

genius, especially the greatest, "Canterbury Tales," inasmuch as they accurately portray the customs and manners of his own times, are invaluable as a complete refutation of the calumnies heaped upon medieval times by modern writers. They are replete with references to the belief and practice of the Church, and although the author sometimes speaks disparagingly of monks and other ecclesiastics, on the whole the masterly picture he draws of the Catholic fourteenth century is such as, by arousing the interest and admiration of the reader, is calculated to leave an impression strongly favorable to Catholicism. But it is in his shorter poems especially that we find Chaucer's spirit asserting itself. That he was animated by a lifelong and sincere devotion to the Blessed Virgin is the surest sign of his essentially Catholic nature. Besides an original poem beginning "Mother of God and Virgin undefiled," we have a translation from the French known as "Chaucer's A, B, C," which consists of twenty-three stanzas, each beginning by a letter of the alphabet in regular order. One stanza will serve to illustrate his reverent and beautiful spirit of filial piety towards the Virgin Mother :

"Glorious mayde and moder ! whiche that never
Were bitter nor in earthe nor in see,
But full of sweetnesse and of mercye ever,
Help, that my fader be not wroth !"

Now that the drooping flower of Catholicism is beginning to revive in England, the works of this great singer will attract more attention than formerly and their spirit of useful influence will be greatly widened.

But the poetic outburst which marked the later years of the fourteenth century closed as suddenly as it began. For one hundred years after the death of Chaucer there was a deplorable dearth of distinguished writers. With the exception of the comparatively unimportant works of John Lydgate, a Benedictine monk who was considered the greatest poet and scholar of his time, this century of gloom was relieved by only one notable addition to the literature of the nation. If there were others they have not been preserved. The "Paston Letters," as this link in our history is known, consists of the correspondence of the Paston family, presumably that of a country squire. This important