

THE STUDY OF MEDIÆVAL CHRONICLES.¹

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IT is, I hope, no longer necessary to justify a systematic effort to equip the young historian with the tools of his trade and to show him practically how to use them. Yet though a great deal has been done towards attaining such an end during the last few years, it still remains the case that this country is behind the other great states of the west in the facilities which it provides for teaching students of history how to become historians on their own account. Long ago we have perfected a system of preparing students for examinations in all subjects of academic study. We may proudly boast that our system has nothing like it in France, Germany or America, and that it can only be paralleled in pre-revolutionary China. In some subjects, notably in the experimental sciences, we have supplemented this by training in research, and in many subjects, notably in history, we have slowly but surely provided instruction in the technicalities of the historian's craft and we have always had in our subject the priceless stimulus of the example of master workers, many of whom at least have always shown the utmost willingness to help and encourage the individual investigator. Above all, we have done something—though not enough—towards reducing our triposes and honour schools to their true insignificance as the starting-point, rather than as the chief qualification, for an academic career. The ancient fetish called “order of merit” is now dethroned even in the temples once thronged by its votaries. Professorships are generally, but not I fear always, given to the best worker in his subject rather than to the happy possessor of

¹ This lecture was first delivered in the Arts School at Cambridge, on 6 February, 1920, and was repeated, with trifling alterations, at the John Rylands Library, on 9 November, 1921.

the most "brilliant degree," or the most attractive social gifts. Sometimes, but not I fear very generally, even in elections to college lectureships in the older universities, work done as well as examination record is taken into consideration. Things are really getting on very well and if we really are going to do what, not long ago, was on everybody's lips, namely embarking on a policy of educational reconstruction, we have now a unique opportunity of setting our houses in still better order.

It is gratifying to record that important steps have already been taken to secure this desirable end. Every university has now a scheme for a new degree, called the Doctorate in Philosophy, and the idea underlying it is that the possession of the degree shall indicate that the recipient has not only himself produced a piece of work that shows a recognised standard of scholarship or learning and marks a real advance in the knowledge of the subject studied, but that he has undergone a course of instruction in the methods and technique of his craft, that he can produce original work because he has been taught by masters the conditions under which original work should be done. How far every University is in practice living up to this ideal can only be determined when we have seen what sort of men and women the new degree courses actually turn out. But there is already one regrettable deviation from this ideal to be noted in the fact that the University of London apparently offers this degree to "external students," whose fitness is to be judged simply by the work they offer, and who, so far as I gather, have not necessarily been subject to any instruction at all in the technique of their subject. This is a striking example of the want of uniformity of standard and ideal still prevailing among the British universities. It is much to be hoped that it will be the exception that proves the rule.

The Ph.D. degree is not, of course, one limited to historians, but it meets the wants of the would-be historian in a fashion that is hardly so completely the case in some other subjects within the ken of a faculty of arts. Indeed, the methods of training the historian are in some special ways more analogous to those of the natural sciences rather than to those of many of the more impalpable "humanities". There is in fact no subject, outside the experimental sciences, which lends itself so easily to a course of practical training in technique as history. History gives opportunities for talents of every sort. It

affords a place for the ordinary man or woman to do useful work according to his capacity, while it can involve processes that tax the highest orders of intelligence. And for all alike the initial stages of training are much the same. We have most of us outgrown the old delusion that it is the business of the plodder to transcribe, edit, and calendar, to "prepare the material" on which the gifted historian is to exercise his superior constructive talent. It is only by learning how to lay his tale of bricks faithfully that the real historian learns his trade. And no methodising of teaching can, or ought, to deprive of his natural advantages the scholar who has imagination and insight. But he will never use his gifts if, in his shy cultivation of Clio the muse, he neglects the preliminary drudgery of the apprentice stage. He will remain the gifted amateur, however beautiful his writing, however brilliant his generalisations.

But we must go back to our starting-point, the "historical teaching of history," as Stubbs once called that education of the historian which he dreamt of but despaired of as an impossibility in his own age and in his own university. This is happily no longer the case, and the historian can now learn his trade in England in quite a satisfactory fashion. The real difficulty is that he still does not know in all cases that he has a trade to learn, and that in even most cases those who call upon him to teach history are even more oblivious of this patent fact. Yet it is gratifying to note quite recently some real steps in advance, notably the foundation of the Institute of Historical Research in London which we owe to the energy and foresight of Professor Pollard, and to the subscribers who answered so munificently to his lead. We in Manchester have now for several years been moving quietly in the same direction. If we were able to appeal to the imagination of the rich after the fashion that seems easy in America, possible in London and in West Lancashire, but less simple to all appearances in our own immediate district, we have here the facilities for a great extension of the technical training of the historian beyond what we are at present in a position to offer. Meanwhile, it is satisfactory to chronicle satisfactory if slow progress. And lecturing in this building it is impossible not to bear testimony to the unique resources of the John Rylands Library in affording us the historical materials which are the implements of our trade and to the courtesy and pains which the chief librarian is daily bestowing in his task of

bringing the facilities which the library offers before the students who work in it.

A training in historical method might well begin with lectures on sources, but as this is not a course but a single lecture, I must be content to-day to speak of one particular historical source, the mediæval chronicle. More particularly I wish to call your attention to the chronicles relating to our national history in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was the time when the fairest flowers of mediæval culture attained their perfection. Indeed, before the end of the period the historic flowers began to show that dankness of growth which was the first symptom of their degeneration.

The chronicle of the great period of the middle ages is a huge subject. It compels summary and generalized and therefore commonplace treatment. But before we finally plunge *in medias res*, a final preliminary question suggests itself. This is, what is a chronicle?

