

Notes to the Parson's Tale

1. The Parson's Tale is believed to be a translation, more or less free, from some treatise on penitence that was in favour about Chaucer's time.

Tyrwhitt says: "I cannot recommend it as a very entertaining or edifying performance at this day; but the reader will please to remember, in excuse both of Chaucer and of his editor, that, considering The Canterbury Tales as a great picture of life and manners, the piece would not have been complete if it had not included the religion of the time." The Editor of the present volume has followed the same plan adopted with regard to Chaucer's Tale of Meliboeus, and mainly for the same reasons. (See note 1 to that Tale). An outline of the Parson's ponderous sermon -- for such it is -- has been drawn; while those passages have been given in full which more directly illustrate the social and the religious life of the time -- such as the picture of hell, the vehement and rather coarse, but, in an antiquarian sense, most curious and valuable attack on the fashionable garb of the day, the catalogue of venial sins, the description of gluttony and its remedy, &c. The brief third or concluding part, which contains the application of the whole, and the "Retractation" or "Prayer" that closes the Tale and the entire "magnum opus" of Chaucer, have been given in full.

2. Jeremiah vi. 16.

3. See Note 3 to the Sompnour's Tale.

4. Just before, the Parson had cited the words of Job to God (Job x. 20-22), "Suffer, Lord, that I may a while bewail and weep, ere I go without returning to the dark land, covered with the darkness of death; to the land of misease and of darkness, where as is the shadow of death; where as is no order nor ordinance, but grisly dread that ever shall last."

5. "I have lost everything - my time and my work."

6. Accidie: neglectfulness or indifference; from the Greek, akedeia.

7. The pax: an image which was presented to the people to be kissed, at that part of the mass where the priest said, "Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum." ("May the peace of the Lord be always with you") The ceremony took the place, for greater convenience, of the "kiss of peace," which clergy and people, at this passage, used to bestow upon each other.

8. Three ways of ornamenting clothes with lace, &c.; in barring it was laid on crossways, in ounding it was waved, in paling it was laid on lengthways.
9. Penitencer: a priest who enjoined penance in extraordinary cases.
10. To be houseled: to receive the holy sacrament; from Anglo- Saxon, "husel;" Latin, "hostia," or "hostiola," the host.
11. It was a frequent penance among the chivalric orders to wear mail shirts next the skin.
12. Surquedrie: presumption; from old French, "surcuidier," to think arrogantly, be full of conceit.