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978-1-108-07726-2 - Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets: Volume 3

Edited by Thomas Percy

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Reliques of Ancient English Poetry

While visiting a friend, the writer and cleric Thomas Percy (1729–1811) noticed a neglected folio whose pages were being used by the maids to light the fire. Upon inspection, this manuscript was found to be a seventeenth-century collection of historical ballads. Following this discovery, Percy collected further ballads and songs from a number of sources, which he published in this three-volume work in 1765, although ultimately only a quarter of the texts he presented came from that original manuscript. Although this work proved to be incredibly popular, Percy's idiosyncratic editorial practices also received much criticism. The collection centres on historical ballads and romances, demonstrating the development of language, customs and traditions, to which Percy added contemporary ballads for his readers' enjoyment. Volume 3 includes ballads of Sir Gawain, King Arthur and St George and the Dragon, and contains the additions and corrections to all three volumes.

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and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets*

VOLUME 3

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R E L I Q U E S
O F
ANCIENT ENGLISH POETRY:
CONSISTING OF
Old Heroic BALLADS, SONGS, and other
PIECES of our earlier POETS,
(Chiefly of the LYRIC kind.)
Together with some few of later Date.
VOLUME THE THIRD.



L O N D O N :
Printed for J. DODSLEY in Pall-Mall.
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**An ordinary SONG or BALLAD that is the delight of the
common people, cannot fail to please all such readers,
as are not unqualified for the entertainment by their
affectation or their ignorance; and the reason is plain,
because the same paintings of nature which recommend
it to the most ordinary Reader, will appear beautiful to
the most refined.**

ADDISON, in SPECTATOR No. 70.

ANDERSON

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ANCIEN
SONGS AND BALLADS,
&c.

SERIES THE THIRD.
BOOK I.

BALLADS ON KING ARTHUR, &c.

This Third Volume being chiefly devoted to Romantic Subjects, may not be improperly introduced with a few slight Strictures on the old METRICAL ROMANCES: a subject the more worthy attention, as such as have written on the nature and origin of Books of Chivalry, seem not to have known
VOL. I. b that

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ii ANCIENT SONGS

that the first compositions of this kind were in Verse, and usually sung to the Harp.

ON
THE ANCIENT METRICAL ROMANCES, &c.

*The first attempts at composition among all barbarous nations are ever found to be Poetry and Song. The praises of their Gods, and the achievements of their heroes, are usually chanted at their festival meetings. These are the first rudiments of History. It is in this manner that the savages of North America preserve the memory of past events †: and the same method is known to have prevailed among our Saxon Ancestors *. The ancient Britons had their BARDS, and the Gothic nations their SCALDS, whose business it was to record the victories of their warriors, and the genealogies of their Princes, in a kind of popular songs, which were committed to memory, and delivered down from one Reciter to another. So long as poetry continued a distinct profession, and while the Bard, or Scald was a regular and stated officer in the Prince's court, these men are thought to have performed the functions of the historian pretty faithfully; for tho' their narrations would be apt to receive a good deal of embellishment, they are supposed to have had at the bottom so much of truth as to serve for the basis of more regular annals. At least succeeding historians have taken up with the relations of these rude men, and for want of more authentic records, have agreed to allow them the credit of true history †.*

After letters began to prevail, and history assumed a more stable form, by being committed to plain simple prose; these Songs of the Scalds began to be more amusing, than useful. And
in

† Vid. Lafiteau Moeurs de. Sauvages, T. 2. Dr. Browne's Hist. of the Rise and Progress of Poetry.

* Barth. Antiq. Dan. Lib. 1. Cap. 10.—Vid. Tacit. de Mor. Germ.

† See "L' Introd. a l' Hist. de Dannemarc. par Mallet, 4to. 1755. pag. 31.

