

**SEQUEL TO LECTURES  
DELIVERED AT LITERARY  
AND MECHANICS'  
INSTITUTIONS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649344512

Sequel to Lectures delivered at literary and mechanics' institutions by William Henry Leatham

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**WILLIAM HENRY LEATHAM**

**SEQUEL TO LECTURES  
DELIVERED AT LITERARY  
AND MECHANICS'  
INSTITUTIONS**



# SEQUEL TO LECTURES

DELIVERED AT

LITERARY AND MECHANICS' INSTITUTIONS,

CONTAINING,

LECTURE I.—ENGLISH LITERATURE, AND THE ACQUISITION  
OF KNOWLEDGE.

LECTURE II.—MENTAL PHENOMENA, AND MENTAL CULTURE.

BY

WILLIAM HENRY LEATHAM.



London:  
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.

MDCCKLVII.

## LECTURE I.

### THE RISE, GROWTH, MATURITY, AND PROSPECTS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, &c. &c.

It would be easy to cull from "The Curiosities of Literature," some highly interesting facts connected with the subject chosen for this lecture; to compile from "Warton's History of Poetry"—from "Hazlitt's Spirit of the Age"—from the learned pages of Hallam, and other authors, matter that would illustrate the rise, growth, maturity, and prospects of English Literature. But our desire has been, not so much to avail of the criticisms of others, as to rely on a clear matter-of-fact statement, by which we may be able to set forth the progress of letters from our earliest annals to the present day.

We cannot promise many of the charms of novelty in this undertaking. Here, as elsewhere, we have preferred *truth* to *originality*, and in our quest of the former, we have been willing to risk the absence of the latter. The state of *Literature* is generally a fair index of the state of *Civilization* in every country. We shall also find that what are frequently called *national literary characteristics*, generally resolve themselves into little more than the mere development of literature under various stages of civilization. A highly civilized country like England, for instance, cannot fail to pass through all these phases of literature. The literature of one age of civilization differing essentially from that of the next, and so on; and this fact we shall soon have an opportunity of exhibiting, as we pass over the literary history of our own country. We, therefore, doubt the propriety of determining the national literary characteristics of any country, apart from its then state of

civilization, and we can only justly compare the literatures of two countries, when they are products of the same states of civilization. There are many abstruse questions, which naturally arise, in connexion with the history of a nation's literature. Does the *age* form the *man*, or the *man* form the *age*? might be a suitable query at the outset. The appearance of great men at great epochs, is, certainly, a coincidence favouring the argument that the *age* makes the *man*; but, then, the age which succeeds the appearance of great men, is as frequently *made* (as it were) by them. Can this point ever be decided when both propositions are in degree true? It may be asked, whether Shakspeare or Milton are expositors of their respective ages, or so much in advance of them, that it required a future age to interpret their works aright? We rather incline to the opinion that some of the *minor* writers may more justly be termed expositors of their own age—because they do not rise above it—but that men of the greatest genius are invariably found in advance of their own age. So many difficulties beset the philosophical discussion of this and similar problems, that we have preferred taking (in the brief lecture before us) a more matter-of-fact chronological survey of the history of English literature, marking, as we proceed, the rise, growth, and maturity of its various branches. We shall afterwards add a few hints as to the future prospects of literature in this country, and conclude by some observations chiefly addressed to the members of Literary and Scientific Societies.

First, then, we shall attempt to trace the origin and growth of English literature, from the time of the Anglo-Saxon Chroniclers to our own days. To render this task more easy, we have subdivided this long period into nine intervals, in each of which we find some great name, or names, to mark the literary era more distinctly. These intervals may be briefly enumerated as follows:—1st. The Anglo-Saxon period; 2ndly. The Anglo-Norman period; 3rdly. The age of Chaucer; 4thly. The period succeeding Chaucer; 5thly. The age of Spenser and Shakspeare; 6thly. The age of Milton and Dryden; 7thly. The age of Pope and Addison; 8thly. The age of Thomson, Goldsmith, and Johnson; 9thly., and finally. The age of Cowper, Burns, Scott, Byron, and Wordsworth, &c.

To proceed with our task. In looking back to the times of the Anglo-Saxon writers, we find the names of Gildas and Nennius, as historians; also, that of St. Columbanus, a native of Ireland, who, like his predecessors, composed chiefly in the Latin tongue. He wrote religious treatises and poetry, contributing to the advancement of Christianity in western Europe, and died A. D. 615.

The first Anglo-Saxon author of note, who wrote in his own language, is Cædmon, a monk of Whitby. He was a genuine poet of the order of Burns, (originally a cowherd,) and sprung from the common people. His productions are curious as evincing the rude character of Anglo-Saxon poetry, which seems destitute of measure and rhyme, but so arranged, that in every couplet there should be two principal words beginning with the same letter. Cædmon died about A. D. 680.

A few names of inferior note bring down the list of Anglo-Saxon writers to the venerable Bede. Many of the works of these authors being in Latin, we need not particularize them here. Bede died at his Monastery of Wearmouth, A. D. 735. King Alfred is the next Anglo-Saxon author of note. He appears to have translated into his own language, some of the writings of his predecessors, and it is supposed, that he rendered *Æsop's Fables*, and the *Psalms of David*, into the vernacular tongue. King Alfred died A. D. 901. Alfric, archbishop of Canterbury, succeeded Alfred as an important writer. He composed many homilies, and translated the seven first books of the Bible into Anglo-Saxon. He also wrote a Latin grammar, which occasioned him to receive the sub-name of "the grammarian." Alfric died A. D. 1006.

Cynewulf, Bishop of Winchester; Wulfstan, archbishop of York, and some others, bring down the list of Anglo-Saxon writers to the time of the Conquest. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, commencing from the time of Alfred and continued till the reign of Henry II., was the composition of a variety of authors.

