

XVI

Chaucer: I

Geoffrey Chaucer,¹ the only known son of John Chaucer, a vintner of London, was born about 1340.² Of his early life and education we know nothing.³ The earliest biographical fact of which we are sure is that in April, 1357, he was a page in the household of the Countess of Ulster, wife of the King's son Lionel. The Countess spent the following Christmas at Hatfield in Yorkshire, and at this time Chaucer probably made the acquaintance of John of Gaunt, his lifelong patron and friend, who was among the guests. In 1359 he went to France with the army, where he was taken pris-

*Chaucer's
Life*

¹ The most valuable book for the student to have is *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston, 1933), with its scholarly and bibliographical apparatus. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (7v, Oxford, 1894-97) is still of value for its notes and glossary; it is often cited as the *Oxford Chaucer*. The one-volume abridgment (Oxford, 1897) and the *Globe Chaucer*, ed. Alfred W. Pollard, et al. (1898) are not, or but slightly, annotated. The volume of selections from the *Canterbury Tales* edited by John M. Manly (1928) contains an admirable introduction. Special bibliographies are E. P. Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual* (1908), D. D. Griffith, *A Bibliography of Chaucer, 1908-1924* (Seattle, 1928), W. E. Martin, *A Chaucer Bibliography, 1925-1933* (Durham, N. C., 1935), and Wells' *Manual* with its supplements. For a comprehensive survey of Chaucer's work the following can be recommended: R. K. Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer* (2ed., 1922), R. D. French, *A Chaucer Handbook* (2ed., 1947), and G. L. Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry* (1915). Of interest in various ways are Émile Legouis, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Paris, 1910; English trans., 1913), A. Brusendorff, *The Chaucer Tradition* (1925), T. R. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer* (3v, 1892), J. L. Lowes, *Geoffrey Chaucer and the Development of His Genius* (1934), J. M. Manly, *Some New Light on Chaucer* (1926), H. R. Patch, *On Rereading Chaucer* (1939), Percy V. D. Shelly, *The Living Chaucer* (Philadelphia, 1940). Among special studies Walter C. Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences* (1926) and Edgar F. Shannon, *Chaucer and the Roman Poets* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929; *Harvard Stud. in Compar. Lit.*, vii) may be mentioned for their wide scope. The publications of the Chaucer Society contain texts, monographs, the *Life Records* compiled by W. D. Selby, F. J. Furnivall, E. A. Bond, and R. E. G. Kirk (index by E. P. Kuhl in *MP*, x, 527-552), and source material. There is a concordance by J. S. P. Tatlock and A. G. Kennedy (Washington, 1927). The allusions to Chaucer are gathered together in C. F. E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900* (7 parts, 1914-24; *Chaucer Soc.*; also 3v, Cambridge, 1925).—The chronology of Chaucer's writings has been worked out by a long succession of scholars, so that today we may feel that the main lines have been laid down. Of major importance in this work are F. J. Furnivall, *Trial-Forwards* (1871; *Chaucer Soc.*, 2nd Ser., 6) John Koch, *The Chronology of Chaucer's Writings* (1890; *Chaucer Soc.*, 2nd Ser., 27), J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works* (1907; *Chaucer Soc.*, 2nd Ser., 37), and the two articles of J. L. Lowes in *PMLA*, xix (1904), 593-683 and xx (1905), 749-864. For other contributions to the subject the reader must be referred to the bibliographies mentioned earlier in this note.

² In 1386 Chaucer testified in the Scrope-Grosvenor trial, a suit over a disputed coat of arms, and gave his age as "forty years and upwards." In the absence of any more precise indication, it seems best to hold to a round number, although some are disposed to put the date a few years later. On the Chaucer family see Alfred A. Kern, *The Ancestry of Chaucer* (Baltimore, 1906).

³ It has been suggested that he may have gone to school at St. Paul's, but the suggestion rests on nothing more than the fact that in 1358 the schoolmaster bequeathed nearly a hundred books to the school and the collection included many titles which Chaucer was later acquainted with. Cf. Edith Rickert, "Chaucer at School," *MP*, xxix (1932), 257-274.

oner, for in March, 1360, Edward III contributed £16 towards his ransom. After October we know nothing about his life for the next six years, although subsequent events make it likely that at some time during this period he was taken into the King's service. In any case, by 1366 he is already married to a Philippa, one of the damoiselles in the Queen's service, who seems to have been the daughter of Sir Payne Roet and sister of Katherine de Swynford, mistress and later wife of John of Gaunt.⁴ In 1367 Chaucer appears as a valet in the King's household and the next year as an esquire. As such he begins to be employed on small missions and from then on his name occurs pretty constantly in the records. Chaucer's early history, as thus seen, is quite normal for one whose parents were able to secure a place for their son in the household of some noble. He was more fortunate than many, however, in being taken into the service of a member of the royal family.

