THE CONTRIBUTION OF SCHOLARSHIP TOWARD AN
UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION
OF CHAUCER

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OF CHAUCER

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INTRODUCTION

In the more than five hundred years since the death of Geoffrey Chaucer, scholars have labored steadfastly to bring to light early criticisms of the poet's works, comments on his life and the customs of his time, and any recorded facts that would contribute in any way toward a better understanding and appreciation of the Canterbury Tales, the poet's life, and the practices of his age.

It is the purpose of this study to show this contribution of scholarship; and the writer has relied heavily upon the publications made by T. R. Lounsbury, Caroline Spurgeon, and F. N. Robinson, each of whom has brought together the results of scholarship up to his own time and without whose works this writer's task would have been impossible.
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CHAPTER I

A HISTORY OF CHAUCER'S LITERARY REPUTATION

In 1954, five and a half centuries after the death of Geoffrey Chaucer, scholars are still searching for and finding bits of information which they hope will lead to even greater understanding and knowledge of the English poet than already exists. It is almost impossible for the layman to imagine the great strides that have been made in recent years. For a period of approximately two centuries, from 1600 to 1800, all interest in Chaucer was lost, and only the earnest efforts of scholars determined not to allow the misconceptions of ignorance to obscure forever the work of one of the greatest poets of the English language have restored him to the reading public.

The literary reputation of Chaucer has suffered the vicissitudes of neglect and inattention. During the antiquarian movement of the eighteenth century, scholars showed us how to love and appreciate Chaucer for his work instead of for his antiquity. Since then, scholarly work has continued, and today we find Chaucer's works being read in our schools and colleges and even in some homes. His stories may be enjoyed by an ever-increasing number of people who read Middle English, or they may be read in translation by those who do not have this linguistic ability.
There is little recorded evidence of any very discriminating judgment of Chaucer's reputation in his own time, but he must have been held in rather high esteem for his works to have survived to the present day. The records which have come down to us from his friends are unanimous in his praise. Like most writers, he doubtless suffered adverse criticism, but his own poetry is the only evidence of it. He often anticipates an attack on his poetry with a defense, as when he defends the suddenness with which Gris-eyde is filled with love for Troilus thus:

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Now myghte som envious jangle thus:
'This was a sodeyn love; how myght it be
That she so lightly loved Troilus,
Right for the firste syghte, ye parde?
Now whoso seith so, mote he nevere ythe:
For every thyng, a gynyng hath it nede
Er al be wrought, withouten any drede.'
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John Gower, contemporary with Chaucer, comments repeatedly on the universality of Chaucer's reputation and the popularity of his writings. One such reference is the following, in which Venus is made to say:

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And gret wel Chaucer when ye mete,
As mi disciple and mi poete:
For in the floures of his youte
In sondri wise, as he wel couthe,
Of Ditees and of songes glade,
The whiche he for mi sake made,
The lend fulfild is overal:
Wherof to him in special
Above alle othre I am most holde.'
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1Geoffrey Chaucer, Poetical Works, edited by F. N. Robinson, p. 477, ll. 666-679. All following line references will be to this edition.

Another of Chaucer's contemporaries, Henry Scogan, calls Chaucer "the noble poet of Britain" and speaks of him as his master, in a poem which he addressed to the lords and gentlemen of the king's house. Scogan was "lord of Haviles (1391), but apparently frequented court in London and there made the acquaintance of Chaucer, whose disciple he became."

On the evidence of the English scholar, Caroline Spurgeon, we find that by far the most fervent praise of Chaucer came from two who were personally acquainted with him, Occleve and Lydgate, both of whom recognized Chaucer's superiority as an indisputable fact. Although he praises Chaucer highly, calling him "the firste fynder of our faire language," Occleve gives us only one brief glimpse of his actual relations with the poet in these lines from his "Regement of Princes":

Mi dere maistir—god his soule quyte!—
And fadir, Chaucer, fayn wolde han me taght;
But I was dul, and lerned lite or nught. (2077-79)

But perhaps our greatest debt to Occleve is a limning, or water-color drawing, by an unknown artist, possibly a court painter, which he included in his "Regement" opposite the following lines:

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3Thomas R. Leunsbury, Studies in Chaucer, III, 10.


5Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, I, xii.

Although his lyfe be queynt the resemblaunce
Of him hath in me so fressh lyflynesse
That to putte othir men in remembraunce
Of his persone I haue heere his lyknesse
Do make to this ende on sothfastnesse
That thei that haue of him lest thought & mynde
By this peynture may ageyn him fynde. (4992-5)

This portrait, together with some nine others, has been made available to us through the scholarly efforts of W. H. Spielmann, who has chosen the ten portraits of Chaucer which to him seem the best ones and has made a critical study of the minute details of each in order to establish its worth.

The Occeleve portrait was admittedly painted from memory, but it is the only one which scholars generally accept as authentic. It not only appears that Occeleve knew Chaucer well enough to have a vivid recollection of him, but it is likely that the artist also had seen him in his comings and goings at Westminster.

Lydgate mentions Chaucer far more frequently, though possibly not so fervently as Occeleve. Many of his works are obviously imitations of Chaucer's style, and it may have been his inability to achieve the master's ease and fluency that led him to say "it will not be." Lydgate may have known Chaucer personally, or he may have had his information about the poet from the Chaucer family. We are

7W. H. Spielmann, Portraits of Geoffrey Chaucer, 1900.
8Ibid., p. 5. 9Ibid., p. 6, note.
10Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 11. 11Ibid.
12Spurgeon, op. cit., p. xii.
indebted to Brusendorff, a twentieth-century Danish critic, for the information that Lydgate was an intimate friend of the two generations of Chaucers following the poet's death, especially Thomas Chaucer. If we can accept the statement of Thomas Gascoigne, a fifteenth-century clergyman, that this Thomas Chaucer was the poet's son, then most certainly it was from the family that Lydgate received his information.

We turn again to modern scholarship to learn of Chaucer's reputation in foreign lands in his own time. Lounsbury notes the precise correspondence between the opening of Froissart's poem "Le Paradis d'Amour" and Chaucer's "Death of Blanche" and concludes that since the English poem was almost certainly written in 1369 and the French one in 1364, Froissart probably knew and imitated the work of Chaucer. The French critic Sandras, who naturally would not favor Chaucer, also admits that the English poem preceded the French one. It is interesting to note, however, that there is disagreement among scholars on this particular point. Robinson says that "Froissart was long supposed to be the borrower";

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14 Ibid. p. 36.
15 Lounsbury, *op. cit.*, III, 13. The French poem was not available to me.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Kittredge attempts to show that Chaucer definitely imitated Froissart for the purpose of humor through naivety. 19 Another French contemporary, Eustace Deschamps, after reading Chaucer's translation of the Roman de la Rose, refers to the poet, in a ballade addressed to him, as

Grand translateur, noble Geoffroy Chaucier. 20

In Scotland, then a foreign country to the English, Chaucer enjoyed wide popularity in the century following his death, although no contemporary literature has survived to give us the Scottish opinion of him during his lifetime; 21 but the early Scottish writers Henryson, Dunbar, Douglas, and Lyndsay mention him with a fervency of admiration. Robert Henryson says that he was moved to write his Testament of Cresseid after reading Troilus and Criseyde "writtin be worthie Chaucer glorius." 22 Gawin Douglas applied to Chaucer the epithet "fount of rhetoric"; 23 and William Dunbar apostrophized him thus:

O reverend Chaucere, rose of rhetoris all,  
As in our e tong ane flour imperial,  
That raise in Britane evir, quho redis ryght,  
Thou beris of Makaris the tryumph riall. 24

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19 George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, pp. 37 ff.
20 Brusendorff, op. cit., p. 486.
21 Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 15.
24 Rachell A. Taylor, Dunbar, The Poet and His Period, p. 45.
In general it can be said that the Scottish view was "one of unstinted admiration, complete comprehension of Chaucer's writings, and hearty acknowledgement of his superiority as artist to every other English or Scottish poet." 25

We have seen that Chaucer was highly regarded in his own age and in the fifteenth century. The sixteenth century, with the introduction of printing, provides much more concrete evidence of his reputation in the increasing demand for his works. 26 The sixteenth-century interest in Chaucer was not, however, purely literary. He had gained a reputation, "not for the beauty of his verse, but for the keenness of his satire and his exposure of the rottenness of religious life." 27 After reading his satirical portraits of the ecclesiastics in the Canterbury Tales, the Protestants took to him as opposing the Catholic Church, and the Puritan element acclaimed him as a reformer. 28 His poetry was, however, appreciated and praised by one of the greatest poets of the age, Edmund Spenser, who called him "welle of Englysh unde fyld." 29 But despite Spenser's admiration for him, such writers as Sir Philip Sidney and William Webbe criticized

25 Spurgeon, op. cit., p. xvi.
26 Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 33.
27 Ibid., p. 34. 28 Ibid., p. 35.
him for what they considered his uneven meter. Lounsbury has summed up the sixteenth-century evaluation of him thus:

Chaucer, in spite of his ill-understood grammar, his misunderstood versification, and his obsolete words, continued yet to reign without a rival.

In the seventeenth century, especially in the middle and latter half, Chaucer's reputation reached the lowest point to which it ever fell. Spurgeon has shown that for a period of eighty-five years, from 1602 to 1687, no new impression of his complete works was made, the longest period of inactivity in Chaucerian scholarship since the beginning of printing. To some extent, however, the lack of interest was due to causes other than literary or linguistic, in that political issues had overshadowed literary interests.

Politics cannot account for all the neglect, however; for the secret of Chaucer's versification had been lost, and the poet's rank in the seventeenth century as the head of English poetry was a purely conventional one. There were two sharply-defined schools of thought concerning Chaucer in the seventeenth century: that he was a rude writer of a rude age, and that he was a clear, graceful, polished poet. Since the followers of the first-named school seemed to be in the

30Spurgeon, op. cit., p. xxv.
31Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 44.
32Ibid., p. 73.
33Spurgeon, op. cit., p. xxviii.
34Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 73.
35Ibid., p. 80.
majority, we find little interest in Chaucer until the days of the Restoration.36 One of the earliest references to him in the seventeenth century occurs in Pepys' Diary in 1663:

Among other things Sir John Minnes brought many fine expressions of Chaucer, which he declares on mightily, and without doubt he is a very fine poet.37

In December of the same year Pepys, considering the purchase of a copy of Chaucer, said:

I could not tell whether to lay out my money for books of pleasure, as plays, which my nature was most earnest in; ... but at last, after seeing Chaucer ... I at last chose [books] ... all of good use or serious pleasure.38

In 1664 the diarist mentions39 having his book of Chaucer repaired; so he must have obtained a copy and read it a great deal.

In 1667 there appeared a reprint of a previous edition of Chaucer, which proves a slightly reviving interest in the poet, but references to him in other works of the time show that those who professed to know him were completely ignorant of him. Their interest was based on hearsay rather than on a reading knowledge. They seemed to be aware of the "comic vein"40.

36Ibid., p. 85.
37Samuel Pepys, The Diary, edited by Henry B. Wheatley, I, 163, June 14, 1663.
38Ibid., p. 358, December 10, 1663.
39Ibid., II, 174, July 8, 1664.
40Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 93.
in his writings but were apparently without knowledge of his other abilities. There were, of course, exceptions; but in general he was no longer a living, breathing source. It was at this time that he ceased to be "learned" Chaucer; he was merely "old" Chaucer and was accordingly treated with respectful admiration, regardless of the little that was known of what he wrote. Joseph Addison recognized the general neglect which the poet suffered at the time:

Long had our dull forefathers slept supine,  
Nor felt the raptures of the tuneful Nine;  
Till Chaucer first, a merry bard, arose,  
And many a story told in rhyme and prose.  
But age has rusted what the poet writ,  
Worn out his language and obscured his wit:  
In vain he jests in his unpolished strain  
And tries to make his readers laugh in vain.  

Many false beliefs and misconceptions hindered the revival of interest which accompanied the antiquarian movement in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. According to Lounsbury, the eighteenth-century conception of Old English was "common English written in an uncommon way, filled with strange words and words in strange senses and disfigured by grammar which would have puzzled grammarians in any epoch." The language which resulted was never spoken by anybody since the English language began to exist on its own. The greatest blunders were made in grammar, however, not in vocabulary. Imitators of Chaucer set up as a

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41 Ibid., p. 94.
42 Quoted by Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 95.
43 Ibid., pp. 121-4.
standard an obscene story, ungrammatical language, and rugged verse, of which the last two were insisted upon. They succeeded in blending the standards, but the obscenity resulting was strictly an eighteenth-century product, a fondness for filth as filth. Their mistaking the frankness of the Middle Ages for love of obscenity on Chaucer's part was evidence of two differing points of view: the fourteenth-century poet used sin and immorality for humorous effect and for satire on the clergy, whereas the eighteenth-century imitator made sin not an accident in the tales nor an incident in them, but the thing for which the story was told.

