to a Danish Saxon poem, celebrating the wars which Beowulf, a noble Dane, descended from the royal stem of Scyldinge, waged against the kings of Swedeland. MSS. Cotton. ut sup. VITELL. A. 15. Cod. membran. ix. fol. 130. Compare, written in the style Caedmon, a fragment of an ode in praise of the exploits of Brithnoth, Offa's ealdorman, or general, in a battle fought against the Danes. Ibid. ORN. A.

12. Cod. membran. 4to. iii. Brithnoth, the hero of this piece, a Northumbrian, died in the year 991.

^e MSS. Bibl. Bodl. Oxon. Cod. membran. in Pyxid. 4to grand. quadrat. And MSS. Cotton. ut sup. ORN. Nor. D. 4. Both these manuscripts were written and ornamented in the Saxon times, and are of the highest curiosity and antiquity.

^f Printed by Junius, Amst. 1655. The greatest part of the Bodleian manuscript of this book, is believed to have been written about A. D. 1000.—Cod. Jun. xi. membran. fol. ^g He died 1189.

the

the Anglo-Saxons, to send their youth to the monasteries of France for education^h: and not only the language, but the manners of the French, were esteemed the most polite accomplishmentsⁱ. In the reign of Edward the Confessor, the resort of Normans to the English court was so frequent, that the affectation of imitating the Frankish customs became almost universal: and even the lower class of people were ambitious of catching the Frankish idiom. It was no difficult task for the Norman lords to banish that language, of which the natives began to be absurdly ashamed. The new invaders commanded the laws to be administered in French^k. Many charters of monasteries were forged in Latin by the Saxon monks, for the present security of their possessions, in consequence of that aversion which the Normans professed to the Saxon tongue^l. Even children at school were forbidden to read in their native language, and instructed in a knowledge of the Norman only^m. In the mean time we should have some regard to the general and political state of the nation. The natives were so universally reduced to the lowest condition of neglect and indigence, that the English name became a term of reproach: and several generations elapsed, before one family of Saxon pedigree was raised to any distinguished honours, or could so much as attain the rank of baronageⁿ. Among

^h Dugd. Mon. i. 89.

ⁱ Ingulph. Hist. p. 62. sub. ann. 1043.

^k But there is a precept in Saxon from William the first, to the sheriff of Somersetshire. Hicet. Thes. i. par. i. pag. 106. See also Prefat. ibid. p. xv.

^l The Normans who practiced every specious expedient to plunder the monks, demanded a sight of the written evidences of their lands. The monks well knew, that it would have been useless or impolitic to have produced these evidences, or charters, in the original Saxon; as the Normans not only did not understand, but would have received with contempt, instruments written in that language. There-

fore the monks were compelled to the pious fraud of forging them in Latin: and great numbers of these forged Latin charters, till lately supposed original, are still extant. See Speiman, in Not. ad Concil. Anglic. p. 125. Stillingfl. Orig. Eccles. Britann. p. 14. Marsham, Prefat. ad Dugd. Monast. And Wharton, Angl. Sacr. vol. ii. Prefat. p. ii. iii. iv. See also Ingulph. p. 512. Launoy and Mabillon have treated this subject with great learning and penetration.

^m Ingulph. p. 71. sub. ann. 1066.

ⁿ See Brompt. Chron. p. 1026. Abb. Rieval. p. 339.

other instances of that absolute and voluntary submission, with which our Saxon ancestors received a foreign yoke, it appears that they suffered their hand-writing to fall into discredit and disuse^o; which by degrees became so difficult and obsolete, that few beside the oldest men could understand the characters^p. In the year 1095, Wolfstan, bishop of Worcester, was deposed by the arbitrary Normans: it was objected against him, that he was "a superannuated English idiot, who could not speak French^q." It is true, that in some of the monasteries, particularly at Croyland and Tavistocke, founded by Saxon princes, there were regular preceptors in the Saxon language: but this institution was suffered to remain after the conquest, as a matter only of interest and necessity. The religious could not otherwise have understood their original charters. William's successor, Henry the first, gave an instrument of confirmation to William archbishop of Canterbury, which was written in the Saxon language and letters^r. Yet this is almost a single example. That monarch's motive was perhaps political: and he seems to have practised this expedient with a view of obliging his queen, who was of Saxon lineage; or with a design of flattering his English subjects, and of securing his title already strengthened by a Saxon match, in consequence of so specious and popular an artifice. It was a common and indeed a very natural practice, for the transcribers of Saxon books, to change the Saxon orthography for the Norman, and to substitute in the place of the original Saxon, Norman words and

^o Ingulph, p. 85.

^p Ibid. p. 98. sub. ann. 1091.

^q Matt. Paris. sub. ann.

^r H. Wharton, Auctar. Histor. Dogmat. p. 388. The learned Mabillon is mistaken in asserting, that the Saxon way of writing was entirely abolished in England at the time of the Norman conquest. See Mabillon. De Re Diplomat. p. 52. The French antiquaries are fond of this

notion. There are Saxon characters in Herbert Losinga's charter for founding the church of Norwich. Temp. Will. Ruf. A. D. 1110. See Lambard's Diction. V. NORWICH. See also Hicckel. Thesaur. i. Par. i. p. 149. See also Prefat. p. xvi. An intermixture of the Saxon character is common in English and Latin manuscripts, before the reign of Edward the third: but of a few types only.

phrases.

phrases. A remarkable instance of this liberty, which sometimes perplexes and misleads the critics in Anglo-Saxon literature, appears in a voluminous collection of Saxon homilies, preserved in the Bodleian library, and written about the time of Henry the second^a. It was with the Saxon characters, as with the signature of the cross in public deeds; which were changed into the Norman mode of seals and subscriptions^b. The Saxon was probably spoken in the country, yet not without various adulterations from the French: the courtly language was French, yet perhaps with some vestiges of the vernacular Saxon. But the nobles, in the reign of Henry the second, constantly sent their children into France, lest they should contract habits of barbarism in their speech, which could not have been avoided in an English education^c. Robert Holcot, a learned Dominican friar, confesses, that in the beginning of the reign of Edward the third, there was no institution of children in the old English: he complains, that they first learned the French, and from the French the Latin language. This he observes to have been a practice introduced by the Conqueror, and to have remained ever since^d. There is a curious passage relating to this subject in Trevisa's translation of Hygden's Polychronicon. "Children in scole, agenst the usage and manir of all other nations, beeth compelled for to leve hire owne langage, and for to construe hir lessons and hire thynges in Frenche; and so they haveth sethe Normans came first into Engelond. Also gentilmen children beeth taught to speke Frensch, from the tyme that they bith rokked in here cradell, and kunneth speke and play with a childes broche: and uplon-

^a MSS. Bodl. NE. F. 4. 12. Cod. membran. fol.

^b Yet some Norman charters have the cross.

^c Gervaf. Tilbur. de Otis Imperial. MSS. Bibl. Bodl. lib. iii. See du Chesne, iii. p. 363.

^d Lect. in Libr. Sapient. Lect. ii. Paris. 1518. 4to.

^e Lib. i. cap. 59. MSS. Coll. S. Johan. Cantabr. But I think it is printed by Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde. Robert of Gloucester, who wrote about 1280, says much the same, edit. Hearne, p. 364.

"diffiche

“disliche” men will likne himself to gentylnen, and fondeth^a with greet besynesse for to speke Frensche to be told of. This maner was moche used to for first deth^b, and is sith some dele changed. For John Cornewaile a maister of grammer, changed the lore in grammer scole, and construction of Frensche into Englishe: and Richard Pencriche lernede the manere techynge of him as other men of Pencriche. So that now, the yere of oure Lorde a thousand three hundred and four score and five, and of the seconde Kyng Richard after the conquest nyne, and [in] alle the grammere scoles of Engeland children lereth Frensche and construeth, and lerneth an Englishe, &c.” About the same time, or rather before, the students of our universities, were ordered to converse in French or Latin^b. The latter was much affected by the Normans. All the Norman accoupts were in Latin. The plan of the great royal revenue-rolls, now called the pipe-rolls, were of their construction, and in that language. But from the declension of the barons, and prevalence of the commons, most of whom were of English ancestry, the native language of England gradually gained ground: till at length the interest of the commons so far succeeded with Edward the third, that an act of parliament was passed, appointing all pleas and proceedings of law to be carried on in English^c: although the same statute de-

^y Country. ^a Delights, tries. ^a Time.
^b In the statutes of Oriel College in Oxford, it is ordered, that the scholars, or fellows, “siqua inter se proferant, colloquio Latino, vel saltem Gallico, perfruantur.” See Hearne’s Trokelowe, pag. 298. These statutes were given 23 Maii, A. D. 1328. I find much the same injunction in the statutes of Exeter College, Oxford, given about 1330. Where they are ordered to use, “Romano aut Gallico saltem sermone.” Hearne’s MSS. Collect. num. 132. pag. 73. Bibl. Bodl. But in Merton College statutes, mention is made of the Latin only. In cap. x. They were given 1271. This was also common in the greater monasteries.