Public
Service

From this time on his life is a record of employment in one form or another of public service, rewarded by pensions, grants, and special payments. He is sent abroad frequently on the King's business, sometimes on "secret negotiations," once as a member of the group which tried in 1381 to arrange a marriage between Richard II and the daughter of the King of France. Most of these journeys were to France and the Low Countries, but at least two were to Italy. These are of special importance since they gave him an opportunity to become acquainted with Italian literature, especially with the work of Dante and Boccaccio. The first Italian journey which we can be sure of was in 1372, when he went to Genoa to negotiate a commercial treaty. His business also took him to Florence and from an allusion in the *Clerk's Tale* it is conjectured that he may have been in Padua and met Petrarch.⁵ He was gone about six months. The second Italian mission was in 1378. This time he was gone only four months and his business brought him in contact with Barnabo Visconti, lord of Milan, whose death is the subject of a stanza in the *Monk's Tale*.

In 1374 Chaucer received the first of several appointments in the civil service. He was made Controller of the Customs and Subsidy on Wool, Skins, and Hides in the port of London, with the usual provision that he should keep the records with his own hand. He was now freed from his attendance upon the King, and went to housekeeping in an apartment above Aldgate. During this period he seems to have enjoyed considerable prosperity, receiving in addition to his salary and the annuities which he and Philippa had, certain wardships and a fine which brought him in sums as

⁴ The relationship is not entirely clear. Katherine was the sole heir of Sir Payne Roet. Moreover Chaucer's relation to John of Gaunt does not seem to have been that of a brother-in-law. Philippa may have been Katherine's sister-in-law, in which case she would have been a Swynford. On the other hand, Thomas Chaucer, who was almost certainly the poet's son, has the Roet arms on his tomb. Philippa seems to have had social connections since she receives a number of grants and honors, in some of which her husband did not share.

⁵ The argument for the affirmative is presented by J. J. Jusserand, "Did Chaucer Meet Petrarch?" *Nineteenth Century*, xxxix (1896), 993-1005. On this general aspect of Chaucer's life see James R. Hulbert, *Chaucer's Official Life* (Menasha, 1912).

large as £104, the equivalent of twenty or more times that amount today. In 1382 he received the additional appointment of Controller of the Petty Customs with permission to exercise the office by deputy. These positions he resigned or lost in 1386. At this time he gave up his apartment over Aldgate, and perhaps was already living in Kent, for he was appointed a justice of the peace there in 1385 and the next year represented Kent in Parliament.⁶ On this occasion he had the uncomfortable experience of seeing his friend John of Gaunt stripped of most of his power. In June of the following year Philippa received the last payment of her pension and it is assumed that shortly after that she died.

In the last dozen years of his life Chaucer's position and financial status fluctuated. In 1388 he sold his annuity, apparently through necessity. However, the next year, when Richard asserted his royal prerogative, Chaucer was appointed Clerk of the King's Works, in charge of the repairs and upkeep of the royal residences and other properties. It was a fairly lucrative position and in addition he was given special commissions of a similar nature the following year. In September, 1390, he was robbed three times, twice on the same day, of money belonging to the King. The thieves were caught and Chaucer was forgiven the loss of the money. His loss of the clerkship nine months later does not seem to be connected with the robberies. Although the King gave him a reward of £10 in 1393 and granted him an annuity of £20 the next year, he was apparently in financial difficulty, since he was forced to borrow small sums and in 1398 was sued for debt. From about 1395 he seems to have been attached in some capacity to John of Gaunt's son, Henry of Lancaster, and when Henry was declared king on September 30, 1399, Chaucer sent the well-known *Complaint to his Empty Purse*. Four days later Henry IV responded with an annuity of 40 marks. The poet promptly leased a house in Westminster, but lived to enjoy his new security only a few months. According to a late inscription on his tomb in Westminster abbey, he died October 25, 1400.⁷

*Later
Years*

From this brief sketch of Chaucer's life we may make certain observations which will be helpful in understanding his character as a poet. In the first place he was an active man of affairs and must have had a highly developed practical side. Poetry was for him not a vocation but an avocation. As the eagle says in the *Hous of Fame*,

*His
Literary
Affiliations*

For when thy labour doon al ys,
And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,
In stede of reste and newe thynges,
Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon;
And, also domb as any stoon,

⁶ On this period of his life see an illuminating paper by Margaret Galway, "Geoffrey Chaucer, J. P. and M. P.," *MLR*, xxxvi (1941), 1-36.

