

# VARIOUS

NOTES AND QUERIES,  
NUMBER 72, MARCH 15,  
1851

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**Various  
Notes and Queries, Number 72,  
March 15, 1851 / A Medium of Inter-  
communication for Literary Men,  
Artists, Antiquaries, Genealogists, etc**

**Notes**

**ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHAUCER**

**(Vol. iii., pp. 131. 133.)**

I am glad to perceive that some of the correspondents of "Notes and Queries" are turning their attention to the elucidation of Chaucer. The text of our father-poet, having remained as it were in fallow since the time of Tyrwhitt, now presents a rich field for industry; and, in offering free port and entry to all comments and suggestions, to be there sifted and garnered up, the pages of "Notes and Queries" may soon become a depository from which ample materials may be obtained for a new edition of Chaucer, now become an acknowledged desideratum.

One excellent illustration has lately been added, at page 133., in a note without signature upon "Nettle in, dock out." If *confirmed*<sup>1</sup>, it will furnish not only a most satisfactory explanation of that hitherto incomprehensible phrase, but also a curious example of the faithful preservation of an exact form of words through centuries of oral tradition.

And if the note which precedes it, at page 131., upon a passage in Palamon and Arcite, is less valuable, it is because it is deficient in one of the most essential conditions which such communications ought to possess—that of originality. No suggestion ought to be offered which had been previously published in connexion with the same subject: at least in any *very obvious* place of reference, such as notes or glossaries already appended to well-known editions of the text.

Now the precise explanation of the planetary distribution of the twenty-four hours of the day, given by ε. in the first portion of his communication, was anticipated seventy or eighty years ago by Tyrwhitt in his note upon the same passage of Palamon and Arcite. And with respect to ε.'s second explanation of the meaning of "heure inequal," that expression also has been commented upon by Tyrwhitt, who attributes it to the well-known expansive duration of ancient hours, the length of which was regulated by that of the natural day at the several seasons of the year: hence an *inequality* always existed; except at the equinoxes, between hours before, and hours after, sunrise. This is undoubtedly the true explanation, since Chaucer was, at the time, referring to hours before and after sunrise upon the same day. On the contrary, ε.'s ecliptic hours, if they ever existed at all (he has cited no authority), would be obviously incompatible with the planetary disposition of the hours first referred to.

I shall now, in my turn, suggest explanations of the two new difficulties in Chaucer's text, to which, at the conclusion of his note, ε. has drawn attention.

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<sup>1</sup> [Of which there can be no doubt. See further p. 205. of our present Number.—Ed.]

The first is, that, "with respect to the time of year at which the tournament takes place, there seems to be an inconsistency." Theseus fixes "this day fifty wekes" from the fourth of May, as the day on which the final contention must come off, and yet the day previous to the final contention is afterwards alluded to as "the lusty seson of that May," which, it is needless to say, would be inconsistent with an interval of fifty *ordinary* weeks.

But fifty weeks, if taken in their literal sense of 350 days, would be a most unmeaning interval for Theseus to fix upon,—it would almost require explanation as much as the difficulty itself: it is therefore much easier to suppose that Chaucer meant to imply the interval of a solar year. Why he should choose to express that interval by fifty, rather than by fifty-two, weeks, may be surmised in two ways: first, because the latter phrase would be unpoetical and unmanageable; and, secondly, because he might fancy that the week of the Pagan Theseus would be more appropriately represented by a lunar quarter than by a Jewish hebdomad.

Chaucer sometimes makes the strangest jumble—mixing up together Pagan matters and Christian, Roman and Grecian, ancient and modern; so that although he names Sunday and Monday as two of the days of the week in Athens, he does so evidently for the purpose of introducing the allocation of the hours, alluded to before, to which the planetary names of the days of the week were absolutely necessary. But in the fifty weeks appointed by Theseus, the very same love of a little display of erudition would lead Chaucer to choose the *hebdomas lunæ*, or lunar quarter, which the Athenian youth were wont to mark out by the celebration of a feast to Apollo on every seventh day of the moon. But after the first twenty-eight days of every lunar month, the weekly reckoning must have been discontinued for about a day and a half (when the new moon was what was called "in coitu," or invisible), after which a new reckoning of sevens would recommence. Hence there could be but four hebdomades in each lunar month; and as there are about twelve and a half lunar months in a solar year, so must there have been fifty lunar weeks in one solar year.

It will explain many anomalies, even in Shakspeare, if we suppose that our early writers were content to show their knowledge of a subject in a few particulars, and were by no means solicitous to preserve, what moderns would call *keeping*, in the whole performance.

The next difficulty, adverted to by ε., is the mention of the THIRD as the morning upon which Palamon "brake his prison," and Arcite went into the woods "to don his observaunce to May."

