ABSTRACT

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SIR BEVIS OF HAMPTON: A STUDY OF THE VOGUE AND SUCCESSIVE TRANSFORMATIONS OF THIS POPULAR ENGLISH ROMANCE FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE PRESENT DAY

by Wilfred Lister

This thesis investigates and illustrates the remarkable vogue of Bevis in England from the Middle Ages to the present day. It examines the changes in content and form which the romance has undergone and the extent to which these changes reflect the changing tastes of different audiences. The study is based on an examination of the many extant texts and editions of Bevis and of other contemporary evidence.

The thesis begins with a survey of the various manifestations of the popularity of the story in mediaeval England and a study of some of the significant features of the mediaeval metrical version of the romance; additions and changes made by the English poet in his treatment of the Anglo-Norman original are examined.

A study is then made of the continued popularity of the mediaeval romance in the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth, against the background of changing fashions and frequent criticism from various quarters. An account is given of the many editions printed during this period.

The publication of the first prose edition of Bevis in 1689 is an important landmark; the study shows how it marks a change not only in form, but also in tone, largely as a result of the expansion and development of the love element — a development which is carried further in the edition of 1775.

The last section deals with the final stage in the vogue of the romance. It shows how it finally became, on the one hand, a 'plaything of children' (available in the form of chap-books), and, on the other hand, an object of scholarly investigation for antiquarians and literary critics, who helped to revive interest in the mediaeval metrical romance. These two lines of development lead us to the present day.

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W. Lister

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations are those in common use. The following are worthy of special note:

EETS.	Early English Text Society.
ES.	Extra Series.
NS.	New Series.
PMLA.	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.
STC.	A. W. Pollard & G. R. Redgrave, A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland ... 1475-1640, London, 1926.
Wing.	D. Wing, A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales ... 1641-1700, New York, 1945.

The romance is generally referred to as Bevis, but when it is necessary to indicate a particular version or edition, the appropriate title is given.

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C H A P T E R I

The Mediaeval Background

Many speken of men that romaunces rede
That were sumtyme doughti in dede,
The while that god hem lyff lente,
That now ben dede and hennes wente:
Off Bevis, Gy, and of Gauwayn,
Off kyng Richard, and of Owayn,
Off Tristram, and of Percyuale,
Off Rouland Ris, and Aglauale,
Off Archeroun, and of Octouian,
Off Charles, and of Cassibaldan,
Off Hauelok, Horne, and of Wade;-
In Romaunces that of hem ben made
That gestoures often dos of hem gestes
At Mangeres and at grete ffestes.
Here dedis ben in remembraunce
In many fair Romaunce ... (1)

The earliest extant English version of the story of Sir Bevis of Hampton belongs to that kind of mediaeval literature usually referred to as 'romance'. The genre is well known, but it is not easy to define the characteristics which mark it off from other kinds of literature,[2] and there is a great deal of uncertainty about authorship, method of presentation, and

(1) The Laud Troy Book. A Romance of About 1400 A.D., ed. J. E. Wülfing, EETS, 121,122 (1902,1903), ll. 11-26.

(2) The most satisfactory attempt is still that of D. Everett in her article on 'A Characterization of the English Medieval Romances' (1929), reprinted in Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. P. Kean (Oxford, 1955).

type of audience catered for in this country. The romance as an art form originated in France, and the fashion spread to other parts of Western Europe, including England, where the romances appeared in both Anglo-Norman and English, but the majority of Middle English romances, even those borrowed most directly from the French, show some independent development in both subject-matter and style. Generally speaking, plot and incident are much more predominant in the English romances and less attention is paid to the theme of courtly love. A comparison, for example, of the English Ywain and Gawain (1) with the French original by Chrestien de Troyes, (2) some version of which the English poet must have had close at hand when he was working since he borrowed phrases and followed the rhyme scheme closely, (3) shows the Eng-

(1) ed. A. B. Friedman and N. T. Harrington, EETS, 254 (1964).

(2) Yvain ou Le Chevalier au Lion (c.1170), ed. W. Foerster (Halle, 1887).

(3) For example:
So lang gaf she him respite. Eng., l. 1619.
Te dona ele de respit. Fr., l. 2751.

... misauentur : ... creature. Eng., ll. 2413-4.
... mesavanture : ... criature. Fr., ll. 4141-2.

lish poet again and again condensing or omitting the speeches and descriptive passages in the original, and concentrating on the story. Thus, for example, when Ywain goes to fight the giant, the French version gives the details of the prayers of the onlookers:

> Et cil qui font remés arriere
> Le comandent au Sauveor;
> Car de lui ont mout grant peor
> Que li maufez, li anemis,
> Qui maint prodome avoit ocis
> Veant lor iauz anmi la place,
> Autretel de lui ne reface ... (1)

The English poet is content to say:

> Ful mani sari murnand man
> Left he in þe kastel þan,
> Þat on þair knees to God of might
> Praied ful hertly for þe knyght. (2)

This interest in the matter rather than the manner of the French romances is typical of English romances derived from the French.

Particularly in the case of romances such as Bevis and Guy, as Dieter Mehl has pointed out,(3) there are

(1) Le Chevalier au Lion, ll. 4170 ff..

(2) Ywain and Gawain, ll. 2425-8.

(3) D. Mehl, The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (London, 1968), p. 17.

close resemblances to saints' legends and chronicles, and it is impossible to draw rigid lines of demarcation. Indeed, in some manuscript collections (such as the Auchinleck MS.)[1] examples of the different forms appear side by side. The English romance often seems to be homiletic in intention, aiming at the illustration of moral truths by way of an exemplary story, and this is certainly true of Bevis. There is a similar didactic intention in saints' lives and chronicles, though romances like Bevis are concerned largely with the adventures of a particular hero or his family, whereas chronicles are usually devoted to the history of larger communities and several generations.

Attempts have been made to classify romances in various ways in view of the wide variety of works that are all grouped under the same name. As far back as the twelfth century, Jean Bodel made his famous classification in terms of subject-matter — 'de France, et de Bretagne, et de Rome la grant' — but this is not a very satisfactory classification since there is no logical correspondence between matter and form, and the

(1) See Chapt. II for a description of this MS..

same story material may occur in two very different forms. Moreover, as the romance developed, it embraced other 'matière'; in particular, so far as Bevis is concerned, the 'matière' of England.

Mrs. L. Hibbard Loomis[1] has looked at the content of romances from a different point of view and has suggested, for example, categories such as romances of trial and faith, romances of love and adventure, and romances of legendary English heroes. She places Bevis in the last category along with Guy of Warwick, King Horn, Havelok the Dane, and Athelstan. M. Dominica Legge,[2] however, places the romances of Bevis and Guy in a category that she calls 'the ancestral romance', commenting on its origin as follows:

> In England and Scotland the peculiar pattern of society after the Conquest seems to have led to the invention of a type of romance which is truly of origine lignagère and deserves a chapter to itself. It arose in the twelfth century, and ... continued to be popular until into the fourteenth ... This type of romance may have filled the place of the 'family' chronicle in France ... It is perhaps difficult to realize the homesick feelings of families isolated in castles and on manors, surrounded by people who did not even speak the same language, and without the comfort of going to church surrounded by

(1) Laura Hibbard Loomis, Mediaeval Romance in England, new edn. (New York, 1960).
(2) M. Dominica Legge, Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background (Oxford, 1963), pp. 139-41.

> the stone effigies of relations whom they hoped to join. Poets would benefit by this feeling and could supply interesting legends of the past glories of the new home and even suggest a connexion with some famous figure of the past, preferably a king and saint. The simplest way of ministering to this need would be to take some old story or stories and provide a local setting. How much the resulting legends would be taken seriously it is impossible to say.

Others have attempted to classify the romances in terms of style, in particular according to the metrical form employed. Thus there is a group known as the alliterative poems of the West Midlands, which includes poems such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Another group is formed by the so-called Northern stanzaic poems, to which, for example, belongs The Awntyrs off Arthure. A third group consists of the tail-rhyme romances, nearly all of which seem to have originated in the East Midlands.(1) Though these tail-rhyme romances have many features in common, the demarcation lines are not very clear for there are poems like Sir Beues of Hamtoun and Guy of Warwick of which only some versions (and these only in part)

(1) See A. Mel Trounce, 'The English Tail-Rhyme Romances', Medium Aevum. I (1932), pp. 87-108, 168-82; II (1933), pp. 34-57, 189-98; III (1934), pp. 30-50.

are written in tail-rhyme stanzas.

Professor Mehl[1] considers that the most useful form of classification is in terms of length, and groups the romances into two categories: shorter poems of between five hundred and twelve hundred lines which could be read comfortably in one sitting (though the manner in which they would be read is not certain), and much more extensive poems, which he calls 'novels in verse', that would have to be read in several instalments. Sir Beues of Hamtoun and Guy of Warwick are put in the latter class, which, according to Mehl, consists of romances that are usually fairly close translations from French or Anglo-Norman versions and are thus much less original and reveal less individuality than the shorter romances, though, as will be seen later, this does not appear to be true of Sir Beues of Hamtoun.

It is difficult to generalize about audience and authorship, and these matters are dealt with more fully later with special reference to Bevis. Certainly

(1) Op. cit., pp. 36 ff..

the importance of the role played by the minstrels has in the past been exaggerated and overrated. It is true that in the majority of the romances use is made of the oral conventions of direct address to the audience, which suggests that the poems were meant to be heard rather than read quietly, but these so-called 'minstrel tags' appear in practically all mediaeval literature and are not evidence that the romances were composed, or even recited, by minstrels. Professor A. B. Taylor acknowledges that the length of many romances makes it difficult to believe that minstrels regularly, or even frequently, recited from memory, but makes the following comment:

> ... constant practice and constant attention to one single pursuit would enable them to memorize more easily and to retain memorized knowledge much longer than people who pursue a variety of interests and are unaccustomed to memorizing. (1)

The skill achieved by actors in modern repertory companies shows that this is feasible.

The minstrels possibly had their own shortened versions of some of the romance stories, which they

(1) A. B. Taylor, An Introduction to Medieval Romance (London, 1930), p. 161.

recited in some way or other, possibly at market-places and at public festivities,[1] but the extant versions, especially the longer ones like those of Bevis and Guy, seem more likely to have been intended for reading aloud by a professional entertainer or some member of the household to which the manuscript belonged. The tone of the manuscripts suggests that in some areas the household audience may have been a middle-class one (the Auchinleck MS., which contains the best-known version of Bevis, seems to be of this kind) whereas in other areas it may have been of a more aristocratic nature (see, for example, MS. Nero A.x, the manuscript containing Sir Gawain and the Green Knight).[2] It should, however, be borne in mind that the divisions between the classes were, on the whole, less rigorous in this country than on the continent; evidence suggests that there was closer

(1) It has been conjectured from a misplacement in the text that the existing manuscript of Havelok the Dane was copied from a manuscript which had only 20 lines to the page, and would, therefore, be small and easily carried.

(2) Cf. Friedman & Harrington, op. cit., p. xvii: 'The poem [Ywain and Gawain] is clearly the work of a minstrel catering for the sober, realistic audience of a provincial baron's hall, an audience whose sensibilities and sympathies were not adjusted to Chrétien's elaborate and subtle representations of courtly love ... '

contact between the aristocracy and the 'citizen'. In view of the length of romances such as Bevis and the evidence provided by the collections of carefully compiled manuscripts in which they are to be found, it is doubtful whether the audience was as illiterate, or the poet as unskilled, as Professor Taylor suggests:

> The themes, moreover, of both these [Bevis and Guy] and the romances of Horn and Havelok would offer little attraction to a courtly audience ... But to the lower classes such themes would naturally be attractive, partly because of their stress on physical prowess, which illiterate people prize as man's supreme gift ... (1)

Certainly it is hardly feasible that so many printed editions of Bevis would have appeared during the sixteenth century (2) if the audience had been simply illiterate. Mrs. Hibbard Loomis seems to appreciate better the appeal of Bevis when she says:

> Few stories better illustrate the catholicity of mediaeval taste; and in this, perhaps, lay the secret of an influence which may be traced, not only through the wealth of manuscript material but through many literary allusions to the poem and through the representation of its incidents in different artistic forms. (3)

(1) Op. cit., p. 134. Cf. p. 157: 'unskilled poets writing for an illiterate audience'.

(2) See Chapter III of this study.

(3) Op. cit., p. 115.

C H A P T E R II

The Mediaeval *Bevis*

To judge from the number of versions extant, the numerous literary allusions to it, and the various representations of its incidents in different artistic forms in mediaeval times, *Bevis* was one of the best-known and most popular of mediaeval romances and Bevis himself obviously a hero of international character. Perhaps the best-known literary allusion is the one in Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*:

> Men speke of romances of prys,
> Of Horn child and of Ypotye,
> Of Bevis and sir Gy,
> Of sir Libeux and Pleyne-damour ... (1)

but he is likewise alluded to in the company of Sir Guy and similar knights in, for example, *Richard Coeur de Lion*,(2) *Speculum Vitae*,(3) *Generides*,(4) and *The Laud Troy Book*.(5)

Scenes from *Bevis* figure in the hangings of

(1) ll. 186-9.
(2) ll. 6659 ff..
(3) ll. 36 ff..
(4) A, ll. 13 ff..
(5) ll. 11 ff..

Juliana de Leybourne (1362)[1] and they also appear in the Smithfield Decretals[2] and the Taymouth Horae (c.1330). A small stone mould (c.1359) of the Musée de Cluny depicts Bevis and two lions with an accompanying inscription referring to Bevis.[3] In W. G. Thompson's Tapestry Weaving[4] there are references to two pieces of arras of Bevis from the time of Henry V. Warton in his History of English Poetry draws attention to the practice of depicting scenes from romances in tapestry and makes special reference to Bevis:

> These fables were not only perpetually repeated at their festivals, but were the constant objects of their eyes. The very walls of their apartments were clothed with romantic history. Tapestry was anciently the fashionable furniture of our houses, and it was chiefly filled with lively representations of this sort. The stories of the tapestry in the royal palaces of Henry the eight are still preserved ... At Richmond, the arras of Sir Bevis, and

(1) See Notes and Queries, 8th ser. XI (1897).

(2) B.M. MS. 10 E IV.

(3) Bull. de la Soc. des Antiquaires de France (1909), p. 237.

(4) W. G. Thompson, Tapestry Weaving, p. 26.

Virtue and Vice fighting. (1)

In Southampton itself the Bargate Guildhall Museum contains two large oak-panelled paintings, one of 'Sir Bevois' and one of 'Ascupart', his giant page. Fixed originally to the two great buttresses which flank the central Norman arch of the north side of the Bargate, they are said to be of unknown antiquity, but were restored in the seventeenth century. Southampton also has its Bevois Valley and Bevois Hill; Warton appears to be referring to the latter when he states that 'near Southampton is an artificial hill called Bevis Mount, on which was probably a fortress'.(2) Like Selden and Fuller(3) before him, he also draws attention to the sword of Bevis which 'is shewn in Arundel castle'.(4)

(1) T. Warton, The History of English Poetry. A full Reprint —Text and Notes — of Edition, London 1778 & 1781 (London; Ward, Lock and Tyler), pp. 142-3.

(2) Ibid., p. 103.

(3) See later in this study, Chapt. V.

(4) Op. cit., p. 103. The sword is still on show. Cf. similar 'relics' of Sir Guy in Warwick Castle; 'Guy's Cliff', the traditional site of Guy's hermitage; and the scenes from Guy (as well as from Bevis) in the Taymouth Horae and the Smithfield Decretals. Warton also records that within his memory a rude painting of the fight of Guy and Colbrand was to be seen on the walls of the north transept of Winchester Cathedral. Ibid., pp. 63-4, footnote.

There are extant versions of the story in Welsh, Irish, French, Dutch, Scandinavian, and Russian; and in English there are six surviving manuscripts, though none of the six is an exact copy of the original Middle English version. The earliest of these manuscripts is the Auchinleck MS..(1)

This manuscript was written c.1330-40 and is a most interesting collection since it seems to have been produced as a commercial venture in one of the secular mediaeval 'bookshops' that Mrs. Hibbard Loomis refers to where authors, translators, and scribes had before them a book containing some version of the story they were about to retell. She conjectures that this particular manuscript was composed by a group of five working in a London lay 'scriptorium' under the direction of a supervisor or editor.(2) Perhaps the collection was produced as the result of a special request by some interested patron, and was

(1) For a description of this manuscript see:
E. Kölbing, 'Vier romanzen-handschriften', Englische Studien, Vol. VII (1884), pp. 177-201.
A. J. Bliss, 'Notes on the Auchinleck Manuscript', Speculum, XXVI(10) (1951), pp. 652-8.

(2) L. Hibbard Loomis, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript and a Possible London Bookshop of 1330-1340', PMLA, LVII (1942), pp. 595-627.

intended for reading aloud in some domestic circle. The first seventy-eight pages of the manuscript contain chiefly legends, but there are also some didactic and devotional poems. The rest of the manuscript contains romances together with some satirical and didactic works, and there is evidence of deliberate grouping. The Auchinleck MS. is preserved in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, to which it was presented in 1744 by Alexander Boswell, father of Dr. Johnson's biographer. He himself had rescued it in 1740 from a professor of Aberdeen University, who had been tearing out leaves to make covers for notebooks. Sir Walter Scott borrowed the manuscript from the library and had it in his keeping for several years.

It is in the second part of the manuscript that Sir Beues of Hamtoun (1) and the closely related Guy of Warwick (2) are to be found. This manuscript of Sir Beues of Hamtoun was edited in a rather unscholarly

(1) fol. 176a-fol. 201a; after fol. 188 one leaf is missing.

(2) In addition to these two, the MS. contains more or less complete texts of the following romances: The King of Tars, Amis and Amiloun, Sire Degarre, The Seven Sages of Rome, Floris and Blauncheflur, Reinbrun, Arthour and Merlin, Lai le Freine, Roland and Verhagu, Otuel, Kyng Alisaunder, Sir Tristrem, Sir Orfeo, Horn Childe, Richard Coeur de Lion.

manner by Turnbull in 1838[1] and formed the basis of Kölbing's Early English Text Society edition, which was published in three parts from 1885 to 1894.[2] Though in certain respects the manuscript seems to be less near to the Middle English original than some of the other manuscripts, Kölbing believes that in general it has preserved the dialect of the original, a study of which, he suggests, proves that the romance must have been composed 'on the borders of the western and the eastern parts of South England, perhaps in the neighbourhood of Southampton, where the fabulous hero of the poem is said to have been born'.[3] 352 lines of the romance are missing from this manuscript, which Kölbing refers to as A.

Another version of the poem is to be found in B.M. MS. Egerton 2862.[4] This manuscript, at one time owned by the Duke of Sutherland, dates from the latter

(1) See Chapt. V of this study.

(2) The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun, ed. E. Kölbing, EETS, ES, 46, 48, 65 (1885, 1886, 1894).

(3) Ibid., p. xxi.

(4) For a description of this manuscript see:
E. Kölbing, 'Vier romanzen-handschriften', op. cit., pp. 191-3;
Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum, vol. 18 (London, 1912), pp. 238-40.

part of the fourteenth century. It appears to have been a carefully compiled collection of popular romances (perhaps for some patron or wealthy customer), five of which are also to be found in the Auchinleck MS.[1] The manuscript has been badly damaged by fire, but only one page (containing the ending) of Bevis is missing.[2] This is Kölbing's MS. S.

