



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

ENGLISH LITERATURE
FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

H. E. Marshall

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED



IT WAS IN THE MONASTERIES THAT BOOKS WERE WRITTEN AND COPIED

English Literature for Boys and Girls

H. E. MARSHALL



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CONTENTS

I. IN THE LISTENING TIME	I
II. THE STORY OF THE CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY	4
III. ONE OF THE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING	8
IV. THE STORY OF A LITERARY LIE	11
V. THE STORY OF FINGAL	14
VI. ABOUT SOME OLD WELSH STORIES AND STORY-TELLERS	19
VII. HOW THE STORY OF ARTHUR WAS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH	24
VIII. THE BEGINNING OF THE READING TIME	30
IX. "THE PASSING OF ARTHUR"	35
X. THE ADVENTURES OF AN OLD ENGLISH BOOK	39
XI. THE STORY OF BEOWULF	43
XII. THE FATHER OF ENGLISH SONG	47
XIII. HOW CAEDMON SANG, AND HOW HE FELL ONCE MORE ON SILENCE	53
XIV. THE FATHER OF ENGLISH HISTORY	58
XV. HOW ALFRED THE GREAT FOUGHT WITH HIS PEN	64
XVI. WHEN ENGLISH SLEPT	67
XVII. THE STORY OF HAVELOK THE DANE	71
XVIII. ABOUT SOME SONG STORIES	75
XIX. "PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN"	81
XX. "PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN"—CONTINUED	85
XXI. HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO THE PEOPLE	92
XXII. CHAUCER—BREAD AND MILK FOR CHILDREN	97
XXIII. CHAUCER—"THE CANTERBURY TALES"	100
XXIV. CHAUCER—AT THE TABARD INN	105
XXV. THE FIRST ENGLISH GUIDE-BOOK	112
XXVI. BARBOUR—"THE BRUCE," THE BEGINNINGS OF A STRUGGLE	116
XXVII. BARBOUR—"THE BRUCE," THE END OF THE STRUGGLE	121
XXVIII. A POET KING	125
XXIX. THE DEATH OF THE POET KING	130
XXX. DUNBAR—THE WEDDING OF THE THISTLE AND THE ROSE	135
XXXI. AT THE SIGN OF THE RED PALE	140
XXXII. ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF THE THEATER	148
XXXIII. HOW THE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS	154
XXXIV. THE STORY OF EVERYMAN	159
XXXV. HOW A POET COMFORTED A GIRL	161
XXXVI. THE RENAISSANCE	168
XXXVII. THE LAND OF NOWHERE	172
XXXVIII. THE DEATH OF SIR THOMAS MORE	180
XXXIX. HOW THE SONNET CAME TO ENGLAND	185
XL. THE BEGINNING OF BLANK VERSE	190
XLI. SPENSER—THE "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR"	193
XLII. SPENSER—THE "FAERY QUEEN"	200
XLIII. SPENSER—HIS LAST DAYS	208

XLIV. ABOUT THE FIRST THEATERS	212
XLV. SHAKESPEARE—THE BOY	218
XLVI. SHAKESPEARE—THE MAN	223
XLVII. SHAKESPEARE—“THE MERCHANT OF VENICE”	229
XLVIII. JONSON—“EVERY MAN IN HIS HUMOUR”	239
XLIX. JONSON—“THE SAD SHEPHERD”	246
L. RALEIGH—“THE REVENGE”	250
LI. RALEIGH—“THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD”	259
LII. BACON—NEW WAYS OF WISDOM	265
LIII. BACON—THE HAPPY ISLAND	273
LIV. ABOUT SOME LYRIC POETS	278
LV. HERBERT—THE PARSON POET	283
LVI. HERRICK AND MARVELL—OF BLOSSOMS AND BOWERS	289
LVII. MILTON—SIGHT AND GROWTH	300
LVIII. MILTON—DARKNESS AND DEATH	310
LIX. BUNYAN—“THE PILGRIM’S PROGRESS”	319
LX. DRYDEN—THE NEW POETRY	329
LXI. DEFOE—THE FIRST NEWSPAPERS	339
LXII. DEFOE—“ROBINSON CRUSOE”	344
LXIII. SWIFT—THE “JOURNAL TO STELLA”	349
LXIV. SWIFT—“GULLIVER’S TRAVELS”	355
LXV. ADDISON—THE “SPECTATOR”	361
LXVI. STEELE—THE SOLDIER AUTHOR	372
LXVII. POPE—THE “RAPE OF THE LOCK”	379
LXVIII. JOHNSON—DAYS OF STRUGGLE	388
LXIX. JOHNSON—THE END OF THE JOURNEY	394
LXX. GOLDSMITH—THE VAGABOND	403
LXXI. GOLDSMITH—“THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD”	408
LXXII. BURNS—THE PLOWMAN POET	414
LXXIII. COWPER—“THE TASK”	426
LXXIV. WORDSWORTH—THE POET OF NATURE	431
LXXV. WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE—THE LAKE POETS	436
LXXVI. COLERIDGE AND SOUTHEY—SUNSHINE AND SHADOW	444
LXXVII. SCOTT—THE AWAKENING OF ROMANCE	449
LXXVIII. SCOTT—“THE WIZARD OF THE NORTH”	456
LXXIX. BYRON—“CHILDE HAROLD’S PILGRIMAGE”	461
LXXX. SHELLEY—THE POET OF LOVE	469
LXXXI. KEATS—THE POET OF BEAUTY	479
LXXXII. CARLYLE—THE SAGE OF CHELSEA	489
LXXXIII. THACKERAY—THE CYNIC?	498
LXXXIV. DICKENS—SMILES AND TEARS	506
LXXXV. TENNYSON—THE POET OF FRIENDSHIP	514

I. IN THE LISTENING TIME

HAS there ever been a time when no stories were told? Has there ever been a people who did not care to listen? I think not.

When we were little, before we could read for ourselves, did we not gather eagerly round father or mother, friend or nurse, at the promise of a story? When we grew older, what happy hours did we not spend with our books. How the printed words made us forget the world in which we live, and carried us away to a wonderland,

“Where waters gushed and fruit trees grew
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honey bees had lost their stings,
And horses were born with eagles’ wings.”

ROBERT BROWNING.

And as it is with us, so it is with a nation, with a people.

In the dim, far-off times when our forefathers were wild, naked savages, they had no books. Like ourselves, when we were tiny, they could neither read nor write. But do you think that they had no stories? Oh, yes! We may be sure that when the day’s work was done, when the fight or the chase was over, they gathered round the wood fire and listened to the tales of the story-teller.

These stories were all of war. They told of terrible combats with men or with fierce strange beasts, they told of passion, of revenge. In them there was no beauty, no tenderness, no love. For the life of man in those far-off days was wild and rough; it was one long struggle against foes, a struggle which left little room for what was beautiful or tender.

But as time went on, as life became more easy, in one way or another the savage learned to become less savage. Then as he changed, the tales he listened to changed too. They were no longer all of war, of revenge; they told of love also. And later, when the story of Christ had come to soften men’s hearts and brighten men’s lives, the stories told of faith and purity and gentleness.

