VI. *Dissertation on the Life and Writings of Mary, an Anglo-Norman Poetess of the 13th Century, by Monsr. La Rue. Communicated by Francis Douce, Esq. F. A. S. in a Letter to the Rev. John Brand, Secretary.*

Read Jan. 12, 1797.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE the honour of communicating to the Society a translation of a letter addressed to me by the Abbé La Rue, upon a very important branch of English literature.

The attention with which it has already honoured the labours of this ingenious and learned writer, will not, I trust, be diminished upon the present occasion.

I remain,

Dear Sir,

very faithfully yours,

Gower Street, Dec. 2, 1796.

FRANCIS DOUCE.

Translation of a Letter to F. Douce, Esq. F. A. S. upon the Life and Writings of Mary, an Anglo-Norman Poetess of the 13th Century.

SIR,

IT is with extreme pleasure that I continue the pursuit of my inquiries into the literary history of the Norman and Anglo-Norman *Trouveurs*; and as no one is better qualified than yourself to appreciate this subject, I have done myself the honour of addressing to you my researches upon these ancient poets.

Mary may, with great propriety, be regarded as the Sappho of her age. Unfortunately she has scarcely mentioned any circumstance relating to herself! but she made so considerable a figure amongst the Anglo-Norman *Trouveurs*, that she may very fairly lay claim to the minutest investigation of whatever concerns her memory.

We are informed by this lady that she was born in France, but she has not mentioned the province that gave her birth, nor the reasons of her going to England. As she appears, however, to have resided in that country at the commencement of the thirteenth century, we may reasonably conclude that she was a native of Normandy. Philip Augustus having made himself master of that Province in 1204, many Norman families, whether from regard to affinity, from motives of adventure, or from attachment to the English government, went over to Great Britain, and there established themselves. Some one of these reasons might have possibly induced Mary to retire into that country, or to have followed her family thither.

If

If this opinion be not adopted, it will be impossible to fix upon any other province of France, under the dominion of the English, as the birth-place of Mary, because her language is neither that of Gascony nor Poitou, &c.; she appears, however, to have been acquainted with the *Bas Breton*, or Armoric tongue, whence it may be inferred that she was born in Bretagne. The duke of that province was then earl of Richmond in England; many of his subjects were in possession of knights fees in that honour; and Mary might have belonged to one of these families. She was, besides, extremely well versed in the literature of this province, and we shall have occasion to remark that she borrowed much from the works of the writers of that country in the composition of her own.

If, however, a preference should be given to the first opinion, we must suppose that Mary got her knowledge both of the Armoric and English languages in Great Britain. She was, at the same time, equally mistress of Latin, and from her application to these several languages, we must take it for granted that she possessed a readiness, a capacity, and even a certain rank in life, that afforded time and means to attain them. But she has said nothing that will throw any light upon her private life, and has even concealed her family name. The kingdom in which she was born, and her christian name, form the total of what she has left relating to her. I am ignorant if this lady had much self-love, but I doubt very much whether, in taking up her pen, she seriously thought about posterity; it should rather seem that she was solicitous to be personally known only at the time she lived in. Hence we find in her works those general denominations, those vague expressions, which discourage the curious antiquary, or compel him to enter into dry and laborious discussions, the result of which often turns out to be little more than conjecture. In short, the silence or the modesty of the lady has contributed, in a great degree, to conceal from us the
names

names of those illustrious persons whose patronage her talents deserved. In the course, however, of my remarks upon her works, I shall endeavour to find out who were her Mécènes.

The first poems of Mary are a collection of Lays in French verse, forming various histories and gallant adventures of our valiant knights, and, according to the usage of those times, they are generally remarkable for some singular, and often marvellous catastrophe. These Lays are in the British Museum amongst the Harleian MSS. No. 978. They constitute the largest, and at the same time most ancient specimen of Anglo-Norman poetry of this kind that has been handed down to us.

The romances of chivalry amongst the old Welsh and Armorican Britons appear to have furnished Mary with the subjects of these various lays; not that the manuscripts of those people were continually before her when she composed them; but, as she herself has told us, depending upon an excellent memory, she sometimes committed them to verse after hearing them recited only, and at others she composed them from what she had read in the Welsh and Armorican MSS.

Plusurs en ai oi conter,
Nes voil laisser ne oblier, &c. [a]
Plusurs le me unt conte et dit
Et jeo l'ai trové en escrit, &c. [b]

Our authoress has informed us that she hesitated a long time before she devoted herself to this species of literature; that oftentimes she began to translate some Latin story into the *Romance* language, but perceived it necessary to desist, from the circumstance, that the same ground had already been trodden by so many writers. She therefore abandoned her design, and confined herself to the sub-

[a] Prologue des Lais de Marie.

[b] Lai du chevre-feuille.

jects of the Welsh and Armoric lays, and the event justifies the choice she had made. To the singularity of such a measure was owing its celebrity. By treating of love, and the various emotions which it excites; of chivalry, and the acts of valour which beauty inspires in its professors, she was certain of attuning her lyre to the feelings of the age, and consequently of insuring success. Upon this account her lays were extremely well received by the people. Denis Pyramus, an Anglo-Norman poet, and the contemporary of Mary, informs us that they were heard with pleasure in all the castles of the English barons, but that they were particularly relished by the women of her time. He even praises them himself, and this from the mouth of a rival could not but have been sincere and well deserved, since our equals are always the best judges of our merit [c].

Inasmuch as Mary was a foreigner, she expected to be criticised with more severity, and therefore applied herself with great care to the due polishing of her works. Besides, she thought, as she says herself, that the chief reward of a poet consists in first perceiving the superiority of his own performance, and the claims to public esteem which it deserves. Hence the unremitted attention to the one for the purpose of laying claim to the other; hence the repeated efforts to attain so honourable a distinction, and the constant apprehension of that chagrin which results from disappointment, and which she has expressed with so much natural simplicity.

