RE-TOLD BY ELEANOR FARJEON

Tales from Chaucer

Illustrated by

MARJORIE WALTERS

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Preface

THIS book is not an attempt to render the whole of *The Canterbury Tales* into literal prose. There would be no excuse for such a work, since it could only be offered to readers already fitted to read Chaucer in his own tongue and metres. To most other readers, a literal prose Chaucer, in present-day spelling, would offer some of the same difficulties which already prevent them from attempting to read him. The one excuse for presenting Chaucer in any words but his own, is that he *may* be read, and a taste for him be got by people (especially young people) who would never try to read the foreign language of his English, and so would miss for ever something of the fun, the beauty, the wisdom, the humanity, and the romance, in which he stands among our poets second only to Shakespeare. In trying to render these tales with such a view in mind, I have at certain points, and in various ways, been obliged to choose between alternatives, and make some reluctant compromises. I have had to decide between the complete omission of certain tales in which particular incidents would prevent their being given to young people, and the suppression or alteration of the incidents. I have had to decide between the compression of some of the very long tales, such as the Monk's, the Parson's, and the Tale of Melibeus, in which the development of the arguments, and the multitude of instances, would be tedious reading to those for whom this book is meant, and would almost certainly not be read by them at all. And I have had to decide on the spelling and translation of Chaucer's proper nouns, his names for places and persons.

In the first case, I decided that, to keep the Pilgrimage

intact, every tale told by Chaucer must have its place; the interludes and personalities would become far less rich and amusing if any man in the fellowship had not his say. So at the risk of violating places somewhat less violable than sanctuaries, I have allowed myself to leave in every tale by changing or omitting special references and episodes. In at least two cases the changes are positive, and the omissions in every case thin the action of the story; I am fully aware of the losses sustained, but to do anything else meant either defeating the purpose of this book, or badly breaking the chain of tales by leaving complete gaps.

In the second case, I tried to make abstracts of Melibeus and the Parson's Tale which should sustain the moral intention on which these two depend, without becoming so long-drawn-out as to discourage the reader; in the Monk's Tale I have kept the most interesting histories, and in leaving out the others have the Knight's countenance, at least—for I do not want young readers to cry with him: 'Hoo! namoore of this!' And *Sir Thopas* I have also condensed—with our Host's sanction this time. Enough of the delightful doggerel is left to make Chaucer's point.

As to the names of places and people, my difficulty was greater, and I am not sure I have always solved it in the best way. I have not tried to be consistent. Where well-known English names appear in an unfamiliar guise (such as Cantebrigge for Cambridge) it seemed to me better to give the name that would make the tales natural and actual to English ears. But in Griselda I have preferred Saluce to Saluzzo, because, the Italian syllables do not seem to accord with the Chaucerian air. For the same reason, I have not replaced Lettow with Lithuania; nor have I tried to find out where Belmary is, or ever was.

The Knight had ridden in Belmary—it is enough. Suppose Belmary proved to be Czecho-Slovakia—what a loss! Yet Ruce I changed unhesitatingly to Russia. I can't explain why. I have merely followed an instinct which may often be called in question—'there is no more to say.'

For the rest, I have tried not merely to re-tell the matter of the Tales, but generally to follow Chaucer's phrase in doing so, subject to the limitations imposed by the changes and suppressions I have spoken of. I have sometimes allowed myself to make a little free with the lingo of the jollier members of the company, but I have done my best not to digress from the highway to Canterbury into by-ways of my own.

The order of the Tales is not, of course, certain. I have kept the order used by Richard Morris in the Aldine Edition; it serves well and I am not enough of a student to amend it where it is fallible. Alfred Pollard's notes in the Globe Edition have been a great help to me, and saved me from many errors I would have made in ignorance. I have, I fear, left in as many more; but for these, and for all other faults, I pray you, who love Chaucer, that you hold it not a villainy in me if I speak not his words properly.

My witt is thynne, ye may wel undurstonde.

E. F.

Hampstead, June 1930.

Contents

THE PROLOGUE

WHEN April with sweet showers has ended the drought of March, and bathed every root in the sap of which the flower is born: when Zephyr with sweet breath has started the tender crops in holt and heath, and the young sun has run half his month, and little birds, stirred by spring, sing half the night—then people long to go on pilgrimages, and palmers to seek strange shores and distant shrines in many lands: and especially, in every shire of England, they wend to Canterbury to seek the blessed martyr who has helped them in sorrow and sickness.

It fell upon a time of day, when I lay at the Tabard in Southwark, ready to make the pilgrimage to Canterbury, that there came by night to the inn a company of some nine-and-twenty folk, whom chance had drawn into fellowship, for all of them were pilgrims riding on their way to Canterbury. There were ample rooms and stables, so

that we were comfortably lodged. And by sunset I had spoken to every one of them, and was of their fellowship: and rose early with them, that we might all take the way together. And now, before I go on with my tale, I think it would be well to tell you something about each of them, who they were, of what degree, and how they were arrayed; and first I will begin with a Knight.

There was a KNIGHT, a very worthy man, who, from the time when he first rode a horse, loved chivalry, truth and honour, freedom and courtesy. He had borne himself gallantly in his Crusades, no man had ridden farther than he in Christian and heathen lands, and everywhere he was honoured for his worth. He had been at Alexandria when it was won; many a time he had taken the lead in assaults in Prussia, and no Christian man of his degree had ridden so often in Russia and Lettow. He had been in Granada at the siege of Algesir, and had ridden in Belmary. When Lieys and Satalye were taken, he was there; he had sailed with many a noble expedition in the Great Sea, and seen fifteen mortal battles; and had fought thrice for our faith in the lists at Tramassene, and always slain his foe. This same worthy Knight had also followed the Lord of Palatye against the heathen Turk, and proved himself of sovereign worth. He was as wise as he was worthy, and as gentle in his bearing as a maid; he had never spoken an ill word in his life. He was a very perfect gentle knight. As to his array, he had a good horse, but his clothes were sober; he wore a short cassock of fustian, and his coat of mail was shabby, for he was but newly returned from a voyage, and was going on his pilgrimage at once.

With him there was his son, a young SQUIRE, a gallant knight and lover, with locks as curly as though they had been crimped. I judged him to be some twenty years old; his body was shapely and strong. He had already practised

chivalry in Flanders, Artois, and Picardy, and had borne himself well enough to be smiled on by his lady. His suit was embroidered like a meadow full of flowers, red and white; he was singing or fluting all the day, and was fresh as the month of May. His tunic was short, with long wide sleeves; he could sit his horse and ride with grace, he could make songs and write them down, he could joust and dance, and draw and paint. In love he was so ardent that he could no more sleep by night than a nightingale; and he was courteous, humble, and serviceable, and carved for his father at table.

He rode with a single servant, a YEOMAN, who was clad in a coat and hood of green. In his belt he bore a sheaf of peacock arrows, and like a good workman he took care of his tackle; the feathers in his arrows never drooped. In his hand he carried a mighty bow, on his arm a shining brassart, by his side a sword and buckler, and on the other side a dagger sharpened to a point; a silver St Christopher on his breast, and a horn in a green sling. I guessed him to be a forester.