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*in proportion, as it became their business chiefly to entertain and delight, they gave more and more into embellishment, and set off their recitals with such marvellous fictions, as were calculated to captivate gross and ignorant minds. Thus began stories of adventures with giants and dragons, and witches and enchanters, and all the monstrous extravagances of wild imagination, unguided by judgment, and uncorrected by art *.*

THIS is the true origin of that species of Romance, which so long celebrated feats of Chivalry, and which at first in metre and afterwards in prose, was the entertainment of our ancestors, in common with their contemporaries on the continent, till the satire of Cervantes, or rather the increase of knowledge and classical literature, drove them off the stage, to make room for a more refined species of fiction, under the name of French Romances, copied from the Greek †.

That our old Romances of Chivalry are derived in a lineal descent from the ancient historical songs of the SCALDS, is uncontested, because there are many of them still preserved in the North, which exhibit all the seeds of Chivalry before it became a solemn institution ‡. “CHIVALRY, as a distinct military order, conferred in the way of investiture, and accompanied with the solemnity of an oath, and other ceremonies” was of later date, and sprung out of the feudal constitution, as an elegant writer has lately shown ||. But the ideas of Chivalry prevailed long before in all the Gothic nations, and may be discovered as in embryo in the customs, manners, and opinions, of every branch of that people §. That fondness of going in quest of adventures, that spirit of challenging to single combat, and that respectful complaisance shewn to the fair sex, (so different from the manners of the Greeks and Romans) all are of Gothic origin, and may be traced up to the earliest times among all the northern nations.

b ii

* Vid. *Infra*.† Viz. *ASTRÆA, CASSANDRA, CLELIA, &c.*‡ Mallet. -- *Int. a l' Hist. de Dannem.* p. 200. *L' Edda.* p. 264. & *passim*.

|| Letters concerning Chivalry. 8vo. 1763.

§ Mallet. *passim*.

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iv ANCIENT SONGS

tions *. These existed long before the feudal ages, tho' they were called forth and strengthened in a peculiar manner under that constitution, and at length arrived to their full maturity in the times of the Crusades, so replete with romantic adventures.

EVEN the common arbitrary fictions of Romance were (as is hinted above) most of them familiar to the ancient Scalds of the North, long before the times of the Crusades. They believed the existence of Giants and Dwarfs †, they had some notion of Fairies ‡, they were strongly possessed with the belief of spells and enchantment §, and were fond of inventing combats with Dragons and Monsters ¶.

We have a striking instance of their turn for Chivalry and Romance, in the history of King Regner Lodbrog, a celebrated warrior and pirate, who reigned in Denmark about the year 800 †. This hero signalized his youth by an exploit of gallantry. A Swedish prince had a beautiful daughter, whom he intrusted (probably during some expedition) to the care of one of his officers, assigning a strong castle for their defence. The Officer fell in love with his ward, and detained her in his castle, spite of all the efforts of her father. Upon this he published a proclamation through all the neighbouring countries, that whoever would conquer the ravisher and rescue the Lady should have her in marriage. Of all that undertook the adventure, Regner alone was so happy as to achieve it: he delivered the fair captive, and obtained her for his prize.—It happened that the name of this discourteous officer was ORME, which in the Islandic language signifies SERPENT: Wherefore the Scalds to give the more poetical turn to the adventure, represent the Lady as detained from her father by a dreadful Dragon, and that Regner slew the monster to set her at liberty. Even Regner himself, who was a celebrated poet,

* Mallet, passim.

† Mallet, p. 22.

‡ Olaus Verel. ad Hervarer Saga, p. 44, 45. Hickes's Thesaur.
V. 2. p. 311.

§ Ibid.

¶ Rellofs Saga, Cap. 35. &c.

‡ Saxo Gram. p. 152, 153.—Mallet, p. 201.

