

other countries the New Testament is efficiently taught. Will the subject matter not make any difference in the result?

It was amusing to read that I am charged with "confusing expertness with education." That is exactly the sort of confusion which Mr. Shaw is trying to create; but there does not seem to be any fear of his succeeding in the attempt to any alarming extent.

A FARMER'S SON.

Lessons in English Literature.—IV.

BY ELEANOR ROBINSON.

Geoffrey Chaucer.

He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote
The Canterbury Tales, and his old age
Made beautiful with song.

—Longfellow

For nearly five hundred years after King Alfred's time, that is to say from the 9th century to the 14th, there is no really great work in English literature. There was a good deal of religious poetry written, and also a number of stories told in verse, but none that would interest you. The stories are rather dull, and the English in which they are written is hard to read. Nearly all the prose of this time was in Latin, and with that we have nothing to do.

But the fourteenth century brought us Chaucer, the first great English poet. He is the father of English poetry. Tennyson calls him "the morning star of song," and "the first warbler." And we have never had a poet who was a better teller of stories. As he is so great and so famous you ought to know something about his life, as well as his writings.

His life was an eventful one, and must have been very interesting. He had a great deal to do with some of the greatest people in England, and because his life is connected with theirs and because he was employed for years in the service of the court, we know more about the events of his life than if he had been only a private gentleman.

Chaucer was born in London, about the year 1340, in the reign of Edward III. His father, John Chaucer, had been in attendance on that king before Geoffrey was born, and when the boy was sixteen or seventeen he began to serve as a page in the household of the wife of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the king's third son. This was a very

common way for boys of good birth and good education to be trained. They were received into some noble family, where they learned all the accomplishments of both outdoor and indoor life. They were taught to ride, to use arms, to make themselves useful and entertaining by waiting on their superiors, reading aloud or singing, and to show courtesy to everybody.

In 1359 Chaucer became a soldier, and went with the army of Edward III, when the king invaded France. Chaucer was taken prisoner, and was kept in France for nearly a year. Then the king paid £16 to ransom him, and he came back to England. Sixteen pounds does not seem a very large sum to pay for a man's ransom, but you must remember that it was worth then about seven or eight times what it would be now, that is, roughly speaking, between five and six hundred dollars.

After this Chaucer married a lady named Philippa, who, as many people believe, was maid of honour to Queen Philippa, who gave her a pension after she was married. And Chaucer himself received a pension from the king. In 1368, Prince Lionel died, and Chaucer then entered the service of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; the king's fourth son, who was always his kind and faithful friend. It is thought that the poet wrote one of his early poems to celebrate the wedding festivities, when this great prince married a lady named Blanche. And it is certain that when this lady died, in the time of the great pestilence of 1369, Chaucer lamented her death and praised her beauty and goodness in a beautiful poem called "The Death of Blanche the Duchess."

Chaucer must have been a man of great sense and wisdom, and very trustworthy, for the king sent him abroad several times on important business to foreign courts. The first of these missions was in 1372, when he was sent to Italy. He visited Genoa, Pisa and Florence, and was gone for nearly a year. The great Italian poet, Petrarch, was living then, and some think that he and the English poet must have met, but no one really knows that they did. But Italy was a land of literature and art, and Chaucer's poetry written after this time shows that he learned a great deal from his visit there. The greatest Italian of all, the poet Dante, had died before Chaucer was born; but besides Petrarch, there was still living Boccaccio, who wrote stories in beautiful prose,