FLORIDA VERBORUM VENUSTAS: SOME EARLY EXAMPLES OF EUPHUIISM IN ENGLAND.¹

By E. F. Jacob, M.A., D.Phil.,
Professor of Medieval History in the Victoria University of Manchester.

I.

The scribe who wrote in Archbishop Chichele's register the minutes of the Southern Convocation in October, 1417, noted the appeal of Oxford University for the more effective promotion of its graduates in these terms: ' [afterwards] mag. Robert Gilbert, Chancellor of the University of Oxford, commended in flowery beauty of words the state of the University and the promotion of its graduates.' ² The phrase occurs later (1426) when at the election of Alan Kirketon as abbot of Thorney, Dr. Stephen Wylton propounded the decree of election in this particular manner before the Archbishop's lawyers.³ In close connection with florida verborum venustas stand the terms ornata verborum series, to denote the rhythm and construction of the flowery sentences—perhaps the cursus in one of its forms. There are other instances where such expressions are used by the same registry: as, for example, when the Archbishop expounds the reasons for the summons of Convocation: in maturo et deliberato verborum eloquio satis floride declaravit.⁴

It may be no more than a busy clerk's method of abbreviating

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on the 8th of February, 1933.
² Reg. Chichele, ii, fo. 11 v.; Wilkins, Concilia, iii, 381.
³ Reg. Chichele, i, fo. 44 v.
⁴ Reg. Chichele, ii, fo 17: Wilkins, Concilia, iii, 394. Cf. Reg. Chichele, ii, fo. 11 v., ' causas convocationis eorum ad tunc elegantissime declaravit eisdem.'
speeches which for official purposes did not demand special record. The medieval scribe follows the *grammaticus* of classical times in regarding carefully chosen words, like historical episodes, as flowers. We might easily translate the words of our title ‘in appropriate language’; but by so doing we might miss the point. The garden of the early fifteenth century is a botanical garden, full of specimens, each bed carefully and curiously labelled. To be ‘natural,’ as we say, in speeches and correspondence is a modern requirement, a thing demanded by the plain man in a democratic age. In the early fifteenth century the plain man did not address Convocation, confirmed no elections, and wrote but little to the great. If ever he had to take up his pen to compose in Latin, he did so according to rules and examples that lay before him. In every age convention has dictated the tone and phrasing of letters and speeches, but in few epochs has it been so much king in learned, that is Latin, composition. It was the heyday of models. This is the more interesting because, as Professor Chambers has recently pointed out, much devotional and mystical writing in English during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries was the fine, straightforward outpouring of the heart, the ‘plain and open style’; and English, as an all-round vehicle of expression in prose, was rapidly gaining the ground it had lost at the Norman Conquest. Dr. Chambers rightly would not have us think that all English had been or was now straightforward. The Brewers, when in 1422 they proposed to use English in writing of their own affairs, after the manner of their sovereign Henry V, spoke of augmenting the English tongue, and the increment

1 Speaking of Trevisa’s observations when he was translating Higden in 1385, he remarks: ‘we might reasonably expect great changes when the children of 1385 had become the men of affairs of, say 1410 or 1420. Which is exactly what we do find. It is interesting to compare the proportions of English to French in legal, civic and official documents by 1375 (when English is practically non-existent), by 1400 (when it is to be found, though it is not common), by 1425 (when it has become common) and by 1450 (when it is winning all along the line). Then (except for its stronghold in Law French) French is driven out of England just as the English (save for Calais) are driven out of France: the two great consequences of the Norman Conquest vanish altogether.’ *Nicholas Harpsfield’s Life of More,* (E.E.T.S.), p. cx.

2 Chambers, op. cit., pp. cxii-cxiii.
only resulted in magniloquence. French models, which no one could forget, fostered the love of the ornate; and indeed, when speaking of the separate identity of English in the early fifteenth century, we should never forget the close approximation of many of its individual words and expressions to Latin on the one hand and French on the other. But the fact remains that until the desire ‘to embellish, ornate and make fair our English’ prevailed and ‘Indenture English,’ which Ascham condemned in the chronicler Hall, became widespread, a pure and vigorous English prose did exist, the English of More, the child of what Dr. Chambers calls ‘the ordinary medieval prose of pious instruction’;¹ in vivid contrast with the ornamental Latin speech and tortuous processes of thought and sentence-construction which we are now to examine. In proportion as this English develops, writing in Latin either becomes flowery and involved, or stiffens unmedievally with the imported classical forms of the early Ciceronian renaissance. In the first paper of this series I suggested that one of the fascinating points of the fifteenth century lay in its contrasts and juxtapositions. These incompatibles were found in Latin style itself: Thomas Elmham and Frulovisi, the two chief biographers of Henry V, have little in common; and just as little the two writers whose periods overlapped in the house of St. Albans, the solid and prolific Walsingham and the temperamental but almost equally prolific abbot, under whose rule Walsingham’s last days were spent.

In his recent book on early English humanism, Dr. Schirmer has devoted considerable attention to John the Sixth or John of Whethamstede, whom he ranks as a Maecenas, a patron of literature and art like Humphrey of Gloucester or Tiptoft. Under him, Dr. Schirmer observes, ‘the attempt was made to garb the literary activity of the convent in the formal, aesthetic spirit of Italian humanism.’² The time may not yet have arrived for a full estimate of this singular personality, for there is much work to be done upon the St. Albans’ manuscripts suspected to have been compiled by him or under his direction during his two periods of rule (1420-40, 1452-65), while the years which

¹ Chambers, op. cit., p. cxvii.  
² Der Englische Frühhumanismus, p. 82.
he spent at Gloucester College (where he constructed the library) demand investigation. But one thing can be definitely stated: the problem of what Whethamstede wrote or did not write cannot be decided upon grounds of palaeography alone; it will, needless to say, be necessary to make as complete a survey as possible of the various hands that occur in the contemporaneous St. Albans' books and treatises connected with him, but the style and the peculiar and highly characteristic constructions he uses in his letters are the true starting-point, and if one works along these difficult and often baffling lines, certain conclusions that have a close bearing upon our subject appear not improbable. The first is that in literary form the compilation known under the doubtful title of Amundesham's *Annales Monasterii Sancti Albani* and a considerable portion (covering at least the first printed volume) of the *Registrum* or 'register' of abbot John, both edited by Riley in the Rolls Series, are, whatever scribes were engaged in their actual production, due to the inspiration, if they are not the authentic work, of a single *dictator*. Otherwise however good an imitator the so-called author Blakeney (or whoever is reported to have written the *Registrum*) may have been of the so-called writer Amundesham (or whoever is supposed to have written the *Annales*)¹ it was scarcely possible for him to