The safest definition of the mediæval chronicle is the broad one which includes all narrative written for the purpose of conveying information as to the past. In the Middle Ages a few writers busied themselves with subtle distinctions between the chronicle and the history; for example, Gervase, the thirteenth century monk of Canterbury.¹ In more recent times many practitioners of the art called by the Germans *Historik* have discoursed upon the same problem. But for our period, at all events, I can find no solid basis for such refinements. To begin with, we cannot always learn from the books themselves what titles, if any, the authors designed to give to the products of the pen. The modern author has to have a title, because his publisher insists on a title page, but title pages had not been invented in the Middle Ages, and titles themselves are so rare that the only safe way of identifying a manuscript is from its first and last words, its *incipit* and *explicit*. Few mediæval writers were seriously concerned in the choice of a title, and if they had any interest in the matter, they called their books, not according to what they were, but according to what they wished them to be. A modest man might style a real history by the less pretentious title of Chronicle or Annals. A more blatant writer, unconscious of his own limitations, might, on the other hand, give a very grand name to a very jejune and annalistic compila-

¹ "Gervase of Canterbury," I., 87-88.

tion. The conventionalist took the fashion of his day, while those with some touch of imagination preferred a title that savoured of originality or singularity. There was no prospect of a wide circulation ; no handsome royalties to tempt the mediæval historians to select a striking title. There was no publisher to urge upon him the commercial importance of an arresting label. Moreover, in many cases the titles by which we know mediæval books are the work of transcribers and editors rather than the authors, and some only see the light when the book is printed. How numerous are the mediæval writings, which, like the *Annals* of Tacitus, have titles of later date, destitute of original warranty ? Accordingly, before we can properly discuss the significance of a mediæval title, we must painfully ascertain whether it is due to the editor or to the author. And it is only the more meticulous and up-to-date editor who gives us the material for doing this. Not to labour further at a trivial point, I need only record my profound conviction that mediæval writers used the three terms chronicles, annals, and histories absolutely indiscriminately. When an author wanted a particular title he chose something fanciful. He styled his book *Flowers of History*, *Chronographia*, or *Polychronicon*, or something that sounds big. But when a good title "took on," it became a fashion. Thus we may speak with Stubbs of the "Age of the Flores," and of the transition in the fourteenth century to the "Age of the Polychronicon". This process was the easier, since there was no copyright in titles or in anything else. The flowers of history, planted by Roger Wendover in the fair historical garden at St. Albans, still blossomed, though attaining a smaller size and emitting a less fragrant odour when transplanted to the convent garden of Westminster. They did not entirely revive even when recultivated under the southern skies of Languedoc by Bernard Guy, Bishop of Lodève, the critical and scholarly author of the *Flores Chronicorum*.

Let us turn from the name to the thing. What we have to deal with is the chronicle in this wider sense, the narrative history, compiled under the conditions of the Middle Ages. It begins when the decay of the Romano-Greek conception of an elaborate literary history was drowned, like so much of ancient civilisation, in the flood of barbarism that reduced the Roman Empire to a tradition, an ideal, and a name. But as this submersion was never complete, the

historical literary tradition lingered on even in the darkest ages. Indeed, there were chronicles before and after the Middle Ages, for the human mind always works in certain definite directions, and we must not differentiate too meticulously mediæval man from his predecessors and his successors. Still we may generally speak of the mediæval chronicle as broadly a type. This type gradually assumed its permanent characteristics. It attained its maximum capacity between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. It was in full decline in the fifteenth century. It ended when the renascence of ancient ideals and the growth of modern conditions of existence made chronicle reading wearisome to the cultivated reader and the composition of a chronicle an unpractical way of communicating historical information.

The chronicle was never in its essence a literary form, for in the Dark Ages few men had interest or care for letters, and when the twelfth century renascence ushered in the true Middle Ages the progressive, intellectually active, and artistically sensitive Middle Ages—men of learning and education were so overwhelmed by the flood of scientific specialism that dominated the universities that they cared little for humanism, and set more store on matter than on form, on telling what they wanted to say rather than on the manner of telling it. Most chroniclers wrote badly, some from natural stupidity and carelessness, some from indifference to anything approaching canons of style. But some wrote well and achieved literary success without much conscious effort to secure it, while many had that style which comes from directness, sincerity, clarity of vision and strength of imagination. But their object in general was not a piece of composition but to fulfil a practical need, to supply information, or to prove some case. Sometimes, indeed, the information they sought to convey was not exactly the fact as it had happened. They wrote for many other reasons besides a pure love of truth. The chronicler had to defend his patron, his abbey, his country, his government, his party, his class, or himself. Yet the very nature of his purpose not uncommonly put him in the way of obtaining access to first-hand sources of information. Even a non-historical purpose did not prevent him communicating to his readers much that was perfectly true.

It is the variety of the chronicler's inspiration that makes his output so instructive to us. There was the motive of religious edification which has robbed so much of hagiography of any relation to reality.

There were, too, other sorts of edification which were far from being religious. There was the "official history". Official history, such as in France emanated in various ages from Saint Denis, told the story, not as it had occurred, but as apologists for a policy wished it to have happened. There was, too, the family history, compiled to glorify a hero or to demonstrate the antiquity of a newly arrived stock. Corporate feeling vied with family pride in falsifying truth. There was the history of a university, which must vindicate its respectability by going back to an age which knew nothing of the university, to Alfred the Great, to Charlemagne, to the mysterious Prince Cantaber. There was, too, the history of a religious house, which always wished to trace itself back further than it could, and whose researches into antiquity were sharpened by the practical motive of proving its right to its property. When title deeds were lacking for this purpose, they had to be invented. There was, too, the motive of interesting and amusing, which weighed most powerfully on the compilers of histories for the great public, the illiterate laity, the idle lords and ladies. It was not for nothing that popular history, at first mainly written in verse, was slowly differentiated from the *Chanson de geste* from which it began.

But these motives are, after all, exceptional, and we have no reason for not believing that the average mediæval chronicler did not honestly try to hand on the tale as he received it. But what means had he for ascertaining the facts as they occurred? Under what conditions did he apply his mind to their selection and criticism.