Cambridge University Library MS. Ff II, 38 (Kölbing's MS. C) dates from the middle of the fifteenth century and, amongst much other material, contains ten romances, including Bevis (complete) and Guy.[3]

In addition to these three important collections of mediaeval romance material, there are three other manuscripts which provide further evidence of the popularity of the story of Sir Bevis. One of these is MS. No. 175 in the Library of Caius College, Cambridge, compiled in the second half of the fourteenth century

(1) Bevis, Richard Coeur de Lion, Sir Degarre, Floris and Blauncheflur, Amis and Amiloun.

(2) Bevis occupies fol. 45-fol. 94 and fol. 96.

(3) For a description of this manuscript see A Catalogue of the Manuscripts preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge (Cambridge, 1857), II, pp. 404-8. Bevis occupies fol. 102b-fol. 133b.

(Kölbing's MS. E).[1] Unfortunately little more than half of the text of Bevis has been preserved. A fifth manuscript is the fifteenth-century MS. XIII, B29, in the Royal Library of Naples, pages 23 - 79 of which contain a complete version of Bevis (Kölbing's MS. N).[2] It was this manuscript that Sir Walter Scott had transcribed in 1832.[3] The sixth manuscript, Kölbing's MS. M, is the fifteenth-century MS. No. 8009 in the Chetham Library, Manchester.[4] The romance is complete except for one missing leaf.[5]

The relationship of these manuscripts to one another is complicated, but Kölbing assumes the existence of at least six other texts between these and the lost

(1) Descriptions of this manuscript are to be found in: (a) C. H. Hartshorne, Ancient Metrical Tales (London, 1829), pp. ix ff.; (b) J. J. Smith, A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (Cambridge, 1849), pp. 89 ff.; (c) J. Zupitza, Englische Studien, Vol. xiv, pp. 321 ff..

(2) For a description of this manuscript see D. Laing, Reliquiae Antiquae, ed. T. Wright & J. O. Halliwell (London, 1841-3), II, pp. 58-70.

(3) See later in this study, pp. 132-3.

(4) This manuscript is described by Kölbing, 'Vier romanzen-handschriften', op. cit., pp. 195-201.

(5) Bevis occupies fol. 122a-fol. 187b.

thirteenth-century Middle English original.[1] One interesting feature of some Middle English versions of the romance is the change in metrical pattern, for no apparent reason, as the story proceeds. For example, in the Auchinleck MS. the first 474 lines are written in the tail-rhymed six-line stanza — the metrical pattern that Chaucer used in his Sir Thopas — but the rest of the poem is in couplets, consisting of lines of mainly four accented syllables. The version of Guy of Warwick in the same manuscript shows a similar change of metrical pattern, but in this case it is the first 7306 lines that are in rhyming couplets and the rest in tail-rhymed twelve-line stanzas. On the other hand, the Chetham MS. version of Bevis has rhyming couplets throughout and no trace of tail-rhymed stanzas. Whether there was a similar change of pattern in the original thirteenth-century version or whether it was entirely in tail-rhymed stanzas or rhyming couplets is a matter of conjecture.

Since Chaucer's Sir Thopas appears to satirize the tail-rhymed stanzas and makes special reference to the romances 'Of Bevis and sir Gy',[2] it seems likely that

(1) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, EETS, pp. xxxviii-xli.

(2) Sir Thopas, l. 188.

Chaucer was aware of some version of the romance that was at least partly in tail-rhymed stanzas. It is generally accepted that in the following lines of Sir Thopas Chaucer was imitating part of the first stanza of Sir Beues of Hamtoun:

> Yet listeth, lordes, to my tale
> Merier than the nightingale,
> For now I wol yow roune ... (1)

Kölbing concludes that the manuscript known to Chaucer is now lost, but that it must have been closely related to MS. C and was perhaps the manuscript from which MS. C was copied.(2) However, in a more recent investigation by Mrs. Hibbard Loomis it has been suggested that Guy of Warwick was the particular object of attack in Chaucer's Sir Thopas and that the manuscript used by Chaucer for his borrowings from Guy (and presumably from Bevis)(3) was the extant Auchinleck MS..

(1) Ibid., ll. 122-4. Cf. Sir Beues of Hamtoun, MS. A:

> Lordinges, herkneþ to me tale!
> Is merier þan þe niȝtingale,
> Þat y schal singe;
> Of a knizt ich wile ȝow roune ... (ll. 1-4)

MSS. E,S,N,C have 'lystniþ' for 'herkneþ'.

(2) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, EETS, p. 219.

(3) L. H. Loomis, 'Chaucer and the Auchinleck MS.', Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown (New York, 1940), p. 111.

In the extant English manuscripts there are various references to a French original. The following passages from MS. A are typical:

> Þe ten forsters wer feld te grounde
> And hew hem alle to pices smale:
> So hit is fonde in frensche tale. (1)
>
> Þe seue kniȝtes of heþen lawe
> Beues slouȝ þat ilche stounde,
> So it is in Frensch y-founde. (2)

References to sources are a fashionable feature of Middle English literature, and too much significance should not be attached to them, but there is other evidence of a French original, which, according to Stimming,(3) was a lost Anglo-Norman version, which was also the source, through various lost intermediaries, not only of the extant Anglo-Norman, Welsh and Norse versions, but also of all continental versions. Evidence of this lost Anglo-Norman poem, Boefe de Haumtone, is to be found in two long fragments that have survived, one in a thirteenth-century manuscript, and the

(1) ll. 886-8.

(2) ll. 1780-2. See also ll. 3643, 4486, etc..

(3) Der AngloNormannische Boeve de Haumtone, ed. A. Stimming (Halle, 1899), p. iii.

other in a fourteenth-century one. The latter contains the beginning of the romance and the former the ending, with a passage common to both in the middle. This common element shows that the two manuscripts represent two very different versions of the romance, neither of which was the direct source of the Middle English version. The style of address suggests that the romance was intended to be recited or intoned before a large company:[1]

> Seingnurs barons, ore entendez a mei,
> Si ws dirrai gestes, que jeo diverses sai,
> De Boefs de Haumtone, li chevaler curtays ...[2]

The writer actually uses the verb 'to sing',[3] but this may simply be a traditional, conventional use of the word. In accordance with the oral tradition, there is the appeal to the audience for money:

> Issi com vus me orrez ja a dreit conter,
> Si vus me volez de vostre argent doner,
> Ou si noun, jeo lerrai issi ester. (4)

(1) See, however, this study, p. 8.

(2) Boeve de Haumtone, ed. A. Stimming, op. cit., ll. 1-3.

(3) Ibid., l. 13:
Seignurs, iceo quens Guioun dount vus chaunt ...

(4) Ibid., ll. 434-6. Cf. ll. 3845-50.

The original Anglo-Norman version was composed possibly in the twelfth century,[1] surviving now in a thirteenth-century form to be found in the two incomplete manuscripts already mentioned.

It is difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions about the English poet's treatment of his original since it is not known how far the existing Anglo-Norman texts represent the original text which was known to the English poet, and the English texts themselves frequently give different readings. It has been suggested that the original Anglo-Norman version was probably rather simpler than the two surviving texts.[2] Kölbing frequently refers to the English version as a 'translation', but the evidence suggests that it was a very free translation. Some lines do closely parallel those of the Anglo-Norman texts, but there are many minor differences of detail,[3] and some rearrangement of material,

(1) See M. Dominica Legge, Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background, op. cit., pp. 157 ff..
L. H. Loomis, however, thinks it improbable that the date of composition was before 1200; see Mediaeval Romance in England, op. cit., p. 119.

(2) See M. Dominica Legge, op. cit., p. 157.

(3) For example, the number of victims, size of booty, etc., are often more exaggerated in the English versions, as in MS. A, l. 3995, which refers to 'Foure hondred beddes', whereas the Anglo-Norman version has only 300.

omissions and condensing of the original. The most surprising and noticeable feature, however, is not the amount of omission and reduction (normally so characteristic of English romances derived from the French), which seems to be surprisingly small, but the additions in the form of new material and extra descriptive detail which are apparently the original contribution of the English poet and are not to be found in the Anglo-Norman versions or other foreign versions of the poem. It is, of course, possible that the Anglo-Norman text known to the English poet was a much fuller version than the ones that have survived,(1) but even this would not account fully for all the additional material. For example, there is no detailed description of Josian in the Anglo-Norman text(2) and there are no detailed descriptions of arms in the Anglo-Norman texts, or in any of the foreign texts of the romance, corresponding to those given by the English poet when describing the arms presented to Bevis by King Ermin(3)

(1) This is not generally accepted. See M. D. Legge, op. cit., p. 156: 'Though this belongs to the class labelled romance, it is ... cast in the form of a chanson de geste'.

(2) See later in this study, pp. 98-100.

(3) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, MS. A, ll. 969 ff..

or those borne by Bevis and Terry when they go forth to joust.[1] Descriptions of fights are generally more detailed. The account of Bevis's fight with the boar is much fuller in the English version than in any other,[2] and in a similar way the English poet's description of Bevis's fight with the flying adder shows considerable expansion of the corresponding passage in the Anglo-Norman version.[3]

In addition to these interesting and significant expansions, there are at least three large additions that the English poet has made to the story. The first one of these is the lengthy account of Bevis's early fight with the Saracens and his success against overwhelming odds.[4] This story of his prowess is obviously a late addition since Bevis is said to ride on Arundel[5] and to gain the sword Morglay[6] although it

(1) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 3779 ff..

(2) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 771-828. Cf. Boeve de Haumtone, ll. 437-49.

(3) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, MS. A, ll. 1547 ff.. Cf. Boeve de Haumtone, ll. 966 ff..

(4) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, MS. A, ll. 585-738.

(5) Ibid., MS. A, l. 589.

(6) Ibid., MS. A, l. 634.

is not until later in the story that he is presented with these by King Ermin and Josian.(1)

The second large addition is to be found in the episode of the fight with the dragon of Cologne.(2) Dragons are not rare in mediaeval literature and this one bears some resemblance to that in Degarre, but clearly Sir Bevis's killing of the dragon is to be regarded as an outstanding achievement since Ascopart the giant is afraid even of its roaring. Bevis's prowess is linked with that of other great heroes:

> After Iosian is cristing
> Beues dede a gret fiȝting,
> Swich bataile dede neuer non
> Cristene man of flesch ne bon,
> Of a dragoun þer be side,
> Þat Beues slouȝ þer in þat tide,
> Saue sire Launcelot de Lake,
> He fauȝt wiþ a fur drake,
> And Wade dede also,
> & neuer kniȝtes boute þai to,
> & Gij a Warwik, ich vnderstonde,
> Slouȝ a dragoun in Norþ-Humberlonde.
> How þat ilche dragoun com þer,
> Ich wile ȝow telle, in what maner. (3)

The third addition consists of the heroic fight of

(1) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 975-88.

(2) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 2597-2910.

(3) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 2597-2610.

Bevis and his sons against the citizens of London, who are stirred up by the false steward of the king.[1] This is an important episode, which shows that the poet had good local knowledge of London, and it is dealt with more fully later in this study.[2] In all, this additional, apparently original, material, together with the expanded account of the fight against the boar, makes up over one sixth of the whole poem.[3]

It is perhaps futile to try to trace the relationship between the Anglo-Norman version and the various continental versions, or to try to trace the Bevis story any further back to its ultimate source. Of the continental French versions there are known to be nine manuscripts in verse and two in prose; the Italian version is preserved in at least six texts. These continental versions are generally considered to be independent versions of the same story as that told in the Anglo-Norman version, but other suggestions have been made. It was partly on the evidence of

(1) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 4287-4538.

(2) See pp. 33-5.

(3) See J. E. Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English. 1050-1400 (New Haven, Conn., 1916), p. 22.

place-names that Stimming suggested that the poem was of Anglo-Norman origin,[1] but others have felt that the foreign place-names in the continental versions are much more in keeping with other non-English elements in the romance.[2] Perhaps it was originally just a typical romance of adventure, modified in various ways by the Anglo-Norman poet and later by the English 'translator' to suit their own local purposes and to give the story a local habitation.[3]

The story certainly, in one form or another, contains many of the typical characteristic details and incidents of the old romances: the forest hunt, the murder of a father, a stepfather's hostility, disguise as a palmer, the love of a Saracen princess for a Christian knight, a forced marriage, the grotesque giant, the great race run by a famous horse, and many others. In other words, 'the author has succeeded in

(1) See A. Stimming, Boeve de Haumtone, pp. clxxx-cxciii.

(2) See C. Boje, Ueber der altfrz. roman v. Bueve de Hamtone (Halle, 1909).
See also L. Hibbard Loomis, Mediaeval Romance in England, pp. 120-6, for a useful summary of opinions and bibliography.

(3) See later, pp. 29 ff..

composing a fresh story out of popular ingredients, which he welded together with a considerable amount of skill'.[1]

In this country, whether it originated here or not,[2] the story took the form of an ancestral romance with Bevis as the local hero (though he seems to spend little time in this country) and the poet showing local knowledge, especially in the English text, to which further attention must now be given. In this Middle English version Bevis is said to be of 'Hamtoun' (with variant spellings such as 'Hamtone' and 'Hampton'):

> Of a knizt ich wile zow roune
> Beues a hizte of Hamtoune,.. (3)

This is very soon identified as Southampton:

(1) M. Dominica Legge, Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background, p. 158.

(2) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, MS. E, ll. 185-7, has the following reference to the French versions:

> As it saiþ in ffrensch romaunce,
> Boþe in Yngelond and in Fraunce,
> So manye men at onys were neuere seye dede.

The lines suggest the interesting possibility that at least the scribe of this late 14th-century MS. (if not the original poet) was aware of the continental French version. Too much significance, however, should not be attached to such references.

(3) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 4-5.

Siþe a ȝaf hire to sire Gii,
A stalword erl and hardi
Of Souþhamtoun. (1)

This local habitation is further established by the request of Sir Guy's wife that the Emperor of Almaine should assemble his army:

... in hare forest
Be side þe se. (2)

The proximity of the sea is obvious again when Bevis's mother has him sold to the heathen merchants:

Forþ þe kniȝtes gonne te,
Til þat hii come to þe se,
Schipes hii fonde þer stonde
Of heþenesse and of fele lond. (3)

— a scene which must have been very familiar in the flourishing mediaeval port of Southampton.

When Bevis is asked by Ermin where he comes from, he replies:

Iboren ich was in Ingelonde,

(1) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 43-5.

(2) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 95-6.

(3) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 501-4.

At Hamtoun, be þe se stronde. (1)

In the midst of Bevis's exploits on the continent near Damascus the local background is not forgotten:

Terri wente hom and telde
His fader Saber in þe ilde of wiȝt. (2)

After about 3000 lines dealing with exploits abroad, Bevis returns to England:

So longe þai hadde here wei idriue,
Þat hii come vpon a done,
A mile out of Souþhamtone. (3)

He sails from this point to the Isle of Wight, throwing the enemy overboard 'whan þai come amidde þe forde'.(4) After defeating his stepfather (a defeat which also results in the death of his mother), Sir Bevis is welcomed as 'lord and sire' by 'al þe lordes

(1) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 543-4. MS. M expresses it rather differently:
In England bare my moder me
At Southampton vppon the see. ll. 419-20.

(2) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 1334-5.

(3) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 2954-6. Pynson's early printed edition (based on a lost MS.) has a slightly different reading:
Tyl they cam to a towne,
But two myle from Southampton. ll. 2595-6.

(4) Ibid., MS. A, l. 3029.

of Hamteschire', who pay due 'feute and omage'.[1] He then proceeds to King Edgar in London, who invests him with his hereditary earldom and also confers on him the dignity of king's marshal.

Soon after this event Bevis wins a spectacular race on his horse Arondel, and with the help of the prize and other money he builds a castle, which in honour of his horse he calls 'Arondel' (Arundel):

> Wiþ þat and wiþ mor catel
> He made þe castel of Arondel. (2)

Kölbing has pointed out that there are at least two more horses in Old French poetry which bear the name 'Arondel' or 'Arondiel': the horse of Henri in La chanson du Chevalier au Cygne[3] and that of Fergus. 'Arundel' is also the name of the strong castle which Divinuspater and Antipater built in the story of the Vengeance de la Mort d'Alexandre.[4] It should also be

(1) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 3467-71.

(2) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 3541-2. For the possible significance of this, see later, p. 36.

(3) Ibid., note to A, l. 589, p. 249.

(4) See A. Stimming, Boeve de Haumtone, note to l. 2522, p. 156.

noted that besides the well-known Arundel Castle in Sussex (about forty miles from Southampton) there is in Southampton itself an Arundel Tower, which is the north-west corner tower of Southampton's mediaeval defences; it dates from the middle of the thirteenth century.(1) The place-name is first recorded in Domesday Book in 1086 under the form 'Harundel'; it is said to be derived from Old English 'Harun dell', meaning 'Hoar-hound valley'.

After a further period abroad Bevis returns to England on receiving news that King Edgar has deprived Saber's son, Robant, of his estates. Then follows the famous London passage,(2) which, in spite of a reference in MS. A to the French source,(3) is, as far as one can tell, largely the English poet's own contribution and addition — an addition which shows fairly exact knowledge of the topography of London. We are told, for

(1) See Aspects of Archaeology in Britain and Beyond, ed. W. F. Grimes (London, 1951), pp. 252 ff..

(2) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, MS. A, ll. 4287-4538.

(3) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 4483-7:
Whan þai come to London gate,
Mani man þai fonde þer ate,
Wel iarmed to þe teþ,
So þe frensche bok vs seþ,
Azen þe children þei ȝeue bataile ...

example, that:

> Whan þat he to London cam,
> In Tour strete is in he nam. (1)

Later we are told:

> Beues prikede forþ to Chepe,
> Þe folk him folwede al to hepe;
> Þourȝ Godes lane he wolde han flowe ...(2)

Elsewhere we are given some idea of the geographical position of Putney, where he left his wife on the way to London:

> To Pownteneth he brought his hoste,
> That is ffro London mylis thre. (3)

The manuscripts, however, do not agree about precise details of street-names. MS. A tells us how:

> ... in a lite stounde
> Fiue hondred þai brouȝte te gronde.
> Beues prikede forþ to Chepe,
> Þe folk him folwede al to hepe ... (4)

whereas the corresponding passage in MS. M gives the

(1) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 4319-20.

(2) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 4395-7.
Cf. MSS. S,N,E: Goos lane; MS. C: Gose lane.

(3) Ibid., MS. M, ll. 4028-9.

(4) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 4393-6.

name of the particular street in Cheapside:

> Than sterid hym Beues in that stound,
> That two hunderid he fell to ground,
> And rode forthe in to Bredstrete;
> Meny Lumbardis he gan mete; (1)

MS. A tells us that the site of the great battle which took place when the two sons of Bevis arrived was:

> Be twene Bowe and London ston. (2)

These places are mentioned again in MS. E at a later stage of the battle:

> As it saiþ in ffrensch romaunce,
> Boþe in Yngland and in Fraunce,
> So manye men at onys were neuere seye ded,
> For þe water off Tempse of blood wax red.
> Fro seynte Marye bowe to Lundone ston
> Þat ylke tyme was housyng non. (3)

Perhaps some lines already quoted contain a clue to the origin of the versions of the story which developed in this country, whether Anglo-Norman or English:

> Wiþ þat and wiþ mor catel
> He made þe castel of Arondel. (4)

(1) Ibid., MS. M, ll. 4099-4102.

(2) Ibid., MS. A, l. 4495.

(3) Ibid., MS. E, ll. 185-90.

(4) Ibid., MS. A, ll. 3541-2.