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AND BALLADS. v

poet, gives this fabulous account of the exploit in a poem of his own writing that is still extant, and which records all the valiant achievements of his life.*

WITH marvellous embellishments of this kind the Scalds early began to decorate their narratives: and they were the more lavish of these in proportion as they departed from their original institution, but it was a long time before they thought of delivering a set of personages and adventures wholly feigned. Of the great multitude of romantic tales still preserved in the libraries of the North, most of them are supposed to have had some foundation in truth, and the more ancient they are the more they are believed to be connected with true history. †

It was not probably till after the historian and the bard had been long disunited, that the latter ventured at pure fiction. At length when their business was no longer to instruct or inform, but merely to amuse, it was no longer needful for them to adhere to truth. Then began fabulous and romantic songs which for a long time prevailed in France and England before they had books of Chivalry in prose. Yet in both these countries the minstrels still retained so much of their original institution, as frequently to make true events the subject of their songs ‡; and indeed, as during the barbarous ages, the regular histories were almost all writ in Latin by the Monks, the memory of events was preserved and propagated among the ignorant laity by scarce any other means than the popular Songs of the Minstrels.

THE inhabitants of Sweden, Denmark and Norway, being the latest converts to Christianity, retained their original manners and opinions longer than the other nations of Gothic race: and therefore they have preserved more of the genuine compositions of their ancient poets, than their southern neighbours.

b iii

bours.

* See a Translation of this poem, lately published among "Five pieces of Runic Poetry, 8vo. 1763." † Vid. Mallet.

‡ The Editor's MS. contains a multitude of poems of this latter kind. It was from this custom of the Minstrels that some of our first Historians wrote their Chronicles in verse, as Rob. of Gloucester, Harding, &c.

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*bours. Among these the progress from poetical history to poetical fiction is very discernable: they have some of the latter kind, that are in effect complete Romances of Chivalry ||. They have also a multitude of SAGAS * or histories on romantic subjects, containing a mixture of prose and verse, of various dates, some of them written since the times of the Crusades, others long before: but their narratives in verse only are esteemed the more ancient.*

With regard to the Saxons and Franks, who it should seem had made their irruptions into Britain and Gaul, before prose compositions were known in the North, they had originally their fabulous stories and tales of amusement wholly in verse. The first Romances of Chivalry that were known in France were in metre †, and so were those that were current in England. In both kingdoms tales in verse were usually sung by minstrels to the harp on festival occasions: and probably both nations derived their relish for this sort of entertainment from their Gothic ancestors, without borrowing it either from the other. In both nations narrative songs on true or fictitious subjects had doubtless obtained from the earliest times. But the professed Romances of Chivalry seem to have been first composed in France; where also they had their name.

The Latin Tongue, as is observed by an ingenious writer ‡, ceased to be spoken in France about the ninth century, and was succeeded by what was called the ROMANCE Tongue, a mixture of the language of the Franks and bad Latin. As the Songs of Chivalry became the most popular compositions in that language, they were emphatically called ROMANS or ROMANTS; tho' this name was at first given to any piece of Poetry.

|| See a Specimen at the end of L'Edda par M. Mallet. 4to 1756.

* Eccardi Hist. Stud. Etym. 1711, p. 179, &c. Hickes's Thesaur. Vol. 2. p. 314.

† San Graal, Perceval, Lancelot du Lac, &c. were among the first prose Romances in French, yet these were originally composed in metre. See a Note of Wanley's in Harl. Catalog. Num. 2252. p. 49. &c. Nicholson's Eng. Hist. Library. 2d. Ed. p. 91. &c. — See also a curious Collect. of old French Romances with Mr. Wanley's account of these sort of pieces in Harl. MSS. Cat. 978. 106.

‡ The Author of the Essay on the Genius of Pope, p. 282.

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etry. The Romances of Chivalry can be traced as early as the eleventh Century §. Le Roman de Brut by Maistre Eustache was written in 1155: But it is well known to Historians, that (long before this) when William the Conqueror with his Normans marched down to the battle of Hastings, they animated themselves by singing (in some popular Romance or Ballad) the exploits of Roland, the great Hero of Chivalry.

