

## TRAVELLING IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

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TRAVELLING, in the middle ages, was assisted by few, if any, conveniences, and was dangerous as well as difficult. The insecurity of the roads made it necessary for travellers to associate together for protection, as well as for company, for their journeys were slow and dull; and as they were often obliged to halt for the night where there was little or no accommodation, they had to carry a good deal of luggage. An inn was often the place



Fig. 1.—THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMS.

character. The host of the Tabard joins the party also, and it is agreed that, to enliven the journey, each, in his turn, shall tell a story on the way. They then sup at a common table, drink wine, and go to bed; and at day-break in the morning they start on their journey. They travelled evidently at a slow pace; and at Boughton-under-Blee—a village a few miles from Canterbury—a canon and his yeoman, after some hard riding, overtake them, and obtain permission to join the company. It would seem that the company had passed a night somewhere on the road,—probably at Rochester,—and we should, perhaps, have had an account of their reception and departure, had the collection of the "Canterbury Tales" been completed by their author; and that the canon had sent his yeoman to watch for any company of travellers who should halt at the hostelry, that he might join them, but he had

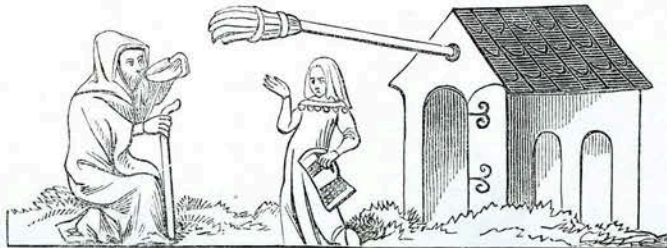


Fig. 2.—A PILGRIM AT THE ALE-STAKE.

period, and is not unfrequently alluded to in popular writers. It was indicated by a stake projecting from the house, on which some object was hung for a sign, and is sometimes represented in the illuminations of manuscripts. Our cut (Fig. 2), taken from a manuscript of the fourteenth century, in the British Museum (MS. Reg. 10 E. IV.), represents one of those ale-houses, at which a pilgrim is halting to take refreshment. The keeper of the ale-house, in this instance, is a woman, the ale-wife, and the stake appears to be a besom. In another (Fig. 3), taken from a manuscript copy of the "Moralization of Chess," by Jacques de Cessoles,

of rendezvous for travellers starting upon the same journey. It is thus that Chaucer represents himself as having taken up his quarters at the Tabard, in Southwark, preparatory to undertaking the journey to Canterbury; and at night there arrived a company of travellers bent to the same destination, who had gathered together as they came along the road:—

"At night was come into that hostelry  
Wel nyne and twenty in a companye,  
Of sondry folk, by aventure ifalle  
In felaschipe."—*Canterbury Tales*, l. 23.

Chaucer obtains the consent of the rest to his joining their fellowship, which, as he describes it, consisted of persons most dissimilar in class and

of a tavern will be seen in our cut (Fig. 9) to the present paper.

Lydgate composed his poem of the "Storie of Thebes" as a continuation of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," and in the prologue he describes him-



Fig. 3.—THE ROAD-SIDE INN.

self as arriving in Canterbury, while the pilgrims were there, and accidentally taking up his lodging at the same inn. He thus seeks and obtains permission to be one of the fellowship, and returns from Canterbury in their company. Our cut (Fig. 1), taken from a fine manuscript of Lydgate's poem (MS. Reg. 18 D. II.), represents the pilgrims leaving Canterbury, and is not only a good illustration of the practice of travelling in companies, but it furnishes us with a characteristic picture of a mediæval town.

This readiness of travellers to join company with each other was not confined to any class of society, but was general among them all, and not unfrequently led to the formation of friendships and alliances between those who had previously been strangers to one another. In the interesting romance of "Blonde of Oxford," composed in the thirteenth century, when Jean of Dammartin came to seek his fortune in England, and was riding from Dover to London, attended by a faithful servant, he overtook the Earl of Oxford, who was on his way to London, with a numerous retinue of armed followers. Jean, having learnt from the earl's followers who he was, introduced himself to him, and was finally taken into his service. Subsequently, in the same romance, Jean of Dammartin, returning to England, takes up his lodging in a handsome hotel in London, and while his man Robin puts the horses in the stable, he walks out into the street, and sees a large company who had just arrived, consisting of squires, servants, knights, clerks, priests, serving-lads (*garçons*), and men who attended the baggage horses (*sommiers*). Jean asked one of the esquires who they all were, what was their business, and where they were going; and was informed that it was the Earl of Gloucester, who had come to London about some business, and was going on the morrow to Oxford, to be married to the Lady Blonde, the object of Jean's affections. Next morning the earl began his journey at day-break, and Jean and his servant, who were mounted ready, joined the company. There was so little unusual in this, that the intruders seem, for a while, not to have been noticed, until, at length, the earl observed Jean, and began to interrogate him: "Friend," said he, "you are welcome; what is your name?"

