

THE CANTERBURY TALES
And other Poems
by
GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE MILLER'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE.

Experience, though none authority *authoritative texts
Were in this world, is right enough for me
To speak of woe that is in marriage:
For, lordings, since I twelve year was of age,
(Thanked be God that *is etern on live),* *lives eternally*
Husbands at the church door have I had five,
For I so often have y-wedded be,
And all were worthy men in their degree.
But me was told, not longe time gone is
That sithen* Christe went never but ones *since
To wedding, in the Cane* of Galilee, *Cana
That by that ilk* example taught he me, *same
That I not wedded shoulde be but once.
Lo, hearken eke a sharp word for the nonce,* *occasion
Beside a welle Jesus, God and man,
Spake in reproof of the Samaritan:
"Thou hast y-had five husbandes," said he;
"And thilke* man, that now hath wedded thee, *that
Is not thine husband:" thus said he certain;
What that he meant thereby, I cannot sayn.
But that I aske, why the fifthe man
Was not husband to the Samaritan?
How many might she have in marriage?
Yet heard I never tellen *in mine age* *in my life*
Upon this number definitioun.
Men may divine, and glosen* up and down; *comment
But well I wot, express without a lie,
God bade us for to wax and multiply;
That gentle text can I well understand.
Eke well I wot, he said, that mine husband
Should leave father and mother, and take to me;
But of no number mention made he,
Of bigamy or of octogamy;
Why then should men speak of it villainy?* *as if it were a disgrace

Lo here, the wise king Dan* Solomon, *Lord
I trow that he had wives more than one;*

As would to God it lawful were to me
 To be refreshed half so oft as he!
 What gift* of God had he for all his wives? *special favour, licence
 No man hath such, that in this world alive is.
 God wot, this noble king, *as to my wit,* *as I understand*
 The first night had many a merry fit
 With each of them, so *well was him on live.* *so well he lived*
 Blessed be God that I have wedded five!
 Welcome the sixth whenever that he shall.
 For since I will not keep me chaste in all,
 When mine husband is from the world y-gone,
 Some Christian man shall wedde me anon.
 For then th' apostle saith that I am free
 To wed, *a' God's half,* where it liketh me. *on God's part*
 He saith, that to be wedded is no sin;
 Better is to be wedded than to brin.* *burn
 What recketh* me though folk say villainy** *care **evil
 Of shrewed* Lamech, and his bigamy? *impious, wicked
 I wot well Abraham was a holy man,
 And Jacob eke, as far as ev'r I can.* *know
 And each of them had wives more than two;
 And many another holy man also.
 Where can ye see, *in any manner age,* *in any period*
 That highe God defended* marriage *forbade
 By word express? I pray you tell it me;
 Or where commanded he virginity?
 I wot as well as you, it is no dread,* *doubt
 Th' apostle, when he spake of maidenhead,
 He said, that precept thereof had he none:
 Men may counsel a woman to be one,* *a maid
 But counseling is no commandement;
 He put it in our owen judgement.
 For, hadde God commanded maidenhead,
 Then had he damned* wedding out of dread;** *condemned **doubt
 And certes, if there were no seed y-sow,* *sown
 Virginity then whereof should it grow?
 Paul durste not commanden, at the least,
 A thing of which his Master gave no hest.* *command
 The dart* is set up for virginity; *goal
 Catch whoso may, who runneth best let see.
 But this word is not ta'en of every wight,
 But there as God will give it of his might. *except where*

*I wot well that th' apostle was a maid,
But natheless, although he wrote and said,
He would that every wight were such as he,
All is but counsel to virginity.
And, since to be a wife he gave me leave
Of indulgence, so is it no reprove* *scandal, reproach
To wedde me, if that my make* should die, *mate, husband
Without exception* of bigamy; *charge, reproach
All were it good no woman for to touch *though it might be*
(He meant as in his bed or in his couch),
For peril is both fire and tow t'assemble
Ye know what this example may resemble.
This is all and some, he held virginity
More profit than wedding in frailty:
(*Frailty clepe I, but if* that he and she *frailty I call it,
Would lead their lives all in chastity), unless*
I grant it well, I have of none envy
Who maidenhead prefer to bigamy;
It liketh them t' be clean in body and ghost;* *soul
Of mine estate* I will not make a boast. *condition*

*For, well ye know, a lord in his household
Hath not every vessel all of gold;
Some are of tree, and do their lord service.
God calleth folk to him in sundry wise,
And each one hath of God a proper gift,
Some this, some that, as liketh him to shift.* *appoint, distribute
Virginity is great perfection,
And continence eke with devotion:
But Christ, that of perfection is the well,* *fountain
Bade not every wight he should go sell
All that he had, and give it to the poor,
And in such wise follow him and his lore:* *doctrine
He spake to them that would live perfectly, —
And, lordings, by your leave, that am not I;
I will bestow the flower of mine age
In th' acts and in the fruits of marriage.
Tell me also, to what conclusion* *end, purpose
Were members made of generation,
And of so perfect wise a wight* y-wrought? *being
Trust me right well, they were not made for nought.
Glose whoso will, and say both up and down,
That they were made for the purgatioun*

Of urine, and of other thinges smale,
And eke to know a female from a male:
And for none other cause? say ye no?
Experience wot well it is not so.
So that the clerkes* be not with me wroth, *scholars
I say this, that they were made for both,
That is to say, *for office, and for ease* *for duty and
Of engendrure, there we God not displease. for pleasure*
Why should men elles in their bookes set,
That man shall yield unto his wife her debt?
Now wherewith should he make his payement,
If he us'd not his silly instrument?
Then were they made upon a creature
To purge urine, and eke for engendrure.
But I say not that every wight is hold,* *obliged
That hath such harness* as I to you told, *equipment
To go and use them in engendrure;
Then should men take of chastity no cure.* *care
Christ was a maid, and shapen* as a man, *fashioned
And many a saint, since that this world began,
Yet ever liv'd in perfect chastity.
I will not vie* with no virginity. *contend
Let them with bread of pured* wheat be fed, *purified
And let us wives eat our barley bread.
And yet with barley bread, Mark tell us can,
Our Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.
In such estate as God hath *cleped us,* *called us to
I'll persevere, I am not precious,* *over-dainty
In wifhood I will use mine instrument
As freely as my Maker hath it sent.
If I be dangerous* God give me sorrow; *sparing of my favours
Mine husband shall it have, both eve and morrow,
When that him list come forth and pay his debt.
A husband will I have, I *will no let,* *will bear no hindrance*
Which shall be both my debtor and my thrall,* *slave
And have his tribulation withal
Upon his flesh, while that I am his wife.
I have the power during all my life
Upon his proper body, and not he;
Right thus th' apostle told it unto me,
And bade our husbands for to love us well;
All this sentence me liketh every deal.* *whit

Up start the Pardoner, and that anon;
"Now, Dame," quoth he, "by God and by Saint John,
Ye are a noble preacher in this case.
I was about to wed a wife, alas!
What? should I bie* it on my flesh so dear? *suffer for
Yet had I lever* wed no wife this year." *rather
"Abide,"* quoth she; "my tale is not begun *wait in patience
Nay, thou shalt drincken of another tun
Ere that I go, shall savour worse than ale.
And when that I have told thee forth my tale
Of tribulation in marriage,
Of which I am expert in all mine age,
(This is to say, myself hath been the whip),
Then mayest thou choose whether thou wilt sip
Of *thilke tunne,* that I now shall broach. *that tun*
Beware of it, ere thou too nigh approach,
For I shall tell examples more than ten:
Whoso will not beware by other men,
By him shall other men corrected be:
These same wordes writeth Ptolemy;
Read in his Almagest, and take it there."
"Dame, I would pray you, if your will it were,"
Saide this Pardoner, "as ye began,
Tell forth your tale, and spare for no man,
And teach us younge men of your practique."
"Gladly," quoth she, "since that it may you like.
But that I pray to all this company,
If that I speak after my fantasy,
To take nought agrief* what I may say; *to heart
For mine intent is only for to play.

Now, Sirs, then will I tell you forth my tale.
As ever may I drinke wine or ale
I shall say sooth; the husbands that I had
Three of them were good, and two were bad
The three were goode men, and rich, and old
Unnethes mighte they the statute hold *they could with difficulty
In which that they were bounden unto me. obey the law*
Yet wot well what I mean of this, pardie.* *by God
As God me help, I laugh when that I think
How piteously at night I made them swink,* *labour
But, *by my fay, I told of it no store.* *by my faith, I held it
They had me giv'n their land and their treasure, of no account*

Me needed not do longer diligence
To win their love, or do them reverence.
They loved me so well, by God above,
That I *tolde no dainty* of their love. *cared nothing for*
A wise woman will busy her ever-in-one* *constantly
To get their love, where that she hath none.
But, since I had them wholly in my hand,
And that they had me given all their land,
Why should I take keep* them for to please, *care
But* it were for my profit, or mine ease? *unless
I set them so a-worke, by my fay,
That many a night they sange, well-away!
The bacon was not fetched for them, I trow,
That some men have in Essex at Dunmow.
I govern'd them so well after my law,
That each of them full blissful was and fawe* *fain
To bringe me gay thinges from the fair.
They were full glad when that I spake them fair,
For, God it wot, I *chid them spiteously.* *rebuked them angrily*
Now hearken how I bare me properly.

Ye wise wives, that can understand,
Thus should ye speak, and *bear them wrong on hand,* *make them
For half so boldly can there no man believe falsely*
Swearen and lien as a woman can.
(I say not this by wives that be wise,
But if it be when they them misadvise.)* *unless* *act unadvisedly
A wise wife, if that she can* her good, *knows
Shall *beare them on hand* the cow is wood, *make them believe*
And take witness of her owen maid
Of their assent: but hearken how I said.
"Sir olde kaynard, is this thine array?
Why is my neigheboure's wife so gay?
She is honour'd *over all where* she go'th, *wheresoever
I sit at home, I have no *thrifty cloth.* *good clothes*
What dost thou at my neigheboure's house?
Is she so fair? art thou so amorous?
What rown'st* thou with our maid? benedicite, *whisperest
Sir olde lechour, let thy japes* be. *tricks
And if I have a gossip, or a friend
(Withoute guilt), thou chidest as a fiend,
If that I walk or play unto his house.
Thou comest home as drunken as a mouse,

And preacheſt on thy bench, with evil prefe: *proof*
Thou ſay'ſt to me, it is a great miſchief
To wed a poore woman, for coſtage: *expense*
And if that ſhe be rich, of high parage; *birth*
Then ſay'ſt thou, that it is a tormentry
To ſuffer her pride and melancholy.
And if that ſhe be fair, thou very knave,
Thou ſay'ſt that every holour will her have; *whoremonger*
She may no while in chaſtity abide,
That is aſſailed upon every ſide.
Thou ſay'ſt ſome folk deſire us for riches,
Some for our ſhape, and ſome for our fairneſſ,
And ſome, for ſhe can either ſing or dance,
And ſome for gentleſſ and dalliance,
Some for her handes and her armes ſmale:
Thus goes all to the devil, by thy tale;
Thou ſay'ſt, men may not keep a caſtle wall
*That may be ſo aſſailed *over all.* *everywhere**
And if that ſhe be foul, thou ſay'ſt that ſhe
Coveteth every man that ſhe may ſee;
For as a ſpaniel ſhe will on him leap,
Till ſhe may finde ſome man her to cheap; *buy*
And none ſo grey goole goes there in the lake,
(So ſay'ſt thou) that will be without a make. *mate*
*And ſay'ſt, it is a hard thing for to weld *wield, govern*
*A thing that no man will, *his thankes, held.* *hold with his goodwill**
Thus ſay'ſt thou, lovel, when thou go'ſt to bed, *good-for-nothing*
And that no wiſe man needeth for to wed,
Nor no man that intendeth unto heaven.
With wilde thunder dint and fiery leven** *stroke **lightning*
Mote thy wicked necke be to-broke. *may*
Thou ſay'ſt, that dropping houſes, and eke ſmoke,
And chiding wives, make men to flee
Out of their owne houſe; ah! ben'dicite,
What aileth ſuch an old man for to chide?
Thou ſay'ſt, we wives will our vices hide,
Till we be faſt, and then we will them ſhew. *wedded*
Well may that be a proverb of a ſhrew. *ill-tempered wretch*
Thou ſay'ſt, that oxen, aſſes, horſes, hounds,
*They be *aſſayed at diſverſe ſounds,* *teſted at various*
Basons and lavers, ere that men them buy, ſeaſons
Spoones, ſtooles, and all ſuch husbandry,

And so be pots, and clothes, and array, *raiment*
But folk of wives make none assay,
Till they be wedded, — olde dotard shrew! —
And then, say'st thou, we will our vices shew.
Thou say'st also, that it displeaseth me,
*But if * that thou wilt praise my beauty, *unless*
And but thou pore alway upon my face, *unless*
And call me faire dame in every place;
And but thou make a feast on thilke** day *unless **that*
That I was born, and make me fresh and gay;
And but thou do to my norice honour, *nurse*
And to my chamberere within my bow'r, *chamber-maid*
And to my father's folk, and mine allies; *relations*
Thus sayest thou, old barrel full of lies.
And yet also of our prentice Jenkin,
For his crisp hair, shining as gold so fine,
And for he squireth me both up and down,
Yet hast thou caught a false suspicioun:
I will him not, though thou wert dead to-morrow.
*But tell me this, why hidest thou, *with sorrow,* *sorrow on thee!**
The keyes of thy chest away from me?
It is my good as well as thine, pardie. *property*
What, think'st to make an idiot of our dame?
Now, by that lord that called is Saint Jame,
Thou shalt not both, although that thou wert wood, *furious*
Be master of my body, and my good, *property*
The one thou shalt forego, maugre thine eyen. *in spite of*
What helpeth it of me t'inquire and spyen?
I trow thou wouldest lock me in thy chest.
Thou shouldest say, 'Fair wife, go where thee lest;
Take your disport; I will believe no tales;
I know you for a true wife, Dame Ales.' *Alice*
We love no man, that taketh keep or charge *care*
Where that we go; we will be at our large.
Of alle men most blessed may he be,
The wise astrologer Dan Ptolemy, *Lord*
That saith this proverb in his Almagest:
'Of alle men his wisdom is highest,
That recketh not who hath the world in hand.
By this proverb thou shalt well understand,
Have thou enough, what thar thee reck or care *needs, behoves*
How merrily that other folkes fare?

For certes, olde dotard, by your leave,
 Ye shall have [pleasure] right enough at eve.
 He is too great a niggard that will werne* *forbid
 A man to light a candle at his lantern;
 He shall have never the less light, pardie.
 Have thou enough, thee thar* not plaine** thee *need **complain
 Thou say'st also, if that we make us gay
 With clothing and with precious array,
 That it is peril of our chastity.
 And yet, — with sorrow! — thou enforcest thee,
 And say'st these words in the apostle's name:
 'In habit made with chastity and shame* *modesty
 Ye women shall apparel you,' quoth he,
 'And not in tressed hair and gay perrie,* *jewels
 As pearles, nor with gold, nor clothes rich.'
 After thy text nor after thy rubrich
 I will not work as muchel as a gnat.
 Thou say'st also, I walk out like a cat;
 For whoso woulde singe the catte's skin
 Then will the catte well dwell in her inn;* *house
 And if the catte's skin be sleek and gay,
 She will not dwell in house half a day,
 But forth she will, ere any day be daw'd,
 To shew her skin, and go a caterwaw'd.* *caterwauling
 This is to say, if I be gay, sir shrew,
 I will run out, my borel* for to shew. *apparel, fine clothes
 Sir olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?
 Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyen
 To be my wardcorps,* as he can best *body-guard
 In faith he shall not keep me, *but me lest.* *unless I please*
 Yet could I *make his beard,* so may I the. *make a jest of him*

"Thou sayest eke, that there be thinges three, *thrive
 Which thinges greatly trouble all this earth,
 And that no wighte may endure the feth:* *fourth
 O lefe* sir shrew, may Jesus short** thy life. *pleasant **shorten
 Yet preacheest thou, and say'st, a hateful wife
 Y-reckon'd is for one of these mischances.
 Be there *none other manner resemblances* *no other kind of
 That ye may liken your parables unto, comparison*
 But if a silly wife be one of tho?* *those
 Thou likenest a woman's love to hell;
 To barren land where water may not dwell.

Thou likenest it also to wild fire;
The more it burns, the more it hath desire
To consume every thing that burnt will be.
Thou sayest, right as wormes shend* a tree, *destroy
Right so a wife destroyeth her husband;
This know they well that be to wives bond."

Lordings, right thus, as ye have understand,
Bare I stiffly mine old husbands on hand, *made them believe*
That thus they saiden in their drunkenness;
And all was false, but that I took witness
On Jenkin, and upon my niece also.
O Lord! the pain I did them, and the woe,
'Full guiltless, by Godde's sweete pine,* *pain
For as a horse I coulde bite and whine;
I coulde plain,* an'* I was in the guilt, *complain **even though
Or elles oftentime I had been spilt* *ruined
Whoso first cometh to the nilll, first grint;* *is ground
I plained first, so was our war y-stint.* *stopped
They were full glad to excuse them full blive* *quickly
Of things that they never *aguilt their live.* *were guilty in their
lives*
Of wenchies would I *beare them on hand,* *falsely accuse them*
When that for sickness scarcely might they stand,
Yet tickled I his heart for that he
Ween'd* that I had of him so great cherte:** *though **affection
I swore that all my walking out by night
Was for to espy wenchies that he dight:* *adorned
Under that colour had I many a mirth.
For all such wit is given us at birth;
Deceit, weeping, and spinning, God doth give
To women kindly, while that they may live. *naturally
And thus of one thing I may vaunte me,
At th' end I had the better in each degree,
By sleight, or force, or by some manner thing,
As by continual murmur or grudging,* *complaining
Namely* a-bed, there hadde they mischance, *especially
There would I chide, and do them no pleasance:
I would no longer in the bed abide,
If that I felt his arm over my side,
Till he had made his ransom unto me,
Then would I suffer him do his nicety.* *folly
And therefore every man this tale I tell,

Win whoso may, for all is for to sell;
 With empty hand men may no hawkes lure;
 For winning would I all his will endure,
 And make me a feigned appetite,
 And yet in bacon* had I never delight: *i.e. of Dunmow
 That made me that I ever would them chide.
 For, though the Pope had sitten them beside,
 I would not spare them at their owen board,
 For, by my troth, I quit* them word for word *repaid
 As help me very God omnipotent,
 Though I right now should make my testament
 I owe them not a word, that is not quit* *repaid
 I brought it so aboute by my wit,
 That they must give it up, as for the best
 Or elles had we never been in rest.
 For, though he looked as a wood* lion, *furious
 Yet should he fail of his conclusion.
 Then would I say, "Now, goode lefe* tak keep** *dear **heed
 How meekly looketh Wilken oure sheep!
 Come near, my spouse, and let me ba* thy cheek *kiss
 Ye shoulde be all patient and meek,
 And have a *sweet y-spiced* conscience, *tender, nice*
 Since ye so preach of Jobe's patience.
 Suffer alway, since ye so well can preach,
 And but* ye do, certain we shall you teach* *unless
 That it is fair to have a wife in peace.
 One of us two must bowe* doubtless: *give way
 And since a man is more reasonable
 Than woman is, ye must be suffrable.
 What aileth you to grudge* thus and groan? *complain
 Is it for ye would have my [love] alone?
 Why, take it all: lo, have it every deal,* *whit
 Peter! shrew* you but ye love it well *curse
 For if I would sell my *belle chose*, *beautiful thing*
 I could walk as fresh as is a rose,
 But I will keep it for your owen tooth.
 Ye be to blame, by God, I say you sooth."
 Such manner wordes hadde we on hand.

Now will I speaken of my fourth husband.
 My fourthe husband was a revellour;
 This is to say, he had a paramour,
 And I was young and full of ragerie,* *wantonness

Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a pie.* *maggie
 Then could I dance to a harpe smale,
 And sing, y-wis,* as any nightingale, *certainly
 When I had drunk a draught of sweete wine.
 Metellius, the foule churl, the swine,
 That with a staff bereft his wife of life
 For she drank wine, though I had been his wife,
 Never should he have daunted me from drink:
 And, after wine, of Venus most I think.
 For all so sure as cold engenders hail,
 A liquorish mouth must have a liquorish tail.
 In woman vinolent* is no defence,** *full of wine *resistance
 This knowe lechours by experience.
 But, lord Christ, when that it rememb'reth me
 Upon my youth, and on my jollity,
 It tickleth me about mine hearte-root;
 Unto this day it doth mine hearte boot,* *good
 That I have had my world as in my time.
 But age, alas! that all will envenime,* *poison, embitter
 Hath me bereft my beauty and my pith:* *vigour
 Let go; farewell; the devil go therewith.
 The flour is gon, there is no more to tell,
 The bran, as I best may, now must I sell.
 But yet to be right merry will I fand.* *try
 Now forth to tell you of my fourth husband,
 I say, I in my heart had great despite,
 That he of any other had delight;
 But he was quit,* by God and by Saint Joke: *requited, paid back
 I made for him of the same wood a cross;
 Not of my body in no foul mannere,
 But certainly I made folk such cheer,
 That in his owen grease I made him fry
 For anger, and for very jealousy.
 By God, in earth I was his purgatory,
 For which I hope his soul may be in glory.
 For, God it wot, he sat full oft and sung,
 When that his shoe full bitterly him wrung.* *pinched
 There was no wight, save God and he, that wist
 In many wise how sore I did him twist.
 He died when I came from Jerusalem,
 And lies in grave under the *roode beam:* *cross*
 Although his tomb is not so curious

*As was the sepulchre of Darius,
Which that Apelles wrought so subtilly.
It is but waste to bury them preciously.
Let him fare well, God give his soule rest,
He is now in his grave and in his chest.*

*Now of my fifthe husband will I tell:
God let his soul never come into hell.
And yet was he to me the moste shrew;* *cruel, ill-tempered
That feel I on my ribbes all *by rew,* *in a row
And ever shall, until mine ending day.
But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,
And therewithal so well he could me glose,* *flatter
When that he woulde have my belle chose,
Though he had beaten me on every bone,
Yet could he win again my love anon.
I trow, I lov'd him better, for that he
Was of his love so dangerous* to me. *sparing, difficult
We women have, if that I shall not lie,
In this matter a quaint fantasy.
Whatever thing we may not lightly have,
Thereafter will we cry all day and crave.
Forbid us thing, and that desire we;
Press on us fast, and thenne will we flee.
With danger* utter we all our chaffare;** *difficulty **merchandise
Great press at market maketh deare ware,
And too great cheap is held at little price;
This knoweth every woman that is wise.
My fifthe husband, God his soule bless,
Which that I took for love and no richness,
He some time was *a clerk of Oxenford,* *a scholar of Oxford*
And had left school, and went at home to board
With my gossip,* dwelling in oure town: *godmother
God have her soul, her name was Alisoun.
She knew my heart, and all my privity,
Bet than our parish priest, so may I the.* *thrive
To her betrayed I my counsel all;
For had my husband pissed on a wall,
Or done a thing that should have cost his life,
To her, and to another worthy wife,
And to my niece, which that I loved well,
I would have told his counsel every deal.* *jot
And so I did full often, God it wot,*

That made his face full often red and hot
For very shame, and blam'd himself, for he
Had told to me so great a privy.* *secret
And so befell that ones in a Lent
(So oftentimes I to my gossip went,
For ever yet I loved to be gay,
And for to walk in March, April, and May
From house to house, to heare sundry tales),
That Jenkin clerk, and my gossip, Dame Ales,
And I myself, into the fieldes went.
Mine husband was at London all that Lent;
I had the better leisure for to play,
And for to see, and eke for to be sey* *seen
Of lusty folk; what wist I where my grace* *favour
Was shapen for to be, or in what place? *appointed
Therefore made I my visitations
To vigilies,* and to processions, *festival-eves
To preachings eke, and to these pilgrimages,
To plays of miracles, and marriages,
And weared upon me gay scarlet gites.* *gowns
These wormes, nor these mothes, nor these mites
On my apparel frett* them never a deal** *fed **whit
And know'st thou why? for they were used* well. *worn
Now will I telle forth what happen'd me:
I say, that in the fieldes walked we,
Till truely we had such dalliance,
This clerk and I, that of my purveyance* *foresight
I spake to him, and told him how that he,
If I were widow, shoulde wedde me.
For certainly, I say for no bobance,* *boasting
Yet was I never without purveyance* *foresight
Of marriage, nor of other thinges eke:
I hold a mouse's wit not worth a leek,
That hath but one hole for to starte* to, *escape
And if that faile, then is all y-do.* *done
[*I bare him on hand* he had enchanted me *falsely assured him*
(My dame taughte me that subtilty);
And eke I said, I mette* of him all night, *dreamed
He would have slain me, as I lay upright,
And all my bed was full of very blood;
But yet I hop'd that he should do me good;
For blood betoken'd gold, as me was taught.

