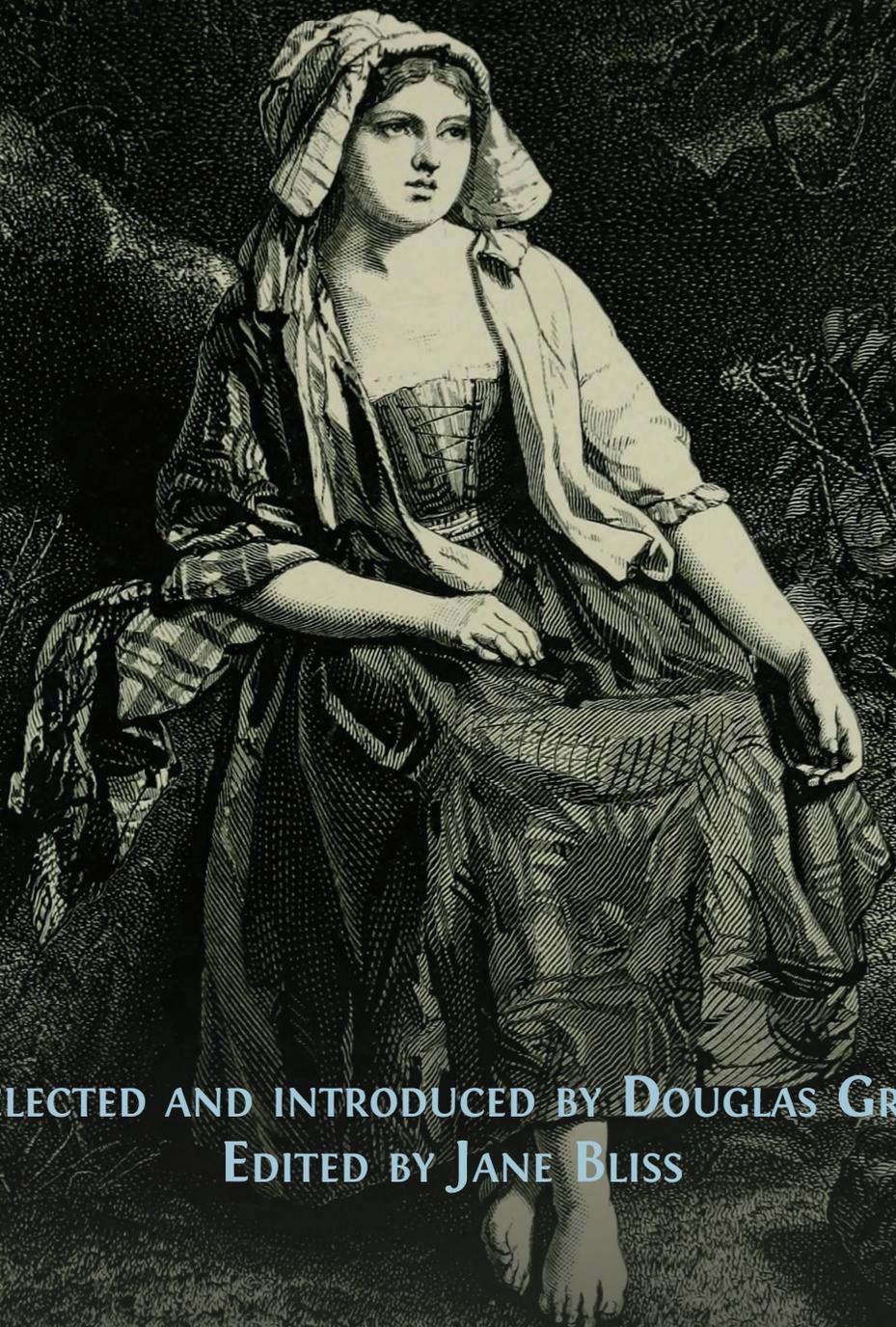


**MAKE WE MERRY MORE AND LESS**  
An Anthology of Medieval English  
Popular Literature



SELECTED AND INTRODUCED BY DOUGLAS GRAY  
EDITED BY JANE BLISS



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2019 Douglas Gray. Jane Bliss (ed.)



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work for non-commercial purposes, providing attribution is made to the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

Attribution should include the following information:

Douglas Gray. Edited by Jane Bliss. *Make We Merry More and Less: An Anthology of Medieval English Popular Literature*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0170>

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0170#copyright>

Further details about CC BY-NC license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0170#resources>

The Faculty of English, University of Oxford, has generously contributed to this publication.

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-710-8

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-711-5

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-712-2

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-713-9

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-714-6

ISBN Digital (XML): 978-1-78374-715-3

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0170

Cover image: Jeanie Dean from John Francis Waller *et al.*, *Pictures From English Literature* (1870), p. 142, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/internetarchivebookimages/14801723273/>

Cover design: Anna Gatti.

All paper used by Open Book Publishers is sourced from SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) accredited mills and the waste is disposed of in an environmentally friendly way.

# Chapter 4

---

## Tales and Legends

This section gives some popular examples of the vast number of short tales, in both prose and verse, which have survived from the Middle Ages. 'Tale' and 'legend' are terms which in medieval English can more easily overlap than in modern English: together they are the equivalent of the German Sage (story). In Middle English 'legend' is used of the story or life of a saint, and also more generally for story or 'account'. It does not seem to have had the common modern meaning of 'non-authentic' or non-historical, although there were certainly people in the Middle Ages who questioned the truth of some legends (such as that King Arthur did not die in his last battle, but lived on). The etymological background of the two English words are of interest: 'tale' is associated with 'telling' or 'speaking'; 'legend' (from Latin, meaning that which is read) with 'reading'. Both activities are significant in the performance and transmission of tales and legends. The two activities, however, were not then mutually exclusive. Tales and legends were spoken, by storytellers or preachers, or sung, by entertainers or minstrels; and also read by the newly literate. But 'reading' was sometimes reading aloud, in public streets or private rooms.<sup>1</sup>

However the tales and legends were experienced, it is very clear that medieval 'folk' loved them: Chaucer's Pardoner remarks 'lewed people loven tales olde', though he also has a cynical eye on the money to be earned. However, it is difficult to overestimate the vast scope

---

1 See 1 xlii and 4 ii. 1 xlii is about the priest reading to Margery, in chapter 1 above; 4 ii is the story of Gunnhild, below: 'sung of in our time in the public streets'.

and variety of these 'tales olde', some of which go back to the very beginnings of recorded literature. It is as if we are confronted by a vast ocean of stories.<sup>2</sup> And the stories are not only of an almost infinite variety, but they seem wonderfully flexible. They are constantly changing, being retold or reshaped, being turned into various literary forms, crossing linguistic or geographical boundaries, sometimes making their way into highly sophisticated literary works like the *Decameron*<sup>3</sup> or the *Canterbury Tales*. Attempts at classifying them are fraught with difficulties. Here we simply offer some examples of some significant 'kinds'. The very common 'comic tales' and 'animal stories' are given their own chapters.<sup>4</sup> This chapter serves as an introduction, and has examples of kinds such as anecdotes, exemplary stories, local legends, religious legends and saints' lives. Some of these continued to flourish: anecdotes are still with us, still circulating by word of mouth and feeding a taste for gossip and satire. In the Middle Ages they also appear in chronicles, and sometimes, it seems, had a role in providing what became in the hands of chroniclers 'historical material' itself. Other kinds have a significance that we do not always recognise. 'Exemplary story' or 'exemplum' sounds at first to be a rather dull category. But the examples are often far from dull: they aim to entertain as well as to instruct. And they have a considerable literary influence: in general, helping to form the 'mentalites' of sophisticated authors, all of whom must have heard them. In particular: we sometimes find echoes of their simple, pungent style in literary storytelling, and even in 'mystical' works when their authors turn to stories (compare Julian of Norwich's description of Christ as a lord in his house, presiding over a stately and joyous feast, or her tale of the Lord and the Servant;<sup>5</sup> and Margery Kempe's own exemplum,<sup>6</sup> which wins the approval of the archbishop).