There was also a NUN, a Prioress, with a smiling face, simple and demure; her strongest oath was 'By Saint Louis!' and she was called Madam Eglantine. She sang well, intoning the divine service prettily through her nose, and spoke French gracefully, after the school of Stratford-at-Bow—for French of Paris was unknown to her. Her manners at table were nice; she let no crumb fall from her lips, nor wetted more than her finger-tips in her gravy, and she could carry a morsel to her mouth without spilling a drop on her breast. She helped herself daintily to meat, and wiped her lips so clean that not a spot of grease was to be seen in her cup, after she had drunk. And she took pains to be pleasant and amiable to all, to bear herself with dignity, and deserve our reverence. By nature

she was so tender-hearted that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap. She had some little dogs that she fed with roast meat, milk, and white bread; and if one died, or someone struck it a blow, she would shed tears for pity. Her wimple was neatly folded; her nose was straight, her eyes as grey as glass, her mouth was small and soft and red, but her forehead was broad and fair—almost a span in breadth, for she was by no means a small woman. Her cloak was well-fashioned, and on her arm she wore her beads of coral strung with green, from which hung a bright gold clasp graven with a crowned A and the motto *Amor Vincit Omnia*. With her rode another Nun, who was her chaplain, and three priests.

There was a MONK, a manly man and skilful, fond of riding and venery, and fit to become an abbot; he had a stableful of fine horses, and when he rode his bridle jingled clear as a whistling wind, and loud as a chapel bell. Finding the rules of Saint Benedict somewhat too old and strict, this same Monk let them pass, and held by newer notions. He would not give a pullet for the text which says that hunters are not holy men, and that a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water. In his opinion that text was not worth an oyster, and I said that he was right. What! should he pore over a book in his cell till his brain was addled, or toil and labour with his hands, as Austin bid? How shall the world be served? Let Austin toil if he liked! but he would go a-riding with his greyhounds swift as swallows; for his delight was in riding and hunting the hare, and he spared no cost about it. His sleeves were edged with the finest fur, his hood was fastened under his chin with a curious golden pin, wrought like a love-knot. His head was bald and shone like glass, and his face shone too, as though it had been anointed. Fat and in good condition, with rolling eyes and

glistening brow, with boots of soft leather and horse richly-appointed—certainly he was a splendid prelate! Nor could he be called as pale as a ghost; his favourite roast was a fat swan, and his palfrey was brown as a berry.

There was a FRIAR, a merry wanton mendicant; in all the four orders of Friars there was none with so coaxing a tongue. He had arranged good marriages for many young women at his own expense, and was a pillar of his order. He was friendly with all the men and women of his parts, heard their confessions leniently, absolved them pleasantly, and gave light penances to sinners, who paid him well for it—for the Friar would declare that the man who gives freely shows himself truly repentant. Many a man finds it hard to shed tears, even when he is penitent; so instead of weeping and prayers, let him give silver to poor friars, and he will be well shrived. The Friar always kept pins stuck in his tippet, for the use of fair ladies; he was full of merry music, whether singing or playing, and at ballads he bore away the prize. His neck was white as the lily, he was strong as a champion, he knew the taverns in every town, and was better acquainted with ostlers and tapsters than with lazars and beggars; to consort with beggars was hardly fitting, he considered, for so worthy a man as he. For there is no advantage to be got from such folk, but much profit from knowing the rich men and the merchants, so to these he was always courteous and obliging. He was the best beggar in his order; so pleasant was his *In Principio*, that though a widow had but one shoe, he would have her mite before he went. He did not go in a threadbare cloak, like some poor scholar, but appeared like a lord or a Pope. His cape was of the best worsted, and round as a bell; he lisped a little on purpose, to make the words sound charming on his tongue, and when he

sang his eyes twinkled in his head like stars on a frosty night. The name of this excellent mendicant was Hubert.

A MERCHANT there was, who had a forked beard; he sat high in his saddle, and was dressed in motley, with a beaver hat from Flanders on his head, and good buckles on his boots. He spoke weightily of his gains, and would have liked the sea between Middleburgh and Orwell to be kept only for trade. Nobody could doubt his credit, so sharp were his wits in all matters of barter, bargain, and borrowing. He too, was an excellent man, but I do not know his name.

There was a CLERK from Oxford, too, a hollow-cheeked fellow, who had long studied Logic. His horse was as lean as a rake, and he was not much fatter himself. His cloak was threadbare, for he had not yet got a benefice; but a set of Aristotle, bound in black and red, at his bedside was more to him than rich robes and gay music. Though he was a philosopher, he had little gold in his coffer; and all he had, or was given by friends, he spent on books and learning, and prayed devoutly for the souls of them that helped him to his scholarship. He never spoke a word more than was needful, and all he said was wise and to the point. His words sowed good seeds, and he was as glad to learn as to teach.

There was also a SERGEANT OF LAW, a cunning man and excellent. His speech was wise and discreet, and he had often sat as justice in the assizes. His fame and skill had brought him many fees, for he could carry all before him. There was never a busier man than he, and he seemed even busier than he was; he knew by heart all the statutes from the time of William the Conqueror, and could so write a thing down that no man could find a flaw in it. He wore a parti-coloured coat, girt with a silk girdle; no more need be said of his dress.

There was a FRANKLIN in the company; his complexion was ruddy, and his beard as white as a daisy. He liked to begin the day with a cup of wine, for he was the very son of Epicurus, and held the opinion that a life of pleasure is perfect happiness. He was used to keeping open house; his bread and ale were of the best, and no man had a better provided larder; so plentiful were the baked meats, flesh, and fish, that his house might be said to snow meat and drink of every description. He dined and supped on the best that was in season; his spits were loaded with roast partridges, and his stew-pots with bream and pike. Woe to his cook if the sauce was not just so! His table stood ready laid in the hall all day long, and he presided over it like a lord of the shire. At his girdle hung a dagger, and a pouch as white as new milk. He had been a sheriff and knight of the shire in his time, and a better small squire was nowhere to be found.

We had also a HABERDASHER, a CARPENTER, a WEAVER, a DYER, and a TAPESTRY-MAKER, dressed in the habit of their Guild; all their trimmings were new, and their girdles, knives, and pouches were mounted with silver instead of brass. Proper Burgesses were they all, to sit on the dais in the Guildhall, and each was fitted by wealth and wisdom to be an Alderman. Nor were their wives unwilling; for it is pleasant to be called Madam and go to church in front of others, with your mantle held up by a page.

With them they had a COOK, to boil their chickens and marrow-bones, spice their meat, and serve their Cyprus wine. He could tell a draught of London Ale from another; he could roast, seethe, broil, and fry, make a good soup, and bake a good pie. The poor fellow suffered from a lump on his leg, but he could make a blancmange with the best.