At last a time came when minstrels wandered from town to town, from castle to castle, singing their lays. And the minstrel who had a good tale to tell was ever sure of a welcome, and for his pains he was rewarded with money, jewels, and even land. That was the true listening time of the world.

It was no easy thing to be a minstrel, and a man often spent ten or twelve years in learning to be one. There were certain tales which all minstrels had to know, and the best among them could tell three hundred and fifty. Of these stories the minstrels used to learn only the outline, and each told the story in his own way, filling it in according to his own fancy. So as time went on these well-known tales came to be told in many different ways, changing as the times changed.

At length, after many years had passed, men began to write down these tales, so that they might not be forgotten. These first books we call Manuscripts, from the Latin words *manus*, a hand, and *scribere*, to write, for they were all written by hand. Even after they were written down there were many changes made in the tales, for those who wrote or copied them would sometimes miss lines or alter others. Yet they were less changed than they had been when told only by word of mouth.

These stories then form the beginnings of what is called our Literature. Literature really means letters, for it comes from a Latin word *littera*, meaning a letter of the alphabet. Words are made by letters of the alphabet being set together, and our literature again by words being set together; hence the name.

As on and on time went, every year more stories were told and sung and written down. The first stories which our forefathers told in the days long, long ago, and which were never written down, are lost forever. Even many of those stories which were written are lost too, but a few still remain, and from them we can learn much of the life and the history of the people who lived in our land ten and twelve hundred years ago, or more.

For a long time books were all written by hand. They were very scarce and dear, and only the wealthy could afford to have them, and few could read them. Even great knights and nobles could not read, for they spent all their time in fighting and hunting, and had little time in which to learn. So it came about that the monks who lived a quiet and peaceful life became the learned men. In the monasteries it was that books were written and copied. There too they were kept, and the monasteries became not only the schools, but the libraries of the country.

As a nation grows and changes, its literature grows and changes with it. At first it asks only for stories, then it asks for history for its own sake, and for poetry for its own sake; history, I mean, for the knowledge it

gives us of the past; poetry for joy in the beautiful words, and not merely for the stories they tell. Then, as a nation's needs and knowledge grow, it demands ever more and more books on all kinds of subjects.

And we ourselves grow and change just as a nation does. When we are very young, there are many books which seem to us dull and stupid. But as we grow older and learn more, we begin to like more and more kinds of books. We may still love the stories that we loved as children, but we love others too. And at last, perhaps, there comes a time when those books which seemed to us most dull and stupid delight us the most.

At first, too, we care only for the story itself. We do not mind very much in what words it is told so long as it is a story. But later we begin to care very much indeed what words the story-teller uses, and how he uses them. It is only, perhaps, when we have learned to hear with our eyes that we know the true joy of books. Yes, hear with our eyes, for it is joy in the sound of the words that makes our breath come fast, which brings smiles to our lips or tears to our eyes. Yet we do not need to read the words aloud, the sight of the black letters on the white page is enough.

In this book I am going to tell you about a few of our greatest story-tellers and their books. Many of these books you will not care to read for yourselves for a long time to come. You must be content to be told about them. You must be content to know that there are rooms in the fairy palace of our Literature into which you cannot enter yet. But every year, as your knowledge grows, you will find that new keys have been put into your hands with which you may unlock the doors which are now closed. And with every door that you unlock, you will become aware of others and still others that are yet shut fast, until at last you learn with something of pain, that the great palace of our Literature is so vast that you can never hope to open all the doors even to peep inside.

II. THE STORY OF THE CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY

OUR earliest literature was history and poetry. Indeed, we might say poetry only, for in those far-off times history was always poetry, it being only through the songs of the bards and minstrels that history was known. And when I say history I do not mean history as we know it. It was then merely the gallant tale of some hero's deeds listened to because it was a gallant tale.

Now the people who lived in the British Isles long ago were not English. It will be simplest for us to call them all Celts and to divide them into two families, the Gaels and the Cymry. The Gaels lived in Ireland and in Scotland, and the Cymry in England and Wales.

It is to Ireland that we must go for the very beginnings of our Literature, for the Roman conquest did not touch Ireland, and the English, who later conquered and took possession of Britain, hardly troubled the Green Isle. So for centuries the Gaels of Ireland told their tales and handed them on from father to son undisturbed, and in Ireland a great many old writings have been kept which tell of far-off times. These old Irish manuscripts are perhaps none of them older than the eleventh century, but the stories are far, far older. They were, we may believe, passed on by word of mouth for many generations before they were written down, and they have kept the feeling of those far-off times.

It was from Ireland that the Scots came to Scotland, and when they came they brought with them many tales. So it comes about that in old Scottish and in old Irish manuscripts we find the same stories.

Many of the manuscripts which are kept in Ireland have never been translated out of the old Irish in which they were written, so they are closed books to all but a few scholars, and we need not talk about them. But of one of the great treasures of old Irish literature we will talk. This is the *Leabhar Na h-Uidhre*, or *Book of the Dun Cow*. It is called so because the stories in it were first written down by St. Ciaran in a book made from the skin of a favorite cow of a dun color. That book has long been lost, and this copy of it was made in the eleventh century.

The name of this old book helps us to remember that long ago there

was no paper, and that books were written on vellum made from calf-skin and upon parchment made from sheep-skin. It was not until the twelfth century that paper began to be made in some parts of Europe, and it was not until the fifteenth century that paper books became common in England.

In the *Book of the Dun Cow*, and in another old book called the *Book of Leinster*, there is written the great Irish legend called the *Tain Bo Chuailgne* or the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*.

This is a very old tale of the time soon after the birth of Christ. In the book we are told how this story had been written down long, long ago in a book called the *Great Book Written on Skins*. But a learned man carried away that book to the East. Then, when many years had passed, people began to forget the story of the Cattle Raid. So the Chief minstrel called all the other minstrels together to ask if any of them knew the tale. But none of them could remember more than a few verses of it. Therefore the chief minstrel asked all his pupils to travel into far countries to search for the rest which was lost.

What followed is told differently in different books, but all agree in this, that a great chief called Fergus came back from the dead in order to tell the tale, which was again written down.

The story is one of the beautiful Queen Meav of Connaught. For many years she had lived happily with her husband and her children. But one day the Queen and her husband began to argue as to which of them was the richer. As they could not agree, they ordered all their treasures to be brought before them that they might be compared.

So first all their wooden and metal vessels were brought. But they were both alike.

Then all their jewels, their rings and bracelets, necklets and crowns were brought, but they, too, were equal.

Then all their robes were brought, crimson and blue, green, yellow, checked and striped, black and white. They, too, were equal.

Next from the fields and pastures great herds of sheep were brought. They, too, were equal.

Then from the green plains fleet horses, champing steeds came. Great herds of swine from forest and glen were brought. They, too, were equal.

Lastly, droves and droves of cattle were brought. In the King's herd there was a young bull named White-horned. When a calf, he had belonged to Meav's herd, but being very proud, and thinking it little honor to be under the rule of a woman, he had left Meav's herd and joined himself to the King's. This bull was very beautiful. His head and horns and hoofs were white, and all the rest of him was red. He was so great and splendid that in all the Queen's herd there was none to match him.