Many of these tales are told in a manner which seems close to the speaking voice of an oral tale-teller. It is very likely that behind our

---

2 Gray's chapter on different kinds of narrative, in *Simple Forms*, is entitled The Ocean of Story.

3 The *Decameron* is a collection of stories or *novellas* written in Italian, in the fourteenth century, by Giovanni Boccaccio.

4 Chapter 5, Merry (Comic) Tales; and chapter 6, Animal Tales.

5 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Wolters, chapters 14 & 51.

6 Extract xlvi, Margery's Own Tale, in chapter 1 (Voices from the Past) above.

examples recorded in manuscript or print there lies a mass of oral stories, now lost forever. This lost corpus would have contained examples of what the Swiss folklorist Max Lüthi thought of as two basic forms in the prehistory of narrative: the *Volksmärchen* or folktale (with its strange magical clarity, its absolute demands, its simple 'one-dimensionality'), and *Volkssage* or traditional story (with a more 'historic' setting in a more familiar world, and some concern with human emotions and relationships). These basic forms also lie behind our recorded copies of narrative ballads and popular romances. Many of our recorded examples of tales and legends seem close to the *Volkssage*, but we sometimes catch glimpses of the simpler *Volksmärchen* and its motifs.<sup>7</sup>

### A. Anecdotes and Tales in Chronicles

As well as the 'lewed peple', chroniclers loved tales and anecdotes. Some of the stories they used are still remembered: Cnut and the sea, Alfred and the cakes; or Lady Godiva of Coventry, who rescued the town from the servitude of an oppressive tax by riding naked (veiled by her long hair) through the streets. And there are very many others, on a variety of topics. William of Newburgh records the finding of fairy children, the Lanercost chronicle records a story of King Arthur living on after his last battle, and there are gossip stories about Fair Rosamund, the mistress of Henry II.<sup>8</sup> Here we have two anecdotes from early medieval chroniclers, concerning the warrior Siward, whose fame lived on in later lore, and of Gunnhild, whose trials seem to have later become the ballad of *Sir Aldingar*.

#### i) Siward<sup>9</sup>

About this time [1054] Siward the brave earl of Northumbria, almost a giant in size and very tough in both hand and mind, sent his son to subjugate Scotland. When messengers reported his death in battle to

---

7 See *Simple Forms*, Chapter 7, for a fuller discussion of points raised in this introduction, including references.

8 These well-known stories can easily be found by consulting reference works, or the internet; space does not permit detailed descriptions of texts not selected for inclusion in this anthology.

9 In Henry of Huntingdon's *Chronicle*, trans. Forester, pp. 204 & 205.

his father, he said 'Did he receive the lethal wound in his front or in his back?' 'In the front', said the messengers. And he said, 'I rejoice wholeheartedly, for I would not consider any other death worthy of me or my son.' And so Siward left for Scotland and overcame its king in battle, ravaged the whole kingdom and subjected it to himself ...

... In the next year [1055] the stern earl Siward was smitten by a 'flux', a discharge from or in the stomach, and, sensing that death was imminent, said 'How deeply shameful it is to me not to have been able to die in the many battles I have fought but am left to die with dishonour in the manner of cows. Put on my invincible breastplate, gird my sword about me, place my shield in my left hand, and my axe adorned with gold in my right, so that the most courageous of warriors may die dressed like a warrior.' He spoke thus and, fully armed, as he had said, breathed out his spirit.

#### ii) **Gunnhild**<sup>10</sup>

Harthcnut ... sent his sister Gunnhild, the daughter of Cnut by Emma, a maiden of outstanding beauty, who in the time of her father was sighed for by many wooers, but not won, in marriage to Henry the emperor of the Germans. Thronged and distinguished was that wedding festivity, and it is still sung of in our time in the public streets. The maiden of so great a name was led to the ship surrounded by all the princes of England ... She came thus to her husband, and for a long time she cherished her matrimonial vows. However, finally she was accused of adultery, and she put forward a little boy, a nursling who kept her pet starling, to battle in a duel with her denouncer, who was a man of gigantic build, since her other servants avoided it out of laziness and fear. And so, when combat was joined, through a miracle from God, the accuser was cut down in the hollow of the knee, and fell. Gunnhild, rejoicing in their unhopd for triumph, gave her husband notice of separation; nor could she be prevailed upon any longer by threats or enticements to come to his bedchamber again, but taking the religious veil, in the service of God, she grew old gently and peacefully.

---

10 The source is William of Malmesbury's *Kings Before the Norman Conquest* (trans. Stephenson), p. 179; it is also in Gray's *From the Norman Conquest*, pp. 66-7.

## B. Moral Tales, Exempla

These are very common, and were often used in sermons: the brief stories could be elaborated or adapted in various ways by preachers. Probably oral 'performance' would make them more emphatic and memorable than when read on the page. Sometimes they could form the basis for more 'literary' versions, sometimes they themselves are abbreviated 'epitomes' of longer versions. They are to be found in various story-collections: *Dives and Pauper*, *Jacob's Well*, the *Book of the Knight of Latour Landry*.<sup>11</sup> This selection is from *The Alphabet of Tales*.<sup>12</sup>

### iii) The Cursed Dancers<sup>13</sup>

... a preste that hight Tulus on a tyme upon the Yole-evyn said mes in a kurk of saynt Magnus. And ther was in the kurk-garthe [churchyard] a grete meneya of men and women dawnssand in a cercle and syngand carals, and lettid [hindered] dyvyne serves with ther noyse and ther cry. And this preste commaundid thaim to lefe, and thay wold not for hym. And when he saw thai wold not lefe, in his mes he prayed unto God and saynt Magnus that it mot please thaim at [that] thai suld abide so still unto the yere end; and so thai did. And all that yere nowder rayn nor snaw fell upon thaim, nor thai wer never hongrie nor thrustie ... bod [but] ever thai went aboute syngand carals as thai had be mad folk. And ther was a yong man that had his sister emang thaim, and he tuke hur be the arm and wold hafe drowen hur fro thaim, and he pullid of hur arm, and ther come no blode further [forth], bod sho dawnsid on still, and thus thai did all the yere to [until] it was passed. And than Hubertus at was bysshopp of Colayn [Cologne] [com] and assoylid thaim and lowsid thaim oute of this band, and recownceld ther befor the altar. And ther dyed of thaim ther a man and ii women, and all the toder [others] slepid .iii. dayes and .iii. nyghtes togeder, and som of thaim had a trembling of all ther bodie evur after ewhils [whilst] thai liffid. And this happened in a town of Ducheland [Germany] in the yere of owr Lord m.l.x.

11 As explained above, space does not permit detailed reference to works not excerpted for this anthology (*Jacob's Well* is mentioned again below, among Animal Proverbs).

12 *An Alphabet of Tales*, ed. Banks, in EETS.

