

saint. What Chaucer takes from the Decameron he purifies directly, or, as in the case of the Clerk's Tale of the patient Griselda, which Petrarch had previously moralized, uses a purified version as his staple.

Let me cite yet another example : To Geoffrey of Monmouth belongs the honour of having given to King Arthur a definite place in English history. Geoffrey's play of fancy or humour, however, overstepped the bounds of fact. William of Newbury-writing only forty years after the publication of the " *Historia Britonum*," says of its writer that he " cloaked with the honest name of History " fables about Arthur ; that he lied " saucily " and " shamelessly ; " that he made " the little finger of his Arthur stouter than the back of Alexander the Great." Geoffrey's fun and levity provoked those of his time to speak out boldly, but his historical falsehoods were soon to be clothed in spiritual dress. The old tales of rapine and passion—that is simply what they were—had a new life given to them at the hand of Walter Map, born on the Marches of Wales about the middle of the twelfth century. It was he who gave Lancelot, the unspiritual Knight, a son, Sir Galahad, clad in a flame-coloured dress which typified purity itself ; and it was he who showed how England's purity was lost when the Holy Grail disappeared to be found only by the unstained Sir Galahad. The echo of Map's song has been caught by one of the sweetest singers of to-day, and Map's high purpose rings out clearer than ever in the grandest of Tennysonian song.

The aim of this introduction has been to show that good English writing is not superficial, but that at its best it possesses something peculiar to it, an inner purpose which has been called the spirit of earnestness. Shakespeare is emphatically the earnest man of our literature. Do not misunderstand me. I do not wish to imply that a seeker of religious fanaticism, generally the result of narrow or warped or unhealthy views, should go to Shakespeare to feed his mind. What I maintain is that any one who loves to think of humanity as man, and God as the good, will find much that is of surpassing excellence in Shakespeare's dramas.