In the register of Wykeham, bishop of Winchester, the domicellus of the Prior of S. Swythyn’s at Winchester, is ordered to address the bishop, on a certain occasion, in French, A. D. 1398. Registr. Par. iii. fol. 177.

^c But the French formularies and terms of law, and particularly the French feudal phraseology, had taken too deep root to be thus hastily abolished. Hence, long after the reign of Edward the third, many of our lawyers composed their tracts in French. And reports and some statutes were made in that language. See Fortescut. de Laud. Leg. Angl. cap. xlviij.

crees,

crees, in the true Norman spirit, that all such pleas and proceedings should be enrolled in Latin^d. Yet this change did not restore either the Saxon alphabet or language. It abolished a token of subjection and disgrace: and in some degree, contributed to prevent further French innovations in the language then used, which yet remained in a compound state, and retained a considerable mixture of foreign phraseology. In the mean time, it must be remembered, that this corruption of the Saxon was not only owing to the admission of new words, occasioned by the new alliance, but to changes of its own forms and terminations, arising from reasons which we cannot investigate or explain^e.

Among the manuscripts of Digby in the Bodleian library at Oxford, we find a religious or moral Ode, consisting of one hundred and ninety-one stanzas, which the learned Hickes places just after the conquest^f: but as it contains few Norman terms, I am inclined to think it of rather higher antiquity. In deference however to so great an authority, I am obliged to mention it here; and especially as it exhibits a regular lyric strophe of four lines, the second and fourth of which rhyme together. Although these four lines may be perhaps resolved into two Alexandrines; a measure concerning which more will be said hereafter, and of which it will be sufficient to remark at present, that it appears to have been used very early. For I cannot recollect any strophes of this sort in the elder Runic or Saxon poetry; nor in any of the old Frankish poems, particularly of Otfrid, a monk of Weissenburgh, who turned the evangelical history into Frankish verse about the ninth century, and has left several

^d Pulton's Statut. 36. Edw. iii. This was A. D. 1363. The first English instrument in Rymer is dated 1368. Fœd. vii. p. 526.

^e This subject will be further illustrated in the next section.

^f Ling. Vett. Thes. Part. i. p. 222. There is another copy not mentioned by Hickes, in Jesus College library at Oxford, MSS. 85. infr. citat. This is entitled *Tractatus quidam in Anglico*. The Digby manuscript has no title.

hymns.

hymns in that language^f, of Stricker who celebrated the achievements of Charlemagne^g, and of the anonymous author of the metrical life of Anno, archbishop of Cologn. The following stanza is a specimen^h.

ⁱ Sende God biforen him man
The while he may to hevene,
For betere is on elmesse biforen
Thanne ben after sevene^k.

That is, "Let a man fend his good works before him to heaven while he can: for one alms-giving before death is of more value than seven afterwards." The verses perhaps might have been thus written as two Alexandrines.

Send God biforen him man the while he may to hevene,
For betere is on almesse biforen, than ben after sevene^l.

Yet alternate rhyming, applied without regularity, and as rhymes accidentally presented themselves, was not uncommon in our early poetry, as will appear from other examples.

Hickes has printed a satire on the monastic profession; which clearly exemplifies the Saxon adulterated by the Norman, and was evidently written soon after the conquest, at

^f See Petr. Lambec. Comment. de Bibl. Cæsar. Vindebon. pag. 418. 457.

^g See Petr. Lambec. ubi sup. lib. ii. cap. 5. There is a circumstance belonging to the ancient Frankish versification, which, as it greatly illustrates the subject of alliteration, deserves notice here. Otfrid's dedication of his Evangelical history to Lewis the first, king of the oriental France, consists of four lined stanzas in rhyming couplets: but the first and last line of every stanza begin and end with the same letter: and the letters of the title of the dedication respectively, and the word of the last line of every tetraffic. Flaccus Illyrius published this work of Otfrid at Basil, 1571. But I think it has been since more

correctly printed by Johannes Schilterus. It was written about the year 880. Otfrid was the disciple of Rhabanus Maurus.

^h St. xiv.

ⁱ Sende god biropen lum man,
þe hpile he mai to heuene;
Fon becepe is on elmeþre biropen
Ðanne ben aþzen seuene.

This is perhaps the true reading, from the Trinity manuscript at Cambridge, written about the reign of Henry the second, or Richard the first. Cod. membran. 8vo. Tractat. I. See Abr. Wheloc. Eccles. Hist. Bed. p. 25. 114.

^k MSS. Digb. A. 4. membran.

^l As I recollect, the whole poem is thus exhibited in the Trinity manuscript.

least before the reign of Henry the second. The poet begins with describing the land of indolence or luxury.

Fur in fee, bi west Spaynge,
Is a lond ihote Cokayne:
Ther nis lond under hevenriche^a
Of wel of godnis hit iliche.
Thoy paradis bi miri^b and brig^t
Cokayn is of fairir figt.
What is ther in paradis
Bot grafs, and flure, and greneris?
Thoy ther be joy^c, and gret dute^d,
Ther nis met, bot frute.
Ther nis halle, bure^e, no bench;
But watir manis thurst to quench, &c.

In the following lines there is a vein of satirical imagination and some talent at description. The luxury of the monks is represented under the idea of a monastery constructed of various kinds of delicious and costly viands.

Ther is a wel fair abbei,
Of white monkes and of grei,
Ther beth boures and halles:
All of pasteus beth the walles,
Of fleis of fisse, and a rich met,
The likefullist that man mai et.
Fluren cakes beth the schingles^f alle,
Of church, cloister, bours, and halle.
The pinnes^g beth fat podinges
Rich met to princes and to kinges.—
Ther is a cloyster fair and ligt,
Brod and lang of sembli figt.

^a Heaven. Sax.

^b Merry, cheerful. "Although Paradise is cheerful and bright, Cokayne is a much more beautiful place."

^c 101. Orig. ^d Pleasure. ^e Buttery.

^f Shingles. "The tiles, or covering of the house, are of rich cakes."

^g The Pinnacles.

C

The

The pilers of that cloister alle
 Beth iturned of cristale,
 With harlas and capital
 Of grene jaspe and red coral,
 In the praer is a tree
 Swithe likeful for to fe,
 The rote is gingeur and galingale,
 The siouns beth al fed wale.
 Trie maces beth the flure,
 The rind canel of fwete odure:
 The frute gilofre of gode smakke,
 Of cucubes ther nis no lakke.—
 There beth iiij willis^b in the abbei
 Of tracle and halwei,
 Of baume and eke piement^c,
 Ever ernend^d to rigt rent^e;
 Of thai stremis al the molde,
 Stonis pretiuse^f and golde,
 Ther is saphir, and uniune,
 Carbuncle and astiune,
 Smaragde, lugre, and praffiune,
 Beril, onyx, topofsiune,
 Amethiste and crisolite,
 Calcedun and epetite^g.
 Ther beth birddes mani and fale
 Throstill, thruiffic, and nigtingale,
 Chalandre, and wodwale,
 And othir briddes without tale,
 That stinteth never bi her migt
 Miri to sing dai and nig.

[*Nonnulla desunt.*]

^b Fountains.

^c This word will be explained at large hereafter.

^d Running. Sax.

^e Courfe. Sax.

^f The Arabian Philofophy imported in-

to Europe, was full of the doctrine of precious stones.

^g Our old poets are never so happy as when they can get into a catalogue of things or names. See Observat. on the Fairy Queen, i. p. 140.

Yite

Yite I do yow mo to witte,
 The gees iroftid on the spitte,
 Fleey to that abbai, god hit wot,
 And gredith °, gees al hote al hote, &c.

Our author then makes a pertinent transition to a convent of nuns; which he supposes to be very commodiously situated at no great distance, and in the same fortunate region of indolence, ease, and affluence.

An other abbai is ther bi
 For soth a gret nunnerie;
 Up a river of swet milk
 Whar is plente grete of filk.
 When the summeris dai is hote,
 The yung nunnes takith a bote
 And doth ham forth in that river
 Both with oris and with stere:
 Whan hi beth fur from the abbei
 Hi makith him nakid for to plei,
 And leith dune in to the brimme
 And doth him sleilich for to swimme:
 The yung monkes that hi seeth
 Hi doth ham up and forth hi fleeth,
 And comith to the nunnes anon,
 And euch monk him takith on,
 And snellich ^p berith forth har prei
 To the mochill grei abbei ^q,
 And techith the nonnes an oreifun
 With jambleus ^r up and dun ^s.

^o Crieth. Gallo-Franc.

^p Quick, quickly. Gallo-Franc.

^q "To the great Abbey of Grey Monks."