Then Meav's sorrow was bitter, and calling a messenger, she asked if he knew where might be found a young bull to match with White-horned.

The messenger replied that he knew of a much finer bull called Donn Chuailgne, or Brown Bull of Cooley, which belonged to Dawra, the chief of Ulster.

"Go then," said Meav, "and ask Dawra to lend me the Bull for a year. Tell him that he shall be well repaid, that he shall receive fifty heifers and Brown Bull back again at the end of that time. And if Dawra should seem unwilling to lend Brown Bull, tell him that he may come with it himself, and that he shall receive here land equal to his own, a chariot worth thirty- six cows, and he shall have my friendship ever after."

So taking with him nine others, the messenger set out and soon arrived at Cooley. And when Dawra heard why the messengers had come, he received them kindly, and said at once that they should have Brown Bull.

Then the messengers began to speak and boast among themselves. "It was well," said one, "that Dawra granted us the Bull willingly, otherwise we had taken it by force."

As he spoke, a servant of Dawra came with food and drink for the strangers, and hearing how they spoke among themselves, he hastily and in wrath dashed the food upon the table, and returning to his master repeated to him the words of the messenger.

Then was Dawra very wrathful. And when, in the morning, the messengers came before him asking that he should fulfill his promise, he refused them.

So, empty-handed, the messengers returned to Queen Meav. And she, full of anger, decided to make good the boastful words of her messenger and take Brown Bull by force.

Then began a mighty war between the men of Ulster and the men of Connaught. And after many fights there was a great battle in which Meav was defeated. Yet was she triumphant, for she had gained possession of the Brown Bull.

But the Queen had little cause for triumph, for when Brown Bull and White-horned met there was a fearful combat between them. The whole land echoed with their bellowing. The earth shook beneath their feet and the sky grew dark with flying sods of earth and with flecks of foam. After long fighting Brown Bull conquered, and goring White-horned to death, ran off with him impaled upon his horns, shaking his shattered body to pieces as he ran.

But Brown Bull, too, was wounded to death. Mad with pain and wounds, he turned to his own land, and there

“He lay down
 Against the hill, and his great heart broke there,
 And sent a stream of blood down all the slope;
 And thus, when all the war and Tain had ended,
 In his own land, ‘midst his own hills, he died.”

THE TAIN, BY MARY A. HUTTON.

The Cattle Raid of Cooley is a strange wild tale, yet from it we can learn a great deal about the life of these old, far-away times. We can learn from it something of what the people did and thought, and how they lived, and even of what they wore. Here is a description of a driver and his war chariot, translated, of course, into English prose. “It is then that the charioteer arose, and he put on his hero’s dress of charioteering. This was the hero’s dress of charioteering that he put on: his soft tunic of deer skin, so that it did not restrain the movement of his hands outside. He put on his black upper cloak over it outside. . . . The charioteer took first then his helm, ridged like a board, four-cornered. . . . This was well measured to him, and it was not an over weight. His hand brought the circlet of red-yellow, as though it were a plate of red gold, of refined gold smelted over the edge of the anvil, to his brow as a sign of his charioteering, as a distinction to his master.

“He took the goads to his horses, and his whip inlaid in his right hand. He took the reins to hold back his horses in his left hand. Then he put the iron inlaid breast-plate on his horses, so that they were covered from forehead to fore-foot with spears, and points, and lances, and hard points, so that every motion in this chariot was war-near, so that every corner, and every point, and every end, and every front of this chariot was a way of tearing.”¹

We can almost see that wild charioteer and his horses, sheathed in bristling armor with “every front a way of tearing,” as they dash amid the foe. And all through we come on lines like these full of color and detail, which tell us of the life of those folk of long ago.

III. ONE OF THE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING

The Tain gives us vivid pictures of people and things, but it is not full of beauty and of tender imagination like many of the Gaelic stories. Among the most beautiful and best known of these are perhaps the *Three Sorrows of Story-Telling*. These three stories are called: *The Tragedy of the Children of Lir*; *The Tragedy of the Children of Tuireann*; and *Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach*. Of the three the last is perhaps the most interesting, because the story happened partly in Scotland and partly in Ireland, and it is found both in old Irish and in old Scottish manuscripts.

The story is told in many old books, and in many ways both in prose and in verse. The oldest and shortest version is in the *Book of Leinster*, the same book in which is found *The Tain*.

The tale goes that one day King Conor and his nobles feasted at the house of Felim, his chief story-teller. And while they feasted a daughter was born to Felim the story-teller. Then Cathbad the Druid, who was also at the feast, became exceedingly sad. He foretold that great sorrow and evil should come upon the land because of this child, and so he called her Deirdre, which means trouble or alarm.

When the nobles heard that, they wished to slay the new-born babe. But Conor spoke.

“Let it not be so done,” he said. “It were an ill thing to shed the blood of an innocent child. I myself shall care for her. She shall be housed in a safe place so that none may come nigh to her, and when she is grown she shall be my one true wife.”

So it was done as King Conor said. Deirdre was placed in a safe and lonely castle, where she was seen of none save her tutor and her nurse, Lavarcam. There, as the years passed, she grew tall and fair as a slender lily, and more beautiful than the sunshine.

Now when fourteen years had passed, it happened one snowy day that Deirdre’s tutor killed a calf to provide food for their little company. And as the calf’s blood was spilled upon the snow, a raven came to drink of it. When Deirdre saw that, she sighed and said, “Would that I had a husband whose hair was as the color of the raven, his cheeks as blood, and his skin as snow.”

“There is such a one,” said Lavarcam, “he is Naisi the son of Usnach.”

After that there was no rest for Deirdre until she had seen Naisi. And when they met they loved each other so that Naisi took her and fled with her to Scotland far from Conor the King. For they knew that when the King learned that fair Deirdre had been stolen from him, he would be exceeding wrathful.

There, in Scotland, Deirdre and Naisi lived for many years happily. With them were Ainle and Ardan, Naisi’s two brothers, who also loved their sister Deirdre well.

But Conor never forgot his anger at the escape of Deirdre. He longed still to have her as his Queen, and at last he sent a messenger to lure the fair lady and the three brave brothers back to Ireland.

“Naisi and Deirdre were seated together one day, and between them Conor’s chess board, they playing upon it.

“Naisi heard a cry and said, ‘I hear the call of a man of Erin.’

“‘That was not the call of a man of Erin,’ says Deirdre, ‘but the call of a man of Alba.’

“Deirdre knew the first cry of Fergus, but she concealed it. Fergus uttered the second cry.

“‘That is the cry of a man of Erin,’ says Naisi.

“‘It is not indeed,’ says Deirdre, ‘and let us play on.’

“Fergus sent forth the third cry, and the sons of Usnach knew it was Fergus that sent for the cry. And Naisi ordered Ardan to go to meet Fergus. Then Deirdre declared she knew the first call sent forth by Fergus.

“‘Why didst thou conceal it, then, my Queen?’ says Naisi.

“‘A vision I saw last night,’ says Deirdre, ‘namely that three birds came unto us having three sups of honey in their beaks, and that they left them with us, and that they took three sups of our blood with them.’

“‘What determination hast thou of that, O Princess?’ says Naisi.

