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CONTEMPORARY LIFE REFLECTED
IN THE PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES

BY

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CONTEMPORARY LIFE REFLECTED
IN THE PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES

I. Introduction

The Canterbury Pilgrimage was an episode in the life of Chaucer which belonged to the England of his time. During his last years of leisure he recorded the impressions of his years of observation of men and women of the different classes of society and of the various occupations of his England, and later he wove his thoughts into story by having groups of pilgrims, real or imaginary, join him in a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

The brief introduction of the Prologue opens with its cheerful messages of Spring, its pleasant showers, the singing of the birds and the budding of the trees. The lines immediately following: "Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages" et cetera; offer reflections of the life of that period, for it

was customary for the English people to make pilgrimages in the spring of the year, especially during the Lenten season. The shrines of Saint Thomas of Canterbury and of Saint James of Compostella were the most famous places visited during Chaucer's time. People went there to pray for the miraculous cure from some bodily affliction, or in fulfillment of a vow, or in the spirit of penance to help make satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to sin.

Shortly after the canonization of Saint Thomas a Becket in 1173, Henry II made a pilgrimage to that holy martyr's tomb, while his relics were still in the crypt of the old church. He did this as a penance for his own sin and that of his knights in the murder of Saint Thomas. After the translation of the relics of the saint to the new cathedral (Trinity Church) in 1220, and especially during the jubilee years 1270, 1320, 1370 et cetera, people flocked to that sacred shrine from all parts of


2. Ibid., p. 162.

England and also from the continent. These pilgrimages continued until the destruction of the cathedral by Henry VIII in 1538.

Pilgrimages were also made to the tomb of Saint James, the Greater, at Compostella. This saint's tomb also became one of the most famous shrines for the attraction of pilgrims during the Middle Ages.

Some people also visited Clough Patrick, the Sinai of Ireland, in County Mayo, because of the story that the Apostle of Ireland himself celebrated Mass on the summit of that mountain. Some folk even made pilgrimages to the tomb of the selfish, narrow-minded and revengeful Thomas, Earl of Lancaster just for the purpose of annoying the king.

True, the end in view in making pilgrimages at that time, was not always a worthy one, as can be seen from the foregoing statement. Some people

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even visited shrines approved by the church, merely for the sake of the pleasure they got out of the trip. Some pilgrims never even so much as assisted at one Mass, and they were informed by Archbishop Sudsbury, when asking his blessing, that the plenary indulgence promised could not be gained by them because of their irreverence.

Palmers, or professional pilgrims, who visited "strange strondes" went chiefly to the Holy Land and to the shrine of Saint James of Compostella. It was the ambition of these palmers to return home with decorations of palm branches in their hats, or with shell souvenirs from Saint James' shrine. When a pilgrim had reached the Holy Land and had visited the usual round of holy places, he was entitled to wear a palm in the token of his accomplishments of that great pilgrimage, and from that badge he derived the name "Palmer".


2. Ibid. p. 142.


Besides those who visited foreign countries, many English palmers and pilgrims were contented to remain at home and visit the most gorgeous shrines of their own country. Such was the attitude of Chaucer's pilgrims who met at Southwerk, at the Tabard Inn for the purpose of making a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

Southwerk was the famous meeting place of the people of Chaucer's time because it was the main junction of all south-of-England travel. The Tabard Inn, which was erected in 1307 had by that time also become one of the most famous of English Inns. At that particular inn it was customary for "sondry folk" of various walks of life to assemble so that they could set out in groups instead of traveling alone. Traveling in crowds was done chiefly for the sake of protection from ordinary perils because highways were crowded with professional tramps, "that neither swink nor sweat, but

swear great oaths and yet have great wit and will to work if they would". Good cheer and lively entertainment abounded at an inn like the Tabard, so travelers naturally waited for days rather than start on a long trip alone.

The "sondry folk" who by "aventure y-falle in felawshippe" were examples of the various classes of people who met at the Tabard for the purpose of setting out on a pilgrimage. For the personages of his pilgrimage, Chaucer either used living models for his characters, or else he let his imagination work upon contemporary life for the pilgrims of his journey. He had probably gone on a pilgrimage to Canterbury himself some time previous to the writing of the Prologue, so that he knew just how to plan for characters of different classes of society and of different disposition. It was not necessary for him to

invent or borrow foreign characters. He was about fifty years of age when he wrote the Prologue, so probably, he just recorded the impressions of his manhood that had been long stored away during his busy years. True the highest and the lowest classes of people were not represented, but his work is typical of the life, the characteristic features and the habits of those whom he did portray.

Chaucer fittingly brought the introduction of the Prologue to a conclusion by stating that he "thinketh it according to reason to tell of the condition of each of them" but instead of taking each pilgrim separately, a grouping of the pilgrims into their respective classes will be employed in this thesis for the purpose of showing how contemporary life is reflected.

1. Kittridge, G.L., Chaucer and His Poetry, p. 149.

2. Cruse, op. cit. p. 27.

II The Knightly Group

To this group belong the "verray parfit gentil knyght, who never said any villiany to any manner of man" and his son, the gallant well dressed squire. These two men represent the upper classes of Chaucer's England. Students of Chaucer assert that the knight was a real person. Professor John Manly claims he belonged to the famous Scope family, but Professor Albert Cook maintained that Chaucer had in mind the elder Earl of Derby, (i.e. the Duke of Gloucester and his grandson, afterwards Henry IV.) when portraying this particular pilgrim, and that the knight was a composite portrait of those two earls.

The elder as well as the younger Earl of Derby traveled into Prussia and with the assistance of the knights of Prussia and the knights of Levonia, they fought in battle against the heathens of Lithuania. During that period of history knights sought employment in foreign countries that were

2. Ibid. p. 256.
warring, so perhaps Chaucer did have in mind these famous personages when giving the knight the most prominent place in the Prologue.

Sir Robert Umfraville, warden of the Northern Marches, also received claim of fulfilling the characteristics of Chaucer's knight, so the researches of interested investigators prove that there must be some truth as to the reality of this "verray parfit knyght".

