

man," and "Beowulf." No man can claim to be a first-class English scholar who has not done so, especially at a time when all high-class American and English universities are acting on this view.

As a specimen of old folk-lore, "Beowulf" is quite as important for the student of English as the "Nibelungen Lied" for the student of German, or the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" for the student of classic Greek. The wonder is, not that so much attention is now paid to it, but that it has been so long neglected. This remark applies equally to the "Vision of Piers, the Plowman." Almost contemporary, in its present form, with the "Canterbury Tales," it is in respect of language very much more archaic, while it is alliterative rather than rhythmical in structure. But its chief value lies in the picture it gives us of the social life of the latter part of the fourteenth century. In it the still unfathomed misery of the common people during the reigns of Edward III. and Richard II. find a voice, rather than in the social descriptions of the "Canterbury Tales," for the obvious reason that while the latter are the work of a court humorist, the "Vision" is the production of one who lived amongst the people, sympathized with them in their sufferings, and spent his time in administering to them the consolations of the gospel of Christ. We obtain from other sources ample proof that the pathetic wail of the "Vision" is a true expression of popular feeling. We learn it alike from the popularity of the poems, from the social uprising under Wat Tyler, and from the "Statute of Laborers," which was passed with a view to preventing servants from availing themselves of the advantage that would naturally have accrued to them from the decimation of their numbers by the "black death." I do not wish to appear as underrating the literary value of the "Canterbury Tales," but that is now so thoroughly appreciated that I need say no word in its favor as a text for the university study of English.

But even if we had no compositions of such literary volumes as the three I have mentioned, it would still be necessary to