THE LIBRARY.

THE 'CHANCUN DE WILLAME'; A FRENCH MANUSCRIPT PRE- SERVED IN ENGLAND.

IN the nineteenth century, English libraries enriched old French literature by several happy discoveries, the most important of which was the Oxford 'Roland.' The manuscript of this, the most ancient version preserved of that great epic, had long lain unperceived in the Bodleian collection. Its discovery marked an epoch in the literary studies of old France.

The new century has brought to light in England an old French manuscript of greater value, if anything, than that of the 'Roland.' Scholars had thought the period for such discoveries closed, at least for northern and central Europe. Accordingly, there was considerable scepticism as to the reality of the reputed discovery, until, in December a year ago, appeared a belated number of the 'Romania,' containing, from the pen of M. Paul Meyer, the first published statement concerning the new manuscript. An air of mystery surrounded the discovery of the poem. All that is known is that it had belonged to the library of the late Sir Hope

Edwardes, which was sold in May, 1901, and figured in the catalogue as lot 566 with the curious description: 'Roman de Guillaume de Courtney (en Vers) Manuscript of the XIVth century on vellum (25 leaves), written in double columns, brown morocco extra, by Bedford.' The sale catalogue had been very sparingly distributed and this, like several other lots, was knocked down for an absurdly low price. In June, 1903, the fortunate purchaser, who refuses to allow his name to be made public, issued at the Chiswick Press a beautifully printed edition of the 'Chancun,' mainly for presentation, though a few copies were placed for sale with Messrs. J. and J. Leighton. No notice of the romance has yet appeared in England, a neglect which surely justifies the present attempt to win for it the interest of readers of 'The Library.'

The new epic, as its title indicates, is written in the Norman-French dialect. It numbers 3553 lines, in assonance. The manuscript seems to date from about the middle of the thirteenth century, but the redaction of the first and older part of the poem goes back to the eleventh century, that of the remainder to the beginning of the twelfth. It is likely that the original of the older part came into England soon after the Conquest, that it was turned into Norman-French, and that later another copy was brought over, a copy which presented the epic as it was then being sung in France. This second copy offered many divergencies, for the literary movement in France at that time swept on with a rapid current. The two versions of what was really the same poem were combined, and the

result is the 'Chancun de Willame' as we have it. The poem was probably not copied many times in England. The metre of the older part shows pure Norman-French, while that of the remainder allows one to see still the metre used in France from 1100 to 1175.

This poem is the fifth old French masterpiece—we use the term advisedly—preserved in a unique manuscript: the Oxford 'Roland'; the 'Pèlerinage de Charlemagne' (stolen from the British Museum in 1879, and never found); 'Raoul de Cambrai'; 'Aucassin et Nicolette'; and the 'Willame.' Nothing could give a clearer idea of the immense richness of the literature of ancient France than that so many of her most admirable monuments should exist in unique copies. The imagination is lost in contemplation of the many treasures that must have irremediably perished.

The 'Cycle de Guillaume,' to which the new 'Chanson de geste' belongs, now numbers twenty-five epics still extant, and many, as we know, have been lost. The subject of this cycle is the wars against the Saracens in the south of France and in Spain. The hero of the cycle is William, who is thought to be historically Guillaume de Toulouse. This hero played an important rôle against the invaders at the close of the eighth and at the beginning of the ninth century. Strangely enough his seat in epic literature is Orange. The older portion of the 'Willame,' however, shows him established apparently at Barcelona, which squares better with history, he having aided Louis in the reduction of this city in 801 or 802. This hero is, in the poems,

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surrounded by a number of lesser heroes, some of them said to be brothers, and others nephews. The first nine hundred lines of the 'Willame' are in the main devoted to the death of one of these 'nephews,' Vivien. It will be impossible to offer in detail the events of the poem, but at least a rapid summary may be given, with here and there the translation of a passage.