^r Lascivious motions. Gambols. Pr.
 Gambiller.

^s Hickef. Thefaur. i. Part i. p. 231. seq.

This poem was designed to be sung at public festivals¹: a practice, of which many instances occur in this work; and concerning which it may be sufficient to remark at present, that a JOCLATOR or bard, was an officer belonging to the court of William the Conqueror².

Another Norman Saxon poem cited by the same industrious antiquary, is entitled THE LIFE OF SAINT MARGARET. The structure of its versification considerably differs from that in the last-mentioned piece, and is like the French Alexandrines. But I am of opinion, that a pause, or division, was intended in the middle of every verse: and in this respect, its versification resembles also that of ALBION'S ENGLAND, or Drayton's POLYOLBION, which was a species very common about the reign of queen Elisabeth³. The rhymes are also continued to every fourth line. It appears to have been written about the time of the crusades. It begins thus.

Olde ant^x yonge I priet^y ou, our folies for to lete,
 Thinketh on god that yef ou wite, our sunnes to bete.
 Here I mai tellen ou, wit wordes faire and swete,
 The vie^z of one maiden was hoten^a Margarete.
 Hire fader was a patriac, as ic ou tellen may,
 In Auntioge wif eches^b I in the falsē lay,
 Deve godes^c ant dombe, he servid nit and day,
 So deden mony othere that fingeth welaway.

¹ As appears from this line.

Lordinges gode and hende, &c.

It is in MSS. More, Cantabrig. 784. f. 1.

² His lands are cited in Doomsday Book.

“GLOUCESTERSCIRE. Berdic, Joclator

“Regis, habet iii. villas et ibi v. car. nil

“redd.” See Anstis, Ord. Gart. ii. 304.

³ It is worthy of remark, that we find in the collection of ancient northern monuments, published by M. Biorner, a poem of some length, said by that author to have

been composed in the twelfth or thirteenth century. This poem is professedly in rhyme, and the measure like that of the heroic Alexandrine of the French poetry. See Mallet's Introd. Dannem. &c. ch. xiii.

^x And. Fr.

^y I direct. Fr. “I advise you, your, &c.”

^z Life. Fr. ^a Called. Saxon.

^b Chose a wife. Sax. “He was married in Antioch.”

^c “Deaf gods, &c.”

Theodosius

Theodosius was is nome, on Criste ne levede he nouht,
 He levede on the false godes, that weren with honden wroutt.
 Tho that child sculde cristine ben it com well in thoutt,
 Ebed wen ^a it were ibore, to deth it were ibrouht, &c.

In the sequel, Olibrius, lord of Antioch, who is called a Saracen, falls in love with Margaret: but she being a christian, and a candidate for canonization, rejects his solicitations and is thrown into prison.

Meiden Margarete one nitt in prison lai
 Ho com biforn Olibrius on that other dai.
 Meiden Margarete, lef up upon my lay,
 And Ihu that thou levest on, thou do him al away.
 Lef on me ant be my wife, ful wel the mai spede.
 Auntioge and Asie scaltou han to mede:
 Ciculauton ^e and purpel pall scaltou have to wede:
 With all the metes of my lond ful vel I scal the ^f fede.

This piece was printed by Hickes from a manuscript in Trinity college library at Cambridge. It seems to belong to the manuscript metrical *LIVES OF THE SAINTS*^g, which form a very considerable volume, and were probably translated or paraphrased from Latin or French prose into English rhyme be-

^a In bed.

^e Checklaton. See Obs. Fair. Q. i. 194.

^f Hickes. i. 225. The legend of *Sainte Juliane* in the Bodleian library is rather older, but of much the same verification. MSS. Bibl. Bodl. NE. 3. xi. membran. 8vo. iii. fol. 36. This manuscript I believe to be of the age of Henry the third or king John: the composition much earlier. It was translated from the Latin. These are the five last lines.

þyhen drihtin o domerþes þinþeð hyr
 hþeate,
 And þerþeð þæt byrti chep to hellene heate,
 þe mote beon a cojn i zodey zubene ebene,

De tynbe ðir of latin to Englyche lebene
 And he þæt her leart onþrat þþa ar he
 cuþe. ACOEN.

That is, "When the judge at doom-
 day winnows his wheat and drives the
 "dusty chaff into the heat of hell; may
 "there be a corner in god's golden Eden
 "for him who turned this book into
 "Latin, &c."

^g The same that are mentioned by Hearne, from a manuscript of Ralph Sheldon. See Hearne's Petr. Langt. p. 542. 607. 608. 609. 611. 628. 670. Saint Winifred's Life is printed from the same collection by bishop Fleetwood, in his *Life and Miracles of S. Winifred*, p. 125. ed. 1713.
 fore

fore the year 1200^b. We are sure that they were written after the year 1169, as they contain the LIFE of Saint Thomas of Becket¹. In the Bodleian library are three manuscript copies of these LIVES OF THE SAINTS^k, in which the LIFE of Saint Margaret constantly occurs; but it is not always exactly the same with this printed by Hickes. And on the whole, the Bodleian Lives seem inferior in point of antiquity. I will here give some extracts never yet printed.

^b It is in fact a metrical history of the festivals of the whole year. The life of the respective Saint is described under every Saints day, and the institutions of some fundays, and feasts not taking their rise from saints, are explained, on the plan of the *Legenda Aurea*, written by Jacobus de Voragine, archbishop of Genoa, about the year 1200, from which Caxton, through the medium of a French version entitled *Legend Dorée*, translated his *Golden Legend*. The *Festivals*, or *Festivals*, printed by Wynkin de Worde, is a book of the same sort, yet with homilies intermixed. See MSS. Harl. 2247. fol. and 2371. 4to. and 2391. 4to. and 2402. 4to. and 2800. seq. Manuscript lives of Saints, detached, and not belonging to this collection, are frequent in libraries. The *Vite Patrum* were originally drawn from S. Jerome and Johannes Cassianus. In Gresham college library are metrical lives of ten Saints chiefly from the *Golden Legend*, by Osberne Bokenham, an Augustine canon in the abbey of Stoke-clare in Suffolk, transcribed by Thomas Burgh at Cambridge 1477. The Life of S. Katharine appears to have been composed in 1445. MSS. Coll. Gresh. 315. The French translation of the *Legenda Aurea* was made by Jehan de Vignay, a monk, soon after 1300.

¹ Ashmole cites this Life, *Instit. Ord. Gart.* p. 21. And he cites S. Brandon's Life, p. 507. Ashmole's manuscript was in the hands of Silas Taylor. It is now in his Museum at Oxford. MSS. Ashm. 50. [7001.]

^k MSS. Bodl. 779.—Laud, L. 70. And they make a considerable part of a prodigious folio volume, beautifully written on vellum, and elegantly illuminated, where

they have the following title, which also comprehends other ancient English religious poems. "Here begynnen the tytles of the booke that is cald in Latyn tonge SALUS ANIME, and in Englysh tonge SOWLE-HELE." It was given to the Bodleian library by Edward Vernon esquire, soon after the civil war. I shall cite it under the title of MS. Vernon. Although pieces not absolutely religious are sometimes introduced, the scheme of the compiler or transcriber seems to have been, to form a complete body of legendary and scriptural history in verse, or rather to collect into one view all the religious poetry he could find. Accordingly the *Lives of the Saints*, a distinct and large work of itself, properly constituted a part of his plan. There is another copy of the *Lives of the Saints* in the British Museum, MSS. Harl. 2277. And in Ashmole's Museum, MSS. Ashm. ut sup. I think this manuscript is also in Bennet college library. The Lives seem to be placed according to their respective festivals in the course of the year. The Bodleian copy (marked 779.) is a thick folio, containing 310 leaves. The variations in these manuscripts seem chiefly owing to the transcribers. The Life of Saint Margaret in MSS. Bodl. 779. begins much like that of Trinity library at Cambridge.

Old ant yonge I preye you your folyis for to lete, &c.

I must add here, that in the Harleian library, a few Lives, from the same collection of *Lives of the Saints*, occur, MSS. 2250. 23. f. 72. b. seq. chart. fol. See also ib. 19. f. 48. These Lives are in French rhymes, ib. 2253. f. 1.

from

From the LIFE of Saint Swithin.

¹ Seint Swythan the confessor was her of Englonde,
 Bifide Wynchestre he was ibore, as ich undirtonde :
 Bi the kynges dei Egbert this goode was ibore,
 That tho was kyng of Englonde, and fomedele eke bifore ;
 The ehtethe he was that com aftur Kinewolfe the kyng,
 That feynt Berin dude to cristendome in Englonde furft
 brynge :

Seynt Austen hedde bifore to cristendom i brouht
 Athelbryt the goode kyng as al the londe nouht.
 Al fetthe ^m hyt was that feynt Berin her bi west wende,
 And tornede the kyng Kinewolfe as vr lord grace fende :
 So that Egbert was kyng tho that Swythan was bore
 The eighth was Kinewolfe that so long was bifore, &c.
 Seynt Swythan his bushopricke to al goodnesse drough
 The towne also of Wynchestre he amended inough,
 Ffor he lette the stronge bruge withoute the toune arere
 And fond therto lym and ston and the workmen that
 ther were ⁿ.