Here we must leave the Anglo-Saxon, or first period of English literature.

We now come to an epoch when our language was destined to undergo a complete change, from the invasion of the Normans, and in the interim, for nearly two centuries, the names



of Norman Poets, men, as frequently natives of France, as of England, are those which occur in the history of English literature. One of the chief of these is Wace, a native of Jersey. About 1160, Wace, wrote in his native French, a narrative poem, entitled "Le Brut D'Angleterre," (Brutus of England). This poem was, in fact, a translation of the legendary history of Geoffery of Monmouth, written a few years before in the Latin tongue.

The poem of Wace, was translated into English, in the form of a metrical version, by Layamon (a priest of Ernely on the Severn). This translation, which is supposed to have been completed about the end of the twelfth century, shows that some alteration had then taken place in the language, evincing a further resemblance to the Anglo-Norman, or English, of our day. The thirteenth century produced a series of rhyming chronicles. Among these we find Robert of Gloucester, and Robert Manning, as the most conspicuous. The former continued the History of England, in long rhymed lines (alexandrines), but his productions are described by Mr. Warton as destitute of art and imagination. Manning flourished in the latter part of the reign of Edward I., and during that of Edward II. He translated a French book entitled, "Manuel des Pêches" (the handling of sins,) the composition of William de Wadinton; also a French chronicle of England, by Peter de Langtoft. The verse adopted in the latter is shorter than that of Robert of Gloucester, making an approach to the octo-syllabic stanza of modern times. The English language having now risen into some consideration, became the vehicle of metrical romances. We may date these from the reign of Edward II., the first of the class being generally translations from the French. This species of composition flourished till the close of the fifteenth century; and though the precise authors of these romances are much disputed, and the date of each production very difficult to determine, yet there appears no doubt, that these early ballads are the originals of those handed down amongst the common people in our days.

Among these may be reckoned, "Sir Tristrem," "Life of Alexander the Great," "King Horn," "Sir Grey," "The Squire

of Low Degree," "Sir Degore," "King Robert of Sicily," "The King of Tars," "Impomedon" and "La Mort d'Arthur," &c.

Hitherto we have described English poetry in the form of chronicle and romance alone. In the reign of Henry III. of England, and Alexander II. of Scotland, we first trace the dawn of miscellaneous poetry. Laurence Minot, (about 1350), composed a series of short poems on the victories of Edward III. About the same time, Richard Rolle, a hermit of the order of St. Augustine, living near the nunnery of Hampole, (four miles from Doncaster), wrote metrical paraphrases of portions of scripture, and an original poem, entitled the "Pricke of Conscience." We are not certain that this latter production was written by him in any other than the Latin tongue, though soon after translated into English.

Robert Longlande, about the same period, wrote "The Vision of Pierce Ploughman." This is a most remarkable production of the age, being a representation of the doctrines which were silently bringing about the Reformation. Pierce is represented as falling asleep on the Malvern hills, and seeing a series of visions, wherein the corruptions of society, but particularly those of the Church and Clergy, are set forth with much bitterness.

In this poem we find a recurrence of the alliteration, which characterised the Anglo-Saxon poetry, and the language is considered purer English than that made use of by Chaucer.

This must close our notice of the Anglo-Norman, or second period of English literature.

We now come to the father of English poetry, whose name has just been mentioned, and who was destined to found on the imperfect models which his native language already contained, a more enduring fabric of immortal verse.

Chaucer did not become notorious until Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, had shed a glory over Italian literature, and, undoubtedly, from them he caught some of his inspiration. It was left for him to accomplish, in the delineation of English life and character, as represented in his inimitable "Canterbury Tales," what Boccaccio had done for Italian manners, in his "Decameron." We cannot now dwell upon this interesting subject as we could desire, but will merely state, that the best

of Chaucer's works, "the Canterbury Tales," are supposed to have been composed at Woodstock, when the venerable poet was about sixty years of age. He died in London, 25th Oct., A. D. 1400, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, being the first of those illustrious poets whose ashes repose in that magnificent sepulchre.

Contemporary with Chaucer was John Gower; but he was destined to be eclipsed by the fame of the greater poet. John Barbour, archdeacon of Abardeen, lived in the same age, and his chief poem, entitled "The Bruce," containing 7000 rhyming octo-syllabic couplets, is a metrical history of King Robert I., of Scotland.

To these Scotch chroniclers, we may add the names of Wynthown and "Blind Harry." Of the latter personage nothing is known, except the fact of his being blind from infancy. He appears to have been a poor unlettered man, who celebrated the exploits of Wallace in rude verse.

Hitherto, we have said little about the prose writers of this era, chiefly, because they scarcely had an existence prior to the reign of Edward III. Sir John Mandeville, who wrote a marvellous account of his travels, is one of the first of these. The translations of the old and new Testaments, by Wickliffe, from the Latin version, was a most interesting and remarkable work of this age. Wickliffe died A. D. 1384.

These few notices must close our review of the third period of English literature, previously designated the age of Chaucer.

From the great increase of writers, who subsequently arise, we shall be compelled to treat of them in a more general manner than hitherto, to omit all mention of many of them, and to speak more of authors in the aggregate, in connexion with the age in which they lived, than of their individual claims to distinction.

James I., of Scotland, taken prisoner in his boyhood by Henry IV., spent nineteen years in England, and studied the works of Chaucer. During his imprisonment he composed "The King's Quhair," or Book, descriptive of his attachment to the daughter of the Earl of Somerset, whom he frequently saw walking in a garden, adjacent to his apartments in Windsor Castle, and to whom he was afterwards married. This accomplished Prince was assassinated at Perth, A. D. 1437.