CHAPTER III.

The New Tongue.

I.
Amid so many barren endeavours, throughout the long impotence of Norman literature, which was content to copy, and of Saxon literature, which bore no fruit, a definite language was nevertheless formed, and there was room for a great writer. Geoffrey Chaucer appeared, a man of mark, inventive though a disciple, original though a translator, who by his genius, education, and life, was enabled to know and to depict a whole world, but above all to satisfy the chivalric world and the splendid courts which shone upon the heights.\(^1\) He belonged to it, though learned and versed in all branches of scholastic knowledge; and he took such a share in it, that his life from beginning to end was that of a man of the world, and a man of action. We find him by turns in King Edward's army, in the king's train, husband of a maid of honour to the queen, a pensioner, a placeholder, a member of Parliament, a knight, founder of a family which was hereafter to become allied to royalty. Moreover, he was in the king's council, brother-in-law of John of Gaunt, employed more than once in open embassies or secret missions at Florence, Genoa, Milan, Flanders, commissioner in France for the marriage

\(^1\) Born between 1328 and 1345, died in 1400.
of the Prince of Wales, high up and low down on the political ladder, disgraced, restored to place. This experience of business, travel, war, and the court, was not like a book-education. He was at the court of Edward III., the most splendid in Europe, amidst tourneys, grand receptions, magnificent displays; he took part in the pomps of France and Milan; conversed with Petrarch, perhaps with Boccaccio and Froissart; was actor in, and spectator of, the finest and most tragical of dramas. In these few words, what ceremonies and cavalcades are implied! what processions in armour, what caparisoned horses, bedizened ladies! what display of gallant and lordly manners! what a varied and brilliant world, well suited to occupy the mind and eyes of a poet! Like Froissart, and better than he, Chaucer could depict the castles of the nobles, their conversations, their talk of love, and anything else that concerned them, and please them by his portraiture.

II.

Two notions raised the middle age above the chaos of barbarism: one religious, which had fashioned the gigantic cathedrals, and swept the masses from their native soil to hurl them upon the Holy Land; the other secular, which had built feudal fortresses, and set the man of courage erect and armed, within his own domain: the one had produced the adventurous hero, the other the mystical monk; the one, to wit, the belief in God, the other the belief in self. Both, running to excess, had degenerated by the violence of their own strength: the one had exalted independence into rebellion, the other had turned piety into enthusiasm: the first made man unfit for civil life, the second drew him back from
natural life: the one, sanctioning disorder, dissolved society; the other, enthroning infatuation, perverted intelligence. Chivalry had need to be repressed because it issued in brigandage; devotion restrained because it induced slavery. Turbulent feudalism grew feeble, like oppressive theocracy; and the two great master passions, deprived of their sap and lopped of their stem, gave place by their weakness to the monotony of habit and the taste for worldliness, which shot forth in their stead and flourished under their name.

Gradually, the serious element declined, in books as in manners, in works of art as in books. Architecture, instead of being the handmaid of faith, became the slave of phantasy. It was exaggerated, became too ornamental, sacrificing general effect to detail, shot up its steeple to unreasonable heights, decorated its churches with canopies, pinnacles, trefoil gables, open-work galleries. "Its whole aim was continually to climb higher, to clothe the sacred edifice with a gaudy bedizenment, as if it were a bride on her wedding morning."¹ Before this marvellous laccwork, what emotion could one feel but a pleased astonishment? What becomes of Christian sentiment before such scenic ornamentations? In like manner literature sets itself to play. In the eighteenth century, the second age of absolute monarchy, we saw on one side finials and floriated cupolas, on the other pretty vers de société, courtly and sprightly tales, taking the place of severe beauty-lines and noble writings. Even so in the fourteenth century, the second age of feudalism, they had on one side the stone fretwork and slender efflorescence of aerial forms, and on the other finical verses and

¹ Renan, De l'Art au Moyen Age.
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diverting stories, taking the place of the old grand architecture and the old simple literature. It is no longer the overflowing of a true sentiment which produces them, but the craving for excitement. Consider Chaucer, his subjects, and how he selects them. He goes far and wide to discover them, to Italy, France, to the popular legends, the ancient classics. His readers need diversity, and his business is to “provide fine tales:” it was in those days the poet’s business. ¹ The lords at table have finished dinner, the minstrels come and sing, the brightness of the torches falls on the velvet and ermine, on the fantastic figures, the motley, the elaborate embroidery of their long garments; then the poet arrives, presents his manuscript, “richly illuminated, bound in crimson violet, embellished with silver clasps and bosses, roses of gold:” they ask him what his subject is, and he answers “Love.”

III.

In fact, it is the most agreeable subject, fittest to make the evening hours pass sweetly, amid the goblets filled with spiced wine and the burning perfumes. Chaucer translated first that great storehouse of gallantry, the Roman de la Rose. There is no pleasanter entertainment. It is about a rose which the lover wished to pluck: the pictures of the May months, the groves, the flowery earth, the green hedgerows, abound and display their bloom. Then come portraits of the smiling ladies, Richesse, Fraunchise, Gaiety, and by way of contrast, the sad characters, Daunger and

¹ See Froissart, his life with the Count of Foix and with King Richard II.
Travail, all fully and minutely described, with detail of features, clothing, attitude; they walk about, as on a piece of tapestry, amid landscapes, dances, castles, among allegorical groups, in lively sparkling colours, displayed, contrasted, ever renewed and varied so as to entertain the sight. For an evil has arisen, unknown to serious ages—ennui: novelty and brilliancy followed by novelty and brilliancy are necessary to withstand it; and Chaucer, like Boccaccio and Froissart, enters into the struggle with all his heart. He borrows from Boccaccio his history of Palamon and Arcite, from Lollius his history of Troilus and Cressida, and rearranges them. How the two young Theban knights, Arcite and Palamon, both fall in love with the beautiful Emily, and how Arcite, victorious in tourney, falls and dies, bequeathing Emily to his rival; how the fine Trojan knight Troilus wins the favour of Cressida, and how Cressida abandons him for Diomedes—these are still tales in verse, tales of love. A little tedious they may be; all the writings of this age; French, or imitated from French, are born of too prodigal minds; but how they glide along! A winding stream, which flows smoothly on level sand, and sparkles now and again in the sun, is the only image we can compare it to. The characters speak too much, but then they speak so well! Even when they dispute, we like to listen, their anger and offences are so wholly based on a happy overflow of unbroken converse. Remember Froissart, how slaughters, assassinations, plagues, the butcheries of the Jacquerie, the whole chaos of human misery, disappears in his fine ceaseless humour, so that the furious and grinning figures seem but ornaments and choice embroideries to relieve the skein of shaded
and coloured silk which forms the groundwork of his narrative; but, in particular, a multitude of descriptions spread their gilding over all. Chaucer leads you among arms, palaces, temples, and halts before each beautiful thing. Here:

"The statue of Venus glorious for to see
Was naked fleting in the large see,
And fro the navel doun all covered was
With wawes grene, and bright as any glas.
A citole in hire right hand hadde she,
And on hire hed, ful semely for to see,
A rose gerlond fressh, and wel smelling,
Above hire hed hire doves fleckering." ¹

Further on, the temple of Mars:

"First on the wall was peinted a forest,
In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,
With knotty knarry barrein trees old
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to behold;
In which ther ran a romble and a swough,
As though a storme shuld bresten every bough:
And dounward from an hill under a bent.
Ther stood the temple of Mars armipotent,
Wrought all of burned stele, of which th' entree
Was longe and streite, and gastly for to see.
And therout came a rage and swiche a vise,
That it made all the gates for to rise.
The northern light in at the dore shone,
For window on the wall ne was ther none,
Thurgh which men mighten any light discerne.
The dore was all of athamant eterne,
Yaleched overthwart and endelang
With yren tough, and for to make it strong.

Every piler the temple to sustene
Was tonne-gret, of yren bright and shene."\(^1\)

Everywhere on the wall were representations of slaughter; and in the sanctuary

"The statue of Mars upon a carle stood
Armed, and loked grim as he were wood,
A wolf ther stod beforne him at his fete
With eyen red, and of a man he ete."\(^2\)

Are not these contrasts well designed to rouse the imagination? You will meet in Chaucer a succession of similar pictures. Observe the train of combatants who came to joust in the tilting field for Arcite and Palamon:

"With him ther wenten knightes many on.
Som wcl ben armed in an habergon
And in a brestplate, and in a gipon;
And som wol have a pair of plates large,
And som wol have a Pruce sheld, or a targe,
Som wol ben armed on his legges wele,
And have an axe, and som a mace of stel . . .
Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace:
Blake was his bard, and manly was his face.
The cercles of his eyen in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,
And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout;
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shoudres brode, his armes round and longe
And as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With four white bolles in the traís.

\(^1\) *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 59, l. 1977–1996.
Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,
With Nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempt behind his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,
Upon his hed sate ful of stones bright,
Of fine rubins and of diamants.
About his char ther wenten white alauns,
Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere,
To hunten at the leon or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound,
Colered with gold, and torettes filed round.
An hundred lوردes had he in his route,
Armed ful wel, with hertes sterne and stoute.
With Arcita, in stories as men find,
The gret Emetrius the king of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
Covered with cloth of gold diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes Mars.
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles, white, and round and grete
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete.
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
His crispe here like ringes was yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glitered as the sonne.
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin . . .
And as a leon he his loking caste.
Of five and twenty yere his age I caste.
His berd was well begonnen for to spring;
His vois was as a trompe thondering.
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene
A gerlond freshe and lusty for to seyn.
Upon his hond he bare for his deduit ,
An egle tame, as any lily whit.
An hundred lorde had he with him there,
All armed save hir hedes in all hir gere,
Ful richely in alle manere things . . .
About this king ther ian on every part
Ful many a tame leon and leopart "1

A herald would not descrie them better nor more fully. The lords and ladies of the time would recognise here their tourneys and masquerades.

