

GENTILESSE, NOBLESSE, AND THEIR CONGENERS:
A SEMANTIC STUDY

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PREFATORY NOTE

The subject treated in the following pages was suggested by Professor Josephine M. Burnham. During the course of the study --- both while I was collecting notes and while I was actually writing --- she has made, with a tact and a patience for which I cannot be too grateful, invaluable suggestions and criticisms. If the paper is a worthy one much of the credit must go to her.

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INTRODUCTION

Daniel De Foe begins the first chapter of The Compleat Gentleman thus truculently:

I matter not your long Etymologies and Derivations, nor all the tedious Harangues of the Ancients or the Moderns, upon the word Gentleman; its interpretation from its jingling with the Word Generosus; whether the Patricii of Rome and the Generosi of the modern Italians were not Synonimous, or which of the two are the more significant.

It may serve in the schools for a good Thesis, and very long Dissertations may be made upon it . . .

We stop at this point, because the rest of the paragraph contains matter of less interest; we are concerned with only what has been set down, for here is some such paper as De Foe's words foreshadow, although there is a difference between the imaginary "Thesis" of De Foe and the present one. Here the writer "matters" not only "long Etymologies and Derivations" — which are necessary to a semantic study — but he has attempted at the same time to trace the development of some of the ideas associated with the words gentillesse and noblesse. This has involved a consideration of words etymologically connected with these two substantives — gentle, gentleman, genteel; noble, and the like —, and a consideration of the words, and the ideas behind the words, as they appear in other languages than English. In concrete terms:

what is the difference between French gentillesse, Middle English gentilesse, Italian gentilezza, and Latin gentilitas, the virtual source of all of them? And, the difference once established, how did the variations come about? Why, for instance, does French gentilhomme differ so remarkably in meaning from English gentleman? Why is the Latin gentilis so far in meaning from French gentil, or from English gentle? Not all these questions can be definitively answered. It is comparatively easy, with a little patience, to establish the differences in meaning; it is difficult and often hazardous to account for these differences.

A study of the ideas behind the words brings us to rather firmer ground. Yet, here again, there is difficulty; the words were --- and are --- widely used under many differing circumstances. They are prominent in the literature of chivalry, prominent in a discussion of English social history -- "gentles", "nobles", "villeins" ---, prominent in any study of English manners and social life --- "gentry", "gentleman", "genteel" ---, but most of all, prominent in and inseparably bound up with the conception of true nobility. It is this last idea that the writer has chosen for extended discussion, chiefly because the conception of what is true nobility is more than English; it is to be found in all the languages in which the derivatives of gentilis and nobilis are to be found, and in some others too. It is a notable example of a literary and philosophical commonplace; authors as divergent in time and temperament as Plato and Robert Burns treated it.

The discussion of the idea in the following paper is not exhaustive. For one thing there has been practically no attempt to examine the modern conception of true nobility, although mention is made of some recent efforts to re-define the word gentleman. In a society that is essentially democratic there is little occasion for analysis of "true nobility", since nobility of birth is supposedly not of great importance. We take for granted, without thinking more about it, that he is noble who does noble deeds, and we probably forget that there was a time when the matter was worth discussion, was even a vital question. Literary commonplace, inherited from Boethius and Seneca though it perhaps was, it must nevertheless have sounded bolder to the people of the thirteenth century than it does to us. It is hard to believe that Beaudouin de Conde was merely reiterating a literary commonplace when he wrote:

Ei ki ki soit gentius de cuer
Autre gentillece ne cuer;

for it must be remembered he was living in a feudal society, not in a modern democratic state.

Exhaustive discussion of the more recent treatment of the idea has been made unnecessary by the existence of other accounts of the subject --- notably, an unpublished paper by Professor H. M. Ayres --- which ^{are} was concerned in some detail with histories of the sentiment. A Smythe-Palmer's The Idea of a Gentleman should be mentioned here, as should also George Vogt's article "Gleanings for the History of a Sentiment".

The present writer has been able to supplement the accounts of all three. None of them, for instance, mentions St. Jerome; Vogt alone speaks of Condé and of any of the proverb literature on the subject. Smythe-Palmer and Vogt have no mention, either, of Medwall's Fulgens and Lucres, to which Professor Ayres directed the writer.

Finally, a word as to why gentillesse and noblesse in particular were chosen for study. Like a number of other words indicating birth or rank in society --- lordly, generous, patrician, plebeian, bourgeois, courteous, lady, kind, churl, boor, villain, middle-class, and pleasant¹, and even the German huebsch, which Smythe-Palmer points out comes from Hof, meaning court² --- gentillesse and noblesse early took on a subjective meaning.

Gentilitas in Latin meant simply the relationship existing between two persons of the same tribe (gens). The words are interesting, therefore, as being representatives of a large class. Chiefly are they interesting, however, for their richness of connotation. As has already been suggested, they have been in the vocabularies of many different fields, and by studying them one may gain a new insight into the fields themselves. They serve remarkably well to illustrate the remark of Kluge: "Jedes Wort ein Kulturtraeger."

1. The list, with one or two additions, is Professor Burnham's.

2. See also Kluge's Etymologisches Woerterbuch der Deutschen Sprache.

CHAPTER I

GENTILITAS, NOBILITAS, AND RELATED WORDS
IN LATIN.

It would be appropriate to give here ---- before discussing the fate of our words and some of their congeners in the classical tongues -- an account of the origins of gentilitas and nobilitas, which became, respectively, with changes of suffix, gentillesse and noblesse. An examination of Walde's Lateinisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch reveals the fact that gentilitas is a derivative of gentilis, which in turn comes from gens. Gens is derived from the root GEN which means to generate, or to produce. One can easily find many other words from the root GEN, not only in Latin, which furnishes us with genus, genitor, and gignere, but in Greek, where we find $\gamma\acute{e}vος$ and $\gamma\acute{ι}γνομαί$, and in English in such words as kin, kind, and king. A glance at the Greek Etymology of Curtius reveals GEN as one of the most productive of Indo-Germanic roots.

Harper's Latin Dictionary supplies us with a number of definitions of the adjective gentilis. It means first "of or belonging to the same clan (gens), stock, or

1. Under gignere.
2. See in Skeat's Etymological Dictionary of the English Language the list of Indo-Germanic roots.
3. V. I., p. 214.

race; and subst. : ... a person belonging to the same family or race, a relative bearing the same name." A reference to the Topica of Cicero proves to be a definition of gentiles.⁴⁾

Gentiles sunt inter se, qui eodem nomine sunt. Non est satis. Qui ab ingenuis oriundi sunt. Ne id quidem satis est. Quorum maiorum nemo servitatem servivit. Abest etiam nunc. Qui capite non sunt deminuti. Hoc fortasse satis est.

No Latin dictionary that the writer has been able to find suggests that the Latin adjective gentilis had the same connotation as does the English adjective gentle in such phrases as "of gentle birth", or the French adjective gentil in such a word as gentilhomme; yet Cicero gives the definition which the dictionary seemingly found adequate and in the next breath says "non est satis", naming some other qualities that the "gentiles" must have, qualities which the lexicon does not even hint at. Not only, according to Cicero, must Romans worthy to be called "gentiles" have sprung from free people; but, more important, they must not themselves fall below the level of their ancestors. This is a definition which certainly seems to foreshadow the various medieval discussions of true nobility, and one which implies that gentilis to the Romans meant rather more than "belonging to the same clan." It is true, of course,

4. Cicero, V. II, p. 344.

5. "Gentiles are those who, among themselves, are called by the same name. But that is inadequate; they are those who proceed from free men. Nor is that sufficient; they are those none of whose forefathers was a slave. Yet even that misses the mark. They are those who have not degenerated from the worth of their ancestors. That perhaps is adequate."

that in the Topica Cicero was writing only an abstract of a work of Aristotle and that Aristotle is probably responsible for some of the ideas. He is hardly to be held responsible for Cicero's choice of words, however. Indeed, there seems to be no reason why we cannot legitimately suppose that Cicero in so defining gentiles was merely expressing what was the connotative meaning of the word to the Roman citizen of 44 B. C.

One other meaning of gentilis in Harper's Dictionary is worth some notice. Because one of the meanings of gens was "race or nation", gentilis came sometimes to have the meaning of "belonging to the same people or nation", or "a fellow-countryman." Apparently, since the term was applied to foreigners as well as to Romans, it came eventually to mean "foreigners", although the first use of it in that sense the dictionary places as late as 438 A. D. in the Codex Theodosianus. The early church further specialized the meaning of the word by applying it to people "foreign" to the Jewish or to the Christian tradition. Consulting the New English Dictionary under gentile one discovers that gentile was once a synonym for pagan in English, although in that sense the word is now obsolete. French gentil⁶⁾, Italian gentile⁸⁾, and Spanish gentil⁹⁾ all mean "pagan".

6. La Curne de Sainte-Palaye in his Dictionnaire Historique de l'Ancien Langage Fran ois remarks under gentil:
Les juifs appelaient les peuples  trangers a leur culte T      (sic), les nations; par imitation les chretiens latins ont appell  gentiles ceux qui n' appartenaient pas a la religion Chr tienne.
7. Le Larousse pour Tous, under gentil.
8. Hoare's Italian Dictionary, under gentile.
9. Rodriguez-Nava's Diccionario Completo de la Lengua Espanola. Under gentil.

or "heathen" even today. In these three languages; however, gentilis --- in this sense --- underwent also the same semantic change as gentile in English, so that les gentils, i gentili, and los gentiles mean Gentiles, or non-Jewish persons, to use a more precise term. It is difficult to say when the word took on this meaning. The New English Dictionary finds that gentile was so used by Wyclif in 1380. Stratman, Du Cange, Godefroi, and Le Cume de Sainte-Palaye are silent on the matter, although the last three give many examples of gentilis meaning heathen or pagan. The quotation from La Cume de Sainte-Palaye
 10) already given suggests that ecclesiastical Latin might have been the place where the change first occurred.

The notes in Harper's Latin Dictionary on gentilitas tell us that the word means first "the relationship of those who belong to the same gens", then "relatives bearing the same name", "plants bearing the same name", and finally, in the Latin of the church, "heathenism or paganism" and, concretely, "pagans, and the heathen". In none of the examples in the dictionary does there seem to be any hint of the subjective meaning that we found in Cicero's definition of gentiles, and which we shall find in the Romance and English derivations of gentilitas. The word as used in ecclesiastical Latin most nearly approaches a
 11) subjective meaning; but the gentilitas of Lactantius is far in both form and signification from the gentillesse of the Roman de la Rose.

10. See note 6, p. 7.

11. See Harper's Latin Dictionary, under gentilitas.

Passing then from the group derived from gens, we next consider the group based upon the Latin nobilis. An examination ¹²⁾ of Walde tells us that nobilis also comes from an Indo-Germanic root GEN, which was equally productive as the first. Different from the GEN that gave gignere and gens, this GEN means to know. Indeed GEN actually appears in our words know and can, the voiced stop (g) having become in Teutonic the corresponding voiceless stop (k), in accordance with Grimm's Law. In Latin the root gave --- among other words which need not concern us --- the adjective gnobilis, meaning originally simply "known". The initial g was dropped early, giving the classical Latin nobilis. Nobilis, however, meant more than "known"; Harper's Dictionary gives as synonyms "well-known", "celebrated", and "famous." Cicero, for example, in the De Inventione Rhetorica speaks of "magnus et nobilis ¹³⁾ rhetor Isocrates", not meaning that Isocrates was a nobleman, or even that he was noble of spirit, but merely that he was renowned.

One may, of course, become famous for bad qualities as well as for commendable ones, and in English we made a distinction ¹⁴⁾ between the "famous" man and the "notorious" man. The Romans, however, might apply nobilis to a notorious character as well as to a renowned one. Clitipho in Terence's Heautontimorumenos thus piles up the adjectives in speaking of his

12. Entry under Nosco.

13. Cicero, V. I., p. 176.

14. Notorious, like nobilis, is from nosco; unlike nobilis it took on a pejorative meaning, and now means almost the opposite of its cognate.

mistress: "Meast potens, procax, magnifica, sumtuosa, nobilis", which George Colman rendered "self-willed, wanton,
 15) haughty, . . . gay and extravagant." A stickler for literal translations might be tempted to criticize Colman's loose rendering of nobilis, but his translation is satisfactory in one way at least: it shows that nobilis had here pretty definitely a pejorative sense. To us who speak English it seems a little strange that noble could ever have had an unpleasant connotation. A "noble woman" is not generally thought of as being one who is "self-willed, wanton, haughty, gay, and extravagant."

The second meaning for nobilis given in Harper's Dictionary is one with which we are more familiar, namely "high-born" or "of noble birth"; in the words of the dictionary, "sprung from a family (either patrician or plebeian) many members of which had filled curule offices." The dictionary suggests a comparison with generosus, which, derived from genus and meaning originally "of high birth", finally came to signify "magnanimous", and according to Harper's even "generous", although an examination of the passages cited indicates that in all of them generosus might well be translated by "noble" rather than by "generous." Generous is indeed an interesting parallel to noble and gentle, for like them it has lost in both Latin and the modern languages

15. Colman, The Comedies of Terence, p. 246.

its primary meaning and taken on another fairly remote from
 16) the first.

