

**ENGLISH LITERATURE  
FOR BOYS AND GIRLS**



IT WAS IN THE MONASTERY THAT BOOKS  
WERE PRINTED AND COPIED.

# ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

BY

**H. E. MARSHALL**

*with illustrations by John R. Skelton*



**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS**  
**CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA**

Cover and arrangement © 2009 Yesterday's Classics.

This edition, first published in 2009 by Yesterday's Classics, an imprint of Yesterday's Classics, LLC, is an unabridged republication of the work originally published by Fredrick A. Stokes Co. in 1909. For a complete listing of the books published by Yesterday's Classics, visit [www.yesterdaysclassics.com](http://www.yesterdaysclassics.com). Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Online Children's Literature Project which presents the complete text of hundreds of classic books for children at [www.mainlesson.com](http://www.mainlesson.com).

ISBN-10: 1-59915-089-1

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-089-5

Yesterday's Classics  
PO Box 3418  
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

**TO**  
**ELIZABETH DOROTHEA PRIAULX TAUDEVIN**  
**HELEN GERTRUDE BAKER**  
**AND**  
**JOHN RAYMOND KEEN**



## TO BOYS AND GIRLS—AN APOLOGY

DEAR BOYS AND GIRLS,—This is not the book you asked for—it is not the book that any of you have asked for, and I hope that you will not be very much disappointed. But in case you should be I will tell you how this book came to be written, and that may make you feel less disappointed.

Long, long ago I said, “If ever I have two brass farthings to rub one against the other I know what I shall do—I shall write an English Literature for Boys and Girls.” But the days and months and years went on, and I never saw even one brass farthing. I wonder if ever any one did. Did you?

Still I kept the hope and kept the wish ready. And at last one day a Magician came. I can't stop to tell you what he was like, but he wasn't a bit like any Magician I ever read about. He put two golden pennies into my hand and said in a very solemn voice, “Rub them one against the other and the first wish you wish shall be granted to you. Be careful. Remember, only one wish. So choose with thought.” Then he vanished. But of course I could not choose with thought, for the wish I had kept ready all the time just slipped off my tongue, and as I rubbed my golden pennies together I said quickly, “I wish to write an English Literature for Boys and Girls.”

So I had my wish and have done my part. It is for you to do the rest. You know in fairy tales when people get their wishes they often find that instead of being made happy they are made unhappy by the fulfillment. But if you like my book, then I can truly say that

my wish has brought only happiness in its fulfillment. And if you like my book, which is now yours, and if you say so, and if your kind Fathers and Mothers and Uncles and Aunts buy it for you, who knows but one day the Magician will come again with two more golden pennies, and let me wish another wish. Then I shall wish to write the history of—the country you asked for. Meantime I am, as always, your slave and friend,

**H. E. MARSHALL.**

OXFORD, 1909.

## TO “THE OLYMPIANS”—AN EXPLANATION

THIS preface, let me begin by stating, is not meant for my proper audience of Boys and Girls, but for the “Olympians,” those semi-fairy godmothers and godfathers whose purses ought to be bottomless as their kindness is limitless. Having thus freed my pen let me proceed with my preface, in the happy consciousness that I may with impunity use five-syllabled words should I so desire.

My preface is an explanation, and an apology. For every one who writes a literature for young people begins with an apology for writing it, and with an explanation of why they wrote it. We explain that in spite of the many excellent literatures published none exactly suits our purpose and, while apologizing for adding to the number, we proceed to write one to please ourselves. My position is the same as that of all those who have gone before me, and I have no more original explanation to offer for adding yet another Literature to the many already published.

None of the Literatures which it has been my fortune to come across suits my purpose, for they are all written for use in schools, while my desire has been to produce a book which a boy or girl will read, not as a task, but as a pleasure. It is my belief that this is the first attempt of the kind that has been made. and whether I have succeeded or failed my young readers must decide.

The object with which I write being to amuse and interest rather than to teach, a great deal has been left out which must of necessity have been included in a book meant for school use. No attempt has been made to include even all the great names. Such an attempt could result, in the space at my disposal, in little more than a catalogue of names and dates. A selection therefore has been

made of the most representative writers in the various periods treated, and any one who loves our literature will at once realize how difficult such selection was. I have chosen for the most part those men and works which seemed best to illustrate the widening and deepening of our literature, but occasionally I have chosen to tell of some work chiefly because of its appeal to young people, while others for obvious reasons have been passed over in silence. In treating of a great man it is not always his greatest work that I have emphasized, but rather that which most easily comes within the grasp of young minds. I have of set purpose treated the early portions of our literature at much greater length than is usual, it being my belief that what was attractive to a youthful nation will be most attractive to the young of that nation. Lastly, I have, especially in the earlier portions, tried to keep literature in touch with history, and to show how the political development of our country influenced, and in its turn was influenced by, the literary development.

In writing such a book my indebtedness to those who have gone before me is extreme, but to make acknowledgments to all who have helped me to produce it would be wellnigh impossible, for it would be to catalogue the reading of a lifetime. The list would make a brave show; too brave a show for such a small result. The great among the dead I trust know my gratitude. Should the great among the living chance to cast an eye upon my poor book, I pray them to take it as an evidence equally of my indebtedness and my gratitude. My direct borrowings I have never failed, I hope, to acknowledge throughout the text by quotation marks and notes. While expressing my gratitude to others I must add one word of thanks to Mr. J. R. Skelton, whose excellent portrait-pictures have helped not a little to illuminate the text and lighten the task of explanation.

In concluding it seems to me I can do little better than add to my already frequent borrowings by quoting a few lines from John Colet, that stern-seeming but tender-hearted man who, four hundred years ago, wrought so much for young folks, and tried to smooth for them the thorny path of learning.

“I have made this lytle boke, not thynkyng that I coude say any thyng beter than hath be sayd before, but I toke this besynes, hauynge grete pleasure to shewe the testimony of my good mynde onto the schole. In whiche lytel warke yf any newe thynges be of me, it is alonely that I have put these partes in a more clere ordre. and have made them a lytel more easy to yonge wyttes than (me thynketh) they were before. Judgyng that no thynghe may be to softe nor to famlyer for lytel chyldren. specyally lernynge a tongue onto them al straunge. In whiche lytel boke I have lefte many thynges out of purpose. consydering the tendernes and small capacitye of lytel myndes. . . . I praye God all may be to his honour. and to the erudicyon and profyt of chyldren my countre men, Londoners epsecyally, whome dygestynge this lytel warke I had alwaye before myn eyen, consyderynge more what was for them than to shewe ony grete connyge, wyllyng to speke the thynges often before spoken in suche maner as gladli yonge begynners and tender wyttes myght take and conceyve. Wherefore I praye you, al lytel babys, al lytel chyldren, lerne gladly this lytel treatyse, and commende it dylygently onto your memoryes. Trusting of this begynnynge that ye shal procede and growe to parfyt literature, and come at the last to be gret clarkes. And lyf to up your lytel whyte handes for me, whiche prayeth for you to God. To Whom be al honour and imperyal maieste and glory. Amen.”

H. E. MARSHALL.

OXFORD, 1909.

NOTE: The lists of books given at the end of some chapters do not claim to be either final or complete, but are the best for the purpose, obtainable at a moderate price, which have come under the writer's notice, and it is hoped that they may be of some little assistance to those who choose books for young readers to read in connection with the *Literature*. Where several editions of one book are given, the most simple version is always placed first. Occasionally where no good simplified version is obtainable an ordinary inexpensive edition is mentioned.



# CONTENTS

I.	IN THE LISTENING TIME.....	1
II.	THE STORY OF THE CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY.....	5
III.	ONE OF THE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING.....	11
IV.	THE STORY OF A LITERARY LIE.....	16
V.	THE STORY OF FINGAL.....	20
VI.	ABOUT SOME OLD WELSH STORIES AND STORY-TELLERS.....	26
VII.	HOW THE STORY OF ARTHUR WAS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH.....	33
VIII.	THE BEGINNING OF THE READING TIME.....	41
IX.	“THE PASSING OF ARTHUR”.....	47
X.	THE ADVENTURES OF AN OLD ENGLISH BOOK.....	52
XI.	THE STORY OF BEOWULF.....	57
XII.	THE FATHER OF ENGLISH SONG.....	62
XIII.	HOW CAEDMON SANG, AND HOW HE FELL ONCE MORE ON SILENCE.....	69
XIV.	THE FATHER OF ENGLISH HISTORY.....	75
XV.	HOW ALFRED THE GREAT FOUGHT WITH HIS PEN....	83
XVI.	WHEN ENGLISH SLEPT.....	87
XVII.	THE STORY OF HAVELOK THE DANE.....	92

ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

XVIII.	ABOUT SOME SONG STORIES.....	98
XIX.	“PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN” .....	106
XX.	“PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN”— <i>continued</i> .....	111
XXI.	HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO THE PEOPLE .....	119
XXII.	CHAUCER—BREAD AND MILK FOR CHILDREN .....	126
XXIII.	CHAUCER—“THE CANTERBURY TALES” .....	130
XXIV.	CHAUCER—AT THE TABARD INN .....	136
XXV.	THE FIRST ENGLISH GUIDE-BOOK .....	145
XXVI.	BARBOUR—“THE BRUCE,” THE BEGINNINGS OF A STRUGGLE.....	151
XXVII.	BARBOUR—“THE BRUCE,” THE END OF THE STRUGGLE.....	157
XXVIII.	A POET KING .....	162
XXIX.	THE DEATH OF THE POET KING .....	168
XXX.	DUNBAR—THE WEDDING OF THE THISTLE AND THE ROSE .....	174
XXXI.	AT THE SIGN OF THE RED PALE.....	180
XXXII.	ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF THE THEATER .....	189
XXXIII.	HOW THE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS....	196
XXXIV.	THE STORY OF EVERYMAN .....	203
XXXV.	HOW A POET COMFORTED A GIRL .....	206
XXXVI.	THE RENAISSANCE .....	215
XXXVII.	THE LAND OF NOWHERE .....	220
XXXVIII.	THE DEATH OF SIR THOMAS MORE.....	230
XXXIX.	HOW THE SONNET CAME TO ENGLAND .....	236

