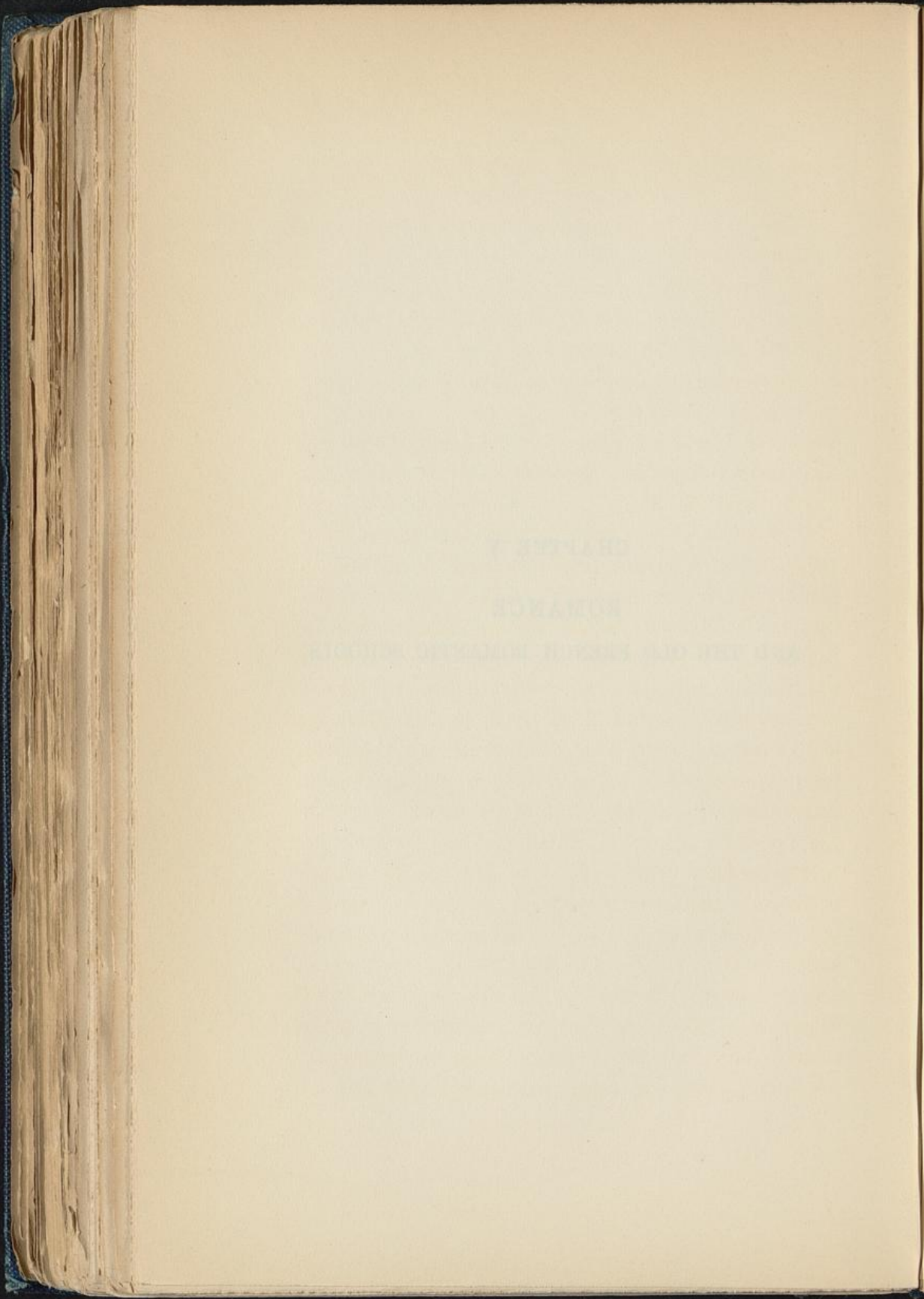


CHAPTER V
ROMANCE
AND THE OLD FRENCH ROMANTIC SCHOOLS



CHAPTER 7

EDWARD

AND THE OLD ENGLISH LANGUAGE

ROMANCE
AND THE OLD FRENCH ROMANTIC SCHOOLS

ROMANCE in many varieties is to be found inherent in Epic and in Tragedy ; for some readers, possibly, the great and magnificent forms of poetry are most attractive when from time to time they forget their severity, and when the tragic strength is allowed to rest, as in the fairy interludes of the *Odyssey*, or the similes of the clouds, winds, and mountain-waters in the *Iliad*. If Romance be the name for the sort of imagination that possesses the mystery and the spell of everything remote and unattainable, then Romance is to be found in the old Northern heroic poetry in larger measure than any epic or tragic solemnity, and in no small measure also even in the steady course of the Icelandic histories. Possibly Romance is in its best place here, as an element in the epic harmony ; perhaps the romantic mystery is most mysterious when it is found as something additional among the graver and more positive affairs of epic or tragic personages. The occasional visitations of the dreaming moods of romance, in the middle of a great epic or a great tragedy, are often more romantic than the literature which is nothing but romance from beginning to end.

The strongest poets, Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, have along with their strong reasoning enough of the lighter and fainter grace and charm to be the despair of all the "romantic schools" in the world. In the Icelandic prose stories, as has been seen already, there is a similar combination. These stories contain the strongest imaginative work of the Middle Ages before Dante. Along with this there is found in them occasionally the uncertain and incalculable play of the other, the more airy mode of imagination; and the romance of the strong Sagas is more romantic than that of the medieval works which have no other interest to rely upon, or of all but a very few.

One of the largest and plainest facts of medieval history is the change of literature in the twelfth century, and the sudden and exuberant growth and progress of a number of new poetical forms; particularly the courtly lyric that took shape in Provence, and passed into the tongues of Italy, France, and Germany, and the French romance which obeyed the same general inspiration as the Provençal poetry, and was equally powerful as an influence on foreign nations. The French Romantic Schools of the twelfth century are among the most definite and the most important appearances even in that most wonderful age; though it is irrational to contrast them with the other great historical movements of the time, because there is no real separation between them. French romance is part of the life of the time, and the life of the twelfth century is reproduced in French romance.

The rise of these new forms of story makes an

unmistakable difference between the age that preceded them and everything that comes after. They are a new, fresh, and prosperous beginning in literature, and they imply the failure of the older manner of thought, the older fashion of imagination, represented in the epic literature of France, not to speak of the various Teutonic forms of heroic verse and prose that are related to the epic of France only by a remote common ancestry, and a certain general likeness in the conditions of "heroic" life.

The defeat of French epic, as has been noted already, was slow and long resisted; but the victory of romance was inevitable. Together with the influence of the Provençal lyric idealism, it determined the forms of modern literature, long after the close of the Middle Ages. The change of fashion in the twelfth century is as momentous and far-reaching in its consequences as that to which the name "Renaissance" is generally appropriated. The later Renaissance, indeed, in what concerns imaginative literature, makes no such abrupt and sudden change of fashion as was made in the twelfth century. The poetry and romance of the Renaissance follow naturally upon the literature of the Middle Ages; for the very good reason that it was the Middle Ages which began, even in their dark beginnings, the modern study of the humanities, and in the twelfth century made a remarkable and determined effort to secure the inheritance of ancient poetry for the advantage of the new tongues and their new forms of verse. There is no such line of division between Ariosto and Chrestien of Troyes as there is between Chrestien and the primitive epic.

The romantic schools of the twelfth century are the result and evidence of a great unanimous movement, the origins of which may be traced far back in the general conditions of education and learning, in the influence of Latin authors, in the interchange of popular tales. They are among the most characteristic productions of the most impressive, varied, and characteristic period in the Middle Ages; of that century which broke, decisively, with the old "heroic" traditions, and made the division between the heroic and the chivalric age. When the term "medieval" is used in modern talk, it almost always denotes something which first took definite shape in the twelfth century. The twelfth century is the source of most of the "medieval" influences in modern art and literature, and the French romances of that age are the original authorities for most of the "Gothic" ornaments adopted in modern romantic schools.

The twelfth-century French romances form a definite large group, with many ranks and divisions, some of which are easily distinguished, while all are of great historical interest.

One common quality, hardly to be mistaken, is that which marks them all as belonging to a romantic *school*, in almost all the modern senses of that term. That is to say, they are not the spontaneous product of an uncritical and ingenuous imagination; they are not the same sort of thing as the popular stories on which many of them are founded; they are the literary work of authors more or less sophisticated, on the look-out for new sensations and new literary

devices. It is useless to go to those French books in order to catch the first fresh jet of romantic fancy, the "silly sooth" of the golden age. One might as well go to the *Légende des Siècles*. Most of the romance of the medieval schools is already hot and dusty and fatigued. It has come through the mills of a thousand active literary men, who know their business, and have an eye to their profits. Medieval romance, in its most characteristic and most influential form, is almost as factitious and professional as modern Gothic architecture. The twelfth-century dealers in romantic commonplaces are as fully conscious of the market value of their goods as any later poet who has borrowed from them their giants and enchanters, their forests and their magic castles; and these and similar properties are used in the twelfth century with the same kind of literary sharpness, the same attention to the demands of the "reading public," as is shown by the various poets and novelists who have waited on the successes, and tried to copy the methods, of Goethe, Scott, or Victor Hugo. Pure Romance, such as is found in the old Northern poems, is very rare in the French stories of the twelfth century; the magical touch and the sense of mystery, and all the things that are associated with the name romance, when that name is applied to the *Ancient Mariner*, or *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, or the *Lady of Shalott*, are generally absent from the most successful romances of the great medieval romantic age, full though they may be of all the forms of chivalrous devotion and all the most wonderful romantic machines. Most

of them are as different from the true irresistible magic of fancy as *Thalaba* from *Kubla Khan*. The name "romantic school" is rightly applicable to them and their work, for almost the last thing that is produced in a "romantic school" is the infallible and indescribable touch of romance. A "romantic school" is a company for the profitable working of Broceliande, an organised attempt to "open up" the Enchanted Ground; such, at least, is the appearance of a great deal of the romantic literature of the early part of the present century, and of its forerunner in the twelfth. There is this difference between the two ages, that the medieval romanticists are freer and more original than the moderns who made a business out of tales of terror and wonder, and tried to fatten their lean kine on the pastures of "Gothic" or of Oriental learning.