“‘It is,’ says Deirdre, ‘that Fergus comes unto us with a message of peace from Conor, for more sweet is not honey than the message of peace of the false man.’

“‘Let that be,’ says Naisi. ‘Fergus is long in the port; and go, Ardan, to meet him and bring him with thee.’”²

AND when Fergus came there were kindly greetings between the friends who had been long parted. Then Fergus told the three brothers that Conor had forgiven them, and that he longed to see them back again in the land of Erin.

So although the heart of Deirdre was sad and heavy with foreboding

of evil, they set sail for the land of Erin. But Deirdre looked behind her as the shore faded from sight and sang a mournful song:—

“O eastern land I leave, I loved you well,
Home of my heart, I love and loved you well,
I ne'er had left you had not Naisi left.”

DOUGLAS HYDE

And so they fared on their journey and came at last to Conor's palace. And the story tells how the boding sorrow that Deirdre felt fulfilled itself, and how they were betrayed, and how the brothers fought and died, and how Deirdre mourned until

“Her heart-strings snapt,
And death had overmastered her. She fell
Into the grave where Naisi lay and slept.
There at his side the child of Felim fell,
The fair-haired daughter of a hundred smiles.
Men piled their grave and reared their stone on high,
And wrote their names in Ogham. So they lay
All four united in the dream of death.”

ANCIENT GAELIC WRITING, DOUGLAS HYDE

Such in a few words is the story of Deirdre. But you must read the tale itself to find out how beautiful it is. That you can easily do, for it has been translated many times out of the old Gaelic in which it was first written and it has been told so simply that even those of you who are quite young can read it for yourselves.

In both *The Tain* and in *Deirdre* we find the love of fighting, the brave joy of the strong man when he finds a gallant foe. *The Tain* is such history as those far-off times afforded, but it is history touched with fancy, wrought with poetry. In the *Three Sorrows* we have Romance. They are what we might call the novels of the time. It is in stories like these that we find the keen sense of what is beautiful in nature, the sense of “man's brotherhood with bird and beast, star and flower,” which has become the mark of “Celtic” literature. We cannot put it into words, perhaps, for it is something mystic and strange, something that takes us nearer fairyland and makes us see that land of dreams with clearer eyes.

BOOKS TO READ

The Celtic Wonder World, by C. L. Thomson.

The Enchanted Land (for version of Deirdre), by L. Chisholm.

Three Sorrows (verse), by Douglas Hyde.

IV. THE STORY OF A LITERARY LIE

WHO wrote the stories which are found in the old Gaelic manuscripts we do not know, yet the names of some of the old Gaelic poets have come down to us. The best known of all is perhaps that of Ossian. But as Ossian, if he ever lived, lived in the third century, as it is not probable that his poems were written down at the time, and as the oldest books that we have containing any of his poetry were written in the twelfth century, it is very difficult to be sure that he really made the poems called by his name.

Ossian was a warrior and chief as well as a poet, and as a poet he is claimed both by Scotland and by Ireland. But perhaps his name has become more nearly linked to Scotland because of the story that I am going to tell you now. It belongs really to a time much later than that of which we have been speaking, but because it has to do with this old Gaelic poet Ossian, I think you will like to hear it now.

In a lonely Highland village more than a hundred and fifty years ago there lived a little boy called James Macpherson. His father and mother were poor farmer people, and James ran about barefooted and wild among the hills and glens. When he was about seven years old the quiet of his Highland home was broken by the sounds of war, for the Highland folk had risen in rebellion against King George II., and were fighting for Prince Charlie, hoping to have a Stewart king once more. This was the rebellion called the '45, for it was fought in 1745.

Now little James watched the red coats of the southern soldiers as, with bayonets gleaming in the sun, they wound through the glens. He heard the Highland battle-cry and the clash of steel on steel, for fighting came near his home, and his own people joined the standard of the Pretender. Little James never forgot these things, and long afterwards, when he grew to be a man and wrote poetry, it was full of the sounds of battle, full, too, of love for mountain and glen and their rolling mists.

The Macphersons were poor, but they saw that their son was clever, and they determined that he should be well taught. So when he left school they sent him to college, first to Aberdeen and then to Edinburgh.

Before he was twenty James had left college and become master of the school in his own native village. He did not, however, like that very much, and soon gave it up to become tutor in a family.

By this time James Macpherson had begun to write poetry. He had also gathered together some pieces of old Gaelic poetry which he had found among the Highland folk. These he showed to some other poets and writers whom he met, and they thought them so beautiful that he published them in a book.

The book was a great success. All who read it were delighted with the poems, and said that if there was any more such poetry in the Highlands, it should be gathered together and printed before it was lost and forgotten for ever. For since the '45 the English had done everything to make the Highlanders forget their old language and customs. They were forbidden to wear the kilt or the tartan, and everything was done to make them speak English and forget Gaelic.

So now people begged Macpherson to travel through the Highlands and gather together as much of the old poetry of the people as he could. Macpherson was at first unwilling to go. For one thing, he quite frankly owned that he was not a good Gaelic scholar. But at length he consented and set out.

For four months Macpherson wandered about the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, listening to the tales of the people and writing them down. Sometimes, too, he came across old manuscripts with ancient tales in them. When he had gathered all he could, he returned to Edinburgh and set to work to translate the stories into English.

When this new book of Gaelic poetry came out, it again was a great success. It was greeted with delight by the greatest poets of France, Germany, and Italy, and was soon translated into many languages. Macpherson was no longer a poor Highland laddie, but a man of world-wide fame. Yet it was not because of his own poetry that he was famous, but because he had found (so he said) some poems of a man who lived fifteen hundred years before, and translated them into English. And although Macpherson's book is called *The Poems of Ossian*, it is written in prose. But it is a prose which is often far more beautiful and poetical than much that is called poetry.

Although at first Macpherson's book was received with great delight, soon people began to doubt about it. The Irish first of all were jealous, for they said that Ossian was an Irish poet, that the heroes of the poems were Irish, and that Macpherson was stealing their national heroes from them.

Then in England people began to say that there never had been an Ossian at all, and that Macpherson had invented both the poems and all the people that they were about. For the English knew little of the Highlanders and their customs. Even after the '15 and the '45 people in the south knew little about the north and those who lived there. They

thought of it as a land of wild mountains and glens, a land of mists and cloud, a land where wild chieftains ruled over still wilder clans, who, in their lonely valleys and sea-girt islands, were for ever warring against each other. How could such a people, they asked, a people of savages, make beautiful poetry?

Dr. Samuel Johnson, a great writer of whom we shall hear more later, was the man of his day whose opinion about books was most thought of. He hated Scotland and the Scottish folk, and did not believe that any good thing could come from them. He read the poems and said that they were rubbish, such as any child could write, and that Macpherson had made them all up.

So a quarrel, which has become famous, began between the two men. And as Dr. Johnson was far better known than Macpherson, most people agreed with him and believed that Macpherson had told a “literary lie,” and that he had made up all the stories.

There is no harm in making up stories. Nearly every one who writes does that. But it is wrong to make up stories and then pretend that they were written by some one else more famous than yourself.

