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## DE VIRIS ILLUSTRIBVS

non modo suae animae morbis, uerum etiam proximorum, mederetur. Nec sic contentus, quae eius erat pietas, una tulit diuitem rerum medicarum copiam, 10 ut corpora intemperie languentia percuraret. Et ne tantus fructus, tam solite quaesitus ac tandem utiliter inuentus, breui cum illo moreretur, scripsit, maxima usus diligentia, egregium de simplicibus medicamentis uolumen, circiter annum a Christo nato MCDXV<sup>m</sup>. Nunc eius benefactorum ratio liquide reddita est. Vtinam per me quam a posteris sperauit famam consequatur. 15

SII

## 504. DE GVLIELMO BLACHENEGO

Gulielmus Blachenegus, Carmelita, Grantanae cultor scholae eximius fuit, et ibidem publico suffragio in theologorum relatus numerum. Scripsit in Cantica Canticorum. In precio fuit circa annum Domini MCDXC. Obiit Sniterlegae Volcarum Aquilonarium. |

SI

## 505. DE GALLOFRIDO CHAVCERO

p. 300 Gallofridus Chaucerus, nobili loco natus et summae spei iuuenis, Isiacas scholas  
 [[uel, ut cum uulgo loquar, Oxonienses]] tam diligenter quam qui maxime celebrauit; id quod ut faceret, academiæ uicinitas quodammodo inuitauit. Nam  
 H 420 quibusdam argumentis adducor ut credam Isiacam uel Baerohensem prouinciam illius natale solum fuisse. Hinc acutus dialecticus, hinc dulcis rhetor, 5 hinc lepidus poeta, hinc grauis philosophus, hinc ingeniosus mathematicus  
 †(qua parte et a Ioanne Somaeo et Nicolao, Carmelita Linensi, uiris in mathesi eruditissimis, quos in libro de sphaera nominat, instructissimus fuit)† hinc denique sanctus theologus euasit. Maxima equidem sum locutus, at quisquis eius libros curiosa manu euoluerit, me bonae fidei praeconem facile iudicabit. Ingenue 10 tamen fatebor sic eum Isiaci studuisse ut et alibi etiam, longo studiorum usu, multa ad scientiae cumulum adiecerit. Constat utique illum circa postremos Richardi secundi, cui non incognitus erat, annos in Gallia floruisse, magnamque ex assidua in literis exercitatione gloriam sibi comparasse; tum praeterea eadem opera omnes ueneres, lepores, delicias, sales, ac postremo gratias linguae 15 Gallicae, tam alte imbibisse quam cuiquam uix credibile. Laus ista Gallofridum in Angliam reuersum sequebatur, tanquam comes eius uirtutis indiuidua. Eiusmodi igitur laetus successibus forum Londinense et collegia Leguleiorum, qui ibidem patria iura interpretantur, frequentauit, ut et ante Galliam cognitam forsitan fecit. 20

Illis temporibus inter forenses clarissimus erat Ioannes Gouerus,<sup>d</sup> cuius uitam praescripsimus, homo uenerandae aetatis et qui mirum in modum Anglicae linguae politiae studebat. Hic, perspecta indole et examinata Gallofridi probitate, illum in familiarem sibi acciuit, illum ulnis amplexus est, illum etiam

<sup>d</sup> Gouerus scribiens? ad legem. 30 Ed. 3. *add. in later band in margin*

## ON FAMOUS MEN

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curatives, with which he could treat not only the diseases of his own soul but also those of his neighbours. Such was his goodness that he was not content even with this, but also brought a rich supply of medical knowledge, to cure bodies suffering from insanity. To prevent such knowledge, sought with such care and at last found to such good purpose, from dying with him, he wrote an excellent volume *On Simple Medicines*, with great diligence, around 1415. Now the account of his beneficent deeds has been clearly rendered, and I dearly hope that through me he may obtain from posterity the fame he desired.

## 504. WILLIAM BLAKENEY

William Blakeney, a Carmelite, was an outstanding student at the university at Cambridge, where he received his doctorate of theology. He wrote on the Song of Songs. He flourished around 1490, and died at Blakeney in Norfolk.

