

background. Prof. Morley touches cursorily on the 'Romaunt of the Rose' and the French mystics and makers of allegory who delighted in these interminable fables. The Miracle Plays, the Cursor Mundi, the Chronicle writers, and the rubbishy writings of John Gower come in for chapters of their own; while 'the Pricke of Conscience,' 'the Ayenbite of Inwyt,' and Langland's 'Vision' are more or less elaborately analyzed. Prof. Skeat's numerous editions of the latter are fitly eulogized, and the gist of the poem is given in a not unreadable paraphrase. Linguistically, for the forms and final shape which the English tongue took under the domination of the Midland dialect, the Fourteenth Century is all-important; æsthetically, it is a waste of insipidity in which Chaucer and Wyclif tower aloft like pillars of sparkling salt giving savor to their surroundings.

A rapid run through this volume shows but the crust of the bivalve; the jewelled interior is reserved for Part II., where the Pilgrim of Canterbury is finally and fully discussed, new elaboration is given to the theme of the 'Romaunt of the Rose,' and Wyclif, the great Bible translator and reformer, is taken up. Prof. Morley does not, it seems to us, give space enough to that delightful creature Maundeville, who, whether a mere *vocis umbra* or not, first 'travailed' into foreign parts to the delectation of English readers, and brought back a wallet full of wonders for them to ruminate on. Reading him is like entering a fresh wonderland full of paynim and paladin, marvels of the sea and town, a region abounding in such 'jests' as we find in the ever-charming 'Gesta Romanorum.'

Literature

Morley's "English Writers." Vol. IV.*

SOME ONE was boasting to the Sicilian Alphonse of powerful Rome, mighty Venice, rich Florence, populous Milan. 'Say no more,' said the Sicilian; 'as for me, give me little Carioncillo, where I was born and bred.' Prof. Morley's endeavor illustrates the same patriotic principle: 'Give me,' he virtually cries, 'not the whole world: only a little corner of it, where I may make myself at home, build a nest like a stork in a chimney, and pass my days in comfortable research.' In this way began his encyclopædic work on English literature—the segment of the great world-literature which he has chosen as his own. Yet small as this segment is, it lengthens, curves, swells, like an arc of any other circle, stretching from narrow beginnings into the illimitable, and impinging in its sweep on all other literatures. The ancients figured the Muses dancing with linked hands through nine arcs of a perfect orb—poetry, memory, history and the rest joined in a flowing curve that met at the other extreme. So with English literature or any other literature: it inevitably joins others like the globules of a string of pearls on a thread. The Saxon, the Celtic, the Norman, the Italian, the Spanish, the French, the German, the cosmopolitan influences have to be traced in their concatenated development; and the result is that this narrow angle of the universal world, this ingle-neuk of history, these *augustæ res domi*, widen out into a continent, an ocean, a story of universal human thought, a tell-tale of universal interest. It is like touching a tonic bell that causes all the other tonic bells in the neighborhood to ring.

Prof. Morley recognizes this interpenetration of influences and from the start has made the discussion of it the valuable characteristic of his literary history. In the present volume he takes up the Fourteenth Century, and clears the way by deliberate and thorough literary cleansing for the great and luminous figures of Chaucer and Wyclif. The *débris* of the Fourteenth Century, so to speak, is gathered, sifted, winnowed, examined in this volume, and the few gleaming jewels like Langland and Maundeville are picked from the rubbish, polished anew by the emery of criticism, and wrought into newer and daintier settings for the literary appreciation of connoisseurs. That famous art which Ronsard described as 'l'art de bien Petrarquiser,' is here set forth in a comprehensive chapter in which the Petrarchan love-song and the Boccacciesque story are fully described, and their influence on the English Petrarchists and Boccaccio imitators is intelligently set forth. All the world knows the story of this duet of friends and how one twined about the other with note and comment as the vine about the elm. In Chaucer, Boccaccio lives anew, though baptized with a baptism of poetic fire which has wonderfully transformed the gay spirit of the Decameronist; while Petrarch and Boccaccio together lit a flame in France which shines and pulsates to-day; and both play like laughing electric light against the thundercloud of Dante, just in their

* English Writers. By Henry Morley. Vol. IV. The Fourteenth Century. In Two Books. Book I. \$1.50. New York: Cassell & Co.