"Amis, bien fustes vené,  
Coment fu vostre non pelé?  
*Romance of Blon e*, l. 2627.

Jean gave him an assumed name, said that he was a merchant, and offered to sell the earl his horse, but they could not agree about the terms. They continued conversing together during the rest of the journey. As they proceeded they encountered a shower of rain, which wet the earl, who was fashionably and thinly clothed. Jean smiled at the impatience with which he seemed to bear this mishap, and when asked to tell the cause of his mirth, said, "If I were a rich man, like you, I should always carry a house with me, so that I could go into it

been too late to start with them, and had, therefore, ridden hard to overtake them:—

"His yeman eek was ful of curtesye,  
And seid, 'Sires, now in the morwe tyde  
Out of your ostelry I saugh you ryde,  
And warned heer my lord and soverayn,  
Which that to ryden with yow is ful fayn,  
For his disport; he loveth daliaunce.'"  
*Canterbury Tales*, l. 12515.

A little further on, on the road, the Pardoner is called upon to tell his tale. He replies—

"'It schal be doon,' quod he, 'and that anon.  
But first,' quod he, 'here, at this ale-stake,  
I will both drynke and byten on a cake.'"  
*Canterbury Tales*, l. 13735.

The road-side ale-house, where drink was sold to travellers, and to the country-people of the neighbourhood, was scattered over the more populous and frequented parts of the country from an early

of the earlier part of the fifteenth century (MS. Reg. 19 C. XI.), a round sign is suspended on the stake, with a figure in the middle, which may possibly be intended to represent a bush. A garland was not unfrequently hung upon the stake; on this Chaucer, describing his "sompnour," says:—

"A garland had he set upon his heed,  
As gret as it were for an ale-stake."  
*Canterbury Tales*, l. 668.

A bush was still more common, and gave rise to the proverb that "good wine needs no bush," that is, it will be easily found out without any sign to direct people to it. A bush hung out as the sign

when the rain came, and not get my clothes dirtied and wet." The earl and his followers set Jean down for a fool, and looked forward to be made merry by him. Soon afterwards they came to the banks of a river, into which the earl rode, without first ascertaining if it were fordable, and he was carried away by the stream, and only saved from drowning by a fisherman in a boat. The rest of the company found a ford, where they passed the river without danger. The earl's clothes had now been completely soaked in the water, and, as his baggage-horses were too far in the rear, he made one of his knights strip, and give him his dry clothes, and left him to make the best of his wet ones. "If I were as rich, and had so many men, as you," said Jean, laughing again, "I would not be exposed to misfortunes of this kind, for I would carry a bridge with me." The earl and his retinue were merry again, at what they supposed to be the folly of their travelling companion. They were now near Oxford, and Jean took his leave of the Earl of Gloucester. We learn, in the course of the story, that all that Jean meant by the house, was that the earl ought to have had at hand a good cloak and cape to cover his fine clothes in case of rain; and that, by the bridge, he intended to intimate that he ought to have sent some of his men to ascertain the depth of the river before he went into it!

These illustrations of the manner and inconveniences of travelling apply more especially to those who could travel on horseback; but the difficulties were still greater for the numerous class of people who were obliged to travel on foot, and who could rarely make sure of reaching, at the end of each day's journey, a place where they could obtain a lodging. They, moreover, had also to carry a certain quantity of baggage. Foot-travellers seem to have had sometimes a mule or a donkey, to carry luggage, or to carry weak women and children. Every one will remember the mediæval fable of the old man and his ass, in which a father and his son have the one ass between them. In mediæval illuminations representing the flight into Egypt, Joseph is often represented as walking, while the virgin and child ride upon an ass which he is leading. The party of



Fig. 4.—TRAVELLERS ON FOOT.

Foot-travellers in our cut (Fig. 4), taken from a manuscript of the beginning of the fourteenth century (MS. Reg. 2 B. VII.), is part of a group representing the relatives of Thomas Beckett driven into exile by King Henry II.; they are making their way to the sea-shore on foot, perhaps to show that they were not of very high condition in life.

