
UNIT 7 A STUDY OF 'THE NONNE PREESTES TALE' II

Structure

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7.0 OBJECTIVE

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- (a) Translate passages from the text into modern English prose.
- (b) Interpret the text.
- (c) Explain passages from it.
- (d) Discuss Chaucer's use of learning and allusion
- (e) Examine his style and
- (f) Be familiar with the tradition of Chaucer criticism

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first unit we described the context of the text, the narrative art of Chaucer with particular reference to this tale, and the complex formal design of the poem.

In this unit we describe the use of learning, allusion and rhetoric made by Chaucer, his style, verse and diction, and the meanings of the tale.

The text with translation into modern English verse, notes and glossary is provided. For a close study you are expected to read it many times in the light of the critical interpretation provided in the two units.

An outline of Chaucer criticism is given to help you place Chaucer properly in the English poetic tradition. Norms and values of literary criticism keep changing, but there is something in art and poetry and the humanistic culture which may be said to be changeless or unalterable. After all, great poets are acknowledged to be great at all times. The mystery of their charm cannot be fully explained by criticism or scholarship.

7.2 THE USE OF LEARNING AND ALLUSION IN NPT

The Tale itself is an adaptation from a French collection of satirical fables, *Roman de Renart*. The two dream stories are taken from Cicero, the great Latin prose-writer. Dionysius Cato on dreams, Macrobius's commentary on the *Dream of Scipio*, are referred to. The dreams of St. Kenelm, Scipio Africanus, Daniel and Joseph of the

Old Testament are mentioned in support of his view by the pedantic cock. All this reflects Chaucer's interest in the contemporary lore of dream-interpretation.

Analogies and parallels are used to introduce learned allusions to the Iliad, the Greek epic by Homer, Aeneid, the Latin epic by Virgil, and to an obscure History of the Trojan war by Dares Phrygius. Allusions to the Christian myth of the loss of paradise, to the theological debate on free will and predestination, the theory of St. Augustine, to the consolations of Philosophy by Boethius (which Chaucer had translated), To Thomas Bradwardine, do all give the tale an atmosphere of learning, reflection and a philosophical context, appropriate to the narrator who is a priest. The reference to the Gospel of St. John is important. The cock is made to twist or adapt the quotation. He mistranslates deliberately. All this illustrates the ironic method of the poet. The reference (in line 446) to one of the most romantic knights of the Arthurian romances— Sir Launcelot de Lakeis sly and ironic.

Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus Christ with a kiss. New Ganelon betrayed his master Charlemagne and caused his defeat. Sinon was a greek who tricked the Trojans into admitting the wooden horse into their city. These three traitors in the spheres of religion, history and myth are compared with the fox, the villain, in the Tale. The familiar parallel of Adam, Eve and Satan is there too.

Some obscure references for a 20th century reader are there. A medieval moralising treatise on beasts, a Latin bestiary, Physiologus, attributed to Theobaldus, is mentioned (in line 505) by the Fox. He claims also to have read a song "Daun Burnal the Ass" (Sir Burnal the Ass) in Nigel Wireker's book.

The author of *Poetria Nova*, Geoffrey de Vinsauf, was regarded in Chaucer's time as a great authority on rhetoric and poetry. The Priest is made to imitate his rhetorical manner in lines 581-608. Contrast the rhetorical, hyperbolic style of these lines with the vivid, realistic description of the chase in the following eight couplets. Astronomy and astrology were Chaucer's favourite objects. We have some evidence of that in this tale too. The Peasant's Revolt of 1381— a contemporary historical event- and one of its leaders- Jack straw- are mentioned in the tale (lines 627-630). The noise that was made in chasing the fox is compared to the noise made by the crowds in the said rebellion.

The use of learning by major English poets like the metaphysical poets, particularly John Donne; John Milton, Alexander Pope and T.S. Eliot is like, and unlike Chaucer's.

The metaphysical poets wrote for a small circle of readers. Milton too was interested in finding "fit audience, though few". Besides, he reflects the conflict as well as the compromise of the Renaissance with the Reformation in his poetry. Classicism and Christianity were undivided in Chaucer's time, but his humanism has a secular bias, which is a mark of his originality. The classicism of Dryden and Pope is imitative and the theme of their poetry is contemporary society, particularly, men of letters and the state of letters in their time. This is something of a late development in the history of English poetry. It may be described as the narrowing down of the subject of poetry to poetry itself-- a circularity. The Waste Land by T.S.Eliot was first received as a very obscure and pedantic poem. Modernism—an amalgam of symbolism, imagism, romanticism and classicism- appeared with this poem. Chaucer's use of learning is most creative. Only Shakespeare may be said to have assimilated it better.

Chaucer's allusions to the poetic, mythological and philosophical traditions of Europe show that he is most European of English poets. Dryden and Pope were mere imitators of the ancients. T.S. Eliot was an American and with him the Trans-Atlantic modern English poetry had emerged. Milton's Christianity, unlike Dante's, was sectarian and reflected a spiritual conflict between reason and faith. Byronism

idolised Byron. Homer, Virgil, Dante and Shakespeare are perhaps the greatest European poets, but Shakespeare's "Englishness" is at once more insular and universal than Chaucer's classical simplicity or Milton's Latinism. Of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton, the last is most exotic, the first is wanting in the depth and range of Shakespeare. Perhaps the freedom from French influence was not complete.

7.3 SPEECH, DIALOGUE, REFLECTION, NARRATION AND DESCRIPTION IN NPT

NPT is a dramatic tale. The action here is more verbal than non-verbal. The debate on dreams, the play of wit between the hero (chauntecleer) and the villain (colfox), the reflections of the priest, the dramatic story-teller, are all verbal action.

The non-verbal action is of two types here. The dream is a psychic event, hardly 'action'. The only physical action is the fox seizing the cock by the neck and running to the forest. The 'action' on the part of the hero, apart from his interpretation of dreams including his own, is wooing, dalliance and enjoyment (see lines 391-437) and play of wit in resolving a crisis.

Speeches, dialogue and reflection, therefore, are more important in this tale than 'action' of the other type. The tale is, thus, remarkable for psychic and mental action. It is more literary or linguistic than might appear on the surface.

The speech of the fox addressed to the cock (518-555) is highly rhetorical and full of dramatic irony. Compare it with Iago's speeches to Othello in the play of that name by Shakespeare, or Satan's in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Evidently, this is a mock-heroic tale in contrast with the serious tragedy and the solemn epic. The brief dialogue between the cock and the fox is crucial action. The cock takes his revenge in a speech of seven lines (three and a half couplets 641-47) and the fox falls in the trap through a speech of half a line (648).

The morals drawn by the participants in the action state the importance of vision (one should keep one's eyes open) and silence (one should not talk when one should hold one's peace). Silence, after all, is golden, while speech is silver. We notice the use and abuse of language – to conceal and to reveal motive. Truth and falsehood in verbal behaviour are to be distinguished by intelligence.

In the debate on dreams, the hen is matter of fact and scientific. She uses expository language or style. Her speech of more than sixty lines (142-203) reflects a skilful control or organisation of feeling and idea.

The cock is long-winded and pedantic in his reply. He is given two hundred lines (204-405) in which he tells two dream stories and refers to many famous dreams in scripture and the classics, implying a correspondence between them and his own. He argues that dreams signify joy or trouble and his own "avision" foretells adversity. His proud, pedantic and amorous character is adumbrated in his mistranslation of a Latin sentence from the gospel according to St. John. He wins the argument but forgets its purpose. He behaves like a smug fatalist ignoring the warning of the dream.

The priest is using the tale as an exemplum. His story is a contemplative and didactic sermon. His reflection on the theological problem of freewill and predetermination relates this tale to the knight's Tale and to *Troilus and Creside*. And in all the three "Chaucer's balance in his just comprehension of tragedy and his gentle sense of humour" may be seen. Poetry and philosophy are united dramatically. In this respect, Chaucer is second only to Shakespeare among great English poets.

The priest's reflection on women or man-woman relationship is curiously less objective. Consider the passage (421-48) where the transition from a solemn, rhetorical tone to satiric-ironical is remarkable. The paradisaical happiness of the cock (434-37) before the fox enters the scene is pastoral or romantic. Notice the word "pasture" used in line 419. But the correspondence with the myth of Adam-Eve-Satan is coloured with antifeminine feeling. The priest's ironic statement that his story is "true" as is the book of Launcelot de Lake reveals the subjective feeling of the narrator author. And a little later he turns again to the topic of woman's counsel to man. His evasive and timid tone is characteristic and tells the story of his own dubious love-hate relation with his mistress prioress.

Chaucer's view of rhetoric is reflected in the priest's reference to Geoffrey de Vinsauf, whose guidance was blindly accepted by poets and rhetoricians of Chaucer's time. Chaucer's poetic technique is more remarkable for irony, satire and realism than for rhetoric and romance. He juxtaposed the plain style with the high style in the tale, creating an ironic effect. In the description of the paradise of married love dramatically rendered (391-420) the poet uses a rhetorical method but not without irony. The realistic style of the chase (609-635) may be contrasted with it.

Chaucer's narrative art combines description, reflection and narration in an aesthetic complex. The narrative has all the qualities that a good narrative requires: (a) the pace and movement of the story, (b) suspense and crisis, (c) Transitions from the serious to the gay tone and back, (d) drama (e) action, (f) contemplating or reflecting on the action, and (g) artistic control of the material of experience. Tradition and individual talent are perfectly blended.

Description is poetic at places, e.g. the description of Chauntecleer's voice and appearance. It is not always so poetic. It is matter-of-fact in tone more frequently. The use of poetic devices like the simile and rhetorical devices like exclamations may be noticed for particular consideration.

In the use of similes, Chaucer is the supreme English poet, as Shakespeare is in the use of metaphors. The Homeric similes of Milton are equally remarkable. The comparisons and similes of lines 85-98 are brilliant. Figure them out.

The most important aspect of Chaucer's style is that the tale is a verse narrative. Modern fiction is normally written in prose. Verse contrasts with prose in many respects. It is more regular and rhythmic. The verse of Chaucer's poems is radically different from the traditional alliterative verse of his age. The influence of Chaucer on the later English poets is immeasurable because they found the syllabic verse pattern introduced by him more congenial than the old alliterative verse.

The music of the heroic couplets of NPT should be appreciated. The initial difficulty of middle English pronunciation can be easily overcome. The syllabic structure of words is somewhat different, especially because the final-e is sounded and adds an extra syllable to the word in many cases.

Chaucer's diction is not 'poetic' in the way in which, according to Wordsworth, that of late 18th century English poetry is.—In the General Prologue Chaucer defended his plain style (lines 725-742). His argument is that rudeness, vulgarity or even obscenity of speech may be dramatically proper on the ground of realism. Secondly, sincerity and honesty require that there should be no reserve (or euphemism) and that words must correspond to action. He mentions both Christ and Plato—the two fountainheads of European culture—in support of his argument. In all this Chaucer was being only half serious. His comic and ironic vision is reflected in his poetic manner.

7.4 LEVELS OF MEANING IN NPT

"On the primary level the Nun's priest's Tale is a brilliant and complex exposure of vanity, self-esteem, and self-indulgence through the mock-heroic treatment of a beast fable. On the secondary level, the Nun's Priest joins the discussions of the Pilgrims on poverty (Man of Law, Wife of Bath), women's advice (Merchant), rhetoric (Host and squire), and marriage. He is also presenting in the contrast between the widow and Chantecleer a veiled comment on his position vis-a-vis the Prioress. Finally, on the level of involuntary revelation, he falls into the pedantry that he is ridiculing and uncovers for a moment in his confusion the feelings of a misogynist dependent on a woman. In this moment there is revealed a second conflict, the conflict between the artist, building with the materials of his art a world where his feelings achieve symbolic and universal expression, and the man, expressing his feelings directly."

7.5 CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL ALLUSION

A touch-and-go allusion to contemporary historical events and personages is made in the Tale. J.L. Hotson suggested so in 1924. According to him, Colfox of the Tale is based on Nicholes Calfox. The real Colfox was one of those who were responsible for the killing of Gloucester, a prince of England and youngest son to Edward III. Chaucer likens the Colfox to famous traitors. The other historical event to which Chaucer seems to have referred is the duel at Coventry between Henry Bolingbroke, then Duke of Hereford, and Thomas Mowbray Duke of Norfolk. King Richard stopped the proceeding just before blows were struck, and exiled the antagonists: Henry for ten years, and Mowbray for ever. "Such an heroic encounter, ending a bit ingloriously, but without hurt, for both combatants, furnishes an excellent occasion for a sympathetic, humorous fable, done in a grave and gay mock-heroic style". A striking similarity between Chantecleer's colours and Henry's arms is noticed. And the striking likeness between the fable and the duel is brought out.

Check Your Progress 6

1. Write a note on Chantecleer's use of learning, distinguishing it from the Priest's and the Poet's.
2. Comment on
 - a) Chaucer's attitude to rhetoric
 - b) His use of rhetoric
3. Compare Chaucer as a learned poet with some other English poets.
4. Write a critical note on Chaucer's use of language.
5. Study the essay "Colfox Vs Chantecleer" by J. Lesley Hotson included in *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism* (1959) edited by Edward WAGENKNECHT. Do you find the argument of Hotson convincing or merely curious?
6. How are poetry and history related? A great critic suggested that poetry is less abstract and more concrete than philosophy and less concrete and more abstract than history. How is this the advantage of poetry?
7. Bring out the poetic features of the style of Chaucer.
8. What makes Chaucer the greatest master of narrative in English verse.
9. Discuss Dryden's description of Chaucer as "the father of English poetry"

7.6 AN OUTLINE SURVEY OF CHAUCER CRITICISM

Chaucer was admired by his contemporaries and imitated by the poets of the succeeding generations in the fifteenth century A.D. The following eulogy by John Skelton is among the first:

O Noble Chaucer, Whos pullish yd eloquence
 Oure Englysshe rude so fresshly bath set out.
 That bounde ar we with all dew reverence,
 With all our strength that we can bring about,
 To owe to you our serveye, and more if we mowte...

Hoccleve praised Chaucer as "the first finder of the English language". Henry VIII exempted his works from his ban on "forbidden" books. Ascham approved of him, and Spenser acknowledged him as "master" from whose "well of English undefyled" he drank deep. Ben Jonson had read Chaucer, and Milton's comments on Chaucer are respectful.

It may be seen that the critical acclaim during the first two centuries after Chaucer focussed on language. Then the language became old and obscure. The transformation of English from Middle English to Modern English was complete.

Joseph Addison's lines on Chaucer in the sixth miscellany (1694) show the new attitude of unfamiliarity with the language."

... Chaucer first, a merry bard, arose,
 And many a story told in rhyme and prose.
 But age has rusted what the poet writ,
 Worn out his language and obscur'd his wit,
 In vain he jests in his unpolish'd strain,
 And tries to make his readers laugh in vain.
 Alexander Pope said:

Authors, like Coins, grow dear as they grow old;
 It is the rust we value, not the gold.
 Chaucer's worst ribaldry is learn'd by rote,
 And beastly Skelton Heads of Houses quote:

But Dryden was much more balanced. However, the general Tendency of the 18th century, or the age of neo-classicism, was to dismiss Chaucer's verse and language. In fact, the unfamiliarity with Chaucer's language continued till Matthew Arnold.

But Dryden held Chaucer "in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, and the Romans Virgil." He called Chaucer "the father of English Poetry" and described him in a fine phrase as "a perpetual fountain of good sense." In Chaucer's verse, however, he found only nine syllables in place of the actual ten, because he did not count the final-e as syllabic in works like "aboute" and "without" in lines 81-2 of our text. They rhyme as well. But his appreciation of Chaucer's art of characterisation is more than fair.

"Chaucer followed Nature everywhere, but was never so bold to go beyond her... we have our forefathers and great-grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days: their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England."

Rewriting or translating Chaucer started with Dryden. A Pope and William Wordsworth also rewrote parts of Chaucer. Nevil Coghill's translation is less free and closer to the original both in language and spirit.

In the mid-19th century the Chaucer society was founded, and towards the end of the century Skeat's edition of Oxford Chaucer started appearing. But Matthew Arnold was, it seems, not aware of the new wave of Chaucer scholarship. His famous criticism of Chaucer as lacking in "high seriousness" derived, partly, from his own lack of humour and, generally, from the romantic aesthetic which regards the artist as her and takes art more seriously than is done in real life and society.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century Chaucer studies have been steadily growing on both sides of the Atlantic. Some prominent American scholars like Kithedge, Manly, Root, Lowes and John Speirs have contributed much to the revival of interest in Chaucer's poetry. It is true that Chaucer studies till about 1920 had strong historical bias. Ever since then Chaucer criticism has emerged and developed as a special branch of English literary criticism.

The texts of Chaucer's poems have been authoritatively edited by F.N. Robinson, J.M. Manly, Edith Rickert, and their pioneer W.W. Skeat. A Chaucer Bibliography with a supplement covering the period 1908-63 and A companion to Chaucer studies (1968) are indispensable to scholars and researchers.

Chaucer's Life-Records, Chaucer's World, Five Hundred years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion are valuable books of reference.

The outline given above shows that Chaucer has always been accepted as a great master of English poetry, but during the last three centuries and a half his language seems to have proved a stumbling block to the reader and the critic.

The emergence of linguistics, particularly Historical linguistics, or Comparative Philology as it was earlier known, made it possible for scholars to appreciate the difference of Chaucer's East Midland Dialect of Middle English from the standard English of today. Secondly, historical scholarship recreated Chaucer's England and his social and literary context. The last six decades have seen the publication in books and journals of studies of Chaucer's verse, language, poetry, style etc. and his place in the English poetic and literary tradition.

The historical approach of the late 19th century and early 20th century Chaucer scholarship interpreted fiction as fact, mistaking realism for reality. The latest view in this respect is that the description of reality in language can only be realistic and must involve the subjective bias or prejudice of the describer. Secondly, Arnold's complaint that "high seriousness" was wanting in Chaucer is now seen in its historical critical perspective. It is accepted that Arnold's view derived partly from his ignorance of Chaucer's language and unfamiliarity with Chaucer's poetic output as a whole, and, more important, from the romantic aesthetic which regarded poets as prophets or legislators of mankind. Poetry, said W.H. Auden, a poet, can make nothing happen. Miles Burrows, a less known poet taken in a poem of two types of poets -- the arch poet and the minipoet and concluded, in a poem entitled "minipoet"

but most of us prefer the minipoet
for the sort of journeys we make now a days.

In India, however, pilgrimages like the one undertaken by Chaucer's pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales are still common. Journeys are always of all sorts, but there is of course a great difference between Chaucer's England and our India.

What is of universal interest in the poetry of Chaucer which is illustrated in NPT at its best is the wealth of experience, the firm grasp of human nature in its great variety, and above all the easy mastery of the art of poetry and a rare assimilation of the tradition of learning.

7.7. SUGGESTED READINGS

A Criticism of Chaucer as a whole

1. *The Canterbury Tales:
A selection of critical Essays* J.I. Anderson (ed)
2. *A Reader's guide to Geoffrey Chaucer* Muriel Bowden

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| 3. | <i>Chaucer in His Time</i> | Derek Brewet |
| 4. | <i>The poet Chaucer</i> | Nevill Coghill |
| 5. | <i>Chaucer and His world</i> | F.E. Halliday |
| 6. | <i>Chaucer and His Poetry</i> | G.L. Kittredge |
| 7. | <i>Chaucer and the Rhetoricians</i> | J.M. Manly |
| 8. | <i>Chaucer and the shape of creation</i> | R.O. Payne |
| 9. | <i>Chaucer's Prosody</i> | Ian Robinson |
| 10. | <i>The Poetry of Chaucer</i> | R.K. Root |
| 11. | <i>Chaucer Criticism</i>
(2 volumes) | Richard J. Scheeck
&
Jerome Taylor
(edd) |
| 12. | <i>Chaucer the Maker</i> | John Speirs |
| 13. | <i>Critics on Chaucer</i> | Sheila Sullivan (ed) |
| 14. | <i>Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism</i> | Edward Wagenknecht
(ed) |
| 15. | <i>On the Sources of the Nun's Priest's tale</i> | K.O. Peterson |

Note: Either A.W. Pfiard's or F.W. Robinson's edition of the text should be used. Nevill Coghill's translation into modern English verse should help the student translate passages from the text into modern English prose.

Works of Reference

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| 1. | <i>Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's
Centerbury Tales</i> | W. F. Bryan
and
Germaine Dempster |
| 2. | <i>Chaucer's Life-Records</i> | M.M. Crow and
C.C. Olsen (edd) |
| 3. | <i>A Bibliography of Chaucer
1908-53</i>
(Supplement 1954-63 by W.R. Crawford) | D.D. Griffith |
| 4. | <i>Companion to Chaucer Studies</i> | Beryl Rowland (ed) |
| 5. | <i>Five Hundred Years of Chaucer
Criticism and Allusion</i> | Caroline F.E. Spurgeon |

Notes:

1. A Brief Note on Chaucer's grammar

The middle English dialect (East Midland) of Chaucer forms the basis of modern English. Therefore, the vocabulary and grammar of this dialect are far less strange than those of the other dialects of his time, e.g. that of Langland's *Piers Plowman*.

The spellings in the text indicate both orthographic and phonetic differences. The difference in the quality of vowels and some consonants has been partly reconstructed on the basis of the spellings which were far from standardised in Chaucer's time. The printing press was introduced soon after Chaucer by Caxton who published Chaucer for the first time.

Word-endings like -e, -en, -n and -es were pronounced in Chaucer's time. The genitive singular is normally formed in -es, -s: Poules, Goddes, Nonnes. Plurals were formed in fully sounded -es the -en suffix was also used: eyen, doghtren. Some plurals had zero inflection: nyght in "seven nyght oold". Adjectives possessed a fully sounded -e final independent of inflection: "muche fold", "poure estaat". The definite use of adjectives had an e-final in the singular: the brighte sune, faire Pertelote, His sweete preest. The indefinite use had no e-final in singular a greet disse. Adjective in the plural inflection were formed with the final -e, fresshe flowers. The predicative use had no final -e as in "neither whit no reed". Comparatives and superlatives doubled the final consonants: redder

Adverbs with final -e: faire, poore, aboute.

Pronouns: Here appears as hir or hire, and in the accusative or dative as here. Them is usually hem and their here but also her and hir. That has its plural tho, the plural of this is thise. Which is used for all genders, and is inflected when adjectival.

Verbs: 1st singular is formed with a final -e:

I gesse, I seye

3rd singular is formed by -eth, -th.

The plural of all persons is formed in -en, -n or the weakened form -e: men han been. WE all desiren, That werken, dreanis been to drede, they been etc.

Strong verb conjugation: ladde, sent, foond, ect, lette, shente, hadde etc. The imperative present in the plural takes -eth: Beth. Also telle war, redeth etc., dredeth. Infinitives end in -en, -n, or -e:

To goon, To doon, to telle, to grone, to han, to teilen

Strong verb past participle forms end in -en, -e: fallen, understonde, shente but maad
Weak verbs in -ed, -d attamed,

Wakened, mordred, dremed

Both strong and weak verbs frequently have the prefix y-

The most remarkable features of the vocabulary of Chaucer are:

- (a) Obsolete words like eek, quod, south, clap, wot, noot, woot, mete, somdeel, sweven, steven, cleped, hight, sikerly, stapc, ywis, avantour, mote, gargat, gabbe wlastsom, biknewe, gladsom etc.
- (b) Compounds and Derivatives which are obsolete.

namoore	=	no more
nevaradeel	=	never a deal
nas	=	was not
noot	=	know not (n+woot)

here	=	were it not
n'apoplexie	=	no apoplexy
thilke	=	the same
everichon	=	every+each+one

(c) Change of form and meaning in certain words

1. Hevinesse = Seriousness, sadness
Now the word is used in the literal physical sense more than in this metaphorical sense
2. disece = the present-day meaning has narrowed down to "illness"
3. Think = seem, appear in Chaucer's use. Consider the sentence: it thinketh me = it thinks me = it seems to me
4. lust = Chaucer's meaning "desire" has no sexual connotation.
5. recche = reckon, interpret, read

Syntactic features

1. That = What (see line 2)
 2. for to telle = for telling or to tell
for to bewaille = to bewail
 3. But for = But because
 4. Whan that = When (see line 122)
- B. Double negatives - e.g. I noot revere ...
(line 17)
no wyn ne drank seh
(line 76)
nas no man in no region (line 544)

Notes to the text

Line 1 The Prologue to NPT links it with the preceding Monk's Tale. The Knight (Who has the pride of place among the pilgrims) interrupts the monk. The monk, in his tale, has recounted universal tragedy - human and superhuman. Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Hercules, Nero, Alexander and Julius caesar are some of the great tragic figures presented by the Monk. He interprets their various tragedies in the light of his faith in destiny or pre-determination.