CONTENTS

XL.	THE BEGINNING OF BLANK VERSE .....	242
XLI.	SPENSER—THE “SHEPHERD’S CALENDAR” .....	246
XLII.	SPENSER—“THE FAERY QUEEN” .....	254
XLIII.	SPENSER—HIS LAST DAYS .....	265
XLIV.	ABOUT THE FIRST THEATERS .....	270
XLV.	SHAKESPEARE—THE BOY .....	278
XLVI.	SHAKESPEARE—THE MAN .....	285
XLVII.	SHAKESPEARE—“THE MERCHANT OF VENICE” .....	293
XLVIII.	JONSON—“EVERYMAN IN HIS HUMOUR” .....	307
XLIX.	JONSON—“THE SAD SHEPHERD” .....	316
L.	RALEIGH—“THE REVENGE” .....	321
LI.	RALEIGH—“THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD” .....	332
LII.	BACON—NEW WAYS OF WISDOM .....	339
LIII.	BACON—THE HAPPY ISLAND .....	349
LIV.	ABOUT SOME LYRIC POETS .....	355
LV.	HERBERT—THE PARSON POET .....	362
LVI.	HERRICK AND MARVELL—OF BLOSSOMS AND BOWERS .....	370
LVII.	MILTON—SIGHT AND GROWTH .....	383
LVIII.	MILTON—DARKNESS AND DEATH .....	395
LIX.	BUNYAN—“THE PILGRIM’S PROGRESS” .....	406
LX.	DRYDEN—THE NEW POETRY .....	418
LXI.	DEFOE—THE FIRST NEWSPAPERS .....	431
LXII.	DEFOE—“ROBINSON CRUSOE” .....	438
LXIII.	SWIFT—THE “JOURNAL TO STELLA” .....	444

*ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS*

LXIV.	SWIFT—"GULLIVER'S TRAVELS" .....	452
LXV.	ADDISON—"THE SPECTATOR" .....	459
LXVI.	STEELE—THE SOLDIER AUTHOR.....	473
LXVII.	POPE—"THE RAPE OF THE LOCK" .....	482
LXVIII.	JOHNSON—DAYS OF STRUGGLE.....	494
LXIX.	JOHNSON—THE END OF THE JOURNEY .....	501
LXX.	GOLDSMITH—THE VAGABOND.....	512
LXXI.	GOLDSMITH—"THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD" .....	519
LXXII.	BURNS—THE PLOWMAN POET.....	527
LXXIII.	COWPER—"THE TASK" .....	542
LXXIV.	WORDSWORTH—THE POET OF NATURE.....	548
LXXV.	WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE—THE LAKE POETS.....	555
LXXVI.	COLERIDGE AND SOUTHEY—SUNSHINE AND SHADOW .....	565
LXXVII.	SCOTT—THE AWAKENING OF ROMANCE .....	571
LXXVIII.	SCOTT—"THE WIZARD OF THE NORTH" .....	579
LXXIX.	BYRON—"CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE" .....	586
LXXX.	SHELLEY—THE POET OF LOVE.....	596
LXXXI.	KEATS—THE POET OF BEAUTY.....	609
LXXXII.	CARLYLE—THE SAGE OF CHELSEA .....	621
LXXXIII.	THACKERAY—THE CYNIC?.....	633
LXXXIV.	DICKENS—SMILES AND TEARS.....	643
LXXXV.	TENNYSON—THE POET OF FRIENDSHIP .....	654

# CHAPTER I

## IN THE LISTENING TIME

HAS there ever been a time when no stories were told? Has there ever been a people who did not care to listen? I think not.

When we were little, before we could read for ourselves, did we not gather eagerly round father or mother, friend or nurse, at the promise of a story? When we grew older, what happy hours did we not spend with our books. How the printed words made us forget the world in which we live, and carried us away to a wonderland,

“Where waters gushed and fruit trees grew  
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,  
And everything was strange and new;  
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,  
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,  
And honey bees had lost their stings,  
And horses were born with eagles’ wings.”

Robert Browning.

And as it is with us, so it is with a nation, with a people.

In the dim, far-off times when our forefathers were wild, naked savages, they had no books. Like ourselves, when we were tiny, they could neither read nor write. But do you think that they had no stories? Oh, yes! We may be sure that when the day’s work was done, when the fight or the chase was over, they gathered round the wood fire and listened to the tales of the story-teller.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

These stories were all of war. They told of terrible combats with men or with fierce strange beasts, they told of passion, of revenge. In them there was no beauty, no tenderness, no love. For the life of man in those far-off days was wild and rough; it was one long struggle against foes, a struggle which left little room for what was beautiful or tender.

But as time went on, as life became more easy, in one way or another the savage learned to become less savage. Then as he changed, the tales he listened to changed too. They were no longer all of war, of revenge; they told of love also. And later, when the story of Christ had come to soften men's hearts and brighten men's lives, the stories told of faith and purity and gentleness.

At last a time came when minstrels wandered from town to town, from castle to castle, singing their lays. And the minstrel who had a good tale to tell was ever sure of a welcome, and for his pains he was rewarded with money, jewels, and even land. That was the true listening time of the world.

It was no easy thing to be a minstrel, and a man often spent ten or twelve years in learning to be one. There were certain tales which all minstrels had to know, and the best among them could tell three hundred and fifty. Of these stories the minstrels used to learn only the outline, and each told the story in his own way, filling it in according to his own fancy. So as time went on these well-known tales came to be told in many different ways, changing as the times changed.

At length, after many years had passed, men began to write down these tales, so that they might not be forgotten. These first books we call Manuscripts, from the Latin words *manus*, a hand, and *scribere*, to write, for they were all written by hand. Even after they were written down there were many changes made in the tales, for those who wrote or copied them would sometimes miss lines or alter others. Yet they were less changed than they had been when told only by word of mouth.

These stories then form the beginnings of what is called our Literature. Literature really means letters, for it comes from a Latin word *littera*, meaning a letter of the alphabet. Words are made

## *IN THE LISTENING TIME*

by letters of the alphabet being set together, and our literature again by words being set together; hence the name.

As on and on time went, every year more stories were told and sung and written down. The first stories which our forefathers told in the days long, long ago, and which were never written down, are lost forever. Even many of those stories which were written are lost too, but a few still remain, and from them we can learn much of the life and the history of the people who lived in our land ten and twelve hundred years ago, or more.

For a long time books were all written by hand. They were very scarce and dear, and only the wealthy could afford to have them, and few could read them. Even great knights and nobles could not read, for they spent all their time in fighting and hunting, and had little time in which to learn. So it came about that the monks who lived a quiet and peaceful life became the learned men. In the monasteries it was that books were written and copied. There too they were kept, and the monasteries became not only the schools, but the libraries of the country.

As a nation grows and changes, its literature grows and changes with it. At first it asks only for stories, then it asks for history for its own sake, and for poetry for its own sake; history, I mean, for the knowledge it gives us of the past; poetry for joy in the beautiful words, and not merely for the stories they tell. Then, as a nation's needs and knowledge grow, it demands ever more and more books on all kinds of subjects.

And we ourselves grow and change just as a nation does. When we are very young, there are many books which seem to us dull and stupid. But as we grow older and learn more, we begin to like more and more kinds of books. We may still love the stories that we loved as children, but we love others too. And at last, perhaps, there comes a time when those books which seemed to us most dull and stupid delight us the most.

At first, too, we care only for the story itself. We do not mind very much in what words it is told so long as it is a story. But later we begin to care very much indeed what words the storyteller uses, and how he uses them. It is only, perhaps, when we

## *ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS*

have learned to hear with our eyes that we know the true joy of books. Yes, hear with our eyes, for it is joy in the sound of the words that makes our breath come fast, which brings smiles to our lips or tears to our eyes. Yet we do not need to read the words aloud, the sight of the black letters on the white page is enough.

In this book I am going to tell you about a few of our greatest story-tellers and their books. Many of these books you will not care to read for yourselves for a long time to come. You must be content to be told about them. You must be content to know that there are rooms in the fairy palace of our Literature into which you cannot enter yet. But every year, as your knowledge grows, you will find that new keys have been put into your hands with which you may unlock the doors which are now closed. And with every door that you unlock, you will become aware of others and still others that are yet shut fast, until at last you learn with something of pain, that the great palace of our Literature is so vast that you can never hope to open all the doors even to peep inside.

## CHAPTER II

# THE STORY OF THE CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY

OUR earliest literature was history and poetry. Indeed, we might say poetry only, for in those far-off times history was always poetry, it being only through the songs of the bards and minstrels that history was known. And when I say history I do not mean history as we know it. It was then merely the gallant tale of some hero's deeds listened to because it was a gallant tale.

Now the people who lived in the British Isles long ago were not English. It will be simplest for us to call them all Celts and to divide them into two families, the Gaels and the Cymry. The Gaels lived in Ireland and in Scotland, and the Cymry in England and Wales.

It is to Ireland that we must go for the very beginnings of our Literature, for the Roman conquest did not touch Ireland, and the English, who later conquered and took possession of Britain, hardly troubled the Green Isle. So for centuries the Gaels of Ireland told their tales and handed them on from father to son undisturbed, and in Ireland a great many old writings have been kept which tell of far-off times. These old Irish manuscripts are perhaps none of them older than the eleventh century, but the stories are far, far older. They were, we may believe, passed on by word of mouth for many generations before they were written down, and they have kept the feeling of those far-off times.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

It was from Ireland that the Scots came to Scotland, and when they came they brought with them many tales. So it comes about that in old Scottish and in old Irish manuscripts we find the same stories.