In dealing with the former problem let us confess at once that the mediæval chronicler had very poor opportunities of dealing adequately with the history of any distant period. He had too few books; he had too little criticism; he had too much deference to the authoritative text as written; and he was in the mass of cases a slipshod and easy-going person who was content to copy out what he found in the old book which happened to be accessible to him. Even when he really took pains, he was pulled up short by his inability to imagine that any other age had conditions at all different from those with which he was himself familiar. To him the heroes of ancient days were like the knights and gentlemen he saw around him. They lived in moated and machicolated castles, bore coat-armour, honoured the Virgin and the Saints, and tilted on horseback, clad in armour and provided with

long spears. They had, therefore, little "historical sense": they never appreciated an historical atmosphere different from that which they themselves breathed. Accordingly, the universal histories from the creation downwards in which mediæval writers delighted are mainly interesting to us as illustrations of that illusive phenomenon, the mediæval mind. And this is not only the case with the periods of which both they and we know nothing. It is equally true when a mediæval writer sets himself sincerely to study a period a century or more earlier than his own. Here his want of aptitude for the "comparative method," which lies at the basis of criticism, becomes painfully obvious. He cannot discriminate between his sources. To the compiler of a universal chronicle who approached the Carolingian age, the authentic testimony of an Einhard or a Nithard was no better and no worse than the romance of the Charlemagne cycle which sends the Great Emperor on a crusade to Palestine. To the twelfth-century attempts to restore Celtic antiquity, Arthur and his knights had the same ideals as Godfrey of Boulogne, Frederick Barbarossa or William the Marshal. Like children, they did not see clearly the distinction between truth, sought by an intellectual process, and the romantic product of the imagination. If many of Geoffrey of Monmouth's contemporaries took him for gospel, has he not still his modern disciples? And it was not so long ago that the false Ingulf and Richard of Cirencester were quoted with respect by the learned.

We shall be fairer, then, if we test our mediæval historian by what he could do when he was at his best. That is to say, we must examine his work when he was dealing with contemporary or nearly contemporary times. We all know the difficulties of recent history, and there may still be teachers who maintain that by reason of those difficulties, history, like port wine or whisky, should not be consumed by the tender digestion of the student until it has become matured by long storage in the dry cellar of a muniment room or a library. Yet for us moderns the difficulty of recent history is not so much the impossibility of getting at the essential facts in their proportion, as it is the flood of unimportant and unsifted information in which the true points of knowledge lie concealed. We are buried in the floods of trivialities which the daily press, the memoirist, the dispatch writer, the pamphleteer, the apologist, and the first-hand seeker for truth pour out upon us. How much worse off was the mediæval chronicler in all

these respects! He had practically nothing to depend on save personal observation, the testimony of friends, and the small doles of official information that his rulers thought it worth while to publish to the world. Yet he often made good use of his inferior means of collecting news. We perhaps, knowing that we do not get at facts as he did, are apt to undervalue the facilities which he had at his command.

Let us avoid this mistake. Let us recognise that many chroniclers had good means of information and made good use of them. There are good chroniclers as well as bad chroniclers. The good chronicler was shrewd, circumspect and judicious. He does not easily give himself away, but is ever ready with his *ut fertur* or *ut dicunt*, when he feels his ground unsure. We see how he sought out his knowledge when we read how Matthew Paris was coached by Henry III himself in the details of the translation of St. Edward, how Richard, king of the Romans, instructed the same writer in the cost of the foundation of the church of Hayles, and how Geoffrey the Baker had before him the written memoir of the Oxfordshire knight, Sir Thomas de la More, relating the story of the enforced deposition of Edward II. Froissart illustrates the chronicler who was an unwearied traveller, picking up information, and often no doubt muddling it up in his head, from the roadside and tavern stories of many persons of all ranks whom he encountered on his wanderings. The prefaces of many chroniclers, from Bede onwards, show what a real process of research some of our writers went through before they put pen to parchment. The simplest of chroniclers regarded the natural sources of material as personal knowledge, common gossip, and the correspondence of great men.¹

There was no lack of trouble taken in the Middle Ages to make news accessible, and the chroniclers doubtless took full advantage of the facilities given to the general public to obtain early information of important changes in the law in our country. From the beginning of the twelfth century copies of important laws, like royal charters of liberties, were sent round to the shires and, after publication in the

¹ John of Reading, monk of Westminster, who wrote a chronicle for the years 1325-1345, and modestly described himself as "void of literature and brains," says that he wrote "*plus relatione vulgari quam propria consideratione seu litteris magnatum instructus*". *Chron. J. de Reading*, ed. Tait, p. 99.

shire moot, deposited in representative local churches. The Ordinances of 1311 were expressly published not only in the shires but in the liberties and the Cinque Ports. In the next generation it was considered that it was part of the business of a knight of the shire or a burgess, when he came home from parliament, to make known to his constituents the laws promulgated in it. Perhaps the repeated re-enactment of many laws may have been the result, not only of important execution, but also of a desire to give them a wider publicity.

If laymen or secular clerks obtained news with difficulty, it seems obvious that monks were still less competent to collect information. Up to the twelfth century at least, a majority of the chroniclers were monks. These were, or ought to have been, recluses by profession, cloistered from the world, uninterested in secular affairs, unversed in war and rarely concerned with politics. Moreover, to many modern eyes, monks saw the world askew. They lived in a cloud of marvel and mystery, greedily sought for the miraculous in the most ordinary operations of nature, were narrow, prejudiced, and superstitious. But no one who knew the twelfth century will recognise much force in either of these accusations. The age which saw the work of Suger, abbot of Saint Denis, who not only administered the affairs of Louis VI but wrote his biography, and the work of St. Bernard, who ruled all Europe from his cloister at Clairvaux, could not regard monks as mere spectators of worldly affairs. Nor was St. Bernard ignorant, though his love of learning was doubtless of an old-fashioned and circumscribed sort. In all practical affairs no one could be nearer the centre of things than those two great monks and the many lesser religious persons who followed, so far as they could, these great masters. And superstition and a cult of the marvellous was not a special prerogative of the monastic orders. I have a shrewd impression that the unlettered layman had a much greater capacity for accepting readily a pious story than the more critical and educated monk or clerk. We may criticise the mediæval point of view, if we like ; but we must not regard it as specially monastic.

