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The History Of English Poetry

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

Warton, Thomas

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Section XV. Chaucer continued. The supposed occasion of his Canterbury Tales superior to that of Boccacio's Decameron. Squire's Tale, Chaucer's capital poem. Origin of its fictions. Story of Patient ...

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S E C T. XV.

NOTHING can be more ingeniously contrived than the occasion on which Chaucer's *CANTERBURY TALES* are supposed to be recited. A company of pilgrims, on their journey to visit the shrine of Thomas a Beckett at Canterbury, lodge at the Tabarde-inn in Southwark. Although strangers to each other, they are assembled in one room at supper, as was then the custom; and agree, not only to travel together the next morning, but to relieve the fatigue of the journey by telling each a story^a. Chaucer undoubtedly intended to imitate Boccaccio, whose *DECAMERON* was then the most popular of books, in writing a set of tales. But the circumstance invented by Boccaccio, as the cause which gave rise to his *DECAMERON*, or the relation of his hundred stories^b, is by no means so happily conceived as that of Chaucer for a similar purpose. Boccaccio supposes, that when the plague began to abate at Florence, ten young persons of both sexes retired to a country house, two miles from the city, with a design of enjoying fresh air, and passing ten days agreeably. Their principal and established amusement, instead of playing at chess after dinner, was for each to tell a tale. One superiority which, among others, Chaucer's plan afforded above that of Boccaccio, was

^a There is an inn at Burford in Oxfordshire, which accommodated pilgrims on their road to Saint Edward's shrine in the abbey of Gloucester. A long room, with a series of Gothic windows, still remains, which was their refectory. Leland mentions such another, *Itin.* ii. 70.

^b It is remarkable, that Boccaccio chose a Greek title, that is, *Δεκαήμερον*, for his *Tales*. He has also given Greek names to the ladies and gentlemen who recite the tales. His *Eclogues* are full of Greek words. This was natural at the revival of the Greek language.

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the

the opportunity of displaying a variety of striking and dramatic characters, which would not have easily met but on such an expedition. A circumstance which also contributed to give a variety to the stories. And for a number of persons in their situation, so natural, so practicable, so pleasant, I add so rational, a mode of entertainment could not have been imagined.

The *CANTERBURY TALES* are unequal, and of various merit. Few, if any, of the stories are perhaps the invention of Chaucer. I have already spoken at large of the *KNIGHT'S TALE*, one of our author's noblest compositions*. That of the *CANTERBURY TALES*, which deserves the next place, as written in the higher strain of poetry, and the poem by which Milton describes and characterises Chaucer, is the *SQUIER'S TALE*. The imagination of this story consists in Arabian fiction engrafted on Gothic chivalry. Nor is this Arabian fiction purely the sport of arbitrary fancy: it is in great measure founded on Arabian learning. Cambuscan, a king of Tartary, celebrates his birth-day festival in the hall of his palace at Sarra, with the most royal magnificence. In the midst of the solemnity, the guests are alarmed with a miraculous and unexpected spectacle: the minstrels cease on a sudden, and all the assembly is hushed in silence, surprize, and suspense.

While that the king fate thus in his noblay,
 Herkining his minstrelis ther thingis play,
 Beforn him at his bord deliciously:
 In at the hallè dore, ful fodeinly,
 There came a knight upon a stede of bras;
 And in his honde a brode mirroir of glafs:
 Upon his thombe he had of gold a ring,

* The reader will excuse my irregularity in not considering it under the *CANTER-*

BURY TALES. I have here given the reason, which is my apology, in the text.

And

And by his side a naked sword hanging.
 And up he rideth to the high bord:
 In all the hall he was there spoke a word,
 For marvel of this knight him to behold^d.

These presents were sent by the king of Araby and Inde to Cambuscan in honour of his feast. The Horse of brass, on the skillful movement and management of certain secret springs, transported his rider into the most distant region of the world in the space of twenty-four hours; for, as the rider chose, he could fly in the air with the swiftness of an eagle: and again, as occasion required, he could stand motionless in opposition to the strongest force, vanish on a sudden at command, and return at his master's call. The Mirror of glass was endued with the power of shewing any future disasters which might happen to Cambuscan's kingdom, and discovered the most hidden machinations of treason. The Naked Sword could pierce armour deemed impenetrable,

“ Were it as thick as is a branchid oke.”

And he who was wounded with it could never be healed, unless its possessor could be entreated to stroke the wound with its edge. The Ring was intended for Canace, Cambuscan's daughter; and, while she bore it in her purse, or wore it on her thumb, enabled her to understand the language of every species of birds, and the virtues of every plant.

^d v. 96. See a fine romantic story of a Count de Macon: who, while revelling in his hall with many knights, is suddenly alarmed by the entrance of a gigantic figure of a black man, mounted on a black steed. This terrible stranger, without re-

ceiving any obstruction from guards or gates, rides directly forward to the high table; and, with an imperious tone, orders the count to follow him, &c. Nic. Gillis, chron. ann. 1120. See also Oas, FAIR. Qv. §. v. p. 146.

