

enemies accused her of all kinds of wickedness, separated her from every one she loved, and tried to kill her. Twice was she sent adrift on the sea in an open boat, the second time with her little child in her arms. But she trusted patiently in God, and prayed to Him, and at last He delivered her out of all her troubles, and brought her safe home to her husband and her father. Then "she praiseth God a hundred thousand times." We are rather surprised that it is the dry old lawyer who tells such a touching story, and makes us feel the beauty and sweetness of Custance.

The host commended this tale. It showed, he said, that learned men knew many good things; so he asked the poor parson, another learned man, to keep to his agreement, and tell them the next tale. The parson answered politely, but was rudely interrupted by the shipman, who objected to the host's request, saying that the parson would preach a sermon instead of telling a story, and that they wanted no preaching. He really wanted to tell his own story, which, he said, had no learning in it, but was a merry tale, and would wake them all up.

The shipman was right about the parson, for when, last of all, that good man was called upon again, he said that he would tell no fables, but that, if they would listen, they might hear a moral and virtuous tale. Said he:

Why should I sow chaff when I might sow wheat? I will try to please you, but I cannot rhyme. So I will tell my tale in prose, and it shall be the last. And I pray God that He will give me skill to show you, on this journey, the way of the perfect and glorious pilgrimage that leads to the heavenly Jerusalem.

The pilgrims all thought that it was right and proper to end their stories with some good teaching, so they begged the parson to go on, and promised to listen gladly. The host, however, asked him to make haste, and to say what he had to say "in little space." The parson then preached a sermon, and a good sermon it was. But it certainly was very long, and we should not call it a tale, though Chaucer does.

In the meantime, all the other tales had been told. The prioress had a pretty, touching story of a little Christian boy who was murdered by the Jews. This made the pilgrims all very sober, and the host asked Chaucer to tell a tale of mirth to cheer them up.

Chaucer said he could not think of anything but a rhyme that he had learned a long time ago. Now

this rhyme was a funny, clever imitation of the long and tiresome rhymed stories of the time, and when Chaucer had mischievously recited about thirty verses, the host said:

"Oh, you make me tired, my ears ache with your worthless rhymes."

"Why do you stop me?" said Chaucer, demurely. "You did not stop any of the others. I'm doing the best I can."

"Because," said the host, "you are only wasting time. Stop rhyming, for pity's sake, and let us see whether you can't tell us something in prose that will be either amusing or instructive."

Then Chaucer offered to tell them "a little thing in prose," that he thought they would like. But it really was a very long and rather stupid story. It was about a man who had a very good tempered and patient wife; and when it was ended, the host said he did wish that his wife could have heard it, for she was anything but patient. Then the monk was asked for his tale, and he told a number of short stories that he had read, all about famous men who had fallen from great prosperity and happiness, to misery, such as Adam, and Alexander the Great, and Julius Cæsar. The priest who attended on the prioress next told a very amusing story about a cock and a hen. This brought them to the end of their second day's journey, and it is thought that they stopped that night at Rochester, which is thirty miles from London.

The physician was the first story-teller the next day, and he told the story of the Roman girl, Virginia, which Lord Macaulay has told in one of his "Lays." Next came the pardoner, who told one of the most impressive tales of all. Then it was the turn of the wife of Bath, and she had a great deal to say before she began her story. She said that there were a great many tales about wicked women, but they were all written by men, and that if women had only written stories, people would know more about the wicked deeds that men had done. In her story, which is of a knight and lady of King Arthur's time, the lady reads her husband a long lecture about judging people by outward appearances, and being scornful of those who are poor or of low degree. She says:

Look who that is most virtuous alway,
Prive* and apert† and most entendeth aye
To do the gentle deedès that he can,
And take him for the greatest gentleman.

* Private, retiring. † Open, frank.