

***GEORGE
SAINTSBURY***

A photograph of a highly ornate, classical-style theater marquee. The structure is painted in a light cream or off-white color, featuring intricate gold-colored scrollwork and decorative elements. A large, arched section of the marquee is painted a deep teal or blue color, with a central circular motif. The marquee is adorned with numerous small, round, silver-colored lights. Below the marquee, several vertical poles support a series of draped curtains in alternating teal and cream colors. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sky.

***A HISTORY
OF THE FRENCH
NOVEL***

George Saintsbury

A History of the French Novel

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PREFACE

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In beginning what, if it ever gets finished, must in all probability be the last of some already perhaps too numerous studies of literary history, I should like to point out that the plan of it is somewhat different from that of most, if not all, of its predecessors. I have usually gone on the principle (which I still think a sound one) that, in studying the literature of a country, or in dealing with such general characteristics of parts of literature as prosody, or such coefficients of all literature as criticism, minorities are, sometimes at least, of as much importance as majorities, and that to omit them altogether is to risk, or rather to assure, an imperfect—and dangerously imperfect—product.

In the present instance, however, I am attempting something that I have never, at such length, attempted before—the history of a Kind, and a Kind which has distinguished itself, as few others have done, by communicating to readers the *pleasure* of literature. I might almost say that it is the history of that pleasure, quite as much as the history of the kind itself, that I wish to trace. In doing so it is obviously superfluous to include inferiorities and failures, unless they have some very special lesson or interest, or have been (as in the case of the minorities on the bridge of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) for the most part, and unduly, neglected, though they are important as experiments and links.^[1] We really do want here—what the reprehensible hedonism of Mr. Matthew

Arnold, and his submission to what some one has called "the eternal enemy, Caprice," wanted in all cases—"only the chief and principal things." I wish to give a full history of how what is commonly called the French Novel came into being and kept itself in being; but I do not wish to give an exhaustive, though I hope to give a pretty full, account of its practitioners.

In another point, however, I have kept to my old ways, and that is the way of beginning at the beginning. I disagree utterly with any Balbus who would build an absolute wall between romance and novel, or a wall hardly less absolute between verse- and prose-fiction. I think the French have (what is not common in their language) an advantage over us in possessing the general term *Roman*, and I have perhaps taken a certain liberty with my own title in order to keep the noun-part of it to a single word. I shall extend the meaning of "novel"—that of *roman* would need no extension—to include, not only the prose books, old and new, which are more generally called "romance," but the verse romances of the earlier period.

The subject is one with which I can at least plead almost lifelong familiarity. I became a subscriber to "Rolandi's," I think, during my holidays as a senior schoolboy, and continued the subscriptions during my vacations when I was at Oxford. In the very considerable leisure which I enjoyed during the six years when I was Classical Master at Elizabeth College, Guernsey, I read more French than any other literature, and more novels than anything else in French. In the late 'seventies and early 'eighties, as well as more recently, I had to round off and fill in my knowledge of the

older matter, for an elaborate account of French literature in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, for a long series of articles on French novelists in the *Fortnightly Review*, and for the *Primer* and *Short History* of the subject which I wrote for the Clarendon Press; while from 1880 to 1894, as a *Saturday Reviewer*, I received, every month, almost everything notable (and a great deal hardly worth noting) that had appeared in France.

Since then, the cutting off of this supply, and the extreme and constant urgency of quite different demands on my time, have made my cultivation of the once familiar field "*parc* and infrequent." But I doubt whether any really good judge would say that this was a serious drawback in itself; and it ceases to be one, even relatively, by the restriction of the subject to the close of the last century. It will be time to write of the twentieth-century novel when the twentieth century itself has gone more than a little farther.

For the abundance of translation, in the earlier part especially, I need, I think, make no apology. I shall hardly, by any one worth hearing, be accused of laziness or scamping in consequence of it, for translation is much more troublesome, and takes a great deal more time, than comment or history. The advantage, from all other points of view, should need no exposition: nor, I think, should that of pretty full story-abstract now and then.