¹ 'John Amundesham, the presumed writer of the Annals of twenty years of John Whethamstede's first abbacy at St. Albans': H. T. Riley, *Johannis Amundesham Annales Monasterii Sancti Albani* (Rolls Ser.), ii. ix. 'Scripsit acta Ioannis Whethamstede abbatis diui Albani': Bale, *Index Britanniae Scriptorum*, ed. Poole and Bateson, p. 176. 'Mortuum [Whethamstede] usque adeo magnificat, ut accurata diligentia eius vitam perscriberet et obtrectatoribus imponeret frenum': Id., *Scriptorum Illustrium Maioris Brytanniae . . . Catalogus* (1559), p. 592. Bale states that he saw certain works of Amundesham, two of which are apologies for the abbot, 'in Ramesiens monasterio.' It seems possible that these are the treatises embodied in the MS. Cotton Otho B. IV. This badly charred volume contained, in addition to the items defending Whethamstede against the charges of his successor, 'Gesta paucula abbatis Johannis sexti . . . de tempore illo quo prefuit primo in officio pastorali (Catalogus, ed. T. Smith, 1696, p. 70), and thus may perhaps be the authentic work of Amundesham. There is no positive evidence earlier than Bale's statement to connect Amundesham with the *Acta* or *Gesta* of Whethamstede; and it is difficult to see what Bale really understood by the *Acta* at all. In one place (*Index*, pp. 263-4) he seems to refer to the 'abbreviated register' in MS. Arundel 34; in another (*ibid.*, p. 462) he appears to refer to Cotton Claudius D. I. It is possible, however, that he is referring to Otho B. IV the whole time.
have caught and sustained so consistently the mannerisms and the vocabulary of the narrative portions connecting the documents which he copies. The Arundel manuscript in the College of Arms (Whethamstede's 'register' of his second abbacy) is not, in the strict sense of the term, a register at all, but is constructed on exactly similar lines as, though without many of the headings in, Cotton Claudius D. I (the account of Whethamstede's first abbacy by the so-called Amundesham.) Both are written, to use the expression in the couplet beginning the 'register,' more registrantis, 'in the manner of one who registers.' Now the abbot's method of recording his own transactions may be gathered from a list of books given in the contemporary St. Albans' volume, Cotton Otho B. IV. There was a large and there was a small volume for each period of his rule; in the large his acts (gesta magis notabilia) were registered plene et satis seriose; in the small, parumper diminute or succinte.1 Whether the College of Arms or the Claudius texts are the full or the 'succinct' versions it is not easy to say. I am inclined to believe that they are the full;2 that the short chronicon rerum gestarum in Harleian 3775 and the burnt Gesta in Otho B. IV, are abbreviations (though probably by different writers) in narrative form; and that the register of the abbot was a peculiar and personal record, differing from the average register in certain distinctive characteristics. Both the College of Arms and the Claudius texts connect the abbot's acta by narratives or explanations that abound in elaborate scriptural allegory, allusions from poetry and mythology and reflections couched in execrable hexameters. These explanatory or connecting portions of narrative, which are the crux of the matter, differ, except for the later part of the

---

1 Fo. 16 (folioation of the mounted and restored text). The four items, recording the full and the abbreviated versions, are numbered in the contemporary list 25-28. It is probable that Tanner (Bibliotheca Britannica-Hibernica, p. 40) consulted the list of books in Otho B. IV, as his footnote seems to indicate.

2 Thus it must be the Claudius D. I text (or part of it) to which reference is made in the entry: 'Item, in factura registri ejusdem, usque ad annum praelationis septimum, cum variis epistolis missivis xl s.: Johannis Amundesham, Annales Mon. Sancti Albani, ii, 270.

3 Fo. 102a et. seq. printed by Riley before Amundesham's Annals (op. cit., i, 3).
Registrum, from the businesslike paragraphs of Walsingham in the
Gesta Abbatum, or the short chronicle of the monastery in Harleian
MS. 3775, to which we have alluded. In his biographies of the
abbots Walsingham inserted documents in a very objective manner
and connected them with straightforward and unelaborate narra-
tives, so that the record of an abbacy appears as much the gesta
monasterii as the gesta abbatis. This had frequently been the
method of monastic annals, like those of Burton, Waverley,
Dunstable and Barnwell, in the thirteenth century. But the two
compilations before us are strongly and unmistakably coloured
by the personality of a single commanding figure. In the
twelfth century abbot Simon had maintained ‘in his own
chamber’ two or three ‘very choice writers’ (electissimus scriptores),
which resulted in a valuable store of excellent books.¹
Is it too fanciful to see both in Amundesham’s Annals and in
the abbot’s Registrum evidence of a return to this practice?
The respectable sums paid for works De propria compilatione²
may help somewhat towards this point of view. At all events
we are prepared for our second conclusion: Whethamstede’s
speeches, letters and almost untranslatable verses are not inserted
and introduced by these lively and entertaining passages purely
for their evidential value, but in the main for their literary merit.
The records of his abbacy were to be literature as well as history,
for the abbot was the first exponent of composition in his day.
On 3 July, 1427, Archbishop Chichele requested him in the
Council Chamber at Westminster to write ‘certain letters of
embassy’ to Martin V ‘both on behalf of the clergy of England
and of the realm of England in general.’³ Martin’s attack upon
Chichele for his suspected defence of the Statute of Provisors
was at its height, and in view of the difficulty that Whethamstede
found in complying with the Archbishop’s request, it is very
likely that the letters formed part of the counter-propaganda
on Chichele’s behalf which reached the Curia in August that
year.⁴ That the abbot should have been chosen for this delicate

¹ Gesta Abbatum, i. 192. See the remarks on him in Professor Claude
² Amundesham, Annales, ii. 270.
³ Amundesham, i. 17.
⁴ Wilkins, Concilia, iii. 473-8.
task testifies, as Riley well observed, to his reputation as a writer.

There was no more outstanding master of the flowery style and none more thoroughly conscious of the fact than Whethamstede. The entertaining account of his visit, as representative of the English Benedictines, to the General Council of Pavia (shortly afterwards removed to Siena) in 1423 shows his conceits and mannerisms at their most typical. He had accepted deprecatingly, but with barely concealed pleasure, his selection by the King's Council as one of the English delegation, and like a good husbandman, he says, had first visited his vineyard, calling upon his monks to reveal any matters that needed correction, with the words: 'a little while, brethren, and ye shall see me, and again a little while and ye shall not see me, because I go to the Father' (Martin V, his purpose being to gain privileges for the abbey).\(^1\) Then followed an exchange of letters with the Archbishop, whose businesslike style contrasts markedly with the abbot's:

Son in Christ and dear friend. We recollect, and assume that you do also, that in an earlier letter we told you of the King's wish that you should go to the General Council now imminent; it is our desire that you should inform us of your intentions in this matter, and in the event of your being disposed to start, that you meet us in London on Passion Sunday, to hear and understand, along with the other prelates who are crossing too, what conduct you shall pursue to the honour and profit of the English Church and its government in the business of this expedition. Fare you well in Christ, dear son and friend, now and, we trust, in the time to come.

