

times he seems to delight in wallowing in the mire. The Wife of Bath's Tale has justly been censured, and even in the Nonne Preestes Tale we find lines that have to be expunged from our school books. He says himself in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales that he is going to repeat the tales just as they were told by the pilgrims, and offers as an excuse that they were not his words—a lame excuse. It is well known that people of his time were as much addicted to profane swearing as the people of to-day, but he leaves the profanity out of the tales and gives us the filth. Why could he not have left both out? and the tales would have been the better for it. He called a spade a spade; but because that spade was muddy was no reason why he should hold it up for close inspection. He might have railed at the abuses that existed—although not general—without portraying all the filthy details. He showed the false characters in an unenviable light, and was nothing loath to point out the scandals in both church and state. He may have overdrawn the picture somewhat, but had he only been a little more moral in his stories we should have much more reason to feel proud of him. His age was not entirely a vicious one, or else he would not have found it necessary to make the apology that he does at the end of his Prologue and elsewhere through the course of the Canterbury Tales.

To his labors more than those of any other we are indebted for the strong terse vehicle of communication which we use to-day. He devoted himself to building up his native tongue, to redeeming the language from the degradation in which it had lain so long. He did this so well that he became a worthy model for the writers who followed him, and his influence lasted for centuries. He gave to us a true picture of early English life, its manners and customs; and although the morality of his works is not all that can be desired, still by leaving out the bad we can find much that is really good.