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LOST LITERATURE IN OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH.<sup>1</sup>

"The Norman Conquest inaugurated a distinctly new epoch in the literary as well as in the political history of England. Anglo-Saxon authors were then as suddenly and as permanently displaced as Anglo-Saxon kings."<sup>2</sup>

Although these words were written some thirty years ago they still appear to express the opinion of many scholars. Recently, indeed, these conclusions have been questioned; note more especially the work of Professor R. W. Chambers "On the Continuity of English Prose."<sup>3</sup> But the mere fact that such a work should have been necessary shows how deeply ingrained is the theory which would postulate an impassable gulf between Old and Middle English literature.

It is not, perhaps, surprising that such a theory should have arisen. Comparatively few works in the vernacular, written during the years immediately before and after the Conquest, have survived. This is more especially the case with regard to Old English poetry; in fact the lack of poetry in the vernacular is so striking that one recent critic can even state that "barring a few notable exceptions such as "Judith" and the poems on the battles of Brunanburh and Maldon—Old English poetry ceased about the beginning of the ninth century."<sup>4</sup> In other words little of the scanty remains of Old English poetry which happen to have been preserved, can be dated much later than the beginning of the ninth century. But, as Professor Chambers has pointed out, the fact that but little has been preserved is far from proving that little 'was ever written. On the

<sup>1</sup> Many of the references in the following article have been pointed out to me by Professor Dickens. It also owes much to the previous work of Professor Chambers on the subject.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Harpsfield's Life of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E. V. Hitchcock, E.E.T.S. 1932, pp. xlv-clxxiv.

<sup>4</sup> Aldo Ricci, RES, V, 1.

contrary it is surprising that anything at all should have survived. We should rather assume that, with such tremendous odds against survival, there must have been a fairly large body of vernacular writings for anything at all to have survived. It is not particularly difficult to show that there must have been much more poetry written in the Old and Middle English periods than has survived to-day. We find references to certain specifically Germanic heroes in Middle English works. Obviously, then, the legends celebrating the exploits of these heroes must, whether in a written or an unwritten form, have enjoyed a continuous existence, though no poem dealing specifically with them has survived.

For example in Old English poetry we find references to a certain Wada<sup>5</sup> and the continued popularity of this hero is shown by numerous references in extant Middle English literature.<sup>6</sup> Such a well-known and popular hero must have been celebrated in poems describing his own exploits. Yet neither from Old nor from Middle English have any of these tales survived. With the exception of the Latin tale which Map tells us, only the barest references remain. Nevertheless to explain these continued references we must postulate an Old English poem on Wada and at least one Middle English work on the same subject. These were never, perhaps, extant in a written form but they must have been widespread and popular. Similarly Weland the Smith is quite an important figure in Old English heroic poetry,<sup>7</sup> and again we have references to him in the extant Middle English literature<sup>8</sup>—he even appears in some modern

<sup>5</sup> See *Widsith*, ed. R. W. Chambers, pp. 95ff.

<sup>6</sup> Map, *De nugis curialium*, ed. M. R. James, ii, 17. Latin Sermon on Humility quoted by M. R. James (*Academy*, Feb., 1896, p. 137). *Fasciculus Morum*, v/26, quoted by C. Brett, *MLR*, xiv, 1. *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, ed. E. Kölbing, E.E.T.S. 1885-94, v. 2605. *The Laud Troy Book*, ed. J. E. Wülfing, E.E.T.S. 1902-3, v. 21. *Morte Arthure*, ed. E. Björkman, v. 964. Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, E. 1424; *Troilus and Criseyde*, iii, 614. Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, bk. vii, cap. 9, which, as shown by E. Vinaver, *Medium Ævum* II, 135-6, derives the reference from *Morte Arthure*.

<sup>7</sup> He appears in three of the few remaining fragments of Old English heroic poetry.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*, v. 235. *Lazamon's Brut*, ed. F. Madden, London, 1847, vv. 21129ff. *Horn Childe*, v. 397ff. ed. J. Hall, *King Horn*, pp. 183-4.

English literature<sup>9</sup>—but no works dealing specifically with him have survived from the older literatures. But these continued references in Middle English can only be accounted for on the assumption that the old legends were still popularly remembered, re-read, and presumably re-written during the Middle English period.

Again it must be remembered that Old English literature itself has been preserved only in a fragmentary condition. In *Widsith* we are told that a certain "East-gota(n), frod(ne) and god(ne)" was "fæder Unwenes."<sup>10</sup> From Old English literature we learn nothing more of this Unwene, yet in his time, he must have been a famous hero since he is remembered long after the Conquest and we find more references to him in Middle English than we do in Old English.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as Professor Chambers points out, from the extract discovered by Dr. Imelmann "it seems clear that the stories of Wudga, Hama, Hrothwulf, Unwen, Hunlaf(ing), Hengest and Hors(a) were current till so long after the Norman Conquest that it was possible for these heroes to be classed with Waltef." With this we may compare the extract pointed out by Professor Brett, from the Romance of Waldef, as printed in *Hermathena*, XLI, 242, "Eo tempore surrexit in Northfolchia quidam rex dictus Attalus; in Suthfolchia vero surrexit rex Vnwyn vocatus, rex Thetfordiae, qui pugnavit cum Attala certamine singulari. Sed hii quidem concordia effecti sunt, nemine mediante."<sup>12</sup> Here we see that the original tale has developed to such an extent that the two heroes, presumably Attila and Unwene, have been made petty English kings. With evidence such as this for a continuous existence, it is surely impossible to

*Torrent of Portyngale*, ed. E. Adam, E.E.T.S. 1887, v. 427. See also P. Maurus, *Die Wielandsage in der Literatur*, Leipzig, 1902.