Dr. Johnson and Macpherson were very angry with and rude to each other. Still that did not settle the question as to who had written the stories; indeed it has never been settled. And what most men believe now is that Macpherson did really gather from among the people of the Highlands many scraps of ancient poetry and tales, but that he added to them and put them together in such a way as to make them beautiful and touching. To do even that, however, a true poet was needed, so people have, for the most part, given up arguing about whether Macpherson wrote Ossian or not, and are glad that such a beautiful book has been written by some one.

I do not think that you will want to read Ossian for yourself for a long time to come, for the stories are not always easy to follow. They are, too, often clumsy, wandering, and badly put together. But in spite of that there is much beauty in them, and some day I hope you will read them.

In the next chapter you will find one of the stories of Ossian called Fingal. Fingal was a great warrior and the father of Ossian, and the story takes place in Ireland. It is told partly in Macpherson’s words.

v. THE STORY OF FINGAL

“CATHULLIN sat by TURA’S wall, by the tree of the rustling sound. His spear leaned against a rock. His shield lay on grass, by his side. And as he thus sat deep in thought a scout came running in all haste and cried, ‘Arise! Cathullin, arise! I see the ships of the north. Many, chief of men, are the foe! Many the heroes of the sea-born Swaran!’

“Then to the scout the blue-eyed chief replied, ‘Thou ever tremblest. Thy fears have increased the foe. It is Fingal King of deserts who comes with aid to green Erin of streams.’

“‘Nay, I beheld their chief,’ replied the scout, ‘tall as a glittering rock. His spear is a blasted pine. His shield the rising moon. He bade me say to thee, “Let dark Cathullin yield.”’

“‘No,’ replied the blue-eyed chief, ‘I never yield to mortal man. Dark Cathullin shall be great or dead.’”

Then Cathullin bade the scout summon his warriors to council. And when they were gathered there was much talk, for some would give battle at once and some delay until Fingal, the King of Morven, should come to aid them. But Cathullin himself was eager to fight, so forward they marched to meet the foe. And the sound of their going was “as the rushing of a stream of foam when the thunder is traveling above, and dark-brown night sits on half the hill.” To the camp of Swaran was the sound carried, so that he sent a messenger to view the foe.

“He went. He trembling, swift returned. His eyes rolled wildly round. His heart beat high against his side. His words were faltering, broken, slow. ‘Arise, son of ocean! arise, chief of the dark brown shields! I see the dark, the mountain stream of battle. Fly, King of ocean! Fly!’

“‘When did I fly?’ replied the King. ‘When fled Swaran from the battle of spears? When did I shrink from danger, chief of the little soul? Shall Swaran fly from a hero? Were Fingal himself before me my soul should not darken in fear. Arise, to battle my thousands! pour round me like the echoing main. Gather round the bright steel of your King; strong as the rocks of my land, that meet the storm with joy, and stretch their dark pines to the wind.’

“Like autumn’s dark storms, pouring from two echoing hills, towards

each other approached the heroes. Like two deep streams from high rocks meeting, mixing, roaring on the plain; loud, rough and dark in battle meet Lochlin and Innis-fail. chief mixes his strokes with chief, and man with man; steel clanging sounds on steel. Helmets are cleft on high. Blood bursts and smokes around. Strings murmur on the polished yews. Darts rush along the sky, spears fall like the circles of light which gild the face of night. As the noise of the troubled ocean when roll the waves on high, as the last peal of thunder in heaven, such is the din of war. Though Cormac's hundred bards were there to give the fight to song, feeble was the voice of a hundred bards to send the deaths to future times. For many were the deaths of heroes; wide poured the blood of the brave."

Then above the clang and clamor of dreadful battle we hear the mournful dirge of minstrels wailing o'er the dead.

"Mourn, ye sons of song, mourn! Weep on the rocks of roaring winds, O maid of Inistore! Bend thy fair head over the waves, thou lovelier than the ghost of the hills, when it moves, in a sunbeam at noon, over the silence of Morven. He is fallen! thy youth is low! pale beneath the sword of Cathullin. No more shall valor raise thy love to match the blood of kings. His gray dogs are howling at home, they see his passing ghost. His bow is in the hall unstrung. No sound is on the hill of his hinds."

Then once again, the louder for the mourning pause, we hear the din of battle.

"As roll a thousand waves to the rocks, so Swaran's host came on. As meets a rock a thousand waves, so Erin met Swaran of spears. Death raises all his voices around, and mixes with the sounds of shields. Each hero is a pillar of darkness; the sword a beam of fire in his hand. The field echoes from wing to wing, as a hundred hammers that rise by turn, on the red son of the furnace."

But now the day is waning. To the noise and horror of battle the mystery of darkness is added. Friend and foe are wrapped in the dimness of twilight.

But the fight was not ended, for neither Cathullin nor Swaran had gained the victory, and ere gray morning broke the battle was renewed.

And in this second day's fight Swaran was the victor, but while the battle still raged white-sailed ships appeared upon the sea. It was Fingal who came, and Swaran had to fight a second foe.

"Now from the gray mists of the ocean, the white-sailed ships of Fingal appeared. High is the grove of their masts, as they nod by turns on the rolling wave."

Swaran saw them from the hill on which he fought, and turning from the pursuit of the men of Erin, he marched to meet Fingal. But Cathullin,

beaten and ashamed, fled to hide himself: "bending, weeping, sad and slow, and dragging his long spear behind, Cathullin sank in Cromla's wood, and mourned his fallen friends. He feared the face of Fingal, who was wont to greet him from the fields of renown."

But although Cathullin fled, between Fingal and Swaran battle was renewed till darkness fell. A second day dawned, and again and again the hosts closed in deadly combat until at length Fingal and Swaran met face to face.

"There was a clang of arms! their every blow like the hundred hammers of the furnace. Terrible is the battle of the kings; dreadful the look of their eyes. Their dark brown shields are cleft in twain. Their steel flies, broken from their helms.

"They fling their weapons down. Each rushes to his hero's grasp. Their sinewy arms bend round each other: they turn from side to side, and strain and stretch their large and spreading limbs below. But when the pride of their strength arose they shook the hills with their heels. Rocks tumble from their places on high; the green-headed bushes are overturned. At length the strength of Swaran fell; the king of the groves is bound."

The warriors of Swaran fled then, pursued by the sons of Fingal, till the hero bade the fighting cease, and darkness once more fell over the dreadful field.

"The clouds of night come rolling down. Darkness rests on the steeps of Cromla. The stars of the north arise over the rolling of Erin's waves: they shew their heads of fire, through the flying mist of heaven. A distant wind roars in the wood. Silent and dark is the plain of death."

Then through the darkness is heard the sad song of minstrels mourning for the dead. But soon the scene changes and mourning is forgotten.

"The heroes gathered to the feast. A thousand aged oaks are burning to the wind. The souls of warriors brighten with joy. But the king of Lochlin (Swaran) is silent. Sorrow reddens in his eyes of pride. He remembered that he fell.

"Fingal leaned on the shield of his fathers. His gray locks slowly waved on the wind, and glittered to the beam of night. He saw the grief of Swaran, and spoke to the first of the bards.