During the nineteenth century there are evidences on all sides of genuine love for, and interest in, Chaucer. Such writers as Ruskin, Leigh Hunt, Keats, and the Pre-Raphaelite poets are all high in their praise. Hunt said:

Chaucer, for all he was 'a man of this world' as well as the poets' world, . . . was one of the profoundest masters of pathos that ever lived . . . .

Chaucer has the strongest imagination of real life, beyond any writers but Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, and in comic painting inferior to none.

Next to Homer and Shakespeare come such narrators as . . . the universal, profoundly simple Chaucer.

Charles Armitage Brown, Keats' friend and biographer, says that Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare were the young poet's household gods; and another critic speaks of Keats' "idol

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44Leigh Hunt, Imagination and Fancy, p. 15.
47Charles Armitage Brown, Life of John Keats, p. 42.
All this appreciation, however, was based on a still incomplete knowledge of the poet.

During the century, however, it became possible for others than those with strictly literary tastes to know Chaucer. Noticeably in the twenty-five years before 1890, acquaintance with his works broadened. He was read in 1892 twelve times more than he was before that time. Since the latter half of the sixteenth century no period had shown such interest in him.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, studies in Chaucer have continued to lead the field in Middle English research. Some years have produced more than others, but the total production seems to warrant the statement that the reviving interest in Chaucer, which began so earnestly in the latter part of the nineteenth century, has continued to increase in the twentieth.

It has been possible to trace Chaucer's literary reputation chiefly through a study of the editions, imitations, translations and modernizations, which reflect the interest of people of the various centuries. Undoubtedly the advent of printing had much to do with spreading Chaucer's popularity. Before the end of the fifteenth century William Caxton had given us two editions of the Canterbury Tales.

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50 Lounsbury, *op. cit.*, III, 263.
and three more followed from the presses of his successors, Wynken de Worde and Pynson, all in the space of twenty-five years. 51

Between 1532 and 1561, inclusive, in addition to works already in circulation, there were four more editions of Chaucer's complete works. The first one, containing all the known pieces and many which were supposed to be Chaucer's, was brought out in 1532 by William Thynne, the first real editor of Chaucer. 52 Scholars are generally agreed that William Thynne's first edition was truly a labor of love, for Francis Thynne tells us in his Animadversions 53 that his father had a commission to search all the libraries of England for Chaucer's works. The remaining three editions of this group were the second edition of William Thynne in 1542, the edition printed "more or less" from Thynne's in 1550 (1545?), and the edition by John Stowe in 1561. 54

In 1598 Speght brought out an edition of Chaucer, followed by a second edition in 1602. A reprint in 1687 of this second edition marked the end of the eighty-five years, previously spoken of, during which no edition of Chaucer appeared. From that time to the present some very important

51 Ibid., p. 33.
52 Spurgeon, op. cit., p. xvi.
53 Francis Thynne, Animadversions, p. 5.
54 Ibid., p. xii.
editions have been published.\textsuperscript{55} John Urry's edition in 1721 made a small step forward in regulating the meter of Chaucer's poetry; Urry also deserves praise for noticing that the Tales are in distinct groups and for printing Chaucer for the first time in something besides black-letter type.\textsuperscript{56} Skeat's six-volume edition of the complete works, 1894, was the most satisfactory text available to scholars before the Robinson edition. The notes and introduction are full of valuable information.\textsuperscript{57} F. N. Robinson's edition, published in 1933, contains, in addition to the complete text, the results of the most important findings of scholars in the explanatory notes. Without doubt, Robinson's edition is superior to any previous work in general usefulness to the modern student of Chaucer.

Further evidence of Chaucer's eminence in the world of English letters is found in the number of Chaucerian imitators who have existed from the time of the poet, himself. We have noted the popularity of Chaucer in Scotland; hence it is not surprising to find that James I of Scotland (1394-1437), in the \textit{Kings Quair}, wrote in the Chaucerian stanza in acknowledged imitation of Chaucer.\textsuperscript{58} Henryson, too,

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{55}Spurgeon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. xvi. Miss Spurgeon lists a total of seven editions between 1801 and 1850, nine between 1851 and 1900, and two between 1901 and 1910.

\textsuperscript{56}Lounsbury, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 286,292.

\textsuperscript{57}R. K. Root, \textit{The Poetry of Chaucer}, p. 291.

\end{footnotes}
imitated Chaucer's seven-line stanza in his Testament of Cresseid (1475), and Bishop Douglas followed the pattern and story of the "Legend of Good Women" very closely in his "Palace of Honor."

In England Edmund Spenser was profoundly influenced by Chaucer's language and literary methods. He himself tells us,

\[ \text{The God of shepheards Tityrus is dead,} \\
\text{Who taught me homely, as I can, to make.} \]

He tried to use Chaucer's archaic diction, but he failed to understand it and often his words and grammar are far from correct.\(^60\)

Imitations existed in the seventeenth century, also—the earliest by Francis James in 1638, of which Lounsbury says, "James was altogether more Chaucerian than Chaucer himself."\(^61\) Caroline Spurgeon says that "the imitations of Chaucer were comparatively few in quantity, but they were fearful and wonderful in quality."\(^62\) The peculiarities of language which developed during the period of imitations have already been shown to be due to lack of knowledge of Chaucer's pronunciation and grammar, which, in turn, was responsible for the previously-mentioned standards of ungrammatical verses and obscene stories in the eighteenth-century imitations of Chaucer.

\(^{59}\) Edmund Spenser, The Shepheard's Calendar, "June Eclog," p. 81, ll. 81-2.

\(^{60}\) Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 63.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 115.  \(^{62}\) Spurgeon, op. cit., p. xlvii.
During the seventeenth century, when interest in Chaucer's works was low, efforts were made to revive him through translations. In 1635 Sir Francis Kynaston, a poet of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, attempted to translate Chaucer's works into Latin, thinking that Latin would be a language understood by all; but for some reason he never published the complete work, although he published the first two books of the Troilus. In the nineteenth century the interest in Chaucer extended to Germany, and the Canterbury Tales were made available in the native language through the industry of several scholars. C. L. Kannigiesser rendered the "Knight's Prologue and Tale," the "Franklin's Prologue and Tale," the "Pardoner's Tale," and the "Cook's Tale" in German verse (1827); E. Fiedler did the "Tales" of the Knight, the Miller, the Reeve, the Cook, and the Man of Law (1844); and Wilhelm Hertzberg translated the complete Tales (1866).

Because the difficulty of language had been the chief obstacle to an interest in Chaucer, it was thought that modernized versions of the poet's works would restore him to public appreciation. The first effort was John Dryden's Fables, published in 1700, a modernization of some of Chaucer's poems. The critic Mark Van Doren has praised Dryden

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63 J. C. Squire, Cambridge Book of Lesser Poets, p. 82.
64 Spurgeon, op. cit., p. xxxiii.
for his recognition of the problems inherent in such a task and for his manner of overcoming them in the face of difficulties, one of which was his failure to understand Chaucer's versification:

The verse of Chaucer, I confess, is not harmonious to us; ... they who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so, even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lidgate and Gower, his contemporaries; there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect.67

But because Dryden was himself a recognized critic, his dissertation accompanying the Fables helped to revive interest in Chaucer, although there were still some who felt that the original works should not be tampered with.

Alexander Pope also did his bit to help in the revival of interest in Chaucer's works. Where Dryden had expanded Chaucer's words, however, Pope reduced the original in his paraphrases. Chaucer's simile in the "Knight's Tale,"

As wilde bores gone they to smyte,
That frothen whyte as foam for ire wood,
becomes in Dryden's "Palamon and Arcite":

Or, as two boars whom love to battle draws,
With rising bristles, and with frothy jaws,
Their adverse breasts with tusks oblique they wound;
With grunts and groans the forest rings around.68

Conversely, Pope has reduced Chaucer's eleven hundred and seventy-two lines of the "Merchant's Tale" to eight hundred and twenty.69

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67Ibid., p. 231. 68Ibid., p. 233.
69Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 185.
Three men in particular attempted to simplify Chaucer for nineteenth-century readers: Lord Thurlow, a minor poet who contributed to the Gentleman's Magazine, the poet Wordsworth, and the poet Leigh Hunt. All of them aimed at making versification smooth, but they avoided the exact words of Chaucer. Thurlow strove to make rugged lines, but he "failed wofully." He "contributed . . . new words . . . and transferred some . . . old words to new parts of speech." Wordsworth adhered closely to the original in his version of the "Prioress' Tale," but the story is almost dull in his hands as compared to the lively pathos of Chaucer. As for Leigh Hunt's versions, Lounsbury says there is a "jauntiness, not to say friskiness, about Leigh Hunt's style which is grossly unsuited to the rendering of an author like Chaucer, who, in his most humorous passages, never forgets his dignity." It was in 1841 that Richard Hengist Horne brought out the last important modernization of the nineteenth century. Interest in this project is evident in that Wordsworth promised to contribute, assisted by Leigh Hunt, Elizabeth Barrett, Robert Bell, Monckton Milnes, Leonard Schmitz, and

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71 Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 204.
72 Ibid., p. 207.
73 Ibid.
75 Spurgeon, op. cit., p. lvi.
Horne himself. For the second volume (which never appeared?) Horne intended to ask for the help of Tennyson, Talfourd, Browning, Bulwer, the Cowden Clarkes, and Mary Howitt. Walter Savage Landor had been asked to help but had seen the folly of the attempt and had refused.

In 1912 J. S. P. Tatlock and Percy MacKaye published The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, a modernization in prose for the twentieth-century reader, and in 1914 the Modern Reader's Chaucer. Frank E. Hill's The Canterbury Tales, containing in verse closely resembling the original, the "Prologue" and four tales, the Book of the Duchess, and six lyrics, appeared in 1930. In 1934 J. U. Nicholson published the Canterbury Tales rendered into modern English verse, and in 1948 R. M. Lumiansky gave us The Canterbury Tales of Geoffrey Chaucer, a modern English prose translation. Nevill Coghill's verse translation, in 1951, which follows the original in verse form and language, is one of the better versions. In the light of the continuing practice of modernizing Chaucer's works, it would appear that the interest revived in the nineteenth century will be kept alive and that knowledge of Chaucer will never again suffer the near-death that it went through in the seventeenth century.

Chaucer seems to have always been a good subject for critical study. Speght's edition, in 1598, of Chaucer's complete works brought about the first critical work on the poet, Francis Thynne's Animadversions. Thynne took this means.

76 Ibid. 77 Ibid.
of scoring Speght for mistakes in various words, references, and statements. He went to great lengths to give correct meanings for words and correct time-and-place references. J. H. Kingsley, a traveler and author, who, in 1865, edited Francis Thynne's *Animadversions*, in writing the preface to the work, says that alterations in the glossary of Speght's second edition (1602) prove that Speght had a copy of Thynne's criticism before him as he prepared the second edition and profited by it.

In 1665, Richard Braithwaite brought out a volume on Chaucer containing the tales of the Miller and the Wife of Bath and commentary on the tales. Braithwaite was one who reckoned Chaucer to be the greatest English poet, but it should be noted that this estimate at this particular time was held chiefly among the very old or those with antiquarian taste.

The first writer who really attacked the problem of Chaucer's language "with authority combined with knowledge and insight" was Thomas Warton. In 1754, in his *Observations on the Faerie Queene*, he said of Chaucer:

80Spurgeon, *op. cit.*, p. xxxvi.
81Lounsbury, *op. cit.*, III, 91.
82Spurgeon, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
It must be confess'd that his uncouth or rather unfamiliar language has deter're d many from perusing him; but at the same time it must be allowed, that nothing has more contributed to his being little looked into, than the convenient opportunity of reading him with facility in modern imitations. Thus when translations . . . become substituted as the means of attaining the knowledge of any difficult and ancient author, the original not only begins to be neglected and excluded as less easy, but also to be despised as less ornamental and elegant . . . 83

Warton continues this argument against modernizations in his History of English Poetry (1774), but by that time the tide was already beginning to turn toward an appreciation of Chaucer in Middle English. 84 Lounsbury says that Warton's chapters on Chaucer will always be of value for information on sentiments of scholars in the transition period through which the poet's reputation was passing. Warton had read Chaucer, not read about him, but he seemed a little ashamed of his liking for the poet. He probably knew more about the early writers of our speech than any man then living, yet he was inclined to quote the views of men who were scarcely any authority at all. 85

Perhaps the person who contributed most to an understanding of Chaucer was Thomas Tyrwhitt, who, in 1775, published a carefully-written text. 86 It is to Tyrwhitt that we owe our understanding of how to read Chaucer smoothly. His

83 Thomas Warton, Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser, p. 142, as quoted by Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 409.
84 Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 111.
85 Lounsbury, op. cit., III, 246-8.
86 Spurgeon, op. cit., p. liv.
five-volume edition is accompanied by an essay on Chaucer's versification, which gives an explanation of the pronunciation of syllables at the ends of words, of case endings in the genitive singular and the plural of nouns, and of the final e feminine. Although these findings did not completely uproot the convictions in men's minds that Chaucer was ungrammatical, one thing did come as a direct result of Tyrwhitt's work: nineteenth-century modernizations were kept as close to the original as possible. It was also this text which began the serious study of separating the genuine from the spurious in Chaucer's writings, although as early as 1598 Francis Thynne had suggested "that yt wolde be good that Chaucer's proper wordes were distinguyshed from the adulterat, and such as were not his," but no actual work had been done to this end before Tyrwhitt.