And whan this knight hath first his tale ytold,
 He ridd out of the hall and down he light:
 His Stede, which that shone as the sunnè bright,
 Stant in the court as still as any stone.
 The knight is to his chamber lad anon,
 He is unarmed and to the mete yfette:
 And all these presents full riche bene yfette,
 That is to faine, the Sword and the Mirrouër,
 All born anon was unto the high tour,
 With certayn officers ordayned therefore:
 And unto Canace the Ring is bore
 Solemnly ther as she fate at the table^e.

I have mentioned, in another place, the favorite philosophical studies of the Arabians^f. In this poem the nature of those studies is displayed, and their operations exemplified: and this consideration, added to the circumstances of Tartary being the scene of action, and Arabia the country from which these extraordinary presents are brought, induces me to believe this story to be one of the many fables which the Arabians imported into Europe. At least it is formed on their principles. Their sciences were tinged with the warmth of their imaginations; and consisted in wonderful discoveries and mysterious inventions.

This idea of a horse of brass took its rise from their chemical knowledge and experiments in metals. The treatise of Jeber a famous Arab chemist of the middle ages, called LAPIS PHILOSOPHORUM, contains many curious and useful processes concerning the nature of metals, their fusion; purification, and malleability, which still maintain a place in modern systems of that science^g. The poets of romance,

^e v. 188.

^f Diff. i. ii.

^g The Arabians call chemistry, as treating of minerals and metals, SIMIA. From SIM, a word signifying the veins of gold

and silver in the mines. Herbelot, Bibl. Orient. p. 810. b. Hither, among many other things, we might refer Merlin's two dragons of gold finished with most exquisite workmanship, in Geoffrey of Monmouth,

who deal in Arabian ideas, describe the Trojan horse as made of brass^b. These sages pretended the power of giving life or speech to some of their compositions in metal. Bishop Grosthead's speaking brazen head, sometimes attributed to Bacon, has its foundation in Arabian philosophy¹. In the romance of VALENTINE and ORSON, a brazen head fabricated by a necromancer in a magnificent chamber of the castle of Clerimond, declares to those two princes their royal parentage^k. We are told by William of Malmesbury, that Pope Sylvester the second, a profound mathematician who lived in the eleventh century, made a brazen head, which would speak when spoken to, and oracularly resolved many difficult questions^l. Albertus Magnus, who was also a profound adept in those sciences which were taught by the Arabian schools, is said to have framed a man of brass; which not only answered questions readily and truly, but was so loquacious, that Thomas Aquinas while a pupil of Albertus Magnus, afterwards a seraphic doctor, knocked it in pieces as the disturber of his abstruse speculations. This was about the year 1240^m. Much in the same manner, the notion of our knight's horse being moved by means of a concealed engine, corresponds with their pretences of producing preternatural effects, and their love of surprising by geometrical powers. Exactly in this notion, Rocail, a giant in some of the Arabian romances, is said to have built a palace, together with his own sepulchre, of most magnificent ar-

mouth, l. viii. c. 17. See also *ibid.* vii. c. 3. Where Merlin prophesies that a brazen man on a brazen horse shall guard the gates of London,

^b See Lydgate's *TROYE BOKE*, B. iv. c. 35. And Gower's *CONF. AMANT.* B. i. f. 13. b. edit. 1554. "A horse of brass
" thei lette do forge."

¹ Gower, *Confes. Amant.* ut *supr.* l. iv. fol. lxxiii. a. edit. 1554.

For of the greate clerke Grootest
I red, how redy that he was
Upon clergy a HEAD of BRASSE
To make, and forge it for so selle
Of such things as besfall, &c.

^k Ch. xxviii. seq.

^l De Gest. Reg. Angl. lib. ii. cap. 10.
Compare Majer, *Symbolor. Aureæ Mensæ*,
lib. x. p. 453.

^m Delrio, *Disquis. Magic.* lib. i. cap. 4.

chitecture,

chitecture, and with singular artifice: in both of these he placed a great number of gigantic statues, or images, figured of different metals by talismanic skill, which, in consequence of some occult machinery, performed actions of real life, and looked like living men^a. We must add, that astronomy, which the Arabian philosophers studied with a singular enthusiasm, had no small share in the composition of this miraculous deed. For, says the poet,

He that it wrought couth many a gin,
He waitid many a constellation
Ere he had don this operation^o.

Thus the buckler of the Arabian giant Ben Gian, as famous among the orientals as that of Achilles among the Greeks, was fabricated by the powers of astronomy^p. And Pope Sylvester's brazen head, just mentioned, was prepared under the influence of certain constellations.

Natural magic, improperly so called, was likewise a favorite pursuit of the Arabians, by which they imposed false appearances on the spectator. This was blended with their astrology. Our author's FRANKLEIN'S TALE is entirely founded on the miracles of this art.

^a Herbelot, Bibl. Orient. V. ROCAIL. p. 717. a.

^o v. 149. I do not precisely understand the line immediately following.

And knew ful many sele and many a bond.

Sele, i. e. Seal, may mean a talismanic sigil used in astrology. Or the Hermetic seal used in chemistry. Or, connected with Bonds, may signify contracts made with spirits in chemical operations. But all these belong to the Arabian philosophy, and are alike to our purpose. In the Arabian books now extant, are the alphabets out of which they formed Talismans to

draw down spirits or angels. The Arabian word KIMIA, not only signifies chemistry, but a magical and superstitious science, by which they bound spirits to their will and drew from them the information required. See Herbelot, Dict. Orient. p. 810. 1005. The curious and more inquisitive reader may consult Cornelius Agrippa, De Vanit. Scient. cap. xlv. xlv. xlv.