Chaucer's knight "loved chivalrie from the tyme that he first began to riden out", which meant from the time he first began to travel abroad. A reflection of contemporary life is shown in this passage, for, "although chivalry was a dying institution, the glories of the court of Edward III had done something to arrest its decay, jousts and tourneys were still part of the medieval life and the citizen could still see such sights as that told us by the chronicler in the Brut, where he described the jousts at Smithfield in 1382." However, chivalry had "been

2. Bennett, H.S., *From Chaucer to Gower*, p. 119.
going to seed" ever since the last years of the Hundred Years' War. This decline was due to the method of warfare having changed from fighting on horseback to using the long spear by the foot soldiers, and also because chivalry was failing to adapt itself to the changes of life outside the castle. /

The following line, "Full worthy was he of his lorde's werre" gives a picture of how the knight spent his time. When he was not training for the joust or tournament, he was engaged in actual warfare which was really his chief business. Therefore he was obliged to serve his king on horseback, in the wars in which the king's country was engaged.

The battles "as wel in Christondom as in hethenesse" in which Chaucer's knight fought were in the Moorish kingdoms of Belmorge and Tremezen, against the Saracens in Egypt at Alexandria in 1365, and in Armenia at Lyeys in 1367, and against

2. Idem.
the Slavic heathens in Lithuania and Russia. During the sixties of the fourteenth century actual campaigns were fought by the English against these Moorish, Saracen and Slavic peoples, so Chaucer took actual history for his knight's campaigns, instead of fictitious warfare.

The knight was accompanied by his son, "a yong Squier," who attended the knight and bore his shield. The description which Chaucer gave of him is that of a squire who had served his years of attendance upon his lord by performing duties of that branch of knightly service for he presented him as a "lusty bachelor", or aspirant to knighthood, who was twenty years of age. That was the age at which a squire's education was usually completed and he was ready to become a knight. Chaucer mentioned that he had been some time in Chyvachee (meaning on a military expedition) in Flaunders, Artoys and Pycordie. It was a fourteenth century requirement for a squire to accompany his knight in a tournament or in battle, in order to take

care of his horses and to give his knight new spears when necessary.

The description of the squire's short gown with its long wide sleeves, is typical of the dress of English squires of that period. Chaucer described him as being "curteis, lowely and servysable," and such was the purpose of the years of training of a young squire before he was permitted to perform some chivalrous deed to win his spurs which were symbolic of "ready service".

"In hope to stonden in his lady grace" was the wish of every young squire, for the lady to whom he showed preference buckled on his armour the morning of his admission to knighthood. It was his duty to serve his lady as well as it was his duty to serve his lord and his God. In return

for serving his lady he received no reward except the satisfaction of knowing that he won her applause.

The squire "carf biform his fader at the table". Learning to carve was part of a squire's education as well as learning to serve food and wine was. Carving was also considered a fine art of that particular time and every well-bred young gentleman of the time could carve, so it was certainly an expected accomplishment of any young man of the high rank of "squire".

Besides the squire, the knight had a sturdy yeoman forester for his attendant. "Yeman" was a term applied to a man bound to the soil who had become a peasant of the highest rank, or a free-man. The coat and hood of the yeoman, the sheaf of peacock feathers, and the shield for protecting the arm from the bowstring were all typical of the kind of dress worn by the fourteenth century yeoman.

2. Hulme, History of the Middle Ages, p. 548.
4. Reynolds, op. cit., p. 35.
The forester yeoman also wore a badge of Saint Christopher because that saint was considered the patron of field sport and the patron of favorable weather.

The brief portrayal of this pilgrim leads one to conclude that the yeman of Chaucer's time was not a yeman of the fifteenth century type who ranked just below the Franklin; but he was merely an attendant and servant of the knight. There were four grades of knightly service at that time, as can be learned from Sir Amadas in the Metrical Romances, namely: Knight, Squire, Yeman and Knave. The lowest grade, "the knave" Chaucer did not mention as accompanying the knight, for "a yeman hadde he and servaunts namo". (1, 101)

III The Ecclesiastical Group

This group of pilgrims was made up of men and women of every garb and character from the fat shiny baldheaded monk, whose chief interest lay in hunting; the hypocritical friar who lived at the expense of others; and the make believe rascal of a pardoner, to

1. Warton, op. cit., p. 211.
the saintly parish priest who lived a hidden and obscure life among the poorer classes of people. The quiet, reserved prioress and her companion represented the religious communities of women of Chaucer's England.

The Prioress, Mdm. Eglantine, is presented as a religious of remarkable delicacy and refinement, and as one possessing some traces of affectation and worldliness. Of course, this portrait, like so many others, is humorously drawn but in it he presents a vivid picture of refinement at table. In those days people ate with their fingers, just as Mdm. Eglantine did. Forks were not yet in existence, and the only spoons were large ones made of horn or wood which were used mainly for dishing out food, so it was necessary to use one's fingers in eating. Chaucer's description of the nun's behavior at table shows that there were well bred women at that time. Plates were made of pieces of wood that were hollowed out in the middle, and were


2. Hulme, The Middle Ages, p. 548.
used to serve two people at a time.

Fifteenth century amusements for women were lap dogs, squirrels, monkeys, birds and cats. These pets were kept by nuns as well as by other women. Bishops, when making their visitation, frequently had to rebuke the nuns for this innovation. Often lay-boarders brought pets to the convent, so the nuns should not have been blamed for their presence. Mme. Eglantine was, however, so attached to her dogs she could not leave them behind her even when going on a pilgrimage.

"And Frenssh she spak full faire and fetisly After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe, For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe."

From these lines it seems that Chaucer held a rather low estimate of the French spoken by the Prioress. It was not the Parisian French but the Anglo-French which was spoken at the convent at

1. Hulme, History of the British People, p. 111.
3. Powers, Ellen, Medieval People, p. 79.
4. Ibid., pp. 79 and 80.
Stratford le Bow that she was familiar with. It was becoming to a lady of her rank to speak French when employed in polite conversation even though it was no longer necessary to do so "... French, after it ceased to be necessary came to be fashionable..." Although it had been the language of the higher classes up to 1300 movements toward the adoption of English were under way by the middle of the fourteenth century. After John of Trevisa had finished translating Ralph Higden's "Polychronicon" from Latin into English he made a correction upon a statement of Higden's regarding the use of French. This correction was necessary because of the changes which had taken place between the time that Higden wrote his history and its translation by Trevisa.