With the appearance in the United States of Child's essay on the use of the final e, in 1862, followed in 1868 by the foundation of the Chaucer Society by Furnivall, scholarly and critical work was inaugurated, "which is one of the literary glories of the nineteenth century." The Chaucer Society has achieved results of four kinds:

87 Thomas Tyrwhitt, The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer, I, 1-94.
89 Brusendorff, op. cit., p. 43.
90 Spurgeon, op. cit., pp. lxviii-lxix.
The printing of all the best Chaucer manuscripts.

(2) The establishment of the chronology of Chaucer's works, including the arrangement of the Canterbury Tales.

(3) The final settlement of the Chaucer canon.

(4) The discovery of many hitherto unknown facts about Chaucer's life and family.

The German professor ten Brink, "who had never heard of the Chaucer Society, astounded English scholars by the publication of his Chaucer Studien (1870), in which he for the first time threw real light on the distinction between genuine and spurious in the poet's works, and also on their true order of succession." Another of his contributions to our appreciation of the poet is his The Language and Meter of Chaucer, now available in an English translation.

In 1891, T. R. Lounsbury published his three-volume Studies in Chaucer, in which he seeks to show that Chaucer was not only a great artist, but that he became so at the cost of time and labor; that in Chaucer the critical spirit was as highly developed as the creative. He says the most pronounced characteristic of Chaucer's style is the low level which he maintains in his writings, so that he is particularly appealing to the common man. In 1925, Caroline Spurgeon brought out Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900, in three volumes, a revision of the

91 Ibid., p. lxix.  
92 Ibid., p. lxxi.  
93 Spurgeon, op. cit., II, 140-1.
earlier edition in seven parts by the Chaucer Society during the years 1914-1924. Her work is a very complete compilation of the studies in Chaucer from 1357 to 1900, and, together with Lounsbury's, has proved to be the foundation for this paper.

A glance at any of the annual bibliographies of scholarly journals will reveal the multiplicity of critical books and articles, only the most significant of which can be mentioned here. No student of Chaucer can afford to overlook Kittredge's delightful volume of lectures entitled Chaucer and His Poetry (1915) nor Manly's illuminating Some New Light on Chaucer (1926). Although accepted with reservations by scholars, Tatlock's The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works issued by the Chaucer Society in 1907 is worthy of serious consideration.

94 Cambridge Bibliography, op. cit., p. 211.
CHAPTER II
THE LIFE OF CHAUCER
IN THE LIGHT OF SCHOLARSHIP

At the same time that scholarly research was giving us the results of its findings concerning the understanding of the poet's works, other scholars were busy trying to make available the complete story of Chaucer's life. Any good edition of his works or critical study of him provides an adequate summary of the known facts of his life and his official career, but speculation has continued to exist among scholars as to certain phases of his life.

The early biographies of Chaucer contained many legends and unfounded beliefs about the life of the poet, which have been demolished by modern scholars, so that what men know today "forms but a small part of what they once thought they knew."¹ The first attempt to record Chaucer's life was that of John Leland (1506?-1552), the antiquary, who set out to publish the lives of all the illustrious poets of Great Britain in one volume written in Latin. Leland died in 1552, and his work was not published until 1709. It furnishes merely a sketch of Chaucer's life. It is of antiquarian value as the source of many early statements about Chaucer. It was

¹Lounsbury, op. cit., I, 130.
freely used by John Bale, bishop of Ossory, in 1557-59, and by John Pits, dean of Liverdun, in 1619, in similar efforts. Lounsbury points out that the three men were more interested in large numbers of names in the biographies than in the authenticity of their statements; hence their work has sometimes been given more weight than it deserves.

The first life of the poet written in English appeared in 1598, by Thomas Speght in his edition of Chaucer's works. It long remained the fullest account and contained results of earnest study of the public records of Chaucer's time. Many of the facts which we know to be trustworthy came from Speght, and it is in this book that we first find the statement that Chaucer married a daughter of Sir Payne Roet and was the father of Thomas Chaucer.

Aside from some brief seventeenth-century sketches, the next life of Chaucer appeared in Urry's edition of his works, in 1721. According to Tyrwhitt, this life was the work of William Thomas, who by his own admission, corrected and enlarged it from material drawn up by John Dart. Thomas' best contributions in this edition, Tyrwhitt says, are his many useful additions to the glossary. The Urry edition makes no other significant contribution to the growing body of knowledge about Chaucer's life, but it includes some interesting

\[\text{\cite{Ibid., pp. 131-2.}}\]
\[\text{\cite{Ibid., p. 133.}}\]
\[\text{\cite{Ibid., p. 154.}}\]
\[\text{\cite{Ibid., pp. 154-5.}}\]
\[\text{\cite{Tyrwhitt, op. cit., I, xxiv, note.}}\]
passages from current writings on the poet, indicating that research was going on and that it had produced some results.\(^7\)

Other lives appeared from time to time, but they only served to add to the legend that was spreading and gave few actual facts about the poet's life.\(^8\) The first significant contribution to our knowledge of the poet's life is the *Life-Records of Chaucer*, published in four parts from 1875 to 1900,\(^9\) by the Chaucer Society. Since the appearance of this important work, scholars have been searching for every bit of evidence which will throw any light upon the poet's life; and it is these findings that this chapter will report, leaving out the known and uncontroversial facts.

Although little evidence is available as to the poet's early years, his education must have been remarkably good for a boy of his social class. In one of the earliest statements made about his education, Speght affirms, on the authority of "Master Buckley," that Chaucer was a student at the Inner Temple, where he was "fined two shillings for beating a Franciscan friar in Fleetstreete."\(^10\) Recent investigation by Edith Rickert\(^11\) confirms Speght's report in the

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\(^7\) Lounsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 158.  
\(^8\) Ibid.  
discovery that the aforementioned "Master Buckley" was William Buckley, bencher and keeper of the archives of the Inner Temple, and "the one man in England whose business it was to have seen such a record if it existed." Although the point is not conclusively settled, there would seem to be no reason, Miss Rickert thinks, for Master Buckley to have distorted the facts when he reported that he had seen a record such as the one described by Speght.

Miss Rickert says that the official positions, such as Chaucer held, would have been administered more effectively if the holder had had legal training; and since Chaucer apparently performed his duties ably and responsibly, she believes that he must have studied at the Inner Temple. Manly also shows that Chaucer's education in the Inner Temple would have been such to make him a better official and that

The history of the family shows that they had wealth enough to give Chaucer the advantages of an education in the Temple if they so desired; and the service of his father, his grandfather, and his step-grandfather in the king's customs may have made the family more ready to spend money to educate their son for an official career than merchants usually were.

Whatever his preparation for it may have been, Chaucer certainly led a full and responsible official life, the most detailed study of which has been made by J. R. Hulbert.

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13Ibid., p. 28.
14James R. Hulbert, Chaucer's Official Life.
He attempts to show the significance of the various appointments which Chaucer received and to ascertain whether or not he was actually dependent upon the favor or disfavor of John of Gaunt in the government for his appointments.

Chaucer's relationship with John of Gaunt is another point which has interested scholars for years. The account books of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster and wife of Prince Lionel, show that in December, 1357, she entertained her brother-in-law, John of Gaunt, then Earl of Richmond, at her residence at Hatfield, Yorkshire. Since Chaucer was, at the time, a page in her household, it is not unlikely that he met there the man who was to become the "most powerful noble in England" and who was to play such a prominent part in his life that speculation arose among scholars as to his actual influence. The poet's connection with John of Gaunt was further strengthened by marriage to Philippa Roet whom Manly identifies as the sister of Katherine Roet Swynford, later the third wife of John of Gaunt. Hulbert, however, believes that Chaucer was not actually under the patronage of John of Gaunt and did not necessarily know the man before his service in the king's household. At any rate

15 Robinson, op. cit., p. xvi.
16 French, op. cit., p. 48.
17 First mentioned by Speght.
18 Manly, op. cit., pp. 49-56.
19 Hulbert, op. cit., pp. 56-72.
Chaucer's annuity from John of Gaunt, which had begun in 1374, continued to be paid until the death of the duke in 1399.20

Another of the speculative points in Chaucer's life is that concerning the existence of his "son" Lewis. The opening lines of A Treatise on the Astrolabe seem to be Chaucer's address to his own son:

Lyte Lowys my sone, I aperceyve wel by certeyne evydences thyne abilitie to lernyn sciences touching nombres and proporciouns; and as wel considre I thy besy praier in special to lerne the tretys of the Astrelabie. Than for as mochel as a philosofre saith, 'he wrappith him in his frend, that condescendith to the rightfulle praiers of his frend,' . . . 21

Lounsbury accepts the statement as proof from the poet, himself, that he is the father of Lewis.22 Kittredge, however, puts forth the idea that Lewis was the son of Sir Lewis Clifford, "gallant gentleman and personal friend of the poet's."23 He says that Clifford also was a "trusted adherent of John of Gaunt and himself a power in the realm."24 He further shows that the practice of addressing one's personal friends with the term "son" was widespread and points out the use of the

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20French, op. cit., pp. 50, 53.
21Robinson, op. cit., p. 641.
22Lounsbury, op. cit., I, 100-1.
23George Lyman Kittredge, "Lewis Chaucer or Lewis Clifford?," Modern Philology, XIV (1917), 513-18.
24Ibid.
word "frond" later in the same paragraph as the key reason for his discounting the father-son relationship.

No actual facts are known concerning little Lewis; therefore, his relationship is still open to speculative study. But it does seem certain that Thomas Chaucer was the poet's son, when we consider all the evidence presented by scholars. According to Lounsbury, Leland makes no mention of a son other than Lewis, but Speght's life of Chaucer, 1598, notes some disagreement about the relationship in his day.

French points out that Thomas Gascoigne, the only person living in the time of Thomas Chaucer who has left any kind of statement concerning Thomas' parentage, connects Geoffrey and Thomas Chaucer as father and son. He also tells of Ruud's study of an antiquarian's report of a stained-glass window which shows the arms of the family which Thomas married into impaled by the arms of Geoffrey Chaucer. Brusendorff says:

Gascoigne who lived most of his life at Oxford, near the Chaucer estates, was in so good a position of knowing the truth about Thomas' parentage, that it is impossible to reject . . . his statement.

New doubts about Thomas Chaucer's parentage were cast by the study of Viktor Langhans when he attempted to show that

26 Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 104.
27 French, op. cit.
28 Ibid.
29 Brusendorff, op. cit., p. 36.
the seal used by Thomas Chaucer in 1409 was not that of the poet Geoffrey and that the Geoffrey Chaucer, forester at Petherton in 1394, though he may have been Thomas' father, was not the poet. His findings were questioned by Krauss, who maintained that Thomas could have been the legitimate son of Geoffrey Chaucer the poet and Philippa Chaucer and that, since no further information about the forester Chaucer has ever been found, he must have been the poet. He also points out that Thomas Chaucer definitely used the arms of a Geoffrey Chaucer and that only one Geoffrey Chaucer is known to have existed in 1394; but after further research intended to prove otherwise, he "reluctantly" concludes that, evidenced by other arms on Thomas' tomb and by John of Gaunt's extensive favoritism to Philippa Chaucer, Thomas must have been the illegitimate son of John of Gaunt and his sister-in-law Philippa Chaucer. Krauss further maintains that, in the light of recorded references to John of Gaunt's mistresses, this illicit affair is not improbable; and the later interest manifested by the nobleman in Thomas Chaucer seems to substantiate it. Since Geoffrey Chaucer's grant from John of Gaunt seems to depend on Philippa Chaucer's similar grant, Krauss thinks John of Gaunt may have been attempting to amend the wrong he had done Chaucer. There is also the possibility,


in the light of Krauss' evidence of Thomas' possible legitimate birth to Geoffrey and Philippa Chaucer, that Geoffrey Chaucer did not know of Thomas' parentage until later years.33 Robinson, however, says34 that the evidence is not conclusive and that it seems very unlikely that Chaucer would have commanded the respect and admiration afforded him had such a situation existed.

