

acquired intimacy with Italian humanism, and points to future developments.

In *The House of Fame*, *Troilus and Creseyde*, and *Palamon and Arcite*, there is a growing interest in the affairs of this world viewed realistically, and in love having the quality of a physical passion. There is also an evidence of a continually deepening grasp of the fundamentals of human characters. It only remains for him to adapt these gifts of vision and understanding, and of technical craftsmanship, to an entirely original material. It was not long before he attained this literary independence. In *The Canterbury Tales*, he abandoned all artificial settings and schemes, forsook imitative methods, and gave primary attention to the representation of the comedy of life in its highest as well as its grossest forms.

(3) THE THIRD PERIOD (THE ENGLISH PERIOD)

Or

Period of Creative Independence

From *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer passed on to *The Canterbury Tales* and this transition meant for him the giving up of old times for new, replacing Greece by England, and finding a subject of his own choice, instead of the somewhat monotonous task prescribed to him by the good Queen Anne of Bohemia. He ceased to be Italian as he had ceased to be French and became English. However, this does not mean that he no longer drew freely upon French and Italian material. He continued to do this to the end. It simply means that instead of being merely imitative, he became independent, relying upon himself entirely even for the use to which he put his borrowed themes. To this last period belongs, together with sundry minor poems, *The Canterbury Tales* in which we have Chaucer's famous and most characteristic work.

Of the last group, *The Canterbury Tales* easily takes the first place. Chaucer works the scheme of this great book upon simple but ingenious lines. Nine and twenty pilgrims meet casually at the Tabard Inn at Southwark, London, intending to visit the tomb of Thomas a Becket at Canterbury. The twenty-nine are carefully chosen by Chaucer to represent various types and professions, and they are brilliantly described in *The Prologue* to the poem. At the suggestion of the host of the Inn, each of the pilgrims agrees to tell two tales on the outward and two on the homeward journey. The prize for the best tale, to be judged by the landlord, is to be a dinner at the Tabard.

Chaucer did not live to complete this immense work, which would have amounted to over a hundred tales, some of which run to a considerable length. He finished only twenty items, and left four unfinished. Of these, two (including Chaucer's own) are in prose, and they are the poorest of all.