The other Nonne and the Nonnes-Preest are barely mentioned as being the Prioress' companions. The rules of the convent required nuns to have a companion when traveling. This particular nun also acted as

1. Liddell, M.H., Chaucer, p. 144, note 125.

2. Authority for the remainder of this paragraph is based upon Lounsbury, op. cit., Chapter IV, pp. 60 to 63.

Mdme. Eglantine's secretary, because it was befitting a lady of her rank to have a secretary. The "priestes three" was perhaps written that way just for the sake of maintaining rhythm, because everywhere else throughout the Tales mention is made of only one priest, and that is all that was required to correspond to Chaucer's number of pilgrims that he mentioned as going on the pilgrimage. Furthermore, only one confessor was generally appointed by the bishop to act as confessor for the nuns of a the convent, so, no doubt, the one priest was all that accompanied the prioress and her "Chapelyne".

Mdme. Eglantine's greatest oath was "by Seinte Loy" (1.120). Not only men, but also women acquired the habit of swearing, so much so that they could scarcely speak without an oath. Among the common forms of oaths were "By God", "By the Blessed Virgin and all the saints", so the prioress' expression was rather mild, or really was no oath at all, because Seinte Loy who was really Saint Eligius refused to take an oath, Chaucer, no doubt, meant

3. Coulton, op. cit., p. 87.
4. Liddell, M.H., Chaucer, p. 144 note 120.
to say that the Prioress did not swear at all.

The Benedictine monk who is represented as riding on his good horse and followed by hounds gives every indication of the worldliness that existed in so many monasteries of that age. The description of his riding dress, trimmed with fur, "the fyneste of a lond" and the gold pin "to festne his hood under his chyn" are indications of the worldliness of dress that was displayed during the fourteenth century, even by Religious. However, this display of dress was put on purposely by monks when traveling so as to make them appear great. The monk's cape or "semi-cope" (1.262) was made of worsted and "rounded as a bell". A little later in history, the Council of York placed severe prohibitions upon Religious for wearing short capes.

Little attention was given to the Rule of Saint Benedict by Chaucer's monk because he held after "the newe world the space" instead of following the

1. Liddell, M.H., Chaucer, p. 144, note 120.
old and strict requirements of his Rule. Perhaps this was due to the fact that many young folk entered the monastery as a profession instead of striving after perfection and devoting themselves to the work for which that particular Religious Community was instituted. The regulations regarding the vow of poverty were often evaded by monks, and unless a strict abbot presided over them, they frequently lived in luxury.

The monk's disregard for the old saying that a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water, was typical of many monks of the time, and the Church disapproved of their wandering about unnecessarily.

The merry faced friar, "Hubert", whose eyes twinkled in his head "as stars do in a frosty night", is also portrayed as a religious who was equally fond of high living and diversion instead of living among the poor and begging honestly as he should have, in order to help provide money for the


upkeep of his monastery. In portraying this character, Chaucer again had recourse to satire for the purpose of presenting a vivid picture of certain individual friars. He did not satirize the Church, however, for Chaucer was a man who took his religion seriously, and he gives no hint of unsteadfastness in his theological views.

Archbishop Spalding in his "Church, Culture and Liberty" tells us that the Church had to weep over many of her unworthy ministers, and that it is not to be expected that the ministers of the Church's altars should all have been stainless, so, in Chaucer's time as well as during our own, such men as this particular friar existed. Chaucer's satires should not blind us to the merit of the Dominicans or Franciscans, nor cause us to see in the members of Religious Orders nothing but the kind of monks and friars which he portrayed, for his criticism was meant only for those whom he saw living a life contrary to the rules of their Order.

In portraying the "Somnour", Chaucer presents an ecclesiastical officer of his time whose work consisted in bringing people before an ecclesiastical court for punishment. The purpose of those courts was to decide upon matrimonial cases, usury, sins of witchcraft, the refusal to pay tithes, etc. The portrait of this particular character seems to be an indirect satire on the ecclesiastical proceedings of those times; due, in many cases, to the degeneracy into which officers like this "Somnour" or archdeacon had fallen. The sketch of this pilgrim certainly seems to be realistically drawn, and since Chaucer took his characters from the men and women around him, he must have found ample reasons for passing censure upon the archdeacons who possessed the authority of using the extreme weapon of excommunication or "Significavit". (1.662) This weapon imposed forty days imprisonment upon those who were excommunicated.

Like the Monk, who forgot to a large extent,

the ideals of simplicity and discipline; and the Pardoner, with his sham relics; this Somnour justly deserved criticism, and Chaucer believed in giving every man his due. Had he performed the duties of his office properly, Chaucer would have given him the praise and respect which he did to those who deserved it, like the learned Clerk and the humble Parson received.

The long humorous description of "the Pardoner" which Chaucer gave of that particular character, makes him appear as quite a rascal. Pardoners from Rouncival were, at that time, objects of satire because after the Black Death the hospital and chapel of that place were badly in need of funds, so many unauthorized pardoners and beggars tried to make believe they had been lawfully sent out to secure funds for the upkeep of the chapel and hospital of Rouncival. These pardoners asked people to give money for a charitable purpose instead of performing heavy penances that were imposed upon penitents in those days. This work of charity was meant to help

1. Manly, _op. cit._, p. 123.
atone for the temporal punishment due to their sins, rather than perform bodily works of penance. In Piers, The Plowman, the pardoner also sold pardons for "pans" (meaning pence), so the Pardoner of Rouncival was not the only one mentioned in literature of that time who traveled through the country selling pardons.

The relics which these pardoners used were not, as a rule, genuine. For instance, a certain pardoner claimed he possessed a feather from the Archangel Gabriel that he left in the Blessed Virgin's chamber on his departure from his heavenly errand. Another pardoner tried to tell the people he had a finger of the Holy Ghost. Chaucer's pardoner possessed a brass cross full of stones, and Our Lady's Veil. This veil was simply a copy of the miraculous transfer of Saint Veronica's veil. In order to prove that his pardons were genuine he showed his bulls. No doubt, these were given him by the French Pope, Clement VII, instead of the lawfully reigning Pope, Urban VI,

2. Ibid., p. 328.
so the Church, in this case, as in so many others was not responsible for the Pardoner's conduct of granting make believe Indulgences.