From a tragic tale to a comic is a transition designed by the poet whose art and vision are essentially serio-comic.

NPT is followed by the Troycrises Tale in which a father kills his daughter to save her honour.

Line 14 St. Paul's Cathedral in London. At the end, too, (line 675) there is a reference to St. Paul. This gives the tale some of its form-rounding off.

Line 16 The phrase "Forth he cometh forth with a chowde" refers to the Monk's conclusion to his tale as follows:

How fortune, ever fickle, will assail
With the sudden stroke the kingdoms of the proud.
And when men trust in her she than will fail
And cover her bright face as with a cloud ...
(Nevil Coghill's translation)

Notice the theme of Destiny versus free will is retained in NPT, but the tone is comic and ironical.

- Line 90 The equinoctical was a great circle of the heavens in the plane of the earth's equator. Chaucer's interest in Astronomy is well-known. According to, medieval astronomy, the equinox made a complete daily revolution, so that fifteen degree would pass, or ascend, every hour. The cock knew this instinctively and would crow precisely every hour.
- Notice the unity of time being observed in the tale. The action starts at dawn with the groaning of the cock. The hen warns him against going out in the ascending sun, but he goes out at 9 a.m. Later "undren" (line 456) indicates time from 9 am to 12 noon. The rest of the action, particularly the chase, seems to take place in the afternoon.
- Secondly, Astrology, the science of medicine, psychology (particularly the theory of humours) and astronomy were all interrelated. Knowledge in Chaucer's time was more general and interdisciplinary than in our time.
- Lines 93-98 The colours of the cock's physical appearance as well as those of the colfox (lines 136-38) have a poetic and rhetorical effect. Moreover, they have a historical connotation, as pointed out by J.L. Hotsun (see suggested Reading List)
- 130 The line should be paraphrased: Now may God (make) my dream mean (read) well.
- Line 148-51 The ideal husband of his age of chivalry and romance is mocked by the poet in a manne reminiscent of Restoration comedy. Compare this with Millamant mocking the romantic ideal of a husband in *The Way of the World*.
- Lines 157-72 Notice the connection between the theory of humours classifying humans into four psychological types, the interpretation of dreams, and the medical advice given by Pertelote. An impressive display of learning as by a court lady. The comic and mock-heroic tone is apparent.
- 174 Dionysius Cato, the author of a Latin book of maxims
- 218 The author is Cicero, the famous Latin author known for his prose style and learning. Divination and Valerius Maximus are the two books by him both or either of which may be the source of the two dream stories of the cock.
- 344-355 The story of the life of St. Kenelm is told in the Golden Legend translated by Caxton.

After the death of his father Kenulphus in 821 A.D. Kenelm became the king of Mercia at the age of seven. But his aunt, Quenedreda got him murdered. Later he was made a saint.

This vision of a stately tree stretching to the stars and with branches covered with flowers is sublime. The tree was ablaze with lamps. He saw himself standing on the top, and three parts of the earth bending towards him reverentially. While he was appreciating the magnificent spectacle, some of his relatives cut the tree down. But he was transformed into a little white bird. The allegorical vision is poetic.

357-58 Macrobius, who interpreted the dream of the worthy scipio of Africa, confirms that dreams are significant. His classification of dreams together with philosophical and astrological explorations attracted medieval readers. The SOMNIUM SCIPIONIS of Cicero, originally a chapter of De Republica, Book VI was edited with a commentary by Macrobius about 400 A.D.

362 The Book of Daniel in the old Testament of the Bible states Daniel's belief that dreams are significant.

364 Joseph in the Book of Genesis in the Bible also asserts that dreams are significant. The dreams of the Egyptian Pharaoh, his baker and butler were indicators of coming events.

372—74 Croesus, King of Lydia, dreamt that he was seated on a high tree, where he was made wet by Jupiter and dried by Phoebus. His daughter, Fania, interpreted the dream as rearing that he would be captured and hanged on a cross, where the rain would moisten him and the sun would dry him. And the dream came true.

375—82 Hector, a Trojan hero, was killed by the greek warrior Achilles in the war of Troy. This story is taken from the Greek epic Iliad by Homer. But Homer does not mention any dream of Andromache. Hector's wife. Chaucer's source for this was the History of the Trojan war by Dares Phrygius.

All the learned allusions made in the context of the dream lore have two main sources: (a) Greek and Roman classics and (b) Christian scripture. Chaucer is fairly representative in his use of learning in poetry. After the Renaissance, a split between the Christian and the classical surfaced, most prominently in Milton's Paradise Lost. Scholars have traced a conflict in Milton's psyche between conscious and unconscious pulls. There is no such conflict in Chaucer.

397-400 In Principio are the first words of the Gospel of St. John. Here this Latin phrase means "as surely as in the beginning" (when Eve tempted Adam). The Latin sentence means "woman is man's ruin." But Chauntecleer deliberately mistranslates it.

421 An implicit reference to a common Hebrew tradition, according to which creation took place at the time of vernal equinox B.C. 3761.

424 May 3 is the date, because thirty days of April and two days of May had passed.

The time is 9 O' clock in the morning.

May 3 is significant in Chaucer's poetry. (a) In the Knight's Tale, it is soon after midnight on May 3 that Palamon breaks out of prison (b) In *Troilus and Criseyde*, after a sleepless night on May 3, Pandarus urges Criseyde to listen to the suit of Troilus. It appears that May 3 was traditionally regarded as an unlucky day. Or was some autobiographical reference hinted?

428-29 The zodiac is an imaginary circular band round the heavens, and the sun's annual course is the middle of this band. This band is divided into twelve signs of the zodiac of which Taurus is the second. 360 degrees of the circle divided by twelve yields 30. This is how months and days of the year were astronomically calculated. The sun was supposed to begin its course in the first sign of Aries on 12th March. 30 days for the thirty degrees of Aries plus 21 days for the twenty one degrees of Taurus bring us to 2nd May. "Somewhat more" (line 429) brings us to the 3rd May.

430 The cock knew all this by nature or instinct, not by any other "lore" or learning.

433 The daily motion of the sun is referred to. Forty one degrees and a fraction makes 9 O' clock.

Thus it is nine am on the third of May. The progress of the action under a unity of time scheme makes it dramatic.

446 Launcelot, a prominent knight of King Arthur's Round Table in the Arthurian romances. A French version by walter Map known for its untruthfulness was held by women in great esteem. Chaucer was referring particularly to this "book."

449 • Colfox = coal-black fox. col-here is M.E. col = Coal; a variety of fox chiefly distinguished by a greater admixture of black in its fur.

"Colfox, as a common noun, occurs only in this passage. But Colfox is also a proper name, a surname; and is found in England from Chaucer's time to ours". Hotsun (1924). Nicholas Colfox and Richard Colfox; two contemporaries known at court, were punished and pardoned by Henry IV. Nicholas Colfox had been involved in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. It was worse than murder; it was treason.

The emphasis on the themes "Mordre wol out" (lines 284-91) and treason (lines 460-63) is interpreted by Hotsun as reflecting Chaucer's attitude to Nicholas Colfox.

The partial resemblance of Chauntecler with Henry Bolingbroke and of Colfox with Nicholas Colfox as well as Thomas Mowbray is not a complete allegory. But their duel at Coventry stopped just before blows were struck is faintly reflected in the encounter between the cock and the fox.

456 "Undren of the day" is the time from 9 a.m to 12 noon"

461-62 Judas Iscariot betrayed christ with a kiss, new Ganelon was an officer under Charlemagne, and by his treachery caused his master's defeat, and the death of Roland, for which he was torn to pieces by horses. Simon was a Greek who tricked Trojans into admitting the wooden horse into their city. Thus, these are three traitors in the spheres of religion, history and myth.

Apart from a rhetorical mock heroic effect, these lines also have a historical overtone, as Holsun shows.

474 bulle it to the bren-separate the flour from the chaff, the truth from falsehood or fiction

475 St. Augustine was regarded as the representative of the orthodox doctrines on the subject. He believed in predestination.

476 Boethius (470-525 A.D) treats the topic in *De Consolatione Philosophie* in a passage which distinguishes between "simple" necessity and "conditional" necessity. Chaucer translated the book into English.

Thomas Bradwardine, a lecturer at Oxford and later Archbishop of Canterbury in 1349 wrote a Latin book *De Causa Dei* defending predestination or predetermination.

491 The story of Adam, Eve and the serpent in Paradise is one of the basic myths of Christianity. The concept of original sin is derived from it. And the relation between character and destiny depends on it.

505 *Physiologus* is the title of Latin bestiary, a medieval moralising treatise on beasts, attributed to Theobaldus. The priest refers to it not without humour.

529 Boethius wrote a book on music in Latin, *De Musica*. He belonged to the mathematical school of music of Pythagoras. His music did not have much feeling. The comparison is hyperbolic, comic, mock-heroic and ironical.

546-52 The story here alluded to is found in a poem entitled *Burnellus Sen Speculum Scultorum* written by Nigel Wireker in the time of Richard I. Master Brunedl the ass, is the hero of the book, a 12th century satire on the vices and corruption of society in general and of the religious orders in particular, under the guise of a narrative of the adventures of the ass who wanted a longer tail. The story referred to is briefly this: A young man named Gundulfus broke a cock's leg by flinging a stone at it. The cock took his revenge by omitting to crow in the morning on the day when Gundulfus was to be ordained a priest and to receive a benefice. The result was that Gundulfus and all his family overslept, he lost the benefice and become a beggar while his parents died of grief.

575 Friday is a day dedicated to Venus. It is traditionally associated with bad luck.

581-86 Gaufred was Geoffrey de Vinsauf, author of the *Poetria Nova*. Which was long recognised as an authoritative treatise on poetry, containing instructions for composing poetry in different styles the passage referred to is an example of lamentation, and deals with king Richard's death.

Chaucer is somewhat ironic of the plaintive style. He has used rhetoric in this tale at important points in the action consider lines 441-48, 460-64, 527-30 and many other passages.

- 590-93 Pyrrhus had seized king Priam by the beard and slain him as the Latin epic Aeneid by Virgil tells us. To compare the crisis of the cock with the fall of Troy is mock-heroic
- 597-602 Hasdrubal was the king of Carthage when the Romans burnt it in 146 B.C. Hasdrubal slew himself, and his wife and two sons burnt themselves in despair.
- 604-607 Emperor Nero's burning of the city of Rome was cruel fun. Nero, a Roman emperor A.D. 54-68, is proverbial for his brutal tyranny. He is said to have been fiddling while Rome was burning.
- 628 The reference here is to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Jack Straw was one of the leaders of the revolt. He and his men killed many Flemings to whom the English workers were hostile in self-interest. He was subsequently beheaded.

GLOSSARY

A

Abrayde = woke up with a start
accord = musical harmony
accordant = in keeping with
actes = records
aferd = afraid
afright = frightened
ageste = terrified
agayn = toward, back
agon = gone past
agrief = unkindly, as a grievance
agu = ague
al = quite
al-be---it = although
alday = continually
als = also
altercation = controversy
anhanged = hanged

anon = at once
anyght = at night
anoye = annoy
apothecary = curer, chemist,
one who sells medicines
aright = rightly
asure = azure
atones = at once
attamed = started, began
atte = at the
attempre = temperate
autorite = authority
auctour = author
aungel = angel
avantour = boaster, braggart
aventure = luck, chance
avysion = vision, dream

B

Bad = bade, commanded
bak = back
bane = death, destruction
bar = bore, conducted
battailed = indented like
a castle wall
bame = beam, perch
bene = bean, a trifle
benedicitee = God bless us,
a benediction
benefice = benefice, living
beth = plural of be
betwixe = between
bifel = happened
bifom = before
bigyle = beguile, cheat, trick

biknewe = acknowledged, confessed
biwaille = bewail, lament
biwreye = betray
blithe = merry
bole = bull
bord = table
bour = hall
brast = burst
bren = bran, husk
brend(e) = burnt
briddes = birds
bulte = separate, sift
burned = burnished
byde = wait, vide
byle = bill, beak

C

Cas = case, circumstance,
happening
catel = property, possession
centaure = the herb called centaury
certes = certainly
chaf = chaff, husk
cherl = rustic, peasant
clappe = to talk
clepe = call
clerk = a scholar, a learned
person, a student of
philosophy

clomben = climb
closs = closed
close = enclosure
colera = cholera
(one of the four humours)
commune = common
cote = cottage
countrefete = imitate
cours = journey, voyage
cronycle = chronicle

D

Damoyscle = damsel
dar = dare
daun = sin
debonaire = gracious
dede = deed
dede = dead
deel = bit, part
deign = please
desport = amusement, sport
deye = dairy woman

dissymilour = dissembler
divyne = guess
doghuren = daughters
doke = duck
donge = dung
drecched = distressed
dreynt = drowned
dystaf = stick, clef stick,
part of spinning
wheel, distaff

E

Ech = each Ech = each
eris = ears
eet,ete = eat, ate
eke = also
ellebour = hellebore
elles = else, otherwise
endite = compose
engendren = originate
engyned = tortured
ensample = example
entente = intention, motive

equinoxial = celestial equator
er -- ere, before
erst = before
eschewed = avoided
ese = ease
estaat = state, condition
evermo = ever more
expown = expound, make clear
ey = egg
eyle = ail, afflict

F

Faire = fairly, fair
fayn = willingly
felonye = crime
fil = befell, happened
flaugh = past tense of fly
fley flew
foond = found
fors = count, heed
forwytyng = fore-knowledge
for = against
fro = from
fumetere = fumitory, the name of
a plant
fyr = fire

faren = gone, fared
foend = fiend
fer = far
flatour = flatterer
flour = flower
forncast = pre-ordained
forslewthn = lose by idleness
forwoot = foreknows
foul = dirty
fume = vapour
fyn = fine

Gabbe = boast, speak wildly
gape = open the mouth
gentillesse = gentleness,
graciousness
gilt = guilt, sin
glade = gladden
grace = good fortune
greve = grove
grote = four penny piece

Habundant = abundant
happe = happen
harrow = a cry for help
(interjection)
heeld = held
heere = hear, here
heet = heated
hele = hide
hente = sized

herkneht = harken, listen
hewe = hue, colour
hir selven = herself
holden = esteem, consider
hostelrie = inn, hotel

hoten = command, promise
housbondre = economy
hyder = hither
hym = him

In = inn

Jade = Poor horse
Jape = mockery
Jolif = happy, jolly

Kan = can
keep = notice, take heed
koude = could
kynde = nature, instinct,
kind (noun)

Ladde = led
lat = let (v)
lawriol = spurge lawrel

G

gan = began
gargat = throat
gesse = guess, suppose
gladsome = gladdening
gon = go
graunt = great, many, much
grone = groan
gryn = fierce, grim

H

han = have
hardy = bold
hath = has

heele = health
heerics = hairs
hegge = hedge
hem = them
herbergage = harbourage,
accommodation, lodging
hevyness = sadness, sorrow
hir, hire = her, hers
hight = called
hoo-ho-hoold = safe keeping
hostier = inn-keeper,
hotelier
housbondc = husband
howp = whoot
hydous = hideous

I

iniquitee = iniquity, wickedness

J

jangle = chatter, talk idly
jeet = jet

K

katapuce = catapuce
kepe = guard, protect
kyn = cows

L

lak = lack, shortage
latter = later, final
leere = learn

leme = flame
 lese = lose
 lette = let
 levere = rather
 lif = dear
 list = please, want wish
 litel = little
 logge = lodging
 loken = locked, held fast
 torn = lost
 Lust = desire

leoun = lion
 leste = hinder
 leve = leave
 leye = bet
 ligger = lie in ambush
 lite = little
 lith = limb, lies (v)
 logging = lodging
 loove = learning, advice
 losengeour = deceiver, flatterer
 lyte = little

M

Mad = made
 maistow = mayest thou
 malencolye = melancholy
 mateere = matter
 maze = muddled thought
 mercy = thanks
 mery = merry, cheerful
 meschief = trouble
 mette = dreamed
 ministre = officer
 moralite = moral lesson
 mordred = murdered
 morwenyng = morning
 muche = much
 murie = merry
 Myddel = middle

maister = master
 maked = made
 maner = kind of, sort of
 maugree = in spite of
 mente = meant
 merueille = marvel, wonder
 meschaunce = misfortune
 messe = mass
 meynee = crowd, mob
 moot = may
 mordre = murder
 morwe = morning
 moste = must
 multiply = increase
 myrie = merry
 myrthe = mirth

N

Namo = no more
 narwe = narrow
 nat = not
 naturecly = naturally
 neded = needed
 nedes (adv) = needs,
 nere = were it not
 nones = occasion
 noon = none
 notabilitee = n notable thing
 noys = noise
 nyce = foolish
 nys = is not

namoore = no more
 nas = was not
 natheless = nevertheless
 ne = not, nor
 nedely = necessarily
 necessarily neer = nearer
 nought = not at all
 nonne = nun
 norice = nurse
 nothyug (adv) = not at all
 ny = near
 nygard = niggard, mean person

O

Ofter = ofener
 oold = old
 oother = other
 orlogge = clock
 outsterte = started out, rushed
 came out
 owene = own

ones = once
 oonly = only
 orgon = organ
 out (interjection) = come out help
 outerly = utterly

owle = owl

P

Paramour = lover
 parfit = perfect

pardee (interjection) = by god
 passe = pass on, surpass

peer = equal
pekke = peck, pick
physik = medicine
plesance = pleasure, will
pleyn = complain, mourn
 bewail

poure = pour
powpe = to blow, puff
preeve = proof
prively = secretly, privately
prime = nine O' clock in
 the morning

Quelle = kill

rage = frenzy
reat = royal, regal

reccheless = reckless, heedless
 regardless

reeke = care, mind
rennen = run
repaire = retire
repleet = over full
retor = rhetor, orator
revers = reverse, opposite
roghte = cared
rome = roam
roore = roar

Saafly = safely
see = sea
sely = silly, simple, innocent
sentence = meaning, judgment
sewe = pursue, follow
seynd = singed, toasted
shende = harm, punish
shoon = shone
shrewe = curse(v)
shul = shall
signification = forewarning
siker = sure
sire = sir
sklendre = slender, frugal
sleen = slay
sly = cunning
sodeyn = sudden
somdel = somewhat
sond = sand
sone = son
soore = sorely
soothfastness = truth
soverayn = sovereign, supreme

pees = peace
peyne = to take pains
pitous = piteous, pitiable
plesen = please
point = detail

poweer = power
preeste = priest
preye = pray
prow = benefit
pyne = tormented

Q

quod = said

R

ravysshed = delighted
recche = interpret, reckon
 head
rede = red, read(v)
reme = realm
rente = income
repleccioun = over eating
 repletion
report = relate
reulen = govern, control
rewe = regret
roial = royal
roune = ran

S

secre = secret
seken = seek, search
sente = sent
sette = consider worth
seyn = say
shaltow = shall thou
sholde = should
shortly = in short
shrihte = shrieked
signe = sign
sik = sick
sikerly = certainly
sith = since
skrike = screech
slepen = sleep
snout = muzzle
solas = comfort, solace
sontyme = occasionally
sondry = sundry, various
sonne = sun
sooth = truth
soothly = truly
sovereynly = especially

sterten = start up
 stikke = stick
 stonden = stand
 strecche = stretch
 streyn = strain, compel
 substance = ability
 suffisaunce = sufficiency,
 satisfaction
 suspicioun = suspicion
 swerd = sword
 swich = such
 syngen = sing

steven = voice
 sterte = started
 stoor = store
 streit = narrow
 stynte = stop, end
 subbittee = cunning
 suffre = allow
 sustre = sister
 swevene = dream
 syn = since

T

taak = take
 tarie = wait
 terciane = tertian,
 running every third day
 thee = prosper
 ther-as = where
 therewithal = moreover
 thinken = think
 tho = those

talking = discourse
 techen = guide, teach
 tespye = to espy
 thanne = then
 therwith = in addition to
 thilke = the same
 thise = these
 thogh = though
 thudde = third

thre = three
 thyn = thine
 toon.toos = toes
 tribulation = sorrow
 tyde = time, hour

thritty = thirty
 thurgh = through
 riptoon = tiptoes
 torne = turn
 twies = twice

U

Understoden = understood
 undren = time before midday
 upright = face upwards

undiscreet = tactless
 unto = in addition to

V

Venym = position
 vers = verse
 viage = voyage
 voys = voice

verray = very
 veyn = vain
 vileynye = wickedness, evil

W

War = aware
 wex = grow
 whan = when
 what though = although
 whether = whether
 whilom = formerly
 wight = person
 wilfully = deliberately
 wrying = knowing
 wo = woe
 wol = wish, will
 wonder = wonderful, strange
 wont = accustomed

wende = go
 weylawey(interjection) = alas!
 whatso = whatever
 wheeras = where
 whelp = dog
 whit = white
 wikke = wicked
 wise = manner(n), wise (adj)
 wlatson = loatheome, hateful
 wode = wood
 whistow = wilt thou
 woned = hved

wook = woke
wort = root, cabbage

woot = know
wys = certainly

Y

Yaf = gave
ydoon = done
yere = year
yfounde = found
yis = certainly
yn = in, down
yollen = yelled
ywrite = written

ybeen = been
yeerd = yard
yeve = give
ygon = gone
ymaginacioun = imagination
ynough = enough
ywis = certainly

7.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have concentrated on the study of the text. We have the modern English verse translation together with the Middle English text in the Appendix. We have learnt how to translate passages from the text into modern English prose with the help of the verse translation. We have also tried to understand and interpret the text. The notes and glossary help us in explaining learned allusions and learning the meanings of obscure words. We have noticed the use of learning, allusion and rhetoric in the tale. We have also viewed the tradition of Chaucer criticism and the changing taste of readers and critics of Chaucer. For further studies, we have a short list of suggested reading material. We have considered the poetic style of Chaucer and appreciated the dramatic nature of the narrative.

Check your Progress

1. What are the main themes of NPT?
2. Consider the rhetorical features of the tale. Discuss in particular the similes.
3. Discuss Chaucer's art of characterisation.
4. Write a note on the criticism of Chaucer made by
(a) Dryden and
(b) Matthew Arnold.
5. What has been the contribution of the twentieth century to Chaucer criticism?

APPENDICES

I

THE CANTERBURY TALES

Fragment I (Group A)

General Prologue

Here bygynneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury.

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote The droghte of March hath perced to the roote, And bathed every veyne in swich licour Of which vertu engendred is the flour; Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth Inspired hath in every bolt and heeth	5
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne, And smale foweles maken melodye, That slepen al the nyght with open ye (So priketh hem nature in hir corages); Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages, And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes, To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;	10
And specially from every shires ende Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende, The hooly blisful martir for to seke, That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. Bifil that in that seson on a day, In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay	15
Redy to wenden on my pilgrynage To Caunterbury with ful devout corage, At nyght was come into that hostelrye Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye, Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle In felawshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle, That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde. The chambres and the stables weren wyde, And wel we weren esed atte beste.	20
And shortly, whan the sonne was to restre, So hadde I spoken with hem everichon That I was of hir felaweshipe anon, And made forward erly for to ryse, To takeoure wey ther as I yow devyse. But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space, Er that I ferther in this tale pace,	25
Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun To telle yow al the condicioun Of ech of hem, so as it somed me, And whiche they weren, and of what degree, And eek in what array that they were inne; And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne. A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man. That fro the tyme that he first bigan To riden out, he loved chivalrie,	30
	35
	40
	45

THE CANTERBURY TALES

Fragment I (Group A)

General Prologue

Here bygynneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury.