Ki de bone mateire traite,

Mult li peise si bien n'est faite, &c. [d]

She has dedicated her Lays to some king whom she thus addresses in her prologue :

[c] Pyramus Vie de St. Edmond Bibl. Cotton. Domit. A. XI.

[d] Prolog. des Lais de Marie.

En le honur de vos nobles reis,
 Ki tant estes preux et curteis,
 M'entremis de Lais affempler,
 Par rime faire et raconter ;
 En mon quoyer penfoe et diseie,
 Sire, ke vos presentereie,
 Si vos les plaist a receveir,
 Mult me ferez grant joie aveir
 A tuz jurs mais en ferrai lié, &c. [e]

But who is this monarch to whom Mary addresses her dedication? This was well known in her time, but in ours we can only conjecture. Let us endeavour, then, in the best manner we are able, to discover him.

1. First, then, we may perceive in Mary's prologue her apprehension of the envy which her success might excite against her in a strange country: for this reason she could not have written in France. 2. When at a loss for some single syllable she sometimes intermixes in her verses words that are pure English, when the French word would not have suited the measure.

Fire et chaundeles alumez.

It should seem, therefore, that she wrote more particularly for the English, since her lines contain words that essentially belong to their language, and not at all to the *Romance*. 3. She dedicates her Lays to a king who understood English, because she takes care to translate into that tongue all the Welsh and Armorican proper names that she was obliged to introduce. Thus in the Lay of *Bisclavret*, she says the English translate this name by that of *Garwaf*, (Werewolf); in that of *Laustic*, that they call it *Nihtgale*, (Nightingale); and in that of *Chevrefeuille*, *Gotelef*, (Goatleaf), &c.

[e] Prolog. des Lais de Marie.

It

It is certain, then, that Mary composed for a king who understood English. 4. She tells us that she had declined translating Latin histories into *Romance*, because, so many others having been thus occupied, her name would have been confounded with the multitude, and her labours unattended with honour. Now this circumstance perfectly corresponds with the reign of Henry III. when such a number of Normans and Anglo-Normans had for more than half a century translated from the Latin so many Romances of chivalry, and especially those of the Round Table, which we owe to the kings of England. 5. Fauchet and Pasquin inform us that Mary lived about the middle of the 13th century, and this period exactly coincides with the reign of that prince [f]. 6. Denis Pyramus, an Anglo-Norman poet, speaks of Mary as an author whose person was as much beloved as her writings, and who, therefore, must have lived in his own time. Now it is known that this poet wrote under Henry III.

Kar mult l'ayment, si l'unt mult cher
Cunte, Barun, et Chevaler,
Et si en aiment mult l'escrit, &c. [g]

For these consolidated reasons I think that it was Henry III. to whom Mary dedicated her Lays. This opinion could only be combated by maintaining that it was rather a king of France of whom she speaks, which king must have been Louis VIII. or St. Louis his son. But this alternative will not bear the slightest examination; for how indeed could it be necessary to explain Welsh and Armoric words to a French king in the English language? How could the writer permit herself to make use of English words in many parts of her work which would most probably be unintelligible to that prince, and most certainly would be so to the greatest part of his subjects? It is true that she sometimes explains them in Ro-

[f] Œuvres de Fauchet, p. 579. Recherches de la France, l. 8. c. 1.

[g] Pyramus loco citato.

mance, but not always; and when, upon the other hand, she makes a constant practice of translating them into English, she proves to what sort of readers she was principally addressing herself, and that the monarch to whom she inscribed her dedication was Henry III.

Mary's Lays are twelve in number.

The first is the Lay of *Guigemar*, Son of Oridial, Lord of Leon in Lower Brittany. Of this monsieur le Grand gives an analysis in his *Tales of the 12th and 13th Centuries* [*h*]. It consists of 860 verses.

The second is that of *Quitan*, Lord of Nauns, or Nantois, and contains 314 verses.

The third is the Lay of *Fresne*. This is the history of the Son of a Bas-Breton Knight, who, although legitimate, is left exposed under an ash-tree as a bastard. It consists of 550 verses.

The fourth is that of *Bisclaveret*, and relates the history of a Bas-Breton Knight who is changed into a Warwolf. It has 284 verses.

The fifth is the Lay of *Lanval*, one of the Knights of king Arthur's Round Table. The queen of this monarch having falsely accused Lanval of insulting her beauty, Arthur causes the knight to be tried for the offence at Cardiff. At the instant that he was about to be unjustly condemned, a benevolent fairy comes to his assistance, delivers, and conveys him to the Isle of Avalon. This poem contains 646 verses. It occurs separately in the Cotton library, Vesp. B. XIV. Monsieur le Grand has translated it into prose amongst his *Fabliaux* [*i*]; and there is an ancient English metrical version of it by Thomas Chestre [*k*].

The sixth is the Lay of the Two Lovers. It is the story of two persons who perish at the same instant, victims to their own love

[*h*] *Fabliaux*, Vol. IV. p. 110.

[*i*] *Ibid.* Vol. I. p. 92.

[*k*] *Bibl. Cotton. Calig. A. II.*

and the mad caprices of a parent. The subject of this romance appears to have been taken from the ecclesiastical history of Normandy : there is still remaining near Rouen the priory of the Two Lovers, which tradition reports to have been founded by the father on the very same spot where the lovers perished, and over the tomb which contained them. This piece consists of 242 verses.

The seventh is the Lay of *Yvenec*, a Bas-Breton Knight, the son of Muldumarec, lord of Carvent, and has 552 verses.

The eighth is that of *Laustic*. This is likewise the romantic history of a Bas-Breton Knight, in which a nightingale forms a considerable character. It contains 158 verses, and has been translated into English metre under the title of the *Nythingale* [1].

The ninth is the Lay of *Milon*, a British Knight, in 536 verses.

The tenth is that of *Chaitivel*. This is the story of a Lady of Nantes, beloved by four knights, three of whom are slain in a tournament, and the fourth dangerously wounded. It is the latter who is called *Chaitivel*, or the *Unhappy*. It consists of 224 verses.