Still further and more recent evidence has been cited by Manly,35 who quotes the record of a lawsuit in 1396, in which a London skinner names Thomas Chaucer, son of Geoffrey Chaucer, as one who owed him money. Manly also reiterates the evidence of the use of Geoffrey's seal by Thomas and reminds us that the contemporaries of the men considered them father and son.

Throughout his life Chaucer was associated with men who were important in their spheres of influence. He was not confined to London and England for his friends, however, but counted among his acquaintances many continentals of distinction. His knowledge of the court had come to him through his association with the households of Lionel, Edward III, and John of Gaunt; and his later association with Henry of Derby indicates a continued adherence to the Lancasters.36

During his official career Chaucer came into contact with such persons as William Walworth, Nicholas Brembre, and

33 Ibid. 34 Robinson, op. cit., pp. xxii-xxii.
36 Robinson, op. cit., p. xxii.
John Philpot—merchants of London; William de Beauchamp, Guichard d'Angle, John Burley, Peter Courtenay, and Walter Skirley, Bishop of Durham—all ambassadors and officials; and Lewis Clifford, William Neville, John Glanvowe, and Richard Stury—Lollard Knights or followers of Wyclif. And from his own writings may be added the names of Philip de Vache, Clifford's son-in-law, and either Peter or Robert Bukton.

Though the records show little in regard to his literary friends, Chaucer must have been well acquainted with all the literary men of importance in his day. Since he dedicated the Troilus to John Gower and Ralph Strode, he must have been on friendly terms with them. Other references in his poetry indicate that he knew Henry Scogan, the poet; Otes de Granson and Eustace Deschamps, French poets; and Thomas Usk, a political associate of Brembre. The poet must also have known John Wyclif, who was frequently at court and numbered among his followers some friends of Chaucer's. He would also have been likely to know Froissart, who was associated with Queen Philippa in Chaucer's youth.

It would have been possible for Chaucer to have seen on his visits to Italy, Robinson thinks, Sercambi, Legnane, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, but no records are available to say as much. Mather presents a detailed account of the poet's

37 Ibid., p. xxiii. 38 Ibid. 39 Ibid. 40 P. J. Mather, "On the Asserted Meeting of Chaucer and Petrarch," Modern Language Notes, XII (1897), 1 ff.
known trips to Italy and finds it doubtful that Chaucer
could have visited Padua for a meeting with Petrarch in the
intervals of his business.

From the wide assortment of friends and acquaintances
of Chaucer, it seems logical to conclude that he must have
been a man of some importance, himself, and one highly
respected by his contemporaries.
CHAPTER III

AN INTERPRETATION OF

SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

One of the best guides to the knowledge and the way of life of an age is the literature of the period. Especially valuable as a picture of the time are the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, particularly the Canterbury Tales, which give valuable insight into the customs and the knowledge of the fourteenth century; but the modern reader would fall far short of an understanding of Chaucer's age had not scholarship given him a key to the language and many of the seemingly obscure references which the poet mentions in the most matter-of-fact way.

Chaucer's references to science have been the subject of wide study on the part of scholars. Notable among these scientific references are those dealing with astrology (or astronomy), alchemy, medicine, and geography, in which order they will be considered in this chapter.

One critic says¹ that the frequency of astronomical allusions in Chaucer is due to the importance of the stars in the life of his century, for in the medieval period astronomy, or astrology, was one of the vital interests of man.

¹Florence Grimm, Astronomical Lore in Chaucer, p. 3.
The ordinary man of the Middle Ages knew more than do most men today of the phenomena of the heavens. In the various aspects of heavenly phenomena he saw the governing principles of his moral life. Each planet was thought to have special attributes and special influence over men's lives. Venus was the planet of love; Mars, of war and hostility; the sun, of power and honor; etc. Each was mysteriously connected with a certain color, with a metal, too, the alchemists said; and each had a special power over some organ of the human body. Everything that happened could be traced to the benevolent or malevolent influence of the position of the stars at the time of the occurrence or at the time of the birth of the person involved.

The Roman Church had discouraged belief in astronomy because it recognized the Bible as the only authority on the constitution of the universe; but the great revival of Greek astronomy in the fourteenth century, when Chaucer lived and wrote, brought about a popularization of astrology, although it had only gradually become so generally known and so fully accepted that a writer could allude to it without running the danger of being misunderstood by the ignorant or of offending the orthodoxy of intelligent readers. An illustration of this popularization is found in the "Man of Law's Tale," in which Chaucer incorporates large amounts of the astronomical

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2Ibid., p. 7.

learning of his day. The Lawyer, in telling the story of Constance, says:

O firste moevyng! cruel firmament, . . .
Thy crowdyng set the hevene in swich array
At the bigynnynge of this fiers viage,
That cruel Mars hath slayn this mariage.
Infortunat ascendent tortuous,
Of which the lord is helples falle, alas!
Out of his angle in-to the derkest hous.
O Mars, O atazir, as in this cas!
O feble mone, unhappy been thy pas!
Thou knittest thee ther thou art nat receyved,
Ther thou were weel, for thennes arrow weyved.

(B, 295-308)

Curry interprets⁴ these lines to mean that there would have been no propitious time for Constance to have made a voyage to join the Sultan, for she was not intended by the planets to have a happy marriage. Mars had slain the marriage before it was even made because he was in conjunction with Luna in the sign of Scorpio at the time of Constance's birth. Chaucer set this horoscope in the tale to foreshadow the hardships that Constance was to suffer and to show that her marriage was foredoomed.

The Man of Law further emphasizes the influence of the stars on man's life when he says:

Paraventure in thilke large book
Which that men clepe the hevene ywriten was
With sterres, whan that he his birthe took,
That he for love sholde han his death, alas!
For in the sterres, clerer than is glas,
Is writen, God woot, whoso koude it rede,
The deeth of every man, withouten drede. (B, 190-6)

The "Knight's Tale" is another example of the use of astrology in literature. In recasting the Teseide of

⁴Walter C. Curry, Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences, p.172.
Boccaccio, Chaucer evidently discarded much of the earlier mythological lore and substituted the influence of the stars in which his own age believed. He gave the powers of the ancient gods to the astrological planets of the same name, allowing them to work their influence on the two rival lovers. Although the persons of Venus, Diane, and Mars strongly resemble the standard descriptions of other pagan deities, it is noteworthy that it is the astrological influence of these planets on which the story turns; and Chaucer is careful to make Palamon, Emily, and Arcite visit the shrines of these deities in their respective "hours," i.e. their astrological hours, when they would be most in power. Curry explains\(^5\) that the conflict which follows, the conflict between Palamon and Arcite, is actually a conflict between the planets Saturn and Mars. He shows that these two planets are in power at specific times of each day and that the choice of Tuesday (Mars' day) for the battle was necessary in order for Mars to have the first victory, only to let Saturn have the final victory at sunset, Saturn's hour of power. The conflict between the two planets is further emphasized, Curry says, in the two kings, Emetreus and Lyouragus who come to aid Palamon and Arcite and who are typically Martian and Saturnalian in their outward appearance and in their personalities. The final evidence of planetary conflict is in the body of the wounded Arcite in the final minutes of Arcite's life. Saturn

\(^5\)Ibid., pp. 119-49.
exercises his retentive power and prevents Arcite from expelling the poison which causes his death.

Chaucer prepares us for the disastrous outcome of the story, however, in Arcite's recognition of the fact that he was foredoomed by planetary influence:

Som wikke aspect or dispositioun
Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,
Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn;
So stood the hevene whan that we were born.

(A, 1087-90).

Chaucer's astronomical references are almost entirely of two kinds: those used to determine the time of day or season of the year, and those used for illustration or comparison. Harry Bailey, in the Introduction to the "Man of Law's Tale," determines the day of the month and the hour of the day by making calculations from the observed position of the sun in the sky and by comparing the length of the shadow with the height of the tree:

Our Hooste saugh wel that the brighte sonne
The ark of his artificial day hath Ronne
The ferthe part, and half an houre and moore,
And though he were nat depe ystert in loore,
He wiste it was the eightetethe day
Of April, that is messager to May;
And saugh wel that the shadowe of every tree
Was as in lengthe the same quantitee
That was the body erect that caused it . . .
And for that day, as in that latitude,
It was ten of the cokke . . . (B, l-14.)

One phase of astrology to which some of the most interesting studies of our time have been devoted is physiognomy, the art of relating a person's physical features to his character. Curry, in some enlightening studies on science in
Chaucer's day, has worked with this question uppermost in his mind: "Did Chaucer's use of physiognomical principles give greater verisimilitude to his characters in the eyes of his audience?" In answer to the question he shows what certain physical characteristics denote in temperament. Of particular interest are the Pardoner, the Reeve, the Miller, and the Wife of Bath.

At first sight the modern reader would not relate the Pardoner's physical peculiarities to his immoral character. It will be remembered that Chaucer has given him, in the "Prologue," long, straight hair as yellow as wax, hanging thin and in separate locks over his shoulders; eyes wide open and glaring like those of a hare; a voice as "smal" as that of a goat; and a complete lack of a beard. Chaucer must have been aware of what he was doing when he gave these characteristics to the Pardoner, for he and every other educated man of his time must have known enough of physiognomical lore to judge a man's inner character from a study of his form and features; hence Curry thinks it only natural that Chaucer would have used his knowledge of physiognomy in formulating the physical characteristics of his pilgrims. From early scientific treatises he has gleaned a number of passages illustrating the close relationship between physical and temperamental characteristics:

... glaring eyes prominently set indicate a 'man given to folly, a glutton, a libertine, and a drunkard'; the

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7Curry, op. cit., p. xii.  
8Ibid., pp. 64-5.
person with 'outstanding, bright eyes from which the eyelids have a tendency to withdraw, and with a high-pitched or shrill voice, is impudent and most dangerous; long and soft hair, immoderately fine in texture and reddish or yellow in color indicates an impoverished blood, lack of virility, and effeminacy of mind; and the sparser the hair, the more cunning and deceptive is the man.' A 'long, slim neck is a sign of garrulity, haughtiness of spirit, and of evil habits' and 'a man beardless by nature is endowed with a fondness for women and for crafty dealings, inasmuch as he is impotent in performing the works of Venus. Yet repeatedly he exhibits a rare and singular intellectual cleverness.'

Curry believes that in the following lines the poet suggests the secret of the Pardoner: he was a eunuch from birth:

A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot;  
No berd hadde he, ne never sholde have,  
As smothe it was as it were late y-shave;  
I trowe he were a gelding or a mare. (A, 688-91)

When the Host demands a merry tale from the Pardoner, there is instant protest from people of high rank:

Nay! lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!  
Telle us som moral thyng, that we may leere  
Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly heere. (C, 324-6)

Doubtless the "gentils" were well enough acquainted with physiognomical lore to recognize the type of the Pardoner at once. Translating his physical peculiarities into terms of character, they expected him to tell a ribald story. If Curry's interpretation is correct, the Pardoner deserves pity rather than censure.

The Miller and the Reeve both have characteristics commonly associated by physiognomists with men of their characters and, in Curry's opinion, were created by the poet with the

9Ibid., pp. 64-5.
sciences of the day in mind. The Miller's short-shouldered, stocky figure, his fat face with red, bushy beard, his flat nose with a wart on top—these, says Curry, variously denoted a shameless, loquacious, quarrelsome, and lecherous fellow, and such he is in the "General Prologue":

He was a janglere and a goliardeys,
And that was moost of synne and harlotries.
Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries.  
(A, 560-2)

Though the description of the Reeve's person is meager enough, it doubtless sufficed to indicate to the well-informed men and women of the fourteenth century most of what Chaucer wanted to bring out in the Reeve's character:

The Reeve was a sclendre colerik man.
His berd was shave as ny as ever he kan;
His heer was by his erye ful round yshorn;
His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn.
Ful longe were his legges and ful lene,
Ylyk a staf, there was no calf ysene. (A, 587-92)

What did these few items of personal appearance, perhaps only amusing to modern readers, signify to the medieval audience? Again we turn to the findings of Curry's research wherein we read:

'The colerike (man) by kynde he sholde be lene of body; his body is lyght and drye, and he shal be sumwhat rogh; . . . of sharpe witt, gyse and of good memorie, a greete entremyttare; he louyth hasty wengeaus; desyrous of company of women more than hym nedyth . . . whoever has thin, sinewy legs is luxurious or voluptuous by nature.'