So early as this I cannot trace the Songs of Chivalry in English. The most ancient I have seen, is that of Hornechild described below, which seems not earlier than the twelfth century. However, as this rather resembles the Saxon poetry, than the French, it is not certain that the first English Romances were translated from that language. We have seen above that a propensity to this kind of fiction prevailed among all the Gothic nations; and, tho' after the Norman Conquest, both the French and English translated each others Romances, There is no room to doubt, but each of them composed original pieces of their own.

*The stories of King Arthur and his round table, may be reasonably supposed of the growth of this island; both the English and the French had them from the Britons *. The stories of Guy and Bevis, with some others, were probably the invention of English Minstrels: on the other hand, the English procured translations of such Romances as were most current in France, and in the List given at the conclusion of these Remarks, many are doubtless of French original.*

The first PROSE books of Chivalry that appeared in our language, were those printed by Caxton †; at least, these are
b iv the

§ Ibid. p. 283. Hist. Lit. Tom. 6. 7.

* The Welsh have some very old Romances about K. Arthur, but as these are in prose, they are not probably their first pieces that were composed on that subject.

† Recuyel of the Hystories of Troy, 1471. Godfroye of Boloynne, 1481. Le Morte de Arthur, 1485. The Life of Charlemagne, 1485. &c. As the old Minstrelsy wore out, prose books of Chivalry became more admired, especially after the Spanish Romances began to be translated into English towards the end of Q. Elizabeth's reign: then the most popular metrical Romances began to be reduced into prose, as Sir Guy, Bevis, &c.

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viii A N C I E N T S O N G S

the first I have been able to discover, and these are all translations from the French. Whereas Romances of this kind had been long current in metre, and were so generally admired in the time of Chaucer, that his Rhyme of sir Thopas was evidently written to ridicule and burlesque them.*

He expressly mentions several of them by name in a stanza, which I shall have occasion to quote more than once in this volume.

Men speak of Romaunces of Price,
Of Horne-Child, and Ipotis,
Of Bevis, and sir Guy,
Of Sir Libeaux and Elandamoure,
But Sir Thopas bereth the flour,
Of riall chevallrie.

Most, if not all, of these are still extant in MS, in some or other of our libraries. as I shall shew in the conclusion of this slight Essay, where I shall give a list of such metrical Histories and Romances as have fallen under my observation.

As many of these contain a considerable portion of poetic merit, and throw great light on the manners and opinions of former times, it were to be wished that some of the best of them were rescued from oblivion. A judicious collection of them accurately published with proper illustrations, would be an important accession to our stock of ancient English Literature. Many of them exhibit no mean attempts at Epic Poetry, and tho' full of the exploded fictions of Chivalry, frequently display great descriptive and inventive powers in the Bards, who composed them. They are at least generally equal to any other poetry of the same age. They cannot indeed be put in competition with the nervous productions of so universal and commanding a genius as Chaucer, but they have a simplicity that makes them be read with less interruption, and be more easily under-

* See Extract from a Letter in Mr. Warton's Observations, Vol. 2. p. 139. [Where in p. 140. instead of "*Most of these &c.*" read "*Many of the old poetical Romances are in the very same metre, &c.*" The old black-letter Edit. in p. 142. proves to be one of Speght's.]

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A N D B A L L A D S. ix

understood: and they are far more spirited and entertaining than the tedious allegories of Gower, or the dull and prolix legends of Lydgate. Yet, while so much stress is laid upon the writings of these last, by such as treat of English poetry, the old metrical Romances tho' far more popular in their time are hardly known to exist. But it has happened unluckily that the antiquaries, who have revived the works of our ancient writers, have been for the most part men void of taste and genius, and therefore have always fastidiously rejected the old poetical Romances, because founded on fictitious or popular subjects, while they have been careful to grub up every petty fragment of the most dull and insipid rhimist, whose merit it was to deform morality, or obscure true history. Should the public encourage the revival of some of those ancient Epic songs of Chivalry, they would frequently see the rich ore of an Ariosto or a Tasso, tho' buried it may be among the rubbish and dross of barbarous times.