The epic begins in the traditional manner with an inquiry as to whether we wish to hear of the great battles of King Deramed, the Saracen, who waged war against our Emperor Louis (*i.e.*, Louis the Debonnaire). Count William contended against him with such vigour that he slew him in the Archamp,¹ but he lost the bravest of his men, and his nephew, Count Vivien the noble, for whose loss he had ever great anguish in his heart.

A Christian army marched to meet an invasion of King Deramed in the Archamp. At the last moment, all of its leaders, save Vivien, flee, and he is chosen chief on the battle field. The small French army is surrounded and hewn to pieces. Vivien sends his cousin Girard to their uncle Guillaume at Barcelona for aid. Vivien's charge to Girard approaches nearer to the ballad form than any other passage in the French epic. This passage is followed by another of unusual power, describing the escape and flight of Girard. He succeeds in breaking through the enemy, his horse soon after dies under him, but he continues his journey on foot. He hurries on, wounded and bloody, almost dying from

¹ This is supposed to be a place in Spain, probably between Barcelona and Tortosa.

hunger, thirst, and fatigue. He throws away his lance, his heavy shield, his helmet, his armour, and keeps only his sword. Up hill and down he hastens all day long. He is obliged to lean on his bloody sword as he walks and runs.

The effect of long agony in this truly epic flight is increased by the fact that the poem returns to Vivien, leaving Girard still hurrying on, straining every nerve to arrive in time. Vivien has only twenty men left, then ten, and finally he alone remains. Surrounded by the enemy, he fights like a wild boar, and again and again forces them back. All at once a barbarian comes riding down the vale, between his thighs a swift horse; the lines fill us with dread; we feel that Vivien is to receive his death wound:

Un barbarin vint par mi un val,
Entre ses cuisses out un ignel cheval.

The Saracen swings a trenchant dart, pierces the coat of mail, and transfixes the body of Vivien. Vivien lets fall his white banner, which he has kept in view in his sublime fury, as if there were still legions left to rally at its sight. He reaches behind, pulls forth the dart, and strikes the barbarian with it. The dart enters his back, and he falls expiring from his horse. "Away with thee," cries Vivien, 'thou vile barbarian! Thou shalt never return to the country whence thou camest, nor shalt thou ever brag that thou slewest the baron of King Louis!'¹

¹ The dramatic power of this duel is heightened by the evidence of other epics, which tell us that Vivien met his death-wound at the hands of a Saracen who had come from a far country to con-

Vivien draws his sword, and continues the hopeless struggle, while he prays to the God of Glory, born of the Holy Virgin, to defend him from death. Almost immediately, however, he corrects this too selfish prayer: 'Send me, Lord, William or Louis who has the realm of France! Then we shall win the battle!' The Saracens have slain his horse. They cut to pieces his shield and the fragments fall at his feet. His broken helmet falls forward. He has many wounds, but still he fights on. He calls upon Jesus, the all-powerful, to send him William, the good, the loyal, or Louis, the brave king. But even in dying, he has a care from which another would have been free, for when his uncle dubbed him knight, he had sworn never to retreat the length of a lance before the Saracens.¹ Accordingly in his prayer at this final moment recur words which we have heard in a preceding prayer: 'Aid me, Father, in thy blessed kindness that I retreat not one foot! Until death, let me keep my faith!' He falls at last, and the enemy hew him to pieces.

Girard now has arrived at Barcelona, and announces the fearful situation of Vivien. William's wife, Guibour, entrusts him with her nephew, Guichard, who has just been knighted, and exacts a promise that he will bring him back, dead or alive. William rides out of the city at nightfall with thirty thousand men. Girard accompanies him to show the way. Long before their arrival, alas! Vivien has

tend against him; that they had several encounters in various wars, and that, finally, each slew the other.

¹ This vow forms the opening scene of a beautiful epic, the 'Covenant Vivien,' Vivien's Vow.

perished, and the Saracens have loaded their booty into their ships. William attacks them, but is defeated; all of his men, including the two nephews, are slain. He has promised to bring back Guichard, and succeeds in escaping, bearing the dead youth before him on his horse.