There is not perhaps in the whole of Chaucer's writings a more exquisite passage than that by which the latter circumstance is introduced; it is well worth transcribing:—

"The besy larke, the messenger of day,  
Salēweth in hire song the morwē gray;  
And firy Phebus riseth up so bright,  
That all the orient laugheth at the sight;  
And with his stremēs drieth in the greves  
The silver dropēs hanging on the leves."

Such is the description of the morning of the "thridde of May;" and perhaps, if no other mention of that date were to be found throughout Chaucer's works, we might be justified in setting it down as a random expression, to which no particular meaning was attached. But when we find it repeated in an entirely different poem, and the same "observaunce to May" again associated with it, the conviction is forced upon us that it cannot be without some definite meaning.

This repetition occurs in the opening of the second book of *Troilus and Creseide*, where "the thridde" has not only "observaunce to May" again attributed to it, but also apparently some peculiar virtue in dreams. No sooner does Creseide behold Pandarus on the morning of the third of May, than "by the hond on hie, she tooke him fast," and tells him that she had thrice dreamed of him that night. Pandarus replies in what appears to have been a set form of words suitable to the occasion—

"Yea, nece, ye shall faren well the bet,  
If God wull, all this yeare."

Now unless the third of May were supposed to possess some unusual virtue, the dreaming on that morning could scarcely confer a whole year's welfare. But, be that as it may, there can at least be no doubt that Chaucer designedly associated *some* celebration of the advent of May with the morning of the third of that month.

Without absolutely asserting that my explanation is the true one, I may nevertheless suggest it until some better may be offered. It is, that the association may have originated in the invocation of the goddess Flora, by Ovid, on that day (*Fasti*, v.), in order that she might inspire him with an explanation of the Floralia, or Floral games, which were celebrated in Rome from the 28th of April to the *third* of May.

These games, if transferred by Chaucer to Athens, would at once explain the "gret feste" and the "lusty seson of that May."

Supposing, then, that Chaucer, in the *Knight's Tale*, meant, as I think he meant, to place the great combat on the anniversary of the fourth of May—that being the day on which Theseus had intercepted the duel,—then the entry into Athens of the rival companies would take place on (Sunday) the second, and the sacrifices and feasting on the *third of May*, the last of the Floralia.

A. E. B.

Leeds, March 4, 1851.

## INEDITED POETRY, NO. II

### CHORUS

(Harleian MSS., No. 367. fo. 154.)

"Is, is there nothing cann withstand  
The hand  
Of Time: but that it must  
Be shaken into dust?  
Then poore, poore Israelites are wee  
Who see,  
But cannot shunn the Graue's captivitie.

"Alas, good Browne! that Nature hath  
No bath,  
Or virtuous herbes to strayne,  
To boyle<sup>2</sup> thee yong againe;  
Yet could she (kind) but back command  
Thy brand,  
Herself would dye thou should'st be unman'd.

"But (ah!) the golden Ewer by [a] stroke,  
Is broke,  
And now the Almond Tree  
With teares, with teares, we see,  
Doth lowly lye, and with its fall  
Do all  
The daughters dye, that once were musicall.

"Thus yf weake builded man cann saye,  
A day  
He lives, 'tis all, for why?  
He's sure at night to dye,  
For fading man in fleshly lome<sup>3</sup>  
Doth rome  
Till he his graue find, His eternall home.

"Then farewell, farewell, man of men,  
Till when  
(For us the morners meet

---

<sup>2</sup> The reader will recognise the classical allusion.

<sup>3</sup> Loam, earth; roam.

Pal'd visag'd in the street,  
To seale up this our brittle birth  
In earth,)  
We meet with thee triumphant in our mirth."

*Trinity Hall's Exequies.*

Now, to what does Hall refer in the third stanza, in his mention of the almond-tree? Is it a classical allusion, as in the preceding stanza, or has it some reference to any botanical fact? I send the ballad, trusting that as an inedited morsel you will receive it.

*Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie.*

[We do not take *Hall* here to be the name of a man, but Trinity Hall at Cambridge.]

## ON A PASSAGE IN MARMION

I venture for the first time to trespass upon the attention of your readers in making the following remarks upon a passage in *Marmion*, which, as far as I know, has escaped the notice of all the critical writers whose comments upon that celebrated poem have hitherto been published.

It will probably be remembered, that long after the main action of the poem and interest of the story have been brought to a close by the death of the hero on the field of Flodden, the following incident is thus pointedly described:—

Short is my tale:—Fitz-Eustace' care  
A pierced and mangled body bare  
To moated Lichfield's lofty pile:  
And there, beneath the southern aisle,  
A tomb, with Gothic sculpture fair  
Did long Lord Marmion's image bear,  
&c. &c. &c.