There is one point on which, at the risk of being thought to "talk too much of my matters," I should like to say a further word. All my books, before the present volume, have been composed with the aid of a library, not very large, but constantly growing, and always reinforced with special

reference to the work in hand; while I was able also, on all necessary occasions, to visit Oxford or London (after I left the latter as a residence), and for twenty years the numerous public or semi-public libraries of Edinburgh were also open to me. This present *History* has been outlined in expectation for a very long time; and has been actually laid down for two or three years. But I had not been able to put much of it on paper when circumstances, while they gave me greater, indeed almost entire, leisure for writing, obliged me to part with my own library (save a few books with a reserve *pretium affectionis* on them), and, though they brought me nearer both to Oxford and to London, made it less easy for me to visit either. The London Library, that Providence of unbooked authors, came indeed to my aid, for without it I should have had to leave the book alone altogether; and I have been "munitioned" sometimes, by kindness or good luck, in other ways. But I have had to rely much more on memory, and of course in some cases on previous writing of my own, than ever before, though, except in one special case,^[2] there will be found, I think, not a single page of mere "rehashing." I mention this without the slightest desire to beg off, in one sense, from any omissions or mistakes which may be found here, but merely to assure my readers that such mistakes and omissions are not due to idle and careless bookmaking. That "books have fates" is an accepted proposition. In respect to one of these—possession of materials and authorities—mine have been exceptionally fortunate hitherto, and if they had any merit it was no doubt largely due to this. I have, in the present, endeavoured to make the best of what was not quite such

good fortune. And if anybody still says, "Why did you not wait till you could supply deficiencies?" I can only reply that, after seventy, νυξ γὰρ ἐρχεται is a more insistent warrant, and warning, than ever.^[3]

GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

[Edinburgh, 1914-15; Southampton, 1915-16]

1 ROYAL CRESCENT, BATH, *May 31, 1917.*

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA

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P. 3, *note*.—This note was originally left vague, because, in the first place, to perform public and personal fantasias with one's spear on the shield of a champion, with whom one does not intend to fight out the quarrel, seems to me bad chivalry, and secondly, because those readers who were likely to be interested could hardly mistake the reference. The regretted death, a short time after the page was sent to press, of Mr. W. J. Courthope may give occasion to an acknowledgment, coupled with a sincere *ave atque vale*. Mr. Courthope was never an intimate friend of mine, and our agreement was greater in political than in literary matters: but for more than thirty years we were on the best terms of acquaintance, and I had a thorough respect for his accomplishments.

P. 20, l. 5.—*Fuerres de Gadres*. I wonder how many people thought of this when Englishmen "forayed Gaza" just before Easter, 1917?

P. 46, mid-page.—It so happened that, some time after having passed this sheet for press, I was re-reading Dante (as is my custom every year or two), and came upon that other passage (in the *Paradiso*, and therefore not known to more than a few of the thousands who know the Francesca one) in which the poet refers to the explanation between Lancelot and the Queen. It had escaped my memory (though I think I may say honestly that I knew it well enough) when I passed the sheet: but it seemed to me that

perhaps some readers, who do not care much for "parallel passages" in the pedantic sense, might, like myself, feel pleasure in having the great things of literature, in different places, brought together. Moreover, the *Paradiso* allusion seems to have puzzled or misled most of the commentators, including the late Mr. A. J. Butler, who, by his translation and edition of the *Purgatorio* in 1880, was my Virgil to lead me through the *Commedia*, after I had sinfully neglected it for exactly half a life-time. He did not know, and might easily not have known, the Vulgate *Lancelot*: but some of those whom he cites, and who evidently *did* know it, do not seem to have recognised the full significance of the passage in Dante. The text will give the original: the *Paradiso* (xvi. 13-15) reference tells how Beatrice (after Cacciaguida's biographical and historical recital, and when Dante, in a confessed outburst of family pride, addresses his ancestor with the stately *Voi*), "smiling, appeared like her who coughed at the first fault which is written of Guinevere." This, of course (see text once more), is the Lady of Malahault, though Dante does not name her as he does Prince Galahault in the other *locus*. The older commentators (who, as has been said, *did* know the original) do not seem to have seen in the reference much more than that both ladies noticed, and perhaps approved, what was happening. But I think there is more in it. The Lady of Malahault (see note in text) had previously been aware that Lancelot was deeply in love, though he would not tell her with whom. Her cough therefore meant: "Ah! I have found you out." Now Beatrice, well as she knew Dante's propensity to love, knew as well that *pride* was even more of a besetting weakness of