*And all was false, I dream'd of him right naught,
 But as I follow'd aye my dame's lore,
 As well of that as of other things more.]
 But now, sir, let me see, what shall I sayn?
 Aha! by God, I have my tale again.
 When that my fourthe husband was on bier,
 I wept algate* and made a sorry cheer,** *always **countenance
 As wives must, for it is the usage;
 And with my kerchief covered my visage;
 But, for I was provided with a make,* *mate
 I wept but little, that I undertake* *promise
 To churche was mine husband borne a-morrow
 With neighebours that for him made sorrow,
 And Jenkin, oure clerk, was one of tho:* *those
 As help me God, when that I saw him go
 After the bier, methought he had a pair
 Of legges and of feet so clean and fair,
 That all my heart I gave unto his hold.* *keeping
 He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,
 And I was forty, if I shall say sooth,
 But yet I had always a colte's tooth.
 Gat-toothed* I was, and that became me well, *see note
 I had the print of Sainte Venus' seal.
 [As help me God, I was a lusty one,
 And fair, and rich, and young, and *well begone:* *in a good way*
 For certes I am all venerian* *under the influence of Venus
 In feeling, and my heart is martian;* *under the influence of Mars
 Venus me gave my lust and liquorishness,
 And Mars gave me my sturdy hardiness.]
 Mine ascendant was Taure,* and Mars therein: *Taurus
 Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!
 I follow'd aye mine inclination
 By virtue of my constellation:
 That made me that I coulde not withdraw
 My chamber of Venus from a good fellow.
 [Yet have I Marte's mark upon my face,
 And also in another privy place.
 For God so wisly* be my salvation, *certainly
 I loved never by discretion,
 But ever follow'd mine own appetite,
 All* were he short, or long, or black, or white, *whether
 I took no keep,* so that he liked me, *heed*

How poor he was, neither of what degree.]
What should I say? but that at the month's end
This jolly clerk Jenkin, that was so hend, *courteous*
Had wedded me with great solemnity,
And to him gave I all the land and fee
That ever was me given therebefore:
But afterward repented me full sore.
He woulde suffer nothing of my list. *pleasure*
By God, he smote me ones with his fist,
For that I rent out of his book a leaf,
That of the stroke mine eare wax'd all deaf.
Stubborn I was, as is a lioness,
And of my tongue a very jangleress, *prater*
And walk I would, as I had done befor,
From house to house, although he had it sworn: *had sworn to*
For which he oftentimes woulde preach prevent it
And me of olde Roman gestes teach *stories*
How that Sulpitius Gallus left his wife
And her forsook for term of all his
For nought but open-headed he her say** *bare-headed **saw*
Looking out at his door upon a day.
Another Roman told he me by name,
That, for his wife was at a summer game
Without his knowing, he forsook her eke.
And then would he upon his Bible seek
That ilke proverb of Ecclesiast, *same*
Where he commandeth, and forbiddeth fast,
Man shall not suffer his wife go roll about.
Then would he say right thus withoute doubt:
"Whoso that buildeth his house all of sallows, *willows*
And pricketh his blind horse over the fallows,
*And suff'reth his wife to *go seeke hallows,* *make pilgrimages**
Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows."
*But all for nought; I *sette not a haw* *cared nothing for**
Of his proverbs, nor of his olde saw;
Nor would I not of him corrected be.
I hate them that my vices telle me,
And so do more of us (God wot) than I.
This made him wood with me all utterly; *furious*
I woulde not forbear him in no case. *endure*
Now will I say you sooth, by Saint Thomas,
Why that I rent out of his book a leaf,

*For which he smote me, so that I was deaf.
He had a book, that gladly night and day
For his disport he would it read alway;
He call'd it Valerie, and Theophrast,
And with that book he laugh'd alway full fast.
And eke there was a clerk sometime at Rome,
A cardinal, that highte Saint Jerome,
That made a book against Jovinian,
Which book was there; and eke Tertullian,
Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise,
That was an abbess not far from Paris;
And eke the Parables* of Solomon, *Proverbs
Ovide's Art, and bourdes* many one; *jests
And alle these were bound in one volume.
And every night and day was his custume
(When he had leisure and vacation
From other worldly occupation)
To readen in this book of wicked wives.
He knew of them more legends and more lives
Than be of goodde wives in the Bible.
For, trust me well, it is an impossible
That any clerk will speake good of wives,
(*But if* it be of holy saintes' lives) *unless
Nor of none other woman never the mo'.
Who painted the lion, tell it me, who?
By God, if women haddde written stories,
As clerkes have within their oratories,
They would have writ of men more wickedness
Than all the mark of Adam may redress
The children of Mercury and of Venus,
Be in their working full contrarious.
Mercury loveth wisdom and science,
And Venus loveth riot and dispence.* *extravagance
And for their diverse disposition,
Each falls in other's exaltation.
As thus, God wot, Mercury is desolate
In Pisces, where Venus is exaltate,
And Venus falls where Mercury is raised.
Therefore no woman by no clerk is praised.
The clerk, when he is old, and may not do
Of Venus' works not worth his olde shoe,
Then sits he down, and writes in his dotage,*

*That women cannot keep their marriage.
But now to purpose, why I tolde thee
That I was beaten for a book, pardie.*

Upon a night Jenkin, that was our sire, *goodman
Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,
Of Eva first, that for her wickedness
Was all mankind brought into wretchedness,
For which that Jesus Christ himself was slain,
That bought us with his heart-blood again.
Lo here express of women may ye find
That woman was the loss of all mankind.
Then read he me how Samson lost his hairs
Sleeping, his leman cut them with her shears,
Through whiche treason lost he both his eyen.
Then read he me, if that I shall not lien,
Of Hercules, and of his Dejanire,
That caused him to set himself on fire.
Nothing forgot he of the care and woe
That Socrates had with his wives two;
How Xantippe cast piss upon his head.
This silly man sat still, as he were dead,
He wip'd his head, and no more durst he sayn,
But, "Ere the thunder stint* there cometh rain." *ceases
Of Phasiphae, that was queen of Crete,
For shrewedness* he thought the tale sweet. *wickedness
Fy, speak no more, it is a grisly thing,
Of her horrible lust and her liking.
Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery
That falsely made her husband for to die,
He read it with full good devotion.
He told me eke, for what occasion
Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life:
My husband had a legend of his wife
Eryphile, that for an ouche* of gold *clasp, collar
Had privily unto the Greekes told,
Where that her husband hid him in a place,
For which he had at Thebes sorry grace.
Of Luna told he me, and of Lucie;
They bothe made their husbands for to die,
That one for love, that other was for hate.
Luna her husband on an ev'ning late
Empoison'd had, for that she was his foe:*

*Lucia liquorish lov'd her husband so,
 That, for he should always upon her think,
 She gave him such a manner* love-drink, *sort of
 That he was dead before it were the morrow:
 And thus algates* husbands hadde sorrow. *always
 Then told he me how one Latumeus
 Complained to his fellow Arius
 That in his garden growed such a tree,
 On which he said how that his wives three
 Hanged themselves for heart dispiteous.
 "O leve* brother," quoth this Arius, *dear
 "Give me a plant of thilke* blessed tree, *that
 And in my garden planted shall it be."
 Of later date of wives hath he read,
 That some have slain their husbands in their bed,
 And let their *lechour dight them* all the night, *lover ride them*
 While that the corpse lay on the floor upright:
 And some have driven nails into their brain,
 While that they slept, and thus they have them slain:
 Some have them given poison in their drink:
 He spake more harm than hearte may bethink.
 And therewithal he knew of more proverbs,
 Than in this world there groweth grass or herbs.
 "Better (quoth he) thine habitation
 Be with a lion, or a foul dragon,
 Than with a woman using for to chide.
 Better (quoth he) high in the roof abide,
 Than with an angry woman in the house,
 They be so wicked and contrarious:
 They hate that their husbands loven aye."
 He said, "A woman cast her shame away
 When she cast off her smock;" and farthermo',
 "A fair woman, but* she be chaste also, *except
 Is like a gold ring in a sowe's nose.
 Who coulde ween,* or who coulde suppose *think
 The woe that in mine heart was, and the pine?* *pain
 And when I saw that he would never fine* *finish
 To readen on this cursed book all night,
 All suddenly three leaves have I plight* *plucked
 Out of his book, right as he read, and eke
 I with my fist so took him on the cheek,
 That in our fire he backward fell adown.*

And he up start, as doth a wood* lion, *furious
And with his fist he smote me on the head,
That on the floor I lay as I were dead.
And when he saw how still that there I lay,
He was aghast, and would have fled away,
Till at the last out of my swoon I braid,* *woke
"Oh, hast thou slain me, thou false thief?" I said
"And for my land thus hast thou murder'd me?
Ere I be dead, yet will I kisse thee."
And near he came, and kneeled fair adown,
And saide", "Deare sister Alisoun,
As help me God, I shall thee never smite:
That I have done it is thyself to wite,* *blame
Forgive it me, and that I thee beseek."* *beseech
And yet eftsoons* I hit him on the cheek, *immediately; again
And saidde, "Thief, thus much am I awreak.* *avenged
Now will I die, I may no longer speak."

But at the last, with muche care and woe
We fell accorded* by ourselves two: *agreed
He gave me all the bridle in mine hand
To have the governance of house and land,
And of his tongue, and of his hand also.
I made him burn his book anon right tho.* *then
And when that I had gotten unto me
By mast'ry all the sovereignty,
And that he said, "Mine owen true wife,
Do *as thee list,* the term of all thy life, *as pleases thee*
Keep thine honour, and eke keep mine estate;
After that day we never had debate.
God help me so, I was to him as kind
As any wife from Denmark unto Ind,
And also true, and so was he to me:
I pray to God that sits in majesty
So bless his soule, for his mercy dear.
Now will I say my tale, if ye will hear. —

The Friar laugh'd when he had heard all this:
"Now, Dame," quoth he, "so have I joy and bliss,
This is a long preamble of a tale."
And when the Sompnour heard the Friar gale,* *speak
"Lo," quoth this Sompnour, "Godde's armes two,
A friar will intermete* him evermo': *interpose

*Lo, goode men, a fly and eke a frere
 Will fall in ev'ry dish and eke mattere.
 What speak'st thou of perambulation?* *preamble
 What? amble or trot; or peace, or go sit down:
 Thou lettest* our disport in this mattere." *hinderesst
 "Yea, wilt thou so, Sir Sompnour?" quoth the Frere;
 "Now by my faith I shall, ere that I go,
 Tell of a Sompnour such a tale or two,
 That all the folk shall laughen in this place."
 "Now do, else, Friar, I beshrew* thy face," *curse
 Quoth this Sompnour; "and I beshrewe me,
 But if* I telle tales two or three *unless
 Of friars, ere I come to Sittingbourne,
 That I shall make thine hearte for to mourn:
 For well I wot thy patience is gone."
 Our Hoste cried, "Peace, and that anon;"
 And saide, "Let the woman tell her tale.
 Ye fare* as folk that drunken be of ale. *behave
 Do, Dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best."
 "All ready, sir," quoth she, "right as you lest,* *please
 If I have licence of this worthy Frere."
 "Yes, Dame," quoth he, "tell forth, and I will hear."*

Tale.

*Whilom there was dwelling in Oxenford
 A riche gnof*, that *questes held to board*, *miser *took in boarders*
 And of his craft he was a carpenter.
 With him there was dwelling a poor scholer,
 Had learned art, but all his fantasy
 Was turned for to learn astrology.
 He coude* a certain of conclusions *knew
 To deeme* by interrogations, *determine
 If that men asked him in certain hours,
 When that men should have drouht or elles show'rs:
 Or if men asked him what shoulde fall
 Of everything, I may not reckon all.*

This clerk was called Hendy Nicholas; *gentle, handsome
 Of derne* love he knew and of solace; *secret, earnest
 And therewith he was sly and full privy,*

*And like a maiden meek for to see.
 A chamber had he in that hostelry
 Alone, withouten any company,
 Full *fetisly y-dight* with herbes swoot*, *neatly decorated*
 And he himself was sweet as is the root *sweet
 Of liquorice, or any setewall*. *valerian
 His Almagest, and bookes great and small,
 His astrolabe, belonging to his art,
 His augrim stones, layed fair apart
 On shelves couched* at his bedde's head, *laid, set
 His press y-cover'd with a falding* red. *coarse cloth
 And all above there lay a gay psalt'ry
 On which he made at nightes melody,
 So sweetely, that all the chamber rang:
 And Angelus ad virginem he sang.
 And after that he sung the kinge's note;
 Full often blessed was his merry throat.
 And thus this sweete clerk his time spent
 After *his friendes finding and his rent.* *Attending to his friends,
 and providing for the
 cost of his lodging*
 This carpenter had wedded new a wife,
 Which that he loved more than his life:
 Of eighteen year, I guess, she was of age.
 Jealous he was, and held her narr'w in cage,
 For she was wild and young, and he was old,
 And deemed himself belike* a cuckold. *perhaps
 He knew not Cato, for his wit was rude,
 That bade a man wed his similitude.
 Men shoulde wedden after their estate,
 For youth and eld* are often at debate. *age
 But since that he was fallen in the snare,
 He must endure (as other folk) his care.
 Fair was this younge wife, and therewithal
 As any weasel her body gent* and small. *slim, neat
 A seint* she weared, barred all of silk, *girdle
 A barm-cloth* eke as white as morning milk *apron
 Upon her lendes*, full of many a gore**. *loins **plait
 White was her smock*, and broider'd all before, *robe or gown
 And eke behind, on her collar about
 Of coal-black silk, within and eke without.
 The tapes of her white volupere* *head-kerchief*

Were of the same suit of her collere;
 Her fillet broad of silk, and set full high:
 And sickerly* she had a likerous** eye. *certainly **lascivious
 Full small y-pulled were her browes two,
 And they were bent*, and black as any sloe. *arched
 She was well more *blissful on to see* *pleasant to look upon*
 Than is the newe perjenete* tree; *young pear-tree
 And softer than the wool is of a wether.
 And by her girdle hung a purse of leather,
 Tassel'd with silk, and *pearled with latoun*. *set with brass pearls*
 In all this world to seeken up and down
 There is no man so wise, that coude thenche* *fancy, think of
 So gay a popelot*, or such a wench. *puppet
 Full brighter was the shining of her hue,
 Than in the Tower the noble* forged new. *a gold coin
 But of her song, it was as loud and yern*, *lively
 As any swallow chittering on a bern*. *barn
 Thereto* she coulde skip, and *make a game* *also *romp*
 As any kid or calf following his dame.
 Her mouth was sweet as braket, or as methe* *mead
 Or hoard of apples, laid in hay or heath.
 Wincing* she was as is a jolly colt, *skittish
 Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
 A brooch she bare upon her low collere,
 As broad as is the boss of a bucklere.
 Her shoon were laced on her legges high;
 She was a primerole,* a piggesnie, *primrose
 For any lord t' have ligging* in his bed, *lying
 Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.

Now, sir, and eft* sir, so befell the case, *again
 That on a day this Hendy Nicholas
 Fell with this younge wife to rage* and play, *toy, play the rogue
 While that her husband was at Oseney,
 As clerkes be full subtle and full quaint.
 And privily he caught her by the queint,* *cunt
 And said; "Y-wis,* but if I have my will, *assuredly
 For *derne love of thee, leman, I spill."* *for earnest love of thee
 And helde her fast by the haunche bones, my mistress, I perish*
 And saide "Leman, love me well at once,
 Or I will dien, all so God me save."
 And she sprang as a colt doth in the trave:
 And with her head she writhed fast away,

And said; "I will not kiss thee, by my fay. *faith
Why let be," quoth she, "let be, Nicholas,
Or I will cry out harow and alas!
Do away your handes, for your courtesy."
This Nicholas gan mercy for to cry,
And spake so fair, and proffer'd him so fast,
That she her love him granted at the last,
And swore her oath by Saint Thomas of Kent,
That she would be at his commandement,
When that she may her leisure well espy.
"My husband is so full of jealousy,
That but* ye waite well, and be privy, *unless
I wot right well I am but dead," quoth she.
"Ye muste be full derne* as in this case." *secret
"Nay, thereof care thee nought," quoth Nicholas:
"A clerk had *litherly beset his while*, *ill spent his time*
But if he could a carpenter beguile." *unless
And thus they were accorded and y-sworn
To wait a time, as I have said beforne.
When Nicholas had done thus every deal*, *whit
And thwacked her about the lendes* well, *loins
He kiss'd her sweet, and taketh his psalt'ry
And playeth fast, and maketh melody.
Then fell it thus, that to the parish church,
Of Christe's owen workes for to wirch*, *work
This good wife went upon a holy day;
Her forehead shone as bright as any day,
So was it washen, when she left her werk.*

*Now was there of that church a parish clerk,
The which that was y-cleped Absolon.
Curl'd was his hair, and as the gold it shone,
And strutted* as a fanne large and broad; *stretched
Full straight and even lay his jolly shode*. *head of hair
His rode* was red, his eyen grey as goose, *complexion
With Paule's windows carven on his shoes
In hosen red he went full fetisly*. *daintily, neatly
Y-clad he was full small and properly,
All in a kirtle* of a light waget*; *girdle **sky blue
Full fair and thicke be the pointes set,
And thereupon he had a gay surplice,
As white as is the blossom on the rise*. *twig
A merry child he was, so God me save;*

Well could he letten blood, and clip, and shave,
And make a charter of land, and a quittance.
In twenty manners could he trip and dance,
After the school of Oxenforde tho*, *then
And with his legges caste to and fro;
And playen songes on a small ribible*; *fiddle
Thereto he sung sometimes a loud quible* *treble
And as well could he play on a giterne.* *guitar
In all the town was brewhouse nor tavern,
That he not visited with his solas*, *mirth, sport
There as that any *garnard tapstere* was. *licentious barmaid*
But sooth to say he was somedeal squaimous* *squeamish
Of farting, and of speeche dangerous.
This Absolon, that jolly was and gay,
Went with a censer on the holy day,
Censing* the wives of the parish fast; *burning incense for
And many a lovely look he on them cast,
And namely* on this carpenter's wife: *especially
To look on her him thought a merry life.
She was so proper, and sweet, and likerous.
I dare well say, if she had been a mouse,
And he a cat, he would *her hent anon*. *have soon caught her*
This parish clerk, this jolly Absolon,
Hath in his hearte such a love-longing!
That of no wife took he none offering;
For courtesy he said he woulde none.
The moon at night full clear and brighte shone,
And Absolon his giterne hath y-taken,
For paramours he thoughte for to waken,
And forth he went, jolif* and amorous, *joyous
Till he came to the carpentere's house,
A little after the cock had y-crow,
And *dressed him* under a shot window, *stationed himself.*
That was upon the carpentere's wall.
He singeth in his voice gentle and small;
"Now, dear lady, if thy will be,
I pray that ye will rue* on me;" *take pity
Full well accordant to his giterning.
This carpenter awoke, and heard him sing,
And spake unto his wife, and said anon,
What Alison, hear'st thou not Absolon,
That chanteth thus under our bower* wall?" *chamber

*And she answer'd her husband therewithal;
"Yes, God wot, John, I hear him every deal."
This passeth forth; what will ye bet* than well? *better*

*From day to day this jolly Absolon
So wooeth her, that him is woebegone.
He waketh all the night, and all the day,
To comb his lockes broad, and make him gay.
He wooeth her *by means and by brocage*, *by presents and by agents*
And swore he would be her owen page.
He singeth brokking* as a nightingale. *quavering
He sent her piment, mead, and spiced ale,
And wafers* piping hot out of the glede**: *cakes **coals
And, for she was of town, he proffer'd meed.
For some folk will be wonnen for richness,
And some for strokes, and some with gentiless.
Sometimes, to show his lightness and mast'ry,
He playeth Herod on a scaffold high.
But what availeth him as in this case?
So loveth she the Hendy Nicholas,
That Absolon may *blow the bucke's horn*: *"go whistle"*
He had for all his labour but a scorn.
And thus she maketh Absolon her ape,
And all his earnest turneth to a jape*. *jest
Full sooth is this proverb, it is no lie;
Men say right thus alway; the nighe sly
Maketh oft time the far lief to be loth.
For though that Absolon be wood* or wroth *mad
Because that he far was from her sight,
This nigh Nicholas stood still in his light.
Now bear thee well, thou Hendy Nicholas,
For Absolon may wail and sing "Alas!"*

*And so befell, that on a Saturday
This carpenter was gone to Oseney,
And Hendy Nicholas and Alison
Accorded were to this conclusion,
That Nicholas shall *shape him a wile* *devise a stratagem*
The silly jealous husband to beguile;
And if so were the game went aright,
She shoulde sleepen in his arms all night;
For this was her desire and his also.
And right anon, withoute wordes mo',*

This Nicholas no longer would he tarry,
 But doth full soft unto his chamber carry
 Both meat and drinke for a day or tway.
 And to her husband bade her for to say,
 If that he asked after Nicholas,
 She shoulde say, "She wist* not where he was; *knew
 Of all the day she saw him not with eye;
 She trowed* he was in some malady, *believed
 For no cry that her maiden could him call
 He would answer, for nought that might befall."
 Thus passed forth all thilke* Saturday, *that
 That Nicholas still in his chamber lay,
 And ate, and slept, and didde what him list
 Till Sunday, that* the sunne went to rest. *when
 This silly carpenter *had great marvaill* *wondered greatly*
 Of Nicholas, or what thing might him ail,
 And said; "I am adrad*, by Saint Thomas! *afraid, in dread
 It standeth not aright with Nicholas:
 God shielde that he died suddenly. *heaven forbid!*"

This world is now full fickle sicklerly*. *certainly
 I saw to-day a corpse y-borne to church,
 That now on Monday last I saw him wirch*. *work
 "Go up," quod he unto his knave*, "anon; *servant.
 Clepe* at his door, or knocke with a stone: *call
 Look how it is, and tell me boldely."
 This knave went him up full sturdily,
 And, at the chamber door while that he stood,
 He cried and knocked as that he were wood:* *mad
 "What how? what do ye, Master Nicholay?
 How may ye sleepe all the longe day?"
 But all for nought, he hearde not a word.
 An hole he found full low upon the board,
 Where as the cat was wont in for to creep,
 And at that hole he looked in full deep,
 And at the last he had of him a sight.
 This Nicholas sat ever gaping upright,
 As he had kyked* on the newe moon. *looked
 Adown he went, and told his master soon,
 In what array he saw this ilke* man. *same

This carpenter to *blissen him* began, *bless, cross himself*
 And said: "Now help us, Sainte Frideswide.
 A man wot* little what shall him betide. *knows

