

But it is especially in the matter of the Middle Ages that the popular histories trample upon the popular traditions. In this respect there is an almost comic contrast between the general information provided about England in the last two or three centuries, in which its present industrial system was being built up, and the general information given about the preceding centuries, which we call broadly mediæval. Of the sort of waxwork history which is thought sufficient for the side-show of the age of abbots and crusaders, a small instance will be sufficient. A popular Encyclopædia appeared some years ago, professing among other things to teach English History to the masses; and in this I came upon a series of pictures of the English kings. No one could expect them to be all authentic; but the interest attached to those that were necessarily imaginary. There is much vivid material in contemporary literature for portraits of men like Henry II. or Edward I.; but this did not seem to have been found, or even sought. And wandering to the image that stood for Stephen of Blois, my eye was staggered by a gentleman with one of those helmets with steel brims curved like a crescent, which went with the age of ruffs and trunk-hose. I am pretty nearly satisfied that the head was that of a halbadier