

# CHAUCER'S RELIGIOUS VIEW—<sup>60</sup>

Naozo Ueno

## INTRODUCTION

Of such an ingenuous story teller as Chaucer, who, because he could so well adapt himself to the situation and the character he was writing that he could without effort conceive any two opposing ideas, could say in one breath both

Who saved Danyel in the horrible cave,  
Ther every wight save he, maister and knave,  
Was with the leon frete er he asterte?  
No wight but God, that he bar in his herte.<sup>1</sup>

and

But wel I woot that in this world greet pyne ys.  
Allas, I se a serpent or a theef,  
.....

Goon at his large, and where hym list may turne.<sup>2</sup>

it would be almost vain to try to figure out what his own religion was. He could denounce the world and curse the cruelty of fate through the mouth of one of his pilgrims, while in another place, another pilgrim is telling a pathetic and beautiful tale of a young martyr and of the Blessed Virgin protecting us all. E. Legouis says:

“Chaucer's religious feelings.....probably kept changing from year to year and almost from hour to hour. There were varying moments in the day when he made fun of the Mendicant Friars, when he prayed with fervour, by preference to the .....

1 II(B), ll. 473-476. MLT. (Man of Law's Tale)

All line references are to The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. by F. N. Robinson (Boston, 1933).

2 I(A), ll. 1324-1327. KnT. (Knight's Tale)

Virgin Mary, .....when he felt sick of the world and looked heavenward. It is probable that he was about as much of a free-thinker as was possible in his day, living without restraint, but not without remorse, lingering for many years in the primrose path, and after a contrite old age reaching the pious end to which his disciples have testified.”<sup>3</sup>

With this type of objective writer, the acme of whose skill was reached in the history of English literature by Shakespeare, the most one can say about his own religious view, or about his own view of life even, is not religion in its narrow sense. Of course, in Chaucer there are much religious feeling. Only the problem is that Chaucer might be merely repeating some religious clichés of the time or putting himself in the shoes of one of his characters, so that we need not surmise him as an anti-Wycliffite even when the host, Harry Bailly, declares

I smelle a Lollere in the wynd,<sup>4</sup>  
or with Lounsbury<sup>5</sup> take him as an agnostic when the summoner scoffs at excommunication.

For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,<sup>6</sup>  
meaning that excommunication of church can no more condemn people than absolution can save them. The real religious feeling of the poet can be reached not through taking every utterance of the characters at its face value but through analysing

---

3 Emile Legouis, Geoffrey Chaucer (London, 1928), p. 22.

4 II (B), 1. 1173. MLT.

5 T. R. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer (Now York, 1892), pp. 517 ff.

6 I (A), 1. 661. CTP. (Prologue to the Canterbury Tales).

the whole plot and finding out what his conception of the characters' fate is; how he suffers his characters to wend through various phases of human life; and how he reveals his conception of human life in the fortunes of the characters.

In Chaucer, this process of deducing the poet's view of religion by minute delineation of the character's fate is not so easy as in the cases of other writers, since the only portion of his writings which is decidedly original is the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. Others are classic tales retouched, contemporary Italian tales told in English or even a résumé of a sermon. His tale of St. Cecilia told by the second nun closely follows Jacobus Januensis in the Legenda Aurea, and Simeon Metaphrastes, who in turn follows early Latin Acta. He astonished his Japanese students, to whom the Buddhist parable on the deadly quality of avarice is familiar, by drawing his Pardoner's Tale of the three thieves from a Hindoo tale in Vedaabbha Játaka.<sup>7</sup> The only difference is that our version of Játaka tale is that of Sakyamuni predicting the lethal quality of gold and of a farmer finding the prediction only too true. One wonders how Chaucer in the fourteenth century could get in touch with the Indian tale. It is one of the Chaucer riddles left for us but not very likely to be solved by anything short of a miracle; unless something like what happened in British Museum in

---

7 Chaucer's tale of the three thieves consists of two Buddhist parables. One includes the motif of a band of thieves killing each other for the riches until the last one, is also killed with poison. This tale is in Originals and Analogues (Chaucer Society). The other, which is more familiar to me, is built on the theme "riches are death."

