

JOHN LORD

BEACON LIGHTS OF
HISTORY, VOLUME 3
PART 2: RENAISSANCE
AND REFORMATION

John Lord

**Beacon Lights of History, Volume 3
part 2: Renaissance and Reformation**

«Public Domain»

Lord J.

Beacon Lights of History, Volume 3 part 2: Renaissance and
Reformation / J. Lord — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

DANTE.	5
GEOFFREY CHAUCER	16
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.	26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

John Lord

Beacon Lights of History, Volume 3

part 2: Renaissance and Reformation

DANTE.

A.D. 1265-1321.

RISE OF MODERN POETRY

The first great genius who aroused his country from the torpor of the Middle Ages was a poet. Poetry, then, was the first influence which elevated the human mind amid the miseries of a gloomy period, if we may except the schools of philosophy which flourished in the rising universities. But poetry probably preceded all other forms of culture in Europe, even as it preceded philosophy and art in Greece. The gay Provencal singers were harbingers of Dante, even as unknown poets prepared the way for Homer. And as Homer was the creator of Grecian literature, so Dante, by his immortal comedy, gave the first great impulse to Italian thought. Hence poets are great benefactors, and we will not let them die in our memories or hearts. We crown them, when alive, with laurels and praises; and when they die, we erect monuments to their honor. They are dear to us, since their writings give perpetual pleasure, and appeal to our loftiest sentiments. They appeal not merely to consecrated ideas and feelings, but they strive to conform to the principles of immortal art. Every great poet is as much an artist as the sculptor or the painter; and art survives learning itself. Varro, the most learned of the Romans, is forgotten, when Virgil is familiar to every school-boy. Cicero himself would not have been immortal, if his essays and orations had not conformed to the principles of art. Even an historian who would live must be an artist, like Voltaire or Macaulay. A cumbrous, or heavy, or pedantic historian will never be read, even if his learning be praised by all the critics of Germany.

Poets are the great artists of language. They even create languages, like Homer and Shakspeare. They are the ornaments of literature. But they are more than ornaments. They are the sages whose sayings are treasured up and valued and quoted from age to age, because of the inspiration which is given to them,—an insight into the mysteries of the soul and the secrets of life. A good song is never lost; a good poem is never buried, like a system of philosophy, but has an inherent vitality, like the melodies of the son of Jesse. Real poetry is something, too, beyond elaborate versification, which is one of the literary fashions, and passes away like other fashions unless, redeemed by something that arouses the soul, and elevates it, and appeals to the consciousness of universal humanity. It is the poets who make revelations, like prophets and sages of old; it is they who invest history with interest; like Shakspeare and Racine, and preserve what is most vital and valuable in it. They even adorn philosophy, like Lucretius, when he speculated on the systems of the Ionian philosophers. They certainly impress powerfully on the mind the truths of theology, as Watts and Cowper and Wesley did in their noble lyrics. So that the most rapt and imaginative of men, if artists, utilize the whole realm of knowledge, and diffuse it, and perpetuate it in artistic forms. But real poets are rare, even if there are many who glory in the jingle of language and the structure of rhyme. Poetry, to live, must have a soul, and it must combine rare things,—art, music, genius, original thought, wisdom made still richer by learning, and, above all, a power of appealing to inner sentiments, which all feel, yet are reluctant to express. So choice are the gifts, so grand are the qualities, so varied the attainments of truly great poets, that very few are born in a whole generation and in nations that number twenty or forty millions of people. They are the rarest of gifted men. Every nation can boast of its illustrious lawyers, statesmen, physicians, and orators; but they can point only to a few of their poets with pride.

We can count on the fingers of one of our hands all those worthy of poetic fame who now live in this great country of intellectual and civilized men, one for every ten millions. How great the pre-eminence even of ordinary poets! How very great the pre-eminence of those few whom all ages and nations admire!

The critics assign to Dante a pre-eminence over most of those we call immortal. Only two or three other poets in the whole realm of literature, ancient or modern, dispute his throne. We compare him with Homer and Shakspeare, and perhaps Goethe, alone. Civilization glories in Virgil, Milton, Tasso, Racine, Pope, and Byron,—all immortal artists; but it points to only four men concerning whose transcendent creative power there is unanimity of judgment,—prodigies of genius, to whose influence and fame we can assign no limits; stars of such surpassing brilliancy that we can only gaze and wonder,—growing brighter and brighter, too, with the progress of ages; so remarkable that no barbarism will ever obscure their brightness, so original that all imitation of them becomes impossible and absurd. So great is original genius, directed by art and consecrated to lofty sentiments.

I have assumed the difficult task of presenting one of these great lights. But I do not presume to analyze his great poem, or to point out critically its excellencies. This would be beyond my powers, even if I were an Italian. It takes a poet to reveal a poet. Nor is criticism interesting to ordinary minds, even in the hands of masters. I should make critics laugh if I were to attempt to dissect the *Divine Comedy*. Although, in an English dress, it is known to most people who pretend to be cultivated, yet it is not more read than the "*Paradise Lost*" or the "*Faerie Queene*," being too deep and learned for some, and understood by nobody without a tolerable acquaintance with the Middle Ages, which it interprets,—the superstitions, the loves, the hatreds, the ideas of ages which can never more return. All I can do—all that is safe for me to attempt—is to show the circumstances and conditions in which it was written, the sentiments which prompted it, its historical results, its general scope and end, and whatever makes its author stand out to us as a living man, bearing the sorrows and revelling in the joys of that high life which gave to him extraordinary moral wisdom, and made him a prophet and teacher to all generations. He was a man of sorrows, of resentments, fierce and implacable, but whose "love was as transcendent as his scorn,"—a man of vast experiences and intense convictions and superhuman earnestness, despising the world which he sought to elevate, living isolated in the midst of society, a wanderer and a sage, meditating constantly on the grandest themes, lost in ecstatic reveries, familiar with abstruse theories, versed in all the wisdom of his day and in the history of the past, a believer in God and immortality, in rewards and punishments, and perpetually soaring to comprehend the mysteries of existence, and those ennobling truths which constitute the joy and the hope of renovated and emancipated and glorified spirits in the realms of eternal bliss. All this is history, and it is history alone which I seek to teach,—the outward life of a great man, with glimpses, if I can, of those visions of beauty and truth in which his soul lived, and which visions and experiences constitute his peculiar greatness. Dante was not so close an observer of human nature as Shakspeare, nor so great a painter of human actions as Homer, nor so learned a scholar as Milton; but his soul was more serious than either,—he was deeper, more intense than they; while in pathos, in earnestness, and in fiery emphasis he has been surpassed only by Hebrew poets and prophets.

It would seem from his numerous biographies that he was remarkable from a boy; that he was a youthful prodigy; that he was precocious, like Cicero and Pascal; that he early made great attainments, giving utterance to living thoughts and feelings, like Bacon, among boyish companions; lisping in numbers, like Pope, before he could write prose; different from all other boys, since no time can be fixed when he did not think and feel like a person of maturer years. Born in Florence, of the noble family of the Alighieri, in the year 1265, his early education devolved upon his mother, his father having died while the boy was very young. His mother's friend, Brunetto Latini, famous as statesman and scholarly poet, was of great assistance in directing his tastes and studies. As a mere youth he wrote sonnets, such as Sordello the Troubadour would not disdain to own. He delights, as a boy, in those inquiries which gave fame to Bonaventura. He has an intuitive contempt for all quacks and pretenders.

At Paris he maintains fourteen different theses, propounded by learned men, on different subjects, and gains universal admiration. He is early selected by his native city for important offices, which he fills with honor. In wit he encounters no superiors. He scorches courts by sarcasms which he can not restrain. He offends the great by a superiority which he does not attempt to veil. He affects no humility, for his nature is doubtless proud; he is even offensively conscious and arrogant. When Florence is deliberating about the choice of an ambassador to Rome, he playfully, yet still arrogantly, exclaims: "If I remain behind, who goes? and if I go, who remains behind?" His countenance, so austere and thoughtful, impresses all beholders with a sort of inborn greatness; his lip, in Giotto's portrait, is curled disdainfully, as if he lived among fools or knaves. He is given to no youthful excesses; he lives simply and frugally. He rarely speaks unless spoken to; he is absorbed apparently in thought. Without a commanding physical person, he is a marked man to everybody, even when he deems himself a stranger. Women gaze at him with wonder and admiration, though he disdains their praises and avoids their flatteries. Men make way for him as he passes them, unconsciously. "Behold," said a group of ladies, as he walked slowly by them, "there is a man who has visited hell!" To the close of his life he was a great devourer of books, and digested their contents. His studies were as various as they were profound. He was familiar with the ancient poets and historians and philosophers; he was still better acquainted with the abstruse speculations of the schoolmen. He delighted in universities and scholastic retreats; from the cares and duties of public life he would retire to solitary labors, and dignify his retirement by improving studies. He did not live in a cell, like Jerome, or a cave, like Mohammed; but no man was ever more indebted to solitude and meditation than he for that insight and inspiration which communion with God and great ideas alone can give.

And yet, though recluse and student, he had great experiences with life. He was born among the higher ranks of society. He inherited an ample patrimony. He did not shrink from public affairs. He was intensely patriotic, like Michael Angelo; he gave himself up to the good of his country, like Savonarola. Florence was small, but it was important; it was already a capital, and a centre of industry. He represented its interests in various courts. He lived with princes and nobles. He took an active part in all public matters and disputations; he was even familiar with the intrigues of parties; he was a politician as well as scholar. He entered into the contests between Popes and Emperors respecting the independence of Italy. He was not conversant with art, for the great sculptors and painters had not then arisen. The age was still dark; the mariner's compass had not been invented, chimneys had not been introduced, the comforts of life were few. Dames of highest rank still spent their days over the distaff or in combing flax. There were no grand structures but cathedral churches. Life was laborious, dismal, and turbulent. Law and order did not reign in cities or villages. The poor were oppressed by nobles. Commerce was small and manufactures scarce. Men lived in dreary houses, without luxuries, on coarse bread and fruit and vegetables. The crusades had not come to an end. It was the age of quarrelsome popes and cruel nobles, and lazy monks and haughty bishops, and ignorant people, steeped in gloomy superstitions, two hundred years before America was discovered, and two hundred and fifty years before Michael Angelo erected the dome of St. Peter's.

But there was faith in the world, and rough virtues, sincerity, and earnestness of character, though life was dismal. Men believed in immortality and in expiation for sin. The rising universities had gifted scholars whose abstruse speculations have never been rivalled for acuteness and severity of logic. There were bards and minstrels, and chivalric knights and tournaments and tilts, and village fetes and hospitable convents and gentle ladies,—gentle and lovely even in all states of civilization, winning by their graces and inspiring men to deeds of heroism and gallantry.

In one of those domestic revolutions which were so common in Italy Dante was banished, and his property was confiscated; and he at the age of thirty-five, about the year 1300, when Giotto was painting portraits, was sent forth a wanderer and an exile, now poor and unimportant, to eat the bread of strangers and climb other people's stairs; and so obnoxious was he to the dominant party in his native city for his bitter spirit, that he was destined never to return to his home and friends.

His ancestors, boasting of Roman descent, belonged to the patriotic party,—the Guelphs, who had the ascendancy in his early years,—that party which defended the claims of the Popes against the Emperors of Germany. But this party had its divisions and rival families,—those that sided with the old feudal nobles who had once ruled the city, and the new mercantile families that surpassed them in wealth and popular favor. So, expelled by a fraction of his own party that had gained power, Dante went over to the Ghibellines, and became an adherent of imperial authority until he died.

It was in his wanderings from court to court and castle to castle and convent to convent and university to university, that he acquired that profound experience with men and the world which fitted him for his great task. "Not as victorious knight on the field of Campaldino, not as leader of the Guelph aristocracy at Florence, not as prior, not as ambassador," but as a wanderer did he acquire his moral wisdom. He was a striking example of the severe experiences to which nearly all great benefactors have been subjected,—Abraham the exile, in the wilderness, in Egypt, among Philistines, among robbers and barbaric chieftains; the Prince Siddartha, who founded Buddhism, in his wanderings among the various Indian nations who bowed down to Brahma; and, still greater, the Apostle Paul, in his protracted martyrdom among Pagan idolaters and boastful philosophers, in Asia and in Europe. These and others may be cited, who led a life of self-denial and reproach in order to spread the truths which save mankind. We naturally call their lot hard, even though they chose it; but it is the school of greatness. It was sad to see the wisest and best man of his day,—a man of family, of culture, of wealth, of learning, loving leisure, attached to his home and country, accustomed to honor and independence,—doomed to exile, poverty, neglect, and hatred, without those compensations which men of genius in our time secure. But I would not attempt to excite pity for an outward condition which developed the higher virtues,—for a thorny path which led to the regions of eternal light. Dante may have walked in bitter tears to Paradise, but after the fashion of saints and martyrs in all ages of our world. He need but cast his eyes on that emblem which was erected on every pinnacle of Mediaeval churches to symbolize passing suffering with salvation infinite,—the great and august creed of the age in which he lived, though now buried amid the triumphs of an imposing material civilization whose end is the adoration of the majesty of man rather than the majesty of God, the wonders of creation rather than the greatness of the Creator.

But something more was required in order to write an immortal poem than even native genius, great learning, and profound experience. The soul must be stimulated to the work by an absorbing and ennobling passion. This passion Dante had; and it is as memorable as the mortal loves of Abelard and Heloise, and infinitely more exalting, since it was spiritual and immortal,—even the adoration of his lamented and departed Beatrice.

I wish to dwell for a moment, perhaps longer than to some may seem dignified, on this ideal or sentimental love. It may seem trivial and unimportant to the eye of youth, or a man of the world, or a woman of sensual nature, or to unthinking fools and butterflies; but it is invested with dignity to one who meditates on the mysteries of the soul, the wonders of our higher nature,—one of the things which arrest the attention of philosophers.

