

Notes to the Prayer of Chaucer

1. The genuineness and real significance of this "Prayer of Chaucer," usually called his "Retractation," have been warmly disputed. On the one hand, it has been declared that the monks forged the retractation, and procured its insertion among the works of the man who had done so much to expose their abuses and ignorance, and to weaken their hold on popular credulity: on the other hand, Chaucer himself at the close of his life, is said to have greatly lamented the ribaldry and the attacks on the clergy which marked especially "The Canterbury Tales," and to have drawn up a formal retractation of which the "Prayer" is either a copy or an abridgment. The beginning and end of the "Prayer," as Tyrwhitt points out, are in tone and terms quite appropriate in the mouth of the Parson, while they carry on the subject of which he has been treating; and, despite the fact that Mr Wright holds the contrary opinion, Tyrwhitt seems to be justified in setting down the "Retractation" as interpolated into the close of the Parson's Tale. Of the circumstances under which the interpolation was made, or the causes by which it was dictated, little or nothing can now be confidently affirmed; but the agreement of the manuscripts and the early editions in giving it, render it impossible to discard it peremptorily as a declaration of prudish or of interested regret, with which Chaucer himself had nothing whatever to do.

2. "[You] Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit livest and reignest God for ever and ever. Amen."