1851 should happen, when the parchment used for lining a fifteenth century book proved to be the list of expenditure in the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, among which there was an item concerning the purchase of several articles for Geoffrey Chaucer, then a page in her service. Chaucer can be at once Harry Bailly, Wife of Bath, Criseyda, Pandarus, King of Theseus, and Arcite. There are those among the characters of his works who we feel certain are the embodiment of his own thought, each being a part of himself, showing at least one phase of his variegated and complex interest in life; yet also there are those who, we feel, Chaucer depicted as representative of what are detestable in life, couching his righteous wrath in the sly words of satire. The Canon in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, the Friar in the Summoner's Tale, the Monk in the Shipman's Tale, and the Monk and the Friar in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales seem to belong to this latter class. We might deduce some of his opinion about the religious world of his time by the curious but not altogether unexplainable fact that those who suffer most his severe attack are more of the clerical world than of laymen. This of course, is only one of the numerous means in which we can know something of his religious attitude.

The literary tradition of his time—the practice of borrowing from other sources—adds much practical difficulty in our investigation of his own thought, not to say of his religious thought. We might be safe in presuming that we can trace his personal view of things first by looking in the lines which are by all evidences supposed to be Chaucer's invention; and secondly, in cases where he quotes from other authors or borrowed other author's thought, by looking at the way in which he quotes or borrows,—in

other words, how he makes use of it; and in the lines where the thought is not Chaucer's invention but borrowed one, by finding out if the original author is, by other evidences, supposed to be Chaucer's favorite; thirdly, we can find something of the poet's own view in the words of the characters whom he seems to have held in sympathy. But whether in passages original or inspired from other sources, one infalliable test is its artistic standard—he must be at his best when he is writing about the things he is really interested in.

## C H A P T E R I

### MEDIEVAL FANATICISM AS SHOWN IN THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

Among his earlier works one that claims our attention for its religious significance is the Second Nun's Tale of the "Lyf of Seinte Cecile" which Chaucer seems to have written early in his literary career but left unpublished till the composition of the Canterbury Tales. Although Prof. Robinson, basing his argument on Chaucer's borrowing from Dante (ll. 36-56), ascribes the probable date of writing to the years immediately following his first Italian journey, namely, shortly after 1373,<sup>8</sup> his close dependence on the sources backs the supposition that the work can be of an earlier date, and the prologue including the Dante passages inserted after the journey. The tale itself is based on both Golden Legends (Legenda Aurea) of Jacobus Januensis, and an earlier version, Jacobus Januensis, Otherwise known as Jacobo a Voragine, was Archbishop of Genoa at the end of the thirteenth century. The earlier version by Simeon Metaphrastes, as suggested by Prof. Köbling, seems less

8 Robinson, op.cit., p. 863.

close to Chaucer's *St. Cecilia* beyond line 350 or thereabouts of the Second Nun's Tale, than *Mombritius' Sanctuarium*.<sup>9</sup>

*St. Cecilia* has been one of the most popular figures in the Christian myth. Today she is remembered chiefly as the guardian saint of music. Her martyrdom is an illustration of the Christian persecution in the third century, when even the Pope (Pope Urban I, who succeeded Calixtus, A. D. 222, and was beheaded May 25, A. D. 230) had to seek refuge in the catacombs and ended his life on gallows. But the simple facts of her martyrdom were elaborated in the ensuing centuries into one of the typical medieval Christian legends. The tale is burdened with the emotional elements of Medieval Christianity—the insistence on celibacy, ecstasy of faith, joy in physical torture, and love of angels resembling that of human husband.

