

Notes to the Clerk's

1. Petrarch, in his Latin romance, "De obedientia et fide uxoria Mythologia," (Of obedient and faithful wives in Mythology) translated the charming story of "the patient Grizel" from the Italian of Bocaccio's "Decameron;" and Chaucer has closely followed Petrarch's translation, made in 1373, the year before that in which he died. The fact that the embassy to Genoa, on which Chaucer was sent, took place in 1372-73, has lent countenance to the opinion that the English poet did actually visit the Italian bard at Padua, and hear the story from his own lips. This, however, is only a probability; for it is a moot point whether the two poets ever met.

2. Vesulus: Monte Viso, a lofty peak at the junction of the Maritime and Cottian Alps; from two springs on its east side rises the Po.

3. Buxomly: obediently; Anglo-Saxon, "bogsom," old English, "boughsome," that can be easily bent or bowed; German, "biegsam," pliant, obedient.

4. Well ofter of the well than of the tun she drank: she drank water much more often than wine.

5. Undern: afternoon, evening, though by some "undern" is understood as dinner-time -- 9 a. m. See note 4 to the Wife of Bath's Tale.

6. Very: true; French "vrai".

7. Nouches: Ornaments of some kind not precisely known; some editions read "ouches," studs, brooches. (Transcriber's note: The OED gives "nouches" as a form of "ouches," buckles)

8. A furlong way or two: a short time; literally, as long as it takes to walk one or two furlongs (a furlong is 220 yards)

9. Lordes' hestes may not be y-feign'd: it will not do merely to feign compliance with a lord's commands.

10. Arace: tear; French, "arracher."

11. Fele: many; German, "viel."

12. Dear enough a jane: worth nothing. A jane was a small coin of little worth, so the meaning is "not worth a red cent".

13. Mo: me. "This is one of the most licentious corruptions of orthography," says Tyrwhitt, "that I remember to have observed in Chaucer;" but such liberties were common among the European poets of his time, when there was an extreme lack of certainty in orthography.

14. The fourteen lines that follow are translated almost literally from Petrarch's Latin.

15. For great skill is he proved that he wrought: for it is most reasonable that He should prove or test that which he made.

16. Chichevache, in old popular fable, was a monster that fed only on good women, and was always very thin from scarcity of such food; a corresponding monster, Bycorne, fed only on obedient and kind husbands, and was always fat. The origin of the fable was French; but Lydgate has a ballad on the subject. "Chichevache" literally means "niggardly" or "greedy cow."

17. Countertail: Counter-tally or counter-foil; something exactly corresponding.

18. Aventail: forepart of a helmet, vizor.