Here is the abbot writing to Chichele (of whom he speaks elsewhere in bitter terms):

In the humble service of our great President an offering of incense, worthy of God, for a sweet savour. Illustrious lord and father, through your merits honourable above others: after we had received with becoming reverence your lordship's letters and had read and fully understood their intent, we decided to inform you that, although our flesh beginneth to be sore amazed and very heavy, and even now to drink the cup of that journey beyond the seas, our spirit is none the less willing to take up the cross with Christ, and as resources of knowledge, ability or finance permit, to labour faithfully for the redemption of the Church now in bondage. If the Author

\(^1\) Given in *Amundesham*, i, 157-62.
of Salvation favour me, I shall come to London before or about Passion Sunday, ready then and, as my estate permits, disposed to climb new summits of Calvary, and to do all and sundry in this respect that the dread authority of your lordship shall enjoin upon me. Whom to the happy increase of his worship may the mercy of this world’s Creator (plasmatoris) preserve for prosperous future days.¹

All mention of pagan deities, mythology and ancient history has been appropriately excluded from this letter, which is in marked contrast to the one written by Whethamstede to the convent on landing at Calais after a tempestuous voyage:

Dear friends: Concerning the great perils of the tempest at sea from which, now that the monster ocean has been appeased, we have by grace been preserved, we are erecting altars of incense to Neptune, who at the intercession of his Thetis calmed the watery storm into a breeze, and spake and the breath of the tempest was stayed and its waves were stilled. To begin, the nature of our business urging us on, we embarked on our mariners’ vessels in the teeth of the wind and immediately upon going on board commanded that the main sail (circumflexum velum)² should be hoisted and bade our sailors set themselves to row, hoping that Aeolus, who favours sailing craft, would in the end be propitious; and that after a short while he would command Eurus who opposed us to go back to his cavern and that kindly Circius (the west wind) would blow in answer to our hope. But in no way did events follow our aspirations: since before the friend of Apollo had given us our full allowance (plenum praebendae porrexerat) and his steeds were tired, all at sea with us suffered the spirit of giddiness, and we, shame to say, were struck with terror and with all the others in every respect suffered watery sufferings (aequioreas passi sumus passiones).

Then follows a long passage, crammed with mythology, about the storm and its gradual decline: at which ‘we were glad, since the waves were silent; and prostrating ourselves’—though doubtless prostrate already—‘we offered incense to the marine deities, who had rescued us from the Scyllan gulf of the furious tempest. We therefore pray you also to offer with us similar sacrifice and to ask the sea gods this privilege and that after these perils of the waves that did so affright us, we may never be terrified henceforth . . . and on bended knees we beseech you to pray without ceasing for such an outcome.’³ The monks

¹ Amundesham, i, 118-19.
² So called probably from the shape of the rigging.
³ Amundesham, i. 126-7; Schirmer, op. cit., pp. 88-9.
would doubtless know well how to interpret this playful poly-
theism, if indeed it ever got further than the abbot's notebook.
His mythological manner meant that he was in good humour,
and was less formidable than his biblical strain, which was
specially reserved for monastic delinquents or his enemies at
law. The poor brother who sought permission to migrate to
Christ Church, Canterbury, on account of the musical facilities
there, is castigated in the best homiletic style:—

Out of the clay of the earth and out of the dust of poverty was this man
created, and placed in a Paradise of contemplation, that there he might work
according to rules, and to keep watch over it in monastic form; it being
granted to him freely to enjoy all claustral delights, and indifferently to eat
of every tree of religion, provided only that he should keep one command-
ment, that is, faithfully abstain from the tree of knowledge, which tendeth
to evil. Now a certain one, who was a crafty serpent, seeing this, who
had theretofore himself departed from this cloistered heaven (claustrial caelo)
and who was now enjoying a life at Christ Church more musical than
monastic, envied the happy state of this man, and seeking the Paradise
from which he had taken his departure, transformed himself into an angel
of light, and offered this flexible brother a threefold apple (pomum
triplarium) for him to taste. An apple, that is, of sweet refection, as
touching the stomach, an apple also of pecuniary profit, as touching the
chamber, an apple too of free conversation, as touching recreation;
and further made promise to him of a knowledge of the art of music, which
would make him equal with the gods therein, if he would but taste
thereof.

That brother, acting the woman's part, seeing how honied was this
apple to the taste, how golden to the sight, how honied, how golden, how
silvery to the smell, gave heed unto the serpent's hissing, and, with the
woman's impulse, seized the apple, bit a full mouthful of it, and yielded
unto the tempting snake his full consent to migrate. Consent therefore
being given, and the sin of trespass in the matter of a habit being committed,
it was devised and contrived on either side, with all possible clandestine
craftiness, how that the fallen brother, throwing off the cowl of immortality,
might by his departure put on the garment of mortality, and rejecting the
clothing of original justice, might pass into the state of the fallen and relin-
quish his primeval rank of innocence.

1 The correct reading here is not quam ad, but quantum ad.
2 Not 'bit it full in the mouth,' as Riley translates.
3 'Amundesham, i, 89-90; Riley's translation (ii, xx-xxi) with some modifications. On the abbot's fondness for rounding off these homiletic passages with hexameters, see G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, p. 579.'
The written permit for the brother to change his monastery is described as *tunica migrationis pellicea*, 'the skin coat of migration'; it began with a greeting 'in Him that put His hand to the plough and looked not back.'

This is not the writing of a humanist, though humanists might be equally allegorical. The threefold apple (a preacher's fruit) would have put the genuine classic to flight. No humanist ill at Rome and turning his face to the wall would have seen in his sleep, as abbot John did, St. Bernard promising him life, if henceforth he would read his books. It was the abbot's *Ciceronianus* es, his warning against too much literary paganism. Whethamstede could never have penned the gracious ending of one of Bishop Fox's letters to the President and Fellows of Corpus:

> Studete virtuti, et bonis literis omnibus viribus certatim operam inpendite, filii non minus quam si vos genuissem nobis carissimi.¹

He was as great an exponent of courtly prose in his day as was Thomas Bekyngton of the language of diplomacy; but it was always the courtliness of the cloister and in the depths of his being he felt the fact. While unwell upon his Italian tour he was told by a courteous Venetian stranger of a doctor who could cure him, and later discovered that his informant was a leading humanist. His unbounded grief at not recognising the great man 'while he was with us in the way,' and his preposterous letter to the *fons rhetoricae Venetiis scaturiens* (he kept a copy of it) exactly convey the futility of his efforts after the polished ease of the South.² But if he could not capture the spirit, he could at least teach others the mechanism; and that is the point of his dictionaries and aids to elegant allusion, and the mass of notes and *obiter dicta* that are scattered over his various compilations. It was doubtless this erudition that won him the friendship of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester and Piero da Monte.³