It has been a noted fact that one of the outstanding characteristics of Medieval Christianity is its emotional quality. Dr. Coulton in his Studies in Medieval Thought says, speaking of *St. Augustine*,

"His (Augustine's) philosophy admirably illustrates the tendencies of Christian thought which I have indicated; its intense vitality, its emotional character, and its consequent limitations."<sup>10</sup>

9 cf. "Professor Köbling's article in Englische Studien, 11. 215-48, although important, is somewhat misleading. Translations from Simeon Metaphrastes, who was himself translating from earlier Latin versions, are sure to be far removed from the original which we are seeking." Robert Dudley French, A Chaucer Handbook (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1929), p. 362, foot note.

10 G. G. Coulton, Studies in Medieval Thought (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1940), p. 24.

To the Medieval mind to which the original knowledge of Greek philosophy was all but lost except through Latin translations, the serenity and equanimity of the Greek geniuses had been unknown. (The Latin translations were very poor ones, as the Greek tradition in the Middle Ages had come to Europe either through Arabic tradition, or through Byzantine tradition, and very little of Greek had come through the direct translation—so little that St. Jerome, commenting on Epistle to the Galatians, grieved over the fact that very few of his contemporaries knew about Plato.<sup>11</sup>) Christian faith had amassed dogmas and legends over its doctrine to reinforce its singularly powerful hold over the people of the Middle Ages, whose emotional characteristic may be best illustrated by the kind of Christian legends popular in those days. Take, for example, the legend of Amis and Amiloun.<sup>12</sup> When Amis is told by the Virgin Mary that the only way to cure his beloved friend Amiloun from leprosy is to kill his two children by his own hands, he loses no time but obeys the order. And lo, our beloved Lady restores the children to life, at the same time curing Amiloun from illness. The tale carries some resemblance to the episode of Abraham and Jacob in the Old Testament, and it is one illustration of the part played by the Hebrew

11 Klibanski, The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition Chap. III.

12 Amis and Amiloun is preserved in MSS. Auchinleck (1330-1340), Douce 326 (15th century), Harley 2386 (16th century), and a MS. of the Duke of Sutherland (now Egerton 2862; end of 14th century). . . . . A Manual of The Writings in Middle English 1050-1400, Jon Edwin Well, (The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1926), p.157.

element in Old Testament on the emotional side of Medieval Christianity, which will be mentioned later. We hear its distant echo in the Clerk's Tale in the Canterbury Tales, where the hero pretends to kill his two children in order to try the heroine's patience. But the main difference between this Abraham episode and Amis tale is that while Abraham is about to kill Isaac as a sacrifice to God, Amis does kill his children on behalf of his friend. Medieval people were moved to tears to hear of such devoted friendship and of such faith in the Virgin Mary, and the tale is told with charming lack of any description about the father's hesitation and grief which modern realists would think human, just like a tale of terror told by an innocent child who does not realize its cruel propensity. Amis' devotion was exactly the kind of devotion Medieval churches needed. And the tale has the charm of simplicity, singleness of purpose, and naivety in the action of the hero and pathetic sweetness in the description of the children, although its absurdity puts itself far from the sympathy of modern readers.

Take, for another example, a passage from the Second Nun's Tale of the "Lyf of Seinte Cecile":

St. Cecile is brought before Almachius the prefect and with a spicy tongue refuses to offer sacrifices to Jupiter.

And he weex wrooth,.....

.....

"Brenne hire right in a bath of flambes rede."

And as he bad, right so was doon the dede;  
For in a bath they gonne hire faste shetten,  
And nyght and day greet fyr under betten.

The long nyght, and eek a day also,  
For al the fyr, and eek the bathes heete,  
She sat al coold, and feeled no wo.

It made hire nat a drope for to sweete.  
 But in that bath hir lyf she moste lete,  
 For he Almachius, with ful wikke entente,  
 To sleen hire in the bath his sonde sente.  
 .....