Some advantages the monastic chronicler possessed. He was not, like the mediæval baronial and ruling class, or like the bishops themselves, a perpetual vagabond. He lived, year in and year out, in a home of his own, where the passing traveller readily sojourned and told his stories of adventure, and where the chronicler occupied a

stately and peaceful dwelling, had books round him in reasonable abundance in the *armaria* of his house, and opportunities of composition and reflection in the compulsory silence of the cloister and the vacant intervals between the regular offices. Moreover, he was a member of a great corporation at a time when corporate spirit was easier to develop than individual self-consciousness. Not only was his own house an organised society for mutual help ; he belonged to a world-wide order. Many great monastic corporations early developed a tradition of historical composition. Knowledge that information given to such a society was likely to be utilised for historical purposes naturally caused historical information to flow to any monastic community intent on writing history, and stirred up the more curious members of the community to seek for it for themselves. The result was a rare continuity of historical writing, which endured from age to age. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, started, as most scholars think, at Winchester by the direction of Alfred, was certainly kept up in its original home for a good century. The continuity becomes greater in later ages, notably in houses like St. Albans, in which the task of writing history was regularly taken up from generation to generation. It has been conjectured by Sir Thomas Hardy, and most of us have followed him without adequate consideration, that the convent of St. Albans appointed a historiographer, to whom the convent assigned the task of writing up the local chronicle. But there seems no early authority for the statement, and the best recent one is the misplacement of a conjectural comma in the modern edition of the *Gesta abbatum*.¹ There was, however, a danger in the continuity of tradition. There was a tendency for this. Such official historians would naturally tend to conform to pattern and we should expect their literary output to show little individuality. Nor is this seldom the case during the three centuries in which St. Albans concerned itself with the writing of history. But individual gifts will rise superior to traditional conditions, and there was no lack of the personal touch in a Roger of Wendover, and still less in Matthew Paris, the most individual of

¹ *Gesta abbatum Sancti Albani*, I. 394, twice (once in heading, once in text) calls Matthew Paris "historiographus," but this need only mean "historian," not an officially appointed abbey historian. In the heading I should read the words, "Monachi Sancti Albani, historiographi," not as Mr. Riley did, "Monachi, Sancti Albani historiographi".

mediæval chroniclers. Sometimes, when we do not so much as know the writer's name, we can discern his personality in his work, as for instance in the fierce diatribe against John of Gaunt and his policy which we read in the anonymous St. Albans' Chronicle of the early years of Richard II.

The continuity of the monastic chronicle was the greater since it was not only carried on generation after generation in the same house, but since friendly or neighbouring convents pooled or interchanged their information. When a society wished to start a chronicle and was too incurious or inactive to compile one on its own, it borrowed, begged or stole the annals of a good-natured community, and continued it in a fashion of its own liking. Thus in the early eleventh century, when the historic fire, kindled by Alfred at Winchester, had grown cold, the monks of Canterbury procured a Winchester manuscript and wrote it up for succeeding generations at Christ Church. It was the same with Worcester or Evesham, with Abingdon and with Peterborough—from all of which abbeys versions of the so-called Anglo-Saxon Chronicle have come down to us. Centuries later it was the same at Westminster, when the reformation and enlargement of St. Peter's abbey by Henry III quickened the intellectual activities of the monks. One result was the transference to Westminster of a short St. Albans' chronicle, called, no doubt by a disciple of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, but quite different from, and indeed very inferior to, that excellent work. But these modest flowers of history were assiduously cultivated year after year by a succession of Westminster monks. That very volume which had been begun at St. Albans in the famous St. Albans' hand, now saw its blank pages gradually filled in by the progressively inferior penmanship in vogue at Westminster. The most individual of the series of Westminster chroniclers was Robert of Reading whose idolatry of the good Earl Thomas of Lancaster is as fierce and malignant as the St. Albans' monk's denunciation of Duke John of Lancaster, nearly two generations later. I call him Robert of Reading for the excellent reason that the official continuator of the Westminster chronicle says that Robert of Reading wrote up to 1326. But the official archives of St. Peter's say that Robert of Reading died in 1318. Here is a glaring contradiction between the statements of two equally official and authoritative sources. One's natural reluctance to believe that the chronicler

went on writing for eight years after his death induces one to prefer the record in this case to the chronicle.

Another Reading, John this time, carried on in a perfunctory way the Westminster annals into the next generation. Under Richard II the Westminster record, like that of St. Albans, becomes interesting and good. We owe this revival of the historic spirit in Westminster Abbey to the unknown monk who wrote a continuation to John of Malvern, prior of Worcester, himself the continuator of Ranulf Higden, monk of Chester. The co-operation between Benedictine houses is here as noteworthy as the annalistic continuity within the same house.

The inter-relations of great churches for co-operation in historical work might be illustrated indefinitely. They go beyond neighbouring houses to convents separated by nationality and geography. Orosius was a common jumping-off point for the writers of universal history of all ages and climes. Marianus Scotus, an Irishman writing at Mainz, compiled a history which Florence, monk of Worcester, continued in England and which was the base of Sigebert of Gembloux's widely circulated *Chronographia*, the most popular of mediæval summaries of universal history, itself the basis of numerous continuations all through Western Europe. But each age had its favourite universal history, just as nowadays each generation feels itself compelled to have its own text-books. But mediæval history, like mediæval life generally, ran in one international channel, and only became tinged with distinctive national features after the thirteenth century.