"Raise, Ullin, raise the song of peace. O soothe my soul from war. Let mine ear forget in the sound the dismal noise of arms. Let a hundred harps be near to gladden the king of Lochlin. He must depart from us with joy. None ever went sad from Fingal. The lightening of my sword is against the strong in fight. Peaceful it lies by my side when warriors yield in war."

So at the bidding of Fingal the minstrel sang, and soothed the grief of Swaran. And when the music ceased Fingal spoke once more:—

“King of Lochlin, let thy face brighten with gladness, and thine ear delight in the harp. Dreadful as the storm of thine ocean thou hast poured thy valor forth; thy voice has been like the voice of thousands when they engage in war.

“Raise, to-morrow, raise thy white sails to the wind. Or dost thou choose the fight? that thou mayest depart renowned like the sun setting in the west.”

Then Swaran chose to depart in peace. He had no more will to fight against Fingal, so the two heroes swore friendship together. Then once again Fingal called for the song of minstrels.

“A hundred voices at once arose, a hundred harps were strung. They sang of other times; the mighty chiefs of other years.” And so the night passed till “morning trembles with the beam of the east; it glimmers on Cromla’s side. Over Lena is heard the horn of Swaran. The sons of the ocean gather around. Silent and sad they rise on the wave. The blast of Erin is behind their sails. White as the mist of Morven they float along the sea.”

Thus Swaran and his warriors departed, and Fingal, calling his men together, set forth to hunt. And as he hunted far in the woods he met Cathullin, still hiding, sad and ashamed. But Fingal comforted the beaten hero, reminding him of past victories. Together they returned to Fingal’s camp, and there the heroes sang and feasted until “the soul of Cathullin rose. The strength of his arm returned. Gladness brightened along his face. Thus the night passed away in song. We brought back the morning with joy.

“Fingal arose on the heath and shook his glittering spear. He moved first towards the plain of Lena. We followed in all our arms.

“‘Spread the sail,’ said the King, ‘seize the winds as they pour from Lena.’

“We rose on the wave with songs. We rushed with joy through the foam of the deep.”

Thus the hero returned to his own land.

NOTE.—There is no book of Ossian specially edited for children. Later they may like to read the Century Edition of Macpherson’s *Ossian*, edited by William Sharpe. Stories about Ossian will be found among the many books of Celtic tales now published.



MINSTRELS SANG OF THE FAMOUS DEEDS OF HEROES.

VI. ABOUT SOME OLD WELSH STORIES AND STORY-TELLERS

YOU remember that the Celtic family was divided into two branches, the Gaelic and the Cymric. So far we have only spoken about the Gaels, but the Cymry had their poets and historians too. The Cymry, however, do not claim such great age for their first known poets as do the Gaels. Ossian, you remember, was supposed to live in the third century, but the oldest Cymric poets whose names we know were supposed to live in the sixth century. As, however, the oldest Welsh manuscripts are of the twelfth century, it is again very difficult to prove that any of the poems were really written by those old poets.

But this is very certain, that the Cymry, like the Gaels, had their bards and minstrels who sang of the famous deeds of heroes in the halls of the chieftains, or in the market-places for the people.

From the time that the Romans left Britain to the time when the Saxons or English were at length firmly settled in the land, many fierce struggles, many stirring events must have taken place. That time must have been full of brave deeds such as the minstrels loved to sing. But that part of our history is very dark. Much that is written of it is little more than a fairy tale, for it was not until long afterwards that anything about this time was written down.

The great hero of the struggle between the Britons and the Saxons was King Arthur, but it was not until many many years after the time in which he lived that all the splendid stories of his knights, of his Round Table, and of his great conquests began to take the form in which we know them. Indeed, in the earliest Welsh tales the name of Arthur is hardly known at all. When he is mentioned it is merely as a warrior among other warriors equally great, and not as the mighty emperor that we know. The Arthur that we love is the Arthur of literature, not the Arthur of history. And I think you may like to follow the story of the Arthur of literature, and see how, from very little, it has grown so great that now it is known all the world over. I should like you to remember, too, that the Arthur story is not the only one which repeats itself again and again throughout our Literature. There are others which have caught the fancy

of great masters and have been told by them in varying ways throughout the ages. But of them all, the Arthur story is perhaps the best example.

Of the old Welsh poets it may, perhaps, be interesting to remember two. These are Taliesin, or "Shining Forehead," and Merlin.

Merlin is interesting because he is Arthur's great bard and magician. Taliesin is interesting because in a book called *The Mabinogion*, which is a translation of some of the oldest Welsh stories, we have the tale of his wonderful birth and life.

Mabinogion really means tales for the young. Except the History of Taliesin, all the stories in this book are translated from a very old manuscript called the *Red Book of Hergest*. This Red Book belongs to the fourteenth century, but many of the stories are far far older, having, it is thought, been told in some form or other for hundreds of years before they were written down at all. Unlike many old tales, too, they are written in prose, not in poetry.

One of the stories in *The Mabinogion*, the story of King Ludd, takes us back a long way. King Ludd was a king in Britain, and in another book we learn that he was a brother of Cassevelaunis, who fought against Julius Caesar, so from that we can judge of the time in which he reigned.

"King Ludd," we are told in *The Mabinogion*, "ruled prosperously and rebuilt the walls of London, and encompassed it about with numberless towers. And after that he bade the citizens build houses therein, such as no houses in the kingdom could equal. And, moreover, he was a mighty warrior, and generous and liberal in giving meat and drink to all that sought them. And though he had many castles and cities, this one loved he more than any. And he dwelt therein most part of the year, and therefore was it called Caer Ludd, and at last Caer London. And after the strange race came there, it was called London." It is interesting to remember that there is still a street in London called Ludgate. Caer is the Celtic word for Castle, and is still to be found in many Welsh names, such as Carnarvon, Caerleon, and so on.

Now, although Ludd was such a wise king, three plagues fell upon the island of Britain. "The first was a certain race that came and was called Coranians, and so great was their knowledge that there was no discourse upon the face of the island, however low it might be spoken, but what, if the wind met it, it was known to them.

"The second plague was a shriek which came on every May-eve over every hearth in the island of Britain. And this went through peoples' hearts and frightened them out of their senses.

"The third plague was, however much of provision and food might be prepared in the king's courts, were there even so much as a year's provi-

sion of meat and drink, none of it could ever be found, except what was consumed upon the first night.”

The story goes on to tell how good King Ludd freed the island of Britain from all three plagues and lived in peace all the days of his life.

In five of the stories of *The Mabinogion*, King Arthur appears. And, although these were all written in Welsh, it has been thought that some may have been brought to Wales from France.

This seems strange, but it comes about in this way. Part of France is called Brittany, as you know. Now, long long ago, before the Romans came to Britain, some of the people who lived in that part of France sailed across the sea and settled in Britain. These may have been the ancient Britons whom Caesar fought when he first came to our shore.

Later, when the Romans left our island and the Picts and Scots oppressed the Britons, many of them fled back over the sea to Brittany or Armorica, as it used to be called. Later still, when the Saxons came, the Britons were driven by degrees into the mountains of Wales and the wilds of Cornwall, while others fled again across the sea to Brittany. These took with them the stories which their minstrels told, and told them in their new home. So it came about that the stories which were told in Wales and in Cornwall were told in Brittany also.