Many of the manuscripts which are kept in Ireland have never been translated out of the old Irish in which they were written, so they are closed books to all but a few scholars, and we need not talk about them. But of one of the great treasures of old Irish literature we will talk. This is the *Leabhar Na b-Uidhre*, or *Book of the Dun Cow*. It is called so because the stories in it were first written down by St. Ciaran in a book made from the skin of a favorite cow of a dun color. That book has long been lost, and this copy of it was made in the eleventh century.

The name of this old book helps us to remember that long ago there was no paper, and that books were written on vellum made from calf-skin and upon parchment made from sheep-skin. It was not until the twelfth century that paper began to be made in some parts of Europe, and it was not until the fifteenth century that paper books became common in England.

In the *Book of the Dun Cow*, and in another old book called the *Book of Leinster*, there is written the great Irish legend called the *Tain Bo Chnailgne* or the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*.

This is a very old tale of the time soon after the birth of Christ. In the book we are told how this story had been written down long, long ago in a book called the *Great Book Written on Skins*. But a learned man carried away that book to the East. Then, when many years had passed, people began to forget the story of the Cattle Raid. So the chief minstrel called all the other minstrels together to ask if any of them knew the tale. But none of them could remember more than a few verses of it. Therefore the chief minstrel asked all his pupils to travel into far countries to search for the rest which was lost.

What followed is told differently in different books, but all agree in this, that a great chief called Fergus came back from the dead in order to tell the tale, which was again written down.

## *THE STORY OF THE CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY*

The story is one of the beautiful Queen Meav of Connaught. For many years she had lived happily with her husband and her children. But one day the Queen and her husband began to argue as to which of them was the richer. As they could not agree, they ordered all their treasures to be brought before them that they might be compared.

So first all their wooden and metal vessels were brought. But they were both alike.

Then all their jewels, their rings and bracelets, necklets and crowns were brought, but they, too, were equal.

Then all their robes were brought, crimson and blue, green, yellow, checked and striped, black and white. They, too, were equal.

Next from the fields and pastures great herds of sheep were brought. They, too, were equal.

Then from the green plains fleet horses, champing steeds came. Great herds of swine from forest and glen were brought. They, too, were equal.

Lastly, droves and droves of cattle were brought. In the King's herd there was a young bull named White-horned. When a calf, he had belonged to Meav's herd, but being very proud, and thinking it little honor to be under the rule of a woman, he had left Meav's herd and joined himself to the King's. This bull was very beautiful. His head and horns and hoofs were white, and all the rest of him was red. He was so great and splendid that in all the Queen's herd there was none to match him.

Then Meav's sorrow was bitter, and calling a messenger, she asked if he knew where might be found a young bull to match with White-horned.

The messenger replied that he knew of a much finer bull called Donn Chuailgne, or Brown Bull of Cooley, which belonged to Dawra, the chief of Ulster.

"Go then," said Meav, "and ask Dawra to lend me the Bull for a year. Tell him that he shall be well repaid, that he shall receive fifty heifers and Brown Bull back again at the end of that time. And

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

if Dawra should seem unwilling to lend Brown Bull, tell him that he may come with it himself, and that he shall receive here land equal to his own, a chariot worth thirty-six cows, and he shall have my friendship ever after.”

So taking with him nine others, the messenger set out and soon arrived at Cooley. And when Dawra heard why the messengers had come, he received them kindly, and said at once that they should have Brown Bull.

Then the messengers began to speak and boast among themselves. “It was well,” said one, “that Dawra granted us the Bull willingly, otherwise we had taken it by force.”

As he spoke, a servant of Dawra came with food and drink for the strangers, and hearing how they spoke among themselves, he hastily and in wrath dashed the food upon the table, and returning to his master repeated to him the words of the messenger.

Then was Dawra very wrathful. And when, in the morning, the messengers came before him asking that he should fulfill his promise, he refused them.

So, empty-handed, the messengers returned to Queen Meav. And she, full of anger, decided to make good the boastful words of her messenger and take Brown Bull by force.

Then began a mighty war between the men of Ulster and the men of Connaught. And after many fights there was a great battle in which Meav was defeated. Yet was she triumphant, for she had gained possession of the Brown Bull.

But the Queen had little cause for triumph, for when Brown Bull and White-horned met there was a fearful combat between them. The whole land echoed with their bellowing. The earth shook beneath their feet and the sky grew dark with flying sods of earth and with flecks of foam. After long fighting Brown Bull conquered, and goring White-horned to death, ran off with him impaled upon his horns, shaking his shattered body to pieces as he ran.

## THE STORY OF THE CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY

But Brown Bull, too, was wounded to death. Mad with pain and wounds, he turned to his own land, and there

“He lay down  
Against the hill, and his great heart broke there,  
And sent a stream of blood down all the slope;  
And thus, when all the war and Tain had ended,  
In his own land, 'midst his own hills, he died.”

*The Tain*, by Mary A. Hutton.

The *Cattle Raid of Cooley* is a strange wild tale, yet from it we can learn a great deal about the life of these old, far-away times. We can learn from it something of what the people did and thought, and how they lived, and even of what they wore. Here is a description of a driver and his war chariot, translated, of course, into English prose. “It is then that the charioteer arose, and he put on his hero’s dress of charioteering. This was the hero’s dress of charioteering that he put on: his soft tunic of deer skin, so that it did not restrain the movement of his hands outside. He put on his black upper cloak over it outside. . . . The charioteer took first then his helm, ridged like a board, four-cornered. . . . This was well measured to him, and it was not an over weight. His hand brought the circlet of red-yellow, as though it were a plate of red gold, of refined gold smelted over the edge of the anvil, to his brow as a sign of his charioteering, as a distinction to his master.

“He took the goads to his horses, and his whip inlaid in his right hand. He took the reins to hold back his horses in his left hand. Then he put the iron inlaid breast-plate on his horses, so that they were covered from forehead to fore-foot with spears, and points, and lances, and hard points, so that every motion in this chariot was war-near, so that every corner, and every point, and every end, and every front of this chariot was a way of tearing.”

*The Cattle Raid of Cualngé*, by L. W. Faraday.

We can almost see that wild charioteer and his horses, sheathed in bristling armor with “every front a way of tearing,” as they dash amid the foe. And all through we come on lines like these

*ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS*

full of color and detail, which tell us of the life of those folk of long ago.

## CHAPTER III

# ONE OF THE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING

*The Tain* gives us vivid pictures of people and things, but it is not full of beauty and of tender imagination like many of the Gaelic stories. Among the most beautiful and best known of these are perhaps the *Three Sorrows of Story-Telling*. These three stories are called: *The Tragedy of the Children of Lir*; *The Tragedy of the Children of Tuireann*; and *Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach*. Of the three the last is perhaps the most interesting, because the story happened partly in Scotland and partly in Ireland, and it is found both in old Irish and in old Scottish manuscripts.

The story is told in many old books, and in many ways both in prose and in verse. The oldest and shortest version is in the *Book of Leinster*, the same book in which is found *The Tain*.

The tale goes that one day King Conor and his nobles feasted at the house of Felim, his chief story-teller. And while they feasted a daughter was born to Felim the story-teller. Then Cathbad the Druid, who was also at the feast, became exceeding sad. He foretold that great sorrow and evil should come upon the land because of this child, and so he called her Deirdre, which means trouble or alarm.

When the nobles heard that, they wished to slay the newborn babe. But Conor spoke.

“Let it not be so done,” he said. “It were an ill thing to shed the blood of an innocent child. I myself shall care for her. She

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

shall be housed in a safe place so that none may come nigh to her, and when she is grown she shall be my one true wife."

So it was done as King Conor said. Deirdre was placed in a safe and lonely castle, where she was seen of none save her tutor and her nurse, Lavarcam. There, as the years passed, she grew tall and fair as a slender lily, and more beautiful than sunshine.

Now when fourteen years had passed, it happened one snowy day that Deirdre's tutor killed a calf to provide food for their little company. And as the calf's blood was spilled upon the snow, a raven came to drink of it. When Deirdre saw that, she sighed and said, "Would that I had a husband whose hair was as the color of the raven, his cheeks as blood, and his skin as snow."

"There is such a one," said Lavarcam, "he is Naisi the son of Usnach."

After that there was no rest for Deirdre until she had seen Naisi. And when they met they loved each other, so that Naisi took her and fled with her to Scotland far from Conor the King. For they knew that when the King learned that fair Deirdre had been stolen from him, he would be exceeding wrathful.

There, in Scotland, Deirdre and Naisi lived for many years happily. With them were Ainle and Ardan, Naisi's two brothers, who also loved their sister Deirdre well.

But Conor never forgot his anger at the escape of Deirdre. He longed still to have her as his Queen, and at last he sent a messenger to lure the fair lady and the three brave brothers back to Ireland.

"Naisi and Deirdre were seated together one day, and between them Conor's chess board, they playing upon it.

"Naisi heard a cry and said, 'I hear the call of a man of Erin.'

"That was not the call of a man of Erin,' says Deirdre, 'but the call of a man of Alba.'

"Deirdre knew the first cry of Fergus, but she concealed it. Fergus uttered the second cry.

## ONE OF THE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING

“That is the cry of a man of Erin,’ says Naisi.

“It is not indeed,’ says Deirdre, ‘and let us play on.’

“Fergus sent forth the third cry, and the sons of Usnach knew it was Fergus that sent forth the cry. And Naisi ordered Ardan to go to meet Fergus. Then Deirdre declared she knew the first call sent forth by Fergus.