Such a publication would answer many important uses: It would throw new light on the rise and progress of English poetry, the history of which can be but imperfectly understood. if these are neglected: it would also serve to illustrate innumerable passages in our ancient classic poets, which without their help must be for ever obscure. For not to mention Chaucer and Spencer, who abound with perpetual allusions to them; I shall give an instance or two from Shakespeare, by way of specimen of their use.

In his play of KING JOHN our great Dramatic poet alludes to an exploit of Richard I, which the reader will in vain look for in any true history. Faulconbridge says to his mother, Act. 1. sc. 1.

- "Needs must you lay your heart at his dispose . . .
- "Against whose furie and unmatched force,
- "The awleste lion could not wage the fight
- "Nor keepe his princely heart from Richard's hand:
- "He that perforce robs Lions of their hearts
- "May easily winne a woman's:" ———

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The fact here referred to, is to be traced to its source only in the old Romance of RICHARD CEUR DE LYON, in which his encounter with a Lion makes a very shining figure. I shall give a large extract from this poem, as a specimen of the manner of these old rhapsodists, and to shew that they did not in their fictions neglect the proper means to produce the ends, as was afterwards done in so childish a manner in the prose books of Chivalry:*

The poet tells us, that Richard in his return from the Holy Land having been discovered in the habit of "a palmer in Almayne," and apprehended as a spy, was by the king thrown into prison Wardrewe the king's son bearing of Richard's great strength, defies the jailor to let him have a fight of his prisoners. Richard being the foremost, Wardrewe asks him "if he dare stand a buffet from his hand?" and that on the morrow he shall return him another. Richard consents and receives a blow that staggers him. On the morrow, having previously waxed his hands, he waits his antagonist's arrival. Wardrewe accordingly, proceeds the story, "held forth as a "trewe man," and Richard gave him such a blow on the cheek, as broke his jaw-bone and killed him on the spot. The king to revenge the death of his son orders by the advice of one Eldrede, that a Lion kept purposely from food, should be turned loose upon Richard. But the king's daughter having fallen in love with him, tells him of her father's resolution, and at his request procures him forty ells of white filk "kerchers;" and here the description of the Combat begins,

The kever-chefes † he toke on honde,

And aboute his arme he wonde;

And

* Dr. Grey has shewn that the same story is alluded to in Rastell's Chronicle: As it was doubtless originally had from the Romance, this is proof that the old metrical Romances throw light on our old writers in prose: many of our ancient Historians have recorded the fictions of Romance.

† i. e. Handkerchiefs. Here we have the etymology of the word, viz. "Couvre le chef."

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And thought in that ylke while,
 To flee the lyon with some gyle.
 And syngle in a kyrtyll he stode,
 And abode the lyon fyers and wode.
 With that came the jaylere,
 And other men that wyth him were,
 And the lyon them amonge;
 His pawes were stiffe and stronge,
 The chambre dore they undonee,
 And the lyon to them is gone.
 Rycharde sayd, Helpe, lorde Jesu!
 The lyon made to hym venu,
 And wolde hym have all to rente:
 Kynge Rycharde befye hym glente*,
 The lyon on the breste hym spurned,
 That aboute he tourned.
 The lyon was hongry and megre,
 And bette his tayle to be egre;
 He loked aboute as he were madde;
 Abrode he all his pawes spradde.
 He cryed lowde, and yaned || wyde.
 Kynge Rycharde bethought hym that tyde,
 What hym was beste, and to hym sterte,
 In at the throte his honde he gerte,
 And hente out the herte with his honde,
 Lounge and all that he there fonde.
 The lyon fell deed to the grounde:
 Rycharde felte no wem †, ne wounde.