³ For Piero da Monte's relations with Whethamstede, see Schirmer, pp. 85-7.
This body of joint classical and medieval learning has long been a puzzle to scholars. Whethamstede is known to have composed works entitled ‘Granarium,’ ‘Palearium,’ ‘Pabularium poetarum,’ and ‘Propinarium.’ The first and longest of these has been thought discoverable in three manuscripts, Cotton Nero C. VI, Tiberius D. V, and Additional MS. 26,674. Dr. Schirmer has rightly pointed out that Additional MS. 26,674 is not the ‘Granarium’ at all, but the ‘Palearium’;¹ but his views on the other two manuscripts, based on incomplete knowledge of the sources, appear open to correction in view of the very thorough survey of Whethamstede’s writing recently completed by Miss Esther Hodge,² who has proved, convincingly to my mind, that of the four volumes (not five, as Tanner thought) into which the large dictionary called the ‘Granarium’ was divided, we possess two in the original version (Nero C. VI and Tiberius D. V, representing respectively entries under the letters A-L in Part I and the whole of Part II of the work), as well as excerpts, in other manuscripts, from the whole of Part I (A-Z), and a complete alternative transcript of Part II, while two articles from Part III also survive in the Bodleian Manuscript 585.³ Of the two parts of the ‘Granarium’ which have survived in the original version or in extracts, the first, labelled de historiis et historiographis, is a lengthy dictionary of historians and their works and of important institutions viewed historically (e.g. the entries concilium, civitas, ecclesia). The second part, headed de viris illustribus illorumque illustriis, de doctrina philosophorum eorumque dictis et dogmatibus, contains, as its title suggests, articles on the heroes of antiquity and is more concerned with

¹ Schirmer, p. 93. This is of entirely different size, script and character from those of the Nero and Tiberius volumes.
² In her unpublished dissertation, The Abbey of St. Albans under John of Whethamstede. Schirmer appears to think (p. 92) that Tiberius D. V has been rendered illegible by fire; and he neglects other manuscripts in which Miss Hodge has found excerpts from the original volumes.
³ Miss Hodge has also identified the ‘Pabularium,’ but not the ‘Propinarium’ which was apparently presented by Whethamstede to Oxford. (It is possible that the Rupinarium, referred to in the Cottonian Catalogue of 1696 (p. 70) as partly contained in Cotton Otho B. IV, is Smith’s misreading of Propinarium.) I do not wish at this stage to anticipate her results beyond pointing to their utility for a comprehensive estimate of the abbot’s work and reputation.
moral adages than with institutions. The ‘Palearium,’ true to its name, holds the chaff rather than the grain;\(^1\) it is a dictionary of classical mythology and allusion, the fluttering gold of the ancient threshing-floor, valuable for anyone attempting the kind of panegyric that Lapo da Castiglionchio wrote for Duke Humphrey.\(^2\) The frequent practice of early humanism was the comparison of the patron addressed to the heroes of ancient history or classical mythology, and the ‘Palearium’ would here be a useful guide. With these two works at hand, a writer would have at his disposal, alphabetically arranged, a corpus of Christian and pagan learning to tell him what authors to cite, what metaphors and allusions to employ, and how to moralise elegantly upon the vices and the virtues, fortune, conjugal fidelity and so forth. Whethamstede’s dependence upon John of Salisbury and Vincent of Beauvais is very marked, and evidently he venerated their encyclopaedic learning. It is much to be hoped that a study will be made of his authorities and the use he makes of them, as has been done for another and more weighty dictionary, the Liber de veritatibus of Thomas Cascoigne; for at the end of each article the abbot invariably cites both author and reference for his statements, and his sources can be traced in almost every instance.

In the ‘Granarium’ the writing is sober and direct, and there is little exuberance. It is essentially a work of reference. Under each historian a brief analysis of his work is given: the main classical writers and the apologists of the Christian Church are allotted summaries at lengths that vary according to their general currency at the time rather than their merit. The greater figures of Western Christendom are discussed both in the light of ascertained fact as well as of legend and conjecture. Where controversy exists, the arguments for and against are

\(^1\) Of one article in the ‘Granarium,’ he imagines his opponents saying ‘capitulum illud . . . non granum esse quod in sementem seritur, immo magis palearm, que vento leuissimo exsufflatur.’ MS. Cotton Nero C. VI, fo. 56 v.

fairly stated, and the summing up is moderate and conservative. Under Brutus, 'who according to the histories of the Britons (Geoffrey of Monmouth) gave his name to Britain,' the abbot admits that according to other histories which some rank higher than the last-named, 'the whole story of Brutus is poeticus potius quam historicus, and four reasons are stated why this is so. One is that Britain is not so named from Brutus, but from brutality, because once upon a time 'very brutal men lived in those territories.' According to these rationalists "it is a work of vanity and absurd to vindicate dignity of race without any basis for such vindication. For only virtue renders a people noble, and it is only mind and reason that makes a man of gentle birth and ennobles him in his origin, since, as Seneca writes in his letters: 'there is no one who is not originally descended from slaves, and no slave that is not descended from a King.' Let it be enough then for the Britons, in this question of noble origin, that they are powerful and strong in battle and everywhere defeat their adversaries, and suffer no yoke of slavery at all." After this early 'Rule, Britannia,' he gives his authorities: 'partly Isodore's Etymologies, the third chapter; Ovid's Fasti, near the beginning, and the Transformations (Metamorphoses)¹ well towards the end; partly Ranulph (Higden) in his Polychronicon, Book II, Chapter 27; and more summarily Geoffrey of Monmouth, de gestis Britonum, the first book, at the beginning.' Ciuitas, one of his longest articles, leads him into the etymology of town names; and he gives a little urban geography of Europe, with the capitals and the names of their founders ('Cnossos, Crete, founded by the Curetes and Corybantes,' etc.). His authorities here are interesting: the beginning of Livy; Sallust's Cataline Conspiracy and the Jugurthan War, Solinus, De mirabilibus mundi, passim; Justin's Abbreviation of Trogus Pompeius;³ Virgil's Aeneid, Book I; Ovid's Transformations, Book III; Josephus's Anti-

² MS. Cotton Nero C. VI, fo. 33.
³ This is one of his favourite works. On its popularity cf. Ruehl, Die Verbreitung des Justinus im Mittelalter (1871).
quities, Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*; Jerome upon Genesis; the eighteenth book of the *De Civitate Dei*, especially chapter ix; Jordanes of Ravenna's *History of the Goths*; Godfrey of Viterbo, William of Tyre, Orosius and Boccaccio's *De deorum genealogiis*. The last reference is worth noting. Only four works of the humanists are cited throughout; besides this, Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* and Leonardo Bruni's translations of Plutarch's *Lives of Antony* and of Cato.¹ One of the most illuminating articles is upon Constantine. Here he defends in a moderate way the legendary figure against the attacks of the rationalists. On three points, he says, my account of him has been challenged: the cure of his leprosy by Pope Sylvester, his endowment of the Church in the Donation, and his miraculous baptism. Take the first. If so remarkable an event had happened, surely, it is urged, Eusebius or some contemporary or later historian like Jerome, Eutropius or Orosius would have mentioned it. The writers of the Tripartite History altogether omit it; and Godfrey of Viterbo declares it to be apocryphal. Against the Donation there are even stronger arguments forthcoming from historians to show that the Empire was both devised by Constantine and inherited by his descendants. Against his baptism, Sozomenus and the letters of Ambrose are cited by the modernists to prove that it was at the very end of the Emperor's life that he was baptized. To these arguments Whethamstede replies that the bible story may provide an analogy and point a moral. The fact that certain events find no mention in the Evangelist does not preclude their likelihood. There is no mention in St. Matthew or St. Mark of the fall of the idols when our Lord came into Egypt: 'and yet it does not thereby follow that the statements of Jerome upon Isaiah are mere tittle-tattle.' Similarly from the omission of the synoptic gospels to mention a fact or event it does not follow that St. John is in error when he does so. On the question of the leprosy, says the abbot, 'in historical matters we ought to trust the more reliable writers. Now the more trustworthy in their writings are James of Genoa, Hugh of Fleury, Vincent of