Unlike gentilitas, nobilitas certainly possessed a
 17) subjective meaning in Latin. Besides meaning, as we should suspect, celebrity, fame, and renown, and also high or noble birth, and the aristocracy, nobilitas might mean "noble or excellent quality, nobleness, excellence, superiority." It was so used by Cicero, Ovid, Velleius, Pliny, Juvenal, and probably others, although the dictionary contents itself with citations from these five. The citation from Juvenal is from the eighth satire, the famous one beginning, "Stemmata quid faciunt", and will serve to introduce us to the study of "true nobility", a conception which is closely linked with the words gentillesse and noblesse, and about which we shall have more to say in the two following chapters.

16. The old meaning survives in Shakespeare. See Measure for Measure, IV, 6, 13:

"The generous and gravest citizens

Have hent the gates";

and also Love's Labor Lost, V, 2, 632:

"This is not generous, not gentle, not humble."

17. It is curious to note that in the modern languages the derivatives of gentilis and gentilitas are all -- with the exception of English Gentiles, French les gentils and gentil homme, Italian i gentili, and Spanish los gentiles -- subjective terms; whereas the derivatives of nobilis and nobilitas are both subjective and concrete. Cf. English noble and gentle.

Juvenal's line,

18)

"Nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus",

is by no means the first statement of the idea that birth alone does not make for nobility, although it is probably one of the most striking. Before Juvenal Seneca, and before Seneca Euripides and Aristotle had said substantially the same thing.

J. E. B. Mayor in his voluminous commentary upon Juvenal quotes
19)

from Stobaeus extracts from Euripides and Menander. From

Euripides he cites: ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐρθλὸς εὖ
γενῆς εἴη μοι γαρίζε. ὁ δ' οὐδὲ σί-
καιος, καὶ αὐτὸς ἀμείνονος πατρὸς
Ζεύς περόκη τοι γενῆς εἶναι
σοκεῖ 20);

and the quotation from Menander ends thus: Καὶ Αἰθίοψ
ἡ, μῆτερ, ἐρτίνει γενῆς 21).

If Juvenal's statement was a remarkable one --- and the vigor of the eighth satire makes one certain that Juvenal considered it remarkable --- those of Euripides and Menander are even more remarkable, especially if we remember that *εὐγένης* (coming of course from the root GEN, meaning "to produce") meant nobly-born; in Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon it is glossed by the Latin generosus. Apparently Euripides and Menander meant that

18. Juvenal, VIII, 20

19. Mayor, V. II, p. 6

20. "To me the good man seems well-born; and churlish the unrighteous man, though he be of a better father than Zeus."

21. "Even if he is an Ethiop, mother, he is noble."

noble actions could actually put one on a level with the nobly born, for they did not use the word *γενναῖος*, which ordinarily refers to noble character, but *εὐεργέτης*, a term the denotation and connotation of which were much stronger. Aristotle in the Rhetic makes a careful distinction between these two words.

He says:

The idea of noble birth [*εὐεργέτης*] refers to the excellence of the race, that of noble character [*γενναῖος*] to not degenerating from the family type, a quality not as a rule found among those of noble birth, most of whom are good for nothing Sometimes, if the race is good, for a certain period, men out of the common are born in it, and then it deteriorates.²²⁾

According to Aristotle's definition we should expect to find in the passages from Euripides and Menander the word *γενναῖος* used in place of *εὐεργέτης*, for one can hardly improve one's race, be he never so virtuous. But just as Latin nobilis came to mean not only "of noble birth", but also "virtuous", so the Greek word underwent a similar semantic change. And just as generosus came to be applied to plants and animals of fine species, so *εὐεργέτης* came to mean in Greek "high-bred"
²³⁾ (of animals) and "of good sort"
²⁴⁾ when applied to plants. *Γενναῖος* was the broader term, since from its earliest meaning
²⁵⁾ of "suitable to one's birth" it came to signify not only all that *εὐεργέτης* did, but also "noble in mind."

22. Rhetic, II, 15, 3.

23. It is, of course, perfectly possible in English to speak of a noble steed, or call the horse a noble animal.

24. The writer is still quoting Liddell and Scott.

25. See E, 253:

"Οὐ μοι γενναῖον ἀλυκαῖοντι μάχεσθαι,"
(Tis not for one of my birth to fight like a coward.)

Aristotle makes at least one more definite reference to "true nobility" besides that in the Rhetoric. It is in the ²⁶⁾ Politics that he points out that noble birth does not necessarily imply that one is skilled in a particular art — flute playing is the example Aristotle uses. Later he shrewdly points out that good birth, although it may not actually make men virtuous, is held in high esteem and is therefore useful. He says, too, that those who are sprung from noble ancestors have a better chance to be virtuous, and will probably be better men.

The Greeks' point of view towards true nobility was aristocratic. Even Euripides, in spite of the fragment already quoted from Stobaeus and some of the remarks made by Orestes in the Electra, does not really believe that noble deeds will make up for the handicap of lowly birth. It is true that the words of Orestes,

"I have seen ere now a noble father's son
Proved nothing worth . . .
And in a poor man's body a great heart",

seem heartfelt; but Orestes implies in the speech that such noble mindedness as the Peasant's is unusual in one of the lower class. Electra's husband is an exception, to the rule, to be stated later by Aristotle, that nobles are usually better men than commoners. Orestes's speech is interesting in itself because

26. Book III, 12 and 13.

27. The translation is that of Arthur Wey, Tragedies of Euripides in English Verse, V. II, p. 199. (Ll. 369-72)

it foreshadows some later discussions of true nobility. How is one to judge what man is noble,

By wealth? a sorry test were this to use.
Or by the lack of all? nay, poverty
Is plague-struck, schooling men to sin through need.
To prowess shall I turn me? who that looks
On spears, can swear what spearman's heart is brave?

None of these will do:

Learn wisdom, ye which wander aimless, swoln
With gain imaginings: by converse judge²⁸⁾
Men, even the noble by their daily walk.

Later an old man, ignorant of the identity of Pylades and Orestes, remarks:

High born of mien: yet false the coin may be;
For many nobly born be slaves in grain.²⁹⁾

That in Roman times the idea that nobility is dependent on noble deeds was fairly common is indicated by its appearance in such diverse writers as Seneca and Sallust, and implicitly at least, in Horace. Seneca in his forty-fourth moral epistle, called by ³⁰⁾ Gummere On Philosophy and Pedigrees, looks at the question from a pseudo-philosophic point of view. Philosophy, asserts Seneca, recognizes no distinctions of rank, for distinctions of rank are false. "All men, if traced back to their original source, come from the gods." Plato, of noble birth though he was, was ennobled by philosophy, just as were Socrates and Cleanthes. The well born man (*generosus*) is he who is by nature inclined to virtue; for an atrium "full of smoke-begrimed busts" does not mean that its

28. Ll. 374-8, and 383-5.

29. Ll. 550-1.

30. In the Loeb Classical Library edition of the Epistles.

owner is noble. Seneca's conclusion to this epistle is that one may become a free man among gentlemen (*liber inter ingenuos*) by learning to distinguish between good and bad without regard to what the crowd believes. After all "animus facit nobilem." In

31)

De Beneficiis Seneca reiterates the idea of the epistle, in order to prove that one may receive benefit from a slave.

Eadem omnibus principio eademque origo; nemo altero
nobilior. Qui imagines in atrio exponunt 32)
et nomina familiae suae longo ordine ac multis
stammatum inligata flexuris in parte prima aedium
conlocant, non noti magis quam nobiles sunt? 33)

At the end of every pedigree is a noble origin; pride of ancestry is therefore false; and none "abase themselves lower", he concludes, "than those who unconscionably give themselves airs."

There is indication in the sixth satire of book one of Horace that although certain enlightened minds like Seneca and Euripides might, centuries before Burns, have believed that "the rank is but the guinea's stamp", many nobles looked down upon men of humble birth. Some of the first lines in the satire read:

31. III, 28.

32. Cf. the "atrium plenum ^{et} mosis imaginibus" of Epistle 44.

33. "All men proceed from the same original stock; no one is better than another . . . Those who display portraits of their ancestors in their halls, and set up in the entrance to their houses the pedigree of their family drawn out at length, with many collateral branches, are they not notorious rather than noble?" (Translated by Stewart).

"You, Maecenas, do not, like most of the world,
curl up your nose at men of unknown birth
men like myself, a freedman's son." 34)

Further proof that the nobles were frequently haughty to members of the lower classes may be found in the eighty-sixth chapter of Sallust's Jugurtha. Just before Marius leaves Rome to attack Jugurtha,

"Hortandi causa, simul et nobilitatem uti consueverat exagitandi, contionem populi ad vocavit." 35)

In his speech he complains that the nobility is hostile to him and that the nobles are for the most part unworthy citizens. He utters the familiar idea that what one accomplishes rather than one's ancestry makes one noble.

"Quamquam ego naturam unam et communem omnium existimo, sed fortissimum quemque generosissimum." 36)

Then after reminding his audience of the wounds and scars he has received he cries: "Hae sunt meae imagines, haec nobilitatis, non hereditate relicta!"

Some five centuries later the idea apparently had not lost all its charm and freshness. It is Boethius who, 37) in the De Consolatione Philosophiae, reiterates it

34. Fairclough's edition, p. 77.

35. "Once he had accustomed even the nobles to the use of exhortation, he called an assembly, to encourage the people."

36. "Though I consider one common nature to be everyone's, yet I consider whoever is bravest the most noble."

37. Consolatio III, prose 6 and meter 6.

without adding much that is new. It is a vain and idle thing, he finds, to be called noble (^Qam vero quam sit inane quam futile nobilitatis nomen, quis non videat), nobilitas obviously meaning here high birth. Nobility is only praise derived from the merit of one's ancestors (videtur namque esse nobilitas quaedem de meritis veniens laus parentum), and the only good in noble birth is that it may keep the nobles from becoming less virtuous than their ancestors. (Quod si quid est in nobilitate bonum, id esse arbitror solum, ut imposita nobilibus necessitudo videatur, ne a maiorum virtute degenerent.) In the following meter Boethius voices an idea we have already found in Seneca. Every man's ancestry is noble, because all men come from the gods. Boethius is even more precise:

"Unus enim rerum pater est."

This "father" he speaks of later in the verse as "auctoremque deum", and declares that all nobility was derived from him.

"Mortalis igitur cunctos edit nobile germanum."

Throughout what has just been quoted Seneca and Boethius seem to have thought similarly. Clearly Boethius is closer here to Seneca than to Aristotle, although as E. K. Rand in his monograph on the composition of the *Consolatio* says, a propos of prose 6 in Book III, "certainly traces of Aristotle are apparent." The parallel is an interesting one at any rate, whether or not there was any actual borrowing from Seneca.

We may make mention here of the commentary on Boethius
 38) made by St. Thomas Aquinas, not, however, that the commentary contains anything remarkable or original. St. Thomas names others who have attempted to define true nobility:
 39) Alain de Lille, Seneca, and Cicero. Seneca he quotes as
 40) saying: "Si pulcher es, lauda naturam, si nobilis
 lauda parentes, si virtuosus et sapientis lauda te ipsum." The commentary, however, adds little either in explanation of the statements of Boethius, or in telling us what ideas St. Thomas himself had on the subject of true nobility; his remarks are not disapproving, but after all we must remember he was writing a commentary, not a personal interpretation. Of Boethius himself and this portion of the Consolatio we shall have more to say when we come to speak of Jean de Meun and Chaucer.

It is not surprising to find a statement of the doctrine of true nobility in the writings of the early church fathers, since the idea that we are all sprung from one noble ancestor is certainly implied in Christianity. One of the letters of St. Jerome contains an explicit statement of the doctrine.

38. Leaf 61 of Vingel's edition contains a commentary on prose 6 of Book III.
39. The De Planctu Naturae is, of course, an exhaustive medieval account of man's weaknesses. It suggests Boethius only in its implication that man may be noble and virtuous only by his own efforts.
40. The meaning here is obviously "nobly born". Even for the medieval Latinists the Latin nobilis was not so indefinite a term as modern English noble. In this passage to translate nobilis by noble would not convey the meaning.

Nulli te unquam de generis nobilitate praeponas . . .
 Nescit religio nostra personas accipere: nec
 conditiones hominum, sed animas inspicit singulorus.
 Servum et nobilem de moribus pronuntiat . . .
 Summa apud Deum est nobilitas, clarum esse virtutibus.
 Quid apud Deum in viris nobilioris Petro, qui piscator
 et pauper fuit . . . nam et si obliviscimur, quia
 ex uno omnes generati sumus: saltam id semper meminisse
 debemus, quia per unum omnes regeneramur.⁴¹⁾

We are reminded at once of Seneca as well as of the philosopher who, when the above words were first written, was still unborn --- Boethius. In all three the emphasis is on the logical absurdity of nobility's being dependent upon high birth, since we are all sprung from one common ancestor. One suspects that this conception of true nobility is probably Stoic in origin. It is not Aristotelism, certainly, since it goes further than do the quotations already given from Aristotle; but its very presence in Seneca indicates it to be a Stoic idea. If one reads Zeller's account of the Stoics' conception of virtue, one will see that the unimportance of noble birth was taken entirely for granted. To the Stoic all virtue was based on knowledge; nothing else was responsible for it. So extraneous a thing as high birth Zeller does not even discuss. To trace borrowings of

41. Migne, V. 22, p. 1214; epistola 92, Sancti Hieronymi.

The translation is as follows: Do not put yourself above anyone because of your noble birth. Our religion does not receive persons or conditions of men; it examines only the minds of individuals. It considers a man slavish or noble according to his conduct. Before God the greatest nobility is to be conspicuous for virtue. What man is nobler in God's sight than Peter, a poverty-stricken fisherman? Even if we forget that we all came from one, we must all remember that we shall be redeemed through one.