Thre strokes in the nekke he smoot hire tho,  
 The tormentour, but for no maner chaunce  
 He myghte noght smyte al hir nekke atwo;  
 And for ther was that tyme an ordinaunce  
 That no man should doon man swich penaunce  
 The ferthe strook to smyten, softe or soore,  
 This tormentour ne dorste do namoore,  
 But half deed, with hir nekke ycorven there,  
 He lefte hir lye, and on his wey is went.<sup>13</sup>

The ecstasy felt in the terrible torture, the elaborate bloodiness of the torture may seem revolting. But no religion would have survived those ages of constant danger unless it was so dramatic that it had a strong emotional hold over the people. The period when most Christian dogmas were being made, roughly corresponds with the great migration of races, which started with the invasion of the Mongolian Huns in to Europe in 375, and subsequent invasion of the Goths into Rome. Shortly after the division of the Roman Empire (395), there occurred the sack of Rome by Alabic, King of the Goths, followed by the seizure and pillage in the western provinces of the Empire by the German tribes, the Battle of Châlons (451) when Attica the chieftain of the Huns was fortunately defeated, the second sack of Rome (455) this time by the Vandals,.....and so on, until the Roman Empire fell and Odoacer, the leader of a small German tribe, took over

.....  
 13 VIII (G), 11. 515-534. SNT (Secod Nun's Tale).

the government (476), ushering in the so-called "Dark Ages."

The centuries which followed the fall of Roman Empire were no less turbulent than those which preceded them. The Dark Ages extending to the beginning of the eleventh century according to Phylip Myere's division, was characterized by the struggle among the feudal lords for supremacy and the effort of these lords to undermine the Papal power over worldly matters. The Eastern front was constantly harassed by Moslem invasions until the righteous wrath of the Christian nations took form in the Crusades beginning in 1096 and lasting for two centuries. In Central Europe the peaceful reign under Charles the Great in Frankish Empire lasted only for half a century; and in the Western part, we find England invaded successively by the Danes, the Romans, and the Normans.

This constant unrest promoted ill-balanced but powerful emotional appeal from the church.

"No careful, balanced, unenthusiastic system of philosophy could have lived through the centuries of brute force and constant warfare that were coming, except, perhaps, here and there in holes and corners. Society needed a creed which strong-willed men could not only commend, but fall in love with, devoting themselves to it, sacrificing themselves to it, propagating and perpetuating it from generation to generation by the intensity and magnetic force of their conviction. A creed of that kind, in an age of that kind, must necessarily cast overboard, abandon to others, much that was subtlest and most suggestive in ancient thought."<sup>14</sup>

In the early centuries in which the church had to establish its own power, the emotional elements of paganism on whose fertile ground Christianity was to be planted had something

---

14 Coulton, op. cit., p. 29.

to do with its violent emotional quality, together with the influence of Neo-Platonism which constituted Christian dogmas at that time and which laid stress on the function of recognition as an illumination transcending reason, as a Neo-Platonic Christian father Johannes Scotus Eriugena, in the ninth century did.<sup>15</sup>

Christian gospel in itself is different from classical philosophies because of its warm human love toward our Savior and God.

“In its mortal bearings the Christian spirit was more ascetic than Neo-Platonism, and its élan of emotion might have been as sublimated in quality as the Neo-Platonic, but for the greater reality of love and terror in the God toward whom it yearned with tears of contrition, love and fear.”<sup>16</sup>

The race that conceived of this love, contrition, and fear had been one always subject to foreign invasions, poverty, and hunger. They yearned for their only God Jehovah, with the bitter pride of a race subdued yet conscious of their own right as the Chosen People of God. In its devotion of God and its hatred of those who hate Jehovah, Judaism is surpassed by no other religion, except, perhaps, Mahometanism.

“As generation after generation clung to this system (patristic theology) as to the stay of their salvation, the intellectual consideration of it became instinct with the emotions of desire and aversion, and with love and gratitude toward the suffering means and instruments which made salvation possible—the Crucified, the Weeping Mother, and the martyred or self-

---

15 Soichi Iwashita, Chusei Tetsugaku Shisoshi Kenkyu (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1943), Johannes Scotus Eriugena.

