

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN.
A LOVER OF
MANKIND. AN ESSAY**

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Abraham Lincoln. A Lover of Mankind. An Essay by Eliot Norton

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AN ESSAY

BY

ELIOT NORTON

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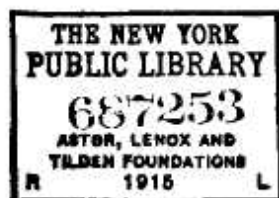
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MOY WEN
TILDEN
YASSEL

A stamp consisting of three lines of text in a dotted or perforated font. The text is 'MOY WEN', 'TILDEN', and 'YASSEL'.

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A LOVER OF MANKIND

MOST men have narrow likings. They like particular things, certain animals, some men. There are others, however, who have broad, catholic and comprehensive likings. These men like whole classes of things or special kinds of animals. Thus some like pictures, others books, others dogs, and others horses, and so on. Exactly in the same way some men like mankind generally, and accordingly in their relations with men regularly show "liking," being at once pleasant, kindly, friendly, genial and social and not cold, nor sarcastic nor superior. Among the men who are living about us those that have most of this disposition are the "good fellows," who are found in every club. They like other men and are genial, friendly and social. Usually,

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however, their liking, although far more broad than that of other men, is still confined to men who belong to about their station in life and have about the same habits. For even they talk of their "inferiors," and are often far from kindly to servants. A liking for men which is comprehensive enough to take in men of all kinds and stations, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, masters and servants, is a very rare disposition.

So rare is it that most men in their journeying through the world never meet with a single instance of it, no matter how long their lives are or how many men they meet. So rare is it that among men living in the public eye to-day there is not one who has this disposition.

To bring therefore such a man to view, we must look back over the recorded dead,—a long list,—and yet singularly empty of such men. It is hard to find them. Still among the English dead two can be found who indubitably had a liking for men of the very broadest sort.

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One was Chaucer and the other Sir Walter Scott.

That Chaucer had this disposition all people who have ever noted the best evidence of it,—the expression of his spirit in his works,—agree in saying.

James Russell Lowell wrote: "Chaucer was a good man, genial, sincere, hearty, temperate of mind, more wise, perhaps, for this world than the next, but thoroughly humane, and friendly with God and men. . . . We are sure that here was a true brother-man, so kindly that in his 'House of Fame,' after naming the great poets, he throws in a pleasant word for the oaten pipes

*'Of the little herd-grooms
That keepen beasts among the brooms.'*"

There are many proofs of the truth of every word of this characterization. The mere scheme of the Canterbury Tales shows it; to wit: the companionship of a number of people, only casually united, who willingly and socially contrib-

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ute to the pleasure and entertainment of all by telling stories. What is this but genial fellow feeling? Moreover, story-telling is one of the oldest and most delightful expressions of good fellowship. Where good fellows have congregated, whether in the earliest days in the Cave or later in the Market Place or in modern times at the Club, they have told good stories. Nobody but a good fellow, a true brother-man, as Mr. Lowell so happily puts it, would have known this, would have found it so vital to his being, so inseparable from his thought, as to make it the medium in which he expressed himself. *Le style c'est l'homme.*

And to see how broad and catholic was Chaucer's liking for his fellow men one has only to turn to the Prologue. Here are described twenty-seven people: a Knight, a young squire, a yeoman, a prioress, a monk, a friar, a merchant, a clerk of Oxenford, a sergeant of law, a franklin, a haberdasher, a carpenter, a weaver, a dyer, a tapicer, a cook, a

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shipman, a doctor of physic, a wife of Bathe, a poor Parson of a Town, a ploughman, a miller, a maunciple, a reeve, a sompnour, a pardoner, and an inn-keeper,—all sorts and conditions of men,—yet Chaucer shows a liking for them all. Not only does he like his Knight, who “loved chivalry, truth and honor, freedom and courtesy;” and the poor Parson, who was “a good man;” and the ploughman, who “loved God best and then his neighbor right as himself;” but he also likes the shipman, although “of nice conscience took he no keep;” and the sompnour who could pluck an innocent; and the miller and pardoner and friar and wife of Bathe, although no more than the shipman and the sompnour did they of nice conscience take heed; and so on with the rest of his twenty-seven,—to no one of whom is Chaucer ungenial or unfriendly.

This spirit of broad humanity, of liking all men of all sorts and conditions, of friendliness, of sociability, of genial en-