

**THE ROMANCE OF  
BLONDE OF OXFORD AND  
JEHAN OF DAMMARTIN**

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The Romance of Blonde of Oxford and Jehan of Dammartin by Philippe De Reimes

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**PHILIPPE DE REIMES**

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JEHAN OF DAMMARTIN**



*Camden Society 1872*

THE ROMANCE OF  
BLONDE OF OXFORD AND JEHAN  
OF DAMMARTIN.

*Reims, chez le Beauvillain*  
BY PHILIPPE DE REIMES,  
A TROUVÈRE OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

EDITED,  
FROM THE UNIQUE MS. IN THE IMPERIAL LIBRARY IN PARIS,  
BY M. LE ROUX DE LINCY.



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## INTRODUCTION.

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PHILIPPE DE REIMES was a trouvère who would have been entirely forgotten if a single manuscript, now in existence, had been lost. This manuscript, which is in a handwriting of the fourteenth century, contains two early French metrical romances, bearing his name, one entitled the *Roman de la Manekine*, a version of a well-known legend, which occurs in various forms in the middle ages, and the scene of which is here laid in Scotland; the other a story of medieval baronial life, relating the adventures of two lovers, Blonde of Oxford and Jean of Dammartin. In both of them, the author makes us acquainted with his name, without giving any further information relating to himself; but the general character of his writings leaves little room for doubting that he lived about the middle or perhaps in the latter half of the thirteenth century. The first of the romances just mentioned, that of *La Manekine*, was edited by M. Francisque Michel for the Bannatyne Club in 1840. We are now enabled to present to the members of the Camden Society the second, which has been edited for them from the original manuscript (No. 7609<sup>2</sup>, in the great collection which has been known during the last few years by the successive titles of the Bibliothèque du Roi, the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the Bibliothèque Imperiale, at Paris,) by M. Le Roux de Lincy, a French scholar well known by his labours in medieval literature.

The poem of Blonde of Oxford and Jean of Dammartin belongs to none of what are called the cycles of medieval romance, but is a simple narrative of familiar incidents such as belonged in the thirteenth century to every-day life; and it is this circumstance which imparts to it its great value, for it is a most interesting picture of medieval manners, equally vivid and minute. As a writer, Philippe de Reimes possesses several rather striking defects; he is continually straining at phraseological effect, which

degenerates into ridiculous conceits, and he is generally verbose, which verbosity, however, has the advantage to us that it leads him into minute descriptions which perhaps another writer would have avoided.

Philippe de Reimes tells us that the object of his story is to incite young gentlemen to bestir themselves in search of fortune and honour, and not to remain idle at home, a burthen upon their families and friends. "If," says he, "a poor gentleman remain in his own country a single hour, he ought to have his eyes put out; for he is only a burthen to himself and to his relatives who love him; and the others call him a 'caitiff' and avoid his company." "If such a one," he adds, "should say, 'I know not where to go,' he ought to be much blamed for it, for he may hear every day of occupation for young people beyond sea (*i. e.* in the East) or in the Morea, or in many a foreign country. The individual of whom I am now going to tell you was not one of these idlers, but he went into a foreign land to gain renown and honour—by seeking honour he arrived at it, and I will tell you how it happened." (ll. 25-48).

There was in France a knight, who had been greatly distinguished in arms in his youth, and now in his old age was renowned for his hospitality; he had a wife, who was no less respected, with two daughters and four sons, all living. His lands lay at Daumartin, in the Ile-de-France, and were of sufficient extent to make him a rich man, but they were burdened with heavy mortgages, the result of his youthful extravagances. Under these circumstances, his eldest son, named Jean, who was already remarked for his good qualities although he had only reached his twentieth year, one day reflecting upon the condition of his father and his own prospects, resolved to leave his home and seek his fortune abroad. Accordingly, Jean departed from Dammartin, taking with him only a horse, twenty sels in his pocket, and one varlet or attendant whose name was Robin. He had selected England as the country which appeared to promise him the greatest prospect of success, and he directed his steps to Boulogne, where he waited until he found a merchant ship which carried him across the channel to Dover. After passing one night there, he was on horseback again early the next morning, and continued his journey towards London. One day he overtook an Earl, who had been on business to the sea-coast, and who was now on his way to London, to attend the parliament which was held there. Jean inquired of the retinue of this nobleman who he was, and learned from them that he was Earl of

Oxford; whereupon he rode up to him, and saluted him. The Earl returned the salutation, "for he understood French well, having been in France to learn it," and asked our wanderer when he had left that country, why he had quitted his home, and what business had brought him to England. Jean briefly told him his history, and said that he had come to England in search of service. After some conversation, the Earl of Oxford retained Jean of Dammartin as an esquire of his household.

Jean now continued on his way as one of the Earl's retinue, and he laboured successfully to make himself agreeable to his companions. They arrived in London on a Tuesday, and had a fair and well furnished hostel, where the Earl remained as long as the parliament lasted. The Earl eat with the King, and it was Jean's duty, as his esquire, to carve before him, an office which he performed so skilfully, and so courteously and attentively, as to merit everybody's good opinion. After the parliament was at an end, Jean accompanied his master to Oxford, where he was presented to the Countess, and at her suggestion, in consideration of his good breeding and gentle disposition, he was appointed to attend at table upon their only child, the Lady Blonde. As this proposal proved equally agreeable to the esquire and to the lady, the former was at once installed in his office; the tables were laid, the Earl first seated himself, each individual of the family followed according to his degree, and Jean stood before the young lady to carve for her. The beauty and good qualities of the lady are described by our poet with great minuteness. She was eighteen years of age, and spoke French not quite so well as if she had been born at Pontoise. Jean not only performed his duties with the greatest assiduity, but he watched every opportunity of doing services to the others, and soon became the favourite of all, from the Earl and his lady down to the lowest menial in the household. "After the meal, they wash their hands, and then go to divert themselves, according as each pleases, either in the forests or on the rivers (*i. e.* in hunting or hawking), or in amusements of other kinds. Jean goes to which he likes, and when he returns he often goes to play in the Countess's chambers with the ladies, who kept him occupied in teaching them French. And he does and says courteously whatever they please to ask him, as one who was ready at anything. Of chamber pastimes he knew enough, chess, tables, and dice, with which he entertained his lady; he often said to her 'check' and 'mate.' He taught her to play many a game, and instructed her in better