The romance-writers of the twelfth century, though they did much to make romance into a mechanic art, though they reduced the game to a system and left the different romantic combinations and conventions within the reach of almost any 'prentice hand, were yet in their way original explorers. Though few of them got out of their materials the kind of effect that appeals to us now most strongly, and though we think we can see what they missed in their opportunities, yet they were not the followers of any great man of their own time, and they chose their own way freely, not as bungling imitators of a greater artist. It is a disappointment to find that romance is rarely at its finest in the works that technically have the best

right in the world to be called by that name. Nevertheless, the work that is actually found there is interesting in its own way, and historically of an importance which does not need to be emphasised.

The true romantic interest is very unequally distributed over the works of the Middle Ages, and there is least of it in the authors who are most representative of the "age of chivalry." There is a disappointment prepared for any one who looks in the greater romantic authors of the twelfth century for the music of the *Faery Queene* or *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. There is more of the pure romantic element in the poems of Brynhild, in the story of Njal, in the *Song of Roland*, than in the famous romances of Chrestien of Troyes or any of his imitators, though they have all the wonders of the Isle of Britain at their command, though they have the very story of Tristram and the very mystery of the Grail to quicken them and call them out. Elegance, fluency, sentiment, romantic adventures are common, but for words like those of Hervor at the grave of her father, or of the parting between Brynhild and Sigurd, or of Helgi and Sigrun, it would be vain to search in the romances of Benoit de Sainte More or of Chrestien. Yet these are the masters of the art of romance when it was fresh and strong, a victorious fashion.

If the search be continued further, the search for that kind of imaginative beauty which these authors do not give, it will not be unsuccessful. The greater authors of the twelfth century have more affinity to the "heroic romance" of the school of the *Grand*

Cyrus than to the dreams of Spenser or Coleridge. But, while this is the case with the most distinguished members of the romantic school, it is not so with all the rest. The magic that is wanting to the clear and elegant narrative of Benoit and Chrestien will be found elsewhere; it will be found in one form in the mystical prose of the *Queste del St. Graal*—a very different thing from Chrestien's *Perceval*—it will be found, again and again, in the prose of Sir Thomas Malory; it will be found in many ballads and ballad burdens, in *William and Margaret*, in *Binnorie*, in the *Wife of Usher's Well*, in the *Rime of the Count Arnaldos*, in the *Königskinder*; it will be found in the most beautiful story of the Middle Ages, *Aucassin and Nicolette*; one of the few perfectly beautiful stories in the world, about which there is no need, in England at any rate, to say anything in addition to the well-known passages in which it has been praised. *Aucassin and Nicolette* cannot be made into a representative medieval romance; there is nothing else like it; and the qualities that make it what it is are the opposite of the rhetorical self-possession, the correct and deliberate narrative of Chrestien and his school. It contains the quintessence of romantic imagination, but it is quite unlike the most fashionable and successful romances.

There are several stages in the history of the great Romantic School, as well as several distinct sources of interest. The value of the best works of the school consists in their representation of the passion of love.

They turn the psychology of the courtly amatory poets into narrative. Chaucer's address to the old poets,—“Ye lovers that can make of sentiment,”—when he complains that they have left little for him to glean in the field of poetry, does not touch the lyrical poets only. The narrative poetry of the courteous school is equally devoted to the philosophy of love. Narrative poets like Chrestien, when they turn to lyric, can change their instrument without changing the purport of their verse; lyric or narrative, it has the same object, the same duty. So also, two hundred years later, Chaucer himself or Froissart may use narrative or lyric forms indifferently, and observe the same “courteous” ideal in both.

In the twelfth-century narratives, besides the interest of the love-story and all its science, there was the interest of adventure, of strange things; and here there is a great diversity among the authors, and a perceptible difference between earlier and later usage. Courteous sentiment, running through a succession of wonderful adventures, is generally enough to make a romance; but there are some notable varieties, both in the sentiment and in the incidents. The sentiment comes later in the history of literature than the adventures; the conventional romantic form of plot may be said to have been fixed before the romantic sentiment was brought to its furthest refinement. The wonders of romantic story are more easily traced to their origin, or at least to some of their earlier forms, than the spirit of chivalrous idealism which came in due time to take possession

of the fabulous stories, and gave new meanings to the lives of Tristram and Lancelot.

Variety of incident, remoteness of scene, and all the incredible things in the world, had been at the disposal of medieval authors long before the French Romantic Schools began to define themselves. The wonders of the East, especially, had very early come into literature; and the Anglo-Saxon *Epistle of Alexander* seems to anticipate the popular taste for Eastern stories, just as the Anglo-Saxon version of *Apollonius of Tyre* anticipates the later importation of Greek romance, and the appropriation of classical rhetoric, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; as the grace and brightness of the old English poems of St. Andrew or St. Helen seem to anticipate the peculiar charm of some of the French poems of adventures. In French literature before the vogue of romance can be said to have begun, and before the epic form had lost its supremacy, the poem of the *Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, one of the oldest extant poems of the heroic cycle, is already far gone in subjection to the charm of mere unqualified wonder and exaggeration—rioting in the wonders of the East, like the Varangians on their holiday, when they were allowed a free day to loot in the Emperor's palace.¹

¹ See the account of the custom in the *Saga of Harald Hardrada*, c. 16. "Harald entrusted to Jarisleif all the gold that he had sent from Micklegarth, and all sorts of precious things: so much wealth all together, as no man of the North Lands had ever seen before in one man's hands. Harald had thrice come in for the palace-sweeping (*Polotasvarf*) while he was in Micklegarth. It is the law there that when the Greek king dies, the Varangians shall have a sweep of the palace; they go over all the king's palaces where his treasures are, and every man shall have for his own what falls to his hand" (*Fornmannna Sögur*, vi. p. 171).

The poem of Charlemagne's journey to Constantinople is unrefined enough, but the later and more elegant romances deal often in the same kind of matter. Mere furniture counts for a good deal in the best romances, and they are full of descriptions of riches and splendours. The story of Troy is full of details of various sorts of magnificence: the city of Troy itself and "Ylion," its master-tower, were built by Priam out of all kinds of marble, and covered with sculpture all over. Much further on in Benoit's poem (l. 14,553) Hector is brought home wounded to a room which is described in 300 lines, with particulars of its remarkable decorations, especially its four magical images. The tomb of Penthesilea (l. 25,690) is too much for the author:—

Sepulture ot et monument
 Tant que se *Plinius* fust vis
 Ou cil qui fist *Apocalis*
 Nel vos sauroient il retraire :
 Por ço si m'en dei gie bien taire.
 N'en dirai plus, que n'oseroie ;
 Trop halte chose envairoie.

Pliny and the author of the Apocalypse are here acknowledged as masters and authorities in the art of description. In other places of the same work there is a very liberal use of natural history, such as is common in many versions of the history of Alexander. There is, for example, a long description of the precious clothes of Briseide (Cressida) at her departure, especially of her mantle, which had been given to Calchas by an Indian poet in Upper India.

It was made by nigromancy, of the skin of the beast *Dindialos*, which is hunted in the shadowless land by the savage people whose name is *Cenocefali*; and the fringes of the mantle were not of the sable, but of a "beast of price" that dwells in the water of Paradise:—

Dedans le flum de Paradis
Sont et conversent, ço set l'on
Se c'est vrais que nos en lison.

Calchas had a tent which had belonged to Pharaoh:—

Diomedes tant la conduit
Qu'il descendi al paveillon
Qui fu al riche Pharaon,
Cil qui noa en la mer roge.

In such passages of ornamental description the names of strange people and of foreign kings have the same kind of value as the names of precious stones, and sometimes they are introduced on their own account, apart from the precious work of Arabian or Indian artists. Of this sort is the "dreadful sagittary," who is still retained in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* on the ultimate authority (when it comes to be looked into) of Benoit de Sainte More.¹

A quotation by M. Gaston Paris (*Hist. litt. de la France*, xxx. p. 210), from the unpublished romance of

¹ Il ot o lui un saietaire
Qui molt fu fels et deputaire :
Des le nombril tot contreval
Ot cors en forme de cheval :
Il n'est riens nule s'il volsist
Que d'isnelece n'ateinsist :
Cors, chiere, braz, a noz semblanz
Avoit, mes n'ert pas avenanz.

l. 12, 207.