There is something more pleasant than a fine narrative, and that is a collection of fine narratives, especially when the narratives are all of different colourings. Froissart gives us such under the name of Chronicles; Boccaccio still better; after him the lords of the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles; and, later still, Marguerite of Navarre. What more natural among people who meet, talk, and wish to amuse themselves. The manners of the time suggest them; for the habits and tastes of society had begun, and fiction thus conceived only brings into books the conversations which are heard in the hall and by the wayside. Chaucer describes a troop of pilgrims, people of every rank, who are going to Canterbury; a knight, a sergeant of law, an Oxford clerk, a doctor, a miller, a prioress, a monk, who agree to tell a story all round:

"For trewely comfort ne mirthe is non,
To rideu by the way domb as the ston."

They tell their stories accordingly; and on this slender and flexible thread all the jewels of feudal imagination, real or false, contribute one after another their motley shapes to form a necklace; side by side with noble

1 Knight’s Tale, ii. p. 68, l. 2120–2133.
and chivalrous stories: we have the miracle of an infant whose throat was cut by Jews, the trials of patient Griselda, Canace and marvellous fictions of Oriental fancy, obscene stories of marriage and monks, allegorical or moral tales, the fable of the cock and hen, a list of great unfortunate persons: Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Nebuchadnezzar, Zenobia, Creesus, Ugolino, Peter of Spain. I leave out some, for I must be brief. Chaucer is like a jeweller with his hands full: pearls and glass beads, sparkling diamonds and common agates, black jet and ruby roses, all that history and imagination had been able to gather and fashion during three centuries in the East, in France, in Wales, in Provence, in Italy, all that had rolled his way, clashed together, broken or polished by the stream of centuries, and by the great jumble of human memory, he holds in his hand, arranges it, composes therefrom a long sparkling ornament, with twenty pendants, a thousand facets, which by its splendour, variety, contrasts, may attract and satisfy the eyes of those most greedy for amusement and novelty.

He does more. The universal outburst of unchecked curiosity demands a more refined enjoyment: reverie and fantasy alone can satisfy it; not profound and thoughtful fantasy as we find it in Shakspeare, nor impassioned and meditative reverie as we find it in Dante, but the reverie and fantasy of the eyes, ears, external senses, which in poetry as in architecture call for singularity, wonders, accepted challenges, victories gained over the rational and probable, and which are satisfied only by what is crowded and dazzling. When we look at a cathedral of that time, we feel a sort of fear. Substance is wanting; the walls are hollowed
out to make room for windows, the elaborate work of the porches, the wonderful growth of the slender columns, the thin curvature of arches—everything seems to menace us; support has been withdrawn to give way to ornament. Without external prop or buttress, and artificial aid of iron clamp-work, the building would have crumbled to pieces on the first day; as it is, it undoes itself; we have to maintain on the spot a colony of masons continually to ward off the continual decay. But our sight grows dim in following the wavings and twistings of the endless fretwork; the dazzling rose-window of the portal and the painted glass throw a chequered light on the carved stalls of the choir, the gold-work of the altar, the long array of damascened and glittering copes, the crowd of statues, tier above tier; and amid this violet light, this quivering purple, amid these arrows of gold which pierce the gloom, the entire building is like the tail of a mystical peacock. So most of the poems of the time are barren of foundation; at most a trite morality serves them for mainstay: in short, the poet thought of nothing else than displaying before us a glow of colours and a jumble of forms. They are dreams or visions; there are five or six in Chaucer, and you will meet more on your advance to the Renaissance. But the show is splendid. Chaucer is transported in a dream to a temple of glass, on the walls of which are figured in gold all the legends of Ovid and Virgil, an infinite train of characters and dresses, like that which, on the painted glass in the churches, occupied then the gaze of the faithful. Suddenly a golden eagle, which soars near the sun, and glitters like a carbuncle descends with the swiftness of

1 The House of Fame
lightning, and carries him off in his talons above the stars, dropping him at last before the House of Fame, splendidly built of beryl, with shining windows and lofty turrets, and situated on a high rock of almost inaccessible ice. All the southern side was graven with the names of famous men, but the sun was continuously melting them. On the northern side, the names, better protected, still remained. On the turrets appeared the minstrels and "gestiours," with Orpheus, Arion, and the great harpers, and behind them myriads of musicians, with horns, flutes, bag-pipes, and reeds, on which they played, and which filled the air; then all the charmers, magicians, and prophets. He enters, and in a high hall, plated with gold, embossed with pearls, on a throne of carbuncle, he sees a woman seated, a "noble queene," amidst an infinite number of heralds, whose embroidered cloaks bore the arms of the most famous knights in the world, and heard the sounds of instruments, and the celestial melody of Calliope and her sisters. From her throne to the gate was a row of pillars, on which stood the great historians and poets; Josephus on a pillar of lead and iron; Statius on a pillar of iron stained with tiger's blood; Ovid, "Venus' clerk," on a pillar of copper; then, one higher than the rest, Homer and Livy, Dares the Phrygian, Guido Colonna, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the other historians of the war of Troy. Must I go on copying this phantasmagoria, in which confused erudition mars picturesqueness, invention, and frequent banter shows sign that the vision is only a planned amusement? The poet and his reader have imagined for half-an-hour decorated halls and bustling crowds; a slender thread of common sense has ingeniously crept along the
transparent golden mist which they amuse, themselves with following. That suffices; they are pleased with their fleeting fancies, and ask no more.

Amid this exuberancy of mind, amid these refined cravings, and this insatiate exaltation of imagination and the senses, there was one passion, that of love, which, combining all, was developed in excess, and displayed in miniature the sickly charm, the fundamental and fatal exaggeration, which are the characteristics of the age, and which, later, the Spanish civilisation exhibits both in its flower and its decay. Long ago, the courts of love in Provence had established the theory. "Each one who loves," they said, "grows pale at the sight of her whom he loves; each action of the lover ends in the thought of her whom he loves. Love can refuse nothing to love."¹ This search after excessive sensation had ended in the ecstasies and transports of Guido Cavalcanti, and of Dante; and in Languedoc a company of enthusiasts had established themselves, love-penitents, who, in order to prove the violence of their passion, dressed in sumner in furs and heavy garments, and in winter in light gauze, and walked thus about the country, so that several of them fell ill and died. Chaucer, in their wake, explained in his verses the craft of love,² the ten commandments, the twenty statutes of love; and praised his lady, his "daieseye," his "Margarite," his "vermeil rose;" depicted love in ballads, visions, allegories, didactic poems, in a hundred guises. This is chivalrous, lofty love, as it was conceived in the middle age; above all, tender love. Troilus loves

¹ André le Chapelain, 1170.
² Also the Court of Love, and perhaps The Assemble of Ladies and La Belle Dame sans Merci.
Cressida like a troubadour; without Pandarus, her uncle, he would have languished, and ended by dying in silence. He will not reveal the name of her he loves. Pandarus has to tear it from him, perform all the bold actions himself, plan every kind of stratagem. Troilus, however brave and strong in battle, can but weep before Cressida, ask her pardon, and faint. Cressida, on her side, has every delicate feeling. When Pandarus brings her Troilus’ first letter, she begins by refusing it, and is ashamed to open it: she opens it only because she is told the poor knight is about to die. At the first words “all rosy hewed tho woxe she;” and though the letter is respectful, she will not answer it. She yields at last to the importunities of her uncle, and answers Troilus that she will feel for him the affection of a sister. As to Troilus, he trembles all over, grows pale when he sees the messenger return, doubts his happiness, and will not believe the assurance which is given him:

“But right so as these holtes and these hayis
That han in winter dead ben and dry,
Revesten hem in grene, whan that May is....
Right in that selfe wise, sooth for to say,
Woxe suddainly his herte full of joy.”

Slowly, after many troubles, and thanks to the efforts of Pandarus, he obtains her confession; and in this confession what a delightful charm!

“And as the newe abashed nightingale,
That stintent first, whan she beginneth sing,
Whan that she heareth any herdes tale,
Or in the hedges any wight steering,
And after siker doeth her voice outring:

1 Troilus and Cressida, vol. v. bk. 3, p. 12.
Right so Cresside, when that her drede stent,  
Opened her herte and told him her euent."

He, as soon as he perceived a hope from afar,
   "In chaunged voice, right for his very drede,  
Which voice eke quoke, and thereto his manere,  
Goodly abasht, and now his hewes rede,  
Now pale, unto Cresside his ladie dere,  
With looke doun cast, and humble iyolden chere,  
Lo, the alderfirst word that him astart  
Was twice: 'Mercy, mercy, O my sweet herte!'"

This ardent love breaks out in impassioned accents, in bursts of happiness. Far from being regarded as a fault, it is the source of all virtue. Troilus becomes braver, more generous, more upright, through it; his speech runs now on love and virtue; he scorns all villany; he honours those who possess merit, succours those who are in distress; and Cressida, delighted, repeats all day, with exceeding liveliness, this song, which is like the warbling of a nightingale:

   "Whom should I thanken but you, god of love,  
Of all this blisse, in which to bathe I ginne?  
And thanked be ye, lorde for that I love,  
This is the right life that I am inne,  
To flmen all maner Vice and sinne:  
This doeth me so to vertue for to entende  
That daie by daie I in my will amende.  
And who that saith that for to love is vice, . . .  
He either is envious, or right nice,  
Or is unmyghtle for his shreudnesse  
To love. . . .  
But I with all mine herte and all my might,  
As I have saied, wolle love unto my last,

1 Troilus and Cressida, vol. v. bk. 3, p 40.  
2 Ibid p. 4.
My owne dere herte, and all mine owne knight,
In whiche mine herte growen is so fast,
And his in me, that it shall ever last.”