42. Zeller, pp. 238-9.

of ideas is difficult; yet knowing Seneca's popularity with the
 early church fathers ⁴³⁾ one is surely not implying too much in suggesting that the church was influenced in this matter by Seneca. The idea was implicit in the teaching of Christ --- the rich man and he who was well born were not necessarily virtuous --- but it is easy to see how the influence of Seneca might emphasize and reinforce the idea.

It occurred to the writer while attempting to trace the conception of true nobility in Latin that proverbs might well furnish some clues to the study. The only two books he had access to, Henderson's Latin Proverbs and Quotations and Vanucci's Proverbi Latini, proved disappointing, however. The English writer quotes Ovid,

"Nam genus et proavos et quae non fecimus ipsi
 Vix es nostra voco"; ⁴⁴⁾

from Seneca (without giving the reference), "Qui genus jactat suum, aliena laudat"; and the following line, attributed to no author, and which one presumes Henderson considers a folk proverb, "Nobilitas morum plus ornat quam genitorum." Vanucci quotes Juvenal (VIII, 20; see above, page 12), and in a footnote a fragment from Euripides (see above, page 17). All the proverbs are paraphrased in Italian; but Vanucci does little more than this.

To sum up, then, we may say that the Latin adjective nobilis, meaning originally "renowned", or simply "known", came to have

43. See Chapter III of Gummere's Seneca.

44. Metamorphoses XIII, 140-1.

almost the significance of English noble; true, it was somewhat more specific in Latin, having the idea contained in the English phrase "of noble birth." Gentilis in classical Latin lacked the subjective meanings which it was to assume in the Romance tongues and in English, although the citation from Cicero (see above, page 6) would appear to indicate that the meaning of the word was changing a trifle even in Latin. Nobilitas and gentilitas are sufficiently similar in meaning to the corresponding adjectives to need no further comment here. Finally we find that even in Latin the conception of true nobility, so closely connected with the study of our words in French and English, appears in such writers as Seneca, Cicero, Juvenal, Horace (implicitly) and Boethius, although the "psychological history" of the words is not so complete as we shall find it in the Romance languages and English.

CHAPTER II

THE WORDS IN FRENCH AND ITALIAN

Du Cange in his Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis lists several meanings of nobilitas different from those in classical Latin. In the vulgar speech it might be a "titulus honorarius", which is near enough to the classical significance of the word; or it might be "idem quod Feudem nobile et honoratum".¹⁾ It also meant "morum elegantia, urbanitas", and "amplitudo, magnificientia." To illustrate the meaning, "morum elegantia", Du Cange quotes from Vita Henrici V, regni Angliae, edited by Hearn:

"Regnorum Angliae et Franciae nobilitatis, modas et gesturas . . . cognoscere et videre desiderat";

and in justification of the gloss "amplitudo" from Vita Sancti Lemovic: "Quantumcumque habuit in provincia Lemovicensi, ipsi sanctissimo viro tradidit, ut faceret exinde nobilitatem ecclesiarum."

Godefroi in his Dictionnaire de l'ancienne Langue Francaise lists nobilite, glossing it to mean "noblesse", "gens nobles," and "action noble", quoting from La Vie de Saint Alexis (of the eleventh century) and from the Oxford French Psalter. It is, however, Godefroi's definitions of noblesse which interest us more, since noblesse is the folk word. The word must have been a popular one, for it had a considerable variety of meanings:²⁾ "action noble" (like nobilite), "fief noble", and "objet, chose

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1. "Feudem nobile . . . est, quod possessorem suum nobilitat, vel eum, qui prius erat, ostendit." (Du Cange.)
 2. Cf. in Du Cange the definition "feudum nobile" for nobilitas.

magnifique, fête pompeuse." In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, then, noblesse apparently did not have the specific meaning it possesses in Modern French, where, according to Littré, it means "gens élevés au-dessus des roturiers, soit par naissance, soit par lettre du prince." From Littré's account it is difficult to tell precisely when noblesse came to have this modern meaning. No more than one of the examples he gives, taken from writers before the seventeenth century, seem very definitely to mean "gens nobles"; the one exception is from Froissart:

"Et entra le jeune roi en la cité de Reims,
bien accompagné de noblesses, de hauts seigneurs,
et de menestrandies."

This does not prove, however, that Froissart was the first to use the word in that sense, or even that noblesse took on its present day French meaning no earlier than the fourteenth century. Until someone has the resources and the patience to examine all of the occurrences of the word in writing from the eleventh century to the fourteenth, we cannot fix precisely the date when the word first began to change in meaning. Unable as we necessarily are to know much of the vernacular in France from 1000 to 1400, we can only conjecture how the change of meaning came about. A not unlikely supposition is that since noblesse sounded something like nobilite, it came, in ordinary speech, first to take on the meaning of nobilite and finally in one sense to supplant the other word --- as well as gentilesse incidentally --- altogether. According to

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3. Noblesse is not found in La Chanson de Roland; its place there is taken by gentilesse.

Littre nobilité is now used as a "terme d' ancienne jurisprudence"; this is the only meaning nobilité has in Modern French.

Littre defines noblesse also as a "terme d' ancienne juris-
4) prudence", but adds the information that it refers to a "fief qui dépendait immédiatement du souverain, et dont la possession anoblissait." This, of course, is simply an extension of the meaning "fief noble", which we found Godefroi giving to the old French word.

A third meaning assigned to noblesse by Littre is "joyaux de la couronne." Such a definition should not be surprising if we remember the courtly connotation noblesse must have had, and remember, too, that in Old French it signified "Objet, chose magnifique." Littre further defines by saying that the word "se disait, dans les tournois . . . , des livrées, des insignes, des decorations qu'on donnait comme marque d'honneur". It would be helpful possibly to include here one of Godefroi's citations, from Le Chevalier au Cygne:

Lance, targe, escus, maint
 jeaume luisant;
Banieres et pegmons contre
 vent ventelant;
Noblaices et dras d'or c'on
 avoit mis devant.⁵⁾

4. Nobilité is the "qualité d'un fonds noble", and has to do, therefore, with nobility arising from the possession of free land, or land not in fief.
5. Ll. 4355-7.
"Lance, target, shield, many a gleaming helm, banners and pinions flapping in the wind, ensigns and golden flags in the van."

"Noblesse personnelle", another meaning of the word in Modern French, is not to be accounted for quite so simply. One's natural inference is that people expected noble actions from the nobly born and by a kind of metonymy gave to the noble actions the general name used for the nobility. Nobilitas in Latin, however, had meant noble actions, as did nobilite in Old French. The matter has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. Closely allied to these meanings of noblesse is the one of "grandeur, élévation, dignité . . . soit des personnes, soit des choses", and of course by only a slight extension of this meaning modern Frenchmen may speak of a "style noble" in reference to anyone who writes in an exalted fashion.

Noblesse may mean, finally, according to Littre, "tout le corps des hommes qualifiés nobles", a definition which makes us think immediately of the eighteenth century and the famous three estates, tiers état, clergé, and noblesse.

The account of nobilitas in Du Cange is somewhat detailed; yet curiously enough there is little information on gentilitas. The reader is referred to one of the definitions of gentiles, that given as "gentiles" in the Modern English sense. Gentilitia, the source of gentillesse, is not found at all in the main part of the dictionary and is mentioned only briefly under gentillesse in the Glossaire Français as meaning "titre des nobles"; gentilise is glossed here as "privileges des nobles."

In Godefroi gentilesse receives much fuller treatment, although it is discussed under gentilise. It is glossed as meaning, "noblesse, vaillance, courage, amabilite, action, conduite digne d'une personne noble", and there follow three columns of examples. That the word meant clearly what Modern French noblesse means is shown by such a citation as this one from the Chroniques des Pays Bas: "Et le roy d' Engleterre, entré en icille (ville) avec sa gentillesse, y sejouMM⁶⁾, nulcune espace" ; and this from the Chronique Anonyme du Regne de Charles VI: "En celle bataille furent occis . . . Loyz de Ghistelle et toute la gentillesche."⁷⁾ The word possessed a subjective meaning, too, as may be seen in these lines from the Roman de la Rose (they are not quoted by Godefroi, but they illustrate the subjective meaning none the less):

Et cil qui d'autrui gentillece,
Sans sa valor et sans proece,
En vuet porter los et renon,⁸⁾
Est-il gentil? ge dis que non.

Another interesting use of gentillesse, which Godefroi does not mention but which is given by La Curne de Ste. Palaye, is as a mild sort of oath, "sorte d' exclamation" — then by way of

- 6. III, 354.
"And the king of England, having entered this city with his nobles, stayed there some time."
- 7. V. v, p. 269.
"In this battle were killed Louis de Ghistille and all the nobles."
- 8. II. 19449-52.
"And he who, lacking prowess and valor, yet wishes praise and honor for nobility. Is he noble? nay, say I."

further explanation --- "comme 'foi de gentilhomme'." The following is taken from the Archives Nationales, and is dated 1392: "Icellui Gidouin s'en commenç a fouir parmi les jardins,
9)
et a crier, Gentilesse, je suis mort."

It is not altogether easy to see from the glosses in Godefroi how the Modern French gentillesse came to mean "caractère qui est à la fois joli et gracieux, tour de souplesse,
10)
saillie agréable." Obviously the word has come to have a weaker meaning in Modern French than it had even in the sixteenth century. Godefroi cites a passage from Amyot in which the translator of Plutarch is speaking of the difficulties in learning "la langue romaine."

Aussi requiert elle une longue et laborieuse exercitation, convenable à ceux qui ont plus de loisir que je n'ay, et qui sont encore en âge pour vacquer à telles gentillesses.¹¹⁾

Here the word obviously means, if we must take one of Godefroi's glosses, "conduite digne d'une personne noble." That is certainly too strong, however, and unless Amyot was using ironically a larger word than was necessary --- for which belief there is no justification in the rest of the passage ---, we should probably be right in interpreting the word, as it appears here, as meaning

9. Year 1392, p. 279.

"Hereupon Gidouin began to rush about the gardens and cry,
"Faith, I am killed."

10. Littre.

11. Vie de Demosthenes. Edition of 1565.

"Accordingly it demands great and troublous exertion, fitting to such as have more leisure than I and who are still of an age to concern themselves with such niceties."

niceties or subtleties. If this is correct it is not difficult to see the origin of one of the meanings mentioned by Littre, namely, "tour de souplesse." True enough, Arnyot was thinking of mental agility, whereas "tour de souplesse" suggests rather nimbleness of body; but that may be merely an indication that gentilesse has narrowed its meaning since the time of Arnyot.

The other two modern meanings of gentillesse given by Littre can perhaps be better understood by reference to the adjective gentil. Godefroi glosses gentil to mean "noble, vaillant." This was the regular meaning of the word in Old French. We find in the Chanson de Roland ¹²⁾ the line:

Vivre l laissiez car molt est
gentilz hom.

The poet is speaking of Ganelon, to whom "gentle" certainly does not apply, but who was of noble birth. Indeed even today gentil plus homme --- gentilhomme --- is the regular French word for ¹³⁾ nobleman, and Godefroi cites several occurrences of gentilfemme and gentifemmes. We find, however, once again in a passage from Arnyot, the word used to mean neither "noble" nor "vaillant." The

12. L. 3811.

13. French gentilhomme has retained its original meaning, whereas English gentleman has undergone a change. Curiously enough the French have found gentleman a useful word and have borrowed it. A somewhat similar case of borrowing may be noted in French flirter borrowed from English flirt, which had been influenced by a French verb fleureter, also in the French borrowing of English jury, from French jurée. See Skeat.

passage is from the life of Lucullus:

Et prenoyent grand plaisir de vеoir les jeunes hommes s'attacher à poursuivre en justice ceulx qui avoyent forfaict, ne plus ne moins que de gentile levriers acharnez après les bestes sauvages.¹⁴⁾

If gentils actually means here "gallant", or "noble" in the English sense, then we have found at least one instance in which the meaning of the word is beginning to change. The meaning is still far from suggesting the modern sense of gentillesse, but is evident that on one occasion it meant something other than "of noble birth." In Arnyot's Caton we find a use of the word where the meaning approaches that of the noun in the modern sense a little more closely:

"Il avait le cuer si gentil, qu' il taschoit
a faire tout ce que son père luy monstrait."¹⁵⁾

The English reader probably thinks at once of Chaucer's phrase, "the gentil herte", but Chaucer's meaning is not the one Arnyot intended. If we were to use an English word to translate Arnyot's gentil we should probably find "amiable" best suited. Of course in his glossing of gentillesse, Godefroi gives "amabilité", and gentillesse meant "amabilité" before gentil.