This man is fall'n with his astronomy
 Into some woodness* or some agony. *madness
 I thought aye well how that it shoulde be.
 Men should know nought of Godde's privity*. *secrets
 Yea, blessed be alway a lewed* man, *unlearned
 That *nought but only his believe can*. *knows no more
 So far'd another clerk with astronomy: than his "credo."*
 He walked in the fieldes for to *pry
 Upon* the starres, what there should befall, *keep watch on*
 Till he was in a marle pit y-fall.
 He saw not that. But yet, by Saint Thomas!
 Me rueth sore of Hendy Nicholas: *I am very sorry for*
 He shall be *rated of* his studying, *chidden for*
 If that I may, by Jesus, heaven's king!
 Get me a staff, that I may underspore* *lever up
 While that thou, Robin, heavest off the door:
 He shall out of his studying, as I guess."
 And to the chamber door he gan him dress* *apply himself.
 His knave was a strong carl for the nonce,
 And by the hasp he heav'd it off at once;
 Into the floor the door fell down anon.
 This Nicholas sat aye as still as stone,
 And ever he gap'd upward into the air.
 The carpenter ween'd* he were in despair, *thought
 And hent* him by the shoulders mightily, *caught
 And shook him hard, and cried spitously;* *angrily
 "What, Nicholas? what how, man? look adown:
 Awake, and think on Christe's passioun.
 I crouche thee from elves, and from wights*. *witches
 Therewith the night-spell said he anon rights*, *properly
 On the four halves* of the house about, *corners
 And on the threshold of the door without.
 "Lord Jesus Christ, and Sainte Benedight,
 Blesse this house from every wicked wight,
 From the night mare, the white Pater-noster;
 Where wonnest* thou now, Sainte Peter's sister?" *dwellest
 And at the last this Hendy Nicholas
 Gan for to sigh full sore, and said; "Alas!
 Shall all time world be lost eftsoones* now?" *forthwith
 This carpenter answer'd; "What sayest thou?
 What? think on God, as we do, men that swink.*" *labour
 This Nicholas answer'd; "Fetch me a drink;

*And after will I speak in privy
Of certain thing that toucheth thee and me:
I will tell it no other man certain."*

*This carpenter went down, and came again,
And brought of mighty ale a large quart;
And when that each of them had drunk his part,
This Nicholas his chamber door fast shet*, *shut
And down the carpenter by him he set,
And saide; "John, mine host full lief* and dear, *loved
Thou shalt upon thy truthe swear me here,
That to no wight thou shalt my counsel wray*: *betray
For it is Christes counsel that I say,
And if thou tell it man, thou art forlore:* *lost
For this vengeance thou shalt have therefor,
That if thou wraye* me, thou shalt be wood**." *betray **mad
"Nay, Christ forbid it for his holy blood!"
Quoth then this silly man; "I am no blab,* *talker
Nor, though I say it, am I *lief to gab*. *fond of speech*
Say what thou wilt, I shall it never tell
To child or wife, by him that harried Hell."*

*"Now, John," quoth Nicholas, "I will not lie,
I have y-found in my astrology,
As I have looked in the moone bright,
That now on Monday next, at quarter night,
Shall fall a rain, and that so wild and wood*, *mad
That never half so great was Noe's flood.
This world," he said, "in less than half an hour
Shall all be dreint*, so hideous is the shower: *drowned
Thus shall mankinde drench*, and lose their life." *drown
This carpenter answer'd; "Alas, my wife!
And shall she drench? alas, mine Alisoun!"
For sorrow of this he fell almost adown,
And said; "Is there no remedy in this case?"
"Why, yes, for God," quoth Hendy Nicholas;
"If thou wilt worken after *lore and rede*; *learning and advice*
Thou may'st not worken after thine own head.
For thus saith Solomon, that was full true:
Work all by counsel, and thou shalt not rue*. *repent
And if thou worke wilt by good counseil,
I undertake, withoute mast or sail,
Yet shall I save her, and thee, and me."*

Hast thou not heard how saved was Noe,
When that our Lord had warned him beforne,
That all the world with water **should be lorn**? **should perish**
"Yes," quoth this carpenter, " **full yore ago**." **long since**
"Hast thou not heard," quoth Nicholas, "also
The sorrow of Noe, with his fellowship,
That he had ere he got his wife to ship?
**Him had been lever, I dare well undertake,*
At thilke time, than all his wethers black,
That she had had a ship herself alone." **see note*
And therefore know'st thou what is best to be done?
This asketh haste, and of an hasty thing
Men may not preach or make tarrying.
Anon go get us fast into this inn **house*
A kneading trough, or else a kemelin **, *brewing-tub*
For each of us; but look that they be large,
In whiche we may swim **as in a barge: *float*
And have therein vitaille suffisant
But for one day; fie on the remenant;
The water shall aslake **and go away *slacken, abate*
Aboute prime **upon the nexte day. *early morning*
But Robin may not know of this, thy knave **, *servant*
Nor eke thy maiden Gill I may not save:
Ask me not why; for though thou aske me
I will not telle Godde's privy.
Sufficeth thee, **but if thy wit be mad*, *unless thou be*
To have as great a grace as Noe had; out of thy wits ***
Thy wife shall I well saven out of doubt.
Go now thy way, and speed thee hereabout.
But when thou hast for her, and thee, and me,
Y-gotten us these kneading tubbes three,
Then shalt thou hang them in the roof full high,
So that no man our purveyance ** espy: *foresight, providence*
And when thou hast done thus as I have said,
And hast our vitaille fair in them y-laid,
And eke an axe to smite the cord in two
When that the water comes, that we may go,
And break an hole on high upon the gable
Into the garden-ward, over the stable,
That we may freely passe forth our way,
When that the greateshower is gone away.
Then shalt thou swim as merry, I undertake,

*As doth the white duck after her drake:
Then will I clepe,* 'How, Alison? How, John? *call
Be merry: for the flood will pass anon.'
And thou wilt say, 'Hail, Master Nicholay,
Good-morrow, I see thee well, for it is day.'
And then shall we be lordes all our life
Of all the world, as Noe and his wife.
But of one thing I warne thee full right,
Be well advised, on that ilke* night, *same
When we be enter'd into shippe's board,
That none of us not speak a single word,
Nor clepe nor cry, but be in his prayere,
For that is Godde's owen heste* dear. *command
Thy wife and thou must hangen far atween*, *asunder
For that betwixte you shall be no sin,
No more in looking than there shall in deed.
This ordinance is said: go, God thee speed
To-morrow night, when men be all asleep,
Into our kneading tubbes will we creep,
And sitte there, abiding Godde's grace.
Go now thy way, I have no longer space
To make of this no longer sermoning:
Men say thus: Send the wise, and say nothing:
Thou art so wise, it needeth thee nought teach.
Go, save our lives, and that I thee beseech."*

*This silly carpenter went forth his way,
Full oft he said, "Alas! and Well-a-day!,"
And to his wife he told his privity,
And she was ware, and better knew than he
What all this *quainte cast was for to say*. *strange contrivance
But natheless she fear'd as she would dey, meant*
And said: "Alas! go forth thy way anon.
Help us to scape, or we be dead each one.
I am thy true and very wedded wife;
Go, deare spouse, and help to save our life."
Lo, what a great thing is affection!
Men may die of imagination,
So deeply may impression be take.
This silly carpenter begins to quake:
He thinketh verily that he may see
This newe flood come weltering as the sea
To drenchen* Alison, his honey dear. *drown*

He weepeth, waileth, maketh **sorry cheer**; **dismal countenance**
 He sigheth, with full many a sorry sough. **groan*
 He go'th, and getteth him a kneading trough,
 And after that a tub, and a kemelin,
 And privily he sent them to his inn:
 And hung them in the roof full privily.
 With his own hand then made he ladders three,
 To climbe by **the ranges and the stalks** **the rungs and the uprights**
 Unto the tubbes hanging in the balks; **beams*
 And victualed them, kemelin, trough, and tub,
 With bread and cheese, and good ale in a jub*, **jug*
 Sufficing right enough as for a day.
 But ere that he had made all this array,
 He sent his knave*, and eke his wench** also, **servant **maid*
 Upon his need* to London for to go. **business*
 And on the Monday, when it drew to night,
 He shut his door withoute candle light,
 And dressed* every thing as it should be. **prepared*
 And shortly up they climbed all the three.
 They satte stille well **a furlong way**. **the time it would take*
 "Now, Pater noster, clum," said Nicholay, to walk a furlong*
 And "clum," quoth John; and "clum," said Alison:
 This carpenter said his devotion,
 And still he sat and bidded his prayere,
 Awaking on the rain, if he it hear.
 The deade sleep, for weary business,
 Fell on this carpenter, right as I guess,
 About the curfew-time, or little more,
 For **travail of his ghost** he groaned sore, **anguish of spirit**
And eft he routed, for his head mislay. **and then he snored,*
 Adown the ladder stalked Nicholay; for his head lay awry*
 And Alison full soft adown she sped.
 Withoute wordes more they went to bed,
There as the carpenter was wont to lie: **where**
 There was the revel, and the melody.
 And thus lay Alison and Nicholas,
 In business of mirth and in solace,
 Until the bell of laudes* gan to ring, **morning service, at 3.a.m.*
 And friars in the chancel went to sing.

This parish clerk, this amorous Absolon,
 That is for love alway so woebegone,
 Upon the Monday was at Oseney

With company, him to disport and play;
 And asked upon cas* a cloisterer** *occasion **monk
 Full privily after John the carpenter;
 And he drew him apart out of the church,
 And said, "I n'ot;* I saw him not here wirch** *know not **work
 Since Saturday; I trow that he be went
 For timber, where our abbot hath him sent.
 And dwellen at the Grange a day or two:
 For he is wont for timber for to go,
 Or else he is at his own house certain.
 Where that he be, I cannot *soothly sayn.*" *say certainly*
 This Absolon full jolly was and light,
 And thought, "Now is the time to wake all night,
 For sickerly* I saw him not stirring *certainly
 About his door, since day began to spring.
 So may I thrive, but I shall at cock crow
 Full privily go knock at his window,
 That stands full low upon his bower* wall: *chamber
 To Alison then will I tellen all
 My love-longing; for I shall not miss
 That at the leaste way I shall her kiss.
 Some manner comfort shall I have, parfay*, *by my faith
 My mouth hath itched all this livelong day:
 That is a sign of kissing at the least.
 All night I mette* eke I was at a feast. *dreamt
 Therefore I will go sleep an hour or tway,
 And all the night then will I wake and play."
 When that the first cock crowed had, anon
 Up rose this jolly lover Absolon,
 And him arrayed gay, *at point devise.* *with exact care*
 But first he chewed grains and liquorice,
 To smelle sweet, ere he had combed his hair.
 Under his tongue a true love he bare,
 For thereby thought he to be gracious.

Then came he to the carpentere's house,
 And still he stood under the shot window;
 Unto his breast it raught*, it was so low; *reached
 And soft he coughed with a semisoun'*. *low tone
 "What do ye, honeycomb, sweet Alisoun?
 My faire bird, my sweet cinamome*, *cinnamon, sweet spice
 Awaken, leman* mine, and speak to me. *mistress
 Full little thinke ye upon my woe,

*That for your love I sweat *there as* I go. *wherever
 No wonder is that I do swelt* and sweat. *faint
 I mourn as doth a lamb after the teat
 Y-wis*, leman, I have such love-longing, *certainly
 That like a turtle* true is my mourning. *turtle-dove
 I may not eat, no more than a maid."
 "Go from the window, thou jack fool," she said:
 "As help me God, it will not be, 'come ha* me.' *kiss
 I love another, else I were to blame",
 Well better than thee, by Jesus, Absolon.
 Go forth thy way, or I will cast a stone;
 And let me sleep; *a twenty devil way*. *twenty devils take ye!**
*"Alas!" quoth Absolon, "and well away!
 That true love ever was so ill beset:
 Then kiss me, since that it may be no bet*, *better
 For Jesus' love, and for the love of me."
 "Wilt thou then go thy way therewith?", quoth she.
 "Yea, certes, leman," quoth this Absolon.
 "Then make thee ready," quoth she, "I come anon."
 [And unto Nicholas she said *full still*: *in a low voice*
 "Now peace, and thou shalt laugh anon thy fill."]
 This Absolon down set him on his knees,
 And said; "I am a lord at all degrees:
 For after this I hope there cometh more;
 Leman, thy grace, and, sweete bird, thine ore.*" *favour
 The window she undid, and that in haste.
 "Have done," quoth she, "come off, and speed thee fast,
 Lest that our neighbours should thee espy."
 Then Absolon gan wipe his mouth full dry.
 Dark was the night as pitch or as the coal,
 And at the window she put out her hole,
 And Absolon him fell ne bet ne werse,
 But with his mouth he kiss'd her naked erse
 Full savourly. When he was ware of this,
 Aback he start, and thought it was amiss;
 For well he wist a woman hath no beard.
 He felt a thing all rough, and long y-hair'd,
 And saide; "Fy, alas! what have I do?"
 "Te he!" quoth she, and clapt the window to;
 And Absolon went forth at sorry pace.
 "A beard, a beard," said Hendy Nicholas;
 "By God's corpus, this game went fair and well."*

This silly Absolon heard every deal*, *word
 And on his lip he gan for anger bite;
 And to himself he said, "I shall thee quite*. *requite, be even with
 Who rubbeth now, who frotteth* now his lips *rubs
 With dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with chips,
 But Absolon? that saith full oft, "Alas!
 My soul betake I unto Sathanas,
 But me were lever* than all this town," quoth he *rather
 I this despite awroken* for to be. *revenged
 Alas! alas! that I have been y-blent*." *deceived
 His hote love is cold, and all y-quent.* *quenched
 For from that time that he had kiss'd her erse,
 Of paramours he *sette not a kers,* *cared not a rush*
 For he was healed of his malady;
 Full often paramours he gan defy,
 And weep as doth a child that hath been beat.
 A softe pace he went over the street
 Unto a smith, men callen Dan* Gerveis, *master
 That in his forge smithed plough-harness;
 He sharped share and culter busily.
 This Absolon knocked all easily,
 And said; "Undo, Gerveis, and that anon."
 "What, who art thou?" "It is I, Absolon."
 "What? Absolon, what? Christe's sweete tree*, *cross
 Why rise so rath*? hey! Benedicite, *early
 What aileth you? some gay girl, God it wote,
 Hath brought you thus upon the viretote:
 By Saint Neot, ye wot well what I mean."
 This Absolon he raughte* not a bean *recked, cared
 Of all his play; no word again he gaf*, *spoke
 For he had more tow on his distaff
 Than Gerveis knew, and saide; "Friend so dear,
 That hote culter in the chimney here
 Lend it to me, I have therewith to don*: *do
 I will it bring again to thee full soon."
 Gerveis answered; "Certes, were it gold,
 Or in a poke* nobles all untold, *purse
 Thou shouldst it have, as I am a true smith.
 Hey! Christe's foot, what will ye do therewith?"
 "Thereof," quoth Absolon, "be as be may;
 I shall well tell it thee another day:"
 And caught the culter by the colde stele*. *handle

Full soft out at the door he gan to steal,
And went unto the carpentere's wall
He coughed first, and knocked therewithal
Upon the window, light as he did ere*. *before
This Alison answered; "Who is there
That knocketh so? I warrant him a thief."
"Nay, nay," quoth he, "God wot, my sweete lefe*, *love
I am thine Absolon, my own darling.
Of gold," quoth he, "I have thee brought a ring,
My mother gave it me, so God me save!
Full fine it is, and thereto well y-grave*: *engraved
This will I give to thee, if thou me kiss."
Now Nicholas was risen up to piss,
And thought he would *amenden all the jape*; *improve the joke*
He shoulde kiss his erse ere that he scape:
And up the window did he hastily,
And out his erse he put full privily
Over the buttock, to the haunch bone.
And therewith spake this clerk, this Absolon,
"Speak, sweete bird, I know not where thou art."
This Nicholas anon let fly a fart,
As great as it had been a thunder dent*; *peal, clap
That with the stroke he was well nigh y-blent*; *blinded
But he was ready with his iron hot,
And Nicholas amid the erse he smote.
Off went the skin an handbreadth all about.
The hote culter burned so his tout*, *breech
That for the smart he weened* he would die; *thought
As he were wood*, for woe he gan to cry, *mad
"Help! water, water, help for Godde's heart!"

This carpenter out of his slumber start,
And heard one cry "Water," as he were wood*, *mad
And thought, "Alas! now cometh Noe's flood."
He sat him up withoute wordes mo'
And with his axe he smote the cord in two;
And down went all; he found neither to sell
Nor bread nor ale, till he came to the sell*, *threshold
Upon the floor, and there in swoon he lay.
Up started Alison and Nicholay,
And cried out an "harow!" in the street.
The neighbours alle, bothe small and great
In ranne, for to gauren* on this man, *stare

That yet in swoone lay, both pale and wan:
For with the fall he broken had his arm.
But stand he must unto his owen harm,
For when he spake, he was anon borne down
With Hendy Nicholas and Alisoun.
They told to every man that he was wood*; *mad
He was aghaste* so of Noe's flood, *afraid
Through phantasy, that of his vanity
He had y-bought him kneading-tubbes three,
And had them hanged in the roof above;
And that he prayed them for Godde's love
To sitten in the roof for company.
The folk gan laughen at his phantasy.
Into the roof they kyken* and they gape, *peep, look.
And turned all his harm into a jape*. *jest
For whatsoe'er this carpenter answer'd,
It was for nought, no man his reason heard.
With oathes great he was so sworn adown,
That he was holden wood in all the town.
For every clerk anon right held with other;
They said, "The man was wood, my leve* brother;" *dear
And every wight gan laughen at his strife.
Thus swived* was the carpentere's wife, *enjoyed
For all his keeping* and his jealousy; *care
And Absolon hath kiss'd her nether eye;
And Nicholas is scalded in the tout.
This tale is done, and God save all the rout*. *company

THE REEVE'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE.

WHEN folk had laughed all at this nice case
Of Absolon and Hendy Nicholas,
Diverse folk diversely they said,
But for the more part they laugh'd and play'd;* *were diverted
And at this tale I saw no man him grieve,
But it were only Osewold the Reeve.
Because he was of carpenteres craft,
A little ire is in his hearte laft*; *left
He gan to grudge* and blamed it a lite.** *murmur **little.
"So the* I," quoth he, "full well could I him quite** *thrive **match
With blearing* of a proude miller's eye, *dimming
If that me list to speak of ribaldry.
But I am old; me list not play for age;
Grass time is done, my fodder is now forage.
This white top* writeth mine olde years; *head
Mine heart is also moulded* as mine hairs; *grown mouldy
And I do fare as doth an open-erse*; *medlar
That ilke* fruit is ever longer werse, *same
Till it be rotten *in mullok or in stre*. *on the ground or in straw*
We olde men, I dread, so fare we;
Till we be rotten, can we not be ripe;
We hop* away, while that the world will pipe; *dance
For in our will there sticketh aye a nail,
To have an hoary head and a green tail,
As hath a leek; for though our might be gone,
Our will desireth folly ever-in-one*: *continually
For when we may not do, then will we speak,
Yet in our ashes cold does fire reek.* *smoke
Four gledes* have we, which I shall devise**, *coals ** describe
Vaunting, and lying, anger, covetise*. *covetousness
These foure sparks belongen unto eld.
Our olde limbes well may be unweld*, *unwieldy
But will shall never fail us, that is sooth.
And yet have I alway a coltes tooth,
As many a year as it is passed and gone

Since that my tap of life began to run;
For sickerly*, when I was born, anon *certainly
Death drew the tap of life, and let it gon:
And ever since hath so the tap y-run,
Till that almost all empty is the tun.
The stream of life now droppeth on the chimb.
The silly tongue well may ring and chime
Of wretchedness, that passed is full yore*: *long
With olde folk, save dotage, is no more.

When that our Host had heard this sermoning,
He gan to speak as lordly as a king,
And said; "To what amounteth all this wit?
What? shall we speak all day of holy writ?
The devil made a Reeve for to preach,
As of a souter* a shipman, or a leach**. *cobbler
Say forth thy tale, and tarry not the time: **surgeon
Lo here is Deptford, and 'tis half past prime:
Lo Greenwich, where many a shrew is in.
It were high time thy tale to begin."

"Now, sirs," quoth then this Osewold the Reeve,
I pray you all that none of you do grieve,
Though I answer, and somewhat set his hove*, *hood <
For lawful is *force off with force to shove.* *to repel force
This drunken miller hath y-told us here by force*
How that beguiled was a carpentere,
Paraventure* in scorn, for I am one: *perhaps
And, by your leave, I shall him quite anon.
Right in his churlish termes will I speak,
I pray to God his necke might to-break.
He can well in mine eye see a stalk,
But in his own he cannot see a balk."

The Tale

At Trompington, not far from Cantebrig,* *Cambridge
There goes a brook, and over that a brig,
Upon the whiche brook there stands a mill:
And this is *very sooth* that I you tell. *complete truth*

A miller was there dwelling many a day,
As any peacock he was proud and gay:
Pipen he could, and fish, and nettes bete*, *prepare
And turne cups, and wrestle well, and shete*. *shoot
Aye by his belt he bare a long pavade*, *poniard
And of his sword full trenchant was the blade.
A jolly popper* bare he in his pouch; *dagger
There was no man for peril durst him touch.
A Sheffield whittle* bare he in his hose. *small knife
Round was his face, and camuse* was his nose. *flat
As pilled* as an ape's was his skull. *peeled, bald.
He was a market-beter* at the full. *brawler
There durste no wight hand upon him legge*, *lay
That he ne swore anon he should abegge*. *suffer the penalty

A thief he was, for sooth, of corn and meal,
And that a sly, and used well to steal.
His name was *hoten deinous Simekin* *called "Disdainful Simkin"*
A wife he hadde, come of noble kin:
The parson of the town her father was.
With her he gave full many a pan of brass,
For that Simkin should in his blood ally.
She was y-foster'd in a nunnery:
For Simkin woulde no wife, as he said,
But she were well y-nourish'd, and a maid,
To saven his estate and yeomanry:
And she was proud, and pert as is a pie*. *magpie
A full fair sight it was to see them two;
On holy days before her would he go
With his tippet* y-bound about his head; *hood
And she came after in a gite* of red, *gown
And Simkin hadde hosen of the same.
There durste no wight call her aught but Dame:
None was so hardy, walking by that way,
That with her either durste *rage or play*, *use freedom*
But if he would be slain by Simekin *unless
With pavade, or with knife, or bodekin.
For jealous folk be per'lous evermo':
Algate* they would their wives *wende so*. *unless *so behave*
And eke for she was somewhat smutterlich*, *dirty
She was as dign* as water in a ditch, *nasty
And all so full of hoker*, and bismare**. *ill-nature **abusive speech
Her thoughte that a lady should her spare*, *not judge her hardly

What for her kindred, and her nortelrie* *nurturing, education
That she had learned in the nunnery.

One daughter hadde they betwixt them two
Of twenty year, withouten any mo,
Saving a child that was of half year age,
In cradle it lay, and was a proper page.* *boy
This wenche thick and well y-grownen was,
With camuse* nose, and eyen gray as glass; *flat
With buttocks broad, and breastes round and high;
But right fair was her hair, I will not lie.
The parson of the town, for she was fair,
In purpose was to make of her his heir
Both of his chattels and his messuage,
And *strange he made it* of her marriage. *he made it a matter
His purpose was for to bestow her high of difficulty*
Into some worthy blood of ancestry.
For holy Church's good may be dispended* *spent
On holy Church's blood that is descended.
Therefore he would his holy blood honour
Though that he holy Churche should devour.

