

the fact that the exigencies of the time called him elsewhere, and forced him to devote nearly all his energies to maintaining his possessions in France intact. England in the meantime, safe from the attacks of his enemies, and with its peaceful population already at work laying the foundations of future mercantile prosperity, was principally useful to Richard in furnishing him with the means of carrying on his expensive wars and exploits in France and in countries farther away. In spite, however, of his seeming neglect of this portion of his subjects, he was held by them in the very highest esteem, and it was they who longest perpetuated his valorous deeds in their poetry. In as short a period as about a century after his death Richard Coeur de Lion had become almost as much a mythical personage in epic poetry as Roland and Charlemagne. This quick process of heroification, if one may use the word, was begun by Norman-French romancers and, probably about the beginning of the fourteenth century, taken up by versifiers in the English language; the course of political events at that time favored the process, and with the rapid fusion of the numerically small, but politically great, element of Norman-French conquerors with the main body of the English people, Richard became transformed by the singers into a national English hero, whose chief glory was his life-long antagonism to the French. The fact that he was French himself and had only been the rival and enemy of another king in France, had in the course of a hundred years faded away to a dim tradition, and Richard in the heroic poetry of the fourteenth century was only the brilliant counterpart of the Edward of the then national struggles with a later French rival. But in the meantime the political relations of France and England had very greatly altered, and „France“ had come to denote an altogether different tract upon the map of Europe. Here it is not necessary to follow the course of these political changes, but some account of Richard Coeur de Lion's life and sphere of action will form the most fitting standpoint from which to view the tortuous path he wandered,