14. "And they took great pleasure to see the young men set themselves in pursuit of those who had done wrong, neither more nor less than gentle hares hot after wild beasts."

15. Littré, under gentil.

"He had so amiable a nature that he tried ever to do what his father showed him."

meant "earable"; it is perhaps helpful, however, to discuss changes in meaning by showing how two similar words had a similar semantic development. Modern French gentil, which English "nice" translates pretty adequately, is in meaning entirely different from the gentil in the Chanson de Roland, and modern gentillesse and Old French gentelise are equally far apart. An eighteenth century French dictionary suggests the modern meanings of gentillesse and gentil in its gloss of gentil.

Ce mot est comme le diminutif de beau, . . . on s'en sert ^{pour} tout, lors-qu'on parle du sexe; des enfants, lorsqu'ils sont beaux, éveillés, et qu'ils commencent un peu à gazouiller et à faire de petites fioritures.¹⁸⁾

To noblesse the same dictionary assigns a meaning unremarked by Littre.

Quand on voit une grande abondance de fruits à la Halle, ou dans un jardin, on dit, Voilà une belle noblesse.¹⁹⁾

Seemingly as late as 1749 noblesse had a subjective meaning which we do not find in Modern French, and which even Littre

16. It is worth noting that Du Cange gives as a second meaning for gentilis "elegans" and "formosus."

17. Dictionnaires de Proverbes Français et des façons de parler comiques, burlesques, et familières avec l'explication et les étymologies.

18. "This word is like the diminutive of beau, . . . it is used especially when one is speaking of the opposite sex, of children, if they are attractive, or lively and when they are just beginning to prattle and to act engagingly."

19.c When one sees in the house or in the garden a fine crop, one says, Voilà une belle noblesse."

does not account for. Interestingly enough, except for this one more too well documented meaning of noblesse, in Modern French noblesse and gentillesse are far apart in meaning, although in Old French, to judge by Godefroi, they must have been almost synonymous.

Gent, a familiar adjective in Old French, deserves some discussion. Coming from Latin genitus, the past participle of gigno²⁰, which became Low Latin *gentus, it first appears in the Chanson de Roland and in connection with nouns of such diverse meaning as "cors", "chevalrie", and "bataille." "Gent cors" must have been a common expression, in Beck's collection of the songs of the troubadours the phrase is so frequently used that one suspects it meant little more than simply "cors". Gent disappeared with the chivalry that made it popular. Littré finds that its last appearance in French literature was in Molière's L'Etourdi. Modern French has lost the word altogether.

The nature of true nobility was a matter for discussion in the Middle Ages just as in the days of Seneca or Boethius. The Chanson de Roland contains no finely spun discussion of the idea; indeed Turolodus, or whoever wrote the epic, has the point of view of a nobleman, or at least that of a person who has never troubled about the distinction between one who is noble by his deeds

20. Littré suggests that gent came from gentilis, accented on the antepenult, since the idea of birth is not found in any of the uses of gent in French. English gent did mean "well-born", however.

and one who calls himself noble because he is well born. If Jean de Meun had written the Chanson, he would probably have made of the character of Ganelon a sermon on true nobility. The writer of the epic was more objective; the line referring to Ganelon as a "molt gentilz hom" has already been quoted.

Two centuries later, the century of the Roman de la Rose, but before the time of Jean de Meun,²¹⁾ Beaudouin de Conde in his Contes de Gentiliche was writing about nobility and the noble man. Conde's view of the nobles is not so critical as Jean de Meun's. Evil doings are abhorrent to one who is nobly born:

Gentius hom de pere et mere,
Trop li est vilounie amere,
Et trop li est au cuer grevaine
A gentil cuer, oevre vilaine,
Qui gentius est de naisson.²²⁾

If, however, in some strange fashion, a nobleman finds that vilounie is not "au cuer grevaine", and does fall from grace, it is much worse than if the wrong-doer were a man of common birth.

Some lines later in the poem, however, Conde voices the familiar idea.

Et j'aimeroie mius assés
A estre fius au piour home
Qui soit au monde, c'est la some,
Et fusse aussi preus d'Alixandre,²³⁾
Qu'estre fius au roi d'Alixandre.

21. Scheler, editor of the contes of Conde, places Beaudouin's floruit between 1240 and 1280. Jean de Meun, born in 1240, died in 1305.

22. LL. 7-12.

"To the man of gentle parentage villainy is too bitter, and to the gentle heart of him who is of gentle birth too grievous are evil deeds."

23. LL. 62-66.

"And I had rather be son to the worst man in the world --- I speak the truth --- and be as noble as Alexander than be the son of Alexandria's king."

Better to be as noble as Alexander than to be the son of Alexandria's king. Condé is not actually decrying noble birth as will Jean de Meun; but he seems to gather courage as he nears the end of the poem.

Ei ki ki soit gentius de cuer,
 Autre gentillece ne cuer,
 S'il est fius au plus vilain home,
 Qui soit en l'empire de Roume,
 Ja pour gou ne le despise on,²⁴⁾
 Car il est assés gentius hom.

The lines here are sufficiently strong; even the assés seems less faint praise when we remember that in the thirteenth century assez still contained the idea of the Latin ad satis, from which it was derived. The Contes de Gentilleche ends by the poet's addressing himself directly and forcibly to those whom Scheler calls in his note the "seigneurs entiches de leur naissance." They do wrong, says the poet, to believe that birth is everything and good deeds nothing.

It is of course Jean de Meun who is most famous as a critic of the established nobility. That he was not the first may be seen not only by the examples just given from Condé, but also by those in Chapter One, taken from Boethius and Seneca. Langlois in his Origines et Sources du Roman de la Rose does not indicate that Jean de Meun borrowed any of his material from Book III, prose 6 and metre 6, of the Consolatio, which contains practically

24. Ll. 85-90.

"Whoso is gentle of heart needs no other gentleness. If he is the son of the most wretched man in the Roman empire, let none despise him for that, for he is a gentle man enough."

25. Cf. especially Seneca's forty-fourth epistle.

all of Boethius's ideas on the subject of true nobility. A comparison, however, between these portions of Boethius and the section of the Roman that begins with line 19297 reveals a similarity. True enough Boethius says in some twenty lines what Jean de Meun needs more than five hundred for; but the germ of the Frenchman's idea is plainly in this bit from the Consolatio. One may compare for example the sentence with which Boethius closes prose 6, "quod si quid est in nobilitate bonum, id esse arbitror solum, ut imposita nobilibus necessitudo videatur ne a maiorum virtute degenerent" ; and this from the Roman:

Por quoi doit estre en li parans
La proece de ses parens
Qui la gentillece conquistrent
Par les travaux que grans i mistrent;
Et quant du siecle trespasserent,
Toutes lor vertus emporterent,
Et lessierent as hoirs l'avoir.²⁶⁾

Langlois shows that de Meun used Boethius extensively in other parts of the Roman. Surely it would not be stretching matters too far to believe, in spite of Langlois' silence, that here too the French cleric was indebted to the philosopher of the dark ages, as well as to an idea, which, if its presence in Baudouin de Condé is an indication was widely prevalent during the thirteenth century. Jean de Meun, although one must concede him honesty and courage, was hardly an innovator. He was working

26. "If there is anything good in nobility, it is, I believe, only this — that it seems to impose upon the nobles the necessity of not declining from the virtue of their ancestors."

27. Ll. 19317-23.

"The noble man must reveal in himself the nobility of his ancestors who won their nobility by hard work, and who when they left the world took their virtues with them and left to their heirs only their possessions."

pretty largely, as even superficial reference to Langlois will show, with borrowed material. To be sure, as we have just pointed out, Jean de Meun expanded the idea, but fundamentally he says the same thing as did his predecessor. There are lines in the Roman that link the poem to the Contes of Beaudouin de Condé; most striking probably are these:

Ge n'en iroi ja nul chuant
Et fust neis fils d'Alixandre.²⁸⁾

One thinks at once of the "preus d' Alixandre", and it is just possible that Jean de Meun was actually borrowing from Condé.

A much more probable supposition is that reference to "Alixandre"
²⁹⁾

was common in the thirteenth century , and that Jean de Meun and Beaudouin de Condé were, each of them, using material

³⁰⁾ in general circulation. Earlier in the Roman de la Rose, beginning with line 6852, in the story of Crésus, Jean de Meun had already spoken of "gentillesse." This time Fortune is criticized; Fortune actually amounts to nothing -- one is ³¹⁾ reminded of Euripides :

28. Ll. 19456-7.

"No one shall I flatter though he be a born son of Alexander."

29. See Paul Mayer, Alexandre le Grand dans la Litterature Francaise du Moyen Age, for an indication of the Macedonian's literary popularity.

30. Any attempt to analyse the relationship existing -- if any did exist -- between Beaudouin de Condé and Jean de Meun is necessarily difficult. Information about Condé is hard to secure; Scheler's notes are somewhat meager and even the compendious Petit de Julleville makes no mention of him. Finally, since Scheler places Condé between 1240 and 1280, and since Langlois decides Jean de Meun began the continuation of Lorris about 1270, there is no positive evidence of actual borrowing.

31. See above, p. 15.

"Qu'el ne prise tout une bille
Fors que gentillesce sa fille."³²⁾

Phanie, the daughter of Crésus, concludes her speech to her father by saying:

"Gentillesse est noble et si l'ain,
Qu'el n'entre mie en cuer vilain:
Pour ce vous los, mon très-chier pere
Que vilonie en vous n'apère."³³⁾

It is interesting to note that, like Conde, Jean de Meun is here contrasting "vilonie" and "gentillesse", the former being conduct worthy of a villein, the latter conduct worthy of a gentilhomme or nobleman. Jean de Meun is deplored the old conditions by which a nobleman is made to seem worth more than anyone else; but language plays a curious trick on him and makes him use in his criticism words that owe their origins to the conditions their user is attacking.

Jean de Meun's conception of true nobility did not die with him. We find Guillaume le Machault in Le Confort d'Ami³⁴⁾ uttering the familiar idea:

Et certes; c'est plus grand noblesse
D'avoir honneur et povres estre, 35)
Que sans honneur estre grant meytre.

Moliere, too, touched upon the subject in the first speech in George Dandin. The point of view here is not the conventional

32. Ll. 6851-2.

"She (Fortune) is nothing worth, only gentleness her daughter."

33. Ll. 6863-6.

"Because gentleness is noble, it pleases me, and because it never enters a base heart; therefore I advise you, my dear father, never to let villainy appear in you."

34. Circa 1356.

35. Ll. 2912-4.

"Truly it is more noble to be honored and poor than without honor to be a great lord."

Note use of noblesse.

one, however. Daudin, a nouveau-riché, has married into the family of a nobleman; naturally enough he finds the situation trying. Molière was shrewd enough to see that if noble birth is not always sufficient, virtue is not always sufficient either.

In Dom Juan, however, Molière utters -- or rather, makes Dom Louis, the father of Dom Juan, utter --- the familiar idea that "la vertu est le premier titre de noblesse" and that "la naissance n'est rien ou la vertu n'est pas." Boileau in the fifth satire, imitated from the eighth satire of Juvenal, discusses exhaustively the nature of true nobility. The ostensible imitation of the Latin satirist is merely a feint, used to make less obvious Boileau's attack on certain of Louis XIV's courtiers. Once, long ago, "le mérite . . . faisait la noblesse et les rois."³⁶⁾ Now "quand un homme est riche il vaut toujours son prix."

More bitter is La Bruyère's Des Grands, found in Les Caractères. True, La Bruyère does not actually use the word noble, or gentilhomme, but his satire is plainly aimed at the nobility. "Grands" is simply another word for hommes nobles; whichever term he used La Bruyère found little to admire in the persons it designates. One feels when one reaches the end of the chapter with the writer's saying "l'on doit se taire sur les puissants: il y a presque toujours de la flatterie à en dire du bien; il y a du péril à en dire du mal pendant

36. Act IV, scene IV.

37. Cf. the golden age theme in Boethius, particularly Book II, metre 5.

qu'ils vivent, et de la lacheté quand ils sont morts", that the writer was stopping not because he had finished, but because he had suddenly decided to be discreet.

Probably the most notable French proverb concerning true nobility is the brief but pithy "Noblesse oblige." An attempt to discover its origin proved rather disappointing. Didier Loubens quotes from a Latin author, whose name he does not trouble to give, but whom the reader will recognize as Boethius:

Hoc unum in nobilitate bonum, ut nobilibus imposita necessitate [sic], et cetera. ³⁸⁾

Loubens also recalls the herald's admonition to a chevalier before a tourney, "Souvenez de qui vous êtes fils et ne forlignez pas." Quitard's Dictionnaire Etymologique, Historique et Anecdotique des Proverbes, an older book than that of Loubens, does not even list "noblesse oblige", although it does mention "noblesse vient di vertu". ⁴⁰⁾

"On lit dans la Genèse ce passage remarquable: 'Noé trouva grâce devant le Seigneur. Voici la généalogie de Noé: 'Noé était un homme juste et parfait.' Cette généalogie est aussi rare que nouvelle. Elle nous apprend, dit St. Chrysostome, que toute la splendeur de la naissance n'est rien aux yeux de Dieu, en

38. Pp. 204-5

39. The remainder follows the Latin original. See above, p. 78 and p. 28. 35.

40. P. 559.

41)

comparaison de la justice et de la perfection.