But misfortune comes. Her father Calchas demands her back, and the Trojans decide that they will give her up in exchange for prisoners. At this news she swoons, and Troilus is about to slay himself. Their love at this time seems imperishable; it sports with death, because it constitutes the whole of life. Beyond that better and delicious life which it created, it seems there can be no other:

“‘But as God would, of swough she abraide,
And gan to sighe, and Troilus she cride,
And he answorde: ‘Lady mine, Cresseide,
Live ye yet?’ and let his swerde doun glide:
‘Ye herte mine, that thanked be Cupide,’
(Quod she), and therewithal she sore sight,
And he began to glade her as he might.

Took her in armes two and kist her oft,
And her to glad, he did al his entent,
For which her gost, that fikered aie a loft,
Into her wofull herte ayen it went:
But at the last, as that her eye glent
Aside, anon she gan his sworde aspie,
As it lay bare, and gan for feare crie.

And asked him why had he it out draw;
And Troilus anon the cause her told,
And how himself therwith he wold have slain
For which Cresseide upon him gan behold,
And gan him in her armes faste fold,
And said: ‘O mercy God, lo which a dede!
Alas, how nigh we weren bothe dede!’”

At last they are separated, with what vows and what tears! and Troilus, alone in his chamber, murmurs:

``'
Where is mine owne lady lefe and dere?
Where is her white brest, where is it, where?
Where been her armes, and her eyen cleere
That yesterdai this time with me were?' . . .
Nor there was lesure in al the day or night,
When he was ther as no man might him here,
That he ne sayd. 'O lovesome lady bright,
How have ye faren sins that ye were there?
Welcome ywis mine owne lady dere!'
Fro thence forth he rideth up and doune,
And every thing came him to remembrancc,
As he rode forth by the places of the town,
In which he whilom had all his pleasure:
'Lo, yonder saw I mine owne lady daunce,
And in that temple with her eien cleere,
Me caught first my right lady dere.
And yonder have I herde full lustely
My dere herte laugh, and yonder play
Saw her ones eke ful blissfully,
And yonder ones to me gan she say,
'Now, good sweete, love me well I pray
And yonde so goodly gan she me behold,
That to the death mine herte is to her hold.
And at the corner in the yonder house
Herde I mine alderlevest lady dere,
So womanly, with voice melodiouse,
Singen so wel, so goodly, and so cleere,
That in my soule yet me thinketh I here
The blissful sowne, and in that yonder place,
My lady first me toke unto her grace.' 1

None has since found more true and tender words

1 *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 5, p 119 et passim.
These are the charming "poetic branches" which flourished amid gross ignorance and pompous parades. Human intelligence in the middle age had blossomed on that side where it perceived the light.

But mere narrative does not suffice to express his felicity and fancy; the poet must go where "shoures sweet of rain descended soft."

"And every plaine was clothed faire  
With new greene, and maketh small floures  
To springen here and there in field and in mede,  
So very good and wholesome be the shoures,  
That it renueth that was old and dede,  
In winter time; and out of every sede  
Springeth the hearbe, so that every wight  
Of this season waxeth glad and light. . .  
In which (grove) were okes great, streight as a line,  
Under the which the grasse so fresh of hew  
Was newly sprung, and an eight foot or nine  
Every tree well fro his fellow grew."

He must forget himself in the vague felicity of the country, and, like Dante, lose himself in ideal light and allegory. The dreams of love, to continue true, must not take too visible a form, nor enter into a too consecutive history; they must float in a misty distance the soul in which they hover can no longer think of the laws of existence; it inhabits another world; it forgets itself in the ravishing emotion which troubles it, and sees its well-loved visions rise, mingle, come and go, as in summer we see the bees on a hill-slope flutter in a haze of light, and circle round and round the flowers.

One morning,¹ a lady sings, at the dawn of day, I entered an oak-grove

¹ The Flower and the Leaf, vi. p 244, l 6-32.
"With branches brode, laden with leves new,
That sprungen out ayen the sunne-shene,
Some very red, and some a glad light grene. . . . ¹

And I, that all this plesaunt sight see,
Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire
Of the eglentere, that certainly
There is no hee, I deme, in such dispaire,
Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,
So overlaid, but it should soone have bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood, and cast aside mine eie,
I was ware of the fairest medler tree
That ever yet in all my life I see,
As full of blossomes as it might be,
Therem a goldfinch leaping pretile
Fro bough to bough; and, as him list, he set
Here and there of buds and flowers sweet. . .

And as I sat, the birds harkening thus,
Methought that I heard voices sodainly,
The most sweetest and most delicious
That ever any wight, I trow truly,
Heard in their life, for the armony
And sweet accord was in so good musike,
That the voice to angels most was like."²

Then she sees arrive "a world of ladies . . . in surcotes white of velvet . . . set with emerauds . . . as of great pearles round and orient, and diamonds fine and rubies red." And all had on their head "a rich fret of gold . . . full of stately riche stones set," with "a chapelet of branches fresh and grene . . . some of

¹ _The Flower and the Leaf_, p 245, l. 83.
² _Ibid_ vi. p 246, l 78-183.
laurer, some of woodbind, some of agnus castus;" and at the same time came a train of valiant knights in splendid array, with "harneis" of red gold, shining in the sun, and noble steeds, with trappings "of cloth of gold, and furred with ermine." These knights and ladies were the servants of the Leaf, and they sate under a great oak, at the feet of their queen.

From the other side came a bevy of ladies as resplendent as the first, but crowned with fresh flowers. These were the servants of the Flower. They alighted, and began to dance in the meadow. But heavy clouds appeared in the sky, and a storm broke out. They wished to shelter themselves under the oak, but there was no more room; they ensconced themselves as they could in the hedges and among the brushwood; the rain came down and spoiled their garlands, stained their robes, and washed away their ornaments; when the sun returned, they went to ask succour from the queen of the Leaf; she, being merciful, consoled them, repaired the injury of the rain, and restored their original beauty. Then all disappears as in a dream.

The lady was astonished, when suddenly a fair dame appeared and instructed her. She learned that the servants of the Leaf had lived like brave knights, and those of the Flower had loved idleness and pleasure. She promises to serve the Leaf, and came away.

Is this an allegory? There is at least a lack of wit. There is no ingenious enigma; it is dominated by fancy, and the poet thinks only of displaying in quiet verse the fleeting and brilliant train which had amused his mind, and charmed his eyes.

Chaucer himself, on the first of May, rises and goes out into the meadows. Love enters his heart with the
balmy air; the landscape is transfigured, and the birds begin to speak:

There sate I downe among the faire flours,
And saw the birds trip out of hir boun,
There as they rested hem all the night,
They were so joyfull of the dayes light,
They began of May for to done honours

They coud that service all by rote,
There was many a lovely note,
Some song loud as they had plained,
And some in other manner voice ysained
And some all out with the ful throte.

The proyned hem and made hem right gay,
And dauncedem, and lepton on the spray,
And evermore two and two in fere,
Right so as they had chosen hem to yere,
In Feverere upon saint Valentines day.

And the-river that I sate upon,
It made such a noise as it ron,
Accordaunt with the birdes armony,
Methought it was the best m‘lody
That might ben yheard of any mon."¹

This confused harmony of vague noises troubles the sense; a secret languor enters the soul. The cuckoo throws his monotonous voice like a mournful and tender sigh between the white ash-tree boles; the nightingale makes his triumphant notes roll and ring above the leafy canopy; fancy breaks in unsought, and Chaucer hears them dispute of Love. They sing alternately an antistrophic song, and the nightingale weeps for vexation to hear the cuckoo speak in depreciation of Love. He

¹ The Cuckow and Nightingale, vi. p. 121, l. 67–85.
is consoled, however, by the poet's voice, seeing that he also suffers with him:

"'For love and it hath doe me much wo.'
'Ye use' (quod she) 'this medicine
Every day this May or thou dine
Go looke upon the fresh daise,
And though thou be for wo in point to die,
That shall full greatly lessen thee of thy pain.

'And looke alway that thou be good and trew,
And I wol sing one of the songs new,
For love of thee, as loud as I may cri.'
And than she began this song full hie,
' I shrew all hem that been of love untrue.'" 