Lady Guibour has begun to gather a fresh army during her husband's absence, fearing that he will need help, and is entertaining the leaders at a dinner in the palace. Ever and anon she glances from the window, and at last sees William come riding down the hill, bearing a body in his arms. She hurries down the stairs and opens the gate for the count to enter. "Lady Guibour, since when dost thou keep my gate?" "By my faith, sir, I am new to the task. Count William, small is the force you bring back!" "Sweet lady, since when art thou my porter?" "By my faith, sir, I am but new to the task. Count William, few are the knights that you bring back!" "Here, Lady Guibour! this is thy nephew Guichard. Thou shalt never see Count Vivien alive again!" The noble woman held up her arms towards him. He placed within them the dead youth. The body was heavy, and her arms gave way. She was a woman, and frail was her strength. Down to the earth the body fell in a heap.' (Ll. 1243-1293.)

The grief and horror of the scene can be imagined. William consoles his wife, and then, by a turn of thought easy to grasp, tells her that she may well weep, for she is the wife of a coward count, who flies from battle without bringing back a single man. They both weep, but Guibour forgets her own an-

guish at sight of William's tears. She reminds him of the high deeds of his ancestors, and ends by urging him to return to the charge: 'Rather would I see you die in the Archamp by the sea than that your lineage should be disgraced by you or your heirs have to blush for you after your death!' He pleads the hopelessness of further resistance, the impossibility of gathering in time a new army. She says that she has already fifteen thousand men ready, and others are preparing; that their leaders are even now at table in the hall above. She will conceal the terrible disaster in part at least, and will persuade them to accompany him in a new expedition. Thereupon she mounts the stone stairs, singing. The knights hear her voice, and call, 'What news?' She says that William has won a victory, but has lost his army, and that Vivien is slain, that Deramed has perished, that many of the enemy's vessels are damaged, that they have gathered an immense booty, but cannot sail away by reason of the absence of all wind; that it will be very easy to catch them and annihilate them. In animated language she asks how many desire rich fiefs, such as William can bestow, and if any do not want a fief without a wife, she has a hundred and more beautiful maids, daughters of princes, who embroider for her and make beautiful garments bedecked with flowers.¹ Let whoever will come forward and choose the fairest maid. 'I will give him a wife,' says Guibour,

¹ The custom of thus rearing, instructing, and caring for children of gentle birth, was general in noble families of mediaeval France. Such young people were said to be *nourris*. Vivien was, in this way, a *nourri* of William and Guibour.

'and my lord will give him lands!' The poem adds in concluding this episode that many a knight pressed forward to select the fairest, who later lost his head in the Archamp.¹

The reader who for the first time arrives at the passage beginning in line 1400, will be surprised to find there thirty-three lines which have already appeared, almost textually (ll. 1041 ss.). A little further on (ll. 1483 ss.), occurs another passage which he has already seen (1064 ss.). The number of lines thus repeated is not far from one hundred. Naturally enough, if the lines are the same, the events are similar. For instance, ll. 1041 ss. describe the scene where Guibour offers food and drink to Girard, the messenger, who has brought news of the fearful situation of Vivien, while the same lines (1400 ss.) are applied later to William, who, as just related, returns alone from the battle field. A similar parallelism exists between all of these recurring passages. One of the most striking of these parallelisms occurs in the departure of the hero from his city (1082 ss., cf. 1504 ss.), and in his subsequent defeat. He is twice said to march out of his *bone cité*, at the same hour of the day, with the same number of men, in search of the same adversary; the battle is joined in the same place, and the hero twice loses all his men and flees alone. We have clearly to do with what scholars call two versions of the same story. The problem, however, has an added charm of difficulty in the fact that, after the second defeat, William

¹ Tel s'aati de choisir la plus bele
 Qui en l'Archamp perdi puis la teste.
 (1397-1398.)

flees, not to Barcelona but to Orange, a city which, up to this moment, has played no part whatever in the action of the epic! We have seen William established at Barcelona with his wife and family. All at once, at the close of the second disastrous expedition to the Archamp, we behold the hero fleeing to Orange, where his wife receives him. There is not a word of explanation as to how she has transported herself from Barcelona to Orange!