The passage in Genesis is certainly ambiguous and need not necessarily be interpreted as St. Chrysostom explained it. It is easy to see that the problem of true nobility must have been quite foreign to the Hebrews, to whom nobility of blood was unimportant. Quillard remarks further, without giving dates:

Les docteurs hébreux disent. Tu demandes pourquoi Adam est seul de première formation?
- C'est afin que, parmi les hommes à venir,
l'un ne pût pas dire à l'autre: je suis de plus noble race que toi.

Neither of these passages has very much value as an explanation of the proverb in question; but both suggest the antiquity of the idea and its wide acceptance among various peoples. It was, as the French would say — more concisely than the English — une idée très répandue.

In Italy as early as the thirteenth century, this same conception of true nobility was to be found. Ozanam in Dante et la Philosophie Catholique au Treizième Siècle quotes a work of St. Thomas Aquinas, which he calls a fragment, entitled De Ereditione Principum.⁴²⁾ The familiar idea is restated in Ozanam's summary, although a new figure is employed:

41. "Genesis contains this remarkable passage (VI, 8-10): Noah found grace before the Lord. Behold the genealogy of Noah: Noah was a righteous and perfect man. This genealogy is as rare as it is new. It teaches us, says St. Chrysostom, that all nobility of birth is nothing in the eyes of God, in comparison with justice and perfection." It is well to note that the statement about Noah's perfection and justice is merely a parenthetical one.
42. Ozanam must remain our only authority for this. The writer has made a careful search for the De Ereditione in the Opera Omnia St. Thomas, and for reference to it in Schmidt's Thomas-Lexikon, and has been unable to find a trace of it.

Sur une même tige naissent la rose et l'épine.
 La rose est une noble créature L'épine,
 au contraire, est une vile excroissance. . . .
 Ainsi d'un même souche deux hommes pourront naître,
 l'un vilain, l'autre noble.⁴³⁾

St. Thomas also adds, according to Ozanam, some new authorities to the list. "Platon", he says "l'a dit: 'Point de roi qui n'ait des esclaves parmi ses aieux: point d'esclave qui ne soit le petit fils des rois.' ". The summary concludes:

Je répète donc avec saint Jérôme que rien ne me paraît digne d'envie dans cette noblesse prétendue héritaire, si ce n'est que les nobles sont astreints à la vertu par la honte de déroger.

The quotation is not of course from Saint Jerome; it is from
 44)

Boethius. Saint Jerome, although he did express himself
 45) on the subject, used slightly different terms, emphasizing the fact that all are descended from one God.

Common then as the idea apparently was in the thirteenth century — if we accept Ozanam's quotation from Aquinas as genuine, or even if we accept it as merely pseudo-Aquinas — it is not surprising to find that same idea in Dante. It is in the Convito, trattato quarto, canzone terza, that the poet discourses at some length upon the nature of true nobility. He says here:

43. Thorn and rose grown on the same branch. The rose is a lovely thing; the thorn, however, is a vile excrescence. Thus two men may be born of the same stock, the one worthless, the other noble.

44. See above p. 18 and pp. 35-36.

45. See above pp. 19 -20.

Dico del valore
 Per lo qual veramente è l'uom gentile,
 Con rima aspra e sottile
 Riprovando il giudicio falso e vile
 Di que', che voglion che de Gentilezza
 Sia principio richezza.⁴⁶⁾

Later in the canzone Dante brings out another familiar idea:

Et Gentilezza dovunque è virtute,
 Ma non virtute ov' ella.⁴⁷⁾

It is worth while to note in regard to the actual semantic study of the words that in this canzone of Dante nobilitate (or nobilità) and gentilezza do not seem to be quite synonymous. Gentilezza is the more popular word, along with the corresponding adjective gentile. Nobilitate is used occasionally, however:

Dico che Nobilitate in sua razione
 Importa sempre ben del suo subietto,
 Come viltate importa sempre male.⁴⁸⁾

To judge by this, nobilitate was a more abstract term, gentilezza meaning primarily "of noble birth", but as Dante tries to explain, misused if applied to noble birth alone. The adjective nobile
⁴⁹⁾ is not found at all in this canzone.

Gentilezza and gentile were used not only to mean "noble birth" and "nobly born". An even cursory examination of La Vita Nuova will convince one of the prominent place of the words in early

46. ll. 12-17.

"And I shall tell of the worth by which man is truly noble, with harsh and subtle rhymes, rebuking the pernicious idea of those who believe that riches are necessary to nobility."

47. ll. 101-2.

"Nobility is wherever virtue is; but virtue is not always where nobility is."

48. "I say that nobility, by reason of it, connotes always good of its subject while wickedness connotes always evil."

49. For further treatment in Dante of the idea of true nobility see the De Monarchia, II, 3, in which Dante quotes Aristotle and Juvenal:

Est enim nobilitas virtus et divitiae antiquae, iuxta Philosophum in Politics, et iuxta Juvenalem: "Nobilitas animi [sic] sola est atque unica virtus." See above p./2 (Juvenal) and p./3 (Aristotle).

Italian love poetry. Sonetto decimo of La Vita Nuova begins:

"Amore e il cor gentil sono una cosa."

In the next line of the sonnet Dante refers to Guido Guinicelli, whose canzone beginning "Al cor gentil" was — and is yet — a popular one. Guinicelli believed that to be gentil one must have Love in one's heart. Rossetti translates the first lines of the
 50) canzone thus:

51)

"Within the gentle heart love sheltered him
 As birds within the green shade of the grove;
 Before the gentle heart in nature's scheme
 Love was not, nor the gentle heart ere Love."

Guinicelli also speaks of the man who wrongly believes himself noble, because of high birth:

See also Paradiso, XVI; the first few lines are particularly pertinent:

O poca nostra nobilità di sangue!

Dico nel cielo, io me ne gloriai.

50. Rossetti: Collected Works, II, p. 264.

51. Root in his edition of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, a propos of the lines (III, 4, 5), cites:

Pleasaunce of love, O goodly debonaire,
 In gentil hertes ay redy to repaire,
 from the Inferno V, l. 100:

Amor, che al cor gentil ratto s' apprende,
 and says that "courtly love was exclusively appropriated to those of gentle birth." The Dante who wrote the fourth tractate of the Convito would certainly be the first to deny that in this line of the Inferno he was appropriating courtly love to those of gentle birth. The rest of Guinicelli's canzone, the first line of which:

Al cor gentil ripara sempre l'amore,
 plainly suggests this line from the Inferno, indicates that Guinicelli was not identifying noble birth and courtly love. Chaucer's frequent mention of the "gentil herte" and Gower's use of the phrase are proof of its prevalence. It is possible that here we have the origin of it.

The sun strikes full upon the mud all day:
 It remains vile, nor the sun's worth is less.
 "By race I am gentle," the proud man doth say;
 He is the mud; the sun is gentleness.
 Let no man predicate
 That ought the name of gentleness should have,
 Even in a king's estate, 52)
 Except the heart there be a gentle man's.
 The star beam lights the wave, ---
 Heaven holds the star and the star's radiance.

The lines are interesting, not only for their aesthetic beauty, but for the recurring of the phrase "the gentle heart", and for the implication in line seven that noble birth does not imply gentleness.

Again in La Vita Nuova, Sonnetto Undecimo, there is the identification of Amore and Gentilezza:

Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore; 53)
 Per che si fa gentil ciò ch'ella mira

Sonnetto Vigesimosecondo begins,

Gentil pensiero che parla di vui.

Finally in the Inferno, in the story of Paolo and Francesca, we find:

Amor, che al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
 Prese costui della bella persona
 Che mi fu tolta. 54)

- 52. Gentil and gentilezza are used in the original where Rossetti translates "gentle" and "gentleness".
- 53. "My lady carries love within her eyes and everything she looks upon is thereby made gentle."
- 54. V, ll 100-2. See above, p. 43.
 "Love that quickly seizes the gentle heart seized him for the lovely body that was taken from me."

These lines should have a particular interest for English
 readers, since Paget Toynbee points out the close resemblance
 they bear to the line which so pleased Chaucer that he used it
 not once but four times:

55)

But pitee remneth soon in gentil herte.

If Dante actually did derive this idea of the identification
 of gentilezza and amore from some earlier author it might be
 logical to assume that the troubadours, as well as Guinicelli,
 suggested it to him. It is true enough that in Beck's collection
gentilise and gent are used comparatively seldom, and when they
 do occur seem almost colorless. There is no connection here
 between amor and gentelise. Gilbert de Berneville, for example,
 begs his mistress:

57)

Alegiez moi par vostre gentelise
 Les cruelx maus que me faites avoir.

Gent is used almost exclusively to modify cors. It is used in the
 song of the King of Navarre, and in numbers 208, 225, and 264, and

55. Dante in English Literature, I, p. 9.

56. Prologue to the Legende of Good Women, l. 503; the Knight's Tale,
 l. 903; the Merchants Tale, l. 742; and the Squire's Tale, l. 749.
 Toynbee suggests comparison with the Man of Law's Tale, l. 660:
 As gentil herte is ful fild of pitee.

57. See above, p. 32.

58. V. II, p. 21.

"In the name of your gentleness relieve me of the cruel torments
 you make me have."

these are merely instances the writer happened upon while running through the book. Systematic search would probably reveal more examples.

Yet even if the troubadours did not actually use gentil and gentilise they were accustomed to speak of love in a gracious and courtly fashion. Daniel in his Chanso beginning "Ans qu'els cim" says that love "gen m'adultz de los artz de l'escola" . In the sixth stanza of the same poem he says that than his lady,

Ges de Paris tro qu'a Sanchas
Genser no s'vest ni s'despitelha. 60)

These citations assume more importance if we remember that Dante thought highly of Daniel, even placing him above Guinicelli.⁶¹⁾ What seems a more likely supposition, however, is not that Dante borrowed directly from Arnaut Daniel — or Guinicelli — such phrases as il cor gentile, but that these phrases represented a way of looking at love, which Dante shared with certain of his predecessors, and sharing, expressed in like terms.

A. G. Ferrers Howell⁶²⁾ suggests that there might be some basis for the belief that Dante in the fourth tractate of the Convito was borrowing from another troubadour, Giraut de Bornelh, and specifically from Giraut's poem "Molt era dolz e plazens."

59. L. 5.

"... gently took me from the arts of the school."

60. "People from Paris even to Sanchas neither dress nor undress themselves more lovelily."

61. *Purgatorio*, XXVI

62. "Dante and the Troubadours" in the Dante sexcentary volume. The present writer is largely indebted to this essay for the material on Provencal poetry, just presented.

This poem the present writer has not been able to secure, since the library to which he has access has only a meager collection of Provençal poetry. Howell quotes a passage from one of Girant's sirventes, which seems to contradict the idea of true nobility as we have become accustomed to it. "The world was good when joy was everywhere welcomed, when nobleness was united to high rank. But now it is the worst men who are called good Reason has gone astray, since men have deemed the bad good and judged the noble, the courteous, and the true to be the worst." It is the troubadour's point of view that we have here, of course. The troubadours were dependent upon aristocratic masters and true nobility was less important than wealth, for true nobility does not pay for singers. In these lines, too, we have an expression of the golden age theme which we find in Boethius, and which the writer of the Chanson de Roland gloomily expressed in the words:
Tot s'en vait declinant.

CHAPTER III

THE WORDS IN ENGLISH

When we come to the discussion of gentillesse and noblesse in the English language, we are met with a veritable embarrassment of riches. The number of significant derivatives in English from gentilis and nobilis is remarkably large; the New English Dictionary lists not only noble and nobility, possibly the two most common in present day English, but also the perfectly familiar word, nobleness, as well as noblesse itself, noblety, and nobley, the noun. The derivatives from gentilis are quite 1) as numerous: they are gent, genteel with all its derivatives, gentillesse, gentility, gentle, and gentry. Nor is this list all inclusive. The present writer is omitting entirely gentile and words derived from it, and for the moment he is also omitting words built upon the English word gentle, such as gentleman and gentleness. Jaunty, despite its lack of resemblance to any of the words above, also belongs in the list; it represents an English attempt to pronounce the French gentil.

Taking up first of all noble and noblesse in English, we find them both to be early borrowings. Both appeared in English at least as early as 1225, in the Ancien Riwle, and both, in

1. Strictly gent is from a past participle gentum from gignere, GEN, the same root that gave gentilis. But see above, p. 32, note.
2. Throughout the early part of this chapter the authority, unless otherwise noted, is N. E. D.

