

English literature cannot be studied apart from English history, from the formation and upbuilding of the nation. It is a rich composite. Greece, for example, was a hermit people, and the foreign influence upon the style of thought was very slight. The earlier literature of Rome was modelled after the masterpieces of Greece; and although Roman arms were borne over almost every nation of Western Europe, yet the national character was too fixed and too imperious to yield to the rough views of inferior colonies. England is different, however. The early Aborigines, of whom the accounts are so slender, were subdued by the martial energy of Rome. Then the Islanders were broken into two divisions, the Romanized British, who represented the governing power, and the Un-Romanized British who roamed among the marshes and forests of primæval England and who could not brook the chafing yoke of a foreign race. Then when the Romanized British had so far declined that the untamed tribes of the interior were thirsting for war and were likely to overpower them, they called upon the English from the old German fatherland to quell the revolt. The allies, however, became the dominant power, and a long bloody strife for the supremacy ensued between the Saxons themselves. Then when the endless rivalries of the Saxon kingdoms had produced no stated order, the Danes crossed over to figure on the scene, and for a time they seemed destined to subjugate the island. It was during this stormy period of tumult that Rome appears again, as if to claim her earlier sceptre; Pope Gregory sent Augustine to convert the natives to his creed. Then William the Conqueror crossed to Britain, and Britain bowed to Norman rule, and the more distant result was that the leading towns and especially the dependents on the royal court were converts to Norman customs. Speaking ethnologically therefore, Britain is a varied formation. The ruthless, warlike, rugged energy of the Saxons and Danes (who were both of one blood); the law-making, order-keeping, governing genius of ancient Italy; the fire and versatile brilliancy of Normandy; these three distinct elements have blended together in one great nationality. This complete composite of itself promises a magnificent literature.

A closer criticism will discover that our literature in its course of growth has been affected, and that not faintly, by other and perhaps subtler causes.

Far back, when the Catholic Missionaries strove to quiet the turbulent disputes between the Saxon kingdoms in Britain, Cædman appears. His poetry is founded on religion, yet it breathes war. The lines of the verses tramp like the lines of soldiery. The abrupt interjections, the savage imageries, the martial outbursts, the keen joy of revenge, the violent phrases, image the battle-field. Even religion assumed a cruel shape, for the excited imagination was colored by the restless motion and contest of the age. Another colossal figure stands out boldly, Father Bæda, of unlimited scholarship, of religious passion, a prolific writer of treatises, and of a history which is a straight narrative of events, curiously enlivened and interspersed with legends and quaint stories, but wanting that philosophic connection which modern investigation demands in a history.

Literature, like geology, has its definite periods of development; and Geoffrey Chaucer ushered in the second period about 1350. What was the condition of the kingdom? The odious distinction between the Norman and the Saxon was wearing away; the people had wrested from royalty the right of self-taxation, of decisions for war, of control over internal affairs; a new flush of life began to shapen trade and agriculture; the old cast-iron feudalism