his. This was quite a harmless instance of it: but still it *was* an instance—and the "smile" which is *not* recorded of the Arthurian lady meant: "Ah! I have *caught* you out." Even if this be excessive "reading into" the texts, the juxtaposition of them may not be unsatisfactory to some who are not least worth satisfying. (Since writing this, I have been reminded that Mr. Paget Toynbee did make the "juxtaposition" in his Clarendon Press *Specimens of Old French* (October, 1892), printing there the "Lady of Malahault" passage from MSS. copied by Professor Ker. But there can be no harm in duplicating it.)

P. 121, ll. 8–10. Perhaps instead of, or at least beside, Archdeacon Grantly I should have mentioned a more real dignitary (as some count reality) of the Church, Charles Kingsley. The Archdeacon and the Canon would have fought on many ecclesiastical and some political grounds, but they might have got on as being, in Dr. Grantly's own words at a memorable moment "both gentlemen." At any rate, Kingsley was soaked in Rabelais, and one of the real curiosities of literature is the way in which the strength of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* helped to beget the sweetness of *The Water Babies*.

Chap. viii. pp. 163–175.—After I had "made my" own "siege" of the *Astrée* on the basis of notes recording a study of it at the B.M., Dr. Hagbert Wright of the London Library was good enough to let me know that his many years' quest of the book had been at last successful, and to give me the first reading of it. (It was Southey's copy, with his own unmistakable autograph and an inserted note, while it also contained a cover of a letter addressed to him, which had

evidently been used as a book-mark.) Although not more than four months had passed since the previous reading, I found it quite as appetising as (in the text itself) I had expressed my conviction that it would be: and things not noticed before cropped up most agreeably. There is no space to notice all or many of them here. But one of the earliest, due to Hylas, cannot be omitted, for it is the completest and most sententious vindication of polyerotism ever phrased: "Ce n'était pas que je n'aimasse les autres: mais j'avais encore, outre leur place, celle-ci vide dans mon âme." And the soul of Hylas, like Nature herself, abhorred a vacuum! (This approximation is not intended as "new and original": but it was some time after making it that I recovered, in *Notre Dame de Paris*, a forgotten anticipation of it by Victor Hugo.)

Another early point of interest was that the frontispiece portrait of Astrée (the edition, see *Bibliography*, appears to be the latest of the original and ungarbled ones, *imprimée à Rouen, et se vend à Paris* (1647, 10 vols.)) is evidently a portrait, though not an identical one, of the same face given in the Abbé Reure's engraving of Diane de Châteaumorand herself. The nose, especially, is hardly mistakable, but the eyes have rather less expression, and the mouth less character, though the whole face (naturally) looks younger.

On the other hand, the portrait here—not of Céladon, but admittedly of Honoré d'Urfé himself—is much less flattering than that in the Abbé's book.

Things specially noted in the second reading would (it has been said) overflow all bounds here possible: but we may perhaps find room for three lines from about the best of

the very numerous but not very poetical verses, at the beginning of the sixth (*i.e.* the middle of the original *third*) volume:

Le prix d'Amour c'est l'Amour même.
Change d'humeur qui s'y plaira,
Jamais Hylas ne changera,

the two last being the continuous refrain of a "villanelle" in which this bad man boasts his constancy in inconstancy.