From the LIFE of Saint Wolstan.

Seynt Wolston byffcop of Wirceter was then in Ingelonde,
 Swithe holyman was all his lyf as ich onderfonde :
 The while he was a yonge childe good lyf hi ladde ynow,
 Whenne other children orne play toward cherche hi drow.
 Seint Edward was tho vr kyng, that now in hevne is,
 And the bisscoppe of Wircester Brytthege is hette I wis, &c.
 Bisscop hym made the holi man feynt Edward vre kyng
 And undirfonge his dignite, and tok hym cros and ringe.

¹ Thus in MSS. Harl. fol. 78.

Seint Swyppin ðe confessor was here of Englonde
 Bifide Wynchestre hi was ibore as ic vnderfonde.

^m Since.

ⁿ f. 93. MS. Vernon.

His

His bufhopreke he wuft wel, and eke his priorie,
 And forcede him to ferve wel god and Seinte Marie.
 Ffour zer he hedde biffcop ibeo and not folliche fyve
 Tho feynt Edward the holi kyng went out of this lyve.
 To gret reuge to al Engelonde, fo welaway the ftounde,
 Ffor ftrong men that come fithen and broughte Engelonde to
 grounde.

Harald was fithen kyng with trefun, allas !
 The crowne he bare of England which while hit was.
 As William bastard that was tho duyk of Normaundy
 Thouhte to winne Englonde thorufg ftrength and felonye :
 He lette hym greith foulke inouh and gret power with him nom,
 With gret ftrengthe in the fee he him dude and to Englonde
 com :

He lette ordayne his oft wel and his baner up arerede,
 And deftruyed all that he fond and that londe fore aferde.
 Harald hereof tell kyng of Englonde
 He let garke faft his ofte agen hym for to ftonde :
 His baronage of Englonde redi was ful fone
 The kyng to helpe and eke himfelf as riht was to done.
 The warre was then in Englonde dolefull and ftronge inouh
 And heore either of othures men al to grounde flouh :
 The Normans and this Englifch men deiy of batayle nom
 There as the abbeye is of the batayle a day togedre com,
 To grounde thei fmiit and flowe alfo, as god yaf the cas,
 William Bastard was above and Harald bi neothe was *.

From the LIFE of Saint Christopher.

^p Seynt Cristofre was a Sarazin in the londe of Canaan,
 In no ftud bi him daye mi fond non fo ftrong a man :

* MS. Vernon. fol. 76. b.

^p MSS. Harl. ut fupr. fol. 101. b.

Seint Cristofre was Sarazin in the lond of Canaan
 In no ftude bi his daye ne fond me fo ftrong a man
 Four and tuenti fet he was long and puche and brod y-nouze, &c.

Ffour

Ffour and twenti feete he was longe, and thikk and brod
inouh,

Such a mon but he weore stronge methinketh hit weore wouh :
A la cuntre where he was for him wolde fleo,
Therefore hym ythoughte that no man ageynst him sculde beo.
He seide he wolde with no man beo but with on that were,
Hext lord of all men and undir hym non othir were.

Afterwards he is taken into the service of a king.

-----Cristofre hym served longe ;
The kyng loved melodye much of fithel^e and of songe :
So that his jogeler on a dai biforen him gon to pleye faste,
And in a tyme he nemped in his song the devil atte laste :
Anon so the kyng that I herde he blefed him anon, &c.

From the LIFE of Saint Patrick.

Seyn Pateryk com thoru godes grace to preche in Irelande
To teche men ther ryt believe Jehu Cryfte to understonde :
So ful of wormes that londe he founde that no man ni
myghte gon,

In som stede for worms that he nas wenemyd anon ;
Seynt Pateryk bade our lorde Cryft that the londe delyvered were,
Of thilke foul wormis that none ne com there .

From the LIFE of Saint Thomas of Becket.

Ther was Gilbert Thomas fadir name the trewe man and gode
He loved God and holi cherche sett he witte ondirstode .
The cros to the holi cherche in his zouthe he nom,
. . . myd on Rychard that was his mon to Jerlem com,

⁹ Fiddle. ¹ MS. Vernon, fol. 119. ² Bodl. MSS. 779. fol. 41. b.

³ MSS. Harl. fol. 195. b.

Gilbert was Thomas fader name þat true was and god
And lovede god and holi church sijþe he wit understod.
This Harleian manuscript is imperfect in many parts.

Thor hy dede here pylgrimage in holi stedes faste
So that among Sarazyns hy wer nom at lasse, &c.

This legend of Saint Thomas of Becket is exactly in the style of all the others; and as Becket was martyred in the latter part of the reign of Henry the second from historical evidence, and as, from various internal marks, the language of these legends cannot be older than the twelfth century, I think we may fairly pronounce the *LIVES OF THE SAINTS* to have been written about the reign of Richard the first².

These metrical narratives of christian faith and perseverance seem to have been chiefly composed for the pious amusement, and perhaps edification, of the monks in their cloisters. The sumptuous volume of religious poems which I have mentioned above³, was undoubtedly chained in the cloister, or church, of some capital monastery. It is not improbable that the novices were exercised in reciting portions from these pieces. In the British Museum⁴ there is a set of legendary tales in rhyme, which appear to have been solemnly pronounced by the priest to the people on sundays and holidays. This sort of poetry⁵ was also sung to the

² MSS. Bodl. 779. f. 41. b.

³ Who died 1109. In the Cotton library I find the lives of Saint Iosaphas and Saint Dorman: where the Norman seems to predominate, although Saxon letters are used. Brit. Mus. MSS. Cott. CALIG. A. ix. Cod. membran. 4to. ii. fol. 192.

Ici commence la vie de seint Iosaphaz.

Ri uout vouz a nul bien entendre

Per essample poet mltz aprendre.

iii. fol. 213. b. *Ici commence la vie de Seint Dorman.*

La vertu deu sur tut sur y dure

E tut sur est certeine epure.

Many legends and religious pieces in Norman rhyme were written about this time. See MSS. Harl. 2253 f. 1. membr. fol. supr. citat. p. 14.

⁴ Viz. MS. Vernon.

⁵ MSS. Harl. 2391. 70. The dialect is perfectly northern.

⁶ That legends of Saints were sung to the harp at feasts, appears from *The Life of Saint Marins*, MSS. Harl. 2253. fol. membr. f. 64. b.

Herketh hideward and beoth stille,

Y prae ou zif hit be or wille,

And ze shule here of one virgin

That was ycleped faint Maryne.

And from various other instances.

Some of these religious poems contain the usual address of the minstrel to the company. As in a poem of our Saviour's descent into hell, and his discourse there with Sathanas the porter, Adam, Eve, Abraham, &c. MSS. *ibid.* f. 57.

Alle herkeneth to me now,

A strif wolle y tellen ou:

Of Jhesu and of Sathan,

Tho Jhesu wes to hell y-gan.

Other proofs will occur occasionally.

harp

harp by the minstrels on sundays, instead of the romantic subjects usual at public entertainments.

In that part of Vernon's manuscript intitled SOULEHELE, we have a translation of the Old and New Testament into verse; which I believe to have been made before the year 1200. The reader will observe the fondness of our ancestors for the Alexandrine: at least, I find the lines arranged in that measure.

Oure ladi and hire sustur stoden under the roode,
And seint John and Marie Magdaleyn with wel fori moode;
Vr ladi bi heold hire swete son i brouht in gret pyne,
Ffor monnes gultes nouthen her and nothing for myne.
Marie weop wel sore and bitter teres leet,
The teres fullen uppon the ston down at hire feet.

Alas, my son, for ferwe wel off seide heo
Nabbe iche bote the one that hongust on the treo;
So ful icham of ferwe, as any wommon may beo,
That ischal my deore child in all this pyne iseo:
How schal I sone deore, how haft i yougt liven withouten the,
Nusti nevere of ferwe nougt sone, what seyft you me?
Then spake Jhesus wordus gode to his modur dere,
Ther he heng uppon the roode here I the take a fere,
That trewliche schal serve ye, thin own cosin Jon,
The while that you alyve beo among all thi son;
Ich the hote Jon, he seide, you wite hire both day and niht
That the Gywes hire son ne don hire non un riht.
Seint John in the stude vr ladi in to the temple nom
God to serven he hire dude sone so he thider come,
Hole and seeke heo duden good that hes founden thore
Heo hire serveden to hond and foot, the las and eke the more.