Ider (Edeyrn, son of Nudd), shows how this fashion of rich description and allusion had been overdone, and how it was necessary, in time, to make a protest against it. Kings' pavilions were a favourite subject for rhetoric, and the poet of *Ider* explains that he does not approve of this fashion, though he has pavilions of his own, and can describe them if he likes, as well as any one :—

Tels diz n'a fors savor de songe,
Tant en acreissent les paroles :
Mes jo n'ai cure d'iperboles :
Yperbole est chose non voire,
Qui ne fu et qui n'est a croire,
C'en est la difinicion :
Mes tant di de cest paveillon
Qu'il n'en a nul soz ciel qu'il vaille.

Many poets give themselves pains to describe gardens and pavilions and other things, and think they are beautifying their work, but this is all dreaming and waste of words ; I will have no such hyperbole. (*Hyperbole* means by definition that which is untrue and incredible.) I will only say of this pavilion that there was not its match under heaven.

The author, by his definition of *hyperbole*¹ in this place, secures an ornamental word with which he consoles himself for his abstinence in other respects. This piece of science is itself characteristic of the rhetorical

¹ Chaucer, who often yields to the temptations of "Hyperbole" in this sense of the word, lays down the law against impertinent decorations, in the rhetorical instruction of Pandarus to Troilus, about Troilus's letter to Cressida (B. ii. l. 1037) :—

Ne jompre eek no discordaunt thing y fere
As thus, to usen termes of phisyk ;
In loves termes hold of thy matere
The forme alwey, and do that it be lyk ;
For if a peyntour wolde peynte a pyk
With asses feet, and hede it as an ape,
It cordeth naught ; so nere it but a jape.

enterprise of the Romantic School; of the way in which Pliny, Isidore, and other encyclopaedic authors were turned into decorations. The taste for such things is common in the early and the later Middle Ages; all that the romances did was to give a certain amount of finish and neatness to the sort of work that was left comparatively rude by the earlier pedants. There may be discovered in some writers a preference for classical subjects in their ornamental digressions, or for the graceful forms of allegory, such as in the next century were collected for the Garden of the Rose, and still later for the *House of Fame*. Thus Chrestien seems to assert his superiority of taste and judgment when, instead of Oriental work, he gives Enid an ivory saddle carved with the story of Aeneas and Dido (*Erec*, l. 5337); or when, in the same book, Erec's coronation mantle, though it is fairy work, bears no embroidered designs of Broceliande or Avalon, but four allegorical figures of the quadrivial sciences, with a reference by Chrestien to Macrobius as his authority in describing them. One function of this Romantic School, though not the most important, is to make an immediate literary profit out of all accessible books of learning. It was a quick-witted school, and knew how to turn quotations and allusions. Much of its art, like the art of *Euphues*, is bestowed in making pedantry look attractive.

The narrative material imported and worked up in the Romantic School is, of course, enormously more important than the mere decorations taken out of Solinus

or Macrobius. It is not, however, with the principal masters the most important part of their study. Chrestien, for example, often treats his adventures with great levity in comparison with the serious psychological passages; the wonder often is that he should have used so much of the common stuff of adventures in poems where he had a strong commanding interest in the sentiments of the personages. There are many irrelevant and unnecessary adventures in his *Erec*, *Lancelot*, and *Yvain*, not to speak of his unfinished *Perceval*; while in *Cliges* he shows that he did not rely on the commonplaces of adventure, on the regular machinery of romance, and that he might, when he chose, commit himself to a novel almost wholly made up of psychology and sentiment. Whatever the explanation may be in this case, it is plain enough both that the adventures are of secondary value as compared with the psychology, in the best romances, and that their value, though inferior, is still considerable, even in some of the best work of the "courtly makers."

The greatest novelty in the twelfth-century narrative materials was due to the Welsh; not that the "matter of Britain" was quite overwhelming in extent, or out of proportion to the other stores of legend and fable. "The matter of Rome the Great" (not to speak again of the old epic "matter of France" and its various later romantic developments) included all known antiquity, and it was recruited continually by new importations from the East. The "matter of Rome," however, the tales of Thebes and Troy and

the wars of Alexander, had been known more or less for centuries, and they did not produce the same effect as the discovery of the Celtic stories. Rather, it may be held that the Welsh stories gave a new value to the classical authorities, and suggested new imaginative readings. As Chaucer's *Troilus* in our own time has inspired a new rendering of the *Life and Death of Jason*, so (it would seem) the same story of Jason got a new meaning in the twelfth century when it was read by Benoit de Sainte More in the light of Celtic romance. Then it was discovered that Jason and Medea were no more, and no less, than the adventurer and the wizard's daughter, who might play their parts in a story of Wales or Brittany. The quest of the Golden Fleece and the labours of Jason are all reduced from the rhetoric of Ovid, from their classical dignity, to something like what their original shape may have been when the story that now is told in Argyll and Connaught of the *King's Son of Ireland* was told or chanted, ages before Homer, of a king's son of the Greeks and an enchantress beyond sea. Something indeed, and that of the highest consequence, as will be seen, was kept by Benoit from his reading of the *Metamorphoses*; the passion of Medea, namely. But the story itself is hardly distinguishable in kind from *Libeaux Desconus*. It is not easy to say how far this treatment of Jason may be due to the Welsh example of similar stories, and how far to the general medieval disrespect for everything in the classics except their matter. The Celtic precedents can scarcely have been without influence on this very

remarkable detection of the "Celtic element" in the voyage of the Argonauts, while at the same time Ovid ought not to be refused his share in the credit of medieval romantic adventure. Virgil, Ovid, and Statius are not to be underrated as sources of chivalrous adventure, even in comparison with the unquestioned riches of Wales or Ireland.

There is more than one distinct stage in the progress of the Celtic influence in France. The culmination of the whole thing is attained when Chrestien makes the British story of the capture and rescue of Guinevere into the vehicle of his most finished and most courtly doctrine of love, as shown in the examples of Lancelot and the Queen. Before that there are several earlier kinds of Celtic romance in French, and after that comes what for modern readers is more attractive than the typical work of Chrestien and his school,—the eloquence of the old French prose, with its languor and its melancholy, both in the prose *Lancelot* and in the *Queste del St. Graal* and *Mort Artus*. In Chrestien everything is clear and positive; in these prose romances, and even more in Malory's English rendering of his "French book," is to be heard the indescribable plaintive melody, the sigh of the wind over the enchanted ground, the spell of pure Romance. Neither in Chrestien of Troyes, nor yet in the earlier authors who dealt more simply than he with their Celtic materials, is there anything to compare with this later prose.

In some of the earlier French romantic work, in some of the lays of Marie de France, and in the

fragments of the poems about Tristram, there is a kind of simplicity, partly due to want of skill, but in its effect often impressive enough. The plots made use of by the medieval artists are some of them among the noblest in the world, but none of the poets were strong enough to bring out their value, either in translating *Dido* and *Medea*, or in trying to educate Tristram and other British heroes according to the manners of the Court of Champagne. There are, however, differences among the misinterpretations and the failures. No French romance appears to have felt the full power of the story of Tristram and Iseult; no French poet had his mind and imagination taken up by the character of Iseult as more than one Northern poet was possessed by the tragedy of Brynhild. But there were some who, without developing the story as Chaucer did with the story of Troilus, at least allowed it to tell itself clearly. The Celtic magic, as that is described in Mr. Arnold's *Lectures*, has scarcely any place in French romance, either of the earlier period or of the fully-developed and successful chivalrous order, until the time of the prose books. The French poets, both the simpler sort and the more elegant, appear to have had a gift for ignoring that power of vagueness and mystery which is appreciated by some of the prose authors of the thirteenth century. They seem for the most part to have been pleased with the incidents of the Celtic stories, without appreciating any charm of style that they may have possessed. They treated them, in fact, as they treated Virgil and Ovid; and

there is about as much of the "Celtic spirit" in the French versions of *Tristram*, as there is of the genius of Virgil in the *Roman d'Eneas*. In each case there is something recognisable of the original source, but it has been translated by minds imperfectly responsive. In dealing with Celtic, as with Greek, Latin, or Oriental stories, the French romancers were at first generally content if they could get the matter in the right order and present it in simple language, like tunes played with one finger. One great advantage of this procedure is that the stories are intelligible; the sequence of events is clear, and where the original conception has any strength or beauty it is not distorted, though the colours may be faint. This earlier and more temperate method was abandoned in the later stages of the Romantic School, when it often happened that a simple story was taken from the "matter of Britain" and overlaid with the chivalrous conventional ornament, losing its simplicity without being developed in respect of its characters or its sentiment. As an example of the one kind may be chosen the *Lay of Guingamor*, one of the lays of Marie de France;¹ as an example of the other, the Dutch romance of Gawain (*Walewein*), which is taken from the French and exhibits the results of a common process of adulteration. Or, again, the story of *Guinglain*, as told by Renaud de Beaujeu with an irrelevant "courtly" digression, may be

¹ Not included in the editions of her works (Roquefort, Warnke); edited by M. Gaston Paris in the eighth volume of *Romania* along with the lays of *Doon*, *Tidorel*, and *Tiolet*.

compared with the simpler and more natural versions in English (*Libeaus Desconus*) and Italian (*Carduino*), as has been done by M. Gaston Paris; or the *Conte du Graal* of Chrestien with the English *Sir Perceval of Galles*.