P. 265, *note* 1.—It ought perhaps to be mentioned that Mlle. de Lussan's paternity is also, and somewhat more probably, attributed to Eugene's elder brother, Thomas of Savoy, Comte de Soissons. The lady is said to have been born in 1682, when Eugene (b. 1663) was barely nineteen; but of course this is not decisive. His brother Thomas *Amédée* (b. 1656) was twenty-six at the time. The attribution above mentioned gave no second name, and did not specify the relationship to Eugene: so I had some difficulty in identifying the person, as there were, in the century, three Princes Thomas of Savoy, and I had few books of reference. But my old friend and constant helper in matters historical, the Rev. William Hunt, D.Litt., cleared the point up for me. Of the other two—Thomas *François*, who was by marriage Comte de Soissons and was grandfather of Eugene and Thomas Amédée, died in the same year in which Thomas Amédée was born, therefore twenty-six before Mlle. de Lussan's birth: while the third, Thomas *Joseph*, Eugene's cousin, was not born till 1796, fourteen years after the lady. The matter is, of course, of no literary importance: but as I had passed the sheet for press before

noticing the diversity of statements, I thought it better to settle it.

P. 267. Pajon. I ought not to have forgotten to mention that he bears the medal of Sir Walter Scott (Introduction to *The Abbot*) as "a pleasing writer of French Fairy Tales."

Page 453.—Choderlos de Laclos. Some surprise has been expressed by a friend of great competence at my leaving out *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. I am, of course, aware that "persons of distinction" have taken an interest in it; and I understand that, not many years ago, the unfortunate author of the beautiful lines *To Cynara* wasted his time and talent on translating the thing. To make sure that my former rejection was not unjustified, I have accordingly read it with care since the greater part of this book was passed for press; and it shall have a judgment here, if not in the text. I am unable to find any redeeming point in it, except that some ingenuity is shown in bringing about the *dénouement* by a rupture between the villain-hero and the villainess-heroine, M. le Vicomte de Valmont and Mme. la Marquise de Merteuil. Even this, though fairly craftsmanlike in treatment, is banal enough in idea—that idea being merely that jealousy, in both sexes, survives love, shame, and everything else, even community in scoundrelism—in other words, that the green-eyed monster (like "Vernon" and unlike "Ver") *semper viret*. But it is scarcely worth one's while to read six hundred pages of very small print in order to learn this. Of amusement, as apart from this very elementary instruction, I at least can find nothing. The pair above mentioned, on whom practically hangs the whole appeal, are merely disgusting. Their very voluptuousness is

accidental: the sum and substance, the property and business of their lives and natures, are compact of mischief, malice, treachery, and the desire of "getting the better of somebody." Nor has this diabolism anything grand or impressive about it—anything that "intends greatly" and glows, as has been said, with a black splendour, in Marlowesque or Websterian fashion. Nor, again, is it a "Fleur du Mal" of the Baudelairian kind, but only an ugly as well as noxious weed. It is prosaic and suburban. There is neither tragedy nor comedy, neither passion nor humour, nor even wit, except a little horse-play. Congreve and Crébillon are as far off as Marlowe and Webster; in fact, the descent from Crébillon's M. de Clerval to Laclos' M. de Valmont is almost inexpressible. And, once more, there is nothing to console one but the dull and obvious moral that to adopt love-making as an "occupation" (*vide* text, p. 367) is only too likely to result in the τέχνη becoming, in vulgar hands, very βαναυσοῦς indeed.

The victims and *comparses* of the story do nothing to atone for the principals. The lacrimose stoop-to-folly-and-wring-his-bosom Mme. de Tourvel is merely a bore; the *ingénue* Cécile de Volanges is, as Mme. de Merteuil says, a *petite imbécile* throughout, and becomes no better than she should be with the facility of a predestined strumpet; her lover, Valmont's rival, and Mme. de Merteuil's plaything, M. le Chevalier Danceny, is not so very much better than *he* should be, and nearly as much an imbecile in the masculine way as Cécile in the feminine; her respectable mother and Valmont's respectable aunt are not merely as blind as owls are, but as stupid as owls are not. Finally, the book, which in

