GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE PROLOGUE TO THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

[SOME difference of opinion exists as to the date at which Chaucer wrote "The Legend of Good Women." Those who would fix that date at a period not long before the poet's death — who would place the poem, indeed, among his closing labours — support their opinion by the fact that the Prologue recites most of Chaucer's principal works, and glances, besides, at a long array of other productions, too many to be fully catalogued. But, on the other hand, it is objected that the "Legend" makes no mention of "The Canterbury Tales" as such; while two of those Tales — the Knight's and the Second Nun's — are enumerated by the titles which they bore as separate compositions, before they were incorporated in the great collection: "The Love of Palamon and Arcite," and "The Life of Saint Cecile" (see note 1 to the Second Nun's tale). Tyrwhitt seems perfectly justified in placing the composition of the poem immediately before that of Chaucer's magnum opus, and after the marriage of Richard II to his first queen, Anne of Bohemia. That event took place in 1382; and since it is to Anne that the poet refers when he makes Alcestis bid him give his poem to the queen "at Eltham or at Sheen," the "Legend" could not have been written earlier. The old editions tell us that "several ladies in the Court took offence at Chaucer's large speeches against the untruth of women; therefore the queen enjoin'd him to compile this book in the commendation of sundry maidens and wives, who show'd themselves faithful to faithless men. This seems to have been written after The Flower and the Leaf." Evidently it was, for distinct references to that poem are to be found in the Prologue; but more interesting is the indication which it furnishes, that "Troilus and Cressida" was the work, not of the poet's youth, but of his maturer age. We could hardly expect the queen — whether of Love or of England — to demand seriously from Chaucer a retractation of sentiments which he had expressed a full generation before, and for which he had made atonement by the splendid praises of true love sung in "The Court of Love," "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale," and other poems of youth and middle life. But "Troilus and Cressida" is coupled with "The Romance of the Rose," as one of the poems which had given offence to the servants and the God of Love; therefore we may suppose it to have more prominently engaged courtly notice at a later period of the poet's life, than even its undoubted popularity could explain. At whatever date, or in whatever circumstances, undertaken, "The Legend of Good Women" is a fragment. There are several signs that it was designed to contain the stories of twenty-five ladies, although the number of the good women is in the poem itself set down at nineteen; but nine legends only were actually composed, or have come down to us. They are, those of Cleopatra Queen of Egypt (126 lines), Thisbe of Babylon (218), Dido Queen of Carthage (442), Hypsipyle and Medea (312), Lucrece of Rome (206), Ariadne of Athens (340), Phiomela (167), Phyllis (168), and Hypermnestra (162). Prefixed to these stories, which are translated or imitated from Ovid, is a Prologue containing 579

lines — the only part of the "Legend" given in the present edition. It is by far the most original, the strongest, and most pleasing part of the poem; the description of spring, and of his enjoyment of that season, are in Chaucer's best manner; and the political philosophy by which Alcestis mitigates the wrath of Cupid, adds another to the abounding proofs that, for his knowledge of the world, Chaucer fairly merits the epithet of "many-sided" which Shakespeare has won by his knowledge of man.]

A THOUSAND times I have hearde tell,
That there is joy in heav'n, and pain in hell;
And I accord* it well that it is so; *grant, agree
But, natheless, yet wot* I well also, *know
That there is none dwelling in this country
That either hath in heav'n or hell y-be;* *been
Nor may of it no other wayes witten* *know
But as he hath heard said, or found it written;
For by assay* there may no man it preve.** *practical trial
**prove, test
But God forbid but that men should believe
Well more thing than men have seen with eye!
Men shall not weenen ev'ry thing a lie
But if himself it seeth, or else do'th; *unless
For, God wot, thing is never the less sooth,* *true
Though ev'ry wighte may it not y-see.
Bernard, the Monke, saw not all, pardie! <1>
Then muste we to bookes that we find
(Through which that olde thinges be in mind),
And to the doctrine of these olde wise,
Give credence, in ev'ry skilful* wise, *reasonable
That tellen of these old approved stories,
Of holiness, of regnes,* of victories, *reigns, kingdoms
Of love, of hate, and other sundry things
Of which I may not make rehearsings;
And if that olde bookes were away,
Y-lorn were of all remembrance the key.
Well ought we, then, to honour and believe
These bookes, where we have none other preve.* *proof
And as for me, though that I know but lite,* *little
On bookes for to read I me delight,
And to them give I faith and good credence,
And in my heart have them in reverence,
So heartily, that there is *game none* <2> *no amusement*
That from my bookes maketh me to go'n,
But it be seldom on the holyday;
Save, certainly, when that the month of May
Is comen, and I hear the fowles sing,