There was a time when the contemptuous "age of reason" lumped all mediæval histories together as the "monastic chroniclers". This is true to the extent that, up to the end of the eleventh century, the great majority, and the best, of the chroniclers were members of religious orders. From the twelfth century the growing variety of monastic types allowed plenty of variety in monastic histories. But the same period also saw many secular clerks as individuals devoting themselves with success to historical composition, and an equally noteworthy extension of the impulse towards corporate historiography from "religious" to "secular" ecclesiastical foundations. In England the "secular" historian will henceforth hold his own against his "regular" rival. If the best historian of his time, William of Malmesbury, who boldly dared to write critical history after the school of Bede, was a monk, his chief rivals, Henry of Huntingdon

and Geoffrey of Monmouth, cannot be proved to have taken the monastic vows and the holding by both Henry and Geoffrey of so "secular" an office as an archdeaconry makes their monastic quality a somewhat otiose hypothesis. But under Henry II the turn of the secular clerk, trained in the royal court, came with the so-called Benedictus Abbas—whose *Gesta Henrici* was most assuredly not written by the abbot of Peterborough—his continuator the Yorkshire clerk, Roger of Howden and Ralph de Diceto—which must not be translated "of Diss"—the dean of the secular chapter of St. Paul's, London. Though historiography reclothed itself in a more monastic garb under Henry III, and hardly threw it off under Edward I, the monastic element in the fourteenth-century chroniclers rapidly decreased both in quality and quantity. Of the best chronicler of Edward II we have no good reason, except the convenience of an accepted label, for calling him the "monk of Malmesbury". Very constant re-readings of this life of Edward II fails to give me reason either for believing or not believing that the author was a monk, and as little for connecting him with Malmesbury. But I may, in passing, bear my testimony to the accuracy of a writer whose *obiter dictum* that in 1314 all the sheriffs of England were charged in one day can be demonstrated from Chancery and Exchequer records. Under Edward III there is a strong secular preponderance, for Geoffrey Baker, the Oxfordshire parson, Robert Avesbury, the *clericus uxoratus* who earned his bread as an officer of the southern archbishop's court, Adam Murimuth, ecclesiastical lawyer and canon of St. Paul's, and John Froissart, the eminently "secular" clerk from Valenciennes, were all without a touch of the monastic leaven. In the fifteenth century few houses, outside St. Albans and Crowland, produced chronicles of even a modest scale of merit. But we must not suppose that we can necessarily see from their mentality whether a chronicler were a monk or a secular. It would be hard to discover a "monastic" or a "secular" view of life reflected in the two types of work. Their outlook is not essentially different on the average. Adam Murimuth tells us in his preface how in his search for historical material he examined indifferently, cathedral, monastic, and collegiate churches. It was as natural to look for a chronicle in a secular foundation, such as Exeter, as in a monastic foundation, like Westminster.

Some later developments of the "religious" profession have a place

of their own in the history of history. This is the case with the friars, and particularly with the Dominicans whose contributions to history cover a wider field than those of the Franciscans. While the Minorites' historical activity was centred round the fortunes of their own order, and of its famous founders and saints, the preaching friars clothed themselves in the mantle of Sigebert of Gembloux and aimed at writing succinct and digested general histories for the educated man in the street. This was a natural result of their intense educational activity and their practical, orderly, business-like tradition. Vincent of Beauvais in his *Speculum Historiale* sets the type, in a work inspired by a didactic purpose. Martin of Troppau, a Pole or Czech, writing at the papal curia, was another Dominican historian, dry, arid, uninspired, but succinct, useful and easy to take in at a glance. Many of us who have read the English Dominican, Nicholas Trevet's thirteenth-century chronicle, have absorbed a good deal of Martin of Troppau without knowing it. Nearly all Trevet's copious references to foreign history are conveyed textually from Martin's *Chronicon Pontificum et Imperatorum*. Nor are Trevet's English additions different in type from his borrowings from Martin. His cut and dried annals, with the facts methodically digested under the years of the popes, emperors, and kings, with few words wasted, but those employed used precisely and distinctly, remind us painfully of the mechanical *clichés* of the modern textbook, and like the better sort of modern textbooks, serve their purpose in an uninspired sort of way. It is just the book for the specialist in other subjects—and all mediæval academic personages were specialists in non-literary fields—to get up in a hurry what he wants to know of recent history for practical purposes. If some of our war statesmen and peace negotiators had read a modern Martin of Troppau or Nicholas Trevet, they might perhaps have appreciated the elementary facts of history without which a rational settlement of, let us say, the problem of Fiume becomes impossible. Meanwhile, let us record the different impression which Dominican historiography makes on us as compared with Franciscan. The whole gulf between the two great mendicant orders is revealed by reading first *De adventu fratrum minorum* and then the Annals of Trevet. If this be too far fetched a contrast, we may more usefully compare Trevet with that portion of the so-called Lanercost Chronicle which is largely of Franciscan provenance.

I must hurry through other historical types which the later Middle Ages produced, and which do much to compensate us for the drying up of the stream of monastic annals. There are the vernacular histories which first leap into prominence when our Henry II and his Queen Eleanor commissioned Master Wace of Jersey to write his *Roman de Rou* and his *Roman de Brut*. The withdrawal of royal favour from Wace to a rival shows that kings and queens, even in those days, were not always sound critics. At first these French chronicles were in verse, for the growing reading or listening public of literate lords and ladies, who were not at home in Latin, preferred poetry to prose. Hence such books as the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* and the so-called *Song of Dermot and the Earl*, narrating the Norman Conquest of Ireland. Prose vernacular history was cultivated earlier in France than in Britain, but from such books written beyond sea we get some of our best illustrations of our early thirteenth-century annals. We never produced French vernacular history that can compare in interest with the Villehardouins and Joinvilles of France. But French vernacular verse was soon succeeded by English rhyming chronicles like Layamon and Robert of Gloucester. We must not forget, when we rashly speak of the barrenness of our mediæval literary history, that the real literary measure of the time is to be found in the Latin vernacular of the scholars and statesmen and in the French vernacular of the gentry and higher commercial classes. To these, English came as a bad third, at least up to the end of the fourteenth century. Schools of English are too apt to ignore this truth and make our mediæval ancestors more illiterate than they were, because they wrote so seldom in the English language.

