

CATHOLIC CHAUCER.

AN ESSAY OF DEEP LITERARY INTEREST.

A Few Thoughts on the Poetical Beauties of the "Father of English Poetry;" Written for The True Witness by a Member of the Paper's Staff.

And as for me, though I have knowledge slight,
In books for me to read I me delight,
And to them I give faith and full credence,
And in my heart have them in reverence
So heartily, that there is game none
That from my books maketh me be gone.

Now that the winter is upon us and sociable Catholics anticipating more evening leisure are inaugurating reading circles, debating societies and other means of instructive recreation; a few thoughts on the beauties that lie upon the printed pages of many books we now know perhaps, but indifferently may be acceptable. It is our idea to confine ourselves as much as convenient to authors who are Catholic and wholly to those whose most salient characteristic is innocent gayety and humor.

We now live in an age of culture, and the easiest way to acquire the attainments demanded by society is by the perusal of good literature. A celebrated German philosopher remarks that in ancient times the state was the great power; in the middle ages the Church, and that in these recent days we have added two others, commerce and literature. If this aphorism be true, therefore, it behooves us to cultivate literature in a degree only secondary to commerce.

IN THOUGHTS ON ENGLISH LITERATURE.

It is well that we should first speak of Chaucer the great Father of our language who painted nature; naturally, as she is joyous and cheerful and not as she has been painted too often since, through the distorting spectacles of art. Chaucer in the 14th century found a daily varying hybrid tongue and left behind him in his works the nucleus of the language that Shakespeare, two centuries later, crystallized. Chaucer was a Catholic; his frequent and loving attestations to the virtues of Our Blessed Lady, show that he was a devout one. He was a master of the most piquant and bewitching humor, and again, when he willed he was capable of rendering the most sublime and the tenderest of thoughts. He could by the versatility of his genius sound with his verse the whole gamut of literary expression. It is true that the coarse influence of the age in which he lived led him to write much in some of his poems that was in exceedingly bad taste, but these lapses were confined to times at which he was treating a humorous or vulgar theme, and his transgressions are expiated to some extent by the devotion and the pure lively narrative in his serious verse.

Chaucer's chief charm is his naturalness, his quaintest thoughts called up by the beauty of the woods and fields fall into words without a seeming effort, and, therefore, without a trace of art; in his poems the glorious meadows are as rich and green, the sylvan walks as cool and shady, and the song of the nightingale as silver sweet as in the natural reality. There is in all his works, whether the theme be grave or gay, a delicate vernal freshness which affects like the bright gayety of innocent youth.

Our own classical philosophic Aubrey de Vere says of him: "In our own literature Chaucer holds a position analogous to Dante, different as is the character of his genius. In him we see the stately foundation laid for a period of English poetry which exists, alas, but in that unfulfilled promise.

Of the fabric which must otherwise have been raised on that basis we were deprived by the wars of the Roses and the barbarism which that struggle bequeathed. Chaucer is, among us, the representative poet of the middle ages.

In his works we recognize two ages: a past one with all its chivalrous splendours, and again, a very different age which was at hand and of which the indications are to be found chiefly in his humorous poems."

To read Chaucer, as Dryden edited him two hundred years ago, requires more study of the 14th century idiom and accent than most young readers for a winter evening's recreation would care to give; for in the five centuries that have elapsed since the poems were composed, the language has altered almost unrecognizably.

To Catholics who would renew or make acquaintance with the Father of our

language and yet be neither offended by his occasional grossness or impeded by his ancient accent, we might recommend the modernized rendition of three of the Canterbury Tales, by the poet Wordsworth. In these versions the feeling has been faithfully preserved while the words of the original as nearly as would be intelligible adhered to. Leigh Hunt, too, made some of Chaucer's poems into modern English. For a complete edition of Chaucer that is understandable to the reader not versed in mediæval literary lore the Riches of Chaucer, by Cowden Clarke, the friend of the poet Keats, is much read. In this book the quaint spelling is modernized, the words are fully accentuated and the works that Chaucer repented having written are entirely eliminated. There are several editions of Chaucer recommended by Catholic literary societies notably those edited by W.W. Skeat and A. W. Pollard.

Chaucer's most famous and most interesting group of poems is his Canterbury Tales. A number of pilgrims 29 in all representing many callings meet at an inn on their pilgrimage to the shrine of Canterbury, and being a jolly company agree to each tell two tales on the journey to the shrine, and two on the return journey, the narrator of the best tales to receive a good supper at the inn as guerdon. Many tales are told, amongst them being the tale of Sir Mopas, The Pardoner's Tale, The Franklins' Tale, The Squire's Tale, The second Nonne's Tale, The Tale of the Prioress, and the Yeoman's Tale.

Wordsworth has modernized the Prioress's tale which tells of a little choir boy who learnt the *Alma Redemptoris*, and in all his leisure time would sing it, until he was seized and murdered by Jews, who cut his throat and then threw his body into a well. But by a miracle, after his murder he still sang loud and clear the *Alma Redemptoris*, and thus his murderers were discovered.