Great soken* hath this miller, out of doubt, *toll taken for grinding
With wheat and malt, of all the land about;
And namely* there was a great college *especially
Men call the Soler Hall at Cantebrege,
There was their wheat and eke their malt y-ground.
And on a day it happed in a stound*, *suddenly
Sick lay the manciple* of a malady, *steward
Men *weened wisly* that he shoulde die. *thought certainly*
For which this miller stole both meal and corn
An hundred times more than befor.
For theretofore he stole but courteously,
But now he was a thief outrageously.
For which the warden chid and made fare*, *fuss
But thereof *set the miller not a tare*; *he cared not a rush*
He *crack'd his boast,* and swore it was not so. *talked big*

Then were there younge poore scholars two,
That dwelled in the hall of which I say;
Testif* they were, and lusty for to play; *headstrong
And only for their mirth and revelry
Upon the warden busily they cry,

To give them leave for but a *little stound*, *short time*
To go to mill, and see their corn y-ground:
And hardily* they durste lay their neck, *boldly
The miller should not steal them half a peck
Of corn by sleight, nor them by force bereave* *take away
And at the last the warden give them leave:
John hight the one, and Alein hight the other,
Of one town were they born, that highte Strother,
Far in the North, I cannot tell you where.
This Alein he made ready all his gear,
And on a horse the sack he cast anon:
Forth went Alein the clerk, and also John,
With good sword and with buckler by their side.
John knew the way, him needed not no guide,
And at the mill the sack adown he lay'th.

Alein spake first; "All hail, Simon, in faith,
How fares thy faire daughter, and thy wife."
"Alein, welcome," quoth Simkin, "by my life,
And John also: how now, what do ye here?"
"By God, Simon," quoth John, "need has no peer*. *equal
Him serve himself behoves that has no swain*, *servant
Or else he is a fool, as clerkes sayn.
Our manciple I hope* he will be dead, *expect
So workes aye the wanges* in his head: *cheek-teeth
And therefore is I come, and eke Alein,
To grind our corn and carry it home again:
I pray you speed us hence as well ye may."
"It shall be done," quoth Simkin, "by my fay.
What will ye do while that it is in hand?"
"By God, right by the hopper will I stand,"
Quoth John, "and see how that the corn goes in.
Yet saw I never, by my father's kin,
How that the hopper waggis to and fro."
Alein answered, "John, and wilt thou so?
Then will I be beneath, by my crown,
And see how that the meale falls adown
Into the trough, that shall be my disport*: *amusement
For, John, in faith I may be of your sort;
I is as ill a miller as is ye."

This miller smiled at their nicety*, *simplicity
And thought, "All this is done but for a wile.

They weenen* that no man may them beguile, *think
 But by my thrift yet shall I blear their eye,
 For all the sleight in their philosophy.
 The more *quainte knackes* that they make, *odd little tricks*
 The more will I steal when that I take.
 Instead of flour yet will I give them bren*. *bran
 The greatest clerks are not the wisest men,
 As whilom to the wolf thus spake the mare:
 Of all their art ne count I not a tare."
 Out at the door he went full privily,
 When that he saw his time, softly.
 He looked up and down, until he found
 The clerkes' horse, there as he stood y-bound
 Behind the mill, under a levesell.* *arbour
 And to the horse he went him fair and well,
 And stripped off the bridle right anon.
 And when the horse was loose, he gan to gon
 Toward the fen, where wilde mares run,
 Forth, with "Wehee!" through thick and eke through thin.
 This miller went again, no word he said,
 But did his note*, and with these clerkes play'd, *business
 Till that their corn was fair and well y-ground.
 And when the meal was sacked and y-bound,
 Then John went out, and found his horse away,
 And gan to cry, "Harow, and well-away!
 Our horse is lost: Alein, for Godde's bones,
 Step on thy feet; come off, man, all at once:
 Alas! our warden has his palfrey lorn.*" *lost
 This Alein all forgot, both meal and corn;
 All was out of his mind his husbandry*. *careful watch over
 "What, which way is he gone?" he gan to cry. the corn*
 The wife came leaping inward at a renne*, *run
 She said; "Alas! your horse went to the fen
 With wilde mares, as fast as he could go.
 Unthank* come on his hand that bound him so *ill luck, a curse
 And his that better should have knit the rein."
 "Alas!" quoth John, "Alein, for Christes pain
 Lay down thy sword, and I shall mine also.
 I is full wight*, God wate**, as is a roe. *swift **knows
 By Godde's soul he shall not scape us bathe*. *both
 Why n' had thou put the capel* in the lathe**? *horse **barn
 Ill hail, Alein, by God thou is a fonne.*" *fool

*These silly clerkes have full fast y-run
Toward the fen, both Alein and eke John;
And when the miller saw that they were gone,
He half a bushel of their flour did take,
And bade his wife go knead it in a cake.
He said; I trow, the clerkes were afeard,
Yet can a miller *make a clerkes beard,* *cheat a scholar*
For all his art: yea, let them go their way!
Lo where they go! yea, let the children play:
They get him not so lightly, by my crown."
These silly clerkes runnen up and down
With "Keep, keep; stand, stand; jossa*, warderere. *turn
Go whistle thou, and I shall keep* him here." *catch
But shortly, till that it was very night
They coulde not, though they did all their might,
Their capel catch, he ran alway so fast:
Till in a ditch they caught him at the last.*

*Weary and wet, as beastes in the rain,
Comes silly John, and with him comes Alein.
"Alas," quoth John, "the day that I was born!
Now are we driv'n till hething* and till scorn. *mockery
Our corn is stol'n, men will us fonnes* call, *fools
Both the warden, and eke our fellows all,
And namely* the miller, well-away!" *especially
Thus plained John, as he went by the way
Toward the mill, and Bayard* in his hand. *the bay horse
The miller sitting by the fire he fand*. *found
For it was night, and forther* might they not, *go their way
But for the love of God they him besought
Of herberow* and ease, for their penny. *lodging
The miller said again, "If there be any,
Such as it is, yet shall ye have your part.
Mine house is strait, but ye have learned art;
Ye can by arguments maken a place
A mile broad, of twenty foot of space.
Let see now if this place may suffice,
Or make it room with speech, as is your guise.*" *fashion
"Now, Simon," said this John, "by Saint Cuthberd
Aye is thou merry, and that is fair answer'd.
I have heard say, man shall take of two things,
Such as he findes, or such as he brings.
But specially I pray thee, hoste dear,*

Gar us have meat and drink, and make us cheer,
And we shall pay thee truly at the full:
With empty hand men may not hawkes tulf*. *allure
Lo here our silver ready for to spend."

This miller to the town his daughter send
For ale and bread, and roasted them a goose,
And bound their horse, he should no more go loose:
And them in his own chamber made a bed.
With sheetes and with chalons* fair y-spread, *blankets
Not from his owen bed ten foot or twelve:
His daughter had a bed all by herselfe,
Right in the same chamber *by and by*: *side by side*
It might no better be, and cause why,
There was no *roomer herberow* in the place. *roomier lodging*
They suppen, and they speaken of solace,
And drinken ever strong ale at the best.
Aboute midnight went they all to rest.
Well had this miller varnished his head;
Full pale he was, fordrunken, and *nought red*. *without his wits*
He yoxed*, and he spake thorough the nose, *hiccuped*
As he were in the quakke*, or in the pose**. *grunting**catarrh
To bed he went, and with him went his wife,
As any jay she light was and jolife,* *jolly
So was her jolly whistle well y-wet.
The cradle at her beddes feet was set,
To rock, and eke to give the child to suck.
And when that drunken was all in the crock* *pitcher
To bedde went the daughter right anon,
To bedde went Alein, and also John.
There was no more; needed them no dwale.
This miller had, so wisly* bibbed ale, *certainly
That as a horse he snorted in his sleep,
Nor of his tail behind he took no keep*. *heed
His wife bare him a burdoun*, a full strong; *bass
Men might their routing* hearen a furlong. *snoring

The wenche routed eke for company.
Alein the clerk, that heard this melody,
He poked John, and saide: "Sleepest thou?
Heardest thou ever such a song ere now?
Lo what a compline is y-mell* them all. *among
A wilde fire upon their bodies fall,

Who hearken'd ever such a ferly* thing? *strange
Yea, they shall have the flow'r of ill ending!
This longe night there *tides me* no rest. *comes to me*
But yet no force*, all shall be for the best. *matter
For, John," said he, "as ever may I thrive,
If that I may, yon wenche will I swive*. *enjoy carnally
Some easement* has law y-shapen** us *satisfaction **provided
For, John, there is a law that sayeth thus,
That if a man in one point be aggriev'd,
That in another he shall be reliev'd.
Our corn is stol'n, soothly it is no nay,
And we have had an evil fit to-day.
And since I shall have none amendement
Against my loss, I will have easement:
By Godde's soul, it shall none, other be."
This John answer'd; Alein, *advise thee*: *have a care*
The miller is a perilous man," he said,
"And if that he out of his sleep abraid*, *awaked
He mighte do us both a villainy*." *mischief
Alein answer'd; "I count him not a fly.
And up he rose, and by the wench he crept.
This wenche lay upright, and fast she slept,
Till he so nigh was, ere she might espy,
That it had been too late for to cry:
And, shortly for to say, they were at one.
Now play, Alein, for I will speak of John.

This John lay still a furlong way or two,
And to himself he made ruth* and woe. *wail
"Alas!" quoth he, "this is a wicked jape*; *trick
Now may I say, that I is but an ape.
Yet has my fellow somewhat for his harm;
He has the miller's daughter in his arm:
He auntred* him, and hath his needes sped, *adventured
And I lie as a draff-sack in my bed;
And when this jape is told another day,
I shall be held a daffe* or a cockenay *coward
I will arise, and auntre* it, by my fay: *attempt
Unhardy is unsely, as men say."
And up he rose, and softly he went
Unto the cradle, and in his hand it hent*, *took
And bare it soft unto his beddes feet.
Soon after this the wife *her routing lete*, *stopped snoring*

And gan awake, and went her out to piss
And came again and gan the cradle miss
And groped here and there, but she found none.
"Alas!" quoth she, "I had almost misgone
I had almost gone to the clerkes' bed.
Ey! Benedicite, then had I foul y-sped."
And forth she went, till she the cradle fand.
She groped alway farther with her hand
And found the bed, and *thoughte not but good* *had no suspicion*
Because that the cradle by it stood,
And wist not where she was, for it was derk;
But fair and well she crept in by the clerk,
And lay full still, and would have caught a sleep.
Within a while this John the Clerk up leap
And on this goode wife laid on full sore;
So merry a fit had she not had *full yore*. *for a long time*
He pricked hard and deep, as he were mad.

This jolly life have these two clerkes had,
Till that the thirde cock began to sing.
Alein wax'd weary in the morrowing,
For he had swonken* all the longe night, *laboured
And saide; "Farewell, Malkin, my sweet wight.
The day is come, I may no longer bide,
But evermore, where so I go or ride,
I is thine owen clerk, so have I hele.*" *health
"Now, deare leman*," quoth she, "go, fare wele: *sweetheart
But ere thou go, one thing I will thee tell.
When that thou wendest homeward by the mill,
Right at the entry of the door behind
Thou shalt a cake of half a bushel find,
That was y-maked of thine owen meal,
Which that I help'd my father for to steal.
And goode leman, God thee save and keep."
And with that word she gan almost to weep.
Alein uprose and thought, "Ere the day daw
I will go creopen in by my fellow:"
And found the cradle with his hand anon.
"By God!" thought he, "all wrong I have misgone:
My head is *totty of my swink* to-night, *giddy from my labour*
That maketh me that I go not aright.
I wot well by the cradle I have misgo';
Here lie the miller and his wife also."

*And forth he went a twenty devil way
Unto the bed, there as the miller lay.
He ween'd* t' have crept by his fellow John, *thought
And by the miller in he crept anon,
And caught him by the neck, and gan him shake,
And said; "Thou John, thou swines-head, awake
For Christes soul, and hear a noble game!
For by that lord that called is Saint Jame,
As I have thrives in this shorte night
Swived the miller's daughter bolt-upright,
While thou hast as a coward lain aghast*." *afraid
"Thou false harlot," quoth the miller, "hast?
Ah, false traitor, false clerk," quoth he,
"Thou shalt be dead, by Godde's dignity,
Who durste be so bold to disparage* *disgrace
My daughter, that is come of such lineage?"
And by the throate-ball* he caught Alein, *Adam's apple
And he him hent* dispiteously** again, *seized **angrily
And on the nose he smote him with his fist;
Down ran the bloody stream upon his breast:
And in the floor with nose and mouth all broke
They wallow, as do two pigs in a poke.
And up they go, and down again anon,
Till that the miller spurned* on a stone, *stumbled
And down he backward fell upon his wife,
That wiste nothing of this nice strife:
For she was fall'n asleep a little wight* *while
With John the clerk, that waked had all night:
And with the fall out of her sleep she braid*. *woke
"Help, holy cross of Bromeholm," she said;
"In manus tuas! Lord, to thee I call.
Awake, Simon, the fiend is on me fall;
Mine heart is broken; help; I am but dead:
There li'th one on my womb and on mine head.
Help, Simkin, for these false clerks do fight"
This John start up as fast as e'er he might,
And groped by the walles to and fro
To find a staff; and she start up also,
And knew the estres* better than this John, *apartment
And by the wall she took a staff anon:
And saw a little shimmering of a light,
For at an hole in shone the moone bright,*

*And by that light she saw them both the two,
But sickerly* she wist not who was who, *certainly
But as she saw a white thing in her eye.
And when she gan this white thing espy,
She ween'd* the clerk had wear'd a volupere**; *supposed **night-cap
And with the staff she drew aye nere* and nere*, *nearer
And ween'd to have hit this Alein at the full,
And smote the miller on the pilled* skull; *bald
That down he went, and cried," Harow! I die."
These clerkes beat him well, and let him lie,
And greithen* them, and take their horse anon, *make ready, dress
And eke their meal, and on their way they gon:
And at the mill door eke they took their cake
Of half a bushel flour, full well y-bake.*

*Thus is the proude miller well y-beat,
And hath y-lost the grinding of the wheat;
And payed for the supper *every deal* *every bit
Of Alein and of John, that beat him well;
His wife is swived, and his daughter als*; *also
Lo, such it is a miller to be false.
And therefore this proverb is said full sooth,
"*Him thar not winnen well* that evil do'th, *he deserves not to gain*
A guiler shall himself beguiled be:"
And God that sitteth high in majesty
Save all this Company, both great and smale.
Thus have I quit* the Miller in my tale. *made myself quits with*

THE COOK'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE.

THE Cook of London, while the Reeve thus spake,
For joy he laugh'd and clapp'd him on the back:
"Aha!" quoth he, "for Christes passion,
This Miller had a sharp conclusion,
Upon this argument of herbergage.* *lodging
Well saide Solomon in his language,
Bring thou not every man into thine house,
For harbouring by night is perilous.
Well ought a man avised for to be *a man should take good heed*
Whom that he brought into his privity.
I pray to God to give me sorrow and care
If ever, since I highte* Hodge of Ware, *was called
Heard I a miller better *set a-work*; *handled
He had a jape* of malice in the derk. *trick
But God forbid that we should stinte* here, *stop
And therefore if ye will vouchsafe to hear
A tale of me, that am a poore man,
I will you tell as well as e'er I can
A little jape that fell in our city."

Our Host answer'd and said; "I grant it thee.
Roger, tell on; and look that it be good,
For many a pasty hast thou letten blood,
And many a Jack of Dover hast thou sold,
That had been twice hot and twice cold.
Of many a pilgrim hast thou Christe's curse,
For of thy parsley yet fare they the worse.
That they have eaten in thy stubble goose:
For in thy shop doth many a fly go loose.
Now tell on, gentle Roger, by thy name,
But yet I pray thee be not *wroth for game*; *angry with my jesting*
A man may say full sooth in game and play."
"Thou sayst full sooth," quoth Roger, "by my fay;
But sooth play quad play, as the Fleming saith,
And therefore, Harry Bailly, by thy faith,
Be thou not wroth, else we departe* here, *part company
Though that my tale be of an hostelere.* *innkeeper

*But natheless, I will not tell it yet,
But ere we part, y-wis* thou shalt be quit." *assuredly
And therewithal he laugh'd and made cheer,
And told his tale, as ye shall after hear.*

The Tale.

*A prentice whilom dwelt in our city,
And of a craft of victuallers was he:
Galliard* he was, as goldfinch in the shaw**, *lively **grove
Brown as a berry, a proper short fellow:
With lockes black, combed full fetisly.* *daintily
And dance he could so well and jollily,
That he was called Perkin Revellour.
He was as full of love and paramour,
As is the honeycomb of honey sweet;
Well was the wenche that with him might meet.
At every bridal would he sing and hop;
He better lov'd the tavern than the shop.
For when there any riding was in Cheap,
Out of the shoppe thither would he leap,
And, till that he had all the sight y-seen,
And danced well, he would not come again;
And gather'd him a meinie* of his sort, *company of fellows
To hop and sing, and make such disport:
And there they *sette steven* for to meet *made appointment*
To playen at the dice in such a street.
For in the towne was there no prentice
That fairer coulde cast a pair of dice
Than Perkin could; and thereto *he was free *he spent money liberally
Of his dispenche, in place of privity.* where he would not be seen*
That found his master well in his chaffare,* *merchandise
For oftentime he found his box full bare.
For, soothely, a prentice revellour,
That haunteth dice, riot, and paramour,
His master shall it in his shop abie*, *suffer for
All* have he no part of the minstrelsy. *although
For theft and riot they be convertible,
All can they play on *giterne or ribible.* *guitar or rebeck**

*Revel and truth, as in a low degree,
They be full wroth* all day, as men may see. *at variance*

*This jolly prentice with his master bode,
Till he was nigh out of his prenticehood,
All were he snubbed* both early and late, *rebuked
And sometimes led with revel to Newgate.
But at the last his master him bethought,
Upon a day when he his paper sought,
Of a proverb, that saith this same word;
Better is rotten apple out of hoard,
Than that it should rot all the remenant:
So fares it by a riotous servant;
It is well lesse harm to let him pace*, *pass, go
Than he shend* all the servants in the place. *corrupt
Therefore his master gave him a quittance,
And bade him go, with sorrow and mischance.
And thus this jolly prentice had his leve*: *desire
Now let him riot all the night, or leave*. *refrain
And, for there is no thief without a louke,
That helpeth him to wasten and to souk* *spend
Of that he bribe* can, or borrow may, *steal
Anon he sent his bed and his array
Unto a compere* of his owen sort, *comrade
That loved dice, and riot, and disport;
And had a wife, that held *for countenance* *for appearances*
A shop, and swived* for her sustenance. *prostituted herself*

.....

THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE.

*Our Hoste saw well that the brighte sun
Th' arc of his artificial day had run
The fourthe part, and half an houre more;
And, though he were not deep expert in lore,
He wist it was the eight-and-twenty day
Of April, that is messenger to May;
And saw well that the shadow of every tree
Was in its length of the same quantity
That was the body erect that caused it;
And therefore by the shadow he took his wit*, *knowledge
That Phoebus, which that shone so clear and bright,
Degrees was five-and-forty clomb on height;
And for that day, as in that latitude,
It was ten of the clock, he gan conclude;
And suddenly he plight* his horse about. *pulled*

"Lordings," quoth he, "I warn you all this rout, *company
The fourthe partie of this day is gone.
Now for the love of God and of Saint John
Lose no time, as farforth as ye may.
Lordings, the time wasteth night and day,
And steals from us, what privily sleeping,
And what through negligence in our waking,
As doth the stream, that turneth never again,
Descending from the mountain to the plain.
Well might Senec, and many a philosopher,
Bewaile time more than gold in coffer.
For loss of chattels may recover'd be,
But loss of time shendeth* us, quoth he. *destroys*

It will not come again, withoute dread,
No more than will Malkin's maidenhead,
When she hath lost it in her wantonness.
Let us not moule thus in idleness.
"Sir Man of Law," quoth he, "so have ye bliss,
Tell us a tale anon, as forword* is. *the bargain*

*Ye be submitted through your free assent
To stand in this case at my judgement.
Acquit you now, and *holde your behest*; *keep your promise*
Then have ye done your devoir* at the least." *duty
"Hoste," quoth he, "de par dieux jeo asente;
To breake forword is not mine intent.
Behest is debt, and I would hold it fain,
All my behest; I can no better sayn.
For such law as a man gives another wight,
He should himselfe usen it by right.
Thus will our text: but natheless certain
I can right now no thrifty* tale sayn, *worthy
But Chaucer (though he *can but lewedly* *knows but imperfectly*
On metres and on rhyming craftily)
Hath said them, in such English as he can,
Of olde time, as knoweth many a man.
And if he have not said them, leve* brother, *dear
In one book, he hath said them in another
For he hath told of lovers up and down,
More than Ovide made of mentioun
In his Epistolae, that be full old.
Why should I telle them, since they he told?
In youth he made of Ceyx and Alcyon,
And since then he hath spoke of every one
These noble wives, and these lovers eke.
Whoso that will his large volume seek
Called the Saintes' Legend of Cupid:
There may he see the large woundes wide
Of Lucrece, and of Babylon Thisbe;
The sword of Dido for the false Enee;
The tree of Phillis for her Demophon;
The plaint of Diane, and of Hermion,
Of Ariadne, and Hypsipile;
The barren isle standing in the sea;
The drown'd Leander for his fair Hero;
The teares of Helene, and eke the woe
Of Briseis, and Laodamia;
The cruelty of thee, Queen Medea,
Thy little children hanging by the halse*, *neck
For thy Jason, that was of love so false.
Hypermnestra, Penelop', Alcest',
Your wifehood he commendeth with the best.*

But certainly no worde writeth he
 Of *thilke wick'* example of Canace, *that wicked*
 That loved her own brother sinfully;
 (Of all such cursed stories I say, Fy),
 Or else of Tyrius Apollonius,
 How that the cursed king Antiochus
 Bereft his daughter of her maidenhead;
 That is so horrible a tale to read,
 When he her threw upon the pavement.
 And therefore he, *of full avisement*, *deliberately, advisedly*
 Would never write in none of his sermons
 Of such unkind* abominations; *unnatural
 Nor I will none rehearse, if that I may.
 But of my tale how shall I do this day?
 Me were loth to be liken'd doubtless
 To Muses, that men call Pierides
 (Metamorphoseos wot what I mean),
 But natheless I recke not a bean,
 Though I come after him with hawebake*; *lout
 I speak in prose, and let him rhymes make."
 And with that word, he with a sober cheer
 Began his tale, and said as ye shall hear.

Tale.

O scatheful harm, condition of poverty,
 With thirst, with cold, with hunger so confounded;
 To aske help thee shameth in thine heart;
 If thou none ask, so sore art thou y-wounded,
 That very need unwrappeth all thy wound hid.
 Maugre thine head thou must for indigence
 Or steal, or beg, or borrow thy dispence*. *expense

Thou blamest Christ, and sayst full bitterly,
 He misdeparteth* riches temporal; *allots amiss
 Thy neighebour thou witest* sinfully, *blamest
 And sayst, thou hast too little, and he hath all:
 "Parfay (sayst thou) sometime he reckon shall,
 When that his tail shall *brennen in the glade*, *burn in the fire*
 For he not help'd the needful in their need."

Hearken what is the sentence of the wise:
Better to die than to have indigence.
Thy selve neighebour will thee despise, *that same*
If thou be poor, farewell thy reverence.
Yet of the wise man take this sentence,
Alle the days of poore men be wick'*, *wicked, evil
Beware therefore ere thou come to that prick*. *point

If thou be poor, thy brother hateth thee,
And all thy friendes flee from thee, alas!
O riche merchants, full of wealth be ye,
O noble, prudent folk, as in this case,
Your bagges be not fill'd with *ambes ace,* *two aces*
But with *six-cinque*, that runneth for your chance; *six-five*
At Christenmass well merry may ye dance.