To such exquisite delicacies love, as with Petrarch, had carried poetry; by refinement even, as with Petrarch, it is lost now and then in its wit, conceits, clinches. But a marked characteristic at once separates it from Petrarch. If over-excited, it is also graceful, polished, full of archness, banter, fine sensual gaiety, somewhat gossipy, as the French always paint love. Chaucer follows his true masters, and is himself an elegant speaker, facile, ever ready to smile, loving choice pleasures, a disciple of the Roman de la Rose, and much less Italian than French. The bent of French character makes of love not a passion, but a gay banquet, tastefully arranged, in which the service is elegant, the food exquisite, the silver brilliant, the two guests in full dress, in good humour, quick to anticipate and please each other, knowing how to keep up the gaiety, and when to part. In Chaucer, without doubt, this other

1 The Cuckow and Nightingale, vi. p. 126, l. 230-241.
2 Stendhal, On Love: the difference of Love-taste and Love-passion.
altogether worldly vein runs side by side with the sentimental element. If Troilus is a weeping lover, Par Jaguar is a lively rascal, who volunteers for a singular service with amusing urgency, frank immorality, and carries it out carefully, gratuitously, thoroughly. In these pretty attempts Chaucer accompanies him as far as possible, and is not shocked. On the contrary, he makes fun out of it. At the critical moment, with transparent hypocrisy, he shelters himself behind his "author." If you find the particulars free, he says, it is not my fault; "so writen clerks in hir bokes old," and "I mote, aftir min auctour, telle . . ." Not only is he gay, but he jests throughout the whole tale. He sees clearly through the tricks of feminine modesty; he laughs at it archly, knowing full well what is behind; he seems to be saying, finger on lip: "Hush! let the grand words roll on, you will be edified presently." We are, in fact, edified; so is he, and in the nick of time he goes away, carrying the light: "For ough I can aspies, this light nor I ne serven hero of nought." "Troilus," says uncle Pandarus, "if ye be wise, sweveneth not now, lest more folke arise." Troilus takes care not to swoon; and Cressida at last, being alone with him, speaks wittily and with prudent delicacy; there is here an exceeding charm, no coarseness. Their happiness covers all, even voluptuousness, with a profusion and perfume of its heavenly roses. At most a slight spice of archness flavours it: "and gode thrift he had full oft." Troilus holds his mistress in his arms: "with worse hap God let us never mete." The poet is almost as well pleased as they: for him, as for the men of his time, the sovereign good is love, not damped, but satisfied; they ended even by thinking such love a
merit. The ladies declared in their judgments, that when people love, they can refuse nothing to the beloved. Love has become law; it is inscribed in a code; they combine it with religion; and there is a sacrament of love, in which the birds in their anthems sing matins.¹ Chaucer curses with all his heart the covetous wretches, the business men, who treat it as a madness:

“As would God, tho wretches that despise
Service of love had eares al so long
As had Mida, ful of covetise,...
To teachen hem, that they been in the vice
And lovers not, although they hold hem nice,
... God yeve hem mischaunce,
And every lover in his trouth avaunce.”²

He clearly lacks severity, so rare in southern literature. The Italians in the middle age made a virtue of joy; and you perceive that the world of chivalry, as conceived by the French, expanded morality so as to confound it with pleasure.

IV.

There are other characteristics still more gay. The true Gallic literature crops up; obscene tales, practical jokes on one’s neighbour, not shrouded in the Ciceronian style of Boccaccio, but related lightly by a man in good humour;³ above all, active roguery, the trick of laughing at your neighbour’s expense. Chaucer displays it better than Rutebeuf, and sometimes better than La Fontaine. He does not knock his men down; he pricks them as

¹ The Court of Love, about 1353, et seq. See also the Testament of Love.
³ The story of the pear-tree (Merchant’s Tale), and of the cradle (Reeve’s Tale), for instance, in the Canterbury Tales.
he passes, not from deep hatred or indignation, but through sheer nimbleness of disposition, and quick sense of the ridiculous; he throws his gibes at them by handfuls. His man of law is more a man of business than of the world:

"No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
And yet he seemed besier than he was."¹

His three burgesses:

"Everich, for the wisdom that he can
Was shapelich for to ben an alderman.
For catel hadden they ynough and rent,
And eke hir wifes wolde it wel assent."²

Of the mendicant Friar he says:

"His wallet lay beforne him in his lappe,
Bretful of pardon come from Rome al hote."³

The mockery here comes from the heart, in the French manner, without effort, calculation, or vehemence. It is so pleasant and so natural to banter one's neighbour! Sometimes the lively vein becomes so copious, that it furnishes an entire comedy, indecuate certainly, but so free and life-like! Here is the portrait of the Wife of Bath, who has buried five husbands;

"Bold was hire face, and fayre and rede of hew,
She was a worthy woman all hire live;
Housbondes at the chirche dore had she had five,
Withouten other compaignie in youthe. . . .
In all the parish wif ne was ther non,
That to the offring before hire shulde gon,
And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee."⁴

CHAP. III.  THE NEW TONGUE.  195

What a tongue she has! Impertinent, full of vanity, bold, chattering, unbridled, she silences everybody, and holds forth for an hour before coming to her tale. We hear her grating, high-pitched, loud, clear voice, wherewith she deafened her husbands. She continually harps upon the same ideas, repeats her reasons, piles them up and confounds them, like a stubborn mule who runs along shaking and ringing his bells, so that the stunned listeners remain open-mouthed, wondering that a single tongue can spin out so many words. The subject was worth the trouble. She proves that she did well to marry five husbands, and she proves it clearly, like a woman who knew it, because she had tried it:

"God bad us for to wex and multiplie;
That gentil text can I wel understoond;
Eke wel I wot, he sayd, that min husband
Shuld leve fader and moder, and take to me;
But of no noumbe mention made he,
Of bigamie or of octogamie;
Why shuld men than speke of it vilanie?
Lo here the wise king dan Solomon,
I trow he hadde wives mo than on,
(As wolde God it leful were to me
To be refreshed half so oft as he,)
Which a gift of God had he for alle his wives? . . .
Blessed be God that I have wedded five.
Welcome the sixthe whan that ever he shall. . . .
He (Christ) spake to hem that wold live parfitly,
And lordings (by your leve), that am nat I;
I wol bestow the flour of all myn age
In th' actes and the fruit of mariage. . . .
An husband wol I have, I wol not lette,
Which shal be both my dettour and my thrall."
And have his tribulation withall
Upon his flesh, while that I am his wif."¹

Here Chaucer has the freedom of Molière, and we possess it no longer. His good wife justifies marriage in terms just as technical as Sganarelle. It behoves us to turn the pages quickly, and follow in the lump only this Odyssey of marriage. The experienced wife, who has journeyed through life with five husbands, knows the art of taming them, and relates how she persecuted them with jealousy, suspicion, grumbling, quarrels, blows given and received; how the husband, checkmated by the continuity of the tempest, stooped at last, accepted the halter, and turned the domestic mill like a conjugal and resigned ass:

"For as an hors, I coude bite and whine;
I coude plain, and I was in the gilt. . .
I plained first, so was our werre ystint.
They were ful glad to excusen hem ful blive
Of thing, the which they never agilt bir live. . .
I swore that all my walking out by night
Was for to espieyn wenches that he dight. . .
For though the pope had sitten hem beside,
I wold not spare hem at hir owen bord.
But certeynly I made folk swiche chere,
That in his owen grese I made him frie
For anger, and for versay jalousie.
By God, in erth I was his purgatorie,
For which I hope his soule be in glorie."²

She saw the fifth first at the burial of the fourth:

"And Jankin oure clerk was on of tho:
As helpe me God, whan that I saw him go

¹ Canterbury Tales, ii. Wife of Bath's Prologue, p. 168, l. 5610–5720
² Ibid. ii. p. 179, l. 5968–6072.
Aftr the bere, me thought he had a paire
Of legges and of feete, so cleane and faire,
That all my herte I yave unto his hold.
He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,
And I was fourty, if I shal say soth. . . .
As helpe me God, I was a lusty on,
And faire, and riche, and yonge, and well begun.""

"Yonge," what a word! Was human delusion ever more happily painted? How life-like is all, and how easy the tone. It is the satire of marriage. You will find it twenty times in Chaucer. Nothing more is wanted to exhaust the two subjects of French mockery, than to unite with the satire of marriage the satire of religion.

We find it here; and Rabelais is not more bitter. The monk whom Chaucer paints is a hypocrite, a jolly fellow, who knows good inns and jovial hosts better than the poor and the hospitals:

"A Frere there was, a wanton and a mery . . .
Ful wel beloved, and familiar was he
With frankecleins over all in his contree,
And eke with worthy wimmen of the towne. .
Full swetely herde he confession,
And pleasant was his absolution.
He was an esy man to give penance,
Ther as he wiste to han a good pitance:
For unto a poure orde for to give
Is signe that a man is wel yshrive. . . .
And knew wel the tavernes in every towne,
And every hosteler and gay tapstere,
Better than a lazor and a beggere. . . .
It is not honest, it may not avence,
As for to delen with no swich pouaille,
But all with riche and sellers of vitaille. . . .

\footnote{\textit{Canterbury Tales, Wife of Bath's Prologue}, p. 185, l. 6177–6183.}
For many a man so hard is of his herte,  
He may not wepe, although him sore smerte.  
Therfore in stede of weping and praiere,  
Men mote give silver to the poure freres."¹

This lively irony had an exponent before in Jean de Meung. But Chaucer pushes it further, and gives it life and motion. His monk begs from house to house, holding out his wallet:

"In every hous he gan to pore and prie,  
And begged mele and chese, or elles corn. . .  
'Yeve us a bushel whete, or malt, or reye,  
A Goddes kichel, or a trippe of chese,  
Or elles what you list, we may not chese;  
A Goddes halfpeny, or a masse peny ,  
Or yeve us of your braun, if ye have any,  
A dagon of your blanket, leve dame,  
Our suster dere (lo here I write your name).'. . .  
And whan that he was out at dore, anon,  
He planed away the names everich on."²

He has kept for the end of his circuit, Thomas, one of his most liberal clients. He finds him in bed, and ill; here is excellent fruit to suck and squeeze:

"'God wot,' quod he, 'laboured have I ful sore,  
And specially for thy salvation,  
Have I sayd many a precious orison. . . .  
I have this day ben at your chirche at messe . . .  
And ther I saw our dame, a, wher is she?'"³

The dame enters:

"This frere ariseth up ful curtisly,  
And hire embraceth in his armes narwe,  
And kisseth hire swete and chirketh as a sparwe."⁴. . .