## 505. GEOFFREY CHAUCER

As a young man of noble birth and the highest promise, Geoffrey Chaucer studied at the University of Oxford, where he worked most diligently. The proximity of the university to his home acted as an invitation to him to go there; various arguments lead me to believe that either Oxfordshire or Berkshire was his native soil. From Oxford, he emerged an acute logician, a sweet-toned orator, a sparkling poet, a weighty philosopher, a gifted mathematician (in this subject he was taught by John Somer and Nicholas the Carmelite of Lynn, erudite mathematicians whom he names in his book *On the Astrolabe*), as well as a devout theologian. I have said great things of him, but anybody who has turned over his books with a careful hand will quickly judge me a witness of good faith. In all honesty, however, I must admit that he studied at Oxford in such a way that by long study he added much to the heap of knowledge even elsewhere. It is clear that around the last years of Richard II (to whom he was not unknown) he lived in France, and earned great glory from his tireless literary activity; in the process, moreover, he drank more deeply of all the beauties, charms, delights, wit, and indeed all the graces of the French language than can scarcely be believed. This reputation followed Geoffrey back to England as the inseparable companion of his excellence. Delighting in successes of this kind, he frequented the London tribunals and the Inns of Court, where the lawyers engage in interpreting the laws of their country, as he perhaps had also done even before his French experience.

At that time the most famous of the lawyers was John Gower, whose life I have narrated above, a man of venerable age who was making marvellous efforts at refining the English language. Having perceived Geoffrey's talents and tested his probity, he offered him his friendship, took him to his bosom, greatly

in honestis delitiis habuit, illum denique tanquam numen aliquod modo non 25  
 ueneratus est. Vt ego taceam, ipsemet Gouverus, in libro qui titulo Amantis  
 <confessio><sup>e</sup> inscribitur, abunde satis declarat quanti suum Chaucerum fecerit;  
 quem accuratissime prius laudatum eximium uocat poetam, et sui operis quasi  
 Aristarchum facit. Ecce tibi, lector, pulcherrimum uirtutis certamen. Nam  
 ut Gouverus, homo parum sibi tribuens, lucubrationes quas consummauerat 30  
 Gallofridi iudicio modeste submitit, sic rursus Chaucerus Amores Troili Go-  
 ueri et Strodae calculis subiecit. Sed quis hic Strodaeus fuerit apud autorem  
 nullum hactenus legi. †At memini interim legisse me illustria de Strodae,  
 Maridunensis societatis ad Isidis Vadum alumno, in poesi<sup>f</sup> eruditissimo, qui  
 H 421 et in catalogo Maridunensium postremis Eadueardi tertii annis asscribitur.<sup>112</sup> 35  
 Tantum apparet ex Gallofridi uersiculis philosophiae studiosum fuisse. Adde  
 huc quod quemadmodum Chaucerus admirator simul et sectator erat Goueri,  
 ita <Henricus><sup>g</sup> Schoganus, cuius sepulchrum Visimonasterii extat, uir ad om-  
 nes facetias et sales compositus, Chauceri admirator ac imitator fuit. At rursus,  
 quanto discipulus Chaucerus maior Gouero praeceptore suo, tanto minor erat 40  
 Schoganus Chaucero. |