The eleventh is the Lay of *Chevrefeuille*. It is an incident taken from the Amours of Tristan de Leonnois with the wife of king Marc his uncle, and contains 118 verses.

Lastly, the twelfth is the Lay of *Elidus*, a Bas-Breton Knight, and is the longest of all Mary's Lays, consisting of 1184 verses.

It is to be regretted that the limits of this dissertation will not admit of my giving some of these poems entire. The smaller ones are in general of much importance as to the knowledge of ancient chivalry. Their author has described manners with a pencil at once faithful and pleasing; she arrests the attention of her readers by the subjects of her stories, by the interest which she skilfully blends in them, and by the simple and natural language in which she relates them. In spite of

[1] Bibl. Cotton. Calig. A. II.

her rapid and flowing style, nothing is forgotten in her details, nothing escapes her in her descriptions. With what grace has she depicted the charming deliverer of the unhappy Lanval? Her beauty is equally impressive, engaging, and seductive; an immense crowd follows but to admire her; the white palfrey on which she rides seems proud of his fair burthen; the greyhound which follows her, and the falcon that she carries, announce her nobility. How splendid and commanding her appearance, and with what accuracy is the costume of the age she lived in observed? But Mary did not only possess a most refined taste, she had also to boast of a mind of sensibility. The English muse seems to have inspired her; all her subjects are sad and melancholy; she appears to have designed to melt the hearts of her readers, either by the unfortunate situation of her hero, or by some truly afflicting catastrophe. Thus she always speaks to the soul, calls forth all its feelings, and very frequently throws it into the utmost consternation.

Fauchet was unacquainted with the lays of Mary, for he only mentions her fables [m]. La Croix du Maine and Du Verdier have done nothing more than cite this latter work [n]. But what is more astonishing, Monsieur le Grand, who published many of her lays, has not ascribed them all to her. He had probably never met with a complete collection of them like that in the British Museum, but only some of those that had been separately transcribed; and, in that case, he could not have seen the preface to them, in which Mary has named herself.

The second work of our poetess consists of a collection of fables, generally called *Æsopian*, which she has translated into French verse.

In the prologue to this work she informs her readers that she

[m] Œuvres de Fauchet, p. 579.

[n] Bibl. Franc. &c. par Juvigny, Tom. II. p. 89. Tom. V. p. 23.

would not have engaged in it but for the sollicitation of a man who was the *flower of chivalry and courtesy*, and whom, at the conclusion of her work, she has called *Earl William*.

Por amor le conte Guillaume,
Le plus vaillant de cest royaume,
Mentremis de cest livre faire,
Et de l'Anglois en Romans traire, &c. [o]

Monfieur le Grand, in his preface to some of Mary's fables which he has published in French prose, informs us that this person was *Earl William de Dampierre* [p]; but he should have given some authority for this opinion, for want of which we must treat it as a mere conjecture. If, on the one hand, there seems to be little that he could have urged in its defence, it is by no means difficult on the other to find reasons to confute it.

William, lord of Dampierre in Champagne, had in himself no right whatever to the title of Earl. During the 13th century this dignity was by no means assumed indiscriminately and at pleasure by French gentlemen; it was generally borne by whoever was the owner of a province, and sometimes of a great city, constituting an earldom; such were the earldoms of Flanders, of Artois, of Anjou, of Paris, &c. It was then that these great vassals of the crown had a claim to the title of Earl, and accordingly assumed it [q]. Now the territory of Dampierre was not in this predicament during the 13th century; it was only a simple lordship belonging to the lords of that name [r].

It is true, indeed, that William de Dampierre married, after the year 1223, Margaret of Flanders; but she did not bring him the

[o] Conclusion of Mary's Fables.

[p] Fabliaux du xii. and xiii. siecle, Vol. iv. p. 321.

[q] Dictionn. Raisonné de Diplomatique Verbo. *Comte*.

[r] Martiniere Dict. Geographique, V. Dampierre.

earldom of Flanders; it was only in 1246 that she came into its possession, and then her husband William was dead [s]. He therefore never acquired the title of Earl: his son Guy de Dampierre was not associated to the government of Flanders before 1251, and did not become an earl till 1280 [t].

Convinced, as I am, that Mary did not compose her fables in France, but in England, it is in this latter kingdom that the earl William is to be sought for; and luckily, the encomium she has left upon him is of such a nature as to excite an opinion that he was William Longsword, natural son of Henry II, and created earl of Salisbury and Romare by Richard Cœur de Lion. She calls him *the flower of chivalry, the most valiant man in the kingdom*, and these features perfectly characterize William Longsword, so renowned for his prowess [u]. The praise she bestows on him expresses, with great fidelity, the sentiments that were entertained of this prince by his contemporaries, and which were become so general, that, for the purpose of making his epitaph, it should seem that the simple elogy of Mary would have sufficed.

Flos comitum, Willelmus obit, stirps regia, longus
Ensis vaginam capit habere brevem [w].

This earl died in 1226 [x], so that Mary must have written her fables before that time. The brilliant reputation she had acquired by her Lays had, no doubt, determined William to solicit a similar translation of *Æsopian Fables*, which then existed in the English language. She, who in her Lays had painted the manners of her age with so much nature and fidelity, would find no difficulty in

[s] Art de verifier les dates, chap. des Contes de Flandres.

[t] Ibid.

[u] Sandford's Genealogical History of the Kings of England, p. 114.

[w] Ibid. p. 116, and M. Paris, p. 317.

[x] Sandford, Ibid.

succeeding

succeeding in this kind of apologue. Both require that penetrating glance which can distinguish the different passions of mankind; can seize upon the varied forms which they assume, and, marking the objects of their attention, discover at the same moment the means they employ to attain them. This faculty Mary had developed in her first work, and it was therefore to be supposed that no diminution of it would appear in her second. For this reason her fables are written with all that acuteness of mind that penetrates the very inmost recesses of the human heart; and at the same time with that beautiful simplicity so peculiar to the ancient romance language, and which causes me to doubt whether La Fontaine has not rather imitated our author than the fabulists either of Rome or of Athens. It must, at all events, be admitted that he could not find in the two latter the advantages which the former offered him. Mary wrote in French, and at a time when that language, yet in its infancy, could boast of nothing but simple expressions, artless and agreeable turns, and on all occasions a natural and unpremeditated phraseology. On the contrary, Æsop and Phædrus, writing in Latin, could not supply the French fabulist with any thing more than the subject matter and ideas, whilst Mary, at the same time that she furnished him with both, might besides have hinted expression, manner, and even rhyme. Let me add, that through the works of La Fontaine will be found scattered an infinite number of words in our ancient language, which are at this day unintelligible without a commentary.