There was a SHIPMAN, out of the West; for aught I know, he came from Dartmouth. He rode in his own fashion on a nag, in a gown of coarse cloth to the knee. He had a dagger hung on a sling round his neck and under his arm; the hot summer had bronzed him, and he was a right good fellow, whose conscience was not overnice. Many a draught of Bordeaux wine had he drawn, while the dealer nodded; and when he got the upper hand in a sea fight, he sent his prisoners to a watery grave. From Hull to Carthage there was not his match for knowing the tides and the currents, the rocks and the harbours, and the phases of the moon; many a tempest had tossed his beard, he was acquainted with every port from Jutland to the Cape of Finisterre, and every creek in Brittany and Spain. His ship was called *The Magdalena.*

There was also a DOCTOR OF PHYSIC. For surgery and medicine there was not his like in all the world; he was well-grounded in astronomy, and kept his patients well by natural magic. He could cast horoscopes, and knew the cause of every malady, cold, hot, moist, or dry, and where they were engendered; he was a very perfect practitioner. When he had found the root of the evil, he always knew the remedy. The apothecaries who supplied his drugs were friends of old standing; and each helped the other's profit. He was familiar with all the ancient doctors: Æsculapius, Discorides, Hippocrates, Galen, and the rest; but he was no great reader of the Bible. He was moderate in his diet, eating not too much, and only what was nourishing and digestible. His gown of scarlet and puce was lined with taffetas; yet though he spent freely, what the plague years brought him he put by, for gold is the best of physics. Therefore he loved gold above all other cordials.

There was also a good WIFE OF BATH, who was unfor-

tunately rather deaf. Her business was cloth-making, in which she surpassed the cloth-makers of Ypres and Ghent; she was the first woman in her parish, and if any went before her to the offering, her anger put an end to her charity. Her head-kerchiefs were of the finest; I dare swear those she wore of a Sunday weighed ten pounds. Her hose were of fine scarlet, neatly tied, and her shoes of new, soft leather. Her face was bold, fair, and rosy; a respectable woman all her life, she had gone to church with five husbands, and had had no other sweethearts. She was a great traveller, and had been three times to Jerusalem, and crossed many strange rivers; she had also visited Rome, Boulogne, Cologne, and the Shrine of Saint James in Galicia. She sat easy on her ambler, and wore on her head over her wimple a hat as broad as a buckler; she had a rug wrapped round her broad hips, and a pair of sharp spurs on her feet. She laughed and joked freely in company, and knew all the moves in the old game of love.

There was a good religious man, a poor PARSON of a town, but rich in holy thoughts and deeds; a learned man too, who preached Christ's Gospel gladly, and taught his parishioners devoutly. He was benign and diligent, and patient in adversity; a very little sufficed him—he would rather give out of his own pocket to his poor parishioners than worry them for his tithes. His parish was wide, and the houses far apart, but he neglected neither in rain nor storm to visit the sick and sorrowful at the very greatest distance, and he went afoot with a staff in his hand. He was a noble example to his flock; he did first, and taught afterwards, living by this precept from the Gospel: If gold rusts, what shall iron do? For if the priest in whom we trust be soiled, no wonder if a common man rust too; the dirty shepherd cannot expect clean sheep, and a priest,

by the example of cleanliness, must show his sheep how to live. He never hired out his benefice, nor left his flock floundering while he went off to seek endowments at Saint Paul's in London; but dwelt at home within his fold, so that the wolf could not harm it. He was a shepherd, not a mercenary; and though he was holy and virtuous, he was not harsh to the sinful, or stern and angry in his speech, but all his teachings were gentle and wise. It was his business to lead folk to heaven by clean living and good example; but he could, on occasion, speak sharply to the stubborn, whether high or low. I do not think there was ever a better priest; he did not cringe to pomp and show, or quibble with his conscience, but taught the word of Christ and his twelve Apostles, and first of all he followed it himself.

With him there was a PLOUGHMAN, his brother, who had ploughed many a furrow; a good and true labourer was he, living in peace and perfect charity. Whether in work or play, he loved God best with all his heart, and then he loved his neighbour as himself. For Christ's sake he would thresh, hedge and ditch for any poor fellow without payment; he paid in full the tithes of his goods and labour; and he rode upon a mare, dressed in a tabard.

There was also a REEVE and a MILLER, a SUMMONER and a PARDONER, a MANCIPLE, and myself, and that was all.

The MILLER was a stout fellow, big of brawn and bone; as he proved by overcoming all at the wrestling, and bearing off the ram. He was short, broad-shouldered, and knotty; he could wrench a door off its hinges, or break it by running at it with his head. His beard was as red as a fox and as broad as a spade; to the right of his nose he had a wart, with a tuft of hair on it as red as the bristles in a sow's ear. His nostrils were black and wide, his mouth

gaped like a furnace, and he was always joking and playing the fool. Yet though he would take thrice his proper toll of corn, he had a thumb of gold, and was honest, for a miller. At his side he bore a sword and buckler; he wore a white coat and a blue hood; and he could play upon the bagpipes, to the tune of which he blew us out of town.

There was also the gentle MANCIPLE of a temple, a model for all buyers of victuals, for whether he paid by cash or tally, he showed such prudence in his purchases that he always got the best of the bargain. Now does it not show the grace of God that the wit of a rascal can get the better of the wisdom of sages? He served more than thirty masters, all experts in the law; of whom a round dozen were fit to be stewards of the rents and lands of any lord in England, and keep him out of debt, whether he lived lavishly or sparingly; yet this Manciple could cap the lot of them.

The REEVE was a lean, choleric man, his beard close-shaven, his hair shorn round the ears, and tonsured like a priest; with long legs, as thin as sticks, showing no sign of a calf. He kept his bins and granaries so that no auditor could find him out, putting down to losses by weather what he stole from the crops. From his master's twentieth year he had had the management of his sheep, his cattle, his dairy, his swine, his horses, his steers, and his poultry; and no man could bring him in arrear. There was no bailiff, herd, or hind on the estate but knew his cunning and feared him like death. His goodly dwelling stood on a heath, shadowed by green trees; he was better off than his master, and had rich private stores of his own. He obliged his master by lending to him out of his substance, earning thereby his thanks, as well as a new coat. In his youth he had been prenticed to a good wheelwright, and had become an excellent carpenter. This Reeve was a

north-countryman from a town called Baldeswell; he was frocked like a friar, and wore a long blue surcoat, with a rusty blade at his side. He rode upon a right good dapple grey, in the rear of our company.

There was also a SUMMONER with us, a man with narrow eyes, and a red, pimpled face like a cherub. His black brow was scabby, his beard mangy, and he was as lively as a sparrow. Children were afraid of his face; neither mercury nor brimstone, borax, oil of Tartar, nor any other ointment, could clear his complexion. He loved eating garlic, leeks, and onions, and drinking strong, red wine; and when he had drunk well, he would cry out in a frenzy, and speak nothing but Latin. He had two or three terms by heart which he had picked up somewhere—small wonder, since he heard it talked all day; and a jay can cry 'Wat!' as well as the Pope. But that was the end of his learning. *Questio quid juris!* was always on his tongue. A kindly rogue, and the best of fellows, he knew how to pluck his pigeon. On his head he wore a garland big enough for an inn-sign; and he had made a shield for himself out of a great cake.

With him rode his friend, a gentle PARDONER of Rouncival, just come from the Court of Rome. He sang aloud, 'Come hither, love, to me!' and when the Summoner joined in, no trumpet made half the noise they did between them. The Pardoner's hair was as yellow as beeswax, and as smooth as a hank of flax; it hung in wisps about his shoulders, for, to be in fashion, he rode only in his cap, and kept his hood tucked away in his pouch. On the front of his cap he had sewed a picture of Christ, and his wallet lay in his lap, stuffed full of pardons hot from Rome. His eyes goggled like a hare's; his voice bleated like a goat's; he had never had a beard, nor ever would, his chin was as smooth as though it had just been shaved.

