

was always the English language. His most eminent disciple was the late Mr. Green, who has aided him in disabusing the public mind of the erroneous impression that there was even any sharp transition in the history either of the English people or of the English language. Possibly Mr. Freeman may have erred in giving undue prominence to the philological, as distinguished from the literary, side of the new professorship, but a little exaggeration in this direction is not likely to do much harm in Oxford at a time when English scholarship has to follow in the wake of the German explorers of the history of Old English, as it is becoming the fashion to call Anglo-Saxon.

I am reminded by this incident of the slight importance heretofore attached to this department of English culture in Canada. In several American universities, Anglo-Saxon and other pre-Chaucerian works are read as carefully and systematically as are the Greek, or Latin, or modern foreign texts. One need no longer go to Germany to obtain a fair knowledge of the older forms of the English language or the older specimens of English literature. Much has been done to elucidate and popularize both by such men as March, Corson, Wood and Lounsbury in America, and Skeat, Morris, Earle and Ewart in England, so that no one who desires to be able to read Old English need now leave his wish unfulfilled for want of sufficient aids.

It may at once be admitted that Old English texts are more valuable for philological than for literary study. For this reason it is not good to place them low down in a university curriculum. The earlier years of the English course should be devoted to acquiring facility, if not elegance, in prose composition, both oral and written, and a good general acquaintance with modern English literature, both prose and poetry. But there is no reason why, during his undergraduate course, the student of English should not acquire a knowledge of the successive stages of our language and give some attention to at least the three chief literary works of the pre-Elizabethan period—the "Canterbury Tales," the "Vision of Piers, the Plow-