There are in the British Museum three MS. copies of Mary's Fables. The first is in the Cotton library, Vesp. B. XIV; the second in the Harleian, N° 4333; and the third in the same collection, N° 978.

In the first, part of Mary's prologue is wanting, and the transcriber

scriber has entirely suppressed the conclusion of her work. This MS. contains only 61 fables.

The second has all the prologue, and the conclusion. It has 83 fables.

The third is the completest of all, and contains 104 fables.

Monfieur le Grand says that he had seen four MSS. of these fables in the libraries of Paris, but all different as to the number of them. He cites one in the library of St. Germain des Prés as containing 66 fables; and another in the Royal library, N^o 7615, with 102 [y]. As he has said nothing about the other MSS. it is to be supposed that he has purposely mentioned that which had the greatest number of fables, and that which had the least. Under this idea the Harleian MS. N^o 978, is the completest of all that have been yet cited.

But whence have arisen these various readings? Did Mary publish originally but a part of her work? Did she afterwards add supplements? or were transcribers permitted to make selections of her fables, to retain those which they liked best, and to reject the others? The latter opinion seems the most probable, for we perceive that the transcriber of the Cotton MS. has entirely omitted the lines which Mary had placed at the end of her work. We must, therefore, conclude that these persons, copying oftentimes merely on their own account, gave themselves but little trouble about posterity; and that, in this case, there were formerly many imperfect MSS. as at present we find mutilated and spurious editions of printed books.

Monfieur le Grand assigns another reason. He contends that the transcribers took the liberty of inserting many strange pieces

[y] Fabliaux, Vol. IV. p. 330.

amongst

amongst the fables of Mary, and particularly the Lay of *the Bird*, the Fabliaux of the *mowed meadow*, of *the woman who drowned herself*, &c. To prove his point he should have informed us who were the real authors of these stories, and, not having done this, his mere assertion is not entitled to much attention. As they are found, however, in the English MSS. before cited, it must be argued against every appearance of probability, that the French and English transcribers have entered into a combination to alter, or rather increase the number of the fables; but as we find a perfect correspondence in this respect in the copies of both nations, we are bound to regard the arguments of Monsieur le Grand as absolutely chimerical. Let me be permitted to ask, since when has the insertion of *fabliaux*, or little stories in a collection of fables, amounted to a proof of interpolation in the MS? We must, in this case, consider all the fables of Æsop and of Phædrus as having been altered, and throw aside, as foreign to these authors, every piece of the kind which at present contributes to the pleasure of their readers, with which they have themselves embellished their works, and which no one has hitherto imagined to have been falsely ascribed to them. Let us reject such a rule of criticism, as false as it is novel, and let us believe that Mary translated the *fabliaux* which we find amongst her fables, as well as the fables themselves. She had found both in her English model, and equally decorated them with the charms of the poetry of the time she lived in.

But Monsieur le Grand does not believe in the collection of English fables; he affirms positively, that this was no more than a sort of *literary quackery*, very much practised at that time, of announcing a work as translated from the Latin or the English [z].

With respect to the first of these languages, I must admit that

[z] Fabliaux, Vol. IV. p. 329.

all our ancient writers of romance, and more especially of those that relate to the Round Table, affirm their works to be translations from the Latin; but it is a great question amongst the learned whether these original Latin compositions ever existed; and as it has never yet been very profoundly agitated, this decision of Monsieur le Grand appears to be a little too assuming. It is, at the same time, the more hazardous, as there would be little difficulty in producing many of the originals which have been used by the ancient *trouveurs*, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's Brute, the history of Charlemagne by the false Turpin, the siege of Troy by Dares, &c. But let us quit, as foreign to our subject, every discussion of this kind, and endeavour to prove that the fables of Mary were really translated from a collection that existed in her time in the English language, under the title of *The Fables of Æsop*.

I. In examining the manner in which Mary speaks of herself, we shall perceive that her name was not *Marie de France*, as Monsieur le Grand has stated, doubtless after la Croix du Maine and du Verdier [a], who followed Fauchet [b]. She only says that her name is *Mary*, and that *she is from France*.

Al finement de cest escrit,
Me nomerai por remembrance,
Marie ai non, si suis de France, &c. [c]

If we consider well the latter verse, there will be no difficulty in perceiving that Mary wrote in England. Indeed, it was formerly a very common thing for authors to say that they were of such a city, and even to assume the name of it. This we can easily conceive; or even that, when writing in Latin, they should state themselves either natives of England or of France. But when an

[a] Fabliaux, Vol. IV. p. 329.

[b] Bibl. Franc. Vol. V. p. 23; and Œuvres de Fauchet, p. 579.

[c] Conclusion of Mary's Fables.

author writes in France, and in the language of the country, he does not say that *he is of France*. Now this precaution on the part of Mary implies that she wrote in a foreign country, the greater part of whose inhabitants spoke her native language; and where shall we find the French tongue more used at that time than in England? In order, therefore, to avoid being confounded with the writers of that island, or to give a greater consequence to her work, she has stated herself a native of France. Guernes de Pont St. Maxence, who wrote at Canterbury in the 12th century, had been equally attentive to announce himself as a Frenchman, that his work might be regarded as written in a purer and correcter style.