^p Many mysteries were concealed in the composition of this shield. It destroyed all the charms and enchantments which either demons or giants could make by goetic or magic art. Herbelot ubi sup. V. GIAN. p. 396. a.

For

For I am fiker⁹ ther be sciences,
 By which men maken divers appearances,
 Soche as these sotill tragetories⁷ plaie :
 For oft at festis, I have herdè saie,
 That tragetors, within a hallè large,
 Have made to comin watir in a barge,
 And in the hallè rowin up and down :
 Sometime hath semid come a grim liown,
 And sometime flouris spring as in a maede ;
 Sometimes a vine, and grapis white and rede ;
 Sometimes a castill, &c⁸.

Afterwards a magician in the same poem shews various specimens of his art in raising such illusions : and by way of diverting king Aurelius before supper, presents before him parks and forests filled with deer of vast proportion, some of which are killed with hounds and others with arrows. He then shews the king a beautiful lady in a dance. At the clapping of the magician's hands all these deceptions disappear¹. These feats are said to be performed by consultation of the stars². We frequently read in romances of illusive

⁹ Sure.

⁷ Juglers.

⁸ v. 2700. Urr.

¹ But his most capital performance is to remove an immense chain of rocks from the sea-shore : this is done in such a manner, that for the space of one week, "it semid all the rockis were away." *ibid.* 2849. By the way, this tale appears to be a translation. He says, "As the boke doth me remember." v. 2799. And "From Garumne to the mouth of Seine." v. 2778. The Garonne and Seine are rivers in France.

² See Frankel. T. v. 2820. p. 111. Urr. The Christians called this one of the diabolical arts of the Saracens or Arabians. And many of their own philosophers, who afterwards wrote on the subject or per-

formed experiments on it's principles, were said to deal with the devil. Witness our Bacon, &c. From Sir John Maundeville's Travels it appears, that these sciences were in high request in the court of the Cham of Tartary about the year 1340. He says, that, at a great festival, on one side of the Emperor's table, he saw placed many philosophers skilled in various sciences, such as astronomy, necromancy, geometry, and pyromancy : that some of these had before them astrolabes of gold and precious stones, others had horologes richly furnished, with many other mathematical instruments, &c. chap. lxxi. Sir John Maundeville began his travels into the East in 1322, and finished his book in 1364. chap. cix. See Johannes Sarif. Polycrat. L. i. cap. xi. fol. 10. b.

appearances

appearances framed by magicians⁶, which by the same powers are made suddenly to vanish. To trace the matter home to its true source, these fictions have their origin in a science which professedly made a considerable part of the Arabian learning⁷. In the twelfth century the number of magical and astrological Arabic books translated into Latin was prodigious⁸. Chaucer, in the fiction before us, supposes that some of the guests in Cambuscan's hall believed the Trojan horse to be a temporary illusion, effected by the power of magic⁹.

An appearaunce ymade by some magike,
As jogleurs playin at these festis grete¹⁰.

In speaking of the metallurgy of the Arabians, I must not omit the sublime imagination of Spenser, or rather some British bard, who feigns that the magician Merlin intended to build a wall of brass about Cairmardin, or Carmarthen; but that being hastily called away by the Lady of the Lake, and slain by her perfidy, he has left his fiends still at work on this mighty structure round their brazen cauldrons, under a rock among the neighbouring woody cliffs of Dynevaour, who dare not desist till their master returns. At this day, says the poet, if you listen at a chink or cleft of the rock,

⁶ See what is said of Spenser's FALSE FLORIMEL, OBS. SPENS. §. xi. p. 123.

⁷ Herbelot mentions many oriental pieces, "Qui traittent de cette art pernicious et defendu." Dict. Orient. V. SCHR. Compare Agrippa, ubi supr. cap. xlii. seq.

⁸ "Irrepsit hac etate etiam turba astrologorum et Magorum, ejus farinae libris una cum aliis de Arabico in Latinum conversis." Conring. Script. Comment. Sec. xlii. cap. 3. p. 125. See also Herbelot. Bibl. Orient. V. KETAB. passim.

⁹ John of Salisbury says, that magicians are those who, among other deceptions, "Rebus adimunt species suas." Polycrat.

i. 10. fol. 10. b. Agrippa mentions one Pafetes a juggler, who "was wont to shewe to strangers a very sumptuous banquet, and when it pleased him, to cause it vanish away, al they which fate at the table being disappointed both of meate and drinke, &c." Van. Scient. cap. xlvi. p. 62. b. Engl. Transl. ut infr. Du Halde mentions a Chinese enchanter, who, when the Emperour was inconsolable for the loss of his deceased queen, caused her image to appear before him. Hist. Chin. iii. §. iv. See the deceptions of Hakem an Arabian juggler in Herbelot, in. V. p. 412. See supr. p. 393. 394.

¹⁰ v. 238.