16 Henry Osborn Taylor, Mediaeval Mind (London: Macmillan & Co., 1927), Vol. I p.347.

torturing saints.....Thus mediaeval religious thought became a well of emotion." 17

St. Augustine, the greatest church father<sup>18</sup> next to Thomas Aquinas, was himself a man capable of strong emotion. The repentance and devotion of a passionate man who had loved his mistress so much that he "felt his heart seperated by force, incised, and bleed"<sup>19</sup> when he was forced to part with her, although his carnal desire led him to fall into liaison with another woman, was as intense as the desire that had led him astray.

All these, however, does not tend to mean that Medieval Christianity was characterized by the spontaneous overflow of emotion. Far from that. It was more the product of obsession than of a mind free from frustration. The suffering of the Jewish race; the troubled life of medieval men — out of these pathetic experiences there arose deeper understanding of the human life and the greater joy at the gospel, the whole emotional pattern, at times, falling into the danger of being eccentric, the more so when the church insisted on celibacy. Medieval people, with the rich merchant in the Merchant's Tale, believed that too much joy in married life in this world deprives one of beatitude in the life hereafter.

Ther may no man han parfite blisses two,  
This is to seye, in erthe and eek in hevене.

.....  
Yet is ther so parfit felicitee

17 Ibid., Vol. I pp. 18-19.

18 Iwashita, op. cit., p.209, "the greatest genius of Catholic fathers." cf. St. Augustinus by Katsumi Matsumura (Kyoto: Kōbundo)

19 Cf. Iwashita, op. cit.

And so greet ese and lust in marriage,  
 That evere I am agast now in myn age  
 That I shal lede now so myrie a lyf,  
 So delicat, withouten wo and stryf,  
 That I shal have myn hevene in erthe heere.  
 For sith that verray hevene is boght so deere  
 With tribulacion and greet penaunce,  
 How sholde I thanne, that lyve in swich pleasaunce  
 As alle wedded men doon with hire wyvys,  
 Come to the bliss ther Christ eterne on lyve ys? <sup>20</sup>

Life of celibacy was the condition to eternal life, since spirit and body were the things incompatible to each other. <sup>21</sup>

And in case of women, single life was lauded more from the belief that every woman was Christ's spouse, than from the ascetic motive. Love between the sexes in marital life might not be a sin, yet it was second in merit to the life of virginity.

A girl was wedded to Christ, because

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy Christ with all thy heart, with all thy mind."

which the church took to mean "Thou shalt not wed".

Thus Abaelard, after his bride Heloise had become a nun in the convent of Argenteuil, addressed her

"To the spouse of Christ, His servant....."

saying,

"Christ is thine, because thou art His spouse. And now thou hast me for a servant, who formerly was thy master....." <sup>22</sup>

in answer to her heart-rending letter. The fight in her heart between the urge for physical pleasure she had experienced before, and the aspiration for the pure life is exactly what

20 IV(E), II. 1638-1652. MerchT. (Merchant's Tale).

21 Cf. R. L. Poole, Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought and Learning. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920).

22 Abaelard and Heloise

makes her letters one of the most beautiful and human in the medieval ages. In many other cases, where the nuns had no human lover to attach their hearts to, their religious ecstasies at the thought of angels or Spiritual Bride came to have subconscious sensual quality, although Taylor says in connection with the Neo-Platonic idea of ecstasy which is analogous to the Christian idea of Ecstasy,

"That ecstasy, however, was to be super-sensual, and indeed came only to those who had long suppressed all cravings of the flesh."<sup>23</sup>

When St. Cecilia says to her bridegroom, Valerian,

"I have an aungel which that loveth me,  
That with greet love, wher so I wake or sleepe,  
Is redy ay my body for to kepe.

"And if that he may feelen, out of drede,  
That ye me touche, or love in vileynye,  
He right anon wol sle yow with the dede,  
And in youre yowthe thus ye sholden dye;"<sup>24</sup>

we wonder if her love of the angel is at all free from sensuality. Taylor says to the same effect;

"Many a mediaeval woman felt a passionate love for the spiritual Bridegroom. Its expression, its suggestions, its training, might transmit power and passion to the love of very mortal men: .....And what reaches of passion might not the Song of Song suggest, although that imagined bridal of the Soul was never deemed a song of human love?"<sup>25</sup>

Needless to say, such sensual quality as seen in this legend of St. Cecilia is far from the vulgar lust of the flesh that the corrupt nuns of the later period felt for men. The medieval ages were full of contradiction. Side by side with the pure

<sup>23</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.* Vol. I. p. 347.