And how were these stories brought back again to England?

Another part of France is called Normandy. The Normans and the Bretons were very different peoples, as different as the Britons and the English. But the Normans conquered part of Brittany, and a close relationship grew up between the two peoples. Conan, Duke of Brittany, and William, Duke of Normandy, were related to each other, and in a manner the Bretons owned the Duke of Normandy as overlord.

Now you know that in 1066 the great Duke William came sailing over the sea to conquer England, and with him came more soldiers from Brittany than from any other land. Perhaps the songs of the minstrels had kept alive in the hearts of the Bretons a memory of their island home. Perhaps that made them glad to come to help to drive out the hated Saxons. At any rate come they did, and brought with them their minstrel tales.

And soon through all the land the Norman power spread. And whether they first heard them in Armorica or in wild Wales, the Norman minstrels took the old Welsh stories and made them their own. And the best of all the tales were told of Arthur and his knights.

Doubtless the Normans added much to these stories. For although they were not good at inventing anything, they were very good at taking what others had invented and making it better. And the English, too, as

Norman power grew, clung more and more to the memory of the past. They forgot the difference between British and English, and in their thoughts Arthur grew to be a national hero, a hero who had loved his country, and who was not Norman.

The Normans, then, brought tales of Arthur with them when they came to England. They heard there still other tales and improved them, and Arthur thus began to grow into a great hero. I will now go on to show how he became still greater.

In the reign of Henry I. (the third Norman king who ruled our land) there lived a monk called Geoffrey of Monmouth. He was filled with the love of his land, and he made up his mind to write a history of the kings of Britain.

Geoffrey wrote his book in Latin, because at this time it was the language which most people could understand. For a long time after the Normans came to England, they spoke Norman French. The English still spoke English, and the British Welsh or Cymric. But every one almost who could read at all could read Latin. So Geoffrey chose to write in Latin. He said he translated all that he wrote from an old British book which had been brought from Brittany and given to him. But that old British book has never been seen by any one, and it is generally thought that Geoffrey took old Welsh tales and fables for a foundation, invented a good deal more, and so made his history, and that the "old British Book" never existed at all. His book may not be very good history—indeed, other historians were very angry and said that Geoffrey "lied saucily and shamelessly"—but it is very delightful to read.

Geoffrey's chief hero is Arthur, and we may say that it is from this time that Arthur became a great hero of Romance. For Geoffrey told his stories so well that they soon became famous, and they were read not only in England, but all over the Continent. Soon story-tellers and poets in other lands began to write stories about Arthur too, and from then till now there has never been a time when they have not been read. So to the Welsh must be given the honor of having sown a seed from which has grown the wide-spreading tree we call the Arthurian Legend.

Geoffrey begins his story long before the time of Arthur. He begins with the coming of Brutus, the ancient hero who conquered Albion and changed its name to Britain, and he continues to about two hundred years after the death of Arthur. But Arthur is his real hero, so he tells the story in very few words after his death.

Geoffrey tells of many battles and of how the British fought, not only with the Saxons, but among themselves. And at last he says: "As barbarism crept in they were no longer called Britons, but Welsh, a word derived

either from Gualo, one of their dukes, or from Guales, their Queen, or else from their being barbarians. But the Saxons did wiselier, kept peace and concord amongst themselves, tilling their fields and building anew their cities and castles.... But the Welsh degenerating from the nobility of the Britons, never after recovered the sovereignty of the island, but on the contrary quarreling at one time amongst themselves, and at another with the Saxons, never ceased to have bloodshed on hand either in public or private feud.”

Geoffrey then says that he hands over the matter of writing about the later Welsh and Saxon kings to others, “Whom I bid be silent as to the kings of the Britons, seeing that they have not that book in the British speech which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, did convey hither out of Brittany, the which I have in this wise been at the pains of translating into the Latin speech.”

BOOKS TO READ

The Mabinogion, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest. Everyman's Library.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Histories*, translated by Sebastian Evans.

VII. HOW THE STORY OF ARTHUR WAS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH

GEOFFREY of Monmouth had written his stories so well, that although he warned people not to write about the British kings, they paid no heed to his warning. Soon many more people began to write about them, and especially about Arthur.

In 1155 Geoffrey died, and that year a Frenchman, or Jerseyman rather, named Robert Wace, finished a long poem which he called *Li Romans de Brut* or the *Romances of Brutus*. This poem was founded upon Geoffrey's history and tells much the same story, to which Wace has added something of his own. Besides Wace, many writers told the tale in French. For French, you must remember, was still the language of the rulers of our land. It is to these French writers, and chiefly to Walter Map, perhaps, that we owe something new which was now added to the Arthur story.

Walter Map, like so many of the writers of this early time, was a priest. He was chaplain to Henry II., and was still alive when John, the bad king, sat upon the throne.

The first writers of the Arthur story had made a great deal of manly strength: it was often little more than a tale of hard knocks given and taken. Later it became softened by the thought of courtesy, with the idea that knights might give and take these hard knocks for the sake of a lady they loved, and in the cause of all women.

Now something full of mystery was added to the tale. This was the Quest of the Holy Grail.

The Holy Grail was said to be a dish used by Christ at the Last Supper. It was also said to have been used to hold the sacred blood which, when Christ hung upon the cross, flowed from his wounds. The Holy Grail came into the possession of Joseph of Arimathea, and by him was brought to Britain. But after a time the vessel was lost, and the story of it even forgotten, or only remembered in some dim way.

And this is the story which the poet-priest, Walter Map, used to give new life and new glory to the tales of Arthur. He makes the knights of the round table set forth to search for the Grail. They ride far away over

hill and dale, through dim forests and dark waters. They fight with men and fiends, alone and in tournaments. They help fair ladies in distress, they are tempted to sin, they struggle and repent, for only the pure in heart may find the holy vessel.

It is a wonderful and beautiful story, and these old story-tellers meant it to be something more than a fairy tale. They saw around them many wicked things. They saw men fighting for the mere love of fighting. They saw men following pleasure for the mere love of pleasure. They saw men who were strong oppress the weak and grind down the poor, and so they told the story of the Quest of the Holy Grail to try to make them a little better.

With every new writer the story of Arthur grew. It seemed to draw all the beauty and wonder of the time to itself, and many stories which at first had been told apart from it came to be joined to it. We have seen how it has been told in Welsh, in Latin, and in French, and, last of all, we have it in English.

The first great English writer of the stories of Arthur was named Layamon. He, too, was a priest, and, like Wace, he wrote in verse.

Like Wace, Layamon called his book the *Brut*, because it is the story of the Britons, who took their name from Brutus, and of Arthur the great British hero. This book is known, therefore, as Layamon's *Brut*. Layamon took Wace's book for a foundation, but he added a great deal to it, and there are many stories in Layamon not to be found in Wace. It is probable that Layamon did not make up these stories, but that many of them are old tales he heard from the people among whom he lived.

