

Chaucer, The First National Poet
Chaucer was the first great national poet of England giving full expression to the new hopes and aspirations of the people of his times. He voiced through his poetry that national unity which had been brought about by the fusion of the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons. The growing influence of France was checked and for the first the poet in the natural language of England gave expression to the life, ideals, hopes and aspirations of the people of the 14th century belonging to his country. In his picture of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, with the frankness of criticism prevailing among all its members, with the strength of its public opinion with its power of regulating its own affairs we find, what as yet had nowhere else appeared in modern European literature, the image of an organized 'nation'. The foundation

of Chaucer's art lies in ~~English~~ English life and English character.

Modern poetry is characterised by realism. The modern poet is a keen, observer of the various tendencies of his times which are being put by him in poetry. This modern note of realism had been sounded by Chaucer long ago in the 14th century. He made a thorough study of his time in its varied aspects and gave expression, to its hopes and aspirations, its fears and doubts in 'The Canterbury Tales'. He reflected his century not in fragments but as a whole and was its chronicler as Froissart had been of France during the same time. He had the innate instinct to catch within his purview the soul of his generation in all its fullness and its depth. He had the seeing eye, the retentive memory, the jud-

gement to select, and the capacity to expound. His observations about his times are true and realistic, and are not set forth with the vision of a dreamy allegorist. He stands in much the same relation to the life of his time as Pope does to the earlier phases of the eighteenth century and Tennyson of the Victorian age. He presents successfully its cross-section of English life in the later fourteenth century.

The end.

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