¹ MS. Cotton Nero C. VI, fos. 40-46. References to Leonardo’s translations are also given on fos. 21 and 39, and to Petrarch on fo. 175.
Beauvais, Gratian of Bologna, Isidore of Seville, and Pope Gelasius the first, all of whom with one consent approve this miracle. This is a true medieval garner, and if one compares with it the titles of the books which he had made for the library of the convent, there will be little doubt on which side of the dividing line the learned abbot is to be found. Yet he wins our heart by his devotion to that sanest and best of English medieval treatises, the *Policraticus*, and by his gathering of rarer flowers like Julius Firmicus Maternus, Helinandus of Froidmont, Petrus de Palude, Alexander de Helpidio, and Cardinal Adam Easton, the champion of St. Bridget. The contrast therefore between this grave work and the light-hearted *Palearium* is very marked. Here beside the usual repertory of classical authorities, Virgil and Livy, Ovid, Statius, Persius, Aulus Gellius, Valerius Maximus, Servius on Virgil, Seneca’s tragedies and letters, Pliny’s *Natural History*, and one mention, though without precise reference, of the *Odyssey*, the dominating influence is Boccaccio’s *Genealogy of the Gods*. From which it may be gathered that certain of its articles come somewhat inappropriately from the abbatial pen. This would not disturb the vigorous polymath of the fifteenth century, the prince of English lexicographers.

II.

When a scholar secures admission to the Vatican Library or Archives to-day he is very properly instructed, before setting to work, to write a letter asking the Holy Father’s permission to utilize the manuscripts or records that bear upon the particular subject of his research. As he casts about him in perplexity for the right words, the *ornata verborum series*, a card

---

1 MS. Cotton Nero C. VI, fos. 53v-56.
2 The best of the semi-institutional articles are those on Ecclesia, fos. 71-3; Eugenius (where, under Eugenius IV, he shows considerable knowledge of the Council of Basel and quotes from its *Acta*: did he know the volume now MS. Emanuel Coll. Cambridge, no. 142?); Johannes (especially John XXIII, and John Hus; in the former of these he quotes ‘auctor recollectionis actorum concilii Constantinensis’), fos. 157-65.
3 Add. MS. 26, 764, especially those on Asellus (fo. 12), Lothis (fo. 83), Priapus (fos. 104, 104 v). The reference to the *Odyssey* is on fo. 12.
is placed before him bearing the correct formula of address and ending. In the Middle Ages not only was the outline provided, but in numerous cases the contents as well. Until the great collections of English private letters (Paston, Cely, Stonor) make their appearance in the fifteenth century, we owe the preservation of correspondence in the main either to administrative and official reasons, or to its aptitude in providing models for future use. It is this latter aspect that has been surprisingly neglected in this country. The systematic study of the \textit{ars dictandi}, or art in composition in prose and verse, on the Continent and in America by generations of scholars from Ludwig Rockinger down to Professor C. H. Haskins might have given us the lead. We have edited and published our unique series of treatises upon administrative practice from the \textit{Dialogus} as far as the sixteenth-century writers on the Justices of the Peace; and in the sphere of justice, from the manor to the King’s Court, we are not badly provided with printed tracts upon procedure. But English rhetoric has been neglected, with serious consequences to other kindred subjects; for, to quote Dr. Haskins, ‘while rhetoric was devoted chiefly to the art of letter-writing, it had at the same time significant relations with formal grammar, with the reading of Latin authors and with poetical composition.’

In a recent essay I ventured to give examples showing how considerably our appreciation of the influence of classical authors in medieval England might be improved by a less restricted selection of the materials for research. But there are other fields of greater relevance where fresh initiative will produce results. The analysis and publication of the letters of medieval students by Dr. Haskins and Mr. Pantin have suggested how much in regard to the technique of composition could be learned from this quarter; and another branch that has long called urgently for attention is the style and method of the local

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{1} ‘An Italian Master Bernard,’ \textit{Esassys in History presented to R. Lane Poole}, p. 211.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{2} ‘Some aspects of classical influence in medieval England,’ \textit{England und die Antike} (Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, ix, 1932), pp. 1-15.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Medieval Culture}, Chaps. I and II.}
\item \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{4} \textit{A medieval treatise on letter-writing, with examples.} (John Rylands Library.)}
\end{itemize}
chancery or registry, whether lay or ecclesiastical. By 'local' here is meant non-royal and non-Papal, e.g. the diocesan registry. It is from local sources for the most part that are derived, in the later Middle Ages, the letter-books and formularies which are the most important source of information for the dictamen in England. The primary need is for a census of these works in each of the great collections. If the private charter and cartulary can be studied, why not the private letter-books?

It is not so much the historical contents of the letters they comprise as the manner in which they are written that concerns us; with their service in providing models for elegant composition. A forthcoming study of the cursus in England by Mr. Noel Denholm-Young is likely to make clear the profound effect of the Papal Chancery upon local chanceries and registries; and the lesson will be driven home in another way when Mr. G. Barraclough's calendar of the Formularium notariorum Curie, with its exhaustive study of the manuscripts, has been published. Somewhere about 1270 an English dictator at Paris, Johannes Anglicus, identified with Johannes ‘grammaticus’ by Bale and Tanner, wrote in the course of his ‘poetria de arte prosaica, metrica et rithmica’ an analysis of the various styles of the cursus, which is preserved along with an Orleans dictamen, now in Munich; and it was round about 1289 that Archbishop Pecham, no mean poet himself, got the Italian notary, John of Bologna, (whom he may have known at the Curia) to send him a summa artis notarie for the use of the legal notabilities of the

1 It is perhaps a better term than ‘private,’ regularly used by the Germans. Cf. H. Bresslau, Urkundenlehre, I (2nd Aufl.), 142 f.; O. Redlich, Urkundenlehre, III Teil (Privaturkunden), 153-208, a chapter, with bibliography from German sources, on the development of the local chancery.