II. Monsieur le Grand advances, without proof, that during the 13th century it was the uniform practice of the French poets to announce their works as translated from the English: an assertion so positive might, at least, have been accompanied with something like proof to support it; for I confess, that after all my researches upon this subject, I have not been able to discover more than two poets who profess to have translated from English works. The first is Geoffrey Gaimar, who in the 12th century composed the history of the Anglo-Saxon kings in French verse; but he not only contents himself with citing the English and Welsh MSS. that he used, but even names those persons who had lent him them. He relates also with extreme minuteness the difficulties he had found in procuring them. Now to call such details as these by the name of *quackery*, is to deny even the existence of the works which he says he had borrowed, and which are certainly known to have existed at that time. In a word, it is throwing a scepticism upon the testimony of ancient writers, equally dangerous and unjust.

The second poet who has mentioned the circumstance of having translated from English works is Mary herself, who, in speaking of Æsop, informs us that a king of England,

Le tranſlata puis en Engleis,
Et je l'ai rimeé en Franceis, &c.

Now at preſent to deny the exiſtence of this Engliſh tranſlation is, in the firſt place, to ſuppoſe that it is inconſiſtent for the Engliſh to have had a collection of *Æſopian* fables in their language during the 13th century; and where is the man of letters that would venture, I do not ſay to maintain, but even to hazard ſuch an opinion? In the next place, it is formally contradicting a woman who affures us that ſhe tranſlated her fables from an Engliſh original, who glories in it, and who muſt have felt a much higher gratification in ſtating herſelf to be the author of them if ſhe really had been ſo.

III. If her own teſtimony ſhould be, nevertheleſs, thought insufficient, it might eaſily be corroborated by that of the MS. in the Royal library, 15 A.VII. which contains a great part of the *Æſopian* fables in Latin, and in which it is expreſsly mentioned, that they had been tranſlated into Engliſh. Being written in the 13th century, it is of the ſame time as Mary; and the tranſcriber, writing only in Latin, cannot be accused of quackery, when he ſimply mentions the Engliſh verſion which then exiſted, in an hiſtorical point of view.

IV. If, in the laſt place, we examine the fables of Mary themſelves, we ſhall diſcover in them internal evidence of their being tranſlated from the Engliſh. In the firſt place, mention is made of counties and their judges, of the great aſſemblies held there for the adminiſtration of juſtice, the king's writs that were iſſued, &c. &c. Now what other kingdom beſides England was at that time divided into counties? What other country poſſeſſed ſimilar eſtabliſhments? But Mary has done more; in her French tranſlation, ſhe has preſerved many expreſſions in the Engliſh original; ſuch as

welke, in the fable of the eagle, the crow, and the tortoise; *wite-cocs*, in that of the three wishes; *grave*, in that of the sick lion; *werbes and wibets*, in that of the battle of the flies with other animals; *wassél*, in that of the mouse and the frog, &c.

But this English collection of Æsopian fables presents difficulties infinitely more important and worthy of our attention than the conjectures of Monsieur le Grand.

1. Was it a faithful translation from the Greek fabulist? 2. By whom was it made? 3. Has Mary followed this version literally? I am aware that upon first view these questions may appear foreign to the object of this dissertation; but their discussion will prove that they are connected with the literary history of the Normans and Anglo-Normans; that they relate to the private history of Mary; and that they are not, therefore, impertinent in an account of this author.

1. As to whether the English translation made use of by Mary was a literal version from the Greek fabulist?

I believe that the largest collection of the works of Æsop is that which Nevelet published at Frankfort in 1610, and which was afterwards reprinted in 1660. Both these editions contain 297 fables. Now we have already seen that the completest MS. of Mary's translation has but 104, out of which 31 only are Æsop's. So that she did not translate this poet entirely, because the English version that she had before her was not a true and complete translation of that fabulist, but a compilation from different authors, in which some of his fables had been inserted. Nevertheless Mary has intitled her work "*Cy Commence li Esope*;" she repeats, also, that she had turned this fabulist into Romance language. Mary, therefore, imagined that she was really translating Æsop; but her original had the same title; and I am the more convinced of this, because, in the Royal MS. before cited, which contains a collection

collection of *Æsopian* fables, there are but 56. According to the introduction, they had been originally translated into Latin prose, and then into English prose; and in this MS. as well as in Mary's, there are many fables and *fabliaux* ascribed to *Æsop* which never could have been composed by him.

Again, if we compare the fables which generally pass for *Æsop*'s, with those written by Mary, we shall perceive that the translation of the latter could never have been regarded as a literal version of the former. She is a great deal more particular than *Æsop*; her moralizations are not the same. In a word, I think she comes nearer to Phædrus than to the Greek writer. To be convinced of this, let the subjects of the Roman fabulist and those of Mary be compared together, and it will be immediately perceived that the latter had always before her eyes the works of the former, and that she has even literally translated the fables she has imitated.

It will, no doubt, be answered that the works of Phædrus have only been known since the end of the 16th century. This I admit, but am not the less persuaded that Mary was better acquainted with Phædrus than with *Æsop*. It will, moreover, be contended that she has herself declared that the English version which served her as a model was a translation from the Greek. To this I reply, first, that Phædrus's fables may very properly be stiled *Æsopian*, as he has himself called them:

*Æsopus auctor quam materiam reperit,
Hanc ego polivi versibus senariis*[f].

and secondly, that although Mary possessed the fire, the imagination, and the genius of a poet, she nevertheless had not the criticism or erudition of a man of letters. For example; she informs us, that before her fables were translated into English, they had al-

[f] Phædr. Prolog. Lib. I.

ready

ready been turned from Greek into Latin by Æsop [g]. This instance will suffice to prove that she had not even the skill of her profession. She then gives the fables of an ox who assisted at mafs, of a wolf that keeps lent, of a monk disputing with a peasant, &c. Now, is it possible, even with the most ordinary learning, that she should be ignorant that Æsop could know nothing of lent, monks, or maffes? What, then, it will be asked, was this English version that Mary translated into French? I am very far from pretending to give a decisive answer to a question so embarrassing; but I believe that a few remarks may be made which will, at least, tend to throw some light upon it.

