CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS.

Hagiographic documents—Imaginative tales. Artificial compositions —Romances—Popular inventions—Myths—Tales—Legends— The hagiographic legend: its two principal factors.

LET us, in the first instance, attempt to define what precisely is to be understood by a *hagiographic document*.

The term should not be applied indiscriminately to every document bearing upon the saints. The chapter in which Tacitus in vivid hues paints the sufferings of the first Roman martyrs is not a hagiographic document, nor can the expression be rightly applied to those pages of Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History across which the victims of the great persecutions defile in serried ranks. It was Eusebius, too, who composed, in four volumes, a panegyric of the first Christian emperor who, in the Greek Church, participates in the honours reserved to the canonised saints. Nevertheless the Life of Constantine is not a saint's life, whereas the book of the Martyrs of Palestine, written with the object of edifying the faithful by an account of the sufferings of these heroes is at once a hagiographic document and an historic record of the first order. So too the Acts of St. Theodore, which in their present form possess

nothing in common with history, should, from the standpoint of hagiography, enjoy similar consideration. In the same class again, though under a special category, we may range the calendars or martyrologies in which the anniversaries of martyrs are recorded, together with official inscriptions, such as those of Pope Damasus, placed upon their tombs.

It thus appears that, in order to be strictly hagiographic, the document should be of a religious character and should aim at edification. The term may only be applied therefore to writings inspired by devotion to the saints and intended to promote it.

The point to be emphasised from the first is the distinction between hagiography and history. The work of the hagiographer may be historical, but it is not necessarily so. It may assume any literary form suitable to the glorification of the saints, from an official record adapted to the use of the faithful, to a poetical composition of the most exuberant character wholly detached from reality.

It is obvious that no one would venture to assert that everywhere and at all times hagiographers have submitted themselves to strict historical canons. But by what standard must we measure their digressions? That is a point to be determined in each individual case. Before attempting to suggest any rules on this subject, let us begin by laying down a few definitions less familiar than might at first sight be supposed.

In order to describe any narrative which is not in accordance with fact, a free use is made of the terms myth, fable, tale, romance, legend. Taken in a general sense these words are frequently used as though they were synonymous. The result has been a constant

confusion of thought which we shall hope to avoid by a more rigorous definition of terms.[1]

We need, however, scarcely discuss the *fable*, which, in its widest sense, may be held to include any imaginary narrative, and in its more restricted acceptation is synonymous with the apologue, more especially when the persons brought upon the scene are represented by animals. This does not mean that hagiographers have wholly neglected this form of imaginative composition. The author of the *Life of SS. Barlaam and Joasaph* has incorporated into his compilation various apologues which have been the subject of individual studies.[2] Nevertheless these are exceptions, and the critic of hagiography need not, as a rule, trouble himself about the emulators of Æsop and La Fontaine.

Myths, tales, legends and romances all belong to the sphere of imaginative writing, but may be divided into two categories, according as they are the spontaneous and impersonal expression of the spirit of the people, or artificial and deliberate compositions.

Romances, in the more usual acceptation of the term, belong to this second category. The author selects and studies his subject, and applies the resources of

1 The following are the titles of works dealing with this question, which we give without questioning the conclusions of the authors, who do not always agree among themselves. J. F. L. George, *Mythus und Sage*, Berlin, 1837. J. Fiske, *Myths and Myth-makers*, London, 1873. H. Steinthal, *Mythos, Sage, Märchen, Legende, Erzählung, Fabel*, in the *Zeitschrift fur Volkerspsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, vol. xvii., 1865, pp. 113-39. E. Bernheim, *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode*, 3rd edition, Leipzig, 1903, pp. 317, 349, 457-68. E. Siecke, *Mythologische Briefe*, Berlin, 1901. E. Bethe, *Mythus, Sage, Märchen*, in *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde*, 1905, pp. 97-142. [Fr. Lanzoni, *Genesi, svolgimento e tramonto delle leggende storiche*, Rome, 1925 (Studi e Testi, 43).]