<sup>9</sup> e.g. Scott's *Kenilworth* and Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

<sup>10</sup> v. 114.

<sup>11</sup> *Fasciculus Morum*, v/26, quoted by C. Brett, MLR, xiv, 1. *Romance of Waldef*, quoted by C. Brett, MLR, xv, 77. *Morte Arthure*, ed. E. Björkman, v. 2863. MS. Cott. Vesp. D. iv (f. 139b), for which see *Widsith*, ed. R. W. Chambers, Appendix (K.).

<sup>12</sup> MLR, xv, 77.

continue to assert that the Norman Conquest meant the disappearance of the Old English poetical subjects.

Moreover these heroes are known to us only from references in the extant Old English literature. In no case have works survived which are primarily connected with them. Consequently there is a possibility, in some cases even a probability, that many of the heroes who are known to us only from Middle English sources may have been celebrated in the earlier period. There are no Old English versions of the tales of Havelok or of Horn. Actually, of course, these tales are derived from Anglo-Scandinavian and not from Anglo-Saxon tradition. Yet amongst the Anglo-Scandinavian population in pre-Conquest times, lays celebrating these heroes must have existed although they have not survived. Naturally such lays would have little in common with the later extant Middle English romances; most probably they were never written down at all. Yet they certainly formed part of the oral tradition of that period and, whenever possible, such oral traditions must be taken into account. They form just as essential a part of the history of literature as those traditions which did happen to be written down. The mere accident that some wandering minstrel chanced to write down his repertoire does not mean that these chance-written poems are literature, whereas the unwritten lays of other minstrels are not. Too often we know only of those which were written down and so have to depend entirely on them. But occasionally we are enabled to catch glimpses of this unwritten literature and, whenever possible, we must take it into account along with the written literature which has since perished. Much of it is, of course, lost for ever but the probability of its existence should restrain us from passing sweeping judgment on the literature of any age.

In some ways, obviously enough, we can judge literature only by that part of it which has survived. We can't criticize the style or metre of poems which have been lost. But too often we are tempted to judge the extent of a literature by that alone which is extant, and for this we have not the slightest excuse.

Frequently we can catch a glimpse of the subject matter of vanished works from other sources. Odd notices of lost works may, perhaps, be found in the vernacular literature which happens to have been preserved, compare for example the different references to the Old English legendary heroes mentioned above. All the works celebrating the deeds of these heroes have been lost and only the scattered references are left to tell of their existence.

Again, notices of works in the vernacular are sometimes to be found in the Latin or Anglo-French literature of the period. Occasionally a work in the vernacular has been translated into the more learned or courtly language and the vernacular version has then disappeared. In such cases it would seem that these works have a place, not only in the histories of Latin or Anglo-French literature but also in the histories of English literature. After all in subject they belong essentially to the vernacular; that they happen to have been preserved only in one of the other languages is due to the merest accident. In any case they inform us that works in the vernacular on that particular subject once existed and so must be taken into account in any history of the vernacular literature. Such works as "Horn et Rimenhild," "Guy de Warwick" or "Havelok" appear in histories of English literature because they are extant in English as well as in Anglo-French versions. "Waldef" is extant only in an Anglo-French translation but we have direct evidence that this Anglo-French version was, in the first place, translated from the vernacular. Apparently the poem has not yet been published but, according to Schofield,<sup>13</sup> the translator explicitly states that "the story of Waldef and his sons was first composed in verse, and translated from English by the French poet at the instance of a lady, the author's "friend," who did not understand that language." So far as we can gather the romance belongs to the same category as those mentioned above and Schofield quite rightly describes it along with them. The fact that it is preserved

<sup>13</sup> *op. cit.* p. 260.

only in Anglo-French is a mere accident; it is originally and essentially an English romance. Similarly the "Gesta Herwardi" is preserved only in a Latin version, but even so the lost English original from which it was translated should have a place of its own in the history of the vernacular literature.

These are the stock examples of the lost literature of Medieval English, but even so they are too often ignored in any survey of that literature. Nor is poetry the only literature which has been lost. Some of Alfred's translations have only narrowly escaped and we hear of one at least of his books which is now lost, though it was known to William of Malmesbury. Similarly the English works of Bede have been almost entirely lost though they were certainly known to Giraldus Cambrensis since, in his "Topography of Wales" he tells us of the "libros Anglicos Bedæ, Rabani, regis Aeluredi."<sup>14</sup> Most of the English works of Alfred still remain to us and Bede himself tells us of his own writings in the vernacular, but what exactly the English books of Rabanus were it is difficult even to guess. In the first place the identification of Rabanus himself is doubtful, the only Rabanus we know is the Mag-nentius Hrabanus Maurus, one of the most important of the pupils of Alcuin. He was born in Mainz somewhere about the year 780 and studied at the famous monastery of Fulda, being elected abbot in 822. Then, about 847, he was appointed Archbishop of Mainz and died some nine years later. He was a voluminous writer in Latin and one of the most famous theologians of his time. From this reference it seems possible that some of his works may have been translated into English, probably by one of the scholars inspired by Alfred. The author of these translations cannot, of course, be identified but the fact itself need not surprise us. Surely it would have been surprising if Werfrith of Worcester had been the only one of Alfred's bishops to respond to his appeal for translators. Nor can we say which of Hrabanus' works may have been so translated, possibly some of his educational treatises or, more