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
 The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
 And bathed every veyne in swich licour
 Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
 Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth 5
 The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
 Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
 And smale foweles maken melodye,
 That slepen al the nyght with open ye
 (So priketh hem nature in hir corages); 10
 Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
 And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
 To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
 And specially from every shires ende
 Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende, 15
 The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
 That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.
 Bifil that in that seson on a day,
 In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay 20
 Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
 To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
 At nyght was come into that hostelrye
 Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
 Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle 25
 In felawshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
 That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.
 The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
 And wel we weren esed atte beste.
 And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste, 30
 So hadde I spoken with hem everichon
 That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,
 And made forward erly for to ryse,
 To takeoure wey ther as I yow devyse.
 But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space, 35
 Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
 Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
 To telle yow al the condicioun
 Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
 And whiche they weren, and of what degree, 40
 And eek in what array that they were inne;
 And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.
 A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
 That fro the tyme that he first bigan
 To riden out, he loved chivalrie, 45

Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
 Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
 And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,
 As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,
 And evere honoured for his worthnesse. 50
 At Alisaundre he was when it was wonne.
 Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne
 Aboven alle nacions in Pruce;
 In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,
 No Cristen man so ofte of his degree. 55
 In Gemade at the seege eek hadde he be
 Of Algezir, and riden in Belmarye.
 At Lyeys was he and at Satalye,
 Whan they were wonne; and in the Grete See
 At many a noble armee hadde he be. 60
 At mortal batailles hadde he been fitene,
 And foughten for oure feith at Tramysse
 In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo.
 This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also
 Sometyme with the lord of Palatye 65
 Agayn another hethen in Turkye.
 And everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys;
 And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
 And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
 He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde 70
 In al his lyf unto no maner wight.
 He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght.
 But, for to tellen yow of his array,
 His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.
 On bestoun he wered a gypon 75
 Al bismotered with his habergeon,
 For he was late ycome from his viage,
 And wente for to doon his pilgrymage.
 With hym ther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,
 A lovyere and a lusty bacheler, 80
 With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse.
 Of twenty year of age he was, I gesse.
 Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,
 And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe. 85
 And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie
 In Flaundes, in Artoys, and Pycardie,
 And born hym weel, as of so litel space,
 In hope to stonden in his lady grace.
 Embrouded was he, as it were a meede 90
 Al ful of freshe floures, whyte and reede.
 Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al the day;
 He was as tresssh as is the month of May.
 Short was his gowne, with sleeves longe and wyde.
 Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde.
 He koude songes make and wel endite, 95
 Juste and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write.
 So hoot he lovede that by nyghtertale
 He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
 Curteis he was, lowely, and servysable,
 And carf bifore his fader at the table. 100
 A YEMAN hadde he and servantz namo
 At that tyme, for hym liste ride so.
 And he was doun in cote and hood of grene.
 A sheef of peccok arwes, bright and kene,

Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
 Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
 And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,
 As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,
 And evere honoured for his worthynesse. 50
 At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne.
 Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne
 Aboven alle nacions in Puce;
 In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,
 No Cristen man so ofte of his degree. 55
 In Gernade at the seege eek hadde he be
 Of Algezir, and riden in Belmarye.
 At Lyeyes was he and at Satalye,
 Whan they were wonne; and in the Grete See
 At many a noble armee hadde he be. 60
 At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,
 And foughten for oure feith at Tramysse
 In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo.
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 And he was clad in cote and hood of grene.
 A sheef of pecock arwes, bright and kene,

Under his belt he bar ful thriftily, 105
 (Wel koude he dresse his takel yemanly:
 His arwes drouped nocht with fetheres lowe)
 And in his hand he baar a myghty howe.
 A not heed hadde he, with a broun visage.
 Of wodcraft wel koude he al the usage. 110
 Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer,
 And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler.
 And on that oother syde a gay daggere
 Harneised wel and sharp as point of spere:
 A Cristopher on his brest of silver sheene. 115
 An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of grene:
 A forster was he, soothly, as I gesse.
 Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,
 That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;
 Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy; 120
 And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.
 Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne.
 Entuned in hir nose ful semely,
 And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisty,
 After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe, 125
 For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
 At mete wel ytaught was she with alle:
 She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
 Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe:
 Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe 130
 That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.
 In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.
 Hir over-lippe wyped she so elene
 That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
 Of grecc, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
 Ful semely after hir mete she raughte. 136
 And sikerty she was of greet desport,
 And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port,
 And peyned hire to countrefete cheere
 Of court, and to been estallich of manere, 140
 And to ben holden digné of reverence.
 But, for to speken of hire conscience,
 She was so charitable and so pitous
 She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous 144
 Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.
 Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde
 With rosted flessch, or milk and wastel-breed.
 But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,
 Or if men smoot it with a yerde snerte:
 And al was conscience and tendre herte. 150
 Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was.
 Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,
 Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed;
 But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed:
 It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe; 155
 For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.
 Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war,
 Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar
 A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene, 159
 And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene.
 On which ther was first write a crowned A,
 And after *Amor vincit omnia*.
 Another NONNE with hire hadde she,

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That was hir chapeleyn, and preestes thre.
 A MONK ther was, a fair for the maistrie, 165
 An outridere, that lovede venerie,
 A manly man, to been an abbot able,
 Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,
 And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere
 Cynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere 170
 And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle.
 Ther as this lord was kepere of the celle,
 The reule of seint Maure or of seint Benet,
 By cause that it was old and somdel streat
 This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace, 175
 And heeld after the newe world the space.
 He yaf nat or that text a pulled hen,
 That seith that hunters ben nat hooly men,
 Ne that a monk, whan he is reccheles,
 Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees, - 180
 This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre.
 But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre:
 And I seyde his opinion was good.
 What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood,
 Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure, 185
 Or swynken with his handes, and labour,
 As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?
 Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!
 Therefore he was a prikasour aright:
 Grehoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flight:
 Of prikyng and of huntyng for the hare 191
 Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.
 I seigh his sleeves purfiled at the hond
 With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;
 And, for to festne his hood under his chyn, 195
 He hadde of gold ywrought a ful curious pym:
 A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.
 His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas.
 And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt,
 He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt; 200
 His eyen stepe, and rollynge in his heed,
 That stemed as a forneys of a leed.
 His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat.
 Now certainly he was a fair prelaat:
 He was nat pale as a forpynded goost, 205
 A fat swan loved he best of any roost.
 His palfrey was as broun as is a berye.
 A FRERE ther was, a wantowne and a merye,
 A lymytour, a ful solemne man.
 In alle the orders foure is noon that kan 210
 So muchel of daliaunce and fair langage.
 He hadde maad ful many a mariage
 Of yonge wommen at his owene cost.
 Unto his ordre he was a noble post.
 Ful wel beloved and famulier was he 215
 With frankeleyns over al in his contree.
 And eek with worthy wommen of the town:
 For he hadde power of confessioun,
 As seyde hymself, moore than a curat,
 For of his ordre he was licenciat, 220
 Ful swetely herde he confessioun.
 And plesaunt was his absolucoun:

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He was an esy man to yeve penaunce,
 Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce.
 For unto a povre ordre for to yive 225
 Is signe that a man is wel yshryve;
 For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,
 He wiste that a man was repentaunt;
 For many a man so hard is of his herte 229
 He may nat wepe, although hym soore smerte.
 Therefore in slede of wepyng and preyeres
 Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres,
 His typet was ay farsed ful of knyves
 And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves.
 And certainly he hadde a murye note: 235
 Wel koude he synge and pleyen on a rote;
 Of yeddynges he baar ourely the pris,
 His nekke whit was as the flour-de-lys;
 Therto he strong was as a champioun,
 He knew the tavernes wel in every toun 240
 And everich hostiler and tappestere
 Bet than a lazar or a beggestere;
 For unto swich a worthy man as he
 Acorded nat, as by his facultee,
 To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce. 245
 It is nat honest, it may nat avaunce,
 For to deelen with no swich poraille,
 But al with riche and selleres of vitaille,
 And over al, ther as profit sholde arise,
 Curteis he was and lowely of servyse. 250
 Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous,
 He was the beste beggere in hys hous;
 [And yaf a certeyn ferme for the graunt;
 Noon of his bretheren cam ther in his haunt:] 252^a
 For thogh a wydwe hadde nought a sho, 252^b
 So plesaunt was his "*In principio*,"
 Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente. 255
 His purchas was wel bettre than his rente.
 And rage he koude, as it were right a whelp,
 In love-dayes ther koude he muchel help,
 For ther he was nat lyk a cloysterer
 With a thredbare cope, as is a povre scoler, 260
 But he was lyk a maister or a pope,
 Of double worstede was his semycope,
 That rounded as a belle out of the presse.
 Somwhat he lipped, for his wantownesse, 264
 To make his Englissh sweete upon his tonge;
 And in his harpyng, whan that he hadde songe,
 His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght,
 As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght.
 This worthy lymytour was cleped Huberd.
 A MERCHANT was ther with a forked berd,
 In mottelee, and hys on horse he sat; 271
 Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bever hat,
 His bootes clasped faire and fetisly,
 His resons he spak ful solentpnelly,
 Sownyng alwey th'encrees of his wynnyng.
 He wolde the see were kept for any thyng 276
 Bitwixe Middleburgh and Orewelle.
 Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle.
 This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:

Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette, 281
 So estatly was he of his governaunce
 With his bargaynes and with his chevyssaunce.
 For sothe he was a worthy man with alle,
 But, sooth to seyn, I noot how men hym calle.

A CLERK ther was of Oxenford also, 285
 That unto logyk hadde longe ygo.
 As leene was his hors as is a rake,
 And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
 But looked holwe, and therto sobrelly.
 Ful thredbare was his overeste courtepy; 290
 For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice,
 Ne was so worldly for to have office.
 For hym was levere have at his beddes heed
 Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,
 Of Aristotle and his philosophie, 295
 Than robes riche, or fithete, or gay sautrie.
 But al be that he was a philosophre,
 Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre;
 But al that he myghte of his freendes hente,
 On bookes and on lernynge he it spente. 300
 And bisily gan for the soules preye
 Of hem that yaf hym wherwith to scoleye.
 Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede.
 Noght o word spak he moore than was neede,
 And that was seyð in forme and reverence, 305
 And short and quyk and ful of hy sentence;
 Sownyng in moral vertu was his speche,
 And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.

A SERGEANT OF THE LAWE, war and wys,
 That often hadde been at the Parvys, 310
 Ther was also, ful riche of excellence.
 Discreet he was and of greet reverence—
 He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise.
 Justice he was ful often in assise.
 By patente and by pleyn commissioun. 315
 For his science and for his heigh renoun,
 Of fees and robes hadde he many oon.
 So greet a purchasour was nowher noon:
 Al was fee symple to hym in effect;
 His purchasyng myghte nat been infect. 320
 Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas,
 And yet he served bisier than he was
 In termes hadde he caas and doomes alle
 That from the tyme of kyng William were falle. 324
 Therto he koude endite, and make a thyng,
 Ther koude no wight pynche at his wrytyng;
 And every statut koude he pleyn by rote.
 He rood but humyly in a medlee cote.
 Girt with a ceint of silk, with barres smale;
 Of his array telle I no lenger tale. 330

A FRANKELEYN was in his compaignye.
 Whit was his berd as is the dayesye;
 Of his complexioun he was sangwyn.
 Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn:
 To lyven in delit was evere his wone, 335
 For he was Epicurus owene sone,
 That heeld opinioun that pleyn delit
 Was verray felicitee parfit.

An housholdere, and that a greet, was he;
 Semt Julian he was in his contree. 340
 His breed, his ale, was always after oon;
 A bettre envyned man was nowher noon.
 Withoute bake mete was nevere his hous
 Of fissh and flessch, and that so plentevous.
 It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke, 345
 Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke.
 After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
 So chaunged he his mete and his soper.
 Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe,
 And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe.
 Wo was his cook but if his sauce were 351
 Poynaunt and sharp, and redy al his geere.
 His table dormant in his halle alway
 Stood redy covered al the longe day.
 At sessounes ther was he lord and sire; 355
 Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire.
 An anlaas and a gipsier al of silk,
 Heeng at his gurdel, whit as morne milk.
 A shurreve hadde he been, and a contour,
 Was nowher swich a worthy vavasour. 360
 AN HABERDASSHERE and a CARPENTER,
 A WEBBE, a DYERE, and a TAPY CER.—
 And they were clothed alle in o tyveree
 Of a solempne and a greet fraternitee.
 Ful fressh and newe hir geere apiked was; 365
 Hir knyves were chaped noght with bras
 But al with silver, wrought ful clene and weel
 Hire gurdles and hir pouches everydeel.
 Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys
 To sitten in a yeldchalle on a deys. 370
 Everich, for the wisdom that he kan,
 Was shaply for to been an alderman.
 For catel hadde they ynogh and rente,
 And eek hir wyves wolde it wel assente;
 And elles certeyn were they to blame. 375
 It is ful fair to been ycleped "madame,"
 And goon to vigilies al bifore,
 And have a mantel roialliche ybore.
 A Cook they hadde with hem for the nones
 To boille the chiknes with the marybones. 380
 And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale.
 Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale.
 He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,
 Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.
 But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me, 385
 That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
 For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.
 A SHIPMAN was ther, wonynge fer by weste;
 For aught I woot, he was of Dertemouthe.
 He rood upon a rouncy, as he kouthe, 390
 In a gowne of faldyng to the knee.
 A daggere hangynge on a laas hadde he
 Aboute his neckke, under his arm adoun.
 The hooote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun;
 And certainly he was a good felawe, 395
 Ful many a draughte of wyn had he ydrawe
 Fro Burdeux-ward, whil that the chapman sleep.

Of nyce conscience took he no keep.
 If that he faught, and hadde the hyer hond.
 By water he sente hem hoom to every lond. 401
 But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes,
 His stremes, and his daungers hym bisides.
 His herberwe, and his moone, his lodemenage,
 Ther nas noon swich from Hulle to Cartage. 405
 Hardy he was and wys to undertake:
 With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.
 He knew alle the havenes, as they were,
 Fro Gootlond to the cape of Fynystere,
 And every cryke in Britaigne and in Spayne. 410
 His barge ycleped was the Maudelayne.
 With us ther was a DOCTOR OF PHISIK;
 In al this world ne was ther noon hym lik,
 To speke of phisik and of surgerye,
 For he was grounded in astronomye. 415
 He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel
 In houres by his magyk natureel
 Wal koude he fortunen the ascendent
 Of his ymages for his pacient. 419
 He knew the cause of everich maladye,
 Were it of hoot, or cold, or moyste, or drye,
 And where they engendred, and of what humour.
 He was a verray, parfit praktisour:
 The cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote,
 Anon he yaf the sike man his boote. 425
 Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries
 To sende hym drogges and his letuaries,
 For ech of hem made oother for to wynne—
 Hir frendshipe nas nat newe to bigynne.
 Wel knew he the olde Esculapius,
 And Dcyscorides, and eek Rufus, 430
 Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen,
 Serapion, Rasis, and Ayycen,
 Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn,
 Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn. 435
 Of his diete mesurable was he,
 For it was of no superfluitee,
 But of greet norissyng and digestible.
 His studie was but litel on the Bible. 440
 In sangwyn and in pers he clad was al,
 Lyned with taffata and with sendal;
 And yet he was but esy of dispence:
 He kepte that he wan in pestilence.
 For gold in phisik is a cordial,
 Therefore he lovede gold in special. 445
 A good WIF was ther of biside BATHE,
 But she was somdei deaf, and that was scathe.
 Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt,
 She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt. 449
 In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
 That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon;
 And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
 That she was out of alle charitee.
 Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;
 I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
 That on a Sunday weren upon hir heed. 455
 Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed.

Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.
 Bould was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.
 She was a worthy womman al hir lyve: 459
 Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
 Withouten oother compaignye in youthe,—
 But therof neddoth nat to speke as nowthe,
 And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem:
 She hadde passed many a straunge strem;
 At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne, 465
 In Galice at Seint-Jame, and at Coloigne.
 She koude muchel of wandryng by the weye.
 Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.
 Upon an amblere esily she sat,
 Ywympled wel, and on hir heed an hat 470
 As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;
 A foot-mantel aboute hir hipis large,
 And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe.
 In felawshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe.
 Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
 For she koude of that art the olde daunce. 476
 A good man was ther of religioun,
 And was a povre PERSON OF A TOWN,
 But riche he was of hooly thought and werk.
 He was also a lerned man, a clerk, 480
 That Cristes gospel trewey wolde preche:
 His parisshe devoutly wolde he teche.
 Benygne he was, and wonder diligent,
 And in adversitee ful pacient,
 And swich he was ypreved ofte sithes. 485
 Ful looth were hym to cursen for his tithes,
 But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,
 Unto his povre parisshe aboute
 Of his offryng and eek of his substance.
 He koude in lite thyng have suffisaunce. 490
 Wyd was his parisse, and houses fer asonder,
 But he ne leste nat, for reyn ne thonder,
 In siknesse nor in meschief to visite
 The ferreste in his parisse, muche and lite,
 Upon his feet, and in his hand a staf. 495
 This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,
 That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.
 Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte,
 And this figure he added eek therto,
 That if gold ruste, what shal iren do? 500
 For if a prest be foul, on whom we truste,
 No wonder is a lewed man to ruste;
 And shame it is, if a prest take keep,
 A shiten shepherde and a clene sheep.
 Wel oghte a prest ensample for to yive, 505
 By his clenesse, how that his sheep sholde lyve.
 He sette nat his benefice to hyre
 And leet his sheep encombred in the myre
 And ran to Londoun unto Seinte Poules
 To seken hym a chaunterie for soules, 510
 Or with a bretherhed to been withholde;
 But dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde,
 So that the wolf ne made it nat mysarie;
 He was a shepherde and nocht a mercenarie.
 And though he hooly were and vertuouus, 515

He was to synful men nat despitous,
 Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne,
 But in his techyng discret and benygne,
 To drawen folk to hevyn by fairnesse,
 By good ensample, this was his bisynesse. 520
 But it were any persone obstinat,
 What so he were, of heigh or lough estat,
 Hym wolde he snybben sharply for the nonys.
 A better preest I trowe that nowher noon ys.
 He waited after no pompe and reverence,
 Ne maked him a spiced conscience. 525
 But Cristes loore and his apostles twelve
 He taughte, but first he folwed it hymselfe.
 With hym ther was a PLOWMAN, was his brother,
 That hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother:
 A trewe swynkere and a good was he,
 Lyvyng in pees and partit charitee. 531
 God loved he best with al his hoolle herte
 At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte,
 And thanne his neighebor right as hymselfe.
 He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve,
 For Cristes sake, for every povre wight. 537
 Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght,
 His tithes payde he ful faire and wel,
 Bothe of his propre swynk and his catel. 540
 In a tabard he rood upon a mere.
 Ther was also a REVE, and a MILLERE,
 A SOMNOUR, and a PARDONER also,
 A MAUNCIPLE, and myself—ther wer namo.
 The MILLERE was a stout carl for the noncs;
 Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones. 546
 That proved wel, for over al ther he cam,
 At wrastlyng he wolde have alwey the ram.
 He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre;
 Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of hane,
 Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed. 551
 His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,
 And therto brood, as though it were a spade.
 Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
 A werte, and theron stood a toft of herys, 555
 Reed as the brustles of a sowes crys;
 His nosethirles blake were and wyde,
 A swerd and bokeler bar he by his syde.
 His mouth as greet was as a greet someys. 560
 He was a jangler and a goliardeys,
 And that was moost of synne and harlotries.
 Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries;
 And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee.
 A whit cote and a blew hood wered he, 564
 A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
 And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.
 A gentil MAUNCIPLE was ther of a temple,
 Of which achatours myghte take exemple
 For to be wise in byyng of vitaille;
 For whether that he payde or took by taille,
 Algate he wayted so in his achaat 571
 That he was ay biforn and in good staat.
 Now is nat that of God a ful fair grace
 That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace

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The wisdom of an heep of lerned men? 575
 Of maistres hadde he mo than thries ten,
 That weren of lawe expert and curious,
 Of which ther were a duszeyne in that hous
 Worthy to been stywardes of rente and lond
 Of any lord that is in Engelond. 580
 To make hym lyve by his propre good
 In honour dettelees (but if he were wood),
 Or lyve as scarsly as hym list desire;
 And able for to helpen al a shire
 In any caas that myghte falle or happe; 585
 And yet this Manciple sette hir aller cappe.
 The REVE was a sclendre colerik man.
 His berd was shave as ny as ever he kan;
 His heer was by his erys ful round yshorn;
 His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn 590
 Ful longe were his legges and ful lene,
 Ylyk a staf, ther was no calf ysene.
 Wel koude he kepe a gemer and a bynne;
 Ther was noon auditour koude ort him wynne.
 Wel wiste he by the droghte and by the reyn
 The yeldyng of his seed and of his greyn. 596
 His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerye,
 His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrye
 Was hoonly in this Reves governyng,
 And by his covenant yaf the rekenyng, 600
 Syn that his lord was twenty yeer of age.
 Ther koude no man bryng hym in arerage.
 Ther nas baillif, ne hierde, nor oother hynne,
 That he ne knew his sleighte and his covyne;
 They were adrad of hym as of the deeth. 605
 His wonyng was ful faire upon an heeth;
 With grene trees yshadwed was his place.
 He koude bettre than his lord purchace.
 Ful riche he was astored pryvely;
 His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly. 610
 To yeve and lene hym of his owene good,
 And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood.
 In youthe he hadde lerned a good myster;
 He was a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.
 This Reve sat upon a ful good stot, 615
 That was al pomety grey and highte Scot.
 A long surcote of pers upon he hade,
 And by his syde he baar a rusty blade.
 Of Northfolk was this Reve of which I telle,
 Biside a toun men clepen Baldeswelle. 620
 Tukked he was as is a frere aboute,
 And evere he rood the hyndreste of oure route.
 A SOMONOUR was ther with us in that place,
 That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,
 For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe. 625
 As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
 With scalled browes blake and piled berd.
 Of his visage children were aferd.
 Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,
 Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon; 630
 Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,
 That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white,
 Nor of the knobbes sittyng on his chekes.

Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,
 And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood: 635
 Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood,
 And whan that he wel dronken hadde the wyn,
 Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn.
 A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,
 That he had lerned out of som decree- 640
 No wonder is, he herde it al the day;
 And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay
 Kan clepen "Watte" as wel as kan the pope,
 But whoso koude in oother thyng hym grope,
 Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie; 645
 Ay "*Questio quid iuris*" wolde he crie,
 He was a gentil harlot and a kynde;
 A bettre felawe sholde men nocht fynde,
 He wolde suffre for a quart of wyn
 A good felawe to have his concubyn 650
 A twelf month, and excuse hym atte fulle;
 Ful prively a fynch eek koude he pulle,
 And if he found owher a good felawe,
 He wolde techen him to have noon awe
 In swich caas of the ercedekenes curs, 655
 But if a mannes soule were in his purs;
 For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed be,
 "Purs is the ercedekenes helle," seyde he,
 But wel I woot he lyed right in dede; 659
 Of cursyng oghte ech gilti man him drede,
 For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,
 And also war hym of a *Significavit*,
 In daunger hadde he at his owene gise
 The yonge girles of the diocise,
 And knew hir conseil, and was al hir reed, 665
 A gerland hadde he set upon his heed
 As greet as it were for an ale-stake,
 A bokeleer hadde he maad hym of a cake
 With hym ther rood a gentil PARDONER
 Of Rouncivale, his ireend and his compeer, 670
 That streight was comen fro the court of Rome,
 Ful loude he soong "Com hider, love, to me!"
 This Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun;
 Was nevere trompe of half so greet a soun,
 This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wax, 675
 But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;
 By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,
 And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;
 But thynne it lay, by colpons oon and oon
 But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon, 680
 For it was trussed up in his walet
 Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe fet,
 For sakeveite, save his cappe, he rood al bar,
 For the glaryngre cote hadde he as an hare,
 A curyefe hadde he sowed upon his cappe
 The walet lay bifore hym in his lappe, 685
 Bretail of pardoun, comen from Rome al boot
 A voys he hadde as swete as hath a goot
 No berd hadde he, ne nevere shilde have;
 As smothle it was as the crete of a nose,
 For toke he were a gyltling of a mare,
 But of his craft, he leryng into Waur,

Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,
 And for to drynken strong wyn, need as blood; 635
 Thanne wolde he speke and cry as he were wood.
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 But thynne it lay, by colpons oon and oon.
 But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon, 680
 For it was trussed up in his walet.
 Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet;
 Dischevelee, save his cappe, he rood al bare.
 Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare.
 A vemyole hadde he sowed upon his cappe.
 His walet lay biforn hym in his lappe, 686
 Bretful of pardoun, comen from Rome al hoot.
 A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot.
 No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have;
 As smothe it was as it were late shave. 690
 I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare.
 But of his craft, fro Berwyk into Ware,

Ne was ther swich another pardonere,
 For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beere,
 Which that he seyde was Oure Lady veyl: 695
 He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seyl
 That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he wente
 Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hym hente.
 He hadde a croys of latoun ful of stones,
 And in a glas he hadde pigges bones. 700
 But with these relikes, whan that he fond
 A povre person dwellynge upon lond,
 Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye
 Than that the person gat in monthes tweye;
 And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes, 705
 He made the person and the peple his apes.
 But trowely to tellen atte laste,
 He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste.
 Wel koude he rede a lessoun or a storie,
 But akterbest he song an offertorie; 710
 For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,
 He moste preche and wel affile his tonge
 To wyne silver, as he ful wel koude;
 Therefore he song the murierly and loude. 714
 Now have I toold you soothly, in a clause,
 In'estaat, th'array, the nombre, and eek the cause
 Why that assembled was this compaignye
 In Southwerk at this gentil hostelrye
 That highte the Tabard, faste by the Belle. 720
 But now is tyme to yow for to telle
 How that we baren us that ilke nyght,
 What we were in that hostelrie alyght;
 And after wol I telle of our viage
 And al the remenaunt of oure pilgrimage. 725
 But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
 That ye n'arette it nat my vileynye,
 Thogh that I pleynly speke in this matecre,
 To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
 Ne thogh I speke hir wordes properly. 730
 For this ye knowen al so wel as I,
 Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
 He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
 Evench a word, if it be in his charge.
 Al speke he never so rudeliche and large, 735
 Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,
 Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.
 He may nat spare, although he were his brother;
 He moot as wel seye o word as another.
 Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ,
 And wel ye woot no vileynye is it. 740
 Eek Plato seith, whoso that kan hym rede,
 The wordes moot be cosyn to the dede.
 Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,
 Al have I nat set folk in hir degree. 744
 Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde.
 My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.
 Greet chiere made oure Hoost us everichon,
 And to the soper sette he us anon.
 He served us with vitaille at the beste; 749
 Strong was the wyn, and wel to drynke us leste.
 A semely man OURE HOOSTE was withalle