After vernacular history comes lay history, that is, history written by men who were not clerks, even in the widest sense. Here again England is behind France, the more so as the first demonstrably lay chronicle, the London history written by Arnold, son of Thedmar, was the work of a man of German stock, but settled in England and an alderman of London. It prepared the way for the long series of London chronicles which are so valuable in their aggregate for the later Middle Ages. But London was the only big town of mediæval England. Its unmeasurable superiority over Bristol and Lynn, its nearest rivals in the composition of civic histories, is symbolic of its unique position in our history in those days. Side by side with civic

histories came chronicles written by lettered knights, for the *miles litteratus* was common from the fourteenth century. We cannot have a better instance of these than the *Scalachronica*, written to beguile his imprisonment at the hands of the Scots, by one of the first of the Northumbrian knightly house of Grey who won for himself a place in history.

But I must pull myself up or I shall be in danger of neglecting the appreciation of the value of the mediæval chronicler in a breathless attempt to enumerate his various types. There still remain for consideration many points connected with their historical value, not only by itself but in comparison with other sources.

Time was when the chronicle was considered the sole or the main material for mediæval history. A now forgotten history of the Norman Conquest declared itself on the title page to be based on a "new collation of the contemporary chronicles". Few writers would be so naive now-a-days as to regard as adequate such a facile method of historical composition. With the opening up of archives and with their contents becoming more accessible through lists, calendars, summaries and the publication *in extenso* of many documents, it has become the fashion to regard the record as superior in authority to the chronicle. There is now a school of historians which is not satisfied unless it can base its conclusions on record evidence. Some of its extreme disciples act as if records could never be wrong. They often declare that chroniclers are essentially untrustworthy. It is easy to demonstrate the unwisdom of such extreme claims. It is more important to notice that, with the increased study of records, the chronicle has more or less come under a cloud.

The consequences of this reaction have been the more serious since with the increased study of records has come a widened view of the province of history. It is not so very long ago that Freeman said, amidst general approval, that history was past politics and politics present history. But nowadays our conception of history is not limited to the history of the state. Even when we still fix our attention on political history, our object is not primarily to frame a narrative. We wish to describe, to analyse, to reconstruct, to understand, rather than simply to tell the tale in chronological sequence. And some of the more ardent souls are beginning to despise political history altogether. They seek to expound not the history of the state but the history of

society, and rightly, since in modern and even in mediæval times the state was not the only or even the most potent of the organisations which bound together man and man for a common purpose. With this extension of the field of history, the chronicler becomes less important. He is, above all things, the teller of a story. If history is not primarily narrative, what is the use of the chronicler ?

The exclusive cult of the chronicler was one-sided and unscientific : but the excessive reaction against him cannot be justified, either by the importance of other sources of information, or by the inclusion within the historic field of activities with which the political or the narrative historian has little concern. Nor can we study the history of society with effect until we have set forth clearly the history of the state in all its aspects. And of how many periods of our mediæval history can we truly say that the basis of political history has been well and truly laid ? And where would political history be, if it were not for the chronicles ?

We may make full recognition of the limitations of a chronicler's knowledge, of his bias, his lack of proportion and his failure in perspective. But we must not blind ourselves to the fact that, without the aid of the chronicler, the consecutive history of church and state in the Middle Ages could not be written at all. The chronicles supply us with the frame in which we can set our picture. More than that, they afford us nearly all the colour, life, and human interest that we can paint into the picture itself. Records are arid things, and though they afford a happy hunting ground for the seeker after novelties, he seldom finds in them anything that can stimulate his imagination or brighten his task. The investigator, who perforce has to work mainly among records, has a weary row to hoe, but he perseveres because it is only by the cultivation of this stubborn field that he can attain the results for which he is seeking. If it may be permitted a personal illustration, I may tell you that for the last ten years I have been largely occupied in investigating some aspects of the administrative machine by which mediæval England was governed. For such an enquiry the chroniclers are almost useless ; if I have read many chronicles, it has only been to seek what I did not find, and to convince myself of their ignorance or indifference to the whole of our administrative system. I have therefore been compelled to quarry my material almost exclusively from records. The result of this long banishment from the intellectual food of my earlier days has made me profoundly cognisant of the in-

dispensable service of the chronicler to mediæval history. The rush through records is interesting enough, but the immediate results are less so. With what thankfulness one notes and remembers the jest, salted perhaps with a touch of profanity, or impropriety, with which the average record writer scribbles on a blank page some effort to alleviate his tedious task. How unrelated and trivial seem our extracts from his rolls! Now that I draw near to the conclusion of the task, I cannot but feel real affinities with M. Fulgence Tapir, the marvellously shortsighted *savant*, whose method of work while compiling the universal annals of art has been revealed to us in the sprightly pages of Anatole France. "I possess the whole of art," boasted that worthy, "on *fiches*, classed alphabetically and by order of subjects." But no sooner had a seeker after knowledge opened, at the master's bidding, the particular box that contained the material which he was to consult, than the whole mass of boxes which lined the scholar's study burst open with a murmur like that of swollen cascades in spring-time pouring down the mountain sides. To cut the story short, M. Tapir was lamentably drowned in the flood of his own slips, in his own *cabinet de travail*. His disciple escaped his fate with difficulty by jumping through the top of the window. The *fiche* is a good servant but a bad master, and the exclusive collection of the isolated slips that record work tends to stimulate requires to be controlled by a strong head and a rigorous sense of proportion. The most wooden collation of chronicles can hardly yield as inhuman a result as the piling up of detached items of detail from a variety of isolated documents. When the ship of knowledge, laden with such a cargo, encounters a storm, we must not be surprised if the captain strives to lighten the ship by jettisoning the most ponderous part of its lading. If he gets home to port with his cargo, its value in the market will depend not on the dry facts, but on his power of selection, construction, imagination and synthesis—just those gifts, in short, which are sometimes regarded as the special gift of the "historian" as opposed to the chronicler.

