

Notes to Chaucer's Tale of Meliboeus.

1. The Tale of Meliboeus is literally translated from a French story, or rather "treatise," in prose, entitled "Le Livre de Melibee et de Dame Prudence," of which two manuscripts, both dating from the fifteenth century, are preserved in the British Museum. Tyrwhitt, justly enough, says of it that it is indeed, as Chaucer called it in the prologue, "'a moral tale virtuous,' and was probably much esteemed in its time; but, in this age of levity, I doubt some readers will be apt to regret that he did not rather give us the remainder of Sir Thopas." It has been remarked that in the earlier portion of the Tale, as it left the hand of the poet, a number of blank verses were intermixed; though this peculiarity of style, noticeable in any case only in the first 150 or 200 lines, has necessarily all but disappeared by the changes of spelling made in the modern editions. The Editor's purpose being to present to the public not "The Canterbury Tales" merely, but "The Poems of Chaucer," so far as may be consistent with the limits of this volume, he has condensed the long reasonings and learned quotations of Dame Prudence into a mere outline, connecting those portions of the Tale wherein lies so much of story as it actually possesses, and the general reader will probably not regret the sacrifice, made in the view of retaining so far as possible the completeness of the Tales, while lessening the intrusion of prose into a volume of poems. The good wife of Meliboeus literally overflows with quotations from David, Solomon, Jesus the Son of Sirach, the Apostles, Ovid, Cicero, Seneca, Cassiodorus, Cato, Petrus Alphonsus -- the converted Spanish Jew, of the twelfth century, who wrote the "Disciplina Clericalis" -- and other authorities; and in some passages, especially where husband and wife debate the merits or demerits of women, and where Prudence dilates on the evils of poverty, Chaucer only reproduces much that had been said already in the Tales that preceded -- such as the Merchant's and the Man of Law's.

2. The lines which follow are a close translation of the original Latin, which reads: "Quis matrem, nisi mentis inops, in funere nati Flere vetet? non hoc illa monenda loco. Cum dederit lacrymas, animumque expleverit aegrum, Ille dolor verbis emoderandus erit." Ovid, "Remedia Amoris," 127-131.

3. See the conversation between Pluto and Proserpine, in the Merchant's Tale.

4. "Thy name," she says, "is Meliboeus; that is to say, a man that drinketh

honey."

5. Los: reputation; from the past participle of the Anglo-Saxon, "hlisan" to celebrate. Compare Latin, "laus."