It is recorded and attested, even by Dante himself, that at the early age of nine he fell in love with Beatrice,—a little girl of one of his neighbors,—and that he wrote to her sonnets as the mistress of his devotion. How could he have written sonnets without an inspiration, unless he felt sentiments higher than we associate with either boys or girls? The boy was father of the man. "She appeared to me," says the poet, "at a festival, dressed in that most noble and honorable color, scarlet,—girded and ornamented in a manner suitable to her age; and from that moment love ruled my soul. And after many days had passed, it happened that, passing through the street, she turned her eyes to the spot where I stood, and with ineffable courtesy she greeted me; and this had such an effect on me that it seemed I had reached the furthest limit of blessedness. I took refuge in the solitude of my chamber; and, thinking over what had happened to me, I proposed to write a sonnet, since I had

already acquired the art of putting words into rhyme." This, from his "Vita Nuova," his first work, relating to the "new life" which this love awoke in his young soul.

Thus, according to Dante's own statement, was the seed of a never-ending passion planted in his soul,—the small beginning, so insignificant to cynical eyes, that it would almost seem preposterous to allude to it; as if this fancy for a little girl in scarlet, and in a boy but nine years of age, could ripen into anything worthy to be soberly mentioned by a grave and earnest poet, in the full maturity of his genius,—worthy to give direction to his lofty intellect, worthy to be the occasion of the greatest poem the world has seen from Homer to modern times. Absurd! ridiculous! Great rivers cannot rise from such a spring; tall trees cannot grow from such a little acorn. Thus reasons the man who does not take cognizance of the mighty mysteries of human life. If anything tempted the boy to write sonnets to a little girl, it must have been the chivalric element in society at that period, when even boys were required to choose objects of devotion, and to whom they were to be loyal, and whose honor they were bound to defend. But the grave poet, in the decline of his life, makes this simple confession, as the beginning of that sentiment which never afterwards departed from him, and which inspired him to his grandest efforts.

But this youthful attachment was unfortunate. Beatrice did not return his passion, and had no conception of its force, and perhaps was not even worthy to call it forth. She may have been beautiful; she may have been gifted; she may have been commonplace. It matters little whether she was intellectual or not, beautiful or not. It was not the flesh and blood he saw, but the image of beauty and loveliness which his own mind created. He idealized the girl; she was to him all that he fancied. But she never encouraged him; she denied his greetings, and even avoided his society. At last she died, when he was twenty-seven, and left him—to use his own expression—"to ruminate on death, and envy whomsoever dies." To console himself, he read Boethius, and religious philosophy was ever afterwards his favorite study. Nor did serenity come, so deep were his sentiments, so powerful was his imagination, until he had formed an exalted purpose to write a poem in her honor, and worthy of his love. "If it please Him through whom all things come," said Dante, "that my life be spared, I hope to tell such things of her as never before have been seen by any one."

Now what inspired so strange a purpose? Was it a Platonic sentiment, like the love of Petrarch for Laura, or something that we cannot explain, and yet real,—a mystery of the soul in its deepest cravings and aspirations? And is love, among mortals generally, based on such a foundation? Is it flesh and blood we love; is it the intellect; is it the character; is it the soul; is it what is inherently interesting in woman, and which everybody can see,—the real virtues of the heart and charms of physical beauty? Or is it what we fancy in the object of our adoration, what exists already in our own minds,—the archetypes of eternal ideas of beauty and grace? And do all men worship these forms of beauty which the imagination creates? Can any woman, or any man, seen exactly as they are, incite a love which is kindred to worship? And is any love worthy to be called love, if it does not inspire emotions which prompt to self-sacrifice, labor, and lofty ends? Can a woman's smiles incite to Herculean energies, and drive the willing worshipper to Aonian heights, unless under these smiles are seen the light of life and the blessedness of supernatural fervor? Is there, and can there be, a perpetuity in mortal charms without the recognition or the supposition of a moral beauty connected with them, which alone is pure and imperishable, and which alone creates the sacred ecstasy that revels in the enjoyment of what is divine, or what is supposed to be divine, not in man, but in the conceptions of man,—the ever-blazing glories of goodness or of truth which the excited soul doth see in the eyes and expression of the adored image? It is these archetypes of divinity, real or fancied, which give to love all that is enduring. Destroy these, take away the real or fancied glories of the soul and mind, and the holy flame soon burns out. No mortal love can last, no mortal love is beautiful, unless the visions which the mind creates are not more or less realized in the object of it, or when a person, either man or woman, is not capable of seeing ideal perfections. The loves of savages are the loves of brutes. The more exalted the character and the soul, the greater is the capacity of love, and the deeper its fervor.

It is not the object of love which creates this fervor, but the mind which is capable of investing it with glories. There could not have been such intensity in Dante's love had he not been gifted with the power of creating so lofty and beautiful an ideal; and it was this he worshipped,—not the real Beatrice, but the angelic beauty he thought he saw in her. Why could he not see the perfections he adored shining in other women, who perhaps had a higher claim to them? Ah, that is the mystery! And you cannot solve it any easier than you can tell why a flower blooms or a seed germinates. And why was it that Dante, with his great experience, could in later life see the qualities he adored in no other woman than in the cold and unappreciative girl who avoided him? Suppose she had become his wife, might he not have been disenchanted, and his veneration been succeeded by a bitter disappointment? Yet, while the delusion lasted, no other woman could have filled her place; in no other woman could he have seen such charms; no other love could have inspired his soul to make such labors.

I would not be understood as declaring that married love must be necessarily a disenchantment. I would not thus libel humanity, and insult plain reason and experience. Many loves ARE happy, and burn brighter and brighter to the end; but it is because there are many who are worthy of them, both men and women,—because the ideal, which the mind created, IS realized to a greater or less degree, although the loftier the archetype, the less seldom is it found. Nor is it necessary that perfection should be found. A person may have faults which alienate and disenchant, but with these there may be virtues so radiant that the worship, though imperfect, remains,—a respect, on the whole, so great that the soul is lifted to admiration. Who can love this perishable form, unless one sees in it some traits which belong to superior and immortal natures? And hence the sentiment, when pure, creates a sort of companionship of beings robed in celestial light and exorcises those degrading passions which belong to earth. But Dante saw no imperfections in Beatrice: perhaps he had no opportunity to see them. His own soul was so filled with love, his mind soared to such exalted regions of adoration, that when she passed away he saw her only in the beatified state, in company with saints and angels; and he was wrapped in ecstasies which knew no end,—the unbroken adoration of beauty, grace, and truth, even of those eternal ideas on which Plato based all that is certain, and all that is worth living for; that sublime realism without which life is a failure, and this world is "a mockery, a delusion, and a snare."

This is the history and exposition of that love for Beatrice with which the whole spiritual life of Dante is identified, and without which the "Divine Comedy" might not have been written. I may have given to it disproportionate attention; and it is true I might have allegorized it, and for love of a woman I might have substituted love for an art,—even the art of poetry, in which his soul doubtless lived, even as Michael Angelo, his greatest fellow-countryman, lived in the adoration of beauty, grace, and majesty. Oh, happy and favored is the person who lives in the enjoyment of an art! It may be humble; it may be grand. It may be music; it may be painting, or sculpture, or architecture, or poetry, or oratory, or landscape gardening, yea, even farming, or needle-work, or house decoration,—anything which employs the higher faculties of the mind, and brings order out of confusion, and takes one from himself, from the drudgery of mechanical labors, even if it be no higher than carving a mantelpiece or making a savory dish; for all these things imply creation, alike the test and the reward of genius itself, which almost every human being possesses, in some form or other, to a greater or less degree,—one of the kindest gifts of Deity to man.

The great artist, kindled by his visions of imperishable loveliness in the person of his departed Beatrice, now resolves to dedicate to her honor his great life-labor,—even his immortal poem, which should be a transcript of his thoughts, a mirror of his life, a record of his sorrows, a painting of his experiences, a description of what he saw, a digest of his great meditations, a thesaurus of the treasures of the Mediaeval age, an exposition of its great and leading ideas in philosophy and in religion. Every great man wishes to leave behind some monument of his labors, to bless or instruct mankind. Any man without some form of this noble ambition lives in vain, even if his monument be no more than a cultivated farm rescued from wildness and sterility.

Now Dante's monument is "the marvellous, mystic, unfathomable song," in which he sang his sorrows and his joys, revealed his visions, and recorded the passions and sentiments of his age. It never can be popular, because it is so difficult to be understood, and because its leading ideas are not in harmony with those which are now received. I doubt if anybody can delight in that poem, unless he sympathizes with the ideas of the Middle Ages; or, at least, unless he is familiar with them, and with the historical characters who lived in those turbulent and gloomy times. There is more talk and pretension about that book than any one that I know of. Like the "Faerie Queene" or the "Paradise Lost," it is a study rather than a recreation; one of those productions which an educated person ought to read in the course of his life, and which if he can read in the original, and has read, is apt to boast of,—like climbing a lofty mountain, enjoyable to some with youth and vigor and enthusiasm and love of nature, but a very toilsome thing to most people, especially if old and short-winded and gouty.

In the year 1309 the first part of the "Divine Comedy," the *Inferno*, was finished by Dante, at the age of forty-four, in the tenth year of his pilgrimage, under the roof of the Marquis of Lunigiana; and it was intrusted to the care of Fra Ilario, a monk living on the beautiful Ligurian shores. As everybody knows, it is a vivid, graphic picture of what was supposed to be the infernal regions, where great sinners are punished with various torments forever and ever. It is interesting for the excellence of the poetry, the brilliant analyses of characters, the allusion to historical events, the bitter invectives, the intense sarcasms, and the serious, earnest spirit which underlies the descriptions. But there is very little of gentleness or compassion, in view of the protracted torments of the sufferers. We stand aghast in view of the miseries and monsters, furies and gorgons, snakes and fires, demons, filth, lakes of pitch, pools of blood, plains of scorching sands, circles, and chimeras dire,—a physical hell of utter and unspeakable dreariness and despair, awfully and powerfully described, but still repulsive. In each of the dismal abodes, far down in the bowels of the earth, which Dante is supposed to have visited with Virgil as a guide, in which some infernal deity presides, all sorts of physical tortures are accumulated, inflicted on traitors, murderers, robbers,—men who have committed great crimes, unpunished in their lifetime; such men as Cain, Judas, Ugolino,—men consigned to an infamous immortality. On the great culprits of history, and of Italy especially, Dante virtually sits in judgment; and he consigns them equally to various torments which we shudder to think of.

And here let me say, as a general criticism, that in the *Inferno* are brought out in tremendous language the opinions of the Middle Ages in reference to retribution. Dante does not rise above them, with all his genius; he is not emancipated from them. It is the rarest thing in this world for any man, however profound his intellect and bold his spirit, to be emancipated from the great and leading ideas of his age. Abraham was, and Moses, and the founder of Buddhism, and Socrates, and Mohammed, and Luther; but they were reformers, more or less divinely commissioned, with supernatural aid in many instances to give them wisdom. But Homer was not, nor Euripides, nor the great scholastics of the Middle Ages, nor even popes. The venerated doctors and philosophers, prelates, scholars, nobles, kings, to say nothing of the people, thought as Dante did in reference to future punishment,—that it was physical, awful, accumulative, infinite, endless; the wrath of avenging deity displayed in pains and agonies inflicted on the body, like the tortures of inquisitors, thus appealing to the fears of men, on which chiefly the power of the clergy was based. Nor in these views of endless physical sufferings, as if the body itself were eternal and indestructible, is there the refinement of Milton, who placed misery in the upbraidings of conscience, in mental torture rather than bodily, in the everlasting pride and rebellion of the followers of Satan and his fallen angels. It was these awful views of protracted and eternal physical torments,—not the hell of the Bible, but the hell of ingenious human invention,—which gives to the Middle Ages a sorrowful and repulsive light, thus nursing superstition and working on the fears of mankind, rather than on the conscience and the sense of moral accountability. But how could Dante have represented the ideas of the Middle Ages, if he had not painted his *Inferno* in the darkest colors that the imagination could conceive, unless he had soared beyond what is revealed into the unfathomable and mysterious and unrevealed regions of the second death?

After various wanderings in France and Italy, and after an interval of three years, Dante produced the second part of the poem,—the *Purgatorio*,—in which he assumes another style, and sings another song. In this we are introduced to an illustrious company,—many beloved friends, poets, musicians, philosophers, generals, even prelates and popes, whose deeds and thoughts were on the whole beneficent. These illustrious men temporarily expiate the sins of anger, of envy, avarice, gluttony, pride, ambition,—the great defects which were blended with virtues, and which are to be purged out of them by suffering. Their torments are milder, and amid them they discourse on the principles of moral wisdom. They utter noble sentiments; they discuss great themes; they show how vain is wealth and power and fame; they preach sermons. In these discourses, Dante shows his familiarity with history and philosophy; he unfolds that moral wisdom for which he is most distinguished. His scorn is now tempered with tenderness. He shows a true humanity; he is more forgiving, more generous, more sympathetic. He is more lofty, if he is not more intense. He sees the end of expiations: the sufferers will be restored to peace and joy.

But even in his purgatory, as in his hell, he paints the ideas of his age. He makes no new or extraordinary revelations. He arrives at no new philosophy. He is the Christian poet, after the pattern of his age.