13 Tale CCXV, *Chorizare*. A version of this story, *The Dancers of Colbek*, is printed in *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*. Another is in William of Malmesbury (*Kings*, p. 158).

iv) A Merry Poor Man<sup>14</sup>

... Ther was a pure man that with the labour off his handis unnethis [scarcely] cuthe get his liflod [livelihood], for when he had suppid, ther lefte right noight over night unto in the morning; and evur he was merie, to so mekull that everilk night, when he was in his bed with his wife, he wolde, and sho [she], syng a sang merelie at [that] all ther neghburs mott here, and than thai wold fall on slepe. So ther neghburs had grete mervall theroff, and one of thaim said, 'I sall make swilk [such] a way at I sall gar [cause] hym lefe hys syngyng'. And in presens of som of his neghburs, opon a night he tuke a sachell full of sylver, and lete fall afor [before] this pure mans dure [door]. And when at he rase and sulde go furth to seke his liflod, he fande this bagg, and he tuke it up and turnyd agayn therwith into his howse and hid it. So on the night after, als tye [as soon] as he was in his bed, he umthoght [considered] hym in his mynde what he wolde do therwith; and he was ferd therfor that he war not culpud [found guilty] with felony therfor, and also at no thevis sulde stele it from hym, or if so be at he boght or solde therwith, or boght any lande, he mond [would] be suspecte, unto so mekull at he was so occupyed in his thoght that at that nyght he sang not, nor was not merie, bod a grete while after he was passand [very] hevie and thoughtfull. And than his neghburs askid hym whi he was so hevie, and whi he sang nott as he was wunte to do; and he wolde nott tell thaim the treuth. And than he at aght [owned] this money said unto hym, 'I know the treuth; for suche a day and in suche a place thou fande my money, and tuke it up at I and my neghburs saw, and had it into thi howse.' And when he hard this he wex [grew] ferd and shamefull, and sayd, 'Woo wurth [befall] that money that hase turment me thus, for sen [since] that I fand it I had never joy in my harte; and I hafe bene trubbled in my witt ever syne, mor than ever I was before when I with grete labour of my bodie and my handis gat my meat [food]. And therfor take thi money thi selfe agayn, at I may syng and be mery as I was wunte to done.' And so he did; and fro [after] it was gone, this pure man made als merie as evur did he.

---

14 Tale CCLXXVI, *Diuicijis preponende sunt condiciones bone.*

**v) Alexander and the Pirate<sup>15</sup>**

... Ther was a maister of a ship that hight [was called] Dironides, and he was a grete robber be the se; so on a tyme hym happend to be taken and broght befor kyng Alexander. And kyng Alexander askid hym whi he usid suche ribburi [robbery] with his shupp; and he ansswerd agayn and said, 'Whi laburs thou to hafe dominacion of all this werld, and I that usis bod [but] a little schup, I am callid a thefe, and thou that usis to rob and refe with a grete navie of schuppis erte callid ane emperour? And forsuthe, thou sall verelie know, that, and [if] rightwusnes be removid away, what er kyngisdomis? Not els bod grete thyfte; and what er little kyngdoms? Not els bod little thifte. And thus, thou erte a grete thefe, and I am bod a little thefe.'

**vi) Envy is found even in Little Girls<sup>16</sup>**

... In Freseland in a nonrie there was ii little maydens that lernyd on the buke, and ever thai strafe [strove] whethur [which] of thaim shulde lern mor than the toder. So the tane [one] of thaim happend to fall seke, and sho garte [caused] call the priores unto hur and sayd, 'Gude ladie, suffer nott my felow to lern unto [until] I cover [recover] of my sekene. And I sall pray my moder to gif me vi d. and that I sall giff you and [if] ye do so; for I drede that whils I am seke that sho sall pas me in lernyng, and that I wolde not at sho did'; and at this wurde the priores smylid and had grete mervayle of the damysell consyte [thought].

**vii) A Lecherous Woman is carried off to Hell<sup>17</sup>**

We rede of a prestis concubyne, that when she was bown to dye sho cried opon thaim at was aboute hur with grete instans, and bad thaim gar make hur a payr of hy bottois [boots] and put thaim on hur leggis for thai war passand necessarie unto hur, and so thai did. And opon the night after, the mone shane bright, and a knight and his servand was rydand in the feldis togedur, and ther come a woman rynand fast unto thaim, cryand, and prayed thaim helpe hur. And onone this knught light

15 Tale CCCXXXIV, *Fures possunt dici multi principes et prelati.*

16 Tale CCCXCVI, *Invidia aliqualis eciam in puellis paruis reperitur.*

17 Tale CCCCLVI, *Luxuriosam mulierem diabolus ad infernum portauit.*

and betaght his man his hors, and he kennyd [recognised] the womman wele enogh, and he made a cercle abowte hym wth his swerd, and tuke hur in unto hym; and sho had nothing on bod [but] hur sarke [shirt] and thies buttois. And belife he harde a blaste of ane ugsom horn at [that] a hunter blew horrible, and huge barkyng of hundis. And als sone as thai hard, this womman was passand ferde. And this knight spirid [asked] hur whi sho was so ferd, and sho tellid hym all; and he light [alighted] and tuke the tressis of hur hare and wappid it strayte abowte his arm, and in his right arm he helde his swerd drawn. And belife [at once] this hunter of hell come at hand, and than this womman said, 'Lat me go, for he commys.' And this knight held hur still, and this womman pullid faste and wolde hafe bene away. So at the laste sho pullid so faste at all hure hare braste of hur heade, and sho ran away and this fend folowd after and tuke hur, and keste hur overthwarte behind hym on his hors at [so that] hur hede and hur armys hang down on the ta [one] syde, and hur legis on the toder syde. And thus, when he had his pray, he rade his ways, and be [by] than it was nere day. And this knight went in the morning unto the town, and he fand this womman new dead, and he teld all as he had sene, and shewid the hare at was wappid abowte his arm. And thai lukyd hur head ther sho lay, and thai fande how all the hare was plukkid of be the ruti.

#### viii) The Weeping Puppy<sup>18</sup>

A common story, told by Petrus Alfonsi and others. Sometimes the elements of a 'merry tale' in it are developed (cf. the Early Middle English *Dame Sirith*),<sup>19</sup> but here it is firmly moral with the title *Mulier mediatrix aliam ad peccatum inducit*: a female go-between leads another woman into sin.

Petrus Alphonsis tellis how som tyme ther was a wurshupfull man that went on pylgrimage, and he had a gude wyfe and a chaste. So ther was a yong man that luffid hur passandly, and wolde hafe giffen hur grete giftis to hafe had his luste on hur, and sho wolde not on no wyse. So at the laste he fell seke for sorrow at he mot not spede [succeed], and lay in his

<sup>18</sup> Tale DXXXVII (the title is as Gray gives it).

<sup>19</sup> In *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*; it is also (moralized) in *A Hundred Merry Tales* (ed. Zall), pp. 33–5.

bed. So ther come in ane olde wyfe and vysitt hym and askid hym what was the cauce at he was seke for. And he oppynd his herte unto hur and tolde hur all that hym ayliid. And sho said hym thurte [he needed] not be seke herfor, sho cuthe help hym well enogh. And he promysid hur a gude rewarde to helpe hym. So sho had a little bykk [bitch] whelpe; and sho held it fastand ii dayes. So on the iii day sho made a cake of mustard and mele and gaff it, and it ete it; and for bytuernes of the musterd it began hugely to grete [weep], and the een [eyes] therof to ryn. So sho went unto this gude wyfe hows, and this whelpe folowid hur. And sho, because sho was ane olde wyfe, welcomyd hur fayre, and gaff hur meat and drynk. So at the laste sho askid hur what this whelpe ayliid to wepe thus. And sho ansswerd and said, 'Dere dame, it is no mervell if I make sorow and wepe, for this whelpe was my doghter, and was a full leall [loyal] maydyn, and a gude and a fayr. And because sho wolde not consent unto a yong man that luffid hur, to be his luff, thus sho was shapen to be a biche whelpe.' And with that sho lete as sho swownyd and wepid sore. So this gude wyfe made mekull sorow, and said, 'What mon I do? Allas! for I am in the same cace; for a yong man luffis me and I have dispysid hym, and I am aferd that I sall oght [have to] be mysshapend.' And than the olde wyfe ansswerd and cownceld hur to consent unto hym, and latt hym hafe his liste at [so that] sho wer not forshapyn and made a byche whelpe. And sho prayed hur to go for hym, and so sho did and fechid hym unto this womman, and ther he had his luste and his desire, and this false alde when [woman] had a gude rewarde of ather [each] partie.