In Chaucer, it is a matter of surprise that the "chanoun" had so little luggage that he carried only a male, or portmanteau, on his horse's crupper, and even that was doubled up (*tweyfold*) on account of its emptiness.

"A male tweyfold on his croper lay,  
It semed that he caried litel array,  
Al light for somer rood this worthy man."  
*Canterbury Tales*, l. 12494.

On the contrary, in the romance of "Berte," when the heroine is left to wander in the solitary forest, the writer laments that she had "neither pack-horse laden with coffers, nor clothes folded up in males," which were the ordinary accompaniments of travellers of any consequence:—

"N'i ot sommier à coffres ne dras troussés en male."  
*Roman de Berte*, p. 42.

A traveller, indeed, had many things to carry

with him. He took provisions with him, or was obliged, at times, to reckon on what he could kill, or obtain undressed, and hence he was obliged to carry cooking apparatus with him. He carried flint and steel to strike a light, and be able to make a fire, as he might have to bivouac in a solitary place, or in the midst of a forest. In the romance of "Garin le Loherain," when the Count Begues of Belin finds himself benighted in the forest, he prepares for passing the night comfortably, and, as a matter of course, draws out his steel (*fusil*), and lights a fire:—

"Et li quens est desous l'arbre ramé;  
Prent son fusil, s'a le fu alumé,  
Grant et plénier, mervelleus embrasé."  
*Garin le Loherain*, vol. ii. p. 231.

The traveller also often carried materials for laying

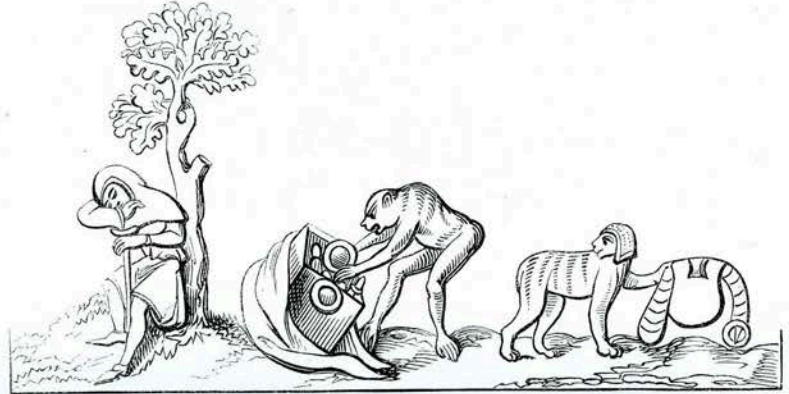


Fig. 5.—PLUNDERING A TRAVELLER.

monkeys. While one is emptying his "male," or box, the other is carrying off his girdle, with the large pouch attached to it, in which, no doubt, the traveller carried his money, and perhaps his eatables. The roads, in the middle ages, appear also to have been infested with beggars of all description, many



Fig. 6.—A CRIPPLE.

of whom were cripples, and persons mutilated in the most revolting manner, the result of feudal wantonness, and feudal vengeance. Our cut (Fig. 6), also furnished by a manuscript of the fourteenth century, represents a very deformed cripple, whose

a bed, if benighted on the road; and he had, above all, to carry sufficient money with him in specie. All these incumbrances, combined with the badness of the roads, rendered travelling slow—of which we might quote abundant examples. At the end of the twelfth century, it took Giraldus Cambrensis four days to travel from Powisland to Haughmond Abbey, near Shrewsbury. The roads, too, were infested with robbers and banditti, and travellers were only safe in their numbers, and in being sufficiently well armed to repel attacks. In the accompanying cut (Fig. 5), from a manuscript of the fourteenth century (MS. Reg. 10 E. IV.), a traveller is taking his repose under a tree,—it is, perhaps, intended to be understood that he is passing the night in a wood,—while he is plundered by robbers, who are here jokingly represented in the forms of

means of locomotion are rather curious. The beggar and the cripple, too, were often only robbers in disguise, who waited their opportunity to attack single passengers, or who watched to give notice to comrades of the approach of richer convoys. The mediæval popular stories give abundant instances of robbers and others disguising themselves as beggars and cripples. Blindness, also, was common among these objects of commiseration in the middle ages; often, as in the case of mutilation of other kinds, the result of deliberate violence. The same manuscript I have so often quoted (MS. Reg. 10 E. IV.), has furnished our cut (Fig. 7), representing a blind man and his dog.