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For to han been a marchal in an halle.
 A large man he was with eyen stepe—
 A fairer burgeys is ther noon in Chepe— 754
 Boold of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught,
 And of manhod hym lakkede right naught.
 Eek therto he was right a myrie man,
 And after soper pleyen he bigan,
 And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynges,
 Whan that we hadde maadoure rekenynges, 760
 And seyde thus: "Now, lordynges, trewely,
 Ye been to me right welcome, hertely;
 For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,
 I saugh nat this yeer so myrie a com paignye
 Atones in this herberwe as is now. 765
 Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how.
 And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght,
 To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.
 Ye goon to Caunterbury — God yow speede,
 The blisful martir quite yow youre meede! 770
 And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
 Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;
 For trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon
 To ride by the weye doumb as a stoon;
 And therefore wol I maken yow disport, 775
 As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort,
 And if yow liketh alle by oon assent
 For to stonden at my juggement.
 And for to werken as I shal yow seye,
 To-morwe, whan ye riden by the weye, 780
 Now, by my fader soule that is deed,
 But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow-myn heed!
 Hoold up youre hondes, withouten moore speche."
 Oure conseil was nat longe for to seche. 784
 Us thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys,
 And graunted hym withouten moore avys,
 And bad him seye his voidit as hym leste.
 "Lordynges," quod he, "now herkneþ for the beste;
 But taak it nought, I prey yow, in desdeyn. 789
 This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyen,
 That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye,
 In this viage shal telle tales tweye
 To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,
 And homward he shal tellen othere two, 795
 Of aventures that whilom han bifalle.
 And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle,
 That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas
 Tales of best sentence and moost solaas,
 Shal have a soper at oure aller cost
 Heere in this place, sittynge by this post, 800
 Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.
 And for to make yow the moore mury,
 I wol myselven goodly with yow ryde,
 Right at myn owene cost, and be youre gyde;
 And whoso wole my juggement withseye 805
 Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye.
 And if ye vouche sauf that it be so,
 Tel me anon, withouten wordes mo,
 And I wol erly shape me therfore."
 This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore 810

With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
 That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so,
 And that he wolde been oure governour,
 And of oure tales juge and reportour,
 And sette a soper at a certeyn pris,
 And we wol reuled been at his devys 815
 In heigh and lough; and thus by oon assent
 We been accorded to his juggement.
 And therupon the wyn was fet anon;
 We dronken, and to reste wente echon, 820
 Withouten any lenger taryynge.
 Amorwe, whan that day bigan to sprynge.
 Up roos oure Hoost, and was oure aller cok,
 And gadrede us togidre alle in a flok.
 And forth we riden a litel moore than paas 825
 Unto the wateryng of Seint Thomas;
 And there oure Hoost bigan his hors areste
 And seyde, "Lordynges, herkneth, if yow leste.
 Ye woot youre foreward, and I it yow recorde.
 If even-song and morwe-song accorde, 830
 Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale.
 As evre mote I drynke wyn or ale,
 Whoso be rebel to my juggement
 Shal paye for al that by the wey is spent. 834
 Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynne;
 He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne.
 Sire Knyght," quod he, "my mayster and my lord,
 Now draweth cut, for that is myn accord.
 Cometh neer," quod he, "my lady Prioressse.
 And ye, sire Clerk, lat be youre shamefastnesse,
 Ne studieth noght; ley hond to, every man!"
 Anon to drawen every wight bigan, 842
 And shortly for to tellen as it was,
 Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,
 The sothe is this, the cut fil to the Knyght, 845
 Of which ful blithe and glad was every wyght,
 And telle he moste his tale, as was resoun,
 By foreward and by composicioun,
 As ye han herd; what nedeth wordes mo?
 And whan this goode man saugh that it was so,
 As he that wys was and obedient 851
 To kepe his foreward by his free assent,
 He seyde, "Syn I shal bigynne the game,
 What, welcome be the cut, a Goddes name!
 Now lat us ryde, and herkneth what I seye." 855
 And with that word we ryden forth oure weye,
 And he bigan with right a myrie cheere
 His tale anon, and seyde as ye may heere.

II
THE NONNE PRESTES TALE

PROLOGUE

'Hoo', quod the Knight, 'good sire, namoore of this!
That ye han seyde is right ynough, ywis,
And muchel moore: for litel heviness
Is right ynough to muche folk, I gesse.
I seye for me, it is a greet disease. 5
Whereas men han been in greet welthe and ese,
To heeren of hire sodeyn fal, allas,
And the contrarie is joye and greet solas.
As whan a man hath been in povre estant,
And climbeth up and wexeth fortunat 10
And there abideth in prosperitee.
Swich thing is gladson, as it thinketh me,
And of swich thing were goodly for to telle.'
'Ye', quod oure Hooste, 'by seint Poules belle,
Ye seye right sooth: this Monk he clappeth lowde. 15
He spak how "Fortune covered with a clowde",
I noot nevere what; and als of a "tragedie"
Right now ye herde, and, pardee, no remedie
It is for to hiwaille ne compleyne
That that is doon, and als it is a peyne. 20
As ye han seyde, to heere of hevnesse.
Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse.
Youre tale anoyeth ai this compaignye
Swich talking is nat worth a boterflye,
For therinne is there no desport ne game, 25
Wherefore, sire Monk, or Daun Piers by youre name,
I pray you hertely telle us somewhat elles.
For sikerly, nere clinking of youre belles,
That on youre bridel hange on every side,
By hevne king, that for us alle dyde, 30
I sholde er this han fallen down for sleep,
Although the slough had never been so deep:
Thanne hadde your tale al be toold in veyn.
For certainly, as that thise clerkes seyn,
Whereas a man may have noon audience, 35
Nought helpeth it to tellen his sentence
And wel I woost the substance is in me,
If any thing shal wel reported be.

Sir, sey somewhat of hunting, I yow preye'
'Nay', quod this Monk, 'I have no lust to pleye 40
Now lat another telle, as I have toold.'
Thanne spak oure Hoost with rude speche and boold,
And seyde unto the Nonnes Preest anon.
'Com neer, thou preest, com hider, thou Sir John,
Telle us swich thing as may oure hertes glade. 45
Be blithe, though thou ride upon a jade.
What thogh thyn hors be foul and lene?
If he wol serve thee, rekke nat a bene.
Looke that thyn herte be murie evermo.

'Yis, sir,' quod he, 'yis' Hoost, so moot I go, 50

But I be myne, ywis I wol be blamed.
 And right anon his tale he hath attamed,
 And thus he seyde unto us everichon,
 This sweete preest, this goodly man, Sir John.

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE NONNES PREESTES TALE

A povre widwe somdeel stape in age
 Was whilom dwellyng in a narwe cotage, 55
 Beside a grove, standing in a dale
 This widwe of which I telle yow my tale,
 Syn thilke day that she was last a wyf,
 In pacience ladde a ful symple lyf,
 For litel was hir catel and hir rente 60
 By housbondrye of swich as God hire sente
 She found hirself and eek hir doghtren two,
 This large sowes hadde she, and namo,
 Thre kyn, and eek a sheep that highte Malle, 65
 Ful sooty was hir, hour and eek hir halle,
 In which she set ful many a solendre meel,
 Of pynaunt sauce hire neded never-a-deel;
 No deyntee morsei passed thurgh hir throte;
 His diete was acordant to hir cote, 70
 Replecion ne made hire nevere sik;
 Attempree diete was al hir phisik
 And exercise and hertes suffisaunce,
 The goute lette hire nothyng for to daunce,
 N'apoplexie shente nat hir heed, 75
 No wyn ne drank she, neither whyt ne reed;
 Hir bord was served moost with whyt and blak—
 Milk and broun breed, in which she found no lak,
 Seynd bacon, and somtyme an ey or tweye,
 For she was, as it were, a maner deye, 80
 A yeerd she hadde, enclosed al aboute
 With stikkes, and a drye dych withoute,
 In which she hadde a cok hight Chauntecleer,
 In al the land, of crowyng has his peer,
 His voys was natter than the murie orgon 85
 On massedayes that in the churche gon,
 Wel sikerer was his crowyng in his logge
 Than is a klokke or an abbeys origge;
 By nature he knew ech ascensioun
 With equinoxial in thilke town, 90
 For whan degrees fiftene were ascended,
 Thanne crew he that it myghte nat been amended
 His comb was redder than the fyn coral,
 And batailed as it were a castel wal; 95
 His hyle was blak, and as the feet it shoon,
 His legges were his legges and his toon;
 His necke was whiter than the hylve flour,
 And eek the rumped gose was his colour, 100
 This gentil cok hadde in his governaunce
 Severe hennes, and to doon al his plesaunce,
 Which were his mistres and his paramours,
 And yemmed hem to hem as of colours;
 Of whiche the fineste hewed on hir throte 105
 That cometh from the name of Pettehote,
 Curteis she was, and of a good debonaire,
 And comyng of hire, and of hirself so faire

But I be myric, ywis I wol be blamed.
 And right anon his tale he hath attamed,
 And thus he seyde unto us everichon,
 This sweete preest, this goodly man, Sir John.

HERE BIGYNNETH THE NONNES PREESTES TALE

A povre widwe somdeel stape in age 55
 Was whilom dwelling in a narwe cotage,
 Beside a grove, standing in a dale.
 This widwe of which I telle yow my tale,
 Syn thilke day that she was last a wyf,
 In pacience ladde a ful symple lyf, 60
 For litel was hir catel and hir rente
 By housbondrye of swich as God hire sente
 She foond hirself and eek hir doghtren two,
 Thre large sowes hadde she, and namo,
 Thre kyn, and eek a sheep that highte Malle. 65
 Ful sooty was hire bour and eek hir halle,
 In which she eet ful many a sclendre meel.
 Of pynaunt sauce hire neded nevar-a-deel;
 No deyntee morsel passed thurgh hir throte;
 His diete was acordant to hir cote. 70
 Replecion ne made hire nevere sik;
 Attemptree diete was al hir phisik
 And exercise and hertes suffisaunce.
 The goute lette hire nothyng for to daunce,
 N'apoplexie shente nat hir heed. 75
 No wyn ne drank she, neither whyt ne reed;
 Hir bord was served moost with whyt and blak—
 Milk and broun breed, in which she foond no lak,
 Seynd bacon, and somtyme an ey or tweye,
 For she was, as it were, a maner deye. 80
 A yeerd she hadde, enclosed al aboute
 With stikkes, and a drye dych withoute.
 In which she hadde a cok hight Chauntecleer,
 In al the land, of crowyng has his peer.
 His voys was murier that the murie orgon 85
 On massedayes that in the chirche gon.
 Wel sikerer was his crowyng in his logge
 Than is a clokke or an abbey orlogge;
 By nature he knew ech ascensioun
 Ofth' equinoxial in thilke toun; 90
 For whan degrees fiftene were ascended,
 Thanne crew he that it myghte nat been amended.
 His comb was redder that the fyn coral, 95
 And batailled as it were a castel wal;
 His byle was blak, and as the jeet it shoon;
 Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
 Hise nayles whiter than the lylye flour,
 And lyk the burned gold was his colour, 100
 This gentil cok hadde in his governaunce
 Sevene hennes for to doon al his plesaunce.
 Whiche were his sustres and his paramours,
 And wonder lyk to hym as of colours;
 Of whiche the faireste hewed on hir throte 105
 Was cleped faire damoysele Pertelote.
 Curteys she was, discreet, and debonaire,
 And compaignable, and bar himself so faire,

Sin thilke day that she was seven nyght bold,
 That trewely she hath the herte in hood 110
 Of Chauntecleer, loken in every lith
 He loved hire so that wel was hym therwith.
 But swich a joye was it to here hem synge.
 Whan that the brighte sonne gan to sprynge,
 In sweete accord. "My lif is faren in londe." 115
 For thilke tyme, as I have understonde,
 Beestes and briddes koude speke and synge.

And so befel that in a dawenyng,
 As Chauntecleer among his wyves alle
 Sat on his perche that was in the halle. 120
 And next hym sat this faire Pertelote,
 This Chauntercleer gan gromen in his throte.
 As man that in his drem is drecched soore.
 And whan that Pertelote thus herde hym rore,
 She was agast, and seyde, "Herte deere, 125
 What eyleth yow to grone in this manere?
 Ye been a verray sleper, fy, for shame!"

And he answerde and seyde thus, "Madame.
 I pray yow that ye take it nat agrief.
 By God, me mette I was in swich meschief 130
 Right now, that yet myn herte is soore aflight.
 Now God, "quod he, "my swevene recche aright.
 And kepe my body out of foul prisoun!
 Me mette how that I romed up and down
 Withinne oure yeerd, where as I saugh a beest 135
 Was lyk an hound, and wolde han maad arceest
 Upon my body, and han had me deed.
 His colour was bitwixe yelow and reed.
 And tipped was his tayl and bothe his crys
 With blak, unlik the remenant of his herys 140
 His snowte smal, with glowyng eyen tweye.
 Yet of his look for fere almost I deye;
 This caused me my gromng, douteless."
 "Avoy!" quod she, "fy on yow, hertelees!
 Allas, "quod she, "for, by that God above, 145
 Now han ye lost myn herte and al my love!
 I kan nat love a coward, by my feith!
 For certes, what so any womman seith,
 We alle desiren, if it myghte be,
 To han houbondes hardy, wise, and free, 150
 And secree, and no nygard, ne no fool,
 Ne hym that is agast of every tool,
 Ne noon avauntour. By that God above,
 How dorste ye seyn, for shame, unto youre love
 That any thyng myghte make yow aferd? 155
 Have ye no mannes herte, and han a berd?
 Allas, and konne ye been agast of swevenys?
 No thyng, God woot, but vanitee in sweven is!
 Swevenes engendron of replecions
 And ofte of fume and compleccions. 160
 Whan humours been to habundant in a wight.
 Certes, this drem which ye han met tonyght
 Comth of the grete superfluytee
 Of youre rede colera, pardee.

Which causeth folk to dreden in hir dremes
 Of arwes and of fyr with rede lemes, 165
 Of rede beesies, that they wol hem byte,
 Right as the humour of malencolie
 Causeth ful many a man in sleep to crie
 For fere of blake beres, or boles blake, 170
 Or elles blake develes wol hem take.
 Of othere humours koude I telle also
 That werken many a man in sleep ful wo,
 But I wol passe as lightly as I kan.
 I.o. Caton, which that was so wys a man, 175
 Seyde he nat thus, "Ne do no fors of dremes"?

Now, sire," quod she, "Whan we flec fro the bemes
 For Goddes love, as taak som laxatif.
 Up peril of my soule and of my lif,
 I conseilte yow the beste, I wol nat lye, 180
 That bothe of colere and of malencolye
 Ye purge yow; and for ye shal nat tarye,
 Though in this toun is noon apothecarye
 I shal myself to herbes bechen yow
 That shul been for youre hele and for youre prow 185
 And in oure yeerd tho herbes shal I fynde,
 The whiche han of hire proprette by kynde
 To purge yow bynethe and eek above
 Foryet nat this, for Goddes owene love.

Ye been ful colerik of complexion;
 Ware the sonne in his ascension 190
 Ne fynde yow nat repleet of humours hote
 And if it do, I dar wel leye a groate
 That ye shul have a fevere terciane,
 Or an agu that may be youre bane, 195
 A day or two ye shul have digestyves.
 Of wormes, or ye take youre laxatyves
 Of lauriol, centaure, and furnetere,
 Or ells of ellebor that groweth there,
 Of katapuce, or of gaitrys beryis, 200
 Of herbe yve growyng in oure yerd there merye is.
 Pekke hem up right as they growe and ete hem in.
 Be myrie, houbonde, for youre fader kyn!
 Dredeth no dreem: I kan sey yow namoore."

"Madame," quod he "graunt mercy of youre loore. 205

But nathelees, as touchyng daun Catoun,
 That hath of wisdom swich a greet renoun,
 Though that he had no dremes for to drede,
 By God, men may in olde bookes rede 210
 Of many a man moore of auctoritee
 Than evere Caton was, so mote I thee,
 That al the revers seyn of this sentence,
 And han wel founden by experience
 That dremes been significance
 As wel of joye as of tribulacions 215
 That folk enduren in this lif present.
 Ther nedeth make of this noon argument:
 The varray preeve sheweth it in dode.

Oon of the gretteste auctour that men rede
Seith thus; that whilom two felawes wente 220
On pilgrimage in a ful good entente.
And happed so they coomen in a toun
Where as ther was swich congregacioun
Of peple, and eek so streit of herbergage,
That they ne founde as muche as cotage 225
In which they bothe mygthe ylogged be.
Wherefore they mosten of necessitee.
As for that nyght, departen compignye,
And ech of hem gooth to his hostelrye.
And took his loggyng as it wolde falle. 230
That oon of hem was logged in a stalle,
Fer in a yeerd, with oxen of the plough;
That oother man was logged wel ynough,
As was his aventure or his fortune.
That us governeth alle as in commune. 235
And so befel that longe er it were day,
This man mette in his bed, ther as he lay,
How that his felawe gan upon hym calle,
And seyde, 'Allas, for in an oxes stalle
This nyght I shal be mordred ther I lye. 240
Now help me. deere brother, or I dye!
In alle haste com to me!' he sayde

This man out of his sleep for feere abrayde;
But whan that he was wakened of his sleep.
He turned hym and took of this no keep; 245
Hym thoughte his dreem nas but a vanitee.
Thus twies in his slepyng dremed he;

And atte thridde tyme yet his felawe
Cam as hym thoughte, and seyde, "I am now slawe.
Bihold my bloody woundes depe and wyde! 250
Arys up erly in the morwe tyde,
And at the west gate of the toun, ' quod he
'A carte ful of dong ther shaltow se,
In which my body is hid ful prively;
Do thilke carte arresten holdely. 255
My gold caused my mordre, sooth to sayn.'
And tolde hym every point how he was slayn,
With a ful pitous face, pale of hewe.
And truste wel, his dreem he founnd ful trewe.
For on the morwe as soone as it was day, 260
To his felawes in he took the way
And whan that he cam to this oxes stalle,
After his felawe he bigan to calle.
The hostiler anserde hym anon,
And seyde, 'Sire, youre felawe is agon; 265
As soone as day he wente out of the toun.'

This man gan fallen in suspicioun,
Remembrynge on his dremes that he meete.
And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he lette.

Unto the west gate of the toun, and fond 270
A dong carte, wente as it were to donge fond.
That was arrayed in that same wise
As ye han herd the dede man devyse.

- And with an hardy herte he gan to crye
 Vengeance and justice of this felonye: 275
 'My felawe mordred is thus same nyght,
 And in this carte he lith gapyng upright!
 I crye out on the ministres' quod he,
 That sholden kepe and reulen this citee.
 Harrow! aill! heere lith my felawe slayn!' 280
 What sholde I moore upto this tale sayn?
 The peple out sterte and cast the cart to grounde,
 And in the myddel of the dong they founde
 The dede man that mordred was al newe.
- O blisful God, that art so just and trewe, 285
 Lo how that thou biwreycest mordre alway!
 Mordre wol out, that se we day by day.
 Mordre is so wlatson and abhomynable
 To God, that is so just and resonable,
 That he ne wol nat suffre it heled be. 290
 Though it abyde a yeer, or two, or thre.
 Mordre wol out, this my conclusioun.
 And right anon, ministers of that toun
 Han hent the carter and so soore hym pyned.
 And eek the hostiler so soore agyned, 295
 That they biknew hir wikkedness anon,
 And were anhangid by the nekke bon.
- Heere may men seen that dremes been to drede.
 And certes, in the same book I rede,
 Right in the nexte chapitre after this -- 300
 I gabbe nat, so have I joye or blis--
 Two men that wolde han passed over see,
 For certeyn cause, into a fer contree,
 If that the wynd ne hadde been contrarie,
 That made hem in a citee for to tarie. 305
 That stood ful myrie upon an haven syde:
 But on a day agayn the even-tyde
 The wynd gan change, and blew right as hem lesie.
 Jolif and glad they wente unto hir reste,
 And casten hem ful erly for to saille. 310
- But to that o man fil a greet mervaille:
 That oon of hem, in slepyng as he lay,
 Hym mette a wonder drem agayn the day.
 Hym thoughte a man stood by his beddes syde,
 And hym commanded that he sholde abyde. 315
 And seyde hym thus: 'If thou tomorwe wende,
 Thou shalt be dreynt: my tale is at an ende.'
- He wook and tolde his felawe what he mette.
 And preyed hym his viage to lette:
 As for that day, he preyde hym to abyde, 320
 His felawe, that lay by his beddes syde.
 Gan for to laughe, and scorned hym ful faste.
 'No drem,' quod he, 'may su myn herte agaste
 That I wol lette for to do my thynges.
 I sette nat a straw by thy dremynges, 325
 For swevenes been but vanytees and japes;
 Men dreme alday of owles or of apes,
 And eek of many a maze therwithal:

Men dreme of thyng that nevere was ne shal,
But sith I see that thou wolt here abyde,
And thus forslawthen wilfully thy lyde 330

God woot, it reweth me; and have good day!
And thus he took his leve and wente his way,
But er that he hadde half his cours yesyled,
Noot I nat why, he what meschaunce it cyfled, 335
But casuelly the shippes botme rente,
and ship and man under the water wente
In sighte of othere shippes bisyde,
That with hem seyled at the same ryde,
And therefore, faire Pertelote so deere, 340
By swiche ensamples olde maistow leere
That no man sholde been to reccheless
Of dremes, for I seye thee, doutelees,
That many a drem ful soore is for to drede,

Lo, in the lyf of Seint Kenelm I rede, 345
That was Kenulphus sone, the noble kyng
Of Mercenkrike, how Kenelm mette a thyng:
A lite er he was mordred on a day,
His mordre in his avysion he say,
His norice hym expowned everydeel 350
His swevene, and bad hym for to kepe hym weel
For traision; but he nas but seven year old,
And therefore litel tale hath he told
Of any drem, so holy was his herte,
By God, I hadde levere than my sherte 355
That ye hadde rad his legende as have I.

Dame Pertelote, I sey yow trewely,
Macrobeus, that writ the Avision
In Affrike of the worthy Cipion,
Affermeth dremes, and seith that they been 360
Warnynge of thynges that men after seen.
And forthermoore, I pray yow, looketh wel
In the Olde Testament of Daniel,
If he heeld dremes any vanitee.

Rede eek of Joseph and there shul ye see 365
Wher dremes be somtyme—I sey nat alle—
Warnynge of thynges that shul after falle.
Looke of Egipte the kyng, daun Pharao,
His baker and his butiller also,
Wher they ne felte noon effect in dremes, 370
Whose wol seken actes of sondry remes
May rede of dremes many a wonder thyng.

Lo Cresus, which that was of Lyde kyng,
Mette he nat that he sat upon a tree,
Which signified he sholde anhangd be? 375

Lo heere Andromacha, Ectores wyf,
That day that Ector sholde lese his lyf,
She dremed on the same nyght biforn
How that the lyf of Ector should be lorn,
If thilke day he wente into bataille, 380
She warned hym, but it myghte nat availle;

He went for to fighte natholees,
 But he was slayn anon of Achilles,
 But thilke tale is al to long to telle,
 And eek it is my day, I may not dwelle,
 Shortly I seye, as for conclusion, 385
 That I shal han of this avision
 Adversitee: and I seye forthermoor
 That I ne telle of laxatyees no stoor,
 For they been venymous, I woot it weel;
 I hem diffye, I love hem never a deel! 390

Now lat us speke of myrthe and stynte al this,
 Madame Pertelote, so have I blis,
 Of o thyng God hath sent me large grace:
 For whan I se the beautee of youre face,
 Ye been so scarlet reed about youre yen, 395
 It maketh al my drede for to dyen:
 For also siker as In principio.

Mulierest hominis confusio-
 Madame, the sentence of this Latyn is,
 'Womman is mannes joye and al his blis.'
 For whan I feele anyght youre softe syde,
 Al be it that I may nat on yow ryde,
 For that oure perche is maad so narwe, alas, 400
 'I am so ful of joye and of solas
 That i deffye bothe swevene and dreem.'