It is plain that the Middle Ages must have accepted or invented some relief from punishment, or every Christian country would have been overwhelmed with the blackness of despair. Men could not live, if they felt they could not expiate their sins. Who could smile or joke or eat or sleep or have any pleasure, if he thought seriously there would be no cessation or release from endless pains? Who could discharge his ordinary duties or perform his daily occupations, if his father or his mother or his sister or his brother or his wife or his son or his daughter might not be finally forgiven for the frailties of an imperfect nature which he had inherited? The Catholic Church, in its benignity,—at what time I do not know,—opened the future of hope amid the speculations of despair. She saved the Middle Ages from universal gloom. If speculation or logic or tradition or scripture pointed to a hell of reprobation, there must be also a purgatory as the field of expiation, for expiation there must be for sin, somewhere, somehow, according to immutable laws, unless a mantle of universal forgiveness were spread over sinners who in this life had given no sufficient proofs of repentance and faith. Expiation was the great element of Mediaeval theology. It may have been borrowed from India, but it was engrafted on the Christian system. Sometimes it was made to take place in this life; when the sinner, having pleased God, entered at once upon heavenly beatitudes. Hence fastings, scourgings, self-laceration, ascetic rigors in dress and food, pilgrimages,—all to purchase forgiveness; which idea of forgiveness was scattered to the winds by Luther, and replaced by grace,—faith in Christ attested by a righteous life. I allude to this notion of purgatory, which early entered into the creeds of theologians, and which was adopted by the Catholic Church, to show how powerful it was when human consciousness sought a relief from the pains of endless physical torments.

After Dante had written his *Purgatorio*, he retired to the picturesque mountains which separate Tuscany from Modena and Bologna; and in the hospitium of an ancient monastery, "on the woody summit of a rock from which he might gaze on his ungrateful country, he renewed his studies in philosophy and theology." There, too, in that calm retreat, he commenced his *Paradiso*, the subject of profound meditations on what was held in highest value in the Middle Ages. The themes are theological and metaphysical. They are such as interested Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura, Anselm and Bernard. They are such as do not interest this age,—even the most gifted minds,—for our times are comparatively indifferent to metaphysical subtleties and speculations. Beatrice and Peter and Benedict alike discourse on the recondite subjects of the Bible in the style of Mediaeval doctors. The themes are great,—the incarnation, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, salvation by faith, the triumph of Christ, the glory of Paradise, the mysteries of the divine and human natures; and with these disquisitions are reproofs of bad popes, and even of some of the bad customs of the Church, like indulgences, and the corruptions of the monastic system. The *Paradiso* is a thesaurus

of Mediaeval theology,—obscure, but lofty, mixed up with all the learning of the age, even of the lives of saints and heroes and kings and prophets. Saint Peter examines Dante upon faith, James upon hope, and John upon charity. Virgil here has ceased to be his guide; but Beatrice, robed in celestial loveliness, conducts him from circle to circle, and explains the sublimest doctrines and resolves his mortal doubts,—the object still of his adoration, and inferior only to the mother of our Lord, regina angelorum, mater carissima, whom the Church even then devoutly worshipped, and to whom the greatest sages prayed.

"Thou virgin mother, daughter of thy Son,

Humble and high beyond all other creatures,
The limit fixed of the eternal counsel,—
Thou art the one who such nobility
To human nature gave, that its Creator
Did not disdain to make himself its creature.
Not only thy benignity gives succor
To him who asketh it, but oftentimes
Forerunneth of its own accord the asking.
In thee compassion is; in thee is pity
In thee magnificence; in thee unites
Whate'er of goodness is in any creature."

In the glorious meditation of those grand subjects which had such a charm for Benedict and Bernard, and which almost offset the barbarism and misery of the Middle Ages,—to many still regarded as "ages of faith,"—Dante seemingly forgets his wrongs; and in the company of her whom he adores he seems to revel in the solemn ecstasy of a soul transported to the realms of eternal light. He lives now with the angels and the mysteries,—

"Like to the fire
That in a cloud imprisoned doth break out expansive.
.....
"Thus, in that heavenly banqueting his soul
Outgrew himself, and, in the transport lost,
Holds no remembrance now of what she was."

The Paradise of Dante is not gloomy, although it be obscure and indefinite. It is the unexplored world of thought and knowledge, the explanation of dogmas which his age accepted. It is a revelation of glories such as only a lofty soul could conceive, but could not paint,—a supernal happiness given only to favored mortals, to saints and martyrs who have triumphed over the seductions of sense and the temptations of life,—a beatified state of blended ecstasy and love.

"Had I a tongue in eloquence as rich as is the coloring in fancy's loom, 'Twere all too poor to utter the least part of that enchantment."

Such is this great poem; in all its parts and exposition of the ideas of the age,—sometimes fierce and sometimes tender, profound and infantine, lofty and degraded, like the Church itself, which conserved these sentiments. It is an intensely religious poem, and yet more theological than Christian, and full of classical allusions to pagan heroes and sages,—a most remarkable production considering the age, and, when we remember that it is without a prototype in any language, a glorious monument of reviving literature, both original and powerful.

Its appearance was of course an epoch, calling out the admiration of Italians, and of all who could understand it,—of all who appreciated its moral wisdom in every other country of Europe. And

its fame has been steadily increasing, although I fear much of the popular enthusiasm is exaggerated and unfelt. One who can read Italian well may see its "fiery emphasis and depth," its condensed thought and language, its supernal scorn and supernal love, its bitterness and its forgiveness; but few modern readers accept its theology or its philosophy, or care at all for the men whose crimes he punishes, and whose virtues he rewards.

But there is great interest in the man, as well as in the poem which he made the mirror of his life, and the register of his sorrows and of those speculations in which he sought to banish the remembrance of his misfortunes. His life, like his poem, is an epic. We sympathize with his resentments, "which exile and poverty made perpetually fresh." "The sincerity of his early passion for Beatrice," says Hallam, "pierces through the veil of allegory which surrounds her, while the memory of his injuries pursues him into the immensity of eternal light; and even in the company of saints and angels his unforgiving spirit darkens at the name of Florence. . . . He combines the profoundest feelings of religion with those patriotic recollections which were suggested by the reappearance of the illustrious dead."

Next to Michael Angelo he was the best of all famous Italians, stained by no marked defects but bitterness, pride, and scorn; while his piety, his patriotism, and elevation of soul stand out in marked contrast with the selfishness and venality and hypocrisy and cruelty of the leading men in the history of his times. "He wrote with his heart's blood;" he wrote in poverty, exile, grief, and neglect; he wrote like an inspired prophet of old. He seems to have been specially raised up to exalt virtue, and vindicate the ways of God to man, and prepare the way for a new civilization. He breathes angry defiance to all tyrants; he consigns even popes to the torments he created. He ridicules fools; he exposes knaves. He detests oppression; he is a prophet of liberty. He sees into all shams and all hypocrisies, and denounces lies. He is temperate in eating and drinking; he has no vices. He believes in friendship, in love, in truth. He labors for the good of his countrymen. He is affectionate to those who comprehend him. He accepts hospitalities, but will not stoop to meanness or injustice. He will not return to his native city, which he loves so well, even when permitted, if obliged to submit to humiliating ceremonies. He even refuses a laurel crown from any city but from the one in which he was born. No honors could tempt him to be untrue unto himself; no tasks are too humble to perform, if he can make himself useful. At Ravenna he gives lectures to the people in their own language, regarding the restoration of the Latin impossible, and wishing to bring into estimation the richness of the vernacular tongue. And when his work is done he dies, before he becomes old (1321), having fulfilled his vow. His last retreat was at Ravenna, and his last days were soothed with gentle attentions from Guido da Polenta, that kind duke who revived his fainting hopes. It was in his service, as ambassador to Venice, that Dante sickened and died. A funeral sermon was pronounced upon him by his friend the duke, and beautiful monuments were erected to his memory. Too late the Florentines begged for his remains, and did justice to the man and the poet; as well they might, since his is the proudest name connected with their annals. He is indeed one of the great benefactors of the world itself, for the richness of his immortal legacy.

Could the proscribed and exiled poet, as he wandered, isolated and alone, over the vine-clad hills of Italy, and as he stopped here and there at some friendly monastery, wearied and hungry, have cast his prophetic eye down the vistas of the ages; could he have seen what honors would be bestowed upon his name, and how his poem, written in sorrow, would be scattered in joy among all nations, giving a new direction to human thought, shining as a fixed star in the realms of genius, and kindling into shining brightness what is only a reflection of its rays; yea, how it would be committed to memory in the rising universities, and be commented on by the most learned expositors in all the schools of Europe, lauded to the skies by his countrymen, received by the whole world as a unique, original, unapproachable production, suggesting grand thoughts to Milton, reappearing even in the creations of Michael Angelo, coloring art itself whenever art seeks the sublime and beautiful, inspiring all subsequent literature, dignifying the life of letters, and gilding philosophy as well as poetry with new

glories,—could he have seen all this, how his exultant soul would have rejoiced, even as did Abraham, when, amid the ashes of the funeral pyre he had prepared for Isaac, he saw the future glories of his descendants; or as Bacon, when, amid calumnies, he foresaw that his name and memory would be held in honor by posterity, and that his method would be received by all future philosophers as one of the priceless boons of genius to mankind!

AUTHORITIES

Vita Nuova; Divina Commedia,—Translations by Carey and Longfellow; Boccaccio's Life of Dante; Wright's St. Patrick's Purgatory; Dante et la Philosophie Catholique du Treizieme Siecle, par Ozinan; Labitte, La Divine Comedie avant Dante; Balbo's Life and Times of Dante; Hallam's Middle Ages; Napier's Florentine History; Villani; Leigh Hunt's Stories from the Italian Poets; Botta's Life of Dante; J. R. Lowell's article on Dante in American Cyclopaedia; Milman's Latin Christianity; Carlyle's Heroes and Hero-worship; Macaulay's Essays; The Divina Commedia from the German of Schelling; Voltaire's Dictionnaire Philosophique; La Divine Comedie, by Lamennais; Dante, by Labitte.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

A.D. 1340-1400.

ENGLISH LIFE IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The age which produced Chaucer was a transition period from the Middle Ages to modern times, midway between Dante and Michael Angelo. Chaucer was the contemporary of Wyclif, with whom the Middle Ages may appropriately be said to close, or modern history to begin.

The fourteenth century is interesting for the awakening, especially in Italy, of literature and art; for the wars between the French and English, and the English and the Scots; for the rivalry between the Italian republics; for the efforts of Rienzi to establish popular freedom at Rome; for the insurrection of the Flemish weavers, under the Van Arteveldes, against their feudal oppressors; for the terrible "Jacquerie" in Paris; for the insurrection of Wat Tyler in England; for the Swiss confederation; for a schism in the Church when the popes retired to Avignon; for the aggrandizement of the Visconti at Milan and the Medici at Florence; for incipient religious reforms under Wyclif in England and John Huss in Bohemia; for the foundation of new colleges at Oxford and Cambridge; for the establishment of guilds in London; for the exploration of distant countries; for the dreadful pestilence which swept over Europe, known in England as the Black Death; for the development of modern languages by the poets; and for the rise of the English House of Commons as a great constitutional power.

In most of these movements we see especially a simultaneous rising among the people, in the more civilized countries of Europe, to obtain charters of freedom and municipal and political privileges, extorted from monarchs in their necessities. The fourteenth century was marked by protests and warfare equally against feudal institutions and royal tyranny. The way was prepared by the wars of kings, which crippled their resources, as the Crusades had done a century before. The supreme miseries of the people led them to political revolts and insurrections,—blind but fierce movements, not inspired by ideas of liberty, but by a sense of oppression and degradation. Accompanying these popular insurrections were religious protests against the corrupted institutions of the Church.

In the midst of these popular agitations, aggressive and needless wars, public miseries and calamities, baronial aggrandizement, religious inquiries, parliamentary encroachment, and reviving taste for literature and art, Chaucer arose.

His remarkable career extended over the last half of the fourteenth century, when public events were of considerable historical importance. It was then that parliamentary history became interesting. Until then the barons, clergy, knights of the shire, and burgesses of the town, summoned to assist the royal councils, deliberated in separate chambers or halls; but in the reign of Edward III. the representatives of the knights of the shires and the burgesses united their interests and formed a body strong enough to check royal encroachments, and became known henceforth as the House of Commons. In thirty years this body had wrested from the Crown the power of arbitrary taxation, had forced upon it new ministers, and had established the principle that the redress of grievances preceded grants of supply. Edward III. was compelled to grant twenty parliamentary confirmations of Magna Charta. At the close of his reign, it was conceded that taxes could be raised only by consent of the Commons; and they had sufficient power, also, to prevent the collection of the tax which the Pope had levied on the country since the time of John, called Peter's Pence. The latter part of the fourteenth century must not be regarded as an era of the triumph of popular rights, but as the period when these rights began to be asserted. Long and dreary was the march of the people to complete political enfranchisement from the rebellion under Wat Tyler to the passage of the Reform Bill in our times. But the Commons made a memorable stand against Edward III. when he was the most powerful sovereign of western Europe, one which would have been impossible had not this able and ambitious sovereign been embroiled in desperate war both with the Scotch and French.

With the assertion of political rights we notice the beginning of commercial enterprise and manufacturing industry. A colony of Flemish weavers was established in England by the enlightened king, although wool continued to be exported. It was not until the time of Elizabeth that the raw material was consumed at home.

Still, the condition of the common people was dreary enough at this time, when compared with what it is in our age. They perhaps were better fed on the necessities of life than they are now. All meats were comparatively cheaper; but they had no luxuries, not even wheaten bread. Their houses were small and dingy, and a single chamber sufficed for a whole family, both male and female. Neither glass windows nor chimneys were then in use, nor knives nor forks, nor tea nor coffee; not even potatoes, still less tropical fruits. The people had neither bed-clothes, nor carpets, nor glass nor crockery ware, nor cotton dresses, nor books, nor schools. They were robbed by feudal masters, and cheated and imposed upon by friars and pedlars; but a grim cheerfulness shone above their discomforts and miseries, and crime was uncommon and severely punished. They amused themselves with rough sports, and cherished religious sentiments. They were brave and patriotic.