<sup>24</sup> VIII (G), ll. 152—158. SNT.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I. p. 366.

spiritual life of the saints, the divine poverty of St. Francis, and the devout adoration of Mary, there were crude contempt for women, clergymen who simply rolled in wealth, and nuns who were no better than harlots. The law was severe and embodied high ideals of life only because the actual practice of the common people was so sinful, or vice versa ..... the lives of the common people were so below the ideals because the moral code that the exacting laws demanded of them were so strict that they could not be carried into effect. Anyway, such realistic elements do not show in the legend of St. Cecilia, which is a tale of medieval religious devotion verging on fanaticism. And if there is a hint of sensuousness, it is subconscious, and strangely fascinating to those who want to find human elements in the medieval literature, which is the literature of purity and idealism expressed at the expense of human elements. It is fascinating because it is a suppressed cry of human nature groaning under the weight overstrained moral idealism.

Over and over again, and oftener in modern times, we hear scholars pointing out that each tale in the Canterbury Tales should be considered in the light of its teller and we must see how well each is fitted to the character of a man or woman who relates it. The teller of the Legend of St. Cecilia, though generally ascribed to the Second Nun, is open to many controversies, because there is no indication, beyond the rubrics of the MSS, to attribute the tale to the Second Nun. The Prologue indicates nothing of its teller; and the epilogue begins with,

“Whan ended was the lyf of Seinte Cecile,—”<sup>26</sup>

26 VIII (G), l. 554. CYT. (Canon's Yeoman's Prologue).

It is often deduced, from the phrase "unworthy sone of Eve" <sup>27</sup>—a very inappropriate phrase to be used by a nun to denote herself, that Chaucer first intended this to be told by some masculine member of the pilgrim party, <sup>28</sup> or that it is quite possible that he had not made up his mind on this point and that the expression is not an over-sight after all. <sup>29</sup> But the supposition falls on the Second Nun, in view of the fact that this also is the literal translation of the Marian antiphon, *Salve regina*,

*Salve regina, mater misericordiae  
Vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve.  
Ad te clamamus exules filii Hevae,  
Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac hacrimarum  
valle* <sup>30</sup>

The Second Nun is the very person who is likely to tell the legend, yet it must be noted that Chaucer did not write the legend to fit the Second Nun as the teller but worked over the tale he had early written as one of the pilgrim tales, with the result that, as Robinson says;

"The Second Nun's Prologue & Tale.....he took over, but never really adapted." <sup>31</sup>

There is a gap between the lively character drawing, the easy flow of narration endowed with graceful touch of the sympathy he felt for such personality as Madam Eglantine, in whose service the second nun was, and the frigid, crude, narration

27 VIII (G), l. 62. SNT.

28 Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 862.

29 Aage Brusendorff, The Chaucer Tradition (London; Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 131.

30 French, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

31 Robinson, *op. cit.*

of the legend allotted to the Second Nun.

The fact that in this tale Chaucer makes no comment of his own but keeps faithful to the original affirms to us the supposition that it must have been written when his interest in life was not so intense. The legend might faithfully reflect the religious feeling of his time or before it but tells nothing of his own view. It is, therefore, as erroneous to surmise that all this intense religious feeling of the legend is Chaucer's as it is to conclude, with Ten Brink, that An A B C betrays his period of piety passed in his early age.<sup>32</sup> Comparison with Jacobo a Voragine's Legenda Anrea tells us that even what seems most characteristically medieval or most devoutly religious is not his. The passages about Cecilia informing her bridegroom Valerian of her intention to keep ascetic life and also about Cecilia telling Valerian's brother Tiburces that there is a better life in other place;

“I have an aungel which that loveth me;  
That with greet love, wher so I wake or sleepe,  
Is redy ay my body for to kepe.  
And if that he may feelen, out of drede,  
That ye me touche, or love in vileynye,  
He right anon wol sle yow with the dede,  
And in youre yowthe thus ye sholden dye;  
And if that ye in clene love me gye,  
He wol yow loven as me, for youre clenesse,  
And shewen yow his joye and his brightnesse.”<sup>33</sup>

corresponds to the following passages in Legenda Aurea.