#### ix) Pope Joan<sup>20</sup>

We rede in cronicles how som tyme ther was a yong damysell, and a luff [lover] of hurs went away with hur and broght hur in mans clothyng unto Rome, and ther sho went unto the scule and wex [became] so parfyte in connyng [learning] that sho had no make [equal] in all Rome. So at the laste, be ane hole consent, sho was chosyn to be pope, and was made pope. And when she was pope hur luff lay with hur and gatt hur with chylde, so he wiste not at sho was with childe to [until] sho

---

20 Tale DCI, *Papa. Papa mulier creatur*. This well-known legend has been told and retold by many, including the novelist Lawrence Durrell.

was evyn at travellyng [labour]. So hur happened on a day to com in procession fro saynt Peturs unto saynt John Latarenens [Lateran], and ther sho began to travel, and bare hur chylde betwixt Colliseum and saynt Clemett kurk; and ther sho dyed, and ther thai berid hur. And because of that detestable dead [deed], the pope usid never syne to com theraway with procession, and herefor hur name is nott putt emang [among] other popes namis in the Martiloge.

**x) The Fate of an English Witch<sup>21</sup>**

... som tyme ther was in Englund a womman that usid sorcerie. And on a day as sho was bown [ready] to eatt, sho hard a craw [crow] cry beside hur, and sodanlie the knyfe that was in hur hande fell. And hereby sho demyd at [that] hur dead [death] drew nere, and so sho fell seke, bown to dye. And sho sent after a monk and a non that was hur childer and chargid thaim in hur blissyng that anone [as soon] as sho war dead thai sulde sew hur in a harte-skyn, and than at thai sulde close hur in a tombe of stone, and at thai sulde feste [fasten] the coveryng theron stronglie bothe with lead and strong yrn, and at thai sulde close this stane and bynde it aboute with iii strang chynys [chains], and than at thai sulde do mes [Mass] and pray for hur aboute hur bodye. And if sho lay so sekurlie [securely] iii dayes, than sho chargid thaim to bery hur upon the iiii day in the erth. And so all this was done, and ii furste nyghtis, as clerkis was sayand ther prayers aboute hur, fendis [fiends] brak the yatis [gates] of the kurk, and come in unto hur and brak ii of the chynys that was at ather end; and the myddyll chyne abade [remained] still hale [whole]. And upon the iii nyght aboute cockkraw [cockrow], ther come in suche a throng of fendis at thai at saw it semyd at the temple turnyd upsadown. So ther come a fend at was maste ugsom [horrible] of all, and hyer than any of the toder [others] was, and he come unto this tombe and called hur be hur name and bad hur ryse. And sho ansswerd agayn and sayde sho mot not for the bondis at was bon [bound] aboute the tombe. And he bad lowse thaim. And onone [instantly] at his commandment the chyne braste [broke] as it had bene hardis [coarse flax], and the covering of the tombe flow [flew] off. And ther he take hur oppynlie befor all men and

---

21 Tale DCCXXVIII, *Sortilegi puniuntur*.

bar hut oute of the kurk. And ther befor the yatis ther was ordand a blak hors, and that ane uglie, and hereoppon was sho sett. And than onone sho and all this felowshup varysshid away.

## C. Local Legends

According to Westwood and Simpson, editors of *The Lore of the Land* (a vast and valuable collection of English examples), local legend is 'a kind of folktale which centres on some specific place, person, or object which really exists or has existed within the knowledge of those telling and hearing the story; it means a great deal to those living in a particular area, or visiting and exploring it, but in most cases has not become widely known outside its own community.'<sup>22</sup> It could therefore, in theory, be easily distinguishable from the more general and less geographically specific 'legend'. However, it is not always easy when dealing with possible medieval examples to isolate or distinguish them in this way, for two obvious reasons. First, because we do not have precise details of their transmission, and also because the world of medieval story is characterised by movement: stories travel about, often very widely. They are retold, adapted for various purposes, and may be attached to various places where they may find a new home. References to places may sometimes be rather arbitrary: according to the prologue to *Sir Orfeo*, Winchester used to be called Thrace. Alexander Neckham says that Cirencester (where he was abbot) received the name of *Urbs Passerum* because the Saxon invaders devised a cunning plan to overcome the British defenders by sending in sparrows with burning straws fastened to their tails to burn the roofs of houses; this story is also found in Gaimar and other writers, but apparently similar stories and strategems are found elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth says that the Saxon Hengist asked Vortigern for enough land as can be encircled by a single thong.<sup>24</sup> By finely cutting the hide of a bull he made one long enough to mark out ground for a great fortress. The place took its name from the thong, *Castrum Corrigie*

---

22 Introduction, p. 3.

23 See Gaimar's *Estoire*, note to vv. 856–70.

24 Geoffrey, trans. Thorpe, pp. 158–9.

(modern Caistor). The story is similar to that in Virgil, of Dido and the founding of Carthage.<sup>25</sup> Henry of Huntingdon's brief story of the Brave Man of Balsham may well be a traditional local legend: when the Danes had ravaged East Anglia and burnt Cambridge they went through the Gog Magog hills and came to Balsham, where they killed everyone they found, throwing the children up in the air and catching them on the sharp points of their spears. But one man, 'worthy of widespread fame' went up the steps of the church tower, 'which stands there at this day',<sup>26</sup> and 'made secure as much by the position as by his bravery' fought the whole army.<sup>27</sup> However, though there are similar stories of a lone hero resisting a great force, like local legends recorded later, medieval examples are often associated with strange or eerie places. Stonehenge had already produced one: according to Geoffrey of Monmouth the stones were transported to England by Merlin from Ireland, where they were called the Giants' Ring because giants had brought them there from Africa.<sup>28</sup> We give a few examples from the twelfth-century chronicler Gervase of Tilbury, who seems to have a particular interest in this type of story.

**xi) Peak Cavern: a passageway to the Antipodes<sup>29</sup>**

In greater Britain there is a castle placed among mountains, to which the people have given the name of the Peak. Its defences are almost impregnable, and in the hill is a cavernous opening which from time to time belches out, and very powerfully, a wind, like a pipe. The people marvel whence such a wind comes, and among other things which happen there causing further wonder, I have heard from a very religious man, Robert, Prior of Kenilworth, who originated from that area, that

25 The agreement was for an area no larger than could be covered by a single hide; cutting the hide into thin strips made a much larger area possible. See *OCCL* for Dido, whose task was to use a single hide; in Mannyng's *Chronicle* (vv. 7499–512) he asks for as much land as can be covered by a single 'boles hyd'.

26 This is an example of the 'still-there' motif, gleefully exploited by medieval authors to prove the veracity of their narrative.