“Why didst thou conceal it, then, my Queen?’ says Naisi.

“A vision I saw last night,’ says Deirdre, ‘namely that three birds came unto us having three sups of honey in their beaks, and that they left them with us, and that they took three sups of our blood with them.’

“What determination hast thou of that, O Princess?’ says Naisi.

“It is,’ says Deirdre, ‘that Fergus comes unto us with a message of peace from Conor, for more sweet is not honey than the message of peace of the false man.’

“Let that be,’ says Naisi. ‘Fergus is long in the port; and go, Ardan, to meet him and bring him with thee.’”<sup>1</sup>

And when Fergus came there were kindly greetings between the friends who had been long parted. Then Fergus told the three brothers that Conor had forgiven them, and that he longed to see them back again in the land of Erin.

So although the heart of Deirdre was sad and heavy with foreboding of evil, they set sail for the land of Erin. But Deirdre looked behind her as the shore faded from sight and sang a mournful song:—

“O eastern land I leave, I loved you well,  
Home of my heart, I loved and love you well,  
I ne’er had left you had not Naisi left.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Theophilus O’Flanagan

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Hyde

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

And so they fared on their journey and came at last to Conor's palace. And the story tells how the boding sorrow that Deirdre felt fulfilled itself, and how they were betrayed, and how the brothers fought and died, and how Deirdre mourned until

“Her heart-strings snap,  
And death had overmastered her. She fell  
Into the grave where Naisi lay and slept.  
There at his side the child of Felim fell,  
The fair-haired daughter of a hundred smiles.  
Men piled their grave and reared their stone on high,  
And wrote their names in Ogham.<sup>1</sup> So they lay  
All four united in the dream of death.”<sup>2</sup>

Such in a few words is the story of Deirdre. But you must read the tale itself to find out how beautiful it is. That you can easily do, for it has been translated many times out of the old Gaelic in which it was first written and it has been told so simply that even those of you who are quite young can read it for yourselves.

In both *The Tain* and in *Deirdre* we find the love of fighting, the brave joy of the strong man when he finds a gallant foe. *The Tain* is such history as those far-off times afforded, but it is history touched with fancy, wrought with poetry. In the *Three Sorrows* we have Romance. They are what we might call the novels of the time. It is in stories like these that we find the keen sense of what is beautiful in nature, the sense of “man's brotherhood with bird and beast, star and flower,” which has become the mark of “Celtic” literature. We cannot put it into words, perhaps, for it is something mystic and strange, something that takes us nearer fairyland and makes us see that land of dreams with clearer eyes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ancient Gaelic writing.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Hyde.

*ONE OF THE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING*

**BOOKS TO READ**

*The Celtic Wonder World*, by C. L. Thomson.

*The Enchanted Land* (for version of *Deirdre*), by L. Chisholm.

*Three Sorrows* (verse), by Douglas Hyde.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE STORY OF A LITERARY LIE

WHO wrote the stories which are found in the old Gaelic manuscripts we do not know, yet the names of some of the old Gaelic poets have come down to us. The best known of all is perhaps that of Ossian. But as Ossian, if he ever lived, lived in the third century, as it is not probable that his poems were written down at the time, and as the oldest books that we have containing any of his poetry were written in the twelfth century, it is very difficult to be sure that he really made the poems called by his name.

Ossian was a warrior and chief as well as a poet, and as a poet he is claimed both by Scotland and by Ireland. But perhaps his name has become more nearly linked to Scotland because of the story that I am going to tell you now. It belongs really to a time much later than that of which we have been speaking, but because it has to do with this old Gaelic poet Ossian, I think you will like to hear it now.

In a lonely Highland village more than a hundred and fifty years ago there lived a little boy called James Macpherson. His father and mother were poor farmer people, and James ran about barefooted and wild among the hills and glens. When he was about seven years old the quiet of his Highland home was broken by the sounds of war, for the Highland folk had risen in rebellion against King George II., and were fighting for Prince Charlie, hoping to have a Stewart king once more. This was the rebellion called the '45, for it was fought in 1745.

## *THE STORY OF A LITERARY LIE*

Now little James watched the red coats of the southern soldiers as, with bayonets gleaming in the sun, they wound through the glens. He heard the Highland battle-cry and the clash of steel on steel, for fighting came near his home, and his own people joined the standard of the Pretender. Little James never forgot these things, and long afterwards, when he grew to be a man and wrote poetry, it was full of the sounds of battle, full, too, of love for mountain and glen and their rolling mists.

The Macphersons were poor, but they saw that their son was clever, and they determined that he should be well taught. So when he left school they sent him to college, first to Aberdeen and then to Edinburgh.

Before he was twenty James had left college and become master of the school in his own native village. He did not, however, like that very much, and soon gave it up to become tutor in a family.

By this time James Macpherson had begun to write poetry. He had also gathered together some pieces of old Gaelic poetry which he had found among the Highland folk. These he showed to some other poets and writers whom he met, and they thought them so beautiful that he published them in a book.

The book was a great success. All who read it were delighted with the poems, and said that if there was any more such poetry in the Highlands, it should be gathered together and printed before it was lost and forgotten for ever. For since the '45 the English had done everything to make the Highlanders forget their old language and customs. They were forbidden to wear the kilt or the tartan, and everything was done to make them speak English and forget Gaelic.

So now people begged Macpherson to travel through the Highlands and gather together as much of the old poetry of the people as he could. Macpherson was at first unwilling to go. For one thing, he quite frankly owned that he was not a good Gaelic scholar. But at length he consented and set out.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

For four months Macpherson wandered about the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, listening to the tales of the people and writing them down. Sometimes, too, he came across old manuscripts with ancient tales in them. When he had gathered all he could, he returned to Edinburgh and set to work to translate the stories into English.

When this new book of Gaelic poetry came out, it again was a great success. It was greeted with delight by the greatest poets of France, Germany, and Italy, and was soon translated into many languages. Macpherson was no longer a poor Highland laddie, but a man of world-wide fame. Yet it was not because of his own poetry that he was famous, but because he had found (so he said) some poems of a man who lived fifteen hundred years before, and translated them into English. And although Macpherson's book is called *The Poems of Ossian*, it is written in prose. But it is a prose which is often far more beautiful and poetical than much that is called poetry.

Although at first Macpherson's book was received with great delight, soon people began to doubt about it. The Irish first of all were jealous, for they said that Ossian was an Irish poet, that the heroes of the poems were Irish, and that Macpherson was stealing their national heroes from them.

Then in England people began to say that there never had been an Ossian at all, and that Macpherson had invented both the poems and all the people that they were about. For the English knew little of the Highlanders and their customs. Even after the '15 and the '45 people in the south knew little about the north and those who lived there. They thought of it as a land of wild mountains and glens, a land of mists and cloud, a land where wild chieftains ruled over still wilder clans, who, in their lonely valleys and sea-girt islands, were for ever warring against each other. How could such a people, they asked, a people of savages, make beautiful poetry?

Dr. Samuel Johnson, a great writer of whom we shall hear more later, was the man of his day whose opinion about books was most thought of. He hated Scotland and the Scottish folk, and did

## *THE STORY OF A LITERARY LIE*

not believe that any good thing could come from them. He read the poems and said that they were rubbish, such as any child could write, and that Macpherson had made them all up.

So a quarrel, which has become famous, began between the two men. And as Dr. Johnson was far better known than Macpherson, most people agreed with him and believed that Macpherson had told a “literary lie,” and that he had made up all the stories.

There is no harm in making up stories. Nearly every one who writes does that. But it is wrong to make up stories and then pretend that they were written by some one else more famous than yourself.

Dr. Johnson and Macpherson were very angry with and rude to each other. Still that did not settle the question as to who had written the stories; indeed it has never been settled. And what most men believe now is that Macpherson did really gather from among the people of the Highlands many scraps of ancient poetry and tales, but that he added to them and put them together in such a way as to make them beautiful and touching. To do even that, however, a true poet was needed, so people have, for the most part, given up arguing about whether Macpherson wrote Ossian or not, and are glad that such a beautiful book has been written by some one.

I do not think that you will want to read Ossian for yourself for a long time to come, for the stories are not always easy to follow. They are, too, often clumsy, wandering, and badly put together. But in spite of that there is much beauty in them, and some day I hope you will read them.

In the next chapter you will find one of the stories of Ossian called Fingal. Fingal was a great warrior and the father of Ossian, and the story takes place in Ireland. It is told partly in Macpherson’s words.

## CHAPTER V

# THE STORY OF FINGAL

“CATHULLIN sat by TURA’S wall, by the tree of the rustling sound. His spear leaned against a rock. His shield lay on grass, by his side. And as he thus sat deep in thought a scout came running in all haste and cried, ‘Arise! Cathullin, arise! I see the ships of the north. Many, chief of men, are the foe! Many the heroes of the sea-born Swaran!’

“Then to the scout the blue-eyed chief replied, ‘Thou ever tremblest. Thy fears have increased the foe. It is Fingal King of deserts who comes with aid to green Erin of streams.’

“ ‘Nay, I beheld their chief,’ replied the scout, ‘tall as a glittering rock. His spear is a blasted pine. His shield the rising moon. He bade me say to thee, “Let dark Cathullin yield.” ’

“ ‘No,’ replied the blue-eyed chief, ‘I never yield to mortal man. Dark Cathullin shall be great or dead.’ ”

Then Cathullin bade the scout summon his warriors to council. And when they were gathered there was much talk, for some would give battle at once and some delay until Fingal, the King of Morven, should come to aid them. But Cathullin himself was eager to fight, so forward they marched to meet the foe. And the sound of their going was “as the rushing of a stream of foam when the thunder is traveling above, and dark-brown night sits on half the hill.” To the camp of Swaran was the sound carried, so that he sent a messenger to view the foe.