The poor Parson who "preached Christ's Gospel trewely" and taught his parishioners devoutly, was perhaps an ideal country priest "whom Chaucer had known and revered", but it is also probable that he was not a real man at all, for Chaucer has presented him without a fault and has made him appear attractive and perfect, merely for the sake of presenting him as an ideal. If such was his intention it can be readily seen that he portrayed him in this manner so as to contrast the poverty and humility of the many poor country priests with the luxury and self-indulgence of many of the monks.

Although Chaucer frequently had recourse to satire in portraying this group of pilgrims, it must be remembered that these men were human, so it should not be surprising that there were men

who were not worthy of their high office in Church affairs. Never the less, it must be admitted that the Church was the great civilizing agency of the Middle Ages, and that it was the monks who kept learning alive, who protected the poor, aided travelers, furnished counselors for kings and emperors, etc. "At its worst the Church had men in high office who were totally unfit and who helped to bring on disaster. At its best, it had many noble men and women who labored diligently for the ideals which the Church had set up."

IV The Professional Group

The busy "Sergeant of the Lawe", the studious Clerk and the irreligious "Doctor of Phisik", represent the professional classes of the Canterbury Pilgrimage.

Chaucer's England as well as the England of today had its distinctive grades of lawyers and those of the highest branch of the legal profession, of which he was a member were termed "sergeant", so this particular pilgrim represented

1. Pahlow, Man's Great Adventure, p. 422.
not only the distinguished social leaders of his time, but also the experienced and most learned men at the bar. Professionally, a sergeant fell in rank next to the judges of the King's bench, above the attorney general. He was chosen and summoned to that rank by the king himself. He did not have to remove his head covering in the presence of the king, and he was regarded as a person of high rank by his king, because when speaking to him, the king used the polite form of address instead of the common one. Socially, a sergeant ranked next to a squire and ahead of the knight's other younger sons.

This sergeant, like so many others of his time, was a great "purcaşour" or conveyor of land which he acquired in "fee simple" (1.319) that is, he held absolute possession of his estate like the distinguished lawyers of that period did.

The dress of the sergeant, in his "ceint"

1. Manly, op. cit., p. 133.
2. Idem.
or girdle of silk and the "baore", or ornaments, shows that Chaucer satirized on the luxury of the dress of his time, because extravagance in dress was displayed by many. This was done in spite of the laws of Parliament of 1363 which declared that people ranking below squires should wear cloth without fur, and no jewelry. Chaucer humorously said "of his array telle I no lenger tale", for undoubtedly, he did not care to go into further detail since he planned to have the parson tell more about the conspicuous dress of that period.

Chaucer's sergeant had often been at the parvis (1.310) which was a portico of the Church. It was a fourteenth century custom for lawyers to consult with their clients at the church portico after the services.

The Clerk, clad in a threadbare cloak, is presented as one who dressed according to his rank. The term "clerk" was used to classify men whose occupation required them to do much reading.

and writing, but it also applied to one of the lower Orders conferred upon young men who were preparing for Holy Orders. Although no real person is represented in this clerk, Chaucer drew an ideal one from the characteristics which he selected from amongst the students of both Cambridge and Oxford Universities. For over a hundred years prior to Chaucer's time, young men looking forward to Ordination were required to attend the university as can be seen from the answer that Nicholas Breakespeare, later Pope Adrian IV, received when he asked to be admitted as a novice to the Augustinian Order.

Chaucer's clerk had long studied "Logic and Philosophy of Aristotle". This was characteristic of many scholars of the Middle Ages, some of whom were amongst the most intellectual men of the world. "Indeed this poet's (Chaucer's) sympathetic description of the shy little clerk is doubtless fairly typical of many of these scholars so

poor in this world's goods and yet so rich in the treasures of the mind".

Although this clerk was a philosopher, he did not believe, as the alchemists of that day did, that minerals were endowed with life, that they were constantly developing in the ground, and that by certain combinations of metals their elements would develop from the meaner metals into gold. For instance, alchemists believed that metals consisted of a fusible mercury and a hardening sulphur and that the quality of the metal varied according to the purity of either one of these elements, so alchemists sought a drug to perfect these metals. This science must have been a sort of medieval forerunner of Chemistry. But it was Chemistry mixed with magic because of the search for the philosopher's (meaning "alchemist" in this case) stone which would change baser metals into gold through its magic art.

However, "some permanent chemical knowledge was acquired as a by-product of alchemical research, and the most recent chemical theories and ex-

2. Traill, op. cit., p. 373.
periments incline us to much greater tolerance toward these early attempts to transmute one metal into another." ¹

The Physician, richly clad in a purple and crimson surcoat and a blue hood trimmed with white fur, corresponds to a well known physician of that time, John Burgoyne, who passes as Sir ²

John Mandeville. This physician was grounded in "Astronomye", as were the physicians of the time. In the statutes of New College at Oxford given in 1387, medicine and astronomy were mentioned as one and the same science. ³ The Arabian medical authorities that are listed in (1.429 - 1.435) were great astronomers of the Middle Ages, and they are to be credited for having given us the medical beliefs of that time. ⁴

Magic was also made use of by the physicians of that time. Red lights and red flannels were used to cure the scars of small-pox, and the heads and wings of crickets were made into oil for killing pain. Roger Clerk tried to cure a

¹. Hulme, The Middle Ages, p. 804.
². Traill, op. cit., p. 86.
³. Warton, op. cit., p. 203.
woman by making her wear a certain parchment on her bosom.

The physician knew the "cause of every maladye - were it hoo1t, or cold, or moyste, or drye and where they engendred, and of what humour." The excess of one of the humors, heat, cold, moisture or dryness over the others was a medieval belief regarding sickness not only during Chaucer's time but even in Carden's time who lived about one hundred fifty years later. The latter physician diagnosed Archbishop Hamilton's case of asthma and decided that the fluid expectorated was brought into the lungs from the brain. This fluid was thought to have formed in the brain because of undue heat in the brain which produced suction and thus carried the phlegm into the lungs through the coats of the windpipe. From this it can be seen that it was only natural for people of the fourteenth century to have been firmly rooted in

3. Idem.
medical beliefs which were still relied upon a century and a half later.

It must have been the marked personality of these professional men and the queer practices and peculiar beliefs that led Chaucer to choose men from these rather than from the other professions of the England of his time.

