

p. 95-6 I have dealt with this passage at some length because it illustrates what can happen to a text in the hands of a careless scribe and an editor who rushes to conclusions. Skeat was a very great scholar, perhaps the greatest of all Chaucerian scholars. The debt which we owe to him is incalculable. But he was not exempt from human frailty. Like Homer, he could nod. Here he fell into elementary mistakes, both of scansion and of method, with results deplorable indeed. The moral for students is simple: never take on faith the emendations which an editor makes. Study the passage for yourself, and see what you can make of it without going beyond the author's own words.

p. 151 Chaucer was not a man to worry overmuch about loose ends, and he was not always careful to make things neat and tidy. This peculiarity goes well with his fondness for the informal style. One of the chief marks of this style is its irregularity, its carelessness, its intentional failure to provide for everything. Indeed, the easy, conversational effect aimed at in any informal style would infallibly be missed if everything was in order. This disorder need not be great, but some disorder there must be in every masterpiece of this style. And the Canterbury Tales is such a masterpiece.

pp. 161-2 Here Chaucer in eight lines puts the pilgrims to bed, gives them a night's rest, and gets them started on the road to Canterbury, with the host very conspicuously in command. There follows the scene in which the host has the pilgrims "draw ^{cut} cut" to see who shall tell the first tale. This method of choosing a speaker is never used again. Thenceforth the host chooses the speaker, though now and then circumstances make him change his decision. This departure from a pattern of procedure duly set up is characteristic of Chaucer. A few minutes ago we had another instance of it, when Chaucer named the pilgrims to be described in Part Two of his series and then proceeded to describe them in an order different from