THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE. <1>

Experience, though none authority* *authoritative textsWere in this world, is right enough for me To speak of woe that is in marriage: For, lordings, since I twelve year was of age, (Thanked be God that *is etern on *lives eternally* Husbands at the church door have I had live),* five, <2> For I so often have y-wedded be, And all were worthy men in their degree. But me was told, not longe time gone is That sithen* Christe went never but ones *since To wedding, in the Cane* of Galilee, *Cana That by that ilk* example taught he me, *same That I not wedded shoulde be but once. Lo, hearken eke a sharp word for the nonce,* *occasion Beside a welle Jesus, God and man, Spake in reproof of the Samaritan: "Thou hast y-had five husbandes," said he; "And thilke* man, that now hath wedded thee, *that Is not thine husband:" <3> thus said he certain; What that he meant thereby, I cannot sayn. But that I aske, why the fifthe man Was not husband to the Samaritan? How many might she have in marriage? Yet heard I never tellen *in my life* Upon this number definitioun. Men *in mine age* may divine, and glosen* up and down; *comment But well I wot, express without a lie, God bade us for to wax and multiply; That gentle text can I well understand. Eke well I wot, he said, that mine husband Should leave father and mother, and take to me; But of no number mention made he, Of bigamy or of octogamy; Why then should men speak of it villainy?* *as if it were a disgrace

Lord <4> Itrow that Lo here, the wise king Dan Solomon, he had wives more than one; As would to God it lawful were to me To be refreshed half so oft as he! What gift* of God had he for all his wives? *special favour, licence No man hath such, that in this world alive is. God wot, this noble king, *as to my wit,* *as I understand* The first night had many a merry fit With each of them, so *well was him on live.* *so well he lived* Blessed be God that I have wedded five! Welcome the sixth whenever that he shall. For since I will not keep me chaste in all, When mine husband is from the world y-gone, Some Christian man shall wedde me anon. For then th' apostle saith that I am free To wed, *a' God's half,* where it liketh me. *on God's part* He saith, that to be wedded is no sin; Better is to be wedded than to brin.* *burn What