27 Henry of Huntingdon's *Chronicle*, the year 1010 (pp. 188–9 in Forester's translation).

28 Geoffrey trans. Thorpe, pp. 196–7.

29 Of the four passages from Gervase in this anthology, just this one matches the passage numbered (c) in Gray's *From the Norman Conquest* (pp. 90–1). As before, he has clearly made his own translation. See Gervase, ed. and trans. Banks and Binns, pp. 642–5.

when the nobleman William Peveril owned the castle with the adjoining estate, an active and powerful man, rich in diverse livestock, one day his swineherd was dilatory in the duty entrusted to him, and lost a pregnant sow, of a very superior kind. Fearing therefore the sharp words of his lord's steward, he pondered whether by any chance the sow might have stolen into the famous, but yet uninvestigated, cave of Peak. He decided that he would explore that hidden place. He went into the cavern at a time when it was without any wind, and after travelling for a long time he completed his journey and at length came out from the darkness, free, into a bright place, a spacious level plain of fields. Going into the land, which was extensively cultivated, he found reapers gathering ripe produce, and among the hanging ears of corn he recognised the sow, which had brought forth from herself little pigs. Then the swineherd, amazed and rejoicing that his loss was repaired, related the events, just as they had happened, to the bailiff of that land; he was given back the sow, and sent off joyfully; and led forth his herd of pigs. A wonderful thing: coming back from the subterranean harvest he saw the wintry cold continuing in our hemisphere, which I have been rightly led to ascribe to the absence of the sun and its presence elsewhere.

**xii) Laikibrais; Saint Simeon's Horn, and a mysterious Dog<sup>30</sup>**

There is in greater Britain a forest,<sup>31</sup> filled with many kinds of game, which looks upon the town of Carlisle. Almost in the middle of this forest is a valley fenced around by hills near a public road. Every day at the first hour is heard a sweet sound of bells, and for this reason the local inhabitants have called that deserted spot Laikibrais in the Gallic (Welsh, *or* French) language.

In this same forest a more marvellous event happened. There was a town named Penrith within the borders of that forest. A knight, springing from that town, when he was hunting in the forest far removed from the noise of men, was alarmed by a sudden tempest with thunder and lightning flashes. When, here and there, flashes of lightning set the forest on fire, he glimpsed a large hound passing, becoming visible in

---

30 In Gervase, ed. and trans. Banks and Binns, pp. 690–5.

31 Inglewood Forest; the 'lake that cries' is probably the fabled Tarn Wathelyn (see note in edition).

the storm, and fire was flashing from its throat. The knight, terrified by such an amazing vision, was unexpectedly met by another knight carrying in his hand a hunting horn. Filled with fear, he approached this figure, and revealed the reason for his fear. 'Hearken,' said the sudden arrival comfortingly, 'Put aside your fear. I am Saint Simeon, whom you called on and entreated in the midst of the lightning. I give you this horn for the perpetual defence of yourself and your household, so that whenever you are afraid of lightning or thunder you can blow the horn and at once all fear of threatening danger will disappear, nor will lightning have any power within the area where the sound of the horn may be heard.' Upon this Saint Simeon inquired if our knight had seen anything which had excited any amazement or wonder in him. In reply he said that he had seen a hound with fire blazing from its open mouth. Saint Simeon vanished in search of it, leaving the horn with the knight as a remembrance of the happening and as a lasting protection for his household. It has been seen by many, and marvelled at. It is lengthy, and twisted back in the style of hunting horns, as if it were made from the horn of an ox. And furthermore the dog which we spoke of went into a priest's house on the edge of that town, making its way through the entrance apparently firmly closed against it, and set fire to his house with its unlawfully begotten family.

#### xiii) **Wandlebury Ring**<sup>32</sup>

In England, on the edges of the diocese of Ely, is a town, Cambridge by name; and nearby, within its area, a place which men call Wandlebury, because the Vandals camped there as they were devastating parts of Britain and destroying the Christians. There, on the peak of a small hill where they set up their tents, is a circular plain, enclosed by ramparts, with a single entrance in the manner of a gate offering access. There is a tale from ancient times supported by popular account that if a knight goes into this level area after nightfall, when the moon is shining, and cries aloud 'Let a knight come forth against a knight!' at once a knight will hasten out against him, prepared for combat, and with their horses galloping together he either unhorses his opponent or is himself thrown

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 668–73.

down. But first, a knight must enter the circle through that entrance alone, though his companions are not prevented from seeing the conflict from outside ...

To support the truth of this tale, Gervase cites the case of Osbert FitzHugh, a twelfth-century knight who put it to the test: he felled his adversary, and captured his horse, but was wounded in the thigh. The challenger disappeared. The horse was black, with grim wild eyes; at cockcrow it broke loose, galloped off, and disappeared. Every year, on the same night and at the same time, Osbert's wound would break open again.

#### xiv) A Mysterious Drinking Horn<sup>33</sup>

Another event no less marvellous, and well enough known, happened in greater Britain. There was in the county of Gloucestershire a hunting forest,<sup>34</sup> filled with bears, stags and all kinds of game found in England. Here in a dale filled with trees was a little knoll, its top as high as a man's stature on which knights and huntsmen are accustomed to ascend when, tired by the heat and thirst, they tried to find a remedy for their condition. Thanks to this place and its nature, if anybody leaving his companions climbed up it by himself, and then, as if he was talking to another person, were to say 'I am thirsty', immediately, and unexpectedly, a cupbearer was standing by his side, impressively attired, and with a cheerful countenance holding in his hand and offering to him a great horn, like that used by the English in olden times for a drinking goblet. A nectar of unknown but most pleasant taste was offered to him; when he drank it all the heat and tiredness of his warm body would vanish, so that anybody would imagine not that he had been toiling away, but wished to seize the opportunity to toil once again. When he had drunk the nectar the attendant offered him a towel to dry his mouth, and having done his service he vanished, nor did he look for a reward for his trouble, nor conversation and inquiry ...

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 672–5.

<sup>34</sup> Probably the Forest of Dean.

This lasted for many years, until one day a knight out hunting did not return the horn according to the proper custom, but kept it for himself. However, the earl of Gloucester did not wish to countenance a theft and gave the horn to King Henry.

#### D. More 'free-standing' Literary Examples

More 'free-standing' literary examples (of which there are many), represented by a story about Hereward and a nice moral tale, *The Childe of Bristowe*.

##### xv) *Hereward*

The deeds of the eleventh-century English hero Hereward were celebrated by the people in songs and dances, and apparently in oral tales. Some made their way into the twelfth-century French verse chronicle of Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, others into the Latin *Gesta Herewardi*, and *The Book of Ely*.<sup>35</sup>

The English rebelling against William the Conqueror around Ely and its fens were surrounded by the Conqueror's forces, and eventually begged for mercy ...

... Except Hereward, who was so noble.  
 With a few men he escaped, and with him  
 Geri, one of his relatives,  
 And five companions with them.  
 A man who brought fish to the guards  
 Along the marshes, acted  
 As a good and courteous man:  
 Sheltered them in a boat of reed,  
 Completely covered them with rushes;  
 And began to row towards the guards,

---

35 The following extract is from Gaimar's *Estoire*, vv. 5492–544 (ed. Bell). Gaimar's patron was a Lincolnshire noblewoman. Gray will have made his own translation (see also his *From the Norman Conquest*, pp. 154–6).