The character which Æsop left behind him had become so renowned, that many authors, during the middle ages, published collections of fables under his name; and in order that these might the more easily be considered as belonging to him, they took care to insert a greater or less number of what he had composed.

Amongst these compilers we find the names of Romulus, Accius, Bernardus, Salon, and many others anonymous. The first is the most celebrated; he has addressed his fables to his son Tiberinus; they are written in Latin prose, sixty in number, and many of them are founded upon those of Æsop and Phædrus. Rimicius published them at the end of the 15th century, and Frederic Nilant gave an edition in 1709 at Leyden, with some curious and interesting notes. Fabricius, in his *Bibliotheca Latina*, says, that these sixty fables are more than 500 years old [h]. I have already mentioned that there is a MS. of them in the Royal library in the British Museum, 15 A. VII. which was written in the 13th century, and contains only 56 fables. They are said, in the preface, to have been translated out of Greek into Latin by the emperor Romulus. Mary likewise

[g] Preface to Mary's Fables.

[h] Fabric. Bibl. Latin. Lib. II. C. 3.
mentions

mentions this Romulus, and gives him the same title. After having remarked, with how much advantage learned men might occupy themselves in extracting from the works of the ancient philosophers, proverbs, fables, and the morals they contained, for the purpose of instructing men, and training them to virtuous actions, she adds that the emperor had very successfully pursued this plan in order to teach his son how to conduct himself with propriety through life [i]. Vincent de Beauvais, a contemporary of Mary, speaks likewise of this Romulus and his fables [k]; and lastly, Fabricius informs us that this author has very much imitated Phædrus, and often preserved even his expressions [l].

But, after all, who is this Romulus that is thus invested with the title of emperor? Is it the last Roman emperor of this name who is likewise called Augustulus; or is it Romulus the grammarian, of whom some writers have made mention? Let us dispense with this discussion as at once idle and useless, inasmuch as all inquiry into the subject can only terminate in vague conjecture. If amidst this impenetrable obscurity, I were compelled to form an opinion, I should contend that these fables were the work of some monk of the 11th or 12th century, and should endeavour to prove it by the rites of the Roman catholic worship which he several times alludes to, and by entire passages of the Vulgate which he very frequently inserts. According, however, to the odd taste of his time, he was desirous of giving greater vogue to his work by ascribing it to a real character, but who, nevertheless, had never thought about it. As to what remains, it is enough to know that in the time of Mary there actually did exist a collection of fables called *Æsopian*, and published under the name of Romulus; that this author, whether real or

[i] Preface to the Fables of Mary.

[k] Vincent. Bellovac. Lib. IV. c. 2.

[l] Fabric. loco citato.

imaginary,

imaginary, has very much imitated Phædrus ; that these Latin fables had been translated into English ; that, without doubt, those of some other unknown writers were added to them ; and, finally, that from this latter version Mary made her translation into French verse.

II. Who was the author of the English translation ?

In a MS. of the fables of Mary, cited by Duchesne and Menage, it is said that this version was the work of king *Mires* [*m*]. The Harleian MS. N° 978, makes the translator to have been king *Alurex*. The MS. cited by Pasquier, calls him king *Auvert* [*n*]. The MS. in the Royal library, 15 A. VII. says the translation was made by the order of king *Affrus* ; and, lastly, the Harleian MS. N° 4333, makes it the work of king *Henry*.

It is easy to perceive into what confusion we are thrown by these different denominations ; but it is not quite so easy to see how it is possible to get out of it.

In the first place, I am unacquainted with any historian, ancient or modern, who has mentioned a king *Mires* ; and I am very much inclined to think that he entirely owes his existence to the transcriber of the MS. cited by Duchesne and Menage. He had probably read his original MS. wrong, and not knowing the series of English kings, did not perceive his mistake.

With respect to king *Alurex* or *Auvert*, every one who has examined our ancient writers of romance during the 12th and 13th centuries, must know that the name of Alfred was thus disfigured by them. But it is difficult to account for its having been converted into the barbarous one of *Affrus*, except we make due allowance for the rudeness and ignorance of the times in which it was done.

[*m*] Menage diction. etymol. V. Romans. Duchesne, Œuvres de Maître Alain Chartier, p. 861.

[*n*] Pasquier Recherches, Liv. VIII. c. 1.

Here, then, we have two kings of England, Alfred and Henry, who are said to have a claim to the English version of the fables which were afterwards translated into French by Mary. Now it could not possibly be a joint work by them, as several ages intervened between their respective reigns, whatever king of the name of Henry be selected. But, if one only of them be the author, to which are we to give the literary palm? To judge of this matter with propriety let us examine the claims of both competitors.

I shall begin with doing homage to the merit of king Alfred; he exerted all the zeal that was possible to cultivate the belles lettres in his dominions; he spoke Latin with great facility; he understood the Greek language tolerably well; in short, he was truly a man of learning [o]. But whence is it that his historian Asser, as well as William of Malmſbury, have mentioned the different translations of this prince without having noticed that of *Æsop* [p]? Whence is it that Spelman, who has given a very ample history of this monarch, and who, in its composition, seems to have collected together every incident of his life, both literary and political, that antiquity has left behind, should have been likewise silent as to this translation, when he has explicitly mentioned the pastoral of St. Gregory, the version of Boetius, &c. How has it happened that two historians, who enter upon details, frequently of little importance to the memory of Alfred, should have omitted a circumstance that would have given undeniable proof of his skill in the Greek language? In short, does not this total silence warrant us in at least doubting the fact? For my own part I confess that I really do question his having been the author of the English translation that is ascribed to him, and I shall crave leave to offer the following reasons for my opinion.

[o] Henry's Hist. of England, Vol. II. p. 348, &c.

[p] Asseri Vita Alfredi. Malmſb. Hist. Lib. II. c. 4.