It will be easily understood, that when travelling was beset with so many inconveniences, private hospitality would be looked upon as one of the first of virtues. The early metrical story of "The Hermit," the foundation of Parnell's poem, gives us examples of the different sorts of hospitality with which travellers met. The hermit and his companion began their travels in a wild country, and at the end of their first day's journey, they were obliged to take up their lodgings with another hermit, who gave them the best welcome he could, and shared



Fig. 7.—A BLIND MAN AND DOG.

his provisions with them. The next evening they came to a city, where everybody shut his door against them, because they were poor, till at length, weary and wet with rain, they sat down on the stone steps of a great mansion; but the host was an usurer, and refused to receive into his house men who promised him so little profit. Yet at length,

to escape their importunities, he allowed them to enter the yard, and sleep under a staircase, where his maid threw them some straw to lie upon, but neither offered them refreshment, except some of the refuse of the table, nor allowed them to go to a fire to dry their clothes. The next evening they sought their lodging in a large abbey, where the

monks received them with great hospitality, and gave them plenty to eat and drink. On the fourth day they came to another town, where they went to the house of a rich and honest burgher, who received them with all the marks of hospitality. Their host washed their feet, and gave them plenty to eat and drink, and they were comfortably lodged for the night.

It would not be difficult to illustrate all the incidents of this story by anecdotes of mediæval life. The traveller who sought a lodging, without money to pay for it, even in private houses, was not always well received. In the fabliau of the Butcher of Abbeville (Barbazan, iv. 1), the butcher, returning from the market of Oisemont, is overtaken by night at the small town of Bailllezel. He determined to stop for the night there, and, seeing a poor woman at her door, at the entrance of the town, he asked her where he could procure a night's lodging, and she recommended him to the priest, as the only person in the town who had wine in his cellar. The butcher accordingly repaired to the priest's house, where he found that ecclesiastic sitting on the sill of his door, and asked him to give him a lodging for the sake of charity. The priest, who thought that there was nothing to be gained from him, refused, telling him he would find plenty of people in the town who could give him a bed. As the butcher was leaving the town, irritated by his inhospitable reception, he encountered a flock of sheep, which he learnt were the property of the priest; whereupon, selecting the fattest of them, he dextrously stole it away unperceived, and, returning with it into the town, he went to the priest's door, found him just closing his house, for it was nightfall, and again asked him for lodging. The priest asked him who he was, and whence he came. He replied that he had been to the market at Oisemont, and bought a sheep; that he was overtaken by night, and sought a lodging; and that, as it was no great consideration to him, he intended to kill his sheep, and share it with his host. The temptation was too great for the greedy priest, and he now received the butcher into his house, treated him with great respect, and had a bed made for him in his hall. Now the priest had—as was common with the Catholic priesthood—a concubine and a maid-servant, and they all regaled themselves on the butcher's sheep. Before the guest left next morning, he contrived to sell the sheep's skin and wool for certain considerations severally to the concubine and to the maid, and, after his departure, their rival claims led to a quarrel, and even to a battle. While the priest, on his return from the service of matins, was labouring to appease the combatants, his shepherd entered, with the information that his best sheep had been stolen from his flock, and an examination of the skin led to the discovery of the trick which had been played upon him—a punishment, as we are told, which he well merited by his inhospitable conduct. A Latin story of the thirteenth century may be coupled with the foregoing anecdote. There was an abbot who was very miserly and inhospitable, and he took care to give all the offices in the abbey to men of his own character. This was especially the case with the monk who had the direction of the *hospitium*, or guest-house. One day came a minstrel to ask for a lodging, but he met with an unfriendly reception, was treated only with black bread and water to drink, and was shown to a hard bed of straw. Minstrels were not usually treated in this inhospitable manner, and our guest resolved to be revenged. He left the abbey next morning, and a little way on his journey he met the abbot, who was returning home from a short absence. "God bless you, good abbot!" he said, "for the noble hospitality which has been shown to me this night by your monks. The master of your guest-house treated me with the choicest wines, and placed rich dishes on the table for me in such numbers, that I would not attempt to count them; and when I came away this morning, he gave me a pair of shoes, a girdle, and a knife." The abbot hurried home in a furious rage, summoned the offending brother before a chapter, accused him of squandering away the property of the monastery, caused him to be flogged and dismissed from his office, and appointed in his place another, on whose inhospitable temper he could place entire confidence.