But from Berwick to Ware there was no Pardoner to match him, for he had in his bundle a pillow-slip which he swore was Our Lady's veil; and he said he had a fragment of the sail that Saint Peter hoisted when he put out to sea before he followed Jesus Christ; he had also a brass cross set with stones, and a pig's bone in a bottle. By means of these relics he could get more money in one day out of a poor parson's living than the parson got out of his tithes in two months, fooling the parson and his flock with jests and flattery. But when all's said, he cut a fine figure in church, read the lessons well, and sang an offertory better than any man; knowing that, when he had sung, his sermon would wheedle silver out of folks' pockets; therefore he sang merrily and loud.

Now I have told you briefly the estate, the dress, the number, and the purpose of all this company assembled in Southwark at the pleasant Inn of the Tabard, hard by the Bell. And the time is come for you to hear what we did that night at the inn; and after that I will tell of our journey, and the rest of our pilgrimage. But first I must beg you kindly not to think ill of me if I speak quite plainly, in telling of their words and their manners; for I must speak as they spoke. Whoever tells a man's tale should use as near as he can that man's own words, however rude they may be; or else, by finding other words, he might tell the tale untruly. Forgive me, too, if I have not given their dues to the folk I have described; my wits are poor, as you must be aware.

Our Host made us all welcome, sat us down to supper, and served us with his best. The wine was strong, and we drank freely. Our Host proved to be a proper man, a big bright-eyed fellow, as honest a burgess as any in Chepe; frank of speech, wise and witty, in short, everything a man should be. He was also a very jolly fellow, and after

supper, when we had paid our bills, all his fun came out, and he said:

'Well, masters, you are mostly heartily welcome; I'm a liar if I've seen in my inn this year so merry a company as you. I should like to entertain you, if I can; and I have just thought of a bit of fun which may amuse you all, and will cost you nothing. You are all going to Canterbury (God speed you! and the holy Martyr reward you!) and I am sure that you will talk and jest a deal by the way; for there's no pleasure in riding as dumb as a stone. So, if you are agreed to be led by me, I'll set some sport afoot; and I wager my head that it will make you merry on the road. All who are willing, hold up your hands.'

We were not long deciding, and bade him come to the point.

'The point is this, good masters,' said he; 'that to shorten the way each of you should tell two tales, one on the road to Canterbury, and the other coming home. And whichever of you prove the best man, that is to say, he who tells the best tale, shall have a supper at the cost of all the rest in this very inn where you now sit, when we are all returned from Canterbury. For, to add to your mirth, I will gladly ride with you, at my own expense, and be your leader. And whoever gainsays my commands, shall pay for everything we spend by the way. If you consent, say so at once without more words.'

The thing was agreed gladly; we begged him to be our leader, and the judge of our tales, and to fix the price of the supper. We would be ruled by him in everything. Thereupon, wine was fetched; we drank, and went straight to bed.

Next morning, when the day began to spring, our Host rose up, and cooked for all of us. Then he assembled us in a flock, and we rode forth a little way to Saint Thomas's

brook. There our Host pulled up his horse and said, 'Listen to me, my masters. You know what is toward; let us now see who shall tell the first tale. And remember, whoever rebels against my ruling must pay for all we spend on the way. Let us draw lots, before we go any farther; he who draws the shortest shall begin. Come, dear Sir Knight,' said he, 'draw the cut, for such is my command. Come nearer, my lady Prioress, and you, Sir Clerk, put down your book and don't be so modest. Now, every man, your hands!'

Each man drew his lot, and, to make a long tale short, the cut fell to the Knight, which delighted us all; according to his promise and the agreement you have heard, he was to tell his tale. When this good man saw that it was so, obedient to his word he said:

'Since I am to open the game, be welcome, cut, in God's name! Let us ride on, and hearken to my tale.'

With that, we rode again; and the Knight began his tale cheerfully, after the following fashion.

The Knight's Tale

PART ONE

THERE was once, so old tales tell, a Duke called Theseus; he was the lord and governor of Athens, and, in his time, the greatest conqueror under the sun. He had conquered, amongst other rich countries, Scythia, the kingdom of the Amazons, and wedded its queen, Hyppolita, whom, with her young sister Emilia, he brought in pomp and glory to his own land. I would like to tell you of his battles and victories, and of the wedding-feast he made for the brave and beautiful Queen of Scythia, but the rest of my tale is too long, so enough of this; each of us has a tale to tell before the supper is won, and here I will make my beginning.

As Duke Theseus was riding proudly home to Athens, he saw a company of ladies clad in black, kneeling in the

roadway two by two. They were wailing and weeping so bitterly that no living soul had ever heard such sorrow before, and they did not cease from crying till they had seized the Duke's reins and brought him to a standstill.

'What folk are you, that disturb my feast and my home-coming with your crying?' asked Theseus. 'Do you weep for envy of my good fortune? Has anyone hurt or offended you? If so, tell me how it can be mended, and why you are all clad in black?'

The oldest lady among them answered him, and said: 'Lord, to whom fortune has given the victory, we do not envy you, we only seek your aid. Take pity on us, for, wretched women though we be, there is not one of us who was not once a duchess or a queen. We have waited a full fortnight for your coming in the temple of the Goddess of Pity. I myself was the wife of King Capaneus of Thebes; we left our husbands in the city when it was besieged. Old Creon is now Lord of Thebes, and our husbands lie dead on a heap, food for the dogs, since Creon refuses them burial or burning.'

At those words, they fell on their faces, crying: 'Have pity on our wretchedness, and let our sorrow touch your heart!'

Moved by their grief, the good Duke leapt down from his horse, and swore an oath so to avenge them, that all Greece should tell how Creon had been served by Theseus. He sent the Queen Hyppolita and her young sister Emilia on to Athens; then, raising his standard, he rode to Thebes with all the flower of chivalry behind him. The image of red Mars, with spear and shield, glittered like fire upon his great white banner, and on his golden ensign was graved the Minotaur, that he slew in Crete. So the Duke rode to Thebes, where he alighted in a field to do battle. And there, to be brief, he fought and slew Creon,

put his folk to flight, won the city by assault, and restored to the ladies the bones of their husbands for burial. After which, he rested all night upon the battle-field, where his own men went about, stripping the dead of their arms.

While doing so, they came upon two young knights lying side by side. They were sorely wounded, seeming neither quite alive nor yet quite dead, and by their costly armour the heralds knew them for two cousins of the blood-royal of Thebes. The name of one knight was Arcite, and of the other Palamon. These two were carried to the tent of Theseus, who had them sent to Athens, to dwell there unransomed in prison for ever. He himself rode back to the city in the front of his army, crowned with laurel; and there he continued to live in joy and honour.

Meanwhile, in woe and anguish, Palamon and his cousin Arcite lived in their tower, from which gold could not release them. The years passed day by day, till it fell out, one May morning, that Emilia rose up early, adorned to do honour to May Day. She was fairer than the lily on its green stalk, and fresher than spring flowers, and her yellow hair was plaited in a tress a yard long. So she walked in the garden at sunrise at her pleasure, gathering red and white flowers to make a garland for her head, and as she walked she sang like a heavenly angel.