2 S. J. Warren, *De Grieksch christelijke roman Barlaam en Joasa en zijne parabels*, Rotterdam, 1899, in 4to, 56 pp.

his talent and his imagination to the work of art he has conceived. If he has chosen for his theme the character and adventures of an historical person or of a period of history, he will produce an historical romance. If everything, both characters and incidents, is pure invention it will be a novel of imagination; and if, by means of a series of incidents, partly true, partly fictitious, the author has attempted to depict the soul of a saint honoured by the Church, we ought to speak of his work as a hagiographic romance, although the expression is one that has scarcely passed into common use.

Romances of this type are exceedingly numerous, and a few of them date back to very early times.[1] One might instance the Acts of Paul and of Thecla, and that collection of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles which enjoyed such long and extraordinary popularity. The romance of the Clementine Homilies and Recognitions is widely known, its main portions figuring for a prolonged period in all the most celebrated hagiographic collections.[2]

Tales and legends, to which reference must now be made, should not, strictly speaking, be placed in the category of artificial compositions. It is true that the name of tale is frequently bestowed upon short works of fiction, and the novelist sometimes devotes himself in his study to the composition of a narrative of which the form recalls the legend or tale properly so called. These learned imitations need only be mentioned here;

1 An interesting account is to be found in E. von Dobschütz, *Der Roman in der altchristlichen Literatur* in the *Deutsche Rundschau*, April, 1902, pp. 87-106.

2 H. U. Meyboom, *De Clemens-Roman*, Groningen, 1904, 2 vols. Concerning this work and the most recent studies on the Clementines, see *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xxiv., pp. 138-41.

it is unnecessary to dwell on them further. We must reserve our attention for those works of fiction which have come down to us without any individual parentage, being the anonymous product of that abstraction known as the spirit of the people.

Let us first consider the *myth*. The term is frequently applied to anything that has no real existence, while the title of mythical personage is bestowed upon any hero who has lived solely in the imagination of the poet. Such, however, is not the technical meaning of the word, and it would be wrong to class as mythical personages figures such as Abner in *Athalie*, although the confidant of Joad was wholly invented by Racine.

The essence of the myth consists in the personification of a force or of an abstract idea; or, if you prefer it, the myth is simply an explanation of natural phenomena adapted to the capacity of a primitive people.[1] Whether we insist on treating it as a poetic symbol or whether, as has been ingeniously suggested, we should prefer to regard mythology as a treatise on physics for primitive times, it is none the less certain that natural phenomena supply the proper matter for the myth. The sun, the moon, the stars, lightning, the succession of night and day and the vicissitudes of the

1 M. S. Reinach in *La Revue Critique* (3rd June, 1905, p. 425) questions this definition of a myth. "A myth," he says, "is essentially a story which humanity has believed to be true at a particular stage of its intellectual development." This formula appears to us too vague to serve as a definition. M. Reinach may have more reason on his side when he adds: "To attempt to draw a rigorous distinction, as the author has done, between the myth on the one side and the legend and tale on the other, is to demand from words a precision which they are unable to supply". The definition that we have adopted, being on the whole, the one most commonly accepted by specialists, we may perhaps be permitted the use of it in order to avoid confusion.

seasons are represented by gods and heroes, and by the adventures attributed to them. Aurora, with rosy fingers, opens the portals of the Orient, Phæton drives the chariot of the sun: such are the graceful fables with which the study of antiquity has familiarised us.

I do not wish to multiply examples, for before classifying a narrative it is essential to ascertain definitely its real significance, and were we to follow the methods of a certain school there would be very few works of fiction that could not be included under the category of mythology. There are men, so an ill-tempered critic has declared, who cannot even watch a cat and dog fight without some reference to the struggle between darkness and light. The exaggerations denounced in this sally are only too real, and we shall be careful not to make use of the term myth without solid reason.

Is there such a thing as a hagiographic myth? Or have the hagiographers made use of mythical elements? I see no difficulty in admitting it, and shall show later on that they have transferred to the saints more than one narrative which belongs to ancient mythology.

The *tale* proper is an invented story referring neither to a real personage nor yet to any definite place. "Once upon a time there were a king and queen who had a very beautiful daughter. . . ." This classical beginning of the story-teller[1] is exactly characteristic of its style, in which everything is made accessory to the plot of the narrative, intended solely for the entertainment of the listener, or calculated to set in relief some practical truth as in the case of moral tales.

1 This is almost literally the opening phrase of Apuleius in *Cupid and Psyche*: "Erant in quadam civitate rex et regina. Hi tres numero filias forma conspicuas habuere," *Met.*, iv., 28.

