

but it was the sleep that gave promise of a glorious awakening.

There has been considerable controversy as to the precise date of Geoffrey Chaucer's birth, some claiming 1328 others 1340. It was probably the latter, because in a famous trial in 1386, he gave his age to the clerk as forty years and upwards, stating that he had borne arms for 27 years. If we take his own statement his birth is fixed about 1340, and this would make him about 17 years of age when he entered the service of the court as a page. It seems more likely that a youth of that age should have that position than a man of 29, which would be the case if we take the poet's birth as 1328. He was the son of a vintner, and like many of our great authors was born in London. His father had attended Edward III and his queen Philippa in their expedition to France, and it was doubtless to this that Chaucer owed his appointment to court. His many courtly missions prove him to have been esteemed highly by his royal master. At one time he was sent to Genoa and is thought to have then visited Padua, and heard from the lips of Petrarch, "the old man eloquent," the story of "Patient Griselda," which he afterwards embodied in "The Clerk's Tale." It is hardly probable that the story of Chaucer's being fined for beating a Franciscan Friar on Fleet street is true, but we cannot think that his meeting Petrarch is also a tradition, because we know of his being at Milan, and being there it is highly probable that he would visit Padua to see the greatest literary man of the day.

Chaucer lived happily during Edward III's and the early part of Richard II's reign, but in the trouble which arose between Richard and the Duke of Lancaster he sided with the Duke and was compelled to flee. Returning after 18 months he was imprisoned, but on Lancaster gaining power fortune smiled on him again. About nine years before his death he became tired of public life and settled in his quiet country seat where he wrote his immortal work, "The Canterbury Tales." These tales are a series of independent stories joined together very ingeniously. The Prologue, which is but an introduction to the stories and describes the persons who relate them is quite a large poem and shows well the descriptive powers of the poet. While

the tales related by the different pilgrims doubtless have been taken from already existing writings, the prologue is Chaucer's own. We have a beautiful description of spring in the introduction to the prologue, and one can almost feel the balmy breezes and hear the sweet songs of the birds. After this short introduction he gives a sketch of each member of the party. He always succeeds in bringing out some particular characteristic and often does it in a very humorous style. He severely attacks and exposes the abuse of the clergy in the description of the Friar who,

"Though a widewe hadde noght oo schoo,
Yet wolde he have a farthing or he wente."

so great a beggar was he.

Some think that Chaucer's Clerk of Oxford has reference to himself in his great love for study.

"Of studie took most care and moste heede."

His knight was a model of manliness and chivalric goodness. He was courageous in battle and worthy of all praise bestowed on him.

The Prioress is affected and sentimental, but seems to have been educated in all the essentials of etiquette. He gives a loving sketch of the poor priest from a country village, telling of the good example he showed his flock.

"But in his teaching descret and benigne,
To drawe folk to heven by fairnesse
By good ensample, this was his busynesse."

Along with these ecclesiastics are described vividly Monk, Sompnour or Officer of church courts and the Pardoner or seller of indulgences. Then the trading and manufacturing sections give several figures to the picture among whom are the Merchant, the Wife of Bath described keenly; in the same group but less important are the Haberdasher, Carpenter, Weaver, Dyer and Tapestry maker. These with the Poet and Host of the Tabard form the Canterbury Pilgrims.

The Knight's tale was first composed as a separate work. It is founded on the Italian story written by Boccaccio and called the *Teseide*. It is the best of chivalrous romances and is a story of Athens and Thebes. The capture and imprisonment of Palamon and Arcite by Theseus Duke of Athens is first told. Then on a bright May morning as Arcite was looking out of his prison window he saw Emilie and immediately fell in love with