It was to describe the habits and customs of these people, as well as those of the classes above them, to give dignity to consecrated sentiments and to shape the English language, that Chaucer was raised up.

He was born, it is generally supposed, in the year 1340; but nothing is definitely known of him till 1357, when Edward III. had been reigning about thirty years. It is surmised that his father was a respectable citizen of London; that he was educated at Cambridge and Oxford; that he went to Paris to complete his education in the most famous university in the world; that he then extensively travelled in France, Holland, and Flanders, after which he became a student of law in the Inner Temple. Even then he was known as a poet, and his learning and accomplishments attracted the attention of Edward III., who was a patron of genius, and who gave him a house in Woodstock, near the royal palace. At this time Chaucer was a handsome, witty, modest, dignified man of letters, in easy circumstances, moving in the higher ranks of society, and already known for his "Troilus and Cresseide," which was then doubtless the best poem in the language.

It was then that the intimacy began between him and John of Gaunt, a youth of eighteen, then Earl of Richmond, fourth son of Edward III., afterwards known as the great Duke of Lancaster,—the most powerful nobleman that ever lived in England, also the richest, possessing large estates in eighteen counties, as well as six earldoms. This friendship between the poet and the first prince of the blood, after the Prince of Wales, seems to have arisen from the admiration of John of Gaunt for the genius and accomplishments of Chaucer, who was about ten years the elder. It was not until the prince became the Duke of Lancaster that he was the friend and protector of Wyclif,—and from different reasons, seeing that the Oxford scholar and theologian could be of use to him in his warfare against the clergy, who were hostile to his ambitious designs. Chaucer he loved as a bright and witty companion; Wyclif he honored as the most learned churchman of the age.

The next authentic event in Chaucer's life occurred in 1359, when he accompanied the king to France in that fruitless expedition which was soon followed by the peace of Bretigny. In this unfortunate campaign Chaucer was taken prisoner, but was ransomed by his sovereign for 16 pounds,—about equal to 300 pounds in these times. He had probably before this been installed at court as a gentleman of the bedchamber, on a stipend which would now be equal to 250 pounds a year. He seems to have been a favorite with the court, after he had written his first great poem. It is singular that in a rude and ignorant age poets should have received much greater honor than in our enlightened times. Gower was patronized by the Duke of Gloucester, as Chaucer was by the Duke of Lancaster, and Petrarch and Boccaccio were in Italy by princes and nobles. Even learning was held in more reverence in the fourteenth century than it is in the nineteenth. The scholastic doctor was one of the great dignitaries of the age, as well as of the schools, and ranked with bishops and abbots. Wyclif at one time was the most influential man in the English Church, sitting in Parliament, and sent by

the king on important diplomatic missions. So Chaucer, with less claim, received valuable offices and land-grants, which made him a wealthy man; and he was also sent on important missions in the company of nobles. He lived at the court. His son Thomas married one of the richest heiresses in the kingdom, and became speaker of the House of Commons; while his daughter Alice married the Duke of Suffolk, whose grandson was declared by Richard III. to be his heir, and came near becoming King of England. Chaucer's wife's sister married the Duke of Lancaster himself; so he was allied with the royal family, if not by blood, at least by ambitious marriage connections.

I know of no poet in the history of England who occupied so high a social position as did Chaucer, or who received so many honors. The poet of the people was the companion of kings and princes. At one time he had a reverse of fortune, when his friend and patron, the Duke of Lancaster, was in disgrace and in voluntary banishment during the minority of Richard II., against whom he had intrigued, and who afterwards was dethroned by Henry IV., a son of the Duke of Lancaster. While the Duke of Gloucester was in power, Chaucer was deprived of his offices and revenues for two or three years, and was even imprisoned in the Tower; but when Lancaster returned from the Continent, his offices and revenues were restored. His latter days were luxurious and honored. At fifty-one he gave up his public duties as a collector of customs, chiefly on wool, and retired to Woodstock and spent the remainder of his fortunate life in dignified leisure and literary labors. In addition to his revenues, the Duke of Lancaster, who was virtually the ruler of the land during the reign of Richard II., gave him the castle of Donnington, with its park and gardens; so that he became a man of territorial influence. At the age of fifty-eight he removed to London, and took a house in the precincts of Westminster Abbey, where the chapel of Henry VII. now stands. He died the following year, and was buried in the Abbey church,—that sepulchre of princes and bishops and abbots. His body was deposited in the place now known as the Poets' Corner, and a fitting monument to his genius was erected over his remains, as the first great poet that had appeared in England, probably only surpassed in genius by Shakspeare, until the language assumed its present form. He was regarded as a moral phenomenon, whom kings and princes delighted to honor. As Leonardo da Vinci died in the arms of Francis I., so Chaucer rested in his grave near the bodies of those sovereigns and princes with whom he lived in intimacy and friendship. It was the rarity of his gifts, his great attainments, elegant manners, and refined tastes which made him the companion of the great, since at that time only princes and nobles and ecclesiastical dignitaries could appreciate his genius or enjoy his writings.

Although Chaucer had written several poems which were admired in his day, and made translations from the French, among which was the "Roman de la Rose," the most popular poem of the Middle Ages,—a poem which represented the difficulties attendant on the passion of love, under the emblem of a rose which had to be plucked amid thorns,—yet his best works were written in the leisure of declining years.

The occupation of the poet during the last twelve years of his life was in writing his "Canterbury Tales," on which his fame chiefly rests; written not for money, but because he was impelled to write it, as all true poets write and all great artists paint,—*ex animo*,—because they cannot help writing and painting, as the solace and enjoyment of life. For his day these tales were a great work of art, evidently written with great care. They are also stamped with the inspiration of genius, although the stories themselves were copied in the main from the French and Italian, even as the French and Italians copied from Oriental writers, whose works were translated into the languages of Europe so that the romances of the Middle Ages were originally produced in India, Persia, and Arabia. Absolute creation is very rare. Even Shakspeare, the most original of poets, was indebted to French and Italian writers for the plots of many of his best dramas. Who can tell the remote sources of human invention; who knows the then popular songs which Homer probably incorporated in his epics; who can trace the fountains of those streams which have fertilized the literary world?—and hence, how shallow the criticism which would detract from literary genius because it is indebted, more or less, to the men who have lived ages ago. It is the way of putting things which constitutes the merit of men of

genius. What has Voltaire or Hume or Froude told the world, essentially, that it did not know before? Read, for instance, half-a-dozen historians on Joan of Arc: they all relate substantially the same facts. Genius and originality are seen in the reflections and deductions and grand sentiments prompted by the narrative. Let half-a-dozen distinguished and learned theologians write sermons on Abraham or Moses or David: they will all be different, yet the main facts will be common to all.

The "Canterbury Tales" are great creations, from the humor, the wit, the naturalness, the vividness of description, and the beauty of the sentiments displayed in them, although sullied by occasional vulgarities and impurities, which, however, in all their coarseness do not corrupt the mind. Byron complained of their coarseness, but Byron's poetry is far more demoralizing. The age was coarse, not the mind of the author. And after five hundred years, with all the obscurity of language and obsolete modes of spelling, they still give pleasure to the true lovers of poetry when they have once mastered the language, which is not, after all, very difficult. It is true that most people prefer to read the great masters of poetry, in later times; but the "Canterbury Tales" are interesting and instructive to those who study the history of language and literature. They are links in the civilization of England. They paint the age more vividly and accurately than any known history. The men and women of the fourteenth century, of all ranks, stand out to us in fresh and living colors. We see them in their dress, their feasts, their dwellings, their language, their habits, and their manners. Amid all the changes in human thought and in social institutions the characters appeal to our common humanity, essentially the same under all human conditions. The men and women of the fourteenth century love and hate, eat and drink, laugh and talk, as they do in the nineteenth. They delight, as we do, in the varieties of dress, of parade, and luxurious feasts. Although the form of these has changed, they are alive to the same sentiments which move us. They like fun and jokes and amusement as much as we. They abhor the same class of defects which disgust us,—hypocrisies, shams, lies. The inner circle of their friendship is the same as ours to-day, based on sincerity and admiration. There is the same infinite variety in character, and yet the same uniformity. The human heart beats to the same sentiments that it does under all civilizations and conditions of life. No people can live without friendship and sympathy and love; and these are ultimate sentiments of the soul, which are as eternal as the ideas of Plato. Why do the Psalms of David, written for an Oriental people four thousand years ago, excite the same emotions in the minds of the people of England or France or America that they did among the Jews? It is because they appeal to our common humanity, which never changes,—the same to-day as it was in the beginning, and will be to the end. It is only form and fashion which change; men remain the same. The men and women of the Bible talked nearly the same as we do, and seem to have had as great light on the primal principles of wisdom and truth and virtue. Who can improve on the sagacity and worldly wisdom of the Proverbs of Solomon? They have a perennial freshness, and appeal to universal experience. It is this fidelity to nature which is one of the great charms of Shakspeare. We quote his brief sayings as expressive of what we feel and know of the certitudes of our moral and intellectual life. They will last forever, under every variety of government, of social institutions, of races, and of languages. And they will last because these every-day sentiments are put in such pithy, compressed, unique, and novel form, like the Proverbs of Solomon or the sayings of Epictetus. All nations and ages alike recognize the moral wisdom in the sayings of those immortal sages whose writings have delighted and enlightened the world, because they appeal to consciousness or experience.

Now it must be confessed that the Poetry of Chaucer does not abound in the moral wisdom and spiritual insight and profound reflections on the great mysteries of human life which stand out so conspicuously in the writings of Dante, Shakspeare, Milton, Goethe, and other first-class poets. He does not describe the inner life, but the outward habits and condition of the people of his times. He is not serious enough, nor learned enough, to enter upon the discussion of those high themes which agitated the schools and universities, as Dante did one hundred years before. He tells us how monks and friars lived, not how they dreamed and speculated. Nor are his sarcasms scorching and bitter, but

rather humorous and laughable. He shows himself to be a genial and loving companion, not an austere teacher of disagreeable truths. He is not solemn and intense, like Dante; he does not give wings to his fancy, like Spenser; he has not the divine insight of Shakspeare; he is not learned, like Milton; he is not sarcastic, like Pope; he does not rouse the passions, like Byron; he is not meditative, like Wordsworth,—but he paints nature with great accuracy and delicacy, as also the men and women of his age, as they appeared in their outward life. He describes the passion of love with great tenderness and simplicity. In all his poems, love is his greatest theme,—which he bases, not on physical charms, but the moral beauty of the soul. In his earlier life he does not seem to have done full justice to women, whom he ridicules, but does not despise; in whom he indeed sees the graces of chivalry, but not the intellectual attraction of cultivated life. But later in life, when his experiences are broader and more profound, he makes amends for his former mistakes. In his "Legend of Good Women," which he wrote at the command of Anne of Bohemia, wife of Richard II., he eulogizes the sex and paints the most exalted sentiments of the heart. He not only had great vividness in the description of his characters, but doubtless great dramatic talent, which his age did not call out. His descriptions of nature are very fresh and beautiful, indicating a great love of nature,—flowers, trees, birds, lawns, gardens, waterfalls, falcons, dogs, horses, with whom he almost talked. He had a great sense of the ridiculous; hence his humor and fun and droll descriptions, which will ever interest because they are so fresh and vivid. And as a poet he continually improved as he advanced in life. His last works are his best, showing the care and labor he bestowed, as well as his fidelity to nature. I am amazed, considering his time, that he was so great an artist without having a knowledge of the principles of art as taught by the great masters of composition.

But, as has been already said, his distinguishing excellence is vivid and natural description of the life and habits, not the opinions, of the people of the fourteenth century, described without exaggeration or effort for effect. He paints his age as Moliere paints the times of Louis XIV., and Homer the heroic periods of Grecian history. This fidelity to nature and inexhaustible humor and living freshness and perpetual variety are the eternal charms of the "Canterbury Tales." They bring before the eye the varied professions and trades and habits and customs of the fourteenth century. We see how our ancestors dressed and talked and ate; what pleasures delighted them, what animosities moved them, what sentiments elevated them, and what follies made them ridiculous. The same naturalness and humor which marked "Don Quixote" and the "Decameron" also are seen in the "Canterbury Tales." Chaucer freed himself from all the affectations and extravagances and artificiality which characterized the poetry of the Middle Ages. With him began a new style in writing. He and Wyclif are the creators of English literature. They did not create a language, but they formed and polished it.

The various persons who figure in the "Canterbury Tales" are too well known for me to enlarge upon. Who can add anything to the Prologue in which Chaucer himself describes the varied characters and habits and appearance of the pilgrims to the shrine of Thomas Becket at Canterbury? There are thirty of these pilgrims including the poet himself, embracing nearly all the professions and trades then known, except the higher dignitaries of Church and State, who are not supposed to mix freely in ordinary intercourse, and whom it would be unwise to paint in their marked peculiarities. The most prominent person, as to social standing, is probably the knight. He is not a nobleman, but he has fought in many battles, and has travelled extensively. His cassock is soiled, and his horse is strong but not gay,—a very respectable man, courteous and gallant, a soldier corresponding to a modern colonel or captain. His son, the esquire, is a youth of twenty, with curled locks and embroidered dress, shining in various colors like the flowers of May, gay as a bird, active as a deer, and gentle as a maiden. The yeoman who attends them both is clad in green like a forester, with arrows and feathers, bearing the heavy sword and buckler of his master. The prioress is another respectable person, coy and simple, with dainty fingers, small mouth, and clean attire,—a refined sort of a woman for that age, ornamented with corals and brooch, so stately as to be held in reverence, yet so sentimental as

to weep for a mouse caught in a trap: all characteristic of a respectable, kind-hearted lady who has lived in seclusion. A monk, of course, in the fourteenth century was everywhere to be seen; and a monk we have among the pilgrims, riding a "dainty" horse, accompanied with greyhounds, loving fur trimmings on his Benedictine habit and a fat swan to roast. The friar, too, we see,—a mendicant, yet merry and full of dalliances, beloved by the common women, to whom he gave easy absolution; a jolly vagabond, who knew all the taverns, and who carried on his portly person pins and songs and relics to sell or to give away. And there was the merchant, with forked beard and Flemish beaver hat and neatly clasped boots, bragging of his gains and selling French crowns, but on the whole a worthy man. The Oxford clerk or scholar is one of the company, silent and sententious, as lean as the horse on which he rode, with threadbare coat, and books of Aristotle and his philosophy which he valued more than gold, of which indeed he could boast but little,—a man anxious to learn, and still more to teach. The sergeant of the law is another prominent figure, wary and wise, discreet and dignified, bustling and busy, yet not so busy as he seemed to be, wearing a coat of divers colors, and riding very badly. A franklin, or country gentleman, mixes with the company, with a white beard and red complexion; one of Epicurus's own sons, who held that ale and wheaten bread and fish and dainty flesh, partridge fat, were pure felicity; evidently a man given to hospitality,—

"His table dormant in his hall alway
Stood ready covered all the longe day."

