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ON THE

Prologue off Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

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PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF

F. A. MARCH,

Professor of English Literature and Lecturer on Comparative Philology,

IN LAFAYETTE COLLEGE, EASTON, PA.

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Prologue of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

The history of a people's language is an index to the history of their nation. Every mutation in a language is accompanied by a corresponding historical event. The confusion of tongues points immediately to the destruction of Babel; the Spanish language to the decay of the Cantabrian, the ancient language of Spain, and to the invasion and possession of that country by the Arabs, Goths, and Moors; the French language to the union of the Celts and Latins; the Anglo-Saxon to the settlement and amalgamation of the Angles, Jutes and Saxons on the coasts of Britain; and the English to the numerous hordes of Northmen who were continually taking possession of the British Isles; but more directly to the Norman conquest.

And not only have great national commotions an influence on a language, but every literary man, the productions of whose mind are given to the world, and transmitted to posterity, exerts a power in the formation, establishment, or debasement, of that tongue in which he speaks.

In the early stages of society, when every one is characterized by native simplicity, the wants of the people are comparatively few, and their vocabulary, therefore, is very limited; but as the human race increases, and the world advances in science and literature, and exchange is awakened between different tribes or nations, and the desires of man become more numerous, he is compelled either to enlarge his vocabulary, or use the same word to express different objects; and it is for this reason that the primitive languages have so many meanings attached to the same word. But as enlightenment advances, and new ideas are origi-

nated in the mind, new words are invented to express these ideas; and thus every author contributes to whatever change is effected in the language of his people. And no author, perhaps, in the literary world, has contributed more to effect a change in his native tongue, than JEOFFREY CHAUCER, the "Morning Star" of English poetry, rising in freshness and beauty, and radiating the thick gloom that overhung our poetical hemisphere.

There is nothing that may be truly called poetry before the days of CHAUCER. True, many ballads and verses existed before that time; yet these were all destitute of imagination and rhyme, and were characterized only by a certain wild fancy and figurative cast of diction.

Poetry, in its comprehensive sense, was introduced into England at a very early age. Of all the tribes that infested England, none seems to have been more noted for skill in poetry than the Scandinavians. With them poetry was a national science, and was familiar to all orders and degrees. Even their kings and warriors are frequently represented as laying aside, for a time, their diadems and swords, and tuning their harps to their favorite muse. But the exercise of the poetic talent was confined chiefly to a distinct profession; the followers of which were called Scalds, or Polishers of Language. These were held in the highest honor and veneration. They attended the festivals of heroic chiefs, accompanied them in battle, celebrated their victories, and received liberal rewards for their verses. And as the Saxons, who succeeded the Britains, and became possessors of England in the sixth century, although they first entered England in 450, were a part of the Scandinavian tribes, they doubtless carried with them into England the old romantic tales and fictions of their scaldic bards; and thus preserved their native and original vein of poetic fabling. And all the British Isles seem to have been acquainted with these scaldic singers; for the songs of the Irish bards are supposed to be strongly marked with scaldic imagination; and the prosody of the Welsh bards was formed greatly on alliteration, which indicated their attention to scaldic versification; and many pieces of the Scottish bards are still remaining, the most noted of which are OSSIAN'S.

But, as literature advanced among the Saxons, "poetry no longer remained a separate science," and the old line of bards declined to give rise to the Gleemen, or Harpers; who, again, probably gave rise to the English Minstrels, who flourished till the sixteenth century. The best writers among the Saxons were ALDHELM, Bishop of Shirburn; CEOLFRID, ALCUINE, BEDE, and KING ALFRED, the supposed founder of Oxford University; all of whom lived about the eighth century. But it was not until about the beginning of the eleventh century, that the literature of England received from the Normans its first rudiments of cultivation and refinement.

The Normans were a people perhaps the most illustrious in history; whose influence has been felt throughout the world. They introduced among the rough and unpolished Saxons, new ideas of splendor and refinement; and bestowed on literature the lustre of their nation. And although the conquest may not have been favorable, for a time, to the national poetry of England, yet, when the spirit of the people was awakened, and a national bard arose, all the foreign and French admixtures but served to enrich and embellish the native tongue; and when CHAUCER, the courtier, scholar and poet, appeared, he united into one grand whole the "attributes and characteristics of the conquerors and the conquered." CHAUCER inherited from the Anglo-Saxons, a quiet and agricultural people, a passionate love for nature, and rural scenery; and for his many beautiful pieces of poetry, painted in minute and glowing descriptions, we are indebted to his morning walk; for oft he

> "Brushed with hasty steps the dews away,
> To meet the sun."