And when one evening it began to darken,  
Came close to the dwellings with his boat.  
The French were in a tent,  
The viscount Guy was their leader;  
He recognized the fisherman,  
And they knew that he often came,  
So none of them took note of him;  
They saw the fisherman rowing.  
It was night, and they sat at meat.  
Out of the boat came Hereward,  
He was as fierce as a leopard,  
And his companions followed him.  
They made for the tent under a bush,  
With them went the fisherman —  
Hereward was formerly his lord.  
What can I say? Those knights  
Were taken by surprise as they ate.  
They came in with axes in their hands,  
And were not unskilled in striking hard;  
They killed six and twenty Normans  
And twelve Englishmen were killed there.  
Terror spread throughout the dwellings,  
And everyone took to flight.  
They abandoned horses still saddled,  
Onto which the outlaws mounted  
At leisure and in safety;  
They had no trouble there at all,  
And went away happy at their misdeeds.  
Each one picked out a very good horse.  
The woods were near, and they entered them,  
They did not lose their way,  
They knew all that country very well!  
There were many of their friends there.  
At a town which they came to  
They found ten of their close friends

And these joined up with Hereward.  
 Once they were eight, now more than ten,  
 Ten and eight are the companions now;  
 Before they passed Huntingdon  
 They had a hundred men, well armed,  
 Close liegemen of Hereward ...

xvi) *The Childe of Bristowe*<sup>36</sup>

A man who has studied law and learnt how to beguile poor men has a son on whom he dotes. In order to make his son rich he 'rought not whom he beguiled'. The young child, set to learning, becomes 'wise and witty' and fears 'al dedis derke'. The father is keen for him to study law, so that no one will be able to beguile him, but the son has other ideas. 'The child answerd with a softe sawe: They fare ful well that lerne no lawe, And so I hope to do'; he fears to imperil his soul 'for any wynnyng of worldes welthe', and is determined to be a merchant: 'that good getyn by marchantye' is 'trouthe'. He goes to Bristol and is engaged to a merchant there, 'a just trew man', for seven years. He does well, loves God, and 'al marchauntz loved hym, yong and olde.' Meanwhile his father continues his dubious behaviour until he falls sick and draws towards his end. On his deathbed he discovers that no one in the neighbourhood is prepared to be his executor; he sends for his son and heir ('moche good have y gadred togeder With extorcion and dedis lither' — all for the son) and eventually persuades him to be his attorney. But the son binds him with another charge: that a fortnight after his death his spirit should appear and report on his fate. When the father dies, the son arranges for masses, sells his father's goods, and distributes the proceeds to the poor. But the gold is soon gone ... [stanzas 39–46]

... By than the fourtenyght was broght to ende,  
 The child to the chamber gan wende,  
     Wher his fader dyed.  
 Adoun he knelid half a day;

---

<sup>36</sup> In Camden *Miscellany*, ed. Hopper, vol. IV.

- Al the good prayers that he couthe say,  
 His fader for to abide.<sup>o</sup> *wait for*
- Betwene mydday and under<sup>o</sup> *afternoon*  
 Ther cam a blast of lightning and dunder  
 Thurgh the walles wide,  
 As al the place on fire had be;  
 The child seid 'Benedicite!'<sup>o</sup> *God bless!*  
 And fast on God he cryde.
- And as he sate on his prayere,  
 Sone before hym gan appere  
 Foule tydynges betwene,<sup>o</sup> *meanwhile*  
 His faders soule brennyng<sup>o</sup> as glede; *burning*  
 The devel bi the nekke gan hym lede  
 In a brennyng cheyne.
- This child seid, 'I conjure the,  
 Whatsoever thu be, speke to me.'  
 That other answerd ageyne,  
 'Y am thy fader that the begate;  
 Now thu may se of myn astate;<sup>o</sup> *condition*  
 Lo, how y dwelle in peyne.'
- The child seid, 'Ful woo is me,  
 In this plyte that [y] yow se;  
 It persheth<sup>o</sup> myn hert sore.' *pierces*  
 'Sone,' he seid, 'thus am y led  
 For because of my falshed  
 That y used ever more.
- Mi good was getyn wrongfully,  
 But<sup>o</sup> it myght restord be, *unless*  
 And aseth<sup>o</sup> be made therefore, *compensation*  
 A C yer thus shal I do;

Gef me my trouthe;<sup>9</sup> y were ago;                    *pledge,*  
 For til than my soule is lore.<sup>9</sup>                    *lost*

'Nay, fader, that shal not be,  
 In better plite y wol yow se,  
     Yf God wol gef me grace;  
 But ye shal me your trouthe plighte,  
 This same day fourtenyht  
     Ye shal appere in this place.

And y shal labore yf y may  
 To bring your soule in better way,  
     Yf y have lyf and space.'  
 He graunted hym in gret hast;  
 With that ther cam a donder blast  
     And both ther way gan passe.

[The son goes back to Bristol and borrows money from his master; he arranges for those who have suffered because of his father to be recompensed. But once again ... stanzas 57–64]

By that the fourtenyht was come,  
 His gold was gone, al and some;  
     Then had he no more.  
 Into the chamber he went that tide,  
 The same that his fader in dyde,<sup>9</sup>                    *died*  
     And knelid, as he dud ore.<sup>9</sup>                    *did previously*

And as he sate in his prayere,  
 The spiret before hym gan appere  
     Right as he dud before,  
 Save the cheyn away was caught;  
 Blak he was, but he brent noght,  
     But yet he was in care.<sup>9</sup>                    *sorrow*

'Welome, fader,' seid the childe,  
 'I pray yow with wordes mylde,  
     Tel me of your astate.'

'Sone,' he seid, 'the better for the,  
 Yblessid mote<sup>o</sup> the tyme be *may*  
 That ever I the begate!

Thou hast relevyd me of moche wo —  
 My bitter chayne is fal me fro  
 And the fire so hote —  
 But yet dwel y stille in peyn,  
 And ever must, in certayn,  
 Tyl y have fulfilled my day.'

'Fader,' he seid, 'y charge yow tel me  
 What is moste ayens<sup>o</sup> the. *against*  
 And doth yow most disese.'

'Tethynges<sup>o</sup> and offrynges, sone,' he sayd, *tithes*  
 'For y them never truly payd,  
 Wherfor my peynes may not cesse,

But it be restored agayn  
 To as many churches, in certayne,  
 And also mykel encesse.  
 Alle that for me thu dos pray  
 Helpeth me not to the uttermost day  
 The vature of a pese.<sup>o</sup> *value of a pea*

Therfor, sone, I pray the  
 Gef me my trouthe<sup>o</sup> y left with the, *pledge*  
 And let me wynde<sup>o</sup> my way,' *wend*  
 'Nay, fader,' he seid, 'ye gete it noght,  
 Another craft<sup>o</sup> ther shal be soght, *device*  
 Yet efte y wille assay.<sup>o</sup> *try*

But your trouthe ye shal me plight.  
 This same day a fourtenyht  
 Ye shal come ageyn to your day;  
 Ye shal appere here in this place,

And I shal loke, with Goddes grace,  
 To amend yow yf y may.'

[The spirit leaves, and the son returns to Bristol to ask his master yet again for  
 'a litel summe of gold' ... stanza 67]

His maister seid, 'Thu art a fole —  
 Thu hast bene at som bad scole;

By my feith, y holde the mad,  
 For thu hast played atte dice,

Or at som other games nyce<sup>o</sup> ... *foolish*

[But the son says that he will sell him his own body 'for ever to be thy lad',  
 and the master, who loves him, gives him more than he has asked for. He is  
 allowed a further fortnight's leave ... stanzas 72–83]

He sought alle the churches in that contre<sup>o</sup> *region*

Where his fader had dwelled by,  
 He left not one behynde.

He made aseth<sup>o</sup> with hem echon. *compensation*

By that tyme his gold was gone,  
 They couthe aske hym no mare;

Save as he went by the street,  
 With a pore man gan he mete,  
 Almost naked and bare.

'Your fader oweth me for a seme<sup>o</sup> of corn.' *load*

Down he knelid hym befor;  
 'And y hym drad full sare.