And that the flowers ginnen for to spring,
Farewell my book and my devotion!
Now have I then such a condition,
That, above all the flowers in the mead,
Then love I most these flowers white and red,
Such that men calle Day's-eyes in our town;
To them have I so great affectioun,
As I said erst, when comen is the May,
That in my bed there dawneth me no day
That I n'am* up, and walking in the mead, *am not
To see this flow'r against the sunne spread,
When it upriseth early by the morrow;
That blissful sight softeneth all my sorrow,
So glad am I, when that I have presence
Of it, to do it alle reverence,
As she that is of alle flowers flow'r,
Fulfilled of all virtue and honour,
And ever alike fair, and fresh of hue;
As well in winter, as in summer new,
This love I ever, and shall until I die;
All* swear I not, of this I will not lie, *although
There loved no wight hotter in his life.
And when that it is eve, I runne blife,* *quickly, eagerly
As soon as ever the sun begins to west,* *decline westward
To see this flow'r, how it will go to rest,
For fear of night, so hateth she darkness!
Her cheer* is plainly spread in the brightness *countenance
Of the sunne, for there it will unclose.
Alas! that I had English, rhyme or prose,
Sufficient this flow'r to praise aright!
But help me, ye that have *cunning or might;* *skill or power*
Ye lovers, that can make of sentiment,
In this case ought ye to be diligent
To further me somewhat in my labour,
Whether ye be with the Leaf or the Flow'r; <3>
For well I wot, that ye have herebefore
Of making ropen,* and led away the corn; <4> *reaped
And I come after, gleaning here and there,
And am full glad if I may find an ear
Of any goodly word that you have left.
And though it hap me to rehearsen eft* *again
What ye have in your freshe songes said,
Forbeare me, and be not *evil apaid,* *displeased*
Since that ye see I do it in th'honour

Of love, and eke in service of the flow'r
Whom that I serve as I have wit or might. <5>
She is the clearness, and the very* light, *true
That in this darke world me winds* and leads; *turns, guides
The heart within my sorrowful breast you dreads,
And loves so sore, that ye be, verily,
The mistress of my wit, and nothing I.
My word, my works, are knit so in your bond,
That, as a harp obeyeth to the hand,
That makes it sound after his fingering,
Right so may ye out of my hearte bring
Such voice, right as you list, to laugh or plain;* *complain, mourn
Be ye my guide, and lady sovereign.
As to mine earthly god, to you I call,
Both in this work, and in my sorrows all.
But wherefore that I spake to give credence
To old stories, and do them reverence,
And that men muste more things believe
Than they may see at eye, or elles preve,* *prove
That shall I say, when that I see my time;
I may not all at ones speak in rhyme.
My busy ghost,* that thirsteth always new *spirit
To see this flow'r so young, so fresh of hue,
Constrained me with so greedy desire,
That in my heart I feele yet the fire,
That made me to rise ere it were day, —
And this was now the first morrow of May, —
With dreadful heart, and glad devotion,
For to be at the resurrection
Of this flower, when that it should unclose
Against the sun, that rose as red as rose,
That in the breast was of the beast* that day *the sign of the Bull
That Agenore's daughter led away. <6>
And down on knees anon right I me set,
And as I could this freshe flow'r I gret,* *greeted
Kneeling alway, till it unclosed was,
Upon the smalle, softe, sweete grass,
That was with flowers sweet embroider'd all,
Of such sweetness and such odour *o'er all,* *everywhere*
That, for to speak of gum, or herb, or tree,
Comparison may none y-maked be;
For it surmounteth plainly all odours,
And for rich beauty the most gay of flow'rs.
Forgotten had the earth his poor estate

