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"SING, THOUGH AT THE HOUR OF DYING."

Herea to Glaucus.

Sing, though at the hour of dying,
Smile, though the swift days be flying,
Laugh, though the whole world be crying,
Love, though each true heart be sighing.

On every lip Death lays the rose,
On every life the day shall close;
To every hope, the World is old,
To every lie, the heart shall hold.

Sing, then, while the wine is flowing,
Smile, then, while the vine is growing,
Laugh, then, while the winds are blowing,
Love, then, while our hearts are glowing.

Death is only dreaming,
Days are only seeming,
Life is a shadow,
Love is enough.

Geoffrey Chaucer.

The praise of this great poet and statesman has been sung long and loud. For five hundred years, he has been held as the acknowledged "father" of the English verse, and, to a great extent, the reformer of the English tongue. While some of the ablest minds of England and America have paid high tribute to the memory of the worthy poet, yet, it seems to me that upon one point, they have erred. Until a very recent period all have agreed in this statement, that a leading aim of the poet was the exposure of the corruptions of the church. Mr. Morris goes so far as to say, that, "if the whole series of the Tales had been completed, this object would have been satisfactorily accomplished." This must be a matter of opinion.

I shall attempt to show that, this was not a leading aim with the poet; and also that, by not taking a more decided stand in such matters, is just where he failed to improve the great opportunities of his time.

Chaucer was no less a statesman than a poet; and it is not probable that, his active and exciting duties as a statesman gave him much opportunity for the consideration of the more earnest and subtle questions connected with the church. But had he found ample time and been inclined to such a work, it is scarcely probable that he would have dared a bold opposition to the opinions of those with whom he was so intimate and whose favors he sought to gain. Nor is this all. Chaucer was essentially a dramatist. By far the greater portion of his writings are of this stamp; and I am inclined to the belief that this was the magnetic force that led him into the production of the "Canterbury Tales". He was conscious of his power to individualize his own ideas, and he has proven it by his compositions rivalled only by the more modern Shakespeare. It is very probable that he sympathized with the opinions of Wycliffe; but it is by no means certain that he accepted them all. I am aware that the former view is strongly argued by the contrast he has drawn between the monastic characters and the Personne, the only secular clergyman among them all; but I can see no more distinction than was proper for him to make, and do not think that he gives it sufficient prominence to justify us in saying that it was a leading aim with

him. Chaucer lived and wrote under those peculiar circumstances, which come to men only in the lapse of ages and the political history of nations. He lived at that period, when the grey lines of a nobler civilization were beginning to fret the horizon, after the long dark night of the middle ages; when the bands that had been tightening about free thought and action, for centuries, gave signs of a speedy dissolution. Crecy and Poitiers, stimulating the national pride and exciting envy against France, had increased the steadily growing breach between England and Rome; while the ignorance, greed and immorality of the priests and monks were arousing the people to a sense of the inherent rottenness of a system which was gradually passing into a active tyrannical and stagnant vice. With this revolution of the church began, also, a revolution of the state. Education received a new impulse; colleges were founded at Oxford, Cambridge and Winchester. As the people were educated they began to see more clearly the evils of priestcraft; and the despotic policy of the Pope aroused the patriotism of the politicians. Though Langland by his "Vision of Piers Plowman" and Wycliffe by his translation of the Bible, had struck an almost fatal blow to the authority of the church; yet, the time had not come and the Reformation was delayed for a century.

Another prominent feature of the times in which Chaucer lived, was their degrading and exclusive feudalism. Chivalry still existed in the court. Class still stood against class. Langland's protest against caste bespoke the spirit of an age scarcely yet realized in England. "Injure not the bondman," he exclaims; "though thy serf on earth he may be thy master in heaven". Chaucer expresses the same sentiment, though in different form, in his oft quoted passage:

"Tis villany that makes the villian,
And by his deeds a churl is seen;
But understand that I intend
To deem no man, in any age,
Gentle for his lineage;
Though he be not highly born,
He is gentle if he doth
What 'longeth to a gentleman."

But with regard to those questions of a higher and more lasting importance, those questions of national interest and national pride, I do not feel at liberty to say that Chaucer has displayed as much interest, as some of his contemporaries; but rather to the contrary. While Chaucer and Gower were busy with the concerns of the court and with foreign missions, and while Wycliffe was engaged with his great work at Lutterworth, far away amid the Malvern hills, Langland was earnestly cogitating that celebrated "Vision" which will render him famous while history shall exist. True, the priesthood had grown into distrust with many, and served for the jest of the careless; and in this manner Chaucer treats them. He well understood the opinions of the masses, and, equally as well, how to please them. It seems to me, then, that this may at least partially account for his introducing so many of the monastic characters. If he had given this subject the

careful and earnest study due to his genius and the circumstances of his day, it would certainly have been more clearly set forth in his "Canterbury Tales". So far as I understand them, the whole tenor of these tales is that of gaiety; and to me they bear the stamp of a mind free from care and inspired with that freshness which the sports of May alone can give. But Langland's mind had received a different impetus; the iron had entered deep into his soul before he wrote.