This reference to the founding of Arundel Castle is not to be found in the continental versions. It seems possible that the story was deliberately reshaped and given a local setting in this country to flatter some noble personage by suggesting a connection with a famous figure of the past - Bevis. It has been suggested that the noble personage may very well have been a certain William de Albini, the second husband of the Queen Dowager, Adeliza of Louvain.(1) The Queen Dowager had been granted the castle by the Constable of Sussex, and consequently William de Albini held it in the right of his wife. In 1154 King Henry II confirmed him in the earldom of Sussex and gave him the honour of Arundel. Since William died in 1176, the original Anglo-Norman romance may have been composed between 1154 and 1176. It is interesting to note that Guy of Warwick, which resembles Bevis in many respects (not least in its continued popularity), may very well have had a similar origin.(2)

(1) See M. Dominica Legge, Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background, p. 159.

(2) Possibly to flatter Thomas Earl of Warwick in the early part of the thirteenth century. Ibid., p. 162.

C H A P T E R III

Bevis in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries

(a) Evidence of the continued popularity of the romance

The latest Bevis manuscripts belong to the fifteenth century, the century which saw the establishment of printing in this country. In 1477 Caxton published the first book printed in England. London, especially the area of St. Paul's Churchyard, became the headquarters of the book-trade, but the stationers did not limit their activities to London; they travelled around the country, doing considerable business at the principal fairs.

The aim of the early printers of the fifteenth century seems to have been to print books of a popular character, purely as commercial ventures, intended to sell cheaply and reach a general audience, though it must be remembered that the reading public would form a much smaller section of the population than in modern

times.[1] However, the mediaeval practice of reading aloud to a circle of listeners no doubt continued, and so the printed books would reach an audience wider than the few who could read.[2]

To judge from the output of the printers, there

(1) Ian Watt, speaking of the Elizabethan Age (about a hundred years later), says: 'Not all Elizabethans could read, to begin with, and the numbers of those who read books to any extent was probably rather small. Certainly the book-buying public was numbered in tens of thousands, rather than in millions as it is today. There was less leisure for reading, and the price of books was much higher in relation to wages. A single printed sheet containing a ballad with a woodcut illustration cost a halfpenny or a penny, and the cheapest novel or pamphlet cost sixpence; whereas the average weekly wage was only about five shillings'. 'Elizabethan Light Reading', The Age of Shakespeare, Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 2 (London, 1955), p. 119.

(2) See A. J. Doyle, 'The Social Context', The Age of Chaucer, Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 1 (London, 1954), p. 89: 'The functions of any literary piece were inevitably broad and the occasions for it various, in the domestic conditions then prevailing; for large and mixed assemblies of people customarily ate and conversed together under one roof and about one hearth, and had very limited possibilities of other kinds of recreation indoors at meal-times, in the evenings, and on frequent holidays. Within these general circumstances, of course, the scale and character of the entertainment could vary considerably, from bold enunciation or performance by several people attempting to hold the attention of casual assemblies of diverse tastes, to modest readings by individuals to small and sympathetic groups of friends'.

continued to be a strong demand for the old romances, and whilst, at first, versions of the newer French prose romances helped to meet the demand, as time went on, much of the material printed consisted of the English metrical romances of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Thus, Wynkyn de Worde, who succeeded Caxton as a producer of romances, printed copies of romances such as Bevis of Hampton,(1) Ipomedon, Richard Coeur de Lion, Sir Degare, Sir Eglamour, Sir Triamour, and The Squire of Low Degree.

Wynkyn de Worde's edition of Bevis is usually dated 1500 and regarded as the earliest printed edition of the romance. There is, however, evidence that either this or some other edition was in existence at least two years before this date. Documents have been discovered dealing with a lawsuit brought by the printer Richard Pynson against a certain John Russhe, to whom he claimed to have supplied certain books at Russhe's request. The documents include a schedule of these books in two lists. The first list consists of books

(1) It has survived only in the form of a two-leaf fragment, which is kept in the Bodleian and catalogued as Douce fragments e. 13, though L. Hibbard Loomis continues to refer to it under its old catalogue number, 19 — long since out of date. This text is referred to as L in Kölbing's EETS edition.

such as Myrc's Festial, Fall of Princes, and Dives and Pauper which Pynson appears to have printed specially at John Russhe's request. Apparently at some stage Russhe felt the need of other books to help his sales:

> Item, whanne the sayd John Russhe had resayved and shulde send them unto the countre to sell, he thought he cowde nat have good utteraunce wythout other bokys of other storys, and than made great request for the same Rycharde for them promysing hym to have hys mony for them in all haste after the sale of them. And the said Rychard trustyng verely upon his promys delyvered hym thyse bokes. (1)

A list of these supplementary books is given:

> In primis xx bokys off bevys off hampton redy bounde the pece —x d ... xx bokys of canterbery Talys ye pece — v s ...

Bevis is one of the cheapest books on the list. It is not clear where Pynson obtained the books on this second list. Plomer, who first drew attention to this lawsuit, suggests that Pynson possibly obtained them from Wynkyn de Worde in order to meet this special

(1) See H. R. Plomer, 'Two Lawsuits of Richard Pynson', The Library, New Series, No. 38, Vol. X (April, 1909), pp. 126-8.

demand. Since Russhe died in 1498, it would appear that this edition of Bevis must have been printed at least two years earlier than 1500, the date assigned to Wynkyn de Worde's edition.

A later edition of Sir Beuys of Southampton was 'Emprynted by Rycharde Pynson in Flete-strete at the sygne of the George' (probably in 1503), a copy of which, with one leaf missing, is preserved in the Bodleian Library;[1] it contains engravings as well as text. Kölbing has drawn attention to the close relationship between this edition (which he refers to as O) and the Chetham Library MS. M; in both, for example, the first 474 lines are not in tail-rhymed six-line stanzas, but in couplets like the rest of the poem, and many other passages appear to have been entirely rewritten. He concludes that the manuscript from which this edition was ultimately derived and the Chetham MS. had a common source.[2]

It is evident from the many printed editions that

(1) Bodl. Ref. Douce B subt. 234. Texts of this and of Douce fragments e. 13 are available on Reel 72, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

(2) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, p. xxxix.

followed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Bevis surpassed all other metrical romances, not only in the greatness of its popularity, but also in the duration of it. Whilst after about 1575 the metrical versions of other romances (including the popular Guy) apparently ceased to be reprinted, editions of the old metrical Bevis continued to be printed as late as 1662,(1) and, of course, prose versions of the story continued to appear long after this — even as recently as 1963.(2)

William Copland, probably son of the Robert Copland who for a long time was assistant to Wynkyn de Worde, produced a quarto edition of Syr Bevys of Hampton with woodcuts c.1565,(3) fourteen years before Spenser began his Faerie Queene. This was followed by another quarto edition printed by T. East [1582?].(4) Winchester Public Library holds a further edition

(1) Bodl. Douce B subt, 232.

(2) Sir Bevis. The renowned legend of Southampton, retold and illustrated by Aylwin Sampson, Shirley Press (Southampton, 1963).

(3) B.M. C.21 c.62. & H. E. Huntington Lib., California.

(4) Sir Bevis of Hampton. Bodl. S.Selden d.45(2) (S.T.C. Film 173).

dated c.1610;[1] the copy is illustrated with five woodcuts, one of which has been used twice,[2] but the title-page is missing and the copy is in a very frail condition. Yet another edition with woodcuts is dated c.1620. There is a copy of this in the British Museum with the original title-page lacking, but a manuscript note is prefixed, which reads: 'Syr Bevis of Hampton, London. Printed by C.W. for W. Lee'; this was presumably copied from a later edition.[3] An interesting feature of this edition is the long line; each line consists of two lines of Copland's edition with the consequent internal rhyme, and so the book has only seventy pages compared with the hundred and forty-four of Copland's edition.

The romance seems to have been particularly popular in the second and third decades of the seventeenth century, for there are extant copies of at least

(1) T. Snodham (?)

(2) Woodcuts are frequently used more than once in these editions.

(3) The Historie of Beuis of Hampton. B.M. C.57 e.7.

four other editions during this period.[1] One of these is of particular interest since it was published in Scotland. Perhaps the fact that Sir Bevis, according to the legend, was the grandson of the King of Scotland gave this poem a local interest. The last of these early recorded printed editions of the metrical version in 1662 is in long lines like the 1620 edition. It is entitled The History of the Famous and Renowned Knight Sir Bevis of Hampton and the copies were 'Printed by G.D. for Andrew Crook, and are to be sold at the sign of the Green Dragon in Pauls Church-yard'. For over a century and a half there must have been a steady demand for printed editions of the metrical version of Bevis — a record of popularity which is rivalled by no other mediaeval metrical romance.

However, it is not the editions alone that provide evidence of the interest shown in the romance of Bevis during the sixteenth century and the first half of the

(1) Syr Bevis of Hampton. C.W.[right, 1625?]. Bodl. L71(8) Art.
Syr Bevis of Hampton. W. Stansby[1626?]. H. E. Huntington Lib..
The historie of Sir Bevis of South-Hampton. Aberdene, E. Raban f. D. Melvill, 1630. B.M. Huth 62.
Sir Bevis of Hampton, newly corrected. R. Bishop [1639?]. Bodl. Wood 321(4) (S.T.C. Film 563). Also in H. E. Huntington Lib..

seventeenth. Bevis appears in list after list of romance heroes well known by the public during this period. As early as 1530 he is referred to, along with Sir Terry, in a poem written by Thomas Feylde on A controuersye bytwene a louer and a Iaye:[1]

> Syr Beuys, syr Eglamoure,
> Syr Terry, syr Tryamoure,
> In more greuous doloure
> Was neuer in bounde.

Much later in the period the romance figures in the list which is given in the play Lingua,[2] first published in 1607, but running into three other editions before 1632, which suggests that it enjoyed considerable popularity, though it was written primarily for an academic audience. One of the characters, Mendacio, a page, boasts of his knowledge:

> For the Mirror of Knighthood, Bevis of Southampton, Palmerin of England, Amadis of Gaul, Huon of Bordeaux, Sir Guy of Warwick ... and a thousand such exquisite monuments as these, no doubt but they breathe in my breath up and down.

He is answered by Appetitus, another character:

(1) See American Journal of Philology, Vol. X, p. 11.

(2) Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. Hazlitt, IX (1874).

> Downwards, I'll swear, for there's stinking lies in them. (1)

Numerous comments are to be found in the writings of the period, some favourable but many unfavourable, on the popularity of mediaeval romances in general and Bevis in particular. In 1523 the Spanish scholar Vives produced a Latin treatise on the education of women — De Institutione feminae christianae. In it he stated that under no conditions should women be allowed to soil their minds with such pestiferous works as:

> ... in Spain, Amadis, Esplandian, Florisanda ...; in France, Launcelot of the Lake, Paris and Vienna ...; in Flanders, Floris and Blanchefleur ... Pyramus and Thisbe. (2)

Vives came to Oxford and was appointed Latin tutor to Princess Mary. His writings became popular with the educated English public, and a translation of the De Institutione by Richard Hyrde was published c.1540.(3) He added to the list of forbidden books a number of romances (including Bevis) which were particularly pop-

(1) Ibid., pp. 365-6.

(2) Opera, II (Basle, 1555), p. 658.

(3) A very frutefull and pleasant boke called the Instruction of a Christian woman .... London. Thomas Berthelet. B.M. G. 11884.

ular in England:

> ... in England, Parthenope, Genarides, Hippomadon, William and Meliour, Libius and Arthur, Guy, Bevis, and many other. (1)

The books are condemned because those that make them 'seem to have no other purpose but to corrupt the manners of young folks'.(2) This translation was reprinted in 1541, 1557, and 1592.

In 1570 Ascham in a similar expression of concern for the minds of both young men and women did not mention Bevis in particular, but he had much to say about the harmful effect of:

> ... certaine bookes of Cheualrie ... which, as some say, were made in Monasteries, by idle Monkes, or wanton Chanons: as one for example, Morte Arthure: the whole pleasure of which booke standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye: In which booke those be counted the noblest knightes, that do kill most men without any quarell, and commit fowlest adulteries by sutlest shiftes ... What toyes, the dayly readyng of such a booke, may worke in the will of a young ientleman, or a yong mayde, that liueth welthelie and idlelie, wise men can iudge, and honest men do pitie. (3)

(1) See The Thought and Culture of the English Renaissance, ed. E. M. Nugent (Cambridge, 1956), p. 78.

(2) Ibid., p. 78.

(3) 'The Scholemaster', English Works of Roger Ascham, ed. W. A. Wright (Cambridge, 1904), pp. 230-1.

Romances such as Bevis were condemned by Vives, Hyrde, and Ascham because of what was considered to be their harmful subject-matter, and this line is pursued by succeeding writers. In 1598 Frances Meres, dealing with the choice of books, included Bevis in a list of books 'to be censured of':

> As the Lord of Noue in the sixt Discourse of his Politike and Military Discourses censureth of the bookes of Amadis de Gaul, which, he saith, are no lesse hurtfull to youth than the workes of Machiavelli to age: so these bookes are accordingly to be censured of whose names follow — Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwicke, Arthur of the Round Table, Huon of Burdeaux, Oliver of the Castle ... The 7 Champions ... The Maiden Knight ... Ornatus and Artesia, etc.. (1)

Also typical of these condemnations is the outspoken denunciation by Henry Crosse in a pamphlet called Vertues Common-wealth, issued in 1603. The wording of the pamphlet also suggests that possibly at this date Bevis and similar romances were being succeeded in popularity by newer but equally 'immoral' works:

> If a view be had of these editions, the Court of Venus, the Pallace of Pleasure, Guy of Warwick, Libbius and Arthur, Beuis of Hampton, the Wise Men of Goatam, Scoggins Ieasts, Fortunatus, and those new delights that haue succeeded these, and are now extant, too

(1) 'Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury', Elizabethan Critical Essays, Vol. II, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford, 1904), p. 308.

> tedious to recken vp: what may we thinke? but that the floudgates of all impietie are drawne vp, to bring a vniuersall deluge ouer all holy and godly conuersation: for there can be no greater meanes to affright the mind from honestie, then these pedling bookes, which haue filled such great volumes, and blotted so much paper, theyr sweete songs and wanton tales do rauish and set on fire the young vntempered affections, to practice that whereof they doo intreate. (1)

This romance —Bevis —which Crosse finds so unholy and ungodly is the very same romance that others have considered to be essentially Christian in tone and outlook! Indeed, Kölbing feels that he can justifiably apply to it remarks made by L. Ranke in a different context:

> The strain in which this work is written is serious, even severe. The chief idea throughout is Christianity ... Offensive, obscene passages are nowhere to be met with ... (2)

In spite of the attacks made by the more puritanical writers, it seems reasonable to suggest that one of the reasons for the popularity of Bevis with at least some of the readers in the sixteenth century (and later) was its portrayal of Sir Bevis as the defender of the faith

(1) Reprint by Grosart (1878), pp. 102-3.

(2) Sir Beues of Hamtoun, p. xxxiii.

and Christian principles.[1] In a similar manner, Guy (almost as popular as Bevis and equally damned by the puritanically-minded) owed some of its popularity to the depicting of Sir Guy as a Christian champion.

Other writers of the period are concerned with Bevis and similar romances from the point of view of literary style — verse, language, and sentiments. There were successive modernisations, but the language was still predominantly mediaeval and increasingly strange to the sixteenth-century reader. However, it is not merely the strangeness of the language that must be considered in assessing the reaction of the reading public. As the sixteenth century progressed, more and more educated readers (especially amongst the younger generations) became acquainted with the newer literature of Renaissance Italy and later of Elizabethan England, and were dissatisfied with the themes and the metrical patterns, as well as the language, of the old romances, which seemed to them crude and outmoded when compared with the more modern literature.

(1) Cf. this study, p. 73.

Puttenham, writing about The Arte of English Poesie (1) in the latter part of the sixteenth century and expressing what seems to be the attitude of a cultured gentleman who is not unsympathetic towards the 'old aduentures and valiaunces of noble knights', recognizes that all literature need not conform to the same pattern. Thus in the First Book, which treats 'Of historicall Poesie', Puttenham makes this comment about Bevis and similar verse romances:

> ... and we our selues who compiled this treatise haue written for pleasure a little brief Romance or historicall ditty in the English tong of the Isle of great Britaine in short and long meetres, and by breaches or diuisions to be more commodiously song to the harpe in places of assembly, where the company shalbe desirous to heare of old aduentures and valiaunces of noble knights in times past, as are those of king Arthur and his knights of the round table, Sir Beuys of Southampton, Guy of Warwicke and others like. Such as haue not premonition hereof, and consideration of the causes alledged, could peradventure reproue and disgrace euery Romance, or short historicall ditty for that they be not written in long meeters or verses Alexandrins, according to the nature and stile of large histories, wherein they should do wrong for they be sundry formes of poems and not all one. (2)

Later in the book Puttenham refers again to Bevis and

(1) ed. G. D. Wilcock & A. Walker (London, 1936). Entered Stationers' Register, 9th Nov., 1588, but possibly begun as early as the mid-sixties.

(2) Ibid., p. 41.

similar works. His later remarks are perhaps a little less generous, but once again he emphasizes that different genres of poetry exist and he does not begrudge the people their entertainment:

> ... so on the other side doth the ouer busie and too speedy returne of one maner of tune, too much annoy and as it were glut the eare, vnlesse it be in small and popular Musickes song by these Cantabanqui vpon benches and barrels heads where they haue none other audience then boys or countrey fellowes that passe by them in the streete, or else by blind harpers or such like tauerne minstrels that giue a fit of mirth for a groat, and their matters being for the most part stories of old time, as the tale of Sir Topas, the reportes of Beuis of Southampton, Guy of Warwicke, Adam Bell, and Clymme of the Clough and such other old Romances or historicall rimes, made purposely for the recreation of the common people at Christmasse diners and brideales, and in tauernes and alehouses and such other places of base resort, also they be vsed in Carols and rounds and such light or lascivious Poems. (1)

The references are obviously to metrical versions of Bevis and Guy and are an indication of the popularity of these works, but it is difficult to believe that 'tauerne minstrels' and their like would recite or sing the versions of the romances that we know. Puttenham's description of the method of presentation seems to con-

(1) Ibid., pp. 83-4.

firm the suggestion made earlier that the minstrels possibly had their own shortened versions of some of the romance stories, which they recited in some way or other at market-places and at public festivities. Such versions would not be preserved in the same way as the longer versions, which were so frequently printed during this period.(1)

In spite of Puttenham's recognition of the metrical romances as an acceptable form of poetry, he apparently does not approve of contemporary writers imitating the language of the earlier poets:

> Our maker therefore at these dayes shall not follow Piers plowman nor Gower nor Lydgate nor yet Chaucer, for their language is now out of vse with vs. (2)

Other writers of the age were more critical of the literary style of the old romances than Puttenham was. Thomas Nashe singles out Bevis for special attention:

(1) See earlier in this study, pp. 8-9. For further evidence of ballad versions of Guy, see R. S. Crane, 'The Vogue of Guy of Warwick', PMLA, NS, XXIII (1915), pp. 149 ff..

(2) Op. cit., p. 144.