He

* i. e. glanced, slipped. || i. e. yawned. † i. e. hurt,

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He fell on his knees in that place,
And thanked Jesu of his grace.

* * * * *

What follows is not so well, and therefore I shall extract no more of this poem: but the preceding circumstances are not unworthy the selection of any Epic poet.—For the above feat the author tells us, the king was deservedly called

Sironge Rycharde cure du Lyowne.

THAT *dislike* which *Shakespeare* puts in the mouth of his madman in K. LEAR, A. 3. sc. 4.

Mice and Rats and such small decre
Have been Tom's food for seven long years.

has excited the attention of the critics. Instead of deere, one of them would substitute geer; and another, cheer †. But the ancient reading is established by the old Romance of SIR BEVIS which Shakespeare had doubtless often heard sung to the harp. This distich is part of a description there given of the hardships suffered by Bevis, when confined for seven years in a dungeon.

Rattes and myse and such smal dere
Was his meate that seven yere. Sign. F. iii.

IN different parts of this work, the Reader will find various extracts from these old poetical Legends: to which I refer him for farther examples of their style and metre. To compleat this subject, it will be proper to give at least one specimen of their skill in distributing and conducting their fable, by which it will be seen that nature and common sense had supplied to these old simple bards the want of critical art, and taught them some of the most essential rules of Epic Poetry.—I shall select the Romance of **LIBIUS DISCONIUS**, as being one of those mentioned by Clæucer, and either shorter or more intelligible than the others he has quoted.

If

† Bp. Warb.---Dr. Grey. * So it is intitled in the Editor's MS.

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If an Epic Poem may be defined, “ A fable related by a poet, to excite admiration and inspire virtue, by representing the action of some one hero, favoured by heaven, who executes a great design, spite of all the obstacles that oppose him:” I know not why we should withhold the name of EPIC POEM from the piece which I am about to analyse.*

My copy is divided into IX PARTS or Cantos, the several arguments of which are as follows.

P A R T I

Opens with a short exordium to bespeak attention: the Heroe is described, a natural son of sir Gawain a celebrated knight of K. Arthur's court, who being brought up in a forest by his mother, is kept ignorant of his name and descent. He early exhibits marks of his courage by killing a knight in single combat, who encountered him as he was hunting. This inspires him with a desire of seeking adventures: therefore cloathing himself in his enemy's armour, he goes to K. Arthur's Court, to request the order of knighthood. His request granted, he obtains a promise of having the first adventure assigned him that shall offer.—A damsel named Ellen, attended by a dwarf, comes to implore K. Arthur's assistance, to rescue a young Princess, “the Lady of Sinadone” their mistress, who is detained from her rights and confined in prison. The adventure is claimed by the young knight Sir Lybius: the king assents: the messengers are dissatisfied and object to his youth: but are forced to acquiesce. And here the first book closes with a description of the ceremony of equipping him forth.

P A R T II.

Sir Lybius sets out on the adventure: he is derided by the dwarf and the damsel for his youth: they come to the bridge of Perill, which none can pass without encountering a knight called William de la Braunch: Sir Lybius is challenged: they just with their spears: De la Braunch is dismounted: the battle is renewed on foot: Sir William's sword breaks: he yields: Sir Lybius makes him swear to go and present himself to K. Arthur, as the first-fruits of his valour. The conquered knight

* Vid, “Discours sur la Poësie Epique.” prefixed to *TELEMAQUE*.

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knight sets out for K. Arthür's court : is met by three knights his relations : who informed of his disgrace, vow revenge, and pursue the conqueror. The next day they overtake him : the eldest of the three attacks him : but is overthrown to the ground. The two other brothers assault him : Sir Lybius is wounded : yet cuts off the second brother's arm : the third yields : Sir Lybius sends them all to K. Arthur. In the third evening he is awaked by a dwarf, who has discovered a fire in a wood.

PART III.