many particular points, as well as in the general letter-scheme, follows Richardson closely (adding clumsy notes to explain the letters, apologise for their style, etc.), exhibits most of the faults of its original with hardly any of that original's merits. Valmont, for instance, is that intolerable creature, a pattern Bad Man—a Grandison-Lovelace—a prig of vice. Indeed, I cannot see how any interest can be taken in the book, except that derived from its background of *tacenda*; and though no one, I think, who has read the present volume will accuse me of squeamishness, I can find in it no interest at all. The final situations referred to above, if artistically led up to and crisply told in a story of twenty to fifty pages, might have some; but ditchwatered out as they are, I have no use for them. The letter-form is particularly unfortunate, because, at least as used, it excludes the ironic presentation which permits one almost to fall in love with Becky Sharp, and quite to enjoy *Jonathan Wild*. Of course, if anybody says (and apologists *do* say that Laclos was, as a man, proper in morals and mild in manners) that to hold up the wicked to mere detestation is a worthy work, I am not disposed to argue the point. Only, for myself, I prefer to take moral diatribes from the clergy and aesthetic delectation from the artist. The avenging duel between Lovelace and Colonel Morden is finely done; that between Valmont and Danceny is an obvious copy of it, and not finely done at all. Some, again, of the riskiest passages in subject are made simply dull by a Richardsonian particularity which has no seasoning either of humour or of excitement. Now, a Richardson *de mauvais lieu* is more than a bore—it is a nuisance, not pure and simple, but impure and complex.

I have in old days given to a few novels (though, of course, only when they richly deserved it) what is called a "slating"—an *éreinement*—as I once had the honour of translating that word in conversation, at the request of a distinguished English novelist, for the benefit of a distinguished French one. Perhaps an example of the process is not utterly out of place in a *History* of the novel itself. But I have long given up reviewing fiction, and I do not remember any book of which I shall have to speak as I have just spoken. So *hic caestus*, etc.—though I am not such a coxcomb as to include *victor* in the quotation.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] For the opposite or corresponding reasons, it has seemed unnecessary to dwell on such persons, a hundred and more years later, as Voisenon and La Morlière, who are merely "corrupt followers" of Crébillon *fils*; or, between the two groups, on the numerous failures of the quasi-historical kind which derived partly from Mlle. de Scudéry and partly from Mme. de la Fayette.

[2] That of the minor "Sensibility" novelists in the last chapter.

[3] I have once more to thank Professors Ker, Elton, and Gregory Smith for their kindness in reading my proofs and making most valuable suggestions; as well as Professor Fitzmaurice-Kelly and the Rev. William Hunt for information on particular points.



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

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Although I have already, in two places,^[4] *The early history of prose fiction.* given a somewhat precise account of the manner in which fiction in the modern sense of the term, and especially prose fiction, came to occupy a province in modern literature which had been so scantily and infrequently cultivated in ancient, it would hardly be proper to enter upon the present subject with a mere reference to these other treatments. It is matter of practically no controversy (or at least of none in which it is worth while to take a part) that the history of prose fiction, before the Christian era, is very nearly a blank, and that, in the fortunately still fairly abundant remains of poetic fiction, "the story is the least part" (as Dryden says in another sense), or at least the *telling* of the story, in our modern sense, is so. Homer (in the *Odyssey* at any rate), Herodotus (in what was certainly not intentional fiction at all), and Xenophon^[5] are about the only Greek writers who can tell a story, for the magnificent narrative of Thucydides in such cases as those of the Plague and the Syracusan cataclysm shows all the "headstrong" *ethos* of the author in its positive refusal to assume a "story" character. In Latin there is nothing before Livy and Ovid;^[6] of whom the one falls into the same category with Herodotus and Xenophon, and the other, admirable *raconteur* as he is, thinks first of his poetry.

Scattered tales we have: "mimes" and other things there are some, and may have been more. But on the whole the schedule is not filled: there are no entries for the competition.