He was a sheriff, also, to enforce the law, and to be present at all the county sessions. The doctor, of course, could not be left out of the company,—a man who knew the cause of every malady, versed in magic as well as physic, and grounded also in astronomy; who held that gold is the best of cordials, and knew how to keep what he gained; not luxurious in his diet, but careful what he ate and drank. The village miller is not forgotten in this motley crowd,—rough, brutal, drunken, big and brawn, with a red beard and a wart on his nose, and a mouth as wide as a furnace, a reveller and a jangler, accustomed to take toll thrice, and given to all the sins that then abounded. He is the most repulsive figure in the crowd, both vulgar and wicked. In contrast with him is the reve, or steward, of a lordly house,—a slender, choleric man, feared by servants and gamekeepers, yet in favor with his lord, since he always had money to lend, although it belonged to his master; an adroit agent and manager, who so complicated his accounts that no auditor could unravel them or any person bring him in arrears. He rode a fine dappled-gray stallion, wore a long blue overcoat, and carried a rusty sword,—evidently a proud and prosperous man. With a monk and friar, the picture would be incomplete without a pardoner, or seller of indulgences, with yellow hair and smooth face, loaded with a pillow-case of relics and pieces of the true cross, of which there were probably cartloads in every country in Europe, and of which there was an inexhaustible supply. This sleek and gentle pedler of indulgences rode side by side with a repulsive officer of the Church, with a fiery red face, of whom children were afraid, fond of garlic and onions and strong wine, and speaking only Latin law-terms when he was drunk, but withal a good fellow, abating his lewdness and drunkenness. In contrast with the pardoner and "sompnour" we see the poor parson, full of goodness, charity, and love,—a true shepherd and no mercenary, who waited upon no pomp and sought no worldly gains, happy only in the virtues which he both taught and lived. Some think that Chaucer had in view the learned Wyclif when he described the most interesting character of the whole group. With him was a ploughman, his brother, as good and pious as he, living in peace with all the world, paying tithes cheerfully, laborious and conscientious, the forerunner of the Puritan yeoman.

Of this motley company of pilgrims, I have already spoken of the prioress,—a woman of high position. In contrast with her is the wife of Bath, who has travelled extensively, even to Jerusalem and Rome; charitable, kind-hearted, jolly, and talkative, but bold and masculine and coarse, with a

red face and red stockings, and a hat as big as a shield, and sharp spurs on her feet, indicating that she sat on her ambler like a man.

There are other characters which I cannot stop to mention,—the sailor, browned by the seas and sun, and full of stolen Bordeaux wine; the haberdasher; the carpenter; the weaver; the dyer; the tapestry-worker; the cook, to boil the chickens and the marrow-bones, and bake the pies and tarts,—mostly people from the middle and lower ranks of society, whose clothes are gaudy, manners rough, and language coarse. But all classes and trades and professions seem to be represented, except nobles, bishops, and abbots,—dignitaries whom, perhaps, Chaucer is reluctant to describe and caricature.

To beguile the time on the journey to Canterbury, all these various pilgrims are required to tell some story peculiar to their separate walks of life; and it is these stories which afford the best description we have of the manners and customs of the fourteenth century, as well as of its leading sentiments and ideas.

The knight was required to tell his story first, and it naturally was one of love and adventure. Although the scene of it was laid in ancient Greece, it delineates the institution of chivalry and the manners and sentiments it produced. No writer of that age, except perhaps Froissart, paints the connection of chivalry with the graces of the soul and the moral beauty which poetry associates with the female sex as Chaucer does. The aristocratic woman of chivalry, while delighting in martial sports, and hence masculine and haughty, is also condescending, tender, and gracious. The heroic and dignified self-respect with which chivalry invested woman exalted the passion of love. Allied with reverence for woman was loyalty to the prince. The rough warrior again becomes a gentleman, and has access to the best society. Whatever may have been the degrees of rank, the haughtiest nobleman associated with the penniless knight, if only he were a gentleman and well born, on terms of social equality, since chivalry, while it created distinctions, also levelled those which wealth and power naturally created among the higher class. Yet chivalry did not exalt woman outside of noble ranks. The plebeian woman neither has the graces of the high-born lady, nor does she excite that reverence for the sex which marked her condition in the feudal castle. "Tournaments and courts of love were not framed for village churls, but for high-born dames and mighty earls."

Chaucer in his description of women in ordinary life does not seem to have a very high regard for them. They are weak or coarse or sensual, though attentive to their domestic duties, and generally virtuous. An exception is made of Virginia, in the doctor's tale, who is represented as beautiful and modest, radiant in simplicity, discreet and true. But the wife of Bath is disgusting from her coarse talk and coarser manners. Her tale is to show what a woman likes best, which, according to her, is to bear rule over her husband and household. The prioress is conventional and weak, aping courtly manners. The wife of the host of the Tabard inn is a vixen and shrew, who calls her husband a milk-sop, and is so formidable with both her tongue and her hands that he is glad to make his escape from her whenever he can. The pretty wife of the carpenter, gentle and slender, with her white apron and open dress, is anything but intellectual,—a mere sensual beauty. Most of these women are innocent of toothbrushes, and give and receive thrashings, and sing songs without a fastidious taste, and beat their servants and nag their husbands. But they are good cooks, and understand the arts of brewing and baking and roasting and preserving and pickling, as well as of spinning and knitting and embroidering. They are supreme in their households; they keep the keys and lock up the wine. They are gossiping, and love to receive their female visitors. They do not do much shopping, for shops were very primitive, with but few things to sell. Their knowledge is very limited, and confined to domestic matters. They are on the whole modest, but are the victims of friars and pedlers. They have more liberty than we should naturally suppose, but have not yet learned to discriminate between duties and rights. There are few disputed questions between them and their husbands, but the duty of obedience seems to have been recognized. But if oppressed, they always are free with their tongues; they give good advice, and do not spare reproaches in language which in our times we should not call particularly choice. They are all fond of dress, and wear gay colors, without much regard to artistic effect.

In regard to the sports and amusements of the people, we learn much from Chaucer. In one sense the England of his day was merry; that is, the people were noisy and rough in their enjoyments. There was frequent ringing of the bells; there were the horn of the huntsman and the excitements of the chase; there was boisterous mirth in the village ale-house; there were frequent holidays, and dances around May-poles covered with ribbons and flowers and flags; there were wandering minstrels and jesters and jugglers, and cock-fightings and foot-ball and games at archery; there were wrestling matches and morris-dancing and bear-baiting. But the exhilaration of the people was abnormal, like the merriment of negroes on a Southern plantation,—a sort of rebound from misery and burdens, which found a vent in noise and practical jokes when the ordinary restraint was removed. The uproarious joy was a sort of defiance of the semi-slavery to which workmen were doomed; for when they could be impressed by the king's architect and paid whatever he chose to give them, there could not have been much real contentment, which is generally placid and calm. There is one thing in which all classes delighted in the fourteenth century, and that was a garden, in which flowers bloomed,—things of beauty which were as highly valued as the useful. Moreover, there was a zest in rural sports now seldom seen, especially among the upper classes who could afford to hunt and fish. There was no excitement more delightful to gentlemen and ladies than that of hawking, and it infinitely surpassed in interest any rural sport whatever in our day, under any circumstances. Hawks trained to do the work of fowling-pieces were therefore greater pets than any dogs that now are the company of sportsmen. A lady without a falcon on her wrist, when mounted on her richly caparisoned steed for a morning's sport, was very rare indeed.

An instructive feature of the "Canterbury Tales" is the view which Chaucer gives us of the food and houses and dresses of the people. "In the Nonne's Prestes' Tale we see the cottage and manner of life of a poor widow." She has three daughters, three pigs, three oxen, and a sheep. Her house had only two rooms,—an eating-room, which also served for a kitchen and sitting-room, and a bower or bedchamber,—both without a chimney, with holes pierced to let in the light. The table was a board put upon trestles, to be removed when the meal of black bread and milk, and perchance an egg with bacon, was over. The three slept without sheets or blankets on a rude bed, covered only with their ordinary day-clothes. Their kitchen utensils were a brass pot or two for boiling, a few wooden platters, an iron candlestick, and a knife or two; while the furniture was composed of two or three chairs and stools, with a frame in the wall, with shelves, for clothes and utensils. The manciple and the cook of the company seem to indicate that living among the well-to-do classes was a very generous and a very serious part of life, on which a high estimate was placed, since food in any variety, though plentiful at times, was not always to be had, and therefore precarious. "Guests at table were paired, and ate, every pair, out of the same plate or off the same trencher." But the bill of fare at a franklin's feast would be deemed anything but poor, even in our times,—"bacon and pea-soup, oysters, fish, stewed beef, chickens, capons, roast goose, pig, veal, lamb, kid, pigeon, with custard, apples and pears, cheese and spiced cakes." All these with abundance of wine and ale.

The "Canterbury Tales" remind us of the vast preponderance of the country over town and city life. Chaucer, like Shakspeare, revels in the simple glories of nature, which he describes like a man feeling it to be a joy to be near to "Mother Earth," with her rich bounties. The birds that usher in the day, the flowers which beautify the lawn, the green hills and vales, with ever-changing hues like the clouds and the skies, yet fruitful in wheat and grass; the domestic animals, so mute and patient, the bracing air of approaching winter, the genial breezes of the spring,—of all these does the poet sing with charming simplicity and grace, yea, in melodious numbers; for nothing is more marvellous than the music and rhythm of his lines, although they are not enriched with learned allusions or much moral wisdom, and do not march in the stately and majestic measure of Shakspeare or of Milton.

But the most interesting and instructive of the "Canterbury Tales" are those which relate to the religious life, the morals, the superstitions, and ecclesiastical abuses of the times. In these we see the need of the reformation of which Wyclif was the morning light. In these we see the hypocrisies and

sensualities of both monks and friars, relieved somewhat by the virtues of the simple parish priest or poor parson, in contrast with the wealth and luxury of the regular clergy, as monks were called, in their princely monasteries, where the lordly abbot vied with both baron and bishop in the magnificence of his ordinary life. We see before us the Mediaeval clergy in all their privileges, and yet in all their ignorance and superstition, shielded from the punishment of crime and the operation of all ordinary laws (a sturdy defiance of the temporal powers), the agents and ministers of a foreign power, armed with the terrors of hell and the grave. Besides the prioress and the nuns' priest, we see in living light the habits and pretensions of the lazy monk, the venal friar and pardoner, and the noisy summoner for ecclesiastical offences: hunters and gluttons are they, with greyhounds and furs, greasy and fat, and full of dalliances; at home in taverns, unprincipled but agreeable vagabonds, who cheat and rob the people, and make a mockery of what is most sacred on the earth. These privileged mendicants, with their relics and indulgences, their arts and their lies, and the scandals they create, are treated by Chaucer with blended humor and severity, showing a mind as enlightened as that of the great scholar at Oxford, who heads the movement against Rome and the abuses at which she connived if she did not encourage. And there is something intensely English in his disgust and scorn,—brave for his day, yet shielded by the great duke who was at once his protector and friend, as he was of Wyclif himself,—in his severer denunciation, and advocacy of doctrines which neither Chaucer nor Duke of Lancaster understood, and which, if they had, they would not have sympathized with nor encouraged. In these attacks on ecclesiastics and ecclesiastical abuses, Chaucer should be studied with Wyclif and the early reformers, although he would not have gone so far as they, and led, unlike them, a worldly life. Thus by these poems he has rendered a service to his country, outside his literary legacy, which has always been held in value. The father of English poetry belonged to the school of progress and of inquiry, like his great contemporaries on the Continent. But while he paints the manners, customs, and characters of the fourteenth century, he does not throw light on the great ideas which agitated or enslaved the age. He is too real and practical for that. He describes the outward, not the inner life. He was not serious enough—I doubt if he was learned enough—to enter into the disquisitions of schoolmen, or the mazes of the scholastic philosophy, or the meditations of almost inspired sages. It is not the joys of heaven or the terrors of hell on which he discourses, but of men and women as they lived around him, in their daily habits and occupations. We must go to Wyclif if we would know the theological or philosophical doctrines which interested the learned. Chaucer only tells how monks and friars lived, not how they speculated or preached. We see enough, however, to feel that he was emancipated from the ideas of the Middle Ages, and had cast off their gloom, their superstition, and their despair. The only things he liked of those dreary times were their courts of love and their chivalric glories.

I do not propose to analyze the poetry of Chaucer, or enter upon a critical inquiry as to his relative merits in comparison with the other great poets. It is sufficient for me to know that critics place him very high as an original poet, although it is admitted that he drew much of his material from French and Italian authors. He was, for his day, a great linguist. He had travelled extensively, and could speak Latin, French, and Italian with fluency. He knew Petrarch and other eminent Italians. One is amazed that in such an age he could have written so well, for he had no great models to help him in his own language. If occasionally indecent, he is not corrupting. He never deliberately disseminates moral poison; and when he speaks of love, he treats almost solely of the simple and genuine emotions of the heart.