Ye seeke land and sea for your winnings,
As wise folk ye knowen all th' estate
Of regnes*; ye be fathers of tidings, *kingdoms
And tales, both of peace and of debate*: *contention, war
I were right now of tales desolate*, *barren, empty.
But that a merchant, gone in many a year,
Me taught a tale, which ye shall after hear.

In Syria whilom dwelt a company
Of chapmen rich, and thereto sad* and true, *grave, steadfast
Clothes of gold, and satins rich of hue.
That widewhere* sent their spicery, *to distant parts
Their chaffare* was so thriftly** and so new, *wares **advantageous
That every wight had dainty* to chaffare** *pleasure **deal
With them, and eke to selle them their ware.

Now fell it, that the masters of that sort
Have *shapen them* to Rome for to wend, *determined, prepared*
Were it for chapmanhood* or for disport, *trading
None other message would they thither send,
But come themselves to Rome, this is the end:
And in such place as thought them a vantage
For their intent, they took their herbergage.* *lodging

Sojourned have these merchants in that town
A certain time as fell to their pleasance:
And so befell, that th' excellent renown

Of th' emperore's daughter, Dame Constance,
Reported was, with every circumstance,
Unto these Syrian merchants in such wise,
From day to day, as I shall you devise* *relate

This was the common voice of every man
"Our emperor of Rome, God him see*, *look on with favour
A daughter hath, that since the the world began,
To reckon as well her goodness and beauty,
Was never such another as is she:
I pray to God in honour her sustene*, *sustain
And would she were of all Europe the queen.

"In her is highe beauty without pride,
And youth withoute greenhood* or folly: *childishness, immaturity
To all her workes virtue is her guide;
Humbless hath slain in her all tyranny:
She is the mirror of all courtesy,
Her heart a very chamber of holiness,
Her hand minister of freedom for almess*." *almsgiving

And all this voice was sooth, as God is true;
But now to purpose* let us turn again. *our tale
These merchants have done freight their shippes new,
And when they have this blissful maiden seen,
Home to Syria then they went full fain,
And did their needes*, as they have done yore,* *business **formerly
And liv'd in weal*; I can you say no more. *prosperity

Now fell it, that these merchants stood in grace* *favour
Of him that was the Soudan* of Syrie: *Sultan
For when they came from any strange place
He would of his benigne courtesy
Make them good cheer, and busily espy* *inquire
Tidings of sundry regnes*, for to lear** *realms **learn
The wonders that they mighte see or hear.

Amonges other thinges, specially
These merchants have him told of Dame Constance
So great nobless, in earnest so royally,
That this Soudan hath caught so great pleasance* *pleasure
To have her figure in his remembrance,

That all his lust, and all his busy cure**, *pleasure **care
Was for to love her while his life may dure.*

Paraventure in thilke large book, *that
Which that men call the heaven, y-written was
With starres, when that he his birthe took,
That he for love should have his death, alas!
For in the starres, clearer than is glass,
Is written, God wot, whoso could it read,
The death of every man withoute dread.* *doubt*

*In starres many a winter therebeforn
Was writ the death of Hector, Achilles,
Of Pompey, Julius, ere they were born;
The strife of Thebes; and of Hercules,
Of Samson, Turnus, and of Socrates
The death; but mennes wittes be so dull,
That no wight can well read it at the full.*

*This Soudan for his privy council sent,
And, *shortly of this matter for to pace*, *to pass briefly by*
He hath to them declared his intent,
And told them certain, but* he might have grace *unless
To have Constance, within a little space,
He was but dead; and charged them in hie* *haste
To shape* for his life some remedy. *contrive*

*Diverse men diverse thinges said;
And arguments they casten up and down;
Many a subtle reason forth they laid;
They speak of magic, and abusion*; *deception
But finally, as in conclusion,
They cannot see in that none advantage,
Nor in no other way, save marriage.*

*Then saw they therein such difficulty
By way of reason, for to speak all plain,
Because that there was such diversity
Between their bothe lawes, that they sayn,
They trowe* that no Christian prince would fain** *believe **willingly
Wedden his child under our lawe sweet,
That us was given by Mahound* our prophete. *Mahomet*

*And he answered: "Rather than I lose
Constance, I will be christen'd doubtless
I must be hers, I may none other choose,
I pray you hold your arguments in peace,
Save my life, and be not reckeless
To gette her that hath my life in cure,* *keeping
For in this woe I may not long endure."*

*What needeth greater dilatation?
I say, by treaty and ambassadry,
And by the Pope's mediation,
And all the Church, and all the chivalry,
That in destruction of Mah'metry,* *Mahometanism
And in increase of Christs lawe dear,
They be accorded* so as ye may hear; *agreed*

*How that the Soudan, and his baronage,
And all his lieges, shall y-christen'd be,
And he shall have Constance in marriage,
And certain gold, I n'ot* what quantity, *know not
And hereto find they suffisant surety.
The same accord is sworn on either side;
Now, fair Constance, Almighty God thee guide!*

*Now woulde some men waiten, as I guess,
That I should tellen all the purveyance*, *provision
The which the emperor of his noblesse
Hath shapen* for his daughter, Dame Constance. *prepared
Well may men know that so great ordinance
May no man tellen in a little clause,
As was arrayed for so high a cause.*

*Bishops be shapen with her for to wend,
Lords, ladies, and knightes of renown,
And other folk enough, this is the end.
And notified is throughout all the town,
That every wight with great devotioun
Should pray to Christ, that he this marriage
Receive *in gree*, and speede this voyage. *with good will, favour**

*The day is comen of her departing, —
I say the woful fatal day is come,
That there may be no longer tarrying,*

But forward they them dresen all and some. *prepare to set out*
Constance, that was with sorrow all o'ercome,
Full pale arose, and dressed her to wend,
For well she saw there was no other end.*

*Alas! what wonder is it though she wept,
That shall be sent to a strange nation
From friendes, that so tenderly her kept,
And to be bound under subjection
of one, she knew not his condition?
Husbands be all good, and have been *of yore*, *of old*
That knowe wives; I dare say no more.*

*"Father," she said, "thy wretched child Constance,
Thy younge daughter, foster'd up so soft,
And you, my mother, my sov'reign pleasance
Over all thing, out-taken* Christ *on loft*, *except *on high*
Constance your child her recommendeth oft
Unto your grace; for I shall to Syrie,
Nor shall I ever see you more with eye.*

*"Alas! unto the barbarous nation
I must anon, since that it is your will:
But Christ, that starf* for our redemption, *died
So give me grace his hestes* to fulfil. *commands
I, wretched woman, *no force though I spill!* *no matter though
Women are born to thraldom and penance, I perish*
And to be under mannes governance."*

*I trow at Troy when Pyrrhus brake the wall,
Or Ilion burnt, or Thebes the city,
Nor at Rome for the harm through Hannibal,
That Romans hath y-vanquish'd times three,
Was heard such tender weeping for pity,
As in the chamber was for her parting;
But forth she must, whether she weep or sing.*

*O firste moving cruel Firmament,
With thy diurnal sway that crowdest* aye, *pushest together, drivest
And hurtlest all from East till Occident
That naturally would hold another way;
Thy crowding set the heav'n in such array*

*At the beginning of this fierce voyage,
That cruel Mars hath slain this marriage.*

*Unfortunate ascendant tortuous,
Of which the lord is helpless fall'n, alas!
Out of his angle into the darkest house;
O Mars, O Atyzar, as in this case;
O feeble Moon, unhappy is thy pace.* *progress
Thou knittest thee where thou art not receiv'd,
Where thou wert well, from thennes art thou weiv'd.*

*Imprudent emperor of Rome, alas!
Was there no philosopher in all thy town?
Is no time bet* than other in such case? *better
Of voyage is there none election,
Namely* to folk of high condition, *especially
Not *when a root is of a birth y-know?* *when the nativity is known*
Alas! we be too lewed*, or too slow. *ignorant*

*To ship was brought this woeful faire maid
Solemnely, with every circumstance:
"Now Jesus Christ be with you all," she said.
There is no more, but "Farewell, fair Constance."
She *pained her* to make good countenance. *made an effort*
And forth I let her sail in this manner,
And turn I will again to my matter.*

*The mother of the Soudan, well of vices,
Espied hath her sone's plain intent,
How he will leave his olde sacrifices:
And right anon she for her council sent,
And they be come, to knowe what she meant,
And when assembled was this folk *in fere*, *together*
She sat her down, and said as ye shall hear.*

*"Lordes," she said, "ye knowen every one,
How that my son in point is for to lete* *forsake
The holy lawes of our Alkaron*, *Koran
Given by God's messenger Mahomete:
But one avow to greate God I hete*, *promise
Life shall rather out of my body start,
Than Mahomet's law go out of mine heart.*

"What should us tiden* of this newe law, *betide, befall
But thralldom to our bodies, and penance,
And afterward in hell to be y-draw,
For we *renied Mahound our creance?* *denied Mahomet our belief*
But, lordes, will ye maken assurance,
As I shall say, assenting to my lore*? *advice
And I shall make us safe for evermore."

They sworn and assented every man
To live with her and die, and by her stand:
And every one, in the best wise he can,
To strengthen her shall all his friendes fand.* *endeavour
And she hath this emprise taken in hand,
Which ye shall heare that I shall devise*; *relate
And to them all she spake right in this wise.

"We shall first feign us *Christendom to take*; *embrace Christianity*
Cold water shall not grieve us but a lite*: *little
And I shall such a feast and revel make,
That, as I trow, I shall the Soudan quite.* *requite, match
For though his wife be christen'd ne'er so white,
She shall have need to wash away the red,
Though she a fount of water with her led."

O Soudaness*, root of iniquity, *Sultaness
Virago thou, Semiramis the second!
O serpent under femininity,
Like to the serpent deep in hell y-bound!
O feigned woman, all that may confound
Virtue and innocence, through thy malice,
Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice!

O Satan envious! since thilke day
That thou wert chased from our heritage,
Well knowest thou to woman th' olde way.
Thou madest Eve to bring us in servage*: *bondage
Thou wilt fordo* this Christian marriage: *ruin
Thine instrument so (well-away the while!)
Mak'st thou of women when thou wilt beguile.

This Soudaness, whom I thus blame and warray*, *oppose, censure
Let privily her council go their way:
Why should I in this tale longer tarry?

*She rode unto the Soudan on a day,
And said him, that she would *reny her lay,* *renounce her creed*
And Christendom of priestes' handes fong*, *take
Repenting her she heathen was so long;*

*Beseeching him to do her that honour,
That she might have the Christian folk to feast:
"To please them I will do my labour."
The Soudan said, "I will do at your hest,*" *desire
And kneeling, thanked her for that request;
So glad he was, he wist* not what to say. *knew
She kiss'd her son, and home she went her way.*

*Arrived be these Christian folk to land
In Syria, with a great solemne rout,
And hastily this Soudan sent his sond,* *message
First to his mother, and all the realm about,
And said, his wife was comen out of doubt,
And pray'd them for to ride again* the queen, *to meet
The honour of his regne* to sustene. *realm*

*Great was the press, and rich was the array
Of Syrians and Romans met *in fere*. *in company*
The mother of the Soudan rich and gay
Received her with all so glad a cheer* *face
As any mother might her daughter dear
And to the nexte city there beside
A softe pace solemnelly they ride.*

*Nought, trow I, the triumph of Julius
Of which that Lucan maketh such a boast,
Was royaller, or more curious,
Than was th' assembly of this blissful host
But O this scorpion, this wicked ghost,* *spirit
The Soudaness, for all her flattering
Cast* under this full mortally to sting. *contrived*

*The Soudan came himself soon after this,
So royally, that wonder is to tell,
And welcomed her with all joy and bliss.
And thus in mirth and joy I let them dwell.
The fruit of his matter is that I tell;*

*When the time came, men thought it for the best
That revel stint,* and men go to their rest. *cease*

*The time is come that this old Soudaness
Ordained hath the feast of which I told,
And to the feast the Christian folk them dress
In general, yea, bothe young and old.
There may men feast and royalty behold,
And dainties more than I can you devise;
But all too dear they bought it ere they rise.*

*O sudden woe, that ev'r art successour
To worldly bliss! spent* is with bitterness *sprinkled
Th' end of our joy, of our worldly labour;
Woe *occupies the fine* of our gladness. *seizes the end*
Hearken this counsel, for thy sickness*: *security
Upon thy glade days have in thy mind
The unware* woe of harm, that comes behind. *unforeseen*

*For, shortly for to tell it at a word,
The Soudan and the Christians every one
Were all *to-hewn and sticked* at the board, *cut to pieces*
But it were only Dame Constance alone.
This olde Soudaness, this cursed crone,
Had with her friendes done this cursed deed,
For she herself would all the country lead.*

*Nor there was Syrian that was converted,
That of the counsel of the Soudan wot*, *knew
That was not all to-hewn, ere he asterted*: *escaped
And Constance have they ta'en anon foot-hot*, *immediately
And in a ship all steereless,* God wot, *without rudder
They have her set, and bid her learn to sail
Out of Syria *again-ward to Itale.* *back to Italy**

A certain treasure that she thither lad, *took
And, sooth to say, of victual great plenty,
They have her giv'n, and clothes eke she had
And forth she sailed in the salte sea:
O my Constance, full of benignity,
O emperores younge daughter dear,
He that is lord of fortune be thy steer!* *rudder, guide*

*She bless'd herself, and with full piteous voice
Unto the cross of Christ thus saide she;
"O dear, O wealful* altar, holy cross, *blessed, beneficent
Red of the Lambes blood, full of pity,
That wash'd the world from old iniquity,
Me from the fiend and from his clawes keep,
That day that I shall drenchen* in the deepe. *drown*

*"Victorious tree, protection of the true,
That only worthy were for to bear
The King of Heaven, with his woundes new,
The white Lamb, that hurt was with a spear;
Flemer* of fiendes out of him and her *banisher, driver out
On which thy limbes faithfully extend,
Me keep, and give me might my life to mend."*

*Yeares and days floated this creature
Throughout the sea of Greece, unto the strait
Of Maroc*, as it was her a venture: *Morocco; Gibraltar
On many a sorry meal now may she bait,
After her death full often may she wait*, *expect
Ere that the wilde waves will her drive
Unto the place *there as* she shall arrive. *where*

*Men mighten aske, why she was not slain?
Eke at the feast who might her body save?
And I answer to that demand again,
Who saved Daniel in the horrible cave,
Where every wight, save he, master or knave*, *servant
Was with the lion fretted*, ere he astart? ** *devoured ** escaped
No wight but God, that he bare in his heart.*

God list to shew his wonderful miracle *it pleased
In her, that we should see his mighty workes:
Christ, which that is to every harm triacle*, *remedy, salve
By certain meanes oft, as knowe clerkes*, *scholars
Doth thing for certain ende, that full derk is
To manne's wit, that for our, ignorance
Ne cannot know his prudent purveyance*. *foresight*

Now since she was not at the feast y-slau, *slain
Who kepte her from drowning in the sea?
Who kepte Jonas in the fish's maw,*

*Till he was spouted up at Nineveh?
Well may men know, it was no wight but he
That kept the Hebrew people from drowning,
With drye feet throughout the sea passing.*

*Who bade the foure spirits of tempest,
That power have t' annoye land and sea,
Both north and south, and also west and east,
Annoye neither sea, nor land, nor tree?
Soothly the commander of that was he
That from the tempest aye this woman kept,
As well when she awoke as when she slept.*

*Where might this woman meat and drinke have?
Three year and more how lasted her vitaille*? *victuals
Who fed the Egyptian Mary in the cave
Or in desert? no wight but Christ *sans faille.* *without fail*
Five thousand folk it was as great marvaille
With loaves five and fishes two to feed
God sent his foison* at her greate need. *abundance*

*She drived forth into our ocean
Throughout our wilde sea, till at the last
Under an hold*, that nempnen** I not can, *castle **name
Far in Northumberland, the wave her cast
And in the sand her ship sticked so fast
That thennes would it not in all a tide:
The will of Christ was that she should abide.*

The Constable of the castle down did fare *go
To see this wreck, and all the ship he sought*, *searched
And found this weary woman full of care;
He found also the treasure that she brought:
In her language mercy she besought,
The life out of her body for to twin*, *divide
Her to deliver of woe that she was in.*

*A manner Latin corrupt was her speech,
But algate* thereby was she understond. *nevertheless
The Constable, when him list no longer seech*, *search
This woeful woman brought he to the lond.
She kneeled down, and thanked *Godde's sond*; *what God had sent**

*But what she was she would to no man say
For foul nor fair, although that she should dey.* *die*

*She said, she was so mazed in the sea,
That she forgot her minde, by her truth.
The Constable had of her so great pity
And eke his wife, that they wept for ruth:* *pity
She was so diligent withoute slouth
To serve and please every one in that place,
That all her lov'd, that looked in her face.*

*The Constable and Dame Hermegild his wife
Were Pagans, and that country every where;
But Hermegild lov'd Constance as her life;
And Constance had so long sojourned there
In orisons, with many a bitter tear,
Till Jesus had converted through His grace
Dame Hermegild, Constableness of that place.*

In all that land no Christians durste rout; *assemble
All Christian folk had fled from that country
Through Pagans, that conquered all about
The plagues* of the North by land and sea. *regions, coasts
To Wales had fled the *Christianity *the Old Britons who
Of olde Britons,* dwelling in this isle; were Christians*
There was their refuge for the meanwhile.*

But yet n'ere Christian Britons so exiled, *there were
That there n'ere* some which in their privy not
Honoured Christ, and heathen folk beguiled;
And nigh the castle such there dwelled three:
And one of them was blind, and might not see,
But* it were with thilk* eyen of his mind, *except **those
With which men maye see when they be blind.*

*Bright was the sun, as in a summer's day,
For which the Constable, and his wife also,
And Constance, have y-take the righte way
Toward the sea a furlong way or two,
To playen, and to roame to and fro;
And in their walk this blinde man they met,
Crooked and old, with eyen fast y-shet.* *shut*

"In the name of Christ," cried this blind Briton,
"Dame Hermegild, give me my sight again!"
This lady *wax'd afracayed of that soun',* *was alarmed by that cry*
Lest that her husband, shortly for to sayn,
Would her for Jesus Christe's love have slain,
Till Constance made her hold, and bade her wirch* *work
The will of Christ, as daughter of holy Church

The Constable wax'd abashed* of that sight, *astonished
And saide; *"What amounteth all this fare?"* *what means all
Constance answered; "Sir, it is Christ's might, this ado?*"
That helpeth folk out of the fiendes snare:"
And *so farforth* she gan our law declare, *with such effect*
That she the Constable, ere that it were eve,
Converted, and on Christ made him believe.

This Constable was not lord of the place
Of which I speak, there as he Constance fand,* *found
But kept it strongly many a winter space,
Under Alla, king of Northumberland,
That was full wise, and worthy of his hand
Against the Scotcs, as men may well hear;
But turn I will again to my mattere.

Satan, that ever us waiteth to beguile,
Saw of Constance all her perfectioun,
And *cast anon how he might quite her while;* *considered how to have
And made a young knight, that dwelt in that town, revenge on her*
Love her so hot of foul affectioun,
That verily him thought that he should spill* *perish
But* he of her might ones have his will. *unless

He wooed her, but it availed nought;
She woulde do no sinne by no way:
And for despite, he compassed his thought
To make her a shameful death to dey;* *die
He waiteth when the Constable is away,
And privily upon a night he crept
In Hermegilda's chamber while she slept.

Weary, forwaked* in her orisons, *having been long awake
Sleepeth Constance, and Hermegild also.
This knight, through Satanas' temptation;

All softly is to the bed y-go, *gone
And cut the throat of Hermegild in two,
And laid the bloody knife by Dame Constance,
And went his way, there God give him mischance.*

*Soon after came the Constable home again,
And eke Alla that king was of that land,
And saw his wife despiteously* slain, *cruelly
For which full oft he wept and wrung his hand;
And ill the bed the bloody knife he fand
By Dame Constance: Alas! what might she say?
For very woe her wit was all away.*

*To King Alla was told all this mischance
And eke the time, and where, and in what wise
That in a ship was founden this Constance,
As here before ye have me heard devise:* *describe
The kinges heart for pity *gan agrise,* *to be grieved, to tremble*
When he saw so benign a creature
Fall in disease* and in misaventure. *distress*

*For as the lamb toward his death is brought,
So stood this innocent before the king:
This false knight, that had this treason wrought,
Bore her in hand that she had done this thing: *accused her falsely*
But natheless there was great murmuring
Among the people, that say they cannot guess
That she had done so great a wickedness.*

*For they had seen her ever virtuous,
And loving Hermegild right as her life:
Of this bare witness each one in that house,
Save he that Hermegild slew with his knife:
This gentle king had *caught a great motife* *been greatly moved
Of this witness, and thought he would inquire by the evidence*
Deeper into this case, the truth to lear.* *learn*

*Alas! Constance, thou has no champion,
Nor fighte canst thou not, so well-away!
But he that starf for our redemption, *died
And bound Satan, and yet li'th where he lay,
So be thy stronge champion this day:*

For, but Christ upon thee miracle kithē, *show
Withoute guilt thou shalt be slain *as swithe.* *immediately**

*She set her down on knees, and thus she said;
"Immortal God, that savedest Susanne
From false blame; and thou merciful maid,
Mary I mean, the daughter to Saint Anne,
Before whose child the angels sing Osanne,* *Hosanna
If I be guiltless of this felony,
My succour be, or elles shall I die."*

*Have ye not seen sometime a pale face
(Among a press) of him that hath been lad* *led
Toward his death, where he getteth no grace,
And such a colour in his face hath had,
Men mighte know him that was so bestad* *bested, situated
Amonges all the faces in that rout?
So stood Constance, and looked her about.*

*O queenes living in prosperity,
Duchesses, and ye ladies every one,
Have some ruth* on her adversity! *pity
An emperor's daughter, she stood alone;
She had no wight to whom to make her moan.
O blood royal, that standest in this drede,* *danger
Far be thy friendes in thy greate need!*

*This king Alla had such compassioun,
As gentle heart is full filled of pity,
That from his eyen ran the water down
"Now hastily do fetch a book," quoth he;
"And if this knight will sweare, how that she
This woman slew, yet will we us advise* *consider
Whom that we will that shall be our justice."*

A Briton book, written with Evangiles, *the Gospels
Was fetched, and on this book he swore anon
She guilty was; and, in the meanewhiles,
An hand him smote upon the necke bone,
That down he fell at once right as a stone:
And both his eyen burst out of his face
In sight of ev'rybody in that place.*

A voice was heard, in general audience,
That said; "Thou hast deslender'd guilteless
The daughter of holy Church in high presence;
Thus hast thou done, and yet *hold I my peace?"* *shall I be silent?*"*
Of this marvel aghast was all the press,
As mazed folk they stood every one
For dread of wreake,* save Constance alone. *vengeance

Great was the dread and eke the repentance
Of them that hadde wrong suspicion
Upon this sely* innocent Constance; *simple, harmless
And for this miracle, in conclusion,
And by Constance's mediation,
The king, and many another in that place,
Converted was, thanked be Christe's grace!

This false knight was slain for his untruth
By judgement of Alla hastily;
And yet Constance had of his death great ruth;* *compassion
And after this Jesus of his mercy
Made Alla wedde full solemnely
This holy woman, that is so bright and sheen,
And thus hath Christ y-made Constance a queen.