Now the great tower of the castle dungeon adjoined the garden where Emilia was playing. The sun was bright and the morning clear, and Palamon, poor prisoner, had risen as was his custom to wander round a high chamber from which he could look down on the great city, and on the green garden where Emilia was walking in delight. As the poor prisoner roamed up and down his chamber, sighing, 'Alas that ever I was born!' he chanced to look through the iron lattice of his window, and no sooner had he set

eyes upon Emilia than he turned pale and cried out 'Ah!' as though his heart had been stung. At his cry, Arcite started up and said, 'Cousin, what ails you? You are as pale as death. What made you cry out? Who has hurt you? For the love of God, bear patiently with your prison; our adversity is written in the stars, and cannot be helped.'

Palamon answered him: 'Cousin, I do not cry out on my prison. It is my heart that has taken hurt through my eyes. My pain is caused by the beauty of the lady I see roaming in the garden below. I do not know whether she is a woman or a goddess, but I think she must be Venus herself.' Then, falling on his knees, he prayed aloud: 'Venus, if indeed thou dost reveal thyself to me, wretch that I am, help us to escape from prison! or if it is our fate to stay here for ever, have pity on us, who have been brought so low.'

At these words, Arcite himself looked down upon the lady, and the sight of her wounded him as it had Palamon, and he sighed: 'I am slain by her fresh beauty, and unless she show me grace I am a dead man; I can say no more.'

Palamon's brow grew dark, and he asked, 'Do you speak in earnest or in jest?'

'In good earnest,' said Arcite.

Then Palamon said, frowning, 'It does you no honour to play the traitor. Did you not swear to me, your cousin and brother, never to cause me pain till death should part us, nor to hinder me in love, but to help me in my need; even as I swore to you? This was our oath. And now you falsely go about to love my lady, whom I love and serve. Oh, false Arcite, you shall not do so! for I loved her first, and told you of my woe, and if you do not keep your oath to help me, I say again you are a traitor!'

Arcite answered proudly, 'It is you who are false, not I! For I swear by love, that I loved her first. Why, you are not even yet certain if she be a woman or a goddess! You love a spirit, while I love a person; and this is the love I have confessed to you, my cousin and sworn brother. And even suppose you did love her first, do you not know the old saying that there is no law in love, but love itself? As to which of us shall win her favour, there we are equal, since we are both condemned to prison for ever. In the king's court, brother, each man for himself! Love her if you please, for I shall love her too, and there's an end of it.'

So a bitter quarrel arose between those two, which I have no time to tell you of; for I must speak to the purpose.

It happened that a worthy Duke called Perotheus came to Athens on a visit; he and Theseus had been friends since childhood, and loved each other tenderly. Now this Duke had known Arcite in Thebes, and held him dear; so presently, at Perotheus' request, Theseus released Arcite from prison without ransom, on condition that he should lose his head if ever he were caught in any territory owned by Theseus. There being no help for it, Arcite departed for his home.

How great was now his sorrow! Death was in his heart. He wept, 'Alas, the day that I was born! Alas, that ever I knew Perotheus! But for him I should have dwelled in bliss in prison, for the sight alone of her I love made prison a heaven to me. Oh, cousin Palamon,' he cried, 'yours is the victory! For you remain in prison—nay, in Paradise!—while I am exiled, and in such despair that neither water, earth, fire nor air, nor any creature born of them, can help or comfort me. Since I can see you no longer, Emilia, I am a dead man, past help!'

But Palamon, for his part, when Arcite was gone, made the tower resound with his sorrow. 'Alas!' cried he, 'the fruit of our quarrel is yours, Arcite, my cousin! You walk at large in Thebes, and can, if you have manhood, gather our kinsmen to make war upon this city, and by victory or treaty win Emilia to wife. For, being free, all things are possible to you, while I can do nothing but die in my cage.'

Summer passed, and the long nights increased the pains of both the lovers. Who shall say which of these two suffered the worst, Palamon or Arcite? The prisoner who could look upon his lady, or the free man who could never see her more?

PART TWO

After his return to Thebes, Arcite could not sleep or eat or drink for sorrow; his cheek grew lean, his eye hollow, his colour paled to ashes, and he dwelt alone and solitary, making his moan. If he heard music, he wept; he was brought so low by grief that when he spoke men could not understand him. In short, poor Arcite was turned upside down by love.

When he had endured his torment a year or two, he saw one night in his sleep the winged god Mercury, who bade him take heart with the words, 'Go to Athens, for there lies the end of thy sorrow.' Arcite awoke with a start, crying, 'Not even the dread of death shall keep me from seeing my lady.' So saying, he looked in a great mirror, and saw how changed he was in complexion and even in feature; and it came into his mind that since his face was so disfigured by the ills he had endured, he might easily pass as a stranger, and see his lady nearly every day. So, clothing himself like a humble labourer, he went at once

to Athens; where, to be brief, he found service under a steward in Emilia's dwelling. Being young and strong, he could hew wood, draw water, and do anything that was required of him. He gave his name as Philostrate, and passed a year or two as page of the chamber to the beautiful Emilia; and there was no one of his degree at court half so well loved as he was. Struck by his gentle bearing, people began to say that Theseus might well raise his estate; and so in a short while it fell out that the Duke made him squire of his own chamber, and soon held no man dearer, so well he bore himself in peace and war. And now, leaving Arcite happy, let me speak again of Palamon.

For seven years Palamon had pined in the darkness of his prison; and love and sorrow nearly destroyed his wits. What tongue can tell his martyrdom? Not mine; let me pass on quickly to what happened. It fell out in the seventh year, upon the third of May, that Palamon, by the help of a friend, broke out of his prison soon after midnight, and fled with all speed from the city. He had given his gaoler wine to drink, drugged with certain opiates, and though men should shake him he would not wake that night. Still, Palamon must haste, for the night was short. At dawn he found himself beside a grove, and here decided to hide himself till night, when he would pursue his way to Thebes and beg his friends to help him against Theseus; for it was his wish either to win Emilia for his wife, or else to die.

On this same May morning, Arcite looked out of his window and saw the lark go up and the sun rise; and as the east began to laugh with light, and the dew to dry on the leaves, he sprang upon his fiery steed to ride forth to the fields to do his May Day rites. Out of the town he rode a mile or so, and halted by the very grove where Palamon

lay hid; and there he began to bind garlands of hawthorn leaves, and sing aloud in the sunshine:

'May, with all thy flowers and green,
Welcome, welcome be thou seen!
Sweet May, send me something green!'

Light of heart, he went into the grove, and strolled about the very bush in which Palamon was concealed, fearful of death. He did not know it was Arcite wandering there, and Arcite knew as little that his cousin was so near him in the bush, listening to his song. Having roamed his fill and sung his song out, Arcite fell suddenly into a day-dream, for the moods of lovers change as quickly as the weather, now shining and now raining. So instead of singing, Arcite fell a-sighing.