In later classical literature, both Greek *The late* and Latin, the state of things alters *classical stage*. considerably, though even then it cannot be said that fiction proper—that is to say, either prose or verse in which the accomplishment of the form is distinctly subordinate to the interesting treatment of the subject—constitutes a very large department, or even any regular department at all. If Lucius of Patrae was a real person, and much before Lucian, he may dispute with Petronius—that first-century Maupassant or Meredith, or both combined—the actual foundation of the novel as we have it; but Lucian himself and Apuleius (strangely enough handling the same subject in the two languages) give securer and more solid starting-places. Yet nothing follows Apuleius; though some time after Lucian the Greek romance, of which we have still a fair number of examples (spread, however, over a still larger number of centuries), establishes itself in a fashion. It does one thing, indeed, which in a way refounds or even founds the whole conception—it establishes the heroine. There are certainly feminine persons, sometimes not disagreeable, who play conspicuous and by no means mute or unpractical parts in both Greek and Latin versions of the Ass-Legend; but one can hardly call them heroines. There need be no chicane about the application of that title to Chloe or to Chariclea, to Leucippe or to her very remarkable rival, to Anthia or to Hysmine. Without the heroine you can

hardly have romance: the novel without her (though her individuality may be put in commission) is an absolute impossibility.

The connection between these curious *A nexus of* performances (with the much larger *Greek and* number of things like them which we know *French* to have existed) on the one side, and the *romance? The* Western mediaeval romance on the other, *facts about the* has been at various times matter of *matter.* considerable controversy; but it need not trouble us much here. The Greek romance was to have very great influence on the French novel later: on the earlier composition, generally called by the same name as itself, it would seem^[7] to have had next to none. Until we come to *Floire et Blanchefleur* and perhaps *Parthenopex*, things of a comparatively late stage, obviously post-Crusade, and so necessarily exposed to, and pretty clearly patient of, Greek-Eastern influence, there is nothing in Old French which shows even the same kinship to the Greek stories as the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*, which was probably or rather certainly in the original Greek itself. The sources of French "romance"—I must take leave to request a "truce of God" as to the application of that term and of "epic" for present purposes—appear to have been two—the Saint's Life and the patriotic or family *saga*, the latter in the first place indelibly affected by the Mahometan incursions of the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries. The story-telling instinct—kindled by, or at first devoted to, these subjects—subsequently fastened on numerous others. In fact almost all was fish that came to the magic net of Romance; and

though two great subjects of ours, the "Matter of Britain" (the Arthurian Legend) and the "Matter of Rome" (classical story generally, including the Tale of Troy), came traditionally to rank themselves with the "Matter of France" and with the great range of hagiology which it might have been dangerous to proclaim a fourth "matter" (even if anybody had been likely to take the view that it was so), these classifications are, like most of their kind, more specious than satisfactory.

Any person—though indeed it is to be feared that the number of such persons is not very large—who has some knowledge of hagiology and some of literature will admit at once that the popular notion of a Saint's Life being necessarily a dull and "goody" thing is one of the foolishlest pieces of presumptuous ignorance, and one of the most ignorant pieces of foolish presumption. Not only have modern novelists sometimes been better informed and better inspired—as in the case of more than one version of the Legends of St. Mary of Egypt, of St. Julian, of Saint Christopher, and others—but there remain scores if not hundreds of beautiful things that have been wholly or all but wholly neglected. It is impossible to imagine a better romance, either in verse or in prose, than might have been made by William Morris if he had kept his earliest loves and faiths and had taken the *variorum* Legend of St. Mary Magdalene, as we have it in divers forms from quite early French and English to the fifteenth-century English Miracle Play on the subject. That of St. Eustace ("Sir Isumbras"), though old letters and modern art have made something of

it, has also never been fully developed in the directions which it opens up; and one could name many others. But it has to be admitted that the French (whether, as some would say, naturally enough or not) never gave the Saint's Life pure and simple the development which it received in English. It started them—I at least believe this—in the story-telling way; but cross-roads, to them more attractive, soon presented themselves.