For your fader soules sake,  
 Som amendes to me ye make,  
 For Hym that Marie bare.'

'Welawey!' seid the yong man,  
 'For my gold and silver is gan;

I have not for to pay.'  
 Off his clothes he gan take,  
 And putt hem on the pore manis bake,  
 Chargyng for hys fader to pray.

Hosen and shon he gave hym tho,  
 In sherte and breche he gan go;  
     He had no clothes gay.  
 Into the chamber he wente that tide<sup>o</sup>                   *time*  
 The same that his fader on dyde,<sup>o</sup>                   *died in*  
     And knelid half a day.

When he had knelid and prayed long,  
 Hym thought he herd the myriest song,  
     That any erthely man might here;  
 After the song he sawe a light,  
 As thow<sup>o</sup> a thousand torches bright,                   *though*  
     It shone so faire and clere.

In that light, so faire lemand<sup>o</sup>                   *shining*  
 A naked child in angel hand  
     Before hym did appere,  
 And seid, 'Sone, blessed thu be,  
 And al that ever shale come of the,  
     That ever thu goten were.'

'Fader,' he seid, 'ful wel is me.  
 In that plite that y now se,  
     Y hope, that ye be save,'  
 'Sone,' he seid, 'y go to blisse,  
 God almyghti quyte the this,  
     Thi good ageyn to have.

Thu hast made the ful bare  
 To aqueynche me of mykel care;  
     My trouthe, good sone, y crave.'  
 'Have your trouthe,' he seid, 'fre,  
 And of thi blessing y pray the,  
     Yf that ye wold fochesave<sup>o</sup>                   *grant*

In that blessing mote thou wone<sup>o</sup> *dwell*  
 That Oure Lady gaf here sone,  
 And myn on the y lay.<sup>'37</sup>  
 Now that soule is gone to blisse  
 With moche joye and angelis,  
 More than y can say.

This child thanked God almyght  
 And his moder Marye bryght,  
 Whan he sey<sup>o</sup> that aray. *saw*  
 Even to Bristow gan he gon  
 In his sherte and breche alon;  
 Had he no clothes gay.

When the burges the child gan se,  
 He seid then, '*Benedicite!*  
 Sone, what araye is this?'  
 'Truly, maister,' seid the childe,  
 'Y am come me to yelde<sup>o</sup> *surrender myself*  
 As your bonde man.'

[His master hears the full story, and is impressed: 'but fewe sones bene of tho  
 That wole serve here [their] fader so.' He makes the son his 'felow' and heir,  
 and has him married to a worthy man's daughter. When his master dies, he  
 inherits all his goods ... stanza 93]

Thus hath this yong man kevered<sup>o</sup> *recovered*  
 First was riche and sitthen<sup>o</sup> bare, *then*  
 And sitthen richer then ever he was ....

---

37 It is thought that 'with God's blessing and mine' is a typical formula used for, or with reference to, a child. Agnes Paston uses it in a letter to her son.

E. Religious Tales and Saints' Legends<sup>38</sup>xvii) *Mary of Nemmegen*<sup>39</sup>

Mary meets the Devil: Mary has been angrily refused lodging for the night by her aunt, and is in despair ...

... She departed fro hyr with a hevy harte out of the towne of Nemmegen in the evening, and at the laste she went so longe tyll she cam to a thycke hegge, where that she satt hyr downe, wepyng and gyvynge hyrselfe unto the dyvell, and sayd, 'Woo be to the, my aunte! This may I thanke the, for nowe care I nat whether that I kyll myself, or whether that I goo to drowne me, and I care nat whether the dyvell or God come to me and helpe me — I care nat whether of them two it be!'

The dyvell, that is at all tymes reddy for to hauke after dampned sowles, heryng these words of Marye, turned hym into the lekenes of a man, but he had but one yee [eye], for the dyvell can never turne hym in the lykenes of a man, but [unless] he hathe some faute. And than sayd he to his selfe, 'Nowe wyll I goo suger my words for to speke unto this mayde that I desplease hyr nat, for men must speke sweetly to women.' And with these words sayde he to Mary, 'O fayer mayde, why syt you here thus wepyng? Hathe there any man that hathe dyspleased you or done you wronge? If that I knewe hym, I shulde be awrokyn [avenged] on hym!' Than Mary, herynge his voyce, loked besyde hyr and sawe a man stande by hyr, wherof she was afrayde, and sayde, 'Helpe, God, I am wayted [spied upon]!' The devell sayd unto Mary, 'Fayer mayde, be nat afrayde, for I wyll nat do unto you no maner of harme, but doo you good. For your fayernes men muste love you, and if that ye wyll consent unto me, I shall make you a woman above all other women, for I have more love unto you than I have to any other woman nowe lyvynge.' Than sayde Mary, 'I syt here halfe mad and in dyspayer. I care nat whether that I gyve myself to God or to the dyvyll so that I were out of this thraldome and mysarye, but I pray you showe unto me who that ye be.' The dyvyll answered to hyr, 'I am a master of many scyances, for that [whatever] I take on me to

38 The latter are often found in abbreviated form in sermons or adapted as exempla. Gray left an extra sub-heading here, for more Saints' Lives which he never inserted; it has been necessary to collapse the sections.

39 *Mary of Nemmegen*, ed. Raftery, pp. 26–8.

do I brynge it unto a ende, and if that ye wyll be my paramoure, I shall tech to you all the forsayde scyances, so that there is the worlde shall passe you.’ Than sayd Mary to the dyvyll, ‘I praye you, showe unto me what ye be, and what your name is.’ Than sayd the dyvell, ‘What recketh [care] you what I be? I am nat the beste of my kynne. And [if] ye wyll nat be displeased, my name is Satan with the one yee, that is well knowen amonges good fellowes.’ Than sayd Mary, ‘Nowe perseyve I well that ye be the dyvell.’ ‘That is al one [all the same] who I be, for I bere unto you good love.’ Than sayd Mary, ‘I wold nat be afrayd of hym if that it were Lusyfer hymselfe!’ Than sayde the dyvell to Marye, ‘Fare mayde, wyll ye be my love? I shall teche unto you al the scyances aforesayde, and I shall gyve unto you manye other costely jewelles and also money at youre pleasure, so that ye shall lacke nothyng at all and you shall have all your owne pleasure to do that thyng that ye wyll desire, so that there is noo woman shall have the pleasure that ye shall have.’ Than sayde Marye to the dyvyll, ‘Or that [before] ye lye with me, ye shall teche to me the forsayde scyances.’ Than sayde the dyvyll, ‘I am contente — aske what that ye wyll, and ye shall have it.’ Than sayde Mary, ‘I wyll have nygromancy [necromancy] for one, for I have a unkyll that hathe a boke therof, and when that he lyste, he wyll bynde the fynde [fiend] therwith.’ Than sayd the dyvell, ‘O fayer mayde, what ye desire ye shal have, but I occupy [employ] nat that science myself, for it is so daungerouse, for when that ye begyn for to counger [conjure] and if ye mysse one letter in redyng, the geste [spirit] that ye call for wyll breke your necke, and therefore I counsayll you nat to lerne that science.’ Than sayd Mary, ‘If that it be so, that science wyll I nat lerne.’ Than was the dyvyll glad, and sayde to his selfe, ‘Now have I turned hyr mynde fro that science, for if that she culde nygromancy, then when she were angry with me, then wolde she bynde me therwith ...’.

