

Notes to the Prioress's Tale

1. Tales of the murder of children by Jews were frequent in the Middle Ages, being probably designed to keep up the bitter feeling of the Christians against the Jews. Not a few children were canonised on this account; and the scene of the misdeeds was laid anywhere and everywhere, so that Chaucer could be at no loss for material.

2. This is from Psalm viii. 1, "Domine, dominus noster, quam admirabile est nomen tuum in universa terra."

3. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength." -- Psalms viii. 2.

4. The ghost that in thee light: the spirit that on thee alighted; the Holy Ghost through whose power Christ was conceived.

5. Jewery: A quarter which the Jews were permitted to inhabit; the Old Jewry in London got its name in this way.

6. St. Nicholas, even in his swaddling clothes -- so says the "Breviarium Romanum" -- gave promise of extraordinary virtue and holiness; for, though he sucked freely on other days, on Wednesdays and Fridays he applied to the breast only once, and that not until the evening.

7. "O Alma Redemptoris Mater," ("O soul mother of the Redeemer") -- the beginning of a hymn to the Virgin.

8. Antiphonere: A book of anthems, or psalms, chanted in the choir by alternate verses.

9. Souded; confirmed; from French, "soulde;" Latin, "solidatus."

10. "And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb." -- Revelations xiv. 3, 4.

11. Freined: asked, inquired; from Anglo-Saxon, "frinan," "fraegnian."
Compare German, "fragen."

12. Halse: embrace or salute; implore: from Anglo-Saxon "hals," the neck.

14 A boy said to have been slain by the Jews at Lincoln in 1255, according to Matthew Paris. Many popular ballads were made about the event, which the diligence of the Church doubtless kept fresh in mind at Chaucer's day.