

Notes to the Friar's Tale

1. Small tithers: people who did not pay their full tithes. Mr Wright remarks that "the sermons of the friars in the fourteenth century were most frequently designed to impress the absolute duty of paying full tithes and offerings".

2. There might astert them no pecunial pain: they got off with no mere pecuniary punishment. (Transcriber's note: "Astert" means "escape". An alternative reading of this line is "there might astert him no pecunial pain" i.e. no fine ever escaped him (the archdeacon))

3. A dog for the bow: a dog attending a huntsman with bow and arrow.

4. Ribibe: the name of a musical instrument; applied to an old woman because of the shrillness of her voice.

5. De par dieux: by the gods.

6. See note 12 to the Knight's Tale.

7. Wariangles: butcher-birds; which are very noisy and ravenous, and tear in pieces the birds on which they prey; the thorn on which they do this was said to become poisonous.

8. Medieval legends located hell in the North.

9. The Pythoness: the witch, or woman, possessed with a prophesying spirit; from the Greek, "Pythia." Chaucer of course refers to the raising of Samuel's spirit by the witch of Endor.

10. Dante and Virgil were both poets who had in fancy visited Hell.

11. Tholed: suffered, endured; "thole" is still used in Scotland in the same sense.

12. Capels: horses. See note 14 to the Reeve's Tale.

13. Liart: grey; elsewhere applied by Chaucer to the hairs of an old man. So Burns, in the "Cotter's Saturday Night," speaks of the gray temples of "the sire" -- "His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare."

14. Rebeck: a kind of fiddle; used like "ribibe," as a nickname for a shrill old scold.

15. Trot; a contemptuous term for an old woman who has trotted about much, or who moves with quick short steps.

16. In his await: on the watch; French, "aux aguets."