Layamon finished his book towards the end of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth. Perhaps he sat quietly writing it in his cell when the angry barons were forcing King John to sign the Magna Charta. At least he wrote it when all England was stirring to new life again. The fact that he wrote in English shows that, for Layamon's *Brut* is the first book written in English after the Conquest. This book proves how little hold the French language had upon the English people, for although our land had been ruled by Frenchmen for a hundred and fifty years, there are very few words in Layamon that are French or that are even made from French.

But although Layamon wrote his book in English, it was not the English that we speak to-day. It was what is called Early English or even sometimes Semi-Saxon. If you opened a book of Layamon's *Brut* you would, I fear, not be able to read it.

We know very little of Layamon; all that we do know he tells us himself in the beginning of his poem. "A priest was in the land," he says:

“Layamon was he called.
 He was Leouenathe’s son, the Lord to him be gracious.
 He lived at Ernleye at a noble church
 Upon Severn’s bank. Good there to him it seemed
 Fast by Radestone, where he books read.
 It came to him in mind, and in his first thoughts,
 That he would of England the noble deeds tell,
 What they were named and whence they came,
 The English land who first possessed
 After the flood which from the Lord came.

Layamon began to journey, far he went over the land
 And won the noble books, which he for pattern took.
 He told the English book that Saint Beda made,
 Another he took in Latin which Saint Albin made,
 And the fair Austin who baptism brought hither.
 Book the third he took laid it in the midst
 That the French clerk made. Wace he was called,
 He well could write.

...

Layamon laid these books down and the leaves turned.
 He them lovingly beheld, the Lord to him be merciful!
 Pen he took in fingers and wrote upon a book skin,
 And the true words set together,
 And the three books pressed to one.”

That, in words such as we use now, is how Layamon begins his poem.
 But this is how the words looked as Layamon wrote them:—

“An preost wes on leoden: lazamon wes ihoten.
 he wes Leouenaðes sone: líoe him beo drihte.”

You can see that it would not be very easy to read that kind of English.
 Nor does it seem very like poetry in either the old words or the modern.
 But you must remember that old English poetry was not like ours. It did
 not have rhyming words at the end of the lines.

Anglo-Saxon poetry depended for its pleasantness to the ear, not on
 rhyme as does ours, but on accent and alliteration. Alliteration means
 the repeating of a letter. Accent means that you rest longer on some
 syllables, and say them louder than others. For instance, if you take the
 line “the way was long, the wind was cold,” way, long, wind, and cold
 are accented. So there are four accents in that line.

Now, in Anglo-Saxon poetry the lines were divided into two half-

lines. And in each half there had to be two or more accented syllables. But there might also be as many unaccented syllables as the poet liked. So in this way the lines were often very unequal, some being quite short and others long. Three of the accented syllables, generally two in the first half and one in the second half of the line, were alliterative. That is, they began with the same letter. In translating, of course, the alliteration is very often lost. But sometimes the Semi-Saxon words and the English words are very like each other, and the alliteration can be kept. So that even in translation we can get a little idea of what the poetry sounded like. For instance, the line “wat heo ihoten weoren: and wonene heo comen,” the alliteration is on w, and may be translated “what they called were, and whence they came,” still keeping the alliteration.

Upon these rules of accent and alliteration the strict form of Anglo-Saxon verse was based. But when the Normans came they brought a new form of poetry, and gradually rhymes began to take the place of alliteration. Layamon wrote his *Brut* more than a hundred years after the coming of the Normans, and although his poem is in the main alliterative, sometimes he has rhyming lines such as “mochel dal heo iwesten: mid harmen pen mesten,” that is:—

“Great part they laid waste:
With harm the most.”

Sometimes even in translation the rhyme may be kept, as:—

“And faer forh nu to niht:
In to Norewaieze forh riht.”

which can be translated:—

“And fare forth now to-night
Into Norway forth right.”

At times, too, Layamon has neither rhyme nor alliteration in his lines, sometimes he has both, so that his poem is a link between the old poetry and the new.

I hope that you are not tired with this long explanation, for I think if you take the trouble to understand it, it may make the rest of this chapter more interesting. Now I will tell you a little more of the poem itself.

Layamon tells many wonderful stories of Arthur, from the time he was born to his last great battle in which he was killed, fighting against the rebel Modred.

This is how Layamon tells the story of Arthur's death, or rather of his "passing":

"Arthur went to Cornwall with a great army.
 Modred heard that and he against him came
 With unnumbered folk. There were many of them fated.
 Upon the Tambre they came together,
 The place was called Camelford, evermore has that name lasted.
 And at Camelford were gathered sixty thousand
 And more thousands thereto. Modred was their chief.
 Then hitherward gan ride Arthur the mighty
 With numberless folk fated though they were.
 Upon the Tambre they came together,
 Drew their long swords, smote on the helmets,
 So that fire sprang forth. Spears were splintered,
 Shields gan shatter, shafts to break.
 They fought all together folk unnumbered.
 Tambre was in flood with unmeasured blood.
 No man in the fight might any warrior know,
 Nor who did worse nor who did better so was the conflict mingled,
 For each slew down right were he swain were he knight.
 There was Modred slain and robbed of his life day.

In the fight

There were slain all the brave
 Arthur's warriors noble.
 And the Britons all of Arthur's board,
 And all his lieges of many a kingdom.
 And Arthur sore wounded with war spear broad.
 Fifteen he had fearful wounds.
 One might in the least two gloves thrust.
 Then was there no more in the fight on life
 Of two hundred thousand men that there lay hewed in pieces
 But Arthur the king alone, and of his knights twain.
 But Arthur was sore wounded wonderously much.
 Then to him came a knave who was of his kindred.
 He was Cador's son the earl of Cornwall.
 Constantine hight the knave. He was to the king dear.
 Arthur him looked on where he lay on the field,
 And these words said with sorrowful heart.
 Constantine thou art welcome thou wert Cador's son,
 I give thee heremy kingdom.
 Guard thou my Britons so long as thou livest,
 And hold them all the laws that have in my days stood
 And all the good laws that in Uther's days stood.
 And I will fare to Avelon to the fairest of all maidens

To Argente their Queen, an elf very fair,
And she shall my wounds make all sound
All whole me make with healing draughts,
And afterwards I will come again to my kingdom
And dwell with the Britons with mickle joy.
Even with the words that came upon the sea
A short boat sailing, moving amid the waves
And two women were therein wonderously clad.
And they took Arthur anon and bare him quickly
And softly him adown laid and to glide forth gan they.
Then was it comewhat Merlin said whilom
That unmeasured sorrow should beat Arthur's forth faring.
Britons believe yet that he is still in life
And dwelleth in Avelon with the fairest of all elves,
And every Briton looketh still when Arthur shall return.
Was never the man born nor never the lady chosen
Who knoweth of the soothof Arthur to say more.
But erstwhile there was a wizard Merlin called.
He boded with words the which were sooth
That an Arthur should yet come the English to help."

You see by this last line that Layamon has forgotten the difference between Briton and English. He has forgotten that in his lifetime Arthur fought against the English. To him Arthur has become an English hero. And perhaps he wrote these last words with the hope in his heart that some day some one would arise who would deliver his dear land from the rule of the stranger Normans. This, we know, happened. Not, indeed, by the might of one man, but by the might of the English spirit, the strong spirit which had never died, and which Layamon himself showed was still alive when he wrote his book in English.