Still, it started them. I hope it is neither *The Legend of* intolerably fanciful nor the mere device of *St. Eulalia*. a compiler anxious to make his arrows of all wood, to suggest that there is something noteworthy in the nature of the very first piece of actual French which we possess. The Legend of St. Eulalia can be tried pretty high; for we have^[8] the third hymn of the *Peristephanon* of Prudentius to compare it with. The metre of this

Germine nobilis Eulalia

is not one of the best, and contrasts ill with the stately decasyllables—perhaps the very earliest examples of that mighty metre that we have—which the infant daughter-tongue somehow devised for itself some centuries later. But Prudentius is almost always a poet, if a poet of the decadence, and he had as instruments a language and a prosody which were like a match rifle to a bow and arrows—*not* of yew and *not* cloth-yard shafts—when contrasted with the dialect and speech-craft of the unknown tenth-century Frenchman. Yet from some points of view, and especially from ours, the Anonymus of the Dark Ages wins. Prudentius spins out the story into two hundred and fifteen lines, with

endless rhetorical and poetical amplification. He wants to say that Eulalia was twelve years old; but he actually informs us that

Curriculis tribus atque novem,
Tres hyemes quater attigerat,

and the whole history of the martyrdom is attitudinised and bedizened in the same fashion.

Now listen to the noble simplicity of the first French poet and tale-teller:

A good maiden was Eulalia: fair had she the body, but the soul fairer. The enemies of God would fain conquer her—would fain make her serve the fiend. She listened not to the evil counsellors, that she should deny God, who abideth in Heaven aloft—neither for gold, nor for silver, nor for garments; for the royal threatenings, nor for entreaties. Nothing could ever bend the damsel so that she should not love the service of God. And for that reason she was brought before Maximian, who was the King in those days over the pagans. And he exhorted her—whereof she took no care—that she should flee from the name of Christian. But she assembled all her strength that she might rather sustain the torments than lose her virginity: for which reason she died in great honour. They cast her in the fire when it burnt fiercely: but she had no fault in her, and so it pained her [*or she burnt*^[9]] not.

To this would not trust the pagan king: but with a sword he bade them take off her head. The damsel did not gainsay this thing: she would fain let go this worldly life if Christ gave command. And in shape of a dove she flew to heaven. Let us all pray that she may deign to intercede for us; that Christ may upon us have mercy after death, and of His clemency may allow us to come to Him.

Of course this is story-telling in its *The St. Alexis*. simplest form and on its smallest scale: but the essentials are there, and the non-essentials can be easily supplied—as indeed they are to some extent in the *Life of St. Leger* and to a greater in the *Life of St. Alexis*, which almost follow the *Sainte-Eulalie* in the making of French literature. The *St. Alexis* indeed provides something like a complete scheme of romance interest, and should be, though not translated (for it runs to between 600 and 700 lines), in some degree analysed and discussed. It had, of course, a Latin original, and was rehandled more than once or twice. But we have the (apparently) first French form, probably of the eleventh century. The theme is one of the commonest and one of the least sympathetic in hagiology. Alexis is forced by his father, a rich Roman "count," to marry; and after (not before) the marriage, though of course before its consummation, he deserts his wife, flies to Syria, and becomes a beggar at Edessa. After a time, long enough to prevent recognition, he goes back to Rome, and obtains from his own family alms enough to live on, though these alms are dispensed to him by the servants with every mark of contempt. At last he dies, and is recognised forthwith as a

saint. This hackneyed and somewhat repulsive *donnée* (there is nothing repulsive to the present writer, let it be observed, either in Stylites or in Galahad) the French poet takes and makes a rather surprising best of it. He is not despicable even as a poet, all things considered; but he is something very different indeed from despicable as a tale-teller. To begin, or, strictly speaking, to end with (R. L. Stevenson never said a wiser thing than that the end must be the necessary result of, and as it were foretold in, the beginning), he has lessened if not wholly destroyed the jar of the situation by (most unusually and considering the mad chastity-worship of the time rather audaciously) associating the deserted wife directly with the Saint's "gustation of God" above:

Without doubt is St. Alexis in Heaven,
With him has he God in the company of the
Angels,
*With him the maiden to whom he made himself
strange,*
*Now he has her close to him—together are
their souls,*
*I know not how to tell you how great their joy
is.*^[10]