## THE STORY OF FINGAL

“He went. He trembling, swift returned. His eyes rolled wildly round. His heart beat high against his side. His words were faltering, broken, slow. ‘Arise, son of ocean! arise, chief of the dark brown shields! I see the dark, the mountain stream of battle. Fly, King of ocean! Fly!’

“‘When did I fly?’ replied the King. ‘When fled Swaran from the battle of spears? When did I shrink from danger, chief of the little soul? Shall Swaran fly from a hero? Were Fingal himself before me my soul should not darken in fear. Arise, to battle my thousands! pour round me like the echoing main. Gather round the bright steel of your King; strong as the rocks of my land, that meet the storm with joy, and stretch their dark pines to the wind.’

“Like autumn’s dark storms, pouring from two echoing hills, towards each other approached the heroes. Like two deep streams from high rocks meeting, mixing, roaring on the plain; loud, rough and dark in battle meet Lochlin and Innis-fail. Chief mixes his strokes with chief, and man with man; steel clanging sounds on steel. Helmets are cleft on high. Blood bursts and smokes around. Strings murmur on the polished yews. Darts rush along the sky, spears fall like the circles of light which gild the face of night. As the noise of the troubled ocean when roll the waves on high, as the last peal of thunder in heaven, such is the din of war. Though Cormac’s hundred bards were there to give the fight to song, feeble was the voice of a hundred bards to send the deaths to future times. For many were the deaths of heroes; wide poured the blood of the brave.”

Then above the clang and clamor of dreadful battle we hear the mournful dirge of minstrels wailing o’er the dead.

“Mourn, ye sons of song, mourn! Weep on the rocks of roaring winds, O maid of Inistore! Bend thy fair head over the waves, thou lovelier than the ghost of the hills, when it moves, in a sunbeam at noon, over the silence of Morven. He is fallen! thy youth is low! pale beneath the sword of Cathullin. No more shall valor raise thy love to match the blood of kings. His gray dogs are howling at home, they see his passing ghost. His bow is in the hall unstrung. No sound is on the hill of his hinds.”

## *ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS*

Then once again, the louder for the mourning pause, we hear the din of battle.

“As roll a thousand waves to the rocks, so Swaran’s host came on. As meets a rock a thousand waves, so Erin met Swaran of spears. Death raises all his voices around, and mixes with the sounds of shields. Each hero is a pillar of darkness; the sword a beam of fire in his hand. The field echoes from wing to wing, as a hundred hammers that rise by turn, on the red son of the furnace.”

But now the day is waning. To the noise and horror of battle the mystery of darkness is added. Friend and foe are wrapped in the dimness of twilight.

But the fight was not ended, for neither Cathullin nor Swaran had gained the victory, and ere gray morning broke the battle was renewed.

And in this second day’s fight Swaran was the victor, but while the battle still raged white-sailed ships appeared upon the sea. It was Fingal who came, and Swaran had to fight a second foe.

“Now from the gray mists of the ocean, the white-sailed ships of Fingal appeared. High is the grove of their masts, as they nod by turns on the rolling wave.”

Swaran saw them from the hill on which he fought, and turning from the pursuit of the men of Erin, he marched to meet Fingal. But Cathullin, beaten and ashamed, fled to hide himself: “bending, weeping, sad and slow, and dragging his long spear behind, Cathullin sank in Cromla’s wood, and mourned his fallen friends. He feared the face of Fingal, who was wont to greet him from the fields of renown.”

But although Cathullin fled, between Fingal and Swaran battle was renewed till darkness fell. A second day dawned, and again and again the hosts closed in deadly combat until at length Fingal and Swaran met face to face.

“There was a clang of arms! their every blow like the hundred hammers of the furnace. Terrible is the battle of the kings; dreadful the look of their eyes. Their dark brown shields are cleft in twain. Their steel flies, broken from their helmets.

## THE STORY OF FINGAL

“They fling their weapons down. Each rushes to his hero’s grasp. Their sinewy arms bend round each other: they turn from side to side, and strain and stretch their large and spreading limbs below. But when the pride of their strength arose they shook the hills with their heels. Rocks tumble from their places on high; the green-headed bushes are overturned. At length the strength of Swaran fell; the king of the groves is bound.”

The warriors of Swaran fled then, pursued by the sons of Fingal, till the hero bade the fighting cease, and darkness once more fell over the dreadful field.

“The clouds of night come rolling down. Darkness rests on the steeps of Cromla. The stars of the north arise over the rolling of Erin’s waves: they shew their heads of fire, through the flying mist of heaven. A distant wind roars in the wood. Silent and dark is the plain of death.”

Then through the darkness is heard the sad song of minstrels mourning for the dead. But soon the scene changes and mourning is forgotten.

“The heroes gathered to the feast. A thousand aged oaks are burning to the wind. The souls of warriors brighten with joy. But the king of Lochlin (Swaran) is silent. Sorrow reddens in his eyes of pride. He remembered that he fell.

“Fingal leaned on the shield of his fathers. His gray locks slowly waved on the wind, and glittered to the beam of night. He saw the grief of Swaran, and spoke to the first of the bards.

“‘Raise, Ullin, raise the song of peace. O soothe my soul from war. Let mine ear forget in the sound the dismal noise of arms. Let a hundred harps be near to gladden the king of Lochlin. He must depart from us with joy. None ever went sad from Fingal. The lightening of my sword is against the strong in fight. Peaceful it lies by my side when warriors yield in war.’”

So at the bidding of Fingal the minstrel sang, and soothed the grief of Swaran. And when the music ceased Fingal spoke once more:—

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

“King of Lochlin, let thy face brighten with gladness, and thine ear delight in the harp. Dreadful as the storm of thine ocean thou hast poured thy valor forth; thy voice has been like the voice of thousands when they engage in war.

“Raise, to-morrow, raise thy white sails to the wind. Or dost thou choose the fight? that thou mayest depart renowned like the sun setting in the west.’”

Then Swaran chose to depart in peace. He had no more will to fight against Fingal, so the two heroes swore friendship together. Then once again Fingal called for the song of minstrels.

“A hundred voices at once arose, a hundred harps were strung. They sang of other times; the mighty chiefs of other years.” And so the night passed till “morning trembles with the beam of the east; it glimmers on Cromla’s side. Over Lena is heard the horn of Swaran. The sons of the ocean gather around. Silent and sad they rise on the wave. The blast of Erin is behind their sails. White as the mist of Morven they float along the sea.”

Thus Swaran and his warriors departed, and Fingal, calling his men together, set forth to hunt. And as he hunted far in the woods he met Cathullin, still hiding, sad and ashamed. But Fingal comforted the beaten hero, reminding him of past victories. Together they returned to Fingal’s camp, and there the heroes sang and feasted until “the soul of Cathullin rose. The strength of his arm returned. Gladness brightened along his face. Thus the night passed away in song. We brought back the morning with joy.

“Fingal arose on the heath and shook his glittering spear. He moved first towards the plain of Lena. We followed in all our arms.

“‘Spread the sail,’ said the King, ‘seize the winds as they pour from Lena.’

“We rose on the wave with songs. We rushed with joy through the foam of the deep.”

Thus the hero returned to his own land.

## *THE STORY OF FINGAL*

NOTE.—There is no book of Ossian specially edited for children. Later they may like to read the Century Edition of Macpherson's *Ossian*, edited by William Sharpe. Stories about Ossian will be found among the many books of Celtic tales now published.