Middle English as in Old French from which they were borrowed, possessed a subjective meaning. Indeed, to judge entirely on the evidence of the New English Dictionary the subjective meaning was apparently in use before the objective one. Noble as a substantive meaning "a man of noble rank, a member of the nobility" was first used in 1340 in Hampsire's Psalter, although the adjective meaning "having a titular pre-eminence" appeared in writing as early as 1297.³⁾ The early subjective meaning of noble in English is really very close to the original Latin significance of nobilis, known, illustrious, as this from the Ancien Riwle⁴⁾ shows: "Hire uader and hire bredren, se noble princes also weren." As a substantive noble was also applied to ^a coin first minted by Edward III.

Noblesse was a popular word in Middle English. In the Chaucer Concordance thirty-five different lines containing the word are quoted. One passage, of particular interest because it shows the indefinite subjective meaning of noblesse, is worth recording. Chaucer in the Roman de la Rose speaks of two "fetis damiselles" who

Had Mirthe doon, for his noblesse,
Amidde the carole for to daunce.⁵⁾

Skeat glosses noblesse in this line by "nobleness", but the meaning is not very definite. It is probably not "high birth", even though Mirthe is called Sir. Gower, in Book Two of the Confessio Amantis in speaking of Pope Boniface, says:

3. A note on this definition explains: "In early use not clearly distinct from sense 1" (illustrious or distinguished and the like.)
4. 54.
5. Ll. 779-80.

His pacience and his simplesse
Hath set him into hih noblesse.⁶⁾

Later, in Book Five, Gower says that the virtue of liberality, which stands between avarice and prodigality, and

Which is the vertu of Largesse,
Stamp and governeth his noblesse.⁷⁾

There is no clear antecedent for "his", and the lines are not very meaningful. One suspects that Gower needed a rhyme for "Largesse" and was not worrying about the meaning of his couplet, like Spenser, who urged one to love that one "might lovéd be with equal crime." If Gower means that nobility depends upon liberality, the lines are reminiscent of those in Chretien's Clices, where Chretien makes largesce the most desirable virtue for a knight,
⁸⁾
a more desirable one than even gentilesse.

The reader has probably anticipated the writer's mention of Chaucer's ballade Womanly Noblesse. The poem presents further evidence that noblesse was a subjective term, for obviously Chaucer is not speaking here of woman's nobility of birth but of her excellent qualities. Particularly interesting is the third stanza:

Considering eek how I hange in balaunce
In your servyce; swich, lo! is my chaunce,
Abydng grace, whan that your gentilnesse
of my gret wo list doon allegeaunce,
An with your pite me som tyse avauance
In full rebating of my hevinesse.

* * * * *

6. Ll. 2819-20.

7. Ll. 7647-8.

8. See H. O. Taylor, The Medieval Mind, I, pp. 583-4. On the part of largesce in the courtier's make up see Neilson, The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love, p. 185.

Here once again is the combination of love and gentleness, and love and pity, fresh indications of Chaucer's debt to Dante and the poets of the "dolce stil nuovo."⁹

Noblesse, although seldom heard, is not obsolete, the dictionary explaining that "in later use (after the seventeenth century) mainly, if not entirely, a direct readoption from French." It means ^{both} that "noble condition" and "members of the nobility"; for a late use of the word in the former sense we have a quotation from Ruskin: "The noblesse of thought which makes the simplest word best."¹⁰

Nobley and noblety, from French nobleye (adjective) and Old French noblete respectively, are obsolete. Of them the former had a wider variety of meanings: "nobility of nature", "articles of value", and "persons of noble rank." The earliest known use of the word was in 1290, the latest in 1530. Noblety, which was apparently first used in written English in 1340, meant nobility or splendor. The latest quotation containing it is from Dunbar:

All gentrice and nobiltie
Ar passit out of he degree.¹¹

Recent uses of noble are mostly those where the word means "having qualities or properties of a very high or admirable kind." But sport writers frequently refer to boxing as "the noble science".

9. See above, pp. 44-5.

10. According to N. E. D. to be found in the Preterita (sic) II, 210. Examination of volume II, section 210, p. 316, of the Praeterita (1899 edition), however, reveals no such passage.

11. Quhome To Soll I Complene My Wo, l. 26.

a meaning which N. E. D. documents thoroughly. The present writer has heard noble used in colloquial speech with a satiric meaning, chiefly in the expression "a noble thought" applied to any idea that meets with the speaker's approval.

Gentle has a number of meanings; originally, or at least in the oldest quotation containing the word in N. E. D., it meant "well-born". But an even earlier example of English use of gentle is to be found in the Middle English translation of the Proverbs of Alfred. Nor does the word necessarily mean well born in the proverb. In the proverb (B. 37) advising one not to trust a red haired man, we have:

Ich ne seige nouht bi-pan
þat moni ne ben gentile man;
þuru wis lore and gentilerie
He amendip huge companie.

If Skeat's dating of the proverbs is correct (1205-1210), the above passage may represent the earliest use of gentle and a derived substantive in written English. At any rate it gives an earlier use of the word than does N. E. D., where the earliest quotation containing gentle is from the Ancien Riwle, dated 1225. In the sense of "well-born" gentle has become obsolete "except in the archaic phrase gentle and simple, and in . . . gentleman, gentlefolk, etc." Gentle might also mean "noble, generous, virtuous", significations which go back to 1297, and which are now archaic. The last use of gentle in this sense listed in N. E. D. is in Browning's Balaustion. The two

common meanings of the word in Modern English are "moderate in operation, intensity, rate, or the like", and "of persons: mild in disposition or behavior," ~~meanings probably due since~~ the earliest written occurrence of the former is listed by N. E. D. as being in 1626, and of the latter 1552, it is quite obvious that these are secondary meanings of the word. It is not so easy to explain how gentle took on these meanings; a plausible suggestion is one made by Professor Burnham that the sense "mild, tender" might be owing to the stress on pity and graciousness in connection with gentilesse; or it might be merely that the word, popular and having a pleasant connotation, came to be applied almost indiscriminately to such divergent things as the weather and a person's disposition.

Gentilesse is listed in N. E. D. as obsolete except for archaic use, it is defined as "the quality of being gentle; courtesy, politeness, good breeding", a meaning plainly connected with the adjective gentle. The further meaning of "slenderness, elegance" is probably connected with the adjective gent, secondary meanings of which were "graceful, pretty", and the like. Gentilesse has, of course, been supplanted in Modern English by gentleness and gentility; but neither word is an exact substitute, nor are both together. Gentleness corresponds roughly to the subjective meaning of gentilesse, and gentility to the objective meaning, "of noble birth";

but gentility shares with genteel a satiric connotation which gentilesse never had. In losing gentilesse English lost a word that had seen much service. A Middle English use of the word, which Stratmann in his dictionary does not account for and which suggests the wide variety of meanings possible, is found in Lydgate's Stans Puer ad Mensam. Line 10 reads:

Loude for to souuppe is against gentiles;
lines 20 and 21:

And whansoever that thou dine or souuppe
Of gentilesse take salt withe thy knyf.

The word as used here means plainly "good manners," a sense which might have grown out of one of the French meanings of gentilesse — "conduite digne d'une personne noble", for example —, or one which may be connected with the meanings of Middle English gent, "elegant and graceful."

Gent itself, as well as the later borrowings genteel, and jaunty, deserves some comment. Besides meaning "elegant and graceful", gent meant also "noble, high born", a meaning more in accordance with the etymology than the others. Later it came to signify "graceful in manners", and the like, as in N. E. D's quotation from Villiers' The Rehearsal:

Is not that now like a well-bred person, E gad?
So modest, so gent.¹²⁾

Genteel was a late borrowing from the French gentil; the pronunciation represents a half-hearted English attempt to pronounce the word as the French did. A less half-hearted

attempt may be seen in the word jaunty. Jaunty has had an interesting semantic history; borrowed into English late in the seventeenth century, the word almost immediately took on the meaning of "sprightly", which gentil in French never had and has not even today. Another interesting attempt of the English to pronounce the French adjective correctly is seen in gentee, a word used by Butler in Hudibras, and meaning the same as genteeel.

Study of the definition of the word gentleman is closely linked to the debate upon the nature of the gentleman which overlaps the discussion of true nobility. The former is distinctly English, peculiarly English even —— and by English we mean, of course, English and American. The latter discussion English shares with some of the other continental languages, as the writer has tried to show earlier in the paper. In spite of the close relationship of the two topics, it will save confusion perhaps to discuss each one individually.

The first meaning of the word gentleman, according to N. E. D., is "a man of gentle birth . . . properly, one who is entitled to bear arms, though not ranking among the nobility." Sir George Stitwell, however, criticizes this definition, since it implies that as early as the thirteenth century there were three classes of freemen in England: nobles, gentlemen, and yeomanry.

13. The first quotation in N. E. D. in support of this meaning is from the proverb of Alfred already quoted (see above, p. 52.) The date here is 1275; but volume 4:2 of N. E. D. appeared seven years before Skeat's edition of the proverbs. In any case the word as used in the quotation hardly fits the definition "of gentle birth", and need not fit the supplementary one: "applied to a person of distinction without precise definition of rank."

Sir George's article, The English Gentleman, is worth our notice, since, having as he did access to old statutes and documents, he was able to add considerably to our information on the word gentleman.¹⁴⁾ "At the present day", explains Sir George, "no one would speak of a knight as a nobleman, or of an earl or baron as a gentleman." Gentleman, as a class name, was not used until early in the fifteenth century; before that there were in England only two classes, "the nobiles or tenants in chivalry, comprising earls, barons, knights, esquires, and franklins, and the ignobiles, consisting of villeins, citizens, and burgesses." Sir George went to the Staffordshire indictments, attributed to the year 1413-14, and found record of a charge against "Robert Erdesyke of Stafford, gentilman." The man whom Sir George immediately christens the first English gentleman was charged with housebreaking, wounding with attempt to kill, and procuring the murder of a certain Thomas Page. The question rather naturally arises: why the designation "gentleman"? Sir George offered as solution a statute passed in 1413 requiring all defendants to tell their "estate, degree, or mystery." This proved to be embarrassing to certain people, such as younger sons, who had no occupation and no definite "estate" or "degree." Gentleman, a term as yet without specific meaning, these younger

14. The reader must keep in mind throughout the fact that Sir George is concerned with the technical, heraldic meaning of the word, not with the loose meaning.

sons adopted and used. Sir George stops here, but it is easy to understand, of course, how from them the designation spread to others who until this time had constituted a kind of lesser nobility, the already mentioned "knights, esquires, and franklins." Sir George also questions the pertinency of the phrase, "having the right to bear arms", in the N. E. D. definitions of gentleman and gentility. Lawyers and writers on heraldry, Englishmen and foreigners, have always declared that any man is "justified" in devising a coat of arms for himself; in support of this view Sir George cites, but does not quote, Sasso Ferrato, Nicholas Upton, John of Guildford, and others.

On the meanings and use of gentil in medieval literature Sir George's remarks are not quite so convincing. He announces somewhat dogmatically that the first appearance of gentil in medieval literature is in Wace's Roman de Rou, line 5955. He dates this work 1170. One immediately wonders, of course, how Sir George classified the Chanson de Roland, in which, one hundred years before Wace, the epithet gentil had been applied to Ganelon, meaning, as earlier in the paper the present writer tried to point out,¹⁵⁾ "well born." Such a slip, however, does not invalidate Sir George's argument about the early meaning of English gentleman.

Why French gentilhomme has so steadfastly retained its meaning, "nobleman", while English gentleman has tended to lose, particularly for us Americans, all trace of the heraldic meaning,

15. See above, p. 29.

is perhaps not difficult to explain. The fact that in France there has always existed a sharp distinction between nobles and commons must have had something to do with the resistance of gentilhomme to change in meaning, in spite of all that such writers as Jean de Meun and Moliere said about true nobility's being a matter of virtue rather than of birth. One reason for the English word's present subjective meaning may be that gentleman began by being a loose compound; indeed, in the early citations in N. E. D. it appears as two words, and the force of each member must have been more strongly felt than in modern gentleman. Then, since gentle had other meanings than "of noble birth", another less precise meaning began to attach itself to the compound in which gentle so prominently appeared. Perhaps the meaning of gentleman altered because the English in their speech apparently do not like to be reminded of class distinctions, as witness the disappearance in present day Standard English of the pronouns of familiar address — thee and thou — so that the standard speech has only one second personal pronoun, whereas most of the continental languages have at least two.

The problem of what exactly — apart from the considerations of heraldry — is a gentleman, is one that has interested a number of

16. La Curn de Ste. Palaye, however, under gentilhomme says: "Jusqu'au seizième siècle l'adjectif n'est pas accolé au nom homme et peut se placer après lui." Since even in French the word was felt as a compound and did not change in meaning, it is apparent that the compound nature of the word in English was not the prime cause of gentleman's shift in meaning.