These cases of want of hospitality were, however, exceptions to the general rule. A stranger was

usually received with great kindness, each class of society, of course, more or less by its own class, though, under such circumstances, much less distinction of class was made than one might suppose. The aristocratic class, which included what we should now call the gentry, sought hospitality in the nearest castle; for a castle, as a matter of pride and ostentation, was, more or less, like an abbey, a place of hospitality for everybody. The visitor, however unknown and unexpected, was received by his equals or by his inferiors with respectful politeness; his host often washed him, especially his feet, and bathed him, dressed him, and furnished him with



Fig. 8.—RECEIVING A GUEST.

a temporary change of garments. Our cut (Fig. 8), taken from a manuscript of the earlier part of the fourteenth century (MS. Harl. No. 1527), represents the reception of a stranger in this manner, and might easily be illustrated by anecdotes from mediæval writers. In the "Roman de la Violette" (p. 233), when its hero, Gerard, sought a lodging at a castle, he was received with the greatest hospitality; the lord of the castle led him into the great

hall, and there disarmed him, furnished him with a rich mantle, and caused him to be bathed and washed. In the same romance (p. 237), when Gerard arrived at the little town of Mouzon, he goes to the house of a widow to ask for a night's lodging, and is received with the same welcome. His horse is taken into a stable, and carefully attended to, while the lady labours to keep him in conversation until supper is ready, after which a good bed is made for him, and they all retire to rest. The comforts, however, which could be offered to the visitor, consisted often chiefly in eating and drinking. People had few spare chambers, especially furnished ones, and, in the simplicity of mediæval manners, the guests were obliged to sleep either in the same room as the family, or, more usually, in the hall, where beds were made for them on the floor or on the benches. "Making a bed" was a phrase true in its literal sense, and the bed made consisted of a heap of straw, with a sheet or two thrown over it. The host, indeed, could often furnish no more than a room of bare walls and floor as a protection from the weather, and the guest had to rely as much upon his own resources for his personal comforts, as if he had had to pass the night in the midst of a wild wood. Moreover the guests, however numerous and though strangers to each other, were commonly obliged to sleep together indiscriminately in the same room.

In towns the hospitality of the burghers was not always given gratis, for it was a common custom, even among the richer merchants, to make a profit by receiving guests. These letters of lodgings were distinguished from the inn-keepers, or *hostelers*, by the title of *herbergeors*, or people who gave harbour to strangers, and in the larger towns they were submitted to municipal regulations. The great barons and knights were in the custom of taking up their lodgings with these *herbergeors*, rather than

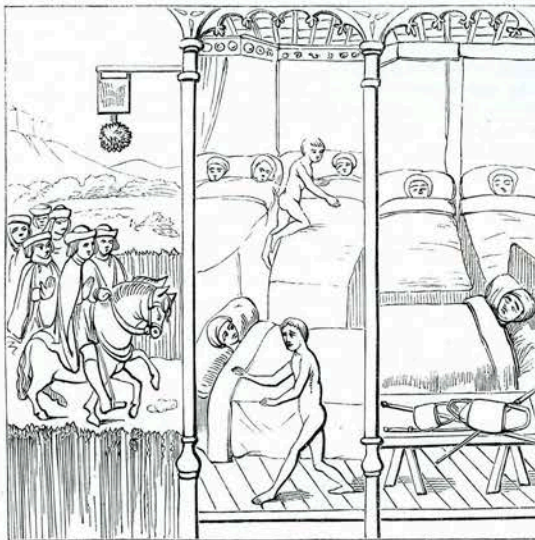


Fig. 9.—A HOSTELRY AT NIGHT.

going to the public hostels; and thus a sort of relationship was formed between particular nobles or kings and particular burghers, on the strength of which the latter adopted the arms of their habitual lodgers as their signs. These *herbergeors* practised great extortions upon their accidental guests, and they appear to have adopted various artifices to allure them to their houses. These extortions are the subject of a very curious Latin poem of the thirteenth century, entitled "*Peregrinus*" (the Traveller.)

Our cut (Fig. 9), taken from an illumination in the unique manuscript of the *Cent nouvelles Nouvelles* (fifteenth century), in the Hunterian Library at Glasgow, represents the exterior and the interior of a public hostel or inn. Without, we see the sign, and the bush suspended to it, and a company of travellers arriving; within, the bed-chambers are represented, and they illustrate not only the practice of lodging a number of persons in the same bedroom, but also that of sleeping in a state of perfect nudity. Our next cut (Fig. 10) is a picture of a mediæval tapster; it is taken from one of the carved seats, or *misereres*, in the fine parish church of Ludlow, in Shropshire.

It will, probably, be remarked, that the size of the tapster's jug is rather disproportionate to that of



Fig. 10.—A MEDIÆVAL TAPSTER.

his barrel; but mediæval artists often set perspective and relative proportions at defiance.