2 Bibliotheca, p. 434.

3 Printed by Rockinger in ‘Briefsteller und Formelbücher des eilften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts,’ Quellen zur bayerischen und deutschen geschichte, Bd. 9, i. 485 f. The Orleans dictamen is in ibid., p. 97 f. See A. C. Clark, The Cursus in medieval and vulgar Latin.

4 See the list of his poetical works by C. L. Kingsford and A. G. Little in their bibliography prefixed to Fratris Johannis Pecham . . . Tractatus tres de paupertate (Brit. Soc. Francisc. Studies, ii), pp. 7-10.

5 He was there c. 1277-79.
Court of Canterbury. It is worth quoting John’s opening words:—

Since the holy Roman Church is mother and mistress of all, every one ought, in so far as God permits him, to imitate her in all her processes. Seeing then that your solemn court and the kingdom of England is almost entirely lacking in persons who have knowledge of the notaries’ art according to the form of the Roman Curia or any suitable form, but that the proceedings in the cases, the processes before the judges, the verdicts in litigation and other matters pertaining to justice are written as they occur by men who, though probably well versed in other things, are entirely ignorant of the art of the notariate, one without which none can proceed in such matters unless he wishes to feel his way with a stick as if in the dark, (from which groping judges often suffer abuse and litigants inconvenience); led on therefore by my devotion to you and wishing to satisfy you and your court and the whole realm, as well as to further the profit of all, I have begun this little work. . . .

It is seldom that one finds any allusion to this valuable and comprehensive formulary, perhaps the basis of much notarial work in the Primate’s court, and a document which must have had an effect, indirectly, upon forms of procedure and methods of registration within the dioceses at large. The point to emphasize is that it was the later thirteenth century that transmitted to England some of the Continental enthusiasm for the *ars dictandi*, so that throughout it and the whole of the later medieval period, formularies, like collections of sermons, multiply. From foreign sources the compilations most frequently found in libraries seem to be those of Peter de Vineis, Thomas of Capua and the Roman notary Ricardus de Pophis. But from this new feeling for expression it must not be inferred that the *dictamen* is the art of writing involved and flowery epistles. To the writer of the Orleans *summa* the letter is but one form of prose composition (the others are *oracio* and *rhetorica*), and is defined as ‘*oracio congrua, suis e partibus conuenienter composita, affectum mentis plene significans.*’ Apart from the information conveyed, its main interest, as a prose form, lies in the conscious

---


2 Rockinger, *op. cit.*, i, 103.
attempt to suit the style to the occasion, and thus to be in turns involved, artificial and fairly simple.'¹ The letter-books of the fifteenth century could be all these, but the prevailing tendency in England during the early part of the period is towards the recondite and the precious, or towards an impressive rotundity. Not till the later part of the century was the Ciceronian con-cinnitas learned at all fully, and even then it was only very partially found. In the early sixteenth century Bishop Booth of Hereford gave his Cathedral registry a formulary, now Ashmole MS. No. 789, partly composed of letters passing between England and Rome during the pontificate of Martin V and the early years of Eugenius IV, and of diplomatic correspondence of the first half of the fifteenth century. In all these exempla there is practically nothing that owes its form and vocabulary to the new classical scholarship. It is a purely medieval, a characteristically late medieval, letter-book.

It may be interesting to observe the equipment in this respect of Exeter during the rule of Bishop Edmund Lacy (1420-58). One of Lacy’s registrars, William Elyot, rector of Blackawton, in the diocese of Exeter, and later Archdeacon of Barnstaple, bought from the executors of his predecessor in the living, John Stevens, canon of Exeter, a large formulary, which is now All Souls College MS. 182.² Stevens had come in 1423 to Blackawton from the Battle living of Hawkhurst in the diocese of Canterbury by exchange with John Birkhede or Brekehede,³ who was to be one of Archbishop Chichele’s closest helpers in the foundation of All Souls College and ended his life as a canon of Chichester.⁴ Elyot, when he died, left the volume to the College of which he had been a Fellow.⁵ It is of some

¹ C. Foligno, *Latin Thought in the Middle Ages*, p. 108.
² The donation is given on fo. 190. Cf. H. O. Coxe Catalogue. The patrons of Blacklawton were the prior and convent of Plympton.
⁴ See C. T. Martin, *Catalogue of the Archives of All Souls College*, passim. In the All Souls Building Accounts Birkhede, who was steward of the Archbishop’s household, figures as paying various sums to the clerk of the works, John Druell. Cf. my pamphlet (printed for the College), *The Archives of All Souls College*.
⁵ It was appropriate that Elyot should purchase the book, for not only would the letters be of use, but also it had belonged to the friend of his own warden,
importance, for apart from the historical value of its contents it is deliberately a composition book, both in Latin and French. The first or Latin section of the book as far as fo. 189 contains a great number of Pecham’s letters and injunctions, with additional material, about which more presently. Then follows a long French series, which includes a group of parliamentary petitions and a long run of diplomatic and semi-official correspondence, upon which Professor Edmund Curtis drew extensively for his work on Richard II in Ireland; and finally there are several treatises of instruction in French, the subject of some notice by scholars abroad, one by Walter of Biblesworth, another a ‘Donat francois,’ by John Barton, scholar of Paris, ‘brought up in all ways in the county of Chester.’ Mr. Roger Keys. In his will John Stevens left Warden Keys (canon of Exeter 1436, Archdeacon of Barnstaple in 1450 and Precentor about 1460), two books, now in the Bodleian Library (MS. Bodl. 315): Richard Rolle of Hampole on Job, and Grosseteste, De oculo morali, both bound up in a single volume with the Poliortaticus and the Metalogicus of John of Salisbury. (The will is given by Miss E. Lega-Weekes, Topography of Exeter Cathedral Close, p. 71.) The close connection of Roger Keys with Exeter is also probably to be seen, as Mrs. Rose-Troup kindly suggests to me, in the appearance of the local Devon saint, St. Sidwell, in a window of the ante-chapel in All Souls College, where Keys, before he became warden, was supervisor of the works (25 Sept., 1441 to 31, Dec. 1443, All Souls Coll. Archives, Building Accounts, fo. 72 f.). The saint also occurs in a window in Eton College Chapel, where Keys was master of the works from the Purification, 1448, to Michaelmas, 1450 (cf. Willis and Clark, Arch. Hist. of the University of Cambridge, i, 396). In 1437 an Act of Parliament had confirmed the Dean and Chapter of Exeter in their rights to the Fee of St. Sidwell, just outside the Eastgate of Exeter (Hooker, History of Exeter, ed. Harte, p. 174). Roger Keys wrote an approbation of Bishop Lacy’s office of St. Raphael in 1444. 