The fame of CHAUCER rests chiefly on his Canterbury Tales. But especially in the Prologue has he displayed his native genius, and descriptive powers. Nothing could be more ingeniously contrived than the occasion that formed the subject of CHAUCER'S Canterbury Tales. A company of twenty-nine pilgrims, on their way to visit the shrine of THOMAS A'BECKET, at Canterbury, meet at the Tabarde Inn, at Southwark; and, although all strangers to each other, they are assembled in one room at supper, as was then customary. While here, they all agreed to journey together the next day to Canterbury; and, to relieve the fatigue of the journey, each agreed to tell a story on the way. And these stories are the celebrated Canterbury Tales.

Such companies as this were, in CHAUCER'S days, of frequent occurrence. For three hundred years was this worldly-minded and rebellious prelate worshiped as a saint; and every fiftieth year a jubilee was proclaimed, with great indulgences to all who visited his shrine; and a day is still set apart for his honor in the Romish church. Thus, we see that CHAUCER'S characters must have formed a noted company.

In the description of these characters, CHAUCER'S universal knowledge enabled him to give an accurate picture of the ancient manners of his nation and times. "It is here that we view the pursuits and employments, the customs and diversions of our ancestors, copied from the life, and represented with real truth and spirit, by a judge of mankind, whose penetration qualified him to discern their foibles, and discriminating peculiarities; and by an artist who understood that proper selection of circumstances, and those predominant characteristics, which form a finished portrait."

The Characters of the Prologue.

We shall first briefly notice these characters in order, before we speak of the language and poetry of the Prologue.

Chaucer very naturally and forcibly introduces the Knight as the first and most conspicuous character in the company. This Knight is represented as a very worthy man, and a great lover of adventure,

"Trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie."

He has performed great feats of chivalry in almost every part of the world, and which the poet beautifully enumerates. He had fought at Alexandria; in "Pruce," (Prussia;) in "Lettowe," (Lithunia;) in "Ruce," (Russia;) in "Gernade," (Grenada;) in "Algesir," (a city in Spain, opposite Gibraltar;) in "Belmerie," (supposed to be Benamarin, in Barbary;) at "Leyes," (by some supposed to be Lavissa, a city near Rhodes; by others Lybissa, a city of Bithynia;) at "Satalie," (a city in Anatolia, called Asalia;) at "Tramissene," (a city in Barbary;) at "Palatie," (Palathia, a city in Anatolia;) and against "another hethen in 'Turkie,'" Such a character was well qualified to tell a good tale, and so we find it one of the noblest productions of Chaucer; but it is not our place to enter into an examination of the tales; we have only to do with the Prologue. Yet, one beautiful figure in this tale, the blooming Emilia, we cannot pass unnoticed, as it so beautifully exhibits how exquisitely the mind of Chaucer relished the beauties of nature.

"Emilie, that fayrer was to sene,
Than is the lillie upon his stalke greene;
And fresher than the Maye with flowres newe,
(For with the rose colour strof hire hewe.")

The Squire is painted as a young man of twenty, in all the freshness, bloom, gayety, and hope of youth; he has curled locks, is finely dressed, wears a short gown with long and wide sleeves, and so ardently does he love that he sleeps no more than does the nightingale. His whole character represents the education and accomplishments requisite for a young gentleman in the gallant reign of Edward the Third. He is attended by a yeoman, whose figure is a beautiful delineation of the manners and customs of those worthy forest men.

The character of the Prioresse is chiefly distinguished by an "excessive delicacy, and an affectation of courtly accomplishments." She has also, to a great degree, the false pity and sentimentality that is so characteristic of many modern ladies. In this character, perhaps, more than in any other, has Chaucer wonderfully displayed the union of the humorous and pathetic; and we

feel that we cannot do it justice, unless we insert the poet's own words; which space forbids. This Prioresse was educated at the school of Stratford, possessed all the accomplishments of a perfect lady; observed the greatest politeness at table; exhibited so great charity, that she would weep if she saw a mouse dead or caught in a trap; wore a richly ornamented cloak, and coral beads around her arms, to which was fastened a large broach of shining gold, on which was written the lover's motto, *Amor vincit omnia*.