"There erst was martial Marmion found,  
His feet upon a couchant hound,  
His hands to Heaven upraised:  
And all around on scutcheon rich,  
And tablet carved, and fretted niche,  
His arms and feats were blazed.  
And yet, though all was carved so fair,  
And priest for Marmion breathed the prayer,  
*The last Lord Marmion lay not there.*  
From Ettrick woods a peasant swain  
Follow'd his lord to Flodden plain,—  
&c. &c. &c.

"Sore wounded Sybil's Cross he spied,  
And dragg'd him to its foot, and died,  
Close by the noble Marmion's side.  
The spoilers stripp'd and gash'd the slain,  
And thus their corpses were mista'en;  
And thus in the proud Baron's tomb,  
The lowly woodsman took the room."

Now, I ask, wherefore has the poet dwelt with such minuteness upon this forced and improbable incident? Had it indeed been with no other purpose than to introduce the picturesque description and the moral reflexions contained in the following section, the improbability might well be forgiven. But such is not the real object. The critic of the *Monthly Review* takes the following notice of this passage, which is printed as a note in the last edition of Scott's *Poems* in 1833:—

"A corpse is afterwards conveyed, as that of Marmion, to the cathedral of Lichfield, where a magnificent tomb is erected to his memory, &c. &c.; but, by an *admirably imagined act of poetical justice*, we are informed that a peasant's body was

placed beneath that costly monument, while the haughty Baron himself was buried like a vulgar corpse on the spot where he died."

Had the reviewer attempted to penetrate a little deeper into the workings of the author's mind, he would have seen in this circumstance much more than "an admirably imagined act of poetical justice." He would have perceived in it the ultimate and literal fulfilment of the whole penalty foreshadowed to the delinquent baron in the two concluding stanzas of that beautiful and touching song sung by Fitz-Eustace in the *Hostelrie of Gifford* in the third canto of the poem, which I here transcribe:

"Where shall the traitor rest,  
He the deceiver,  
Who could win maiden's breast,  
Ruin, and leave her?  
In the lost battle  
Borne down by the flying,  
Where mingles war's rattle,  
With groans of the dying—  
There shall he be lying.  
Her wing shall the eagle flap  
O'er the false-hearted,  
His warm blood the wolf shall lap  
Ere life be parted.  
*Shame and dishonour sit  
By his grave ever;  
Blessing shall hallow it,  
Never, O never!"*

Then follows the effect produced upon the conscience of the "Traitor," described in these powerful lines:—

"It ceased. the melancholy sound;  
And silence sunk on all around.  
The air was sad; but sadder still  
It fell on Marmion's ear,  
And plain'd as if disgrace and ill,  
And shameful death, were near."  
&c. &c. &c.

And lastly, when the life of the wounded baron is ebbing forth with his blood on the field of battle, when—

"The Monk, with unavailing cares  
Exhausted all the Church's prayers—  
Ever, he said, that, close and near,  
A lady's voice was in his ear,  
And that the priest he could not hear—  
For that she ever sung,  
*'In the lost battle, borne down by the flying,  
Where mingles war's rattle with groans of the dying!'—*

So the notes ring."

I am the more disposed to submit these remarks to your readers, because it is highly interesting to trace an irresistible tendency in the genius of this mighty author towards the fulfilment of prophetic legends and visions of second sight: and not to extend this paper to an inconvenient length, I purpose to resume the subject in a future number, and collate some other examples of a similar character from the works of Sir Walter Scott.

I write from the southern slopes of Cheviot, almost within sight of the Hill of Flodden. During the latter years of the great Border Minstrel, I had the happiness to rank myself among the number of his friends and acquaintances, and I revere his memory as much as I prized his friendship.

*A Borderer.*

## GLOUCESTERSHIRE PROVINCIALISMS

*To burl, burling; to shunt, &c.*—In the report of the evidence regarding the death of Mrs. Hathway, at Chipping Sodbury, supposed to have been poisoned by her husband, the following dialectical expression occurs, which may deserve notice. One of the witnesses stated that he was invited by Mr. Hathway to go with him into a beer-house in Frampton Cotterell, "and have a tip," but he declined.

"Mr. H. went in and called for a quart of beer, and then came out again, and I went in. He told me 'to burl out the beer, as he was in a hurry;' and I 'burled' out a glass and gave it to him."—*Times*, Feb. 28.