<sup>14</sup> *Descriptio Kambriæ*, bk. i, cap. 6. Chronicles and Memorials, vol. 21.

probably, his encyclopaedic "De Universo," "a treatise based on Isidore of Seville, in which he explains the universe of things both in a mythical and a historical sense."<sup>15</sup> Here, it seems, is evidence that Alfred was not alone in his educational work. Moreover we know from William of Malmesbury<sup>16</sup> that the works of Hrabanus Maurus were known in England. But, since we are not told otherwise, it would seem that they were known to him only in the original Latin. It is by no means certain, of course, that this Rabanus is to be identified with Hrabanus Maurus but it seems probable enough.

Hints of vanished works may also be gathered occasionally from some of the medieval Latin Chroniclers. In order to amplify his information on any period the chronicler may quote some old poem describing events which happened in the period under discussion. We find this method illustrated quite well in the Old English Chronicle itself. About the year 923 it seems to have been laid aside and neglected for a generation. Consequently when it was again taken up, somewhere about 955, the new Chronicler could find little material with which to fill in the intervening gap. Now the battle of Brunanburh had taken place in 937 and the Chronicler apparently knew of a poem on this battle. And so instead of writing a description of the battle he inserts this poem into the Chronicle. Similarly William of Malmesbury, as he himself tells us, drew much of his information "magis cantilenis per successiones temporum detritis, quam libris ad instructiones posterorum elucubratis."<sup>17</sup> And, at the time when he was writing his history, these ballads were still being sung by the common people.<sup>18</sup> In the unlikely

<sup>15</sup> Wright and Sinclair, *A History of Later Latin Literature*, London, 1931, p. 158. For a full account of Hrabanus see Max Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, vol. i, pp. 288ff. Alfword, Bishop of Crediton, bequeathed (1008-1012) a Hrabanus, possibly in English (A. S. Napier and W. H. Stevenson, *The Crawford Collection of Early Charters*, pp. 24, 129). Professor Dickins suggests that all these references may be to Hrabanus "De Institutione Clericorum," which is conveniently summarised by M. L. W. Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500-900*, pp. 253-4.

<sup>16</sup> M. R. James, *Two Ancient English Scholars*, Glasgow, 1931, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Gesta Regum*, *Chronicles and Memorials*, vol. 90 (1), p. 155.

<sup>18</sup> See R. W. Chambers, *Bibliogr. Society's Trans.*, 1925, p. 293ff.



event that these were ever written down, they have now all disappeared but they are as much entitled to a place in the history of English literature as is the poem on the battle of Brunanburh. The latter has survived merely because the Chronicler who used it was writing in the same language whereas William of Malmesbury was writing in Latin. Consequently, instead of a transcription of the ballads from which he drew much of his information, he gives us a translation. It is merely by chance that "Brunanburh" is known to us in the original and not only from the Latin translation given by Henry of Huntingdon.

But in the list of Medieval Latin Chroniclers William of Malmesbury holds a high place because of his honesty in supplying us, whenever possible, with his sources. Other Chroniclers are not so conscientious. We may suspect them of utilizing legendary material which was still current in the vernacular, but they rarely tell us so definitely. Undoubtedly Henry of Huntingdon drew much of his information from vernacular sources similar to those utilized by William of Malmesbury. When he comes to describe contemporary events he definitely tells us "Hactenus de his quæ vel in libris veterum legendo repperimus, vel fama vulgante percepimus, tractatum est. Nunc autem de his quæ vel ipsi vidimus, vel ab his qui viderant audivimus pertractandum est."<sup>19</sup> But, unfortunately, he does not say how much of this "common report" was in the form of ballads or poetry still extant in his day. He uses a manuscript of the Old English Chronicle and gives us a paraphrase of the poem on the battle of Brunanburh, but he also seems to have had access to other Old English poems not in the Chronicle. He knew, for example, of the Late Old English poem on the city of Durham and he seems also to have known of an Old English poem on the battle of Winwed. He does not say this definitely, but he quotes some lines which seem to fall naturally into Old English metre and to be a quotation

<sup>19</sup> *Historia Anglorum*, bk. vii. Chronicles and Memorials, vol. 74.

from some old poem. After describing the battle he proceeds  
 " unde dicitur:—

In Winwed amne vindicata est cædes Annæ,  
 Cædes regum Sigbert et Ecgrice,  
 Cædes regum Oswald et Edwine."<sup>20</sup>

It is quite natural that such a poem should have been in existence. Moreover, marking as it did the final defeat of paganism and the victory of the Church, such a poem would find favour with the clergy and might well have been preserved until the days of Henry of Huntingdon. Penda too, the last of the old heroic pagans, must have been an important figure in his day, much more important than the monkish historians will allow. Naturally enough they attempt to belittle the prowess of their last great opponent and seize every opportunity of glorifying the contemporary Northumbrian kings. However important Eadwine may have been before his defeat and death, his successors Oswald, and Oswy too until his unexpected victory, existed only by the sufferance of the all-powerful king of the Mercians.