He also dislikes her name, because he and his fellows have suffered from a Mary in the past. He persuades her to be called Emmekyn. She becomes his paramour. They travel around together, and eventually return to Nemmegen. There Mary is converted by a play about sinful living. The devil tries to kill her, but she survives. The pope imposes on her the penance of wearing three iron rings. She enters a nunnery, and when she dies an angel frees her from the rings as a sign of God’s forgiveness.

**xviii) Saint George and the Dragon<sup>40</sup>**

As the saint rides by, he sees a damsel standing and mourning ...

... And when he saw the aray of thys damesell, hym thought well that hyt schuld be a woman of gret renon, and askyd hur why scho stode ther with soo mornynge a chere. Than answered scho and sayde, 'Gentyll knyght, well may I be of hevy chere, that am a kyngys doghtyr of thys cyte, and am sette here for to be devoured anon of a horrybull dragon that hath eton all the chyldyr of thys cyte. And for all ben eton, now most I be eten; for my fader yaf the cyte that consell. Wherfor, gentyll knyght, gos [go] hens fast and save thyselpe, lest he les [destroy] the as he wol me!' 'Damesell,' quod George, 'that wer a gret vyleny to me, that am a knyght well i-armed, yf I schuld fle, and thou that art a woman schuld abyde.' Than wyth thys worde, the horrybull best put up his hed, spyttyng out fure, and proferet batayll to George. Then made George a cros befor hym, and set hys spere in the grate [rest], and wyth such might bare down the dragon into the erth, that he bade this damysell bynd hur gurdull aboute his necke and led hym aftyr hur into the cyte. Then this dragon sewet [followed] her forth, as hyt had ben a gentyll hownde, mekly without any mysdoynge.

**xix) Saint Julian<sup>41</sup>**

We rede how that when saynt Julyan was a yong man and went on huntyng, he pursewid on a tyme after a harte. And this harte turnyd agayn and spak unto hym and sayd, 'Thow that mon [is destined to] sla bothe thi fadir and thi moder, wharto pursewis thou me?' And he had grete wonder herof, and becauce [so that] this sulde not happyn hym, he went away oute of a fer contreth and servid a wurthi prince; and he made hym a knyght and gaff hym a warde, a grete gentylwomman, unto his wife. And his fadur and his moder at home, hafyng grete sorrow that he was gone oute of the contrey fro thaim, went and soght hym many mylis. So on a tyme when he was furthe [away], be a sodan cace [sudden chance] thaim happynd to com unto his castell. And be wurdis at [that]

40 *John Mirr's Festial*, vol. 1 item 30 in the EETS edition (the episode appears on p. 118); Gray also included it in *Simple Forms* p. 142 (within *Saints' Legends*, pp. 139–43).

41 See *Gilte Legende*, EETS OS 327 (vol. 1, pp. 143–4), in which this Julian is one of several Julians. Gray's version is close, but not exactly as printed in the EETS edition.

thai said ther his wyfe understude at thai was fadir and moder unto hur husband, be all the proces at sho had hard [heard] hur husband say. And when sho had made thaim wele to fare, sho laid thaim samen [together] in hur awn bedd. And this Julian come home sodanlie in the mornyng and wente unto his chamber, and fand thaim ii samen in the bed. And he, trowyng that it had bene one that had done avowtry [adultery] with his wyfe, he slew thaim bothe and went his ways. And he mett his wife fro the kurkward [coming from the church], and sho tolde hym how his fadir and his moder was comen, and how sho had layd thaim in hur awn bedd. And than he began to wepe and make sorow, and said, 'Lo! that at the harte said unto me, now I, a sory wriche, hafe fulfillid itt.' And than he went oute of contre and did penans, and his wyfe wolde never forsake hym. And ther thai come unto a grete water, ther many war perisschid, and ther he byggid a grete hostre, and all that ever come he herbard [lodged] thaim, and had thaim over this watyr. And this he usyd a lang tyme. So on a nyght aboute mydnyght, as he layin his bed and it was a grete froste, he hard a voyce cry petifullie, and sayd, 'Julian! Com and feche me owr, I pray the!' And he rase onone [at once] and went our the water, and ther he fand a man that was nerehand frosyn to dead, and he had hym our, and broght hym into his howse and refresshid hym, and laid hym in his awn bed and happid [covered] hym. And within a little while he that was in the bed, that semyd seke and like a lepre, ascendid unto hevyn and sayd on this maner of wyse, 'Julyan! Almighty God hase reseyyvid thi penans. And within a little while ye bothe shall com unto Hym.' And with that he vanysshid away.

#### xx) A Saintly Fool<sup>42</sup>

... Som tyme ther was in a monasterie of nonnys a maydyn, and for Goddis luff sho made hur selfe evyn as a fule, and meke and buxhom [obedient] to everilk bodis commandment; and sho made hur selfe so vile, and so grete ane underlowte [underling], that ilkone uggid [everyone felt apprehensive] with hur, bod [but] ilkone strak hur and skornyd hur, and evur sho tuke it in plesans. So sho passed never the kichyn, bod bade ther, and wasshid dysshis and skowrid pottys, and did all maner of fowle labur. And sho satt never at meat, bod held hur

---

42 In the *Alphabet of Tales*, number CCCXXII, *Fatuitas*.

selfe content with crombys and crustis that war lefte at the burd [table]; and therwith sho liffid, and sho war [wore] nevur shone nor hose, and sho had nothing on hur head bod revyn [torn] clothis, and raggid. And sho was servyciable to everilk creatur, and wold do no bodye wrong, and what at evur was done unto hur, ther was none at hard hur gruche therwith. So emang all thies, be the commawndement of ane aungell, saynt Patryk, at was a holie man and liffid in wildrenes, come unto this same monasterie, and callid befor hym all the nonnys and all the susters of the place, at he might se thaim, and sho come not. And than he said, 'Ye er not all here.' And thai said, 'Yis, fadur, we er all here, outtakyn one that is bod a fule.' And he bad thaim call hur; and als sone as he saw hur he knew in his spiritt that sho was mor halie than he. And he fell down on his kneis befor hur an said, 'Spirituall moder, giff me thi blissing!' And sho fell down on kneis before hym and said, 'Nay, fathur, rather thou sulde blis me.' And with that the susters of the howse had grete wonder, and said unto hym, 'Fathir, suffer not this enjorie, for sho is bod a fulle.' And he said, 'Nay, sho is wise, and ye er bod fules, for sho is bettyr than owder ye or I.' And than all the susters fell on ther kneis befor hur, and askyd hur forgifnes of wrangis and injuries that thai had done unto hur [and] scho forgiffes thaim ilkone with all hur harte.

**xxi) The Virgin Mary saves a Thief on the Gallows<sup>43</sup>**

We rede in hur 'Meracles' how som tyme ther was a thefe, and he had a grete devocion unto our Ladie, and said hur salutacion oft unto hur. So at the laste he was takyn with thift and hanged, and our Ladie come and held hym up iii dayes, hur awn handis, so that he felid no sare. So thai that hanged hym happened be cace [chance] to com by hym away, and fand hym mery and liffand [living]. And thai trowed he had not bene wele hanged. And thai wer avysid [thought] to have stykkid hym with a swerd as he hang. And as thai wold hafe stryken hym, our Lady putt it away with hur hand, so at thai noyed [harmed] hym noght. And he told thaim how our Ladie helpid hym, and thai tuke hym down and lete [released] him. And he went unto ane abbay, and ther servid our Ladie ewhils [whilst] he liffid.

43 In *Alphabet of Tales*, number CCCCLXIV, *Maria deuotos sibi a morte liberat*. In *From the Norman Conquest* (pp. 229–31) Gray gives Adgar's version of the tale, in which the thief's name is Ebbo.