The transfer from Barcelona to Orange is simply one phase of the two versions mentioned. We know, in fact, from a score of poems that the seat of William was supposed to be Orange. One great service rendered by the new epic is to show that the seat of our hero was anciently placed at Barcelona, and that it was later, for reasons which are not as yet clear, transferred to Orange. The value of this discovery in the development of the legend of William is enormous. Since the publication of the 'Willame,' search in an unpublished epic, 'Foucon de Candie,' has offered evidence supporting that of our poem, that the seat of the great hero was at one time supposed to be Barcelona.¹

To return to the two versions. We can understand how two different manuscripts, one considerably more ancient than the other, could offer two versions of the same story. Indeed, the history of the French epic is filled with such examples. But

¹ In several articles written before the discovery of the 'Willame,' the present writer suggested that an epic comprising the events of the more ancient version of this poem once existed. He did not foresee, however, that the hero's residence had ever been given as Barcelona.

how can two versions, one of which may be a hundred years older than the other, be preserved side by side in the same manuscript? The question is a most difficult one. We offer, as a simple hypothesis, the following suggestions.

The 'Song of William' passed into England soon after the Conquest, and was turned into the Norman-French dialect—unless, to be sure, this change had already taken place in Normandy. We have known for many years that the legend of William was familiar to the knights of William the Conqueror. Nothing is more likely, therefore, than that this epic should be one of the first to pass the Channel, where its feudal spirit could hardly fail to make it more popular than the 'Roland,' which sang of France and Charlemagne, being royal rather than feudal in its spirit. The song, however, continued to be sung in France, where the quicker literary current caused it to change rapidly. The version sung in England doubtless underwent relatively slight changes. There are many examples of a primitive legend being preserved in some province or foreign country, while the same legend, at home, underwent the usual series of alterations and additions which are inevitable where the legend forms a part of the literary entertainment offered to a more or less fastidious and exacting public. Whatever the 'Chanson de Guillaume' may have been as sung in France in the eleventh century, its events would have undergone a profound change at the end of two or three generations, provided, that is, that it continued to be sung. As to this last point, we may pause to say that this poem, as evidence on all

sides shows, was sung continuously, in one form or another, until, in the thirteenth century, it is found bearing a different name, 'Aliscans,' a name which does not even exist in the 'Willame,' an earlier form of the same poem! Space is lacking to mention duly the great epic, 'Aliscans,' generally placed by the critics as second only to the 'Roland,' and suddenly dethroned in our day by the discovery of one of its own prototypes, which has been sleeping in English libraries for six hundred years or more. Suffice it to say that 'Aliscans' presents the final form, for France, of the original of the epic which we have supposed to have crossed the Channel at the close of the eleventh century.

This much said to show the continued and changing existence of the poem in the land of its birth, we pass to our second point: namely, that at a given moment, perhaps shortly before the middle of the twelfth century, there passed into England another version of the 'Song of William,' the one current at that moment in France. Under these circumstances one of two things would happen: one of the two versions (probably the more ancient) would disappear; or an attempt would be made to combine them. We suppose the latter to have happened. The new song, whose events we shall soon narrate, sang of a departure of the hero from Orange; the old song, from Barcelona. If many of the events immediately following were virtually the same in the two songs, there existed none the less many differences, and then, too, the conclusion of the new poem was totally different and, dramatically, superior. What more natural than that the

older poem, at least in large part, should have been prefixed to the newer? This seems especially probable in the light shed on the matter by 'Aliscans,' whose abrupt beginning and whose sequence of opening events indicate that the first few hundred lines of the original poem had ceased to be sung. The new version, then, may have seemed to need precisely that introduction which the older preserved. Add to these considerations the tendency to conserve, which, happily for French letters, was strong in the higher circles of Anglo-Norman society, and we have a sufficient explanation for the preservation of the older version of the 'Willame' in England.