V The Country Group

The old Epicurian Frankeleyn whom Chaucer so fittingly portrayed is a good model of the kind of country gentlemen of that period of history. Their estates consisted of free land whose tenure was immediately from the King, and they were not subject to feudal services or payments.

This particular Frankeleyn had been "knight of the shire" or representative in Parliament for his district. He also served as "shirrev", or king's administrative representative of his country, a "countour" or comptroller, and auditor and a "vavasour" or sub-vassal. Careful investigation of records for men who possessed all the foregoing executive traits led John Manly to come to the conclusion that of the eight men of Parli-

ament whose records were investigated, because of similar services, John Bussy's fulfills the requirements. Therefore Chaucer, in this portrayal undoubtedly drew a picture of a real country gentleman. The dramatic power through which Chaucer later made him express himself in the beautiful tale of the fidelity of the much admired Dorigenvaragus, makes him appear a true representative of his type of people.

Chaucer portrayed his Frankeleyn as a lover of comfort and happiness as can be seen from lines 334 - 338 of the Prologue:

"Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn. To liven in delyt was ever his wone, For he was Epicurus owne sone, That heeld opiinioun that pleyn delyt Was verraily felicitee parfyte."

These few lines could be appropriately applied to country squires of Chaucer's England. They believed in comfort and happiness, in good wine and bountiful dinners of fox which these squires had the servants prepare for him and for his companions after the hunt.

Chaucer also pictured his Frankeleyn as a patron of hospitality. He called him the "Saint Iulian" of his country. This particular saint was considered the patron of travelers then, as he is at the present time, because people pray to him for protection and safety while on a journey.

The Frankeleyn's house was never "without bake mete". (1.343) Venison was to be found hanging in the homes of country squires during the summer and autumn months and in the winter, "partrich hadde he in mewe", that is, in his coop, just as was the custom at that time.

"It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke,
Of all deyntees that men coude thynke.
After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
So chaunged he his mete and his soper."

The above lines also help to contribute toward revealing hospitality of Merry England Frankeleyns of Chaucer's time. During certain times "the sondry sesons", country squires entertained not only the people of the manor, but also the villagers

1. Ibid., p. 197.
and farmers of the parish. On these occasions it was customary for the entire parish to assemble at the manor to join in merriment and feasting, and the country squires tried to make all people happy and contented, as he himself believed in being.

The Plowman living in "pees and parfit char-itee" was meant to represent the peasant laborers of the time. The "tabard" or sleeveless overcoat worn by him was the type of dress proper to tillers of the soil. "A trewe swinker and a good was he" and, like Piers Plowman, (1.1-58 B. text passus VI) he thought nothing of laboring hard to enable the knight to go hunting and abroad to protect the Church from harm. The plowman was usually one of the regular servants of the manor but he was paid only about six shillings each year besides his usual allowance of grain. A laborer who held thirty acres

1. Ibid., p. 187.
of land had to work three days each week on his lord's land. He had no civil rights but did possess independence in his home.

The portrayal of this humble laborer's attitude toward work shows that these laborers must have been contented with their lot and that they were as John Selden later said, "cheerful, jocund and full of song." This honest laborer was, no doubt, intended to represent the Christian ideal among the peasants of his England.

The Miller of Trumpington, wearing a white coat and a blue hood, was another portrait that was drawn from real life. Investigation proves that he was Sir Roger of Trumpington. Like Chaucer's miller who "wel coude stelen corn", the millers of that time were notorious for their dishonesty. It was customary for them to hold back a larger portion of grain than they should have in payment for grinding the grain that was brought to them. "A thombe of gold" was a familiar term of the time that was used to de-

1. Wilmot Buxton, op. cit., p. 81.
scribe the miller's skill in testing the quality of the flour between his thumb and fingers.  

The miller, as well as the prioress, squire and friar, was doing his part toward furnishing music for the entertainment of the pilgrims. The bagpipe was his instrument. It was one of the famous musical instruments used by the minstrels of the time for, Fox in his "Acts and Monuments" gives an account of the bagpipe being used by pilgrims when passing through towns to serve as entertainment. The bagpipe was the instrument that was used to entertain Edward III so this cunning miller was not behind time when it came to giving the pilgrims the type of music that was in demand at the time.

Although there are strokes of satire in the description of the Reeve, nevertheless, the long passages telling about his responsibilities are true to life of the time. A reeve was a bailiff of an English estate. Of course, a fourteenth

2. Cutts, op. cit., p. 179.
century estate was far different from one of today. It consisted of a number of scattered manors. A steward presided over the entire estate, and over each manor a bailiff or reeve, was given charge. This reeve was responsible to his steward for the running of the manor entrusted to his supervision. A manor generally included all the land surrounding the village in which the workmen lived, who were to work the surrounding territory according to the bailiff's instructions. He gave orders regarding the care of his livestock, he kept account of the seed and grain, guarded the property against damage and theft, and he superintended the laborers. It was his duty to watch laborers and to correct their shortcomings.

The office of reeve was by no means an easy task for besides the above responsibilities the reeves were also responsible for each other because a lord could fine an entire township if he failed to get satisfactory results from only one

1. Ibid., p. 92.
district. For this reason men tried to evade the responsibilities of this office by offering to pay as much as twenty shillings in order to be excused from these responsibilities.

VI The Town Group

The Shipman who had encountered many a tempest and who "knew alle the havenes... and every cryke in Britayne and Spayne" was an example of the daring race that was accustomed to the hardships of a sailor's life. This shipman was captain of the Maudelayne. Researches of scholars throw light upon this particular captain. They prove that either George Countree or Peter Resshender was the person whom Chaucer had reference to. This shipman reflects a tinge of the illegitimate trade that existed at that time, for Chaucer mentioned that "of nyce conscience took he no keep, and by water sente hem hoom to every lond."