But it is quite possible that these lines on the battle of Winwed are only part of a much longer poem. Perhaps there existed in Old English a poem something after the style of Widsith, but containing a catalogue of famous battles instead of legendary heroes. At any rate for many of the important battles of this early period, Henry of Huntingdon has some appropriate quotation introduced by some such words as " unde dicitur," and many of these quotations seem to fall naturally into Old English metrical lines. The first of these battles is that in which Raedwald of East Anglia defeated and killed Aethelfrith of Northumbria in 617. We are told that the battle was fought on the eastern bank of the river Idle

<sup>20</sup> *Æt Winwed wæs wrecen wælsliht Annan,  
 slege landfrumena Sigbeorhtes and Ecgrices,  
 ærdeap eorla Oswaldes and Eadwines.*

This, of course, makes no pretence of being an actual reconstruction of the lost poem. It merely shows the ease with which the Latin falls into alliterative metre. Note that the alliteration of the lastline is made necessary by the fact that four of the kings have names beginning with a vowel.

"unde dicitur 'Amnis Idle Anglorum sanguine sorduit'."<sup>21</sup> The elaborate account of the battle which follows was certainly not drawn from the Old English Chronicle or from Bede but, just as certainly, it seems to have a documentary basis of some kind. The next battle given is the battle of Heathfield (633) in which Edwin of Northumbria was defeated and slain by Penda of Mercia and Cadwallon of Gwynedd, "dicitur autem quod Hadfeld rubens undique nobilium fumabat cruore." But a year later Edwin's successor, Oswald, defeated and killed Cadwallon at the battle of the Denisesburn (634) "unde dicitur 'Cædes Cedwalensium Denisi cursus coercuit'," and succeeded to a part of Edwin's power. But he never succeeded in making an end of Penda who, in 642, descended on him and slew him at the battle of Mesafeld "unde dicitur 'Campus Masefeld sanctorum conduit ossibus'."<sup>22</sup> The battle of Winwed in 655 which saw the end of Penda we have already dealt with, and after this we have a long gap until the battle of Ellendune in 825. By this battle Ecgberht of Wessex finally cast off the supremacy of Mercia. It was evidently a fiercely contested battle—"unde dicitur 'Ellendune rivus cruore rubuit, ruina restitit, fætore tabuit'."

Now Henry of Huntingdon nowhere says definitely that he is quoting from a vernacular poem on the subject but such a hypothesis certainly seems very probable. The poem may have been extant in a written form or he may merely be quoting from oral tradition, but that a poem on famous Old English battles had survived to his day seems most probable. So far as we can tell he seems to be quite a conscientious, if somewhat credulous, historian and it is difficult to believe that he is inventing the quotations in order to give a more authentic air to his history. It is possible, of course, that these quotations were taken from some Latin Chronicle which is now lost and are not originally from the vernacular at all. But such a theory does not seem very probable and, as already pointed

<sup>21</sup> Fag wæs seo Idle Englena blode.

<sup>22</sup> Blac wearþ Mesafeld banum sancta.

out, the ease with which the quotations fall into alliterative verses seems to point to a metrical vernacular basis. It is possible too, that the quotations are not from a single poem but that there were in existence separate poems dealing with all these battles. But, on the whole, it seems unlikely that Henry knew much more about the various battles than the quotations which he gives. Had his originals gone into any detail he would most probably have given us florid descriptions of each battle, whereas we find such descriptions only in the case of the battle of the Idle and the battle of Winwed. On the whole I think we can safely conclude that there was certainly extant, at the time when Henry of Huntingdon was writing, an Old English poem or poems on the famous battles of the times, most probably a single poem something after the style of Widsith but not necessarily. Nor need the fact surprise us at all. The poems of Brunanburh and Maldon show that the English continued to celebrate in poetry their famous battles. The evidence of Henry of Huntingdon merely suggests that such poems were no isolated exceptions. By accident they happened to survive where so many other have perished, but they are only representatives of what may once have been a considerable class of Old English poetry.

Such a poem, or poems, would, of course, belong to the earlier period from which most of the extant Old English poetry dates. In comparison it may be admitted that the later period, stretching from the Danish wars to the Norman Conquest, is very bare. Odd fragments have been preserved which serve to prove that the traditional poetry was still being composed, but there is nothing to compare with the earlier national poetry or with the works of Caedmon and Cynewulf. Obviously this state of things cannot be due entirely to the destruction of manuscripts in after years since most of the Old English poetry which is still extant was not written down until this period. True this extant poetry is contained almost entirely in four great codices, but how is it that these manuscripts contain so little contemporary poetry?

Ricci suggests that it is because there was no contemporary poetry being composed. "In literature the best (the) period could do was to copy out the great poems of earlier times."<sup>23</sup> But one would suggest that this zeal in the copying out of the poetry provides evidence of an entirely different nature. If people are interested enough in poetry to copy it out, they will be interested enough to compose it. The result may not be great poetry but the copyists were probably not particularly critical on this point and it is unlikely that they were consciously collecting anthologies of great poems. Rather, I think, we must conclude that they were writing down the poetry which was in common circulation amongst them; that which was known to the monks and by them regarded as being worthy of a written existence. We have no evidence that it had been extant in a written form before. It had lived long by oral tradition alone and by constant reworking it had been polished and brought into conformity with the monkish tastes. But the poetry dealing with contemporary events was still in the hands of the minstrels. It had not yet become traditional and was still in the oral stage of development. In time to come, with its edges smoothed away and a veneer of Christian teaching imposed upon it, it would have reached the cloister. But when that time came the English language had been relegated to the common people, the Norman Conquest was here and there was no longer so strong a tradition of vernacular writing in the cloister. The old poems were long remembered but there was now no one to write them down. Consequently the old "ballads" dealing with Aethelstan and Eadgar are known only from references in the Latin Chroniclers. A few odd poems dealing with contemporary events were, for one reason or another, written down and accidentally preserved. Some of them, as we have seen, were used to fill in gaps in the Old English Chronicle and the looseness of metre of some of these poems is quite probably due to the fact that they are taken directly from the oral tradition of the time. They have not