Leaving now these matters of literary criticism, we shall relate as rapidly as possible the remaining events of the poem. William sets out with thirty thousand men from what is called simply his *bone cité*. He arrives in the Archamp, and is defeated as before—save for minor differences—and forced to flee. In his flight, he comes upon Vivien dying, but still able to speak. We have to do with an attenuation of the original tragedy. He dismounts, and weeps over his nephew, who revives for long enough to make an act of contrition for his sins, then dies. The scene is one of the most tender and beautiful in all the range of old French literature. William lifts the body to the saddle, resolved to bear it to Orange, but he is almost immediately attacked by pursuers, and forced to replace it on the earth. He succeeds in cutting his way through the enemy, and begins a solitary flight. He is soon attacked by a formidable Saracen, whom he succeeds in slaying, and whose

horse he mounts. The enemy pursue him to Orange. He rides up to the gate, but the porter does not recognize him, and refuses to let him enter without the authorization of Guibour. The porter hurries to the palace, and tells her that a strange knight is at the gate, a man of huge stature and terrible appearance, who says that he is William. He rides a beautiful horse, and pagan arms hang at his side. Lady Guibour hastens down the stone stairs, mounts the wall above the gate: 'Who are you who ask entrance at the gate?' 'Lady,' said he, 'truly you know me well. I am William, the *marchis al curbnies*.'¹ 'Miserable pagan! You know well how to deceive! By such tricks as that you will never enter here, for I am alone, there are no men to defend me. If you were William *al curbnies*, there would be with you seven thousand men of arms of the Franks of France, noble barons. All about there would be jongleurs singing, and one would hear the music of viol and harp!' 'Alas, unfortunate that I am,' said William *al curbnies*, 'amid such joy I was wont to go! Lady, you know well that, as long as God pleases, a man has wealth, and that when it pleases Him no longer, he has poverty! Truly, I have returned from the Archamp by the sea, where I lost Vivien the noble. My nephew Bertram was captured, and Guielin and Guischarde the courageous.'

Guibour interrupts him. She sees coming a band

¹ In later poems, William is usually called the *marquis au court nez*, a title which has aroused endless discussion. The new epic shows us that the original word was *courb*, and that the title is equivalent to hook-nosed or beak-nosed.

of Saracens who have just returned from pillaging sweet France. They have pillaged St. Martin of Tours, and are driving along a hundred Christian captives.¹ She points to the band of marauders, and says that, if he were William he would never allow such a thing. Thereupon he attacks the infidels, frees the prisoners, and returns to ask entrance to the city. This, however, is still refused him until he has bared his head that Guibour may see the scar from a wound received in the battle with Tibaut l'Escler. She then bids the porter to open the gate. William enters at last. The hundred lines that follow are so interesting and so beautiful that we cannot resist translating them, in spite of the insufficiency of cold, foreign prose, as compared with the strange beauty of the original verse. When we consider that the text as we have it has evidently undergone numerous deteriorations, we obtain an idea of what must once have been the primitive power of the epic, and we understand somewhat its popularity in mediaeval castles.

Count William dismounted at the marble steps. Lady Guibour received his horse and led it into the stable. She took off its bridle and saddle, and gave it fodder and oats to eat. Then she covered it with a good warm blanket. After this, she went to salute and embrace the count. She

¹ The depredations committed against this celebrated church in the Middle Ages, were numerous and disastrous. We mention only one case. According to Rodericus Toletanus, 'Historia Arabum,' cap. xiv, the Saracens had sacked Tours and the monastery before the battle of Poitiers, 732. The exploits of Guillaume de Toulouse, the original of *Guillaume au courbnes*, occur about sixty or seventy years later.