In making the Reeve sharp witted, wise, and of good memory,
Chaucer follows closely the current interpretation of his physical traits set forth in the "General Prologue." He has kept his master's records so well that no man can show him in arrears. The apparent change in the Reeve from the cunning and crafty young man of the "General Prologue" to an irascible old man in his tale, boasting of his follies committed in youth, makes us think that Chaucer has forgotten the character he set out to portray; but closer study of Curry shows that the original reference in the "General Prologue" to the lean legs of the Reeve was a very important observation and that by it the poet was preparing his readers for the revelation of the Reeve's character in his own "Prologue":

We olde men, I drede, so fare we:
Til we be roten, kan we nat be rype;  
We hoppen alway whil the world wol pype. . . .  
. . . for thoughoure myght be goon,
Cure wil desireth folie evere in oon.
For whan we may nat doon, than wol we speke;
Yet in oure ashen olde is fyr yreke. (A, 3874-82)

Thus it is obvious from Curry's interpretation of the Reeve and the Miller that their characters, as portrayed in the "General Prologue," are substantially confirmed in the tales which they tell.14

The Wife of Bath is such a mixture of coarseness in her personal life and of delicacy in her story-telling that we immediately wonder what factors lie behind her dual personality and create so many conflicting elements in her being.15

Chaucer indicates that the conflicts in her character were due to the configuration of the stars:

14Ibid., p. 76. 15Ibid., p. 91.
Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,  
And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse; 
Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.

(D, 611-13)

To the modern reader these references to Taur, Mars, and Venus are meaningless until explained by Curry in the light of his research. He has found this of women born under the sign of Taurus:

"When Taurus is discovered in the ascendant, the woman born under that sign shall be exceedingly large of face and forehead, rather fleshy with a great number of lines or wrinkles, especially in the forehead, and florid of complexion. She shall have bold eyes, a mobile head, inclined more to the right than to the left side, long black hair widely spread over broad shoulders and breast. She shall be slow in her movements, but equipped to perform a maximum of labor with a minimum of aversion. When the first face of Taurus is in the ascendant, she shall be lightly given to affairs of the heart, having a lover for the greater part of her life; . . . She shall be inconstant, changeable, speaking (or gossiping) with fluency and volubility, now to this one, now to that . . . This sign shall give her a mole or mark on the neck near its junction with the shoulders; when this mark is located on the right side, a happy fate may be conjectured, but if on the left side one may reasonably predict dangers . . . When the line of Venus is observed to be joined to that of Mars, she shall be exceedingly virile, and sagacious in matrimony."

One born under the influence of Venus should possess much beauty and charm; but if Mars is in the picture, the whole thing becomes completely reversed and the characteristics of Mars add their influence. In place of all the attractive features which Venus should have given her, the Wife of Bath has the coarse, stocky, ugly features which Mars gave her. Unfortunately the good Wife is also "gap-tothed," which interpreted as meaning "gap-tothed," may signify that she is

16Ibid., pp. 95-96.
"envious, irreverent, luxurious by nature, bold, deceitful, faithless, and suspicious." This unattractive detail is perhaps another unwelcome gift from Mars. In the light of Curry's findings the Wife becomes less a humorous than a tragic figure, one whose pleasure has been mainly carnal and who finds that pleasure waning as the years draw on.

Whether or not Chaucer actually believed in astrology, we have no way of knowing. Living as he did, however, in a pre-Copernican universe in which the sun moved around the earth and the stars traveled across the heavens directing rays upon humanity, it would have been surprising if he had not had a certain respect for the influence of the planets upon the lives of men. He sometimes speaks of astrology in a disdainful manner, calling a book of natural magic "not worth a flye"; for this reason Lounsbury holds that Chaucer was far ahead of most of his contemporaries in his attitude toward the superstitious practices connected with the astrology of his day; that his attitude toward judicial astrology was one of total disbelief and scorn; and that Chaucer was guilty of a breach of artistic workmanship in expressing his disbelief so scornfully in the "Franklin's Tale" in

17 Ibid., p. 109.
19 "Franklin's Tale," l. 1132.
20 Lounsbury, op. cit., II, 498 ff.
which the very climax of the dramatic action depends upon
a feat of astrological magic:

This is to seye, to maken illusioun,
By swich an apparence of jogelrye—
I ne kan no terms of astrologys—
That she and every wight sholde wene and seye
That of Britaigne the rokkes were awaye,
Or ellis they were sonken under grounde.
So atte laste he hath his tyme yfounde
To maken his japes and his wrecchednesse
Of swich a supersticious cursednesse.

(T, 1264-72)

Tatlock has another explanation for Chaucer's disdainful passages about astrology. He shows that the poet has taken great pains to place the setting of the "Franklin's Tale" in ancient times and that he, along with most of the educated men of his day, disapproved of the practices and the practitioners of judicial astrology but thought of the feats and observances of astrological magic as having been possible in ancient times. Chaucer's attitude then, Tatlock believes, is one of disapproval rather than disbelief, disapproval not of the general theory of astrology but of the shady rituals and quackery connected with its application to the problems of life in his time.

It is interesting to note that all of Chaucer's criticism of magic and astrology is based on religious grounds. Holding the conservative attitude toward astrology which was characteristic of the Middle Ages, he probably had his

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doubts concerning the ability of the professional astrologer
to accomplish all that his science boasted.  

Chaucer seems to favor a kind of determinism based on
astrology. In the "Man of Law's Tale" he expresses outspoken
astrological fatalism:

For in the sterres, clerer than is glas,
Is writen, God woot, whose koude it rede,
The deeth of every man, withouten drede.(B, 194-6)

A similar attitude is found in the "Knight's Tale," in which
Arcite advises Palamon to accept the rule of the stars over
man's destinies as unavoidable fact and counsels resignation:

For Goddes love, taak al in pacience
Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be.
 Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.
 Som wikke aspect or disposicioun
 Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,
 Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn;
 So stood the hevene whan that we were born.
 We moste endure it; this is the short and playn.
(A, 1084-91)

Another branch of the medieval sciences which Chaucer
uses to advantage in the Canterbury Tales is alchemy, a
phase of chemistry dedicated to the search for the philoso-
pher's stone, a substance with which to change base metals
into silver or gold. That the search was often a fruitless
one is evidenced in the lines of the "Canon's Yeoman's Tale":

With this Chanoun I dwelt have seven yeer,
And of his science am I never the neer.
Al that I hadde I have lost therby,
And, God woot, so hath many mo than I.(G, 720-23)

Alchemists worked long and hard on their experiments with

23Ibid.
many disappointments. The Yeoman pictures the heartbreak when

... ful ofte it happeth so,
The pot tobreketh, and farewell, al is go!

(G, 906-7)

Some of the alchemists were sincere, but Chaucer pictures one of the charlatans hoping to gain from the eager ignorance of the people. After many failures the Canon slips an ounce of silver into the process so it will be found in the end:

I seye, he took out of his owene sleeve
A tayne of silver—yvele moot he cheewe!—
Which was nat but an ounce of weighte.
And taaketh heede now of his cursed sleighte!
He shoop his ingot, in lengthe and in breede
Of this tayne, withouten any drede . . .
'Loke what ther is, put in thyn hand and grope.
Thow fynde shalt thar silver, as I hope.' . . .
He putte his hand in and took up a tayne
Of silver fyne, and glad in every veyne
Was this preest, whan he saugh that it was so.

(G, 1224-42)

What Chaucer thinks of alchemy is just as difficult to determine as what he thinks of astrology. Damon maintains that Chaucer was not denouncing alchemy in the tale; that the poet was probably not only in sympathy with alchemy but possibly knew (and if so, respected) the famous secret. He believes that Chaucer was attacking dishonest alchemists because they were becoming a nuisance, but that underneath the attack he deliberately introduced material to stimulate those rare experimenters who knew something of the real secret. He further points out that the last fifty-four lines of the

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tale sympathize with the alchemists and that they are the lines which show that Chaucer knew the secret.

Tyrwhitt, in agreement with Damon, suggests that Chaucer added the "Canon's Yeoman's Tale" to the others out of resentment against some dishonest alchemist who had cheated him. He is borne out in this belief by Manly, who calls attention to the fact that Chaucer repeatedly borrowed small sums of money and raises the question whether he could have needed the ready cash for his pursuit of the philosopher's stone. Marchette Chute, in disagreement with this point of view, maintains that Chaucer used the Yeoman's tirade against the Canon not to characterize the Canon but to characterize the Yeoman. She says that it is not Chaucer who is angry; it is the Yeoman, "the sweating fool on horseback whom the pilgrims met near Boughton under Blean." Curry, also, contends that Chaucer is just a literary artist interested only in developing his characters and that he wrote this story only for the purpose of presenting the character of the Yeoman.

Another field of science used in the Canterbury Tales is that of medicine. In many ways fourteenth-century medicine was closely allied with astrology, in which any reputable

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25 Tyrwhitt, op. cit., I, 156.
26 Manly, New Light, pp. 244 ff.
28 Ibid.
29 Curry, op. cit., pp. xix-xx.
physician was well versed. Consider the Physician, who

... was grounded in astronomye.
He kepte his patient a ful greet deel
In houres by his magyk natureel. ... 
He knew the cause of everich maladye,
Were it hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye,
And where they engendred, and of what humour.

(A, 414-21)

Curry says that fundamental medicine of the fourteenth century was based on the theories of Galen, a Greek physician of the second century, who assumed

'that there are four elements or simple bodies in cre-
ation, earth, fire, air, and water, which are thought to possess certain qualities; earth is cold and dry; fire, hot and dry; air, hot and moist; water, cold and moist. Corresponding with these four elementary qua-

ties are four bodily humours, namely, melancholia, choler-

era, phlegm, and blood, generated in the brain, heart, liver, and stomach. And arising from the compounding of these humours in the body come four complexions or tempers of men, viz., the melancholic, the choleric, the phlegmatic, and the sanguine. ... In health there is a just proportion of qualities or humours mingled together in the human body; in sickness there is an excess of one or more qualities, according as the dis-
temper is simple or compound.30

The proportions of the humours in a person, and thus his temperament, are determined by the configuration of the stars at the time of his birth. This explanation of the humours makes intelligible to the modern reader Arcite's mania "engen-
dred of humour melancolik" and Chauntecleer's superabundance of humours "colere" and "melancolye" which cause him to have terrifying dreams. The "colerik" Reeve is another example of the "compounding in the body" of the humours. Of equal impor-
tance with the humours as the cause of illness was the subse-
quent treatment determined by a person's temperament and

30 Curry, op. cit., p. 10.
carried out in conjunction with the position of the stars at the time of the conception of the illness and at the time of treatment. No doctor would have thought of trying to cure a fever unless he knew at what hour it had begun and how it coincided with the constellation of the patient. In the light of this belief it is easy to understand why a physician of the fourteenth century must be grounded in astronomy.

Equipped with such a knowledge of illness, Chaucer describes the Summoner's affliction with professional self-confidence. Both the Summoner and the Cook bear upon their bodies the marks of vicious living. The Summoner

... hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,  
For saucefulm he was, with eyen narwe.  
As hooth he was and lecherous as a sparwe,  
With scalled browes blake and piled berd.  
Of his visage children were aferd.  
Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brazymston,  
Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon;  
Ne oynement that wolde clensse and byte,  
That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white,  
Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.  
Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,  
And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood.  
(A, 624-35)

What do the narrow eyes, the thin beard, the pimply skin connote to the modern reader? Curry found that

the Summoner [was] afflicted with a species of morphea known as gutta rosacea, which [had] already been allowed to develop into that kind of leprosy called alopecia ... Morphea ... is a skin disease resulting from certain impurities in the blood, and ... there are three or four species of it corresponding to the four natural humours of the body.31

Not even the most violent case of gutta rosacea, however,

31Ibid., p. 38.
can account for more than the fiery red face of the Summoner. The other characteristics which Chaucer gives him show that the poet evidently had in mind the fact that the "saucifleem" simply condition had already developed into alopecia, which Curry found in a medieval medical treatise to be described as

... a species of leprosy ... marked by a complete depilation of the eyebrows and beard. The eyes of the patient become inflated and exceedingly red. Pimples of a reddish color appear ... The cheeks swell up.\(^32\)

In the light of Chaucer's description of the man, Curry has no doubt that the Summoner is suffering from this disease. He also adds that Chaucer has indicated the two principal causes of the disease: the Summoner is "lecherous as a sparwe," and he is accustomed to the eating of onions, garlic, and leeks and to the drinking of strong red wine. The Summoner might have learned from any physician, says Curry, that leprosy may be contracted by association with women infected with it; that garlic, onions, and leeks produce evil humours in the blood; and that red wine of all others is the most powerful and heating of drinks. The list of remedies which Chaucer mentions in the passage were standard remedies at that time for leprosy.\(^33\)

The Cook is also afflicted with a kind of cutaneous eruption, which is less malignant than that of the Summoner but perhaps more offensive to the eye:\(^34\)

\(^{32}\)Ibid., pp. 43-4. \(^{33}\)Ibid., pp. 45-6. \(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 47.
. . . on his shynne a mormal hadde he. (A, 386)

He apparently is suffering, as Curry believes,

with what mediaeval medical writers call malum mortuum . . . 'an infirmity infecting the arms and shins of the patient. It consists of dry ulcers . . . which are produced sometimes from a corruption of pure melancholia and sometimes from melancholia mixed with salt phlegm' . . . 'Moreover, the cause of this scabies is much consuming of melancholic foods' . . . 'such as the flesh of cattle and salt fish, and by intercourse with a woman . . . leprous or wormy.'