Guingamor is one of the best of the simpler kind of romances. The theme is that of an old story, a story which in one form and another is extant in native Celtic versions with centuries between them. In essentials it is the story of Ossian in the land of youth; in its chief motive, the fairy-bride, it is akin to the old Irish story of Connla. It is different from both in its definite historical manner of treating the subject. The story is allowed to count for the full value of all its incidents, with scarcely a touch to heighten the importance of any of them. It is the argument of a story, and little more. Even an argument, however, may present some of the vital qualities of a fairy story, as well as of a tragic plot, and the conclusion, especially, of *Guingamor* is very fine in its own way, through its perfect clearness.

There was a king in Britain, and Guingamor was his nephew. The queen fell in love with him, and was driven to take revenge for his rejection of her; but being less cruel than other queens of similar fortune, she planned nothing worse than to send him into the *lande aventureuse*, a mysterious forest on the other side of the river, to hunt the white boar. This white boar of the adventurous ground had already taken off ten knights, who had gone out to hunt it and had never returned. Guingamor followed

the boar with the king's hound. In his wanderings he came on a great palace, with a wall of green marble and a silver shining tower, and open gates, and no one within, to which he was brought back later by a maiden whom he met in the forest. The story of their meeting was evidently, in the original, a story like that of Weland and the swan-maidens, and those of other swan or seal maidens, who are caught by their lovers as Weland caught his bride. But the simplicity of the French story here is in excess of what is required even by the illiterate popular versions of similar incidents.

Guingamor, after two days in the rich palace (where he met the ten knights of the king's court, who had disappeared before), on the third day wished to go back to bring the head of the white boar to the king. His bride told him that he had been there for three hundred years, and that his uncle was dead, with all his retinue, and his cities fallen and destroyed.

But she allowed him to go, and gave him the boar's head and the king's hound; and told him after he had crossed the river into his own country to eat and drink nothing.

He was ferried across the river, and there he met a charcoal-burner and asked for news of the king. The king had been dead for three hundred years, he was told; and the king's nephew had gone hunting in the forest and had never been seen again. Guingamor told him his story, and showed him the boar's head, and turned to go back.

Now it was after nones and turning late. He saw a wild apple-tree and took three apples from it; but as he tasted them he grew old and feeble and fell from his horse.

The charcoal-burner had followed him and was going to help him, when he saw two damsels richly dressed, who came to Guingamor and reproached him for his forgetfulness. They put him gently on a horse and brought him to the river, and ferried him over, along with his hound. The charcoal-burner went back to his own house at nightfall. The boar's head he took to the king of Britain that then was, and told the story of Guingamor, and the king bade turn it into a lay.

The simplicity of all this is no small excellence in a story. If there is anything in this story that can affect the imagination, it is there unimpaired by anything foreign or cumbrous. It is unsupported and undeveloped by any strong poetic art, but it is sound and clear.

In the Dutch romance of *Walewein*, and doubtless in its French original (to show what is gained by the moderation and restriction of the earlier school), another story of fairy adventures has been dressed up to look like chivalry. The story of *Walewein* is one that appears in collections of popular tales; it is that of Mac Iain Direach in Campbell's *West Highland Tales* (No. xlvi.), as well as of Grimm's *Golden Bird*. The romance observes the general plot of the popular story; indeed, it is singular among the romances in its close adherence to the order of events as given in

the traditional oral forms. Though it contains 11,200 lines, it begins at the beginning and goes on to the end without losing what may be considered the original design. But while the general economy is thus retained, there are large digressions, and there is an enormous change in the character of the hero. While Guingamor in the French poem has little, if anything, to distinguish him from the adventurer of popular fairy stories, the hero in this Dutch romance is Gawain,—Gawain the Courteous, in splendid armour, playing the part of Mac Iain Direach. The discrepancy is very great, and there can be little doubt that the story as told in Gaelic forty years ago by Angus Campbell, quarryman, is, in respect of the hero's condition and manners, more original than the medieval romance. Both versions are simple enough in their plot, and their plot is one and the same: the story of a quest for something wonderful, leading to another quest and then another, till the several problems are solved and the adventurer returns successful. In each story (as in Grimm's version also) the Fox appears as a helper.

Mac Iain Direach is sent to look for the Blue Falcon; the giant who owns the Falcon sends him to the big Women of the Isle of Jura to ask for their white glaive of light. The Women of Jura ask for the bay filly of the king of Erin; the king of Erin sends him to woo for him the king's daughter of France. Mac Iain Direach wins all for himself, with the help of the Fox.

Gawain has to carry out similar tasks: to find and

bring back to King Arthur a magical flying Chessboard that appeared one day through the window and went out again; to bring to King Wonder, the owner of the Chessboard, "the sword of the strange rings"; to win for the owner of the sword the Princess of the Garden of India.

Some things in the story, apart from the hero, are different from the popular versions. In *Walewein* there appears quite plainly what is lost in the Gaelic and the German stories, the character of the strange land in which the quests are carried out. Gawain has to pass through or into a hill to reach the land of King Wonder; it is not the common earth on the other side. The three castles to which he comes have all of them water about them; the second of them, Ravensten, is an island in the sea; the third is beyond the water of Purgatory, and is reached by two perilous bridges, the bridge of the sword and the bridge under water, like those in Chrestien's *Lancelot*. There is a distinction here, plain enough, between the human world, to which Arthur and his Court belong, and the other world within the hill, and the castles beyond the waters. But if this may be supposed to belong to an older form of the story not evident in the popular versions, a story of adventures in the land of the Dead, on the other hand the romance has no conception of the meaning of these passages, and gets no poetical result from the chances here offered to it. It has nothing like the vision of Thomas of Erceldoune; the waters about the magic island are tame and shallow; the castle beyond the Bridge of

Dread is loaded with the common, cheap, pedantic "hyperboles," like those of the *Pèlerinage* or of Benoit's *Troy*. Gawain is too heavily armoured, also, and even his horse Gringalet has a reputation of his own; all inconsistent with the lightness of the fairy tale. Gawain in the land of all these dreams is burdened still by the heavy chivalrous conventions. The world for him, even after he has gone through the mountain, is still very much the old world with the old stale business going on; especially tournaments and all their weariness. One natural result of all this is that the Fox's part is very much reduced. In the Gaelic story, Mac Iain Direach and his friend Gille Mairtean (the Lad of March, the Fox) are a pair of equals; they have no character, no position in the world, no station and its duties. They are quite careless, and they move freely. Gawain is slow, and he has to put in a certain amount of the common romantic business. The authors of that romantic school, if ever they talked shop, may have asked one another, "Where do you put your Felon Red Knight? Where do you put your doing away of the Ill Custom? or your tournaments?" and the author of *Walewein* would have had an answer ready. Everything is there all right: that is to say, all the things that every one else has, all the mechanical business of romance. The Fox is postponed to the third adventure, and there, though he has not quite grown out of his original likeness to the Gille Mairtean, he is evidently constrained. Sir Gawain of the romance, this courteous but rather dull and middle-aged gentle-

man in armour, is not his old light-hearted companion.

Still, though this story of *Gawain* is weighed down by the commonplaces of the Romantic School, it shows through all its encumbrances what sort of story it was that impressed the French imagination at the beginning of the School. It may be permitted to believe that the story of *Walewein* existed once in a simpler and clearer form, like that of *Guingamor*.

The curious sophistication of *Guinglain* by Renaud de Beaujeu has been fully described and criticised by M. Gaston Paris in one of his essays (*Hist. litt. de la France*, xxx. p. 171). His comparison with the English and Italian versions of the story brings out the indifference of the French poets to their plot, and their readiness to sacrifice their unities of action for the sake of irrelevant sentiment. The story is as simple as that of *Walewein*; an expedition, this time, to rescue a lady from enchantment. She is bewitched in the form of a serpent, and freed by a kiss (*le fier baiser*). There are various adventures on the journey, which has some resemblance to that of Gareth in the *Morte d'Arthur*, and of the Red Cross Knight in Spenser, which is founded upon Malory's *Gareth*.¹ One of the adventures is in the house of a beautiful sorceress, who treats Guinglain with small consideration. Renaud de Beaujeu, in order to get literary credit from his handling of this romantic episode, brings Guinglain back to this enchantress after the real close of the

¹ Britomart in the House of Busirane has some resemblance to the conclusion of *Libius Disconius*.

story, in a kind of sentimental show-piece or appendix, by which the story is quite overweighted and thrown off its balance for the sake of a rhetorical demonstration. This of course belongs to the later period of romance, when the simpler methods had been discredited; but the simpler form, much nearer the fashion of popular stories, is still kept more or less by the English and the Italian rhymes of "Sir Lybeaux."

The most remarkable examples of the earlier French romantic methods are presented by the fragments remaining of the old Anglo-Norman poems on Tristram and Yseult, by Béroul and Thomas, especially the latter;¹ most remarkable, because in this case there is the greatest contradiction between the tragic capabilities of the story and the very simple methods of the Norman poets. It is a story that might test the tragic strength and eloquence of any poet in any age of the world; the poetical genius of Thomas is shown in his abstinence from effort. Hardly anything could be simpler. He does very little to fill out or to elaborate the story; he does nothing to vitiate his style; there is little ornament or emphasis. The story itself is there, as if the poet thought it an impertinence to add any harmonies of his own. If it were only extant as a whole, it would be one of the most notable of poems. Where else is there anything like it, for sincerity and for thinness?

