

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

Vol. XIX.

TORONTO, JULY 1, 1899.

No. 26.



THE TARARD INN, SOUTHWARK.

Grown Up Land.

Good-morning, fair maid, with lashes brown,
Can you tell me the way to Womanhood Town?

Oh, this way and that way—never stop,
'Tis picking up stitches grandma will drop,
'Tis kissing the baby's troubles away
'Tis learning that cross words never will pay,
'Tis helping mother, 'tis sowing up rents,
'Tis reading and playing, 'tis saving the pence,
'Tis lovin' and smiling, forgetting to frown;
Oh, that is the way to Womanhood Town.

Just wait, my brave lad—one moment I pray;
Manhood Town lies where—can you tell the way?

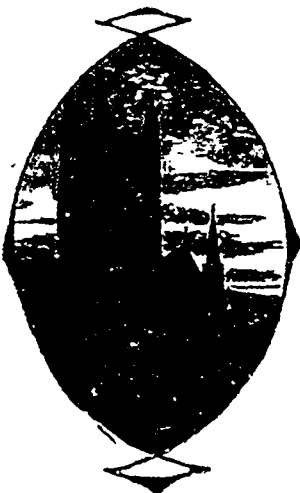
Oh, by toiling and trying we reach that land—
A bit with the head, a bit with the hand—
'Tis by climbing up the steep hill Work,
'Tis by keeping out of the wide street Shirk,
'Tis by always taking the weak one's part,
'Tis by giving mother a happy heart,
'Tis by keeping bad thoughts and actions down,
Oh, that is the way to Manhood Town.
And the lad and the maiden ran hand-in-hand,
To their fair estate in the grown-up land.

CHAUCER.

BY THE REV. ALFRED H. BEYER, LL.D.

Professor of Modern Languages and Literature,
Victoria University, Toronto.

Chaucer was the first great English poet; he may also be called the first great Englishman. Our ideal of a "fine old English gentleman" is not the same as our ideal of a Saxon. The Saxon is sober, even sombre, and, if not solitary, he is at best domestic, but he is not social. The typical Englishman has a clear head, a sprightly temper, and social grace that never came from the Saxon stalk or from German forests, but from Norman blood and from the vine-clad hills of sunny France. With this social light and grace the Englishman retains



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the sterling qualities of his Saxon ancestors—the moral earnestness that puts duty before glory, and truth before brilliance, the domestic instinct that puts home and wife and children before society; the individuality and independence that will not stoop to the slavery of fashion or of creed.

In the Norman, the aesthetic bent was much stronger than in the Saxon, whilst in the Saxon the ethical tendency was stronger than in the Norman. Again, the strong social instinct of the Norman made him largely the creature of society, fashion, authority; it gave to the race a solidarity—to use a French word for a French thing—in which the individual feels lost when he stands alone and never seems to find himself till he is lost in the mass, in society, on the crowded boulevard, in the cafe, in a great visible church, or in a great nation. The Saxon, on the other hand, was marked in all things by the strongest individuality. He felt best when he stood alone, his home was his castle, his own conscience and judgment the rule of faith and life, and his personal choice and vote the ground of his allegiance.

Now there were in England from the Norman Conquest till about the time of Chaucer these two races and two languages, Saxon and Norman, but from that time the two were blended into one

Chaucer may or may not have been a college student, but he certainly was a student, for his writings show that he was familiar with classic learning and with the modern languages and literature and science of his times. In our day more than in Chaucer's, education is helped by books, but it is also true that education is now sometimes embarrassed and hindered by books as it was not then. In fact, we sometimes neglect education in the pursuit of learning—of book-learning, as it is sometimes called, with a touch of scorn not always undeserved. In the good old times young gentlemen had not so much of the school and college as they now have, but they had far more of the hall and court and camp. Would that our students had some of the advantages of the page and squire of old, so would they be saved from the prejudice often felt against a good student as a man whose head may be filled with learned lumber, but who does not count for much either in the business or in the amenities of life.