O, Thou great God that dost perform thy laud;
By mouths of innocents to here thy might;
This gem of chastity, this emerald,
And eke of martyrdom, this ruby bright,
There, where with mangled throat he lay upright,
The *Alma Redemptoris* gan to sing
So loud that with his voice the place did ring.

Another beautiful piece in Wordsworth's version of Chaucer's poems is in the tale of Troilus and Cresida, where Troilus, reaching the palace of Cresida and finding the door fast shut and Cresida away laments:

O, of all the houses once the crowned boast;
Palace illumined with the sun of bliss;
O ring of which the ruby now is lost,
O cause of woe, that cause has been of bliss,
Yet, since I may no better, would I kiss
Thy cold doors; but I dare not for this rout;
Farewell thou shrine of which the saint is out.

In the tale of the Cuckoo and the Nightingale there is a charming freshness as witness the following verses:—

Till to a lawn I came all white and green,
I in so fair a one had never been.
The ground was green, with daisy powdered over;
Tall were the flowers, the grove a lofty cover,
All green and white; and nothing else was seen.

There sat I down among the fair fresh flowers,
And saw the birds come tripping from their bowers,
Where they had rested them all night; and they,
Who were so joyful at the light of day,
Began to honor May with all their powers.

But Chaucer can delineate with as much sympathy the emotions of man as the aspect of nature. A tender picture of a devout priest in a poor parish is drawn in the following verses:—

Benign he was and wondrous diligent,
And in adversity full patient.
And such he was y-proved ofte sithes.
Full loth he was to curse men for his tithes;
But rather would he give, without doubt, unto
his poor parishers about
Of his offering, and eke of his substance,
He could in little wealth have suffiance.
Wide was his parish, houses far asunder,
Yet failed he not, for either rain or thunder,
In sickness or mischance, to visit all
The furthest in his parish, great or small.

He was a shepherd and no mercenary,
And though he holy were, and virtuous,
He was to sinful man not despituous,
And of his speech, nor difficult, nor digne,
But in his teaching discreet and benign.
For to draw folk to heaven by fairness,
By good ensample this was his business;
But were there any person obstinate,
What so he were of high or low estate,
Him would he sharply snub at once. Than
this
A better priest, I trow, there nowhere is
He waited for no pomp and reverence,
Nor made himself a special conscience;
But Christe's lore and His Apostles' twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himself.

We could quote very many passages from Chaucer as charming as the above, and a perusal of the poems of the grand old Catholic poet will repay any one well in recreation and instruction. The reader of the Canterbury Tales, particularly,

becomes imbued with a truer spirit of the feelings and the conditions of the people in the middle ages than he would from reading whole volumes of modern written history. Never man attained to greatness by conceit but Cicero, and Chaucers modest estimate of his power as a poet is one of his most charming qualities; outcome though it is of the natural selfconsciousness that is the concomitant of genius. In the prettily natural prologue to his Legend of Good Women he describes himself as following in the wake of the harvesters in the cornfield of song:

And I come after, gleaning here and there,
And am full glad if I can find an ear
Of any goodly word that ye have left.

In our next article we shall speak a little of the work of Cervantes, the author of the adventures of the immortal Don Quixote. L. C.

RELIGIOUS NEWS ITEMS.

The bequest of the late Rev. Father O'Haran to the diocese of Scranton, Pa., of \$55,000 has been decided by the courts to be valid.

The cause of the beatification of Christopher Columbus, it is said, will again be brought before the Congregation of Rites in October.

The King of Portugal has ordered by a decree, signed by all the Ministers, that the centenary of St. Anthony of Padua be a national feast.

Sister Bridget Joseph, of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Fall River, recently died of consumption. In lay life she was known as Bridget Mooney.

The prospects for the establishment of a new Catholic orphan asylum at Memphis, Tenn., are encouraging. Already \$11,400 has been subscribed.

It is stated on the authority of the Vicar General of Lyons that President Carnot wore at the time of his murder the brown scapular and the miraculous medal of the Immaculate Conception.

Rev. E. P. Murphy, C.S.C., of Sacred Heart College, Watertown, Wis., has been appointed president of St. Edward's College, Austin, Tex., as successor to Rev. P. J. Hurth, C.S.C., Bishop of Dacca.

In France there are about 300 Catholic workingmen's clubs. Delegates recently held a congress in Paris, and a special committee was formed, with the famous Catholic leader, Count de Mun, as president.

A new church is to be built in St. Maurice parish, New Orleans, La., to cost about \$12,000. It will be a handsome Gothic structure 130 feet in length by 58 feet in width. Rev. Father Avelhe, the pastor, is the architect.

Twenty-seven million francs has already been spent on the great Church of the Sacred Heart at Montmartre and the building is far from complete. The money has been raised entirely by voluntary contributions.