While I hold that Chaucer did not accomplish what a man of his genius, surrounded by such circumstances, might have accomplished, yet I shall not be rash enough to accuse him of indifference to the events and influences of his time, or that he was insensible to the depraved condition of the church. All that I have attempted to show is, that he did not hold that decided opinion with regard to the church which has been credited to him.

Mrs. Browning has said:

"Old Chaucer with his infantine
Familiar clasp of things divine,
That stain upon his lips is wine."

However, the proof is by no means certain that he was immoral or intemperate to excess; though we have his word for it, that he loved good liquor. But with the few facts we have at our command, with regard to Chaucer's moral character, it is, perhaps, better to leave that matter to the poet and his Judge.

The idea that we should discard Chaucer, because he wrote when the language was essentially different, is a gross error; but he should rather be regarded as the sire of his nation's minstrelsy and as such is worthy of candid consideration.

He seems to have embodied all those qualities—those finer sensibilities—as well as a keen observance of nature and of character which go to make up the poet of today. D.

Inter Collegiate Contests.

The beginning of this year was marked by one event in educational history that will probably prove a point of new departure in literary culture. On the 7th of January there was held in the city of New York a literary contest between representatives of seven or eight eastern colleges for the prizes in oratory and critical essay writing. Some of the colleges represented are leading ones in the East; but it must be also admitted that some of the most renowned schools have not yet given this new method their indorsement. As nothing is so successful as success, there can be little doubt, but the success and enthusiasm resulting from the late literary trial will eventually draw most of the Eastern Colleges into the field of rivalry for the belt of literary championship.

For some years the rivalry for excellence between various Colleges has been physical. To produce the most muscular athlete, especially in boating, has seemed to some as their being's end and aim.

Tom Brown alias Thomas Hughes at Oxford, has seemed to some students as the beau ideal of culture. He was sent

to that famous University, not for gaining vast treasures of literary lore, but to culture his physical and moral qualities in the midst of large numbers, whose aims were substantially his own. His father's last interview, and his parting injunctions breathe nothing but fondness for manly sports, and that frank magnanimity, which befits an Englishman of comfortable circumstances in life. Charles Kingsley has also lent the aid of his graceful and facile pen to promote the same love of athletic sports, and in his vocation as clergyman, to commend the importance of "Muscular Christianity."

That this studious praise and this practice of sports has had the expected reflex action to give any more vigorous physique to students in general, or to quicken the mass or individuals with greater intellectual vigor is not yet proven. The result, it seems to me, is far short of what was expected, and for obvious reasons. First, but few are inclined to engage in such sports, on account of expense, loss of time, and diversion from the aim of study—mental culture. Again, the superiority that might be thus attained is not of the highest order. We do not live in an age when physical powers can be brought for a moment into comparison with intellectual achievements. Men prefer to be Homer rather than Achilles.

"Paulum sepulchre distatae inert
Celata Virtus."

Besides intellectual superiority is more lasting.

The story of Herodotus reading his incomparably simple narrative at the Olympic games, when the youthful listener Thucydides was effected to tears, will be remembered and handed down forever. But the names of pugilists, racers, horse or man, have passed from the history of those things which men care to remember. If Pindar has celebrated "*Ore profundo*" the exploits of horse and man, their names are such as men willingly let die.

This attempt therefore to reproduce, even with faint imitation, the past will prove a signal failure.

As an antithesis, the intellectual strife, and competition for public applause, have just been inaugurated. Not precisely in the spirit in which Abelard or Admirable Crichton indulged their polemical passion in various European cities, followed by admiring multitudes, do the young men of our colleges propose a yearly reunion, the chief attraction of which shall be of a literary character, such as to stimulate scholarship, and promote good fellowship and acquaintance among students of widely separated Colleges.

It is not easy to forecast the probable result of any enterprise however humble, much less of one undertaken for such ends, and by persons filled with youthful enthusiasms and ambitions.

It seems quite feasible so to extend the scope of the competition as to embrace subjects of science and practical art, as well as oratory and criticism. If this shall be done, the nucleus of the American University will be formed and the solution