And with that word he fley doum fro the beem,
 For it was day, and eek his hennes alle,
 And with a "chuk" he gan hem for to calle,
 For he hadde founde a corn lay in the yerd. 410
 Real he was: he was namoore aferd.
 He fethered Ptelote twenty tyme,
 And trad hire eek as ofte er it was pryne.
 He looketh as it were a grym leoun, 415

And on his toos he rometh up and doum:
 Hym deigned nat to sette his foot to grounde.
 He chukketh whan he hath a corn yfounde,
 And to hym rennen thanne his wyves alle.
 Thus roial, as a prince is in his halle, 420
 Leve I this Chauntecleer in his pasture,
 And after wol I telle his aventure

Whan that the monthe in which the world bigan
 That highte March, whan God first maked man,
 Was compleet, and passed were also, 425
 Syn March bigan, thirty dayes and two,

Bifel that Chauntecleer in al his pryde,
 His sevene wyves walkyng by his syde,
 Caste up his eyen to the brighte sonne,
 That in the signe of Taurus hadde yronne 430
 Twenty degrees and oon and somewhat moore,
 And knew by kynde, and by noon oother loore,

That it was pryne, and crew with blisful stevene.
 "The sonne," he seyde, "is clomben up on hevene
 Fourty degrees and oon and moore, ywis. 435
 Madame Pertelote, my worldes blis,

Herkneth these blisful briddes how they synge,
 And se the freshe floures how they spryng;
 Ful is myn herte of revel and solas!"

But sodelyny hym fil a sorweful cas. 440
For evere the latter endie of joye is wo.
God woot that wordly joye is soone ago.
And if a rethor koude faire endite,
He in a cronycle saufly myghte it write
As for a sovereyn notabilitee. 445
Now every wys man, lat hym herkne me:
This storie is also trewe, I undertake.
As is the book of Launcelot de Lake.
That wommen holde in ful greet reverence. 450
Now wel I torne agaim to my sentence.

A colifox, ful of sly inquitee,
That in the grove hadde woned yeres three,
By heigh ymaginacion forecast,
The same nyght thurghout the hegges brust 455
Into the yerd ther Chauntecleer the faire
Was wont, and eek his wyves, to repaire;
And in a bed of wortes stille he lay

Til it was passed undren of the day,
Waitinge his tyme on Chauntecleer to falle,
As gladly doon thise homycides alle 460
That in await liggon to mordre men.
O false mordreour, lurkyng in thy den!
O newe Scuriot! Newe Genylon!
False dissimlour O Greek Synon.

That broughtest Troye al outurely to sorwe! 465
O Chauntecleer, Acursed be that morwe
That thou into the yerd flaugh fro the hemes!
Thou were ful wel ywamed by thy dremes
That thilke day was perilous to thee;
But what that God forwoot moor nedes be. 470

After the opinon of certain clerkis,
Witness on hym that any parfit clerk is,
That in scole is greet altercacion
In this matere, and greet disputison, 475
And hath been of an hundred thousand men.

But I ne kan nat bulie it to the bren
As kan the holy doctour Augustyn,
Or Boece, or the bissshop Bradwardyn.
Whether that Goddes worthy forwityng
Streyneth me nedely for to doon a thyng 480
("Nedely" clepe I symple necessitee),
Or elles if free choys be graunted me
To do that same thyng, or do it noht.

Though God forwoot it er that I was wrought;
Of if his wityng streyneth never a deel 485
But by necessitee condicioneel.

I wol nat han to do of swich matere:
My tale is of a cok, as ye may heere,
That took his conseil of his wyl with sorwe,
To walken in the yerd upon that morwe 490

That he hadde met that drem that I yow tolde,
Wommanes consails been ful ofte cold
Wommanes conseil broghte us first to wo,
And made Adam fro Paradys to go,
Ther as he was ful myrie and wel at ese. 495
But for I noot to whm it myght displese

- If I conseil of women wolde blame,
 Passe over, for I seyde it in my game
 Rede auctours where they trete of swich matere,
 And what they seyn of women ye may heere. 500
 Thise been the cokkes wordes and nat myne;
 I kan noon harm of no womman divyne.
- Faire in the sond to bathe hire myrily
 Lith Pertelote, and alle hir sustres by,
 Agayn the sonne, and Chauntecleer so free
 Soong murier than the mermayde in the see- 505
 For Phisiologus seith sikerly
 How that they syngen wel and myrily.
 And so bifel that as he caste his ye
 Among the wortes on a boterfly, 510
 He was war of this fox that lay ful lowe.
 No thyng he liste hym thanne for to crowe.
 But cride anon, "Cok!" and up he stete,
 As man that was affrayed in his herte.
 For naturelly a beest desreth flee 515
 fro his contrarie if he may it see.
 Though he nevere erst hadde seen it with his ye,
 This Chauntecleer, whan he gan hym espye,
 He wolde han fled, but that the fox anon
 Seyde, "Gentil sire, allas, wher wol yegon? 520
 Be ye affrayd of me that am youre freend?
 Now certes, I were worse than a feend
 If I to yow wolde harm or vileynye!
 I am nat come youre conseil for t'espice,
 But trewely, the cause of my comyng 525
 Was oonly for to herkne how that ye synge,
 For trewely, ye have as myrie a stevene
 As any aungel hath that is in hevene.
 Therewith ye han in mysyk moore feelynge
 Than hadde Boece, or any that kan synge. 530
 My lord your fader... God his soule bless!--
 And eek youre moder, of hire gentillesse
 Han in myn housybeen, to my greet ese.
 And certes, sire, ful fayn wolde I yow plese.
- But for men speke of syngyng, I wol seye, 535
 So mote I brouke wel myne eyen tweye.
 Save yow, I herde nevere man so synge
 As dide youre fader in the morwenyng.
 Certes, it was of herie, al that he song,
 And for to make his voys the moore strong, 540
 He wolde so peyne hym that with hothe his yen
 He most wynke, so loude he wolde cryen.
 And stonden on his tipton therewithal
 And strecche forth his necke long and smal.
 And eek he was of swich discrecion 545
 That ther nas no man in no region
 That hym in song or wisdom myghte passe.
 I have wel rad in 'Daun Burnel the Assc.'
 Among his vers how that ther was a cok,
 For that a preestes sone gaf him a knob 550
 Upon his leg whil he was yong and nyce.
 He made hym for to lese his benefice.
 But certeyn, ther nys no comparison

Bitwixe the wisdom and discrecion
 Of youre fader and of his subtiltee. 555
 Now syngeth, sire, for seinte charitee!
 Lat se, konneye youre fader countrefete?
 This Chauntecleer his wynges gan to bete,
 As man that koude his trayson nat espie,
 So was he ravysshed with his flaterie. 560
 Allas, ye lordes, many a fis flatour
 Is in youre courts, and many a losengeour,
 That plesen yow wel moore, by my feith,
 Than he that soothfastness unto yow seith!
 Redeth Ecclesiaste of flaterye: 565
 Both war, ye lordes, of hir trecherye.

This Chauntecleer stood hye upon his toos,
 Strecchyng his nekke, and heeld his eyen cloos,
 And gan to crowe loude for the nones.
 And daun Russell the fox stirte up atones. 570
 And by the gargat hente Chauntecleer,
 And on his bak toward the wode him beer.
 For yet ne was ther no man that hym sewed

O destinee, that mayst nat been eshewed!
 Allas that Chauntecleer feigh fro the bemes!
 Allas, his wif ne roghte nat of dremes!
 And on a Friday fil al this meschaunce! 575

O Venus, that are goddesse of plesaunce,
 Syn that thy servant was this Chauntecleer,
 And in thy servyce dide al his power-
 Moore for delit than world to mulplye- - 580
 Why woldestow suffre hym on thy day to dye?

O Gaufred, deere maister soverayn,
 That, whan thy worthy kyng Richard was slayn
 With shot, compleynedest his deeth so soore. 585
 Why ne hadde I now thy sentence and thy loore
 The Friday for to chide, as diden ye?
 For on a Friday, soothly, slayn was he,
 Thanne wolde I shew yow how that I koulde pleyne 590
 For Chauntecleres drede and for his peyne.

Certes, swich cry ne lamentation
 Was nevere of ladyes maad whan Ylion
 Was wonne, and Pirrus with his streite swerd,
 Whan he hadde hent kyng Priam by the berd 595
 And slayn hym, as seith us Eneylos
 As maden alle the hennes in the cloos
 Whan they had seen of Chauntecleer the sighte.
 But soverynly dame Pertelote shrighite
 Ful louder than dide, Hasdrubales wyf, 600
 Whan that hir housbonde hadde lost his lyf,
 And that the Romayns hadden brend Cartage;
 She was so ful of torment and of rage
 That wilfully into the fyr she sterte,
 And brende hirselves with a stedefast herte.

O woful hennes, right so cryden ye 605
 As, whan that Nero brende the citee

Of Rome. cryden senatoures wyves
For that hir housholdes losten alle hir lyves-
Withouten gilt this Nero hath hem slayn.
Now wol I urne to my tale agayn. 610

This sely widew and eek hir doghtres two
Herden this heenes crye and maken wo
And out at dores sturten they anon,
And syen the fox toward the grove gon.
And bar upon his bak the cok away, 615
And cryden, "Out ! harrow! and weylaway!
Ha! ha! the fox!" and after hym they ran.
And eek with staves many another man.

Ran Colleoure dogge, and Talbot and Gerland,
And Malkyn, with a distaf in hir hand, 620
Ran cow and calf, and eek the verray hogges,
So fered for the berkyng of the dogges
And shoutyng of the men and wommen eek,
They ronnc so hem thoughte hir herte breek.
They yelleden as feendes doon in helle: 625

The dokes cryden as men wolde hem quelle;
The gees for feere flownen over the trees:
Out of the hyve cam the swarm of bees,
So hydous was the noyse, a , benedicite
Certes, be Jakke Straw and his meynee!
Ne made nevere shoultes half so shrille 630
Whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille,
As thilke day was maad upon the fox.
Of bars they broghten bemes, and of box,
Of horn, of boon, in whiche they blewe and powped,
And therwithal they skrieked and they howped- - 635
It semed as that hevenc sholde falle.

Now goode men, I prey yow herkneth alle.
Lo, how Fortune turneth sodeynly
The hope and pryde eek of hir enemy.
This cok, that lay upon the foxes bak, 640
In al his drede unto the fox he spak
And seyde, "Sire, if that I were as ye,
Yet sholde I seyn, as I praye for a helpe me,
"Turneth agayn, ye" "Aie cherles alle!
A verray pestilence upon yow falle!" 645
Now am I come unto this wodes syde.
Maugree youre heed, the cok shal here abyde
I wol hym etc. in feith, and that anon".

The fox answered, "In feith, It shal be don."
And as he spak that word, al sodeynly 650
This cok brak from his mouth delyverly,
and hie upon a tree he fleigh anon.

And whan the fox saugh that the cok was gon,
"Allas", quod he, "O Chauntecleer, allas!
I have to yow," quod he, "ydoon trespas, 655
In as muche as I madek yow aferd

Whan I yow hente and broghte out of the yerd.
But see, I jide it in no wikke entente,

Of Rome, cryden senatoures wyves
For that hir housbohndes losten alle hir lyves-
Withouten gilt this Nero hath hem slayn.
Now wol I turne to my tale agayn. 610

This sely widew and eek hir doghtres two
Herden thise heenes crye and maken wo
And out at dores stirten they anon,
And syen the fox toward the grove gon.
And bar upon his bak the cok away, 615
And cryden, "Out ! harrow! and weylaway!
Halha! the fox!" and after hym they ran.
And eek with staves many another man.

Ran Colleoure dogge, and Talbot and Gerland,
And Malkyn, with a distaf in hir hand, 620
Ran cow and calf, and eek the verray hogges,
So fered for the berkyng of the dogges
And shoutyng of the men and wommen eek,
They ronne so hem thoughte hir herte breek.
They yelleden as feendes doon in helle: 625

The dokes cryden as men wolde hem quelle;
The gees for feere flownen over the trees;
Out of the hyve cam the swarm of bees;
So hydous was the noyse, a benedicite
Certes, he Jakke Straw and his meynee!
Ne made nevere shoultes half so shrille 630
Whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille,
As thilke day was maad upon the fox.

Of bars they broghten bemes, and of box,
Of horn, of boon, in whiche they blewe and powped,
And therwithal they skriked and they howped- - 635
It semed as that hevene sholde falle.

Now goode men, I prey yow herkneth alle;
Lo, how Fortune turneth sodeynly
The hope and pryde eek of hir enemy,
This cok, that lay upon the foxes bak, 640
In al his drede unto the fox he spak
And seyde, "Sire, if that I were as ye,
Yet sholde I seyn, as wys God helpe me,
"Turneth agayn, ye proude cherles alle!
A verray pestilence upon yow falle! 645
Now am I come unto this wodes syde;
Maugree youre heed, the cok shal here abyde.
I wol hym etc. in feith, and that anon'."

The fox answered, "In feith, It shal be don."
And as he spak that word, al sodeynly 650
This cok brak from his mouth delyverly.
and hye upon a tree he fleigh anon.

And whan the fox saugh that the cok was gon,
"Allas", quod he, "O Chauntecleer, allas!
I have to yow." quod he, "ydoon trespas, 655
In as muche as I maked yow aferd

Whan I yow hente and broghte out of the yerd.
But sire, I dide it in no wikke entente;

Com daun, and I shal telle you what I meane
I shal seve sooth to you, God be my reue." 660

"Nay thanne," quod he, "I browe not of yow
And first I snewe my self hit to be fals and bones
If thou bigile me offer than anye
Thou shalt nanmore, thureh thy taryng,
Do me up songe and wynde with anyng." 665

For he that wyneketh when he sholde see
Al wyltoly, God lat him nevere thee!

"Nay", quod the fox, "but good ye ceite, markchaunce
That is so indiscreet of governaunce
That jangleth when he sholde holde his pres." 670

Lo, swich it is for to be techeless
And necheert, and trustles, thery
But ye that holden us for to be wylde
As of a fox, or of a cok, or of a wyld
Taketh the moraltie, as I have seyd,
For Sente Paull seith that a fox is crafty,
To oure doctryne it is ywylde, and wyld,
Taketh the fruyt, and lat the cheryng, and chere,
Now goode God, if that it me thy wylle
As seith my lord, so make us alle good men,
And bringe us to his heighe, that is our end,
Heere is ended the Nones, threestes, and fyve.

THE FIFTE

"Sire Nonne," quod he, "I prayte you to be wylde
"Yblessed be thou, that is our end,
This was a myghty knyght, that was a knyght,
But by my trouthe, it is a knyght,
Thou woldst swere a knyght, that is a knyght,
For if thou have conage, and chere,
Thee were nedde of knyghtes, and chere,
ya, mo than seven tymes, and chere,
See which braunes hath the chere,
So greet a nekke, and swylde, and chere,
He looketh as a sperhawk, and chere,
Hym nedeth nat his colour, but chere,
With brasile ne with greyn of Port, and chere,
Now sire, faire falle yow for youre fay,
And after that he with ful more chere,
Seide unto another as ye shuln heere." 675

Com down, and I shal telle yow what I mente,
I shal seye sooth to yow, God help me so!" 660

"Nay thanne," quod he, "I shrewe us bothe two:
And first I shrewe myself, bothe blood and bones,
If thou bigile me ofter than ones.
Thou shalt namoore, thurgh thy flaterye,
Do me to synge and wynke with myn ye, 665

For he that wynketh whan he sholde see,
Al wilfully, God lat him nevere thee!"

"Nay", quod the fox, " but God yeve hym meschaunce,
That is so undiscreet of governaunce
That jangleth whan he sholde holde his pees!" 670

Lo, Swich it is for to be reccheless
And necligent, and truste on flaterye.
But ye that holden this tale a folye,
As of a fox or of a cok and hen,
Taketh the moralitee, goode men. 675

For Seint Paull seith that al that writen is
To oure doctryne it is ywrite, ywis;
Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille.
Now goode God, if that it be thy wille,
As seith my lord, so make us alle goode men. 680
And bringe us to his heighe blisse. Amen.
Heere is ended the Nonnes Presses Tale.

EPILOGUE

"SireNonnes preest". oure Hooste seide anon,
"Yblessed be thy breche and every stoon!
This was a murie tale of Chauntecleer. 685
But by my trouthe, if thou were seculer
Thou woldest been a tredefoul aright;
For if thou have corage as thou hast myght
Thee were nede of hennes, as I wene,
Ya, mo than seven tymes seventene. 690
See which braunes hath this gentil preest,
So greet a nekke, and swich a large breest!
He looketh as a sperhawk with his yen;
Hym nedeth nat his colour for to dyen
With brasile ne with greyn of Portyngale. 695
Now sire, faire falle yow for youre tale."
And after that he with ful merie chere,
Seide unto another as ye shuln heere. 698

THE CANTERBURY TALES
[GROUP A]
The Prologue

When in April the sweet season is,
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
From the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the *Kenn* has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially, from every shire ende
In England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.

It happened in that season that one day
In Southwark, at *The Tabard*, as I say,
Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
For Canterbury, most devout at heart,
At night there came into that hostelry
Some nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry folk happening then to fall
In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all
That toward Canterbury meant to ride.
The rooms and stables of the inn were so clean
That they made us easy, all was of the best,
And shortly when the star had gone to rest,
They went out into the hall upon the tap,
And sat down some of them in fellowship,
And I was chosen to rise early and take the way
To Southwark, to see how late the day

was. And when I came to the inn, I saw that the company
was of sundry folk, of many a kind,
And I was the first to rise and say
What the condition was, the full array
That was there, as it appeared to me,
According to profession and degree,
And what appeared they were riding in.
And of a Knight I then first will begin,
There was a *knicht*, a most distinguished man,
That served the day on which he first began
To ride abroad had followed chivalry
In his honour, generosity, and courtesy.
He had done nobly in his sovereign's war
And ridden into battle, no man more,
As well in christian as in heathen places,
And ever honoured for his noble graces.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

[GROUP A]

The Prologue

When in April the sweet showers fall
 And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
 The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
 As brings about the engendering of the flower,
 When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
 Exhales an air in every grove and heath
 Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
 His half-course in the sign of the *Ram* has run,
 And the small fowl are making melody
 That sleep away the night with open eye
 (So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
 Then people long to go on pilgrimages
 And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
 Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
 And specially, from every shire's end
 In England, down to Canterbury they wend
 To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
 To give his help to them when they were sick.

It happened in that season that one day
 In Southwark, at *The Tabard*, as I lay
 Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
 For Canterbury, most devout at heart,
 At night there came into that hostelry
 Some nine and twenty in a company
 Of sundry folk happening then to fall
 In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all
 That towards Canterbury meant to ride.
 The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;
 They made us easy, all was of the best.
 And shortly, when the sun had gone to rest,
 By speaking to them all upon the trip
 I soon was one of them in fellowship
 And promised to rise early and take the way
 To Canterbury, as you heard me say.

But none the less, while I have time and space,
 Before my story takes a further pace,
 It seems a reasonable thing to say
 What their condition was, the full array
 Of each of them, as it appeared to me
 According to profession and degree,
 And what apparel they were riding in;
 And at a Knight I therefore will begin.
 There was a *knight*, a most distinguished man,
 Who from the day on which he first began
 To ride abroad had followed chivalry,
 Truth, honour, generousness and courtesy.
 He had done nobly in his sovereign's war
 And ridden into battle, no man more,
 As well in christian as in heathen places,
 And ever honoured for his noble graces.

When we took Alexandria, he was there.
He often sat at table in the chair
Of honour, above all nations, when in Prussia.
In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,
No christian man so often, of his rank.
When, in Granada, Algeciras sank
Under assault, he had been there, and in
North Africa, raiding Benamarin:
In Anatolia he had been as well
And fought when Ayas and Attalia fell,
For all along the Mediterranean coast
He had embarked with many a noble host.
In fifteen mortal battles he had been
And jousted for our faith at Trarussene
Thrice in the lists, and always killed his man.
This same distinguished knight had led the van
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work
For him against another heathen Turk;
He was of sovereign value in all eyes.
And though so much distinguished, he was wise
And in his bearing modest as a maid.
He never yet a boorish thing had said
In all his life to any, come what might:
He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight.

Speaking of his equipment, he possessed
Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.
He wore a fustian tunic stained and dark
With smudges where his armour had left mark;
Just home from service, he had joined our ranks
To do his pilgrimage and render thanks.

He had his son with him, a fine young *Squire*,
A lover and cadet, a lad of fire
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed.
In stature he was of a moderate length,
With wonderful agility and strength.
He'd seen some service with the cavalry
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy
And had done valiantly in little space
Of time, in hope to win his lady's grace.
He was embroidered like a meadow bright
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.
Singing he was, or fluting all the day:
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
Short was his gown, the sleeves were long and wide;
He knew the way to sit a horse and ride.
He would make songs and poems and recite,
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale
He slept as little as a nightingale.
Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
And carved to serve his father at the table.

There was a *Yeoman* with him at his side,
No other servant; so he chose to ride.
This *Yeoman* wore a coat and hood of green,

And peacock-feathered arrows, bright and keen
And neatly sheathed, hung at his belt the while
-For he could dress his gear in yeoman style,
His arrows never dropped their feathers low -
And in his hand he bore a mighty bow,
His head was like a nut, his face was brown,
He knew the whole of woodcraft up and down
A saucy brace was on his arm to ward
It from the bow-string, and a shield and sword
Hung at one side, and at the other slipped
A jaunty dirk, spear-sharp and well-equipped,
A medal of St. Christopher he wore
Of shining silver on his breast, and bore
A hunting-horn, well slung and burnished clean,
That dangled from a baldric of bright green,
He was a proper forester I guess

There also was a *Nun*, a Prioress,
Her way of smiling very simple and coy,
Her greatest oath was only 'By St. Loy!'
And she was known as Madam Eglantyne,
And well she sang a service, with a fine
Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,
And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;
French in the Paris style she did not know.
At meat her manners were well taught withal,
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
But she could carry a morsel up and keep
The smallest drop from falling on her breast,
For courtliness she had a special zest,
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean
That not a trace of grease was to be seen
Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,
She reached a hand sedately for the meat,
She certainly was very entertaining,
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining
To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,
A stately bearing fitting to her place,
And to seem dignified in all her dealings
As for her sympathies and tender feelings,
She was so charitably solicitous
She used to weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding,
And she had little dogs she would be feeding
With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread,
And bitterly she wept if one were dead
Or someone took a stick and made it smart,
She was all sentiment and tender heart,
Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,
Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;
Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,
Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread,
Almost a span across the brows, I own,
She was indeed by no means undergrown,
Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm,
She wore a coral trinket on her arm,
A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,

And peacock-feathered arrows, bright and keen
And neatly sheathed, hung at his belt the while
-For he could dress his gear in yeoman style,
His arrows never dropped their feathers low-
And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
His head was like a nut, his face was brown.
He knew the whole of woodcraft up and down.
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Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest metal
On which there first was graven a crowned A,
And lower, *A non vincet omnia*.

Another *Nun* the chaplain at her cell,
Was riding with her, and *three Priests* as well.

A Monk there was, one of the finest sort
Who rode the country, hunting was his sport.
A manly man to be an Abbot able;
Many a dainty horse he had in stable.
His bridle, when he rode, a man might hear
Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell
Where my lord Monk was Prior of the cell.
The Rule of good St. Benet or St. Maur
As old and strict he tended to ignore;
He let go by the things of yesterday
And took the modern world's more spacious way.
He did not rate that text at a plucked hen
Which says that hunters are not holy men
And that a monk uncloustered is a mere
Fish out of water, flapping on the pier,
That is to say a monk out of his cloister,
That was a text he held not worth an oyster;
And I agreed and said his views were sound;
Was he to study till his head went round
Foring over books in cloisters? Must he toil
As Austin bade and till the very soil?
Was he to leave the world upon the shelf?
Let Austin have his labour to himself.

This Monk was therefore a good man to horse;
Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds, to course.
Hunting a hare or riding at a fence
Was all his fun, he spared for no expense.
I saw his sleeves were garnished at the hand
With fine grey fur, the finest in the land,
And on his hood, to fasten it at his chin
He had a wrought-gold cunningly fashioned pin;
Into a lover's knot it seemed to pass
His head was bald and shone like looking-glass,
So did his face, as if it had been greased.
He was a fat and personable priest;
His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle
They glittered like the flames beneath a kettle;
Supple his boots, his horse in fine condition.
He was a prelate fit for exhibition.
He was not pale like a tormented soul;
He liked a fat swan best, and roasted whole.
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

There was a *Priar*, a wanton one and merry,
A *Limitier*, a very festive fellow.
In all Four Orders there was none so mellow
So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.
He'd fixed up many a marriage, giving each
Of his young women what he could afford her.
He was a noble pillar to his Order.