^b As I collect from the following poem,
MS. Vernon, fol. 229.
*The Visions of Seynt Paul won he abas rist
into Parady.*

Lusteneth lordynges leof and dere,

Ze that wolen of the Sunday here;

The Sunday a day hit is
That angels and archangels joyn i wis,
More in that ilke day
Then any oður, &c.

The pore folke feire heo fedde there, heo sege that hit was neode
And the feke heo brougte to bedde and met and drinke gon
heom beode.

Wy at heore mihte yong and olde hire loveden bothe fyke
and fer

As hit was riht for alle and fumme to hire servise hedden
mester.

Jon hire was a trew feer, and nolde nought from hire go,

He lokid hire as his ladi deore and what heo wolde hit was i do.

Now blowith this newe fruyt that lat bi gon to springe,

That to his kuynd heritage monkunne schal bringe,

This new fruyt of whom I speke is vre cristendome,

That late was on erthe ifow and latir furth hit com,

So hard and luthur was the lond of whom hit scholde springe

That wel unnethe eny rote men mougte theron bring,

God hi was the gardener, * &c.

In the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth, among other Norman-Saxon homilies in prose, there is a homily or exhortation on the Lord's prayer in verse: which, as it was evidently transcribed rather before the reign of Richard the first, we may place with some degree of certainty before the year 1185.

Vre feder that in hevene is

That is al fothfull I wis.

Weo moten to theos weordes ifeon

That to live and to faule gode beon.

That weo beon swa his sunes iborene

That he beo feder and we him icorene.

That we don alle his ibeden

And his wille for to reden, &c.

Lauerde God we biddeth thus

Mid edmode heorte gif hit us.

That vre soule beo to the icore

Noht for the flesce for lore.

* MS. Vernon, fol. 8.

Dole us to biwepen vre funne
 That we ne sternen noht therunne
 And gif us, lauerd, that ilke gifte
 Thet we hes ibeten thurh holic scrifte. AMEN⁴.

In the valuable library of Corpus Christi college in Cambridge, is a sort of poetical biblical history, extracted from the books of Genesis and Exodus. It was probably composed about the reign of Henry the second or Richard the first. But I am chiefly induced to cite this piece, as it proves the excessive attachment of our earliest poets to rhyme: they were fond of multiplying the same final sound to the most tedious monotony; and without producing any effect of elegance, strength, or harmony. It begins thus:

Man og to luuen that rimes ren.
 The wiffed wel the logede men.
 Hu man may him wel loken
 Thog he ne be lered on no boken.
 Luuen god and ferven him ay
 For he it hem wel gelden may.
 And to al cristenei men
 Boren pais and luue by twem.
 Than sal him almighti luuen.
 Here by nethen and thund abuuven,
 And given him blisse and soules rest.
 That him sal eavermor lesten.
 Ut of Latin this song is a dragen
 On Engleis speche on soche fagen,
 Cristene men ogen ben so fagen.
 So fueles arn quan he it sen dagen.
 Than man hem telled soche tale
 Wid londes speche and wordes smale
 Of bliffes dune, of forwes dale,

⁴ Quart. minor. 185. Cod. membran. vi. f. 21. b.

Quhu

Quhu Lucifer that devel dwale
 And held him sperred in helles male,
 Til god him frid in manliched
 Dede mankinde bote and red.
 And unfwered al the fendes sped
 And halp thor he fag mikel ned
 Biddi hie fingen non other led.
 Thog mad hic folgen idel hed.
 Fader gode of al thinge,
 Almighty louerd, hegest kinge,
 Thu give me felu timinge
 To thau men this werdes bigininge.
 The lauerd god to wurthinge
 Quether so hic rede or finge^e.

We find this accumulation of identical rhymes in the Runic odes. Particularly in the ode of Egill cited above, entitled EGILL'S RANSOM. In the Cotton library a poem is preserved of the same age, on the subjects of death, judgment, and hell torments, where the rhymes are singular, and deserve our attention.

Non mai longe lives wene
 Ac ofte him lieth the wrench.
 Feir weither turneth ofte into reine
 And thunderliche hit maketh his blench,
 Tharfore mon thu the biwench
 At schal falewi thi grene.
 Weilawei! nis kin ne quene
 That ne schal drincke of deathes drench,
 Mon er thu falle of thi bench
 Thine funne thu aquench^f.

^e MSS. R. 11. Cod. membran. octavo. It seems to be in the northern dialect.

^f Bibl. Cotton, MSS. CALIG. A. ix.—vi, f. 243.

To the same period of our poetry I refer a version of Saint Jerom's French psalter, which occurs in the library of Corpus Christi college at Cambridge. The hundredth psalm is thus translated.

Mirthes to god al erthe that es
 Serves to louerd in faines.
 In go yhe ai in his siht,
 In gladnes that is so briht.
 Whites that louerd god is he thus
 He us made and our self noht us,
 His folk and shep of his fode:
 In gos his yhates that are gode:
 In scharf his woches belive,
 In ympnes to him yhe scharve.
 Heryhes his name for louerde is hende,
 In all his merci do in strende and strande^e.

In the Bodleian library there is a translation of the psalms, which much resembles in style and measure this just mentioned. If not the same, it is of equal antiquity. The handwriting is of the age of Edward the second: certainly not later than his successor. It also contains the Nicene creed^b, and some church hymns, versified: but it is mutilated and imperfect. The nineteenth psalm runs thus.

Hevenes tellen godes blis
 And wolken shewes hond werk his
 Dai to dai word rise riht,
 And wisdom shewes niht to niht,
 Of whilke that noht is herde thar steven.
 In al the world out yhode thar corde
 And in ende of erthe of tham the worde.

^a O. 6. Cod. membr. 4to.
^b Hickes has printed a metrical version of the creed of St. Athanasius. To whom, to avoid prolix and obsolete specimens al-

ready printed, I refer the reader. Thesaur. P. i. p. 233. I believe it to be of the age of Henry the second.

. . . funne he fette his telde to stande
 And b. bridegroome a. he als of his lourd commande.
 He gladen als den to renne the wai
 Ffrem^h heighist heven hei outcoming ai,
 And his gairenning tilheht fete,
 Ne is qwilke mai him from his hete.
 Lagh of louerd unwenned iffe,
 Turnand faules in to blisse :
 Witnes of lourd is ever trewe
 Wisdom servand to littell newe :
 Lourd's rihtwifnesse riht hertes famand,
 But of lourd is liht eghen fighand,
 Drede of lourde hit heli es
 Domes of love ful fori sothe are ai
 Rihted in thamsalve ar thai,
 More to be beyorned over golde
 Or ston derwurthi that is holde :
 Wel fwetter to mannes wombe
 Ovir honi and to kombe ⁱ.

This is the beginning of the eighteenth psalm.

I fal love the Lourd of blisse
 And in mine Lourd festnes min esse,
 And in Fleming min als so
 And in leffer out of wo^k.

I will add another religious fragment on the crucifixion, in the shorter measure, evidently coeval, and intended to be sung to the harp.

Vyen i o the rode fe
 Jesu nayled to the tre,
 Jesu mi lefman,

^b Sic.

ⁱ MSS. Bodl. pergamen. fol. 425. f. 5.

^k Ibid. f. 4.

Ibunder

Ibunder bloe and blodi,
 An hys moder stant him bi,
 Wepand, and Johan:
 Hys bac wid scwрге ifwungen,
 Hys fide depe iftungen,
 Ffor finne and louve of man,
 Weil anti finne lete
 An nek wit teres wete
 Thif i of love can ¹.

In the library of Jesus college at Oxford, I have seen a Norman-Saxon poem of another cast, yet without much invention or poetry ^m. It is a contest between an owl and a nightingale, about superiority in voice and singing; the decision of which is left to the judgment of one John de Guldevord ⁿ. It is not later than Richard the first. The rhymes are multiplied, and remarkably interchanged.

Ich was in one fumere dale
 In one snwe digele hale,
 I herde ich hold grete tale,
 An hule ° and one nightingale.

¹ MSS. Bibl. Bodl. B. 3. 18. Th. f. 101. b. (Langb. vi. 209.)

^m It is also in Bibl. Cotton. MSS. CALIG. ix. A. 5. fol. 230.

ⁿ So it is said in Catal. MSS. Angl. p. 69. But by mistake. Our John de Guldevorde is indeed the author of the poem which immediately precedes in the manuscript, as appears by the following entry at the end of it, in the hand-writing of the very learned Edward Lwyhd. "On part of a broken leaf of this MS. I find these verses writ-

"ten, wherby the author may be guest

"at.

"Mayster Johan eu greteth of Guldworde

tho,

"And sendeth eu to seggen that synge he

nul he wo,

"On thisse wife he will endy his songe,
 "God louerde of hevене, beo us alle
 amonge."