'Alas, the day that I was born!' said he. 'How long, O Juno, wilt thou leave Thebes in distress? All is confusion in the city built by Cadmus, of whose lineage I am. Instead of living like a prince, I serve my enemy like a poor squire, and I who was once Arcite am now called Philostrate. Alas, Mars! Alas, Juno! Ye have forsaken both me and the wretched Palamon, who languishes in prison. And, to crown all, love has slain me through the bright eyes of Emilia.' Saying her name, he fell down in a swoon.

When Palamon heard these words, he could remain in hiding no longer; starting out of the bush he cried, 'Arcite, false traitor, I know you now! One of us two must die. I say you shall not love my lady Emilia, but I alone will love her! For I am Palamon, your mortal foe.'

Then Arcite recognized him, and fierce as a lion he drew his sword, exclaiming, 'By heaven, if I did not know you were unarmed and distraught with love, you never should leave this grove alive! Fool! I will love Emilia in

spite of you, for love is free. But since you are a gentle, perfect knight, and would do battle for her, I will not fail you tomorrow. I will come again, not like a squire but a knight, with arms enough for two, and you shall choose the best and leave me the worst. For tonight I will bring you meat and drink and bedding. And if you slay me in this wood, and win the lady, you may have her.' Palamon answered, 'I agree to this,' and so they parted until morning. Alas, that Love should come between these friends.

Arcite returned to the city, and before daylight he provided two full suits of armour, and everything needed for the battle between them. Carrying all this before him on his horse, he met with Palamon at the appointed time. Their very looks were changed at the encounter, their faces became like hunters of the lion and the bear, who, when they hear the wild beast in the leaves, think, 'Here comes my mortal enemy! I must kill him without fail, else he will kill me.' So between Palamon and Arcite there was no greeting or Good Day, but straightway without words they began to arm themselves, helping each other in this as though they had been brothers. And then they fell upon each other with their spears, and the fight went on for a long while. Palamon seemed like a maddened lion, and Arcite like a cruel tiger; and they went to the fight foaming like wild boars, till they were ankle-deep in blood. And here for a little I will leave them fighting, and speak of Theseus.

Fate had ordained that Theseus should awake on this May morning full of longing to go hunting; the day never dawned that he was not ready to ride with horn and hounds and huntsmen, for hunting was his delight. With Hyppolita and Emilia clothed in green, he rode joyously to the grove, where he had been told that a hart was to be found. And when the Duke had come to the place, there

in the sun he saw Palamon and Arcite fighting like two boars; their swords flashed to and fro as though each stroke would fell an oak, but as yet he did not know who they were. The Duke put spurs to his horse, and in a moment had parted them with his drawn sword.

'Ho!' cried he, 'no more, on pain of losing your heads! By Mars, he shall die that strikes again! But tell me who you are, that fight here without a judge, as fiercely as though you were met in the lists.'

Palamon answered quickly, 'Sire, what need of words? We have both deserved death. We are two wretched men, weary of our lives. As you are just, show neither of us mercy; kill me first for charity, and then kill my comrade. Or slay him first, if you please; for though you know him under another name, he is Arcite, your mortal enemy, whom you banished from your land. He it is who under the name of Philostrate has deceived you many a year, and become your squire; he it is who loves Emilia. And I am the unhappy Palamon, who has broken prison. I too am your mortal enemy, and I love the bright Emilia so deeply that I am ready to die in her sight. Therefore, I ask to die; but slay my fellow also.'

The Duke replied, 'You are condemned by your own confession. By Mars, you shall both die.'

Then the Queen for very womanhood began to weep, and so did Emilia and all the ladies there. For they were full of pity for these two noble knights, who had been brought to their sad state by nothing but love. Falling on their knees they cried, 'Have mercy, lord!' and Theseus, too, was moved to pity, and considered the case again in his gentle heart. 'Fie on a lord that cannot show mercy,' he said to himself, 'but will always play the lion, both to the proud man and the humble. What have these two done that is so wrong? Any man would break out of prison if

he could, and any man do his best to win his love. That lord has little wit who, in such a case, cannot make distinction between humility and pride.' So the Duke's anger passed out of him, and he looked with kindly eyes on the two knights, and said, 'Arcite and Palamon, being out of prison, you might have gone to Thebes and lived in safety; love it is that has made you risk death from me, and from each other. I too have known what love can make men do; therefore, at the request of my kneeling Queen and my dear sister Emilia, I pardon you; and you shall swear never more to make war upon my crown, but to be my friends in everything.'

They swore the oath, and he granted them his mercy, and then said:

'Now as to my sister Emilia, who is the cause of your quarrel, both of you are worthy by birth and fortune to wed her, although she is a princess. But though you fought about it for ever, she could not wed you both. Listen, therefore, to what I have devised. It is my will that you should both go free; and fifty weeks from this day each of you shall bring a hundred knights armed for a tourney. And I take my oath that whichever of you with his knights defeats the other, and drives him out of the lists, shall have Emilia to wife. The tourney shall be held on this very spot, and I myself will judge it well and truly. Does this content you? Speak.'

Who but Palamon now looked bright of face? Who but Arcite sprang to his feet for joy? Who could tell or write of the happiness the words of Theseus brought to all present? They went down on their knees, and thanked him from their hearts, and especially the two Thebans. So with good hope, and blithe of heart, they took their leave, and rode home to the ancient walls of Thebes.

PART THREE

Theseus set about to prepare the lists, and raised the noblest theatre in the world, a mile in circumference, with walls of stone. To the east was a gate of white marble, and to the west another like it, and over the east gate he set an altar to Venus, the Goddess of Love, and over the west gate an altar to Mars, the God of Battle. In a turret on the north wall he raised a temple of white alabaster and red coral to Diana, the Goddess of Chastity. And in the temples he set glorious statues of Venus, Mars, and Diana, and made their altars rich with beautiful carvings telling the tales of their lives. There was not an artist or a craftsman in the land that Theseus did not employ upon this work; architects and builders, painters and sculptors, were all paid with his gold. And when at great cost the work was done, and the theatre and the temples all adorned, it pleased Duke Theseus well.

The day of the tourney drew near, when Palamon and Arcite must come with a hundred knights apiece to do battle for Emilia. In good time each arrived in Athens with his band, and never since the world began had such a company of noble knights been seen. For every chivalrous nobleman on earth had begged to be chosen for the fray, and they came armed in every fashion new and old, in tunics, coats of mail, and glittering breastplates, some armed upon the legs, some with rich shields and bucklers, some bearing axes or maces made of steel.

The greatest knight who followed Palamon was Lycurgus, King of Thrace; his beard was black, his eyes glowed red and yellow in his head, his muscles were brawny, his arms long, his shoulders broad, and he glanced about him like a dragon from under his shaggy brows. He rode upon

a high chariot of gold, and wore a coal-black bearskin; on his long hair, black as the raven's feather, was set a heavy golden circlet crusted with rubies and diamonds. About his chariot ran twenty white wolf-hounds, as big as oxen, each in a golden collar; and a hundred lords well-armed were in his train.

With Arcite came the great Emetreus, King of India, riding like Mars himself upon a bay horse, in trappings of steel and cloth of golden damask. His surcoat was of cloth of Tartary, sown with big white pearls; his saddle of newly-beaten gold; a mantle hung from his shoulder, covered with rubies that sparkled like fire; his crisp hair was in ringlets, and glittered like gold in the sun; his nose was high, his eyes were bright, his lips thick, his colour ruddy, he looked about him like a lion, and his voice was like the thundering of trumpets. With him rode a hundred lords, richly armed, and on either side of the king's horse tame lions and leopards ran.