Such

----- Such gaffly noyse of yron chaines
 And brafen cauldrons thou shalt rombling heare,
 Which thousand sprights with long enduring paines
 Do tosse, that it will stunn thy feeble braines.
 And oftentimes great grones and grievous stowndes
 When too huge toile and labour them constraines,
 And oftentimes loud strokes and ringing sowndes
 From under that deepe rocke most horribly reboundes.

X.

The cause some say is this: a little while
 Before that Merlin dyde, he dyd intend
 A BRASEN WALL in compasse to compyle
 About Cairmardin, and did it commend
 Unto those sprights to bring to perfect end:
 During which work the Lady of the Lake,
 Whom long he lov'd for him in haste did send,
 Who therby forst his workemen to forsake,
 Them bounde, till his returne, their labour not to flake.

XI.

In the mean time, through that false ladies traine,
 He was surprizd, and buried under beare,
 Ne ever to his work return'd againe:
 Nathlesse those feends may not their worke forbear,
 So greatly his commandement they feare,
 But there do toyle and travayle night and day,
 Until that BRASEN WALL they up do reare^b.

This story Spenser borrowed from Giraldus Cambrensis,
 who during his progress through Wales, in the twelfth cen-
 tury, picked it up among other romantic traditions propa-

^b Fairy Queen, iii. 3. 9 seq.

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gated by the British bards ^c. I have before pointed out the source from which the British bards received most of their extravagant fictions.

Optics were likewise a branch of study which suited the natural genius of the Arabian philosophers, and which they pursued with incredible delight. This science was a part of the Aristotelic philosophy; which, as I have before observed, they refined and filled with a thousand extravagancies. Hence our strange knight's MIRROR OF GLASS, prepared on the most profound principles of art, and endued with preternatural qualities.

And some of them wondrin on the mirrour,
That born was up into the master tour:
How men mightin in it such thingis se,
And othir feid, certis it wel might be
Naturally by compositiouns
Of angles, and of sly reflectiouns:
And faide, that at Rome was soche an one,
Thei spak of Alcen and Vitellion,
And Aristote, that writith in their lives
Of queint MIRROURIS, and of PERSPECTIVES ^d.

And again.

The mirrour eke which I have in my hand,
Hath such a might, that men may in it se
When there shall fall any aduersite
Unto your reigne, &c. ^e.

Alcen, or Alhazen, mentioned in these lines, an Arabic philosopher, wrote seven books of perspective, and flourished

^c See Girald. Cambrenf. Itin. Cambr. i. c. 6. Hollingsh. Hist. i. 129. And Camden's Brit. p. 734. Drayton has this fiction, which he relates somewhat differently. Polycolb. lib. iv. p. 62. edit. 1613. Hence Bacon's wall of brais about England. ^d v. 244. ^e v. 153.

about

about the eleventh century. Vitellio, formed on the same school, was likewise an eminent mathematician of the middle ages, and wrote ten books of Perspective. The Roman mirror here mentioned by Chaucer, as similar to this of the strange knight, is thus described by Gower.

When Rome stoode in noble plite
 Virgile, which was the parsite,
 A mirroure made of his clergie^f
 And sette it in the townes eie
 Of marbre on a pillar without,
 That thei be thyrte mile aboute
 By daie and eke also bi night
 In that mirroure behold might
 Her enemies if any were, &c.^g.

The oriental writers relate, that Giamschid, one of their kings, the Solomon of the Persians and their Alexander the Great, possessed, among his inestimable treasures, cups, globes, and mirrors, of metal, glass, and crystal, by means of which, he and his people knew all natural as well as supernatural things. A title of an Arabian book, translated from the Persian, is, "The Mirror which reflects the World." There is this passage in an antient Turkish poet, "When I am purified by the light of heaven my soul will become the *mirror of the world*, in which I shall discern all *abstruse secrets*." Monsieur l'Herbelot is of opinion, that the orientals took these notions from the patriarch Joseph's cup of divination, and Nestor's cup in Homer, on which all nature was symbolically represented^h. Our great countryman Roger

^f Learning. Philosophy.

^g Confess. Amant. l. v. fol. xciv. 6. edit. Berth. 1554. ut supr.

^h Herbelot. Dict. Oriental. V. GIAM. p. 392. col. 2. John of Salisbury men-

tions a species of diviners called *SPÉCULARII*, who predicted future events, and told various secrets, by consulting mirrors, and the surfaces of other polished reflecting substances. Polycrat. i. 12. pag. 32. edit. 1595.

Bacon, in his *OPUS MAJUS*, a work entirely formed on the Aristotelic and Arabian philosophy, describes a variety of Specula, and explains their construction and uses ^l. This is the most curious and extraordinary part of Bacon's book, which was written about the year 1270. Bacon's optic tube, with which he pretended to see *future events*, was famous in his age, and long afterwards, and chiefly contributed to give him the name of a magician ^k. This art, with others of the experimental kind, the philosophers of those times were fond of adapting to the purposes of thaumaturgy; and there is much occult and chimerical speculation in the discoveries which Bacon affects to have made from optical experiments. He asserts, and I am obliged to cite the passage in his own mysterious expressions, "Omnia sciri per Perspectivam, quoniam omnes actiones rerum fiunt secundum specierum et virtutum multiplicationem ab agentibus hujus mundi in materias patientes, &c. ^l." Spenser feigns, that the magician Merlin made a *glassie globe*, and presented it to king Ryence, which shewed the approach of enemies, and discovered treasons ^m. This fiction, which exactly corresponds with Chaucer's *Mirroure*, Spenser borrowed from some romance, perhaps of king Arthur, fraught with oriental fancy. From the same sources came a like fiction of Camoens, in the *Lusiad* ⁿ, where a globe is shewn to Vasco de Gama, representing the universal fabric or system of the world, in which he sees future kingdoms and future events. The Spanish historians report an American tradition, but more