¹ *Canterbury Tales*, prologue, ii. p. 7, l. 208 et passim.
³ *Ibid. p. 221, l. 7866.
⁴ *Ibid. p. 221, l. 7884.*
Then, in his sweetest and most caressing voice, he compliments her, and says:

"Thanked be God that you yaf soule and lif,
Yet saw I not this day so faire a wif
In all the chirche, God so save me.'"\(^1\)

Have we not here already Tartuffe and Elmire? But the monk is with a farmer, and can go to work more quickly and directly. When the compliments ended, he thinks of the substance and asks the lady to let him talk alone with Thomas. He must inquire after the state of his soul:

"'I wol with Thomas speke a litle shrow:
These curates ben so negligent and slow
To gropen tendrely a conscience. . . .
Now, dame,' quod he, 'joe vous die sans doute,
Have I nat of a capon but the liver,
And of your white bred nat but a shiver,
And after that a rosted pigges hed
(But I ne wolde for me no beest were ded),
Than had I with you homly suffisance.
I am a man of litle sustenance,
My spirit hath his fostring in the Bible.
My body is ay so redy and penible
To waken, that my stomak is destroyed.'"\(^2\)

Poor man, he raises his hands to heaven, and ends with a sigh.

The wife tells him her child died a fortnight before. Straightway he manufactures a miracle; could he earn his money in any better way? He had a revelation of this death in the "dortour" of the convent; he saw the

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\(^1\) *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Tale*, p. 222, l. 7389.
child carried to paradise; he rose with his brothers.
"with many a tere trilling on our cheke," and they sang
a Te Deum:

" 'For, sire and dame, trusteth me right wel,
Our orisons ben more effectuel,
And more we seen of Cristes secrec thanges
Than borel folk, although that they be kinges
We live in povertie, and in abstinence,
And borel folk in richesse and dispence.
Lazer and Dives livened diversely,
And divers guerdon hadden they therby.'" 1

Presently he spurts out a whole sermon, in a loathsome
style, and with an interest which is plain enough. The
sick man, wearied, replies that he has already given half
his fortune to all kinds of monks, and yet he continually
suffers. Listen to the grieved exclamation, the true
indignation of the mendicant monk, who sees himself
threatened by the competition of a brother of the cloth
to share his client, his revenue, his booty, his food-
supplies:

"The frere answered: 'O Thomas, dost thou so?
What nedeth you diverse freres to seche?
What nedeth him that hath a parfit leche,
To sechen other leches in the toun?
Your inconstance is your confusion.
Hold ye than me, or elles our covent,
To pray for you ben insufficient?
Thomas, that jape n' is not worth a mite,
Your maladie is for we han to lite.'" 2

Recognise the great orator; he employs even the grand
style to keep the supplies from being cut off:

1 Canterbury Tales, ii. The Sowynoure Tale, p. 223, l. 7450–7460.
2 Ibid. p. 226, l. 7536–7544.
"'A, yeve that covent half a quarter otes;  
And yeve that covent four and twenty grotes;  
And yeve that frere a peny, and let him go:  
Nay, nay, Thomas, it may no thing bo so.  
What is a ferthing worth parted on twelve  
Lo, eche thing that is oncd in himself  
Is more strong, than whan it is yscatered ...  
Thou woldest han our labour al for nought.'"  

Then he begins again his sermon in a louder tone,  
shouting at each word, quoting examples from Seneca  
and the classics, a terrible fluency, a trick of his trade,  
which, diligently applied, must draw money from the  
patient. He asks for gold, "to make our cloistre,"

"... 'And yet, God wot, uneth the fundament  
Parbourned is, ne of our pavement  
N' is not a tile yet within our wones;  
By God, we owen fourte mould for stones.  
Now help Thomas, for him that harwed helle,  
For elles mote we oure bokes solle,  
And if ye lacke oure predication,  
Than goth this world all to destruction.  
For who so fro this world wold us believe.  
So God me save, Thomas, by your leve,  
He wold bereve out of this world the sonne.'"  

In the end, Thomas in a rage promises him a gift, tells  
him to put his hand in the bed and take it, and sends  
him away duped, mocked, and covered with filth.  

We have descended now to popular farce: when  
amusement must be had at any price, it is sought, as  
here, in broad jokes, even in filthiness. We can see how  
these two coarse and vigorous plants have blossomed in

1 Canterbury Tales, ii. The Sompnoure Tale, p. 220, l. 7545-7558.  
2 Ibid. p. 230, l. 7685-7695.
the dung of the middle age. Planted by the sly fellows of Champagne and Ile-de-France, watered by the trouvères, they were destined fully to expand, speckled and ruddy, in the large hands of Rabelais. Meanwhile Chaucer plucks his nosegay from it. Deceived husbands, mishaps in inns, accidents in bed, cuffs, kicks, and robberies, these suffice to raise a loud laugh. Side by side with noble pictures of chivalry, he gives us a train of Flemish grotesque figures, carpenters, joiners, friars, summoners; blows abound, fists descend on fleshy backs; many nudities are shown; they swindle one another out of their corn, their wives; they pitch one another out of a window; they brawl and quarrel. A bruise, a piece of open filthiness, passes in such society for a sign of wit. The summoner, being rallied by the friar, gives him tit for tat:

"This Frere bosteth that he knoweth helle,
And, God it wot, that is but litle wonder,
Freres and fendas ben but litle asonder.
For parde, ye han often thine herd telle
How that a Frere ravished was to helles
In spirit ones by a visioun,
And as an angel lad him up and doun,
To shewen him the peines that thor were, . . .
And unto Sathanas he lad him doun.
(And now hath Sathanas, saith he, 'a tayl
Broder than of a Carrike is the sayl.)
Hold up thy tayl, thou Sathanas, quod he,
. . . . . . . and let the Frere see
Wher is the nest of Freres in this place.
And er than half a furlong way of space,
Right so as bees out swarmen of an hive,
Out of the devils . . . ther gonnen to drive.
A twenty thousand Freres on a route,
And thurghout hell they swarmed al aboute,
And com agen, as fast as they may gon.'" 1

Such were the coarse buffooneries of the popular imagination.

V.

It is high time to return to Chaucer himself. Beyond the two notable characteristics which settle his place in his age and school of poetry, there are others which take him out of his age and school. If he was romantic and gay like the rest, it was after a fashion of his own. He observes characters, notes their differences, studies the coherence of their parts, endeavours to describe living individualities,—a thing unheard of in his time, but which the renovators in the sixteenth century, and first among them Shakspere, will do afterwards. Is it already the English positive common sense and aptitude for seeing the inside of things which begins to appear? A new spirit, almost manly, pierces through, in literature as in painting, with Chaucer as with Van Eyck, with both at the same time; no longer the childish imitation of chivalrous life 2 or monastic devotion, but the grave spirit of inquiry and craving for deep truths, whereby art becomes complete. For the first time, in Chaucer as in Van Eyck, the character described stands out in relief; its parts are connected; it is no longer an unsubstantial phantom. You may guess its past and foretell its future action. Its externals manifest the personal and incommunicable details of its inner nature, and the

1 Canterbury Tales, ii. The Somnoures Prologue, p. 217, l. 7254–7279.
2 See in The Canterbury Tales the Rhyme of Sir Topas, a parody on the chivalric histories. Each character there seems a precursor of Cervantes.
infinite complexity of its economy and motion. To this day, after four centuries, that character is individuated, and typical; it remains distinct in our memory, like the creations of Shakspeare and Rubens. We observe this growth in the very act. Not only does Chaucer, like Boccaccio, bind his tales into a single history; but in addition—and this is wanting in Boccaccio—he begins with the portrait of all his narrators, knight, summoner, man of law, monk, bailiff or reeve, host, about thirty distinct figures, of every sex, condition, age, each painted with his disposition, face, costume, turns of speech, little significant actions, habits, antecedents, each maintained in his character by his talk and subsequent actions, so that we can discern here, sooner than in any other nation, the germ of the domestic novel as we write it to-day. Think of the portraits of the franklin, the miller, the mendicant friar, and wife of Bath. There are plenty of others which show the broad brutalities, the coarse tricks, and the pleasantries of vulgar life, as well as the gross and plentiful feastings of sensual life. Here and there honest old swashbucklers, who double their fists, and tuck up their sleeves: or contented beadles, who, when they have drunk, will speak nothing but Latin. But by the side of these there are some choice characters: the knight, who went on a crusade to Granada and Prussia, brave and courteous:

"And though that he was worthy he was wise,  
And of his port as make as is a mayde.  
He never yet no vilanie ne sayde  
In alle his lif, unto no manere wight,  
He was a veray parfit gentil knight."

1 Prologue to Canterbury Tales, ii. p. 3, l. 68-72.
“With him, ther was his sone, a yonge Squier.
A lover, and a lusty bachelore,
With lockes crull as they were laide in press;
Of twenty yere of age he was I gesse.
Of his stature he was of even lengthe,
And wonderly deliver, and grete of strengthe.
And he hadde be somtime in chevachie,
In Flaundres, in Artois, and in Picardie,
And borne him wele, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his ladie grace.