The "Monke" is represented as a sporting prelate, who regards not the ordinances of Saint Benedict; but rather wishes to appear conspicuous on a brown palfrey. The costly trappings of his horse are thus elegantly represented by the poet:

"And when he rode, men mighte his bridel here
Gingeling in a whistling winde, as clere,
And eke as loude, as doth the chapell belle."

The Friar is equally a lover of sports and good living; but on account of the poverty of his order, he is compelled to travel the country as a confessor, in order to provide for his convent. He is known and loved by all, especially by the "worthy wimen" of every town; for

"Ful swetely herde he confession," and
"Pleasante was his absolution."

The Merchant is an honest man of business, who never goes in debt; he is judicious in all his bargains, and anxious about his increase.

The Clerk of Oxenford is described as being emaciated with study, wearing a threadbare coat, and riding on a horse as lean as a rake. He would rather possess twenty books of Aristotle, than costly robes or stringed instruments; and all the money he can procure he spends in books and learning. His conversation is modest and instructive; and happy were it for modernists, did they inherit something of his spirit.

"Not a worde spake he more than was nede;
And that was said in forme and reverence,
And short and quick, and full of high sentence.
Souning in moral vertue was his speeche,
And gladly would he lerne, and gladly teche."

The Sergeant of the Law has the peculiar faculty of appearing busy when he is doing nothing.

The Frankelein is a wealthy country gentleman, whose house, continually filled with all manner of meats and drinks, is freely open to all. The poet says that he was a St. Julian in his own country. This Julian was a knight, who having unwittingly killed his old parents, erected a sumptuous hospital for the accommodation of travelers on the banks of a dangerous river.

The HABERDASHER, CARPENTER, WEBBE, (or weaver,) DEYER, and TAPISER, are united in one fraternity; all of them wise and dignified enough to be aldermen.

"The cookè is well skilled in all his art; he can
Roste, and sethe, and broile, and frie,
Maken mortrewes, and well bake a pie."

He is also well acquainted with a draught of London ale.

The SHIPMAN is painted as a brawny fellow, riding on an old stage-horse. He is distinguished for his knowledge of the seas and coasts; and not a "creke" in Britain or in Spain that he did not know.

The DOCTOR is a perfect representation of medical skill, and medical treatment, in his days. He is skilled in all the rules of astronomy, and treats his patients accordingly.

"For he was grounded in astronomie;
He kept his patient a ful gret del
In houres by his magike naturel."

The poet very ingeniously enumerates the books with which our scientific physician was acquainted. He was skilled in all the works of the renowned ÆSCULAPIUS, and of DIOSCORDES; of RUFUS, a physician of Ephesus, who wrote in Greek, about the time of TRAJAN; and of HIPPORCUS, an Arabic physician of the eleventh century; of HALI, a famous Arabic astronomer of the eleventh century; and of GALLIEN, another Arabic physician of the same time; of SERAPION, a celebrated Arabic physician, who wrote on the practice of medicine in the eleventh century; and of RASIS, an Asiatic physician, who practised at Cordova, in Spain, in the tenth century; of AVICEN, the most eminent physician of the Arabian school, in the eleventh century; and of AVERROIS, a learned professor in the University of Morocco; of DAMASCENE, secretary of one of the Caliphs, and who wrote on various sciences before the Arabians entered Europe; and of CONSTANTIN, a native of Carthage, who was learned in all the sciences of the Arabians, Chaldees, Egyptians, Indians, Persians and Saracens, and who flourished in the eleventh century; and of BERNARD, the contemporary of CHAUCER; and of GATTISDEN, a fellow of Merton College, in the fourteenth century; and finally of GILBERTIN, who flourished in the thirteenth century. Such were the books that formed the library of this wondrous doctor. And after thus enumerating them, the poet satirically informs us that

"His studie was but litel on the *Bible*."

The good WIFE OF BATH is represented as a "worthy woman all her life," who is very desirous of appearing conspicuous at church on the Sabbath; doubtless from the many pleasing incidents connected with it, as there she had been united to five husbands.