From investigations we learn that he even threw overboard the crew of the ships that he helped to

1. Traill, op. cit., p. 94.
The frequent wars between England and France throughout that century offered opportunity for privateering. English shipmen had recourse to this illegal profession as well as the French shipmen did.

Chaucer's Shipman was from Dartmouth, which was at that time one of the leading ports of his England. At that time Dartmouth was surpassed in ships and sailors only by Yarmouth and Fowey, as can be seen from a check up on the Royal Navy, at the time of the siege of Calais in 1347. Then the Royal Navy consisted of only twenty-five ships, that carried only seventeen men each, and of seven hundred thirty-eight ships, and fourteen thousand nine hundred fifty-six men were furnished by English ports. Of this total amount Dartmouth furnished thirty-one ships and one thousand nine hundred five sailors.

In all probability Chaucer's Shipman reflects, to some extent, at least, the dealings

2. Thompson, op. cit., p. 583.
which Chaucer had with certain shipmen while he was at the Customs. A record which Miss Rickert found a few years ago proves that he actually went down from the Customs to Dartmouth to make investigations concerning a certain ship called "the Maudelayne" which John Howley, the mayor of Dartmouth, was accused of having robbed. Chaucer lets us draw our own conclusion regarding shipmen of that period. "He does not argue but lets us see his fools in their own foolishness".

The "Wif of Bathe", in her conspicuous attire, presents a picture of the women of her class. Chaucer's observation of the outlandishness of dress, the speech, actions and the mannerisms of women, the brilliant colored head-dresses, the shoes "ful moyste and newe" were all characteristics of the dress of women of that time. Her face "reed of hewe" was in keeping with the times for women of her type, because cosmetics were used to a great extent and they


were frequently applied with more earnestness than skill.

The fact that this "good wif" came from Bathe shows that she must have been connected with the weaving industry of that place, for women took an active part in cloth making at Bathe.

The "fyne scarlet reed hosen" worn by this woman show that she was properly dressed for horseback riding. As a rule, women of that time did not sit sideways as the Prioress did, but they rode astride. The manuscript of the Decretals in the British Museum, represents the ladies all riding astride. The saddles for men and women were made exactly alike, for both had tall backs for the purpose of making them comfortable. The "wymple referred to (1.470) was a head covering of stiff linen worn by women of that time.

1. Idem.
2. Wilmot Buxton, op. cit., p. 95.
Chaucer's portrayal of this woman is somewhat humorously and ironically drawn, nevertheless, he drew a portrait of a middle aged woman whose speech, actions and emotional reactions came under his observation. He left us an insight into the personality of a great many middle aged women of his time. We must admit that he was a poet who recognized the inner beauty of womanhood and that he saw with reverence, the spiritual side of marriage. His model for women was the patient Grisilda, whose story was so beautifully told by the Clerk of Oxenford, but most women of that time modeled themselves after the famous "Wif of Bathe", who was so revengeful, arrogant and whimsical; and so bent on pleasure and show.

VII The City Group

The gentle Maunciple was a purchasing officer or steward of the Inns of Court. The master of these Inns were learned men, lawyers, who acquired the inns which had formerly belonged to

2. Salzman, op. cit., p. 256.
noblemen. They organized into sorts of clubs which had about them something of a guild, as well as educational characteristics. Chaucer did not give a portrayal of any particular individual in this sketch, but he presented the Maunciple simply to show the cunning attitude of the servants of the Inns of Court who were able to defraud their learned managers. He is described as a man without an education, but his inborn wit surpassed "the wisdom of an heep of learned men" because he was able to swindle the "thries ten" benches of the Inns of Court who were skilled in the law and fit for trustees of any estate in England.

The Marchant with a "forked berd" and wearing a "Flaundryssh bevere hat" represented that class of wholesale traders of Chaucer's time who were termed "Marchant". These traders were divided into two classes, namely: "merchants of the staple" and "merchant adventurers".

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1. Traill, op. cit., p. 479.
former were wool merchants who were chartered by the king and incorporated under the governance of a major in 1354. Through these merchants all wool, hides and leather had to be handled in trade. Their places for marketing goods were fixed by law. Sometimes the market was at Antwerp or Bruges, but usually at Calais. Between 1384 and 1389 the market was at Middleborough.

At the close of the fourteenth century the merchant adventurers were running in competition with merchants of the staple. They manufactured cloth and sold it abroad rather than selling the raw material as the merchants of the staple did. They separated from the Mercers Company of London, of which they were a part, and they secured a charter for an independent organization in 1447. These merchant adventurers carried on trade in foreign goods. They did not possess a large stock of goods, nor have large wholesale

1. Power, op. cit., p. 112.
houses as the merchants of today do, but they bought their merchandise in small amounts from the craftsmen as they traveled from place to place, thereby enabling them to have on hand a sufficient stock to make sales successfully. They carried on foreign trade with Flanders at that time, but Bruges was also an important place for exchanging wool fells and coal.

In 1372 the English were defeated by the French and Spanish navies off La Rochelle and they lost command of the sea until they gained their great victory at Cadzand in 1387, so Chaucer's "Marchant" rightly voiced the crying need of English commerce during that time.

The Guildmen

"An Haberdassher, a Carpenter, a Webbe, a Dyere, and a Tapyser", all clothed in a "lyveree of a solempne and a great fraternitee" were examples of men belonging to the fourteenth cen-

1. Hulme, The Middle Ages, p. 604.
3. Coulton, op. cit., p. 133.
tury craft guilds. Workmen of that time banded themselves together into a common guild. This was done for the purpose of protecting their individual trade interests, to keep up the standard of their lines of work and to prevent foreigners from competing with them.

"Everich for the wisdom that he kan, was shaply for to been an alderman."

The guildmen of that period could appropriately have been called "aldermen" for to them was intrusted the carrying out of the civic and social duties of the town. These men regulated the hours and days of labor, they set the amount of compensation for laborers, they imposed fines for making use of short weights and measures, and they assisted the sick and needy. The guild authorities also took charge of the mystery plays, and they supervised certain types of Church work. It was also their duty to impose

1. Hulme, History of the British People, p. 128.
2. Wilmot Buxton, op. cit., p. 70.
fines upon their fellow tradesmen for breaking the by-laws of their trade union.