Of winter, that him naked made and mate,* *dejected, lifeless
And with his sword of cold so sore grieved;
Now hath th'attemper* sun all that releaved** *temperate **furnished
That naked was, and clad it new again. anew with leaves
The smalle fowles, of the season fain,* *glad
That of the panter* and the net be scap'd, *draw-net
Upon the fowler, that them made awhap'd* *terrified, confounded
In winter, and destroyed had their brood,
In his despite them thought it did them good
To sing of him, and in their song despise
The foule churl, that, for his covetise,* *greed
Had them betrayed with his sophistry* *deceptions
This was their song: "The fowler we defy,
And all his craft:" and some sunge clear
Layes of love, that joy it was to hear,
In worshipping* and praising of their make;** *honouring **mate
And for the blissful newe summer's sake,
Upon the branches full of blossoms soft,
In their delight they turned them full oft,
And sunge, "Blessed be Saint Valentine! <7>
For on his day I chose you to be mine,
Withoute repenting, my hearte sweet."
And therewithal their heals began to meet,
Yielding honour, and humble obeisances,
To love, and did their other observances
That longen unto Love and to Nature;
Construe that as you list, I *do no cure.* *care nothing*
And those that hadde *done unkindeness,* *committed offence
As doth the tidife, <8> for newfangleness, against natural laws*
Besoughte mercy for their trespassing
And humblely sange their repenting,
And swore upon the blossoms to be true;
So that their mates would upon them rue,* *take pity
And at the laste made their accord.* *reconciliation
All* found they Danger** for a time a lord, *although **disdain
Yet Pity, through her stronge gentle might,
Forgave, and made mercy pass aright
Through Innocence, and ruled Courtesy.
But I ne call not innocence folly
Nor false pity, for virtue is the mean,
As Ethic <9> saith, in such manner I mean.
And thus these fowles, void of all malice,
Accorded unto Love, and lefte vice
Of hate, and sangen all of one accord,

"Welcome, Summer, our governor and lord!"
And Zephyrus and Flora gentilly
Gave to the flowers, soft and tenderly,
Their sweete breath, and made them for to spread,
As god and goddess of the flow'ry mead;
In which me thought I mighte, day by day,
Dwellen alway, the jolly month of May,
Withoute sleep, withoute meat or drink.
Adown full softly I began to sink,
And, leaning on mine elbow and my side
The longe day I shope* to abide, *resolved, prepared
For nothing elles, and I shall not lie
But for to look upon the daisy;
That men by reason well it calle may
The Daye's-eye, or else the Eye of Day,
The empress and the flow'r of flowers all
I pray to God that faire may she fall!
And all that love flowers, for her sake:
But, nathelesse, *ween not that I make* *do not fancy that I
In praising of the Flow'r against the Leaf, write this poem*
No more than of the corn against the sheaf;
For as to me is lever none nor lother,
I n'am withholden yet with neither n'other.<10>
Nor I n'ot who serves Leaf, nor who the Flow'r; *nor do I know*
Well *brooke they* their service or labour! *may they profit by*
For this thing is all of another tun, <11>
Of old story, ere such thing was begun.
When that the sun out of the south gan west,
And that this flow'r gan close, and go to rest,
For darkness of the night, the which she dread;* *dreaded
Home to my house full swiftly I me sped,
To go to rest, and early for to rise,
To see this flower spread, as I devise.* *describe
And in a little arbour that I have,
That benched was of turfes fresh y-grave,* <12> *cut out
I bade men shoulde me my couche make;
For dainty* of the newe summer's sake, *pleasure
I bade them strowe flowers on my bed.
When I was laid, and had mine eyen hid,
I fell asleep; within an hour or two,
Me mette* how I lay in the meadow tho,** *dreamed **then
To see this flow'r that I love so and dread.
And from afar came walking in the mead
The God of Love, and in his hand a queen;