spoke to him courteously and fair. 'Sir William,' said she, 'what hast thou done with thy men whom thou didst lead away, four-thousand and seven hundred strong?'¹ 'By my faith, lady, the pagans have vanquished them. With bloody mouths they are lying prone in the Archamp.' 'Sir William,' said she, 'what hast thou done with Vivien?' 'By my faith, lady, he lies dead covered with blood.' When Guibour heard, her heart was filled with aching. 'Sir William,' said she, 'what hast thou done with Bertram, the son of Bernard of the city of Brusban?' 'Wife, sweet friend, he fought bravely in the battle! Fifteen times he charged over the deadly field. At the sixteenth, the enemy so assailed him that they slew under him his splendid steed. He fought on foot, his sword in hand, his shield in front of him. He cut to the right and to the left, but there they took him, the devilish crew; they bound his hands and feet. Before my eyes they bore him away to one of their boats. It was beyond me to protect or succour him.' 'God!' said the lady, 'what mourning for Bertram! My heart aches, for I loved him much!'² 'Sir William,' said she, 'what hast thou done with Guiotun, the handsome boy with such winning ways? At his departure I gave him the standard that had belonged to King Mabun, the horse of Oliver the Gascon, and the halberc and helmet of Tibaut l'Escler.' 'By my faith, lady, he fought like a tried knight. It was he who bore the standard in the battle, and he contended until the sixteenth charge. Then the fell Saracens took him, and bound his feet and arms. Before my eyes, they put him into a ship. He received neither aid nor succour from me.' 'God!' said the lady, 'what anguish and what sorrow! My heart aches, for I loved him much

¹ The contradiction between these figures and the thirty thousand men with whom the hero seems to have set out, is probably due to some confusion in the versions.

² These words of Guibour are full of feeling. In fact, Bertram, one of the most ancient heroes of the French epics, nephew to William,

Sir William, what hast thou done with Walter, with Guielin and with Count Reiner?' 'By my faith, lady, the pagans have vanquished them. They lie in chains in their ships.' 'God,' said the lady, 'what anguish and what sorrow! if, as thou sayest, not one of them returns!'

William takes his wife by her silken sleeve. Together, they mount the marble stairs. There is not a man to serve them. Lady Guibour hastens to bring him water to wash, and afterwards she gives him the towel.¹ Then they sit down at the lowest table. For grief, they cannot sit at the highest. William sees the benches, the seats and the tables where his many brave knights used to sit. Now there is no one amusing himself in the hall, playing at chess or backgammon. Speaking aloud, he regrets them, as becomes a loyal man.² 'Alas! good hall! how long thou art and wide! On all sides, I see thee so adorned. Blest be the lady who thus has bedecked thee!'³ Alas! lofty tables! how high you are! I see cloths of white linen spread, bowls filled to the brim, haunches and shoulders of venison, cakes and wafers. They will not be eaten by the sons of gentle ladies, who, in the Archamp lie with heads cut off! William weeps, and Guibour swoons. He supports her, and comforts her: 'Guibour, my lady, thou hast no cause to weep, for thou hast lost none of thy own family. But I, I have lost my noble kinsmen, and may well grieve and

is united to his aunt Guibour by the most touching devotion, as is shown by numerous passages.

¹ It must not be supposed that she would not have rendered this service had there been servants present. It was a part of the duty of the lady of the house thus to serve guests and friends, and the loftiest lady seems to have been proud and glad to perform this duty, as scores of passages indicate.

² The verb *regreter*, as here used, is almost equivalent to a funeral lament, a dirge for the dead, in accordance with mediæval custom.

³ An ancient legend tells how Guibour had the walls of her palace ornamented with figures of beasts and animals.

lament. I will flee away into a strange country, to Saint-Michel-au-Péril-de-la-Mer, or to a desert, where men can never find me.¹ There I will become a hermit monk, and thou, thou shalt become a nun, and shalt wear a veil over thy head!' 'Sir William,' said she, 'it will be time to think of that when we have finished becomingly our active life' (Ll. 2328-2420).

She urges him to start at dawn for Laon, which appears as the capital of the Frankish kings long before Paris attains this honour.² Accordingly, he sets out to obtain aid the next morning, accompanied by a mere lad as squire. The picture drawn of the hero's kindness to his squire shows a new side to his character. The lance and the shield were heavy. William takes pity on the lad, and relieves him of these burdens; 'but when they were to meet a pilgrim or merchant, or to come to a castle or town, he gave all his arms back to the child.' He rides northward, often weeping for his nephews.