But who was woeful, if I shall not lie,
Of this wedding but Donegild, and no mo',
The kinge's mother, full of tyranny?
Her thought her cursed heart would burst in two;
She would not that her son had done so;
Her thought it a despite that he should take
So strange a creature unto his make.* *mate, consort

Me list not of the chaff nor of the stre* *straw
Make so long a tale, as of the corn.
What should I tellen of the royalty
Of this marriage, or which course goes beforne,
Who bloweth in a trump or in an horn?
The fruit of every tale is for to say;
They eat and drink, and dance, and sing, and play.

They go to bed, as it was skill* and right; *reasonable
For though that wives be full holy things,
They muste take in patience at night

Such manner* necessities as be pleasings *kind of
To folk that have y-wedded them with rings,
And lay *a lite* their holiness aside *a little of*
As for the time, it may no better betide.

On her he got a knave* child anon, *male
And to a Bishop and to his Constable eke
He took his wife to keep, when he is gone
To Scotland-ward, his foemen for to seek.
Now fair Constance, that is so humble and meek,
So long is gone with childe till that still
She held her chamb'r, abiding Christe's will

The time is come, a knave child she bare;
Mauricius at the font-stone they him call.
This Constable *doth forth come* a messenger, *caused to come forth*
And wrote unto his king that clep'd was All,
How that this blissful tidings is befall,
And other tidings speedful for to say
He* hath the letter, and forth he go'th his way. *i.e. the messenger

This messenger, to *do his advantage,* *promote his own interest*
Unto the kinge's mother rideth swithe,* *swiftly
And saluteth her full fair in his language.
"Madame," quoth he, "ye may be glad and blithe,
And thanke God an hundred thousand sithe;* *times
My lady queen hath child, withoute doubt,
To joy and bliss of all this realm about.

"Lo, here the letter sealed of this thing,
That I must bear with all the haste I may:
If ye will aught unto your son the king,
I am your servant both by night and day."
Donegild answer'd, "As now at this time, nay;
But here I will all night thou take thy rest,
To-morrow will I say thee what me lest.*" *pleases

This messenger drank sadly* ale and wine, *steadily
And stolen were his letters privily
Out of his box, while he slept as a swine;
And counterfeited was full subtilly
Another letter, wrote full sinfully,

Unto the king, direct of this matter
From his Constable, as ye shall after hear.

This letter said, the queen deliver'd was
Of so horrible a fiendlike creature,
That in the castle none so hardy* was *brave
That any while he durst therein endure:
The mother was an elf by aventure
Become, by charmes or by sorcery,
And every man hated her company.

Woe was this king when he this letter had seen,
But to no wight he told his sorrows sore,
But with his owen hand he wrote again,
"Welcome the sond* of Christ for evermore *will, sending
To me, that am now learned in this lore:
Lord, welcome be thy lust* and thy pleasance, *will, pleasure
My lust I put all in thine ordinance.

"Keepe* this child, albeit foul or fair, *preserve
And eke my wife, unto mine homecoming:
Christ when him list may send to me an heir
More agreeable than this to my liking."
This letter he sealed, privily weeping.
Which to the messenger was taken soon,
And forth he went, there is no more to do'n.* *do

O messenger full fill'd of drunkenness,
Strong is thy breath, thy limbes falter aye,
And thou betrayest alle secretness;
Thy mind is lorn,* thou janglest as a jay; *lost
Thy face is turned in a new array;* *aspect
Where drunkenness reigneth in any rout,* *company
There is no counsel hid, withoute doubt.

O Donegild, I have no English dign* *worthy
Unto thy malice, and thy tyranny:
And therefore to the fiend I thee resign,
Let him indite of all thy treachery
'Fy, mannish,* fy! O nay, by God I lie; *unwomanly woman
Fy, fiendlike spirit! for I dare well tell,
Though thou here walk, thy spirit is in hell.

*This messenger came from the king again,
And at the king's mother's court he light,* *alighted
And she was of this messenger full fain,* *glad
And pleased him in all that e'er she might.
He drank, and *well his girdle underpight*; *stowed away (liquor)
He slept, and eke he snored in his guise under his girdle*
All night, until the sun began to rise.*

Eft were his letters stolen every one, *again
And counterfeited letters in this wise:
The king commanded his Constable anon,
On pain of hanging and of high Jewry,* *judgement
That he should suffer in no manner wise
Constance within his regne* for to abide *kingdom
Three dayes, and a quarter of a tide;*

*But in the same ship as he her fand,
Her and her younge son, and all her gear,
He shoulde put, and crowd* her from the land, *push
And charge her, that she never eft come there.
O my Constance, well may thy ghost* have fear, *spirit
And sleeping in thy dream be in penance,* *pain, trouble
When Donegild cast* all this ordinance.** *contrived **plan, plot*

*This messenger, on morrow when he woke,
Unto the castle held the nexte* way, *nearest
And to the constable the letter took;
And when he this dispiteous* letter sey,** *cruel **saw
Full oft he said, "Alas, and well-away!
Lord Christ," quoth he, "how may this world endure?
So full of sin is many a creature.*

*"O mighty God, if that it be thy will,
Since thou art rightful judge, how may it be
That thou wilt suffer innocence to spill,* *be destroyed
And wicked folk reign in prosperity?
Ah! good Constance, alas! so woe is me,
That I must be thy tormentor, or dey* *die
A shameful death, there is no other way.*

*Wept bothe young and old in all that place,
When that the king this cursed letter sent;
And Constance, with a deadly pale face,*

*The fourth day toward her ship she went.
But natheless she took in good intent
The will of Christ, and kneeling on the strond* *strand, shore
She saide, "Lord, aye welcome be thy sond* *whatever thou sendest*

*"He that me kepte from the false blame,
While I was in the land amonges you,
He can me keep from harm and eke from shame
In the salt sea, although I see not how
As strong as ever he was, he is yet now,
In him trust I, and in his mother dere,
That is to me my sail and eke my stere."* *rudder, guide*

*Her little child lay weeping in her arm
And, kneeling, piteously to him she said
"Peace, little son, I will do thee no harm:"
With that her kerchief off her head she braid,* *took, drew
And over his little eyen she it laid,
And in her arm she lulled it full fast,
And unto heav'n her eyen up she cast.*

*"Mother," quoth she, "and maiden bright, Mary,
Sooth is, that through a woman's eggement* *incitement, egging on
Mankind was lorn,* and damned aye to die; *lost
For which thy child was on a cross y-rent:* *torn, pierced
Thy blissful eyen saw all his torment,
Then is there no comparison between
Thy woe, and any woe man may sustene.*

*"Thou saw'st thy child y-slain before thine eyen,
And yet now lives my little child, parfay:* *by my faith
Now, lady bright, to whom the woeful cryen,
Thou glory of womanhood, thou faire may,* *maid
Thou haven of refuge, bright star of day,
Rue* on my child, that of thy gentleness *take pity
Ruest on every rueful* in distress. *sorrowful person*

*"O little child, alas! what is thy guilt,
That never wroughtest sin as yet, pardie?* *par Dieu; by God
Why will thine harde* father have thee spilt?*** *cruel **destroyed
O mercy, deare Constable," quoth she,
"And let my little child here dwell with thee:*

*And if thou dar'st not save him from blame,
So kiss him ones in his father's name."*

*Therewith she looked backward to the land,
And saide, "Farewell, husband ruthelless!"
And up she rose, and walked down the strand
Toward the ship, her following all the press:* *multitude
And ever she pray'd her child to hold his peace,
And took her leave, and with an holy intent
She blessed her, and to the ship she went.*

Victual'd was the ship, it is no drede, *doubt
Abundantly for her a full long space:
And other necessities that should need* *be needed
She had enough, heried* be Godde's grace: *praised
For wind and weather, Almighty God purchase,* *provide
And bring her home; I can no better say;
But in the sea she drived forth her way.*

*Alla the king came home soon after this
Unto the castle, of the which I told,
And asked where his wife and his child is;
The Constable gan about his heart feel cold,
And plainly all the matter he him told
As ye have heard; I can tell it no better;
And shew'd the king his seal, and eke his letter*

*And saide; "Lord, as ye commanded me
On pain of death, so have I done certain."
The messenger tormented* was, till he *tortured
Muste beknow,* and tell it flat and plain, *confess
From night to night in what place he had lain;
And thus, by wit and subtle inquiring,
Imagin'd was by whom this harm gan spring.*

*The hand was known that had the letter wrote,
And all the venom of the cursed deed;
But in what wise, certainly I know not.
Th' effect is this, that Alla, *out of drede,* *without doubt*
His mother slew, that may men plainly read,
For that she traitor was to her liegeance:* *allegiance
Thus ended olde Donegild with mischance.*

*The sorrow that this Alla night and day
Made for his wife, and for his child also,
There is no tongue that it telle may.
But now will I again to Constance go,
That floated in the sea in pain and woe
Five year and more, as liked Christe's sond,* *decree, command
Ere that her ship approached to the lond.* *land*

*Under an heathen castle, at the last,
Of which the name in my text I not find,
Constance and eke her child the sea upcast.
Almighty God, that saved all mankind,
Have on Constance and on her child some mind,
That fallen is in heathen hand eftsoon* *again
In point to spill, as I shall tell you soon! *in danger of
perishing*
Down from the castle came there many a wight
To gauren* on this ship, and on Constance: *gaze, stare
But shortly from the castle, on a night,
The lorde's steward, — God give him mischance, —
A thief that had *renied our creance,* *denied our faith*
Came to the ship alone, and said he would
Her leman* be, whether she would or n'ould. *illicit lover*

*Woe was this wretched woman then begone;
Her child cri'd, and she cried piteously:
But blissful Mary help'd her right anon,
For, with her struggling well and mightily,
The thief fell overboard all suddenly,
And in the sea he drenched* for vengeance, *drowned
And thus hath Christ unwemmed* kept Constance. *unblemished*

*O foul lust of luxury! lo thine end!
Not only that thou faintest* manne's mind, *weakenest
But verily thou wilt his body shend.* *destroy
Th' end of thy work, or of thy lustes blind,
Is complaining: how many may men find,
That not for work, sometimes, but for th' intent
To do this sin, be either slain or shent?*

*How may this weake woman have the strength
Her to defend against this renegade?
O Goliath, unmeasurable of length,*

How mighte David make thee so mate? *overthrown
So young, and of armour so desolate,* *devoid
How durst he look upon thy dreadful face?
Well may men see it was but Godde's grace.*

*Who gave Judith courage or hardiness
To slay him, Holofernes, in his tent,
And to deliver out of wretchedness
The people of God? I say for this intent
That right as God spirit of vigour sent
To them, and saved them out of mischance,
So sent he might and vigour to Constance.*

*Forth went her ship throughout the narrow mouth
Of *Jubaltare and Septe,* driving alway, *Gibraltar and Ceuta*
Sometime west, and sometime north and south,
And sometime east, full many a weary day:
Till Christe's mother (blessed be she aye)
Had shaped* through her endlesse goodness *resolved, arranged
To make an end of all her heaviness.*

Now let us stint of Constance but a throw,** *cease speaking
And speak we of the Roman emperor, **short time
That out of Syria had by letters know
The slaughter of Christian folk, and dishonor
Done to his daughter by a false traitor,
I mean the cursed wicked Soudaness,
That at the feast *let slay both more and less.* *caused both high
and low to be killed*
For which this emperor had sent anon
His senator, with royal ordinance,
And other lordes, God wot, many a one,
On Syrians to take high vengeance:
They burn and slay, and bring them to mischance
Full many a day: but shortly this is th' end,
Homeward to Rome they shaped them to wend.*

*This senator repaired with victory
To Rome-ward, sailing full royally,
And met the ship driving, as saith the story,
In which Constance sat full piteously:
And nothing knew he what she was, nor why*

*She was in such array; nor she will say
Of her estate, although that she should dey.* *die*

*He brought her unto Rome, and to his wife
He gave her, and her younge son also:
And with the senator she led her life.
Thus can our Lady bringen out of woe
Woeful Constance, and many another mo':
And longe time she dwelled in that place,
In holy works ever, as was her grace.*

*The senatores wife her aunte was,
But for all that she knew her ne'er the more:
I will no longer tarry in this case,
But to King Alla, whom I spake of yore,
That for his wife wept and sighed sore,
I will return, and leave I will Constance
Under the senatores governance.*

*King Alla, which that had his mother slain,
Upon a day fell in such repentance;
That, if I shortly tell it shall and plain,
To Rome he came to receive his penitance,
And put him in the Pope's ordinance
In high and low, and Jesus Christ besought
Forgive his wicked works that he had wrought.*

*The fame anon throughout the town is borne,
How Alla king shall come on pilgrimage,
By harbingers that wente him beforne,
For which the senator, as was usage,
Rode *him again,* and many of his lineage, *to meet him*
As well to show his high magnificence,
As to do any king a reverence.*

Great cheere did this noble senator *courtesy
To King Alla and he to him also;
Each of them did the other great honor;
And so befell, that in a day or two
This senator did to King Alla go
To feast, and shortly, if I shall not lie,
Constance's son went in his company.*

Some men would say, at request of Constance
This senator had led this child to feast:
I may not tellen every circumstance,
Be as be may, there was he at the least:
But sooth is this, that at his mother's hest* *behest
Before Alla during *the meates space,* *meal time*
The child stood, looking in the kinges face.

This Alla king had of this child great wonder,
And to the senator he said anon,
"Whose is that faire child that standeth yonder?"
"I n'ot,"* quoth he, "by God and by Saint John; *know not
A mother he hath, but father hath he none,
That I of wot:" and shortly in a stound* *short time
He told to Alla how this child was found.

"But God wot," quoth this senator also,
"So virtuous a liver in all my life
I never saw, as she, nor heard of mo'
Of worldly woman, maiden, widow or wife:
I dare well say she hadde lever* a knife *rather
Throughout her breast, than be a woman wick',* *wicked
There is no man could bring her to that prick.* *point

Now was this child as like unto Constance
As possible is a creature to be:
This Alla had the face in remembrance
Of Dame Constance, and thereon mused he,
If that the childe's mother *were aught she* *could be she*
That was his wife; and privily he sight,* *sighed
And sped him from the table *that he might.* *as fast as he could*

"Parfay,"* thought he, "phantom** is in mine head. *by my faith
I ought to deem, of skilful judgement, **a fantasy
That in the salte sea my wife is dead."
And afterward he made his argument,
"What wot I, if that Christ have hither sent
My wife by sea, as well as he her sent
To my country, from thennes that she went?"

And, after noon, home with the senator.
Went Alla, for to see this wondrous chance.
This senator did Alla great honor,

*And hastily he sent after Constance:
But truste well, her liste not to dance.
When that she wiste wherefore was that sond,* *summons
Unneth* upon her feet she mighte stand. *with difficulty*

When Alla saw his wife, fair he her gret, *greeted
And wept, that it was ruthe for to see,
For at the firste look he on her set
He knew well verily that it was she:
And she, for sorrow, as dumb stood as a tree:
So was her hearte shut in her distress,
When she remember'd his unkindeness.*

*Twice she swooned in his owen sight,
He wept and him excused piteously:
"Now God," quoth he, "and all his hallows bright* *saints
So wisly* on my soule have mercy, *surely
That of your harm as guilteless am I,
As is Maurice my son, so like your face,
Else may the fiend me fetch out of this place."*

*Long was the sobbing and the bitter pain,
Ere that their woeful heartes mighte cease;
Great was the pity for to hear them plain,* *lament
Through whiche plaintes gan their woe increase.
I pray you all my labour to release,
I may not tell all their woe till to-morrow,
I am so weary for to speak of sorrow.*

*But finally, when that the *sooth is wist,* *truth is known*
That Alla guiltless was of all her woe,
I trow an hundred times have they kiss'd,
And such a bliss is there betwixt them two,
That, save the joy that lasteth evermo',
There is none like, that any creature
Hath seen, or shall see, while the world may dure.*

*Then prayed she her husband meekely
In the relief of her long piteous pine,* *sorrow
That he would pray her father specially,
That of his majesty he would incline
To vouchesafe some day with him to dine:*

*She pray'd him eke, that he should by no way
Unto her father no word of her say.*

*Some men would say, how that the child Maurice
Did this message unto the emperor:
But, as I guess, Alla was not so nice,* *foolish
To him that is so sovereign of honor
As he that is of Christian folk the flow'r,
Send any child, but better 'tis to deem
He went himself; and so it may well seem.*

*This emperor hath granted gentilly
To come to dinner, as he him besought:
And well rede* I, he looked busily *guess, know
Upon this child, and on his daughter thought.
Alla went to his inn, and as him ought
Arrayed* for this feast in every wise, *prepared
As farforth as his cunning may suffice. *as far as his skill**

The morrow came, and Alla gan him dress, *make ready
And eke his wife, the emperor to meet:
And forth they rode in joy and in gladness,
And when she saw her father in the street,
She lighted down and fell before his feet.
"Father," quoth she, "your younge child Constance
Is now full clean out of your remembrance.*

*"I am your daughter, your Constance," quoth she,
"That whilom ye have sent into Syrie;
It am I, father, that in the salt sea
Was put alone, and damned* for to die. *condemned
Now, goode father, I you mercy cry,
Send me no more into none heatheness,
But thank my lord here of his kindness."*

*Who can the piteous joye tellen all,
Betwixt them three, since they be thus y-met?
But of my tale make an end I shall,
The day goes fast, I will no longer let.* *hinder
These gladdē folk to dinner be y-set;
In joy and bliss at meat I let them dwell,
A thousand fold well more than I can tell.*

*This child Maurice was since then emperor
Made by the Pope, and lived Christianly,
To Christe's Church did he great honor:
But I let all his story passe by,
Of Constance is my tale especially,
In the olde Roman gestes* men may find *histories
Maurice's life, I bear it not in mind.*

This King Alla, when he his time sey, *saw
With his Constance, his holy wife so sweet,
To England are they come the righte way,
Where they did live in joy and in quiet.
But little while it lasted, I you hete,* *promise
Joy of this world for time will not abide,
From day to night it changeth as the tide.*

*Who liv'd ever in such delight one day,
That him not moved either conscience,
Or ire, or talent, or *some kind affray,* *some kind of disturbance*
Envy, or pride, or passion, or offence?
I say but for this ende this sentence,* *judgment, opinion*
That little while in joy or in pleasance
Lasted the bliss of Alla with Constance.*

*For death, that takes of high and low his rent,
When passed was a year, even as I guess,
Out of this world this King Alla he hent,* *snatched
For whom Constance had full great heaviness.
Now let us pray that God his soule bless:
And Dame Constance, finally to say,
Toward the town of Rome went her way.*

*To Rome is come this holy creature,
And findeth there her friendes whole and sound:
Now is she scaped all her aventure:
And when that she her father hath y-found,
Down on her knees falleth she to ground,
Weeping for tenderness in hearte blithe
She herieth* God an hundred thousand sithe.** *praises **times*

*In virtue and in holy almes-deed
They liven all, and ne'er asunder wend;
Till death departeth them, this life they lead:*

*And fare now well, my tale is at an end
Now Jesus Christ, that of his might may send
Joy after woe, govern us in his grace
And keep us alle that be in this place.*

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE.

Experience, though none authority *authoritative texts
Were in this world, is right enough for me
To speak of woe that is in marriage:
For, lordings, since I twelve year was of age,
(Thanked be God that *is etern on live),* *lives eternally*
Husbands at the church door have I had five,
For I so often have y-wedded be,
And all were worthy men in their degree.
But me was told, not longe time gone is
That sithen* Christe went never but ones *since
To wedding, in the Cane* of Galilee, *Cana
That by that ilk* example taught he me, *same
That I not wedded shoulde be but once.
Lo, hearken eke a sharp word for the nonce,* *occasion
Beside a welle Jesus, God and man,
Spake in reproof of the Samaritan:
"Thou hast y-had five husbandes," said he;
"And thilke* man, that now hath wedded thee, *that
Is not thine husband:" thus said he certain;
What that he meant thereby, I cannot sayn.
But that I aske, why the fifthe man
Was not husband to the Samaritan?
How many might she have in marriage?
Yet heard I never tellen *in mine age* *in my life*
Upon this number definitioun.
Men may divine, and glosen* up and down; *comment
But well I wot, express without a lie,
God bade us for to wax and multiply;
That gentle text can I well understand.
Eke well I wot, he said, that mine husband
Should leave father and mother, and take to me;
But of no number mention made he,
Of bigamy or of octogamy;
Why then should men speak of it villainy?* *as if it were a disgrace*

Lo here, the wise king Dan Solomon, *Lord
 I trow that he had wives more than one;
 As would to God it lawful were to me
 To be refreshed half so oft as he!
 What gift* of God had he for all his wives? *special favour, licence
 No man hath such, that in this world alive is.
 God wot, this noble king, *as to my wit,* *as I understand*
 The first night had many a merry fit
 With each of them, so *well was him on live.* *so well he lived*
 Blessed be God that I have wedded five!
 Welcome the sixth whenever that he shall.
 For since I will not keep me chaste in all,
 When mine husband is from the world y-gone,
 Some Christian man shall wedde me anon.
 For then th' apostle saith that I am free
 To wed, *a' God's half,* where it liketh me. *on God's part*
 He saith, that to be wedded is no sin;
 Better is to be wedded than to brin.* *burn
 What recketh* me though folk say villainy** *care **evil
 Of shrewed* Lamech, and his bigamy? *impious, wicked
 I wot well Abraham was a holy man,
 And Jacob eke, as far as ev'r I can.* *know
 And each of them had wives more than two;
 And many another holy man also.
 Where can ye see, *in any manner age,* *in any period*
 That highe God defended* marriage *forbade
 By word express? I pray you tell it me;
 Or where commanded he virginity?
 I wot as well as you, it is no dread,* *doubt
 Th' apostle, when he spake of maidenhead,
 He said, that precept thereof had he none:
 Men may counsel a woman to be one,* *a maid
 But counseling is no commandement;
 He put it in our owen judgement.
 For, hadde God commanded maidenhead,
 Then had he damned* wedding out of dread;** *condemned **doubt
 And certes, if there were no seed y-sow,* *sown
 Virginity then whereof should it grow?
 Paul durste not commanden, at the least,
 A thing of which his Master gave no hest.* *command
 The dart* is set up for virginity; *goal
 Catch whoso may, who runneth best let see.*

But this word is not ta'en of every wight,
But there as God will give it of his might. *except where*
I wot well that th' apostle was a maid,
But natheless, although he wrote and said,
He would that every wight were such as he,
All is but counsel to virginity.
And, since to be a wife he gave me leave
Of indulgence, so is it no reprove* *scandal, reproach
To wedde me, if that my make* should die, *mate, husband
Without exception* of bigamy; *charge, reproach
All were it good no woman for to touch *though it might be*
(He meant as in his bed or in his couch),
For peril is both fire and tow t'assemble
Ye know what this example may resemble.
This is all and some, he held virginity
More profit than wedding in frailty:
(*Frailty clepe I, but if* that he and she *frailty I call it,
Would lead their lives all in chastity), unless*
I grant it well, I have of none envy
Who maidenhead prefer to bigamy;
It liketh them t' be clean in body and ghost;* *soul
Of mine estate* I will not make a boast. *condition

For, well ye know, a lord in his household
Hath not every vessel all of gold;
Some are of tree, and do their lord service.
God calleth folk to him in sundry wise,
And each one hath of God a proper gift,
Some this, some that, as liketh him to shift.* *appoint, distribute
Virginity is great perfection,
And continence eke with devotion:
But Christ, that of perfection is the well,* *fountain
Bade not every wight he should go sell
All that he had, and give it to the poor,
And in such wise follow him and his lore:* *doctrine
He spake to them that would live perfectly, —
And, lordings, by your leave, that am not I;
I will bestow the flower of mine age
In th' acts and in the fruits of marriage.
Tell me also, to what conclusion* *end, purpose
Were members made of generation,
And of so perfect wise a wight* y-wrought? *being
Trust me right well, they were not made for nought.