And she was clad in royal habit green;
A fret* of gold she hadde next her hair, *band
And upon that a white corown she bare,
With flowrons* small, and, as I shall not lie, *florets <13>
For all the world right as a daisy
Y-crowned is, with white leaves lite,* *small
So were the flowrons of her crowne white.
For of one pearle, fine, oriential,
Her white crowne was y-maked all,
For which the white crown above the green
Made her like a daisy for to see'n,* *look upon
Consider'd eke her fret of gold above.
Y-clothed was this mighty God of Love
In silk embroider'd, full of greene greves,* *boughs
In which there was a fret of red rose leaves,
The freshest since the world was first begun.
His gilt hair was y-crowned with a sun,
lnstead of gold, for* heaviness and weight; *to avoid
Therewith me thought his face shone so bright,
That well unnethes might I him behold;
And in his hand me thought I saw him hold
Two fiery dartes, as the gledes* red; *glowing coals
And angel-like his winges saw I spread.
And *all be* that men say that blind is he, *although*
Algate* me thoughte that he might well see; *at all events
For sternly upon me he gan behold,
So that his looking *did my hearte cold.* *made my heart
And by the hand he held this noble queen, grow cold*
Crowned with white, and clothed all in green,
So womanly, so benign, and so meek,
That in this worlde, though that men would seek.
Half of her beauty shoulde they not find
In creature that formed is by Kind;* *Nature
And therefore may I say, as thinketh me,
This song in praising of this lady free:
"Hide, Absolon, thy gilte* tresses clear; *golden
Esther, lay thou thy meekness all adown;
Hide, Jonathan, all thy friendly mannere,
Penelope, and Marcia Catoun,<14>
Make of your wifehood no comparisoun;
Hide ye your beauties, Isoude <15> and Helene;
My lady comes, that all this may distain.* *outdo, obscure
"Thy faire body let it not appear,
Lavine; <16> and thou, Lucrece of Rome town;

And Polyxene, <17> that boughte love so dear,
And Cleopatra, with all thy passioun,
Hide ye your truth of love, and your renown;
And thou, Thisbe, that hadst of love such pain
My lady comes, that all this may distain.
"Hero, Dido, Laodamia, y-fere,* *together
And Phyllis, hanging for Demophoon,
And Canace, espied by thy cheer,
Hypsipyle, betrayed by Jasoun,
Make of your truthe neither boast nor soun';
Nor Hypermnestr' nor Ariadne, ye twain;
My lady comes, that all this may distain."
This ballad may full well y-sungen be,
As I have said erst, by my lady free;
For, certainly, all these may not suffice
T'appaire with my lady in no wise; *surpass in beauty
For, as the sunne will the fire distain, or honour*
So passeth all my lady sovereign,
That is so good, so fair, so debonair,
I pray to God that ever fall her fair!
For *n'hadde comfort been* of her presence, *had I not the
I had been dead, without any defence, comfort of*
For dread of Love's wordes, and his cheer;
As, when time is, hereafter ye shall hear.
Behind this God of Love, upon the green,
I saw coming of Ladies nineteen,
In royal habit, a full easy pace;
And after them of women such a trace,* *train
That, since that God Adam had made of earth,
The thirde part of mankind, or the ferth,* *fourth
Ne ween'd I not by possibility, *I never fancied*
Had ever in this wide world y-be;* *been
And true of love these women were each one.
Now whether was that a wonder thing, or non,* *not
That, right anon as that they gan espy
This flow'r, which that I call the daisy,
Full suddenly they stenten* all at once, *stopped
And kneeled down, as it were for the nonce,
And sange with one voice, "Heal and honour
To truth of womanhead, and to this flow'r,
That bears our aller prize in figuring; *that in its figure bears
Her white crowne bears the witnessing!" the prize from us all*
And with that word, *a-compass enviroun* *all around in a ring*
They sette them full softely adown.