It is easy to see a superficial justification for the superior person who brushes aside a picturesque bit of history, a trait of personality, or a direct attribution of motive, as "mere chroniclers' gossip". I have already hinted at the difficulties by which the mediæval chroniclers were beset, and I do not deny that for precision of detail and chronological accuracy of statement the best of chroniclers leave something to

be desired. But the same may be said of the poems and romances and the other literary remains that reflect the spirit of an age. Moreover, it is in these pedestrian respects that chronicler's statements can be controlled by records, and that more easily than more easily in England than in any other country of Western Europe, except perhaps Aragon, because of the wonderful richness of our surviving archives. Moreover, the chroniclers who are best known, and who have by their inaccuracies and confusions brought discredit to their class, are precisely those brilliant and literary historians who, with many merits of their own, are far from representing the average level of a chronicler's accuracy. Take, for instance, Matthew Paris and Froissart, certainly the most talked about, probably the most read of the narrative authorities for our mediæval history. They are the most slipshod and inaccurate of writers. They are full of strong prejudices and abound in biased judgments. They can, times out of mind, be demonstrated to be wrong in this or that statement, and in this or that judgment. Yet what should we do without them? How instructive, yet how hopelessly warped are those curious embroideries with which Matthew Paris so often ornamented the plain though fine cloth garments of his predecessor Roger Wendover? How the *Chronica Maiora* give us a vivid impression of the dawn of self-consciousness in the infant English nation, handing on to the Jingo chroniclers of the Hundred Years' War the germ of their fierce undying prejudice against the foreigner which comes to a head in the fiercely patriotic pages of a Geoffrey Baker? How instructive, too, in the atmosphere of fourteenth-century chivalry is Froissart? Better chroniclers may control his inaccuracies. Baker shows us that the Black Prince did not in 1355 work his way into Languedoc up the Garonne valley, as Froissart imagines, but through the tangled uplands of Armagnac, Astarac and Foix, and that the crowning victory of Poitiers was not a cavalry scuffle in a narrow lane. Record sources will enable us still more meticulously to trace the itineraries of kings and armies, to appreciate the methods by which the English host was levied, paid, drilled, equipped and governed. But we should study the "age of chivalry" to little purpose did we not gather from Froissart's pages the very spirit of the time, the hard-fighting, magnanimous, whimsical gentry of France and England, waging war against each other with strict attention to the artificial rules of the ring which they had devised for the protection of their class, only cruel and re-

morseless to their own order when they regarded it as violating the conventions of honour, but seldom deigning to spare the puddle blood of the rascal multitude, on which, as the story of the Limoges massacre shows, the worst burden of war inevitably fell.

The chronicler is not our only source of colour and atmosphere. The literary remains are almost as important and have been lamentably neglected by most historians. Almost as neglected by the generality are the records in stone, the archæological remains, that have a colour and art of their own. Yet we must turn first of all to the chronicler for variety of inspiration. From the chroniclers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries every current of public opinion in France and England is reflected as in a mirror. In our own land we have the majority of the chroniclers representing that baronial policy of opposition which English public opinion identified with the national struggle for freedom, just as they indicated, even more meticulously, the sturdy patriotism which saw in the dynastic claims of Edward III a national struggle for existence against our enemy of France. Among the French writers we have an equal variety of sentiment. The international ideal of aristocratic chivalry had its champion in Froissart, just as the national monarchy of France had its advocate in Pierre d'Orgement. The common people, of whom Froissart spoke so lightly, had its claims set forth by the Parisian friar, Jean de Venette, who describes the sufferings of the peasantry from the ravages of war, denounces the nobles who rode roughshod over their serfs, and saw in Étienne Marcel the champion of a liberty worth winning even at the price of a revolution. The generally "Burgundian" sentiment of the early fifteenth-century French writers shows the need that France had for the patriotic inspiration of the Maid of Orleans.

Even the chroniclers who write with a purpose were often well informed when their brief allowed them to tell the truth. The official chroniclers make up for their political or personal object by their access to official sources of information. For this reason the official annals of the Merovingians and Carolingians have their special value, despite their bias. For this reason the official history of the Capetians, largely written at Saint Denis, must not be neglected. The best example of this is the way in which Pierre d'Orgement, Chancellor of France, re-edited the Chronicle of Saint Denis so as to glorify the deeds of his master, Charles V, and justify the claims of France against the English.

Orgement wrote, we are told, under the inspiration of the king, and reflected the monarch's most secret motives and cares. Such a book is a real document, far removed from the "chroniclers' gossip" which the one-sided record enthusiast vainly talks. The parallel French and Latin versions of the official Saint Denis apology shows that public opinion was as much deferred to in France as in England.

Most sharp contrasts have more reality in the minds of those who make them than in the facts themselves. The contrast between chronicle and record suggests fundamentally different types of information. Yet as a matter of fact chroniclers used records just as we have learnt to do, and not the least of our debts to chronicles is that many of them have utilized record material and have handed on to us records that otherwise we should never have known. Bede obtained from Rome copies of papal letters to elucidate the conversion of England to the Christian faith. The so-called Benedict of Peterborough and his continuator, Roger Howden, availed themselves of the extensive archives of their master Henry II, and wrote out many charters in the course of their narrative. We are much indebted to the arid lawyer-chronicler, Robert of Avesbury, for saving himself the labour of composing his own story of Edward III's campaigns in France by copying the despatches sent from the field by the king's counsellors, chaplains, and generals. Even an involved and artfully confected narrative, like that of Geoffrey the Baker of the same wars, is in parts based on record sources, even when these sources are not acknowledged. Yet how few of these records used by chroniclers are now to be found in our national archives, and how great is our debt to the historians who have preserved them for us?

So much was the working up of records in a narrative a recognised method of historiography, that we have a definite type of monastic cartulary-chronicle in which the charters of the house are strung together by a thin thread of narrative, after the fashion of Avesbury's chronicle of battles. Perhaps this type is best illustrated for us by a famous early fifteenth-century forgery which assumed this shape. This is the *Historia Crowlandensis*, compiled in Crowland abbey in the days of Richard II and Henry IV in order to justify the monks' claims to disputed property. This "history" added immensely to the goodly store of false charters already in possession of the house to secure its title deeds. The forgery was fathered on Ingulf, abbot of Crow-

land under William the Conqueror, and taken as a valuable piece of true history almost to our own days. But the art of forgery was universal in the Middle Ages. It was contact with these falsifications that produced some of the best efforts of mediæval *Quellenkritik*.