The piece is entitled and begins thus;
Ici commence la Passyon Ihu Crist en englyss.
 I hereth eu one lutele tale that ich eu wille
 telle

As we vyndeth hit iwrite in the godspelle,
 Nis hit nouht of Karlemeyne ne of the
 Duzpere

As of Cristes throuwynge, &c.

It seems to be of equal antiquity with that mentioned in the text. The whole manuscript, consisting of many detached pieces both in verse and prose, was perhaps written in the reign of Henry the sixth.

° Owl.

E

That

That plait was stif I stare and strong,
 Sum wile softe I lud among.
 Another agen other sval
 I let that wole mod ut al.
 I either seide of otheres custe,
 That alere worste that hi wuste
 I hure and I hure of others songe
 Hi hold plaidung suthe stronge^p.

The earliest love-song which I can discover in our language, is among the Harleian manuscripts in the British Museum. I would place it before or about the year 1200. It is full of alliteration, and has a burthen or chorus,

Blow northerne wynd, sent
 Thou me my suetyng; blow
 Northerne wynd, blou, blou, blou.
 Ich ot a burde in boure bryht
 That fully femly is on syht,
 Menskful maiden of myht,
 Feire ant fre to fonde.
 In al this wurhliche won,
 A burde of blod and of bon,
 Never ^q zete y nuste ^r non
 Luffomore in Londe. *Blow, &c.*
 With lokkes ^s lefliche and longe,
 With front ant face feir to fonde;
 With murthes monie mote heo monge
 That brid so breme in boure;
 With lossun eie grete and gode,
 Weth browen blifsoll undirhode,
 He that rest him on the rode
 That lesfych lyf honoure. *Blou, ^t &c.*

^p MSS. Coll. Jef. Oxon. 86. membr. ^q Yet. ^r Knew not. ^s Lively. ^t Sic.

Hire bire limmes liht,
 Afe a lantern a nyht,
 Hyr bleo blynkyth so bryht *.
 So feore heo is ant fyn,
 A fuetly fuyre heo hath to holde,
 With armes, shuldre as mon wolde,
 Ant fynGRES feyre forte fold:
 God wolde hue were myn.
 Middel heo hath menfkfull small,
 Hire loveliche chere as cristal;
 Theyes, legges, fit, and al,
 Ywraught of the best;
 A luffum ladi laftelefs,
 That fweting is and ever wes;
 A betere burde never was
 Yheryed with the hefte,
 Heo ys dere worthe in day,
 Gracioufe, stout, and gaye,
 Gentil, joly, so the jay,
 Workliche when she waketh,
 Maiden murgest * of mouth
 Bi eft, bi west, bi north, bi south,
 That nis ficle ne trowth,
 That fuch murthes maketh.
 Heo is corall of godneffe,
 Heo is rubie of riche fulneffe,
 Heo is cristal of clarnesse,
 Ant baner of bealtie,
 Heo is lilie of largesse,
 Heo is parnenke proneffe,
 Heo is falsecle of fuetneffe,
 Ant ladic of lealtie,

* Blee. Complexion.

* Merriet.

To lou that leflich ys in londe
Ytolde as hi as ych underftonde, &c *.

From the fame collection I have extracted a part of another amatorial ditty, of equal antiquity; which exhibits a stanza of no inelegant or unpleasing ftructure, and approaching to the octave rhyme. It is, like the laft, formed on alliteration.

In a fryhte as y con fare framede
Y founde a wet feyr fenge to fere,
Heo glyftenide ase gold when hit glemed,
Nes ner gom fo gladly on gere,
Y wolde wyte in world who hire kenede
This burde bryht, zef hire wil were,
Heo me bed go my gates, left hire gremede,
Ne kept heo non henyngre here †.

In the following lines a lover compliments his miftrefs named Alyfoun.

Bytween Mershe and Averile when fpray beginneth to fpringe,
The lutel fowl hath hyre wyl on hyre lud to fynge,
Ich libbem lonclonginge for femlokeft of all thyngre.
He may me blyffe bringe icham in hire banndonn,
An hendy happe ichabbe yhent ichot from hevене it is me fent.
From all wymmen mi love is lent and lyht on Alifoun,
On hers here is fayre ynoh, hire browe bronne, hire eye blake,
With loffum chere he on me lok with middel fmal and
welymake,
Bote he me wolle to hire take, &c *.

The following fong, containing a description of the fpring, displays glimmerings of imagination, and exhibits fome faint

* MSS. Harl. 2253. fol. membran. f. 72. b.

† MSS. ibid. f. 66. The pieces which

I have cited from this manuscript, appear to be of the hand-writing of the reign of Edward the first.

* MSS. ibid. f. 63. b. ideas

ideas of poetical expression. It is, like the three preceding, of the Norman Saxon school, and extracted from the same inexhaustible repository. I have transcribed the whole.

In May hit murgeth when hit dawes ^a,

In dounes with this dueres plawes ^b,

Ant lef is lyht on lynde ;

Blofmes brideth on the bowes,

Al this wylde whytes vowes,

So wel ych under-fynde.

The thresteue ^c hym threteth so,

Away is huere wynter do,

When woderove syngeth ferly fere,

And blyleth on huere wynter wele,

That al the wode ryngeth ;

The rose rayleth hir rode,

The leves on the lyhte wode

Waxen all with will :

The mone mandeth hire bleo

The lilie is lossium to scho ;

The fengle and the fille

Wowes this wilde drakes,

Wiles huere makes.

As strete that still

Wody moneth so doth mo.

Ichott ycham on of tho

For love that likes ille,

The mone mandeth hire liht,

When briddes syngeth breme,

Deawes donneth the donnes

Deores with huere derne ronnes,

Domes forte deme,

Wormes woweth under cloude,

Wymmen waxith wondir proude,

^a "It is mery at dawn."

^b *Plays.*

^c *Throstle. Thrush.*

So

So wel hyt wol him seme
 Yef me shall wonte wille of on
 This dreweale is wole forgon
 Ant whyt in wode be freme .

The following hexastic on a similar subject, is the product of the same rude period, although the context is rather more intelligible: but it otherwise deserves a recital, as it presents an early sketch of a favourite and fashionable stanza.

Lenten-ys come with love to tonne,
 With blosmen and with briddes ronne,
 That al this blisse bryngeth:
 Dayes ezes in this dales
 Notes suete of nightingales,
 Vch foul fonge fingeth .

This specimen will not be improperly succeeded by the following elegant lines, which a cotemporary poet appears to have made in a morning walk from Peterborough on the blessed Virgin: but whose genius seems better adapted to descriptive than religious subjects.

Now skruketh rose and lylie flour,
 That whilen ber that suete favour
 In fomer, that suete tyde;
 Ne is no quene so stark ne stour,
 Ne no luedy so bryht in bour
 That ded ne shal by glyde:
 Whofo wol fleshye lust for-gon and hevене-blisse abyde
 On Jhesu be is thoht anon, that tharled was ys fide .^f

To which we may add a song, probably written by the same author, on the five joys of the blessed Virgin.

^d MSS. *ibid.* ut *supr.* f. 71. b. ^e MSS. *ibid.* f. 71. b. ^f *Ibid.* f. 80.

Asē y me rod this ender day,
 By grene wode, to seche play;
 Mid herte y thohte al on a May.
 Sucteste of al thinge :

Lithe, and ich on tell may al of that suete thinge †.

In the same pastoral vein, a lover, perhaps of the reign of king John, thus addresses his mistress, whom he supposes to be the most beautiful girl, "Bituene Lyncolne and Lyn-
 "defeye, Northampton and Lounde ^h."

When the nytenhale finges the wodes waxen grene,
 Lef, gras, and blofme, springes in Avril y wene.
 Ant love is to myn harte gon with one spere so kene
 Nyht and day my blod hit drynkes myn hart deth me tene †.

Nor are these verses unpleasing, in somewhat the same measure.

My deth y love, my lyf ich hate for a levedy shene,
 Heo is brith so daies liht, that is on me wel fene.
 Al y falewe so doth the lef in somir when hit is grene,
 Zef mi thoht helpeth me noht to whom schal I me mene ?
 Ich have loved at this yere that y may love na more,
 Ich have siked moni syh, lemon, for thin ore,
 . . . my love never the ner and that me reweth fore;
 Suete lemon, thenck on me ich have loved the sore,
 Suete lemon, I preye the, of love one speche,
 While y lyve in worlde so wyde other nill I seche †.

Another, in the following little poem, enigmatically compares his mistress, whose name seems to be Joan, to various gems and flowers. The writer is happy in his alliteration, and his verses are tolerably harmonious.

† MSS. *ibid.* f. 81. b. ^h London. † *Ibid.* f. 80. b. * *Ibid.* f. 80. b.