Sir Lybius arms him, and leaps on horseback : he finds two Giants roasting a wild boar, who have a fair Lady their captive. Sir Lybius by favour of the night runs one of them through with his spear : is assaulted by the other : a fierce battle ensues : he cuts off the giant's arm, and at length his head. The rescued Lady (an Earl's daughter) tells him her story : leads him to her father's castle : who entertains him with a great feast ; and presents him at parting with a suit of armour and a steed. He sends the giant's head to king Arthur.

PART IV.

Sir Lybius, maid Ellen and the dwarf renew their journey : they see a castle stuck round with human heads : are informed it belongs to a knight called sir Gefferon, who in honour of his lemman or mistress, challenges all comers : He that can produce a fairer lady, is to be rewarded with a milk-white falcon, but if overcome, to lose his head. Sir Lybius spends the night in the adjoining town : In the morning goes to challenge the falcon : The knights exchange their gloves : they agree to just in the market place : the lady and maid Ellen are placed aloft in chairs : their dresses : the superior beauty of sir Gefferon's mistress described : the ceremonies previous to the combat : they engage : the combat described at large : sir Gefferon is incurably hurt ; and carried home on his shield : Sir Lybius sends the falcon to K. Arthur : receives back a large present in florins : stays 40 days to be cured of his wounds, which he spends in feasting with the neighbouring lords.

V.

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P A R T V.

Sir Lybius proceeds for Sinadone: in a forest he meets a knight hunting, called sir Otes de Lisle: maid Ellen charmed with a very beautiful dog, begs sir Lybius to bestow him upon her: Sir Otes meets them, and claims his dog: is refused: being unarmed he rides to his castle, and summons his attendants: they go in quest of sir Lybius: a battle ensues: he is still victorious, and forces sir Otes to follow the other conquered knights to K. Arthur.

P A R T VI.

Sir Lybius comes to a fair city and castle by a river-side, beset round with pavilions or tents: he is informed, in the castle is a beautiful lady besieged by a giant named Maugys, who keeps the bridge, and will let none pass without doing him homage: this Lybius refuses: a battle ensues: the giant described: the several incidents of the battle: which lasts a whole summer's day: the giant is wounded: put to flight: slain. The citizens come out in procession to meet their deliverer: the lady invites him into her castle: falls in love with him; and seduces him to her embraces. He forgets the princess of Sinadone, and slays with this bewitching lady a twelve-month. This fair sorceress, like another Alcina, intoxicates him with all kinds of sensual pleasure; and detains him from the pursuit of honour.

P A R T VII.

Maid Ellen by chance gets an opportunity of speaking to him: upbraids him with his vice and folly: he is filled with remorse, and escapes the same evening: at length he arrives at the city and castle of Sinadone: Is given to understand that he must challenge the constable of the castle to single combat before he can be received as a guest: they fight: the constable is worsted: Sir Lybius is feasted in the castle: he declares his intention of delivering their lady; and inquires the particulars of her history. "Two Negromancers have built a fine palace by sorcery, and there keep her enchanted, till she will surrender her dutchy to them, and yield to such base conditions as they would impose."

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P A R T VIII.

Early on the morrow Sir Lybius sets out for the enchanted palace: he alights in the court: enters the hall: the wonders of which are described in strong Gothic painting: he sits down at the high table: on a sudden all the lights are quenched, it thunders, lightens; the palace shakes; the walls fall to pieces about his ears: he is dismayed and confounded: but presently hears horses neigh, and is challenged to single combat by the forcerers: he gets to his steed: a battle ensues, with various turns of fortune: he loses his weapon: but gets a sword from one of the Negromancers, and wounds the other with it: the edge of the sword being secretly poisoned, the wound proves mortal.

P A R T IX.

