

I.

Introduction.

The life of Richard Coeur de Lion fell in the midst of a period in which, more than in any other in the history of Western Europe, men gave themselves up to the delights of adventure and the sturdy joys of living; when, more than at any other time, life was made a romance. It was not a time, indeed, of such unclouded sunshine as we might be led to suppose from the poetry of the Troubadours alone, which was then at its zenith, but the spontaneous freshness of this poetry, pre-eminently lyric as it was, shows us at every step that the poetic and the prosaic, the romantic and the every-day, aspects of life were more nearly one than they ever were before or have been since. And Richard Coeur de Lion was at once one of the most important figures in the political world of that time, and one of the time's most typical representatives.

Though king of England from 1189 to 1199 Richard spent scarcely six months of his reign on the island, a fact, however, which must not mislead us to believe that his sympathies were entirely estranged from this the principal part of his kingdom. England was then, as far as the court and the upper classes were concerned, as thoroughly French as France itself. From the year 1066, when William duke of Normandy defeated Harold the last of the Saxon kings at Hastings and made himself king of England, French influence had ruled supreme. And Richard Coeur de Lion was even less English than his predecessors since the conquest, spent less of his time on the island, and bestowed less care on its government. But this was chiefly owing to