

**ANECDOTA LITERARIA: A COLLECTION
OF SHORT POEMS IN ENGLISH, LATIN,
AND FRENCH, ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE
LITERATURE AND HISTORY OF
ENGLAND IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY**

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Anecdota Literaria: A Collection of Short Poems in English, Latin, and French, Illustrative of the Literature and History of England in the Thirteenth Century by Thomas Wright

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THOMAS WRIGHT

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ANECDOTA LITERARIA.

TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES ONLY OF THIS WORK
PRINTED.

ANECDOTA LITERARIA;

A COLLECTION OF

SHORT POEMS

IN ENGLISH, LATIN, AND FRENCH,

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE

LITERATURE AND HISTORY OF ENGLAND IN
THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY,

AND MORE ESPECIALLY OF THE

CONDITION AND MANNERS OF THE DIFFERENT CLASSES
OF SOCIETY.

EDITED FROM MANUSCRIPTS AT OXFORD, LONDON, PARIS, AND BERNE,

BY THOMAS WRIGHT, Esq. M.A., F.S.A., Hon.M.R.S.L., &c.

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TO

HENRY HALLAM, ESQ. F. R. S., V. P. S. A. &c.

Foreign Associate of the Institute of France (Académie des Sciences morales
et politiques.)

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DEAR SIR,

THE following pieces have been collected in part during a favourite study, that of the intellectual and moral character of society in the middle ages as exhibited in its lighter literature, a rich and abundant field of research. I beg the permission of dedicating my little volume to you, not only as a testimony of personal respect and esteem, but as a very feeble mark of my admiration of your writings, which have conduced more than any others to the improved historical taste which now prevails in England. Perhaps I may also be led by an interested feeling; for I can hope from your deep knowledge of the social history of the middle ages for an indulgent appreciation of scraps which, bearing upon minute points, may appear to many to be hardly worth the trouble of collecting.

These pieces were assembled with a view to two particular objects; one, the social history of the middle ages, the other, the history of the transmission of popular fiction. I was led to insert a few inedited fabliaux, by the accidental discovery of one which appears to be the immediate original of one of Chaucer's tales, which I have therefore chosen for the purpose of showing

how much remains to be done to produce even a tolerable text of Chaucer's works. The history of fiction is best illustrated by collecting the different forms of one tale in their chronological order. Although the tale of the Miller and the Two Clerks is an unfavourable example in some respects, yet it is curious from the circumstance of its having appeared under two forms in the thirteenth century, each of which became the head of a separate branch continued distinct down to the seventeenth century: one branch is represented by the tales here printed, the French *fabliau*, the Miller of Trompington, and the Miller of Abington; the other is found in the *fabliau* of Gombert, in the story in Boccaccio, and in the French novelists down to Lafontaine. The English *fabliau* of Dame Siriz is one form of a story of which we can trace the history through all its variations from its first origin in the farthest East.

Society in the middle ages was formed of discordant materials. It exhibited during a period of its history somewhat of an oriental separation of castes; and each class regarded the others with more or less of jealousy and hatred. The minstrel not unfrequently gratified the feelings of the caste which supported him by satirising the peasant, or the burgher, or the priest. Many of the brief metrical pieces in which these satirical expressions were conveyed, are found scattered through old manuscripts, and I have thought