## CHAPTER VI

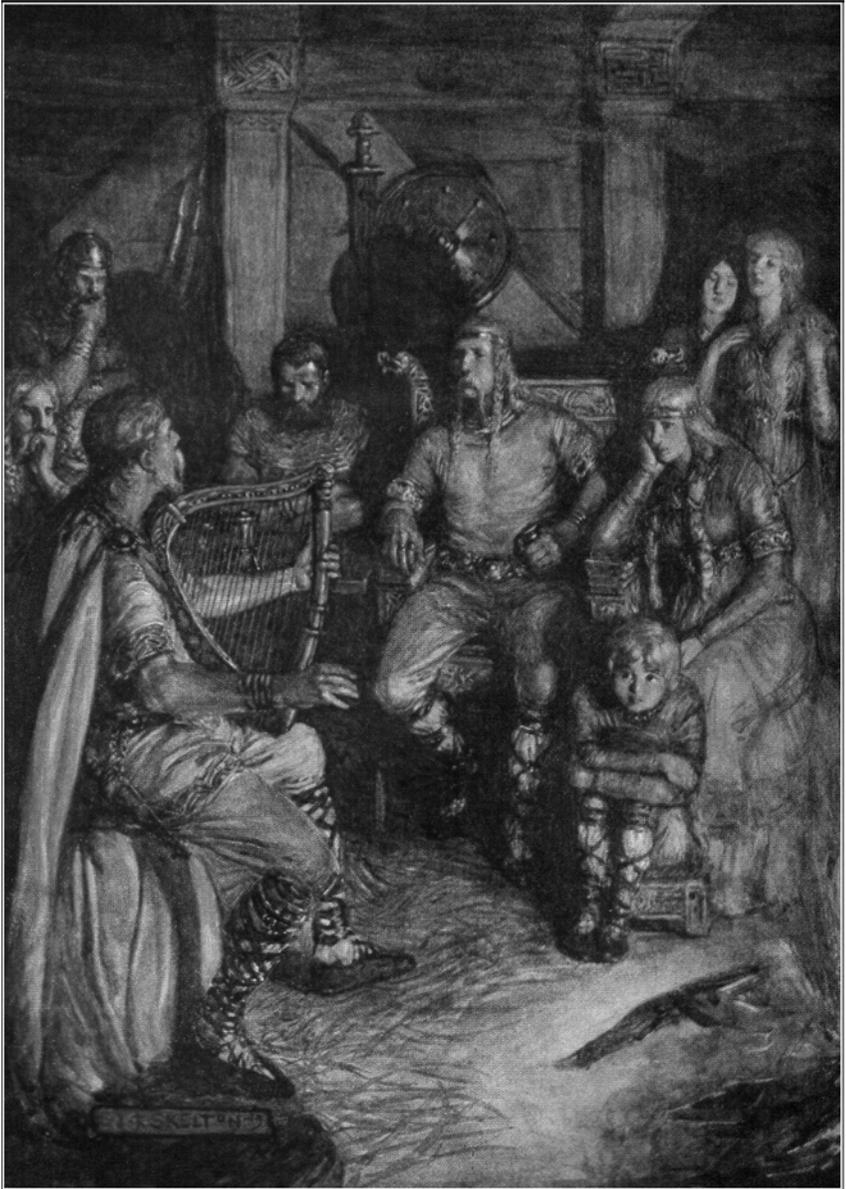
# ABOUT SOME OLD WELSH STORIES AND STORY-TELLERS

YOU remember that the Celtic family was divided into two branches, the Gaelic and the Cymric. So far we have only spoken about the Gaels, but the Cymry had their poets and historians too. The Cymry, however, do not claim such great age for their first known poets as do the Gaels. Ossian, you remember, was supposed to live in the third century, but the oldest Cymric poets whose names we know were supposed to live in the sixth century. As, however, the oldest Welsh manuscripts are of the twelfth century, it is again very difficult to prove that any of the poems were really written by those old poets.

But this is very certain, that the Cymry, like the Gaels, had their bards and minstrels who sang of the famous deeds of heroes in the halls of the chieftains, or in the market-places for the people.

From the time that the Romans left Britain to the time when the Saxons or English were at length firmly settled in the land, many fierce struggles, many stirring events must have taken place. That time must have been full of brave deeds such as the minstrels loved to sing. But that part of our history is very dark. Much that is written of it is little more than a fairy tale, for it was not until long afterwards that anything about this time was written down.

The great hero of the struggle between the Britons and the Saxons was King Arthur, but it was not until many many years after



MINSTRELS SANG OF THE FAMOUS DEEDS OF HEROES.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

the time in which he lived that all the splendid stories of his knights, of his Round Table, and of his great conquests began to take the form in which we know them. Indeed, in the earliest Welsh tales the name of Arthur is hardly known at all. When he is mentioned it is merely as a warrior among other warriors equally great, and not as the mighty emperor that we know. The Arthur that we love is the Arthur of literature, not the Arthur of history. And I think you may like to follow the story of the Arthur of literature, and see how, from very little, it has grown so great that now it is known all the world over. I should like you to remember, too, that the Arthur story is not the only one which repeats itself again and again throughout our Literature. There are others which have caught the fancy of great masters and have been told by them in varying ways throughout the ages. But of them all, the Arthur story is perhaps the best example.

Of the old Welsh poets it may, perhaps, be interesting to remember two. These are Taliesin, or "Shining Forehead," and Merlin.

Merlin is interesting because he is Arthur's great bard and magician. Taliesin is interesting because in a book called *The Mabinogion*, which is a translation of some of the oldest Welsh stories, we have the tale of his wonderful birth and life.

Mabinogion really means tales for the young. Except the History of Taliesin, all the stories in this book are translated from a very old manuscript called the *Red Book of Hergest*. This Red Book belongs to the fourteenth century, but many of the stories are far far older, having, it is thought, been told in some form or other for hundreds of years before they were written down at all. Unlike many old tales, too, they are written in prose, not in poetry.

One of the stories in *The Mabinogion*, the story of King Ludd, takes us back a long way. King Ludd was a king in Britain, and in another book we learn that he was a brother of Cassevelaunus, who fought against Julius Caesar, so from that we can judge of the time in which he reigned.

"King Ludd," we are told in *The Mabinogion*, "ruled prosperously and rebuilt the walls of London, and encompassed it

## ABOUT SOME OLD WELSH STORIES AND STORY-TELLERS

about with numberless towers. And after that he bade the citizens build houses therein, such as no houses in the kingdom could equal. And, moreover, he was a mighty warrior, and generous and liberal in giving meat and drink to all that sought them. And though he had many castles and cities, this one loved he more than any. And he dwelt therein most part of the year, and therefore was it called *Caer Ludd*, and at last *Caer London*. And after the strange race came there, it was called London.” It is interesting to remember that there is still a street in London called Ludgate. *Caer* is the Celtic word for Castle, and is still to be found in many Welsh names, such as *Carnarvon*, *Caerleon*, and so on.

Now, although Ludd was such a wise king, three plagues fell upon the island of Britain. “The first was a certain race that came and was called *Coranians*, and so great was their knowledge that there was no discourse upon the face of the island, however low it might be spoken, but what, if the wind met it, it was known to them.

“The second plague was a shriek which came on every May-eve over every hearth in the island of Britain. And this went through peoples’ hearts and frightened them out of their senses.

“The third plague was, however much of provision and food might be prepared in the king’s courts, were there even so much as a year’s provision of meat and drink, none of it could ever be found, except what was consumed upon the first night.”

The story goes on to tell how good King Ludd freed the island of Britain from all three plagues and lived in peace all the days of his life.

In five of the stories of *The Mabinogion*, King Arthur appears. And, although these were all written in Welsh, it has been thought that some may have been brought to Wales from France.

This seems strange, but it comes about in this way. Part of France is called Brittany, as you know. Now, long long ago, before the Romans came to Britain, some of the people who lived in that part of France sailed across the sea and settled in Britain. These

## *ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS*

may have been the ancient Britons whom Caesar fought when he first came to our shore.

Later, when the Romans left our island and the Picts and Scots oppressed the Britons, many of them fled back over the sea to Brittany or Armorica, as it used to be called. Later still, when the Saxons came, the Britons were driven by degrees into the mountains of Wales and the wilds of Cornwall, while others fled again across the sea to Brittany. These took with them the stories which their minstrels told, and told them in their new home. So it came about that the stories which were told in Wales and in Cornwall were told in Brittany also.

And how were these stories brought back again to England?

Another part of France is called Normandy. The Normans and the Bretons were very different peoples, as different as the Britons and the English. But the Normans conquered part of Brittany, and a close relationship grew up between the two peoples. Conan, Duke of Brittany, and William, Duke of Normandy, were related to each other, and in a manner the Bretons owned the Duke of Normandy as overlord.

Now you know that in 1066 the great Duke William came sailing over the sea to conquer England, and with him came more soldiers from Brittany than from any other land. Perhaps the songs of the minstrels had kept alive in the hearts of the Bretons a memory of their island home. Perhaps that made them glad to come to help to drive out the hated Saxons. At any rate come they did, and brought with them their minstrel tales.

And soon through all the land the Norman power spread. And whether they first heard them in Armorica or in wild Wales, the Norman minstrels took the old Welsh stories and made them their own. And the best of all the tales were told of Arthur and his knights.

Doubtless the Normans added much to these stories. For although they were not good at inventing anything, they were very good at taking what others had invented and making it better. And

## *ABOUT SOME OLD WELSH STORIES AND STORY-TELLERS*

the English, too, as Norman power grew, clung more and more to the memory of the past. They forgot the difference between British and English, and in their thoughts Arthur grew to be a national hero, a hero who had loved his country, and who was not Norman.

The Normans, then, brought tales of Arthur with them when they came to England. They heard there still other tales and improved them, and Arthur thus began to grow into a great hero. I will now go on to show how he became still greater.

In the reign of Henry I. (the third Norman king who ruled our land) there lived a monk called Geoffrey of Monmouth. He was filled with the love of his land, and he made up his mind to write a history of the kings of Britain.

Geoffrey wrote his book in Latin, because at this time it was the language which most people could understand. For a long time after the Normans came to England, they spoke Norman French. The English still spoke English, and the British Welsh or Cymric. But every one almost who could read at all could read Latin. So Geoffrey chose to write in Latin. He said he translated all that he wrote from an old British book which had been brought from Brittany and given to him. But that old British book has never been seen by any one, and it is generally thought that Geoffrey took old Welsh tales and fables for a foundation, invented a good deal more, and so made his history, and that the "old British Book" never existed at all. His book may not be very good history—indeed, other historians were very angry and said that Geoffrey "lied saucily and shamelessly"—but it is very delightful to read.

Geoffrey's chief hero is Arthur, and we may say that it is from this time that Arthur became a great hero of Romance. For Geoffrey told his stories so well that they soon became famous, and they were read not only in England, but all over the Continent. Soon story-tellers and poets in other lands began to write stories about Arthur too, and from then till now there has never been a time when they have not been read. So to the Welsh must be given the honor of having sown a seed from which has grown the wide-spreading tree we call the Arthurian Legend.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Geoffrey begins his story long before the time of Arthur. He begins with the coming of Brutus, the ancient hero who conquered Albion and changed its name to Britain, and he continues to about two hundred years after the death of Arthur. But Arthur is his real hero, so he tells the story in very few words after his death.

Geoffrey tells of many battles and of how the British fought, not only with the Saxons, but among themselves. And at last he says: "As barbarism crept in they were no longer called Britons, but Welsh, a word derived either from Gualo, one of their dukes, or from Guales, their Queen, or else from their being barbarians. But the Saxons did wiselier, kept peace and concord amongst themselves, tilling their fields and building anew their cities and castles. . . . But the Welsh degenerating from the nobility of the Britons, never after recovered the sovereignty of the island, but on the contrary quarreling at one time amongst themselves, and at another with the Saxons, never ceased to have bloodshed on hand either in public or private feud."