In the character of the "PARSOUNE," or parish priest, CHAUCER wonderfully displays that discriminating power and sympathetic feeling, which spring from an observant eye and a good heart. The parson is noted for his piety, sincerity, simplicity, industry, courage, and patience; and he always gave this noble example to his flock.

"That first he wrought, and afterward he taught."

Dryden has imitated this good parson, and is said to have applied it to Bishop Ken.

The PLOUGHMAN is noted for his love to GOD and to his neighbor.

The MILLER is a stout, hearty fellow, who played them out of town with his bagpipe. He has broad shoulders, and a head so strong that he can break any door with it.

The MANCIPLE is a simple, unlettered man, who can outwit the wisdom of the most learned.

The character of the REVE, whose office was one of great trust, under the feudal system, is happily painted by the poet. "His attention to the care and custody of the manors, the produce of which was then kept in hand for furnishing his lord's table, perpetually employs his time, preys upon his thoughts, and makes him choleric. He is the terror of bailiffs and hinds; and is remarkable for his circumspection, vigilance, and subtlety. He is never in arrears, and no auditor is able to overreach or detect him in his accounts; yet he makes more commodious purchases for himself than for his master, without forfeiting the good will or bounty of the latter."

The humorous vein of CHAUCER is fully revealed in the character of the SOMPNOUR, whose office it was to bring uncanonical offenders into the court of the archdeacon. His face is fire-red, and his whole appearance is voluptuous; thus belying his occupation. He must have appeared extremely ridiculous, when he "dronken had the wine;" for

"Than would he speken no worde but Latin."

And when his philosophy failed him, he would cry, "*Questio quid juris.*"

With him rides the PARDONER, or dispenser of indulgences, who has just arrived, "Bretful of pardon come from Rome al hote." He carries with him the veil of the Virgin Mary, and a part of the sail of Saint Peter's ship.

Such are the characters, together with the HOSTE, so much noted for his good sense, that form the company to Canterbury.

We are now prepared to enter on

The Diction of the Poem.

The Prologue is an iambic pentameter poem of eight hundred and sixty lines. The number of words in this poem is six thousand seven hundred and twenty-seven: eighty-seven of which are proper names, and which we do not include in the comparative relation of the Saxon and foreign element, as they cannot properly be called the language of the poet; discarding these, therefore, the number of comparative words is six thousand six hundred and forty. Of these, eight hundred and thirty-one are foreign words, while the remainder are Saxon; thus making a per cent. of eighty-seven and a half Saxon, and twelve and a half foreign. Thus we find that the language of the Prologue is largely Saxon. Yet we might have expected to find a greater per cent. of Saxon in the language of such an early writer; and especially if we compare the language of the Prologue with the language of Wycliffe's Bible.

From an examination of the sixth chapter of John, in Wycklife's version of the Bible, we find that it contains a per cent. of ninety-five Saxon and five foreign words; or a per cent. of seven and a half more Saxon than is found in the Prologue. The cause of this difference in the language of the two contemporaries may be briefly stated. And, first: Chaucer was an attendant upon the gallant court of Edward III. He had daily intercourse with, and was considered a favorite among, the gallants of the court and nobles of the kingdom; and, also, being a Norman by descent, he would of course follow the phraseology of the court, and thus use a greater proportion of foreign words than Wycliffe, who lived and labored among the poorer and less refined class of the people, translating and distributing, often in quietness and seclusion, his version of the Bible.

The *character* of the two authors has contributed, also, to the difference in their language. Chaucer was gay, humorous and pathetic, and would, therefore, use a corresponding diction; while Wycliffe, who, Milton says, possessed a "divine and amiable spirit," was calm, settled and contemplative, and would naturally express it in his language; for, in all ages and climes, the language gives expression to the character, and the character gives formation to the language.

We might adduce another cause of the difference in the language of these two authors, from the subject itself on which they wrote; but we shall speak of that again, in connection with our own Bible.

We shall now compare the language of Chaucer with the language of King James' Bible, the true standard of the English tongue.