⁷ Lewis, for whom he wrote the *Astrolabe*, and Thomas Chaucer, a prominent member of the government in the early part of the fifteenth century, were probably the poet's children. On the latter see Martin B. Ruud, *Thomas Chaucer* (Minneapolis, 1926) and A. C. Baugh, "Kirk's Life Records of Thomas Chaucer," *PMLA*, xlvii (1932), 461-515.

Thou sittest at another book
 Tyl fully daswed ys thy look. . . . (lines 652-8)

He read and he wrote because he wanted to, because there was something within him, as in every true poet, that impelled him to write. But since writing was a pastime he did not always take it too seriously. In the second place, all his life was spent in association with people at the court and in government circles, people for whom French had been not so long ago more familiar than English and whose tastes were formed on things French. Such an environment is sufficient to account for the fact that Chaucer is completely Continental in his literary affiliations. He is remarkably indifferent to English writings, but the *Roman de la Rose* and the poems of Machaut are his missal and breviary; in Latin Ovid is his bible. His indebtedness to recent and contemporary French poets, including Deschamps and Froissart, and to certain classical authors at either first or second hand is the most noticeable characteristic of his early work and has often led to the designation of it as his French period. With his two journeys to Italy he comes under the influence of Italian poetry, the *Divine Comedy* to some extent but more especially certain poems of Boccaccio. With the *House of Fame* begins what is often called his Italian period. He never deserts his first love, French poetry, so full of allegorical love visions and their conventions, but he builds on the old framework with new matter from Italy. It is only relatively late—in certain aspects of the *Troilus* and chiefly in the *Canterbury Tales*—that having learned all he could from his teachers and having won the complete mastery of his art, he dares to strike out on his own with confidence and ease. This phase of his career can only be described as his English period.

*The
Romance
of the
Rose*

The *Roman de la Rose* was the most popular and influential of all French poems in the Middle Ages, and set a fashion in courtly poetry for two centuries in western Europe.⁹ This poem Chaucer tells us he translated, and it is altogether likely that it is one of the ways in which he served his apprenticeship in poetry. The version which has come down to us covers only a part of the original, and though generally printed in editions of Chaucer, is probably not all his work. But there are passages from the *Roman* scattered through his poetry as late as the *Canterbury Tales*.

*Book
of the
Duchess*

The earliest of Chaucer's original poems of any length is the *Book of the Duchess*. It is an elegy recording in an unusually graceful way the loss which John of Gaunt suffered in 1369 in the death of his first wife, Blanche. After relating a story which he has been reading, the tragic story of Ceys and Alcyone, the poet falls asleep and dreams that he comes upon a knight dressed in black, sitting sorrowfully beneath a tree in the woods. The

⁹ It was begun about 1225 by Guillaume de Lorris as a vision picturing in allegorical form the quest of a lover for his ideal, symbolized by a rose. It ran to only about 4000 lines. Some forty years later it was continued by Jean de Meun in a more realistic and satirical vein, with not a little that is frankly didactic, until it reached a length of 18,000 lines. The standard edition of the French text is by E. Langlois (5v, 1914-24; *SATF*). There is a verse translation in English by F. S. Ellis in the *Temple Classics*.

stranger recognizes his solicitude and tells him the cause of his grief: he has played a game of chess with Fortune and the goddess has taken his queen. The poet seems not to understand quite what he means and he tells him in detail the story of his love—how he met one day a lady, whom he describes: her beauty, accomplishments, gentle ways, soft speech, goodness. Her name was White. He finally persuaded her to accept his heart and they lived in perfect bliss full many a year. All this he relates sadly and at length. Now he has lost her.

“Allas, sir, how? what may that be?”

“She ys ded!” “Nay!” “Yis, be my trouthe!”

“Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!”

The simplicity and restraint of this close, the absence of strained sentiment, show the delicate instinct of the artist. The poem is greatly indebted to Machaut, Froissart, Ovid, and other poets, in fact is a mosaic of passages borrowed or remembered, but the concept and, what is more important, the tone and treatment are Chaucer's own.

It is apparently ten years before we get another long poem from his pen, although we can hardly believe that he wrote nothing in all this time. However, he had been to Italy and he had read Dante's great vision of a journey to the Inferno, to Purgatory, and to Paradise. Such earnestness and tragic grandeur were beyond his power of emulation, but the idea of a journey to regions unknown was one which he could turn to his own purposes. The *Hous of Fame*, generally dated about 1379, is a badly proportioned, incomplete, and utterly delightful poem. It is in three books, with all the epic machinery of invocations, proems, apostrophes, and the like. In the first book the poet dreams that he is in the temple of Venus, where he reads on the wall and tells at length the story of Dido and Æneas. The episode is pleasantly related but is a digression and is artistically one of the blemishes in the poem. At the end he steps out of doors and sees flying toward him an eagle of great size and shining so brightly that it appears to be of gold. It is obviously of the same family as Dante's eagle in the ninth book of the *Purgatorio*. The eagle seizes him in its claws and immediately soars aloft with him, telling him that Jove means to reward him for his long service to Venus and Cupid by taking him to the house of Fame where he will hear abundant tidings of Love's folk. The second book is wholly taken up with the eagle's flight and is one of the most delightfully humorous episodes in literature, what with the eagle's friendliness and loquacity, and the poet's utter terror. The contrast between the eagle's talkativeness and familiarity—he calls him Geoffrey—and the speechless fright of the poet, who can answer only in monosyllables, “Yes” and “Well” and “Nay”, is high comedy. Unfortunately the third book, which describes what the poet saw when the eagle set him down outside of Fame's house, carries us to the point where he is about to hear an announcement from “a man of greet auctoritee” and leaves us still waiting for the expected news. For at this point the poem

*The Hous
of Fame*

breaks off. Scholars have interpreted the poem in different ways and taken it perhaps too seriously. Some have seen in it an allegory of the poet's life,⁹ others a conventional love vision of a kind for which French literature furnished many models,¹⁰ and still others have tried to solve the mystery of the news which the poet is about to hear. One explanation¹¹ holds that Chaucer's purpose was to introduce a series of stories as in the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Canterbury Tales*. But it seems likely from an allusion at the beginning of Book Three to "this lytel laste bok" that the poem as we have it is nearly complete and that the announcement was something which Chaucer decided not to write or perhaps later suppressed.

Anelida
and Arcite

If the *Hous of Fame* was left unfinished, it would be far from the only work which Chaucer began and did not complete. At about this time he apparently started what was to be a considerable poem of *Anelida and Arcite*, but after some three hundred lines he abandoned the project. It is a pity that it remains such a fragment, if for no other reason than that it keeps from the full recognition of its worth the beautiful "Complaint" of Anelida, which with its perfect balance of strophe and antistrophe is one of the most finished and charming examples of the type in medieval literature. To this period may also belong some of the shorter pieces such as the *Complaint unto Pity* and *A Complaint to his Lady*.

Parlement
of Foules

The *Parlement of Foules* is clearly an occasional poem, but the occasion for which it was written is not so clear. It takes its theme from the popular belief that on St. Valentine's day the birds choose their mates, and it accordingly represents a gathering of birds for that purpose. Dame Nature holds on her hand a formel or female eagle of great beauty and goodness, for whom three royal and noble eagles make their respective pleas. Although Nature advises in favor of the royal suitor, the formel asks and is granted a year in which to make her choice. There is much amusing by-play over the impatience of the lesser birds and the varied opinions that they express, but one cannot escape the thought that the essence of the poem is the competition of the three noble eagles for the hand of the worthy formel. The most commonly accepted interpretation is that the poem celebrates the betrothal of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia, whom he married in January, 1382. The rival suitors according to this theory were Friedrich of Meissen and Charles VI of France.¹² Other interpretations have been suggested,¹³

⁹ Sandras, Ten Brink, and early scholars quite generally.

¹⁰ W. O. Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's Hous of Fame* (1907; *Chaucer Soc.*, 2nd Ser., 39).