<sup>23</sup> Aldo Ricci, RES. v, 9.

yet attained the stage of development which was reached by the earlier poetry before it was written down. But though the bulk of such extant contemporary poetry is small we must take into account the break in development caused by the Norman Conquest. Undoubtedly there was a flourishing oral literature and only the accident of the Conquest prevented its later appearance in written form.

Professor Chambers has pointed out some of the poems dealing with this period which were still remembered when William of Malmesbury was writing his "*Gesta Regum*." But these are the gleanings from an exceptionally honest and conscientious historian. Similar tales may be gathered from other Chronicles though the authors are not always careful to give us their exact sources. There must, for example, have existed some poem describing a single combat between Canute and Eadmund Ironside. Neither the Old English Chronicle nor Florence of Worcester know anything of such a single combat. The tale seems to start its written existence with William of Malmesbury, but he tells only of a challenge, peace is made before the actual fight can be arranged. But Henry of Huntingdon has a full description of the fight which is said to have taken place at Olney and his account is copied and amplified by Roger of Wendover. Moreover we have what seems to be an independent account by Walter Map and from the latter we obtain the information that the legend was still remembered at the time he wrote, "It hath not been forgotten," he tells us, "how when the horses were slain, they fought on foot."<sup>24</sup> Actually there seem to have been at least two different versions of the fight, one in which it is on foot, and the other in which it proceeds like one of the fashionable tournaments. Henry of Huntingdon seems to have mixed the two accounts, he says nothing of a fight on horseback, but at the same time he tells of preliminary engagement with

<sup>24</sup> "unde tamen et memorabile verbum, quod ut pedites equis facti sunt trucidatis." *De nugis curialium*, ed. M. R. James, p. 213.

<sup>25</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 206ff.

spears. It seems certain, in any case, that the legend of a single combat between Canute and Eadmund grew up and long survived the Conquest. The probability is that if such a legend were extant in the vernacular, as it surely must have been, then it would have been in verse and, in fact, the descriptions given by Huntingdon and Map read almost like a translation from some Old English alliterative poem. But this point cannot be pressed since the likeness may only be due to conventionality in the description of battles. In any case, on the whole, I think we can feel fairly confident that the legend of a single combat between Canute and Eadmund must take its place amongst the lost vernacular literature of medieval England. It is, of course, quite a natural development of legend that a long campaign between two opposing leaders should gradually be changed to a dramatic single combat.

Another probable hero of legend is the great Earl Godwine, the father of Harold II. If we are to judge from the details of his life as given by Map,<sup>25</sup> a regular cycle of romance must have grown up round his name. His descent from Wulnoth Cild, a not too creditable ancestor, has been entirely forgotten and he is made the son of humble parents. He attracts the notice of Ethelred and is received into favour by that king. When he grows up he goes on a crusade and slays Saracens and pagans by the score, all in the approved fashion of romance. He marries a royal bride, some rather discreditable anecdotes are told about him, and finally he falls dead in dramatic fashion whilst protesting to the Confessor his innocence of the death of Alfred the Aetheling. The tale of his death is also told by some of the post-Conquest historians, it was known, for example, to William of Malmesbury and to Roger of Wendover. A slightly different form of the Romance of Godwine was also known to the Old Norse saga writers, as for example to the author of the "Knytlinga Saga." But except for these Latin and Old

<sup>25</sup> Plummer suggests that this is a mistake for Eadric Wild—quite a possible theory; in any case he is certainly the same as the Eadric Sylvaticus mentioned by the Latin Chroniclers.

Norse references all knowledge of the Romance of Godwine has been lost though it must surely once have existed.

It is difficult to say exactly how much of the old unwritten vernacular literature has been preserved by Map. He gives few sources or indications of the origin of any of his numerous tales but many of them seem to be taken from the vernacular—translations of the vernacular ballads into Latin prose. We have already seen that he gives us a version of the "tale of Wade," a legend of which we know from other sources. Beyond this tale in Map we have little other evidence for a romance of Godwine but the existence of such a romance is plausible enough. A similar tale is the one he tells us about a certain Eddic Wilde—a tale of the marriage of a mortal with a wife from the other world. But this Eddic Wilde was a real person. In the Old English Chronicle (D text) under the year 1067, we read how a powerful thegn, Eadric cild<sup>26</sup> raised the West Midlands against William. He appears to have carried on a guerilla warfare for some years and did not submit to the Conqueror until 1070. We find brief notices of him in some of the Latin Chroniclers. Ordericus Vitalis gives his name in a list of those who submitted to William after Hastings, "Eddicus quoque cognomento Guilda, id est sylvaticus, nepos Eddici pestiferi ducis cognomento Streone, id est acquisitoris,"<sup>27</sup> and a little later on he also tells of the revolt of the inhabitants of Shrewsbury who allied themselves "cum Eddico Guilda potenti et bellicoso viro."<sup>28</sup> Florence of Worcester and Symeon of Durham also give us the bare fact of his struggle against the Normans. Perhaps some of his deeds are preserved in Dugdale's *Monasticon* under Wygmore Abbey<sup>29</sup> where some mythical details of his struggle against Ralf de Mortimer are given. But the tale told by Map shows that he had become a legendary hero and, as usual with such heroes, tales which originally had no connection have been fathered upon him. But, except for this single incident and the short reference in

<sup>27</sup> Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 188, 306B.