Chaucer's descriptions of the Summoner and the Cook leave much to the imagination of modern readers, but it is probably safe to assume that the readers of his day knew exactly what he had left unsaid about each of the men.

An interesting study connected with medicine has been made by Lowes concerning the "loveris maladye of Hereos" from which Arcite was suffering. The term is found in the "Knight's Tale" in the description of the pains of love:

And in his geere for al the world he ferde,
Nat onely lik the loveris maladye
Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye,
Engendred of humour melancholik,
Biforen, in his celle fantastik. (A, 1372-76)

Lowes says that Hereos was a technical medical term used by medieval physicians, which Chaucer knew for a specific and well-recognized malady and which can be traced in treatises on medicine from Galen through the Arabic physicians and their followers straight down to Robert Burton.


Lowes traces the lore about heroea from Speght, who in 1598 explained that Hereos is Eros, Cupid. Francis Thynne, however, took issue with him and said that the correct word should be Heroes. Morell also agreed with Thynne; but everyone since Speght, except Thynne and Morell, has made Hereos Eros. Lowes tells us that he found the word heroys in a book by Arnaldus de Villanova, a famous physician in 1285, who was recognized as an authority in his own field in his day. The word reminded Lowes of the "Knight's Tale," and he thought that some light might be thrown upon Chaucer's use of it. In Arnaldus de Villanova he found that there was existent in the Middle Ages a malady called "hereos," described as a lover's pining away for the sight of a certain lady and that the symptoms of the disease were almost the same as those suffered by Arcite and other romantic heroes who loved according to the rules and conventions of courtly love. Arcite manifests all the symptoms of the stricken lover's disease in that

His slep, his mete, his drynke, is hym biraft,
That leue he wex and drye as is a shaft;
His eyen holwe, and grisly to biholde,
His hewe falow and pale as ashen colde,
And solitarie he was and evere allone,
And waillynge al the nyght, makynge his mone;
And if he herde song or instrument,
Thanne wolde he wepe, he myghte nat be stent.

(A, 1361-68)

So, also, Aurelius for love of Dorigen

... langwissheth as a furrye dooth in helle;
And dye he moste ... as dide Ekko.

(V, 950-51)

The malady of "Hereos" so severely afflicted Aurelius that he
lay "sike"

In languor and in torment furious
Two yeer and moore . . .
Er any foot he myghte on erthe goon.

(V, 1101-1103)

In courtly love the man suffered all the symptoms of "sickness" pointed out in the "loveris maladye" and frequently died for love.

One of the accepted conventions of the system of courtly love was that when a young man looked upon a lovely lady, he was immediately pierced to the heart through his eyes. In true tradition, Palamon

... cast his eye upon Emelya,
And therewithal he bleynte and cride, 'Al'
As though his stongen were unto the herte.

(A, 1077-79)

According to the conventional ideas of the system, the lover underwent a change of mood because of his love for the lady. When Arcite looked upon Emily, he suffered in such fashion, thus:

Into a studie he fil sodeynly,
As doon thise loveis in hir queynte geres,
Now in the croppe, now doun in the breeres,
Now up, now doun, as boket in a welle.

(A, 1530-33)

Dodd has given a detailed account of the system of courtly love and its origin. He traces its beginnings to Eleanor of Aquitaine, who took with her to northern France some of the southern ideas of social etiquette and rules governing the sexes in their relations, particularly in love.

Eleanor's daughter, Marie of Champagne, gave the ideas to Chrétien de Troies, who introduced them into stories of the Round Table. Writers began to spread the idea and to treat love as an art. Society developed standards of character and of behavior for both sexes: the young man should be handsome, stalwart, and indomitable; the lady should be fragile, fair, beautiful, and practically unobtainable.

The lady's high social position and the lover's humility toward her formed the basis for the entire system, and she remained an indistinct, lovely goal for the young man who viewed her. Her role in courtly love relationship is exemplified by Pertelote, the hen, in the "Nun's Priest's Tale":

Curteys she was, discreet, and debonaire,  
And compaignable, and bar herself . . . faire.  
(VII, 4061-62)

It is interesting to note that the underlying principles of courtly love demanding that it be sensual, illicit, secret, and unobtainable did not arrest the development of a feeling of ennoblement of character among its followers.

By identifying place names which have undergone considerable change, modern scholars have given us further insight into the geographical knowledge of the fourteenth century as reflected in Chaucer's works. Three of the pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales were extensive travelers—the Knight, the Wife of Bath, and the Shipman. It was from people such as

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38Ibid., p. 2.  
40Ibid., p. 10.  
39Ibid., pp. 10 ff.  
41Ibid., p. 5.
these that the ordinary citizen must have obtained his knowledge of the world as it was known in that day, for they represented crusades, pilgrimages, and merchant traveling.

Chaucer names twelve places that the Knight visited in his service for the king, and both Manly and Cook have reconstructed his career in minute detail. According to Manly's study, besides fighting in the king's service (in his lorde werre), the Knight had been to Gernade (Granada) and Algezir (Algeciras), both possibly with Henry, Earl of Derby, in 1343-44, Manly thinks. About that same time he could have gone to Belmasye (Bemamarin, Morocco) and Tramysene (Tlemcen, Western Algeria). After the Peace of Bretigny (1360), he may have campaigned with King Peter of Cyprus, who captured Satalye (the ancient Attalia on the southern coast of Asia Minor); conquered Alisaundre (Alexandria); and partially taken Lyesys (Lyas, Ayas, in Armenia). The reference to Palatye (probably Turkish Balat on the site of the ancient Miletus), though not clear, may have resulted from the friendship between King Peter and the lord of Palatye. Chaucer also says:

... and in the Grete See (the Mediterranean) At many a noble armee hadde he be. (A, 59-60)


Albert S. Cook, "Chaucer's Knight and His Exploits in the South," Historical Background of Chaucer's Knight, Ch. II, pp. 216-38.
On the basis of the lines

In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,
No Cristen man so ofte of his degree, (A, 54-55)

Manly believes that the Knight campaigned in Lithuania and Russia in the service of the Teutonic Order. He notes that the Lithuanians turned Christian in 1386 and that Chaucer may have conceived the Knight as having made the Canterbury pilgrimage immediately upon his return to England from Lithuania.

Cook's work produces virtually the same results as to place names, but he has gone into more detailed study of the persons involved in the campaigns and their possible relationship with Chaucer.

Reading of the travels of the Wife of Bath, one is amazed at the courage and hardiness of a woman who could have traveled so extensively under such difficulties as then existed. Of her Chaucer says:

And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem;
She hadde passed many a straunge strem;
At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,
In Galice at Saint Jame, and at Coloine.

(A, 463-6)

Robinson identifies^{44} Boloigne as probably Boulogne-sur-mer, in France, where a fragmentary image of the Blessed Virgin is still venerated and Galice (Galicia) as the shrine of St. James at Compostella in Spain. At Cologne was the shrine of the Three Kings, the goal of many pilgrims. As Robinson says, it

^{44}Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 765, note 465.
is obvious that the pilgrimage offered a legitimate excuse
for a trip and an escape from the realities of a hum-drums
existence.

The Shipman, too, had traveled widely by reason of his
occupation. Chaucer says:

He knew alle the havenes, as they were,
Fro Gootland to the cape of Fynystere,
And every cryke in Britaigne and in Spayne.
(A, 407-9)

Gootland, probably the island of Gotland off the coast of
Sweden, was much frequented by merchants at the time, for
Wisby, its capital, was a very important trading town, one
which the Shipman would have been likely to visit, Robinson
says.

The religious life of the fourteenth century receives
great emphasis in Chaucer's works, especially in the six
ecclesiastics depicted in the Canterbury Tales. The poet
holds up to criticism many of the corrupt practices of the
churchmen, at the same time showing the better side of their
lives. Again scholarship has come to our aid and offered
explanations without which we would be unable to understand
many of the poet's references.

The portrait which Chaucer has drawn of the Parson is
that of a good parish priest:

A good man . . . of religioun,
And . . . a povre Persoun of a Toun,
But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk. . .
Benygne he was, and wonder diligent,
And in adversitee ful pacient,
And swich he was ypreved ofte sitthes. . .
This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,
That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.
(A, 477-97)
But in praising the Parson, Chaucer has also hinted at some of the ecclesiastical abuses which were prominent in his day. Robinson explains that a priest often imposed the penalty of excommunication for the non-payment of tithes. He could report the failure to pay to his superiors, exclude the offender from the sacraments, and declare him liable to excommunication, which would be actually pronounced by the bishop.

Hence Chaucer's Parson, who was loath to "cursen for his tithes" (A, 486) but preferred to give from his own purse to his parishioners who could not pay it, typifies the ideal priest, the shepherd who loves his flock. In Chaucer's implied condemnation of this method of enforcing payment, there is very likely an echo of Wyclif's protests against the abuse of this power. Chaucer's Parson "sette nat his benefice to hyre" nor went running here and there, as Chaucer implies the practice of some was. These somewhat negative virtues make the Parson seem an admirable character in the light of reports that there were some medieval parishes that never saw a resident rector and that many lazy priests forsook their flocks for the easy life of a chaunterie, a provision for a priest to sing mass daily for the repose of a soul. The usual payment for such a service in 1380 was seven marks a year. A parson could also be retained by a gild to act as their chaplain.

47 Robinson, op. cit., p. 766, note 510.
The Prioress has been discussed at length by scholars. Some contend that Chaucer was satirizing her, while others think that he was describing her in the style of the romances. If he was not satirizing her, he has, nevertheless, given a picture in which Robinson sees some minor infractions of rules on her part. He feels that her brooch was objectionable as a bit of worldly vanity, that her wimple possibly should not have been fluted, that her forehead should have been covered, that her keeping of pet dogs was against the rules, and that her very presence on the pilgrimage was a violation of orders. Although Sister Madeleva attempts to explain these seeming disobediences by assuming that the Prioress was an elderly sister, perhaps as much as fifty years of age, and therefore entitled to certain privileges, Robinson says that the argument is not convincing but, because of Sister Madeleva's knowledge of the life of a religious, it is worthy of consideration. Sister Madeleva points out that most religious rules even today forbid the keeping of pets, but she says that, when exceptions are made, they are usually to an older religious and that an older woman of fifty or so could have such

48Ibid., pp. 754-5.  
49Ibid.  
50Sister Madeleva, "Chaucer's Nuns," A Lost Language and Other Essays on Chaucer, pp. 29-60.  
51Robinson, op. cit., p. 755.  
52Sister Madeleva, op. cit., p. 47.
animals as birds, cats, and dogs with no impropriety but that a Sister of thirty would not think of such a thing.

The Prioress' use of the oath "by Seinte Loy" has been variously discussed, but it may be that the character and person of St. Loy were such as might naturally have appealed to the Prioress. The saint may have been Eloi or Eligius, who was famed for his personal beauty and courtesy as well as for his craftsmanship and whose character was very like that of the Prioress. It is possible that there was a cult of St. Loy at the English court at this time; that the Countess of Pembroke gave an image of him to the high altar of the Grey Friars; and that Queen Philippa came from a district where he was especially popular. In saying that she spoke French after the school of "Stratford atte Bowe," Chaucer may have been casting a slur at the inferior convent which Robinson identifies as the Benedictine nunnery of St. Leonard's, at Bromley, Middlesex, adjoining Stratford-Bow. The occupants of St. Leonard's were of lower station than were those of the same order at Barking; and the Stratford nuns, in counterfeiting "cheere of court," may have been "aping Windsor" or the nuns at Barking.

We are indebted to scholarship still further for information about religious practices in Chaucer's day. The poet describes the Monk as "an outridere," defined by Robinson as

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53 Ibid.
54 Robinson, op. cit.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., p. 756.
one "whose duty it was to look after the estates of the monastery." From Gilbert White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne* Robinson finds that the Monk's habits of hunting, his love for fine horses and dogs, and his desire for rich food and clothing were all condemned. Chaucer himself tells us that the Monk cared little for the rules of his order, so long as he was free to do as he pleased:

What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood,
Upon a book in cloystre alway to poure,
Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,
As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?
Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!