“Angelum Dei habeo amatorem, qui nimio zelo custodit corpus meum. Hic si vel leviter senserit, quod tu me pluto

<sup>32</sup> Legouis, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> VIII (G), ll. 152-161. SNT.

amore contingas, statim feriet te, et amittes florem tuae gratissimae juventutis, si autem cognoverit, quod me sincero amore diligas, ita quoque diliget te sicut me, et ostendet tibi gloriam suam." <sup>34</sup>

and

"But ther is bettre lif in oother place,  
That nevere shal be lost, ne drede thee noght,  
Which Goddes Sone us tolde thurgh his grace.  
That Fadres Sone hath alle thyng ywroght,  
And al that wroght is with a skilful thoght,  
The Goost, that fro the Fader gan procede,  
Hath sowled hem, withouten any drede.  
By word and by myracle Goddes Sone,  
Whan he was in this world, declared heere  
That ther was oother lyf ther men may wone." <sup>35</sup>

corresponds to

"Si haec sola esset vita, juste hanc perdere timeremus; est autem alia melior, quae nunquam amittitur, quam nobis Dei filius enarravit. Omnia enim, quae facta sunt, filius ex patre genitus condidit, universa autem, quae condita sunt, ex patre procedens spiritus animavit. Hic igitur filius Dei in mundum veniens verbis et miraculis aliam vitam esse nobis monstravit." <sup>36</sup>

Thus in rendering the Latin prose into English verse, Chaucer's "licence" was used rather in cutting off the dull parts and retaining the pretty ones than in adding anything to it.

Again, as Prof. Legouis points out in his Chaucer <sup>37</sup> An A B C was composed by the request of Blanch Duchess of Lancaster—a dubious statement made by Soeght in the

<sup>34</sup> Chaucer Society, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>35</sup> VIII (G), ll. 323-332. SNT.

<sup>36</sup> Chaucer Society, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>37</sup> Legouis, op. cit., p. 63.

sixteenth century which enables us to date the composition of the poem before or shortly after her death in 1367—the poem being a free translation of a prayer in Deguillencille's Le Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine written about 1330. By free I mean the metrical freedom taken by Chaucer in translation of the original French text of octasyllabic 12 line stanza verse built on two rhymes into eight-line stanzas of a b a b b c b c rhyme scheme, of decasyllabic line, and his method of taking a clue from two or three lines of the original poem and working it over, sometimes supplying his own metaphor. For example, comparison of the Virgin Mary to "flower of flowers" (l. 40). Medieval poems on adoration of Mary had already been predominant in the eleventh century and remained until the end of the Middle Ages over against the counterbalancing disdain of women as the daughter of Eve, and as is customary with such poems this one is packed with allusions and metaphors. Some of them, such as

Kalenderes enlumyned ben thei

That in this world been lighted with thi name;<sup>38</sup>

or the metaphor comparing the Virgin to a healer whose medicine the poet seeks,

Now, queen of comfort, sith thou art that same

To whom I seeche for my medicyne.....<sup>39</sup>

are very sweet but not his own. On the whole, the tautological construction and the artificial and rather conventional phrases deprives the poem of warm personal feeling of adoration. That is because the poet resorted to a French poem for inspiration, and French poetry at the time of Chaucer was barren.