The best criticism that I have read of Chaucer's poetry is that of Adolphus William Ward; although as a biography it is not so full or so interesting as that of Godwin or even Morley. In no life that I have read are the mental characteristics of our poet so ably drawn,—"his practical good sense," his love of books, his still deeper love of nature, his naivete, the readiness of his description, the brightness of his imagery, the easy flow of his diction, the vividness with which he describes character; his inventiveness, his readiness of illustration, his musical rhythm, his gaiety and cheerfulness, his

vivacity and joyousness, his pathos and tenderness, his keen sense of the ridiculous and power of satire, without being bitter, so that his wit and fun are harmless, and perpetually pleasing.

He doubtless had great dramatic talent, but he did not live in a dramatic age. His especial excellence, never surpassed, was his power of observing and drawing character, united with boundless humor and cheerful fun. And his descriptions of nature are as true and unstinted as his descriptions of men and women, so that he is as fresh as the month of May. In his poetry is life; and hence his immortal fame. He is not so great as Spenser or Shakspeare or Milton; but he has the same vitality as they, and is as wonderful as they considering his age and opportunities,—a poet who constantly improved as he advanced in life, and whose greatest work was written in his old age.

Unfortunately, we know but little of Chaucer's habits and experiences, his trials and disappointments, his friendships or his hatreds. What we do know of him raises our esteem. Though convivial, he was temperate; though genial, he was a silent observer, quiet in his manners, modest in his intercourse with the world, walking with downcast eye, but letting nothing escape his notice. He believed in friendship, and kept his friends to the end, and was stained neither by envy nor by pride,—as frank as he was affectionate, as gentle as he was witty. Living with princes and nobles, he never descended to gross adulation, and never wrote a line of approval of the usurpation of Henry IV., although his bread depended on Henry's favor, and he was also the son of the king's earliest and best friend. He was not a religious man, nor was he an immoral man, judged by the standard of his age. He probably was worldly, as he lived in courts. We do not see in him the stern virtues of Dante or Milton; nothing of that moral earnestness which marked the only other great man with whom he was contemporary,—he who is called the "morning star" of the Reformation. But then we know nothing about him which calls out severe reprobation. He was patriotic, and had the confidence of his sovereign, else he would not have been employed on important missions. And the sweetness of his character may be inferred from his long and tender friendship with Gower, whom some in that age considered the greater poet. He was probably luxurious in his habits, but intemperate use of wine he detested and avoided. He was portly in his person, but refinement marked his features. He was a gentleman, according to the severest code of chivalric excellence; always a favorite with ladies, and equally admired by the knights and barons of a brilliant court. No poet was ever more honored in his life or lamented in his death, as his beautiful monument in Westminster Abbey would seem to attest. That monument is the earliest that was erected to the memory of a poet in that Pantheon of English men of rank and genius; and it will probably be as long preserved as any of those sculptured urns and animated busts which seek to keep alive the memory of the illustrious dead,—of those who, though dead, yet speak to all future generations.

AUTHORITIES

Chaucer's own works, especially the *Canterbury Tales*; publications of the Chaucer Society; Pauli's *History of England*; ordinary *Histories of England* which relate to the reigns of Edward III. and Richard II., especially Green's *History of the English People*; *Life of Chaucer*, by William Godwin (4 volumes, London, 1804); Tyrwhitt's edition of *Canterbury Tales*; Speglet's edition of Chaucer; Warton's *History of English Poetry*; St. Palaye's *History of Chivalry*; *Chaucer's England*, by Matthew Browne (London, 1869); Sir Harris Nicholas's *Life of Chaucer*; *The Riches of Chaucer*, by Charles Cowden Clarke; Morley's *Life of Chaucer*. The latest work is a *Life and Criticism of Chaucer*, by Adolphus William Ward. There is also a *Guide to Chaucer*, by H. G. Fleary. See also Skeat's collected edition of Chaucer's Works, brought out under the auspices of the Early English Text Society.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

A.D. 1446-1506.

MARITIME DISCOVERIES

About thirteen hundred years ago, when Attila the Hun, called "the scourge of God," was overrunning the falling empire of the Romans, some of the noblest citizens of the small cities of the Adriatic fled, with their families and effects, to the inaccessible marshes and islands at the extremity of that sea, and formed a permanent settlement. They became fishermen and small traders. In process of time they united their islands together by bridges, and laid the foundation of a mercantile state. Thither resorted the merchants of Mediaeval Europe to make exchanges. Thus Venice became rich and powerful, and in the twelfth century it was one of the prosperous states of Europe, ruled by an oligarchy of the leading merchants.

Contemporaneous with Dante, one of the most distinguished citizens of this mercantile mart, Marco Polo, impelled by the curiosity which reviving commerce excited and the restless adventure of a crusading age, visited the court of the Great Khan of Tartary, whose empire was the largest in the world. After a residence of seventeen years, during which he was loaded with honors, he returned to his native country, not by the ordinary route, but by coasting the eastern shores of Asia, through the Indian Ocean, up the Persian Gulf, and thence through Bagdad and Constantinople, bringing with him immense wealth in precious stones and other Eastern commodities. The report of his wonderful adventures interested all Europe, for he was supposed to have found the Tarshish of the Scriptures, that land of gold and spices which had enriched the Tyrian merchants in the time of Solomon,—men supposed by some to have sailed around the Cape of Good Hope in their three years' voyages. Among the wonderful things which Polo had seen was a city on an island off the coast of China, which was represented to contain six hundred thousand families, so rich that the palaces of its nobles were covered with plates of gold, so inviting that odoriferous plants and flowers diffused the most grateful perfumes, so strong that even the Tartar conquerors of China could not subdue it. This island, known now as Japan, was called Cipango, and was supposed to be inexhaustible in riches, especially when the reports of Polo were confirmed by Sir John Mandeville, an English traveller in the time of Edward III.,—and with even greater exaggerations, since he represented the royal palace to be more than six miles in circumference, occupied by three hundred thousand men.

In an awakening age of enterprise, when chivalry had not passed away, nor the credulity of the Middle Ages, the reports of this Cipango inflamed the imagination of Europe, and to reach it became at once the desire and the problem of adventurers and merchants. But how could this El Dorado be reached? Not by sailing round Africa; for to sail South, in popular estimation, was to encounter torrid suns with ever increasing heat, and suffocating vapors, and unknown dangers. The scientific world had lost the knowledge of what even the ancients knew. Nobody surmised that there was a Cape of Good Hope which could be doubled, and would open the way to the Indian Ocean and its islands of spices and gold. Nor could this Cipango be reached by crossing the Eastern Continent, for the journey was full of perils, dangers, and insurmountable obstacles.

Among those who meditated on this geographical mystery was a young sea captain of Genoa, who had studied in the University of Pavia, but spent his early life upon the waves,—intelligent, enterprising, visionary, yet practical, with boundless ambition, not to conquer kingdoms, but to discover new realms. Born probably in 1446, in the year 1470 he married the daughter of an Italian navigator living in Lisbon; and, inheriting with her some valuable Portuguese charts and maritime journals, he settled in Lisbon and took up chart-making as a means of livelihood. Being thus trained in both the art and the science of navigation, his active mind seized upon the most interesting theme of the day. His studies and experience convinced him that the Cipango of Marco Polo could be

reached by sailing directly west. He knew that the earth was round, and he inferred from the plants and carved wood and even human bodies that had occasionally floated from the West, that there must be unknown islands on the western coasts of the Atlantic, and that this ocean, never yet crossed, was the common boundary of both Europe and Asia; in short, that the Cipango could be reached by sailing west. And he believed the thing to be practicable, for the magnetic needle had been discovered, or brought from the East by Polo, which always pointed to the North Star, so that mariners could sail in the darkest nights; and also another instrument had been made, essentially the modern quadrant, by which latitude could be measured. He supposed that after sailing west, about eight hundred leagues, by the aid of compass and quadrant, and such charts as he had collected and collated, he should find the land of gold and spices by which he would become rich and famous.

This was not an absurd speculation to a man of the intellect and knowledge of Columbus. To his mind there were but few physical difficulties if he only had the ships, and the men bold enough to embark with him, and the patronage which was necessary for so novel and daring an enterprise. The difficulties to be surmounted were not so much physical as moral. It was the surmounting of moral difficulties which gives to Columbus his true greatness as a man of genius and resources. These moral obstacles were so vast as to be all but insurmountable, since he had to contend with all the established ideas of his age,—the superstitions of sailors, the prejudices of learned men, and general geographical ignorance. He himself had neither money, nor ships, nor powerful friends. Nobody believed in him; all ridiculed him; some insulted him. Who would furnish money to a man who was supposed to be half crazy,—certainly visionary and wild; a rash adventurer who would not only absorb money but imperil life? Learned men would not listen to him, and powerful people derided him, and princes were too absorbed in wars and pleasure to give him a helping hand. Aid could come only from some great state or wealthy prince; but both states and princes were deaf and dumb to him. It was a most extraordinary inspiration of genius in the fifteenth century which created, not an opinion, but a conviction that Asia could be reached by sailing west; and how were common minds to comprehend such a novel idea? If a century later, with all the blaze of reviving art and science and learning, the most learned people ridiculed the idea that the earth revolved around the sun, even when it was proved by all the certitudes of mathematical demonstration and unerring observations, how could the prejudiced and narrow-minded priests of the time of Columbus, who controlled the most important affairs of state, be made to comprehend that an unknown ocean, full of terrors, could be crossed by frail ships, and that even a successful voyage would open marts of inexhaustible wealth? All was clear enough to this scientific and enterprising mariner; and the inward assurance that he was right in his calculation gave to his character a blended boldness, arrogance, and dignity which was offensive to men of exalted station, and ill became a stranger and adventurer with a thread-bare coat, and everything which indicated poverty, neglect, and hardship, and without any visible means of living but by the making and selling of charts.

Hence we cannot wonder at the seventeen years of poverty, neglect, ridicule, disappointment, and deferred hopes, such as make the heart sick, which elapsed after Columbus was persuaded of the truth of his theory, before he could find anybody enlightened enough to believe in him, or powerful enough to assist him.

Wrapped up in those glorious visions which come only to a man of superlative genius, and which make him insensible to heat and cold and scanty fare, even to reproach and scorn, this intrepid soul, inspired by a great and original idea, wandered from city to city, and country to country, and court to court, to present the certain greatness and wealth of any state that would embark in his enterprise. But all were alike cynical, cold, unbelieving, and even insulting. He opposes overwhelming, universal, and overpowering ideas. To have surmounted these amid such protracted opposition and discouragement constitutes his greatness; and finally to prove his position by absolute experiment and hazardous enterprise makes him one of the greatest of human benefactors, whose fame will last through all the generations of men. And as I survey that lonely, abstracted, disappointed, and derided

man,— poor and unimportant, so harassed by debt that his creditors seized even his maps and charts, obliged to fly from one country to another to escape imprisonment, without even listeners and still less friends, and yet with ever-increasing faith in his cause, utterly unconquerable, alone in opposition to all the world,—I think I see the most persistent man of enterprise that I have read of in history. Critics ambitious to say something new may rake out slanders from the archives of enemies, and discover faults which derogate from the character we have been taught to admire and venerate; they may even point out spots, which we cannot disprove, in that sun of glorious brightness, which shed its beneficent rays over a century of darkness,—but this we know, that, whatever may be the force of detraction, his fame has been steadily increasing, even on the admission of his slanderers, for three centuries, and that he now shines as a fixed star in the constellation of the great lights of modern times, not alone because he succeeded in crossing the ocean, when once embarked on it, but for surmounting the moral difficulties which lay in his way before he could embark upon it, and for being finally instrumental in conferring the greatest boon that our world has received from any mortal man, since Noah entered into the ark.

I think it is Lamartine who has said that truly immortal benefactors have seldom been able to accomplish their mission without the encouragement of either saints or women. This is emphatically true in the case of Columbus. The door to success was at last opened to him by a friendly and sympathetic friar of a Franciscan convent near the little port of Palos, in Andalusia. The sun-burned and disappointed adventurer (for that is what he was), wearied and hungry, and nearly discouraged, stopped at the convent-door to get a morsel of bread for his famished son, who attended him in his pilgrimage. The prior of that obscure convent was the first who comprehended the man of genius, not so much because he was an enlightened scholar, but because his pious soul was full of kindly sympathy, showing that the instincts of love are kindred to the inspirations of genius. It was the voice of Ali and Cadijeh that strengthened Mohammed. It was Catherine von Bora who sustained Luther in his gigantic task. The worthy friar, struck by the noble bearing of a man so poor and wearied, became delighted with the conversation of his guest, who opened to him both his heart and his schemes. He forwarded his plans by a letter to a powerful ecclesiastic, who introduced him to the Spanish Court, then one of the most powerful, and certainly the proudest and most punctilious, in Europe. Ferdinand of Aragon was polite, yet wary and incredulous; but Isabella of Castile listened more kindly to the stranger, whom the greatness of his mission inspired with eloquence. Like the saint of the convent, she and she alone of her splendid court, divined that there was something to be heeded in the words of Columbus, and gave her womanly and royal encouragement, although too much engrossed with the conquest of Grenada and the cares of her kingdom to pay that immediate attention which Columbus entreated.