Highly beloved and intimate was he
With County folk within his boundary,
And city dames of honour and possessions;
For he was qualified to hear confessions
Or so he said, with more than priestly scope
He had a special license from the Pope.
Sweetly he heard his penitents at shrift
With pleasant absolution, for a gift.
He was an easy man in penance-giving
Where he could hope to make a decent living;
It's a sure sign whenever gifts are given
To a poor Order that a man's well shriven,
And should he give enough he knew in verity
The penitent repented in sincerity.
For many a fellow is so hard of heart
He cannot weep, for all his inward smart.
Therefore instead of weeping and of prayer
One should give silver for a poor Friar's care.
He kept his tippen stuffed with pins for curls,
And pocket-knives, to give to pretty girls.
And certainly his voice was gay and sturdy,
For he sang well and played the hurdy-gurdy.
At sing-songs he was champion of the hour.
His neck was whiter than a lily-flower
But strong enough to butt a bruiser down,
He knew the taverns well in every town
And every innkeeper and barmaid too
Better than lepers, beggars and that crew,
For in so eminent a man as he
It was not fitting with the dignity
Of his position, dealing with a scum
Of wretched lepers; nothing good can come
Of dealings with the slum-and-gutter dwellers,
But only with the rich and victual-sellers.
But anywhere a profit might accrue
Courteous he was and lowly of service too.
Natural gifts like his were hard to match.
He was the finest beggar of his batch,
And, for his begging-district, payed a rent;
His brethren did no poaching where he went.
For though a widow mightn't have a shoe,
So pleasant was his holy how-d'ye-do
He got his farthing from her just the same
Before he left, and so his income came
To more than he laid out. And how he romped,
Just like a puppy! He was ever prompt
To arbitrate disputes on settling days
(for a small fee) in many helpful ways,
Not then appearing as your cloistered scholar
With threadbare habit hardly worth a dollar,
But much more like a Doctor or a Pope.
Of double-worsted was the semi-cope
Upon his shoulders, and the swelling fold
About him, like a bell about its mould
When it is casting, rounded out his dress.
He lisped a little out of wantonness
To make his English sweet upon his tongue.
When he had played his harp, or having sung,
His eyes would twinkle in his head as bright

As any star upon a frosty night.
His worthy's name was Hubert, it appeared.

There was a *Merchant* with a forking beard
And motley dress: high on his horse he sat.
Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat
And on his feet daintily buckled boots.
He told of his opinions and pursuits
In solemn tones, and how he never lost
The sea should be kept free at any cost
(He thought) upon the Harwich-Holland range.
He was expert at currency exchange.
This estimable Merchant so had set
His wits to work, none knew he was in debt.
He was so stately in negotiation,
Loan, bargain, and commercial obligation.
He was an excellent fellow all the same:
To tell the truth I do not know his name.

An *Oxford Cleric*, still a student though,
One who had taken logic long ago,
Was there; his horse was thinner than a rake,
And he was not too fat, I undertake,
But had a hollow look, a sober stare:
The thread upon his overcoat was bare.
He had found no preferment in the church
And he was too unworldly to make search
For secular employment. By his bed
He preferred having twenty books in red
And black, of Aristotle's philosophy,
To having fine clothes, fiddle or psaltery.
Though a philosopher, as I have told,
He had not found the stone for making gold.
Whatever money from his friends he took
He spent on learning or another book
And prayed for them most earnestly, returning
Thanks to them thus for paying for his learning
His only care was study, and indeed
He never spoke a word more than was need,
Formal at that, respectful in the extreme,
Short, to the point, and lofty in his theme.
The thought of moral virtue filled his speech
And he would gladly learn, and gladly teach.

A *Serjeant at the Law* who paid his calls,
Wary and wise, for clients at St. Paul's
There also was, of noted excellence.
Discreet he was, a man to reverence,
Or so he seemed, his sayings were so wise.
He often had been Justice of Assize
By letters patent, and in full commission,
His fame and learning and his high position
Had won him many a robe and many a fee.
There was no such conveyancer as he;
All was fee-simple to his strong digestion,
Not one conveyance could be called in question.
Nowhere there was so busy a man as he:
But was less busy than he seemed to be.
He knew of every judgment, case and crime

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Recorded, ever since King William's time,
He could dictate defences or draft deeds;
No one could pinch a comma from his screeds,
And he knew every statute off by rote.
He wore a homely parti-coloured coat
Girt with a silken belt of pin-stripe stuff;
Of his appearance I have said enough.

There was a *Franklin* with him, it appeared;
White as a daisy-petal was his beard.
A sanguine man, high-coloured and benign,
He loved a morning sop of cake in wine.
He lived for pleasure and had always done,
For he was Epicurus' very son,
In whose opinion sensual delight
Was the one true felicity in sight.
As noted as St. Julian was for bounty
He made his household free to all the County.
His bread, his ale were finest of the fine
And no one had a better stock of wine.
His house was never short of bake-meat pies,
Of fish and flesh, and these in such supplies
It positively snowed with meat and drink
And all the dainties that a man could think.
According to the seasons of the year
Changes of dish were ordered to appear.
He kept fat partridges in coops, beyond,
Many a bream and pike were in his pond.
Woe to the cook whose sauces had no sting
Or who was unprepared in anything!
And in his hall a table stood arrayed
And ready all day long, with places laid.
As justice at the Sessions none stood higher;
He often had been Member for the Shire.
A dagger and a little purse of silk
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
As Sheriff he checked audit, every entry.
He was a model among landed gentry.

A Huberdasher, a Dyer, a Carpenter,
A Weaver and a Carpet-maker were
Among our ranks, all in the livery
Of one impressive guild-fraternity.
They were so trim and fresh their gear would pass
For new. Their knives were not tricked out with brass
But wrought with purest silver, which avouches
A like display on girdles and on pouches.
Each seemed a worthy burgess, fit to grace
A guild-hall with a seat upon the dais.
Their wisdom would have justified a plan
To make each one of them an alderman;
They had the capital and revenue,
Besides their wives declared it was their due.
And if they did not think so, then they ought;
To be called '*Madam*' is a glorious thought,
And so is going to church and being seen
Having your mantle carried like a queen.

They had a *Cook* with them who stood alone

For boiling chicken with a marrow-bone,
Sharp flavouring-powder and a spice for savour.
He could distinguish London ale by flavour,
And he could roast and seethe and broil and fry,
Make good thick soup and bake a tasty pie.
But what a pity – so it seemed to me,
That he should have an ulcer on his knee.
As for blancmange, he made it with the best.

There was a *Skipper* hailing from far west;
He came from Dartmouth, so I understood.
He rode a farmer's horse as best he could,
In a wollen gown that reached his knee,
A dagger on a lanyard falling free
Hung from his neck under his arm and down.
The summer heat had tanned his colour brown,
And certainly he was an excellent fellow.
Many a draught of vintage, red and yellow,
He'd drawn at Bordeaux, while the trader snored.
The nicer rules of conscience he ignored.
If, when he fought, the enemy vessel sank,
He sent his prisoners home; they walked the plank.
As for his skill in reckoning his tides,
Currents and many another risk besides,
Moons, harbours, pilots, he had such dispatch
That none from Hull to Carthage was his match.
Hardy he was, prudent in undertaking;
His beard in many a tempest had its shaking,
And he knew all the havens as they were
From Gottland to the Cape of Finisterre,
And every creek in Brittany and Spain;
The barge he owned was called *The Maudelayne*.

A *Doctor* too emerged as we proceeded;
No one alive could talk as well as he did
On points of medicine and of surgery,
For, being grounded in astronomy,
He watched his patient's favourable star
And, by his Natural Magic, knew what are
The lucky hours and planetary degrees
For making charms and magic effigies.
The cause of every malady you'd got
He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot;
He knew their seat, their humour and condition.
He was a perfect practising physician.
These causes being known for what they were,
He gave the man his medicine then and there.
All his apothecaries in a tribe
Were ready with the drugs he would prescribe
And each made money from the other's guile;
They had been friendly for a goodish while.
He was well-versed in Aesculapius too
And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew
And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,
Galen and Rhazes, Hali, Serapion,
Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,
Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine.
In his own diet he observed some measure;
There were no superfluties for pleasure.

Only digestives, nutritives and such.
He did not read the Bible very much.
In blood-red garments, slashed with bluish-grey
And lined with taffeta, he rode his way;
Yet he was rather close as to expenses
And kept the gold he won in pestilences.
Gold stimulates the heart, or so we're told.
He therefore had a special love of gold.

A worthy *woman* from beside *Bath* city
Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity.
In making cloth she showed so great a bent
She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.
In all the parish not a dame dared stir
Towards the altar steps in front of her,
And if indeed they did, so wrath was she
As to be quite put out of charity.
Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;
I dared have sworn they weighted a good ten pound,
The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.
Her hose were of the finest scarlet red
And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.
Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue.
A worthy woman all her life, what's more
She'd had five husbands, all at the church door,
Apart from other company in youth;
No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.
And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;
She'd been to Rome and also to Boulogne,
St. James of Compostella and Cologne,
And she was skilled in wandering by the way.
She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.
Easily on an ambling horse she sat
Well wimpled up, and on her head a hat
As broad as is a buckler or a shield;
She had a flowing mantle that concealed
Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that.
In company she liked to laugh and chat
And knew the remedies for love's mischances,
And art in which she knew the oldest dances.

A holy-minded man of good renown
There was, and poor, the *Parson* to a town,
Yet he was rich in holy thought and work.
He also was a learned man, a clerk,
Who truly knew Christ's gospel and would preach it
Devoutly to parishioners, and teach it.
Benign and wonderfully diligent,
And patient when adversity was sent
(For so he proved in great adversity)
He much disliked extorting tithe or fee,
Nay rather he preferred beyond a doubt
Giving to poor parishioners round about
From his own goods and Easter offerings.
He found sufficiency in little things.
Wide was his parish, with houses far asunder,
Yet he neglected not in rain or thunder,
In sickness or in grief, to pay a call

On the remotest, whether great or small,
 Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.
 This noble example to his sheep he gave,
 First following the word before he taught it,
 And it was from the gospel he had caught it,
 This little proverb he would add thereto
 That if gold rust, what then will iron do?
 For if a priest be foul in whom we trust
 No wonder that a common man should rust:
 And shame it is to see-let priests take stock-
 A shitten shepherd and a snowy flock.
 The true example that a priest should give
 Is one of cleanness, how the sheep should live.
 He did not set his benefice to hire
 And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire
 Or run to London to earn easy bread
 By singing masses for the wealthy dead,
 Or find some Brotherhood and get enrolled.
 He stayed at home and watched over his fold
 So that no wolf should make the sheep miscarry.
 He was a shepherd and no mecenary.
 Holy and virtuous he was, but then
 Never contemptuous of sinful men,
 Never disdainful, never too proud or fine,
 But was discreet in teaching and benign.
 His business was to show a fair behaviour
 And draw men thus to Heaven and their Saviour,
 Unless indeed a man were obstinate;
 And such, whether of high or low estate,
 He put to sharp rebuke to say the least.
 I think there never was a better priest.
 He sought no pomp or glory in his dealings,
 No scrupulosity had spiced his feelings.
 Christ and His Twelve Apostles and their lore
 He taught, but followed it himself before.

There was a *Plowman* with him there, his brother
 Many a load of dung one time or other
 He must have carted through the morning dew.
 He was an honest worker, good and true,
 Living in peace and perfect charity,
 And, as the gospel bade him, so did he.
 Loving God best with all his heart and mind
 And then his neighbour as himself, repined
 At no misfortune, slacked for no content,
 For steadily about his work he went
 To thrash his corn, to dig or to manure
 Or make a ditch; and he would help the poor
 For love of Christ and never take a penny
 If he could help it, and, as prompt as any,
 He paid his tithes in full when they were due
 On what he owned, and on his earnings too.
 He wore a tabard smock and rode a mare.

There was a *Reeve*, also a *Miller*, there,
 A College *Manciple* from the Inns of Court,
 A papal *Pardoner* and, in close consort,
 A Church-Court *Summoner*, riding at a trot,
 And finally myself--that was the lot.

The *Miller* was a chap of sixteen stone,
A great stout fellow big in brawn and bone.
He did well out of them, for he could go
And win the ram at any wrestling show.
Broad, knotty and short-shouldered, he would boast
He could heave any door off hinge and post,
Or take a run and break it with his head.
His beard, like any sow or fox, was red
And broad as well, as though it were a spade;
And, at its very tip, his nose displayed
A wart on which there stood a tuft of hair
Red as the bristles in an old sow's ear.
His nostrils were as black as they were wide.
He had a sword and buckler at his side,
His mighty mouth was like a furnace door.
A wrangler and buffoon, he had a store
Of tavern stories, filthy in the main.
His was a master-hand at stealing grain.
He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew
Its quality and took three times his due -
A thumb of gold, by God, to gauge an oat!
He wore a hood of blue and a white coat.
He liked to play his bagpipes up and down
And that was how he brought us out of town.

The *manciple* came from the Inner Temple;
All caterers might follow his example
In buying victuals; he was never rash
Whether he bought on credit or paid cash.
He used to watch the market most precisely
And got in first, and so he did quite nicely.
Now isn't a marvel of God's grace
That an illiterate fellow can outpace
The wisdom of a heap of learned men?
His masters - he had more than thirty then -
All versed in the abstrusest legal knowledge,
Could have produced a dozen from their College
Fit to be stewards in land and rents and game
To any Peer in England you could name,
And show him how to live on what he had
Debt-fee (unless of course the Peer were mad)
Or be as frugal as he might desire,
And they were fit to help about the Shire
In any legal case there was to try;
And yet this Manciple could wipe their eye.

The *Reeve* was old and choleric and thin;
His beard was shaven closely to the skin,
His shorn hair came abruptly to a stop
Above his ears, and he was docked on top
Just like a priest in front; his legs were lean,
Like sticks they were, no calf was to be seen.
He kept his bins and gamers very trim;
No auditor could gain a point on him.
And he could judge by watching drought and rain
The yield he might expect from seed and grain.
His master's sheep, his animals and hens,
Pigs, horses, dairies, stores and cattle-pens

Were wholly trusted to his government.
 And he was under contract to present
 The accounts, right from his master's earliest years.
 No one had ever caught him in arrears.
 No bailiff, serf or herdsman dared to kick,
 He knew their dodges, knew their every trick;
 Feared like the plague he was, by those beneath.
 He had a lovely dwelling on a heath,
 Shadowed in green by trees above the sward.
 A better hand at bargains than his lord,
 He had grown rich and had a store of treasure
 Well tucked away, yet out it came to pleasure
 His lord with subtle loans or gifts of goods,
 To earn his thanks and even coats and hoods.
 When young he'd learnt a useful trade and still
 He was a carpenter of first-rate skill.
 The stallion-cob he rode at a slow trot
 Was dapple-grey and bore the name of Scot.
 He wore an overcoat of bluish shade
 And rather long; he had a rusty blade
 Slung at his side. He came, as I heard tell,
 From Norfolk, near a place called Baldeswell.
 His coat was tucked under his belt and splayed.
 He rode the hindmost of our cavalcade.

There was a *Summoner* with us in the place
 Who had a fire-red cherubimish face,
 For he had carbuncles. His eyes were narrow,
 He was as hot and lecherous as a sparrow.
 Black, scabby brows he had, and a thin beard.
 Children were afraid when he appeared.
 No quicksilver, lead ointments, tartar creams,
 Boracic, no, nor brimstone, so it seems,
 Could make a salve that had the power to bite,
 Clean up or cure his wheeks of knobby white
 Or purge the pimples sitting on his cheeks.
 Garlic he loved, and onions too, and leeks,
 And drinking strong wine till all was hazy.
 Then he would shout and jabber as if crazy,
 And wouldn't speak a word except in Latin
 When he was drunk, such tags as he was pat in:
 He only had a few, say two or three,
 That he had mugged up out of some decree;
 No wonder, for he heard them every day.
 And, as you know, a man can teach a jay
 To call out 'Walter' better than the Pope.
 But had you tried to test his wits and grope
 For more, you'd have found nothing in the bag.
 Then '*Questio quid juris*' was his tag.
 He was a gentle variet and a kind one,
 No better fellow if you went to find one.
 He would allow-just for a quart of wine-
 Any good lad to keep a concubine
 A twelvemonth and dispense it altogether!
 Yet he could pluck a finch to leave no feather:
 And if he found some rascal with a maid
 He would instruct him not to be afraid
 In such a case of the Archdeacon's curse
 (Unless the rascal's soul were in his purse)

For in his purse the punishment should be.
'Purse is the good Archdeacon's Hell,' said he.
But well I know he lied in what he said;
A curse should put a guilty man in dread,
For curses kill, as shricing brings, salvation.
We should beware of excommunication.
Thus, as he pleased, the man could bring duress
On any young fellow in the diocese.
He knew their secrets, they did what he said.
He wore a garland set upon his head
Large as the holly-bush upon a stake
Outside an ale-house, and he had a cake,
A round one, which it was his joke to wield
As if it were intended for a shield.

He and a gentle *Pardoner* rode together,
A bird from Charing Cross of the same feather,
Just back from visiting the Court of Rome.
He loudly sang '*Come hither, love, come home!*'
The Summoner sang deep seconds to this song,
No trumpet ever sounded half so strong.
This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.
In driblets fell his locks behind his head
Down to his shoulders which they overspread;
Thinly they fell, like rat-tails, one by one.
He wore no hood upon his head, for fun;
The hood inside his wallet had been stowed,
He aimed at riding in the latest mode;
But for a little cap his head was bare
And he had bulging eye-balls, like a hare.
He'd sewed a holy relic on his cap;
His wallet lay before him on his lap,
Brimful of pardons come from Rome all hot.
He had the same small voice a goat has got.
His chin no beard had harboured, nor would harbour,
Smoother than ever chin was left by barber.
I judge he was a gelding, or a mare.
As to his trade, from Berwick down to Ware
There was no pardoner of equal grace.
For in his trunk he had a pillow-case
Which he asserted was Our Lady's veil.
He said he had a gobbet of the sail
Saint Peter had the time when he made bold
To walk the waves, till Jesu Christ took hold.
He had a cross of metal set with stones
And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs' bones.
And with these relics, any time he found
Some poor up-country parson to astound,
On one short day, in money down, he drew
More than the parson in a month or two,
And by his flatteries and prevarication
Made monkeys of the priest and congregation.
But still to do him justice first and last
In church he was a noble ecclesiast.
How well he read a lesson or told a story!
But best of all he sang an Offertory,
For well he knew that when that song was sung
He'd have to preach and tune his honey-tongue

And (well he could) win silver from the crowd.
That's why he sang so merrily and loud.

Now I have told you shortly, in a clause,
The rank, the array, the number and the cause
Of our assembly in this company
In Southwark, at that high-class hostelry
Known as *The Tabard*, close beside *The Bell*.
And now the time has come for me to tell
How we behaved that evening; I'll begin
After we had alighted at the Inn,
Then I'll report our journey, stage by stage,
All the remainder of our pilgrimage.
But first I beg of you, in courtesy,
Not to condemn me as unmannerly
If I speak plainly and with no concealings
And give account of all their words and dealings.
Using their very phrases as they fell.
For certainly, as you all know so well,
He who repeats a tale after a man
Is bound to say, as nearly as he can,
Each single word, if he remembers it,
However rudely spoken or unfit,
Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,
The things invented and the phrases new.
He may not flinch although it were his brother,
If he says one word he must say the other.
And Christ Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ,
And as you know there's nothing there unfit,
And Plato says, for those with power to read,
'The word should be as cousin to the deed.'
Further I beg you to forgive it me
If I neglect the order and degree
And what is due to rank in what I've planned.
I'm short of wit as you will understand.

Our *Host* gave us great welcome; everyone
Was given a place and supper was begun.
He served the finest victuals you could think,
The wine was strong and we were glad to drink.
A very striking man our *Host* withal,
And fit to be a marshal in a hall.
His eyes were bright, his girth a little wide;
There is no finer burgess in Cheapside.
Bold in his speech, yet wise and full of tact,
There was no manly attribute he lacked,
What's more he was a merry-hearted man.
After our meal he jokingly began
To talk of sport, and, among other things
After we'd settled up our reckonings,
He said as follows: 'Truly, gentlemen,
You're very welcome and I can't think when
-Upon my word I'm telling you no lie-
I've seen a gathering here that looked so spry.
No, not this year, as in this tavern now.
I'd think you up some fun if I knew how.
And, as it happens, a thought has just occurred
And it will cost you nothing, on my word,
You're off to Canterbury—well, God speed!

Blessed St. Thomas answer to your need!
And I don't doubt, before the journey's done
You mean to while the time in tales and fun.
Indeed, there's little pleasure for your bones
Riding along and all as dumb as stones.
So let me then propose for your enjoyment.
Just as I said, a suitable employment.
And if my notion suits and you agree
And promise to submit yourselves to me
Playing your parts exactly as I say
Tomorrow as you ride along the way,
Then by my father's should (and he is dead)
If you don't like it you can have my head!
Hold up your hands, and not another word.'

Well, our consent of course was not deferred,
It seemed not worth a serious debate;
We all agreed to it at any rate
And bade him issue what commands he would.
'My lords,' he said, 'now listen for your good,
And please don't treat my notion with disdain.
This is the point. I'll make it short and plain.
Each one of you shall help to make things slip
By telling two stories on the outward trip
To Canterbury, that's what I intend.
And, on the homeward way to journey's end
Another two, tales from the days of old;
And then the man whose story is best told,
That is to say who gives the fullest measure
Of good morality and general pleasure,
He shall be given a supper, paid by all.
Here in this tavern, in this very hall,
When we come back again from Canterbury,
And in the hope to keep you bright and merry
I'll go along with you myself and ride
All at my own expense and serve as guide.
I'll be the judge, and those who won't obey
Shall pay for what we spend upon the way.
Now if you all agree to what you've heard
Tell me at once without another word,
And I will make arrangements early for it'.

Of course we all agreed, in fact we swore it
Delightedly, and made entreaty too
That he should act as he proposed to do,
Become our Governor in short, and be
Judge of our tales and general referee,
And set the supper at a certain price.
We promised to be ruled by his advice
Come high, come low; unanimously thus
We set him up in judgement over us.
More wine was fetched, the business being done;
We drank it off and up went everyone
To bed without a moment of delay.

Early next morning at the spring of day
Up rose our Host and roused us like a cock,
Gathering us together in a flock,
And off we rode at slightly faster pace

Than walking to St. Thomas' watering-place:
And there our Host drew up, began to ease
His horse, and said, 'Now listen if you please,
My lords! Remember what you promised me.
If evensong and mattins will agree
Let's see who shall be first to tell a tale.
And as I hope to drink good wine and ale
I'll be your judge. The rebel who disobeys,
However much the journey costs, he pays.
Now draw for cut and then we can depart;
The man who draws the shortest cut shall start.
My lord the Knight, ' he said, 'step up to me
And draw your cut, for that is my decree.
And come you near, my Lady Prioress,
And you, Sir Cleric, drop your shamefastness,
No studying now! A hand from every man!
Immediately the draw for lots began
And to tell shortly how the matter went,
Whether by chance or fate or accident,
The truth is this, the cut fell to the Knight,
Which everybody greeted with delight.
And tell his tale he must, as reason was
Because of our agreement and because
He too had sworn. What more is there to say?
For when the good man saw how matters lay,
Being by wisdom and obedience driven
To keep a promise he had freely given,
He said, 'Since it's for me to start the game,
Why, welcome be the cut in God's good name!
Now let us ride, and listen to what I say.'
And at the word we started on our way
And in a cheerful style he then began
At once to tell his tale, and thus it ran.

Words of the Knight and the Host

Ho, my good sir, no more!" exclaimed the Knight.
What you have said so far no doubt is right,
And more than right, but still a little grief
Will do for most of us, in my belief.
As for myself, I take a great displeasure
In tales of those who once knew wealth and leisure
And then are felled by some unlucky hit.
But it's a joy to hear the opposite,
For instance tales of men of low estate
Who climb aloft and growing fortunate
Remain secure in their prosperity:
That is delightful as it seems to me
And is a proper sort of tale to tell.