> Who is it that reading Beuis of Hampton, can forbeare laughing, if he marke what scambling shyft he makes to ende his verses a like? I will propound three or four payre by the way for the Readers recreation.
>
> The Porter said, by my snout,
> It was Sir Beuis that I let out.
>
> or this,
>
> He smote his sonne on the breast,
> That he neuer after spoke with Clark nor Priest.
>
> or this,
>
> This almes by my crowne,
> Giues she for Beuis of South-hamptoune.
>
> or this,
>
> Some lost a nose, some a lip,
> And the King of Scots hath a ship.
>
> But I let these passe as worne out absurdities. (1)

The influence on Elizabethan literature of romances such as Bevis is further evidence of their popularity in spite of the complaints of the critics. This influence may be seen at work in specific borrowings. For example, it has been suggested by several

(1) The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. R. B. McKerrow, I (Oxford, 1904), p. 26.
Cf. Melbancke, Philotimus (1583), sig. L2: 'This followes as well as that in Beuis of Hampton: Some lost a nose, and some their lip, and the King of Scots hath a ship'.

critics that Spenser borrowed his well of healing in The Faerie Queene, Book I, from the well that Sir Bevis bathed in when pursued by the dragon. Spenser's version is as follows:

> It fortuned (as faire it then befell)
> Behind his backe vnweeting, where he stood,
> Of auncient time there was a springing well,
> From which fast trickled forth a siluer flood,
> Full of great vertues, and for medicine good.
> Whylome, before that cursed Dragon got
> That happie land, and all with innocent blood
> Defyld those sacred waues, it rightly hot
> The well of life, ne yet his vertues had forgot.
>
> For vnto life the dead it could restore,
> And guilt of sinfull crimes cleane wash away,
> Those that with sicknesse were infected sore,
> It could recure, and aged long decay
> Renew, as one were borne that very day.
> Both Silo this, and Iordan did excell,
> And th'English Bath, and eke the german Spau,
> Ne can Cephise, nor Hebrus match this well:
> Into the same the knight backe ouerthrowen, fell.
>
> At last she saw, where he vpstarted braue
> Out of the well, wherein he drenched lay;
> As Eagle fresh out of the Ocean waue,
> Where he hath left his plumes all hoary gray,
> And deckt himselfe with feathers youthly gay,
> Like Eyas hauke vp mounte vnto the skies,
> His newly budded pineons to assay,
> And marueiles at himselfe, still as he flies:
> So new this new-borne knight to battell new did rise. (1)

Here is the corresponding passage from the edition by

(1) Book I, Canto XI, Stanzas 29, 30 & 34.

William Copland, c.1565, which Spenser may very well have known:

> The dragone shewed on Beuis so hard
> That as he should haue fled bacward
> There was a well, so haue I wenne,
> And Beuis stumbled right therein.
> Than was Beuis afrayde and wo
> Leest the dragon should him slo,
> Or that he might away pas,
> Whan he in that well was.
> Than was the well of suche vertu
> Through the might of Christ Iesu,
> For some time dwelled in that lond
> A vyrgyn full of Christes sonde
> That had bene bathed in that well,
> That euer after, as men tell,
> Myght no venemous worme come therin
> By that vertue of that virgyn
> Nyghe it seuen fote and more;
> Than was Beuis glad without sore;
> Whan Beuis sawe the dragon fell
> Had no poore to come to the well,
> Than was he glad without fayle
> And rested a while for his auayle, (1)
> And dranke of that water his fyll,
> And than he lept out with good will,
> And with Morglay his brande
> He assailed the dragon, I understand. (2)

Later in the fight, Bevis falls into the well a second time:

> He smote Beuis, as I you tell;
> The dynt smote him in to the well
> That was of great vertue that time,

(1) Copland: aualye.

(2) Syr Beuys of Hampton, Copland's edition, p. 81. Since many of the pages are cropped, it is more convenient to refer to pages than to lines.

For it would suffer no venime
Through vertue of that virgin
That some time was bathed therin.
In the well when Beuis was at the grounde,
The water made him hole and sounde
And quenched all the venim awaye;
That well saued him that daye. (1)

In a similar manner Spenser's knight falls a second time, not into the same well, but into:

A trickling streame of Balme, most soueraine
And daintie deare, which on the ground still fell,
And ouerflowed all the fertill plaine,
As it had deawed bene with timely raine:
Life and long health that gratious ointment gaue,
And deadly woundes could heale, and reare againe
The senselesse corse appointed for the graue.
Into that same he fell: which did from death him saue. (2)

This may be evidence that Spenser had read Bevis. He probably had, along with other metrical romances such as The Squire of Low Degre, and the prose versions of Le Morte Darthur and Huon of Bordeaux, but it is not so much in the precise borrowings of items such as the well of healing as in the deep pervasive effects on Spenser of a large body of romance readings that the influence of the romance is revealed. Rosemond Tuve

(1) Ibid., p. 82.

(2) The Faerie Queene, Book I, Canto XI, Stanza 48.

in her Allegorical Imagery has criticized this search for specific borrowings or influences, which has made the whole relationship appear trivial:

> The bane of studies relating Spenser to romances has been the hunt for borrowed story-motifs. (1)

Sugden has shown how the language of The Faerie Queene is distinguished from that of other literary works of the period by a free use of archaic forms, chiefly in vocabulary and spelling, but to some extent in inflexions and only slightly in the syntax; the old romances such as Bevis were among the material that inspired this deliberate archaic language:

> The chief inspiration for this deliberately archaic speech was Chaucer ... Other old poets, such as Lydgate ... were likewise known to Spenser and were drawn upon for their obsolete language; old ballads and Middle English romances in verse and prose, especially Malory's Morte Darthur, were also familiar to him, and they too contributed their share to the archaic speech of the Faerie Queene ... (2)

(1) Rosemond Tuve, Allegorical Imagery (Princeton, 1966), p. 336.

(2) H. W. Sugden, The Grammar of Spenser's 'Faerie Queene', Reprint (New York, 1966), p. 9.

The literary influences of the romances are widespread, and 'the central fact is ... that mediaeval romance is what is responsible for the character the Faerie Queene has as a narrative'.(1) The large body of romance with which Spenser was acquainted almost certainly included Bevis.

Spenser was by no means the only Elizabethan writer whose work shows the popularity and influence of romances such as Bevis. Though inspired also by Renaissance literature, writers like William Drummond of Hawthornden(2) and Lodge(3) were steeped in, and influenced by, mediaeval literature generally and romances in particular. Sidney, too, although in some respects a stern critic of the state of English poetry, was obviously familiar with romances of the type of Amadis(4) and King Arthur,(5) and at one time seems to

(1) Tuve, op. cit., p. 336.

(2) See Archaeologica Scotica, IV, i (1831), pp. 73-4.

(3) See Tuve, op. cit., Chapt. I.

(4) See An Apology for Poetry, ed. H. A. Needham (London, n.d.), p. 26.

(5) See ibid., p. 43.

have planned to transform The Arcadia into a collection of Arthurian legends. However, like Puttenham, he is opposed to the use of archaic language:

> That same framing of his style to an old rustic language, I dare not allow, since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sannazzaro in Italian did affect it. (1)

The reference in the play Lingua to the 'stinking lies' of Bevis and similar romances has already been noted.(2) Other plays, though not referring to Bevis in particular, afford evidence of the popularity of the reading of mediaeval (and later) romances and the kind of person to whom they appealed. For example, the goldsmith's daughter in Eastward Hoe (1605) shows how well acquainted she is with the knightly romances and some of their heroes:

> Would the knight o' the sunne, or Palmerin of England, have used their ladies so ... or Sir Lancelot, or Sir Tristram? ... the knighthood of old time. They rid a horseback; ours goe a foote. They were attended by their squires; ours by their lacquaies. They went buckled in their armor; ours muffled in their cloaks ... They would gallop on at sight of a monster; ours run away at sight of a serjeant. They would helpe poore ladies;

(1) Ibid., p. 51.

(2) See earlier, pp. 45-6.

ours make poore ladies ... (1)

In The Knight of the Burning Pestle (1609) satire is directed at the romance-loving tradesmen and their associates. Errant knights, squires, dwarfs, giants, dragons, distressed damsels, caves — all the features of the romances are there. It is true that many of these features may be derived from the later Spanish, French, and Italian romances rather than from their mediaeval predecessors; Palmerin and Amadis in particular are mentioned,(2) but it is interesting to note that Sir Guy and Sir Bevis are the only 'native' mediaeval heroes who receive special mention.(3) Merry-thought sings a verse from the late sixteenth-century ballad of Sir Guy,(4) and Humphrey speaks of Bevis

(1) ed. F. E. Schelling, Belles Lettres Series (1903), pp. 112-3.

(2) Two very popular heroes of Spanish origin. Munday translated Amadis (1590) and three parts of the Palmerin cycle. See The Knight of the Burning Pestle, I.iii, 4 ff., 40 ff.; II.ii, 66 ff.; III.ii, 136.

(3) With the possible exception of Sir Dagonet (who appears in Malory's Morte Darthur); see ibid., IV.i, 59.

(4) Ibid., II.viii, 93 ff.:

Was never man for lady's sake,
Down, down,
Tormented as I, poor Sir Guy ...

when he and Venturewell are confronted by Jasper:

> There, there he stands, with sword, like martial knight,
> Drawn in his hand; therefore beware the fight,
> You that be wise; for, were I good Sir Bevis,
> I would not stay his coming, by your leaves. (1)

Like Sir Bevis and other heroes of mediaeval romance, Ralph is keen 'to spill the blood of treacherous Saracens'[2] and also refuses to accept the favours of a Saracen princess:

> I am a knight of religious order,
> And will not wear a favour of a lady
> That trusts in Antichrist and false traditions. (3)

It was Bishop Percy who first drew attention to Shakespeare's indebtedness to the metrical Bevis for the couplet spoken by Edgar in King Lear, Act III, Sc. 4:

> But mice and rats and such small deer,
> Have been Tom's food for seven long year. (4)

These lines echo part of the description given of the

(1) Ibid., III.i, 108-11.

(2) Ibid., III.ii, 20.

(3) Ibid., IV.ii, 38-40.

(4) ll. 142-3.

hardships suffered by Sir Bevis when imprisoned in a dungeon for seven years:

> Rattes and myse and suche smal dere
> Was his meate that seuen yere. (1)

The influence of the mediaeval (and later) romance on Elizabethan drama, including that of Shakespeare, is, of course, a much larger field for investigation and does not come within the scope of this study.(2)

Drayton devoted 127 lines to the retelling of the story of Sir Bevis in his Poly-Olbion, or A Chorographical Description of Tracts, Rivers, Mountains, Forests, and other Parts of this renowned Isle of Great Britaine, With intermixture of the most Remarquable Stories, Antiquities, Wonders, Rarityes, Pleasures, and Commodities of the same: Digested in a Poem.(3) The poem consists of thirty songs, the first eighteen of which were published in 1612 with accompanying notes or 'Illustrations' by John Selden of the Inner Temple.

(1) Copland's edn., p. 47. See also this study, p. 122.

(2) See, for example, E. C. Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition (London, 1949).

(3) The Works of Michael Drayton, ed. J. William Hebel, Vol. IV (Oxford, 1933).

Bevis is one of the 'Remarquable Stories' and is related by the River Itchen in Book II, somewhat to the annoyance of her neighbours since she:

> Would needs be telling things exceeding all beliefe:
> For, she had given it out South-hampton should not loose
> Her famous Bevis so, wer't in her power to choose. (1)

The main episodes of the story are related in a lively, vigorous style. Bevis's sensational entry at his mother's wedding-feast is described as follows:

> ... unto the Toune hee wente;
> As having in his heart a resolute intent
> Or manfullie to die, or to revenge his wrong:
> Where pressing at the gate the multitude among,
> The Porter to that place his entrance that forbad
> (Supposing him some swaine, some boystrous Country-lad)
> Upon the head hee lent so violent a stroke,
> That the poore emptie skull, like some thin pot-sheard broke,
> The braines and mingled blood, were spertled on the wall. (2)

The squalor of the dungeon and its inmates is effectively suggested:

> They, rising, him by strength into a Dungeon thrust;

(1) Ibid., Song II, ll. 230-2.

(2) Ibid., ll. 275-83.

In whose black bottom, long two Serpents had remain'd
(Bred in the common sewre that all the Cittie drain'd)
Empoysning with their smell; which seiz'd him for their pray:
With whom in strugling long (besmeard with blood and clay)
He rent their squallid chaps, and from the prison scap't. (1)

Unfortunately her listeners grow tired before she has time to finish her story:

... which boldlie having song,
With all the sundry turnes that might therto belong,
Whilst yet shee shapes her course how he came back to show
What powers he got abroad, how them he did bestow;
In England heere againe, how he by dint of sword
Unto his ancient lands and titles was restor'd,
New-forrest cry'd enough: and Waltham with the Bere,
Both bad her hold her peace; for they no more would heare. (2)

Selden added a note on Bevis, which Percy and Warton made use of at a later date:

> About the Norman invasion was Bevis famous with title of Earle of South-hampton; Dunoton in Wiltshire knowne for his residence. What credit you are to give to the Hyperbolies of Itchin in her relation of Bevis, your owne judgement, and the Authors censure in the admonition of the other rivers here

(1) Ibid., ll. 354-9.

(2) Ibid., ll. 375-82.

> personated, I presume, will direct. And it is wished that the poeticall Monkes in celebration of him, Arthur, and other such worthies had contained themselves within bounds of likelyhood; ... His sword is kept as a relique in Arundell Castle, not equalling in length (as it is now worne) that of Edward the thirds at westminster. (1)

Unfortunately for Drayton, by the time he published the first part of Poly-Olbion, fashions had changed and the long expansive poems of this kind were no longer in favour as they had been earlier in the Elizabethan age.

Finally, it is fitting at this stage to note that Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was possibly influenced by his memories of the story of Sir Bevis, which he had come across (in ballad form?) in his younger days, along with similar stories, as he tells us in A Few Sighs from Hell (1658):

> Alas! What is the Scripture? Give me a ballad, a news-book, George on horseback, (2) or Bevis of Southampton; give me some book that teaches curious arts, that tells of old fables; but for the holy Scriptures I cared not. (3)

(1) Ibid., pp. 46-7.

(2) St. George, probably known to Bunyan through Johnson's The Seven Champions of Christendom.

(3) Complete Works of John Bunyan, 3 vols., ed. George Offor (London & Edinburgh, 1860-2), III, p. 711.

It is in the more stirring sections of his story, the exploits of giants, lions, and monsters, that Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress seems to show the influence of these romances and ballads that brought him pleasure in his youth.

(b) Reasons for the popularity

There is thus plenty of evidence of the popularity of the story of Sir Bevis during the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth — a popularity which led to the frequent reprinting of metrical versions of the romance. Extracts from the works of contemporary writers have already given some indication of the class of reader to whom the romance appealed at various times. In the following paragraphs this aspect will be investigated further and an attempt made to outline some of the reasons for the popularity.

There is no doubt that, even as late as the accession of Elizabeth, England was still more than half mediaeval in its literary tastes. In particular, there survived an interest in the old stories of knightly conduct and courtly love with their accounts of giants, dwarfs, dragons, tournaments and battles long ago. The printers themselves were still con-

servative in taste, but also commercially minded, and they recognized the demand of the reading public for this kind of literature. To supply this need, the printers drew mainly on the English mediaeval metrical romances and the newer fifteenth-century prose versions of French romances.

Between 1474 and 1491 Caxton brought out English editions of no fewer than eight romances of the latter type. The work was continued by Wynkyn de Worde and William Copland (active between 1546 and 1569) with the result that the old French romances were accessible to the public of early Elizabethan England, but from the press of Wynkyn de Worde (as already pointed out)(1) there issued perhaps even more frequently romances of the type of Bevis, Generides, Sir Degare, Sir Triamour, and The Squire of Low Degree, works which were nearly all reprinted by William Copland between the forties and the seventies.

The metrical version of Bevis had all the fictitious elements of story and character which so many of the Elizabethan public loved, including, in particular,

(1) See earlier, p. 39.

all the ritual and excitement of the tournament, contest, and single combat. Here, for example, is the account of the famous race won by Arundel:

> In somer at whitsontyde
> Whan knights most on horsbacke ride,
> A cours let they make on a daye
> Stedes and palfraye for to assaye,
> Whiche horse that best may ren;
> Thre myles the cours was then.
> Who that might ryd shoulde
> Haue forty pounde of redy golde.
> Syr Beuis was a payed well,
> For muche he trusted in Arundell.
> On the morowe whan it was lyght,
> Theyther came both baron and knight,
> With fayre stedes and muche pryde,
> That on that course woulde ryde.
> Two knightes were stolen before
> A large halfe myle and more
> That none of theyr felowes wote;
> Beuis with the spurres yn horse smot;
> On Arundell, so sayth the boke,
> Amyd the waye Beuis them ouertoke
> And had ryden the course within a while
> Or he had thought he had riden a mile.
> Nowe hath Beuis the treasure wone
> Through Arundell that wyll runne. (1)

A little later in the story there is a typical jousting scene:

> Forth rode Beuis bi dale and downe
> Tyll he came to a castell towne;
> He toke his yne as courteis knight
> And fast to his supper he him dight.
> At a windowe Beuis loked out,
> He sawe in the strete all about
> Stedes trapped fayre and bright,

(1) Copland's edn., pp. 107-8.

Dukes and erles and many a knight;
Out of the windowes on euery side
Armes were hanged fayre and wide.
Harodes gan the armes soone escry,
And therof Beuis marualed greatly
And asked his hoost therof tydinge.
'Syr,' he sayd, 'harde ye nothinge
Of the great iusting that shall be
To morowe here in this citie?
The Dukes doughter and his heire,
She is a mayden good and fayre,
Her father is now here deed,
Therfore it is geuen her to red
A great iusting for to cry,
That he that may haue the maystry
Shall this mayde haue to mede
And her lande to guid and lede.'
Now sayde Beuis to Terry,
'Shall we iust for that lady?'
'Yes,' sayd Terry, 'god forbede els,
If it were southe as he vs telles!'
Beuis gaue that man for his tiding
Of grotes twenty shylling.
On the morowe whan it was be light,
Than rose both baron, squyer, and knyght;
Fayre tokens they on them throwe,
Where by the lady shulde them knowe.
Syr Beuis and Syr Terry
Armed them full hastely;
Syr Beuis bare of colowrs poiment
A rede lyon of golde rampaunte,
And forth rode Terry and he
Theyther as the iustinge shulde be.
The fayre lady Elynoure (1)
Ouer the castell lay that houre,
And the iustinge she behelde
What knight bare him beste in the felde.
Than these knightes begane to ryde,
Eche to other on euery syde.
The fyrst knight that euer Beuis rode agayne
Was the Emperours sonne of Almayne,
And Beuis to him bare so faste
That horse and man to the grounde he caste.
The erle Florens forth gan thring

(1) The/Copland: They.

Against Sir Beuis with great hasting,
And Beuis mette with him in the felde
And hit him in the middes of the shild,
That two lande brode and more
He caste him from his horse thore.
Than came forth Duke Anthonye,
He was Duke of Burgonye;
He was stronge and of great pryce,
And thus he sayd to Syr Beuys,
'Turne thee,' he saide, 'and make defence,
For I wyll auenge the erle Florens.'
Than Beuis wolde no lenger abyde,
But smote Arundell vnder the syde,
So that eyther to other droue
That theyr shaftes all to roue,
But Syr Beuis so harde to him thrust
That his shoulder bone all to brust;
Therfore he was greued sore
For that daie he might iust no more ... (1)

This love of a good mediaeval story with all its trappings is not, however, the only reason for the continued popularity of Bevis in particular. In spite of the complaints of some of the critics, Sir Bevis is essentially the 'good warrior',(2) a knight who fights against corruption and evil, and is a firm defender of the faith against the heathen Saracens. His father before him was a loyal steward of the king, maintaining peace and order throughout the land:

(1) Copland's edn., pp. 114-15.