1. The silence of historians, and especially the historians of Alfred. 2. The works falsely attributed to that prince, of which Spelman has given some account [q]. 3. The great number of expressions, and many of the morals to the fables, which imply a feudal government in its greatest vigour, and which, therefore, demonstrate that this English translation could not have been of the time of Alfred. 4. This prince began his reign in 871, and died in 901; now is it credible that an Anglo-Saxon version of the 9th century could have been intelligible to Mary, who had only learned the English of the 13th? Had not the lapse of time, and the descents of the Danes and Normans in the 11th century, contributed, in the first place, to alter the Anglo-Saxon; and afterwards, during the 12th, the rest of the people from the northern and western provinces of France, having become dependant upon England, did not they, likewise, by their commerce, and residence in that country, introduce a considerable change into its language? I know not if I mistake, but I can never believe that Mary could have understood the language of the time of Alfred. This difficulty may, perhaps, be removed by a comparison of works. The poems of Robert of Gloucester, who wrote in English at the time Mary lived, are still remaining, and if examined with the Anglo-Saxon pieces of king Alfred, will at once point out the changes in the English language between the 9th and 13th centuries. To accomplish this, it is necessary to possess an intimate acquaintance with the language of both periods, and consequently my powers are inadequate to the task. Yet, if it were undertaken by some competent judge, I believe all would concur in the opinion of the learned Dr. Johnson, who agrees that before the middle of the 12th century the Anglo-Saxon language was already much changed, and that in the 13th

[q] Spelman: *Vita Alfredi*. pp. 93 and 98.

Robert of Gloucester wrote in a language that was neither Saxon nor English, though compounded of a little of both [r]. But, inasmuch as this poet wrote to be understood, his language must have been that of the time in which he lived, and not being Saxon, but a confused medley of that ancient language, of Norman-French, and of the new English which was just then coming into existence, let it be considered whether Mary, who had to make herself mistress of the uncouth language of Robert of Gloucester, was capable of understanding that of king Alfred. For the above reasons I cannot but decide against this monarch; but mine is merely an individual opinion, and certainly liable to confutation. The MS. in the Royal library, 15 A. VII. which contains a translation into Latin prose of 56 Æsopian fables, purports that they were rendered into English *by the orders* of king Alfred [s]. Spelman informs us that he caused several learned men to instruct his people by means of songs and apologues in the vulgar tongue [t]; this might lead us to imagine that the above work was performed by one or more of those persons whom the king was fond of collecting about his throne; but Spelman has furnished no proof of this fact whatever, and therefore it must be entirely rejected. Besides, the objections we have already seen adduced against Alfred himself, militate, with equal force, against the learned men of his kingdom. The names of Seneschal, Justiciar, Viscount, Provost, Bailiff, Vassal, &c. which occur in these fables, both in the Latin text and French translation by Mary, ought naturally to have been found in the English version. Now these several terms were all, according to Madox, introduced by the Normans [u]; and the morals to these fables, which make

[r] Johnson's History of the English Language, p. 5, &c.

[s] Bibl. Reg. 15 A. VII. Præf. ad Fabul.

[t] Spelman. loc. cit. p. 89.

[u] Madox's History of the Exchequer, c. 4.

frequent

frequent allusions to the feudal system, prove more and more that this English translation must have been posterior to the reign of Alfred. In short, before it can be established that either that king, or any of the learned men about his court, could have performed it, it must be shewn that Mary, who learned only the English of the 13th century, was capable, by that means, of understanding the Saxon of the 9th; and this impossibility, coupled with the reasons already given, induces me to give judgment as well against the pretended translators employed by Alfred, as against that prince himself.

In the last place, the Harleian MS. N^o 4333, ascribes the translation to king Henry. But to which of the three first princes of that name? For if a king Henry was really the translator, it is necessarily to one of them, since Mary lived under the reign of Henry III.

With respect to Henry I.—The Normans were acquainted with the fables of Æsop, or at least those which were attributed to him during the middle ages. Ravul de Vaffy, son of Robert archbishop of Rouen, died in 1064, without leaving issue, and the duke of Normandy thought that, in this case, he could reunite the succession to his demesne. From the same archbishop issued the family of the earls of Evreux; the lords of Montfort, one of whom had married its heiress, represented it, and consequently there were collateral heirs who had a legal claim to the succession. But duke William, who was the grand-nephew of the same archbishop, imagined that he could seize upon the whole of the inheritance; and force having silenced right, the real heirs were deprived of their own during the life of the conqueror. After his death, however, they found means to establish their claim against Robert Courthoise, and we find that in asserting it they reproach his father with having made the *Lion's partition* in seizing upon their inheritance [*w*].

[*w*] Orderic. Vitalis Hist. apud Duchesne, pp. 488, 681, and 1084.

This proverbial expression very clearly shews that the writings of the Greek fabulist, or at least of those who had followed him, were known to the Normans from the 11th century. It is possible, therefore, that Henry I. might have studied and translated them into English. Again, all historians agree in giving this prince the title of *Beauclerc*, though no one has assigned any reason for a designation so honourable. Now, the title of *clerk* being, at that time, bestowed only upon men of learning, it follows that this king must have really deserved that character; and I confess myself very much inclined to believe him the author of the English version that Mary translated. This opinion, too, serves to justify history, which has given to Henry a name with which authors alone were dignified, and which he certainly would not have received if he had not had certain and generally acknowledged claims to it. In short, what serves singularly to strengthen this opinion is, the number of feudal terms with which the fables abound, and which correspond perfectly well with the reign of this prince.

But, if the author of this translation was not Henry I. can it be maintained that he was Henry II? The reign of the latter was so tempestuous, and it requires a very pacific government indeed to admit of a king's relaxing himself with the Muses, that I cannot believe that Henry II. could taste this pleasure for any length of time. In short, was it Henry III? According to the testimony of all historians, that prince was not endowed with much understanding; and this serves, on the present occasion, to exclude him with great propriety.

III. Has Mary followed the English version literally?

To answer with accuracy it is necessary to be acquainted with this version, and we do not even know whether it exists at this day, and therefore to collect even a very few ideas upon the subject, we are under the necessity of collating the fables of Mary with those
of

of the fabulists of the middle ages. From this collation it appears, 1. That Mary translated from the English 104 fables into French verse, and that of this number there are 65, the subjects of which had already been treated of by Æsop, Phædrus, Romulus, and the anonymous author of the *Fabulæ Antiquæ*, published by Nilant.