We find, from an extended examination of the Bible, that its language contains a per cent. of ninety-two and seventy-five hundredths of Saxon, and seven and twenty-five hundredths of foreign words; or a Saxon per cent. of five and twenty-five hundredths more than the language of the Prologue. The same passages in Wycliffe's Bible have a per cent. of ninety-three and five-tenths Saxon words; thus differing from our present version only seventy-five hundredths. And two hundred words in the beginning of the sixth chapter of John, contain the *same* percentage in both versions.

This difference in the language of the Prologue and James' Bible, may be traced to two causes, *the subject matter of the two works, and the growth of the language.*

Had the English language remained stationary, not advancing one step, from the days of Chaucer to the reign of James I., the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales and the English Bible would not have been written with an equal portion of the Saxon and foreign element. Plainness of speech is one of the evidences of the divine origin of the Bible. The wondrous miracles of the Saviour are painted with as much simplicity and truthfulness as the poor beggar, whose physicians were the compassionate dogs of the city. Not a word of false coloring, or of high sounding astonishment, is uttered. The diction of the Bible is not that of a man but of a God; and, therefore, devoid of all adornments of human ingenuity; its characters are all described in honesty and sincerity, and so free from all false shadings that the art of man would throw around them. But the characters of the Prologue being from all classes and grades of society, are painted in words suited to their stations, and colored by the fancy of a poet's mind. So that, in proportion as the character of the Bible differs from the character of the Prologue, so its language will differ also; and we have a proof of this in the version of Wycliffe, for we know that his language was much more vulgar, as it was then called, than Chaucer's; and although he may have labored in his translations to effect this, yet he was but doing what the Scriptures commanded, and what his latin Vulgate required.

Now, that we may form some idea of the progress of the English language, from the days of Chaucer up to 1611, when King James' Bible made its appearance, let us compare with the language of Chaucer that of Spencer, who flourished in the sixteenth century, between Chaucer and the appearance of our version of the Bible. From a critical examination of Colin Clout, the Egloga Prima of Spencer, we find that its language contains a per cent. of eighty six and two-tenths Saxon, and thirteen and eight-tenths foreign words; or a per cent. of one and three-tenths less Saxon than the language of the Prologue. Might Spencer's language be taken as a standard of his times, we should thus find the progress of the foreign element in the English language in a

hundred and eighty years. But this is by no means the case, for SPENCER followed his TITYRUS, as he called CHAUCER, comparing him to VIRGIL, the Roman TITYRUS, as closely as possible in the use of old words; desiring, as he said, to restore his mother-tongue. And, indeed, many of his words had become obsolete before his works were published. And now we shall see that the translators of JAMES' Bible formed no new language, but merely revised the diction of the several versions already existing.

When JAMES VI. of Scotland succeeded ELIZABETH on the throne of England, under the title of JAMES I., the question of a new translation or revision of the Scriptures, adequate to the demands of the age, had been long agitated; and HUGH BROUGHTON, at that time the most profound Biblical scholar in England, had urged its claims so strenuously, that he had even gone so far as to translate a portion of the Old Testament, and send it to Lord BURLEIGH, with a letter stating his plan for a new translation, and requesting his Lordship to be "chiefest in contribution towards the charge, which would be exceeding great." So that when Dr. REYNOLDS, in the conference assembled by JAMES in 1604, "moved his Majesty that there might be a new translation of the Bible," the subject was not a novel one. The Bible then most commonly read in the churches was the Bishop's; and when those who had been appointed by JAMES were assembled to begin their laborious task, they received a letter from his Majesty, bearing a complete set of Rules for their guidance in the preparation of their arduous work. The first of these Rules is as follows: *The ordinary Bible read in the Churches, commonly called the Bishop's Bible, to be followed, and as little altered, as the original will permit.* And, accordingly, from a comparison of this Bible with our own, we find that its diction differs but very little from the diction of our version. For instance, all the difference worthy of note in the 20th chapter of Exodus, from the first to the seventeenth verse, is where our version has *before me*, the Bishop's has *in my sight;* where ours has *nor serve them*, the Bishop's has *nor worship them;* and where ours has Remember the Sabbath day, *to keep it holy*, the Bishop's has, Remember the Sabbath day, *that thou sanctify it.* For a further illustration of the fact that the language of JAMES' version is but slightly varied from the language of the versions that preceded it, we shall here insert the second, third, fourth and fourteenth Rules of JAMES, which read as follows:

2d. The names of the prophets, and the holy writers, with the other names in the text, to be retained as near as may be, accordingly as they are vulgarly read.