¹ Fr. Michel: *Tristan*: Recueil de ce qui reste des Poèmes relatifs à ses Aventures. London, 1835. Cf. Gaston Paris, "Tristan et Iseut," in the *Revue de Paris* for 15th April 1894.

This poet of *Tristram* does not represent the prevalent fashion of his time. The eloquence and the passion of the amorous romances are commonly more effusive, and seldom as true. The lost *Tristram* of Chrestien would probably have made a contrast with the Anglo-Norman poem in this respect. Chrestien of Troyes is at the head of the French Romantic School, and his interest is in the science of love; not in ancient rude and passionate stories, such as the story of Tristram—for it is rude and ancient, even in the French of Thomas—not in the “Celtic magic,” except for decorative and incidental purposes, but in psychology and analysis of the emotions, and in the appropriate forms of language for such things.

It is impossible (as M. Gaston Paris has shown) to separate the spirit of French romance from the spirit of the Provençal lyric poetry. The romances represent in a narrative form the ideas and the spirit which took shape as lyric poetry in the South; the romances are directly dependent upon the poetry of the South for their principal motives. The courtesy of the Provençal poetry, with its idealism and its pedantry, its psychological formalism, its rhetoric of antithesis and conceits, is to be found again in the narrative poetry of France in the twelfth century, just as, in the thirteenth, all the floods of lyrical idealism are collected in the didactic reservoir of the *Romaunt of the Rose*. The dominant interest in the French romances is the same as in the Provençal lyric poetry and in the *Romaunt of the Rose*; namely, the idealist or courteous science

of love. The origins of this mode of thought are difficult to trace fully. The inquiry belongs more immediately to the history of Provence than of France, for the romancers are the pupils of the Provençal school; not independent practitioners of the same craft, but directly indebted to Provence for some of their main ideas and a good deal of their rhetoric. In Provence itself the origins are partly to be found in the natural (*i.e.* inexplicable) development of popular love-poetry, and in the corresponding progress of society and its sentiments; while among the definite influences that can be proved and explained, one of the strongest is that of Latin poetry, particularly of the *Art of Love*. About this there can be no doubt, however great may seem to be the interval between the ideas of Ovid and those of the Provençal lyrists, not to speak of their greater scholars in Italy, Dante and Petrarch. The pedantry of Ovid was taken seriously, for one thing, in an age when everything systematic was valuable just because it was a system; when every doctrine was profitable. For another thing, they found in Ovid the form, at least, of devotion, and again the *Art of Love* was not their only book. There were other writings of Ovid and works of other poets from whom the Middle Ages learned their lesson of chivalrous service; not for the most part, it must be confessed, from the example of "Paynim Knights," but far more from the classical "Legend of Good Women," from the passion of Dido and the other heroines. It is true that there were some names of ancient heroes that were held in

honour ; the name of Paris is almost inseparable from the name of Tristram, wherever a medieval poet has occasion to praise the true lovers of old time, and Dante followed the common form when he brought the names together in his fifth canto.

But what made by far the strongest impression on the Middle Ages was not the example of Paris or of Leander, nor yet the passion of Catullus and Propertius, who were then unknown, but the poetry of the loyalty of the heroines, the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, the *Heroides* of Ovid, and certain parts of the *Metamorphoses*. If anything literary can be said to have taken effect upon the temper of the Middle Ages, so as to produce the manners and sentiments of chivalry, this is the literature to which the largest share of influence must be ascribed. The ladies of Romance all owe allegiance, and some of them are ready to pay it, to the queens of the Latin poets.¹

¹ A fine passage is quoted from the romance of *Ider* in the essay cited above, where Guenloie the queen finds Ider near death and thinks of killing herself, like Phyllis and other ladies of the old time, who will welcome her. It is the "Saints' Legend of Cupid," many generations before Chaucer, in the form of an invocation to Love, the tyrant :—

Bel semblant ço quit me feront
 Les cheitives qui a toi sont
 Qui s'ocistrent par druerie
 D'amor ; mout voil lor compainie :
 D'amor me recomfortera
 La lasse Deianira,
 Qui s'encroast, et Canacé,
 Eco, Scilla, Fillis, Pronné,
 Ero, Biblis, Dido, Mirra,
 Tisbe, la bele Hypermnestra,
 Et des autres mil et cinc cenx.
 Amor ! por quoi ne te repenz
 De ces simples lasses destruire ?
 Trop cruelment te voi deduire :
 Pechié feiz que n'en as pitié ;

Virgil's Dido and Ovid's Medea taught the eloquence of love to the French poets, and the first chivalrous lovers are those who have learned to think poorly of the recreant knights of antiquity.

The French romantic authors were scholars in the poetry of the Provençal School, but they also knew a good deal independently of their Provençal masters, and did not need to be told everything. They read the ancient authors for themselves, and drew their own conclusions from them. They were influenced by the special Provençal rendering of the common ideas of chivalry and courtesy; they were also affected immediately by the authors who influenced the Provençal School.

Few things are more instructive in this part of literature than the story of Medea in the *Roman de Troie* of Benoit de Sainte More. It might even claim to be the representative French romance, for it contains in an admirable form the two chief elements common to all the dominant school—adventure (here reduced from Ovid to the scale of a common fairy story, as has been seen already) and sentimental eloquence, which in this particular story is very near its original fountain-head.

It is to be noted that Benoit is not in the least

Nuls deus fors toi ne fait pechié !
De ço est Tisbé al dessus,
Que por lié s'ocist Piramus ;
Amors, de ço te puet loer
Car a ta cort siet o son per ;
Ero i est o Leander :
Si jo i fusse avec Ider,
Aise fusse, ço m'est avis,
Com alme qu'est en parais.

troubled by the Latin rhetoric when he has to get at the story. Nothing Latin, except the names, and nothing rhetorical remains to show that the story came from Ovid, and not from Blethericus or some other of his fellow-romancers in Wales,¹ so long, that is, as the story is merely concerned with the Golden Fleece, the Dragon, the Bulls, and all the tasks imposed on Jason. But one essential thing is retained by Benoit out of the Latin which is his authority, and that is the way in which the love of Medea for Jason is dwelt upon and described.

This is for medieval poetry one of the chief sources of the psychology in which it took delight,—an original and authoritative representation of the beginning and growth of the passion of love, not yet spoilt by the pedantry which later displayed itself unrestrained in the following generations of amatory poets, and which took its finest form in the poem of Guillaume de Lorris ; but yet at the same time giving a starting-point and some encouragement to the later pedants, by its study of the different degrees of the passion, and by the success with which they are explained and made interesting. This is one of the masterpieces and one of the standards of composition in early French romance ; and it gives one of the most singular proofs of the dependence of modern on ancient literature, in certain respects. It would not be easy to prove any real connexion between Homer and the Sagas, in order to explain the resemblances of temper, and even

¹ Blethericus, or Bréri, is the Welsh authority cited by Thomas in his *Tristram*. Cf. Gaston Paris, *Romania*, viii. p. 427.

of incident, between them; but in the case of the medieval romances there is this direct and real dependence. The Medea of Apollonius Rhodius is at the beginning of medieval poetry, in one line of descent (through Virgil's Dido as well as Ovid's Medea); and it would be hard to overestimate the accumulated debt of all the modern poets whose rhetoric of passion, whether they know it or not, is derived somehow from the earlier medieval masters of Dante or Chaucer, Boccaccio or Spenser.

The "medieval" character of the work of Chrestien and his contemporaries is plain enough. But "medieval" and other terms of the same sort are too apt to impose themselves on the mind as complete descriptive formulas, and in this case the term "medieval" ought not to obscure the fact that it is modern literature, in one of its chief branches, which has its beginning in the twelfth century. No later change in the forms of fiction is more important than the twelfth-century revolution, from which all the later forms and constitutions of romance and novel are in some degree or other derived. It was this revolution, of which Chrestien was one of the first to take full advantage, that finally put an end to the old local and provincial restrictions upon narrative. The older schools of epic are bound to their own nation or tribe, and to the family traditions. These restrictions are no hindrance to the poetry of Homer, nor to the plots and conversations of the Sagas. Within these local restrictions the highest form of narrative art is possible. Nevertheless the period of these restrictions must come to

an end; the heroic age cannot last for ever. The merit of the twelfth-century authors, Benoit, Chrestien, and their followers, is that they faced the new problems and solved them. In their productions it may be seen how the Western world was moving away from the separate national traditions, and beginning the course of modern civilisation with a large stock of ideas, subjects, and forms of expression common to all the nations. The new forms of story might be defective in many ways, thin or formal or extravagant in comparison with some of the older modes; but there was no help for it, there was no progress to be made in any other way.