(2) Cf. MS. M: Here endyth a good tale of Beues of Hamtoun, that Good Verriour.

For Syr Guy was treue and wyse,
And knowen for a knight of pryce,
He made him highe steward of his lande;
And what soeuer he sayde, it sholde stande.
He kept well England in his dayes
And set peace and stable layes,
That no man was so hardy
To do another vylany. (1)

Sir Bevis, like his father, is portrayed as an English Christian knight fighting evil both at home and abroad. Moreover, although this is not the most courtly of romances, Bevis always behaves in a courteous manner:

Beuis is nowe of great might
Beloued both of kynge and knight;
Eche man, both erle and baron,
Loued and dred Beuis of Hampton,
For largely woulde he spende
And gyftes both gyue and sende
To euery man after his astate.
No man had cause him to hate;
He was so curteyse and so hynde
That euery man was his frende ... (2)

There is also a courtly atmosphere about many of the proceedings as, for example, the conferment of the earldom on Sir Bevis by King Edgar:

Saber counseled him there
To go to London to King Edgare

(1) Copland's edn., p. 2.

(2) Ibid., p. 107. Cf. p. 97:
Beuis was curteyse and fre
To eueriman in his degre.

For to make him homage, as reson wolde,
For his landes to chalenge and holde.
Syr Beuis dyd after counsaeylynge
And went forth before the kinge
And proferd the king to do him homage,
As it fell to his herytage.
King Edgar asked him what he hight
And what he claimed for his right.
'Syr,' he sayd, 'mi name is Beuis;
The erledome of Hampton it is,
After my father, Syr Guy ...' (1)

Although Bevis has to fight against King Edgar's men in order to maintain his rights and save his life, there is no suggestion of disloyalty to the king, and it is frequently emphasized that the king was led astray by a wicked counseller and false steward, the Earl of Cornwall, who receives his just reward when he is slain by Bevis. Bevis's own son Miles is offered the king's daughter in marriage and becomes Earl of Cornwall in his place. This is part of the 'history' and past glory of England in which the Elizabethans were so interested.

A great deal of emphasis is placed on Sir Bevis as an upholder of the Christian faith. When King Ermin first offers his daughter Josian in marriage to Bevis, the knight refuses to forsake his Christian faith for

(1) Ibid., p. 106. Cf. the tournaments already referred to on pp. 68-71 of this study.

the sake of Josian.[1] Soon after, he slays some fifty or sixty Saracens and gives the glory to God:

> 'Here is sene,' said Beuis, 'in this stounde,
> That god is stronger then mahounde.' (2)

Josian eventually forsakes her false gods and embraces Christianity because of her love for Bevis, who promptly accepts her love when she rejects the heathen gods. In the city of Damas (Damascus) Bevis in the spirit of St. Paul (and the Reformation?) destroys the images of the heathens with great vigour. His own release from prison is reminiscent of the experiences of the early Christian disciples:

> 'Jesu Christ,' Syr Beuis sayde,
> 'Helpe me nowe a lytell brayde;
> The rope may I not reche
> But yf thou me wisshe or teche.'
> So hygh he smote the rope a sunder,
> If he it reche, it were great wonder,
> But not for thy for gods myght.
> Beuis skypped; he was full lyght
> And gat the rope in his hande,
> And came vp, I vnderstande. (3)

The giant of the castle town where Bevis seeks hospit-

(1) Ibid., p. 15.

(2) Ibid., p. 19.

(3) Ibid., p. 54.

ality is an evil anti-Christian figure:

> The lady aunswered to hym tho,
> 'Fro my gate I reade thee go;
> Another place is better chambere,
> For here thou getest a colde dynere,
> For my lorde is a gyaunte
> And beleuith on mahound & tarmagant.
> Yf he know thou be a christian,
> He wyll the slo with much payne.' (1)

Josian is baptized; Bevis, continuing his role as the Christian warrior, in vain suggests baptism to King Yvor, who prefers his own faith and death. Bevis is, however, responsible for the conversion of the whole of Armenia:

> Beuis sent for the bisshop of Rome
> That he should send his clarkes good ...
> The bysshope it herde and he was glad
> And hath sente after his sawe
> Clerkes that were wise in the lawe.
> They christened King Ermin with their hande,
> And sythen all the people of that land.
> In many a place Beuis gan wirche
> Abbeyes and many a goodly churche.
> So was fyrst the land of Armonye
> Through Beuis chrystened trulye. (2)

It is not surprising that at the end of the romance Bevis's son Guy orders a chapel to be built and dedicated to St. Lawrence, where the bodies of his

(1) Ibid., p. 57.

(2) Ibid., p. 121.

father and mother are interred under the high altar. He also founds a monastery, in which the monks are to sing masses for the souls of Bevis and Josian. Bevis certainly deserved to be called 'that Good Verriour'; in this respect, as in others, he resembles that other popular romance hero, Sir Guy.

Moreover, according to the poet, this was no legendary Ywain or Gawain performing brave and noble exploits in remote, enchanted realms (even though they might at times bear some resemblance to the landscape of the Wirral peninsula). Here was a member of a noble English family firmly established in Hampshire, whose memory is still preserved in Southampton and Arundel; an earl whose son married King Edgar's daughter; the founder of the historically important Arundel Castle; and, above all, a knight who achieved some of his bravest exploits in the very streets of London so familiar to the citizens and apprentices — Cheapside, Tower Street, Goose Lane, and Bread Street. It is, therefore, not surprising that in The Knight of the Burning Pestle Bevis is well known to Humphrey and the citizens, and is referred to as 'the good Sir Bevis'. (1)

(1) See earlier in this study, pp. 61-2.

Although much of the action takes place abroad, we are not allowed to forget Southampton and London for long. The romance has a local colour, which must have added greatly to its appeal in Elizabethan times.

Another special feature worthy of note in Bevis is the stress laid on the nobility and virtue of virginity. It is hard to believe that this feature would pass unnoticed in the Elizabethan age with its cult of the virgin queen,(1) and it must certainly have been an additional attraction for some readers. Josian is untouched by the lions because she is a king's daughter and a virgin:

> Whan they had eaten of that man,
> They went both to Iosian
> And laid there hedes vpon her barme,
> But they wolde do her no harme,
> For it is the lyons kynde, ywys,
> A kynges doughter that mayd is
> Harme ne scathe none to do;
> Therfore lay the lyons so. (2)

It is this incident that proves to Sir Bevis that Josian is still 'a mayden clene' in spite of her seven years' marriage to King Yvor, her virginity having been

(1) Cf. Shakespeare, Midsummer Night's Dream, II.i, 155-164; I.i, 74-5.

(2) Copland's edn., pp. 70-1.

preserved by a charm:

> I shall now go and make me a writte
> Through a clarke wyse of witte;
> There no man shall haue grace
> While the letters are in this place,
> Against my wyll to lye me by,
> Nor do me shame nor vylany.
> She did the letters sone to be wrought,
> On the maner as she had thought,
> And put it abought her necke. (1)

Bevis has already been warned by the patriarch of Jerusalem never to marry a woman 'But if she were a mayden clene'.(2) In the passage already referred to which seems to have been the inspiration for Spenser's well of healing in The Faerie Queene, Sir Bevis is refreshed and healed in his fight against the dragon through the miraculous virtues of water bathed in by a virgin.(3) Finally there is the virtuous example of the daughter and heiress of the ruler of Aumberforce. When Bevis wins her hand in marriage as a result of his victory in the tournament, she falls in love with him, but is content to accept him as her lord 'in clene manere' for seven years in order to allow time for Josian to be

(1) Ibid., p. 49. Cf. MS. A, where the charm is a ring, and MS. M, where it is a 'litull girdull' around 'my medull'.

(2) Copland's edn., p. 60.

(3) See earlier in this study, pp. 54-7.

found if she is still alive.[1]

There are also folk-tale elements in Bevis which would appeal to many of the readers (and listeners) of this period. In particular, there is the theme of the wicked stepfather who treacherously slays the lady's first husband (with her connivance), marries the lady, and contrives with her to get rid of the child by the previous marriage. The similarity to Hamlet has not gone unnoticed, but the theme is common enough in folk-tales.

Whatever the reasons for its popularity, it is obvious from the evidence presented in this chapter that Bevis was well known and popular in the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth, but the popularity varied from class to class and generation to generation. It has already been indicated that as the sixteenth century progressed, surviving mediaeval romances became the object of increasing attacks from several different groups of writers — humanists, educational reformers, puritanical moralists, and students and men of letters imbued with the literary culture of the Renaissance. With the notable exception of Bevis,

(1) Copland's edn., p. 117.

the mediaeval metrical versions, though still in circulation, ceased to be reprinted after c.1575, but many of the later prose versions of romances translated from the French, such as those about Arthur and Huon of Bordeaux, continued to be reprinted, and in the later years of the sixteenth century and the first three or four decades of the seventeenth century there appears to have been some revival of interest in chivalrous romance and the legends of the Middle Ages. The English mediaeval material and the later prose translations of French origin were supplemented, and to some extent superseded, by printings and reprintings of translations from French and Spanish of a new body of knightly adventures belonging to the late mediaeval cycles of Amadis and Palmerin.(1) The interest shown is reflected in the number of plays dealing with romance subjects which appeared on the stage at the turn of the century.(2)

The evidence suggests that although for three-quarters of a century after the introduction of print-

(1) See earlier in this study, p. 61.

(2) For example, Huon of Bordeaux, Uther Pendragon, The Life of King Arthur, The Four Sons of Aymon — all between 1593 and 1603.

ing the romances appealed to the nobles and the upper classes just as much as to the lower classes, it was more and more the country gentlemen, the merchants, and the apprentices —the old-fashioned and the imperfectly educated —who formed the reading public for the romances. The words of Rosemond Tuve are a fitting reminder of the importance and significance of this interest in the romances:

> We watch this [English] development from the time when Caxton and early printers found a motive for printing romances in the desire to enhance England's prestige and revitalise her institutions, down to the high tide of Arthurian interest in the 1580's. The Faerie Queene no longer stands so alone, as we consider plentiful evidence that the obsolescence of chivalry as an institution was far from obvious to a still partly feudal society, or evidence for the aristocracy's attempt to revitalise as well as to take refuge in the traditional ways of living and thinking, or as we observe the many other manifestations of close relations between chivalry and developing concepts of the commonwealth, of national pride, courtiership, or the ideals of other classes. Many of these points of view have been obscured by an interest in satire directed against quite limited aspects of the ancient institutions. (1)

(1) Op. cit., p. 341.

CHAPTER IV

The Emergence and Development of the Prose *Bevis* in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

An examination of the popular prose literature of the last decade of the sixteenth century and the early part of the seventeenth century shows a strange mixture of realism and romance; there were popular stories about the lives of worthy tradesmen and merchants flourishing alongside equally popular stories of great knights and adventurers — sometimes written by the same authors.

Thus Henry Roberts had published in 1600 *A Pleasant Discourse of Sixe Gallant Marchants of Deuonshire. Their liues, Aduentures and Trauailes, etc.*, but the same author had already in 1595 produced *Phaeander, The Mayden Knight; Describing his honourable Trauailes and hautie attempts in Armes, with his successe in loue.* Editions of the latter continued to appear during the seventeenth century.[1] Likewise Richard Johnson in

(1) 1617, 1661, etc.. See A. Esdaile, *A List of English Tales and Prose Romances* (London, 1912).

1592 wrote about The nine Worthies of London; Explaining the honourable exercise of Armes, the vertues of the valiant, and the memorable attempts of magnanimous minds ...,[1] and in 1607 The Pleasant Conceites of Old Hobson the merry Londoner,[2] but the same author could also write The Most famous History of the Seauen Champions of Christendom ... in 1596. In 1597 there appeared The second Part of the Famous History of the seauen Champions of Christendome.[3] The work was then reissued in two volumes in 1608 under the title of The Most Famous History of the seuen Champions of Christendome ... Shewing their Honorable batailes by Sea and Land.[4] This was a very popular work and there are more than twenty recorded editions and abridgements during the seventeenth century and the early part of the eighteenth.[5]

1607 was the year of the first edition of the

(1) B.M. C.38 c.10.

(2) B.M. C.39 d.2. Also later editions, 1634, 1640.

(3) 'Likewise showing the Princely prowesse of Saint Georges three Sonnes, the liuely Spark of Nobilitie. With many other memoriall atchiuements worthy the golden Spurres of Knighthood'.

(4) B.M. C.57 b.27.

(5) See Esdaile, op. cit..

story of Tam a Lincoln, to be followed by several other editions, its popularity continuing into the early part of the eighteenth century. The sixth impression in 1631 is entitled The most pleasant History of Tam a Lincolne, That renowned Soldier, the Red-Rose Knight, who for his Valour and Chiualry, was surnamed the Boast of England .... Tam a Lincoln was King Arthur's son and the Red Rose Knight, but like Robin Hood, George a Green, and Dick Whittington,(1) he was a popular hero, one of the people.

The literary standard of these and similar works may not be very high, but there was obviously no shortage of such prose romances and other stories. They supplied a demand, and their popularity was probably greatest amongst the lower middle classes, apprentices, and other readers with a limited education.

However, by the middle of the seventeenth century there was a newer influx of romances to attract the attention of the more sophisticated readers. From about 1650 onwards there began to appear in this country editions of the long, artificial French romances, issued often in instalments. In 1652 there

(1) There is no known edition of this story before 1656.

appeared the first instalments of Calprenède's Cassandra and Cleopatra and of Mlle de Scudéry's Ibrahim, to be followed in 1653 by the same author's Grand Cyrus, and in 1658 by her Clelia. Such romances continued to be reprinted as late as 1725; and it was romances such as these that formed part of the lady's library described by Addison in The Spectator:

> The Grand Cyrus; with a pin stuck in one of the middle leaves ... Clelia; which opened of itself in the place that describes two lovers in a bower. (1)

Francis Kirkham, a contemporary authority on these romances, writing in the middle of the seventeenth century, expresses his appreciation of them in the following terms:

> I beleeve the French for amorous language, admirable invention, high achievements, honorable loves, inimitable constancy, are not to be equalled. (2)

It is against this background that the further development of the story of Bevis during the seventeenth century and the early part of the eighteenth century must be studied. The metrical version of

(1) No. 37. 'A Lady's Library'.

(2) Dedication of his translation of Clerio and Lozio.

Bevis maintained its popularity longer than the rest of the metrical romances, and it is proof of its continued popularity that a fresh edition was called for as late as 1662,[1] but the metrical romances were already considered old-fashioned in literary circles before the end of the sixteenth century, and it is doubtful whether they any longer held much interest for the majority of the educated and cultured classes. As the seventeenth century progressed, there would seem to be far more danger of the heads of the young ladies being turned by the newer romances such as Clelia than by Bevis, as Hyrde had feared two centuries earlier.[2] The traditional story of Bevis would seem at first sight to be far removed from the fashionable new romances and to have closer affinities with the other popular stories of the age, with which it has so many elements in common: Bevis himself is in many respects a champion of Christendom, he is a local hero, the streets of London are the scene of some of his bravest exploits, and not surprisingly Bevis became a hero of popular appeal in the company of such varied heroes as St. George,

(1) There was an even later edition printed by James Nicol in Aberdeen, c.1711. Bodl. Douce R 267 (3).

(2) See earlier in this study, pp. 46-7.

Tam a Lincoln, and innumerable worthies of London. However, as will be seen later, when the story of Bevis came to be retold in prose, the result was more than just a prose version of the old metrical romance; whilst retaining many of the old features, the prose Bevis is more closely related to the newer romances, mainly as a result of the development and changed tone of the love element.

The first prose version of Bevis appeared in 1689, twenty-seven years after the last seventeenth-century edition of the metrical Bevis. It was printed for W. Thackeray (1) 'at the Angel in Duck Lane', and is entitled as follows: The Famous and Renowned History of Sir Bevis of Southampton, giving an account of his birth, education, heroick exploits and enterprises, his fights with giants, monsters, wild-beasts and armies, his conquering kings and kingdoms, his love and marriage, and many other famous and memorable things and

(1) It is interesting to note that The Pleasant History of Jack of Newbery (John Winchcombe, the famous clothier) and Ornatus and Artesia were also printed for W. Thackeray between 1683 and 1690. At some later stage (early 18th cent.?) they were bound in the same volume as Bevis (and The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Mandevile Knight). This is the copy preserved in the British Museum.

actions, worthy of wonder, etc..[1] In his book Enchanted Ground A. Johnston states that John Shurley (or Shirley) was the author of the 1689 prose version of Bevis,[2] but it is not clear what his authority is for this attribution. It is true that Shurley rewrote Guy and Amadis of Gaul, but there would seem to be no firm proof that he was also the author of the prose Bevis.[3]

The 1689 prose version obviously has close links with the metrical editions. It includes many of the same woodcut illustrations[4] as the earlier metrical editions and occasionally echoes the words and lines of these versions. For example, when Sir Bevis meets Sir Brian in battle, the following passage occurs in the

(1) B.M. 1077. g.35(3).

(2) A. Johnston, Enchanted Ground (London, 1964), pp. 29 & 31.

(3) I am indebted to the Department of Printed Books, British Museum, for the following comment: 'I am unable to confirm that John Shirley was the author of the 1689 version of Sir Bevis, but think it unlikely as the preface is signed S.J. and not J.S.. In other works in our catalogue attributed to Shirley the pseudonym J.S. Gent is used'. The edition is not attributed to Shurley in any of the usual works of reference (Wing, Halkett & Laing, etc.).

(4) There are 21 of these altogether; at least 9 of them can also be found in the metrical editions. From Pynson onwards there is frequent use of the same illustrations in editions of Bevis.

prose version under consideration:

> ... he met Sir Brian at the head of the people he had raised, and said to him, 'Come on now, you are an old Knight of War,' and so they run upon each other. (1)

The corresponding passage in the 1662 metrical version is as follows:

> And then Sir Bevis said to Brian, 'Turn thee now as thou art a man,
> Thou art an old Knight of War,' ... (2)

The sixteenth-century printed editions and MS. M record the utterance of the same words, but they are spoken by Sir Brian to Sir Bevis.(3) In the account of the battle in London (though it is less detailed in the prose version) we hear that there was great slaughter 'inso-

(1) 1689 edn., pp. 57-8.

(2) 1662 edn., p. 61, ll. 2052-3.

(3) Cf. Pynson's edn.:
Vnto Syr Beuys sayde Bryan,
'Turne the as thou art a man,
Thou art an olde knight of warre.'
Copland's edn.:
And to Syr Beuis sayde Brian,
'Turne thee as thou art a man,
Thou arte an olde knight of warre.'

The 1620 edition has a reading similar to the 1662 one given above:
And then Sir Bevis said to Brian, 'Turne thee as thou art a man,
Thou art an old knight of warre,' ...

much that the streets ran with blood',[1] which echoes the following line in the metrical romance:

... that the blood ran in every street. (2)

The story and the order of events are basically the same.

In some respects, however, there are important differences. Freed from the restrictions and conventions of the metrical tradition —with its minstrel tags, alliterative phrases, frequent and excessive direct speech, and necessity of rhyme —the author tells the story more concisely in a straightforward, rhythmical prose style, which is not over-ornate and is surprisingly modern in vocabulary, syntax, and morphology, though the sentences are often lengthy, with frequent use of participial constructions. One's attention is occasionally caught by an expression which nowadays has become homely and colloquial, such as '... at which he for some time bogled'[3] when the Sultan finds the

(1) 1689 edn., p. 58.