3d. The old ecclesiastical words to be kept; namely, as the word *church*, not to be translated *congregation*, &c.

4th. When any word hath divers significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most eminent fathers, being agreeable to the propriety of the place, and the analogy of faith.

14th. These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishop's Bible; namely, TYNDALE'S, MATTHEW'S, COVERDALE'S, WHITCHURCH'S, (CRANMER'S,) the GENEVAN.

And from a comparison of portions of these various versions, we find that their diction differs but very slightly among themselves, and from that of our version; and thus we find that the translators of 1604, formed no new language, but merely revised that of former editions. So that, while we must admit that the development of the language contributed, in some degree, to the difference of the language in CHAUCER and that of the Bible; yet the great cause of their difference must be attributed to the subject of the works themselves.

But that we may form a better relative estimate of the language of CHAUCER, let us compare it with the language of POPE; to whom, says WARTON, "English poetry and the English language is everlastingly indebted;" and who flourished in an age when the English language had reached the summit of its glory; and for this purpose we have examined his Messiah, one of his most characteristic poems, and find that its language has a per cent. of seventy-five Saxon, and twenty-five foreign words; or twelve-and-a-half less Saxon than the language of the Prologue.

When Pope wrote his Messiah, the English language had attained that high degree of symmetry, strength and beauty, which characterizes it as the image of a SHAKSPEARIAN and MILTONIC mind. The Latinisms of Sir THOMAS BROWNE, and his "mixture of heterogeneous words brought together from distant regions," had been Gallicized and polished by DRYDEN; and although the language "had begun," as DR. JOHNSON remarks, "to lose some of that stability it had attained in the golden age of ELIZABETH," yet it was properly moulded and developed to receive the gentle impression from the hand of the "cautious" POPE. It is not so much the *number* of Saxon or foreign words that beautify a language, as the discriminating selection and judicious arrangement of both; and this we find to be the case with POPE, who adopted neither the Saxon element of DRYDEN, nor the foreign element of BROWNE; but directing his course between the two, with much study and careful consideration, sailed flowingly along in numbers "smooth, uniform, and gentle."

So that the difference in CHAUCER'S language, and the language of POPE, must be attributed to the well-proportioned development of the languge itself, combined with the characteristic spirit of

POPE, who could not condescend to say the *House* of Fame, while *Temple* was at his command.

Before leaving this paragraph on the comparative relation of Saxon and foreign words in the Prologue, we would state that the foreign element consists chiefly of nouns-substantive, adjectives, verbs, and participles, and are such as we should naturally expect; being either connected in some way with the church, or articles of dress. And as the majority of these words are through the French, which being a more polished and refined language than the Saxon, we might conclude that these foreign words were better adapted for rhyming and metre than the Saxon. And so we find this to be the case; for the per cent. of rhyming words in the Prologue is thirty-eight; making the per cent. of foreign words in the *body* of the poem only nine. So that the number of foreign *rhyming* words is more than four times the number of all other foreign words in the Prologue. This arises from the fact that all the writers and poets that preceded CHAUCER were merely translators from the French; so that it was to their advantage to retain words that flowed into metre and rhyme more sweetly than the Saxon. Peculiar phrases.

As CHAUCER was the first great poet of the English tongue, he used many phrases and transposition of words that have still been preserved in prose and poetry. One of the most frequent modes of expression that we find in CHAUCER, is where he uses the adverb *full* to modify another adverb or adjective; as "*ful-swetely*," "*ful-fayre*." Another of his peculiar expressions is, "*quod he*," now softened into *quoth he*. He makes frequent use, also, of the imperfect for the perfect, of the verb *to be*. His *use* of two prepositions combined with the Saxon infinitive, has rather a pleasing and flowing sound, not common to our inelegant use of them. He adopted this mode of expression from the analogy of the French, who, not being acquainted with the English preposition *to*, used *pour* to express *for*, and the remainder of the verb as one word.

