

Notes to The prologue to The Legend of Good Women

1. Bernard, the Monke, saw not all, pardie!: a proverbial saying, signifying that even the wisest, or those who claim to be the wisest, cannot know everything. Saint Bernard, who was the last, or among the last, of the Fathers, lived in the first half of the twelfth century.
2. Compare Chaucer's account of his habits, in "The House of Fame."
3. See introductory note to "The Flower and the Leaf."
4. "ye have herebefore Of making ropen, and led away the corn"
The meaning is, that the "lovers" have long ago said all that can be said, by way of poetry, or "making" on the subject. See note 89 to "Troilus and Cressida" for the etymology of "making" meaning "writing poetry."
5. The poet glides here into an address to his lady.
6. Europa was the daughter of Agenores, king of Phrygia. She was carried away to Crete by Jupiter, disguised as a lovely and tame bull, on whose back Europa mounted as she was sporting with her maidens by the sea-shore. The story is beautifully told in Horace, Odes, iii. 27.
7. See "The Assembly of Fowls," which was supposed to happen on St. Valentine's day.
8. The tidife: The titmouse, or any other small bird, which sometimes brings up the cuckoo's young when its own have been destroyed. See note 44 to "The Assembly of Fowls."
9. Ethic: the "Ethics" of Aristotle.
10. "For as to me is lever none nor lother, I n'am withholden yet with neither n'other." i.e. For as neither is more liked or disliked by me, I am not bound by, holden to, either the one or the other.
11. All of another tun i.e. wine of another tun -- a quite different matter.
12. Compare the description of the arbour in "The Flower and the Leaf."
13. Flowrons: florets; little flowers on the disk of the main flower; French

"fleuron."

14. Mr Bell thinks that Chaucer here praises the complaisance of Marcia, the wife of Cato, in complying with his will when he made her over to his friend Hortensius. It would be in better keeping with the spirit of the poet's praise, to believe that we should read "Porcia Catoun" -- Porcia the daughter of Cato, who was married to Brutus, and whose perfect wifhood has been celebrated in The Franklin's Tale. See note 25 to the Franklin's Tale.

15. Isoude: See note 21 to "The Assembly of Fowls".

16. Lavine: Lavinia, the heroine of the Aeneid, who became the wife of Aeneas.

17. Polyxena, daughter of Priam, king of Troy, fell in love with Achilles, and, when he was killed, she fled to the Greek camp, and slew herself on the tomb of her hero-lover.

18. Mountance: extent, duration. See note 84 to "The House of Fame".

19. Relic: emblem; or cherished treasure; like the relics at the shrines of saints.

20. Losengeour: deceiver. See note 31 to the Nun's Priest's Tale.

21. "Toteler" is an old form of the word "tattler," from the Anglo-Saxon, "totaelan," to talk much, to tattle.

22. Envy is lavender of the court alway: a "lavender" is a washerwoman or laundress; the word represents "meretrice" in Dante's original -- meaning a courtesan; but we can well understand that Chaucer thought it prudent, and at the same time more true to the moral state of the English Court, to change the character assigned to Envy. He means that Envy is perpetually at Court, like some garrulous, bitter old woman employed there in the most servile offices, who remains at her post through all the changes among the courtiers. The passage cited from Dante will be found in the "Inferno," canto xiii. 64 -- 69.

23. Chaucer says that the usurping lords who seized on the government of the free Lombard cities, had no regard for any rule of government save sheer tyranny -- but a natural lord, and no usurper, ought not to be a tyrant.

24. Farmer: one who merely farms power or revenue for his own purposes

and his own gain.

25. This was the first version of the Knight's tale. See the introductory note, above

26. Boece: Boethius' "De Consolatione Philosophiae;" to which frequent reference is made in The Canterbury Tales. See, for instances, note 91 to the Knight's Tale; and note 34 to the Squire's Tale.

27. A poem entitled "The Lamentation of Mary Magdalene," said to have been "taken out of St Origen," is included in the editions of Chaucer; but its authenticity, and consequently its identity with the poem here mentioned, are doubted.

28. For the story of Alcestis, see note 11 to "The Court of Love."

29. "For he who gives a gift, or doth a grace, Do it betimes, his thank is well the more" A paraphrase of the well-known proverb, "Bis dat qui cito dat." ("He gives twice who gives promptly")

30. The same prohibition occurs in the Fifteenth Statute of "The Court of Love."

31. Chaucer is always careful to allege his abstinence from the pursuits of gallantry; he does so prominently in "The Court of Love," "The Assembly of Fowls," and "The House of Fame."

32. Pity runneth soon in gentle heart: the same is said of Theseus, in The Knight's Tale, and of Canace, by the falcon, in The Squire's Tale.