Embrouded was he, as it were a mede
Alle ful of freshe florues, white and reyle.
Singing he was, or floyting alle the day,
He was as freshe, as is the moneth of May.
Short was his goun, with sleeves long and wide
Wel coude he sitte on hors, and fayre ride.
He coude songes make, and wel endite,
Juste and eke dance, and wel pourtraie and write
So hote he loved, that by nightertale
He slep no more then doth the nightingale.
Curteis he was, lowly and servisable,
And carf befor his fader at the table.”

There is also a poor and learned clerk of Oxford; and
finer still, and more worthy of a modern hand, the
Prioress, “Madame Eglantine,” who as a nun, a maiden,
a great lady, is ceremonious, and shows signs of exquisite
taste. Would a better be found now-a-days in a Ger-
man chapter, amid the most modest and lively bevy of
sentimental and literary canonesses?

“Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy
Hire gretest otho n’as but by Seint Eloy;
And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.

1 Prologue to Canterbury Tales, ii. p. 3, l. 79-100.
Ful wel she sange the service devine,
Entuned in hire nose ful swetely;
And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetialy
After the scole of Stratford-atte-bowe,
For Frenche of Paris, was to hire unknowe.
At mete was she wel ytaughte withallo,
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hir finges in hire sauce depe
Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
Thatte no drop ne fell upon hire brest.
In curtesie was sette ful moche hire lest.
Hire over lippes wiped she so cleene,
That in hire cuppe was no fething sene
Of grese, when she drunken hadde hire draught,
Ful semely after hire mete she raught.
And sikerly she was of grete disport
And ful plesant, and amiable of port,
And peined hire to conteseten chere
Of court, and ben estatelich of manere,
And to ben holden digné of reveréncé."

Are you offended by these provincial affectations?
Not at all; it is delightful to behold these nice and pretty ways, these little affectations, the waggery and prudery, the half-worldly, half-monastic smile. We inhale a delicate feminine perfume, preserved and grown old under the stomacher:

"But for to spoken of hire conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous
Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde.
Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede.
But sere wept she if on of hem were dede,

1 Prologue to Canterbury Tales, ii. p. 4, l. 118–141.
Or if men ampte it with a yerde amert:
And all was conscience and tendre herte.” 1

Many elderly ladies throw themselves into such affections as these, for lack of others. Elderly! what an objectionable word have I employed! She was not elderly:

"Ful semoly hire wimple ypinched was,
Hire nose tretis; hire eyen grey as glas;
Hire mouth ful smale, and therto soft and red,
But sikerly she hadde a fayre forshed.
It was almost a spame brode I trowe;
For hardly she was not undergrouwe.

Ful felise was hire cloke, as I was ware.
Of small corall aboute hire arm she bare
A pair of bedes, gaude d al with grene ;
And thereon heng a broche of gold ful shene,
On whiche was first ywritten a crownd A,
And after, Amor vincit omnia.” 2

A pretty ambiguous device, suitable either for gallantry or devotion; the lady was both of the world and the cloister; of the world, you may see it in her dress; of the cloister, you gather it from “another Nonne also with hire hadde she, that was hire chapelleine, and Preestes thre;” from the Ave Maria which she sings, the long edifying stories which she relates. .She is like a fresh, sweet, and ruddy cherry, made to ripen in the sun, but which, preserved in an ecclesiastical jar, has become candied and insipid in the syrup.

Such is the power of reflection which begins to dawn, such the high art. Chaucer studies here, rather than aims at amusement; he ceases to gossip, and thinks; instead

1 Prologue to Canterbury Tales, ii. p. 5, l. 142-150.
2 Ibid. l. 151-162.
of surrendering himself to the facility of flowing improvisation, he plans. Each tale is suited to the teller: the young squire relates a fantastic and Oriental history; the tipsy miller a loose and comical story; the honest clerk the touching legend of Griselda. All these tales are bound together, and that much better than by Boccaccio, by little veritable incidents, which spring from the characters of the personages, and such as we light upon in our travels. The horsemen ride on in good humour in the sunshine, in the open country; they converse. The miller has drunk too much ale, and will speak, "and for no man forbear." The cook goes to sleep on his beast, and they play practical jokes on him. The monk and the summoner get up a dispute about their respective lines of business. The host restores peace, makes them speak or be silent, like a man who has long presided in the inn parlour, and who has often had to check brawlers. They pass judgment on the stories they listen to: declaring that there are few Griseldas in the world; laughing at the misadventures of the tricked carpenter; drawing a lesson from the moral tale. The poem is no longer, as in the contemporary literature, a mere procession, but a painting in which the contrasts are arranged, the attitudes chosen, the general effect calculated, so that it becomes life and motion; we forget ourselves at the sight, as in the case of every life-like work; and we long to get on horseback on a fine sunny morning, and canter along green meadows with the pilgrims to the shrine of the good saint of Canterbury.

Weigh the value of the words "general effect." According as we plan it or not, we enter on our maturity or infancy? The whole future lies in these
two words. Savages or half savages, warriors of the
Heptarchy or knights of the middle-age; up to this
period, no one had reached to this point. They had
strong emotions, tender at times, and each expressed
them according to the original gift of his race, some by
short cries, others by continuous babble. But they did
not command or guide their impressions; they sang or
conversed by impulse, at random, according to the bent
of their disposition, leaving their ideas to present
themselves as they might, and when they hit upon
order, it was ignorantly and involuntarily. Here for
the first time appears a superiority of intellect, which
at the instant of conception suddenly halts, rises above
itself, passes judgment, and says to itself, “This phrase
tells the same thing as the last—remove it; these two
ideas are disjointed—connect them; this description
is feeble—reconsider it.” When a man can speak thus
he has an idea, not learned in the schools, but personal
and practical, of the human mind, its process and needs,
and of things also, their composition and combinations;
he has a style, that is, he is capable of making every-
thing understood and seen by the human mind. He
can extract from every object, landscape, situation, char-
acter, the special and significant marks, so as to group
and arrange them, in order to compose an artificial
work which surpasses the natural work in its purity
and completeness. He is capable, as Chaucer was, of
seeking out in the old common forest of the middle-
ages, stories and legends, to replant them in his own
soil, and make them send out new shoots. He has the
right and the power, as Chaucer had, of copying and
translating, because by dint of retouching he impresses
on his translations and copies his original mark; he
re-creates what he imitates, because through, or by the side of worn-out fancies and monotonous stories, he can display, as Chaucer did, the charming ideas of an amiable and elastic mind, the thirty master-forms of the fourteenth century, the splendid freshness of the verdurous landscape and spring-time of England. He is not far from conceiving an idea of truth and life. He is on the brink of independent thought and fertile discovery. This was Chaucer's position. At the distance of a century and a half, he has affinity with the poets of Elizabeth¹ by his gallery of pictures, and with the reformers of the sixteenth century by his portrait of the good parson.

Affinity merely. He advanced a few steps beyond the threshold of his art, but he paused at the end of the vestibule. He half opens the great door of the temple, but does not take his seat there; at most, he sat down in it only at intervals. In *Arcite and Palamon*, in *Troilus and Cressida*, he sketches sentiments, but does not create characters; he easily and naturally 'races the winding course of events and conversations, but does not mark the precise outline of a striking figure. If occasionally, as in the description of the temple of Mars, after the *Thebaids* of Statius, feeling at his back the glowing breeze of poetry, he draws out his feet, clogged with the mud of the middle-age, and at a bound stands upon the poetic plain on which Statius imitated Virgil and equalled Lucan, he, at other times, again falls back into the childish gossip of the trouvères, or the dull gabble of

¹ Tennyson, in his *Dream of Fair Women*, sings:

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Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath
Preluded those melodious bursts, that fill
The spacious times of great Elizabeth
With sounds that echo still.”—Tennyson
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learned clerks—to "Dan Phebus or Apollo-Delphicus." Elsewhere, a commonplace remark on art intrudes in the midst of an impassioned description. He uses three thousand verses to conduct Troilus to his first interview. He is like a precocious and poetical child, who mingles in his love-dreams quotations from his grammar and recollections of his alphabet. Even in the Canterbury Tales he repeats himself, unfolds artless developments, forgets to concentrate his passion or his idea. He begins a jest, and scarcely ends it. He dilutes a bright colouring in a monotonous stanza. His voice is like that of a boy breaking into manhood. At first a manly and firm accent is maintained, then a shrill sweet sound shows that his growth is not finished, and that his strength is subject to weakness. Chaucer sets out as if to quit the middle-age; but in the end he is there still. To-day he composes the Canterbury Tales; yesterday he was translating the Roman de la Rose. To-day he is studying the complicated machinery of the heart, discovering the issues of primitive education or of the ruling disposition, and creating the comedy of manners; to-morrow, he will have no pleasure but in curious events, smooth allegories, amorous discussions, imitated from the French, or learned moralities from the ancients. Alternately he is an observer and a trouvère; instead of the step he ought to have advanced, he has but made a half-step.