A Jesuit Father, Rev. Ambrose Amirdam was killed recently by the idolaters whom he was trying to convert near Laticorm, India. He was a Spaniard, very zealous and charitable, and very successful in missionary work.

Many of the Turks of New York have not only embraced the Roman Catholic faith, but have a church and regularly-ordained priest, who celebrates Mass according to the Roman ritual every day at the Maronet Church, 81 Washington street.

Nearly two hundred veterans, members of the 69th, 71st, 72nd, and 106th, Pennsylvania regiment attended the Vesper service at the Cathedral of Philadelphia on last Sunday week. Rev. Dr. McLaughlin delivered the sermon and in conclusion Archbishop Ryan addressed the old soldiers.

The German Catholic party stands firm in its resolutions of having all laws of proscription against religious orders repealed. The offer of the government to permit the return of the Redemptionist on condition that the Catholics would drop the agitation about the return of the Jesuits has been rejected.

Mr. Oldstyle: "I don't think that a college education amounts to much."
Mr. Sparerod: "Don't you? Well you ought to foot my boy's bills and see."

IMMORAL BOOKS.

To the Editor of THE TRUE WITNESS:

Sir,—I have been watching, and, as it appears, in vain, for some protest on the part of our Catholic organ against the importation of obscene literature, such as "Maria Monk," "The Fruits of the Confessional," &c., the Customs authorities having given Mr. Norman Murray permission to import these works for sale in our midst.

Several times I have read in THE TRUE WITNESS that its aim and object is to uphold the rights of our English-speaking Catholics, and withstand the attacks of all assailants against our Holy Faith; and hitherto there has been no cause to complain, for the paper has done its work right nobly. Some two years ago it raised its voice, and by no means feebly, against immorality in our midst, and only recently, when a great injustice was done to Irish Catholics by the removal of their representative from the Board of Catholic School Commissioners, THE TRUE WITNESS was faithful to its vocation and protested strongly against the injustice committed.

And now, when permission is given for the importation of such vile and slanderous works as those above mentioned, how is it that our Catholic paper (which is our voice) is silent? You protest against immoral posters on our fences, and why not against the sale of these filthy, blasphemous books? Surely the authorities would listen if the true nature of these works were made known to them; and how are we to protest, if THE TRUE WITNESS, which professes to represent our interests, remains silent?

I trust I may not be compelled to go elsewhere to bring this matter to public notice, but that THE TRUE WITNESS will be true to itself and raise its voice against this outrage done to them it represents.

H. J. C.
Secty. Cath. Truth Society.
Montreal, 26th Sept., 1894.

[In an editorial, in this issue, we make reply to the foregoing letter. We may simply state that THE TRUE WITNESS is not a medium for the advertising and circulating of immoral literature, and that we are positive that more harm than good would result from any marked reference on our part to such publications. Please see, for a reply, our editorial on "Immoral Literature."—EDITOR TRUE WITNESS.]

Catholics will hear with satisfaction that the sturdy advocate Francis Margotti, nephew to the theologian, James Margotti, and no mean follower in his footsteps in the Unita Cattolica, has been invested by the Holy Father with the Cross of Gregory the Great. Felicitations to our able colleague.

Rudyard Kipling's mother said of her son that he was a clever man, but that he should never be allowed to talk; he should be used as a dictionary, and consulted when required.

Mrs. Pendleton, when told by a Britisher that America was deficient in antiquities and curiosities, remarked: "The antiquities will come; as for our curiosities, we import them."

The Sultan of Turkey has given three hundred Turkish pounds for the benefit of the sufferers of forest fires in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

SEND TO-DAY.

Ladies and Gentlemen, be alive to your own interests. There has recently been discovered and is now for sale by the undersigned, a truly wonderful "Hair Grower" and "Complexion Whiteners." This "Hair Grower" will actually grow hair on a bald head in six weeks. A gentleman who has no beard can have a thrifty growth in six weeks by the use of this wonderful "Hair Grower." It will also prevent the hair from falling. By the use of this remedy boys raise an elegant mustache in six weeks. Ladies if you want a surprising head of hair have it immediately by the use of this "Hair Grower." I also sell a "Complexion Whiteners" that will in one month's time make you as clear and white as the skin can be made. We never knew a lady or gentleman to use two bottles of this Whiteners for they all say that before they finished the second bottle they were as white as they would like to be. After the use of this whiteners, the skin will forever retain its color. It also removes freckles, etc., etc. The "Hair Grower" is 50 cents per box and the "Face Whiteners" 50 cents per bottle. Either of these remedies will be sent by mail, postage paid, to any address on receipt of price. Address all orders to,

R. RYAN,
22 SHEERWOOD STREET, Ottawa, Ont.

P. S.—We take P. O. stamps same as cash but parties ordering by mail confer a favour by ordering \$1.00 worth, as it will require this amount of the solution to accomplish either purpose, then it will save us the rush of P. O. stamps.