Glose whoso will, and say both up and down,
That they were made for the purgatioun
Of urine, and of other thinges smale,
And eke to know a female from a male:
And for none other cause? say ye no?
Experience wot well it is not so.
So that the clerkes* be not with me wroth, *scholars
I say this, that they were made for both,
That is to say, *for office, and for ease* *for duty and
Of engendrure, there we God not displease. for pleasure*
Why should men elles in their bookes set,
That man shall yield unto his wife her debt?
Now wherewith should he make his payement,
If he us'd not his silly instrument?
Then were they made upon a creature
To purge urine, and eke for engendrure.
But I say not that every wight is hold,* *obliged
That hath such harness* as I to you told, *equipment
To go and use them in engendrure;
Then should men take of chastity no cure.* *care
Christ was a maid, and shapen* as a man, *fashioned
And many a saint, since that this world began,
Yet ever liv'd in perfect chastity.
I will not vie* with no virginity. *contend
Let them with bread of pured* wheat be fed, *purified
And let us wives eat our barley bread.
And yet with barley bread, Mark tell us can,
Our Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.
In such estate as God hath *cleped us,* *called us to
I'll persevere, I am not precious,* *over-dainty
In wifehood I will use mine instrument
As freely as my Maker hath it sent.
If I be dangerous* God give me sorrow; *sparing of my favours
Mine husband shall it have, both eve and morrow,
When that him list come forth and pay his debt.
A husband will I have, I *will no let,* *will bear no hindrance*
Which shall be both my debtor and my thrall,* *slave
And have his tribulation withal
Upon his flesh, while that I am his wife.
I have the power during all my life
Upon his proper body, and not he;
Right thus th' apostle told it unto me,

*And bade our husbands for to love us well;
All this sentence me liketh every deal.* *whit*

*Up start the Pardoner, and that anon;
"Now, Dame," quoth he, "by God and by Saint John,
Ye are a noble preacher in this case.
I was about to wed a wife, alas!
What? should I bie* it on my flesh so dear? *suffer for
Yet had I lever* wed no wife this year." *rather
"Abide,"* quoth she; "my tale is not begun *wait in patience
Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tun
Ere that I go, shall savour worse than ale.
And when that I have told thee forth my tale
Of tribulation in marriage,
Of which I am expert in all mine age,
(This is to say, myself hath been the whip),
Then mayest thou choose whether thou wilt sip
Of *thilke tunne,* that I now shall broach. *that tun*
Beware of it, ere thou too nigh approach,
For I shall tell examples more than ten:
Whoso will not beware by other men,
By him shall other men corrected be:
These same wordes writeth Ptolemy;
Read in his Almagest, and take it there."
"Dame, I would pray you, if your will it were,"
Saide this Pardoner, "as ye began,
Tell forth your tale, and spare for no man,
And teach us younge men of your practique."
"Gladly," quoth she, "since that it may you like.
But that I pray to all this company,
If that I speak after my fantasy,
To take nought agrief* what I may say; *to heart
For mine intent is only for to play.*

*Now, Sirs, then will I tell you forth my tale.
As ever may I drinke wine or ale
I shall say sooth; the husbands that I had
Three of them were good, and two were bad
The three were goode men, and rich, and old
Unnethes mighte they the statute hold *they could with difficulty
In which that they were bounden unto me. obey the law*
Yet wot well what I mean of this, pardie.* *by God
As God me help, I laugh when that I think*

How piteously at night I made them swink,* *labour
But, *by my fay, I told of it no store:* *by my faith, I held it
They had me giv'n their land and their treasure, of no account*
Me needed not do longer diligence
To win their love, or do them reverence.
They loved me so well, by God above,
That I *tolde no dainty* of their love. *cared nothing for*
A wise woman will busy her ever-in-one* *constantly
To get their love, where that she hath none.
But, since I had them wholly in my hand,
And that they had me given all their land,
Why should I take keep* them for to please, *care
But* it were for my profit, or mine ease? *unless
I set them so a-worke, by my fay,
That many a night they sange, well-away!
The bacon was not fetched for them, I trow,
That some men have in Essex at Dunmow.
I govern'd them so well after my law,
That each of them full blissful was and fawe* *fain
To bringe me gay thinges from the fair.
They were full glad when that I spake them fair,
For, God it wot, I *chid them spiteously.* *rebuked them angrily*
Now hearken how I bare me properly.

Ye wise wives, that can understand,
Thus should ye speak, and *bear them wrong on hand,* *make them
For half so boldly can there no man believe falsely*
Swearen and lien as a woman can.
(I say not this by wives that be wise,
But if it be when they them misadvise.)* *unless* *act unadvisedly
A wise wife, if that she can* her good, *knows
Shall *beare them on hand* the cow is wood, *make them believe*
And take witness of her owen maid
Of their assent: but hearken how I said.
"Sir olde kaynard, is this thine array?
Why is my neigheboure's wife so gay?
She is honour'd *over all where* she go'th, *wheresoever
I sit at home, I have no *thrifty cloth.* *good clothes*
What dost thou at my neigheboure's house?
Is she so fair? art thou so amorous?
What rown'st* thou with our maid? benedicite, *whisperest
Sir olde lechour, let thy japes* be. *tricks
And if I have a gossip, or a friend

(Without guilt), thou chidest as a fiend,
If that I walk or play unto his house.
Thou comest home as drunken as a mouse,
And preachest on thy bench, with evil prefe:* *proof
Thou say'st to me, it is a great mischief
To wed a poore woman, for costage:* *expense
And if that she be rich, of high parage;* *birth
Then say'st thou, that it is a tormentry
To suffer her pride and melancholy.
And if that she be fair, thou very knave,
Thou say'st that every holour* will her have; *whoremonger
She may no while in chastity abide,
That is assailed upon every side.
Thou say'st some folk desire us for richness,
Some for our shape, and some for our fairness,
And some, for she can either sing or dance,
And some for gentilles and dalliance,
Some for her handes and her armes smale:
Thus goes all to the devil, by thy tale;
Thou say'st, men may not keep a castle wall
That may be so assailed *over all.* *everywhere*
And if that she be foul, thou say'st that she
Coveteth every man that she may see;
For as a spaniel she will on him leap,
Till she may finde some man her to cheap;* *buy
And none so grey goose goes there in the lake,
(So say'st thou) that will be without a make.* *mate
And say'st, it is a hard thing for to weld *wield, govern
A thing that no man will, *his thankes, held.* *hold with his goodwill*
Thus say'st thou, lovel,* when thou go'st to bed, *good-for-nothing
And that no wise man needeth for to wed,
Nor no man that intendeth unto heaven.
With wilde thunder dint* and fiery leven** *stroke **lightning
Mote* thy wicked necke be to-broke. *may
Thou say'st, that dropping houses, and eke smoke,
And chiding wives, make men to flee
Out of their owne house; ah! ben'dicite,
What aileth such an old man for to chide?
Thou say'st, we wives will our vices hide,
Till we be fast,* and then we will them shew. *wedded
Well may that be a proverb of a shrew.* *ill-tempered wretch
Thou say'st, that oxen, asses, horses, hounds,

They be *assayed at diverse stounds,* *tested at various
 Basons and lavers, ere that men them buy, seasons
 Spooones, stooles, and all such husbandry,
 And so be pots, and clothes, and array,* *raiment
 But folk of wives make none assay,
 Till they be wedded, — olde dotard shrew! —
 And then, say'st thou, we will our vices shew.
 Thou say'st also, that it displeaseth me,
 But if * that thou wilt praise my beauty, *unless
 And but* thou pore alway upon my face, *unless
 And call me faire dame in every place;
 And but* thou make a feast on thilke** day *unless **that
 That I was born, and make me fresh and gay;
 And but thou do to my norice* honour, *nurse
 And to my chamberere* within my bow'r, *chamber-maid
 And to my father's folk, and mine allies,* *relations
 Thus sayest thou, old barrel full of lies.
 And yet also of our prentice Jenkin,
 For his crisp hair, shining as gold so fine,
 And for he squireth me both up and down,
 Yet hast thou caught a false suspicioun:
 I will him not, though thou wert dead to-morrow.
 But tell me this, why hidest thou, *with sorrow,* *sorrow on thee! *
 The keyes of thy chest away from me?
 It is my good* as well as thine, pardie. *property
 What, think'st to make an idiot of our dame?
 Now, by that lord that called is Saint Jame,
 Thou shalt not both, although that thou wert wood,* *furious
 Be master of my body, and my good,* *property
 The one thou shalt forego, maugre* thine eyen. *in spite of
 What helpeth it of me t'inquire and spyen?
 I trow thou wouldest lock me in thy chest.
 Thou shouldest say, 'Fair wife, go where thee lest;
 Take your disport; I will believe no tales;
 I know you for a true wife, Dame Ales.'* *Alice
 We love no man, that taketh keep* or charge *care
 Where that we go; we will be at our large.
 Of alle men most blessed may he be,
 The wise astrologer Dan* Ptolemy, *Lord
 That saith this proverb in his Almagest:
 'Of alle men his wisdom is highest,
 That recketh not who hath the world in hand.

By this proverb thou shalt well understand,
 Have thou enough, what thar* thee reck or care *needs, behoves
 How merrily that other folkes fare?
 For certes, olde dotard, by your leave,
 Ye shall have [pleasure] right enough at eve.
 He is too great a niggard that will werne* *forbid
 A man to light a candle at his lantern;
 He shall have never the less light, pardie.
 Have thou enough, thee thar* not plaine** thee *need **complain
 Thou say'st also, if that we make us gay
 With clothing and with precious array,
 That it is peril of our chastity.
 And yet, — with sorrow! — thou enforcest thee,
 And say'st these words in the apostle's name:
 'In habit made with chastity and shame* *modesty
 Ye women shall apparel you,' quoth he,
 'And not in tressed hair and gay perrie,* *jewels
 As pearles, nor with gold, nor clothes rich.'
 After thy text nor after thy rubrich
 I will not work as muchel as a gnat.
 Thou say'st also, I walk out like a cat;
 For whoso woulde singe the catte's skin
 Then will the catte well dwell in her inn;* *house
 And if the catte's skin be sleek and gay,
 She will not dwell in house half a day,
 But forth she will, ere any day be daw'd,
 To shew her skin, and go a caterwaw'd.* *caterwauling
 This is to say, if I be gay, sir shrew,
 I will run out, my borel* for to shew. *apparel, fine clothes
 Sir olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?
 Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyen
 To be my wardcorps,* as he can best *body-guard
 In faith he shall not keep me, *but me lest.* *unless I please*
 Yet could I *make his beard,* so may I the. *make a jest of him*

"Thou sayest eke, that there be thinges three, *thrive
 Which thinges greatly trouble all this earth,
 And that no wighte may endure the firth:* *fourth
 O lefe* sir shrew, may Jesus short** thy life. *pleasant **shorten
 Yet preachest thou, and say'st, a hateful wife
 Y-reckon'd is for one of these mischances.
 Be there *none other manner resemblances* *no other kind of
 That ye may liken your parables unto, comparison*

But if a silly wife be one of tho?* *those
Thou likenest a woman's love to hell;
To barren land where water may not dwell.
Thou likenest it also to wild fire;
The more it burns, the more it hath desire
To consume every thing that burnt will be.
Thou sayest, right as wormes shend* a tree, *destroy
Right so a wife destroyeth her husband;
This know they well that be to wives bond."

Lordings, right thus, as ye have understand,
Bare I stiffly mine old husbands on hand, *made them believe*
That thus they saiden in their drunkenness;
And all was false, but that I took witness
On Jenkin, and upon my niece also.
O Lord! the pain I did them, and the woe,
'Full guiltless, by Godde's sweete pine;* *pain
For as a horse I coulde bite and whine;
I coulde plain,* an'** I was in the guilt, *complain **even though
Or elles oftentime I had been spilt* *ruined
Whoso first cometh to the nilll, first grint;* *is ground
I plained first, so was our war y-stint.* *stopped
They were full glad to excuse them full blive* *quickly
Of things that they never *aguilt their live.* *were guilty in their
lives*
Of wenchies would I *beare them on hand,* *falsely accuse them*
When that for sickness scarcely might they stand,
Yet tickled I his hearte for that he
Ween'd* that I had of him so great cherte:** *though **affection
I swore that all my walking out by night
Was for to espy wenchies that he dight:* *adorned
Under that colour had I many a mirth.
For all such wit is given us at birth;
Deceit, weeping, and spinning, God doth give
To women kindly, while that they may live. *naturally
And thus of one thing I may vaunte me,
At th' end I had the better in each degree,
By sleight, or force, or by some manner thing,
As by continual murmur or grudging,* *complaining
Namely* a-bed, there hadde they mischance, *especially
There would I chide, and do them no pleasance:
I would no longer in the bed abide,
If that I felt his arm over my side,

Till he had made his ransom unto me,
 Then would I suffer him do his nicety.* *folly
 And therefore every man this tale I tell,
 Win whoso may, for all is for to sell;
 With empty hand men may no hawkes lure;
 For winning would I all his will endure,
 And make me a feigned appetite,
 And yet in bacon* had I never delight: *i.e. of Dunmow
 That made me that I ever would them chide.
 For, though the Pope had sitten them beside,
 I would not spare them at their owen board,
 For, by my troth, I quit* them word for word *repaid
 As help me very God omnipotent,
 Though I right now should make my testament
 I owe them not a word, that is not quit* *repaid
 I brought it so aboute by my wit,
 That they must give it up, as for the best
 Or elles had we never been in rest.
 For, though he looked as a wood* lion, *furious
 Yet should he fail of his conclusion.
 Then would I say, "Now, goode lefe* tak keep** *dear **heed
 How meekly looketh Wilken oure sheep!
 Come near, my spouse, and let me ba* thy cheek *kiss <
 Ye shoulde be all patient and meek,
 And have a *sweet y-spiced* conscience, *tender, nice*
 Since ye so preach of Jobe's patience.
 Suffer alway, since ye so well can preach,
 And but* ye do, certain we shall you teach* *unless
 That it is fair to have a wife in peace.
 One of us two must bowe* doubteless: *give way
 And since a man is more reasonable
 Than woman is, ye must be suffrable.
 What aileth you to grudge* thus and groan? *complain
 Is it for ye would have my [love] alone?
 Why, take it all: lo, have it every deal,* *whit
 Peter! shrew* you but ye love it well *curse
 For if I would sell my *belle chose*, *beautiful thing*
 I could walk as fresh as is a rose,
 But I will keep it for your owen tooth.
 Ye be to blame, by God, I say you sooth."
 Such manner wordes hadde we on hand.

Now will I speaken of my fourth husband.
My fourthe husband was a revellour;
This is to say, he had a paramour,
And I was young and full of ragerie,* *wantonness
Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a pie.* *magpie
Then could I dance to a harpe smale,
And sing, y-wis,* as any nightingale, *certainly
When I had drunk a draught of sweete wine.
Metellius, the foule churl, the swine,
That with a staff bereft his wife of life
For she drank wine, though I had been his wife,
Never should he have daunted me from drink:
And, after wine, of Venus most I think.
For all so sure as cold engenders hail,
A liquorish mouth must have a liquorish tail.
In woman vinolent* is no defence,** *full of wine *resistance
This knowe lechours by experience.
But, lord Christ, when that it rememb'reth me
Upon my youth, and on my jollity,
It tickleth me about mine heart-root;
Unto this day it doth mine heart boot,* *good
That I have had my world as in my time.
But age, alas! that all will envenime,* *poison, embitter
Hath me bereft my beauty and my pith:* *vigour
Let go; farewell; the devil go therewith.
The flour is gon, there is no more to tell,
The bran, as I best may, now must I sell.
But yet to be right merry will I fand.* *try
Now forth to tell you of my fourth husband,
I say, I in my heart had great despite,
That he of any other had delight;
But he was quit,* by God and by Saint Joice: *requited, paid back
I made for him of the same wood a cross;
Not of my body in no foul mannere,
But certainly I made folk such cheer,
That in his owen grease I made him fry
For anger, and for very jealousy.
By God, in earth I was his purgatory,
For which I hope his soul may be in glory.
For, God it wot, he sat full oft and sung,
When that his shoe full bitterly him wrung.* *pinched
There was no wight, save God and he, that wist

In many wise how sore I did him twist.
He died when I came from Jerusalem,
And lies in grave under the *roode beam:* *cross*
Although his tomb is not so curious
As was the sepulchre of Darius,
Which that Apelles wrought so subtely.
It is but waste to bury them preciously.
Let him fare well, God give his soule rest,
He is now in his grave and in his chest.

Now of my fifthe husband will I tell:
God let his soul never come into hell.
And yet was he to me the moste shrew;* *cruel, ill-tempered
That feel I on my ribbes all *by rew,* *in a row
And ever shall, until mine ending day.
But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,
And therewithal so well he could me glose,* *flatter
When that he woulde have my belle chose,
Though he had beaten me on every bone,
Yet could he win again my love anon.
I trow, I lov'd him better, for that he
Was of his love so dangerous* to me. *sparing, difficult
We women have, if that I shall not lie,
In this matter a quainte fantasy.
Whatever thing we may not lightly have,
Thereafter will we cry all day and crave.
Forbid us thing, and that desire we;
Press on us fast, and thenne will we flee.
With danger* utter we all our chaffare;** *difficulty **merchandise
Great press at market maketh deare ware,
And too great cheap is held at little price;
This knoweth every woman that is wise.
My fifthe husband, God his soule bless,
Which that I took for love and no richness,
He some time was *a clerk of Oxenford,* *a scholar of Oxford*
And had left school, and went at home to board
With my gossip,* dwelling in oure town: *godmother
God have her soul, her name was Alisoun.
She knew my heart, and all my privity,
Bet than our parish priest, so may I the.* *thrive
To her betrayed I my counsel all;
For had my husband pissed on a wall,
Or done a thing that should have cost his life,

To her, and to another worthy wife,
 And to my niece, which that I loved well,
 I would have told his counsel every deal.* *jot
 And so I did full often, God it wot,
 That made his face full often red and hot
 For very shame, and blam'd himself, for he
 Had told to me so great a privity.* *secret
 And so befell that ones in a Lent
 (So oftentimes I to my gossip went,
 For ever yet I loved to be gay,
 And for to walk in March, April, and May
 From house to house, to heare sundry tales),
 That Jenkin clerk, and my gossip, Dame Ales,
 And I myself, into the fieldes went.
 Mine husband was at London all that Lent;
 I had the better leisure for to play,
 And for to see, and eke for to be sey* *seen
 Of lusty folk; what wist I where my grace* *favour
 Was shapen for to be, or in what place? *appointed
 Therefore made I my visitations
 To vigilies,* and to processions, *festival-eves
 To preachings eke, and to these pilgrimages,
 To plays of miracles, and marriages,
 And weared upon me gay scarlet gites.* *gowns
 These wormes, nor these mothes, nor these mites
 On my apparel frett* them never a deal** *fed **whit
 And know'st thou why? for they were used* well. *worn
 Now will I telle forth what happen'd me:
 I say, that in the fieldes walked we,
 Till truely we had such dalliance,
 This clerk and I, that of my purveyance* *foresight
 I spake to him, and told him how that he,
 If I were widow, shoulde wedde me.
 For certainly, I say for no bobance,* *boasting
 Yet was I never without purveyance* *foresight
 Of marriage, nor of other thinges eke:
 I hold a mouse's wit not worth a leek,
 That hath but one hole for to starte* to, *escape
 And if that faile, then is all y-do.* *done
 [*I bare him on hand* he had enchanted me *falsely assured him*
 (My dame taughte me that subtilty);
 And eke I said, I mette* of him all night, *dreamed

He would have slain me, as I lay upright,
 And all my bed was full of very blood;
 But yet I hop'd that he should do me good;
 For blood betoken'd gold, as me was taught.
 And all was false, I dream'd of him right naught,
 But as I follow'd aye my dame's lore,
 As well of that as of other things more.]
 But now, sir, let me see, what shall I sayn?
 Aha! by God, I have my tale again.
 When that my fourthe husband was on bier,
 I wept algate* and made a sorry cheer,** *always **countenance
 As wives must, for it is the usage;
 And with my kerchief covered my visage;
 But, for I was provided with a make,* *mate
 I wept but little, that I undertake* *promise
 To churche was mine husband borne a-morrow
 With neigheighbours that for him made sorrow,
 And Jenkin, oure clerk, was one of tho:* *those
 As help me God, when that I saw him go
 After the bier, methought he had a pair
 Of legges and of feet so clean and fair,
 That all my heart I gave unto his hold.* *keeping
 He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,
 And I was forty, if I shall say sooth,
 But yet I had always a colte's tooth.
 Gat-toothed* I was, and that became me well, *see note
 I had the print of Sainte Venus' seal.
 [As help me God, I was a lusty one,
 And fair, and rich, and young, and *well begone:* *in a good way*
 For certes I am all venerian* *under the influence of Venus
 In feeling, and my heart is martian;* *under the influence of Mars
 Venus me gave my lust and liquorishness,
 And Mars gave me my sturdy hardiness.]
 Mine ascendant was Taure,* and Mars therein: *Taurus
 Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!
 I follow'd aye mine inclination
 By virtue of my constellation:
 That made me that I coulde not withdraw
 My chamber of Venus from a good fellow.
 [Yet have I Marte's mark upon my face,
 And also in another privy place.
 For God so wisly* be my salvation, *certainly

*I loved never by discretion,
But ever follow'd mine own appetite,
All* were he short, or long, or black, or white, *whether
I took no keep,* so that he liked me, *heed
How poor he was, neither of what degree.]
What should I say? but that at the month's end
This jolly clerk Jenkin, that was so hend,* *courteous
Had wedded me with great solemnity,
And to him gave I all the land and fee
That ever was me given therebefore:
But afterward repented me full sore.
He would suffer nothing of my list.* *pleasure
By God, he smote me ones with his fist,
For that I rent out of his book a leaf,
That of the stroke mine eare wax'd all deaf.
Stubborn I was, as is a lioness,
And of my tongue a very jangleress,* *prater
And walk I would, as I had done beforne,
From house to house, although he had it sworn:* *had sworn to
For which he oftentimes would preach prevent it
And me of olde Roman gestes* teach *stories
How that Sulpitius Gallus left his wife
And her forsook for term of all his
For nought but open-headed* he her say** *bare-headed **saw
Looking out at his door upon a day.
Another Roman told he me by name,
That, for his wife was at a summer game
Without his knowing, he forsook her eke.
And then would he upon his Bible seek
That ilke* proverb of Ecclesiast, *same
Where he commandeth, and forbiddeth fast,
Man shall not suffer his wife go roll about.
Then would he say right thus withoute doubt:
"Whoso that buildeth his house all of sallows,* *willows
And pricketh his blind horse over the fallows,
And suff'reth his wife to *go seeke hallows,* *make pilgrimages*
Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows."
But all for nought; I *sette not a haw* *cared nothing for*
Of his proverbs, nor of his olde saw;
Nor would I not of him corrected be.
I hate them that my vices telle me,
And so do more of us (God wot) than I.*

