

Notes to the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale

1. Among the evidences that Chaucer's great work was left incomplete, is the absence of any link of connexion between the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, and what goes before. This deficiency has in some editions caused the Squire's and the Merchant's Tales to be interposed between those of the Man of Law and the Wife of Bath; but in the Merchant's Tale there is internal proof that it was told after the jolly Dame's. Several manuscripts contain verses designed to serve as a connexion; but they are evidently not Chaucer's, and it is unnecessary to give them here. Of this Prologue, which may fairly be regarded as a distinct autobiographical tale, Tyrwhitt says: "The extraordinary length of it, as well as the vein of pleasantry that runs through it, is very suitable to the character of the speaker. The greatest part must have been of Chaucer's own invention, though one may plainly see that he had been reading the popular invectives against marriage and women in general; such as the 'Roman de la Rose,' 'Valerius ad Rufinum, De non Ducenda Uxore,' ('Valerius to Rufinus, on not being ruled by one's wife') and particularly 'Hieronymus contra Jovinianum.' ('Jerome against Jovinianus') St Jerome, among other things designed to discourage marriage, has inserted in his treatise a long passage from 'Liber Aureolus Theophrasti de Nuptiis.' ('Theophrastus's Golden Book of Marriage')."

2. A great part of the marriage service used to be performed in the church-porch.

3. Jesus and the Samaritan woman: John iv. 13.

4. Dan: Lord; Latin, "dominus." Another reading is "the wise man, King Solomon."

5. Defended: forbade; French, "defendre," to prohibit.

6. Dart: the goal; a spear or dart was set up to mark the point of victory.

7. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour." -- 2 Tim. ii 20.

8. Jesus feeding the multitude with barley bread: Mark vi. 41, 42.

9. At Dunmow prevailed the custom of giving, amid much merry making, a

flich of bacon to the married pair who had lived together for a year without quarrel or regret. The same custom prevailed of old in Bretagne.

10. "Cagnard," or "Caignard," a French term of reproach, originally derived from "canis," a dog.

11. Parage: birth, kindred; from Latin, "pario," I beget.

12. Norrice: nurse; French, "nourrice."

13. This and the previous quotation from Ptolemy are due to the Dame's own fancy.

14. (Transcriber's note: Some Victorian censorship here. The word given in [brackets] should be "queint" i.e. "cunt".)

15. Women should not adorn themselves: see I Tim. ii. 9.

16. Cherte: affection; from French, "cher," dear.

17. Nicety: folly; French, "niaiserie."

18. Ba: kiss; from French, "baiser."

19. Peter!: by Saint Peter! a common adjuration, like Marie! from the Virgin's name.

20. St. Joce: or Judocus, a saint of Ponthieu, in France.

21. "An allusion," says Mr Wright, "to the story of the Roman sage who, when blamed for divorcing his wife, said that a shoe might appear outwardly to fit well, but no one but the wearer knew where it pinched."

22. Vigilies: festival-eves; see note 33 to the Prologue to the Tales.

23. Bobance: boasting; Ben Jonson's braggart, in "Every Man in his Humour," is named Bobadil.

24. "I hold a mouse's wit not worth a leek, That hath but one hole for to starte to" A very old proverb in French, German, and Latin.

25. The lines in brackets are only in some of the manuscripts.

26. Gat-toothed: gap-toothed; goat-toothed; or cat- or separate toothed. See note 41 to the prologue to the Tales.
27. Sempronius Sophus, of whom Valerius Maximus tells in his sixth book.
28. The tract of Walter Mapes against marriage, published under the title of "Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum."
29. "Ars Amoris."
30. All the mark of Adam: all who bear the mark of Adam i.e. all men.
31. The Children of Mercury and Venus: those born under the influence of the respective planets.
32. A planet, according to the old astrologers, was in "exaltation" when in the sign of the Zodiac in which it exerted its strongest influence; the opposite sign, in which it was weakest, was called its "dejection." Venus being strongest in Pisces, was weakest in Virgo; but in Virgo Mercury was in "exaltation."
33. Intermete: interpose; French, "entremettre."