Geoffrey then says that he hands over the matter of writing about the later Welsh and Saxon kings to others, "Whom I bid be silent as to the kings of the Britons, seeing that they have not that book in the British speech which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, did convey hither out of Brittany, the which I have in this wise been at the pains of translating into the Latin speech."

### BOOKS TO READ

*The Mabinogion*, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest. Everyman's Library.  
Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Histories*, translated by Sebastian Evans.

## CHAPTER VII

# HOW THE STORY OF ARTHUR WAS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH

GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH had written his stories so well, that although he warned people not to write about the British kings, they paid no heed to his warning. Soon many more people began to write about them, and especially about Arthur.

In 1155 Geoffrey died, and that year a Frenchman, or Jerseyman rather, named Robert Wace, finished a long poem which he called *Li Romans de Brut* or the *Romances of Brutus*. This poem was founded upon Geoffrey's history and tells much the same story, to which Wace has added something of his own. Besides Wace, many writers told the tale in French. For French, you must remember, was still the language of the rulers of our land. It is to these French writers, and chiefly to Walter Map, perhaps, that we owe something new which was now added to the Arthur story.

Walter Map, like so many of the writers of this early time, was a priest. He was chaplain to Henry II., and was still alive when John, the bad king, sat upon the throne.

The first writers of the Arthur story had made a great deal of manly strength: it was often little more than a tale of hard knocks given and taken. Later it became softened by the thought of courtesy, with the idea that knights might give and take these hard knocks for the sake of a lady they loved, and in the cause of all women.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Now something full of mystery was added to the tale. This was the Quest of the Holy Grail.

The Holy Grail was said to be a dish used by Christ at the Last Supper. It was also said to have been used to hold the sacred blood which, when Christ hung upon the cross, flowed from his wounds. The Holy Grail came into the possession of Joseph of Arimathea, and by him was brought to Britain. But after a time the vessel was lost, and the story of it even forgotten, or only remembered in some dim way.

And this is the story which the poet-priest, Walter Map, used to give new life and new glory to the tales of Arthur. He makes the knights of the round table set forth to search for the Grail. They ride far away over hill and dale, through dim forests and dark waters. They fight with men and fiends, alone and in tournaments. They help fair ladies in distress, they are tempted to sin, they struggle and repent, for only the pure in heart may find the holy vessel.

It is a wonderful and beautiful story, and these old story-tellers meant it to be something more than a fairy tale. They saw around them many wicked things. They saw men fighting for the mere love of fighting. They saw men following pleasure for the mere love of pleasure. They saw men who were strong oppress the weak and grind down the poor, and so they told the story of the Quest of the Holy Grail to try to make them a little better.

With every new writer the story of Arthur grew. It seemed to draw all the beauty and wonder of the time to itself, and many stories which at first had been told apart from it came to be joined to it. We have seen how it has been told in Welsh, in Latin, and in French, and, last of all, we have it in English.

The first great English writer of the stories of Arthur was named Layamon. He, too, was a priest, and, like Wace, he wrote in verse.

Like Wace, Layamon called his book the *Brut*, because it is the story of the Britons, who took their name from Brutus, and of Arthur the great British hero. This book is known, therefore, as

## HOW THE STORY OF ARTHUR WAS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH

Layamon's *Brut*. Layamon took Wace's book for a foundation, but he added a great deal to it, and there are many stories in Layamon not to be found in Wace. It is probable that Layamon did not make up these stories, but that many of them are old tales he heard from the people among whom he lived.

Layamon finished his book towards the end of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth. Perhaps he sat quietly writing it in his cell when the angry barons were forcing King John to sign the Magna Charta. At least he wrote it when all England was stirring to new life again. The fact that he wrote in English shows that, for Layamon's *Brut* is the first book written in English after the Conquest. This book proves how little hold the French language had upon the English people, for although our land had been ruled by Frenchmen for a hundred and fifty years, there are very few words in Layamon that are French or that are even made from French.

But although Layamon wrote his book in English, it was not the English that we speak to-day. It was what is called Early English or even sometimes Semi-Saxon. If you opened a book of Layamon's *Brut* you would, I fear, not be able to read it.

We know very little of Layamon; all that we do know he tells us himself in the beginning of his poem. "A priest was in the land," he says:

"Layamon was he called.  
He was Leouenathe's son, the Lord to him be gracious.  
He lived at Ernleye at a noble church  
Upon Severn's bank. Good there to him it seemed  
Fast by Radestone, where he books read.  
It came to him in mind, and in his first thoughts,  
That he would of England the noble deeds tell,  
What they were named and whence they came,  
The English land who first possessed  
After the flood which from the Lord came.

Layamon began to journey, far he went over the land  
And won the noble books, which he for pattern took.  
He told the English book that Saint Beda made.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Another he took in Latin which Saint Albin made,  
And the fair Austin who baptism brought hither.  
Book the third he took laid it in the midst  
That the French clerk made. Wace he was called,  
He well could write.

. . . . .

Layamon laid these books down and the leaves turned.  
He them lovingly beheld, the Lord to him be mercifull!  
Pen he took in fingers and wrote upon a book skin,  
And the true words set together,  
And the three books pressed to one.”

That, in words such as we use now, is how Layamon begins his poem. But this is how the words looked as Layamon wrote them:—

“An preost wes on leoden: lazamon wes ihoten.  
he wes Leouenaóes sone: líóe him beo drihte.”

You can see that it would not be very easy to read that kind of English. Nor does it seem very like poetry in either the old words or the modern. But you must remember that old English poetry was not like ours. It did not have rhyming words at the end of the lines.

Anglo-Saxon poetry depended for its pleasantness to the ear, not on rhyme as does ours, but on accent and alliteration. Alliteration means the repeating of a letter. Accent means that you rest longer on some syllables, and say them louder than others. For instance, if you take the line “the way was long, the wind was cold,” way, long, wind, and cold are accented. So there are four accents in that line.

Now, in Anglo-Saxon poetry the lines were divided into two half-lines. And in each half there had to be two or more accented syllables. But there might also be as many unaccented syllables as the poet liked. So in this way the lines were often very

## HOW THE STORY OF ARTHUR WAS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH

unequal, some being quite short and others long. Three of the accented syllables, generally two in the first half and one in the second half of the line, were alliterative. That is, they began with the same letter. In translating, of course, the alliteration is very often lost. But sometimes the Semi-Saxon words and the English words are very like each other, and the alliteration can be kept. So that even in translation we can get a little idea of what the poetry sounded like. For instance, the line “*ƿat heo ihoten ƿeoren: and ƿonene heo comen,*” the alliteration is on *w*, and may be translated “*what they called were, and whence they came,*” still keeping the alliteration.

Upon these rules of accent and alliteration the strict form of Anglo-Saxon verse was based. But when the Normans came they brought a new form of poetry, and gradually rhymes began to take the place of alliteration. Layamon wrote his *Brut* more than a hundred years after the coming of the Normans, and although his poem is in the main alliterative, sometimes he has rhyming lines such as “*mochel dal heo iwesten: mid harmen pen mesten,*” that is:—

“Great part they laid waste:  
With harm the most.”

Sometimes even in translation the rhyme may be kept, as:—

“And faer forh nu to niht:  
In to Norewaieze forh riht.”

which can be translated:—

“And fare forth now to-night  
Into Norway forth right.”

At times, too, Layamon has neither rhyme nor alliteration in his lines, sometimes he has both, so that his poem is a link between the old poetry and the new.

I hope that you are not tired with this long explanation, for I think if you take the trouble to understand it, it may make the rest

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

of this chapter more interesting. Now I will tell you a little more of the poem itself.

Layamon tells many wonderful stories of Arthur, from the time he was born to his last great battle in which he was killed, fighting against the rebel Modred.

This is how Layamon tells the story of Arthur's death, or rather of his "passing":

“Arthur went to Cornwall with a great army.  
Modred heard that and he against him came  
With unnumbered folk. There were many of them fated.  
Upon the Tambre they came together,  
The place was called Camelford, evermore has that name lasted.  
And at Camelford were gathered sixty thousand  
And more thousands thereto. Modred was their chief.  
Then hitherward gan ride Arthur the mighty  
With numberless folk fated though they were.  
Upon the Tambre they came together,  
Drew their long swords, smote on the helmets,  
So that fire sprang forth. Spears were splintered,  
Shields gan shatter, shafts to break.  
They fought all together folk unnumbered.  
Tambre was in flood with unmeasured blood.  
No man in the fight might any warrior know,  
Nor who did worse nor who did better so was the conflict mingled,  
For each slew downright were he swain were he knight.  
There was Modred slain and robbed of his life day.

In the fight

There were slain all the brave  
Arthur's warriors noble.  
And the Britons all of Arthur's board,  
And all his lieges of many a kingdom.  
And Arthur sore wounded with war spear broad.  
Fifteen he had fearful wounds.  
One might in the least two gloves thrust.  
Then was there no more in the fight on life  
Of two hundred thousand men that there lay hewed in pieces  
But Arthur the king alone, and of his knights twain.  
But Arthur was sore wounded wonderously much.  
Then to him came a knave who was of his kindred.