(A, 184-8)

Another ecclesiastic, the Summoner, an officer "who cited delinquents to appear before the ecclesiastical court," was guilty of indulging in the same sins for which he excused others:

He wolde suffer for a quart of wyn
A good felawe to have his concubyn
A twelf month, and excuse hym atte fulle;
Ful privelly a fynch eek koude he pulle.

(A, 649-52)

Robinson suggests that the "good felawe" referred to was probably a priest.

Lounsbury interprets the lines

Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede,
For curs wol slye right as assoilyng savith.

(A, 660-61)

to be an indication of Chaucer's doubt of the efficacy of

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57 Ibid., p. 757, note 166.  
58 Ibid., pp. 756-7.  
59 Ibid., p. 768  
60 Ibid.
the practice of assoiling, either the removal of a sentence of excommunication or the sacramental absolution; but Robinson believes that they imply only "a condemnation of an avaricious clergy." Chaucer's sketches of the Friar in the "General Prologue" and the Friar in the " Summoner's Tale" are both examples of corruptness. The friar was a "lymytour," one who paid a "ferme" (rent) for the "privilege of begging within certain assigned limits." He was "the beste beggere in his hous" (l. 252), and his income from his begging was often more than the rent which he turned in to his convent. Chaucer's lines

He hadde maad ful many a mariaage
Of yonge wommen at his owene cost. (A, 212-13)

are explained by Robinson to mean that the Friar "arranged marriages for young women whom he had himself seduced." The Pardoner, who sold indulgences, is perhaps Chaucer's supreme creation and a consummate rascal. He carried in his cloak certain cloths, stones, and bones which he said were religious relics and sold them for more money in one day's time than the poor man who bought them could make in "monthes tweye." Thus he "made the person and the peple his apes."

Although he appears to have actually been an ecclesiastic,

61 Lounsbury, op. cit., II, 517 ff.
62 Robinson, op. cit., p. 768, note 661.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., p. 758, note 252 a-b.
65 Ibid., notes 212-13.
Robinson says that many people traveled as pardoners who were wholly unauthorized and full of tricks and abuses. In the "Prologue" to his tale the unscrupulous Pardoner reveals himself and his corrupt practices in a confession matched only by the Wife of Bath's for frankness. In fact, his denunciation of himself is so clear that the reader gets the full import of his corrupt nature without the aid of any scholarly interpretation.

Chaucer was a devout Catholic, and as evidenced in his "retractions," he must have regretted the corruption in religion that he saw around him. He very probably used the satirical allusions to the clergy in an earnest effort to dispel such corruption and vice.

Ibid., p. 769.
CHAPTER IV

CHAUCER'S METHOD OF CHARACTERIZATION

Inquiry into the possible origins of the characters in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and analysis of the poet's method of characterization have resulted in two very interesting studies directly opposed to each other in approach, Types of Society in Medieval Literature, by Frederick Tupper, and Some New Light on Chaucer, by John Matthews Manly, both published in 1926.

Tupper believes that Chaucer delineated his pilgrims after the medieval manner of typing characters and doing away with all individuality, whereas Manly shows that Chaucer individualized them. Both men present substantial arguments for their beliefs, a summary of which will suffice to show that either method may have been Chaucer's.

Tupper cites examples to show that it was customary in that society to ignore personalities and give special attention to types, "perhaps because all forms and functions seemed rooted in the eternal order of things."\(^1\) He contends that the medieval writer, besides typing his characters, also assigned certain qualities to each class.\(^2\) He accepts John

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\(^1\)Frederick Tupper, Types of Society in Medieval Literature, p. 13.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 15.
Gower's classification of the three degrees as follows: the clergy, made up of
mighty prelates of the Court of Rome, cardinals, bishops, deans, parsons, curates . . . priests without a cure, the religious orders—monks and nuns and mendicant friars;

the knighthood, composed of "emperors, kings, lords, knights, and men at arms"; and the peasantry, which included also the craftsmen and merchants.3

That Chaucer recognized the adequacy of generalizing is accepted by Tupper because of the lack of personal names and individual characteristics for most of his pilgrims.4

True, the poet assigns names and places of residence to a few of his characters, but the majority are purely conventional figures which his readers knew well, says Tupper.

Manly, on the other hand, sees the pilgrims as types only as any individual may be a member of a type by reason of status or occupation.5 He believes that his assumption will be more readily accepted if we remember that

Chaucer's poetry was not written for the world in general . . . It was written for a comparatively small social group, to the members of which the persons, places, and experiences hinted at were thoroughly familiar. Allusions which to us mean little or nothing were instantly intelligible to the hearers and readers for whom he wrote . . . The nobility and gentry of England numbered not more than a few hundred, and their social life centered in London. They were acquainted with one another and knew one another's affairs in the same way that 'society' in any of our smaller cities knows all about its members . . . and we may be

3Ibid., p. 14.  
4Ibid., p. 17.  
5Manly, New Light, p. 74.
sure that they caught every sly reference to persons and things they knew. . . . Chaucer was not writing for posterity . . . but for a handful of courtiers, gentlemen, churchmen, professional men, officials, and city merchants. There was no need to give them a systematic view of fourteenth-century life.

As the chief source for his belief that the pilgrims were representative of medieval orders and estates, Tupper uses the Chess Book of Jacobus de Cessolis. Through it he shows that Chaucer began his Tales with a Knight because he wished to put chivalry first, that being the accepted literary practice of his time. From the fact that Chaucer uses the adjective "worthy" for his Knight five times, Tupper believes the medieval conception of the word to be brave.

He interprets the line

And though that he were worthy, he was wys (A, 68) as "Though he was a brave man, he was a prudent one," using the Chess Book to support his belief, and he further states that the distinction between bravery and prudence became a medieval formula. "Chaucer's Knight is the ideal knight of the Chess Book":

. . . such is he
That every man at arms would wish to be.

Manly contends that, although the Knight's career was typical of that period, Chaucer probably had in mind a specific person, or persons, when he wrote. Manly's studies

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6Ibid.
7Tupper, op. cit., p. 33.
8Ibid., p. 34.
9Ibid., p. 35.
10Ibid., p. 38.
11Manly, New Light, p. 254.
have resulted in his making Chaucer's Knight a composite picture of two members of the Scrope family, in whose behalf Chaucer testified in the Scrope-Grosvenor trial over a coat of arms. Albert S. Cook agrees with Tupper that the Knight's career is typical but agrees also with Manly that he is a composite figure of two persons known to Chaucer. He believes the persons to be members of the Derby family, however, instead of the Scrope family. Manly is willing to accept the fact that either the Derby or the Scrope family could have fulfilled the requirements, but he believes that Chaucer's Knight was not of the social rank of the Derbys.

The character of Chaucer's Host Manly shows to be definitely drawn from a Harry Bailly, hosteler, who lived in Southwark at the time the Tales were written. He was at various times a burgess and a special coroner, a man fit For to han been a marchal in an hall. (A, 752)

Manly further substantiates his belief by pointing out that the Host is clearly individualized in his handling of the pilgrims, his attitudes, his language, and his personal reactions. Tupper says of the Host's language, however, that it "is typical of his profession" and should not point to any particular person. Again he uses the Chess Book to show the Host's type.

14 Manly, New Light, p. 256. 15 Ibid., p. 78.
16 Ibid., p. 77. 17 Tupper, op. cit., p. 50. 18 Ibid.
Chaucer further individualizes the Host by telling us his wife's name:

I hadde levere than a barel ale
That Godelief, my wyf, hadde herd this tale!
(VII, 1893-94)

One wonders whether there was such a name as Godelief; but Edith Rickert discovered in the Public Records Office in London that the name "Godelief" appears several times as a woman's name in fourteenth-century London, although the wife of Harry Bailly is listed in those records as "Christian." Manly thinks that Chaucer may have described an actual person so vividly that he did not wish to use the correct name of the Host's wife.

The character of the Reeve is the one which Manly says prompted him to make his study of the personalities of Chaucer's pilgrims. He points out three particular passages which seem to him to prove that Chaucer had in mind a definite Reeve. Of the first passage,

Of Northfolk was this Reeve of which I telle,
Biside a towne men clepen Baldeswelle, (A, 619-20)

Manly thinks that Chaucer may have visited in the vicinity of Baldeswelle as one of two deputies chosen to view the waste committed on lands belonging to Sir William de Beauchamp, with whom he became associated in the investigation of the Pembroke estate. E. B. Powley believes, however, that

19 Manly, New Light, pp. 80-81. 20 Ibid., p. 81.
21 Ibid., p. 83. 22 Ibid., p. 86.
Chaucer's acquaintance with Baldeswelle came through the fact that it was a part of the Manor of Clare, which belonged in 1360 to Prince Lionel, in whose wife's service Chaucer had been in 1357. The second passage,

With grene trees yshadowed was his place, (A, 607)

seems to Manly to be too specific a reference not to be taken from an actual scene. The third quotation,

And by his covenant yaf the rekenynge,
Syn that his lord was twenty yeer of age,
(A, 601-2)

Manly considers a reference to scandalous mismanagement of the estate of the young earl of Pembroke in Norfolk. Records show that the earl had come into his inheritance before he was of age and had been "fleeced" by the crafty reeve appointed to administer the farms.\(^{24}\) Manly thinks that Chaucer's public would readily have recognized the reference to the Pembroke affair and would know to whom he was referring in the character of the Reeve.

Manly believes that the Miller also was an actual person.\(^{25}\)

The fact that the Miller and the Reeve seem to have a standing quarrel cannot be laid to their types, he thinks, nor to the supposition that they had formed a dislike for each other on the first night of their meeting. Rather he thinks that they had had previous dealings with each other, possibly on the same Pembroke estate; for a part of every estate was the

\(^{24}\) Manly, New Light, pp. 86-90.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., pp. 94-100.
manorial windmill which ground all the corn raised there, and the Reeve would have had occasion to know of the Miller's dishonesty.

Tupper is of the opinion that the quarrel between the Miller and the Reeve is merely traditional. He says that the relation between the two is so close that William Langland "speaks of the two classes in one breath." He concedes, however, that Chaucer gave the Reeve the trade of Carpenter in order to allow the Miller's story of the cuckolded carpenter to apply to him, for the trade does not appear traditional among reeves.

Tupper also believes that Chaucer used as a structural device for his Tales the Seven Deadly Sins, embodying each of the sins in one of his pilgrims. The sin of Wrath he considers to be represented in the Summoner and the Friar. Of these two Tupper says, "Their is a conflict not of men but of professions." They give vent to their anger by telling tales which discredit the occupations of each. Chaucer did, however, mingle some few good points in each of the characters, Tupper says, because "he never views men as mere personifications of this or that evil."

Manly, on the other hand, believes that the two were enemies through earlier association. Evidence of their

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26 Tupper, op. cit., p. 52.  
27 Ibid., p. 53.  
28 Ibid., p. 55.  
29 Ibid., p. 56.  
30 Ibid., p. 64.
language places the residence of both the Summoner and the Friar in the North\textsuperscript{31} and investigation into old records shows that certain men, particularly one Richard de Ravenser, who later became archdeacon and was closely associated with Chaucer, was also from the North.\textsuperscript{32} Manly admits that

These facts . . . do not prove that Ravenser was the butt of Chaucer's satire of a greedy archdeacon; they merely make him a possible candidate for the position. They do show that Chaucer must have had associations with the district, out of which his stories could have grown.\textsuperscript{33}

In the scheme of the Seven Deadly Sins, Tupper sees the sins of Avarice, Gluttony, and Lechery embodied in the Pardoner, and the "Pardoner's Tale" further illustrates these vices.\textsuperscript{34} Chaucer puts into the mouth of a person who himself indulges in all these vices a sermon against them; but the Pardoner, Tupper thinks, tricks his audience into listening to him and overlooking the fact that he is all the things he denounces.\textsuperscript{35}

If any of the other pilgrims leave us doubtful of their identity as real people, Manly thinks, the Pardoner "who came from Runoevale" certainly does not.\textsuperscript{36} Manly identifies "Runoevale" with a cell of the convent of Roncesvalles, not the convent itself, which Chaucer would have known because John

\textsuperscript{31} Manly, New Light, pp. 103 ff.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., pp. 107-111.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 120.
\textsuperscript{34} Tupper, op. cit., pp. 94-98.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 99.
\textsuperscript{36} Manly, New Light, p. 122.
of Gaunt was one of its patrons. Manly says that the Pardoner may have been duly authorized to collect for the Hospital and keep a share, or he may have been offering pardons which were just "as spurious as were his relics." Manly also cites the Pardoner's superiority in preaching as evidence of his individuality, for "not all Pardoners were allowed to preach."

