

"I will not say too much about it,
 So diverse is the matter,
 Among those who are in the habit of telling
 And relating the story of Tristran."

This is a specimen of the language which was in use among the nobility of England, in the ages immediately after the Norman conquest. The following is a specimen of the English that existed at the same time, among the common people. Robert de Brunne, speaking of his Latin and French authorities, says:

"Als thai haf wryten and sayd
 Haf I alle in myn Inglis layd,
 In symple speche as I couthe,
 That is lightest in manne's mouthe.
 Alle for the luf of symple men,
 That strange Inglis cannot ken."

The "strange Inglis" being the language of the previous specimen.

It was not till toward the end of the thirteenth century that the prose romances began to appear. These works generally began with disowning and discrediting the sources from which in reality they drew their sole information. As every romance was supposed to be a real history, the compilers would have forfeited all credit if they had announced themselves as mere copyists of the minstrels. On the contrary, they usually state that, as the popular poems upon the matter in question contain many lesings,¹ they had been induced to translate the real and true history of such or such a knight from the original Latin or Greek, or from the ancient British or Armorican authorities, which authorities existed only in their own assertion.

A specimen of the style of the prose romances may be found in the following extract from one of the most celebrated and latest of them, the *Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Mallory, of fourteen hundred and eighty-five. From this work much of the contents of this volume has been drawn, with as close an adherence to the original style as was thought consistent with our plan of adapting our narrative to the taste of modern readers.

"It is notoyrly knowen thourgh the vnyuersal world that there

¹ Falsities.