<sup>28</sup> *op. cit.*, 318C.

<sup>29</sup> Vol. vi, pp. 343ff.



Dugdale, all the tales of Eadric Wilde have been lost and we know nothing of the deeds by which this Hereward of the West must have gained his renown.

Another hero of the Conquest was more fortunate in that, in addition to the notices preserved in other works, we also have a brief Latin version of his *Gesta*. But even when the *Gesta Herwardi Saxonis* was written the English original from which it had been translated was almost destroyed and that was still in the lifetime of those who had fought with Hereward. In the introduction to the *Gesta* the author tells us how the work came to be written. He was interested in the deeds of the famous outlaw and, hearing that there was in existence an English book describing his life he searches for it with the intention of translating it into Latin, “subjungens etiam et ea quæ a nostris audire contigerit, cum quibus conversatus est, ut insignis miles magnanimiter vivens.” But his search is in vain, “penitus nihil invenimus, præter pauca et dispersa folia, partim stillicidio putrefactis et abolitis et partim abscissione divisis.” With difficulty the author extracts from these pages “primitiva insignia præclarissimi exulis Herwardi, editum Anglico stilo a Lefrico Diacono ejusdem ad Brun presbyterum.” Nothing more is to be found—“Quos tandem vana spes diu delusit, sicut ab initio a quibusdam dicentibus quod in illo et illo loco magnus liber est de gestis ejusdem”—and consequently he lays the work aside. But apparently someone in authority hears of the half-finished work and desires to see it. The author then takes up his pen and completes the book, “de his quæ a nostris et a quibusdam suorum audivimus, cum quo a principiis illius conversati sunt, et in multis consortes fuerunt.”<sup>30</sup> Evidently whilst those who had known him were still living, the biography of Hereward by his chaplain had almost perished. But the early part of the *Gesta* makes us hesitate to believe that one who had known Hereward at all intimately could have been responsible for such an entirely unhistorical account of his ancestors and early life. Either the

<sup>30</sup> *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis*, ed. S. H. Miller, Peterborough, 1895, pp. 7-8.

author of the *Gesta* was mistaken in supposing that his original was by Leofric the Deacon or else he did not trouble to make certain of his transcription. Nor is Leofric's the only life of Hereward which is lost; lost also is the book of Richard of Ely to which the author of the *Liber Eliensis* refers us unless, indeed, it is identical with the *Gesta Herwardi Saxonis*, since we are not told whether it was written in Latin or in English. "Hæc quidem de pluribus historiis rescindentes ac simul sed breviter conjungentes, ex multis et magnis pauca memoramus ac parva, ne prolixitas nimis procedat, neu fide majora dicantur quamvis vera, in libro autem de ipsius gestis Herwardi dudum a venerabili viro et doctissimo fratre nostro beatæ memoriæ Ricardo edito, plenius descripta inveniuntur."<sup>31</sup> It is impossible here to go at all deeply into the development of the Hereward legend and we must be content with noting the chief materials as given by H. W. C. Davis.<sup>32</sup> The principal sources are (1) the Latin romance *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis*; (2) the pseudo-Ingulph, *Chronicles of Croyland*; (3) the *Annales Burgo-Spaldenses* (John of Peterborough); (4) the *Historia Eliensis*; (5) Gaimar's *L'estoire des Engles*; (6) the *Liber de Hyda*.

So the books of the exploits of Hereward were lost but the fame of his deeds lived on for, says his biographer, "qua de re provinciales eum in laudibus præferebant, et mulieres ac puellæ de eo in choris canebant."<sup>33</sup> The author of the pseudo-Ingulph also knew of ballads celebrating the deeds of Hereward. He tells of the innumerable dangers and conflicts of Hereward "prout adhuc in triviis canuntur."<sup>34</sup> But even these ballads are lost, in fact they were probably never written down at all, and to-day Hereward has no place in the history of English

<sup>31</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, ed. D. J. Stewart, London, 1848, p. 239.

<sup>32</sup> H. W. C. Davis, *England under the Normans and Angevins*, 1905, Appendix III, p. 524.

<sup>33</sup> *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis*, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> See Davis as above.

<sup>35</sup> *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis*, p. 53. Note that the *Liber Eliensis*, p. 235, has a slightly different version, "Ollæ, ollæ, bonæ ollæ et urnæ; omnia vasa hæc fictilia et optima."

literature. Probably some of these songs were used by the author of the *Gesta*. We seem to detect the reminiscence of one such song in the words used by Hereward when, disguised as a potter, he sought the court of the Conqueror. His cry, we are told, was "Anglica lingua 'Ollæ! ollæ! bonæ ollæ et urnæ! omnia hæc fictilia vasa peroptima!',"<sup>35</sup> and this has been re-translated into Old English as

"Greofan, greofan,      gode greofan and croccan;  
Ealle þas læmenan      fatu þa selestan."<sup>36</sup>