William arrives in front of the palace at Laon. He had been wont to bring gold from Spain and to distribute it with a lavish hand. Scores of young knights swarm out of the palace, and hasten to hold his horse for him, and to do him honour. But when he tells them that he has nothing, and that he has

¹ It is interesting to note that in the later legend of the great hero, he actually becomes a monk. In fact, the 'Moniage Guillaume' is the title of one of the oldest epics of the cycle—an epic about to be published by the Société des Anciens Textes Français, Paris. The original of our hero, Guillaume de Toulouse, became a monk in his old age, in 806.

² Paris is mentioned, however, as an important city: l. 2585; also l. 3535.

been fearfully defeated in the Archamp, they leave him, and go back into the palace where they continue their interrupted repast. The king reproves them, and sends to have William conducted into the hall, where he tells of his defeat and of the situation of Guibour, besieged in Orange with only women to aid in its defence. The King receives him kindly, but, on being asked for succour, refuses, whereupon William bursts into a passion, draws off his glove, throws it at Louis' feet, and announces that he ceases to be his vassal. Others present interfere and convince the king that unless the encroachments of the Saracens are checked at once, they will end by conquering all France. He declares that he is ready to help, and that he will himself accompany the army. At this juncture, the scene takes an unexpected turn, for the queen cries out that he must not go; that Guibour was born in pagandom, and knows all the art of herbs and potions; that she would poison him, in which case William would become king and Guibour queen, while she, the speaker, would be undone. This speech, startling in its naturalness and vivacity, corroborates evidence already existing which ascribes to Guibour some of the qualities of the magician. William's reply to the queen is of a violence that oversteps all limits. The bitter lines leap from his lips, each one with an insult or an injury. At the end of his horrible arraignment, he strides towards the cowering woman, and starts to draw his sword to kill her, when, happily, his arm is stayed by the interposition of his own father, who happens to be present. The king sides with William, and gives orders for the immediate levy of an army. Thus

closes this celebrated scene, known as the wrath of William.¹

At this point another poem has been welded to the preceding events, and is to occupy nearly all of the remaining nine hundred lines of the manuscript. This new poem is the 'Reneward,' and begins with line 2647:

De la quisine al rei issit un bachelier :

'From the kitchen of the king a youth came forth.' The 'Willame' preserves for us, not alone the epic events which its title comports, but also at least three-fourths of the 'Reneward,' a good part of the remaining fourth of which we already possessed. This poem draws its name from that of its hero. Reneward is the son of Deramed, and consequently a brother of Guibour. He ran away from home when a boy, was captured by pirate merchants and sold as a slave. He was finally bought by the king, and brought to Paris. He served seven years in the king's kitchen at Laon, where his overgrown body and tremendous strength made him an object of derision and of dread. Immediately at the close of the poignant and fearful scene of the wrath of William, at the moment when the king has given orders for the preparation of an army, by an admirable juxtaposition of dramatic elements, this uncouth

¹ We say 'celebrated,' for this scene exists in 'Aliscans,' and has long figured as one of the masterly scenes of the French epic. One thing which may have added to the terror of this scene in the minds of the listeners is the fact that the queen is said to be William's sister. We expect shortly to try to prove in another journal that the woman thus brutalized by our hero was not his sister.

young giant, bare-footed, in rags, carrying easily over his shoulder a huge bludgeon, walks out of the kitchen, enters the royal hall, thronged with the nobles of the court, and advances until he stands before William. Assuredly, rarely have two poems been joined with equal skill! It will be impossible, for lack of space, to recount in detail the events which follow. We shall venture, however, to indicate the thread of the story, if only to offer to the reader a conception of the 'Willame' taken as a whole.

