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Chaucer, the Poet of the People
inspite of his sympathy for the
disintegrated and the common peo-
ple, Chaucer wrote for the Court,
the nobility and cultivated cla-
sses to whom the sufferings and
pathetic groanings of the masses
were a matter of utmost indiff-
erence. In the fourteenth century
aristocratic people had food in
abundance but poor villagers were
dying of 'Black Death' and fami-
nes. In consequence, indignation
against aristocracy was spreading
like wide fire among the mass-
es, but it proved of no avail.
The appeals of the poor fell flat
on the deaf ears of the nobility.
Even in these hard times, Chaucer
did not champion the cause of the
poor, he lured, courtiers by his
poetry. The aim of Chaucer in
'The Canterbury Tales' was to
represent the microcosm of Eng-
lish Society. He represented the
wide and variegated fourteenth
century life in 'The Canterbury
Tales'. But Chaucer, inspite of

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his broad outlook and humanity did not touch the burning social problems of the fourteenth century - the plague, the peasant uprising and the Lollardry. "The peasant rebellion and the Lollard agitation," says Moody and Lovett, "give us glimpses of ~~an~~ England which Chaucer in spite of the many-sidedness of his work, did not reveal. 'The Canterbury Tales' contains in few references to the plague and only one to the peasant uprising and only one to Lollardry and these references are casual or jesting." Chaucer did not mix with the common people, he kept himself aloof from the mob. He had no deep feeling and regard for the crowd which is evident not only in his sketches of crowd but also by such references as this in 'The Clerk's Tale':

"O stormy people! un-
 sad and ever untrewe
 As undiscreef and claug-
 ing as a vane!"

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In spite of his aloofness from the poor, Chaucer was not completely devoid of sympathy for the common crawling people. Chaucer was not a reformer, but he disliked tyranny and injustice as fiercely as he loathed cant and hypocrisy. Though Chaucer like Keats carried no burden at all, yet he laid his finger on despotism and oppression. In the following passage from 'The Pardoner's Tale', we can show that he became a spokesman, a voice of the masses. He admirably put forth the cause of the poor, "Think also that of the same seed of which churchills spring, of the same seed spring lords, as well may the church be saved as the lord. Wherefore I counsel thee do just so with the church as thou wouldst thy lord with thee if thou wert in his plight... I counsel thee certainly thou lord that thou work in such wise with thy churchills that they rather love thee than dread thee." The milk

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of human kindness, the sympathy with the poor was strongly felt by Chaucer as by Shakespeare. Both Chaucer and Shakespeare like Juvenal did not fall foul on their characters. There was a spirit of sunny endeavour about Chaucer and Shakespeare to make things better for the people. Chaucer's aloofness from starving people was also the outcome and result of his conservatism and optimism. He saw the world as it was full violence, treachery, avarice and haunted by the ~~shadow~~ shadow of disease and death, but he saw it - whole with calm, amused and delighted eyes. He was not like some of the doubt-racked Victorians who took a pessimistic view of life, but like Browning he had enough courage, faith and optimism to enjoy the world in the midst of miseries. ~~Chaucer~~ Chaucer took delight like a roe in the sunny and bright pleasure of life. intense

sobriety and Chaucer were poles apart. He was a man of artistic, jovial, gay and tolerant dispositions. Hence the sufferings, moanings and groanings of the poor made no intense appeal to Chaucer as they appealed to Langland and Gower. As Chaucer was the representative of the court, Langland and Gower were enthusiastic and zealous advocates of the common people. 'The vision of Piers the Plowman' by Langland proved a clarion call to the peasant uprising. Moody and Lovett consider that more than Langland and Chaucer, Gower was truly representative of his age. Gower in 'The vox clamantis' sketched the naked pitiable picture of the serfs, the low wages, the devouring plague, the scarcity of food which resulted in the wide-spread hunger and discontent. "The poem is full of horror and dismay at the social volcano which had

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opened for a moment, threatening to engulf the nation." The true picture of the society, the sufferings, the discontent of the poor are mirrored by power and not by chance, though there are passages in his poetry which reveal his sympathy for the masses and the poor people of his times.

The end.

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