

Besides his Italian mission, he visited France and Flanders on various matters of moment to the state and proved himself a successful plenipotentiary, and also, what literary men very frequently are not, a thoroughly good man of business.

The time was when the romantic gallantry of the Anglo-Norman knighthood had reached its highest pitch. It was the era of chivalry, and Chaucer was deeply imbued with the spirit of his age. His great work, or rather collection of works, is the *Canterbury Tales*, a number of stories told by pilgrims to the shrine of Thomas A'Becket at Canterbury. Every rank in life furnishes its pilgrim. There is an old knight, just returned from foreign wars, who:—

“Fro the time that he firste began
To riden out, he loved chivalrie
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie.”

He had fought, under the banner of the Cross, against the heathen in Africa, in Spain, in Armenia, in Turkey, and:—

“At mortal batailles had he ben fifteen,
And foughten for our faith at Tramissene,
In listes thries, and ay slain his fo.”

His experience in war has rendered him perfectly indifferent to his personal appearance, for, though:—

“His hors was good, he ne was not gaie,
Of fustian he wered a gipon
All besmottred.”

He is altogether a good representative of the old feudal aristocracy. With him is his son, a coxcomb of the day. Of this youth we are told that he was:—

“—————A young squyer,
A lovyer and a lusty bachelor,
With lokkes crulle,* as they were layde in presse,
Of twenty year he was of age, I gesse.”

A passage, by the way, which effectually disposes of

*lokkes crulle—curled locks.