The first condition of modern progress in novel-writing, as in other more serious branches of learning, was that the author should be free to look about him, to reflect and choose, to pick up his ideas and his matter anyhow. He was turned out of the old limited region of epic tradition. The nations had several centuries to themselves, in the Dark Ages, in which they were at liberty to compose Homeric poems ("if they had a mind"), but by the twelfth century that time was over. The romancers of the twelfth century were in the same position as modern authors in regard to their choice of subjects. Their subjects were not prescribed to them by epic tradition. They were more or less reflective and self-conscious literary men, citizens of the universal world, ready to make the most of their education. They are the sophists of medieval literature; emancipated, enlightened, and intelligent persons, with an apparatus of rhetoric, a

set of abstract ideas, a repertory of abstract sentiments, which they could apply to any available subject. In this sophistical period, when the serious interest of national epic was lost, and when stories, collected from all the ends of the earth, were made the receptacles of a common, abstract, sentimental pathos, it was of some importance that the rhetoric should be well managed, and that the sentiment should be refined. The great achievement of the French poets, on account of which they are to be remembered as founders and benefactors, is that they went to good masters for instruction. Solid dramatic interpretation of character was beyond them, and they were not able to make much of the openings for dramatic contrast in the stories on which they worked. But they were caught and held by the language of passion, the language of Dido and Medea; language not dramatic so much as lyrical or musical, the expression of universal passion, such as might be repeated without much change in a thousand stories. In this they were happily guided. The greater drama, the stronger characters, appeared in due time; but the dramas and the novels of Europe would not have been what they are, without the medieval elaboration of the simple motives, and the practice of the early romantic schools in executing variations on Love and Jealousy. It may be remarked that there were sources more remote and even more august, above and beyond the Latin poets, from whom the medieval authors copied their phrasing, in so far as the Athenian tragedy affected the Latin poets, directly or indirectly, in their great declama-

tory passages, which in turn affected the Middle Ages.

The history of this school has no end, for it merges in the history of the romantic schools that are still flourishing, and will be continued by their successors. One of the principal lines of progress may be indicated, to conclude this discourse on Epic Poetry.

The twelfth-century romances are in most things the antithesis to Homer, in narrative. They are fanciful, conceited, thin in their drama, affected in their sentiments. They are like the "heroic romances" of the seventeenth century, their descendants, as compared with the strong imagination of Cervantes or Shakespeare, who are the representatives, if not of the Homeric line, at any rate of the Homeric principles, in their intolerance of the formally pathetic or heroic, and who have all the great modern novelists on their side.

But the early romantic schools, though they are generally formal and sentimental, and not dramatic, have here and there the possibilities of a stronger drama and a truer imagination, and seem at times almost to have worked themselves free from their pedantry.

There is sentiment and sentiment; and while the pathos of medieval romance, like some of the effusion of medieval lyric, is often merely formal repetition of phrases, it is sometimes more natural, and sometimes the mechanical fancy seems to quicken into true poetical vision, or at least to make room for a sane

appreciation of real life and its incidents. Chrestien of Troyes shows his genius most unmistakably in his occasional surprising intervals of true description and natural feeling, in the middle of his rhetoric; while even his sustained rhetorical dissertations, like those of the *Roman de la Rose* in the next century, are not absolutely untrue, or uncontrolled by observation of actual manners. Often the rhetorical apparatus interferes in the most annoying way with the clear vision. In the *Chevalier au Lion*, for example, there is a pretty sketch of a family party—a girl reading a romance to her father in a garden, and her mother coming up and listening to the story—from which there is a sudden and annoying change to the common impertinences of the amatory professional novelist. This is the passage, with the two kinds of literature in abrupt opposition:—

Messire Yvain goes into the garden, and his people follow; and he sees a goodly gentleman reclining on a cloth of silk and leaning on his elbow; and a maiden was sitting before him reading out of a romance, I know not whose the story. And to listen to the romance a lady had drawn near; that was her mother, and he was her father, and well might they be glad to look on her and listen to her, for they had no other child. She was not yet sixteen years old, and she was so fair and gentle that the God of Love if he had seen her would have given himself to be her slave, and never would have bestowed the love of her on any other than himself. For her sake, to serve her, he would have made himself man, would have put off his deity, and would have stricken himself with the dart whose wound is never healed, except a disloyal physician tend it. It is not right that any should recover from that wound, unless there be disloyalty in it; and whoever is otherwise healed, he never loved with loyalty.

Of this wound I could talk to you without end, if it pleased you to listen; but I know that some would say that all my talk was idleness, for the world is fallen away from true love, and men know not any more how to love as they ought, for the very talk of love is a weariness to them! (ll. 5360-5396).

This short passage is representative of Chrestien's work, and indeed of the most successful and influential work of the twelfth-century schools. It is not, like some affected kinds of romance, entirely cut off from reality. But the glimpses of the real world are occasional and short; there is a flash of pure daylight, a breath of fresh air, and then the heavy-laden, enchanted mists of rhetoric and obligatory sentiment come rolling down and shut out the view.

It is possible to trace out in some detail a line of progress in medieval romance, in which there is a victory in the end for the more ingenuous kind of sentiment; in which the rhetorical romantic forms are altered and strengthened to bear the weight of true imagination.

This line of progress is nothing less than the earlier life of all the great modern forms of novel; a part of European history which deserves some study from those who have leisure for it.

The case may be looked at in this way. The romantic schools, following on the earlier heroic literature, generally substituted a more shallow, formal, limited set of characters for the larger and freer portraits of the heroic age, making up for this defect in the personages by extravagance in other respects—in the incidents, the phrasing, the senti-

mental pathos, the rhetorical conceits. The great advantage of the new school over the old was that it was adapted to modern cosmopolitan civilisation; it left the artist free to choose his subject anywhere, and to deal with it according to the laws of good society, without local or national restrictions. But the earlier work of this modern enlightenment in the Middle Ages was generally very formal, very meagre in imagination. The progress of literature was to fill out the romantic forms, and to gain for the new cosmopolitan schemes of fiction the same sort of substantial contents, the same command of human nature and its variety, as belong (with local or national restrictions) to some at any rate of the earlier epic authors. This being so, one of the interests of the study of medieval romance must be the discovery of those places in which it departs from its own dominant conventions, and seems to aim at something different from its own nature: at the recovery of the fuller life of epic for the benefit of romance. Epic fulness of life within the limits of romantic form—that might be said to be the ideal which is *not* attained in the Middle Ages, but towards which many medieval writers seem to be making their way.

Chrestien's story of *Geraint and Enid* (Geraint has to take the name of *Erec* in the French) is one of his earlier works, but cannot be called immature in comparison with what he wrote afterwards. In Chrestien's *Enid* there is not a little superfluity of the common sort of adventure. The story of

Enid in the *Idylls of the King* (founded upon the Welsh *Geraint*, as given in Lady Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion*) has been brought within compass, and a number of quite unnecessary adventures have been cut out. Yet the story here is the same as Chrestien's, and the drama of the story is not the pure invention of the English poet. Chrestien has all the principal motives, and the working out of the problem is the same. In one place, indeed, where the Welsh romance, the immediate source of Tennyson's *Enid*, has shortened the scene of reconciliation between the lovers, the Idyll has restored something like the proportions of the original French. Chrestien makes Erec speak to Enid and renounce all his ill-will, after the scene in which "the brute Earl" is killed; the Welsh story, with no less effect, allows the reconciliation to be taken for granted when Geraint, at this point in the history, with no speech of his reported, lifts Enid on his own horse. The Idyll goes back (apparently without any direct knowledge of Chrestien's version) to the method of Chrestien.

The story of Enid in Chrestien is very unlike the other stories of distressed and submissive wives; it has none of the ineradicable falsity of the story of Griselda. How much is due to Chrestien for this can hardly be reckoned, in our ignorance of the materials he used. But taking into account the other passages, like that of the girl reading in the garden, where Chrestien shows a distinct original appreciation of certain aspects of life, it cannot be

far wrong to consider Chrestien's picture of Enid as mainly his own; and, in any case, this picture is one of the finest in medieval romance. There is no comparison between Chrestien of Troyes and Homer, but it is not impious to speak of Enid along with Nausicaa, and there are few other ladies of romance who may claim as much as this. The adventure of the Sparrowhawk, one of the finest pieces of pure romance in the poetry of this century, is also one of the finest in the old French, and in many ways very unlike the commonplaces of chivalry, in the simplicity of the household where Enid waits on her father's guest and takes his horse to the stable, in the sincerity and clearness with which Chrestien indicates the gentle breeding and dignity of her father and mother, and the pervading spirit of grace and loyalty in the whole scene.¹

In the story of Enid, Chrestien has a subject which recommends itself to modern readers. The misunderstanding between Enid and her husband, and the reconciliation, are not peculiarly medieval, though the adventures through which their history is worked out are of the ordinary romantic commonplace.

Indeed the relation of husband and wife in this

¹ The Welsh version has the advantage here in noting more fully than Chrestien the beauty of age in Enid's mother: "And he thought that there could be no woman fairer than she must have been in the prime of her youth." Chrestien says merely (at the end of his story, l. 6621):—

Bele est Enide et bele doit
Estre par reison et par droit,
Que bele dame est mout sa mere
Bel chevalier a an son pere.

story is rather exceptionally divergent from the current romantic mode, and from the conventional law that true love between husband and wife was impossible. Afterwards, in his poem of *Lancelot (le Chevalier de la Charrette)*, Chrestien took up and worked out this conventional and pedantic theory, and made the love of Lancelot and the Queen into the standard for all courtly lovers. In his *Enid*, however, there is nothing of this. At the same time, the courtly and chivalrous mode gets the better of the central drama in his *Enid*, in so far as he allows himself to be distracted unduly from the pair of lovers by various "hyperboles" of the Romantic School; there are a number of unnecessary jousts and encounters, and a mysterious exploit of Erec in a magic garden, which is quite out of connexion with the rest of the story. The final impression is that Chrestien wanted strength of mind or inclination to concentrate himself on the drama of the two lovers. The story is taken too lightly.