1 See the description in C. T. Martin, Registrum Epistolarium Johannis Pechham (Rolls Ser.), i, xlv-11ii.


4 Is this John Barton, ‘medicus,’ the author of the confutatio Lollardorum in All Souls MS. 42?
H. G. Richardson has given his opinion that the nucleus of the epistolary collections was formed by Roger Walden, secretary to Richard II, later treasurer and ultimately Archbishop of Canterbury (deprived in 1399), and that the collection was added to by some one attached to Archbishop Arundel and possibly his successors. That some one seems also to have been in close touch with Bishop Guy Mone. Whoever he was, he has included a number of important letters in French from various high personages, including Prince Henry of Monmouth while he was guarding the Welsh marches from hostile incursion. For our purpose, however, it is the Latin section which is of chief interest, though it is difficult to say whether or not it was formed by the collector of the French epistles. The hand is of the early fifteenth century, and it is consequently the more interesting to find the compiler going back to Pecham for his models. Among the Archbishop's letters he has inserted a number of a less responsible kind, students' letters that form a little commentary both on his own taste and on that of his contemporaries. In one a student at Oxford recommends a younger friend to study rhetoric, but to be careful in its use:

These and similar words I write to you, my friend, that you may the more fervently delight in the art of rhetoric which, by happy communication of itself, generalises the blessings of peace with remarkable sweetness, refreshing the spirit of its lover. Its abuses, which surpass the sand of the seashore, affect the majority of men, as you know well; a few, however, lead even modern rhetoricians astray and deceive the professors of that art with their cloudiness (nebulositate). Avoid obscure words which weaken the senses of the hearers, and use terms easily understood by the human intelligence; for these hold the attention of readers by their attractiveness, and a friend can thus listen to your words and your solicitations are the more readily understood. Take care, secondly, that your exhortations and those preliminaries which we call 'never-ending' do not proceed eternally in a circle and lead to no conclusion. Why give a picture of the heavens and complain that you are in an ill plight? Why begin with a description of the planets before lamenting your unhappy circumstances? And if you are asking a friend for money, what right have you to begin with the Incarnation of the Word? ¹

¹ All Souls Coll. MS. 182, fo. 73. The third piece of advice is worth quoting:
‘Cave tercio ne Scripture summas vel historias literales, quibus sentenciam decreueris perorare, ad materiam applices sub sensu mistico.’
This gentle castigation of modern rhetoric 'written at Oxford' is not dated, but may well be of the late fourteenth century. Of an earlier period is the elaborate fooling of a group of Oxford letters, in one of which 'the glory in the highest revealed by divine inspiration' announces the election by the students in their drinking-place at an extraordinary hour, 'as the custom is,' of Robert Grosseteste, 'knight in scholastic arms' as king of Christmas. In another, dated 'in the luminous air above Bethlehem,' Discretion addresses the king and informs him that while in the consistory of wisdom she was legislating for humanity, she decided to stop the strife between lascivious Happiness and Religion (clerimonia), a virgin attended by the seven liberal arts, who complained that Happiness was trying, titillatoria voluptate, to undermine the morals of the scholars. Six of the 'liberal sciences' were on the side of Clerimony, but music, the seventh, varied between one side and the other. Discretion observes that she decided the strife by decreeing that, just as the face of the heavens changes with the passage of the months and stars give place to other stars, so at certain seasons, notably Candlemas, Happiness must give place to Clerimony; 'et ideo uolumus,' she sums up very pompously, 'ut iocunditatis et clerimonie talis fiat sacrosancta commixtio ut et clerimonia sit iocunda et iocunditas studiosa.' A second address to the Christmas king from a deity described as 'transetherius pater patrum et tocius ecclesiastice monarchie pontifex et minister' is dated 'on the top of Mount Cancer,' 'pontificatus nostri anno non fluxibili set eterno.' It is refreshing to find these tokens of the students merry England amid the sober models of Pecham, and more pleasant still to think of Edmund Lacy's registrar reading and perhaps imitating them when he was off duty. But the insertions are not all lighthearted: there is a letter of Sigismund to Henry V after the death of Clarence at Bauge in 1421 and one from the Archbishop of Bordeaux to Henry VI during the early years of the minority. The first of these is in the hand that copied


2 All Souls Coll. MS. 182, fo. 92.

3 Ibid., fo. 92 v.

4 Ibid., fo. 113.

5 Ibid., fo. 160.
the Pecham letters and is not an interpolation. I cannot help suspecting that this section of the manuscript was done by some one in close connection with Archbishop Chichele, who had access both to the Archiepiscopal registers as well as to recent diplomatic correspondence; by a man of conservative mind, who was prepared to lighten the collection with examples that made more appeal to modern taste. The contrast between the ecclesiastical character of the Latin section and the secular and governmental nature of the French is worth noting. One belongs to clerus, the other to militia.

The second Exeter book belonged to Edmund Lacy himself. His executors gave it to the Cathedral, 'to be chained in the Great Library there.' Whether it ever reached its destination seems uncertain; it is now the first section of Bodleian MS. 859, a composite volume containing the Distinctions of Bromyard and some collections of sermons, with an attractive copy of Archbishop Pecham’s Commentary on the Fourth Book of the Sentences at the end. The first forty-two leaves contain the collection of letters made by Gilbert Stone, canon of Wells, who was successively registrar to Robert Weyville, Bishop of Salisbury (in his later days), Ralph Erghum, who followed him in that see and was translated to Bath and Wells, and then to Erghum’s successor, the celebrated Richard Clifford, who was moved to Worcester and thence to London. Stone was faithful to each master, for Erghum took him from Salisbury to Wells, where he occupied one of the canon's houses, and Clifford brought him from Wells to Worcester. He is described in 1398 as 'clerk of the diocese of Lichfield, notary,' and to judge by his letters to the prior and convent of that place, Stone was cer-

1 Summary Cat. 2722.
2 Fo. 60. Also 'given' to the cathedral, though like Stone’s letters, it is uncertain when it was ever chained in the library there. Between Stone and Bromyard a theological glossary has been inserted (fos. 44-58), perhaps bound up by the chapter with the two volumes of Lacy’s bequest.
3 Cal. Papal Lett., v, 315: “in the canon’s house hard by the street known as ‘Terre Lane.’” He held the prebend of Wedmore Secunda. In 1400 he acted as a commissary for Archbishop Arundel upon his visitation of Bath and Wells diocese sede vacante (p. 362).
tainly his home.\textsuperscript{3} The metrical reflections of a scribe at the end\textsuperscript{2} show that the letter-book in Bodley is a copy from the original which was sent, along with a dedicatory epistle, to Gilbert’s friend and former fellow-student at Oxford, John Langrysh, Prior of the Charterhouse of Witham,\textsuperscript{3} whom he addresses in terms of admiration as a great exponent of composition. This connexion with Langrysh suggests that our Stone may be identical with the Carthusian who wrote the metrical account of Richard Fleming, printed by Mr. Salter in Snappe’s Formulary.\textsuperscript{4} The earlier letters can be dated shortly before 1381, and the latest not long before Robert Hallum’s promotion to the episcopate,\textsuperscript{5} probably in 1406, when he was at the Roman Curia.