I am not aware that the use of this verb, as a provincialism, has been noticed; it is not so given by Boucher, Holloway, or Halliwell. In the Cumberland dialect, a *birler*, or *burler*, is the master of the revels, who presides over the feast at a Cumberland bidden-wedding, and takes especial care that the drink be plentifully provided. (*Westmoreland and Cumberland Dialects*, London, 1839.)

Boucher and Jamieson have collected much regarding the obsolete use of the verb *to birle*, to carouse, to pour out liquor. See also Mr. Dyce's notes on *Elynour Rummyng*, v. 269. (*Skelton's Works*, vol. ii. p. 167.). It is a good old Anglo-Saxon word—byrlan, *propinare*, *haurire*. In the Wycliffite versions it occurs repeatedly, signifying to give to drink. See the Glossary to the valuable edition lately completed by Sir F. Madden and Mr. Forshall.

In the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, vol i. p. 51., we find—

"Bryllare of drynke, or schenkare: Bryllyn, or schenk drynke, *propino*:  
Bryllynge of drynke," &c.

Whilst on the subject of dialectical expressions, I would mention an obsolete term which has by some singular chance recently been revived, and is actually in daily use throughout England in the railway vocabulary—I mean the verb "to shunt." Nothing is more common than to see announced, that at a certain station the parliamentary "shunts" to let the Express pass; or to hear the order—"shunt that truck," push it aside, off the main line. In the curious ballad put forth in 1550, called "John Nobody" (Strype's *Life of Cranmer*, App. p. 138.), in derision of the Reformed church, the writer describes how, hearing the sound of a "synagogue," namely, a congregation of the new faith, he hid himself in alarm:

"The I drew me down into a dale, wheras the dumb deer  
Did shiver for a shower, but I shunted from a freyke,  
For I would no wight in this world wist who I were."

In the Townley Mysteries, *Ascensio Domini*, p. 303., the Virgin Mary calls upon St. John to protect her against the Jews,—

"Mi fleshe it qwakes, as lefe on lynde,  
To shontt the shrowres sharper than thorne,"—

explained in the Glossary, "sconce or ward off." Sewel, in his *English and Dutch Dictionary*, 1766, gives—"to shunt (a country word for to shove), *schuiven*." I do not find "shunt," however, in the Provincial Glossaries: in some parts of the south, "to shun" is used in this sense. Thus, in an assault case at Reigate, I heard the complainant say of a man who had hustled him, "He kept shunning me along: sometimes he shunt me on the road," that is, pushed me off the footpath on to the highway.

I hope that the Philological Society has not abandoned their project of compiling a complete Provincial Glossary: the difficulties of such an undertaking might be materially aided through the medium of "Notes and Queries."

*Albert Way.*

## THE CHAPEL OF LORETTO

Among the aerial migrations of the chapel of Loretto, it is possible that our own country may hereafter be favoured by a visit of that celebrated structure. In the mean time, as I am not aware that the contributions of our countrymen to its history have been hitherto commemorated, the following extract from a note, made by me on the spot some years ago, may not be unsuitable for publication in "Notes and Queries." As I had neither the time nor the patience which the pious, but rather prolix, Scotchman bestowed upon his composition, I found it necessary to content myself with a mere abstract of the larger portion.

The story of the holy House of Loretto is engraved on brass in several languages upon the walls of the church at Loretto. Among others, there are two tablets with the story in English, headed "The wondrous flitting of the kirk of our blest Lady of Laureto." It commences by stating that this kirk is the chamber of the house of the Blessed Virgin, in Nazareth, where our Saviour was born; that after the Ascension the Apostles hallowed and made it a kirk, and "S. Luke framed a pictur to har vary liknes thair zit to be seine;" that it was "haunted with muckle devotione by the folke of the land whar it stud, till the people went after the errour of Mahomet," when angels took it to Slavonia, near a place called Flumen: here it was not honoured as it ought to be, and they took it to a wood near Recanati, belonging to a lady named Laureto, whence it took its name. On account of the thieveries here committed, it was again taken up and placed near, on a spot belonging to two brothers, who quarrelled about the possession of the oblations offered there; and again it was removed to the roadside, near where it now stands. It is further stated that it stands without foundations, and that sixteen persons being sent from Recanati to measure the foundations still remaining at Nazareth, they were found exactly to agree:

"And from that tim fourth it has beine surly ken'd that this kirk was the Cammber of the B. V. whereto Christian begun thare and has ever efter had muckle devotione, for that in it daily she hes dun and dus many and many mirakels. Ane Frier Paule, of Sylva, an eremit of muckle godliness who wond in a cell neir, by this kirk, whar daily he went to mattins, seid that for ten zeirs, one the eighth of September, tweye hours before day, he saw a light descende from heaven upon it, whelk he seyde was the B. V. wha their shawed harselife one the feest of her birthe."

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