Who has prevented him, and the others who sur-

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1 Speaking of Cressida, i. v., book i. p. 236, he says:
"Right as our first letter is now an a,
In beautie first so stood she makeles,
Her goodly looking gladed all the prees,
Nas never scene thing to be praised so dere,
Nor under cloude blacks so bright a sterre."
round him? We meet with the obstacle in the tales he has translated of Melibœus, of the Parson, in his Testament of Love; in short, so long as he writes verse, he is at his ease; as soon as he takes to prose, a sort of chain winds around his feet and stops him. His imagination is free, and his reasoning a slave. The rigid scholastic divisions, the mechanical manner of arguing and replying, the ergo, the Latin quotations, the authority of Aristotle and the Fathers, come and weigh down his budding thought. His native invention disappears under the discipline imposed. The servitude is so heavy, that even in the work of one of his contemporaries, the Testament of Love, which, for a long time, was believed to be written by Chaucer, amid the most touching plaints and the mostsmarting pains, the beautiful ideal lady, the heavenly mediator who appears in a vision, Love, sets her theses, establishes that the cause of a cause is the cause of the thing caused, and reasons as pedantically as they would at Oxford. In what can talent, even feeling, end when it is kept down by such shackles? What succession of original truths and new doctrines could be found and proved, when in a moral tale, like that of Melibœus and his wife Prudence, it was thought necessary to establish a formal controversy, to quote Seneca and Job, to forbid tears, to bring forward the weeping Christ to authorise tears, to enumerate every proof, to call in Solomon, Cassiodorus, and Cato; in short, to write a book for schools? The public cares only for pleasant and lively thoughts; not serious and general ideas; these latter are for a special class only. As soon as Chaucer gets into a reflective mood, straightway Saint Thomas, Peter Lombard, the manual of sins, the treatise on definition and syllogism, the
army of the ancients and of the Fathers, descend from
their glory, enter his brain, speak in his stead; and the
trouvèrent's pleasant voice becomes the dogmatic and
sleep-inspiring voice of a doctor. In love and satire
he has experience, and he invents; in what regards
morality and philosophy he has learning, and copies.
For an instant, by a solitary leap, he entered upon the
close observation and the genuine study of man; he
could not keep his ground, he did not take his seat, he
took a poetic excursion; and no one followed him. The
level of the century is lower; he is on it himself for
the most part. He is in the company of narrators like
Froissart, of elegant speakers like Charles of Orléans,
of gossipy and barren verse-writers like Gower, Lydgate,
and Occlive. There is no fruit, but frail and fleeting
blossom, many useless branches, still more dying or
dead branches; such is this literature. And why?
Because it had no longer a root; after three centuries
of effort, a heavy instrument cut it underground. This
instrument was the Scholastic Philosophy.

VI.

Beneath every literature there is a philosophy.
Beneath every work of art is an idea of nature and of
life; this idea leads the poet. Whether the author
knows it or not, he writes in order to exhibit it; and
the characters which he fashions, like the events which
he arranges, only serve to bring to light the dim creative
conception which raises and combines them. Under-
lying Homer appears the noble life of heroic paganism
and of happy Greece. Underlying Dante, the sad and
violent life of fanatical Catholicism and of the much-
hating Italians. From either we might draw a theory
of man and of the beautiful. It is so with others; and this is how, according to the variations, the birth, blossom, decline, or sluggishness of the master-idea, literature varies, is born, flourishes, degenerates, comes to an end. Whoever plants the one, plants the other: whoever undermines the one, undermines the other. Place in all the minds of any age a new grand idea of nature and life, so that they feel and produce it with their whole heart and strength, and you will see them, seized with the craving to express it, invent forms of art and groups of figures. Take away from these minds every grand new idea of nature and life, and you will see them, deprived of the craving to express all-important thoughts, copy, sink into silence, or rave.

What has become of these all-important thoughts? What labour worked them out? What studies nourished them? The labourers did not lack zeal. In the twelfth century the energy of their minds was admirable. At Oxford there were thirty thousand scholars. No building in Paris could contain the crowd of Abelard's disciples; when he retired to solitude, they accompanied him in such a multitude, that the desert became a town. No difficulty repulsed them. There is a story of a young boy, who, though beaten by his master, was wholly bent on remaining with him, that he might still learn. When the terrible encyclopedia of Aristotle was introduced, though disfigured and unintelligible, it was devoured. The only question presented to them, that of universals, so abstract and dry, so embarrassed by Arabic obscurities and Greek subtilties, during centuries, was seized upon eagerly. Heavy and awkward as was the instrument supplied to them, I mean syllogism, they made themselves masters of it, rendered it
still more heavy, plunged it into every object and in every direction. They constructed monstrous books, in great numbers, cathedrals of syllogism, of unheard of architecture, of prodigious finish, heightened in effect by intensity of intellectual power, which the whole sum of human labour has only twice been able to match.¹ These young and valiant minds thought they had found the temple of truth; they rushed at it headlong, in regions, breaking in the doors, clambering over the walls, leaping into the interior, and so found themselves at the bottom of a moat. Three centuries of labour at the bottom of this black moat added not one idea to the human mind.

For consider the questions which they treat of. They seem to be marching, but are merely marking time. People would say, to see them moil and toil, that they will educe from heart and brain some great original creed, and yet all belief was imposed upon them from the outset. The system was made; they could only arrange and comment upon it. The conception comes not from them, but from Constantinople. Infinitely complicated and subtle as it is, the supreme work of Oriental mysticism and Greek metaphysics, so disproportioned to their young understanding, they exhaust themselves to reproduce it, and moreover burden their unpractised hands with the weight of a logical instrument which Aristotle created for theory and not for practice, and which ought to have remained in a

¹ Under Proclus and under Hegel. Duns Scotus, at the age of thirty-one, died, leaving beside his sermons and commentaries, twelve folio volumes, in a small close handwriting, in a style like Hegel's, on the same subject as Proclus treats of. Similarly with Saint Thomas and the whole train of schoolmen. No idea can be formed of such a labour before handling the books themselves.
cabinet of philosophical curiosities, without being ever carried into the field of action. "Whether the divine essence engendered the Son, or was engendered by the Father; why the three persons together are not greater than one alone; attributes determine persons, not substance, that is, nature; how properties can exist in the nature of God, and not determine it; if created spirits are local and can be circumscribed; if God can know more things than He is aware of;"—these are the ideas which they moot: what truth could issue thence? From hand to hand the chimera grows, and spreads wider its gloomy wings. "Can God cause that, the place and body being retained, the body shall have no position. that is, existence in place?—Whether the impossibility of being engendered is a constituent property of the First Person of the Trinity—Whether identity, similitude, and equality are real relations in God." Duns Scotus distinguishes three kinds of matter: matter which is firstly first secondly first, thirdly first. According to him, we must clear this triple hedge of thorny abstractions in order to understand the production of a sphere of brass. Under such a regimen, imbecility soon makes its appearance. Saint Thomas himself considers, "whether the body of Christ arose with its wounds,—whether this body moves with the motion of the host and the chalice in consecration,—whether at the first instant of conception Christ had the use of free judgment,—whether Christ was slain by Himself or by another?" Do you think you are at the limits of human folly? Listen. He considers "whether the dove in which the Holy Spirit appeared

1 Peter Lombard, Book of Sentences. It was the classic of the middle-age.  
2 Duns Scotus, ed. 1639.
was a real animal,—whether a glorified body can occupy one and the same place at the same time as another glorified body,—whether in the state of innocence all children were masculine?" I pass over others as to the digestion of Christ, and some still more untranslatable.¹ This is the point reached by the most esteemed doctor, the most judicious mind, the Bossuet of the middle-age. Even in this ring of inanities the answers are laid down. Roscellinus and Abelard were excommunicated, exiled, imprisoned, because they swerved from it. There is a complete minute dogma which closes all issues; there is no means of escaping; after a hundred wriggles and a hundred efforts, you must come and tumble into a formula. If by mysticism you try to fly over their heads, if by experience you endeavour to creep beneath, powerful talons await you at your exit. The wise man passes for a magician, the enlightened man for a heretic. The Waldenses, the Catharists, the disciples of John of Parma, were burned: Roger Bacon died only just in time, otherwise he might have been burned. Under this constraint men ceased to think; for he who speaks of thought, speaks of an effort at invention, an individual creation. an energetic action. They recite a lesson, or sing a catechism; even in paradise, even in ecstasy and the divinest raptures of love, Dante thinks himself bound to show an exact memory and a scholastic orthodoxy. How then with

¹ Utrum angelus diligat se ipsum dilectione naturali vel electiva? Utrum in statu innocentiae fuerit generation per coitum? Utrum omnes fuisse nati in sexu masculino? Utrum cognitio angeli posset dici matutina et vesPERTina? Utrum martyribus aureola debeatur? Utrum virgo Maria fuerit virgo in conciipiendo? Utrum remanserit virgo post partum? The reader may look out in the text the reply to these last two questions. (S. Thomas, Summa Theologica, ed. 1677.)
the rest? Some, like Raymond Lully, set about inventing an instrument of reasoning to serve in place of the understanding. About the fourteenth century, under the blows of Occam, this verbal science began to totter; they saw that its entities were only words; it was discredited. In 1367, at Oxford, of thirty thousand students, there remained six thousand;¹ they still set their “Barbara and Fetapton,” but only in the way of routine. Each one in turn mechanically traversed the petty region of threadbare cavils, scratched himself in the briars of quibbles, and burdened himself with his bundle of texts; nothing more. The vast body of science which was to have formed and vivified the whole thought of man, was reduced to a text-book.

So, little by little, the conception which fertilised and ruled all others, dried up; the deep spring, whence flowed all poetic streams, was found empty; science furnished nothing more to the world. What further works could the world produce? As Spain, later on, renewing the middle-age, after having shone splendidly and foolishly by her chivalry and devotion, by Lope de Vega and Calderón, Loyola and St. Theresa, became enervated through the Inquisition and through casuistry, and ended by sinking into a brutish silence; so the middle-age, outstripping Spain, after displaying the senseless heroism of the crusades, and the poetical ecstasy of the cloister, after producing chivalry and saintship, Francis of Assisi, St. Louis, and Dante, languished under the Inquisition and the scholastic learning, and became extinguished in idle raving and insanity.