The volume which he sends Langrysh contains mostly, but not entirely, his own letters. He inserts as a delicate compliment several examples by the Carthusian himself, one a very beautiful piece of writing addressed to a brother of the Charterhouse at Hull who had besought him for release from the duties of acting as proctor for the convent,\textsuperscript{6} and another an exhortation to dovelike simplicity—‘simplicitatis columbline redolens suavitas’—sent to the House in London.\textsuperscript{7} There are quite a number by Richard II addressed to the Papacy (Boniface IX and Innocent VII), and one suspects that Stone may have had something to do with their redaction;\textsuperscript{8} for the heading makes it clear that

\textsuperscript{1} MS. Bodl. 859, fos. 1 v., 3.\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., fo. 42.\textsuperscript{3} See E. M. Thompson, The Carthusian Order in England, pp. 133-47; for the library, pp. 316-22.\textsuperscript{4} Pp. 138-144.\textsuperscript{5} Fo. 41 v. ‘Caudet R. Clyflord Wygorn Episcopus de prosperitate magistri Roberti Hallum commorantis in Curia Romana, affectans continuacionem benevolencie sue, etc.’ The last dated letter is 12 Jan., 1406. Ibid.\textsuperscript{6} The reason being the desire to devote himself to contemplation. Langrysh replies: ‘Quanto enim fervencius diligimus, tanto perfectius contemplamur.’ True obedience is ‘the stable foundation and the lively origin and root of perfect contemplation.’ Ibid., fo. 6.\textsuperscript{7} Fo. 5 v.\textsuperscript{8} E.g., three on behalf of Bishop John Waltham of Salisbury supporting his claim to visit the Chapter, fos. 15 v., 16, 16 v and 17; to others at Rome about the same suit, fo. 17, 17 v; to Boniface IX against Cardinal Adam Easton, fo. 24 v., 25; a second complaint of similar nature, fo. 25 v. These letters will be noted in M. E. Pevroy’s forthcoming volume, The Diplomatic Correspondence of Richard II.
they were written by him ‘nomine dictorum dominorum et aliorum amicorum suorum et eciam nomine suo proprio.’ There is one provincial constitution enjoining prayers for the souls of deceased bishops drawn up by the command of the Archbishop: \(^1\) the last entry of all. Stone is very modest about the style of his writing. He reproaches himself for his leisureliness, his lack of systematic study while a young man and still more in advanced age, and asks Langrysh to correct, and absolve him from, any faults of poor composition (\textit{sermo incompositus}). He confesses that he attaches no importance whatever to complaints made by clever young men of more voluble eloquence who presume, in the ingenuity of their literary skill (\textit{curiositate dictaminum}), to say

\begin{quote}
Ecce quomodo sue innitens prudencie compiler merus iste, papirum denigrans frustra, in vanum laboraverat ydiota, dum vento glorie volatilis intumescens talia nullius efficacie affatoria in unum memoriale pomposum satis inutiliter collegit, affectans preconii varie laudis attolli, qui in iota minimo nequaquam meruit commendari.\(^2\)
\end{quote}

A diverting parody of the new pompous style. But it must be admitted that Stone can do as much himself on occasion. Let us take the beginning of the letter which he wrote for Ralph Erghum condemning the murderers of Archbishop Sudbury in 1381: it illustrates particularly well his use of the double epithet and the climax of verbs:

\begin{quote}
Vorax et horribilis impie rapacitatis audita, heu modernis temporibus sceleratus inualescens, dum oues pinguioris dominici gregis effurrit, ipsummet pastorem morsibus funestis dilacerat, deuorat et consumit.\(^3\)
\end{quote}

The unconscious humour of ‘the Lord’s fatter flock’ (an adaptation of a passage in Ezekiel) is worth noting. His best effort was written for Ralph Erghum, while at Salisbury, to the Bishop of Lincoln urging him to take steps ‘against those committing idolatory at the new well near Bustlesham’ (Bisham). Certain persons, ‘blinded by the phantasy of diabolical deceit’ had been worshipping the well and paying profane and heathen devotion to a bird’s nest hard by. The passage had best be left in its original form:

\(^1\) Fo. 41 v. \quad \(^2\) Fo. 1. \quad \(^3\) Fo. 2.
Et pro eo quod, ut dicitur, in eodem fonte, iuxta quem in quodam arbole insuper nidificans quedam ausi manibus hominum in nido suo tacta illorum, ut asseritur, non recessit, ymmo quia domestica et satis domita in nido reposita pacifice requievit, lippus quidam vir fantasticus, suos nuper lauans oculos defluentes estu feruido autumpnali adustos et potu superfuo plus solito humectantes, oculorum suorum lippitudines frigore aquatico natura-liter operante refrigescere senciebat, hoc nunc reputat pro miraculo multorum erronie credentium ceca leuitas scandalizans; unde modernis temporibus ad fontem eundem tanquam ad locum sanctissimum multi confluent, et ibidem offerunt et adorant. Quorum quidam in nidum dicte ausi, vile gazofilacium suis et pullorum suorum stercoribus maculatum, es iactant, et nephanda manu prophanas oblaciones turpissima deuotione reponunt, in sancte matris ecclesie scandalum, fidei catholice preiudicium, pernici-ousum exemplum plurimorum, ac ipsorum sic ut premititur ydolatrantium grave periculum animarum.¹

The bishop had the well sealed up, but it was no good: the wretched people of Wycombe and Marlow opened it again, and in spite of Erghum’s warnings and express prohibitions continued their worship; he therefore requests his brother of Lincoln to have the penalties incurred by such conduct duly proclaimed in the churches. An interesting feature of Stone’s letters are the number addressed on behalf of his masters, especially the supple politician, Richard Clifford,² to the Holy See.³ They point to the need for every bishop to have a registrar who could impetrate in the best curial style, and solicit whatever cardinal was his special protector. There was a good practical reason behind these local works on the dictamen. The favour of a friendly cardinal was half the battle, and it was advisable to approach him in the most ingratiating manner. A suit in the Court of Rome was prepared and reinforced by an

¹ Fo. 3. The quia in l. 3 is evidently a mistake of the copyist, and should be omitted. For similar practices at St. Edmund’s Well in Oxford, 1291-1304, see A. B. Emden, An Oxford Hall in Medieval Times, pp. 86-7. I owe this reference to Mr. W. A. Pantin.

² Clifford had started life in the king’s chapel and had passed via the Great Wardrobe, to the Keepership of the Privy Seal; cf. T. F. Tout, Chapters in Medieval Administrative History, iv, 382, and the index, s.v. Clifford, Richard (vi, 205).

³ E.g., fos. 24 v., 33 v., 41.
immense amount of extra-judicial solicitation. Happy was the prelate who had a Gilbert Stone to do it for him.

Better examples of composition-books made in the fifteenth century could, no doubt, be found elsewhere. The study of the letter-book is still in its early days, and the more work we can do upon it, the more light are we likely to gain from many different quarters upon the later Middle Ages in England.