^l Edit. Jebb. p. 253. Bacon, in one of his manuscripts, complains, that no person read lectures in Oxford *DE PERSPECTIVA*, before the year 1267. He adds, that in the university of Paris, this science was quite unknown. In *Epist. ad OPUS MINUS*. Clementi iv. Et *ibid. OP. MIN.* iii. cap. ii. MSS. Bibl. Coll. Univ. Oxon. c. 20. In another he affirms, that Julius Cæsar, before he invaded Britain, viewed our harbours and shores with a telescope

from the British coast. MSS. lib. *DE PERSPECTIVIS*. He accurately describes reading glasses or *spectacles*, *Op. Maj.* p. 236. And the *Camera Obscura*, I believe, is one of his discoveries.

^k Wood, *Hist. Antiquit. Univ. Oxon.* i. 122.

^l *Op. Min.* MSS. ut *supr.*

^m *Fairy Queen*, iii. ii. 21.

ⁿ *Cant.* x.

probably

probably invented by themselves, and built on the Saracen fables, in which they were so conversant. They pretend that some years before the Spaniards entered Mexico, the inhabitants caught a monstrous fowl, of unusual magnitude and shape, on the lake of Mexico. In the crown of the head of this wonderful bird, there was a mirror or plate of glass, in which the Mexicans saw their future invaders the Spaniards, and all the disasters which afterwards happened to their kingdom. These superstitions remained, even in the doctrines of philosophers, long after the darker ages. Cornelius Agrippa, a learned physician of Cologne, about the year 1520, author of a famous book on the Vanity of the Sciences, mentions a species of mirror which exhibited the form of persons absent, at command°. In one of these he is said to have shewn to the poetical earl of Surry, the image of his mistress, the beautiful Geraldine, sick and reposing on a couch[¶]. Nearly allied to this, was the infatuation of *seeing things* in a beryl, which was very popular in the reign of James the first, and is alluded to by Shakespeare. The Arabians were also famous for other machineries of glass, in which their chemistry was more immediately concerned. The philosophers of their school invented a story of a magical steel-glass, placed by Ptolemy on the summit of a lofty pillar near the city of Alexandria, for burning ships at a distance. The Arabians called this pillar *Hemadessaeor*, or the pillar of the Arabians[§]. I think it is mentioned by Sandys.

° It is diverting in this book to observe the infancy of experimental philosophy, and their want of knowing how to use or apply the mechanical arts which they were even actually possessed of. Agrippa calls the inventor of magnifying glasses, "with-
out doubt the beginner of all dishonest-
" tie." He mentions various sorts of di-
minishing, burning, reflecting, and multi-
plying glasses, with some others. At length
this profound thinker closes the chapter
with this sage reflection, "All these things

"are vaine and superfluous, and invented
"to no other end but for pompe and idle
"pleasure!" Chap. xxvi. p. 36. A transla-
tion by James Sandford, Lond. 1569. 4to.
Bl. Let.

¶ Drayton's Heroical Epit. p. 87. b.
edit. 1598.

§ The same fablers have adapted a simi-
lar fiction to Hercules; that he erected pil-
lars at Cape Finestere, on which he raised
magical looking-glasses. In an eastern
romance,

Roger Bacon has left a manuscript tract on the formation of burning-glasses: and he relates that the first burning-glass which he constructed cost him sixty pounds of Parisian money. Ptolemy, who seems to have been confounded with Ptolemy the Egyptian astrologer and geographer, was famous among the eastern writers and their followers for his skill in operations of glass. Spenser mentions a miraculous tower of glass built by Ptolemy, which concealed his mistress the Egyptian Phao, while the invisible inhabitant viewed all the world from every part of it.

Great Ptolomee it for his leman's sake
Ybuided *all of glass* by magicke power,
And also it impregnable did make¹.

But this magical fortress, although impregnable, was easily broken in pieces at one stroke by the builder, when his mistress ceased to love. One of Boyardo's extravagancies is a prodigious wall of glass built by some magician in Africa, which obviously betrays its foundation in Arabian fable and Arabian philosophy.

The Naked Sword, another of the gifts presented by the strange knight to Cambuscan, endued with medical virtues,

romance, called the SEVEN WISE MASTERS, of which more will be said hereafter, at the siege of Hur in Persia, certain philosophers terrified the enemy by a device of placing a habit (says an old English translation) "of a giant-like proportion, on a tower, and covering it with burning-glasses, looking-glasses of cristall, and other glasses of several colours, wrought together in a marvellous order, &c." ch. xvii. p. 182. edit. 1674. The Constantinopolitan Greeks possessed these arts in common with the Arabians. See Morisotus, ii. 3. Who says, that in the year 751, they set fire to the Saracen fleet before Constantinople by means of burning glasses.