English writers. As early as the fifteenth century there appeared an anonymous quatrain, entitled in the Reliquiae Antiquae "Qualities of a Gentleman":

In whom is trouthe, pittee, fredome,
and hardynesse
He is a man inheryte to
gentlemene.
Off thisse virtues iij who
lakkyth iij.,
He aught never gentylmame called
be.¹⁷⁾

It is interesting to see that the identification of gentility and pity, so popular with Chaucer,¹⁸⁾ appears here in the next century. That a gentleman should be truthful, liberal and brave is not surprising; that pity should be a part of his character is rather remarkable. Elyot, for instance, in The Boke Called the Gouvernour, ignores altogether in his discussion of gentleman this quality. His point of view throughout strikes one as being that of an economist:

Fyrst that in the beginning, when private possession and dignitie were gyven by the consent of the people, who than had all thinge in commune, and equalitie in degree and condition, undoubtedly they gave the one and the other to him at whose vertue they mervailed, and by whose labour and industrie they received a commune benefit. . . . And that promptitude or redinesse in employinge that benefite was then named in englishe gentilnesse, as it was in latine benignitas . . . and the persons were called gentilmen, more for the remembraunce of their vertue and benefite than for discrepance of astates.¹⁹⁾

17. V. I, p. 252.

18. See above, p. 45.

19. V. 2, p. 27.

This is, the reader will see, the idealistic conception of what is the gentleman. One wonders what Eliot would have said of Robert Erdeswyke.

John Ferne in the Blazon of Gentry sticks pretty closely to etymology:

The word Nobilitas . . . is derived of the verbe Nosco, to knowe. . . . A Gentleman or Nobleman is he, (for I do wittingly confound these voices) whiche is knowne, and through the heroycall vertues of his life, talked of in everye man's mouth.^{20}}

Here is another discussion of true nobility, a restatement of the idea that good deeds make the noble man. Yet Ferne has respect for the nobly born, for on the preceding page of the Blazon of Gentry we learn that "from Sem did pursue by the flesh, our Saviour and King Jesus Christ: A Gentleman of blood." This was eighteen years before Dekker wrote in The Honest Whore²¹ that Christ was the "first true gentleman." The authorities seemingly did not always agree.

John Selden discussed the question, too, although not formally; it is only one of the many subjects in the famous Table Talk.
(The present writer is preserving the old spelling and punctuation.)

What a Gentleman is; tis hard with us to define.
In other Countrys he is known by his Priviledges;
In Westminster Hall he is one yt is repured one:
In ye Court of Honour he yt has Arms: ye King
can not make a Gentleman (. . . Nor God Almighty)

20. P. 4.

21. Act V, Scene 2, the last speech of Candide. The full account reads:

The best of men
That e'er wore earth about him, was a sufferer,
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit,
The first true gentleman that ever breathed.

but he can make a Gentleman by creacon;
 If you Ask which is ye better of these two.
 Civilly ye Gen (tleman) of blood, morally²²⁾
 ye Gentleman by creacon may be ye better.

Selden's definition is so restricted that one concludes he must have been defining the heraldic term. That a man might be a gentleman without being gently born or knighted seems not to have occurred to him. Selden had (although he seems to be unaware of it) some difficulty with the etymology of the word.

In ye beginning of Christianity ye ffathers
 writt Contra Gentes and contra Gentiles . . .
 but after all were Christians ye better sort of
 people still retained ye name of Gentiles through-
 out ye 4 provinces of ye Roman Empire as Gentil:
 home in ffrench; Gentil: homo in Italian;²³⁾
 Gentil: hombre in Spanish, Gentleman in English.

We shall stop for only one of the many more who have tried to decide what is a gentleman. Stile, Hazlitt, Newman are all names more famous than that of Henry Peacham — even Katherine Fullerton Gerould, a contemporary whose essay on the nature of the gentleman is the latest contribution to the subject that this writer has seen, is better known to us than the versatile school teacher whose Compleat Gentleman went into three editions, the third one appearing only twenty years after his death. Since Peacham was writing his book for the instruction of the son of a nobleman, the gentleman in the title of the book must be a subjective term,

22. P. 50.

23. Ibid.

for we have Sir George Sitwell's word for it that no one would speak of an earl or baron as a gentleman in the heraldic sense. Peacham has also something to say about true nobility; but most of the book is taken up with an account of the things requisite to a "compleat gentleman." Noble birth, by implication, is one, but there are many others, for Peacham himself was a musician, a scholar, a mathematician, and an authority on heraldry. A gentleman should be well rounded.

We of today have weakened the term; perhaps it is the influence of Lord Chesterfield ²⁴⁾ that has made good manners the most important thing about the contemporary gentleman's make-up. The last word on the subject — Mrs. Gerould's essay — takes the preeminence of good manners entirely for granted. Mrs. Gerould is concerned with deciding what good manners are and incidentally with refuting Newman's belief that the gentleman does injury only unintentionally. Her belief is that the gentleman is one who injures only intentionally. Again one is reminded of the line from Roland:

25)
Tot s'vn vait declinant.

24. See Heltzel's The Chesterfieldian Idea of the Gentleman.

25. The reader will find the term gentleman discussed in De Foe's The Compleat Gentleman; Steele's "A Fine Gentleman", in the Guardian, no. 34; Hazlitt's "On the Look of a Gentleman", V. 7, p. 209 of the Collected Works; Mill's System of Logic, (Book IV, Chapter V, 1); Newman's eighth discourse in The Idea of a University; Samuel McCord Crothers' essay, "The Evolution of the Gentleman", in The Gentle Reader; and Katherine Fullerton Gerould's "Ladies and Gentlemen", in Harper's for November, 1926.

The discussion of true nobility, which, as we have seen, overlaps the discussion of the gentleman, in Middle English, begins with Chaucer, or at least with the Middle English translator of the Romaunt of the Rose, fragment B. Beginning with line 2187, Love explains what is the basis of true gentility; no man is "only gentil for his linages"; but

Who-so (that) is vertuous
 * * * * *
 Though he be not gentil born,
 Thou may well seyn * * *
 That he is gentil, because he doth
 as longeth to a gentil man.

Dr. Fansler in Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose points out the similarity between these lines and those in the Roman which are a discussion of true nobility, explaining that Chaucer here as in The Wife of Bath's Tale and in the ballade Gentilesse agrees with Boethius, Dante, Guillaume de Lorris, and Jean de Meun.

Gentilesse is probably Chaucer's most striking discussion of the doctrine of true nobility, being as it is a complete poem on the subject. The idea found in Dekker that Christ was "the first true gentleman that ever breathed" is found too in the opening line of Chaucer's poem:

The firste stok, fader of gentilesse
 What man that claymeth gentil
 for to be,
 Must folewe his trace, and
 all his wittes dresse
 Virtue to serve, and vyses for
 to flee.
 For unto vertu longeth dignitie.

This emphasis in Chaucer upon the necessity of eschewing vice invites comparison with Juvenal's eighth satire:

Effigies quo
Tot bellatorum, si luditur
alea pernox
Ante mumatinos, si dormire
incipis ortu.
Luciferi²⁷⁾

In the third stanza Chaucer combines the idea of Juvenal with that of Dante and Jean de Meun — that wealth does not make a man gentil:

Vyce may well be heir to old richesse;
But this may no man, as men may well see,
Bequeathe his heir his vertuous noblesse
That is appropred unto no degree.

Throughout the poem runs the familiar idea that nobility is independent of birth, the final line of each stanza reading:

Al were he myrtree, croune, or diademe,
which is as much as to say that neither bishop, king, nor noble
is actually noble unless he imitates Christ.

Another Chaucerian expression of the idea is in The Wife of Bath's Tale. The ugly fairy is reading a sermon to the knight of Arthur's court, whose life she has saved by telling him what every woman most desires.

27. Ll. 9-12.

"What matter these statues of warriors if you gamble away the night before your Numantine fathers, and start to bed at the rise of Lucifer?"

She speaks derisively of
swich gentillesse
As is descended out of old richesse²⁸⁾,

and in support of her statement quotes Dante — a slip in chronology since the Wife of Bath has said at the beginning of her tale that the action of the story here took place hundreds and hundreds of years ago —, Seneca, Boethius, and Juvenal. Seemingly it was the idea that riches are responsible for gentility that Chaucer found chief fault with; in both the ballade and the present passage he emphasized the fact that wealth and noblesse were by no means the same thing.

Says the fairy,

Crist wol, we clayme of him
our gentillesse,
Not of our eldres for hir
old richesse,²⁹⁾

and we think of the ballade's mention of Christ as the "fader of gentillesse." Good actions are positive qualities of gentillesse. The knight is to take the doer of "gentil dedes"³⁰⁾ as the "grettest gentil man," — — incidentally an interesting early use of the word discussed above. The fairy later says

That he is gentil that doth gentil dedis,³¹⁾

but is still insistent upon the idea, earlier expressed, that

Thy gentillesse cometh fro God
alone.³²⁾

This last statement, as Dr. Fansler points out, is different

28. Ll. 254-5.

29. Ll. 261-2.

30. L. 259.

31. L. 314.

32. L. 306.

from the remarks of Nature in Jean de Meun, although it
 bears a resemblance to both Dante and Boethius. Chaucer's
 fondness for insisting upon a distinction between gentillesse
 and richesse has led Professor Lowes to believe that Chaucer's
 chief source for these lines in The Wife of Bath's Tale was the
 fourth tractate of the Convito,³³⁾ although Chaucer must have
 had pretty clearly in mind as well all the authorities whom the
 fairly cites. Professor Ayres³⁴⁾ is convinced that in this
 passage Chaucer is definitely indebted to Seneca's forty-fourth
 epistle, which has already been mentioned in Chapter I of this
 paper.³⁵⁾ He is not in accord, however, with Jefferson's
 statement that Boethius was the "starting place of this dis-
 cussion" of true nobility. Indeed in his unpublished paper on
 the subject, Professor Ayres was attempting to show that the
 idea was a common one before Boethius, a contention to which
 the early material in this paper lends support.

There is no good reason to suppose, however, that Chaucer
 used any one of the sources cited by the supernatural heroine
 of the Wife's Tale to the exclusion of all the others, although
 certainly the very fact that Chaucer himself made a translation
 of Consolatio suggests that he might have been influenced by some
 of Boethius's ideas. A propos of Chaucer's Boethius, it is
 worth while to note that in the translation of Prose VI and
 Metre VI of Book III, Chaucer translates the Latin nobilitas

33. See Jefferson's Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Philosophy of Boethius, p. 100.

34. See Lowes : Chaucer and Dante's Convivio."

35. Ayres: "Chaucer and Seneca".

36. See above, p. 5 et seq.

and nobilis by gentilesse and gentil, good evidence that in the fourteenth century noble had not yet supplanted gentle in the meaning "admirable, excellent, or well born" as it so clearly has today.

Chaucer's Parson also discusses true nobility and reminds us that "Ek for to pryd him of his gentrye is ful greet folye" for "we ben alle of o fader and of o moder", a repetition of the idea found in Seneca's forty-fourth epistle, in the De Beneficiis, and in St. Jerome. In the Squire's Tale occurs the famous,

For pitee renmeth sone in gentil
herte,

which is followed a couple of lines later by,

For gentil herte kytheth gentilesse,

both speeches are uttered by the falcon when she understands that Canacee is her friend.

It is Jefferson who notes that "several of the Canterbury tales are avowedly tales of gentilesse, and several are avowedly tales of churls." The Squire's Tale and the Franklin's Tale for example are plainly tales of gentilesse; the Reeve's Tale is concerned with churls. At the close of the Squire's Tale, the Franklin laments that his own son is not so learned as the Squire and wishes the son

" . . . mighte lerne gentillesse awght".

37. L. 460 et seq.

38. See above, p. 15 et seq.

39. De Beneficiis, 11, 28. For Jerome see above, p. 20 et. seq.

40. Jefferson, p. 101.

"Straw for your gentillesse," says the host, immediately causing himself to be classified as one of the churlish. The Franklin, in no way perturbed by the Host's criticism, begins a tale the entire basis of which is gentillesse; for, as
 41) Kittredge explains, Arveragers "out of pure gentillesse" promises not to tyrannize over Dongen after they are married. And Dongen answers:

" . . . sire, sith of your gentillesse
 Ye profre me to have so large a reyne." 42)

Gower, Chaucer's contemporary, in both his French work Misour de l'Omme and the English Confessio Amantis, discusses the subject of gentillesse.

Alle est sans falte la noblesce
 Quelle est par droit la garderesse
 De l'alme. 43)

Nobility is the guardian of the soul. Like St. Jerome and Seneca he argues that we all come from a common ancestor, but it is Jerome and Seneca with a difference:

Terre es et terre au departie
 Serras, et tiel a ma partie
 Sui je. 44)

The Confessio Amantis contains a more extended discussion of the subject. Be gentle, urges the Confessor,
 45)
 For the gentils ben most desired.

In defining gentillesse the Confessor explains that the world believes

41. Chaucer and his Poetry, p. 206.

For further discussion of the Franklin and his tale see Manly, Some New Light on Chaucer, p. 167; and Schofield, Chivalry in English Literature, p. 53 et seq. See the latter also (p. 63 et seq. and *passim*) for an account of Chaucer's attitude toward the gentles.