First sat the God of Love, and since* his queen, *afterwards
With the white corowne, clad in green;
And sithen* all the remnant by and by, *then
As they were of estate, full courteously;
And not a word was spoken in the place,
The mountance* of a furlong way of space. *extent <18>
I, kneeling by this flow'r, in good intent
Abode, to knowe what this people meant,
As still as any stone, till, at the last,
The God of Love on me his eyen cast,
And said, "Who kneeleth there? "and I answer'd
Unto his asking, when that I it heard,
And said, "It am I," and came to him near,
And salued* him. Quoth he, "What dost thou here, *saluted
So nigh mine owen flow'r, so boldely?
It were better worthy, truely,
A worm to nighe* near my flow'r than thou." *approach, draw nigh
"And why, Sir," quoth I, "an' it liketh you?"
"For thou," quoth he, "art thereto nothing able,
It is my relic,* dign** and delectable, *emblem <19> **worthy
And thou my foe, and all my folk warrayest,* *molestest, censurest
And of mine olde servants thou missayest,
And hind'rest them, with thy translation,
And lettest* folk from their devotion *preventest
To serve me, and holdest it folly
To serve Love; thou may'st it not deny;
For in plain text, withoute need of glose,* *comment, gloss
Thu hast translated the Romance of the Rose,
That is a heresy against my law,
And maketh wise folk from me withdraw;
And of Cresside thou hast said as thee list,
That maketh men to women less to trust,
That be as true as e'er was any steel.
Of thine answer *advise thee right weel;* *consider right well*
For though that thou *renied hast my lay,* *abjured my law
As other wretches have done many a day, or religion*
By Sainte Venus, that my mother is,
If that thou live, thou shalt repente this,
So cruelly, that it shall well be seen."
Then spake this Lady, clothed all in green,
And saide, "God, right of your courtesy,
Ye mighte hearken if he can reply
Against all this, that ye have *to him meved;* *advanced against him*
A godde shoulde not be thus aggrieved,

But of his deity he shall be stable,
And thereto gracious and merciable.* *merciful
And if ye n'ere* a god, that knoweth all, *were not
Then might it be, as I you telle shall,
This man to you may falsely be accused,
Whereas by right him ought to be excused;
For in your court is many a losengeour,* *deceiver <20>
And many a *quaint toteler accusour,* *strange prating accuser <21>*
That tabour* in your eares many a soun', *drum
Right after their imaginatioun,
To have your dalliance,* and for envy; *pleasant conversation,
These be the causes, and I shall not lie, company
Envy is lavender* of the Court alway, *laundress
For she departeth neither night nor day <22>
Out of the house of Caesar, thus saith Dant';
Whoso that go'th, algate* she shall not want. *at all events
And eke, parauntre,* for this man is nice,** *peradventure **foolish
He mighte do it guessing* no malice; *thinking
For he useth thinges for to make;* *compose poetry
Him *recketh naught of * what mattere he take; *cares nothing for*
Or he was bidden *make thilke tway* *compose those two*
Of* some person, and durst it not withsay;* *by **refuse, deny
Or him repenteth utterly of this.
He hath not done so grievously amiss,
To translate what olde clerkes write,
As though that he of malice would endite,* *write down
Despite of Love, and had himself it wrought. *contempt for*
This should a righteous lord have in his thought,
And not be like tyrants of Lombardy,
That have no regard but at tyranny.
For he that king or lord is naturel,
Him oughte not be tyrant or cruel, <23>
As is a farmer, <24> to do the harm he can;
He muste think, it is his liegeman,
And is his treasure, and his gold in coffer;
This is the sentence* of the philosopher: *opinion, sentiment
A king to keep his lieges in justice,
Withoute doubte that is his office.
All* will he keep his lords in their degree, — *although
As it is right and skilful* that they be, *reasonable
Enhanced and honoured, and most dear,
For they be halfe* in this world here, — *demigods
Yet must he do both right to poor and rich,
All be that their estate be not y-lich;* *alike