Certainly as given by the author of the *Gesta* we should expect that his original had been composed from the vernacular songs of the countryside, rather than that it was a sober biography written by an intimate follower of the hero. In any case we have definite evidence for the one-time existence in the vernacular of at least one, and possibly two, lives of Hereward, along with numerous songs and ballads celebrating his fame. But all these have perished along with the other English works of Leofric the Deacon for we learn that he was zealous in collecting "omnes actus Gygantum et bellatorum ex fabulis antiquorum, aut ex fideli relatione, ad edificationem audientium congregare, et ob memoriam Angliæ literis commendare."<sup>37</sup> Of these we know even less than we know of the songs which once celebrated Godwine, son of Guthlac, and practically all we know of these we learn from the *Gesta Herwardi*. The author is giving a list of the principal followers of Hereward and amongst them is a certain "Godwinus Gille qui vocabatur Godwinus, quia non impar Godwino filio Guthlaci, qui in fabulis antiquorum valde prædicatur."<sup>38</sup> The only hero of the name of Godwine whom we know is the great earl of that name and he was probably the son of Wulnoth; at any rate there is not the slightest authority for making him the son of any Guthlac. It is quite possible that Godwine's true descent has been forgotten as in *Map*, and that he has been provided with a new ancestor. But even so it is not very

<sup>35</sup> *Pauls Grundriss* (2nd ed.), ii, 1088.

<sup>36</sup> *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis*, p. 40.

probable that the author of the *Gesta* should speak of one who was contemporary with the father of his hero as being "celebrated in the songs of the ancients." It seems more probable that, as Freeman suggests,<sup>39</sup> this quotation must be taken in conjunction with the mention of the Guthlacingas by Ordericus Vitalis. Orderic is telling of the parenthood and birth of St. Guthlac, the hermit of Croyland. Apparently he was the son of Penvaldus and Tetta, and "post octo dies infans baptizatur, et Guthlacus, id est belli munus, a tribu quam Guthlacingas dicunt, appellatur."<sup>40</sup> We learn nothing more of these Guthlacingas; possibly, like the Old Norse *Völsungar*, they had a saga to themselves, but, if so, it has been entirely lost and these two references are all that we have left of the legend.

These, of course, deal with the times immediately succeeding the Conquest. Even if English literature had stopped with the coming of the Normans we should expect that there would have been in existence a diminishing body of Anglo-Saxon readers. But, if we are to accept the statements of the historians of English literature, we should expect that after a century of Norman rule the vernacular as a literary language would have been dead. That this is far from being the case is shown by the historians themselves. Moreover we have definite evidence that, throughout this period, there was a living vernacular literature, not perhaps a written literature but a literature which lived amongst the common people. The fact that Anglo-French or Latin were the languages of the court and of the Church and so the languages of the official documents, blinds us to the fact that the speakers of these languages were a very small proportion of the nation. Actually, as Professor Chambers has shown, English is still the official language throughout the eleventh century although to a gradually decreasing extent. Nevertheless writings in Latin and Anglo-French bulk largely in the extant Middle English literature simply because the position of their users gave them a better

<sup>39</sup> *Norman Conquest*, 2nd ed. vol. iv, p. 829.

<sup>40</sup> Note that in Freeman the reference given to the edition of Ordericus in Migne is 537C; it should be 357C.

chance of survival. Probably a much smaller proportion of writings in these languages has perished than has been the case with writings in the vernacular. Because of this we are probably apt to hold an exaggerated opinion of the importance of Latin and Anglo-French in the two centuries succeeding the Conquest. The monasteries would, presumably, be centres of Latin influence but, with the exception of London and a few of the larger towns in the South, French must have been little known. The Angevin empire of Henry II and his successors must have greatly stimulated the use of French, but even so it seems to have been confined to a few of the larger towns. An interesting sidelight is thrown on the question by Richard of Devizes, the Chronicler of the Third Crusade. In the course of one of his tales a Jew is advising a Frenchman on the choice of a home in England. The Jew gives a list of the principal English towns adding to each its particular drawback. Thus there are too many Scots in York; Worcester, Chester and Hereford abound with desperate Welshman; Rochester and Chichester are mere villages; Bath is, as it were, at the gates of Hell and, towards the end of the list, "in Dunelmo, Norhrico, sive Lincolnia, perpaucos de potentibus de tua conditione, nullum penitus audies Romane loquentem."<sup>41</sup> True, the Jew is trying to persuade the Frenchman to settle in Winchester but there must have been some measure of truth in the statement to make it plausible. Moreover the descriptions of the other cities seem true enough, though distinctly unflattering. But, if there was no French spoken in rich and flourishing cities like these, then obviously its sphere of influence must have been much narrower than is sometimes supposed. Latin and French were certainly to the fore in medieval literature and, because they were to the fore, they attract an inordinate amount of attention. We are apt to forget that behind the Latin and French speakers are the masses of the common people with a rich literature of their own, little of which was ever written down and still less preserved.

<sup>41</sup> Chronicles and Memorials, vol. 82 (iii), p. 437.

Naturally such a statement as to a rich vernacular literature in the years succeeding the Conquest requires proof. Here we can only point out a few indications of this richness and indicate the sources from which further proofs may be obtained. The subjects of the vernacular literature may remain hidden but occasionally we can glimpse the bare fact of its existence. For example in Fitz-Stephen's *Life of Becket*, we read in the account of the Chancellor's embassy to France "In ingressu Gallicanarum villarum et castrorum, primi veniebat garciones pedites 'fruges consumere nati' quasi ducenti quinquaginta, gregatim euntes sex vel deni, vel plures simul, aliquid lingua sua pro more patriæ suæ cantantes."<sup>42</sup> What exactly their songs were we have no means of telling but the mention of them certainly gives us a glimpse of lost literature in the vernacular. The only songs from this period which have survived are those said to have been composed by St. Godric. But even if these had reached the south so early, we get the impression that the songs sung on this occasion were rather more worldly than any of Godric's hymns which have been preserved.