---

38 An A B C, ll. 73-74.

39 Ibid., ll. 77-78.

Legouis says:

"..... French poetry was never more wretched and destitute than during the period extending from Rutebeuf to Villon, or, if it be preferred from the Roman de la Rose to Charles d'Orléans.....It is surprising to compare this lifeless poetry with the rich prose of the same period." <sup>40</sup>

According to him, the childish grace of Froissart's verse, or the prosiness of Eustache Deschamps relieves the monotony of this gaudy garden of artificial flowers where young Chaucer came for picking flowers. Even Machaut, whose Roman de la Rose Chaucer loved and translated, and to whose credit may it be said that Chaucer got his inspiration for the Book of the Duchess, House of Fame, Parliament of Foules, Legend of Good Women, and other minor poems,—even Machaut bound him in a sense with his fetters of symbolism for a long time afterwards. It took him his two Italian journeys (in 1372 and 1378) and his contact <sup>41</sup> with Petrarch and Boccaccio, although perhaps not personal contact with the latter, to get rid of the over-elaborate allegories.

Compared to this artificiality, some lyrics by his contemporaries in clerical circles seem to sing more straightforward praises of the Virgin and Son. Take, for example, a midcentury lyric;

The Christ Child Shivering With Cold.

Ler to loven as y love the;  
 On al my limes thu mith i-se  
 Hou sore thei quaken for colde;  
 For the i suffre michil wo,

<sup>40</sup> Legouis, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. John Manly, Caterbury Tales (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1931), pp. 43-44.

Love me, suete, an no-mo —  
To the i take and holde.

Ihesu, suete sone dere,  
In porful bed thu list now here,  
And that me greuet sore;  
For thi credel is als a bere,  
Ox and Asse ben thi fere—  
Wepen may i ther fore.

Ihesu, suete, be nout wroth,  
I have neither clut ne cloth  
The inne for to folde;  
I ne lave but a clut of a lappe,  
Therefore ley thi feet to my pappe,  
And kep the fro the colde.

Cold the taket, i may wel se.  
For love of man it mot be  
The to suffren wo,  
For bet it is thu suffre this  
Than man for-bere hevne blis—  
Thus most him bizen ther-to.

Sythen it most nedes that thu be ded  
To saven men fro the qued,  
Thi suete wil be do.  
But let me nouth duellen her to long;  
After thi det me underfonge  
To ben for evermo. Amen. <sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Carleton Brown, ed., Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century (Oxford University Press, 1924).

## Note 1.

In some instances nuns lapsed trances where things took shapes of symbolical interpretation of the Bible. Hildegard of Bingen (1099-1179) in her ecstasy saw, "Wind having the storm-cloud over it,.....a multitude of the blessed.....darkness.....a countless crowd of lost souls." <sup>43</sup> Being a woman of intellectual power, she saw symbols and heard voices from Heaven as appertaining for the propagation of dogmas and convictions, in the Apocryphal form. With women of more emotional tendency than Hildegard, the vision was one of morbid ecstasy of love, which was at that time thought consummation of piety in woman. We hear of the hysterical joy of a passionate nun at the thought of her spiritual Spouse. What Jacques de Vitry who consecrated the holy bones of Mary of Ognies and who had known her till her death, witnessed in her nunnery is proof enough:

"Some of these women dissolved with such a particular and marvellous love toward God that they languished with desire, and for years had rarely been able to rise from their cots. They had no other infirmity, save that their souls were melted with desire of Him, and sweetly resting with the Lord, as they were comforted in spirit they were weakened in body." <sup>44</sup>

In the Canterbury Tales we are inclined to think the Legend of St. Cecilia was intended for the Second Nun for one reason because it included the kind of vision intellectual nuns would likely see.

This angel hadde of roses and of lilie  
 Corones two, the which he bar in honde;  
 And first to Cecile, as I understonde,

<sup>43</sup> Taylor op. cit., p. 469.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 477.

He yaf of that oon. And after gan he take  
That oother to Valerian,.....<sup>45</sup>

after Valerian's baptism and his resolution to help his bride  
live a life of virgin in marriage. The crown of roses and of  
lylys is the symbol of martydom and purity.

---

45 VIII (G), ll. 220 f. SNT.