In this wise they entered Athens on the Sunday; and Theseus feasted them and did them honour, and gave gifts to the greatest and the least among them. But of all this, of the fairest ladies, the best dancers, the sweetest singers, the hawks on their perches and the hounds on the floor, I will say no more.

That Sunday night, two hours before daybreak, Palamon heard the lark begin to sing; and he rode with high courage and a pure heart on a pilgrimage to Venus the Goddess of Love. When he had reached her temple in the lists, he knelt down and prayed to her as follows:

'Fairest of the fair, O lady Venus, Jove's daughter, Vulcan's wife! by thy love for Adonis have pity on my tears, and take my prayer to thy heart. I do not ask for victory or fame, I only pray to possess Emilia; bring this about in any way thou canst, and I will live and die in thy

service. I care not whether I triumph over Arcite, or he over me, so long as I have my lady in my arms. For though Mars is the God of Battle, thou art the Goddess of Love, and thy power in heaven is as great as his. Grant me this, and I will sacrifice for ever on thy altars. And if thou wilt not, sweet lady, then let Arcite run me through the heart tomorrow with his spear, for then, being dead, I shall not know Emilia is his wife. This is all my prayer; give me my love, dear heavenly lady.'

His prayer done, Palamon made sacrifice upon the altar; and after a little the statue of Venus shook and made a sign, by which, although there had been some delay, he took it that his prayer was granted. And he went home with a glad heart.

Three hours after Palamon had set out for the temple of Venus, the sun rose, and Emilia rose with it, and wended her way to the temple of Diana. Her maidens came with her, with fire and incense and horns full of mead, and all that was needful for the sacrifice; and when the smoke rose in the temple, Emilia bathed her body in a spring, and bound her bright unbraided hair with a garland of green oak. Then she knelt before the kindled fire, and prayed to Diana.

'Chaste Goddess of the green woods, who seest heaven and earth and ocean, queen of the dark region of Pluto, Goddess of Maidens, thou knowest my desire to be a maiden all my life, and never be any man's love or wife. I am still one of thy company, a maid who loves hunting and hawking and walking in the wild woods, and men and children are nothing to me. Now help me, lady, by thy threefold power! Send love and peace between Palamon and Arcite, who love me so sorely; quench the fire of their tormenting love, and turn their hearts from me. Or if it is my destiny to have one of them, let me have him who

desires me most. Behold my tears, Goddess of Chastity! Since thou art a maid, and the keeper of maidens, preserve me, and as long as I remain a maid I will serve thee.'

The fires burned bright on the altar while Emilia made her prayer; but suddenly she saw a strange sight, for one of the flames died down and then burned bright again, and then the other flame died down, and went out; and in going out it hissed like a wet brand in the burning. And at the end of the torch the drops oozed out like blood, so that Emilia was sore afraid and began to cry, not knowing what it meant. As she wept piteously, Diana herself appeared, arrayed like a huntress with her bow in her hand, and said, 'Ha, daughter! lift up thy heart. It is agreed among the gods and written in the stars that thou must wed one of these two who have suffered so much for thee; but I may not tell thee which. Farewell, I can stay no longer; the fires burning on my altar have already declared to thee the course thy love shall take.'

Emilia, amazed, replied, 'Alas, what does this mean? I put myself under thy protection, Diana, to dispose of as thou wilt.' With this, she returned home, and there is no more to say of what happened there.

An hour later, Arcite went with pleading heart and high devotion to make sacrifice in the temple of fiery Mars. And in these words he made his orison: 'Strong god, whom Thrace holds most in honour, and who controllest the fortune of war in every land, accept my sacrifice! If my youth and strength are worthy of thee, I pray thee, by the love thou hast for Venus, to look upon my sorrow. For I am young and ignorant, and, as I think, more afflicted with love than any living creature; since she for whom I suffer cares not whether I live or die, and before she shows me favour, I must win her by strength of arms. Therefore I pray thee, lord, to aid me in my

battle, because the fire which once burned thee burns me. Give me the victory; mine shall be the stress, and thine the glory. Then I will hang my banner in thy temple, with the arms of all my company, and till I die will keep the fire alight upon thy altar. And I swear also to shave off my beard, that has never yet felt razor or shears, and give it to thee, and be thy servant as long as I live. Grant me the victory, lord! I ask no more than this.'

As Arcite ended his prayer, the iron rings upon the temple-doors began to clatter, which startled him greatly; the fires glowed on the altar, lighting up the temple, a sweet smell arose from the ground, and as he lifted his hand to cast more incense on the fire, the statue of Mars made his hauberk ring, and a low murmuring voice said 'Victory!' For which Arcite gave honour and glory to Mars, and returned full of joy to his lodging, as glad as a bird in the sun.

And now, by the granting of these prayers, such strife began in heaven between Venus the Goddess of Love and Mars the God of War, that Jupiter was put to it to calm them; till pale, cold Saturn, old in experience and wisdom, took part, and said:

'Dear daughter Venus, my power to turn the course of events is greater than any man knows; it is I who control drowning by sea and dark imprisonment, murmuring and rebellion, vengeance and punishment. Mine is the ruin of the high halls, the falling of towers and walls upon the workmen; I was with Samson when he shook the pillar, and I am master of illness, pestilence, and treason. Weep no more, for I will see to it that Palamon, who is my own knight, shall have his lady as thou hast promised him. Mars shall keep his word to his knight, yet I will bring this about. Therefore, weep no more, thou shalt have thy pleasure.'

And now, enough of the gods, of Mars, and Saturn, and Venus; I must make an end of my tale.

PART FOUR

That day there was a mighty feast in Athens, and the season being May everyone danced and played and was happy; and went to his rest eager for the fight on the morrow. At daybreak, what a noise and clatter there was of horses and harness! On all the ways men rode to the palace on steeds and palfreys, in trappings of gold, embroidery, and steel, with bright shields, helmets and breastplates: lords, knights, and squires, dressing their spears, buckling their arms, girding their shields, and fastening their straps; no one was idle, the horses champed their golden bits, the smiths were busy everywhere with file and hammer: yeomen on foot, with short thick staves in their hands: pipes and trumpets, kettledrums and clarions, sounding their battle-blasts: the palace was thronged with people, here three or so together, there ten, discussing the two Theban knights, some saying this, some saying that would win. Long after sun-up the hall buzzed with talk of the knights and their followers—some swore by the man with the black beard, some by him with the thick skull, and others by the grim warrior whose battle-axe weighed twenty pounds. The great Theseus awoke to the sound of minstrelsy and the noise of the talkers; arrayed like a god, he stood at his window, and the people in the streets pressed thither to see and hear him. A herald on a scaffold shouted 'Peace!' till the hum was stilled; and then he proclaimed the will of the mighty Duke.