Of the subject of these poems we can say nothing. Perhaps they celebrated the spreading fame of Arthur and his Round Table, or perhaps they told of Charlemagne and his peers like the vulgar rhymes which Map laments, "nobis divinam Karolorum et Pepinorum nobilitatem vulgaribus rithmis sola mimorum concelebrat nugacitas, præsentibus vero Cæsares nemo loquitur."<sup>43</sup> Presumably these refer to the forerunners of the later Middle English romances and of such celebrating the "godlike nobility" of Charlemagne many still remain to us, but where are the romances of Pepin? Unless this is merely another name for the Charlemagne romances, Middle English literature knows them not.

Nor can we say anything of the form of this lost literature. Was it in rhyme or in the old alliterative metre, a metre which we know long survived the Conquest? When Giraldus discusses the use of alliteration in Welsh, he is struck by the

<sup>42</sup> *Chronicles and Memorials*, vol. 67 (iii), p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Map, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

parallel between Welsh and English in this respect, "Adeo igitur hoc verborum ornatu duæ nationes, Angli scilicet et Kambri, in omni sermone exquisito utuntur, ut nihil ab his eleganter dictum, nullum egregium, nullum nisi rude et agreste censeatur eloquium, si non schematis hujus lima plene fuerit expolitum. Sicut Britannice in hunc modum;

"Dychaun Dyu da dy unic"

"Erbyn dibuilh puilh paraut"

Anglice vero sic;

"Godis to gedere gamen and wisdom."

"Ne halt nocht alsor isaid, ne al sorghe atwite."

"Betere is red thene rap, and liste thene lither streingthe"<sup>44</sup>

Yet from this period what alliterative poetry we have remaining was intended for an entirely different audience and we can hardly assume that Giraldus ever saw any of it. Nevertheless alliterative works in the vernacular must have been perfectly familiar to him. Probably many of those which he heard were never written down, and of those written down most must have perished. We speak of the "underground tradition" by which the alliterative technique survived until the final burst of the alliterative revival. Whatever it may mean, it is an unfortunate phrase and we have evidence here which shows that the tradition was anything but underground. When alliteration as the national poetical ornament was quite familiar to a cultured cosmopolitan like Giraldus it certainly suggests that the tradition, far from being underground, was living and active. But so much has been lost that the final glory of the alliterative revival comes as a complete surprise and consequently we talk of "underground traditions" in order to explain it.

To continue, we are reminded of another lost cycle of romance by the reference in *Piers Plowman*<sup>45</sup> to the

"rhymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Erle of Chester."

<sup>44</sup> op. cit., bk. i, cap. 12.

<sup>45</sup> C. viii, 11.

<sup>46</sup> *Fulk Fitz-Warine*, ed. Louis Brandin, Paris, 1930, pp. 70ff.

Langland tells us nothing more of these lost rhymes and the reference in *Fulk Fitz-Warine*<sup>46</sup> does not even provide further evidence for the existence of such rhymes. But J. H. Round<sup>47</sup> claimed to have identified "a portion at least of the lost song of the great earl." In Dugdale's *Baronage* (I, 42-43) we are told how Randolph, Earl of Chester, was responsible for the success of the youthful Henry III against Louis of France. The battle of Lincoln is won entirely by his own efforts and the opposing leader, the Earl of Perche, is killed by Randolph. Louis is then seized and made to swear that he will return to France and the episode ends with the Earl of Chester as king-maker paying homage to the young king. The whole tale is, of course, entirely unhistorical and there is not the slightest justification for the prominence given to the Earl of Chester. Actually he seems to have usurped the place of William the Marshall, some of whose deeds have been assigned to Randolph. But the tale was probably part of the geste of Randolph, Earl of Chester, which has otherwise been almost entirely lost.

These few examples, far from exhaustive, are perhaps sufficient to show how much light on the state of English medieval literature can be gathered from out-of-the-way contemporary documents. A careful examination of the references to the lost and unwritten literature in the vernacular will probably cause the revision of many of the opinions held at present. The trouble is that all this contemporary evidence has been ignored and we are far too apt to base our views on Medieval English literature on that part of it which has been preserved, totally ignoring the fact that this is but a small proportion of that which was composed. Necessary though the histories of the extant medieval vernacular literature may be, we need also a history of the lost and unwritten literature if our perspective is to be corrected. Such a history could never, of course, be complete. Much that is lost is lost for ever and can never be known to us. But even so a knowledge of that which we know to have once existed will enable us to judge far

<sup>47</sup> *Peerage and Pedigree*, ii, 302.



more correctly of the range of medieval vernacular literature and of the development of modern literature. We may ignore the evidence if we wish; but then we must expect to falsify our own conclusions by so doing. So long as the artificial gaps remain in our text-books it is useless to insist on the essential continuity of English literature. Because of various accidents much of the vernacular literature written immediately before and after the Conquest has disappeared. But we have definite proof that it once existed and, in face of that proof, we have no excuse for repeating the sweeping mis-statements made by earlier historians to whom such evidence was not available.

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