Contrary to what one would imagine, there exists no great variety of popular tales. All may be traced back to a certain number of types, none of which appears to belong exclusively to a particular nation or even race; they are the common patrimony of humanity.

Much has been written concerning their origin.[1] Without entering into a detailed study of the various theories propounded by specialists, mention must be made of two principal ones which have won more favour than the rest, and which may be considered as extreme solutions. Some explain the repetition of the same themes and the similarity in their forms by the uniformity of the human mind. Others take refuge in a less simple and less metaphysical explanation, which coincides more nearly with ascertained facts. According to them India is the one and only cradle of all popular tales disseminated throughout the whole world,[2] and whatever one may like to assume concerning their original author, they had their birth there and thence set out on their travels to become in the widest sense the common possession of all nations. It is in

1 Emmanuel Cosquin, *Contes Populaires de Lorraine*, vol. i., Paris, 1886, i.-lxvii.; *id.*, *L'Origine des contes populaires européens et les théories de M. Lang*, Paris, 1891; *id.*, *Quelques observations sur les "Incidents communs aux contes orientaux,"* London, 1892. M. Cosquin is a definite partisan of the Orientalist theory, which has been combated more especially by M. J. Bédier, *Les fabliaux—Bibliotheque de l'École des Hautes Études*, vol. 98, Paris, 1893, pp. 45-250. Concerning other systems and their variations, the following may be consulted: Ch. Martens, *L'origine des Contes populaires* in the *Revue Néo-Scolastique*, vol. i., 1894, pp. 234-62, 352-84. L. Sainéan, *L'état actuel des études de Folk-lore* in the *Revue de Synthèse historique*, vol. iv., 1902, pp. 147-74. [In the 3d ed. Delehaye deletes the citation of Sainéan and in its place cites: G. Huet, *Les contes populaires*, Paris, 1923, 189 pp.]

2 Among the advocates of the Orientalist theory, there are some who regard Egypt as the birthplace of popular tales. See, for instance, S. Reinach in the *Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuses*, vol. ix., 1904, pp. 319-20. We cannot discuss the subject here.

no way necessary to commit ourselves here to any theory of the first origin of popular tales. We need only remember that, like those light seeds that the wind carries beyond the seas, they are for ever floating in the atmosphere, and may be found in every country and every clime without their being connected in any definite way with either name or place.

The *legend*, on the other hand, has, of necessity, some historical or topographical connection. It refers imaginary events to some real personage, or it localises romantic stories in some definite spot. Thus one may speak of the legend of Alexander or of Cæsar, of the legend of the Castle of the Drachenfels on the Rhine, or of that of the Red Lake, Lough Derg, in Ireland. Such, in accordance with common usage, is the precise meaning of the terms we have to employ.

It must, however, be observed that in practice classification is less easy, and the various categories are less clearly differentiated. One of these winged tales which fly from nation to nation may for a moment settle on some famous monument, or the anonymous king who was the principal personage may take to himself some historic name. At once the tale is transformed into a legend, and one might easily be misled if some other version of the same story did not reveal the purely accidental introduction of the historical element.[1] In the

1 In certain cases the various disguises are easy to recognize, as in the stories in which Jesus Christ and St. Peter are brought on the scene. Here, for example, is a legend of the Basque country, chronicled by Cerquand: "Our Lord and St. Peter one day, when out walking, came across a man kneeling in the middle of the road and praying to God to extricate his cart from the ditch into which it had fallen. As Jesus was passing on without paying any attention to the carter's prayer, St. Peter said to Him, 'Lord, wilt thou not come to the help of this poor man?' 'He does not deserve our help,' Jesus replied, 'for he makes no effort to help himself.' A little farther on they came upon another man in similar plight, but shouting and swearing and doing his utmost. Jesus hastened to his assistance, saying: 'This one deserves our help for he is doing what he can'." Every one is familiar with this incident as told by the fabulist concerning Hercules. See R. Köhler, *Kleine Schriften*, Berlin, 1900, vol. ii., pp. 102-4. Consult also the admirable apologue: "Why men no longer know when they are going to die," *ibid.*, pp. 100-2.

same way the myth itself may also readily assume the appearance of a legend.

