

We have the germ of earnestness of purpose in the oldest song. The gleeman boldly avowed that he lived by skill of hand and brightness of wit. The warriors about whom he sang vaunted that they fought for pay and not for glory. "Send, dear Hrothgar, to Hygelac the gold thou hast given me, that the Goth's lord may know I have found a good bestower of rings," said Beowulf, the hero of our first great English epic, ere he dived into the mere to combat the monsters who had desolated Hrothgar's hearth and home. This was the spirit, mercenary but candid, of our Pagan literature, both Keltic and Saxon; a spirit enshrined in the inmost feelings of men, and hesitating not for a moment to proclaim exactly what those feelings were. "I will make your hall ring with your praises" is the refrain of the old bard, "but you must promise me as my reward the spoils of the bright spear." As time rolled on the earnestness became deeper and nobler, its aspirations higher. I will adduce three striking examples to prove my statement: the first two relating to romance, the third to history—all three showing that the inner meaning of Shakespeare's plays does not stand alone, but that it finds a fainter foreshadow nearly three centuries ere our great dramatist was born.

About the middle of the fourteenth century an English book was written, *The Court of Love*. Who the author was we know not for certain. He may have been Chaucer despite the verdict given by one of the most accomplished scholars of our day, Mr. Furnivall. When speaking of *The Court of Love* together with other poems generally ascribed to Chaucer, Mr. Furnivall says, "they must be considered as spurious till some one can establish their genuineness, which I make bold to doubt whether any one ever can or will do." Still the writer of the book wedded the English sense of duty to the frivolity of the Troubadour, who poured forth a flood of song about those fashionable but innocent assemblies in the south of France where love verses were set to music, love causes tried in accordance with formal codes, and judgments delivered in conformity with precedent. The Englishman's king and queen of love are not ordinary monarchs to whom the discussions of the court