"That's certain, by St. Paul's and by its bell!"
Our Host joined in. "This Monk, he talks too loud;
All about "Fortune covered with a cloud"
-I don't know what - and as for "Tragedy"
You heard just now, what has to be must be,
It does no good to grumble and complain,
What's done is done, Moreover, it's a pain,
As you have said, to hear about disaster:
Let's have no more of it, God bless you, master.
It's an offence, you're boring us, that's why!
Such talk as that's not worth a butterfly,
Gives no enjoyment, doesn't help the game,
In short Sir Monk - Sir Peter - what's-your-name-
I heartily beg you'll talk of something else,
But for the clink and tinkle of those bells
That hang your bridle round on every side,
By my salvation, by the Lord that died,
I simply should have fallen down asleep
Into the mud below, however deep,
Your story then would have been told in vain,
For, quoting the authorities again,
"When lecturers find their audiences decrease
It does them little good to say their piece."
Give us a word or two on hunting, say.
'No', said the Monk. 'I'm in no mood to-day
For fun. Ask someone else, I've said enough

Our Host, whose language was a little rough,
Seeing a Priest beside the Nun, went on:
'Come here, yu priest, step forward, you, Sir John,
And tell a tale to make our troubles pack.
Cheer yourself up although you ride a hack.
What if your ugly horse is poor and thin?
If it will serve you, never care a pin!
And always keep your heart up-that's the test!
'Yes,' he replied, 'yes, Host, I'll do my best,
Not to be merry would deserve reproach.'
And he immediately began to broach
His story to us as we all rode on,
This charming priest and kindly man, Sir John,

The Nun's Priest's Tale

ONCE, long ago, there dwelt a poor old widow
In a small cottage, by a little meadow
Beside a grove and standing in a dale.
This widow-woman of whom I tell my tale
Since the sad day when last she was a wife
Had led a very patient, simple life.
Little she had in capital or rent,
But still, by making do with what God sent,
She kept herself and her two daughters going,
Three hefty sows - no more - were all her showing-,
Three cows as well; there was a sheep called Molly,

Sooty her hall, her kitchen melancholy,
And there she ate full many a slender meal;
There was no sauce piquante to spice her veal,
No dainty morsel ever passed her throat,
According to her cloth she cut her coat.
Repletion never left her in disquiet
And all her physic was temperate diet,
Herd work for exercise and heart's content
And rich man's gout did nothing to prevent
Her dancing, apoplexy struck her not;
She drank no wine, nor white nor red had got.
Her board was mostly served with white and black,
Milk and brown bread, in which she found no lack;
Broiled bacon or an egg or two were common,
She was in fact a sort of dairy-woman.
She had a yard that was enclosed about
By a stockade and a dry ditch without,
In which she kept a cock called Chanticleer.
In all the land for crowing he'd no peer:
His voice was jollier than the organ blowing
In church on Sundays, he was great at crowing.
Far, far more regular than any clock
Or abbey bell the crowing of this cock.
The equinoctial wheel and its position*
At each ascent he knew by intuition;
At every hour - fifteen degrees of movement -
He crowed so well there could be no improvement.
His comb was redder than fine coral, tall
And battlemented like a castle wall,
His bill was black and shone as bright as jet,
Like azure were his legs and they were set
On azure toes with nails of lily white,
Like burnished gold his feathers, flaming bright.
This gentlecock was master in some measure
Of seven hens, all there to do his pleasure.
They were his sisters and his paramours,
Coloured like him in all particulars;
She with the loveliest dyes upon her throat
Was known as gracious Lady Pertelote.
Courteous she was, discreet and debonair,
Companionable too, and took such care
In her deportment, since she was seven days old
She held the heart of Chanticleer controlled,
Locked up securely in her every limb;
O such happiness his love to him!

And such a joy it was to hear them sing,
As when the glorious sun began to spring,
In sweet accord My Love is far from land*
- For in those far off days I understand
All birds and animals could speak and sing,
Now it befell, as dawn began to spring,
When Chanticleer and Pertelote and all
His wives were perched in this poor widow's hall
(Fair Pertelote was next him on the perch),
This Chanticleer began to groan and lurch
Like someone sorely troubled by a dream,
And Pertelote who heard him roar and scream
Was quite aghast and said, 'O dearest heart,
What's ailing you? Why do you groan and start?
Fie, what a sleeper! What a noise to make!
'Madam,' he said, 'I beg you not to take
Offence, but by the Lord I had a dream
So terrible just now I had to scream;
I still can feel my heart racing from fear.
God turn my dream to good and guard all here,
And keep my body out of durance vile!
I dreamt that roaming up and down a while
Within our yard I saw a kind of beast,
A sort of hound that tried or seemed at least
To try and seize me ... would have killed me dead!
His colour was a blend of yellow and red,
His ears and tail were tipped with sable fur
Unlike the rest, he was a russet cur.
Small was his snout, his eyes were glowing bright,
It was enough to make one die of fright
That was no doubt what made me groan and swoon.'

'For shame,' She said, 'you timorous poltroon!
Also, what cowardice! By God above,
You've forfeited my heart and lost my love,
For certainly, whatever we may say,
All women long - and O that it might be! -
For husbands tough, dependable and free,
Secret, discreet, no niggard, not a fool
That boasts and then will find his courage cool

At every trifling thing. By God above,
How dare you say for shame, and to your love,
That anything at all was to be feared?
Have you no manly heart to match your beard?
And can a dream reduce you to such terror?
Dreams are a vanity, God knows, pure error.
Dreams are engendered in the too-replete
From vapours in the belly, which compete
With others, too abundant, swollen tight,
'No doubt the redness in your dream to-night
Comes from the super-fluity and force
Of the red cholera in your blood, Of course.
That is what puts a dreamer in the dread
Of crimsoned arrows, fires flaming red,
Of great red monsters making as to flight him,
And big red whelps and little ones to bite him:
Just so the black and melancholy vapours
Will set a sleeper shrieking, cutting capers

And swearing that black bears, black bulls as well,
Or blackest fiends are haling him to Hell,
And there are other vapours that I know
That on a sleeping man will work their woe,
But I'll pass on as lightly as I can.

'Take Cato now, that was so wise a man,
Did he not say, "Take no account of dreams"?'
Now, Sir, 'she said, 'on flying from these beams,
For love of God do take some laxative;
For melancholy choler: let me urge
upon my soul that The advice to give
You free yourself from vapours with a purge.
And that you may have no excuse to tarry
By saying this town has no apothecary,
I shall myself instruct you and prescribe
Herbs that will cure all vapours of that tribe.
Herbs from our very farmyard! You will find
Their natural property is to unbind
And purge you well beneath and well above.
Now don't forget it, dear, for God's own love!
Your face is choleric and shows distension;
Be careful lest the sun in his ascension
Should catch you full of humours, hot and many.
And if he does, my dear, I'll lay a penny
It means a bout of fever or a breath
Of tertian ague, you may catch your death.

'Worms for a day or two I'll have to give
As a digestive, then your laxative.
Centaury, fumitory, caper-spurge
And hellebore will make a splendid purge:
And then there's laurel or the blackthorn berry,
Ground-ivy too that makes our yard so merry:

Peck them right up, my dear, and swallow whole.
Be happy, husband, by your father's soul!
Don't be afraid of dreams. I'll say no more.

'Madam.' He said, 'I thank you for your lore,
But with regard to Cato all the same,
His wisdom has, no doubt, a certain fame,
But though he said that we should take no heed
Of dreams, by God in ancient books I read
Of many a man of more authority
Than ever Cato was, believe you me,
Who say the very opposite is true
And prove their theories by experience too.
Dreams have quite often been significations
As well of triumphs as of tribulations
That people undergo in this our life.
This need no argument at all, dear wife.
The proof is all too manifest indeed.
'One of the greatest authors one can read
Says thus: there were two comrades once who went
On pilgrimage, sincere in their intent.
And as it happened they had reached a town
Where such a throng was milling up and down
And yet so scanty the accommodation,

They could not find themselves a habitation,
No, not a cottage that could lodge them both.
And so they separated, very loath,
Under constraint of this necessity
And each went off to find some hostelry,
And lodge whatever way his luck might fall.

'The first of them found refuge in a stall.
Down in a yard with oxen and a plough.
His friend found lodging for himself somehow
Elsewhere, by accident or destiny,
Which governs all of us and equally.

Now it so happened, long ere it was day,
This fellow had a dream, and as he lay
In bed it seemed he heard his comrade call,
"Help! I am lying in an ox's stall
And shall to-night be murdered as I lie.
Help me, dear brother, help or I shall die!
Come in all haste!" Such were the words he spoke;
The dreamer, lost in terror, then awoke.

But once awake he paid it no attention
Turned over and dismissed it as invention,
It was a dream, he thought, a fantasy,
And twice he dreamt this dream successively.

'Yet a third time his comrade came again,

Or seemed to come, and said, "I have been slain.
Look, Look! my wounds are bleeding wide and deep.
Rise early in the morning, break your sleep
And go to the west gate. You there shall see
A cart all loaded up with dung." Said he,
"And in that dung my body has been hidden.
Boldly arrest that cart as you are bidden.
It was my money that they killed me for."

'He told him every detail, sighing sore,
And pitiful in feature, pale of hue.
This dream, believe me, Madam, turned out true;
For in the dawn, as soon as it was light,
He went to where his friend had spent the night
And when he came upon the cattle-stall
He looked about him and began to call.

'The innkeeper, appearing thereupon,
Quickly gave answer, "Sir, your friend has gone.
He left the town a little after dawn."
The man began to feel suspicious, drawn
By memories of his dream - the western gate,
The dung-cart - off he went, he would not wait,
Towards the western entry. There he found,
Seemingly on its way to dung some ground,
A dung-cart loaded on the very plain
Described so closely by the murdered man.
So he began to shout courageously
For right and vengeance on the felony,
"My friend's been killed! There's been a foul attack,

He's in that cart and gaping on his back!
Fetch the authorities, get the sheriff down
- Whosever job it is to run the town -
Help! My companion's murdered, sent to glory!"
'What need I add to finish off the story?
People ran out and cast the cart to ground,
And in the middle of the dung they found
The murdered man. The corpse was fresh and new.

'O blessed God, that art so just and true,
Thus thou revealest murder! As we say,
"Murder will out. "We see it day by day,
Murder's a foul, abominable treason,
So loathsome to God's justice, to God's reason,
He will not suffer its concealment. True,
Things may lie hidden for a year or two,
But still "Murder will out," that's my conclusion.

'All the town officers in great confusion
Seized on the carter and they gave him hell,
And then they racked the innkeeper as well,
And both confessed. And then they took the wrecks
And there and then they hanged them by their necks.
'By this we see that dreams are to be dreaded,
And in the self-same book I find embedded,
Right in the very chapter after this
(I'm not inventing, as I hope for bliss)
The story of two men who started out
To cross the sea - for merchandise no doubt -
But as the winds were contrary they waited,
It was a pleasant town, I should have stated,
Merrily grouped about the haven-side.
A few days later with the evening tide
The wind veered round so as to suit them best,
They were delighted and they went to rest
Meaning to sail next morning early. Well,
To one of them a miracle befell.

This man as he lay sleeping, it would seem,
Just before dawn had an astounding dream.
He thought a man was standing by his bed
Commanding him to wait, and thus he said:
"If you set sail to-morrow as you intend
You will be drowned. My tale is at an end."

'He woke and told his friend what had occurred
And begged him that the journey be deferred
At least a day, implored him not to start.
But his companion, lying there apart.

Began to laugh and treat him to derision.
"I'm not afraid," he said, "of any vision,
To let it interfere with my affairs;
A straw for all your dreamings and your scares.
Dreams are just empty nonsense, merest japes:
Why, people dream all day of owls and apes,
All sorts of trash that can't be understood,
Things that have never happened and never could.
But as I see you mean to stay behind

And miss the tide for wilful sloth of mind
God knows I'm sorry for it, but good day!"
And so he took his leave and went his way.

'And yet, before they'd covered half the trip
I don't know what went wrong - there was a rip
And by some accident the ship went down,
Her bottom rent, all hands aboard to drown
In sight of all the vessels at her side,
That had put out upon the self-same tide.

'So, my dear Pertelote, if you discern
The force of these examples, you may learn:
One never should be careless about dreams,

For, undeniably, I say it seems
That many are a sign of trouble breeding.

'Now, take St Kenelm's life which I've been reading;
He was Kenulphus' son, the noble King
Of Mercia. Now, St. Kenelm dreamt a thing

Shortly before they murdered him one day.
He saw his murder in a dream, I say.
His nurse expounded it and gave her reasons
On every point and warned him against treasons
But as the saint was only seven years old,
All that she said about it left him cold.
He was so holy how could visions hurt?
'By God, I willingly would give my shirt
To have you read his legend as I've read it;
And, Madam Pertelote, upon my credit,
Macrobius wrote of dreams and can explain us
The vision of young Scipio Africanus,
And he affirms that dreams can give a due
Warnings of things that later on come true.

'And then there's the Old Testament - a manual
Well worth your study; see the Book of Daniel,
Did Daniel think a dream was vanity?
Read about Joseph too and you will see
That many dreams - I do not say that all -
Give cognizance of what is to befall.

'Look at Lord Pharaoh, King of Egypt! Look
At what befell his butler and his cook.
Did not their visins have a certain force?
But those who study history of course
Meet any dreams that set them wondering.

'What about Croesus too, the Lydian king,
Who dreamt that he was sitting in a tree,
Meaning he would be hanged? It had to be.
'Or take Andromache, great Hector's wife;
The day on which he was to lose his life
She dreamt about, the very night before,
And realized that if Hector went to war
He would be lost that very day in battle.
She warned him; he dismissed it all as prattle

And sallied forth to fight, being self-willed.
 And there he met Achilles and was killed.
 The tale is long and somewhat overdrawn,
 And anyhow it's very nearly dawn,
 So let me say in very brief conclusion,
 My dream undoubtedly foretells confusion,
 It bodes me ill, I say, And, furthermore,
 Upon your laxatives I set no store,
 For they are venomous, I've suffered by them
 Often enough before and I defy them.
 'And now, let's talk of fun and stop all this.
 Dear Madam, as I hope for Heaven's bliss,
 Of one thing God has sent me plenteous grace,
 For when I see the beauty of your face,
 That scarlet loveliness about your eyes,
 All thought of terror and confusion dies,
 For it's as certain as the Creed, I know,
 Mulier est hominis confusio
 (A Latin tag, dear Madam, meaning this:
 "Woman is man's delight and all his bliss"),
 For when at night I feel your feathery side,
 Although perforce I cannot take a ride,
 Because, alas, our perch was made too narrow,
 Delight and solace fill me to the marrow
 And I defy all visions and all dreams !'
 And with that word he flew down from the beams.
 For it was day, and down his hens flew all,
 And with a chuck he gave the troupe a call
 For he had found a seed upon the floor.
 Royal he was, he was afraid no more.
 He feathered Pertelote in wanton play
 And trod her twenty times ere prime of day.
 Grim as a lion's was his manly frown
 As on his toes he sauntered up and down;
 He scarcely deigned to set his foot to ground
 And every time a seed of corn was found
 He gave a chuck, and up his wives ran all.
 Thus royal as a prince who strides his hall
 Leave we this Chanticleer engaged on feeding
 And pass to the adventure that was breeding.
 Now when the month in which the world began,
 March, the first month, when God created man,
 Was over, and the thirty-second day
 Thereafter ended, on the third of May
 It happened that Chanticleer in all his pride,
 His seven wives attendant at his side,
 Cast his eyes upward to the blazing sun,
 Which in the sign of Taurus then had run
 His twenty-one degrees and somewhat more,
 And knew by nature and no other lore
 That it was nine o'clock. With blissful voice
 He crew triumphantly and said, 'Rejoice,
 Behold the sun! The sun is up, my seven.
 Look, it has climbed forty degrees in heaven.
 Forty degrees and one in fact, by this.

Dear Madam Pertelote, my earthly bliss,
 Hark to those blissful birds and how they sing !
 Look at those pretty flowers, how they spring !

Solace and revel fill my heart ! He laughed.
But in that moment Fate let fly her shaft:
Even the latter end of joy is woe,
God knows that worldly joy is swift to go.
A rhetorician with a flair for style
Could chronicle this maxim in his file
Of Notable Remarks with safe conviction.
Then let the wise give ear; this is no fiction
My story is as true, I undertake,
As that of good Sir Lancelot du Lake
Who held all women in such high esteem.
Let me return full circle to my theme.

A coal-tipped fox of sly iniquity
That had been lurking round the grove for three
Long years, that very night burst through and passed
Stockade and hedge, as Providence forecast,
Into the yard where Chanticleer the Fair
Was wont, with all his ladies, to repair.
Still, in a bed of cabbages, he lay
Until about the middle of the day
Watching the cock and waiting for his cue,
As all these homicides so gladly do
That he about in wait to murder men.
O false assassin, lurking in thy den !
O new Iscariot, new Genelon !
And O Greek Sinon, thou whose treachery won
Troy town and brought it utterly to sorrow !
O Chanticleer, accursed be that morrow
That brought thee to the yard from thy high beams !
Thou hadst been warned, and truly, by thy dreams
That this would be a perilous day for thee.

But that which God's foreknowledge can foresee
Must needs occur, as certain men of learning
Have said. Ask any scholar of discerning;
He'll say the Schools are filled with altercation
On this vexed matter of predestination
Long bandied by a hundred thousand men.
How can I sift it to the bottom then ?
The Holy Doctor St. Augustine shines
In this, and there is Bishop Bradwardine's
Authority, Boethius' too, decreeing
Whether the fact of God's divine foreseeing
Constrains me to perform a certain act
- And by 'constraint' I mean the simple fact
Of mere compulsion by necessity -
Or whether a free choice is granted me
To do a given act or not to do it
Though, ere it was accomplished, God foreknew it,
Or whether Providence is not so stringent
And merely makes necessity contingent.

But I decline discussion of the matter,
My tale is of a cock and of the clatter
That came of following his wife's advice
To walk about his yard on the precise
Morning after the dream of which I told.
O woman's counsel is so often cold !

A woman's counsel brought us first to woe.
Made Adam out of Paradise to go
Where he had been so merry, so well at ease.
But, for I know not whom it may displease
If I suggest that women are to blame.
Pass over that; I only speak in game.
Read the authorities to know about
What has been said of women: you'll find out.
These are the cock's words, and not mine, I'm giving;
I think no harm of any woman living.

Merrily in her dust-bath in the sand
Lay Pertelote. Her sisters were at hand
Basking in sunlight. Chanticleer sang free,
More merrily than a mermaid in the sea
(For Physiologus reports the thing*
And says how well and merrily they sing).
And so it happened as he cast his eye
Towards the cabbage at a butterfly
It fell upon the fox there, lying low.
Gone was all inclination then to crow.
'Cok cok,' he cried, giving a sudden start,
As one who feels a terror at his heart,
For natural instinct teaches beasts to flee
The moment they perceive an enemy,
Though they had never met with it before.

This Chanticleer was shaken to the core
And would have fled. The fox was quick to say
However, 'Sir! Whither so fast away?
Are you afraid of me, that am your friend?
A friend, or worse, I should be, to intend
You harm, or practise villainy upon you;
Dear Sir, I was not even spying on you!
Truly I came to do no other thing
Than just to lie and listen to you sing.
You have as merry a voice as God has given
To any angel in the courts of Heaven;
To that you add a musical sense as strong
As had Boethius who was skilled in song.

My Lord your Father (God receive his soul!),
Your mother too - how courtly, what control :-
Have honoured my poor house, to my great ease;
And you, sir, too, I should be glad to please.
For, when it comes to singing, I'll say this
(Else may these eyes of mine be barred from bliss),
There never was a singer I would rather
Have heard at dawn than your respected father.
All that he sang came welling from his soul
And how he put his voice under control!
The pains he took to keep his eyes tight shut
In concentration - then the tip-toe strut,
The slender neck stretched out, the delicate beak!
No singer could approach him in technique
Or rival him in song. Still less surpass
I've read the story in *Bumel the Ass*,
Among some other verses, of a cock
Whose leg in youth was broken by a knock

A clergyman's son had given him, and for this
He made the father lose his benefice,
But certainly there's no comparison
Between the subtlety of such an one
And the discretion of your father's art
And wisdom. Oh, for charity of heart,
Can you not emulate your sire and sing?

This Chanticleer began to beat a wing
As one incapable of smelling treason,
So wholly had this flattery ravished reason.
Alas, my lords ! there's many a sycophant
And flatterer that fill your courts with cant
And give more pleasure with their zeal for sooth
Than he who speaks in soberness and truth.
Read what Ecclesiasticus records
Of flatterers, 'Ware treachery, my lords !
This Chanticleer stood high upon his toes,
He stretched his neck, his eyes began to close,
His beak to open: with his eyes shut tight
He then began to sing with all his might.
Sir Russel Fox then leapt to the attack,
Grabbing his gorge he flung him o'er his back
And off he bore him to the woods, the brute,
And for the moment there was no pursuit.
O Destiny that may not be evaded !
Alas that Chanticleer had so paraded !
Alas that he had flown down from the beams !
O that his wife took no account of dreams !
And on a Friday too to risk their necks !
O Venus, goddess of the joys of sex,
Since Chanticleer thy mysteries professed
And in thy service always did his best,
And more for pleasure than to multiply
His kind, on thine own day is he to die ?
O Geoffrey, thou my dear and sovereign master
Who, when they brought King Richard to disaster
And shot him dead, lamented so his death,
Would that I had thy skill, thy gracious breath,
To chide a Friday half so well as you !
(For he was killed upon a Friday too.)
Then I could fashion you a rhapsody
For Chanticleer in dread and agony.
Sure never such a cry or lamentation
Was made by ladies of high Trojan station,
When Ilium fell and Pyrrhus with his sword
Grabbed Priam by the beard, their king and lord,
And slew him there as the Aeneid tells,
As what was uttered by those fens, Their yells
Surpassed them all in palpitating fear
When they beheld the rape of Chanticleer,
Dame Pertelote emitted sovereign shrieks
That echoed up in anguish to the peaks
Louder than those extorted from the wife
Of Hasdrubal, when he had lost his life
And Carthage all in flame and ashes lay.
She was so full of torment and dismay
That in the very flames she chose her part
And burnt to ashes with a steadfast heart.

O woeful hens, louder your shrieks and higher
 Than those of Roman matrons when the fire
 Consumed their husbands, senators of Rome,
 When Nero burnt their city and their home,
 Beyond a doubt that Nero was their hale !
 Now let me turn again to tell my tale:
 This blessed widow and her daughters two
 Heard all these hens in clamour and halloo
 And, rushing to the door at all this shrieking,
 They saw the fox towards the covert streaking
 And, on his shoulder, Chanticleer stretched flat.
 'Look, look!' they cried, 'O mercy, look at that !
 Ha ! Ha ! the fox !' and after him they ran,
 And stick in hand ran many a serving man.
 Ran coll our dog, ran Talbot, Bran and Shaggy,
 And with a distaff in her hand ran Maggie.
 Ran cow and calf and ran the very hogs
 In terror at the barking of the dogs;
 The men and women shouted, ran and cursed,
 They ran so hard they thought their hearts would burst.
 They yelled like fiends in Hell, ducks left the water
 Quacking and flapping as on point of slaughter,
 Up flew the geese in terror over the trees.
 Out of the hive came forth the swarm of bees;
 So hideous was the noise - God bless us all,
 Jack Straw and all his followers in their brawl
 Were never half so shrill, for all their noise,
 When they were murdering those Flemish boys,
 As that day's hue and cry upon the fox,
 They grabbed up trumpets made of brass and box,
 Of horn and bone, on which they blew and pooped,
 And therewithal they shouted and they whooped
 So that it seemed the very heavens would fall.

And now, good people, pay attention all.
 See how Dame Fortune quickly changes side
 And robs her enemy of hope and pride !
 This cock that lay upon the fox's back
 In all his dread contrived to give a quack
 And said, 'Sir Fox, if I were you, as God's
 My witness, I would round upon these clods
 And shout, "Turn back, you saucy humpkins all !
 A very pestilence upon you fall !
 Now that I have in safety reached the wood
 Do what you like, the cock is mine for good;
 I'll eat him there in spite of every one."
 The fox replying, 'Faith, it shall be done!
 Opened his mouth and spoke. The nimble bird,
 Breaking away upon the uttered word,
 Flew high into the tree-tops on the spot,
 And when the fox perceived where he had got,
 'Alas.' He cried, 'alas, my Chanticleer,
 I've done you grievous wrong, indeed I fear
 I must have frightened you: I grabbed too hard
 When I caught hold and took you from the yard.
 But, sir, I meant no harm, don't be offended;
 Come down and I'll explain what I intended:
 So help me God I'll tell the truth - on oath !
 'No', said the cock, 'And curses on us both.

And first on me if I were such a dunce
As let you fool me oftener than once.
Never again, for all your flattering lies,
You'll coax a song to make me blink my eyes!

And as for those who blink when they should look,
God blot them from his everlasting Book!
'Nay, rather,' said the fox, 'his plagues be flung
On all who chatter that should hold their tongue.'

Lo, such it is not to be on your guard
Against the flatterers of the world, or yard,
And if you think my story is absurd,
A foolish trifle of a beast and bird,
A fable of a fox, a cock, a hen,
Take hold upon the moral, gentlemen.

St Paul himself, a saint of great discerning,
Says that all things are written for our learning;
So take the grain and let the chaff be still.
And, gracious Father, if it be thy will
As saith my Saviour, make us all good men,
And bring us to his heavenly bliss.