On the other hand, if you despoil the legend of all that connects it with reality, you give it the external features of a mere tale. Hence the difficulty of disentangling legend and tale in the celebrated collection of the *Arabian Nights*, for in spite of the highly fantastic character of the stories that compose it, portions have been identified with some sort of historical basis.[1] Contrariwise it may occur that what is apparently a highly distinctive legend will suddenly re-appear in the guise of a folk tale. It was a long time before men recognised an adaptation of the celebrated tale of the ass's skin in the legend of Saint Dymphna, or before the touching history of Geneviève de Brabant[2] proved to be a theme which had previously been turned to account by the epic poets of India.[3]

As we have just seen, legends, considered as connected narrations, in contradistinction to myths and tales, presuppose an historical fact as basis or pretext: such is the first essential element of the species. This

1 M. J. de Goeje, *De Arabische Nachtvertellingen* in *De Gids*, 1886, vol. iii., pp. 383-413.

2 *Acta* SS., May, vol. iii, pp. 479-86.

3 On the variations and derivatives of this story see H. Suchier, *Oeuvres poëtiques de Beaumanoir*, Société des anciens textes Français, vol. i., 1884, pp. xxv.-lxxxi., clx. Marie de Brabant, whose story is identical has been the object of ecclesiastical veneration. *Acta SS.*, Jan., vol. ii., p. 180; April, vol. i., p. 57.

historical fact may either be developed or disfigured by popular imagination: and here we have the second element. Both elements may be combined in very unequal proportions, and according as the preponderance is to be found on the side of fact or on that of fiction, the narrative may be classed as history or as legend.

As it is the fictitious element which determines the classification of legendary narratives, people have naturally formed the habit of applying to it the name of the species itself, and thus the term legend has been extended to every unconscious distortion of historic truth, whether there be question of a series of incidents or of a solitary episode.

However we interpret the term, it seems scarcely worth while to insist on the considerable part played by legend in hagiographic literature, which is emphatically popular both in its origins and in its aim. Indeed it is from hagiography that the name itself has been borrowed. In its primitive meaning the legend is the history that has to be read, *legenda*, on the feast of a saint. It is the passion of the martyr or the eulogy of the confessor, without reference to its historical value. "Legendarius vocatur liber ille ubi agitur de vita et obitu confessorum, qui legitur in eorum festis, martyrum autem in Passionariis," wrote John Beleth,[1] in the twelfth century, thus differentiating the passion from the legend, contrary to the custom that was subsequently to prevail. For, as early as the thirteenth century, the *Legenda Aurea* sanctioned the wider meaning which includes at once the acts of the martyrs and the biographies of other saints. We

1 *De divinis officiis*, 60; Migne, P. L., vol. ccii., p. 66. See also E. von Dobschütz, art. "Legende," in the *Realencyklopaedie für Protestantische Theologie*, 3rd edition, vol. xi., p. 345.

might, therefore, in conformity with ancient usage, bestow the term legend upon all hagiographic narratives, including even those of admitted documentary value. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion in the following pages, we shall rigidly refrain from doing so, and the word legend will only be applied to stories or incidents unauthenticated by history.

Hagiographic literature has come to be written under the influence of two very distinct factors, factors to be met with, indeed, in whatever stream of literary productiveness we seek to trace to its source. There is, first, the anonymous creator called the people or, if we prefer to take the effect for the cause, the legend. Here the work is that of a mysterious and many-headed agent, uncontrolled in his methods, swift and unfettered as the imagination always is, perpetually in labour with fresh products of his fancy, but incapable of chronicling them in writing. Beside him there is the man of letters, the editor, who stands before us as one condemned to a thankless task, compelled to follow a beaten track, but giving to all he produces a deliberate and durable character. Both together have collaborated in that vast undertaking known as "The Lives of the Saints," and it is important for us to recognise the part played by each in this process of evolution, which, though the work of all time, is yet incessantly renewed.

It is our intention to restrict ourselves almost exclusively to the pious literature of the Middle Ages, and we shall seek to prove how it was elaborated by the people on the one side and the hagiographers on the other. The methods pursued both by the one and the other may appear to some people to be not yet wholly a thing of the past. It is an opinion which we ourselves are not prepared to controvert.

THE LEGENDS OF THE SAINT

AN INTRODUCTION TO HAGIOGRAPHY

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