In *Cliges*, his next work, the dramatic situation is much less valuable than in *Enid*, but the workmanship is far more careful and exact, and the result is a story which may claim to be among the earliest of modern novels, if the Greek romances, to which it has a close relation, are not taken into account. The story has very little "machinery"; there are none of the marvels of the Faërie in it. There is a Thessalian witch (the heroine's nurse), who keeps well within the limits of possible witchcraft, and there is

the incident of the sleeping-draught (familiar in the ballad of the *Gay Gosshawk*), and that is all. The rest is a simple love-story (or rather a double love-story, for there is the history of the hero's father and mother, before his own begins), and the personages are merely true lovers, undistinguished by any such qualities as the sulkiness of Erec or the discretion of Enid. It is all pure sensibility, and as it happens the sensibility is in good keeping—not overdriven into the pedantry of the more quixotic troubadours and minnesingers, and not warped by the conventions against marriage. It is explained at the end that, though Cliges and Fenice are married, they are lovers still:—

De s'amie a faite sa fame,
 Mais il l'apele amie et dame,
 Que por ce ne pert ele mie
 Que il ne l'aint come s'amie,
 Et ele lui autresi
 Con l'an doit feire son ami:
 Et chascun jor lor amors crut,
 N'onques cil celi ne mescrut,
 Ne querela de nule chose.

Cliges, l. 6753.

This poem of Chrestien's is a collection of the finest specimens of medieval rhetoric on the eternal theme. There is little incident, and sensibility has it all its own way, in monologues by the actors and digressions by the author, on the nature of love. It is rather the sentiment than the passion that is here expressed in the "language of the heart"; but, however that may be, there are both delicacy and eloquence in the language. The pensive Fenice, who debates with her-

self for nearly two hundred lines in one place (4410-4574), is the ancestress of many later heroines.

Meis Fenice est sor toz pansive ;
Ele ne trueve fonz ne rive
El panser dont ele est anplie,
Tant li abonde et mouteplie.

Cliges, l. 4339.

In the later works of Chrestien, in *Yvain*, *Lancelot*, and *Perceval*, there are new developments of romance, more particularly in the story of Lancelot and Guinevere. But these three later stories, unlike *Cliges*, are full of the British marvels, which no one would wish away, and yet they are encumbrances to what we must regard as the principal virtue of the poet—his skill of analysis in cases of sentiment, and his interest in such cases. *Cliges*, at any rate, however far it may come short of the *Chevalier de la Charrette* and the *Conte du Graal* in variety, is that one of Chrestien's poems, it might be said that one of the twelfth-century French romances, which best corresponds to the later type of novel. It is the most modern of them; and at the same time it does not represent its own age any the worse, because it also to some extent anticipates the fashions of later literature.

In this kind of romance, which reduces the cost of the "machinery," and does without enchanters, dragons, magic mists, and deadly castles, there are many other examples besides *Cliges*.

A hundred years after Chrestien, one of his cleverest pupils wrote the Provençal story of *Flamenca*,¹

¹ Ed. Paul Meyer, 1865.

a work in which the form of the novel is completely disengaged from the unnecessary accidents of romance, and reaches a kind of positive and modern clearness very much at variance in some respects with popular ideas of what is medieval. The Romance of the medieval Romantic School attains one of its highest and most distinctive points in *Flamenca*, and shows what it had been aiming at from the beginning—namely, the expression in an elegant manner of the ideas of the *Art of Love*, as understood in the polite society of those times. *Flamenca* is nearly contemporary with the *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris. Its inspiring ideas are the same, and though its influence on succeeding authors is indiscernible, where that of the *Roman de la Rose* is widespread and enduring, *Flamenca* would have as good a claim to be considered a representative masterpiece of medieval literature, if it were not that it appears to be breaking loose from medieval conventions where the *Roman de la Rose* makes all it can out of them. *Flamenca* is a simple narrative of society, with the indispensable three characters—the husband, the lady, and the lover. The scene of the story is principally at the baths of Bourbon, in the then present day; and of the miracles and adventures of the more marvellous and adventurous romances there is nothing left but the very pleasant enumeration of the names of favourite stories, in the account of the minstrelsy at Flamenca's wedding. The author knew all that was to be known in romance, of Greek, Latin, or British invention—Thebes and Troy, Alexander and

Julius Caesar, Samson and Judas Maccabeus, Ivain and Gawain and Perceval, Paris and Tristram, and all Ovid's *Legend of Good Women*—but out of all these studies he has retained only what suited his purpose. He does not compete with the Greek or the British champions in their adventures among the romantic forests. Chrestien of Troyes is his master, but he does not try to copy the magic of the Lady of the Fountain, or the Bridge of the Sword, or the Castle of the Grail. He follows the doctrine of love expounded in Chrestien's *Lancelot*, but his hero is not sent wandering at random, and is not made to display his courtly emotions among the ruins and shadows of the lost Celtic mythology, like Lancelot in Chrestien's poem. The life described in *Flamenca* is the life of the days in which it was composed; and the hero's task is to disguise himself as a clerk, so as to get a word with the jealously-guarded lady in church on Sundays, while giving her the Psalter to kiss after the Mass. *Flamenca* is really the triumph of Ovid, with the *Art of Love*, over all his Gothic competitors out of the fairy tales. The Provençal poet has discarded everything but the essential dominant interests, and in so doing has gone ahead of his master Chrestien, who (except in *Cliges*) allowed himself to be distracted between opposite kinds of story, between the school of Ovid and the school of Blethericus; and who, even in *Cliges*, was less consistently modern than his Provençal follower.

Flamenca is the perfection and completion of medieval romance in one kind and in one direction.

It is all sentiment; the ideal courtly sentiment of good society and its poets, made lively by the author's knowledge of his own time and its manners, and his decision not to talk about anything else. It is perhaps significant that he allows his heroine the romance of *Flores and Blanche fleur* for her reading, an older story of true lovers, after the simpler pattern of Greek romance, which the author of *Flamenca* apparently feels himself entitled to refer to with the condescension of a modern and critical author towards some old-fashioned prettiness. He is completely self-possessed and ironical with regard to his story. His theme is the idle love whose origin is explained by Ovid; his personages are nothing to him but the instruments of the symphony which he composes and directs: *sopra lor vanità che par persona*, over and through their graceful inanity, passes the stream of sentiment, the shifting, flickering light which the Provençal author has borrowed from Ovid and transferred for his own purposes to his own time. It is perhaps the first complete modern appropriation of classical examples in literary art; for the poem of *Flamenca* is classical in more than one sense of the term—classical, not only because of its comprehension of the spirit of the Latin poet and his code of manners and sentiment, but because of its clear proportions and its definite abstract lines of composition; because of the self-possession of the author and his subordination of details and rejection of irrelevances.

Many things are wanting to *Flamenca* which it did not suit the author to bring in. It was left to

other greater writers to venture on other and larger schemes with room for more strength and individuality of character, and more stress of passion, still keeping the romantic framework which had been designed by the masters of the twelfth century, and also very much of the sentimental language which the same masters had invented and elaborated.

The story of the *Chastelaine de Vergi*¹ (dated by its last editor between 1282 and 1288) is an example of a different kind from *Flamenca*; still abstract in its personages, still sentimental, but wholly unlike *Flamenca* in the tragic stress of its sentiment and in the pathos of its incidents. There is no plot in *Flamenca*, or only just enough to display the author's resources of eloquence; in the *Chastelaine de Vergi* there is no rhetorical expansion or effusion, but instead of that the coherent closely-reasoned argument of a romantic tragedy, with nothing in it out of keeping with the conditions of "real life." It is a moral example to show the disastrous result of breaking the first law of chivalrous love, which enjoins loyal secrecy on the lover; the tragedy in this case arises from the strong compulsion of honour under which the commandment is transgressed.

There was a knight who was the lover of the Chastelaine de Vergi, unknown to all the world. Their love was discovered by the jealous machinations of the Duchess of Burgundy, whom the knight had neglected. The Duchess made use of her knowledge to insult the Chastelaine; the

¹ Ed. G. Raynaud, *Romania*, xxi. p. 145.

Chastelaine died of a broken heart at the thought that her lover had betrayed her; the knight found her dead, and threw himself on his sword to make amends for his unwilling disloyalty. Even a summary like this may show that the plot has capabilities and opportunities in it; and though the scheme of the short story does not allow the author to make use of them in the full detailed manner of the great novelists, he understands what he is about, and his work is a very fine instance of sensitive and clearly-executed medieval narrative, which has nothing to learn (in its own kind, and granting the conditions assumed by the author) from any later fiction.

The story of the *Lady of Vergi* was known to Boccaccio, and was repeated both by Bandello and by Queen Margaret of Navarre.

It is time to consider how the work of the medieval romantic schools was taken up and continued by many of the most notable writers of the period which no longer can be called medieval, in which modern literature makes a new and definite beginning; especially in the works of the two modern poets who have done most to save and adapt the inheritance of medieval romance for modern forms of literature—Boccaccio and Chaucer.

