

Our author also deserves especial mention as the discoverer of the true scope of English rhythm. At one time the old alliterative verse was used, afterwards the octasyllabic. But Chaucer was the first to employ the decasyllabic, which has justly been called the English heroic measure; for in it the matchless dramas of Shakespeare were written and in it Milton sang his lofty epic strains.

Power of vivid description is one of the prominent characteristics of this ancient bard. His pen-portraits are wonderful. The reader has no difficulty in arranging every person before him. How droll his description of the miller:—

“He was schort schuldred¹, broode², a thikke knarre³,
 There was no dore that he nolde⁴ heve of harre⁵,
 Or breke it at a rennyng⁶ with his heed.
 His berd, as ony sowe or fox, was reed,
 And thereto brood², as though it were a spade.
 Upon the cop⁷ right of his nose he hade
 A werte⁸, and thereon stound a tuft of heres,
 Reede⁹ as the berstles¹⁰ of a sowes ceres.”

Says Professor Craik: “The general Prologue is a gallery of pictures almost unequalled for their air of life and truthfulness.”

He has justly weighed each character, applauding every virtue, and with gentle satire striking at every failing. In his notice of the “pore persoun,” after describing his habits of study, and his faithfulness to his flock, with the following eucomium, which any pastor might covet, simply and beautifully he concludes:—

“But Criste’s lore” and His Apostles twelve,
 He taught, and first he followed it himselfe.”

1 Short shouldered.

2 Broad.

3 A thick-set fellow.

4 ne + wolde, would not.

5 Lift off the hinge.

6 Running.

7 Top, summit.

8 Wart.

9 Red.

10 Bristles.

11 Christ’s doctrine.