

kindred. They certainly brought to the language the greater part of its grace and refinement, besides the unconscious boon they gave it when the clash of speech with speech rubbed off the inflections and created a simple syntax. They did more; they gave to the race all its more splendid qualities. They gave to the nation association with European history, and contact with the art and culture of the South. Nay, more; these very relations with the continent were in the end to make it possible for Norman and Saxon to blend into Englishman. There were other causes, it is true, that tended to fuse into one people the rival races on the English soil, Kymric Kete and Gaelic Kete; Angle, Saxon, Jute and Frisian; Dane and Norman. But the ambitious efforts of her Angevin princes to carve a great Kingdom out of the lands of the old Frankish conquest were a mighty factor in the problem of unification.

It was at this very time that Geoffrey Chaucer, courtier, diplomatist, soldier and business man, assumed the fitting task of giving the new tongue literary shape and courtly recognition. Just when all combining causes had reached their full measure in the sympathy of glorious victories won side by side against a common enemy; just when Crecy and Poitiers had shed a new splendor on the name of Englishman; just when the brotherhood of battle and the fellowship of trade were exerting alike their powerful influences upon the separate races and tongues, the poet, who was John of Gaunt's friend and Wycliffe's sympathizer, found time in the midst of his stirring life to show his countrymen what a noble language genius could make of the English they spoke so rudely.

Unquestionably Chaucer wrote the

language he spoke, however fluent he may have been in the use of French, not, like that of his Prioress.

"After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe," and possibly other tongues. It was in English that he conversed in London, if not at court; and it was in English that men habitually spoke to him. But the poet's written language was a judicious blending of the Normanesque English, used at court, and the Saxonesque English, used in the country. It was, no doubt, perfectly intelligible to both classes, and yet an improvement upon the familiar language of each.

His variety as an artist is truly wonderful. With all his tendency to realism, his delight in painting men and manners, we find him wreathing for the dreamer's delight the most fanciful allegories, and, telling, naively, wild fictions akin to the tales of the East. Again, he turns from these lighter themes and the frolic fun of his comic tales--sometimes as full of horseplay as the coarse humor of Smollett--to deliver moral homilies and string together sententious maxims, or to touch the heart with the chivalrous generosity of Arcite and Palamon, or the too poignant trials of Grisella. Well fitted by nature to originate a great literature, he seems to have held in himself the dawns of many great things; to be allied on the one hand to Shakspeare and his brother dramatists, as a discernor and limner of character, to Spenser on the other hand, as an imaginative poet, with tastes fitting him for epic forms; while, in sober and independent thought on the special evils of his time, he certainly stood with his contemporaries, Langlande and Wycliffe.

It was a good thing for England that her first great poet, the fountain-head of