And have of poore folk compassion.
For lo! the gentle kind of the lion;
For when a fly offendeth him, or biteth,
He with his tail away the flye smiteth,
All easily; for of his gentery* *nobleness
Him deigneth not to wreak him on a fly,
As doth a cur, or else another beast.
In noble corage ought to be arrest, *in a noble nature ought
And weighen ev'rything by equity, to be self-restraint*
And ever have regard to his degree.
For, Sir, it is no mastery for a lord
To damn* a man, without answer of word; *condemn
And for a lord, that is *full foul to use.* *most infamous practice*
And it be so he* may him not excuse, *the offender
But asketh mercy with a dreadful* heart, *fearing, timid
And proffereth him, right in his bare shirt,
To be right at your owen judgement,
Then ought a god, by short advisement,* *deliberation
Consider his own honour, and his trespass;
For since no pow'r of death lies in this case,
You ought to be the lighter merciable;
Lette* your ire, and be somewhat tractable! *restrain
This man hath served you of his cunning,* *ability, skill
And further'd well your law in his making.* *composing poetry
Albeit that he cannot well endite,
Yet hath he made lewed* folk delight *ignorant
To serve you, in praising of your name.
He made the book that hight the House of Fame,
And eke the Death of Blanche the Duchess,
And the Parliament of Fowles, as I guess,
And all the Love of Palamon and Arcite, <25>
Of Thebes, though the story is known lite;* *little
And many a hymne for your holydays,
That highte ballads, roundels, virelays.
And, for to speak of other holiness,
He hath in prose translated Boece, <26>
And made the Life also of Saint Cecile;
He made also, gone is a greate while,
Origenes upon the Magdalene. <27>
Him oughte now to have the lesse pain;* *penalty
He hath made many a lay, and many a thing.
Now as ye be a god, and eke a king,
I your Alcestis, <28> whilom queen of Thrace,
I aske you this man, right of your grace,

That ye him never hurt in all his life;
And he shall sweare to you, and that blife,* *quickly
He shall no more aguilten* in this wise, *offend
But shall maken, as ye will him devise,
Of women true in loving all their life,
Whereso ye will, of maiden or of wife,
And further you as much as he missaid
Or* in the Rose, or elles in Cresseide." *either
The God of Love answered her anon:
"Madame," quoth he, "it is so long agone
That I you knew, so charitable and true,
That never yet, since that the world was new,
To me ne found I better none than ye;
If that I woulde save my degree,
I may nor will not warne* your request; *refuse
All lies in you, do with him as you lest.
I all forgive withoute longer space;* *delay
For he who gives a gift, or doth a grace,
Do it betimes, his thank is well the more; <29>
And deeme* ye what he shall do therefor. *adjudge
Go thanke now my Lady here," quoth he.
I rose, and down I set me on my knee,
And saide thus; "Madame, the God above
Foryielde* you that ye the God of Love *reward
Have made me his wrathe to forgive;
And grace* so longe for to live, *give me grace
That I may knowe soothly what ye be,
That have me help'd, and put in this degree!
But truely I ween'd, as in this case,
Naught t' have aguilt,* nor done to Love trespass;** *offended
For why? a true man, withoute dread, **offence
Hath not *to parte with* a thieve's deed. *any share in*
Nor a true lover oughte me to blame,
Though that I spoke a false lover some shame.
They oughte rather with me for to hold,
For that I of Cressida wrote or told,
Or of the Rose, *what so mine author meant;* *made a true translation*
Algate, God wot, it was mine intent *by all ways
To further truth in love, and it cherice,* *cherish
And to beware from falseness and from vice,
By such example; this was my meaning."
And she answer'd; "Let be thine arguing,
For Love will not counterpleaded be <30>
In right nor wrong, and learne that of me;