¹ MSS. Bibl. Bodl. Digb. 183. And Arch. A. 149. But I think it was printed at Francfort, 1614. 4^{to}.

² Twenty pounds sterling. Compend. Stud. Theol. c. i. p. 5. MS.

³ Fairy Queen, iii. ii. 20.

⁴ Hither we might also refer Chaucer's House of Fame, which is built of glass, and Lydgate's TEMPLE OF GLASS. It is said in some romances written about the time of the Crusades, that the city of Damascus was walled with glass. See Hall's VIRGIDEM. or Satyres, &c. B. iv. S. 6. written in 1597.

Or of Damascus magicke wall of glasse,
Or Solomon his sweating piles of brasse, &c.

and

and so hard as to pierce the most solid armour, is likewise an Arabian idea. It was suggested by their skill in medicine, by which they affected to communicate healing qualities to various substances *, and from their knowledge of tempering iron and hardening all kinds of metal †. It is the classical spear of Peleus, perhaps originally fabricated in the same regions of fancy.

And othir folk han wondrid on the Sworde,
That wold so percin thorow everie thing;
And fell in speche of Telephus the king,
And of Achilles for his quyntè spere
For he couth with it bothè hele and dere
Right in foche wise as men may by that sworde,
Of which right now you have your selfis harde.
Thei spake of fundri harding of metall
And spake of medicinis ther withall,
And how and when it sholdin hardin be, &c ‡.

The sword which Berni in the ORLANDO INNAMORATO, gives to the hero Ruggiero, is tempered by much the same fort of magic.

Quel brando con tal tempra fabbricato,
Che taglia incanto ad ogni fatatura §.

So also his continuator Ariosto,

Non vale incanto, ov' elle mette il taglio ¶.

* The notion, mentioned before, that every stone of Stone-henge was washed with juices of herbs in Africa, and tinctured with healing powers, is a piece of the same philosophy.

† Montfaucon cites a Greek chemist of the dark ages, CHRISTIANI LADY-

“ RINTHUS SALOMONIS, de temperando
“ ferro, conficiendo crystallo, et de aliis
“ nature arcanis.” Palæogr. Gr. p. 375.

‡ Hurt. Wound.

§ v. 256.

¶ Orl. Innam. ii. 17. ff. 13.

‡ Orl. Fur. xii. 83.

And

And the notion that this weapon could resist all incantations, is like the fiction above-mentioned of the buckler of the Arabian giant Ben Gian, which baffled the force of charms and enchantments made by giants or demons ^c. Spenser has a sword endued with the same efficacy, the metal of which the magician Merlin mixed with the juice of meadow-wort, that it might be proof against enchantment; and afterwards, having forged the blade in the flames of Etna, he gave it hidden virtue by dipping it seven times in the bitter waters of Styx ^d. From the same origin is also the golden lance of Berni, which Galafron king of Cathaia, father of the beautiful Angelica and the invincible champion Argalia, procured for his son by the help of a magician. This lance was of such irresistible power, that it unhorsed a knight the instant he was touched with its point.

----- Una lancia d'oro,
Fatto con arte, e con sottil lavoro.
E quella lancia di natura tale,
Che resistere non puossi alla sua spinta;
Forza, o destrezza contra lei non vale,
Convien che l'una, e l'altra resti vinta:
Incanto, a cui non è nel mondo eguale,
L'ha di tanta possanza intorno cinta,
Che nè il conte di Brava, nè Rinaldo,
Nè il mondo al colpo suo starebbe saldo ^e.

Britormart in Spenser is armed with the same enchanted spear, which was made by Bladud an antient British king skilled in magic ^f.

^c Amadis de Gaul has such a sword. See Don Quixote, B. iii. Ch. iv.

^d Fairy Queen, ii. viii. 20. See also Ariost. xix. 84.

^e Orl. Innam. i. i. R. 43. See also, i.

ii. st. 20, &c. And Ariosto, viii. 17. xviii. 118. xxiii. 15.

^f Fairy Queen, iii. 3. 60. iv. 6. 6. iii. 1. 4.

The Ring, a gift to the king's daughter Canace, which taught the language of birds, is also quite in the style of some others of the occult sciences of these inventive philosophers^a: and it is the fashion of the oriental fabulists to give language to brutes in general. But to understand the language of birds, was peculiarly one of the boasted sciences of the Arabians; who pretend that many of their countrymen have been skilled in the knowledge of the language of birds, ever since the time of king Solomon. Their writers relate, that Balkis the queen of Sheba, or Saba, had a bird called *Hudhud*, that is, a lapwing, which she dispatched to king Solomon on various occasions; and that this trusty bird was the messenger of their amours. We are told, that Solomon having been secretly informed by this winged confident, that Balkis intended to honour him with a grand embassy, enclosed a spacious square with a wall of gold and silver bricks, in which he ranged his numerous troops and attendants in order to receive the embassadors, who were astonished at the suddenness of these splendid and unexpected preparations^b. Monsieur l'Herbelot tells a curious story of an Arab feeding his camels in a solitary wilderness, who was accosted for a draught of water by Alhejaj a famous Arabian commander, and who had been separated from his retinue in hunting. While they were talking together, a bird flew over their heads, making at the same time an unusual sort of noise; which the camel-feeder hearing, looked steadfastly on Alhejaj, and demanded who he was. Alhejaj, not choosing to return him a direct answer, desired to know the reason of that question. "Because, replied the camel-feeder, this bird assured me, that a company of people is coming this

^a Rings are a frequent implement in romantic enchantment. Among a thousand instances, see *Orland. Innam.* l. 14. Where

the palace and gardens of Dragontina vanish at Angelica's ring of virtue.