The description which Chaucer so fittingly gave of the men "Clad in the lyveree" of their guild, reflects also the kind of religious badge worn by fourteenth century craftmen. They were bound to exercises of practical charity by their guild statutes. The religious connection was similar to our sodalities or other religious confraternities, with their exercises of devotion. However, each craft guild had its own patron saint and held regular devotional exercises of a religious nature in honor of its own patron. Undoubtedly there is some truth in Professor Manly's suggestion that perhaps these particular craft men belonged to a confraternity of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, the patron saint of merchants.

When the merchant guilds were formed, the craftmen were not allowed to sell to the public.

but only to the merchants, so the craftmen organized themselves into guilds also. There were three grades of workers in these craftmen guilds, namely; the apprentice, the journeyman and the master. The apprentice entered the trade when still in his teens, and after serving his term of apprenticeship, which usually lasted about seven years, he was permitted to join the second group of workers - the journeymen.

The journeyman spent his time in villages far away from home, where he tried to perfect himself in his trade. Then he presented to his master a piece of work, and if it met with the latter's approval, he too became a master of that trade.

Why Chaucer presented these five craftmen without giving more of a portrayal is left for interested scholars to try to solve. Perhaps the group of workmen did not attract the poet, or else he intended to reserve their characterization for the prologues of their respective

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1. Hulme, The Middle Ages, p. 605.

tales. This intention, however, never found fulfillment if it did exist in the poet's mind.

The London Cook, Roger Hagge of Ware, is presented as being a good cook of all kinds of meat. He could "broile the chicknes with the mary bones...and make blankmanger". (1.390 f.) The impression left after reading the sketch of this character in the Prologue, leads one to conclude that meat was one of the favorite dishes of Chaucer's time. In Warner's Antiquitates Culinariae (pp. 34 and 35) the menu of a three course banquet proves that such was the case. The following dishes of meat were served at a certain royal banquet:

First Course.

fylettes - that is pieces of meat rolled up with bread crumbs and spices.
gross cheer - which consisted of mutton or beef, capon, or pheasants,
Chewetys - made from flesh meat or fish

Second Course.

porcellys - that is, suckling pigs,
conynge - which was a sort of rabbit stew,
puleyng - a sort of partridge,
brawne bruse - which consisted of any kind of broiled meat.
Third Course.  

1 snytys — or snipes.

In the various dishes mentioned by Chaucer, which the cook was fond of preparing, other spices besides "galyngale" were required in the preparation of the meats mentioned, because spices entered into almost every dish. It was necessary to use spices freely because meat was not always properly cured, so spices were used to kill the taste of meat that would otherwise have been unfit for food.

Although the cook was one of the characters selected from the humble walks of life, and from amongst the lowest class of people, Chaucer, nevertheless, must have considered it necessary to select a man of the cook's type in order to make his work appear complete and to display life in reality.

"Oure Hooste" is presented as a person of quick wit, sly humor, and as one who was acquainted

2. Ibid., p. 436.
with, and knew how to deal with all sorts of
men. Perhaps he was a friend of Chaucer's for
he and Henry Baily represented Southwerk in Par-
liament during 1376 and 1378. An innkeeper
by that name also lived there about that time,
so it is almost certain that this character was
a reality. In conversation with the pilgrims,
the evening before their setting out on the pil-
grimage, he portrayed his own character. Life,
of that period, is not reflected in his character-
ization, except in so far as the mirth and game
of Merry England indirectly manifest themselves.

Incidently, Chaucer also gave us a picture
of himself, for besides the "nyne and twenty"
pilgrims, he was also one of the band whom he
represented as going on that memorable journey.
One thinks of him as being among the group, but
avoiding as far as possible, the notice of his
companions. Beneath his good humour and the
twinkle in his eye one can see a great deal of
his philosophy. His portrayal of life indirectly

shows that life then, as now, was comfortable for the rich, and much less so, for the poor. The shortcomings of his pilgrims he exposed, but he has also proven that there "lived men of honest industry and sincere piety" in the England of his time. His satire is not cutting, but it only leads one to look upon and judge mankind with toleration instead of contempt.

VIII Conclusion

Chaucer's greatest achievement was the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. It not only possesses variety, humor and reality, but it also reflects the life of the people drawn from all the social ranks of his England. In the Knightly Group of pilgrims he represented through the "Knyght", that group of high minded patriotic class of young men who had fought against the Saracens, the Moors, and the Slavic tribes of Russia during the second half of the fourteenth

1. Minto, op. cit., p. 47.
century. Although chivalry was failing to adopt itself to the changes of life outside the castle and to the methods of warfare, the comments on this pilgrim show that jousts and tournaments were still held at that time and that the knight took part in them when not employed on the battle field. The young "Squier" who accompanied the Knight is, in my estimation, a representative of the brilliant youth of Chaucer's England. This reveals itself in the dress, duties, aims and accomplishments that are attributed to this character. Chaucer seems to have infused into this pilgrim his own characteristics and personality, so one is inclined to see in the Squire not only the youth of England at large, but Chaucer himself as he was when a young man at the court of Edward III. The "Yeman", according to certain commentators, represented the sturdy English yeomanry class who with their six-foot bow and yard-long shafts feathered from gray goose wings, defeated the French at Crecy and at Agincourt during the Hundred Years' War. However, I believe Chaucer intended this pilgrim merely as an attendant for the Knight,
since he already attributed the qualities of bravery in battle to this former pilgrim.

In his presentation of the Ecclesiastical Group of pilgrims, Chaucer included those who were in any way connected with the administration of the medieval Church. Through the group of Ecclesiastical pilgrims whom he so vividly portrayed in the Prologue, he endeavored to present a picture more or less satirical. The worldly "Monk" who was so fond of hunting, and the Merry "Frere" who possessed such a charming gift of speech, no doubt deserved criticism. Since Chaucer was the first English poet who was not in some way or other connected with the Church, he felt free to satirize those Religious whom he saw not living up to the rules of their Order. Thomas Walsingham, a Monk and a contemporary of Chaucer's voiced the same sentiment against certain Religious in his authoritative work "The English History", when he said that they were unmindful of their profession and forgot the end for which their Order was instituted.