Ic hot a burde in a bour, ase beryl fo bryght,
 Ase saphyr in selver femely on fyht,
 Ase jaspe¹ the gentil that lemeth^m with lyht,
 Ase gernetⁿ in golde and rubye wel ryht,
 Ase onycle^o he is on y holden on hyht;
 Ase diamand the dere in day when he is dyht:
 He is coral yend with Cayser and knyght,
 Ase emeraude a morewen this may haveth myht.
 The myht of the margaryte haveth this mai mere,
 Ffor charbocele iche hire chafe bi chyn and bi chere,
 Hire rede ys as rose that red ys on ryfe^p,
 With lilye white leves lossium he ys,
 The primros he passeth, the penenke of prys,
 With alisaundre thareto ache and anys:
 ' Coynte as columbine such hire ' cande ys,
 Glad under gore in gro and in grys
 Heo is blosome upon bleo brihtest under bis
 With celydone ant fange as thou thi self fys,
 From Weye he is wifist into Wyrhale,
 Hire nome is in a note of the nyhtegale;
 In a note is hire nome nempneth hit non
 Who fo ryht redeth ronne to Johon'.

The curious Harleian volume, to which we are so largely indebted, has preserved a moral tale, a Comparison between age and youth, where the stanza is remarkably constructed. The various sorts of verification which we have already seen, evidently prove, that much poetry had been written, and that the art had been greatly cultivated, before this period.

Herkne to my ron, *Of elde al bou yt ges.*
 As ich ou tell con,

¹ Jasper.
ⁿ Garnet.

^m Streams, shines.
^o Onyx. ^p Branch.

^q Quaint. ^r White complexion.
^s MSS. *ibid.* f. 63.

Of a mody mon, *Soth without les.*
 Hihte Maximion,
 Clerc he was ful god, *Nou herkne bou it wes'.*
 So moni mon undirftod.

For the same reason, a sort of elegy on our Saviour's crucifixion should not be omitted. It begins thus:

I fyke when y finge for forewe that y fe
 When y with wyppinge bihold upon the tre,
 Ant fe Jhesu the suete
 Is hert blod for-lete,
 For the love of me;
 Ys woundes waxen wete,
 Thei wepen, still and mete,
 Marie reweth me."

Nor an alliterative ode on heaven, death, judgement, &c.

Middel-erd for mon was mad,
 Un-mihti aren is meste mede,
 This hedy hath on honde yhad,
 That hevne hem is hafte to hede.
 Ich erde a blisse budel us bade, *That be ben derne done.*
 The dreri domefdai to drede,
 Of finful sauhting sone be sad,
 That derne doth this derne dede,
 This wrakefall werkes under wede,
 In foule foteleth sone"

Many of these measures were adopted from the French chansons *. I will add one or two more specimens.

* Ibid. f. 82. " Ibid. f. 80. " Ibid. f. 62, b. * See MSS. Harl. ut supr. f. 49, 76.

On our Saviour's Passion and Death.

Jesu for thi muchele might
 Thou zef us of thi grace,
 That we mowe day and nyht
 Thenken of thi face.
 In myn hert it doth me god,
 When y thenke on Jhesu blod,
 That ran down bi ys syde ;
 From is harte doume to ys fote,
 For ous he sprodde is harte blode
 His wondes were so wyde^y.

On the same subject.

Lutel wot hit any mon
 Hou love hym haveth y bounde,
 That for us o the rode ron,
 Ant boht us with is wonde ;
 The love of him us haveth ymaked found,
 And y cast the grimly goft to ground :
 Ever and oo, nyht and day, he haveth us in his thohte,
 He nul nout leofe that he so deore boht^z.

The following are on love and gallantry. The poet, named Richard, professes himself to have been a great writer of love-songs.

Weping haveth myn wonges wet,
 For wilked worke ant wone of wyt,
 Unblithe y be til y ha bet,
 Bruches broken ase bok byt :
 Of levedis love that y ha let,
 That lemeth al with luefly lyt,
 Ofte in songe y have hem set,
 That is unsemly ther hit fyt.

^y Ibid. f. 79. Probably this song has been somewhat modernised by transcribers.
^z Ibid. f. 128. These lines afterwards

occur, burlesqued and parodied, by a writer of the same age.

Hit fyt and femethe noht,
 Ther hit ys feid in fong
 That y have of them wroht,
 Y wis hit is all wrong^a.

It was customary with the early scribes, when stanzas consisted of short lines, to throw them together like prose. As thus:

“ A wayle whiyt as whalles bon | a grein in golde that
 “ godly shon | a tortle that min hart is on | in tonnes trewe |
 “ Hire gladshipp nes never gon | while y may glewe^b.”

Sometimes they wrote three or four verses together as one line.

With longynge y am lad | on molde y waxe mad | a maide
 marreth me,
 Y grede y grone un glad | for felden y am sad | that femly
 for te fee.
 Levedi thou rewe me | to routhe thou haveft me rad | be
 bote of that y bad | my lyf is long on the^c.

Again,

Most i rydden by rybbes dale | wide wymmen for te wale |
 ant welde wreek ich wolde:
 Founde were the feireft on | that ever was mad of blod ant
 bon | in boure best with bolde^d.

This mode of writing is not uncommon in antient manuscripts of French poetry. And some critics may be inclined to suspect, that the verses which we call Alexandrine, accidentally assumed their form merely from the practice of absurd transcribers, who frugally chose to fill their pages to the extremity, and violated the metrical structure for the sake-

^a Ibid. f. 66.

^b Ut supr. f. 67.

^c Ibid. 63. b.

^d Ibid. f. 66.

of faving their vellum. It is certain, that the common stanza of four short lines may be reduced into two Alexandrines, and on the contrary. I have before observed, that the Saxon poem cited by Hickes, consisting of one hundred and ninety one stanzas, is written in stanzas in the Bodleian, and in Alexandrines in the Trinity manuscript at Cambridge. How it came originally from the poet I will not pretend to determine.

Our early poetry often appears in satirical pieces on the established and eminent professions. And the writers, as we have already seen, succeeded not amiss when they clothed their satire in allegory. But nothing can be conceived more scurrilous and illiberal than their satires when they descend to mere invective. In the British Museum, among other examples which I could mention, we have a satirical ballad on the lawyers^e, and another on the clergy, or rather some particular bishop. The latter begins thus:

Hyrd-men hatieth ant vch mones hyne,
 For ever uch a paroshe heo polketh in pyne
 Ant clastreth wyf heore celle:
 Nou wol vch fol clerc that is fayly
 Wend to the byshop ant bugge bayly,
 Nys no wyt in is nolle^f.

The elder French poetry abounds in allegorical satire: and I doubt not that the author of the satire on the monastic profession, cited above, copied some French satire on the subject. Satire was one species of the poetry of the Provençal troubadours. Anselm Fayditt a troubadour of the eleventh century, who will again be mentioned, wrote a sort of satirical drama called the HERESY of the FATHERS, HEREGIA DEL PREYRES, a ridicule on the council which condemned the Albigenfes. The papal legates often fell under

^e MSS. ut supr. f. 70. b.

^f Ibid. f. 71.

the lash of these poets; whose favour they were obliged to court, but in vain, by the promise of ample gratuities⁵. Hugues de Bercy, a French monk, wrote in the twelfth century a very lively and severe satire; in which no person, not even himself, was spared, and which he called the BIBLE, as containing nothing but truth⁶.

In the Harleian manuscripts I find an ancient French poem, yet respecting England, which is a humorous panegyric on a new religious order called LE ORDRE DE BEL EYSE. This is the exordium.

Qui vodra a moi entendre
Oyr purra e aprendre
L'estoyre de un ORDRE NOVEL
Qe mout est delitous bel.

The poet ingeniously feigns, that his new monastic order consists of the most eminent nobility and gentry of both sexes, who inhabit the monasteries assigned to it promiscuously; and that no person is excluded from this establishment who can support the rank of a gentleman. They are bound by their statutes to live in perpetual idleness and luxury: and the satyrist refers them for a pattern or rule of practice in these important articles, to the monasteries of Sempringham in Lincolnshire, Beverley in Yorkshire, the Knights Hospitalers, and many other religious orders then flourishing in England⁷.

When we consider the feudal manners, and the magnificence of our Norman ancestors, their love of military glory, the enthusiasm with which they engaged in the crusades, and the wonders to which they must have been familiarised from those eastern enterprises, we naturally suppose, what will hereafter be more particularly proved, that their retinues

⁵ Fontenelle, Hist. Theatr. Fr. p. 18.
edit 1742.

⁶ See Fauchett, Rec. p. 151.
⁷ MSS. *ibid.* f. 121.

abounded

abounded with minstrels and harpers, and that their chief entertainment was to listen to the recital of romantic and martial adventures. But I have been much disappointed in my searches after the metrical tales which must have prevailed in their times. Most of those old heroic songs are perished, together with the stately castles in whose halls they were sung. Yet they are not so totally lost as we may be apt to imagine. Many of them still partly exist in the old English metrical romances, which will be mentioned in their proper places; yet divested of their original form, polished in their style, adorned with new incidents, successively modernised by repeated transcription and recitation, and retaining little more than the outlines of the original composition. This has not been the case of the legendary and other religious poems written soon after the conquest, manuscripts of which abound in our libraries. From the nature of their subject they were less popular and common; and being less frequently recited, became less liable to perpetual innovation or alteration.