2. That the English translation was not only compiled from these different authors, but from many other fabulists whose names are unknown to us, since out of the 104 fables of Mary there are 39 which are neither found in the before-mentioned authors, nor in other writers of a similar kind.

3. That the English version contained a more ample assemblage of fables than that of Mary, since out of the 56 in the Royal MS. 15 A.VII. which made a part of the former, we find 7 that she has not introduced into her French translation; and from this it appears that she made a selection of subjects that were pleasing to her, and rejected those she disliked; and that, therefore, her work is to be considered as nothing more than an extract from the English collection.

4. That this numerous collection was, in a great measure, the work of the Anglo-Normans, as we find it in their language during the 12th and 13th centuries. It existed, likewise, amongst them in Latin, and, what is very singular, England appears to have had fabulists during the ages of ignorance, whilst Athens and Rome possessed theirs only amidst the most refined periods of their literature.

Among the Harleian MSS. N^{os} 219 and 463, and among those of the Royal Society, N^o 292, contain very large collections of fables and devout stories written in Latin during the middle ages. The two first are anonymous, and the other is ascribed to Odo de Cirington [*x*]. Of these pieces many are full of wit and pleasantry;

[*x*] Narrationes Magistri Odonis de Ciringtonia.

but

but what renders them peculiarly interesting is, the ideas they afford us of the manners and customs of the English in these ancient times. I am entirely persuaded that the authors or compilers of them are to be sought for in the monasteries of England; the morals bear too frequent an allusion to a monastic life, and whole sentences of the vulgate and the writings of the fathers are too often introduced to suffer us to think otherwise. I have, in vain, examined these MSS. in the hopes of finding the 39 fables of which Mary has left a translation, but of which the original authors are unknown; I have only been able to trace three or four, and these with different readings. Some may, perhaps, be disposed to conclude that these 39 fables were actually composed by Mary, but I believe that upon a little reflection this opinion must be abandoned. Mary herself terms her work a translation, she glories in the enterprize, and, if it had been only in part the labour of her genius, can it be imagined that she would have passed over that circumstance in silence? When a person takes a pride in the character of a translator, self-love would hardly permit him to make a sacrifice of that of author, if he could claim it. Again, Denis Piramus, who commends the rich and fertile genius of Mary, does it in her Lays, and not in the fables which she had merely translated.

Monfieur Le Grand has published 43 of Mary's fables in prose, and these are nearly all that I have met with in any of the fabulists, ancient, or of the middle ages [y]. His translation, however, is not always literal, and seems, in many places, to have departed from the original. He has likewise published many of the *fabliaux*, or little stories which he has unadvisedly attributed to the transcribers of them, and which I have shewn to belong indisputably to Mary [z].

[y] *Fabliaux*. Vol. IV.

[z] *Ibid.* Vol. III. pp. 197, 201, 440, 448

I have

I have already hinted a suspicion that La Fontaine was acquainted with the fables of Mary, and had actually borrowed from them many of his subjects; to ascertain this fact I have examined the French fabulist, in hopes of discovering some of the 39 fables which we have already found to be wanting in all the writers of this kind with whom we are at present acquainted, and have actually discovered that he is indebted to them for those of the drowning woman, the fox and the cat, and the fox and the pigeon. From others he has only taken the subject, but changed the actors, and, by retouching the whole in his peculiar manner, has enriched these pieces with a new turn, and given them an appearance of originality.

The third work of Mary consists of a history, or rather a tale, in French verse, of St. Patrick's Purgatory. This performance was originally composed in Latin by a monk of the abbey of Saltrey, who dedicated it to the abbot of that monastery, and is to be found in manuscript in most public libraries. There are two translations of it into French verse. The first of these is in the Cotton library, Domit, A. IV. and the second in the Harleian, N° 273; but they are not from the same pen. The former consists of near 1800 lines, and the latter of about 700. Monsieur Le Grand has given an analysis of one of these translations in his *fabliaux* [a]; and it is upon the authority of this writer that I have ascribed it to Mary, as he maintains that she is the author of it, but without adducing the necessary proofs for this assertion. The Cotton MS. however, contains nothing that gives the least support to monsieur le Grand's opinion, or even stamps it with probability; neither is Mary's name mentioned in the Harleian MS.: but as the translator in his preface

[a] *Fabliaux*, Vol. V.

entitles the work a lay, and professes that he had rather engage in it than *relate fables*, it may afford a conjecture that Mary has sufficiently developed herself in speaking of her labours of this kind. This, however, is merely a conjecture. It is not impossible that the MSS. which monsieur le Grand consulted contained more particular details on this subject; but he is certainly mistaken in one respect, and that is, in supposing Mary to have been the original author of this piece, whilst all the Latin MSS. that exist attest that she could have been only the translator; and if the translation in the Harleian MS. actually be her performance, she there positively declares that she had been desired to translate the work from Latin into Romance.

This poem was at a very early period translated into English verse; it is to be found in the Cotton library, Calig. A. II. under the title of *Owayne Miles*, on account of Sir Owen being the hero of the piece, and the person whose descent into St. Patrick's Purgatory is related. Walter de Metz, author of the poem entitled *Image du Monde*, mentions also the wonders of St. Patrick's Purgatory, the various adventures of those who descended into it, and the condition of those who had the good fortune to return from it; but I am uncertain whether he speaks from the original Latin of the monk of Saltrey, or from Mary's French translation. In the latter case it should appear that Mary finished her translation before 1246, the year in which Walter says he composed his work [b].

Whether Mary was the author of any other pieces I have not been able to ascertain: her taste, and the extreme facility with which she wrote poetry of the lighter kind, induce a presump-

[b] See his Works amongst the Harleian MSS. N° 4333.

tion that she was; but I know of none that have come down to us.

I am, Sir,

with great respect,

your very humble and obedient servant,

Windmill Street,
Nov. 1, 1796.

L A R U E.