He goes up to the surviving forcerer, who is carried away from him by enchantment: at length he finds him, and cuts off his head: He returns to the palace to deliver the lady: but cannot find her: as he is lamenting, a window opens, through which enters a horrible serpent with wings and a woman's face: it coils round his neck and kisses him: on a sudden is converted into a very beautiful lady. She tells him she is the Lady of Sinadone, and was so enchanted, till she might kiss Sir Gawain, or some one of his blood: that he has dissolved the charm, and that herself and her dominions may be his reward. He joyfully accepts the offer; makes her his bride, and then sets out with her for King Arthur's court.

SUCH is the fable of this ancient piece: which the reader may observe, is as regular in its conduct, as any of the finest poems of classical antiquity. If the execution, particularly as to the diction and sentiments, were but equal to the plan, it would be a capital performance; but this is such as might be expected in rude and ignorant times, and in a barbarous unpolished language.

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I shall conclude this prolix account, with a LIST of such old METRICAL ROMANCES as are still extant: beginning with those mentioned by Chaucer.

1. *The Romance of Horne-childe is preserved in the British Museum, where it is intitled þe geste of kyng Horne. See Catalog. Harl. MSS. 2253. p. 70. The Language is almost Saxon, yet from the mention in it of Sarazens, it appears to have been written after some of the Crusades. It begins thus,*

All heo ben blyþe
þat to my song ylyþe:
A song ychulle ou sing
Of Alloi þe gode kynge † &c.

2. *The Poem of Ipotis (or Ypotis) is preserved in the Cotton Library, Calig. A. 2. fo. 77. but is rather a religious Legend, than a Romance. Its beginning is*

He bat wyl of wyðome here
Herkeneth now ze may here
Of a tale of holy wryte
Seynt Jon the Evangelyste wytneseth hyt.

3. *The Romance of Sir Guy, was written before that of Bevis, being quoted in it *. An account of this old poem is given below, pag. 104. To which I can now add, that two compleat copies in MS. are preserved at Cambridge. the one in the public Library †, the other in that of Caius College, Class A. 8.—In Ames's Typog. p. 153. may be seen the first lines of the printed copy.—The 1st MS. begins*

Sythe the tyme that God was borne.

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4.

† i. e. May all they be bliþe, that to my song listen: A song I shall you sing, Of Alloi the good king, &c.

* Sign. K. 2. C.

† For this and most of the following, which are mentioned as preserved in the Public Library, I refer the reader to the Oxon Catalog. of MSS. 1697. vol. 2. pag. 394. in Appendix to Bp. More's MSS. No. 690. 331 since given to the University of Cambridge.

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4. Guy and Colbronde, *an old Romance in three parts, is preserved in the Editor's folio MS. (pag. 349.) It is in stanzas of 6 lines, the first of which may be seen in vol. 2. p. 163. Beginning*

When meate and drinke is great plentye.

5. *The Romance of Syr Bevis is described in pag. 214. of this vol. Two manuscript copies of this poem are extant at Cambridge. viz. in the Public Library ||, and in that of Caius Coll. Clafs A. 9. (5.)—The first of these begins,*

Lordyngs lyftenyth grete and smale.

The printed copies begin differently,

Lyften, Lordinges, and hold you styl.

6. Libeaux (Libeaus, or, Lybius) Disconius *is preserved in the Editor's folio MS. (pag. 317.) where the first stanza is*

Jefus Christ christen kinge,
And his mothe that sweete thinge,
Helpe them at their neede,
That will listen to my tale,
Of a Knight I will you tell,
A doughtye man of deede.

An older copy is preserved in the Cotton Library [Cal. A. 2. fol. 40.] containing innumerable variations: the first line is

Jefu Cryft our Savvour.

As for Blandamoure, no Romance with this title has been discovered; but as the word occurs in that of Libeaux, 'tis possible Chaucer's memory deceived him.

7. Le Morte Arthure, *is among the Harl. MSS. 2252. §. 49. This is judged to be a translation from the French; Mr.*

|| No. 690, §. 31, Vid. Catalog, MSS. p. 394.