¹¹ J. M. Manly, "What Is Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*?" *Kittredge Anniversary Papers* (Boston, 1913), pp. 73-81.

¹² The interpretation was proposed by Koch in 1877 and modified by O. F. Emerson, "The Suitors in Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*," *MP*, VIII (1910-11), 45-62; reprinted in *Chaucer Essays and Studies* (Cleveland, 1929). The objections to it were summed up by J. M. Manly, "What Is the *Parlement of Foules*?" *Festschrift für Lorenz Morsbach* (Halle, 1913; *Studien zur englischen Phil.*, 50), pp. 279-290.

¹³ Edith Rickert, "A New Interpretation of the *Parlement of Foules*," *MP*, XVIII (1920), 1-29, identified the formel eagle with Philippa, a daughter of John of Gaunt. More recently Haldeen Braddy, in "The *Parlement of Foules*: A New Proposal," *PMLA*, XLVI (1931), 1007-1019, and in subsequent papers, has suggested a connection with negotiations in 1377 for the marriage of Richard with the princess Marie of France. For parallels to the general situation see Willard E. Farnham, "The Contending Lovers," *PMLA*, xxxv (1920), 247-323.

and if none of them carries complete conviction, the fact need not detract from our enjoyment of the poem as one of Chaucer's smaller but most finished productions.

At about this time, somewhere in the early eighties, Chaucer translated the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius,¹⁴ if we may judge by the fact that its influence is very noticeable in such poems as *Palamon and Arcite* (included in the *Canterbury Tales* as the *Knight's Tale*) and *Troilus and Criseyde*, which were written, it would seem, between 1382 and 1385-6. It is significant as an indication of the range of Chaucer's interests, but as a translation it leaves much to be desired. Chaucer's prose both here and in the *Astrolabe* (1391), and in the prose tales included in the *Canterbury Tales* as well, is formless and undistinguished.

*Troilus and Criseyde*¹⁵ is at once Chaucer's longest complete poem and his greatest artistic achievement. In some 8000 lines, in stanzas of rime royal, it tells a tragic love story from the time Troilus first sees Criseyde, a young and beautiful widow whose father, Calchas, has abandoned Troy and gone over to the Greek side, until she proves unfaithful to him, and death puts an end to his suffering. For three skilfully ordered books the story rises steadily to a climax when Troilus, with the aid of Pandarus, his friend and the uncle of Criseyde, having overcome her natural caution and conventional reserve, finally possesses her completely, both body and soul. For three years they are united in a mutual love that could not be more complete. Then in the last two books events move inevitably toward their tragic conclusion. Through an exchange of prisoners Criseyde must go to her father in the Greek camp. She leaves, swearing undying love and fidelity and promising to find some way of returning before ten days are past. But by the time the ten days are up her handsome Greek escort, Diomedes, has caused her to change her mind, and within a few months she has given him the brooch which had been Troilus's parting gift to her when she left.

The main features of the story Chaucer took from a poem by Boccaccio called the *Filostrato*.¹⁶ Boccaccio had found the latter part of it in Benoît

¹⁴ Boethius illustrates the medieval conception of tragedy, the fall of a great man from his high estate. In the innermost counsels of the emperor Theodoric, he was accused of disloyalty, thrown into prison, and eventually (524) put to death. The *Consolation of Philosophy* was written in prison, and was so in harmony with Christian teaching on the questions which it discusses that it became one of the most widely read books of the Middle Ages. For the earlier translation due to King Alfred, see above, p. 99. It was later translated by Queen Elizabeth. See Howard R. Patch, *The Tradition of Boethius: A Study of His Importance in Medieval Culture* (1935).

¹⁵ The definitive edition of the poem is that of R. K. Root (Princeton, 1926). Professor Root has settled a long controversy over the date of the poem by identifying a rare astronomical phenomenon mentioned in Book III, which shows that it could not have been finished before May, 1385. Cf. R. K. Root and H. N. Russell, "A Planetary Date for Chaucer's *Troilus*," *PMLA*, xxxix (1924), 48-63. See also Thomas A. Kirby, *Chaucer's Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love* (University, La., 1940; *Louisiana State Univ. Stud.*, No. 39).

¹⁶ As is well known, the story of the Trojan war was familiar to the Middle Ages not through Homer but in two late accounts by Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis. These were made the basis, about 1155, of the French poem by Benoît mentioned in the text. An account in Latin prose, the *Historia Trojana*, was taken from Benoît's poem about 1287 by Guido della Colonna (ed. N. E. Griffin, Cambridge, Mass., 1936; *Mediaeval Acad. of Amer.*, Pub.