We can form no just estimate of the per cent. of words in the Prologue that have the same orthography as in modern writers; because we have seen no two editions of his works that are exactly alike; but judging from those we have seen, we find a per cent. of about fifty-seven words bearing the same orthography as they do now; and the majority of these are conjunctions, prepositions, the form of the verb *to be* in its third person singular, present, and third singular perfect, and the personal pronoun *they*. This percentage bears a close relation to that in WYCLIFFE'S Bible, that being about fifty-five in the portion examined; and all being about the same parts of speech.

THE VERSIFICATION.

The versification of CHAUCER, we must confess, is neither pleasing nor harmonious to the ear. It is often deficient, at least to modern readers, of half a foot, and sometimes a whole one; "but it is," says DRYDEN, "like the eloquence of one whom TACITUS commends—it was *auribus istius temporis accomodata*. They who lived with him, and sometime after him, thought it musical; and it continues so, even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of LYDGATE and GOWER, his contemporaries. There is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect." Nor is DRYDEN'S own verse perfect; nor SHAKSPEARE'S, nor MILTON'S. It is not necessary, nor is it altogether agreeable, that every line in a poem has the same sing-song harmony. It is the *whole* that requires harmony; and poets, therefore, knowing this, often insert lines, where the sense or ear requires it, that will not conform to the strict rules of criticism. CHAUCER wrote not by rule, yet he produced poetry, which all who taste the streams of HELICON draw from through their mother tongue. Nor did SHAKSPEARE or MILTON write by rule, but trusted to their ear; and one has formed an inimitable dramatic verse, the first in the world; whilst the other has produced cadences not to be excelled by any. Nor do they hesitate to throw in such lines as these:

> "*Whose womb unmeasurable, and infinite breast,*
> Teems and feeds all."

> "*And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old.*"

But all the *seeming* deficiencies of CHAUCER'S versification, that cannot be accounted for by poetic license, or the blunders of careless transcribers, concerning whom CHAUCER prays GOD that they may not *mis-write* or *mis-metre* his poem, may be accounted for by the following considerations:

1st. That CHAUCER uses *es* in the genitive case, singular and plural number of nouns, as a separate syllable; pronouncing such words as *showres* and *lordes* as consisting of two syllables.

2d. That *ed*, in the imperfect and perfect participles, was considered, in CHAUCER'S time, a distinct syllable.

3d. That *a* or *e*, ending all plural adjectives, was separately pronounced.

4th. That CHAUCER laid his accent, in words brought through the French, according to the French custom, on the *ultimate*, and on the *penult* in words ending in *e* feminine.

5th. That he accented the *final* syllable of the present participle; thus, liv-*ing* for *liv*-ing.

So, that if we take these five rules, and examine the versification of CHAUCER'S Prologue, we shall find that it flows as smoothly as SHAKSPEARE'S or MILTON'S; excepting, of course, the blunders of transcribers.

POETRY AS A FINE ART.

So far as poetry may be considered one of the fine arts, we apprehend that it is the first; since "it combines nearly all the excellencies of the other arts, with much that is peculiar to itself. It has the vivid beauty of painting, the prominence and simplicity of sculpture, and the touching cadences of music." It may not attain its end as easily or as perfectly as the other arts, because its end is higher, and more extended, since it deals with abstract questions and ideas beyond the reach of painting or sculpture; yet we might say that it often attains its end through the media of the other arts; for what are the productions of the pencil or chisel but the translation of the images of the poet's imagination! As a work of art, a poem, we apprehend, should have the just proportions of the sculptured statue, the varied hues of the finished painting, and the sweet cadences of the soul-inspiring music. And if we examine the productions of a SPENCER, a SHAKSPEARE, or a MILTON, we shall find these qualities chiefly displayed. So far, then, as the Prologue attains to this ideal, we observe that it consists of the varied images of the poet's imagination harmoniously blended into one grand, symmetrical, and beautiful whole. We conclude, in the words of CAMPBELL—words truly beautiful and truthful—

> "CHAUCER, our Helicon's first fountain stream,"
> Our morning-star of song, that leads the way
> To welcome the long-after coming beam
> Of SPENCR'S light, and SHAKSPEARE'S perfect day;
> Old England's fathers live in CHAUCER'S lay,
> As if they ne'er had died. He grouped and drew
> Their likeness, with a spirit of life so gay,
> That still they live and breathe in Fancy's view,
> Fresh beings fraught with Truth's imperishable hue."