

obtained its final triumph over the French. The stately tree of to-day thus first saw the light in Catholic times, under a sovereign and among a people professing obedience to the Roman Pontiff. When the pliant twig grew into a vigorous young sapling, it naturally followed the inclination given it by early influences, the least easily eradicable of any, and hence is the first period at least of English literature so distinctively Catholic in tone.

The mist and obscurity which envelops the works of the earlier writers fades from our view, as the shades of night are dispelled by the approach of dawn, in the glorious vision which illuminated the literary firmament during the closing years of the fourteenth century. Need we mention that this was Geoffrey Chaucer, "the morning-star of song," who not only completely surpassed all his predecessors, but is even to-day acknowledged as one of the greatest masters of our language. The year 1900 will mark the fifth centennial of his death, yet in all the intervening time few can claim to rival, none, with the exception of Shakespeare, to surpass him. That his undeniable merit has been highly esteemed in all ages and by those best capable of judging, the unstinted praise which later writers have delighted to shower upon him assures us. "The finder of our fair language," "the English Homer," are early appellations; Spencer styles him "the well of English undefiled," and Dryden, "the father of English poetry." The latter designation is especially applicable. Chaucer found a language consisting of several discordant elements. He left it a united and powerful frame, its full stature attained, though lacking that polish which later writers imparted. To him alone, however, is due the credit for the solid and permanent foundation of the magnificent fabric we possess to-day.

As regards the Catholicity of Chaucer, we must admit that, although he died a fervent Catholic, during life he became slightly tainted with the doctrines of Wycliffe, which were then beginning to inoculate the public mind, but not to such a degree as to seriously injure his writings. His themes, as was customary with the age, were chiefly romantic, dealing with love and chivalry. In his treatment of them, however, the author's deep religious feeling and his strong attachment to the Faith, despite his somewhat heterodox opinions, is clearly revealed. The longer works of his