33. Stellify: assign to a place among the stars; as Jupiter did to Andromeda and Cassiopeia.

34. Agathon: there was an Athenian dramatist of this name, who might have made the virtues and fortunes of Alcestis his theme; but the reference is too vague for the author to be identified with any confidence.

CHAUCER'S A. B. C. <1>
LA PRIERE DE NOSTRE DAME <2>

CALLED

A.

Flying, I flee for succour to thy tent, Me for to hide from tempest full of
dread; Beseeching you, that ye you not absent, Though I be wick'. O help yet
at this need! All* have I been a beast in wit and deed,
*although Yet, Lady! thou me close in with thy grace; *Thine enemy and
mine,* -- Lady, take heed! -- *the devil* Unto my death in point is
me to chase.

G.

Gracious Maid and Mother! which that never Wert bitter nor in earthe nor in
sea, <4> But full of sweetness and of mercy ever, Help, that my Father be
not wroth with me! Speak thou, for I ne dare Him not see; So have I done in
earth, alas the while! That, certes, but if thou my succour be, To sink etern
He will my ghost exile.

H.

He vouchesaf'd, tell Him, as was His will, Become a man, *as for our
alliance,* *to ally us with god* And with His blood He wrote that
blissful bill Upon the cross, as general acquittance To ev'ry penitent in full
creance;* *belief And therefore, Lady bright! thou for us
pray; Then shalt thou stenten* alle His grievance, *put an end to
And make our foe to failen of his prey.

I.

I wote well thou wilt be our succour, Thou art so full of bounty in certain;
For, when a soule falleth in errour, Thy pity go'th, and haleth* him again;
*draweth Then makest thou his peace with his Sov'reign, And bringest him
out of the crooked street: Whoso thee loveth shall not love in vain, That shall
he find *as he the life shall lete.* *when he leaves
life*

K.

Kalendares illumined be they *brilliant exemplars* That in
this world be lighted with thy name; And whoso goeth with thee the right
way, Him shall not dread in soule to be lame; Now, Queen of comfort! since
thou art the same To whom I seeke for my medicine, Let not my foe no more
my wound entame;* *injure, molest My heal into thy hand all I
resign.

L.

Lady, thy sorrow can I not portray Under that cross, nor his grievous penance; But, for your bothe's pain, I you do pray, Let not our *aller foe* make his boastance, *the foe of us all -- That he hath in his listes, with mischance, Satan* *Convicte that* ye both have bought so dear; *ensnared that which* As I said erst, thou ground of all substance! Continue on us thy piteous eyen clear.

M.

Moses, that saw the bush of flames red Burning, of which then never a stick brenn'd,* *burned Was sign of thine unwemmed* maidenhead. *unblemished Thou art the bush, on which there gan descend The Holy Ghost, the which that Moses wend* *weened, supposed Had been on fire; and this was in figure. <5> Now, Lady! from the fire us do defend, Which that in hell eternally shall dure.

N.

Noble Princess! that never haddest peer; Certes if any comfort in us be, That cometh of thee, Christe's mother dear! We have none other melody nor glee,* *pleasure Us to rejoice in our adversity; Nor advocate, that will and dare so pray For us, and for as little hire as ye, That helpe for an Ave-Mary or tway.

O.

O very light of eyen that be blind! O very lust* of labour and distress! *relief, pleasure O treasurer of bounty to mankind! The whom God chose to mother for humbles! From his ancill* <6> he made thee mistress *handmaid Of heav'n and earth, our *billes up to bede;* *offer up our petitions* This world awaiteth ever on thy goodness; For thou ne failedst never wight at need.

P.

Purpose I have sometime for to enquire Wherefore and why the Holy Ghost thee sought, When Gabrielis voice came to thine ear; He not to war* us such a wonder wrought, *afflict But for to save us, that sithens us bought: Then needeth us no weapon us to save, But only, where we did not as we ought, Do penitence, and mercy ask and have.

Q.

Queen of comfort, right when I me bethink That I aguilt* have bothe Him

passioun, And suffer'd eke that Longeus his heart pight,* <8>
 *pierced And made his hearte-blood to run adown; And all this was for my
 salvatioun: And I to him am false and eke unkind, And yet he wills not my
 damnation; *This thank I you,* succour of all mankind! *for this I
 am indebted to you*
 Y.

Ysaac was figure of His death certain, That so farforth his father would obey,
 That him *ne raughte* nothing to be slain; *he cared not* Right so
 thy Son list as a lamb to dey:* *die Now, Lady full of
 mercy! I you pray, Since he his mercy 'sured me so large, Be ye not scant,
 for all we sing and say, That ye be from vengeance alway our targe.*
 *shield, defence

Z.