In these very desultory observations I have aimed at showing that, with all its many faults, the mediæval chronicle is an indispensable tool to the mediæval historian. To all young mediævalists one can say with absolute assurance—Read mediæval chronicles. Read them, not merely to pick out the particular points which you are in quest of, or to copy out a passage indicated by the index ; but read them consecutively and as a whole. Read them in your armchair when you have no immediate practical point to extract from them, and no special occasion to remember them. Read them to get the spirit and mentality of the time, even if for your particular purpose the chronicle has little to tell. But when you have done this, do not think that there is nothing more to be done with the chroniclers. It is not only that they must find their place among the many types of source on which your book will be based. Then the chronicle, so far as it is true to fact, must be combined with your records, your letters, your archæological, and your literary material in a synthesis that correlates the whole of the evidence. And the danger to mediæval studies, as to many other studies, is not only lack of technique, which can be remedied. It is much more a long continued concentration on one aspect of the sources which makes the rest worse than non-existent to us. To the more technical students of the Middle Ages, there is no better relief than the study of the chroniclers. If you do this, you will not stop there ; you will go on to non-historical literature. You will, in time, become that *rara avis* among historians, a well-read man in the general literature of your period. The one-sided and restricted knowledge that comes from premature and excessive specialisation on one side of an age is almost as dangerous to true science as the lack of adequate specialism at all.

One more problem before I finish. Let us admit, it may be said, the rather restricted value which you assign to the chroniclers. But have we not learnt already all that the chronicles have to tell us ? Have they not been in print, the best of them for centuries ? Have not their provenance, their inter-relations, their affiliations, their authorship, their authority, been already so thoroughly studied that

the field is almost exhausted, and its further cultivation would involve an increasingly diminishing return to the labourers ?

My answer is that those, who are most prone to complain that all the work that matters has been done already, are just those who have the least clear conception of the immensity of the field to be traversed and of the imperfection of much of the work already accomplished. But it is useless to deny that in some quarters the essential work on the chronicles has already been done and that we have printed and critical editions that are sufficient for most purposes. This is especially true of the earlier periods, where the mass of material is small and the fascination of exploring origins and solving puzzles have always attracted the attention of many acute minded scholars. There is not perhaps much more to be done with English before the Conquest, and what is still to be done is rather in the criticism of charters than of chronicles. The same is true of the Norman and Angevin periods, but to a decreasing extent as we get towards the end of that age. It is much less true of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. We have learned much that is new as to these periods from the publication of unedited chronicles by Liebermann, Horstmann, Paul Meyer, Kingsford, James, Flenley, and Tait, but the tale is not yet complete. An old pupil of mine, a recent teacher in our University, has just come across almost by accident a chronicle hitherto unknown, which will, when published, help to illuminate some of the darker passages of the reign of Edward III. In all great libraries, such as the John Rylands, there may well be similar discoveries to be made and that not only in the way of chronicles. But there is work to be done even on the known chronicles. Many of the best chronicles are only accessible in old editions, not always very critical, and, critical or not, existing in such scanty numbers that the least increase in demand sends up their prices in second-hand book shops to an alarming rate. For that reason we are thankful to welcome such a reprint as that which Dr. James, the Provost of Eton, has recently given us of Blakman's eulogy of Henry VI. We want new editions of such works as Hemingburgh, Trevet, and other very imperfectly studied thirteenth-century writers. In the next period what an impetus to study a good new edition, such as that of Thompson's *Geoffrey le Baker*, has proved to be. We want some notoriously bad editions, which it would be invidious to name, superseded by something more competent. But we do not only want new

editions ; we want still more increased study of texts already more or less accessible. So long ago as 1840 Francisque Michel published the chronicle which he called *L'Histoire des Ducs de Normandie et des Rois d'Angleterre*, but it was not until more than fifty years later that M. Petit Dutailis demonstrated its origin and showed its supreme importance for the reign of John and the early part of the reign of Henry III. It was in 1894 that the Abbé Moisant printed from manuscript in Corpus College, Cambridge, in his *Prince Noir en Aquitaine* the fragmentary *acta bellicosa Edwardi* which threw real light on the conquest of Normandy in 1346. But the *acta bellicosa* had little to do with the Black Prince and nothing with Aquitaine, and for ten years it escaped all attention until it was at last fully utilized by Professor Prentout of Caen in his *Prise de Caen par Édouard III*, issued in 1904. Thus discoveries can be made in printed sources, whether chronicles or otherwise. I think they can still be made in Rymer's *Foedera*, which has now been in print for over two centuries !

Thus there is plenty of work still to be done on the chronicles, both printed and unprinted. And if we are to popularise the study of mediæval chronicles in this country, we should do well to interest the younger generation in establishing a series of cheap and short but adequate texts of the better chronicles for class and seminar use, such as was first illustrated in Germany by the Pertz series *in usum scholarum* and is best shown by Picard's extremely valuable and handy *Collection de Textes pour servir à l'Etude et l'Enseignement de l'Histoire*. If such a series, like the French one, contained documents as well as chronicles, so much the better. For, though my business to-day is to claim its rights for the chronicle, I should be the last to claim for it an exclusive or even preponderating place among our authorities. It is indispensable for certain purposes ; it is useful for all. But I am bound to confess that, while to some temperaments there is plenty of mental gymnastic and some good chance of fruit to be obtained from the meticulous study of the chronicle, yet the harvest to be garnered from the fourteenth-century record is to most of us incomparably more satisfying and abundant. But to digest this great store of knowledge there is nothing like the study of the chronicles to give one the proper mediæval tone and spirit. And, finally, the way of progress is to be found not in stressing one side or the other of our sources, but in the intelligent study and combination of them as a whole.