*Relation to
Boccaccio's
Filostrato*

de Sainte-More, who had hit upon the idea of filling out with a love story the lagging intervals between periods of fighting in his *Roman de Troie*. All that part of the story which precedes Criseyde's departure for the Greek camp is due to Boccaccio, and he also created the character of Pandarus. But while Chaucer's indebtedness to the Italian poem is very great, his own contribution is still greater. He has basically altered the character of Pandarus and he has added complexity and mystery to Criseyde until she is much more than Troilus's mistress. Without losing its essential qualities of medieval romance or abandoning the conventions of courtly love, *Troilus and Criseyde* has taken on many of the characteristics of the psychological novel. It should be remembered that less than 2600 lines in Chaucer's poem have their counterparts in Boccaccio.

*The
Character
of Criseyde*

What gives the story its chief interest and acts as a constant challenge to understanding is the character of Criseyde. She combines the qualities that will always appeal in woman, beauty and mystery. Her behavior is never transparent and we try without complete success to penetrate the mingling of impulses and the complex workings of her mind. In her early defensive attitude toward the advances of Troilus there is probably a mixture of caution and the courtly love tradition which expected the woman to be difficult to approach. She is more interested in her reputation than her virtue. Her ultimate surrender is brought about partly by circumstance, but when she yields it is because she has made her own decision. How much of her emotion is the womanly love of being loved we cannot say, but during the three years that she gives herself to Troilus her affection is genuine and complete. When finally as a result of separation she abandons him for Diomedes she reproaches herself, but her love is not the kind that is proof against every storm. Her father was a traitor and an opportunist; she was of a yielding disposition, "slydyng of corage." When in the end she gives Diomedes gifts which Troilus had given her, we cannot but admit that she was without depth of feeling. And yet withal, her faults spring from weakness rather than baseness of character, and the poet in pleading that we judge her not too harshly says, "I would excuse her if I could."

*The
Legend of
Good
Women*

The *Legend of Good Women* was begun, according to the prologue, as a penance imposed by Queen Alceste for his offenses against the God of Love in writing the *Troilus* and the *Romance of the Rose*, which speak slightly of women. Chaucer refers to the work elsewhere as the *Seintes Legende of Cupide*, and it was to be a collection of nineteen stories about women famous for their faithfulness in love. A twentieth and longer legend of Alceste would doubtless have completed the whole. The most interesting part of the poem is the long Prologue, with its frank enjoyment of nature

No. 26). Boccaccio adopted from Benoît the love story, keeping only as much of the war and the fighting as he needed for background to the Troilus and Criseyde story. The *Filostrato* can be had most conveniently with an English translation in *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio*, by N. E. Griffin and A. B. Myrick (Philadelphia, 1929), with an excellent introduction on the development of the story. See also Karl Young, *The Origin and Development of the Story of Troilus and Criseyde* (Chaucer Soc., 1908).

and the spring, its amusing picture of the God of Love's anger at the poet, the Queen's generous intercession, the partly gratuitous enumeration of his works, and the penance that is imposed upon him. Some of the legends had been written earlier, but even so, the poem as it has come down to us is unfinished, breaking off in the midst of the ninth legend. It has been suggested that Chaucer found the idea too monotonous. If the suggestion recently made¹⁷ that he was writing the poem for Joan, the widow of the Black Prince, is accepted, we might assume that her death in August, 1385, removed the immediate occasion for writing it. It does not make any easier our understanding the fact that he subjected the Prologue to a very careful revision in 1394; one does not ordinarily devote so much time and labor to the preliminary part of an unfinished work. In any case, if he abandoned the project originally to devote himself to the *Canterbury Tales*, we cannot feel regret, and to this, his last and best-known work, we turn in the next chapter.

¹⁷ Margaret Galway, "Chaucer's Sovereign Lady: A Study of the Prologue to the *Legend and Related Poems*," *MLR*, xxxiii (1938), 145-199. Objection to so early a date, based on Chaucer's supposed use of Deschamps' *Lai de Franchise*, has little force. See Marian Lossing, "The Prologue to the Legend of Good Women and the *Lai de Franchise*," *SP*, xxxix (1942), 15-35.