(2) 1662 edn., p. 63, l. 2118.
Cf. MS. M, l. 4224: That the blood ran down in yche strete.

(3) 1689 edn., p. 75.

peace terms excessive, or again, '... returned to the pallace leaving the rest to shift for themselves'.(1) Extracts given later will further illustrate the prose style, but at this stage the opening lines in comparison with those of a typical metrical edition will sufficiently indicate the different register:

> How Sir Guy of Southampton, having married a fair Lady, had by her Sir Bevis; and how she afterward caused her Husband to be treacherously slain in the Forrest, and married the Knight that slew him, etc..
>
> In the days, when England was more immediately renowned, for the famous and valiant Atchievements of their Knights and Warlike Champions, whose great Actions and Heroick enterprises were loudly trumped by Fame, in each part of the World, There dwelt at the antient and celebrated Town of Southampton, a Knight called Sir Guy, who in his Travels and search of Adventures through the Countries of Flanders, France, Almain, Cicily, Denmark, Gascoin, Hungary, Calabria, Burgundy, Poland, Normandy, Maine, Turkey, Eastland, Norway, Picardy, Scotland, Lumbardy, etc. signalized his Valour in the Courts of divers great Princes at Tilt, Tournament, and many mortal Combats, ever striving to right the injured, and such as suffered wrong from their too powerful oppressors, and having spent his younger days in the exercise of Arms abroad, every where gaining a high esteem, at length Age rendering him unfit for great exploits, he resolved to give up the remainder of his life to a more setled state in his own Country, and thereupon returning loaden with Lawrels won with infinite hazzard and danger, and

(1) Ibid., p. 70.

> also with the Presents and Favour of Emperors, Kings and Princes: he at length setled in the Town of Southampton, the place of his birth ... (1)

In Copland's metrical edition (which is typical) the corresponding lines are:

> Lysten, lordinges, and holde you styll;
> Of doughty men tell you I wyll,
> That haue ben in many a stoure
> And helde vp England in honoure,
> That before this time hath ben;
> By a knight it is that I meane,
> Sir Beues of Hampton the knight hight,
> That neuer was preued a cowarde in fight,
> And by his father that hight Syr Guy,
> A goodly knight and full hardy,
> And how Syr Guy betrayed was
> Through his wife alas, alas!
> That tyme was Guy of great renowne,
> Erle he was of South hamton.
> In Christendome farre and nere
> Of doughtinesse was not his pere,
> Ne none so harde ne none so stronge;
> He loued the right and not the wronge.
> Whyle Syr Guy was younge and light,
> Knowen he was a doughty knight,
> In euery land he rode and yede,
> For to wynne him price and mede;
> In Fraunce, in Flaunders, and in Almaine,
> In Brobant, in Cecele, & in Britayne,
> In Denmarke, Galyce, and in Gascoune,
> In Hungry, Calabre, and in Burgoyne,
> In Pole, in Normandy, and in Mayne,
> In Turkye, Nabrant, and in Spayne,
> In Eastland, Norway, and in Picardye,
> In Scotland, in Wales, & in Lumbardye,
> In Christendome, and also in heathenesse,
> Full well is knowen Sir Guyes worthinesse.
> In all the landes of Chrystante
> Was none founde so good as he.
> Whyle he was younge and iolyfe,

(1) Ibid., p. 9.

> Wolde Syr Guy weed no wyfe,
> But whan that he was olde,
> He waxed feble, croked, and colde,
> Than toke he his leue of cheualry
> And dwelled in England certainly. (1)

The story is broken up into eighteen chapters covering seventy-eight pages, which contain approximately half the number of words of the metrical version, and of these seventy-eight pages the last sixteen (Chapts. XV - XVIII) deal with the siege of Babylon and the marriage of Sir Miles to the Sultan's daughter, Rosalinda — events which are not covered by the metrical versions, which simply mention that Bevis and Josian spent seven years living quietly and devoutly in Mambrant before they died. There are some minor differences in content, and at least one major difference, apart from the additional material mentioned above. For example, much more is made of the pastoral life led by Bevis when he is under the protection of Sir Sabre; a fuller description is given of how he:

> ... drove forth Sir Sabre's Sheep each morning, warily guarding them upon the flowry Plains, and chearing himself with his Pipe of Reeds, wearing a Shepherds Scrip, and carrying in his hand a Crook, and at Even he brought them home again, contenting himself with course

(1) Copland's edn., pp. 1-2. MS. M and other printed editions have a similar text.

Fare and a homely Lodging ... (1)

We are also told how he 'exercised the first proof of his valour upon a fierce and cruel Wolf' — an incident which is not recounted in the metrical versions. However, the woodcut illustrating Bevis's pastoral employment is the one that also appears in the metrical editions.

In the metrical versions Bevis is sold to the Saracens at the port of Southampton by Sir Sabre or other knights. In the 1689 prose edition Sir Sabre is imprisoned by Bevis's mother when she discovers that he has not murdered Bevis as instructed; Bevis rescues him, but in order to save Sabre from further misfortune, Bevis agrees to leave the country, and Sir Sabre spreads the story that it was not Bevis (who, he claims, has been slain), but an unknown knight who released him. Meanwhile, Bevis sets sail, encounters a storm, and is shipwrecked in the Mediterranean. When he reaches shore with a few other survivors,

> ... contrary to the Rules of Hospitality, they were encountered and taken Prisoners by a great power of the Infidels, who sold them to

(1) 1689 edn., p. 10.

> the Merchants, bound for the Coast of Egypt, who presented Bevis, as a very comely Personage, to the King of Armony. (1)

When Sir Bevis is in the pit of dragons, according to the prose version, he finds an old rusty sword, (2) whereas the metrical versions refer to a short truncheon or staff, (3) and the charm adopted by Josian to preserve her virginity takes yet another form in the prose version:

> ... she, in that time, procured of the wise Magicians of Aegypt, then at her Father's Court, such Spells and Inchantments, that being worn, they, by secret power and operation, took away all desire in the King her husband to bereave her of her Virginity; as shall be further mentioned hereafter. (4)

The most important differences come towards the end of the story, where the roles of Guy and Miles, the two sons of Bevis, are exchanged. It is Sir Guy (and not Sir Miles as in the metrical versions) who marries King Edgar's daughter, and it is Sir Miles who later joins Sir Bevis abroad and has a romantic love-affair,

(1) Ibid., p. 15.

(2) Ibid., p. 28.

(3) See, for example, MS. M, l. 1316; MS. C, l. 48, and printed editions.

(4) 1689 edn., p. 29. See this study, pp. 77-8.

of which there is no record in the metrical versions.(1)

Occasionally the author of the prose version supplies the additional descriptive detail, epithet, or simile of his own. For example, he describes the richness of the feast in the hall of Sir Murdure when Bevis accosts him:

> ... he found the Guests seated in a splendid manner, the Tables loaded with varieties of divers kinds, and Wine flowing in abundance.(2)

Again, the conversation between Josian's father and Bevis in which the king tries to persuade Bevis to change his faith is given a pleasant setting, for which there is no basis in the metrical versions:

> ... for taking him by the hand and leading him into a plesaunt Garden, under the shade of Orange Trees, he made him sit down by him, there being none but these two, all others being strictly forbidden entrance, he thus began ... (3)

It is in the prose version, too, that we read of the 'horrid Bristles [of the boar] that stood up like a grove of Speares'.(4) Generally avoiding the cruder

(1) 1689 edn., Chapt. XIV, pp. 60-1.

(2) Ibid., p. 12.

(3) Ibid., p. 16.

(4) Ibid., p. 19.

details of dismembered bodies given by some of the metrical versions,[1] the author gives vivid accounts of battle scenes:

> ... yet after both Armies had for a while faced each other, and bid defiance, a fearfull Combate ensued, so that the Showers of Arrows in a manner darkened the Sky, and what together with the clashing of Swords, the Shouts of the Victors, the cryes of the Vanquished, the neighing of Horses, and the noise of warlike Instruments, it seemed as if the dissolution of all things was at hand, insomuch that the wild Beasts in the forrests and mountains stood amazed and trembled, as wondring what so great a clamour and confusion should mean ... (2)

A similar passage occurs in the account of the fight between the army of Bevis and the Sultan's army led by Amphiron:

> ... both Armies joyned with huge shouts and cryes, so that for the horrible clashing of Swords and Armour, the cryes of the dying, and the shouts of the vanquishers, the sound of Trumpets, and the noise of Drums, the Earth trembled, and the wild beast in the Forrests stood astonished ... (3)

(1) See, for example, MS. M, ll. 799-802:

> Men myght se ouer all
> Hedys cirlyng as a ball,
> Sarzins meny myght men mete
> With guttes tirlinge in the strete.

(2) 1689 edn., p. 21 (describing the same battle).

(3) Ibid., p. 64.

The most interesting expansion is to be found in the elaboration of the existing love scenes and the addition of others. The ladies are much more alluring and enticing, and the men — Sir Bevis and his two sons Guy and Miles — still brave and indulging in slaughter, but much more gallant and sensitive to ladies' charms. More than one stealthy kiss is exchanged or snatched. There are three major love-affairs: firstly that of Bevis and Josian, which is the most prolonged; then the one between Sir Guy (Bevis's son) and King Edgar's daughter, Lyndamira; and finally that of Sir Miles and Rosalinda, the daughter of the Sultan of Babylon, which is peculiar to the prose version.

Even the metrical versions extol the beauty of Josian, though the details vary. In MS. A, for example, we are given the following description:

> A douȝter a hadde of ȝong age,
> Iosiane þat maide het,
> Hire schon wer gold vpon hire fet;
> So faire she was & briȝt of mod,
> Ase snow vpon þe rede blod;
> Whar to scholde þat may discriue?
> Men wiste no fairer þing aliue,
> So hend ne wel itauȝt;
> Boute of cristene lawe ȝhe koupe nauȝt. (1)

(1) MS. A, ll. 518-26.

MS. M has a different reading:

> He had a doughter ffeyre and bryght,
> Iosyan, that Maiden, she hight,
> Her visage was white as floure,
> There in ran a reed coloure;
> With bent browes and eyen shene,
> With her long as gold wire on the grene,
> With small handus and fyngurs longe,
> No thinge of her was shapen wronge,
> Where to shold I her discryve?
> There was none so ffeire on lyve. (1)

The version in Pynson's edition, though closely related to that of MS. M, gives yet another picture of the charms of Josian:

> He had a doughter faire and bryght,
> Josian that lady hyght,
> Hyr visage was whyte as lylly floure,
> Therin ranne the rede colour;
> Wyth bryght browes & iyen shene,
> Wyth here as golde wyre on the grene,
> Hyr nose was comely, hyr lyppes swete,
> Wyth a louely mouth and fayre fete,
> With tethe whyte and euen set;
> Hyr handes were swete as vyolet;
> Hyr body was gentyl withouten lacke,
> Wel shapen both body and backe;
> Hyr handes were smal, hyr fyngers longe,
> No thynge on hyr was shapen wronge;
> What nedeth me hyr to dyscryue?
> There was neuer fayrer mayde on lyue. (2)

This seems to hsve been the kind of passage where

(1) MS. M, ll. 395-401.

(2) Pynson's edn., ll. 424-37. Other printed editions have similar readings.

scribes and retellers of the story felt free to draw on their own imagination and literary tradition in giving their picture of a beautiful, attractive lady. The prose edition, unlike the metrical versions, includes an account of the immediate effect on Bevis:

> ... a Princess exceeding fair and beautifull, adorned with all the rare perfections that make womankind tempting and desirable, on whom Bevis, fixing his Eyes, began to think he had never seen any so charming, her Eyes seemed like two Stars, her Forehead like polished Alablaster, her Cheeks outdid the Roses, even her Lips and Teeth might compare with Rubies and Pearls, all her other parts being proportionally beautiful; but above all she was possessed with a virtuous mind and courteous behaviour. (1)

The author of the prose edition tends to linger longingly over the subsequent love scenes. After the slaying of the sixty Saracens, Josian visits Bevis. In the metrical version (as represented by the 1662 edition) there is the following description of the scene:

> Then Bevis looked as he lain, and Iosian in her armes twain,
> Took Bevis, and kissed him so sweet, his sorrow, she said, she did weet,
> 'Sir Bevis,' said she, 'grieve no more, though thou art hurt wondrous sore,

(1) 1689 edn., p. 15.

> For there is not in Panims Land, better salve I understand,
> Than I have brought this stound, for to heal there with thy wound.'
> Bevis rose up at her bidding; and went forth unto the King. (1)

This incident is developed into a much more tender love-making scene in the prose version:

> ... she went attended with two Knightes to his Chamber, where Bevis perceiving so bright a Creature, who had long since conquered his affections, rose and threw himself at her feet, expressing himself altogether unworthy of so great a favour, and expressed a thousand thanks, with all imaginable respect, but she not suffering him long to kneel, clasped her snowy Arms about him, and raised him gently from the ground, and as she raised him stole a gentle kiss. at which Bevis in a manner ravished with joy, began to demand the cause of her coming, who thereupon told him what had been witnessed against him, and in what danger he was, and how she had interceeded on his behalf, and obtained so much favour of the King, as to hear him in Person as to the matter whereof he stood accused, giving him Instructions how he should behave himself, and promising to deal further with the King on his behalf, she left the Knights to dress his Wounds and departed. (2)

Before his fight against Bradamound, Josian embraced

(1) 1662 edn., p. 11, ll. 289-94. Cf. MS. M, ll. 579-92, and other printed editions.

(2) 1689 edn., p. 18.

Bevis and:

> clasping him in those Walls of Steel, gave him a gentle Kiss: at which, he, smiling, said, 'Dear Madam, this Favour has made your Knight half a Conqueror before he enters on the War.' (1)

The love-making is resumed after Bevis's victory over Bradamound and the author fittingly describes the vagaries and torments of love:

> ... so that with his consent he had leave to visit the beautiful lady in her Chamber; who when they were together by themselves, earnestly beholding him, said, with a sigh, and then a rosie Blush overspread her Virgin Face: 'How long wil it be, Sir Knight, before you will truly understand how much I love you, and how passionately, pardon my free expression, I desire to be your wife?' To which Bevis, over-ravished with Joy, yet dissembling as well as he could, the excess of his Passion, replyed, 'Most lovely Maid, it cannot sink into my thoughts, that she whom Kings have courted, and truly deserves the greatest Potentate on Earth, will condescend to wed a Stranger, who though perhaps nobly born, yet is destitute at present of those mighty Fortunes, that your merit justly requires and abundantly deserves: Thrones and Sceptres I have none, nor can I incircle your head with a sparkling Diadem, of which you may otherwise furnish your self.'
>
> Sir Bevis expressing himself as aforesaid, and being misconstrued by the fair Josian, she said he slighted and contemned her proffered Love, and therefore sought those excuses, grew angry, or appeared seemingly so, upbraiding him with too much neglect and coldness of affection pressing her resent-

(1) Ibid., p. 21.

> ments so home, that she urged he could not, as he said, be nobly descended and prove so cruel to one that dearly loved him, and so far proceeded on that Subject, that Sir Bevis sensibly finding his honour touch'd went discontented from her Chamber; nor did she at that time further endeavour to stay him; however, soon after having notice that his discontent had created an Indisposition both of body and mind, she sent to comfort him, and in the end payed him a Visit, again unfolding to him the secrets of her heart; and there it was concluded between them, that the Princess becoming a Christian, he should marry her: but knowing her Father would not suffer her to do it upon that condition, it was further agreed, that with all her Jewils and Treasure they should secretly depart for England ... (1)

It is true that a similar incident occurs in the metrical versions,(2) but there are important differences. The tone is different; Bevis's affection for Josian is stressed much more in the prose version (in the metrical versions he is a very reluctant lover); and the plan to elope and depart secretly for England seems to be a new idea introduced by the author of the prose version.

The love-affair of Sir Guy (not Sir Miles as in the metrical version) and King Edgar's daughter is developed even more fully in the prose version under re-

(1) Ibid., pp. 22-3.

(2) See, for example, MS. M, ll. 857-960.

view. The metrical versions deal with it in a very matter-of-fact way:

> Bevis is to London come, the wedding was presently begun:
> The Lady to the Church was led, and to Sir Miles she was wed. (1)

In the prose version the king's daughter becomes 'the beautiful Lyndamira', and once again we are given a lengthy account of the joys and sufferings that true lovers experience:

> ... the beautiful Lyndamira Daughter to the King, took such notice of his manly form, proportion of Body and rare acchievements beyond, in a manner, the strength of man, that she fell desperately in love with him, of which the young Knight being ignorant, and the Princess through excess of Modesty, not willing to discover it to any, she fell sick and in a languishing condition, whereat the King being greatly grieved, sent for his Physicians, from all parts of the Land to cure her Malady, who soon found it proceeded from a cause beyond the power of their Art; and enformed the King, that distemper of the fair Princess, proceeded from love ... who pressed her in all Fatherly mildness to let him know the object that occasioned it, which at first she began with modesty to refuse, or rather excuse, but the King being earnest herein, she amidst sighs, blushes and much confusion, told him it was Sir Guy.
>
> The King knowing the cause of his fair

(1) 1662 edn., p. 64, ll. 2143-4.

> Lyndamira's sickness, he made it his business to apply the cure, and thereupon sent for Sir Guy, and in plain terms told him what happiness was designed him, and how much his Daughter suffered for his sake: The young Knight, though inwardly overjoyed at this news, being no less in love than she, strove at first to excuse it, alleadging he was unworthy of so great an honour, yet in the end, submitted to be wholly disposed off at the King's pleasure, who caused them to be married to their great joy, and mutual satisfaction, the wedding being kept with much pomp and splendor, and graced with a concourse of the Nobility, where many noble feats of Arms were done ... (1)

The additional love story of Sir Miles and the Sultan's daughter (who is given the unlikely name of Rosalinda) is told in a similar manner:

> ... in the night of this Action it so happened, that the fair and beautiful Rosalinda Princess of Babylon, and only Daughter to the Soldian, dreamed she saw Sir Miles, or the Imagined Idea of that Heroick young Knight by her bed-side, with whose features she was so wonderfully taken, as also with his manly proportion and Martial looks, that she could not forbear to fix her Eyes upon him, and demand what his request or desire was, or what brought him thither, who returned for answer, that her beauty alone had charmed him, and that although at present he was beset with danger, yet no fear possessed him ... but the fear of her frowns alone could shake his soul, upon which seeming to disapear with a sigh and much discontent she awaked and

(1) 1689 edn., pp. 60-1.

> was so affected with the Vision ... that she could not blot it out of her memory ... when standing one day to behold the Assault of the Tower, and perceiving a gallant Youth armed at all points with a Cask of Gold adorned with a Plume of crimson Feathers on his Head, she verely conceited him to be the same she had seen in the Vision, and from that time, used her endeavours with her Father to offer honourable conditions to those that were besieged in the Tower ... (1)

She contrives a meeting with Sir Miles:

> ... Love prompting her on, she adventured with two Knights, whom her Beauty had made her Creatures, and two of her Maids of Honour, under the favour of the night, to find admittance into the Tower, so powerful is Love, that it takes the Diadems from Queens, and with some difficulty obtained it; when being brought to Sir Miles, and she perceiving him to be the very same her fancy had represented, she stood in a manner transported, which the courteous Knight perceiving, and seeing so excellent a beauty before him, fell at her feet, and with profound reverence kissed her fair hand, who raising him said, 'Ah my Lord, why do you shew this respect to your Captive, who though a Princess is nevertheless constrained (O pardon my modesty, for this freedome, contrary to the rules of our Sex,) to beg a favour, I hope, is in your power to give, and look not upon it, as the effects of my presumption, but the effects of Love, and it is your Love I ask, and for which I have not only undertaken this difficulty, but put myself into the power of my Fathers Enemy, hazarding what ever the World may construe of my reputation.' (2)

(1) Ibid., p. 68.

