

beautiful and consequently had no capacity for art. And we may extend this reproach even to Englishmen ; for what have they done for music, painting and architecture ? It is no exaggeration to say that they have made the finest working institutions and the ugliest attempts at art of any nation in the world. The only fine art the English have succeeded in is poetry and for this they must thank the Norman and the Celt.

They had need of such an impetus if they would do anything in imaginative literature. Their productions before the Norman Conquest were abominable. They wrote chronicles in bad prose and legends in worse metre and seemed wholly incapable of ever doing better. To them "the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling" was a thing unknown. There was need of the Norman leaven to relieve this home-baked Saxon loaf of its heaviness. Dwelling in the green fields of the sunny south it is no wonder that the Normans possessed a much livelier imagination than did the Anglo-Saxons in their fog-environed island. This was intensified by the Normans' love of glory and their chivalrous customs. Whilst sordid Saxons were intent only in raising large crops and fine stock the Norman French were struck with the beauties of nature by which they were surrounded and were impelled by their appreciation of them to illustrate these beauties in their works of art. The cold-blooded Saxons beheld in nature nothing but what could be turned to their own advantage, whilst the Normans, on the contrary, found there fuel to feed their imagination and thereby increase the genial warmth of their character. Chivalry, whose generous sentiments prompted so many noble actions, was wholly unknown to the Saxons. In fact the Saxon mind was so obtuse that what penetrated it had to be a very material fact indeed.

Here again it was just the contrary with the Norman French. Chivalry was, for a long time, the principal motive of all their actions. The vivacity of the Norman character gave them a literature at a very early period, a literature imperfect, it is true, but vastly superior to the miserable

attempts of their contemporaries, the stolid Anglo-Saxons. The influence of the Normans was felt in England during the reign of Edward the Confessor. As he had been educated in Normandy he was naturally inclined to adopt some of the Norman customs. After the battle of Hastings this influence became wholly predominant and gave to the Anglo-Saxon literature an impetus it had never known before. The imagination of the Normans and the solid understanding of the Saxons were the parts of English genius. The liveliness of the Normans deprived the Saxon mind of its uncouthness and infused into it the lightness and grace of the Norman literature.

If anyone wishes to form an idea of Saxon literature as it was before the Norman Conquest let him read one of John Gower's works. For, though Gower lived after the Conquest, he seems to have written only for the purpose of giving a last proof of the clumsiness and stolidity of the Anglo-Saxons. The first effect of the Norman yeast on the Saxon dough is to be found in Geoffrey Chaucer, who though contemporary with Gower differed from him as day from night. Gower has actually raised tediousness to a science while Chaucer has a certain freshness and charm that pleases even yet, notwithstanding the remoteness of the age. In proportion as the Norman influence gained ground the Saxon literature improved. First came Chaucer then Spenser and finally Shakespeare, the greatest dramatic poet the world has ever produced. It is then clearly proven that the union of these two nations was an unmixed blessing so far as English literature is concerned.

But was it equally beneficial to the English language ? As the Normans at the time of the Conquest were in a minority they made use of various means to perpetuate their predominance in England. They did not, however, endeavor to exterminate the Saxons ; on the contrary they sought to keep them on the soil as a subject and servile race. To accomplish this they endeavoured to depress the social and political condition of the Saxons as much as possible. They introduced