Envy, in Tupper's study, is represented by the Man of Law, who tells a story of false witness. Since lawyers had the reputation of being "arch-deceivers and detractors," Chaucer gave him this tale of falseness with deliberate ironical intent: the revelation of a man "at variance with himself and his profession." Tupper thinks that the thought of giving that type of tale to the lawyer was an afterthought and was not the tale intended for him when the "Introduction" was written.

In direct opposition to Tupper's view, Manly shows that the Man of Law belonged to a very special, and "distinguished," class of society:

The sergeants at law were such of the most eminent pleaders practicing in the king's court, as had been chosen for their special attainments and summoned to that rank and grade by a writ from the king . . . Professionally, they ranked immediately after the judges of the king's bench . . . they are not required

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37 Ibid., p. 126.  
38 Ibid., p. 128.  
39 Ibid., p. 129.  
40 Tupper, op. cit., p. 104.  
41 Ibid., pp. 104-5.  
42 Ibid., p. 104.  
43 Manly, New Light, p. 132.
to remove their head-covering, the coif, even in the presence of the king.\textsuperscript{44}

By eliminating first one and then another from the list of sergeants of law who might have been Chaucer’s model, Manly arrives at Thomas Pynchbek as the most likely one.\textsuperscript{45} Chaucer and Pynchbek were apparently about the same age, and Chaucer may have known him in the Temple.\textsuperscript{46} Also, the village of Pynchbek was near the country home of Katherine Swynford, Chaucer’s sister-in-law, where Chaucer and his wife may have spent considerable time.\textsuperscript{47} The final bit of evidence which Manly presents is a possible pun on the name Pynchbek when he says:

\begin{quote}
Therto he \textit{The Man of Law} koude endite, and make a thyng, Ther koude no wight pynche at his writyng. \\
(A, 325-6)
\end{quote}

The evil of Sloth is typified in Tupper’s discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins by the Nun; her tale represents the evil of Sloth, or, rather, the antithesis of Sloth, in the busy St. Cecilia.\textsuperscript{48}

The sin of Pride, the first of the medieval vices, is closely connected with disobedience. With the thought of wifely disobedience in mind, Tupper believes that the Wife of Bath, who gains the "maistrie" over her husband, is another ironical illustration of the Seven Deadly Sins.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 133-4.  
\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 147.  
\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 154. 
\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 154-5.  
\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Tupper, op. cit.}, p. 105.  
\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 110.
He analyzes the medieval concept of wifely obedience and shows that the question was one of supreme importance to the fourteenth-century people who heard or read Chaucer's stories. 50

Manly goes beyond the fact that the Wife possesses certain traits and characteristics common to her type and suggests that she had some individual traits which the poet apparently knew. 51 He concedes that women played an important part in the weaving industry but believes that her traits were not necessarily those belonging to her trade. She had been to Jerusalem on pilgrimages three times; as a year was necessary for each one, she must have been an extraordinary lover of pilgrimages. Manly believes, however, that her addiction to them was for social, not religious purposes. 52 Although her name Alysoun was a popular one of the time and gives her no distinction, the very fact that Chaucer speaks of her as living beside Bath, not in the town, makes the Wife seem even more like a real person. 53 Chaucer's forestership at North Petherton, Somerset, near Bath, would have given him time and opportunity to have seen the person he described. 54

One more character that Tupper discusses in his efforts to show the typical quality of Chaucer's pilgrims is the Merchant. He shows that the Merchant's habit of disguising

52Ibid., p. 230. 53Ibid., p. 234.
54Ibid., p. 232.
his indebtedness was one of the common practices of the time. Although the Chess Book set forth freedom from debt as a standard for merchants, Tupper says that merchants who did not pay their debts were traditional and that failure to do so furnishes no clue to the identity of any one merchant.\textsuperscript{55}

The same may be said for the Doctor, "every important trait" of whom is typical of his profession, says Tupper.\textsuperscript{56} He continues, "There is absolutely no warrant for identifying such a bundle of stock qualities with . . . any . . . contemporary practitioner."\textsuperscript{57} He believes that the Doctor's lack of knowledge of the Bible is not a personal trait but the result of his being a fourteenth-century "Arabist and astrologer."\textsuperscript{58}

Manly includes both the Merchant and the Doctor in his study but does not identify them specifically. He believes that the Merchant may have been one concerned with the importation of cloth into foreign cities instead of one whose business was the export of wool and skins.\textsuperscript{59} Because the Merchant Adventurers contributed to the support of two chapels of St. Thomas of Canterbury, the Merchant may have had a special reason for being on the pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{60} Chaucer's picture of the Doctor, clothed "in sangwyn and pers . . . lyned with taffata," whose "studie was but litel on the Bible," is, Manly thinks, one which would immediately call

\textsuperscript{55}Tupper, op. cit., p. 44. \textsuperscript{56}Ibid., p. 45. \textsuperscript{57}Ibid. \textsuperscript{58}Ibid., p. 47. \textsuperscript{59}Manly, New Light, p. 184. \textsuperscript{60}Ibid., p. 187.
to mind a well-known person; but he does not attempt to identify him.\textsuperscript{61}

Of the Manciple, Manly says:

He is not an individual; he is not even a well-rounded type; he is merely a stalking horse from behind which Chaucer shoots a playful arrow at his learned masters of the temple...\textsuperscript{62}

and of the Cook:

Every act and word ascribed to him are as definitely his as are the normal on his shin or his personal name.\textsuperscript{63}

Tupper, however, uses both these characters to further illustrate the theme of the Seven Deadly Sins as an architectonic device,\textsuperscript{64} ascribing their quarrel to Wrath, as in the case of the Summoner and the Friar. Again he says theirs is a class quarrel, not a personal one.

Of the remaining pilgrims, Manly has less material to prove individuality, but he still maintains that Chaucer's hearers probably knew to whom he was referring. The Franklin, although he lacks such convincing traits as his counterpart the Man of Law had, Manly identifies with Fynchbek's neighbor, Sir John Bussy.\textsuperscript{65}

Some years ago P. Q. Karkeek pointed out in an essay for the Chaucer Society that a vessel named "Magdaleyne," from Dartmouth, paid customs duties in 1379 and 1391. Scholars have long recognized the fact that one of the two known masters of the ship may have been the original of Chaucer's

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., p. 261. \textsuperscript{62}Ibid., p. 257. \textsuperscript{63}Ibid., p. 259. \textsuperscript{64}Tupper, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 164 ff. \textsuperscript{65}Manly, \textit{New Light}, pp. 162-3.
Shipman, but Manly's more recent studies show that the last one, Peter Risshenden, is more probably the correct one.

Manly believes that the Monk, who wore fur on his sleeves, kept "grehoundes," and refused to "studie and make hymselfen wood," had a living model; but he does not identify him by name or by monastery.

The Parson was at one time thought to be a portrait of Wyclif, but that theory is no longer held among scholars. Manly does not attempt to identify him, but he thinks that one cannot read the account of the Parson without believing that Chaucer had a special person in mind.

M. E. Richardson identifies the Clerk with Walter Dissy, who was confessor to John of Gaunt from 1375 until 1386; but Robinson feels that the ground for identification is too slight to be readily accepted. Manly says the Clerk may have been a description of the ideal student with some personal traits added for verisimilitude. He thinks Chaucer may have begun the account of the Clerk with a person in mind and ended with the ideal.

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66 Robinson, op. cit., p. 762.
67 Manly, New Light, pp. 180-1.
68 Ibid., p. 262.
69 Robinson, op. cit., p. 873.
70 Manly, New Light, p. 260.
72 Robinson, op. cit., p. 759.
73 Manly, New Light, p. 261.
Manly does not believe that Chaucer merely photographed his friends and acquaintances, but he does think that the contemporaries who read his Tales would have been amused and interested in the recognition of certain traits of people they all knew.\(^{74}\)

\(^{74}\)Ibid., p. 263.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that Chaucer's reputation has gone through varying periods of intense admiration, lack of interest caused by failure to understand his language, and revival of interest because of extensive research by scholars eager to keep alive the works of one of the greatest English poets.

Representatives of his own time, such as Occleve, Lydgate, and Scogan, testify to the high literary position held by Chaucer in England in his lifetime; while Froissart and Deschamps show us the esteem of the French for their contemporary.

In the fifteenth century the evidence of the Scottish writers Henryson, Dunbar, Douglas, and James I indicates that complete understanding, as well as appreciation and admiration, prevailed for a long time after the poet's death. There is no indication of lack of understanding until the sixteenth century, when writers began to see Chaucer as a reformer and to believe that he wrote purely to expose the rottenness of religious life. Although Edmund Spenser expresses appreciation for the poet, his efforts to imitate Chaucer's style show that he, too, failed to understand the language. Other writers openly criticized Chaucer for his "ungrammatical" constructions.
During the seventeenth century, Chaucer's reputation reached the lowest point to which it ever fell. From 1602 (Speght's second edition) to 1687 (a reprint from the 1602 edition) no printing of the entire works of the poet appeared. The few people who believed Chaucer a clear, polished poet were in the minority; general opinion held him a "rude writer of a rude age."

The antiquarian movement in the eighteenth century gave rise to a revival of interest in the poet, but many false beliefs and misconceptions about his life arose as a result of the inaccurate early biographies based on legend. The first life of Chaucer, written by John Leland, who died in 1552, appeared in the eighteenth century. Other biographers followed Leland and accepted his statements until research in the nineteenth century began to disprove many of his misconceptions. Eighteenth-century poets who attempted to imitate Chaucer made great blunders in grammar while trying to reproduce his language. They also mistook his frankness for a love of sin, and their imitations of him emphasized obscenity in their stories.

The nineteenth century brought evidences of a genuine love for and appreciation of Chaucer. The works of such writers as Ruskin, Leigh Hunt, and Keats show that they truly understood him. The Chaucer Society, organized in this century, made one of the most important steps forward when it published the Life-Records of Chaucer; also, modernizations
and translations during the nineteenth century made it possible for those without a knowledge of Middle English to read the poet's works, and Chaucer studies have increased to the extent that, in the twentieth century, they lead the field in Middle English research.

Scholars have persistently searched for any evidence that will throw some light upon the life of the poet, but some phases of his life are still under controversy. Whether or not Chaucer received part of his education at the Inner Temple; whether he had two sons, Lewis and Thomas; and whether he was definitely under the patronage of John of Gaunt are questions still under discussion by scholars. Frequent new evidence favoring one side or the other comes forth, but no incontrovertible proof has been found.

Evidence as to the possible circle of friends in which Chaucer moved shows that he numbered among his acquaintances influential merchants, ambassadors and officials, Lollard Knights, and literary people of both England and Italy. Such evidence indicates that the poet was himself a person of some importance and one who commanded the respect of his contemporaries.

Aside from work on the life of Chaucer, interesting studies concerning the beliefs and practices of the fourteenth century interpret for us some of the scientific knowledge of his time. Notable among the scientific researches are those of Curry, which show that the fourteenth-century man believed that his entire life was governed by planetary influences.
His every action and the simplest occurrence in his life he believed to be affected by the position of the stars at the time of his birth. Such a belief had a marked effect upon the medical practices and on the interpretation of a man's character by his physical characteristics. Curry shows that when Chaucer drew some of his pilgrims, he probably had in mind the physiognomical lore which related a man's personality to his physical appearance.

What the fourteenth-century man knew about geography is evidenced by the travels of the Knight, the Wife of Bath, and the Shipman. The Knight had traveled through Europe, into southern Asia Minor, and Russia; the Wife of Bath had been to Jerusalem, France, and Spain; and the Shipman had visited ports in Spain and Sweden.

Chaucer used several ecclesiastical characters in the Canterbury Tales to point out abuses in the church in his day. The Monk and the Summoner are depicted as practicing many vices which were frowned upon by the church and which were subject to reform by the Wyclifites. The Nun, in spite of her many graces, was guilty of minor infractions of the rules of her order. The Parson, a picture of the good parish priest, is depicted as one who does not practice the abuses prominent in his time. His virtues are all negative in that he is unlike most of his fellow parsons.

Studies made by Manly and Tupper have attempted to explain Chaucer's method of characterization. Manly believes that the poet had certain individuals in mind when he drew
his pilgrims, whereas Tupper believes that he followed the medieval custom of typing his characters after the manner of the *Chase Book*, which delineates the characteristics of each type. Manly identifies some of the pilgrims by name, but all of them have some individual traits which led him to believe that they were real people. Tupper also shows that Chaucer may have used the structural device of the Seven Deadly Sins for the *Tales*, each character representing one of the sins.

Scholarship may discover, in the years to follow, evidence which will settle some of the speculative problems of today, for research continues daily for material to further enlighten the modern reader. Certainly the twentieth-century scholar has access to the most comprehensive and enlightening studies of the poet which modern methods of research are able to produce.
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