This made him wood with me all utterly; *furious
I woulde not forbear* him in no case. *endure
Now will I say you sooth, by Saint Thomas,
Why that I rent out of his book a leaf,
For which he smote me, so that I was deaf.
He had a book, that gladly night and day
For his disport he would it read alway;
He call'd it Valerie, and Theophrast,
And with that book he laugh'd alway full fast.
And eke there was a clerk sometime at Rome,
A cardinal, that highte Saint Jerome,
That made a book against Jovinian,
Which book was there; and eke Tertullian,
Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise,
That was an abbess not far from Paris;
And eke the Parables* of Solomon, *Proverbs
Ovide's Art, and bourdes* many one; *jests
And alle these were bound in one volume.
And every night and day was his custume
(When he had leisure and vacation
From other worldly occupation)
To readen in this book of wicked wives.
He knew of them more legends and more lives
Than be of goodde wives in the Bible.
For, trust me well, it is an impossible
That any clerk will speake good of wives,
(*But if* it be of holy saintes' lives) *unless
Nor of none other woman never the mo'.
Who painted the lion, tell it me, who?
By God, if women haddde written stories,
As clerkes have within their oratories,
They would have writ of men more wickedness
Than all the mark of Adam may redress
The children of Mercury and of Venus,
Be in their working full contrarious.
Mercury loveth wisdom and science,
And Venus loveth riot and dispence.* *extravagance
And for their diverse disposition,
Each falls in other's exaltation.
As thus, God wot, Mercury is desolate
In Pisces, where Venus is exaltate,
And Venus falls where Mercury is raised.*

*Therefore no woman by no clerk is praised.
The clerk, when he is old, and may not do
Of Venus' works not worth his olde shoe,
Then sits he down, and writes in his dotage,
That women cannot keep their marriage.
But now to purpose, why I tolde thee
That I was beaten for a book, pardie.*

Upon a night Jenkin, that was our sire, *goodman
Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,
Of Eva first, that for her wickedness
Was all mankind brought into wretchedness,
For which that Jesus Christ himself was slain,
That bought us with his heart-blood again.
Lo here express of women may ye find
That woman was the loss of all mankind.
Then read he me how Samson lost his hairs
Sleeping, his leman cut them with her shears,
Through whiche treason lost he both his eyen.
Then read he me, if that I shall not lien,
Of Hercules, and of his Dejanire,
That caused him to set himself on fire.
Nothing forgot he of the care and woe
That Socrates had with his wives two;
How Xantippe cast piss upon his head.
This silly man sat still, as he were dead,
He wip'd his head, and no more durst he sayn,
But, "Ere the thunder stint* there cometh rain." *ceases
Of Phasiphae, that was queen of Crete,
For shrewedness* he thought the tale sweet. *wickedness
Fy, speak no more, it is a grisly thing,
Of her horrible lust and her liking.
Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery
That falsely made her husband for to die,
He read it with full good devotion.
He told me eke, for what occasion
Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life:
My husband had a legend of his wife
Eryphile, that for an ouche* of gold *clasp, collar
Had privily unto the Greekes told,
Where that her husband hid him in a place,
For which he had at Thebes sorry grace.
Of Luna told he me, and of Lucie;*

They bothe made their husbands for to die,
 That one for love, that other was for hate.
 Luna her husband on an ev'ning late
 Empoison'd had, for that she was his foe:
 Lucia liquorish lov'd her husband so,
 That, for he should always upon her think,
 She gave him such a manner* love-drink, *sort of
 That he was dead before it were the morrow:
 And thus algates* husbands hadde sorrow. *always
 Then told he me how one Latumeus
 Complained to his fellow Arius
 That in his garden growed such a tree,
 On which he said how that his wives three
 Hanged themselves for heart dispiteous.
 "O leve* brother," quoth this Arius, *dear
 "Give me a plant of thilke* blessed tree, *that
 And in my garden planted shall it be."
 Of later date of wives hath he read,
 That some have slain their husbands in their bed,
 And let their *lechour dight them* all the night, *lover ride them*
 While that the corpse lay on the floor upright:
 And some have driven nails into their brain,
 While that they slept, and thus they have them slain:
 Some have them given poison in their drink:
 He spake more harm than hearte may bethink.
 And therewithal he knew of more proverbs,
 Than in this world there groweth grass or herbs.
 "Better (quoth he) thine habitation
 Be with a lion, or a foul dragon,
 Than with a woman using for to chide.
 Better (quoth he) high in the roof abide,
 Than with an angry woman in the house,
 They be so wicked and contrarious:
 They hate that their husbands loven aye."
 He said, "A woman cast her shame away
 When she cast off her smock;" and farthermo',
 "A fair woman, but* she be chaste also, *except
 Is like a gold ring in a sowe's nose.
 Who coulde ween,* or who coulde suppose *think
 The woe that in mine heart was, and the pine?* *pain
 And when I saw that he would never fine* *finish
 To readen on this cursed book all night,

All suddenly three leaves have I plight* *plucked
Out of his book, right as he read, and eke
I with my fist so took him on the cheek,
That in our fire he backward fell adown.
And he up start, as doth a wood* lion, *furious
And with his fist he smote me on the head,
That on the floor I lay as I were dead.
And when he saw how still that there I lay,
He was aghast, and would have fled away,
Till at the last out of my swoon I braid,* *woke
"Oh, hast thou slain me, thou false thief?" I said
"And for my land thus hast thou murder'd me?
Ere I be dead, yet will I kisse thee."
And near he came, and kneeled fair adown,
And saide", "Deare sister Alisoun,
As help me God, I shall thee never smite:
That I have done it is thyself to wite,* *blame
Forgive it me, and that I thee beseek."* *beseech
And yet eftsoons* I hit him on the cheek, *immediately; again
And saidde, "Thief, thus much am I awreak.* *avenged
Now will I die, I may no longer speak."

But at the last, with muche care and woe
We fell accorded* by ourselves two: *agreed
He gave me all the bridle in mine hand
To have the governance of house and land,
And of his tongue, and of his hand also.
I made him burn his book anon right tho.* *then
And when that I had gotten unto me
By mast'ry all the sovereignty,
And that he said, "Mine owen true wife,
Do *as thee list,* the term of all thy life, *as pleases thee*
Keep thine honour, and eke keep mine estate;
After that day we never had debate.
God help me so, I was to him as kind
As any wife from Denmark unto Ind,
And also true, and so was he to me:
I pray to God that sits in majesty
So bless his soule, for his mercy dear.
Now will I say my tale, if ye will hear. —

The Friar laugh'd when he had heard all this:
"Now, Dame," quoth he, "so have I joy and bliss,

This is a long preamble of a tale."
And when the Sompnour heard the Friar gale, *speak*
"Lo," quoth this Sompnour, "Godde's armes two,
A friar will intermete him evermo': *interpose*
Lo, goode men, a fly and eke a frere
Will fall in ev'ry dish and eke mattere.
What speak'st thou of perambulation? *preamble*
What? amble or trot; or peace, or go sit down:
Thou lettest our disport in this mattere." *hinderesst*
"Yea, wilt thou so, Sir Sompnour?" quoth the Frere;
"Now by my faith I shall, ere that I go,
Tell of a Sompnour such a tale or two,
That all the folk shall laughen in this place."
"Now do, else, Friar, I beshrew thy face," *curse*
Quoth this Sompnour; "and I beshrewe me,
But if I telle tales two or three *unless*
Of friars, ere I come to Sittingbourne,
That I shall make thine hearte for to mourn:
For well I wot thy patience is gone."
Our Hoste cried, "Peace, and that anon;"
And saide, "Let the woman tell her tale.
Ye fare as folk that drunken be of ale. *behave*
Do, Dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best."
"All ready, sir," quoth she, "right as you lest, *please*
If I have licence of this worthy Frere."
"Yes, Dame," quoth he, "tell forth, and I will hear."

Tale.

In olde dayes of the king Arthour,
Of which that Britons speake great honour,
All was this land full fill'd of faerie; *fairies*
The Elf-queen, with her jolly company,
Danced full oft in many a green mead
This was the old opinion, as I read;
I speak of many hundred years ago;
But now can no man see none elves mo',
For now the great charity and prayeres
Of limitours, and other holy freres, *begging friars*
That search every land and ev'ry stream

*As thīck as motes in the sunne-beam,
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchenes, and bowers,
Cities and burghes, castles high and towers,
Thorpes* and barnes, shepens** and dairies, *villages **stables
This makes that there be now no faeries:
For *there as* wont to walke was an elf, *where*
There walketh now the limitour himself,
In undermeles* and in morrowings**, *evenings **mornings
And saith his matins and his holy things,
As he goes in his limitatioun.* *begging district
Women may now go safely up and down,
In every bush, and under every tree;
There is none other incubus but he;
And he will do to them no dishonour.*

*And so befell it, that this king Arthour
Had in his house a lusty bacheler,
That on a day came riding from river:
And happen'd, that, alone as she was born,
He saw a maiden walking him beforne,
Of which maiden anon, maugre* her head, *in spite of
By very force he reft her maidenhead:
For which oppression was such clamour,
And such pursuit unto the king Arthour,
That damned* was this knight for to be dead *condemned
By course of law, and should have lost his head;
(Paraventure such was the statute tho),* *then
But that the queen and other ladies mo'
So long they prayed the king of his grace,
Till he his life him granted in the place,
And gave him to the queen, all at her will
To choose whether she would him save or spill* *destroy
The queen thanked the king with all her might;
And, after this, thus spake she to the knight,
When that she saw her time upon a day.
"Thou standest yet," quoth she, "in such array,* *a position
That of thy life yet hast thou no surety;
I grant thee life, if thou canst tell to me
What thing is it that women most desiren:
Beware, and keep thy neck-bone from the iron* *executioner's axe
And if thou canst not tell it me anon,
Yet will I give thee leave for to gon
A twelvemonth and a day, to seek and lear* *learn*

An answer suffisant* in this matter. *satisfactory
And surety will I have, ere that thou pace,* *go
Thy body for to yelden in this place."
Woe was the knight, and sorrowfully siked;* *sighed
But what? he might not do all as him liked.
And at the last he chose him for to wend,* *depart
And come again, right at the yeare's end,
With such answer as God would him purvey.* *provide
And took his leave, and wended forth his way.

He sought in ev'ry house and ev'ry place,
Where as he hoped for to finde grace,
To learne what thing women love the most:
But he could not arrive in any coast,
Where as he mighte find in this matter
Two creatures *according in fere.* *agreeing together*
Some said that women loved best richness,
Some said honour, and some said jolliness,
Some rich array, and some said lust* a-bed, *pleasure
And oft time to be widow and be wed.
Some said, that we are in our heart most eased
When that we are y-flatter'd and y-praised.
He *went full nigh the sooth,* I will not lie; *came very near
A man shall win us best with flattery; the truth*
And with attendance, and with business
Be we y-limed,* bothe more and less. *caught with bird-lime
And some men said that we do love the best
For to be free, and do *right as us lest,* *whatever we please*
And that no man reprove us of our vice,
But say that we are wise, and nothing nice,* *foolish
For truly there is none among us all,
If any wight will *claw us on the gall,* *see note*
That will not kick, for that he saith us sooth:
Assay,* and he shall find it, that so do'th. *try
For be we never so vicious within,
We will be held both wise and clean of sin.
And some men said, that great delight have we
For to be held stable and eke secre,* *discreet
And in one purpose steadfastly to dwell,
And not bewray* a thing that men us tell. *give away
But that tale is not worth a rake-stele.* *rake-handle
Pardie, we women canne nothing hele,* *hide
Witness on Midas; will ye hear the tale?

Ovid, amanges other thinges smale* *small
 Saith, Midas had, under his longe hairs,
 Growing upon his head two ass's ears;
 The whiche vice he hid, as best he might,
 Full subtilly from every man's sight,
 That, save his wife, there knew of it no mo';
 He lov'd her most, and trusted her also;
 He prayed her, that to no creature
 She woulde tellen of his disfigure.
 She swore him, nay, for all the world to win,
 She would not do that villainy or sin,
 To make her husband have so foul a name:
 She would not tell it for her owen shame.
 But natheless her thoughte that she died,
 That she so longe should a counsel hide;
 Her thought it swell'd so sore about her heart
 That needes must some word from her astart
 And, since she durst not tell it unto man
 Down to a marish fast thereby she ran,
 Till she came there, her heart was all afire:
 And, as a bittern bumbles* in the mire, *makes a humming noise
 She laid her mouth unto the water down
 "Bewray me not, thou water, with thy soun"
 Quoth she, "to thee I tell it, and no mo',
 Mine husband hath long ass's eares two!
 Now is mine heart all whole; now is it out;
 I might no longer keep it, out of doubt."
 Here may ye see, though we a time abide,
 Yet out it must, we can no counsel hide.
 The remnant of the tale, if ye will hear,
 Read in Ovid, and there ye may it lear.* *learn

This knight, of whom my tale is specially,
 When that he saw he might not come thereby,
 That is to say, what women love the most,
 Within his breast full sorrowful was his ghost.* *spirit
 But home he went, for he might not sojourn,
 The day was come, that homeward he must turn.
 And in his way it happen'd him to ride,
 In all his care,* under a forest side, *trouble, anxiety
 Where as he saw upon a dance go
 Of ladies four-and-twenty, and yet mo',
 Toward this ilke* dance he drew full yern,** *same **eagerly

*The hope that he some wisdom there should learn;
But certainly, ere he came fully there,
Y-vanish'd was this dance, he knew not where;
No creature saw he that bare life,
Save on the green he sitting saw a wife,
A fouler wight there may no man devise.* *imagine, tell
Against* this knight this old wife gan to rise, *to meet
And said, "Sir Knight, hereforth* lieth no way. *from here
Tell me what ye are seeking, by your fay.
Paraventure it may the better be:
These olde folk know muche thing." quoth she.
My leve* mother," quoth this knight, "certain, *dear
I am but dead, but if* that I can sayn *unless
What thing it is that women most desire:
Could ye me wiss,* I would well *quite your hire.*" *instruct
"Plight me thy troth here in mine hand," quoth she, *reward you*
"The nexte thing that I require of thee
Thou shalt it do, if it be in thy might,
And I will tell it thee ere it be night."
"Have here my trothe," quoth the knight; "I grant."
"Thenne," quoth she, "I dare me well avaunt,* *boast, affirm
Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby,
Upon my life the queen will say as I:
Let see, which is the proudest of them all,
That wears either a kerchief or a caul,
That dare say nay to that I shall you teach.
Let us go forth withoute longer speech
Then *rowned she a pistel* in his ear, *she whispered a secret*
And bade him to be glad, and have no fear.*

*When they were come unto the court, this knight
Said, he had held his day, as he had hight,* *promised
And ready was his answer, as he said.
Full many a noble wife, and many a maid,
And many a widow, for that they be wise, —
The queen herself sitting as a justice, —
Assembled be, his answer for to hear,
And afterward this knight was bid appear.
To every wight commanded was silence,
And that the knight should tell in audience,
What thing that worldly women love the best.
This knight he stood not still, as doth a beast,
But to this question anon answer'd*

With manly voice, that all the court it heard,
"My liege lady, generally," quoth he,
"Women desire to have the sovereignty
As well over their husband as their love
And for to be in mast'ry him above.
This is your most desire, though ye me kill,
Do as you list, I am here at your will."
In all the court there was no wife nor maid
Nor widow, that contraried what he said,
But said, he worthy was to have his life.
And with that word up start that olde wife
Which that the knight saw sitting on the green.

"Mercy," quoth she, "my sovereign lady queen,
Ere that your court departe, do me right.
I taughte this answer unto this knight,
For which he plighted me his trothe there,
The firste thing I would of him requere,
He would it do, if it lay in his might.
Before this court then pray I thee, Sir Knight,"
Quoth she, "that thou me take unto thy wife,
For well thou know'st that I have kept* thy life. *preserved
If I say false, say nay, upon thy fay."* *faith
This knight answer'd, "Alas, and well-away!
I know right well that such was my behest.* *promise
For Godde's love choose a new request
Take all my good, and let my body go."
"Nay, then," quoth she, "I shrew* us bothe two, *curse
For though that I be old, and foul, and poor,
I n'ould* for all the metal nor the ore, *would not
That under earth is grave,* or lies above *buried
But if thy wife I were and eke thy love."
"My love?" quoth he, "nay, my damnation,
Alas! that any of my nation
Should ever so foul disparaged be.
But all for nought; the end is this, that he
Constrained was, that needs he muste wed,
And take this olde wife, and go to bed.

Now woulde some men say paraventure
That for my negligence I do no cure* *take no pains
To tell you all the joy and all th' array
That at the feast was made that ilke* day. *same

To which thing shortly answeren I shall:
 I say there was no joy nor feast at all,
 There was but heaviness and much sorrow:
 For privily he wed her on the morrow;
 And all day after hid him as an owl,
 So woe was him, his wife look'd so foul
 Great was the woe the knight had in his thought
 When he was with his wife to bed y-brought;
 He wallow'd, and he turned to and fro.
 This olde wife lay smiling evermo',
 And said, "Dear husband, benedicite,
 Fares every knight thus with his wife as ye?
 Is this the law of king Arthoures house?
 Is every knight of his thus dangerous?* *fastidious, niggardly
 I am your owen love, and eke your wife
 I am she, which that saved hath your life
 And certes yet did I you ne'er unright.
 Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?
 Ye fare like a man had lost his wit.
 What is my guilt? for God's love tell me it,
 And it shall be amended, if I may."
 "Amended!" quoth this knight; "alas, nay, nay,
 It will not be amended, never mo';
 Thou art so loathly, and so old also,
 And thereto* comest of so low a kind, *in addition
 That little wonder though I wallow and wind;* *writhe, turn about
 So woulde God, mine hearte woulde brest!"* *burst
 "Is this," quoth she, "the cause of your unrest?"
 "Yea, certainly," quoth he; "no wonder is."
 "Now, Sir," quoth she, "I could amend all this,
 If that me list, ere it were dayes three,
 So well ye mighte bear you unto me. *if you could conduct
 But, for ye speaken of such gentleness yourself well
 As is descended out of old riches, towards me*
 That therefore shalle ye be gentlemen;
 Such arrogancy is *not worth a hen.* *worth nothing
 Look who that is most virtuous alway,
 Prive and apert, and most intendeth aye *in private and public*
 To do the gentle deedes that he can;
 And take him for the greatest gentleman.
 Christ will,* we claim of him our gentleness, *wills, requires
 Not of our elders* for their old riches. *ancestors

For though they gave us all their heritage,
For which we claim to be of high parage,* *birth, descent
Yet may they not bequeathe, for no thing,
To none of us, their virtuous living
That made them gentlemen called to be,
And bade us follow them in such degree.
Well can the wise poet of Florence,
That highte Dante, speak of this sentence:* *sentiment
Lo, in such manner* rhyme is Dante's tale. *kind of
'Full seld'* upriseth by his branches smale *seldom
Prowess of man, for God of his goodness
Wills that we claim of him our gentleness;
For of our elders may we nothing claim
But temp'ral things that man may hurt and maim.
Eke every wight knows this as well as I,
If gentleness were planted naturally
Unto a certain lineage down the line,
Prive and apert, then would they never fine* *cease
To do of gentleness the fair office
Then might they do no villainy nor vice.
Take fire, and bear it to the darkest house
Betwixt this and the mount of Caucasus,
And let men shut the doores, and go thenne,* *thence
Yet will the fire as fair and lighte brenne* *burn
As twenty thousand men might it behold;
Its office natural aye will it hold, *it will perform its
On peril of my life, till that it die. natural duty*
Here may ye see well how that gentery* *gentility, nobility
Is not annexed to possession,
Since folk do not their operation
Alway, as doth the fire, lo, *in its kind* *from its very nature*
For, God it wot, men may full often find
A lorde's son do shame and villainy.
And he that will have price* of his gent'ry, *esteem, honour
For* he was boren of a gentle house, *because
And had his elders noble and virtuous,
And will himselfe do no gentle deedes,
Nor follow his gentle ancestry, that dead is,
He is not gentle, be he duke or earl;
For villain sinful deedes make a churl.
For gentleness is but the renomee* *renown
Of thine ancestors, for their high bounte,* *goodness, worth

Which is a strange thing to thy person:
Thy gentleness cometh from God alone.
Then comes our very* gentleness of grace; *true
It was no thing bequeath'd us with our place.
Think how noble, as saith Valerius,
Was thilke* Tullius Hostilius, *that
That out of povert' rose to high
Read in Senec, and read eke in Boece,
There shall ye see express, that it no drede* is, *doubt
That he is gentle that doth gentle deedes.
And therefore, leve* husband, I conclude, *dear
Albeit that mine ancestors were rude,
Yet may the highe God, — and so hope I, —
Grant me His grace to live virtuously:
Then am I gentle when that I begin
To live virtuously, and waive* sin. *forsake

"And whereas ye of povert' me reprove,* *reproach
The highe God, on whom that we believe,
In wilful povert' chose to lead his life:
And certes, every man, maiden, or wife
May understand that Jesus, heaven's king,
Ne would not choose a virtuous living.
Glad povert' is an honest thing, certain; *poverty cheerfully
This will Senec and other clerkes sayn endured*
Whoso that *holds him paid of* his povert', *is satisfied with*
I hold him rich though he hath not a shirt.
He that coveteth is a poore wight
For he would have what is not in his might
But he that nought hath, nor coveteth to have,
Is rich, although ye hold him but a knave.* *slave, abject wretch
Very povert' is sinne, properly. *the only true poverty is sin*
Juvenal saith of povert' merrily:
The poore man, when he goes by the way
Before the thieues he may sing and play
Povert' is hateful good, and, as I guess,
A full great *bringer out of business,* *deliver from trouble*
A great amender eke of sapience
To him that taketh it in patience.
Povert' is this, although it seem elenge* *strange
Possession that no wight will challenge
Povert' full often, when a man is low,
Makes him his God and eke himself to know

Povert' a spectacle* is, as thinketh me *a pair of spectacles
 Through which he may his very* friendes see. *true
 And, therefore, Sir, since that I you not grieve,
 Of my povert' no more me reprove.* *reproach
 "Now, Sir, of elde* ye reprove me: *age
 And certes, Sir, though none authority* *text, dictum
 Were in no book, ye gentles of honour
 Say, that men should an olde wight honour,
 And call him father, for your gentleness;
 And authors shall I finden, as I guess.
 Now there ye say that I am foul and old,
 Then dread ye not to be a cokewold.* *cuckold
 For filth, and elde, all so may I the,* *thrive
 Be greates wardens upon chastity.
 But natheless, since I know your delight,
 I shall fulfil your wordly appetite.
 Choose now," quoth she, "one of these thinges tway,
 To have me foul and old till that I dey,* *die
 And be to you a true humble wife,
 And never you displease in all my life:
 Or elles will ye have me young and fair,
 And take your aventure of the repair* *resort
 That shall be to your house because of me, —
 Or in some other place, it may well be?
 Now choose yourselve whether that you liketh.

This knight adviseth* him and sore he siketh,** *considered **sighed
 But at the last he said in this mannere;
 "My lady and my love, and wife so dear,
 I put me in your wise governance,
 Choose for yourself which may be most pleasance
 And most honour to you and me also;
 I *do no force* the whether of the two: *care not
 For as you liketh, it sufficeth me."
 "Then have I got the mastery," quoth she,
 "Since I may choose and govern as me lest."* *pleases
 "Yea, certes wife," quoth he, "I hold it best."
 "Kiss me," quoth she, "we are no longer wroth,* *at variance
 For by my troth I will be to you both;
 This is to say, yea, bothe fair and good.
 I pray to God that I may *sterve wood,* *die mad*
 But* I to you be all so good and true, *unless
 As ever was wife since the world was new;

And but I be to-morrow as fair to seen, *unless
As any lady, emperess or queen,
That is betwixt the East and eke the West
Do with my life and death right as you lest.* *please
Cast up the curtain, and look how it is."*

*And when the knight saw verily all this,
That she so fair was, and so young thereto,
For joy he hent* her in his armes two: *took
His hearte bathed in a bath of bliss,
A thousand times *on row* he gan her kiss: *in succession*
And she obeyed him in every thing
That mighte do him pleasance or liking.
And thus they live unto their lives' end
In perfect joy; and Jesus Christ us send
Husbandes meek and young, and fresh in bed,
And grace to overlive them that we wed.
And eke I pray Jesus to short their lives,
That will not be governed by their wives.
And old and angry niggards of dispence,* *expense
God send them soon a very pestilence!*