(2) Ibid., pp. 68-9.

The emphasis on love shown in these passages alters the whole tone of the romance; it seems to have come under the influence of the seventeenth-century French romances and is now more suited to gentle female readers, whom perhaps the author had partly in mind when he retold the story. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a great increase in the number of people, especially in the lower middle class, who could read and were interested in reading, and amongst these, women in particular were influencing both the content and style of the works of many writers. In a sense, the story as retold by the author of this first prose edition has become more of a romance than it ever was in mediaeval times.

However, in spite of this change of tone, it is still a sound, moral story, and Sir Bevis himself is, without doubt, still the noble hero, the Christian warrior, and the champion of England. His oration to his men before the battle with the Sultan's army led by Amphiron (an oration which is not to be found in the metrical versions) is in the true spirit of this role:

> ... Sir Bevis nothing daunted, incouraged his Souldiers with this short Oration: 'You see, Fellow Souldier,' said he, 'and what is yet more glorious, Fellow Christians, that this

> numerous Hoast of Infidels, that defy the blessed name of our Lord, and whose Armies we have so often bafled and defeated, are come up against us to destroy us, and take away the Land we so quietly possess, and which by right of war and heritage is our own; wherefore be valiant for the truth, and let us this day so well play the men, in shewing forth our utmost prowess, that hereafter our names may become so terrible to them, that they may rather implore our Friendship, and become our Tributaries, than dare to arm against us, and as for my part, my fear is so little, that I doubt not, but this day we shall so deal, that few of them shall escape our hands.' (1)

Further examples of expansion in the prose version may be found in the two letters which appear in the text. The first one is the letter sent by King Ermin to Bradamound, giving instructions for Bevis to be put to death. The letter takes up twelve lines of the prose edition (2) and is an expansion of the simple statement in the metrical version that a message was sent. The second letter is the one sent by Rosalinda to her father, a letter which forms part of the additional material supplied by the author of the prose edition:

> Most Mighty Soldian, Emperor of Babylon, and my honoured Father, How but with Blushes and Confusion, can your disobedient Daughter,

(1) Ibid., p. 64.

(2) Ibid., p. 27.

> frame her self to write unto you, who in a time of danger, has delivered her self into the hands of your Enemies; But Dread Sir, when you shall know that what I have done, proceeded from an extraordinary Affection, a Love surpassing the bounds of Reason, and even of Duty it self: I hope Dread Sir, You will take compassion upon a distressed Maid, involved in many afflictions, and out of the abundance of tenderness and fatherly compassion, pass over this one disobedience in her, who has made it her study to obey and Reverence you, and still is ready to sacrifice her life to your displeasure, to expiate so great an offence, but must lowly beg pardon, if she cannot forgoe the powerful Affection, even in death, which has chained her to so generous an Enemy.
>
> Dread Sir,
> Your afflicted Daughter
> Rosalinda (1)

Upon the death of Bevis and Josian the metrical versions relate how their son had a chapel built, in which they were entombed together:

> Sir Guy did ordain and make, for Bevis and Iosians sake,
> A place of Religion and price, to sing for Iosian and Bevis;
> And tombed them together there, King and Queen as they were;
> Jesu Christ in Trinity, on their soals have mercy. (2)

Only the prose version states that they were buried in

(1) Ibid., p. 72.

(2) 1662 edn., p. 64, ll. 2162-5.

Southampton and supplies the epitaph:

> ... when falling sick with his Queen, he called his Sons before him, and having established them in the possession of those Kingdoms he had gained, he enjoyned them on his blessing to carry his, and his Queens Body, when they should happen to die, to Southampton, and there inter them in one Tomb, which was accordingly observed, with great Solemnity and Magnificence, their Epitaph being this:
>
> THE EPITAPH.
>
> Valour and beauty in this Marble lies,
> The valiant, fair, the chast, the good, the wise;
> The matchless Bevis and his Queen lye here,
> Whose worthy Fame the World has every where. (1)

This 1689 prose edition of Bevis is an interesting landmark in the development of the story, and the author's own 'Epistle to the Reader' best sums up what he considers to be the value and appeal of the story in the late seventeenth century:

> Courteous Reader,
>
> I Here present you with the pleasant History of the Famous and Renowned Knight, Sir Bevis of Southampton, a Man for his Virtue and Valour, Highly esteemed throughout the world; In whose many Actions and glorious Achievements, you will find things that may reasonably surmout [sic] an ordinary credit, how-

(1) 1689 edn., pp. 77-8.

ever in perusing them, you may plainly perceive the difference between Elder times and these we live in, which are too much divolved into effeminacy, and please your self in consulting the many rare Adventures of such, as gave themselves up to the practice of Arms and Love, which being mingled in their many excellencies, appear as beautiful and gay as a bed of Roses and Lillies, in their blushing Glory and innocent Candure, and as the noble Enterprizes of others have stirred up the Spirits of such as read them, to an illustrous imitation of what is truly great, and held in the highest esteem: So past all peradventure, what is here laid down, will not come behind the most exaulted Actions of Heroes, set forth to the best advantage, either in Love or Arms, those two Excellencies that adorn mankind; for here you will find our Champion, though early crushed by the adverse hand of Fortune, making his way to Glory, before he could aspire to Manhood, cutting it by Dint of Valour and Heroick Conduct from a dejected state by degrees, till he mounts to the highest pinacle of Honour, in rescuing the distressed, destroying Monsters and Tyrants, gaining Kingdoms, and converting Infidels to the Christian Faith, obleiging by his Affability and excellent parts Queens and Princesses, to lay their Diadems and Grandure at his feet, and doing such things as have amazed Mankind. Therefore for the honour of our Country, of which he has so well deserved, let his Memory live in the thoughts of every true English Man, and be to them a pattern of Heroick Virtue, that by imitating him, they may raise the very name of the British Empire, as formerly it was, to be the Terror of the World, which is the wish,

Reader,
Of your most
Humble Servant
S.J. (1)

(1) Ibid., The Epistle to the Reader.

This prose version of Bevis was followed by others. Some of these were in the form of short chap-book versions such as The Gallant History of the Life and Death of that most Noble Knight, Sir Bevis of Southampton, 'wherein is contained much Variety of Pleasant and Delightful Reading'.(1) These little twenty-three or twenty-four page booklets, often badly printed, with poor illustrations, were very popular at the beginning of the eighteenth century and mark another significant development in the vogue of Bevis, since they soon became the favourite books of children — a development which is dealt with more fully in Chapter V.

The most interesting of the longer prose versions that followed the 1689 edition is one printed and published in Southampton by T. Baker almost a century later in 1775. The title-page reads as follows:

> The History of the Famous and Extraordinary Sir Bevis of Southampton.
> Together with some Account of Ascapart.
> Carefully revised, from a very ancient Copy, in Black Letter.

(1) 1690(?). Printed by A.M. for J. Deacon, at the Angel in Guilt-spur Street without Newgate. B.M. 837. e. 4. B.M. also has editions dated 1700(?), 837. e. 3; 1700(?), 12431. d. 21; 1750, 1079. i. 13(8).

There is a copy in the British Museum[1] and also in the Cope Collection of Southampton University Library.[2] The entry in the catalogue to the latter states that the book is a 'reprint of the London edition of 1689', but, though generally true, the statement is misleading, since there are interesting differences between the two editions.

The 'Advertisement to the Reader' rather surprisingly claims that the story of Bevis was not very well known (in Southampton?) at the time of this publication:

> As the great Achievements and noble Actions of this famous Champion were equal, if not superior, to those of any Hero of Antiquity, and very little known, it is therefore presumed that this History will not be an unwelcome Offering to the Public, and particularly to the Inhabitants of the Town and Environs of his native Place, Southampton.

The text occupies pages 5 - 103 and there are no illustrations. There is some confusion over chapter headings; the final chapter is numbered Chapt. XVIII, but there are two consecutive chapters headed Chapt.

(1) B.M. 12431. d. 33.

(2) SOU 81. Cope Collection.

XV, and there is no Chapt. XVI or XVII.

As one might expect, there are minor but interesting changes in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and lexis. Thus 'alledging' (p.83), 'lie' (p.103), 'ancient' (p.5), 'achievements' (p.5), 'laurels' (p.6), 'cheering' (p.12), 'cries' (p.27), 'forests' (p.27), 'wondering' (p.27), 'beautiful' (p.17) appear in place of the following spellings in the 1689 edition: 'alleadging' (p.61), 'lye' (p.78), 'antient' (p.5), 'Atchievements' (p.5), 'lawrels' (p.5), 'chearing' (p.10), 'cryes' (p.21), 'forrests' (p.21), 'wondring' (p.21), 'beautifull' (p.15). Fewer nouns have an initial capital letter, pronouns are occasionally dispensed with, and there are other minor changes such as the omission of 'verely' and the replacement of 'even' by 'and'. The expression 'at which he for some time bogled'[1] is replaced by the less effective 'at which he for some time denied'.[2] However, it is in the story itself that the most significant changes are to be observed. Bevis's oration to his men[3] is omitted,

(1) See earlier in this study, p. 90.

(2) 1775 edn., p. 100.

(3) See earlier, pp. 107-8.

and the final battle scenes are much less detailed. In contrast, the love element is given further emphasis and development. For example, Rosalinda's letter to her father the Sultan is extended; instead of concluding at 'to so generous an enemy' as in the 1689 edition,(1) it continues in the following manner:

> ... who wishes nothing more than your safety and happiness; therefore, dearest Father, if the tears or entreaties of your afflicted daughter may find any place in your breast, regard your own safety, and the life and honour of her who, but in the case of love, could not have been guilty of an act of disobedience, and hearken to the offer of peace that will shortly be proposed to you. In hopes this letter may work upon you in some measure to mitigate your displeasure, and dispose you to embrace, as friends, those you now hold your enemies, I remain,
>
> Dread Sir,
> Your afflicted Daughter,
> ROSALINDA. (2)

The greatest development is to be found in the account of the earlier love-affair between Lyndamira and Sir Guy. The author of the 1689 edition had already considerably developed and expanded the meagre

(1) See earlier in this study, pp. 108-9.

(2) 1775 edn., pp. 96-7.

account of this in the metrical versions,[1] but the 1775 edition carries the process much further. In the 1689 edition the love story is concluded in the following manner:

> The young Knight, though inwardly overjoyed at this news, being no less in love than she, strove at first to excuse it, alleadging he was unworthy of so great an honour, yet in the end, submitted to be wholly disposed off at the King's pleasure, who caused them to be married to their great joy, and mutual satisfaction, the wedding being kept with much pomp and splendor, and graced with a concourse of the Nobility, where many noble feats of Arms were done ... (2)

This is expanded in the 1775 edition to include an additional scene between the two lovers:

> ... the young knight, though inwardly overjoyed at this news, being no less in love than she, strove at first to excuse it, alledging he was unworthy of so great an honor profered him; but so far, with deference to his Majesty, he begged a private audience of the princess prior to the incumbent duty he owed Sir Bevis, his father, without whose advice and approbation, he was determined never to change his condition in life. The which the king very much approved of, and immediately conducted him to the princess, who was then alone in her chamber. At the approach of the king and Sir Guy, she found it impossible to conceal

(1) See earlier, pp. 103-5.

(2) 1689 edn., p. 61.

her perturbation; however, having summoned her utmost fortitude, she received the young knight with unfeigned welcome. The king then left them together, in compliance with Sir Guy's request, as above mentioned. Sir Guy then began to declare the real sentiments of his heart, protesting, that, feeling he was now encouraged by the king, his master, to solicit his daughter in marriage, a circumstance which he had long wished for, he begged that she would excuse his brief manner of expressing himself her sincere admirer, and to such degree, that nothing less than an assurance of her affection for life could crown his happiness; and was proceeding to confirm the same on his knees, had not the princess most complaisantly prevented him, by raising him, with, 'No, Sir Guy, It is my duty to stoop to you, for the consolation you have now administered. With you I could travel to any clime, and deem even hardships an ease. To you only can I bestow a heart you have already insensibly conquered.' After mutual caresses, they took leave of each other, he recommending it to her to fix upon the day for their nuptials. Sir Guy then went to inform his father, Sir Bevis, of what had happened, who heard it with great pleasure, as it was a means of promoting his son's happiness, and establishing himself in the king's good graces. (1)

(1) 1775 edn., pp. 83-5.

C H A P T E R V

The Final Stage: The Scholar and the Child

The century which saw the further development of the Bevis story into a sentimental romance, appealing perhaps largely to a female and lower middle-class reading public, also saw the beginning of developments in two other important directions. On the one hand, it began to be regarded more and more as a story suitable for the amusement and entertainment of children; on the other hand, it began more and more to attract the interest of scholars. It is these two lines of development that lead us right up to the present day, when the main interest in the story of Bevis is shared by children and scholars.

It is well known that during the course of the eighteenth century there developed increased interest in mediaeval literature, and in ballads and romances in particular. This revival of interest is very noticeable in the works of a group of critics, antiquaries, poets, and editors who came into prominence during the second half of the century. It is in their works that the further development of interest in romances such as

Bevis can readily be traced.

These scholars, ill-equipped and ill-informed in the light of modern knowledge, approached the romances with mixed motives and feelings, but they were all 'animated not simply by a love of what was old, but by a delight in what for them was new'.(1) They enjoyed them as romantic stories in which the old poets had given free rein to their imaginations; at the same time they tended to regard them as historical and antiquarian documents reflecting the true customs and habits of mediaeval times, failing to realize the idealized nature of much of the material. They were valued for their role in literary history and the light they shed on the works of later poets such as Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton (and were quoted in commentaries on the texts of these writers). The language of the romances invited investigation because of its strangeness; the approach was often amateurish, but the foundations of Middle English linguistic scholarship were being laid. Furthermore, partly no doubt because some of the scholars were themselves poets, there was the feeling that these romances might

(1) A. Johnston, Enchanted Ground (London, 1964), p. 4.

help to revivify contemporary poetry. Arguments about the ultimate origins of the mediaeval romances were frequent.

One of the first and most important of the eighteenth-century studies of the mediaeval metrical romances was Thomas Percy's essay 'On The Ancient Metrical Romances', which appeared in the third volume of his Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, first published in 1765. This is a collection of ballads, songs, and metrical romances derived partly from the Percy Folio, a seventeenth-century manuscript which was discovered and rescued by Percy. The collection is interspersed with comments and introductions by the editor.

The stories of Guy and Bevis were obviously well known to Percy. The collection contains a shortened, ballad version of Guy called The Legend of Sir Guy, which, as Percy points out:

> ... contains a short summary of the exploits of this famous champion, as recorded in the old story-books, and is commonly entitled, 'A pleasant song, of the valiant deeds of chivalry atchieved by that noble knight sir Guy of Warwick, who, for the love of fair Phelis, became a hermit, and dyed in a cave

> of craggy rocks, a mile distant from Warwick.' (1)

He refers to an imperfect copy in black letter (Copland's edition) which 'is still preserved among Mr. Garrick's collection of old plays', but in his account of the origins of the story, perhaps misled by Puttenham, he seems to confuse the romance with the ballad version:

> The original whence all these stories are extracted, is a very ancient romance in old English verse, which is quoted by Chaucer as a celebrated piece even in his time ... and was usually sung to the harp at Christmas dinners and brideales, as we learn from Puttenham's Art of Poetry, 4to. 1589. (2)

He refers more specifically to the role of the minstrels when speaking of Bevis and Guy in his introductory remarks on the metrical romances:

> The stories of Guy and Bevis, with some others, were probably the invention of English Minstrels. (3)

He adds a footnote on the French versions:

(1) Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. T. Percy, New Edition in 3 Vols., London. Printed for Henry Washbourne. 1844. Vol. III, p. 143.

(2) Ibid., p. 144.

(3) Ibid., p. 14.

> What now pass for the French originals were probably only amplifications, or enlargements of the old English story. (1)

The collection contains no version of the story of Sir Bevis though there are several references to it. He refers to three of the extant manuscripts and to printed editions, and also quotes from the romance. He makes critical comments and he appears to have been the first critic to draw attention to Bevis as the source of Edgar's lines in King Lear:

> That distich which Shakespeare puts in the mouth of his madman in 'King Lear', act iii, sc. 4,
>
> Mice and rats and such small deere
> Have been Tom's food for seven long yeare,
>
> has excited the attention of the critics ... But the ancient reading is established by the old romance of 'Sir Bevis', which Shakespeare had doubtless often heard sung to the harp. This distich is part of a description there given of the hardships suffered by Bevis, when confined for seven years in a dungeon:
>
> Rattes and myse and such small dere
> Was his meate that seven yere. (2)

(1) Ibid., p. 14.

(2) Ibid., p. 19. The Arden edition of King Lear (ed. K. Muir) quotes (after Capell) from the MS. C text as edited by Kölbing (to fill the gap in MS. A) - a text not used as a basis for the early printed editions and the lines consequently bear less resemblance.

In his introduction to the Birth of St. George[1] he claims that the incidents in this poem and in the ballad of St. George and the Dragon are chiefly taken from 'the old story-book of the Seven Champions of Christendome; which though now the plaything of children, was once in high repute'.[2] He then points out that the Seven Champions was itself indebted to the metrical romances of former ages, and to Bevis in particular:

> At least the story of St. George and the fair Sabra is taken almost verbatim from the old poetical legend of Syr Bevis of Hampton. (3)

According to Percy, the dragon in Bevis was the origin of that in the Seven Champions. In a final comment on Sir Bevis himself as a historical figure, Percy refers to Selden:

> The learned Selden tells us, that about the time of the Norman invasion was Bevis famous with the title of Earl of Southampton, whose residence was at Duncton in Wiltshire; but he observes, that the monkish enlargements of

(1) As Ritson pointed out, this was Percy's own composition, presumably specially composed in order to display his discovery of the indebtedness of the Seven Champions to Bevis.

(2) Percy, op. cit., III, p. 265.

(3) Ibid., pp. 266-7.

the story have made his very existence doubted. See notes on Poly-Olbion, song iii. (1)

Unfortunately Percy, though scholarly and thorough in some respects, failed to present accurate, original texts. He altered, rewrote, and sometimes composed the poems himself. There is, however, no doubt about his keen interest in the metrical romances. To supplement the section on romances in his Reliques, he hoped to produce later a collection of romances, and altogether collected texts of twenty-six of the metrical romances.(2) Amongst these was Bevis, the text of which he transcribed from Garrick's collection of early printed books. He also borrowed from Farmer a volume of texts belonging to Lincoln Cathedral Library and collated (amongst others) the text of Bevis. He had a brief glance at the Auchinleck MS. in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh and later had an account of its contents sent to him. He discovered the existence in Cambridge University Library of MS. Ff II, 38, which contains another version of Bevis as well as other romances.

(1) Ibid., p. 268.

(2) Transcripts were sold by Sotheby's in 1884. See PMLA, XLIX (1934).