Amen.

Words of the Host to the Nun's Priest

'Sir Priest,' our Host remarked in merry tones,
Blest be your breeches and your precious stones,
That was a merry tale of Chanticleer!
If you had only been a secular
You would have trodden a pretty fowl, no doubt,
Had you the heart, your muscles would hold out.
You look as if you needed hens, I mean,
Yes, more than seven, Seven times seventeen!
Just look what brawn he has, this gentle priest,
And what a neck! His chest's not of the least.
As for his eyes, they're like a sparrow-hawk's,
And his complexion like a box of chalks;
He needs no dyes imported from the East
Or Portugal, Good luck to you, Sir Priest,
For telling a fine tale!' And saying thus
He turned, as you shall hear, to one of us.
Here follows the Physician's Tale.

Supplementary Reading

Chaucer

by

Aldous Huxley

There are few things more melancholy than the spectacle of literary fossilisation. A great writer comes into being, lives, labours, and dies. Time passes : year by year the sediment of muddy comment and criticism thickens round the great man's bones. The sediment sets firm; what was once a living organism becomes a thing of marble. On the attainment of total fossilisation the great man has become a classic. It becomes increasingly difficult for the members of each succeeding generation to remember that the stony objects which fill the museum cases were once alive. It is often a work of considerable labour to reconstruct the living animal from the fossil shape. But the trouble is generally worth taking. And in no case is it more worth while than in Chaucer's.

With Chaucer the ordinary fossilising process, to which every classical author is subject, has been complicated by the petrification of his language. Five hundred years have almost sufficed to turn the most living of poets into a substitute on the modern sides of schools for the mental gymnastic of Latin and Greek. Prophetically, Chaucer saw the fate that awaited him and appealed against his doom :-

"Ye know eke that, in form of spech is change
Within a thousand year, and wordes tho
That hadden price, now wonder nice and strange
Us thinketh them ; and yet they spake them so.
And sped as well in love as men now do."

The body of his poetry may have grown old, but its spirit is still young and immortal. To know that spirit - and not to know it is to ignore something that is of unique importance in the history of our literature - it is necessary to make the effort of becoming familiar with the body it informs and gives life to. The antique language and versification, so "wonder nice and strange" to our ears, are obstacles in the path of most of those who read for pleasure's sake (not that any reader worthy of the name ever reads for anything else but pleasure) ; to the pedants they are an end in themselves. Theirs is the carcass, but not the soul. Between those who are daunted by his superficial difficulties and those who take too much delight in them Chaucer finds but few sympathetic readers. ~~The~~ in these pages to be able to give a few of the reasons that make Chaucer so well worth reading.

Chaucer's art is, by its very largeness and objectiveness, extremely difficult to subject to critical analysis. Confronted by it, Dryden could only exclaim, "Here is God's plenty!" - and the exclamation proves, when all is said, to be the most adequate and satisfying of all criticisms. All that the critic can hope to do is to expand and to illustrate Dryden's exemplary brevity.

"God's plenty!" - the phrase is a peculiarly happy one. It calls up a vision of the prodigal earth, of harvest fields, of innumerable beasts and birds, to teeming life. And it is in the heart of this living and material world of Nature that Chaucer lives. He is the poet of earth, supremely content to walk, desiring no wings. Many English poets have loved the earth for the sake of something - a dream, a reality, call it which you will - that lies behind it. But there have been few, and, except for Chaucer, no poets of greatness, who have been in love with earth for its own sake, with nature in the sense of something inevitably material, something that is the opposite of the supernatural. Supreme over everything in this world he sets the natural order, the "law of kind," as he calls it. The teachings of most of the great prophets and poets are simply protests against the law of kind. Chaucer does not protest, he accepts. It is precisely this acceptance that makes him unique among English poets. He does not

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go to Nature as the symbol of some further spiritual reality ; hills, flowers, sea, and clouds are not, for him, transparencies through which the workings of a great soul are visible. No, they are opaque ; he likes them for what they are, things pleasant and beautiful, and not the less delicious because they are definitely of the earth earthy. Human beings, in the same way, he takes as he finds, noble and beastish, but, on the whole, wonderfully decent. He has none of that strong ethical bias which is usually to be found in the English mind. He is not horrified by the behaviour of his fellow-beings, and he has no desire to reform them. Their characters, their motives interest him, and he stands looking on at them, a happy spectator. This serenity of detachment, this placid acceptance of things and people as they are, is emphasised if we compare the poetry of Chaucer with that of his contemporary, Langland, or whoever it was that wrote *Piers Plowman*.

The historians tell us that the later years of the fourteenth century were among the most disagreeable periods of our national history. English prestige was a very low ebb. The Black Death had exterminated nearly a third of the working population of the islands, a fact which, aggravated by the frenzied legislation of the Government, had led to the unprecedented labour troubles that culminated in the peasants' revolt. Clerical corruption and lawlessness were rife. All things considered, even our own age is preferable to that in which Chaucer lived. Langland does not spare denunciation; he is appalled by the wickedness about him, scandalised at the openly-confessed vices that have almost ceased to pay to virtue the tribute of hypocrisy. Indignation is the inspiration of *Piers Plowman*, the righteous indignation of the prophet. But to read Chaucer one would imagine that there was nothing in fourteenth-century England to be indignant about. It is true that the Pardoner, the Friar, the Shipman, the Miller, and in fact, most of the Canterbury pilgrims are rouses and scoundrels; but, then, they are such "merry harlots," too. It is true that the Monk prefers hunting to praying, that in these latter days when fairies are no more, "there is none other incubus" but the friar, that "purse is the Archdeacon's hell," and the Summoner a villain of the first magnitude; but Chaucer can only regard these things as primarily humorous. The fact of people not practising what they preach is an unending source of amusement to him. Where Langland cries aloud in anger, threatening the world with hell fire, Chaucer looks on and smiles. To the great political crisis of his time he makes but one reference, and that a comic one :-

"So hideous was the noyse, ah *benedicite* !
 Certes he Jakke Straw, and his meyné,
 Ne maden schoutes never half so schrille,
 What that they wolden eny Flemyng kille,
 As thilke day was mad upon the fox."

Peasants may revolt, priests break their vows, lawyers lie and cheat, and the world in general indulge its sensual appetites ; why try and prevent them, why protest ? After all, they are all simply being natural, they are all following the law of kind. A reasonable man, like himself, "flees fro the pres and dwelkes with soothfastnesse." But reasonable men are few, and it is the nature of human beings to be the unreasonable sport of instinct and passion, just as it is the nature of the daisy to open its eye to the sun and of the goldfinch to be a spritely and "gaylard" creature. The law of kind has always and in everything domination ; there is no rubbing nature against the hair. For

"God it wot, there may no man embrace
 As to destreyne a thing, the which nature
 Hath naturelly set in a creature.
 Take any brid, and put him in a cage,
 And do all tyme entent and try corrage
 To foster it tendrely with meat and drynke,
 And with alle the deyntees thou canst bethinke,
 And keep it all so kyndly as thou may ;

Although his cage of gold be never so gay,
 Yet hath this brid, by twenty thousand fold,
 Lever in a forest, that is wyld and cold,
 Gon etc wormes, and such wrecchidness :
 For ever this brid will doon his busynes
 To scape out of his cage when that he may ;
 His liberté the bird desireth aye . . .
 Lo, heer hath kynd his dominacioun.
 And appetyt flemeth (banishes) discrescioun,
 Also a she wolf hath a vilayne kynde,
 The lewideste wolf that she may fynde,
 Or least of reputacioun, him will sche take,
 In tyme whan hir lust to have a make.
 Alle this ensamples tell I by these men
 That ben untrewé, and nothing by women."

(As the story from which these lines are quoted happens to be about an unfaithful wife, it seems that, in making the female sex immune from the action of the law of kind, Chaucer is indulging a little in irony.)

"For men han ever a licorous appetit
 On lower thing to parfume her delit
 Than on her wyves, ben they never so faire,
 Ne never so trewe, ne so debonaire."

Nature, delorable as some of its manifestations may be must always and inevitably assert itself. The law of kind has power even over immortal souls. This fact is the source of the poet's constantly-expressed dislike of celibacy and asceticism. The doctrine that upholds the superiority of the state of virginity over that of wedlock is, to begin with (he holds), a danger to the race. It encourages a process which we may be permitted to call dysgenics - the carrying on of the species by the worst members. The Host's words to the Monk are memorable:-

"Allas ! why wearest thou so wide a cope?
 God give me sorwe ! and I were a pope
 Nought only thou, but every mighty man,
 Though he were shore brode upon his pan (head)
 Should han a wife ; for all this world is lorn ;
 Religioun hath take up all the corn
 Of tredyng, and we burel (humble) men ben shrimpes ;
 Of feble trees there cometh wreth wrecchind impes.
 This maketh that our heirs ben so sclendere
 And feble, that they may not wel engredre."

But it is not merely dangerous ; it is anti-natural. That is the theme of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*. Counsels of perfection are all very well when they are given to those

" That wolde lyve parfytly ;
 But, lordyngs, by your leve, that am not I."

The bulk of us must live as the law of kind enjoins. It is characteristic of Chaucer's conception of the world, that the highest praise he can bestow on anything is to assert of it, that it possesses in the highest degree the qualities of its own particular kind. Thus of Criseyde he says :-

"She was not with the least of her stature,
 But all her limbes so well answering
 Weren to womanhood, that creature

Nas never lesse mannish in seeming."

The horse of brass in the *Squire's Tale* is

"So well proportioned to be strong,
Right as it were a steed of Lombardy,
Thereto so *horsely* and so quicck of eye."

Everything that is perfect of its kind is admirable, even though the kind may not be an exalted one. It is, for instance, a joy to see the way in which the Canon sweats : -

"A cloote-leaf (dock leaf) he had under his hood
For sweat, and for a keep his head from heat.
But it was joye for to see him sweat ;
His forehead dropped as a stillatorie
Were full of plantain or of peritorie."

The Cannon is supreme in the category of sweaters, the very type and idea of perspiring humanity ; therefore he is admirable and joyous to behold, even as a horse that is supremely horsely or a woman less mannish than anythin one could imagine. In the same way it is a delight to behold the Pardoner preaching to the people. In its own kind his charlatanism is perfect and deserves admiration : -

"Mine handes and my tonge gon so yerne,
That it is joye to see my busynesse."

This manner of saying of things that they are joyous, or very often, heavenly, is typical of Chaucer. He looks out on the world with a delight that never grows old or weary. The sights and sounds of daily life, all the lavish beauty of the earth fill him with a pleasure which he can only express by calling it a "joy" or a "heaven.") It "joye was to see" Criseyde and her maidens playing together ; and

"So aungellyke was bee native beaute
That like a thing immortal seemede she,
As doth an heavenish parfit creature."

The peacock has angel's feathers ; a girl's voice is heavenly to hear :-

"Antigone the shene
Gan on a Trojan song to singen clear,
That it an heaven was her voice to hear."

One could go on indefinitely multiplying quotations that testify to Chaucer's exquisite sensibility to sensuous beauty and his immediate, almost exclamatory response to it. Above all, he is moved by the beauty of "young, fresh folkes, he and she" ; by the grace and swiftness of living things, birds and animals ; by flowers and placid, luminous, park-like landscapes.

It is interesting to note how frequently Chaucer speaks of animals. Like many other sages, he perceives that an animal is, in a certain sense, more human in character than a man. For an animal bears the same relation to a man as a caricature to a portrait. In a way a caricature is truer than a portrait. It reveals all the weakness and absurdities that flesh is heir to. The portrait brings out the greatness and dignity of the spirit that inhabits the often ridiculous flesh. It is not merely that Chaucer has written regular fables, though the *Nun's Priest's Tale* puts him among the great fabulists of the world, and there is also much definitely fabular matter in the *Parliament of Fowls*. No, his references to the beasts are not confined to his animal stories alone ; they are scattered broadcast throughout his works. He relies for much of his psychology and for much of his most vivid description on the comparison of man, in his character

and appearance (which with Chaucer are always indissolubly blended), with the beasts. Take, for example, that enchanting simile in which Troilus, stubbornly anti-natural in refusing to love as the law of kind enjoins him, is compared to the corn-fed horse, who has to be taught good behaviour and sound philosophy under the whip:-

"As proude Bayard ginneth for to skip
Out of the way, so pricketh him his corn,
Till he a lash have of the longe whip,
Then thinketh he, 'Though I prance all biforn,
First in the trace, full fat and newe shorn,
Yet am I but an horse, and horses' law
I most endure and with my feeres draw.'"

Or, again, women with too pronounced a taste for fine apparel are likened to the cat:-

And if the cattes skin be sleek and gay,
She will not dwell in housé half a day,
But forth she will, ere any day be dawet
To show her skin and gun a caterwrawet."

In his descriptions of the personal appearance of his characters Chaucer makes constant use of animal characteristics." Human beings, both beautiful and hideous, are largely described in terms of animals. It is interesting to see how often in that exquisite description of Alisoun, the carpenter's wife, Chaucer produces his clearest and sharpest effects by a reference to some beast or bird :-

"Fair was this younge wife, and therewithal
As any weasel her body gent and small ...
But of her song it was as loud and yern
As is the swallow chittering on a barn.
Thereto she coulde skip and make a game
As any kid or calf following his damé.
Her mouth was sweet as bragot is or meath,
Or hoard of apples, laid in hay or heath.
Wincing she was, as is a jolly colt,
Long as a mast and upright as a bolt."

Again and again in Chaucer's poems do we find such similitudes, and the result is always a picture of extraordinary precision and liveliness. Here, for example, are a few :-

"Gaylard he was w goldfinch in the shaw,"

or,

"Such glaring eyen had he as an hare,"

or,

"As piled (bald) as an ape was his skull."

The self-indulgent friars are

" Like Jovinian,
Fat as a whale, and walken as a swan."

The Pardoner describes his own preaching in these words :-

Then pain I me to stretche forth my neck
And cast and west upon the people I beek,
As cloth a dove, sitting on a barn."

Very often, too, Chaucer derives his happiest metaphors from birds and beasts. Of Troy in its misfortune and decline he says : Fortune

"Gan pull away the feathers bright of Troy
From day to day."

Love-sick Troilus soliloquises thus:-

"He said : ' O fool, now art thou in the snare
That whilom japedest at lovés pain,
Now art thou bent, now gnaw thin owné chain."

The metaphor of Troy's bight feathers reminds me of a very beautiful simile borrowed from the life of the plants :-

"And as in winter leavés been bereft,
Each after other, till the tree be bare,
So that there nis but bark and branches left,
Lieth Troilus, bereft of each welfare,
Ybounden in the blacke bark of care."

And this, in turn, reminds me of that couplet in which Chaucer compares a girl to a flowering pear-tree:-

"She was well more blissful on to see
Than is the newe parjonette tree."

Chaucer is as much at home among the stars as he is among the birds and beasts and flowers of earth. There are some literary men of to-day who are not merely not ashamed to confess their total ignorance of all facts of a "scientific" order, but even make a boast of it. Chaucer would have regarded such persons with pity and contempt. His own knowledge of astronomy was wide and exact. Those whose education has been as horribly imperfect as my own will always find some difficulty in following him as he moves with easy assurance through the heavens. Still, it is possible without knowing any mathematics to appreciate Chaucer's descriptions of the great pageant of the sun and stars as they march in triumph from mansion to mansion through the year. He does not always trouble to take out his astrolabe and measure the progress of "Phebus, with his rosy cart"; he can record the god's movements in more general terms that may be understood even by the literary man of nineteen hundred and twenty. Here, for example, is a description of "the colde frosty seisoun of Decembre," in which matters celestial and earthly are mingled to make a picture of extraordinary richness:-

"Phebus wox old and hewed like latoun,
That in his hote declinacioun
Shone as the burned gold, with streames bright;
But now in Capricorn adown he light,
Where as he shone full pale; I dare well sayn
The bitter frostes with the sleet and rain
Destroyed hath the green in every yerd.
Janus sit by the fire with double beard,
And drinketh of his bugle horn the wine
Befom him stont the brawn of tusked swine,
And 'noel' cryeth every lusty man."

In astrology he does not seem to have believed. The magnificent passages in the *Man of Law's Tale*, where it is said that

In the starres, clearer than is glass,
Is written, God wot, whoso can it read,
The death of every man withouten drede,"

is balanced by the categorical statement found in the scientific and educational treatise on the astrolabe, that judicial astrology is mere deceit.

His scepticism with regard to astrology is not surprising. Highly as he prizes authority, he prefers the evidence of experience, and where that evidence is lacking he is content to profess a quiet agnosticism. His respect for the law of kind is accompanied by a complementary mistrust of all that does not appear to belong to the natural order of things. There are moments when he doubts even the fundamental beliefs of the Church:-

"A thousand sythes have I herd men telle
That there is joye in heaven and peyne in helle
And I accorde well that it be so.
But natheless, this wot I well also
That there is none that dwelleth in this countre
That either hath in helle or heaven y-be."

Of the fate of the spirit after death he speaks in much the same style :-

"His spiryt changed was, and wente there
As I came never, I cannot tellen where;
Therefore I stint, I nam no divinistre:
Of soules fynde I not in this registre,
No me list not th' opinions to telle
Of hem, though that they witten where they dwelle."

He has no patience with superstition. Belief in dreams, in auguries, fear of the "ravenes qualm or schrychyng of thise owles" are all unbecfitting to a self-respecting, man:-

"To trowen on it bothe false and foul is;
Alas, alas, so noble a creature
As is a man shall dreaden such ordure!"

By an absurd pun he turns all Calchas's magic arts of prophecy to ridicule:-

"So when this Calkas knew by calkulynge,
And eke by answer of this Apollo
That Grekes sholden such a people bringe,
Through which that Troyc muste ben fordo,
He cast anon out of the town to go."

It would not be making a fanciful comparison to say that Chaucer in many respects resembles Anatole France. Both men possess a profound love of this world for its own sake, coupled with a profound and gentle scepticism about all that lies beyond this world. To both of them the lavish beauty of Nature is a never-failing and all-sufficient source of happiness. Neither of them are ascetics; in pain and privation they see nothing but evil. To both of them the notion that self-denial and self-mortification are necessarily righteous and productive of good is wholly alien. Both of them are apostles of sweetness and light, of humanity and reasonableness. Unbounded tolerance of human weakness and a pity, not the less sincere for being a little ironical, characterise them both. Deep knowledge of the evils and horrors of this unintelligible world makes them all the more attached to its kindly beauty. But in at least one important respect Chaucer shows himself to be the greater, the completer spirit. He possesses, what Anatole France does not, an imaginative as well as an intellectual comprehension of things. Faced by the multitudinous variety of human character, Anatole France exhibits a curious impotence of imagination. He does not understand characters in the sense that, say, Tolstoy understands them; he cannot, by the power of imagination, get inside them, become what he contemplates. None of the persons of his creation are complete characters: they cannot be looked at from every side; they are portrayed, as it were, in the flat and not in three dimensions. But Chaucer has the power of getting into someone else's character. His understanding of the men and of women he writes is complete; his slightest character-sketches are

always solid and three-dimensional. The Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, in which the effects are almost entirely produced by the description of external physical features, furnishes us with the most obvious example of his three dimensional drawing. Or, again, take that description in the Merchant's tale of old January and his young wife May after their wedding night. It is wholly a description of external details, yet the result is not a superficial picture. We are given a glimpse of the characters in their entirety :-

"Thus laboureth he till that the day gan dawne,
And then he taketh a sop in fine clarre,
And upright in his bed then sitteth he.
And after that he sang full loud and clear.
And kissed his wife and made wanton cheer.
He was all coltish, full of ragerye,
And full of jargon as a flecked pye.
The slacke skin about his necke shaketh,
While that he sang, so chanteth he and craketh,
But God wet what that May thought in her heart,
When she him saw up sitting in his shirt,
In his night cap and with his necke lean;
She praiseth not his playing worth a bean."

But these are all slight sketches. For full-length portraits of characters we must turn to *Troilus and Cressida*, a work which, though it was written before the fullest maturity of Chaucer's powers, is in many ways his most remarkable achievement, and one, moreover, which has never been rivalled for beauty and insight in the whole field of English narrative poetry. When one sees with what certainty and precision Chaucer describes every movement or Cressida's spirit from the first moment she hears of Troilus' love for her to the moment when she is unfaithful to him, one can only wonder why the novel of character should have been so slow to make its appearance. It was not until the eighteenth century that narrative artists, using prose as their medium instead of verse, began to rediscover the secrets that were familiar to Chaucer in the fourteenth.

Troilus and Cressida was written, as we have said, before Chaucer had learnt to make the fullest use of his powers. In colouring it is fainter, less sharp and brilliant than the best of the *Canterbury Tales*. The character studies are there, carefully and accurately worked out; but we miss the bright vividness of presentation with which Chaucer was to endow his later art. The characters are all alive and completely seen and understood. But they move, as it were, behind a veil - the veil of that poetic convention which had, in the earliest poems, almost completely shrouded Chaucer's genius, and which, as he grew up, as he adventured and discovered, grew thinner and thinner, and finally vanished like gauzy mist in the sunlight. When *Troilus and Cressida* was written the mist had not completely dissipated, and the figures of his creation, complete in conception and execution as they are, are seen a little dimly because of the interposed veil.

The only moment in the poem when Chaucer's insight seems to fail him is at the very end; he has to account for Cressida's unfaithfulness, and he is at a loss to know how he shall do it. Shakespeare, when he rehandled the theme, had no such difficulty. His version of the story, planned on much coarser lines than Chaucer's, leads obviously and inevitably to the fore-ordained conclusion; his Cressida is a minx who simply lives up to her character. What could be more simple? But to Chaucer the problem is not so simple. His Cressida is not a minx. From the moment he first set eyes on her Chaucer, like his own unhappy, Troilus, falls head over ears in love. Beautiful, gentle, gay; possessing, it is true, somewhat "tendre wittes," but making up for her lack of skill in ratiocination by the "sudden avysements" of intuition; vain, but not disagreeably so, of her good looks and of her power over so great and noble a knight as Troilus; slow to feel love but once she has yielded, rendering back to Troilus passion for passion; in a word, the "least mannish" of all possible creatures

- she is to Chaucer the ideal of gracious and courtly womanhood. But, alas, the old story tells us that Cressida jilted her Troilus for that gross prize-fighter of a man, Diomed. The woman whom Chaucer has made his ideal proves to be no better than she should be ; there is a flaw in the crystal. Chaucer is infinitely reluctant to admit the fact. But the old story is specific in its statement; indeed, its whole point consists in Cressida's infidelity. Called upon to explain his heroine's fall, Chaucer is completely at a loss. He makes a few half-hearted attempts to solve the problem, and then gives it up, falling back on authority. The old clerks say it was so, therefore it must be so, and that's that. The fact is that Chaucer pitched his version of the story in a different key from that which is found in the "okde bokes," with the result that the note on which he is compelled by his respect of authority to close is completely out of harmony with the rest of the music. It is this that accounts for the chief, and indeed the only, defect of the poem - its hurried and boggled conclusion.

I cannot leave Cressida without some mention of the doom which was prepared for her by one of Chaucer's worthiest disciples, Robert Henryson, in some ways the best of the Scottish poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Shocked by the fact that, in Chaucer's poem, Cressida receives no punishment for her infidelity, Henryson composed a short sequel, *The Testament of Cresseid*, to show that poetic justice was duly performed. Diomed, we are told, grew weary as soon as he had "all his appetys and mair, fulfillit on this fair ladie" and cast her off, to become a common drab.

" O fair Cresseid ! the flour and *A per se*
Of Troy and Greece, how wast thou fortunait !

To change in filth all thy feminitie
And be with fleshly lust sa maculait,
And go among the Grekis, air and late
So giglot-like."

In her misery she curse Venus and Cupid for having caused her to love only to her to this degradation :-

"The seed of love was sowen in my face
And ay grew green through your supply and grace.
But now, alas ! that seed with frost is slain.
And I fra lovers left, and all forlane."

In revenge Cupid and his mother summon a council of gods and condemn the *per se* of Greece and Troy to be a hideous leper. And so she goes forth with the other lepers, armed with bowl and clapper, to beg her bread. One day Troilus rides past the place where she is sitting by the roadside near the gates of Troy :-

"Then upon him she cast up both her een,
And with ane blenk it cam into his thocht
That he some time before her face had seen,
But she was in such plight he knew her nocht.
Yet then her look into his mind it brocht
The sweet visage and amorous blenking
Of fair Cresseid, one sometime his own darling."

He throws her an alms and the poor creature dies. And so the moral sense is satisfied. There is a good deal of superfluous mythology and unnecessary, as in *The Testament of Cresseid*, but the main lines of the poem are firmly and powerfully drawn. Of all the disciples of Chaucer, from Hoccleve and the Bury down to Mr. Masfield, Henryson may deservedly claim to stand the