

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SCIENCE;  
POPULAR TREATISES ON SCIENCE  
WRITTEN DURING THE MIDDLE  
AGES: IN ANGLO-SAXON,  
ANGLO-NORMAN, AND ENGLISH**

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**THOMAS WRIGHT**

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**POPULAR TREATISES ON SCIENCE**

**WRITTEN DURING THE**

**MIDDLE AGES.**

# Historical Society of Science.

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## POPULAR TREATISES ON SCIENCE

WRITTEN DURING THE

## MIDDLE AGES,

IN

ANGLO-SAXON, ANGLO-NORMAN, AND ENGLISH.

EDITED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS BY

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109



## P R E F A C E.

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**T**HE object of the present volume is to bring together a set of treatises on science written in a popular form, and in the vernacular tongue of the time, for the instruction of those who were unacquainted with the Latin language, at an early period of the history of learning in England. They are important documents of the history of popular science. We are wrong in supposing that our forefathers endeavoured to conceal science from the unlearned; at all times they published treatises for the uninitiated, which are curious not only as showing us the mode in which they made instruction popular, but as exhibiting the quantity which they thought necessary. The present volume forms an index to the state of general knowledge in England through upwards of five centuries. In this point of view the Anglo-Saxon treatise on Astronomy is the most curious, because it is of so remote an age as the tenth century. One of the Manuscripts ap-

pears to have belonged to a nunnery, and to have formed a part of the studies of the ladies. The *Bestiary* of Philippe de Thaun was intended primarily for the instruction of a queen.

It was my intention to include in this volume the curious work of Gautier de Metz, in French verse of the thirteenth century, entitled the *Image du Monde*; but various reasons have decided me to omit it. The *Image du Monde* is reserved to form a separate work, with copious notes instead of a translation, and will be an interesting illustration of the history of science in the Middle Ages: it was the popular text-book of general science in the age of Roger Bacon and Robert Grosseteste. In the present collection I have given nothing which was not written in England.

1. The first tract in the present volume was compiled in the tenth century, but we have no means of ascertaining its author. It has, I believe, been attributed to Alfric; and an entry in a modern hand in one of the MSS. in the British Museum states, that it is the work of Athelard of Bath, but this is an evident mistake, since Athelard lived in the twelfth century. It is, as the prologue states, a mere abridgement of Bede's treatise *De Natura Rerum*, printed in the second volume of his works (ed. Cologne, p. 3). We are justified in believing that it was once extremely popular, by the number of copies which, after so long a period, still remain. It is sometimes found complete, with the title *De Compoto*, and sometimes without the introductory part, commencing on the fourth page of the present edition, with the title *De*

*Primo Die Sæculi* \*. There are four copies of this tract among the Cottonian Manuscripts :— MSS. Cotton. Tiberius, B. V., fol. 23, r<sup>o</sup>. ; Tiberius, A. III., fol. 63, v<sup>o</sup>. ; Caligula, A. XV., fol. 140, r<sup>o</sup>. (imperfect) ; Titus, D. XXVII., fol. 30, r<sup>o</sup>. ; besides a few which are found in other collections, as one in the Public Library of the University of Cambridge. I have printed the text from MS. Cotton. Tiberius, B. V., written somewhere near the year 990, and have inserted between brackets from another MS. one or two omissions of the MS. adopted for the text †.

2. Philippe de Thaun is known as an Anglo-Norman poet through the *Essais historiques* of the Abbé de la Rue (vol. ii. p. 41), who tells us that the family took its name from the manor of Than, about three leagues from Caen in Normandy ‡. M. de la Rue was unable to collect any satisfactory information relating to the person of the poet. We learn from the prologue to his *Livre des Créatures*, that he had an uncle named Humfrey de Thaun, who was chaplain to Yhun, Yun, or Ydun (as different MSS. read the name), “and” seneschal to the king. M. de la Rue supposes this ‘Yhun’ was Hugh Bigot, seneschal of

\* In MS. Cotton. Titus, D. XXVII., the introductory part is given at the end.

† Some observations on this tract will be found in the Editor's Essay on the State of Literature and Learning among the Anglo-Saxons, pp. 86–89.

‡ The writer of his life in the *Histoire Littéraire de France*, vol. ix., conjecturing that *Philippus Taonensis* in the description of the MS. in the Catalogue of the Cottonian MSS., was an error for *Philippus Taorcensis*, has hazarded the very unauthorized supposition that his name was Philippe de Thouars.