The most antient English metrical romance which I can discover, is entitled the *GESTE OF KING HORN*. It was evidently written after the crusades had begun, is mentioned by Chaucer^k, and probably still remains in its original state. I will first give the substance of the story, and afterwards add some specimens of the composition. But I must premise, that this story occurs in very old French metre in the manuscripts of the British Museum^l, so that probably it is a translation: a circumstance which will throw light on an argument pursued hereafter, proving that most of our metrical romances are translated from the French.

Mury, king of the Saracens, lands in the kingdom of Sudene, where he kills the king named Allof. The queen, Godylt, escapes; but Mury seizes on her son Horne, a beau-

^k Rim. Thop. 3402. Urr.

^l MSS. Harl. 527. b. f. 59. Cod. membr.

tiful youth aged fifteen years, and puts him into a galley, with two of his play-fellows, Achulph and Fykenyld: the vessel being driven on the coast of the kingdom of Westnesse, the young prince is found by Aylmar king of that country, brought to court, and delivered to Athelbrus his steward, to be educated in hawking, harping, tilting, and other courtly accomplishments. Here the princess Rymenild falls in love with him, declares her passion, and is betrothed. Horne, in consequence of this engagement, leaves the princess for seven years; to demonstrate, according to the ritual of chivalry, that by seeking and accomplishing dangerous enterprises he deserved her affection. He proves a most valorous and invincible knight: and at the end of seven years, having killed king Mury, recovered his father's kingdom, and achieved many signal exploits, recovers the princess Rymenild from the hands of his treacherous knight and companion Fykenyld; carries her in triumph to his own country, and there reigns with her in great splendor and prosperity. The poem itself begins and proceeds thus:

Alle heo ben blythe, that to my songe ylythe^m:
 A songe yet ule ou singe of Alloff the god kyng,
 Kyng he was by weste the whiles hit y leste;
 And Godylt his gode quene, no feyore myhte bene,
 Ant huere sone hihte Horne, feyore childe ne myhte be borne:
 For reyne ne myhte by ryne ne sonne myhte shine
 Feyror childe than he was, bryht so ever eny glas,
 So whyte so eny lilye floure, so rose red was his colour;
 He was feyre ant eke bold, and of fyfteene wynter old,
 This non his yliche in none kinges ryche.
 Tueye ferenⁿ he hadde, that he with him ladde,
 Al rychemenne sonne, and al suyth feyre gromes,
 Weth hem forte pley anuste^o he loved tueye,

^m Listen.ⁿ Companions.^o Alike.

That

That on was hoten Achulph child, and that other Ffykenild,
 Aculph was the best, and Ffykenyld the werste,
 Yt was upon a fomerday also, as ich one telle may,
 Allof the gode kynge rode upon his pleyng,
 Bi the se fide, there he was woned to ride;
 With him ne ryde bot tuo, at to felde hue were tho:
 He fond bi the stronde, aryved on is lond,
 Shipes systene of Sarazins kene:
 He asked what hue sohten other on his lond brohten.

But I hasten to that part of the story where prince Horne
 appears at the court of the king of Westnesse.

The kyng com into hall, among his knyghtes alle,
 Forth he cleped Athelbrus, his stewarde, him seyde thus:
 " Steward tal thou here my fundling for to lere,
 " Of some mystere of woode and of ryvere^p,
 " And toggen othe harpe with is nayles sharpe^q,
 " And teche at the listes that thou ever wifes,
 " Byfore me to kerven, and of my course to ferven^r,

^p So Robert de Brunne of king Marian.
 Heame's Rob. Gloc. p. 622.

—Marian faire in chere
 He couthe of wod and ryvere
 In alle maner of venrie, &c.

^q In another part of the poem he is in-
 troduced playing on his harp.

Horne sett hi abenche, his harpe he gan
 clenche,
 He made Rymenild a lay ant he seide
 weilaway, &c.

In the chamber of a bishop of Winchester
 at Merdon castle, now ruined, we find
 mention made of benches only. Comp. MS.
 J. Gerveys, Episcop. Winton, 1266. " Ii-
 dem red. comp. de ii. mensis in aula ad
 " magnum descum. Et de iii. mensis, ex
 " una parte, et ii. mensis ex altera parte
 " cum tressellis in aula. Et de i. mensa

" cum tressellis in camera dom. episcopi.
 " Et v. formis in eadem camera." *Descus*,
 in old English *decs*, is properly a canopy
 over the high table. See a curious account
 of the goods in the palace of the bishop
 of Nivernois in France, in the year 1287,
 in Montf. Cat. MSS. ii. p. 984. col. 2.

^r According to the rules of chivalry,
 every knight before his creation passed
 through two offices. He was first a page:
 and at fourteen years of age he was formal-
 ly admitted an esquire. The esquires were
 divided into several departments; that of
 the body, of the chamber, of the stable,
 and the carving esquire. The latter stood
 in the hall at dinner, where he carved the
 different dishes with proper skill and ad-
 dress, and directed the distribution of them
 among the guests. The inferior offices had
 also their respective esquires. Mem. anc.
 Cheval. i. 16. seq.

" Ant

“ Ant his feren devyfe without other furmife ;
 “ Horne-childe, thou underftond, teche hym of harpe and
 “ fonge.”

Athelbrus gon leren Horne and hyfe feren ;
 Horne mid herte laghte al that mon hym taghte,
 Within court and withoute, and overall aboute,
 Lovede men Horne-child, and moft him loved Ymenild
 The kinges owne dohter, for he was in hire thohte,
 Hire loved him in hire mod, for he was faire and eke gode,
 And that tyne ne dorfte at worde and myd hem spek ner a
 worde,

Ne in the halle, amonge the knyhtes alle,
 Hyre forewe and hire payne nolde never fayne,
 Bi daye ne bi nyhte for here speke ne myhte,
 With Horne that was fo feir and fre, tho hue ne myhte with
 him be ;

In herte hue had care and wo, and thus hire bihote hire tho :
 Hue fende hyre fonde Athelbrus to honde,
 That he come here to, and alfo childe Horne do,
 In to hire boure, for hue bigon to loure,
 And the fond * fayde, that feek was the mayde,
 And bed hym quyke for hue nis non blyke.
 The ftewarde was in huerte wo, for he wift whit he fhulde do,
 That Rymenyld byfohte gret wonder him thohte ;
 About Horne he yinge to boure forte bringe,
 He thohte en his mode hit nes for none gode ;
 He toke with him another, Athulph Horne's brother ;
 “ Athulph, quoth he, ryht anon thou fhalt with me to boure
 “ gon,

“ To speke with Rymenyld ftille, and to wyte hire wille,
 “ Thou art Horne's yliche, thou fhalt hire by fuyke,
 “ Sore me adrede that hire wil Horne mys rede.”
 Athelbrus and Athulph tho to hire boure both ygo,

* Meflenger.

* Companion, friend.

G

Upon

Upon Athulf childe Rymenilde con wox wilde,
 Hue wende Horne it were, that hue hadde there;
 Hue fetten adown stille, and seyden hire wille,
 In her armes tweye Athulf she con leye,
 "Horne, quoth heo, wellong I have lovede thee strong,
 "Thou shalt thy truth plyht in myne honde with ryht,
 "Me to spoufe welde and iche the loverde to helde."
 "So stille so hit were, Achulf feide in her ere,
 "Ne tel thou no more speche may y the byseche
 "Thi tale---thou linne, for Horne his nout his ynne, &c."

At length the princess finds she has been deceived, the steward is severely reprimanded, and prince Horne is brought to her chamber; when, says the poet,

Of is fayre fyhte al that boure gan lyhte".

It is the force of the story in these pieces that chiefly engages our attention. The minstrels had no idea of conducting and describing a delicate situation. The general manners were gross, and the arts of writing unknown. Yet this simplicity sometimes pleases more than the most artificial touches. In the mean time, the pictures of antient manners presented by these early writers, strongly interest the imagination: especially as having the same uncommon merit with the pictures of manners in Homer, that of being founded in truth and reality, and actually painted from the life. To talk of the grossness and absurdity of such manners is little to the purpose; the poet is only concerned in the justness and faithfulness of the representation.

" MSS. *ibid.* f. 83. Where the title is written, "þe geste of kyng Horne." There is a copy, much altered and modernised, in the Advocates library at Edinburgh, W. 4. i. Numb. xxxiv. The title

Horn-bilde and Maiden Riniuel. The beginning,

Mi leve frende dere,
 Herken and ye shall here.