

lamp-post just for making a little innocent doggerel. While he is writing verse he is at least out of worse mischief; and the attempt to be tuneful, whether successful or not, tends to teach appreciation of such intellect-quickenng, immortal work as that under consideration. Chaucer shows us vividly what folks were like five hundred years ago, and yet how wonderfully like in nature to folks we all know are the people of the Prologue!

Chaucer himself is the most interesting. His most noticeable characteristic is at once patent; the keen penetration of his understanding manifests itself in the celerity and ease with which he becomes acquainted with the Tabard's other guests:

'And shortly when the sunne was to rest,
So had I spoken with them every one,
That I was of their fellowship anon.'

He evidently possessed enough personal magnetism to have made his fortune as a politician, and we are not surprised when we are told that he sat in Parliament.

His naive verse is in style at once jocose, colloquial, familiar, and delightful.

'A knight there was, and that a worthy man,'—

the picture of chivalry; and what an improvement upon Cœur-de-Lion, than whom he is by two centuries a better Christian.

— 'He was worthy, he was wise,
And of his port as meek as is a maid.
He never yet no villainy he said
In all his life;'

and hence, accordingly, the tale he told is chastity itself; yet, odd to say, a trifle tedious and insipid.

'His sonne, a younge squire,
A lover, and a lusty bachelor,'

was apparently a unique antique specimen of a "freshie," for

'He was as fresh as is the month of May;
Short was his gown, with sleeves long and wide.'

That parody upon Litoria last term would seem to parallel—

'He coulede songes make.'

Fitly, his unfinished tale is one of love:

'And say somewhat of love, for certes ye
Conne thereon as much as any man.'

His is that tale of which wrote Milton—

'Or call up him that left half-told
The story of Cambuscan bold.'—*Il Penseroso*.

More probably an error of copy for

'The tale of Cambuscan, the bold,'

than that Milton mistook the metre, else the accent.

The Yeoman with his 'nut-head,' 'with a brown visage,' tells no tale (save metaphorically), for he is not the Canon's Yeoman that does such yeoman service in disclosing the alchemist-cheat. A dear old maid the Nun Prioress is, to be sure—

'Her mouth full small, and thereto soft and red,'

prettily puckered, too, doubtless. What an exquisite touch of a master-hand is seen in the ultra-polite manner of the Host's approach to her prim delicacy,—

'As courteously as it had been a maid;—
"My lady Prioress, by your leave,
So that I wist I should you not grieve,
I would deeme that ye telle should
▲ tale next, if so were that ye would,
Now will ye vouchsafe, my lady dear?"'

And how immutable is human nature! Elderly ladies now-a-days delight to turn to that department of the newspaper which chronicles the deaths, marriages, etc.; so, as one might have expected, the tale of the prude Prioress partakes largely of pious horror,

'O Alma redemptoris mater!'

Residents who read so hard and cram so fast as to acquire the title of 'fast' men should note how Chaucer indorses the opinion of the Monk,

'And I say his opinion was good,
Why should he study and make himself wood (*i. e.* mad)
Upon a book in cloister always pore?'

The Monk's tale is long and learned (as times were then) and

is borrowed from Boccaccio. These ancient authors borrow unblushingly.

'A Friar there was, a wanton and a merry,
Somewhat he lispèd for his wantonness,
To make his English sweet upon his tongue,
His eyen twinkled in his head aright
As do the starrès in a frosty night.'

Evidently there were dudes too, in those old days.

'Of double worsted was his semicope,
That round was as a bell out of the press.'

Craik's note on this couplet is, 'Not understood. Is it the *bell* or the *semicope* that is described as *out of the press*?' I beg to suggest that '*bell*' should be spelled '*Belle*;' then that it was *round* when *out of the press* becomes comprehensible.

The Friar and the Sompnour resemble Samson's foxes, for betwixt their two tales they set the fierce fire of satire to the reputation of the contemporary clergy. It should seem that then as now

'Twas the vice of the times
To relish those rhymes,
Where the ridicule runs on the parson.'

Aristocratic Don Chaucer had not the pleasure nor the privilege of knowing the plebeian merchant's name.

'But, sooth to say, I n'ot how men him call.'

Yet he amply atones for this slur by allotting to this same man of merchandise, one of the very prettiest and most fanciful of all the stories. Pope modernized it under the title of "January and May." Shakspeare paralleled its elfish folk in his "Midsummer Night's Dream." All men, married or otherwise miserable, might profit by its perusal. Time and space would fail me to comment upon all the Canterbury characters. Every one of them is so replete with that which merits attention, that we are evermore saddened at the recollection of the fact that Chaucer's death left the poem only a fragment. What a lamentable list might be made of the princes of poesy who left their greatest works incomplete. Virgil, Chaucer, Spenser, Byron, and Burns, Poe, Shelley and Keats, all died too soon.

Chaucer all through is characterized by cheerfulness, often rising into merriment. He satirizes all monkery without mercy, and pokes all manner of malicious fun at matrimony.

The Parson is the first protestant in English Literature. Most refreshingly redolent of farm-home and pastoral life is that metaphor, in which his opinion of the priesthood lies couched.

'A shame it is, if that a priest take keep,
To see a tag-locked shepherd herd clean sheep.'

He is the model after which Goldsmith fashioned his parson in the 'Deserted Village.' The line,

'Allured to brighter worlds and led the way,'

parallels Chaucer's clumsier couplet,

'But Christe's lore, and his apostles' twelve,
He taught, and first he followed it himselfe.'

The wife of Bath was an undeniable daisy.

'Alas, alas, that ever love was sin.'

'Patient Griselda,' the Clerk, or Student's Tale, is from Petrarch's version of Boccaccio's story in the Decameron. Was there ever such a wife? Surely it is not to be hoped—it is but little to be feared—that there exists any such now. The pagans sneeringly said, 'What wondrous wives these Christians have!' but to untutored me meek Griselda seems to have been quite too utterly without spunk. She seems an Italian medieval ideal imported from the Orient.

Chaucer, the poet, in his own tale, talks prose, just for a change, the jolly Host having recalculated, *i. e.*, I mean, kicked vigorously at his first attempted unspeakable doggerel. The Host was truly in himself a host. The Miller and the Carpenter tell two of those universally relished stories with plenty of humor and human-naturalness in them. Prudes are forewarned by Chaucer 'to choose another tale;' but did any of them ever do so, I wonder? In Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, and other fleshly moderns, appear signs of a reaction against the absurd extremes to which this classic-emasculating modern purity has gone since Byron's death. In Charles II.'s days similar causes brought a reaction parallel to what may be ex-