Zachary you calleth the open well <9> That washed sinful soul out of his
 guilt; Therefore this lesson out I will to tell, That, n'ere* thy tender hearte,
 we were spilt.** *were it not for Now, Lady brighte! since thou canst and
 wilt, *destroyed, undone* Be to the seed of Adam merciabe;*
 *merciful Bring us unto that palace that is built To penitents that be *to
 mercy able!* *fit to receive mercy*

Explicit.*

*The end

Notes to Chaucer's A. B. C.

1. Chaucer's A. B. C. -- a prayer to the Virgin, in twenty three verses, beginning with the letters of the alphabet in their order -- is said to have been written "at the request of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, as a prayer for her private use, being a woman in her religion very devout." It was first printed in Speght's edition of 1597.
2. La Priere De Nostre Dame: French, "The Prayer of Our Lady."
3. Thieves seven: i.e. the seven deadly sins
4. Mary's name recalls the waters of "Marah" or bitterness (Exod. xv. 23), or the prayer of Naomi in her grief that she might be called not Naomi, but "Mara" (Ruth i. 20). Mary, however, is understood to mean "exalted."
5. A typical representation. See The Prioress's Tale, third stanza.

6. The reference evidently is to Luke i. 38 -- "Ecce ancilla Domini," ("Behold the handmaid of the Lord") the Virgin's humble answer to Gabriel at the Annunciation.
7. "Xpe" represents the Greek letters chi rho epsilon, and is a contraction for "Christe."
8. According to tradition, the soldier who struck the Saviour to the heart with his spear was named Longeus, and was blind; but, touching his eyes by chance with the mingled blood and water that flowed down the shaft upon his hands, he was instantly restored to sight.
9. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. xiii. 1).

A GOODLY BALLAD OF CHAUCER.<1>

MOTHER of nurture, best belov'd of all, And freshe flow'r, to whom good
 thrift God send Your child, if it lust* you me so to call, *please
 All be I unable myself so to pretend, *although I be To your
 discretion I recommend My heart and all, with ev'ry circumstance, All wholly
 to be under your governance.

Most desire I, and have and ever shall, Thinge which might your hearte's
 ease amend Have me excus'd, my power is but small; Nathless, of right, ye
 oughte to commend My goode will, which fame would entend*
 attend, strive To do you service; for my suffisance
 *contentment Is wholly to be under your governance.

Mieux un in heart which never shall apall, <2> Ay fresh and new, and right
 glad to dispend My time in your service, what so befall, Beseeching your
 excellence to defend My simpleness, if ignorance offend In any wise; since
 that mine affiance Is wholly to be under your governance.

Daisy of light, very ground of comfort, The sunne's daughter ye light, as I
 read; For when he west'reth, farewell your disport! By your nature alone,
 right for pure dread Of the rude night, that with his *boistous weed*
 rude garment Of darkness shadoweth our hemisphere, Then close ye, my
 life's lady dear!

Dawneth the day unto his kind resort, And Phoebus your father, with his

streames red, Adorns the morrow, consuming the sort*
 *crowd Of misty cloudes, that would overlade True humble heartes with
 their mistihead.* *dimness, mistiness New comfort adaws,* when your
 eyen clear *dawns, awakens Disclose and spread, my life's lady
 dear.

Je voudrais* -- but the greate God disposeth, *I would wish And
 maketh casual, by his Providence, Such thing as manne's fraile wit
 purposeth, All for the best, if that your conscience Not grudge it, but in
 humble patience It receive; for God saith, withoute fable, A faithful heart
 ever is acceptable.

Cauteles* whoso useth gladly, gloseth;** *cautious speeches To
 eschew such it is right high prudence; **deceiveth Whatye said
 ones mine heart opposeth, That my writing japes* in your absence
 *jests, coarse stories Pleas'd you much better than my presence: Yet can I
 more; ye be not excusable; A faithful heart is ever acceptable.

Quaketh my pen; my spirit supposeth That in my writing ye will find offence;
 Mine hearte welketh* thus; anon it riseth; *withers, faints Now hot,
 now cold, and after in fervence; That is amiss, is caus'd of negligence, And
 not of malice; therefore be merciab; A faithful heart is ever acceptable.

L'Envoy.

Forth, complaint! forth, lacking eloquence; Forth little letter, of enditing
 lame! I have besought my lady's sapience On thy behalfe, to accept in game
 Thine inability; do thou the same. Abide! have more yet! *Je serve Joyesse!*
 I serve Joy Now forth, I close thee in holy Venus' name! Thee shall uncloze
 my hearte's governess.

Notes To a Goodly Ballad Of Chaucer

1. This elegant little poem is believed to have been addressed to Margaret,
 Countess of Pembroke, in whose name Chaucer found one of those
 opportunities of praising the daisy he never lost. (Transcriber's note: Modern
 scholars believe that Chaucer was not the author of this poem)

2. Mieux un in heart which never shall apall: better one who in heart shall
 never pall -- whose love will never weary.