p. 301 Nunc uero ipsa orationis series postulat ut aperte doceamus quem scopum  
 Gallofridus studiis praefixerit suis. Profecto eius studiorum scopus unicus fuit,  
 ut linguam Anglicam numeris omnibus quam ornatissimam redderet. Vide-  
 rat enim Gouverum in eodem negotio belle processisse: multa tamen, quae 45  
 circulum absoluerent, reliquisse. Quare nullum non mouendum sibi lapidem  
 putabat, quo ad supremam felicitatis metam perueniret. Et quoniam poesim  
 praeter caetera semper dilexit, amaui, coluit, uisum est ei uel commodissimum  
 per illam ad ipsa eloquentiae culmina uiam patefacere. Tale etenim est poesis  
 ut tropos, elegantias, ornamenta, copiam, et quicquid uenerum et leporum 50  
 est, non modo admittat, uerum—quod multo maius—suo quodam iure pos-  
 scat. Adde huc quod Italos et Gallos, qui plurima suis linguis terse, nitide, ac  
 eleganter scripserunt, in partem operis euocauerit. Tantum est inclytos habere  
 duces quos sequaris. Petrarcha circiter haec tempora in Italia claruit, cuius  
 opera lingua ibidem uernacula eo elegantiae perducta est ut cum ipsa Latina de 55  
 eloquentiae palma contenderit. Quidam etiam Alanus linguam Gallicam infini-  
 tis modis expoliebat. Vterque istorum (multos alios clarissimae notae homines,  
 qui eadem fecerunt, omitto) calcar Chaucero, alioqui sua sponte satis currenti,  
 addidit. Bonis igitur auibus incepto operi incubuit—nunc libellos Gallica lin-  
 gua compe, ornate, diserte scriptos in patrium sermonem transferens; nunc 60  
 Latinos uersus Anglicis sed docte, sed apte, sed canore exprimens; nunc multa  
 e suo capite nata, et Latinorum felicitatem aequantia, uicturis chartis com-  
 mendans; nunc lectori ut prodesset neruis omnibus contendens, et uicissim  
 ut eundem delectaret sedulo curans—nec antea finem fecit quam linguam  
 nostram ad eam puritatem, ad eam eloquentiam, ad eam denique breuitatem 65

<sup>e</sup> confessio supplied from T fol. 125r  
 space in MS

<sup>f</sup> poesi subst. for mathesi MS

<sup>g</sup> Henricus ed.; blank

delighted in his company, and indeed practically revered him as a divinity. Even if I were to say nothing, Gower himself makes his admiration of Chaucer more than sufficiently clear in his book called *Confessio amantis*; having taken great pains to eulogize Chaucer he calls him an outstanding poet, and makes him the Aristarchus of his own work. Here, reader, you have a pleasant competition in virtue: just as Gower, a man who claimed little for himself, modestly submitted what he had done to Geoffrey's judgement, so Chaucer, in turn, submitted his *Troilus and Criseyde* to the criticisms of Gower and Strode. I have not yet discovered Strode's identity from any author, but I do remember once reading great things about a Strode who was a student of Merton College in Oxford, very learned in poetry, whom the catalogue of members of Merton assigns to the last years of Edward III.<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey's verses make it clear only that he was a student of philosophy. Just as Chaucer was at once an admirer and a follower of Gower, moreover, so Henry Scogan, whose tomb may be seen at Westminster, a man of ready wit and facetiousness, was Chaucer's admirer and imitator. To the same degree, moreover, that Chaucer the disciple was greater than his teacher Gower, so too Scogan was inferior to Chaucer.

Now, indeed, the order of my discourse demands that I show clearly Geoffrey's goal in his studies. Indeed, the single aim of his studies was to make the English language as polished as possible in all respects, for he had seen what good progress Gower had made in the same task, although much was left to be done. Therefore he thought he should leave no stone unturned in order to reach the highest degree of success. And since he always admired poetry above all things, had loved and cultivated it religiously, it seemed most appropriate to him to open the way to the very heights of expression through poetry. Indeed, such is the nature of poetry that it not only admits tropes, graces of style, ornaments of speech, richness of language, and whatever else is beautiful and charming, but rather (what is more) the very rules of the form demand these. Chaucer, moreover, called on the Italians and the French, who have written many things with purity, clarity, and elegance in their own languages, to assist in his work. It is a great thing to have noble guides to follow. Petrarch was flourishing in Italy at the time, by whose efforts the vernacular tongue of that land had been brought to such a point of refinement that it was competing with Latin itself for the prize in eloquence. A certain Alain had likewise polished the French language in an infinite variety of ways. Both of them (and I omit many other men of great note who did the same) were spurs to Chaucer, who was already pressing forward fast enough of his own accord. It was thus under favourable auspices that he applied himself to the work he had begun, now translating books written elegantly, ornately, and eloquently in the French language into his native speech; now rendering Latin verse into English, learnedly, aptly, and harmoniously; now committing to enduring parchment many products of his own imagination, which equalled Latin authors in their aptness of expression; now striving with all his strength to be of use to the reader, and alternately taking sedulous care to delight him. He did not desist until he had raised our language to such purity, such eloquence, such concision and grace,

<sup>12</sup> *Catalogus vetus*, 12.