Thou hast thy grace, and hold thee right thereto.
Now will I say what penance thou shalt do
For thy trespass;* and understand it here: *offence
Thou shalt, while that thou livest, year by year,
The moste partie of thy time spend
In making of a glorious Legend
Of Goode Women, maidenes and wives,
That were true in loving all their lives;
And tell of false men that them betray,
That all their life do naught but assay
How many women they may do a shame;
For in your world that is now *held a game.* *considered a sport*
And though thou like not a lover be, <31>
Speak well of love; this penance give I thee.
And to the God of Love I shall so pray,
That he shall charge his servants, by any way,
To further thee, and well thy labour quite:* *requite
Go now thy way, thy penance is but lite.
And, when this book ye make, give it the queen
On my behalf, at Eltham, or at Sheen."
The God of Love gan smile, and then he said:
"Know'st thou," quoth he, "whether this be wife or maid,
Or queen, or countess, or of what degree,
That hath so little penance given thee,
That hath deserved sorely for to smart?
But pity runneth soon in gentle* heart; <32> *nobly born
That may'st thou see, she kitheth* what she is. *showeth
And I answer'd: "Nay, Sir, so have I bliss,
No more but that I see well she is good."
"That is a true tale, by my hood,"
Quoth Love; "and that thou knowest well, pardie!
If it be so that thou advise* thee. *bethink
Hast thou not in a book, li'th* in thy chest, *(that) lies
The greate goodness of the queen Alceste,
That turned was into a daisy
She that for her husbande chose to die,
And eke to go to hell rather than he;
And Hercules rescued her, pardie!
And brought her out of hell again to bliss?"
And I answer'd again, and saide; "Yes,
Now know I her; and is this good Alceste,
The daisy, and mine own hearte's rest?
Now feel I well the goodness of this wife,
That both after her death, and in her life,

Her greate bounty* doubleth her renown. *virtue
Well hath she quit* me mine affectioun *recompensed
That I have to her flow'r the daisy;
No wonder is though Jove her stellify, <33>
As telleth Agathon, <34> for her goodness;
Her white crowne bears of it witness;
For all so many virtues hadde she
As smalle flowrons in her crowne be.
In remembrance of her, and in honour,
Cybele made the daisy, and the flow'r,
Y-crowned all with white, as men may see,
And Mars gave her a crowne red, pardie!
Instead of rubies set among the white."
Therewith this queen wax'd red for shame a lite
When she was praised so in her presence.
Then saide Love: "A full great negligence
Was it to thee, that ilke* time thou made *that same
'Hide Absolon thy tresses,' in ballade,
That thou forgot her in thy song to set,
Since that thou art so greatly in her debt,
And knowest well that calendar* is she *guide, example
To any woman that will lover be:
For she taught all the craft of true loving,
And namely* of wifehood the living, *especially
And all the boundes that she ought to keep:
Thy little wit was thilke* time asleep. *that
But now I charge thee, upon thy life,
That in thy Legend thou make* of this wife, *poetise, compose
When thou hast other small y-made before;
And fare now well, I charge thee no more.
But ere I go, thus much I will thee tell, —
Never shall no true lover come in hell.
These other ladies, sitting here a-row,
Be in my ballad, if thou canst them know,
And in thy bookes all thou shalt them find;
Have them in thy Legend now all in mind;
I mean of them that be in thy knowing.
For here be twenty thousand more sitting
Than that thou knowest, goode women all,
And true of love, for aught that may befall;
Make the metres of them as thee lest;
I must go home, — the sunne draweth west, —
To Paradise, with all this company:
And serve alway the freshe daisy.

At Cleopatra I will that thou begin,
And so forth, and my love so shalt thou win;
For let see now what man, that lover be,
Will do so strong a pain for love as she.
I wot well that thou may'st not all it rhyme,
That suche lovers didden in their time;
It were too long to readen and to hear;
Suffice me thou make in this mannere,
That thou rehearse of all their life the great,* *substance
After* these old authors list for to treat; *according as
For whoso shall so many a story tell,
Say shortly, or he shall too longe dwell."
And with that word my bookes gan I take,
And right thus on my Legend gan I make.
Thus endeth the Prologue.

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 wifehood 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 "tatler," 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 courtezan; 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.