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HISTORY

OF THE

NORMAN KINGS OF ENGLAND.

FROM A NEW COLLATION OF

THE CONTEMPORARY CHRONICLES.

BY

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PREFACE.

IN WRITING of our Norman Kings from my own collation of the materials extant, I refer almost exclusively to those annalists who lived among the people and scenes they describe, whose reflections are in accord with the spirit of their time, whose point of view is real and picturesque. And I discharge myself of unwarranted augmentations by later chroniclers, of the so-called 'philosophies of history' and of rhetorical flourishes which involve the false with the true.

I seek to be accurate and clear rather than elegant.

Of my authorities—familiar to the student,—I have to confess that they are apt to exaggerate: they have *formulæ* to express their passions: they seem credulous, uncritical as we say. But, with these characteristics of recluse life, I insist that they possessed mother-wit and conscience; and it is no less certain that they took pains to be well informed. In fact the intellectual monks were the thinkers as well as the writers, the *clerici* and just centre of civilisation, through whom alone we can appreciate their era. Nor were they so limited by their order as to be incapable of lay interests. In spite of the claims of Rome

and of the discipline of the cloister, they yet loved their country and heartily asserted its liberties. They farmed, they hoarded, they felt the grief of taxes, as did other men. They mediated in affairs of peace, of ransoms, of marriage and the like; they aided in electing kings, thronged the general councils, ministered on the battle-field. They wended from convent to castle, from the cell to the Vatican; now in the hall face to face with some magnate, now in the refectory with gossiping travellers. In the *Scriptorium*, they transcribed old records and maintained the traditions: they supplemented the experiences of the past, for they noted what they saw and heard and believed. Farther, authentic copies of state proclamations, of charters royal and baronial, of all such documents as needed to be published and preserved, lay to their hand in the archives of every chief monastery. They treat of the joys and sorrows of the foreworld. Their tale is human albeit their reasoning be unworldly now and then. Occasionally they tell us the price of corn, of wool, the value of money, of the failure of this crop and of that, of the glad harvest, of famines, diseases, floods and raids, of affairs of state, sieges and battles, of peace and innocence; at all times of religion: they describe the relation between God and man and between man and man as they perceived it; and when they vaunt miracles and portents they but illustrate the faith by which they lived. From age to age, throughout the land, they, more or less ably, devoted life to literature and, daily adding to the store, have preserved to us an entire series of contemporary Chronicles.

Cf. Chr. J.
Oxenedes,
pp. 278, sq.

The study of letters was, of course, confined to those among them who might be capable: the practice of writing history and the annals still more straightened. Of lazy, 'futile,' monks, I find but few traces at this epoch. "Pray, read, chant, write; be instant in occupation of the sort; so shall you arm yourselves against the temptations of the Evil One," said Abbot Thierry to the brothers of S. Evroult. And again, "*Unde vivent oratores, si defecerint aratores?*" "*Laborare est orare.*" Abbot Osbern, 'an enemy to idleness, with his own hands would make the writing-implements, prepare the tables overspread with wax and, by a faculty, draw the novices to learning.'

O. Vit. iii. 3.

Ib. 7.

Duty taught in this way, the 'merit' of writing is thus curiously illustrated. 'A certain brother, wont to break monastic rule, being a good scribe, copied out the entire Holy Scriptures. After death, his soul was brought before the tribunal of the righteous Judge. There the evil spirits sharply accused him while the godly angels shewed the volume he had written; against every sin balancing a syllable. Finally, words outweighing wickedness, though by but one letter, mercy prevailed.' "Cleanse your hearts, then, from vain desires," says Vitalis, "and be always offering the work of your hands as an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord."

Ib. iii. 3.

The scope of our chroniclers may be somewhat narrow; but, with due allowance for the facts that they lived much apart from the more eager struggle for life, that the interests of the convent and of the church were dearest to their hearts, that they were shut out from