^b Herbelot, *Dict. Oriental.* V. BALKIS, p. 182.

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“ way, and that you are the chief of them.” While he was speaking, Alhejaj’s attendants arrived¹.

This wonderful ring also imparted to the wearer a knowledge of the qualities of plants, which formed an important part of the Arabian philosophy².

The vertues of this ring if ye woll here
 Are these, that if she list it for to were,
 Upon her thomb, or in her purse it bere,
 There is no fowle that fleith undir heven
 That she ne shal wele understond his steven³;
 And know his mening opinly and plain,
 And answere him in his language againe.
 And everie grasse that growith upon rote,
 She shal wele knowe, and whom it woll do bote:
 All be his woundis never so depe and wide⁴.

Every reader of taste and imagination must regret, that instead of our author’s tedious detail of the quaint effects of Canace’s ring, in which a falcon relates her amours, and talks familiarly of Troilus, Paris, and Jason, the notable achievements we may suppose to have been performed by the assistance of the horse of brass, are either lost, or that this part of the story, by far the most interesting, was never written. After the strange knight has explained to Cambuscan the management of this magical courser, he vanishes on a sudden, and we hear no more of him.

And aftir suppir goth this nobil king
 To fene this Horse of Brass, with all his rout
 Of lordis and of ladies him about :

¹ See Herbel. ubi sup. V. HEGIAGE EBN YUSEF AL THAKEFI. p. 442. This Arabian commander was of the eighth century. In the SEVEN WISE MASTERS, one of the tales is founded on the language of birds. Ch. xvi.

² See what is said of this in the DISSERTATIONS.

³ Language.

⁴ v. 166.

Soch wondering was ther on this Horſe of Braſs^a;
 That ſithin the grete ſiege of Troye was,
 Ther as men wondrid on an horſe alſo,
 Ne was ther ſoch a wondering as was tho.
 But finally the king askith the knight
 The vertue of this courſere and the might;
 And prayid him to tell his governaunce:
 The hors anon gan forth to trip and daunce,
 When that the knight laid hold upon his reine.—
 Enfourmid when the king was of the knight,
 And hath conceivid in his wit aright,
 The mannir and the form of all the thing,
 Full glad and blyth, this nobil doubty king
 Repairith to his revell as beforne:
 The brydil is into the Toure yborn,
 And kept among his jewels^p lefe and dere:
 The horſe vaniſhith: I not in what manere^q.

By ſuch inventions we are willing to be deceived. Theſe
 are the triumphs of deception over truth.

*Magnanima menſogna, hor quando è al vero
 Si bello, che ſi poſſa à te preporre?*

The CLERKE OF OXENFORDES TALE, or the ſtory of Pa-
 tient Grifilde, is the next of Chaucer's Tales in the ſerious
 ſtyle which deſerves mention. The Clerke declares in his
 Prologue, that he learned this tale of Petrarch at Padua.

^a Cervantes mentions a horſe of wood,
 which, like this of Chaucer, on turning a
 pin in his forehead, carried his rider
 through the air. This horſe, Cervantes
 adds, was made by Merlin for Peter of
 Provence; with which that valorous knight
 carried off the fair Magalona. From what
 romance Cervantes took this I do not re-
 collect: but the reader ſees its correſpon-

dence with the fiction of Chaucer's horſe,
 and will refer it to the ſame original. See
 Don Quixote, B. iii. ch. 8. We have the
 ſame thing in VALENTINE AND ORSON,
 ch. xxxi.

^p Then.
^q *Jocalia*. Precious things.
^r v. 322. ſeq. 355. ſeq.

slow 1

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But

But it was the invention of Boccaccio, and is the last in his *DECAMERON*. Petrarch, although most intimately connected with Boccaccio for near thirty years, never had seen the *Decameron* till just before his death. It accidentally fell into his hands, while he resided at Arque between Venice and Padua, in the year one thousand three hundred and seventy-four. The tale of Grifilde struck him the most of any: so much, that he got it by heart to relate it to his friends at Padua. Finding that it was the most popular of all Boccaccio's tales, for the benefit of those who did not understand Italian, and to spread its circulation, he translated it into Latin with some alterations. Petrarch relates this in a letter to Boccaccio: and adds, that on shewing the translation to one of his Paduan friends, the latter, touched with the tenderness of the story, burst into such frequent and violent fits of tears, that he could not read to the end. In the same letter he says, that a Veronese having heard of the Paduan's exquisiteness of feeling on this occasion, resolved to try the experiment. He read the whole aloud from the beginning to the end, without the least change of voice or countenance; but on returning the book to Petrarch, confessed that it was an affecting story: "I should have wept, added he, like the Paduan, had I thought the story true. But the whole is a manifest fiction. There never was, nor ever will be, such a wife as Grifilde." Chaucer, as our Clerke's declaration in the Prologue seems to imply, received this tale from Petrarch, and not from Boccaccio: and I am inclined to think, that he did not take it from Petrarch's Latin translation, but that he was one of those friends to whom Petrarch used to relate it at Padua. This too seems sufficiently pointed out in the words of the Prologue,

¹ Giorn. x. Nov. 10. Dryden, in the superficial but lively Preface to his Fables, says, "The Tale of Grifilde was the invention of Petrarch: by him sent to

"Boccace, from whom it came to Chaucer."