¹ The Rev. Henry Austey, in his Introduction to *Munimenta Academiae*, Lond. 1868, says that “the statement of Richard of Armagh that there were in the thirteenth century 30,000 scholars at Oxford is almost incredible.” P. xlviii.—Tr.
Must we quote all these good people who speak without having anything to say? You may find them in Warton; dozens of translators, importing the poverties of French literature, and imitating imitations; rhyming chroniclers, most commonplace of men, whom we only read because we must accept history from every quarter, even from imbeciles; spinners and spinsters of didactic poems, who pile up verses on the training of falcons, on heraldry, on chemistry; editors of moralities, who invent the same dream over again for the hundredth time, and get themselves taught universal history by the goddess Sapience. Like the writers of the Latin decadence, these folk only think of copying, compiling, abridging, constructing in text-books, in rhymed memoranda, the encyclopedia of their times.

Listen to the most illustrious, the grave Gower—"morall Gower," as he was called? Doubtless here and there he contains a remnant of brilliancy and grace. He is like an old secretary of a Court of Love, André le Chapelain or any other, who would pass the day in solemnly registering the sentences of ladies, and in the evening, partly asleep on his desk, would see in a half-dream their sweet smile and their beautiful eyes. The ingenious but exhausted vein of Charles of Orléans still flows in his French ballads. He has the same fondling delicacy, almost a little affected. The poor little poetic spring flows yet in thin transparent streamlets over the smooth pebbles, and murmurs with a babble, pretty, but so low that at times you cannot hear it. But dull is the rest! His great poem, Con-

2 Contemporary with Chaucer. The Confessio Amantis dates from 1393
3 History of Rosiglione. Ballads.
Jessro Amantis, is a dialogue between a lover and his confessor, imitated chiefly from Jean de Meung, having for object, like the Roman de la Rose, to explain and classify the impediments of love. The superannuated theme is always reappearing, covered by a crude erudition. You will find here an exposition of hermetic science, lectures on the philosophy of Aristotle, a treatise on politics, a litany of ancient and modern legends gleaned from the compilers, marred in the passage by the pedantry of the schools and the ignorance of the age. It is a cartload of scholastic rubbish; the sewer tumbles upon this feeble spirit, which of itself was flowing clearly, but now, obstructed by tiles, bricks, plaster, ruins from all quarters of the globe, drags on darkened and sluggish. Gower, one of the most learned of his time,¹ supposed that Latin was invented by the old prophetess Carmentis; that the grammarians, Aristarchus, Donatus, and Didymus, regulated its syntax, pronunciation, and prosody; that it was adorned by Cicero with the flowers of eloquence and rhetoric; then enriched by translations from the Arabic, Chaldæan, and Greek; and that at last, after much labour of celebrated writers, it attained its final perfection in Ovid, the poet of love. Elsewhere he discovers that Ulysses learned rhetoric from Cicero, magic from Zoroaster, astronomy from Ptolemy, and philosophy from Plato. And what a style! so long, so dull,² so drawn out by repetitions, the most minute details, garnished with references to his text, like a man who, with his eyes glued to his Aristotle and his Ovid,
a slave of his musty parchments, can do nothing but copy and string his rhymes together. Schoolboys even in old age, they seem to believe that every truth, all wit, is in their great wood-bound books; that they have no need to find out and invent for themselves; that their whole business is to repeat; that this is, in fact, man's business. The scholastic system had enthroned the dead letter, and peopled the world with dead understandings.

After Gower come Occleve and Lydgate.1 "My father Chaucer would willingly have taught me," says Occleve, "but I was dull, and learned little or nothing." He paraphrased in verse a treatise of Egidius, on government; these are moralities. There are others, on compassion, after Augustine, and on the art of dying; then love-tales; a letter from Cupid, dated from his court in the month of May. Love and moralities,2 that is, abstractions and affectation, were the taste of the time; and so, in the time of Lebrun, of Esménard, at the close of contemporaneous French literature,3 they produced collections of didactic poems, and odes to Chloris. As for the monk Lydgate, he had some talent, some imagination, especially in high-toned descriptions: it was the last flicker of a dying literature; gold received a golden coating, precious stones were placed upon diamonds, ornaments multiplied and made fantastic; as in their dress and buildings, so in their style.4 Look at the costumes of Henry IV. and Henry V., monstrous heart-shaped or horn-shaped head-dresses, long sleeves covered

1 1420, 1430.
2 This is the title Froissart (1397) gave to his collection when presenting it to Richard II. 3 Lebrun, 1729-1807; Esménard, 1770-1812.
4 Lydgate, The Destruction of Troy—description of Hector's chapel. Especially read the Pageants or Solemn Entries.
with ridiculous designs, the plumes, and again the oratories, armorial tombs, little gaudy chapels, like conspicuous flowers under the naves of the Gothic perpendicular. When we can no more speak to the soul, we try to speak to the eyes. This is what Lydgate does, nothing more. Pageants or shows are required of him "disguisings" for the Company of goldsmiths; a mask before the king, a May-entertainment for the sheriffs of London, a drama of the creation for the festival of Corpus Christi, a masquerade, a Christmas show; he gives the plan and furnishes the verses. In this matter he never runs dry; two hundred and fifty-one poems are attributed to him. Poetry thus conceived becomes a manufacture; it is composed by the yard. Such was the judgment of the Abbot of St. Albans, who, having got him to translate a legend in verse, pays a hundred shillings for the whole, verse, writing, and illuminations, placing the three works on a level. In fact, no more thought was required for the one than for the others. His three great works, The Fall of Princes, The Destruction of Troy, and The Siege of Thebes, are only translations or paraphrases, verbose, erudite, descriptive, a kind of chivalrous processions, coloured for the twelfth time, in the same manner, on the same vellum. The only point which rises above the average, at least in the first poem, is the idea of Fortune,¹ and the violent vicissitudes of human life. If there was a philosophy at this time, this was it. They willingly narrated horrible and tragic histories; gather them from antiquity down to their own day; they were far from the trusting and passionate piety which felt the hand of God in the government of

¹ See the Vision of Fortune, a gigantic figure. In this painting he shows both feeling and talent.
the world; they saw that the world went blundering here and there like a drunken man. A sad and gloomy world, amused by eternal pleasures, oppressed with a dull misery, which suffered and feared without consolation or hope, isolated between the ancient spirit in which it had no living hope, and the modern spirit whose active science it ignored. Fortune, like a black smoke, hovers over all, and shuts out the sight of heaven. They picture it as follows:—

"Her face semyng cruel and terrible
And by disdaynè menacing of loke, . . .
An hundred handes she had, of eche part . . .
Some of her handès lyft up men alofte,
To bye estate of worldlye dignitè;

Another handè griped ful unsofte,
Which cast another in grete adversite."\(^1\)

They look upon the great unhappy ones, a captive king, a dethroned queen, assassinated princes, noble cities destroyed,\(^2\) lamentable spectacles as exhibited in Germany and France, and of which there will be plenty in England; and they can only regard them with a harsh resignation. Lydgate ends by reciting a commonplace of mechanical piety, by way of consolation. The reader makes the sign of the cross, yawns, and goes away. In fact, poetry and religion are no longer capable of suggesting a genuine sentiment. Authors copy, and copy again. Hawes\(^3\) copies the _House of Fame_ of Chaucer, and a sort of allegorical amorous poem, after the _Roman de la Rose_. Barclay\(^4\) translates the _Mirror of Good

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\(^1\) Lydgate, _Fall of Princes_. Warton, ii. 230.
\(^2\) The War of the Hussites, The Hundred Years’ War, and The War of the Roses.
\(^3\) About 1506. _The Temple of Glass_. _Passetyme of Pleasure._
\(^4\) About 1500.
Manners and the Ship of Fools. Continually, we meet with dull abstractions, used up and barren; it is the scholastic phase of poetry. If anywhere there is an accent of greater originality, it is in this Ship of Fools, and in Lydgate’s Dance of Death, bitter buffooneries, sad gaieties, which, in the hands of artists and poets, were having their run throughout Europe. They mock at each other, grotesquely and gloomily; poor, dull, and vulgar figures, shut up in a ship, or made to dance on their tomb to the sound of a fiddle, played by a grinning skeleton. At the end of all this mouldy talk, and amid the disgust which they have conceived for each other, a clown, a tavern Triboulet,\(^1\) composer of little jeering and macaronic verses, Skelton\(^2\) makes his appearance, a virulent pamphleteer, who, jumbling together French, English, Latin phrases, with slang, and fashionable words, invented words, intermingled with short rhymes, fabricates a sort of literary mud, with which he bespatters Wolsey and the bishops. Style, metre, rhyme, language, art of every kind, is at an end; beneath the vain parade of official style there is only a heap of rubbish. Yet, as he says,

``Though my rhyme be ragged,
Tattered and gagged,
Rudely rain-beaten,
Rusty, moth-eaten,
Yf ye take welle therewithal,
It hath in it some pithe.``

It is full of political animus, sensual liveliness, English

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\(^1\) The court fool in Victor Hugo’s drama of Le Roi s’amuse.—Tr.

\(^2\) Died 1529; Poet-Laureat 1489. His Bouge of Court, his Crown of Laurel, his Elegy on the Death of the Earl of Northumberland, are well written, and belong to official poetry.
and popular instincts; it lives. It is a coarse life, still elementary, swarming with ignoble vermin, like that which appears in a great decomposing body. It is life, nevertheless, with its two great features which it is destined to display: the hatred of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which is the Reformation; the return to the senses and to natural life, which is the Renaissance.