But there are earlier touches of that life which makes all literature, and tale-telling most of all. An opening on Degeneracy is scarcely one of these, for this was, of course, a commonplace millenniums earlier, and it had the recent belief about the approaching end of the world at the actual A.D. 1000 to prompt it. The maiden is "bought" for Alexis

from her father or mother. Instead of the not unusual and rather distasteful sermons on virginity which later versions have, the future saint has at least the grace to accompany the return of the ring^[11] with only a few words of renunciation of his spouse to Christ, and of declaration that in this world "love is imperfect, life frail, and joy mutable." A far more vivid touch is given by the mother who, when search for the fugitive has proved futile, ruins the nuptial chamber, destroys its decorations, and hangs it with rags and sackcloth,^[12] and who, when the final discovery is made, reproaches the dead saint in a fashion which is not easy to reply to: "My son, why hadst thou no pity of *us*? Why hast thou not spoken to me *once*?" The bride has neither forgotten nor resented: she only weeps her deserter's former beauty, and swears to have no other spouse but God. The poem ends—or all but ends—in a hurly-burly of popular enthusiasm, which will hardly resign its new saint to Pope or Emperor, till at last, after the usual miracles of healing, the body is allowed to rest, splendidly entombed, in the Church of St. Boniface.

Now the man who could thus, and by many other touches not mentioned, run blood into the veins of mummies,^[13] could, with larger range of subject and wider choice of treatment, have done no small things in fiction.

But enough talk of might-have-beens: let us come to the things that were done.

FOOTNOTES:

^[4] The article "Romance" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed.; and the volume on *The English Novel* in Messrs. Dent's series "Channels of English

Literature," London, 1913.

[5] Plato (or Socrates?) does it only on a small scale and partially, though there are the makings of a great novelist in the *Dialogues*. Apollonius Rhodius is the next verse-tale teller to Homer among the prae-Christian Greeks.

[6] Virgil, in the only parts of the *Aeneid* that make a good story, is following either Homer or Apollonius.

[7] To me at least the seeming seems to approach demonstration; and I can only speak as I find, with all due apologies to those who find differently.

[8] There is, of course, a Latin "sequence" on the Saint which is nearer to the French poem; but that does not affect our present point.

[9] The literal "cooked," with no burlesque intention, was used of punitory burning quite early; but it is not certain that the transferred sense of *cuire*, "to pain," is not nearly or quite as old.

[10] Not the least interesting part of this is that it is almost sufficient by itself to establish the connection between Saint's Life and Romance.

[11] By a very curious touch he gives her also "les reinges de s'espide," *i.e.* either the other ring by which the sword is attached to the sword-belt, or the belt itself. The meaning is, of course, that with her he renounces knighthood and all worldly rank.

[12] She addresses the room itself, dramatically enough: "Chamber! never more shalt thou bear ornament: never shall any joy in thee be enjoyed."

[13] Let me repeat that I mean no despite to the "Communion of Saints" or to their records—much the reverse. But the hand of any *purpose*, Religious, Scientific, Political, what not, is apt to mummify story.

CHAPTER II

THE MATTERS OF FRANCE, ROME, AND BRITAIN

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It has been said already that the Saint's Life, as it seems most probable to the present writer, started the romance in France; but of course we must allow considerable reinforcement of one kind or another from local, traditional, and literary sources. The time-honoured distribution, also given already, of the "matter" of this romance does not concern us so much here as it would in a history of French literature, but it concerns us. We shall indeed probably find that the home-grown or home-fed *Chanson de Geste* did least for the novel in the wide sense—that the "Matter of Rome" chiefly gave it variety, change of atmosphere to some extent, and an invaluable connection with older literatures, but that the central division or "Matter of Britain," with the immense fringes of miscellaneous *romans d'aventures*—which are sometimes more or less directly connected with it, and are always moulded more or less on its patterns—gave most of all.

Of these, however, what has been *The Chanson* called the family or patriotic part was *de Geste*. undoubtedly the earliest and for a long time the most influential. There is, fortunately, not the least need here to fight out the old battle of the *cantilenae* or supposed *ballad*-originals. I see no reason to alter the doubt with which I have always regarded their existence; but it