With Chaucer's appearance we are familiar, though his body has returned to the dust more than four hundred years ago. Occleve, one of the poet's friends and admirers, and himself a poet and an artist, painted from memory a portrait of his "worthy master," as he calls him, and writes thus of him in the book that contains the picture:



CHAUCER.

—the English. Chaucer is of abiding interest to us as an early and illustrious example of this composite character. Chaucer saw and felt and thought for himself, and his language was the perfection of art in that it was the most simple and direct expression of all that passed in his soul.

It is recorded on Chaucer's tombstone that he died on the 25th of October, 1400 A.D., but there is some uncertainty as to the year of his birth. The old biographers give 1328, following, it is supposed, an old slab or shield in Westminster Abbey, the predecessor of the present tombstone, erected in 1556 by Nicholas Brigham.

We have no information concerning Chaucer's education or academic training, but considering the opportunities of his time and his readiness to make the best of such opportunities, we may reasonably suppose him to have studied at Oxford or Cambridge. This is mere conjecture, however, notwithstanding some familiarity with university life that Chaucer shows in the "Canterbury Tales." But we do know that Chaucer was a student—he studied books, he studied nature, he studied human life and character.

His loving study of both books and nature finds expression in the "Legend of Good Women":

"As for me though that I know but lite
On bookes for to read I me delight"

"Although his life be quenched, the resemblance

Of him hath in me so fresh liveliness,
That to put other men in remembrance
Of his person I have here his likeness
Made, to this end in very soothfulness,
That they that have of him lost
thought and mind
May by the painting here again him find."

This portrait impresses one at the first glance with a sense of life-likeness that could only come from one who bore his resemblance in "fresh liveliness." It represents Chaucer in the attitude of "a quiet talker with downcast eyes, but sufficiently erect bearing of body. The features are mild but expressive, with just a suspicion—certainly no more—of saturnine or sarcastic humour. The lips are full, and the nose is what is called good by the learned in such matters."

Chaucer's years of literary activity fall naturally into three periods—the first (till 1372), in which his writings were largely translations or imitations from the French; the second (1372-1384), in which he was chiefly influenced by Italian models; and the third (1384-1400), in which his English genius reached its maturity and his own originality was most marked. In the transition from one period to another there is no sudden break, but only an easy, natural development.

In the "Romaunt of the Rose," Chau-



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cer did little beyond translating and condensing the work of the French masters. In his last period Chaucer writes in the Teutonic spirit, and presents more frequently for the love and worship of mankind the noble examples of conformity to the true, the beautiful and the good.

In the second or Italian period we notice "The House of Fame," "Troilus and Cressida," and the "Knight's Tale." In the "House of Fame" he dreams that he is carried away by an eagle to a sublime region between heaven and earth and sea. Here he finds the temple of fame. It is on a great rock of ice covered with the names of famous men:

"Many were melted or melting away,
but the graving of the names of men
of old fame was as fresh as if just written,
for they were conserved with the shade."

"Troilus and Cressida" is a tale of ancient Troy, diversified with characters and incidents from all times and lands. Writers of the fourteenth century had no fear of anachronisms before their eyes.

The "Knight's Tale" is of the second period, though contained in the "Canterbury Tales." We have not space to dwell on it, but if the reader would study some of Chaucer's best poems in the best form and with the best annotations, he will find his work in a volume from the Clarendon Press Series containing this tale, "The Prologue" and the "Nonne Preste's Tale."

Here we reach the greatest of Chaucer's works, and the last that we will mention—"The Canterbury Tales." In this work Chaucer still follows the prevailing taste for stories, but he follows more freely than before his personal and national bent in choice of subject and mode of treatment. In the following passage Lowell describes the style of this work:

"His best tales run on like one of our inland rivers, sometimes hastening a little and turning upon themselves in eddies that dimple without retarding the current; sometimes loitering smoothly, while here and there a quiet thought, a

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INTERIOR OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.