² Vie de Petrarch, iii. 797.

I wolle

I wolle you telle a talè which that I
Lernid at Padow of a worthie clerke :—
Frauncis Petrarke, the laureate poete,
Hightin this clerke, whose rhetorike so swete
Enluminid Italie of poetrie '.

Chaucer's tale is also much longer, and more circumstantial, than Boccacio's. Petrarch's Latin translation from Boccacio was never printed. It is in the royal library at Paris, and in that of Magdalene college at Oxford *.

The story soon became so popular in France, that the comedians of Paris represented a Mystery in French verse entitled *LE MYSTERE DE GRISEILDIS MARQUIS DE SALUCES*, in the year 1393 *. Lydgate, almost Chaucer's cotemporary, in his manuscript poem entitled the *TEMPLE OF GLASS* †, among the celebrated lovers painted on the walls of the temple †,

* v. 1057. p. 96. Urr. Afterwards Petrarch is mentioned as dead. He died of an apoplexy, Jul. 18. 1374. See v. 2168.

† Viz. "Vita Griseildis per Fr. Petrar-
" cham de vulgari in Latinam linguam tra-
" ducta." But Rawlinson cites, "Epistola
" Francisci Petrarche de insigni obedientia
" et fide uxoria Griseildis in Waltherum
" Ulme, impres." per me R. . . . A. D.
1823. MS. Not. in Mattairii Typogr.
Hist. i. i. p. 104. In Bibl. Bodl. Oxon.
Among the royal manuscripts, in the Bri-
tish Museum, there is, "Fr. Petrarcha
" super Historiam Walterii Marchionis et
" Griseildis uxoris ejus." 8. B. vi. 17.

* It was many years afterwards printed at Paris, by Jean Bonnesons. The writers of the French stage do not mention this piece. See p. 246. Their first theatre is that of Saint Maur, and its commencement is placed five years later, in the year 1398. Afterwards Apostolo Zeno wrote a theatrical piece on this subject in Italy. I need not mention that it is to this day represented in England, on a stage of the lowest species, and of the highest antiquity: I mean at a puppet-show. The French have this story in their *PAREMENT DES DAMES*, see Mem. Lit. Tom. ii. p. 743. 4^{to}.

* And in a *Balade*, translated by Lydgate from the Latin, "Griseilde's humble
" patience" is recorded. Urr. Ch. p. 550.
v. 108.

† There is a more curious mixture in *Chaucer's Balade to king Henry iv.* Where Alexander, Hector, Julius Cesar, Judas Macabeus, David, Joshua, Charlemagne, Godfrey of Bulloign, and king Arthur, are all thrown together as antient heroes. v. 281. seq. But it is to be observed, that the French had a metrical romance called *Judas Macchabée*, begun by Gualtier de Belleperche, before 1240. It was finished a few years afterwards by Pierres du Riez. Fauch. p. 197. See also Lydgate, Urr. Chauc. p. 550. v. 89. M. de la Curne de Sainte Palaye, has given us an extract of an old Provençal poem, in which, among heroes of love and gallantry, are enumerated Paris, Sir Trifram, Ivaime the inventor of gloves and other articles of elegance in dress, Apollonius of Tyre, and king Arthur. Mem. Chev. Extr. de Poef. Prov. ii. p. 154. In a French romance, *Le livre de cuer a' amour espris*, written 1457, the author introduces the blazoning of the arms of several celebrated lovers: among which are king David,

mentions Dido, Medea and Jason, Penelope, Alcestis, PATIENT GRISILDE, Bel Ifoulde and Sir Triftram², Pyramus and Thisbe, Theseus, Lucretia, Canace, Palamon and Emilia³.

The pathos of this poem, which is indeed exquisite, chiefly consists in invention of incidents, and the contrivance of the story, which cannot conveniently be developed in this place: and it will be impossible to give any idea of its essential excellence by exhibiting detached parts. The versification is equal to the rest of our author's poetry.

David, Nero, Mark Antony, Theseus, Hercules, Enneas, Sir Lancelot, Sir Triftram, Arthur duke of Bretagne, Gaston du Foix, many French dukes, &c. Mem. Lit. viii. p. 592. edit. 4to. The chevalier Bayard, who died about the year 1524, is compared to Scipio, Hannibal, Theseus, king David, Samson, Judas Maccabeus, Orlando, Godfrey of Bulloign, and mon-

sieur de Palisse, marshal of France. LA VIE ET LES GESTES DU PREUX CHEVALIER BAYARD, &c. Printed 1525.

² From MORTE ARTHUR. They are mentioned in Chaucer's ASSEMBLIE OF FOWLES, v. 290. See also Compl. Bl. Kn. v. 367.

³ MSS. Bibl. Bodl. Fairfax. 16.

SECT.