

Notes to the Wife of Bath's Tale

1. It is not clear whence Chaucer derived this tale. Tyrwhitt thinks it was taken from the story of Florent, in the first book of Gower's "Confessio Amantis;" or perhaps from an older narrative from which Gower himself borrowed. Chaucer has condensed and otherwise improved the fable, especially by laying the scene, not in Sicily, but at the court of our own King Arthur.

2. Limitours: begging friars. See note 18 to the prologue to the Tales.

3. Thorpes: villages. Compare German, "Dorf, "; Dutch, "Dorp."

4. Undermeles: evening-tides, afternoons; "undern" signifies the evening; and "mele," corresponds to the German "Mal" or "Mahl," time.

5. Incubus: an evil spirit supposed to do violence to women; a nightmare.

6. Where he had been hawking after waterfowl. Froissart says that any one engaged in this sport "alloit en riviere."

7. Nice: foolish; French, "niais."

8. Claw us on the gall: Scratch us on the sore place. Compare, "Let the galled jade wince." Hamlet iii. 2.

9. Hele: hide; from Anglo-Saxon, "helan," to hide, conceal.

10. Yern: eagerly; German, "gern."

11. Wiss: instruct; German, "weisen," to show or counsel.

12. Dante, "Purgatorio", vii. 121.

13. "Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator" -- "Satires," x. 22.

14. In a fabulous conference between the Emperor Adrian and the philosopher Secundus, reported by Vincent of Beauvais, occurs the passage which Chaucer here paraphrases: -- "Quid est Paupertas? Odibile bonum; sanitas mater; remotio Curarum; sapientiae repertrix; negotium sine damno; possessio absque calumnia; sine sollicitudinae felicitas." (What is Poverty? A

hateful good; a mother of health; a putting away of cares; a discoverer of wisdom; business without injury; ownership without calumny; happiness without anxiety)

15. Elenge: strange; from French "eloigner," to remove.