42. F. 754-5.

43. Ll. 12085-7

44. Ll. 12091-3. "Earth thou art, and earth at last thou wilt be, and such for my part, am I."

45. IV, l. 2199.

it depends upon wealth, but

Thanne is a man of hih lignage
After the forme, as thou miht
hiere
Bot nothing after the matiere.⁴⁶⁾

Strictly -- the Senecan argument in another guise, and one
that the followers of John Ball adopted --- since we are all
children of Adam we are all born of the same rank:

So that of generacion
To make declaracion,
Ther mai no gentilesce be.⁴⁷⁾

Later Gower repeats the idea already mentioned in connection
with Le Mirour de l'Omme.

Sche which oure Eldemoder is,
The Erthe, both that and this
Receiveth and alich devoureth.⁴⁸⁾

Finally towards the end of the discussion, the Confessor
attempts a positive definition.

For after the condicion
Of resonable entencion,
The which out of the Soule groweth
And the vertu fro vice knoweth,
Wheroft a man the vice eschuieth,
Withoutte Slowthe and vertu
suieth,
That is a verrai gentil man.⁴⁹⁾

The emphasis upon the necessity of eschewing vice is reminiscent
of Juvenal's eighth satire, but at the last Gower makes an
original contribution to the discussion: one must work and

46. Ll. 2210-2.

47. Ll. 2227-9.

48. Ll. 2251-3.

49. Ll. 2269-75.

"don his besinesse",

For nowther good ne gentillesse
Nai helpen him whiche
ydel be. 50)

Your salvation lies in work; one thinks of Carlyle, albeit Gower's advice is certainly more gently — in the modern sense — given than is Carlyle's; and the motive for Gower's suggestion is not the same as was the Scotochman's.

Contemporaries of Chaucer and of Gower were those rebels who made so much of the proverb

When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?

in which the idea of true nobility is certainly implicit if not actually stated. Unfortunately the present writer has not access to a copy of W. C. Hazlitt's Proverbs, and must depend entirely upon the few hints given by Vogt in his article, Some Gleanings for the History of a Sentiment, Generositas Virtus, 51) Non Sanguis. Vogt cites, quoting Hazlitt, a Latin proverb of the fourteenth century which "appears to be the parent phrase":

Cum vanga quadam tellurem
foderit Adam
Et Eva neus fuerat, quis
generosus erat?

and an undated German version:

So Adam reutte, and Eva span,
Wer was da ein eddleman?

The English version, used by John Ball, Wat Tyler and their

50. Ll. 2290-1.

51. Vogt's purpose in this article was to show by a large number of quotations from Latin, Old French, Italian, and English the fact that the identity of true nobility and virtue was

followers in the peasant revolt of 1381, is of more importance to English social history than to literary history. Its popularity during the rebellion illustrates the possible unpleasant results consequent upon introducing to the lower classes an idea academically appealing to the educated. Beaudouin de Condé might write that than of nobility of soul

Autre gentillesse ne cuer,

and Chaucer in a ballade might enlarge upon the same theme; but to preach it and to attempt putting it into practice were different matters entirely, as John Ball found to his cost. Literary commonplaces are pretty exclusively for the lettered.

The list of references to the subject in Vogt's article is surprisingly long, and he cautions his readers to remember that he has not been exhaustive. Two Middle English references to the subject which he omits are a passage in Thomas Usk's Testament of Love and Henry Medwall's play, Fulgens and Lucres. Usk's treatment is merely a reiteration of the idea that one's ancestors cannot make one "gentil", and is chiefly interesting as an indication of the prevalency of the idea in English literature, even though Usk was probably writing under the influence of Chaucer. There is an interesting parallel with the discussion of Boethius:

a literary commonplace to Chaucer and his contemporaries and that the idea was not, as Root suggests, indicative of "a tinge of radicalism and . . . a strong leaven of democracy."

If gentilesse is a cleer thing, renome and glorie to enhancen, as in reckening of thy linage, than is gentilesse of thy kinne; for why it seemeth that gentilesse of thy kinne is but praysing and renome that come of thyne auncestres ⁵²⁾ desertes.

Usk, towards the close of his account, sums up:

Than gentilesse of thyne auncestres,
that forayne is to thee, maketh thee
not gentil, but ungentil and reproved,
and - if thou contimnest not their
⁵³⁾ gentilesse.

More interesting than Usk is the Fulgens and Lucres, which, inasmuch as the Dictionary of National Biography places Medwall's floruit at 1486, may be dated at some time in the latter half of the fifteenth century. The play is an interlude, an adaptation in dialogue of " . . . the Controversia de nobilitate written by Bonus Accursius or Buonaccorsi of Pistoia, translated into French by Jehan Miclot and of which an English version by the Earl of Worcester was printed in 1481 by Caxton. . . . We may easily believe that Medwall used Caxton's volume.⁵⁴⁾"

Fulgens is quite frankly a debate on true nobility, not devoid of dramatic interest to be sure, but primarily a debate. The situation in the play is simple. Fulgens has promised to give his daughter, Lucres, to either Gaius

52. Testament of Love, Bk II, ch. 8. In Skeat's edition of Chaucer 11. 89-92. ^{v.11}

53. Ibid., ll. 96-99.

54. The writer is quoting from de Ricci's introduction to the 1920 reprint.

Flaminus or Publius Cornelius, whichever shall prove himself the nobler. Cornelius is of noble birth; Gaius a man of a lower class, more skilled in dialectic, however, and possessed of better arguments, for it is he who finally wins the daughter. It is worth while, perhaps to quote a part of his speech in summary of his rival's arguments:

Fyrst of your auncetours ye
allege the noble gestis
Secondly the substaunce that
ye have of their bequestis,
In the whiche thing is onely
by your own cofession
Standeth all your noblanes . . . 55)

Later in the speech:

Nay the title of noblenes wyl not
ensue
A man that is all gevyn to
such insolence
But it groweth of long continued
vertu
* * * * *
And - as for that poynt this I
wott welle
That both he and I came of
adam and eve
there is no difference that I
can tell
Whiche makith oon man
an other to excell
So moche as doth vertue
and godely maner
And therin may I well with
hym compare.

Earlier — for Cornelius has of course spoken first — the young nobleman addressed Gaius in a fashion that entirely

55. From part two of the play. In the 1920 reprint both lines and pages are unnumbered.

justifies the commoner's smug last sentence. Said Cornelius,

I marwayle gretly what shulde
thy mynde ⁵⁶⁾ insence
To thinke that thy tytle therin
sholde be gode
Parde thou canst not say
for thy deffence ⁵⁷⁾
That ever there was gentilman
of thy kyn or blode.

Lucres in making her decision chooses Gaius; but she means no slight to nobility of blood, for she says,

. . . I wyll not dispise
The blode of Cornelius I pray
you thinke not so
God forbade that ye sholde
note me that wyse
For truely I shall honoure them
whereso ever I go.
And all other that be of lyke
blode also
But unto the blode I wyll
have lytyl respect
Where tho the condicyons be
synfull and abiect.

A little later Lucres concludes that the best man is really he who is both nobly born and virtuous, for nobility of birth, although less important perhaps than a noble heart, was nothing to consider lightly, as Lucres is courageous enough to say.

Semantically Fulgens and Lucres is interesting, because throughout the play noble and noblenes are used for "high birth." Gentilesse has disappeared entirely, and gentil is used only in

56. Note that Cornelius uses thou and thy, whereas Gaius used ye and your.

57. Here gentilman obviously means "nobleman", since Cornelius has been speaking to Gaius of Cornelius's own progenitors, who were rulers of the city.

58. cf. Aristotle. See above, p.

the compounds gentilman and gentilwoman. Gentle, which early in the thirteenth century, began along with noble to displace the Anglo-Saxon adjective athel ($\alpha\beta/e/$), is now displaced, in the meaning "of high birth", by noble. This displacement was not complete for several hundred years. N. E. D. quotes Burns's Highland Lassie, It

Nae gentle dames, tho' e'er sae
fair,

Shall ever be my muse's care:
Their titles a' are empty show.

As early as 1552 gentle was beginning to develop what is probably its most common Modern English meaning: "mild in disposition or behaviour", and a century later the meaning "moderate in operation or intensity." These significations, with the corresponding meanings of gentleness, are quite different from French gentil and gentillesse. Noble and nobility or nobleness compared with French noble and noblesse, on the other hand, show almost no difference in meaning. Noblesse has to English ears perhaps a rather formal sound, but it is used in French as commonly as is English nobleness.

Elyot in The Boke Called the Gouvernour, in connection with a discussion of the nature of true nobility and the importance of teaching it to a "gentilman", writes a definition and analysis of nobilite:

" . . . but in a more briefe manner it (Eugenia) was after called nobilite, and the personnes noble, whiche signifieth excellent, and in the analogie or signification it is more ample than gentili, for it containeth as well all that whiche is in gentillesse, as also the honour or dignitie therefore received, whiche be so annexed the one to the other that they can not be separate.⁵⁹⁾

Elyot, too, voices the familiar idea that nobility is dependent upon one's actions, citing as examples the Romans, Numa Pompilius, elected king though a peasant; Quintius who quit his plow to defeat the Samnites; and the Decii, who, though of "base astate", died nobly in battle. The writer's closing argument is an ingenious one:

More over we have in this realme coynes
which be called nobles; as long as they seem
to be golde, they be so called. But if they be
counterfaicted, and made in brasse, coper,
or other vile metal, who for the print only
calleth them nobles?

Henry Peacham's general discussion of nobility is worth quoting in part; it seems a trifle curious coming from a schoolmaster.

For since all virtue consists in action,
and no man is born for himself . . . hardly
are they to be admitted for noble, who (though
of never so excellent parts) consume, their light
as in a dark Lanthorn, in contemplation, and a
Stoical retirednesse.⁶⁰

If Peacham seems, even more than Gower, to be anticipating Carlyle, he also echoes Dante and Chaucer when he writes a few pages later that "riches are an ornament, not a cause
^{61}} of nobility."

Vogt's article already mentioned includes several literary treatments of true nobility of later date than the seventeenth century: Southey's Wat Tyler, in which its presence is not

60. Peacham, p. 2.

61. Ibid., p. 10.

unlooked for; Burns's The Cotter's Saturday Night, stanza xix; and Tennyson's Lady Clara Vere de Vere; in William Morris's Dream of John Ball the famous "When Adam delved" is used, but that is hardly an independent expression of the idea. There are no quotations from the twentieth century. Neither does Vogt include any mention of Elyot, Ferne, Peacham or George Borrow, who in the appendix to The Romany Rye, attacks the word gentility. He is not, however, attacking the qualities of mind or character which his predecessors found epitomized in the words gentillesse and noblesse, for Borrow makes a careful definition of the word gentleman:

The characteristics of a gentleman are high feeling — a determination never to take a cowardly advantage of another — a liberal education — absence of narrow views — generosity and courage, propriety of behavior.⁶²⁾

But towards the person who is merely genteel Borrow cannot be severe enough.

What is gentility? People in different stations in England — entertain different ideas of what is genteel, but it must be something gorgeous, glittering, or tawdry, to be considered genteel by any of them.⁶³⁾

In a footnote to the above passage Borrow remarks that "genteel is heathenish", and adds "it was from the Norman, the worst of all robbers and miscreants, . . . that the English got their detestable word genteel." One wonders whether Borrow would

62. The Romany Rye, appendix, chapter V.

63. Ibid., chapter IV.

have been less scornful of the word if he had known it came into the language, not during the period of Norman supremacy but several hundred years later, N. E. D. placing its earliest discoverable appearance in writing at 1599.

Tennyson's poem Lady Clara Vere de Vere preceded Borrow's Romany Rye, but it is the poem that contains, to judge by Vogt's list, the last independent expression of the idea generositas virtus, non sanguis, for the quotation of John Ball's proverb in William Morris's Dream of John Ball could scarcely be called that. Indeed from the time of Shakespeare it has been chiefly the poets who have kept discussion of the idea alive. One thinks of Burns's line,

The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
An interesting reminder of Elyot's metaphor about the counterfeited nobles, and of course of:

Trust me, Clara Vere de Vere
From yon blue heavens
above us bent
The gardener Adam and his wife
Smile at the claims of long
descent.
Howe'er it be it seems to me,
'Tis only noble to be good.
King hearts are more than
coronets
And simple faith than
Norman blood.

There are many echoes in this our final quotation on the subject of true nobility. Seneca's De Beneficiis,

65)

The Consolatio of Boethius , the Gentillesse and
the Wife of Bath's Tale of Chaucer , the Confessio
and the Mirour of Gower , and the proverb of John
Ball were concerned with the common ancestry of all men.
"Kind heart" takes us back to Condé 's:

Ki ki soit gentius de cuer,
and Chaucer's frequent mentions of the gentle heart and
pity. Finally by his mention of Norman blood Tennyson
anticipates Borrow's attack on the Normans in The Romany
Rye.

The famous lines serve as a good close. "We moderns" are little concerned with the question of true nobility, even when it is disguised as a discussion of the term gentleman. Since De Foe there has been a gradual change, and we are concerned less — in this paper at least — with the moral implications of the word gentleman, and more with the "long Etymologies" and "tedious Harangues of the ancients and moderns."

65. P. 17.

66. P. 64 et seq.

67. P. 68 et seq.

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A SEMANTIC STUDY.

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