## *HOW THE STORY OF ARTHUR WAS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH*

He was Cador's son the earl of Cornwall.  
Constantine hight the knave. He was to the king dear.  
Arthur him looked on where he lay on the field,  
And these words said with sorrowful heart.  
Constantine thou art welcome thou wert Cador's son,  
I give thee here my kingdom.  
Guard thou my Britons so long as thou livest,  
And hold them all the laws that have in my days stood  
And all the good laws that in Uther's days stood.  
And I will fare to Avelon to the fairest of all maidens  
To Argente their Queen, an elf very fair,  
And she shall my wounds make all sound  
All whole me make with healing draughts,  
And afterwards I will come again to my kingdom  
And dwell with the Britons with mickle joy.  
Even with the words that came upon the sea  
A short boat sailing, moving amid the waves  
And two women were therein wouderously clad.  
And they took Arthur anon and bare him quickly  
And softly him adown laid and to glide forth gan they.  
Then was it comewhat Merlin said whilom  
That unmeasured sorrow should beat Arthur's forth faring.  
Britons believe yet that he is still in life  
And dwelleth in Avelon with the fairest of all elves,  
And every Briton looketh still when Arthur shall return.  
Was never the man born nor never the lady chosen  
Who knoweth of the sooth of Arthur to say more.  
But erstwhile there was a wizard Merlin called.  
He boded with words the which were sooth  
That an Arthur should yet come the English to help."

You see by this last line that Layamon has forgotten the difference between Briton and English. He has forgotten that in his lifetime Arthur fought against the English. To him Arthur has become an English hero. And perhaps he wrote these last words with the hope in his heart that some day some one would arise who would deliver his dear land from the rule of the stranger Normans. This, we know, happened. Not, indeed, by the might of one man, but by the might of the English spirit, the strong spirit which had

*ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS*

never died, and which Layamon himself showed was still alive when he wrote his book in English.

## CHAPTER VIII

# THE BEGINNING OF THE READING TIME

WE are now going on two hundred years to speak of another book about Arthur. This is *Morte d'Arthur*, by Sir Thomas Malory.

Up to this time all books had to be written by hand. But in the fifteenth century printing was discovered. This was one of the greatest things which ever happened for literature, for books then became much more plentiful and were not nearly so dear as they had been, and so many more people could afford to buy them. And thus learning spread.

It is not quite known who first discovered the art of printing, but William Caxton was the first man who set up a printing-press in England. He was an English wool merchant who had gone to live in Bruges, but he was very fond of books, and after a time he gave up his wool business, came back to England, and began to write and print books. One of the first books he printed was Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*.

In the preface Caxton tells us how, after he had printed some other books, many gentlemen came to him to ask him why he did not print a history of King Arthur, "which ought most to be remembered among us Englishmen afore all the Christian kings; to whom I answered that divers men hold opinion that there was no such Arthur, and all such books as be made of him be but fained matters and fables."

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

But the gentlemen persuaded Caxton until at last he undertook to “imprint a book of the noble histories of the said King Arthur and of certaine of his knights, after a copy unto me delivered, which copy Sir Thomas Malory tooke out of certaine bookes in the Frenche, and reduced it into English.”

It is a book, Caxton says, “wherein ye shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts. . . . Doe after the good and leave the ill, and it shall bring you unto good fame and renowne. And for to pass the time this booke shall be pleasant to read in.”

In 1485, when *Morte d'Arthur* was first printed, people indeed found it a book “pleasant to read in,” and we find it so still. It is written in English not unlike the English of to-day, and although it has a quaint, old-world sound, we can readily understand it.

*Morte d'Arthur* really means the death of Arthur, but the book tells not only of his death, but of his birth and life, and of the wonderful deeds of many of his knights. This is how Malory tells of the manner in which Arthur came to be king.

But first let me tell you that Uther Pendragon, the King, had died, and although Arthur was his son and should succeed to him, men knew it not. For after Arthur was born he was given to the wizard Merlin, who took the little baby to Sir Ector, a gallant knight, and charged him to care for him. And Sir Ector, knowing nothing of the child, brought him up as his own son.

Thus, after the death of the King, “the realm stood in great jeopardy a long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many weened to have been King.

“Then Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury and counselled him for to send for all the lords of the realm, and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should come to London afore Christmas upon pain of cursing, and for this cause, that as Jesus was born on that night, that he would of his great mercy show some miracle, as he was come to be king of all mankind, for to show some miracle who should be right wise king of this realm. So the Archbishop by the advice of Merlin, sent for all the lords and

## *THE BEGINNING OF THE READING TIME*

gentlemen of arms that they should come by Christmas even unto London. . . . So in the greatest church of London, whether it were Paul's or not the French book maketh no mention, all the estates were long or<sup>1</sup> day in the church for to pray. And when matins and the first mass were done, there was seen in the churchyard, against the high altar, a great stone foursquare, like unto a marble stone, and in the midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus:— 'Whoso pulleth out this sword of the stone and anvil is rightwise king born of all England.'

"Then the people marvelled and told it to the Archbishop. . . . So when all masses were done, all the lords went to behold the stone and the sword. And when they saw the scripture, some essayed; such as would have been king. But none might stir the sword nor move it.

"'He is not here,' said the Archbishop, 'that shall achieve the sword, but doubt not God will make him known. But this is my counsel,' said the Archbishop, 'that we let purvey ten knights, men of good fame, and they to keep the sword.'

"So it was ordained, and then there was made a cry, that every man should essay that would, for to win the sword. . . .

"Now upon New Year's Day, when the service was done, the barons rode unto the field, some to joust, and some to tourney, and so it happened that Sir Ector rode unto the jousts, and with him rode Sir Kay his son, and young Arthur that was his nourished brother. So as they rode to the jousts-ward, Sir Kay had lost his sword for he had left it at his father's lodging, and so he prayed young Arthur for to ride for his sword.

"'I will well,' said Arthur, and rode fast after the sword, and when he came home, the lady and all were out to see the jousting. Then was Arthur wroth and said to himself, 'I will ride to the churchyard, and take the sword with me that sticketh in the stone, for my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this

<sup>1</sup> Before.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

day.' So when he came to the churchyard Sir Arthur alit and tied his horse to the stile, and so he went to the tent and found no knights there, for they were at the jousting, and so he handled the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode his way until he came to his brother Sir Kay, and delivered him the sword.

"And as soon as Sir Kay saw the sword he wist well it was the sword of the stone, and he rode to his father Sir Ector and said: 'Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone, wherefore I must be king of this land.'

"When Sir Ector beheld the sword he returned again and came to the church, and there they alit all three, and went into the church. And anon he made Sir Kay to swear upon a book how he came to that sword.

" 'Sir,' said Sir Kay, 'by my brother Arthur, for he brought it to me.'

" 'How got ye this sword?' said Sir Ector to Arthur.

" 'Sir, I will tell you. When I came home for my brother's sword, I found no body at home to deliver me his sword, and so I thought my brother Sir Kay should not go swordless, and so I came hither eagerly and pulled it out of the stone without any pain.'

" 'Found ye any knights about the sword?' said Sir Ector.

" 'Nay,' said Arthur.

" 'Now,' said Sir Ector to Arthur, 'I understand ye must be king of this land.'

" 'Wherefore I,' said Arthur, 'and for what cause?'

" 'Sir,' said Ector, 'for God will have it so, for there should never man have drawn out this sword, but he that should be rightwise king of this land. Now let me see if ye can put the sword there as it was and pull it out again.'

" 'That is no mastery,' said Arthur. And so he put it in the stone. Therewithall Sir Ector essayed to pull out the sword and failed.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE READING TIME

“‘Now essay,’ said Sir Ector unto Sir Kay. And anon he pulled at the sword with all his might, but it would not be.

“‘Now shall ye essay,’” said Sir Ector unto Arthur.

“‘I will well,’ said Arthur, and pulled it out easily.

“‘And therewithall Sir Ector knelt down to the earth, and Sir Kay.’”

And so Arthur was acknowledged king. “And so anon was the coronation made,” Malory goes on to tell us, “and there was Arthur sworn unto his lords and to the commons for to be a true king, to stand with true justice from henceforth the days of his life.”

For the rest of all the wonderful stories of King Arthur and his knights you must go to *Morte d'Arthur* itself. For the language is so simple and clear that it is a book that you can easily read, though there are some parts that you will not understand or like and which you need not read yet.

But of all the books of which we have spoken this is the first which you could read in the very words in which it was written down. I do not mean that you could read it as it was first printed, for the oldest kind of printing was not unlike the writing used in manuscripts and so seems hard to read now. Besides which, although nearly all the words Malory uses are words we still use, the spelling is a little different, and that makes it more difficult to read.

The old lettering looked like this:—

**“With that Sir Arthur turned with his knights, and smote behind and before, and ever Sir Arthur was in the foremost press till his horse was slain under him.”**

That looks difficult. But here it is again in our own lettering:—

“With that Sir Arthur turned with his knights, and smote behind and before, and ever Sir Arthur was in the foremost press till his horse was slain under him.”

## ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

That is quite easy to read, and there is not a word in it that you cannot understand. For since printing came our language has changed very much less than it did before. And when printing came, the listening time of the world was done and the reading time had begun. As books increased, less and less did people gather to hear others read aloud or tell tales, and more and more people learned to read for themselves, until now there is hardly a boy or girl in all the land who cannot read a little.

It is perhaps because *Morte d'Arthur* is easily read that it has become a storehouse, a treasure-book, to which other writers have gone, and from which they have taken stories and woven them afresh and given them new life. Since Caxton's time *Morte d'Arthur* has been printed many times, and it is through it perhaps, more than through the earlier books, that the stories of Arthur still live for us. Yet it is not perfect—it has indeed been called “a most pleasant jumble.”<sup>1</sup> Malory made up none of the stories; as he himself tells us, he took them from French books, and in some of these French books the stories are told much better. But what we have to remember and thank Malory for is that he kept alive the stories of Arthur. He did this more than any other writer in that he wrote in English such as all English-speaking people must love to read.

### BOOKS TO READ

*Stories of King Arthur's Knights*, by Mary Macgregor.

*Stories from Morte d'Arthur*, by C. L. Thomson. *Morte d'Arthur*, Globe Edition.

<sup>1</sup> J. Furnivell.