Thomas Warton had already in 1754 (1) published his Observations on the 'Faerie Queene', which showed a similar interest in mediaeval romance. As Clarissa Rinaker commented some years ago:

> Warton not only perceived the necessity of the historical method of studying the older poets, but he had acquired what few of his contemporaries had attained, sufficient knowledge of the earlier English literature to undertake such a study of Spenser. (2)

He was one of the earliest critics to point out not only that Spenser was indebted to the mediaeval metrical romances, but also that the romances were well known in Elizabethan England and influenced other writers as well. It was Warton who first drew attention to Bevis as the possible source of the incident of the well of marvellous healing power. (3)

In 1774 there appeared the first section of Warton's History of English Poetry (1774-81). The following extract gives an interesting indication of the attitude of these eighteenth-century scholars and the

(1) Revised in 1762.

(2) C. Rinaker, 'Thomas Warton and Literary Criticism', PMLA, New Series XXIII (1915), p. 94.

(3) See earlier, p. 55.

appeal that the metrical romances had for them:

> It is not to be expected that this work should be a general repository of our ancient poetry. I cannot however help observing, that English literature and English poetry suffer, while so many pieces of this kind [Ipomedon, etc.] still remain concealed and forgotten in our MSS. libraries. They contain in common with the prose romances, to most of which indeed they gave rise, amusing images of ancient customs and institutions, not elsewhere to be found, or at least not otherwise so strikingly delineated; and they preserve pure and unmixed, those fables of chivalry which formed the taste and awakened the imagination of our elder English classics. The antiquaries of former times overlooked or rejected these valuable remains, which they despised as false and frivolous; and employed their industry in reviving obscure fragments of uninstructive morality or uninteresting history. But in the present age we are beginning to make ample amends; in which the curiosity of the antiquarian is connected with taste and genius, and his researches tend to display the progress of human manners, and to illustrate the history of society. (1)

It is thus not merely as an antiquarian that Warton approaches the romances; he is aware of their literary qualities, the way in which 'images' are 'so strikingly delineated', their power to rouse the imagination, and the part they have played in helping to form the taste of previous generations.

(1) T. Warton, The History of English Poetry. A full Reprint — Text and Notes — of Edition, London 1778 & 1781. London, Ward, Lock and Tyler. pp. 141-2.

Whilst still assigning a role to the minstrels, Warton draws attention to the part that may have been played by the monks:

> From proofs here given we may fairly conclude, that the monks often wrote for the minstrels: and ... it is reasonable to suppose that many of our ancient tales in verse containing fictitious adventures, were written, although not invented, in the religious houses ... The libraries of the monasteries were full of romances. 'Bevis of Southampton', in French, was in the library of the abbey of Leicester. (1)

Warton has one paragraph dealing with Bevis in his survey of metrical romances in Section III, but does not include it amongst the romances (Guy, La Mort Arthur, etc.) of which he makes a more detailed examination in Sections IV and V. Quoting three lines from the poem in illustration of the poet's references to the French original, he supplies information about some of the French versions of the story and refers to Chaucer's mention of Bevis, along with other famous romances, 'but whether in French or English is uncertain'. (2)

Of Bevis himself, deriving his information, like

(1) Ibid., pp. 61-2.

(2) Ibid., p. 102.

Bishop Percy before him, largely from Selden's 'Illustrations', he has the following to say:

> Bevis was a Saxon chieftain, who seems to have extended his dominion along the southern coasts of England, which he is said to have defended against Norman invaders. He lived at Downton in Wiltshire. Near Southampton is an artificial hill called 'Bevis Mount', on which was probably a fortress. It is pretended that he was earl of Southampton. His sword is shewn in Arundel castle. This piece was evidently written after the crusades; as Bevis is knighted by the king of Armenia, and is one of the generals at the siege of Damascus. (1)

He also draws attention to the arras at Richmond.(2)

In the meantime, in 1762 Richard Hurd had produced his Letters on Chivalry and Romance. Possibly influenced by Warton, he was not as good a scholar, but his work is a further example of the scholarly and antiquarian interest then being shown in mediaeval romances. Other scholars and critics, some more scholarly and thorough, others less imaginative, than Percy and Warton, continued to produce studies, extracts, and editions of the metrical romances.

(1) Warton, op. cit., pp. 102-3.

(2) See earlier in this study, pp. 12-13.

In 1802 Ritson published his Ancient English Metrical Romances in three volumes.[1] He was more scholarly and critical and less romantic in his approach to the metrical romances than Warton, and his editions have been found useful by later scholars. Bevis is not included in the collection, but he obviously knew the romance and elsewhere compared the early printed texts of Bevis and Guy with the manuscript versions in order to show that Warton was wrong in his conjecture that the texts had been modernized by the printers.[2] He was also critical of Camden's claim that Bevis was a historical Saxon chieftain and violently attacked Warton for repeating the error, though, as already pointed out, Warton appears to have derived his information from Selden's notes on the Poly-Olbion:

> Camden with singular puerility, says that, at the coming of the Normans, one Bogo, or Beavose, a Saxon, had this title (of Earl of Winchester); who, in the battle of Cardiff in Wales, fought against the Normans. For this, however, in a way too usual with him, he cites no authority; nor does any ancient or veracious historian mention either Bogo, Beavose, or the

(1) J. Ritson, Ancient English Metrical Romances, 3 vols. (London, 1802).

(2) J. Ritson, Observations on Warton's History of English Poetry (1782), p. 35.

battle of Cardiff. (1)

Ellis's Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances appeared in 1805 and was revised by Halliday in 1848.(2) Ellis's aims were to avoid romances already collected by Ritson and to make available to the general reader, rather than to the scholar, a source-book of mediaeval romances. He provided prose abstracts, together with such passages of the originals (in modern orthography) as appeared to him worth preserving, 'either from their poetical merit, — from their representing correct pictures of antient manners, — or from their being characteristic of the author's feelings, or those of the nation'.(3) He is more entertaining than his predecessors, possibly because he had less scholarly respect for the romances and had a sense of humour, which reveals itself in his abstracts. There are abstracts of twenty romances, including Bevis. The work did not achieve the wide popularity that had been hoped for, but there was a second edition publish-

(1) J. Ritson, Dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy, p. xciii. See G. Ellis, Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, New Edition, Revised by J. C. Halliwell (London, 1848), p. 239.

(2) See note (1) above.

(3) Specimens of Romances, i. p. iv.

ed in 1811.

The abstract of Bevis, which includes just over 450 lines of quotations from the text, is to be found on pages 239-281. He was indebted to Scott (who sent him transcripts from the Auchinleck MS.) and Douce for the supply of texts. He was aware of the existence of four manuscript copies of the romance and several printed editions, including those of Pynson (of which Douce had a copy) and Copland.(1) In his introduction he declares that the English version of Bevis is a translation from the Anglo-Norman. His abstract was taken mainly from the Caius College MS. (MS. E), omissions in which were generally made good from Pynson's printed copy. The following extract is typical of his entertaining treatment of the original:

> The young envoy, without considering that sealed credentials were much more contrary to usage than the precautions which he had desired to adopt took the oath without hesitation, and departed, full of confidence, on his disastrous mission.
>
> Bevis was seldom provident. Much of his journey lay through an uninhabited country, yet had he taken no measures for his subsistence; so that, after travelling three days with all the speed that his ambling hackney could exert,

(1) See Specimens of Romances, p. 239.

> he found himself very sleepy and hungry. He then lay down to rest during a few hours, and, awaking with a keener appetite than before, pursued his way through the forest, where he had the good fortune to discover a palmer seated at his dinner, which consisted of a plentiful store of good bread and wine, together with the unusual luxury of three baked curlews. The pilgrim, perceiving that the stranger was a knight, vailed his bonnet to him, and respectfully entreated him to share his humble repast ... (1)

The references to Bevis's trust in 'sealed credentials' and his improvidence on his journeys are typical of Ellis's facetious attitude to some of the ideals and extravagances of the mediaeval romances.(2)

Several other editions of metrical romances appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century,(3) showing the continued interest in this field, but they made no significant contribution to the study of Bevis. However, it is interesting to note that in 1832 Sir

(1) Ibid., p. 253.

(2) Cf. Scott's remark in Edinburgh Review, vii (1806), p. 412: '... it looks as if the jest were levelled at once against the reader, the editor, and the original minstrel'.

(3) See, for example: H. Weber, Metrical Romances (Edinburgh, 1820); C. H. Hartshorne, Ancient Metrical Tales (London, 1829); J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, The Thornton Romances, Camden Society (London, 1844).

Walter Scott had the Naples manuscript (MS. N) transcribed by 'a man named Sticchini, who, without understanding a word of English, copied the whole in a character as nearly as possible the fac-simile of the original'. As a result, Halliwell's attention was drawn to the Naples manuscript, and he himself had 180 lines of the text of Bevis printed, with, according to Kölbing, 'a good many inaccuracies'.(1)

The next important landmark in the history of the story of Bevis is Turnbull's edition of Sir Beves of Hamtoun, edited from the Auchinleck MS. in 1838.(2) Unfortunately Turnbull was not a scholarly editor; the text appears to have been carelessly transcribed,(3) and he limited his edition to the text of the Auchinleck MS.. He did not fill the gap in the middle of the text with readings from other manuscripts, but it is worthy of note that in his 'Preliminary Remarks'(4)

(1) See Kölbing, EETS edn., p. viii.

(2) The full title is: 'Sir Beves of Hamtoun: A Metrical Romance. Now first edited from the Auchinleck MS. Printed at Edinburgh: MDCCCXXXVIII. Presented to the Maitland Club by William B.D.D. Turnbull'. Copies were limited — one for each of the 70 members of the Club — but facsimiles exist.

(3) See Kölbing, EETS edn., p. ix, for a list of errors.

(4) Turnbull's edn., p. xvii.

he made good the defect (the incident of Josian and the lions) with the relevant passage from the prose edition of 1689, from which he also reproduced in full the Editor's Preface, suggesting that it was still appropriate.(1) This is one of the few references by scholars to the prose editions that were in existence. Like Percy, Warton, and Ritson, he was interested in the historicity of Bevis, but realized that there was little genuine historical evidence. In order to save time and spare controversy, he confines himself to the following statement from Fuller's History of the Worthies of England, his own final comment on the matter being, 'So far plain History. The Fiction will probably prove more attractive':

> Beavois, an English-man, was Earle of South-Hampton, in the time of the Conqueror; and, being unable to comport with his oppression, banded against him, with the fragments of the English-men, the strength of Hastings the Dane, and all the assistance the Welch could afford; in whose country a battel was fought near Cardiffe, against the Normans, anno Domini 1070, wherein Three Nations were conquered by One. Beavois being worsted (Success depends not on Valour), fled to Carlile (a long step from Cardiffe): and afterwards no mention what became of him.
>
> This is that Beavois whom the monks cried

(1) Turnbull's edn., pp. xvii ff..

> up to be such a man, that since it hath been questioned whether ever such a man, I mean, whether ever his person was in rerum natura; so ingenious those are, who, in the reports of any man's performance, exceed the bounds of probability.
>
> All I will add is this, that the sword preserved and shewed to be Beavoises in Arundel-Castle, is lesser (perchance worn with age) than that of King Edward the Third, kept in Westminster-church. (1)

Turnbull considers it worthy of note that the romance 'affords the only proof — but a satisfactory one — of the existence of female itinerant minstrels in the middle ages'.(2) Unfortunately he fails to add what the proof is.

With the formation of the Early English Text Society in 1864, the way was prepared for further studies of mediaeval romances, which included Kölbing's edition of Sir Beues of Hamtoun (1885-94), the first (and still the only) scholarly edition of the metrical romance, complete with introduction, textual notes, and glossary. It has provided the indispensable foundation for later studies of the romance and has already been referred to on numerous occasions in this study.

(1) Ibid., pp. xi-xii. Cf. Selden's note.

(2) Ibid., p. xiv.

The scholarly interest in the metrical versions of the story of Bevis led to further prose versions; these were not reprints of the older prose versions, but new editions derived afresh from the metrical Bevis. For example, in 1872 there was published in Southampton The Romance of Sir Bevis of Hamtoun, which, according to the title-page, was 'newly done into English prose from the metrical version, the ms. of which was preserved by lord Auchinleck ... by Eustace Hinton Jones'. The author made use of Turnbull's edition, even to the extent of repeating the extract from Fuller, reproducing the Editor's Preface from the 1689 edition, and borrowing, like Turnbull, the episode of Josian and the lions from this earlier prose version. The story is told in eighty-four pages (octavo) and is broken up into thirty rather short chapters. The aims of the author are set out in the Introduction:

> I have freely rendered the following Romance of Sir Bevis from the verbatim reprint of the Auchinleck Manuscript of the Metrical Romance in 4,440 lines, privately issued by the Maitland Club in 1838 ... In the version here presented I have sought to bring the Romance of Sir Bevis within reach of the average reader without mutilation; but in order not to destroy its tone and feeling I have naturally adopted a style of language in accordance with

> that of the old prose versions of similar romances. (1)

There is nothing very distinctive about this prose version; it lacks life, and there is an archaic flavour about the vocabulary, spelling, and grammar. This is a typical passage:

> There, men told the Bischop of his coming, and Bevis went to greet the holy man. Right glad he was, I wis, since that same Bischop welcomed him as dearly as a son: for it was Saber, a Florentine, cousin to Saber in the Isle of Wight. That Bischop quotha — Never was I gladder since I lived than now, to meet thee Bevis, whom I long gave up for lost. Welcome, dear cousin — But prithee tell me, who is this lovely lady? (2)

Thus, though not singled out for special attention as in earlier centuries, Bevis was studied as a result of the renewed interest taken by scholars and critics in mediaeval metrical romances from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards. Topics dealt with in the earlier part of this study and the bibliographies given in the revised edition of Mrs. Hibbard Loomis's Mediaeval Romances in England (3) and in the various

(1) The Romance of Sir Bevis of Hamtoun (Southampton, c.1872), p. ii. There is a copy in the Cope Collection of Southampton University Library, SOU 81. Bodl. gives the date c.1860.

(2) Ibid., pp. 40-1. (3) Op. cit., pp. 125-6 & 347.

supplements of A Manual of the Writings in Middle English[1] give some indication of the work carried out on the story of Bevis in more recent years.

Bishop Percy, in drawing attention to the indebtedness of the Seven Champions of Christendome to Bevis,[2] refers to the former as 'the old story-book ... which though now the plaything of children, was once in high repute'. He comments in a similar manner on Guy:

> The history of Sir Guy, though now very properly resigned to children, was once admired by all readers of wit and taste: for taste and wit had once their childhood. (3)

He makes no similar comment on Bevis, but there is interesting evidence that the story of Sir Bevis, like those of other romance heroes, had for some time been 'the plaything of children' as well as of scholars. In The Tatler, No. 95, 1709, Steele gives an interesting account of Mr. Bickerstaff's visit to a friend's house, where a happy domestic atmosphere prevails.

(1) J. E. Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400 & Nine Supplements (New Haven, Conn., 1916 ff.).

(2) Reliques, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 265.

(3) Ibid., p. 144.

Mr. Bickerstaff is engaged in conversation:

> ... when on a sudden we were alarmed with the noise of a drum, and immediately entered, my little godson to give me a point of war. His mother, between laughing and chiding, would have put him out of the room; but I would not part with him so. I found, upon conversation with him, though he was a little noisy in his mirth, that the child had excellent parts, and was a great master of all the learning on the other side eight years old. I perceived him a very great historian in Aesop's fables, but he frankly declared to me his mind, that he did not believe they were true; for which reason, I found he had very much turned his studies, for about a twelve-month past, into the lives and adventures of Don Bellianis of Greece, Guy of Warwick, the Seven Champions, and other historians of that age. I could not but observe the satisfaction the father took in the forwardness of his son; and that these diversions might turn to some profit, I found the boy had made remarks, which might be of service to him during the course of his whole life. He would tell you the mismanagements of John Hickathrift, find fault with the passionate temper in Bevis of Southampton, and loved St. George for being the champion of England; and by this means, had his thoughts insensibly moulded into the notions of discretion, virtue, and honour. (1)

This is a very revealing picture of the 'learning' of a somewhat precocious eight-year-old child at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Of particular interest is his knowledge of mediaeval romance,

(1) The Tatler, ed. George A. Aitken (London, 1898), Vol. II, pp. 315-6.

including Bevis. In what form or in what way he became acquainted with the stories is not clear. There is some indication that he read and studied these works, but the father speaks earlier in the account of 'the pleasure I used to take in telling my boy stories of battles'.(1) If the young godson had done his own reading of Bevis and similar stories, it was probably in the chap-book versions, already mentioned,(2) which were common in the nurseries of the eighteenth century. To judge from the evidence, Bevis, Guy, Don Bellianis, and the Seven Champions were particularly popular.

It may have been through the childhood reading of such chap-books that Wordsworth and Crabbe first became acquainted with the romance stories. Though neither poet refers to Sir Bevis by name, both look back nostalgically to their early acquaintanceship with romances of this kind. Thus Crabbe in The Library (1781) enters once again into the world of the romances:

> Come, let us then with reverend step advance,
> And greet — the ancient worthies of ROMANCE.
>
> Hence, ye profane! I feel a former dread,

(1) Ibid., p. 313.

(2) See earlier in this study, p. 112.

A thousand visions float around my head:
Hark! hollow blasts through empty courts resound,
And shadowy forms with staring eyes stalk round;
See! moats and bridges, walls and castles rise,
Ghosts, fairies, demons, dance before our eyes;
Lo! magic verse inscribed on golden gate,
And bloody hand that beckons on to fate:-
..... and now for bloody deeds,
Black suits of armour, masks, and roaming steeds;
The giant falls; his recreant throat I seize,
And from his corslet take the massy keys:-
Dukes, lords, and knights in long procession move,
Released from bondage with my virgin love:-
She comes! she comes! in all the charms of youth,
Unequall'd love and unsuspected truth! (1)

In a similar vein, Wordsworth in The Prelude (1805) asks to be given once again the delights of childhood:

Oh! give us once again the wishing-cap
Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat
Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,
And Sabra in the forest with St. George!
The child, whose love is here, at least, doth reap
One precious gain, that he forgets himself. (2)

The chap-books have been succeeded by more recent versions of the story, retold for children, (3) but perhaps the fame of Bevis is now largely limited to the Southampton area, where in some schools he is regarded

(1) The Poetical Works of George Crabbe, ed. A. J. & R. M. Carlyle (London, 1914), pp. 31-2.

(2) The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, ed. T. Hutchinson (London, 1932), Book V, ll. 341-6, p. 670.

(3) See, for example, W. S. Durrant, Bevis of Hampton, All Time Tales (London, 1914).

as a legendary local hero, whose exploits are read, discussed, dramatized, and celebrated in various art forms. It was with this kind of reader in mind that Aylwin Sampson produced her little book entitled Sir Bevis. The Renowned Legend of Southampton.(1) The story is retold and illustrated in twenty-five pages, and the book is thus very much the modern equivalent of the old chap-book. The author concentrates on the imprisonment of Bevis in the dungeon, the episode of the lions, the adventures of Ascupart, and the final battle against Sir Murdure; the street fight in London and many other episodes are, of necessity, omitted.

It is impossible to foresee what interest there will be in Bevis in the future, but the persistence of the vogue and popularity of this mediaeval story, in its various transformations, with different classes and generations of men, women, and children, from the twelfth or thirteenth century to the second half of the present century, as shown in this study, is

(1) The Shirley Press (Southampton, 1963).

already a remarkable and extraordinary achievement. This is a romance with a history of which much greater works might well be proud.

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