After bantering Reneward on his appearance, which is that of a man who dines early and rises late, William accepts his proffered services, and he sets out with the army of relief. The army arrives at Orange, and William and Reneward are able to enter the city. They mount the palace stairs. Guibour, after the first salutations, fixes her eyes on the strange figure of Reneward, and inquires who he is.¹ She seeks a conversation with him, learns his name and that of his father. She sees that he must be her young brother, but does not impart this knowledge to him. None the less, she shows unusual interest in him, and equips him with arms. Supper is now ready; the knights troop in and sit down at table, but Reneward follows his natural inclinations. Wearing the sword which Guibour

¹ In Guibour's questions as to William's success at Court, there occurs a valuable passage. To her inquiry as to whether the emperor is coming, he answers that he lies ill in his chapel at Aix. 'If now he has taken to his bed,' she replies, 'may he never get up.' This is a clear reference to Charlemagne, and indicates that the action of the 'Reneward' was originally placed under this prince. Cf. l. 2938.

has given him, he marches into the kitchen, where he busies himself at turning the spits. The cooks are delighted at his culinary skill, and ply him with wine and claret. He is soon drunk. Guibour has had prepared for him a good bed. He is brought in, looks stupidly at the bed, turns and staggers back to the kitchen, where he throws himself down by the fire to sleep. This is the incongruous hero, who in the battle is to play the great *rôle*, and who ends by winning our sympathy and even affection.

Reneward is up long before day, and forces the soldiers to begin at once their march to the Archamp.¹ The scene of their departure in the darkness is genuinely amusing, like many of the scenes where he appears. In the battle which ensues, Reneward plays the chief part. It is he who liberates the imprisoned nephews, who slays the most redoubtable of the hostile champions, and who wins, in short, the victory. The Saracens flee, the Christians obtain a rich booty and return to Orange. At this point occurs an episode which doubtless won for Reneward much sympathy in the hearts of those who, of old, in the castles of France and England, heard sung the 'Song of William.' The victors return to Orange with music and rejoicings. They sit down to a bountiful dinner, but Reneward has been left behind! No one has invited him to the repast, and William sits as forgetful as the others of the great service he has rendered. It is the old story

¹ The awkwardness of the Saracens' apparent abandonment of the siege and of the necessity of going to the Archamp to attack them, is one trace of the fusion of two separate poems. The 'Reneward' had originally nothing to do with the Archamp.

of the forgetfulness of merit by power. Some squires who have seen Reneward come to inform William of his strange neglect. William offers a reward to whoever will bring Reneward back. Hundreds mount on horseback and ride in a wild rout, but the offended hero receives them with blows and curses, kills many, and puts the remainder to flight. At last William and Guibour go themselves, and, at the prayer of the countess, whose voice seems to touch him, he yields, and accompanies them to Orange. Follow the baptism of Reneward and his marriage with a princess of the court, Ermentrud. The lands which had belonged to Vivien are conferred on him. The poem closes with a conversation between Guibour and Reneward, of whom she inquires the history of his life. This he relates in a few words. Then follow two lines really charming in the simplicity of their art: 'Guibour heard him, and stepped forward: "Kiss me, brother, I am thy own sister!"'

Guiburc l'oï, si passat avant:
Baisez mei, frere! ta soror sui naissant!

The well-rounded action has reached its conclusion; the play is over, the curtain descends.

Such are the main events of this all-but primitive masterpiece. It would be easy to select a score of scenes which might well tempt a painter, and it is to be hoped that the day will come when an artist of talent, possessing a sympathetic knowledge of the Middle Ages in France, will give to the world a series of powerful and adequate illustrations of the admirable, the unique 'Willame'! The range of

feeling and emotion, the changing variety of the scenes, are without parallel in the French epic—the latest and last of the epics which the world has seen or will see—and in these regards our poem is considerably superior to the 'Roland.' It is superior to the 'Roland,' too, in profundity. Most of the beauties of the 'Roland' strike one at the first or second reading; if one reads the 'Willame' a hundred times, one will still find depths of beauty and truth which have thus far been unperceived. The perfection of the 'Willame' is that of a primitive monument. The poem impresses us like a miraculous Ilion, dug, eternal, from its ruins, and standing before us almost unchanged. When the text of the 'Willame' has received the sure and safe corrections which modern philology allows, it will remain for posterity the most primitive, the most human, and the most beautiful of the many *chansons de geste* of ancient France.

RAYMOND WEEKS.