



THE NORMAN
BARON



*Dans les moments de la vie
ou la reflexion devient plus calme*

*et plus profonde,
ou l'interet et l'avarice parlent moins haut*

*que la raison, dans les instants
de chagrin domestique, de*

*maladie, et de peril de mort,
les nobles se repentirent de*

*posseder des serfs, comme
d'une chose peu agreable a Dieu, qui*

*avait cree tous les hommes a son image.—
THIERRY, Conquete de l'Angleterre.*



In his chamber, weak and dying,
Was the Norman baron lying;
Loud, without, the tempest thundered
And the castle-turret shook,

In this fight was Death the gainer,
Spite of vassal and retainer,
And the lands his sires had plundered,
Written in the Doomsday Book.

By his bed a monk was seated,
Who in humble voice repeated
Many a prayer and pater-noster,
From the missal on his knee;

And, amid the tempest pealing,
Sounds of bells came faintly stealing,
Bells, that from the neighboring kloster
Rang for the Nativity.

In the hall, the serf and vassal
Held, that night their Christmas wassail;
Many a carol, old and saintly,
Sang the minstrels and the waits;

And so loud these Saxon gleemen
Sang to slaves the songs of freemen,
That the storm was heard but faintly,
Knocking at the castle-gates.

All the pomp of earth had vanished,
Falsehood and deceit were banished,
Reason spake more loud than passion,
And the truth wore no disguise.

Till at length the lays they chanted
Reached the chamber terror-haunted,
Where the monk, with accents holy,
Whispered at the baron's ear.

Every vassal of his banner,
Every serf born to his manor,
All those wronged and wretched creatures,
By his hand were freed again.

Tears upon his eyelids glistened,
As he paused awhile and listened,
And the dying baron slowly
Turned his weary head to hear.

And, as on the sacred missal
He recorded their dismissal,
Death relaxed his iron features,
And the monk replied, "Amen!"

"Wassail for the kingly stranger
Born and cradled in a manger!
King, like David, priest, like Aaron,
Christ is born to set us free!"

Many centuries have been numbered
Since in death the baron slumbered
By the convent's sculptured portal,
Mingling with the common dust:

And the lightning showed the sainted
Figures on the casement painted,
And exclaimed the shuddering baron,
"Miserere, Domine!"

But the good deed, through the ages
Living in historic pages,
Brighter grows and gleams immortal,
Unconsumed by moth or rust

In that hour of deep contrition
He beheld, with clearer vision,
Through all outward show and fashion,
Justice, the Avenger, rise.