I may not dwell on the vexatious delays and the protracted discouragements of Columbus after the Queen had given her ear to his enthusiastic prophecies of the future glories of the kingdom. To the court and to the universities and to the great ecclesiastics he was still a visionary and a needy adventurer; and they quoted, in refutation of his theory, those Scripture texts which were hurled in greater wrath against Galileo when he announced his brilliant discoveries. There are, from some unfathomed reason, always texts found in the sacred writings which seem to conflict with both science and a profound theology; and the pedants, as well as the hypocrites and usurpers, have always shielded themselves behind these in their opposition to new opinions. I will not be hard upon them, for often they are good men, simply unable to throw off the shackles of ages of ignorance and tyranny. People should not be subjected to lasting reproach because they cannot emancipate themselves from prevailing ideas. If those prejudiced courtiers and scholastics who ridiculed Columbus could only have seen with his clearer insight, they might have loaded him with favors. But they were blinded and selfish and envious. Nor was it until Columbus convinced his sovereigns that the risk was small for so great a promised gain, that he was finally commissioned to undertake his voyage. The promised boon was the riches of Oriental countries, boundless and magnificent,—countries not to be discovered, but already

known, only hard and perhaps impossible to reach. And Columbus himself was so firmly persuaded of the existence of these riches, and of his ability to secure them, and they were so exaggerated by his imagination, that his own demands were extravagant and preposterous, as must have seemed to an incredulous court,—that he, a stranger, an adventurer, almost a beggar even, should in case of success be made viceroy and admiral over the unexplored realm, and with a tenth of all the riches he should collect or seize; and that these high offices—almost regal—should also be continued not only through his own life, but through the lives of his heirs from generation to generation, thus raising him to a possible rank higher than that of any of the dukes and grandees of Spain.

Ferdinand and Isabella, however, readily promised all that the persistent and enthusiastic adventurer demanded, doubtless with the feeling that there was not more than one chance in a hundred that he would ever be heard from again, but that this one chance was well worth all and more than they expended,—a possibility of indefinite aggrandizement. To the eyes of Ferdinand there was a prospect—remote, indeed—of adding to the power of the Spanish monarchy; and it is probable that the pious Isabella contemplated also the conversion of the heathen to Christianity. It is possible that some motives may have also influenced Columbus kindred to this,—a renewed crusade against Saracen infidels, which he might undertake from the wealth he was so confident of securing. But the probabilities are that Columbus was urged on to his career by ambitious and worldly motives also, or else he would not have been so greedy to secure honors and wealth, nor would have been so jealous of his dignity when he had attained power. To me Columbus was no more a saint than Sir Francis Drake was when he so unscrupulously robbed every ship he could lay his hands upon, although both of them observed the outward forms of religious worship peculiar to their respective creeds and education. There were no unbelievers in that age. Both Catholics and Protestants, like the ancient Pharisees, were scrupulous in what were supposed to be religious duties,—though these too often were divorced from morality. It is Columbus only as an intrepid, enthusiastic, enlightened navigator, in pursuit of a new world of boundless wealth, that I can see him; and it was for his ultimate success in discovering this world, amid so many difficulties, that he is to be regarded as a great benefactor, of the glory of which no ingenuity or malice can rob him.

At last he sets sail, August 3, 1492, and, singularly enough, from Palos, within sight of the little convent where he had received his first encouragement. He embarked in three small vessels, the largest of which was less than one hundred tons, and two without decks, but having high poops and sterns inclosed. What an insignificant flotilla for such a voyage! But it would seem that the Admiral, with great sagacity, deemed small vessels best adapted to his purpose, in order to enter safely shallow harbors and sail near the coast.

He sails in the most propitious season of the year, and is aided by steady trade-winds which waft his ships gently through the unknown ocean. He meets with no obstacles of any account. The skies are serene, the sea is as smooth as the waters of an inland lake; and he is comforted, as he advances to the west, by the appearance of strange birds and weeds and plants that indicate nearness to the land. He has only two objects of solicitude,—the variations of the magnetic needle, and the superstitious fears of his men; the last he succeeds in allaying by inventing plausible theories, and by concealing the real distance he has traversed. He encourages them by inflaming their cupidity. He is nearly baffled by their mutinous spirit. He is in danger, not from coral reefs and whirlpools and sunken rocks and tempests, as at first was feared, but from his men themselves, who clamor to return. It is his faith and moral courage and fertility of resources which we most admire. Days pass in alternate hope and disappointment, amid angry clamors, in great anxiety, for no land appears after he has sailed far beyond the points where he expected to find it. The world is larger than even he has supposed. He promises great rewards to the one who shall first see the unknown shores. It is said that he himself was the first to discover land by observing a flickering light, which is exceedingly improbable, as he was several leagues from shore; but certain it is, that the very night the land was

seen from the Admiral's vessel, it was also discovered by one of the seamen on board another ship. The problem of the age was at last solved. A new continent was given to Ferdinand and Isabella.

On the 12th of October Columbus lands—not, however, on the continent, as he supposed, but on an island—in great pomp, as admiral of the seas and viceroy of the king, in a purple doublet, and with a drawn sword in one hand and the standard of Spain in the other, followed by officers in appropriate costume, and a friar bearing the emblem of our redemption, which is solemnly planted on the shore, and the land called San Salvador. This little island, one of the Bahamas, is not, however, gilded with the anticipated splendors of Oriental countries. He finds neither gold, nor jewels, nor silks, nor spices, nor any signs of civilization; only naked men and women, without any indication of wealth or culture or power. But he finds a soft and genial climate, and a soil of unparalleled fertility, and trees and shrubs as green as Andalusia in spring and birds with every variety of plumage, and insects glistening with every color of the rainbow; while the natives are gentle and unsuspecting and full of worship. Columbus is disappointed, but not discouraged. He sets sail to find the real Cipango of which he is in search. He cruises among the Bahama islands, discovers Cuba and Hispaniola (now called Hayti), explores their coasts, holds peaceful intercourse with the natives, and is transported with enthusiasm in view of the beauty of the country and its great capacities; but he sees no gold, only a few ornaments to show that there is gold somewhere near, if it only could be found. Nor has he reached the Cipango of his dreams, but new countries, of which there was no record or suspicion of existence, yet of vast extent, and fertile beyond knowledge. He is puzzled, but filled with intoxicating joy. He has performed a great feat. He has doubtless added indefinitely to the dominion of Spain.

Columbus leaves a small colony on the island of Hispaniola, and with the trophies of his discoveries returns to Spain, without serious obstacles, except a short detention in Portugal, whither he was driven by a storm. His stories fill the whole civilized world with wonder. He is welcomed with the most cordial and enthusiastic reception; the people gaze at him with admiration. His sovereigns rise at his approach, and seat him beside themselves on their gilded and canopied throne; he has made them a present worthy of a god. What honors could be too great for such a man! Even envy pales before the universal exhilaration. He enters into the most august circles as an equal; his dignities and honors are confirmed; he is loaded with presents and favors; he is the most marked personage in Europe; he is almost stifled with the incense of royal and popular idolatry. Never was a subject more honored and caressed. The imagination of a chivalrous and lively people is inflamed with the wildest expectations, for although he returned with but little of the expected wealth, he has pointed out a land rich in unfathomed mines.

A second and larger expedition is soon projected. Everybody wishes to join it. All press to join the fortunate admiral who has added a continent to civilization. The proudest nobles, with the armor and horses of chivalry, embark with artisans and miners for another voyage, now without solicitude or fear, but with unbounded hopes of wealth,—especially hardy adventurers and broken-down families of rank anxious to retrieve their fortunes. The pendulum of a nation's thought swings from the extreme of doubt and cynicism to the opposite extreme of faith and exhilaration. Spain was ripe for the harvest. Eight hundred years' desperate contest with the Moors had made the nation bold, heroic, adventurous. There were no such warriors in all Europe. Nowhere were there such chivalric virtues. No people were then animated with such martial enthusiasm, such unfettered imagination, such heroic daring, as were the subjects of Ferdinand and Isabella. They were a people to conquer a world; not merely heroic and enterprising, but fresh with religious enthusiasm. They had expelled the infidels from Spain; they would fight for the honor of the Cross in any clime or land.

The hopes held out by Columbus were extravagant; and these extravagant expectations were the occasion of his fall and subsequent sorrows and humiliation. Doubtless he was sincere, but he was infatuated. He could only see the gold of Cipango. He was as confident of enriching his followers as he had been of discovering new realms. He was as enthusiastic as Sir Walter Raleigh a century

later, and made promises as rash as he, and created the same exalted hopes, to be followed by bitter disappointments; and consequently he incurred the same hostilities and met the same downfall.

This second expedition was undertaken in seventeen vessels, carrying fifteen hundred people, all full of animation and hope, and some of them with intentions to settle in the newly discovered country until they had made their fortunes. They arrived at Hispaniola in March, of the year 1493, only to discover that the men left behind on the first voyage to secure their settlement were all despoiled or murdered; that the natives had proved treacherous, or that the Spaniards had abused their confidence and forfeited their friendship. They were exposed to new hostilities: they found the climate unhealthy; their numbers rapidly dwindled away from disease or poor food; starvation stared them in the face, in spite of the fertility of the soil; dissensions and jealousies arose; they were governed with great difficulty, for the haughty hidalgoes were unused to menial labor, and labor of the most irksome kind was necessary; law and order were relaxed. The blame of disaster was laid upon the Admiral, who was accused of deceiving them; evil reports were sent to Spain, accusing him of incapacity, cruelty, and oppression; gold was found only in small quantities; some of the leading men mutinied; general discontent arose; the greater part of the colonists were disabled from sickness and debility; no gold of any amount was sent back to Spain, only five hundred Indian slaves to be sold instead, which led to renewed hostilities with the natives, and the necessity for their subjugation. All of these evils created bitter disappointment in Spain and discontent with the measures and government of Columbus himself, so that a commission of inquiry was sent to Hispaniola, headed by Aguado, who assumed arrogant authority, and made it necessary for Columbus to return to Spain without adding essentially to his discoveries. He sailed around Cuba and Jamaica and other islands, but as yet had not seen the mainland or found mines of gold or silver.

He landed in Spain, in 1496, to find that his popularity had declined and the old enthusiasm had grown cold. With him landed a feeble train of emaciated men, who had nothing to relate but sickness, hardship, and disappointment. The sovereigns, however, received him kindly; but he was depressed and sad, and clothed himself with the habit of a Franciscan friar, to denote his humility and dejection. He displayed a few golden collars and bracelets as trophies, with some Indians; but these no longer dazzled the crowd.

It was not until 1498 that Columbus was enabled to make his third voyage, having experienced great delay from the general disappointment. Instead of seventeen vessels, he could collect but six. In this voyage he reached the mainland,—that part called Paria, near the mouth of the Orinoco, in South America, but he supposed it to be an island. It was fruitful and populous, and the air was sweetened with the perfumes of flowers. Yet he did not explore the coast to any extent, but made his way to Hispaniola, where he had left the discontented colony himself broken in health, a victim of gout, haggard from anxiety, and emaciated by pain. His splendid constitution was now undermined from his various hardships and cares.

He found the colony in a worse state than when he left it under the care of his brother Bartholomew. The Indians had proved hostile; the colonists were lazy and turbulent; mutiny had broken out; factions prevailed, as well as general misery and discontent. The horrors of famine had succeeded wars with the natives. There was a general desire to leave the settlement. Columbus tried to restore order and confidence; but the difficulty of governing such a disorderly set of adventurers was too great even for him. He was obliged to resort to severities that made him more and more unpopular. The complaints of his enemies reached Spain. He was most cruelly misrepresented and slandered; and in the general disappointment, and the constant drain upon the mother country to support the colony, his enemies gained the ear of his sovereigns, and strong doubts arose in their minds about his capacity for government. So a royal commission was sent out,—an officer named Bovadilla, with absolute power to examine into the state of the colony, and supplant, if necessary, the authority of Columbus. The result was the arrest of Columbus and his brothers, who were sent to Spain in chains. What a change of fortune! I will not detail the accusations against him, just, or unjust.

It is mournful enough to see the old man brought home in irons from the world he had discovered and given to Spain. The injustice and cruelty which he received produced a reaction, and he was once more kindly received at court, with the promise that his grievances should be redressed and his property and dignities restored.

Columbus was allowed to make one more voyage of discovery, but nothing came of it except renewed troubles, hardships, dangers, and difficulties; wars with the natives, perils of the sea, discontents, disappointments; and when at last he returned to Spain, in 1504,—broken with age and infirmities, after twelve years of harassing cares, labors, and dangers (a checkered career of glory and suffering),—nothing remained but to prepare for his final rest. He had not made a fortune; he had not enriched his patrons,—but he had discovered a continent. His last days were spent in disquieting and fruitless negotiations to perpetuate his honors among his descendants. He was ever jealous and tenacious of his dignities. Ferdinand was polite, but selfish and cold; nor can this calculating prince ever be vindicated from the stain of gross ingratitude. Columbus died in the year 1506, at the age of sixty, a disappointed man. But honors were ultimately bestowed upon his heirs, who became grandees and dukes, and intermarried with the proudest families of Spain; and it is also said that Ferdinand himself, after the death of the great navigator, caused a monument to be erected to his memory with this inscription: "To Castile and Leon Columbus gave a new world." But no man of that century needed less than Columbus a monument to perpetuate his immortal fame.

