

LITERARY FEATURES OF THE AGE OF CHAUCER

The period of transition is now nearly over. The English language has shaken down to a kind of average - to the standard of the East Midland speech, the language of the capital city and of the universities.

The other dialects, with the exception of the Scottish branch, rapidly melt away from literature, till they become quite exiguous. French and English have amalgamated to form the standard English tongue, which attains to its first full expression in the works of Chaucer.

A curious modern note begins to be apparent at this period. There is a sharper spirit of criticism, a more searching interest in man's affairs, and a less childlike faith in, and a less complacent acceptance of, the established order. The vogue of the romance, though it has by no means gone, is passing, and in Chaucer it is derided. The freshness of the

It is now customary to divide the Chaucerian poems into three stages - the French the Italian and the English of which the last is a development of the first two. In none of these divisions of course is the one influence felt to the exclusion of the other. It is merely that one predominates. The poems of the earliest or French group are closely modelled upon French originals and the style is clumsy and immature, of such poems the longest is The Romaunt of the Rose, a lengthy allegorical poem written in octosyllabic couplets and based upon Le Romaunt de la Rose of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung. This poem only a fragment though of 8000 lines was once entirely ascribed to Chaucer but recent research based upon a scrutiny of Chaucerian style has suggested that only the first part is his work other poems of this include The Book of the Duchesse probably his earliest and written in 1369. the year when John of Gaunt's wife died, The Complaynt into Pite An A.B.C and the Complaynt of Mars.

romantic ideal is being superseded by the more acute spirit of the drama; which even at this early time is faintly foreshadowed. Another more modern feature that at once strikes the observer is that the age of anonymity is passing away. Though many of the texts still lack named authors, the greater number of the books can be definitely ascribed. Moreover, we have for the first time a figure of outstanding literary importance, who gives to the age the form and pressure of his genius.

This era sees the foundation of an English prose style. Earlier specimens have been experimental or purely imitative, now in the works of Mandeville and Malory, we have prose that is both original and individual. The English tongue is now ripe for a prose style. The language is settling to a standard, Latin and French are losing grip as popular prose mediums and the growing desire for an English Bible exercise a steady pressure in favour of a standard English prose. Scottish literature for the first time in our literature in the person of Barbour Esq; Scotland supplies a writer worthy of note. This is only the beginning for the tradition is handed on to the powerful group of poets who are mentioned in the next chapter. In many of the documents of the time Chaucer's name is mentioned with some frequency, and these reference in addition to some remarks he

makes regarding himself in the course of his poems, are the sum of what we know about his life. The date of his birth is uncertain, but it is now generally accepted as being 1340. He was born in London, entered the household of the wife of the Duke of Clarence, and saw military service abroad, where he was captured. Next he seems to have entered the royal household, for he is frequently mentioned as the recipient of royal pensions and bounties. When Richard II succeeded to the crown (1377) Chaucer was confirmed in his offices and pensions, and shortly afterwards he was sent to Italy on one of his several diplomatic missions. More pecuniary blessings followed, then ensued a period of depressing depression due probably to the departure to Spain of his patron John of Gaunt but his life closed with a revival of his prosperity. He was the first poet to be buried in what is now known as Poets Corner in Westminster Abbey.

His Poems the order of Chaucer's poems cannot be ascertained with certitude, but from internal evidence they can as a rule be approximately, but from internal evidence they can as a rule be approximately dated.