The "Prioress", her "Chapeleyne", the
"Nonnes Preest" and the "Poure Persoun of a Toun" were meant to represent those of the Church group who truly labored for their own perfection and for furthering the causes of Religion and the Social Life of the people. The "Somnour" and the "Pardonner" were included in this group of pilgrims simply because they were "hangers on" to the Church administration during Chaucer's life time. His treatment of these two officers was good natured and tolerant because many Summoners of that time misused their rights and many Pardoners were fakers, so he could have given them much harsher treatment. In his portrayal of this group of pilgrims Chaucer did not intend to cast reflection on the Church, for he was a man who loved and cherished his Faith. He truly considered the Church a Divine institution, but he realized that it was run by human beings very much like ourselves, so his criticism and satire were intended merely for those who were not conscientiously fulfilling the duties of their high office.

The Professional Group of pilgrims included only three members, but these three were a good
representation of the leading professions of the time. In the "Clerk of Oxenford" Chaucer presented an ideal young man, or rather only a type, who was meant to represent those young men of his England who possessed that great enthusiastic passion for learning which was already astir in Europe at that time. The "Doctour of Phisik" was portrayed so as to throw light upon the medieval medicine and upon magic and astrology as being closely associated with medicine. Chaucer was intensely interested in the magical remedies which physicians had recourse to in his day. He even intended to write a treatise on the subject as a part of the Astrolabe, but he did not succeed in carrying out his plan. The "Sergeant, of the Lawe" represented the most esteemed profession of Chaucer's time. Perhaps it came to be so esteemed because Sergeants were allowed to consult with their clients at the Church door as Chaucer's "Sergeant" did. Then too the fact that these sergeants were in absolute possession of an English estate and because they were given special recognition by the king helped to make them rank high, both professionally and
socially, in the estimation of all.

The Country Group of pilgrims represented the four different classes of country folk of that time. The country gentlemen who lived in comfort and happiness were represented through the "Franke leyn". The poor laboring men of the soil and the peasants can be seen in the portrayal of the "Plowman" who is described as a "trewe swynkere and a good". (1.531) The "Miller" was a portrait of those country folk who were dishonest but could manifest an outward show of happiness in spite of the conscience that must have troubled them. In the "Reeve" Chaucer pictured that class of country folk upon whom was imposed the task of satisfactorily assuming the responsibilities of serving as bailiff of an English estate.

The Town Group of pilgrims consisted of only the Shipman and the Wife of Bathe, but they were typical representatives of the town folk of Chaucer's day. Since Chaucer had come into actual contact with shipmen while he was employed at the Customs he was justified in portraying his pilgrim as he did. Investigations prove that shipmen of his
time were dishonest and given to privateering and to cruel treatment of those whom they captured. His mentioning that the Shipman was from Dartmouth has led to investigations which prove that Dartmouth was at that time one of England's leading ports.

Chaucer's presentation of the Wife of Bath's traits could have been applied to the women of that time in many respects. Women dressed in bright colors, the "reed hosen" were characteristic of the kind worn by women when riding horse back. The description of the head dress and wimple were also typical of those worn by women of his day. The "reed hewe" of her cheeks which was not natural color was also characteristic of the time, since women of her type used cosmetics for the purpose of making themselves appear beautiful.

Chaucer's City Group of pilgrims was representative of that new social class of people or city folk, which resulted eventually from the Crusades. At the head of this group might be placed the "Marchant". He was a portrait of the Merchant Adventurers who carried on foreign trade
but made the English ports their headquarters. The "Haberdassher", "Carpenter", "Webbe", "Dyere" and "Tapycer" represented the Craft Guilds of England. They demanded a share in the government of their cities because good or bad city government influenced business. Whether it was or was not Chaucer's intention; at present, one can see how these five Guildsmen and the Merchant could have represented the manufacturing and mercantile activities which were beginning to make England a great commercial power.

In the "Maunciple" and the "Cook" Chaucer gave a picture of the domestics of his time. In the Maunciple he characterized those clever servants who could so easily defraud their masters. The Cook represented those of his class who knew how to satisfy the stewards of those hearty old times with palatable dishes of peacock, goose, mutton, mince pie, plum porridge and the liquor for the "wassail bowl".

The last of the City Group, "Oure Hooste", whom Chaucer so dramatically portrayed might be said to represent that class of English diplomats
who so artfully tried and succeeded in pleasing everyone. Through his rough tact, his tincture of shrewdness and his jolly good nature, he certainly played his part well.

The above mentioned "nyne and twenty sondry folk" whom Chaucer so realistically portrayed give us a vivid picture of the manners, dress, speech and ways of thinking of the different classes of people of his time. Although he merely selected them from the men and women whom he saw around him, he has certainly put human interest and reality into the entire Prologue. Through the various pilgrims whom he portrayed therein, he has left us an unfading picture of the life of the latter part of the fourteenth century, and, the secret of his charm has kept the Prologue alive after a lapse of over five hundred years. It will continue to be of historic value; and as a piece of descriptive verse, it will remain unique in English literature. "There is ", as Coulton says, "no such wonderful gallery of finished portraits, nor any drama so true both to common life and to perfect art"."
The author of this Prologue which is so thoroughly English in tone and in spirit, well deserved the lament which Thomas Hacceleve composed in honor of him whom he considered "the londes verray tresour and richesse".

"But wele away, so is myn herte wo, That the honour of English tongue is dead Of which I was wonte to have counseil and rede. O maister dere and fadir reverent My maister Chaucer, floure of eloquence, Mirror of fructuous entendement, O universal fadir of science. Alas! that thou thyne excellent prudence In thy bedde mortel myghtest not bequethe, What eyled Dethe? alas, why-wold he sle the? O Dethe, that didest not harme singulere In slaughter of hym, but all this lond it smerteth, But nothelless yet hast thou no powere His name to slee, his highe virtue asterteth Unsleyne fro thee, which ay us lyfly herteth With books of his orhat endityng That to all this lond enlumynyng."


22. Houston, Percy H., Main Currents in English Literature, S.F. Crofts & Co. 1926.