I think that historians belittle Columbus when they would excite our pity for his misfortunes. They insult the dignity of all struggling souls, and make utilitarians of all benefactors, and give false views of success. Few benefactors, on the whole, were ever more richly rewarded than he. He died Admiral of the Seas, a grandee of Spain,—having bishops for his eulogists and princes for his mourners,—the founder of an illustrious house, whose name and memory gave glory even to the Spanish throne. And even if he had not been rewarded with material gains, it was enough to feel that he had conferred a benefit on the world which could scarcely be appreciated in his lifetime,—a benefit so transcendent that its results could be seen only by future generations. Who could adequately pay him for his services; who could estimate the value of his gift? What though they load him to-day with honors, or cast him tomorrow into chains?—that is the fate of all immortal benefactors since our world began. His great soul should have soared beyond vulgar rewards. In the loftiness of his self-consciousness he should have accepted, without a murmur, whatever fortune awaited him. Had he merely given to civilization a new style of buttons, or an improved envelope, or a punch for a railway conductor, or a spring for a carriage, or a mining tool, or a screw, or revolver, or reaper, the inventors of which have "seen millions in them," and been cheated out of his gains, he might have whimpered over his wrongs. How few benefactors have received even as much as he; for he won dignities, admiration, and undying fame. We scarcely know the names of many who have made grand bequests. Who invented the mariner's compass? Who gave the lyre to primeval ages, or the blacksmith's forge, or the letters of the alphabet, or the arch in architecture, or glass for windows? Who solved the first problem of geometry? Who first sang the odes which Homer incorporated with the Iliad? Who first turned up the earth with a plough? Who first used the weaver's shuttle? Who devised the cathedrals of the Middle Ages? Who gave the keel to ships? Who was the first that raised bread by yeast? Who invented chimneys? But all ages will know that Columbus discovered America; and his monuments are in every land, and his greatness is painted by the ablest historians.

But I will not enlarge on the rewards Columbus received, or the ingratitude which succeeded them, by force of envy or from the disappointment of worldly men in not realizing all the gold that he promised. Let me allude to the results of his discovery.

The first we notice was the marvellous stimulus to maritime adventures. Europe was inflamed with a desire to extend geographical knowledge, or add new countries to the realms of European sovereigns.

Within four years of the discovery of the West India Islands by Columbus, Cabot had sailed past Newfoundland, and Vasco da Gama had doubled the Cape of Good Hope, and laid the foundation of the Portuguese empire in the East Indies. In 1499 Ojeda, one of the companions of Columbus, and Amerigo Vespucci discovered Brazil. In 1500 Cortereal, a Portuguese, explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence. In 1505 Francesco de Almeida established factories along the coast of Malabar. In 1510 the Spaniards formed settlements on the mainland at Panama. In 1511 the Portuguese established themselves at Malacca. In 1513 Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Darien and reached the Pacific Ocean. The year after that, Ponce de Leon had visited Florida. In 1515 the Rio de la Plata was navigated; and in 1517 the Portuguese had begun to trade with China and Bengal. As early as 1520 Cortes had taken Mexico, and completed the conquest of that rich country the following year. In 1522 Cano circumnavigated the globe. In 1524 Pizarro discovered Peru, which in less than twelve years was completely subjugated,—the year when California was discovered by Cortes. In 1542 the Portuguese were admitted to trade with Japan. In 1576 Frobisher sought a North-western passage to India; and the following year Sir Francis Drake commenced his more famous voyages under the auspices of Elizabeth. In 1578 Sir Humphrey Gilbert colonized Virginia, followed rapidly by other English settlements, until before the century closed the whole continent was colonized either by Spaniards, or Portuguese, or English, or French, or Dutch. All countries came in to share the prizes held out by the discovery of the New World.

Colonization followed the voyages of discovery. It was animated by the hope of finding gold and precious stones. It was carried on under great discouragements and hardships and unforeseen difficulties. As a general thing, the colonists were not accustomed to manual labor; they were adventurers and broken-down dependents on great families, who found restraint irksome and the drudgeries of their new life almost unendurable. Nor did they intend, at the outset, permanent settlements; they expected to accumulate gold and silver, and then return to their country. They had sought to improve their condition, and their condition became forlorn. They were exposed to sickness from malaria, poor food, and hardship; they were molested by the natives whom they constantly provoked; they were subject to cruel treatment on the part of royal governors. They melted away wherever they settled, by famine, disease, and war, whether in South or North America. They were discontented and disappointed, and not easily governed; the chieftains quarrelled with each other, and were disgraced by rapacity and cruelty. They did not find what they expected. They were lonely and desolate, and longed to return to the homes they had left, but were frequently without means to return,—doomed to remain where they were, and die. Colonization had no dignity until men went to the New World for religious liberty, or to work upon the soil. The conquest of Mexico and Peru, however, opened up the mining of gold and silver, which were finally found in great abundance. And when the richness of these countries in the precious metals was finally established, then a regular stream of emigrants flocked to the American shores. Gold was at last found, but not until thousands had miserably perished.

The mines of Mexico and Peru undoubtedly enriched Spain, and filled Europe with envy and emulation. A stream of gold flowed to the mother country, and the caravels which transported the treasures of the new world became objects of plunder to all nations hostile to Spain. The seas were full of pirates. Sir Francis Drake was an undoubted pirate, and returned, after his long voyage around the world, with immense treasure, which he had stolen. Then followed, with the eager search after gold and silver, a rapid demoralization in all maritime countries.

It would be interesting to show how the sudden accumulation of wealth by Spain led to luxury, arrogance, and idleness, followed by degeneracy and decay, since those virtues on which the strength of man is based are weakened by sudden wealth. Industry declined in proportion as Spain became enriched by the precious metals. But this inquiry is foreign to my object.

A still more interesting inquiry arises, how far the nations of Europe were really enriched by the rapid accumulation of gold and silver. The search for the precious metals may have stimulated

commercial enterprise, but it is not so clear that it added to the substantial wealth of Europe, except so far as it promoted industry. Gold is not wealth; it is simply the exponent of wealth. Real wealth is in farms and shops and ships,—in the various channels of industry, in the results of human labor. So far as the precious metals enter into useful manufactures, or into articles of beauty and taste, they are indeed inherently valuable. Mirrors, plate, jewelry, watches, gilded furniture, the adornments of the person, in an important sense, constitute wealth, since all nations value them, and will pay for them as they do for corn or oil. So far as they are connected with art, they are valuable in the same sense as statues and pictures, on which labor has been expended. There is something useful, and even necessary, besides food and raiment and houses. The gold which ornamented Solomon's temple, or the Minerva of Phidias, or the garments of Leo X., had a value. The ring which is a present to brides is a part of a marriage ceremony. The golden watch, which never tarnishes, is more valuable inherently than a pewter one, because it remains beautiful. Thus when gold enters into ornaments deemed indispensable, or into manufactures which are needed, it has an inherent value,—it is wealth.

But when gold is a mere medium of exchange,—its chief use,—then it has only a conventional value; I mean, it does not make a nation rich or poor, since the rarer it is the more it will purchase of the necessities of life. A pound's weight of gold, in ancient Greece, or in Mediaeval Europe, would purchase as much wheat as twenty pounds' weight will purchase to-day. If the mines of Mexico or Peru or California had never been worked, the gold in the civilized world three hundred years ago would have been as valuable for banking purposes, or as an exchange for agricultural products, as twenty times its present quantity, since it would have bought as much as twenty times the quantity will buy to-day. Make diamonds as plenty as crystals, they would be worth no more than crystals, if they were not harder and more beautiful. Make gold as plenty as silver, it would be worth no more than silver, except for manufacturing purposes; it would be worth no more to bankers and merchants. The vast increase in the production of the precious metals simply increased the value of the commodities for which they were exchanged. A laborer can purchase no more bread with a dollar to-day than he could with five cents three hundred years ago. Five cents were really as much wealth three hundred years ago as a dollar is to-day. Wherein, then, has the increase in the precious metals added to the wealth of the world, if a twentieth part of the gold and silver now in circulation would buy as much land, or furniture, or wheat, or oil three hundred years ago as the whole amount now used as money will buy to-day? Had no gold or silver mines been discovered in America, the gold and silver would have appreciated in value in proportion to the wear of them. In other words, the scarcer the gold and silver the more the same will purchase of the fruits of human industry. So industry is the wealth, not the gold. It is the cultivated farms and the manufactures and the buildings and the internal improvements of a country which constitute its real wealth, since these represent its industry,—the labor of men. Mines, indeed, employ the labor of men, but they do not furnish food for the body, or raiment to wear, or houses to live in, or fuel for cooking, or any purpose whatever of human comfort or necessity,—only a material for ornament; which I grant is wealth, so far as ornament is for the welfare of man. The marbles of ancient Greece were very valuable for the labor expended on them, either for architecture or for ornament.

Gold and silver were early selected as useful and convenient articles for exchange, like bank-notes, and so far have inherent value as they supply that necessity; but if a fourth part of the gold and silver in existence would supply that necessity, the remaining three-fourths are as inherently valueless as the paper of which bank-notes are printed. Their value consists in what they represent of the labors and industries of men.

Now Spain ultimately became poor, in spite of the influx of gold and silver from the American mines, because industries of all kinds declined. People were diverted from useful callings by the mighty delusion which gold discoveries created. These discoveries had the same effect on industry, which is the wealth of nations, as the support of standing armies has in our day. They diverted men from legitimate callings. The miners had to be supported like soldiers; and, worse, the sudden influx

of gold and silver intoxicated men and stimulated speculation. An army of speculators do not enrich a nation, since they rob each other. They cause money to change hands; they do not stimulate industry. They do not create wealth; they simply make it flow from one person to another.

But speculations sometimes create activity in enterprise; they inflame desires for wealth, and cause people to make greater exertions. In that sense the discovery of American mines gave a stimulus to commerce and travel and energy. People rushed to America for gold: these people had to be fed and clothed. Then farmers and manufacturers followed the gold-hunters; they tilled the soil to feed the miners. The new farms which dotted the region of the gold-diggers added to the wealth of the country in which the mines were located. Colonization followed gold-digging. But it was America that became enriched, not the old countries from which the miners came, except so far as the old countries furnished tools and ships and fabrics, for doubtless commerce and manufacturing were stimulated. So far, the wealth of the world increased; but the men who returned to riot in luxury and idleness did not stimulate enterprise. They made others idle also. The necessity of labor was lost sight of.

And yet if one country became idle, another country may have become industrious. There can be but little question that the discovery of the American mines gave commerce and manufactures and agriculture, on the whole, a stimulus. This was particularly seen in England. England grew rich from industry and enterprise, as Spain became poor from idleness and luxury. The silver and gold, diffused throughout Europe, ultimately found their way into the pockets of Englishmen, who made a market for their manufactures. It was not alone the precious metals which enriched England, but the will and power to produce those articles of industry for which the rest of the world parted with their gold and silver. What has made France rich since the Revolution? Those innumerable articles of taste and elegance—fabrics and wines—for which all Europe parted with their specie; not war, not conquest, not mines. Why till recently was Germany so poor? Because it had so little to sell to other nations; because industry was cramped by standing armies and despotic governments.

One thing is certain, that the discovery of America opened a new field for industry and enterprise to all the discontented and impoverished and oppressed Europeans who emigrated. At first they emigrated to dig silver and gold. The opening of mines required labor, and miners were obliged to part with their gold for the necessities of life. Thus California in our day has become peopled with farmers and merchants and manufacturers, as well as miners. Many came to America expecting to find gold, and were disappointed, and were obliged to turn agriculturists, as in Virginia. Many came to New England from political and religious motives. But all came to better their fortunes. Gradually the United States and Canada became populated from east to west and from north to south. The surplus population of Europe poured itself into the wilds of America. Generally the emigrants were farmers. With the growth of agricultural industry were developed commerce and manufactures. Thus, materially, the world was immensely benefited. A new continent was opened for industry. No matter what the form of government may be,—I might almost say no matter what the morals and religion of the people may be,—so long as there is land to occupy, and to be sold cheap, the continent will fill up, and will be as densely populated as Europe or Asia, because the natural advantages are good. The rivers and the lakes will be navigated; the products of the country will be exchanged for European and Asiatic products; wealth will certainly increase, and increase indefinitely. There is no calculating the future resources and wealth of the New World, especially in the United States. There are no conceivable bounds to their future commerce, manufactures, and agricultural products. We can predict with certainty the rise of new cities, villas, palaces, material splendor, limited only to the increasing resources and population of the country. Who can tell the number of miles of new railroads yet to be made; the new inventions to abridge human labor; what great empires are destined to rise; what unknown forms of luxury will be found out; what new and magnificent trophies of art and science will gradually be seen; what mechanism, what material glories, are sure to come? This is not speculation. Nothing can retard the growth of America in material wealth and glory. The splendid external will call forth more panegyrics than the old Roman world which fancied itself eternal. The

tower of the new Babel will rise to the clouds, and be seen in all its glory throughout the earth and sea. No Fourth of July orator ever exaggerated the future destinies of America in a material point of view. No "spread-eagle" politician even conceived what will be sure to come.

And what then? Grant the most indefinite expansion,—the growth of empires whose splendor and wealth and power shall utterly eclipse the glories of the Old World. All this is probable. But when we have dwelt on the future material expansion; when we have given wings to imagination, and feel that even imagination cannot reach the probable realities in a material aspect,—then our predictions and calculations stop. Beyond material glories we cannot count with certainty. The world has witnessed many powerful empires which have passed away, and left "not a rack behind." What remains of the antediluvian world?—not even a spike of Noah's ark, larger and stronger than any modern ship. What remains of Nineveh, of Babylon, of Thebes, of Tyre, of Carthage,—those great centres of wealth and power? What remains of Roman greatness even, except in laws and literature and renovated statues? Remember there is an undeviating uniformity in the past history of nations. What is the simple story of all the ages?—industry, wealth, corruption, decay, and ruin. What conservative power has been strong enough to arrest the ruin of the nations of antiquity? Have not material forces and glories been developed and exhibited, whatever the religion and morals of the fallen nations? Cannot a country grow materially to a certain point, under the most adverse influences, in a religious and moral point of view? Yet for lack of religion and morals the nations perished, and their Babel-towers were buried in the dust. They perished for lack of true conservative forces; at least that is the judgment of historians. Nobody doubts the splendor of the material glories of the ancient nations. The ruins of Baalbec, of Palmyra, of Athens, prove this, to say nothing of history. The material glories of the ancient nations may be surpassed by our modern wonders; but yet all the material glories of the ancient nations passed away.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.