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TO CLASS '80. † †

As a tale that's been told
In the days far and old,
As a song long since unsung,
Seen the days that have flown,
When the seed has been sown,
For the years but just begun.

O oft will the swells
Of sweet memory's bells
Through your inmost natures roll,
And their dear hallowed strain
Will again and again
Re-echo in every soul.

Yes, we know that you tread
With "reluctant feet," led
From our *Alma Mater's* side,
But the broad field of life,
With its pleasure and strife,
Lies waiting, by you to be tried.

Let the years that are fled
Be the strong silken thread,
Binding wisdom's jewels rare.
May the spirit of Love
Ever shine from above,
And shield you from every care.

CLASS '79.

[First Prize Essay, by Miss Lucy Lister.]

CHAUCER AND HIS TIMES.

SOME one has compared a great life to a great Epic poem. Years must intervene between us and it before its full richness can be revealed. Only after years are the turning points seen on which hang important issues; only then are the inner thoughts and purposes given us to interpret actions, so that we can understand how harmonious may be the echo of "one discordant life."

Such a poem was the life of Chaucer. The very boldness and distinctness with which any person or event is thrown in the foreground confirms the fact of distance the more surely. Lack of detail and minutia proves the distance in time, just as the mountain, though covered with verdure and sleety pines, appears barren and sterile in the distance. But to this disadvantage there is a corresponding advantage. Only those at a distance can take in its free bold outline. Those who live in the valley know nothing of its curves and declines, the rich

luxuriance and wild grandeur of its scenery. And consequently, removed so many hundreds of years from the scene of action, causes and their effects may be more easily traced, and the actions of men read more justly.

What Alfred the Great did for literature in the days of Anglo-Saxon darkness, and Shakspeare for the drama; what Milton has done for the epic and Bunyan for the allegorical style of writing, Chaucer has done for English poetry. He came as the dawn after a dark night, as the refreshing rain after a sultry day.

"Chaucer! Our Helicon's first fountain stream,
Our morning star of song that led the way
To welcome the long after-coming beam
Of Spencer's light and Shakspeare's perfect day."

Italy may boast her bards and Greece her heroes in arms, but none may claim a more illustrious poet than the morning star of our English poesy, or a literature richer and more varied than that which flowed from the pen of England's great versifier.

The history of the times is involved necessarily in much obscurity. It was an age of reconstruction and revolution. It was a literary crisis, a transition period. The old Saxon tongue was becoming slowly transformed by the admixture of the Norman French. Up to this time the people had been like children, craving amusement rather than instruction. Their poetry, if brilliant, was unreal—full of improbable adventures and impossible voyages, but lacking the spirit of truth, which is the very soul of poetry. Even at the death of Chaucer the first printers were unborn. No great discoverer of continents had appeared. In Spain the Moors held Granada, and the Christians were divided; and in Germany the Reformation, which was steadily gathering force, had not yet sounded out its clarion battle cry.

The people were smarting under the rule of a depraved priesthood. From the Vatican down to the most insignificant monastery, scenes of profligacy were constantly