

THE SOMPNOUR'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE.

The Sompnour in his stirrups high he stood, Upon this Friar his hearte was so wood,*
furious That like an aspen leaf he quoke for ire:
quaked, trembled "Lordings," quoth he, "but one thing I desire; I you beseech, that of your courtesy, Since ye have heard this false Friar lie, As suffer me I may my tale tell This Friar boasteth that he knoweth hell, And, God it wot, that is but little wonder, Friars and fiends be but little asunder. For, pardie, ye have often time heard tell, How that a friar ravish'd was to hell In spirit ones by a visioun, And, as an angel led him up and down, To shew him all the paines that there were, In all the place saw he not a frere; Of other folk he saw enough in woe. Unto the angel spake the friar tho;' *then 'Now, Sir,' quoth he, 'have friars such a grace, That none of them shall come into this place?' 'Yes' quoth the angel; 'many a millioun:' And unto Satanus he led him down. 'And now hath Satanus,' said he, 'a tail Broader than of a carrack<1> is the sail. Hold up thy tail, thou Satanus,' quoth he, 'Shew forth thine erse, and let the friar see Where is the nest of friars in this place.' And *less than half a furlong way of space* *immediately* <2> Right so as bees swarmen out of a hive, Out of the devil's erse there gan to drive A twenty thousand friars *on a rout.* *in a crowd* And throughout hell they swarmed all about, And came again, as fast as they may gon, And in his erse they creeped every one: He clapt his tail again, and lay full still. This friar, when he looked had his fill Upon the torments of that sorry place, His spirit God restored of his grace Into his body again, and he awoke; But natheless for feare yet he quoke, So was the devil's erse aye in his mind; That is his heritage, *of very kind* *by his very nature* God save you alle, save this cursed Frere; My prologue will I end in this mannere.

Notes to the Prologue to the Sompnour's Tale

1. Carrack: A great ship of burden used by the Portuguese; the name is from the Italian, "cargare," to load
2. In less than half a furlong way of space: immediately; literally, in less time than it takes to walk half a furlong (110 yards).