The development of romance in these authors is not always and in all respects a gain. Even the pathetic stories of the *Decameron* (such as the *Pot of Basil*, *Tancred and Gismunda*, *William of Cabestaing*) seem to have lost something by the

adoption of a different kind of grammar, a more learned rhetoric, in comparison with the best of the simple French stories, like the *Chastelaine de Vergi*. This is the case in a still greater degree where Boccaccio has allowed himself a larger scale, as in his version of the old romance of *Flores and Blanchefleur* (*Filocolo*), while his *Teseide* might be taken as the first example in modern history of the pernicious effect of classical studies. The *Teseide* is the story of Palamon and Arcita. The original is lost, but it evidently was a French romance, probably not a long one; one of the favourite well-defined cases or problems of love, easily understood as soon as stated, presenting the rivalry of the two noble kinsmen for the love of the lady Emily. It might have been made into one of the stories of the *Decameron*, but Boccaccio had other designs for it. He wished to write a classical epic in twelve books, and not very fortunately chose this simple theme as the ground-work of his operations. The *Teseide* is the first of the solemn row of modern epics; "reverend and divine, abiding without motion, shall we say that they have being?" Everything is to be found in the *Teseide* that the best classical traditions require in epic—Olympian machinery, catalogues of armies, descriptions of works of art to compete with the Homeric and Virgilian shields, elaborate battles, and epic similes, and funeral games. Chaucer may have been at one time tempted by all this magnificence; his final version of the story, in the *Knight's Tale*, is a proof

among other things of his critical tact. He must have recognised that the *Teseide*, with all its ambition and its brilliancy of details, was a failure as a story; that this particular theme, at any rate, was not well fitted to carry the epic weight. These personages of romance were not in training for the heavy classical panoply. So he reduced the story of Palamon and Arcita to something not very different from what must have been its original scale as a romance. His modifications of Boccaccio here are a lesson in the art of narrative which can hardly be overvalued by students of that mystery.

Chaucer's procedure in regard to his romantic subjects is often very difficult to understand. How firm and unwavering his critical meditations and calculations were may be seen by a comparison of the *Knight's Tale* with its Italian source. At other times and in other stories he appears to have worked on different principles, or without much critical study at all. The *Knight's Tale* is a complete and perfect version of a medieval romance, worked out with all the resources of Chaucer's literary study and reflexion; tested and considered and corrected in every possible way. The story of *Constance* (the *Man of Law's Tale*) is an earlier work in which almost everything is lacking that is found in the mere workmanship of the *Knight's Tale*; though not, of course, the humanity, the pathos, of Chaucer. The story of *Constance* appears to have been taken by Chaucer from one of the

least artificial specimens of medieval romance, the kind of romance that worked up in a random sort of way the careless sequence of incidents in a popular traditional tale. Just as the tellers of the stories in Campbell's *Highland Tales*, and other authentic collections, make no scruple about proportion where their memory happens to fail them or their irrelevant fancy to distract them, but go on easily, dropping out a symmetrical adventure here and there, and repeating a favourite "machine" if necessary or unnecessary; so the story of *Constance* forgets and repeats itself. The voice is the voice of Chaucer, and so are the thoughts, but the order or disorder of the story is that of the old wives' tales when the old wives are drowsy. All the principal situations occur twice over; twice the heroine is persecuted by a wicked mother-in-law, twice sent adrift in a rudderless boat, twice rescued from a churl, and so on. In this story the poetry of Chaucer appears as something almost independent of the structure of the plot; there has been no such process of design and reconstruction as in the *Knight's Tale*.

It is almost as strange to find Chaucer in other stories, as in the *Franklin's Tale* and the *Clerk's Tale*, putting up with the most abstract medieval conventions of morality; the Point of Honour in the *Franklin's Tale*, and the unmitigated virtue of Griselda, are hopelessly opposed to anything like dramatic truth, and very far inferior as motives to the ethical ideas of many stories of the twelfth century. The truth of *Enid* would have given no opportunity

for the ironical verses in which Chaucer takes his leave of the Clerk of Oxford and his heroine.

In these romances Chaucer leaves some old medieval difficulties unresolved and unreconciled, without attempting to recast the situation as he found it in his authorities, or to clear away the element of unreason in it. He takes the framework as he finds it, and embroiders his poetry over it, leaving an obvious discrepancy between his poetry and its subject-matter.

In some other stories, as in the *Legend of Good Women*, and the tale of Virginia, he is content with pathos, stopping short of vivid drama. In the *Knight's Tale* he seems to have deliberately chosen a compromise between the pathetic mood of pure romance and a fuller dramatic method; he felt, apparently, that while the contrast between the two rivals admitted of drama, the position of the lady Emily in the story was such as to prevent a full dramatic rendering of all the characters. The plot required that the lady Emily should be left without much share of her own in the action.

The short and uncompleted poem of *Anelida* gains in significance and comes into its right place in Chaucer's works, when it is compared with such examples of the older school as the *Chastelaine de Vergi*. It is Chaucer's essay in that delicate abstract fashion of story which formed one of the chief accomplishments of the French Romantic School. It is his acknowledgment of his debt to the artists of sensibility, the older French authors, "that can make

of sentiment," and it proves, like all his writings, how quick he was to save all he could from the teaching of his forerunners, for the profit of "that fair style that has brought him honour." To treat a simple problem, or "case," of right and wrong in love, was a favourite task of medieval courtly poetry, narrative and lyric. Chaucer in his *Anelida* takes up this old theme again, treating it in a form between narrative and lyric, with the pure abstract melody that gives the mood of the actors apart from any dramatic individuality. He is one of the Extractors of Quintessence, and his *Anelida* is the formal spirit, impalpable yet definite, of the medieval courtly romance.

It is not here, but in a poem the opposite of this in fulness and richness of drama, that Chaucer attains a place for himself above all other authors as the poet who saw what was needed to transform medieval romance out of its limitations into a new kind of narrative. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is the poem in which medieval romance passes out of itself into the form of the modern novel. What Cervantes and what Fielding did was done first by Chaucer; and this was the invention of a kind of story in which life might be represented no longer in a conventional or abstract manner, or with sentiment and pathos instead of drama, but with characters adapting themselves to different circumstances, no longer obviously breathed upon by the master of the show to convey his own ideas, but moving freely and talking like men and women. The romance of the Middle Ages

comes to an end, in one of the branches of the family tree, by the production of a romance that has all the freedom of epic, that comprehends all good and evil, and excludes nothing as common or unclean which can be made in any way to strengthen the impression of life and variety. Chaucer was not tempted by the phantasm of the Epic Poem like Boccaccio, and like so many of the great and wise in later generations. The substance of Epic, since his time, has been appropriated by certain writers of history, as Fielding has explained in his lectures on that science in *Tom Jones*. The first in the line of these modern historians is Chaucer with his *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the wonder still is as great as it was for Sir Philip Sidney:—

Chaucer undoubtedly did excellently in his *Troilus and Cresseid*; of whom, truly I know not whether to mervaile more, either that he in that mistie time could see so clearely, or that wee in this cleare age walke so stumblingly after him.

His great work grew out of the French Romantic School. The episode of Troilus and Briseide in Benoit's *Roman de Troie* is one of the best passages in the earlier French romance; light and unsubstantial like all the work of that School, but graceful, and not untrue. It is all summed up in the monologue of Briseide at the end of her story (l. 20,308):—

Dex donge bien a Troylus !
 Quant nel puis amer ne il mei
 A cestui¹ me done et otrei.

¹ i. e. Diomedes.

Molt voldreie aveir cel talent
Que n'eüsse remembrement
Des ovres faites d'en arriere:
Ço me fait mal à grant manière !

Boccaccio took up this story, from the Latin version of the Tale of Troy, the *Historia Trojana* of Guido. His *Filostrato* is written on a different plan from the *Teseide*; it is one of his best works. He did not make it into an epic poem; the *Filostrato*, Boccaccio's *Troilus and Cressida*, is a romance, differing from the older French romantic form not in the design of the story, but in the new poetical diction in which it is composed, and its new poetical ideas. There is no false classicism in it, as there is in his *Palamon and Arcita*; it is a novel of his own time, a story of the *Decameron*, only written at greater length, and in verse. Chaucer, the "great translator," took Boccaccio's poem and treated it in his own way, not as he had dealt with the *Teseide*. The *Teseide*, because there was some romantic improbability in the story, he made into a romance. The story of Troilus he saw was strong enough to bear a stronger handling, and instead of leaving it a romance, graceful and superficial as it is in Boccaccio, he deepened it and filled it with such dramatic imagination and such variety of life as had never been attained before his time by any romancer; and the result is a piece of work that leaves all romantic convention behind. The *Filostrato* of Boccaccio is a story of light love, not much more substantial, except in its new poetical language, than the story of *Flamenca*. In Chaucer the passion of

Troilus is something different from the sentiment of romance; the changing mind of Cressida is represented with an understanding of the subtlety and the tragic meaning of that life which is "Time's fool." Pandarus is the other element. In Boccaccio he is a personage of the same order as Troilus and Cressida; they all might have come out of the Garden of the *Decameron*, and there is little to choose between them. Chaucer sets him up with a character and a philosophy of his own, to represent the world outside of romance. The Comic Genius claims a share in the tragedy, and the tragedy makes room for him, because the tragic personages, "Tragic Comedians" as they are, can bear the strain of the contrast. The selection of personages and motives is made in another way in the romantic schools, but this poem of Chaucer's is not romance. It is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Socrates, just before Aristophanes and the tragic poet had to be put to bed at the end of the *Symposium*, that the best author of tragedy is the best author of comedy also. It is the freedom of the imagination, beyond all the limits of partial and conventional forms.

