

**MEDIAEVAL LORE FROM
BARTHOLOMAEUS
ANGLICUS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649087013

Mediaeval lore from Bartholomaeus Anglicus by Robert Steele

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ROBERT STEELE

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ANGLICUS**



Philosophica in Mount Olympus
17. 21

MEDIÆVAL LORE &
FROM BARTHOLO-
MEW ANGLICUS
BY ROBERT STEELE
WITH PREFACE BY
WILLIAM MORRIS

ALEXANDER MORING, LTD.
THE DE LA MORE PRESS 32
GEORGE ST. LONDON W 1905

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" . . . WHEN HOLY WERE THE HAUNTED FOREST BOUGHS,
HOLY THE AIR, THE WATER, AND THE FIRE."

KEATS.

PREFACE

IT is not long since the Middle Ages, of the literature of which this book gives us such curious examples, were supposed to be an unaccountable phenomenon accidentally thrust in betwixt the two periods of civilisation, the classical and the modern, and forming a period without growth or meaning—a period which began about the time of the decay of the Roman Empire, and ended suddenly, and more or less unaccountably, at the time of the Reformation. The society of this period was supposed to be lawless and chaotic; its ethics a mere conscious hypocrisy; its art gloomy and barbarous fanaticism only; its literature the formless jargon of savages; and as to its science, that side of human intelligence was supposed to be an invention of the time when the Middle Ages had been dead two hundred years.

The light which the researches of modern historians, archæologists, bibliographers, and others, have let in on our view of the Middle Ages has dispersed the cloud of ignorance on this subject which was one of the natural defects of the qualities of the learned men and keen critics of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries. The Middle-class or Whig theory of life is failing us in all branches of human intelligence. Ethics, Politics, Art, and Literature are more than beginning to be regarded from a wider point of view than that from which our fathers and grandfathers could see them.

For many years there has been a growing reaction against the dull "grey" narrowness of the eighteenth century, which looked on Europe during the last thousand years as but a riotous, hopeless, and stupid prison. It is true that it was on the side of Art alone that this enlightenment began, and that even on that side it progressed slowly enough at first—*e.g.* Sir Walter Scott feels himself obliged, as in the *Antiquary*, to apologize to pedantry for his instinctive love of Gothic architecture. And no less true is it that follies enough were mingled with the really useful and healthful birth of romanticism in Art and Literature. But at last the study of facts by men

who were neither artistic nor sentimental came to the help of that first glimmer of instinct, and gradually something like a true insight into the life of the Middle Ages was gained ; and we see that the world of Europe was no more running round in a circle then than now, but was developing, sometimes with stupendous speed, into something as different from itself as the age which succeeds this will be different from that wherein we live. The men of those times are no longer puzzles to us ; we can understand their aspirations, and sympathise with their lives, while at the same time we have no wish (not to say hope) to put back the clock, and start from the position which they held. For, indeed, it is characteristic of the times in which we live, that whereas in the beginning of the romantic reaction, its supporters were for the most part mere *laudatores temporis acti*, at the present time those who take pleasure in studying the life of the Middle Ages are more commonly to be found in the ranks of those who are pledged to the forward movement of modern life ; while those who are vainly striving to stem the progress of the world are as careless of the past as they are fearful of the future. In short, history, the new sense of modern times, the great

compensation for the losses of the centuries, is now teaching us worthily, and making us feel that the past is not dead, but is living in us, and will be alive in the future which we are now helping to make.

To my mind, therefore, no excuse is needful for the attempt made in the following pages to familiarise the reading public with what was once a famous knowledge-book of the Middle Ages. But the reader, before he can enjoy it, must cast away the exploded theory of the invincible and wilful ignorance of the days when it was written ; the people of that time were eagerly desirous for knowledge, and their teachers were mostly single-hearted and intelligent men, of a diligence and laboriousness almost past belief. The "Properties of Things" of Bartholomew the Englishman is but one of the huge encyclopædias written in the early Middle Age for the instruction of those who wished to learn, and the reputation of it and its fellows shows how much the science of the day was appreciated by the public at large, how many there were who wished to learn. Even apart from its interest as showing the tendency of men's minds in days when Science did actually tell them "fairy tales," the book is a delightful one in its English garb ; for the language is as simple as if the