'The Duke in his high discretion hath decided against the destruction of all these gentle knights in mortal com-

bat; so, to ensure that none shall die, he modifies his first intention, and declares that no man, upon pain of death, shall enter the lists with bolt, pole-axe, or knife, nor bear a short sword at his side; and each man shall ride but one course against his adversary, bearing a spear, unless he prefer to fight afoot; and any that is hurt shall not be slain, but brought to the stake set up on either side, and there stay captive. And if it befalls that the chief of either side is captured, or slays his adversary, the tourney shall be at an end. God speed you, knights! Go forth and set to, with mace and spear. This is the Duke's decree!'

The joyous voice of the people rose to heaven: 'God save our good Duke, who will not have the gentle knights destroyed!' Up go the trumpets and the music, and through the great city, hung with cloth of gold, the company rides to the lists: led by the Duke, with the two Thebans on either side, followed by the Queen and Emilia, and after them a company of ladies, and after them the people according to their degree. So they passed through the city and came to the lists.

Day had not reached its prime when Theseus seated himself on his high throne, surrounded by Hyppolita and Emilia and the ladies of the court; the crowd pressed to its seats; and westward, through the Gate of Mars, Arcite and his hundred knights entered with red banners, at the same moment that Palamon rode in from the east by the gate of Venus, under a white banner. Never had two such companies been seen. When every one of their names had been read out, the gates were shut, the clarions rang, and the heralds pacing up and down cried loud: 'Do your devoir, proud young knights!'

Now from east and west there is the clash of spears; now men can see which of the knights joust well, and which ride best. Up spring the spears, twenty foot high,

out flash the swords, as bright as silver; the shafts ring on the shields, helmets are hacked and split; blood streams, and bones are broken. Here presses one through the thick of the fray; here stumbles a horse, with his rider under him; here one rolls underfoot like a ball, and one goes afoot with a truncheon, hurtling down a horse; here one is brought wounded to the stake, where he must bide. And on the other side, another man is taken. At times, Theseus bids them rest and refresh themselves, and drink if they desire. Full often have the two Thebans met already in the fray; each has pressed his adversary sore, and has unhorsed the other. No tiger in the vale of Gargaphia when her whelp is stolen is fiercer than is Arcite against Palamon; no dangerous lion in Belmary, hunted by men or maddened by hunger, lusts for his prey more than Palamon to slay Arcite. Their furious strokes batter their helms; blood runs from their sides. But all things come at some time to an end.

And so, before the setting of the sun, the foreign king Emetreus fell on Palamon as he was fighting with Arcite, and his sword bit deep into Palamon's flesh; it took twenty men to drag him, unyielding, to the stake. In seeking to rescue Palamon, the mighty king Lycurgus was borne down; while King Emetreus, for all his strength, had been forced from his saddle by a thrust from Palamon before he was taken. But this availed Palamon nothing; his brave heart could not save him from the stake, and, once captured, he must abide where he was put. Who now so sorrowful as Palamon, that could go no more into the fight?

When Theseus saw this sight he cried, 'Ho! enough! The fight is done, and I will judge it fairly, without favour. Arcite of Thebes shall have Emilia, having won her by fortune of war.'

At this, the shouts of the people seemed as though they would make the very lists to fall.

But what of lovely Venus up above? What said the Queen of Love? She wept tears enough to fill the lists with water, and said, 'I have been shamed.' Then Saturn said, 'Peace, daughter! Mars has his will, his knight has his boon, and by my head, thou shalt soon be satisfied.'

The heralds and trumpeters below were proclaiming the name of Arcite in joy and triumph, when lo! a miracle befell. Arcite had taken off his helmet to show his face, as he rode from end to end of the lists looking up at his Emilia; and she looked kindly down on him (for, to tell truth, women love those that are favoured by fortune), and his heart was full of cheer. Suddenly out of the ground a flame sprang up, sent by Pluto at the request of Saturn, which made the horse begin to curvet and stumble; and before Arcite could take heed, he was thrown on his head, and lay as though dead upon the ground, his breast broken by his saddle-bow. Black as a crow he lay, with the dark blood running down his face. Soon he was borne in sorrow to Theseus' palace, and there undressed and laid on a soft bed, where, being still alive, he lay and cried for Emilia. Duke Theseus and his company rode back in pomp to Athens, for despite what had happened he would not let the great occasion become sad. And he made a great revel that night for the lords and strangers, as was fitting. For the jousting had been gallant, and all the knights had taken their risk without cowardice; on which account Theseus proclaimed that enmity should cease between the two sides, and each hold the other as a brother; and he gave them gifts according to their degree, feasted them for three days, and had them convoyed with honour on their way. They departed saying, 'Farewell and

good day.' Now of this tourney I need speak no more, but only of Palamon and Arcite.

The wound in Arcite's breast increased, and neither leech-craft nor book-lore, cupping nor medicine, could help him. Nothing could expel the poison from his veins; he was a broken man, past the help of nature. And where nature will not work, farewell to physic! the sick man must soon be carried to church.

When Arcite knew that he must die, he sent for Emilia and his dear cousin Palamon, and spoke to them thus:

'To you, my lady that I love most, I cannot speak of the sorrow in my heart; I bequeath to you, above every living creature, the service of my spirit. Alas, my grief! alas, death! alas, Emilia! alas, to leave my friends! What is this world? Now we are with our love, now in the grave alone. Farewell, my sweet, my heart's queen, my destroyer! Take me softly in your arms, and hearken to what I say. For many a day I have striven in anger and jealousy with my cousin Palamon, for love of you; and now I swear, by truth and honour and knighthood, I know of none in this world so worthy of your love as Palamon, who serves you with his life. If ever you should become a wife to any man, let it be the gentle Palamon.'

With that, his speech began to fail, and the coldness of death stole on his heart, and overcame him. And when his heart felt death, first his strength, and then his thoughts, departed, and his eye grew dim and his breath faint; but still he looked upon his lady, and his last word was 'Mercy, Emilia!' Then his spirit went to that place of which, since I was never there, I cannot tell. Therefore I will speak no more of his soul's dwelling. Arcite is cold; let me speak of Emilia.

Emilia shrieked, and Palamon wailed, and Theseus came and bore away his swooning sister. I will not dwell

on how she wept, by morn and eve; she wept as women do in such a case, or they must die of grief. And through all the palace there was weeping as great as when Hector was slain at Troy. For pity of Arcite, cheeks were seamed with tears, and hair was rent. No man could comfort Theseus but his old father Egeus, who knew how joy and sorrow follow each other.

'There never was a dead man,' said he, 'but at some time he was alive; nor yet lived there any man,' said he, 'but at some time he died. This world is but a thoroughfare full of woe, and we are pilgrims passing to and fro; death is the end of every worldly sore.'

Duke Theseus now considered where he might raise Arcite's tomb in the most honourable manner; and at last he decided that, in the sweet green grove where Arcite had quarrelled with Palamon for his love, and had felt love's burning fires, he would make the fire in which the funeral rites might be accomplished. He straightway commanded his officers to hew down the old oaks, and split and chop them for burning; he had a bier prepared, spread with the costliest cloth of gold, and he clad Arcite in the same rich stuff, and gloved his hands in white, put a green laurel crown upon his head, and laid a keen, bright sword in his arm. He laid him on the bier with his face uncovered, and wept; and at dawn he led the people through the hall to look on him, and the sound of their crying was as roaring. And there came the unhappy Palamon, tear-stained and clothed in black, with matted beard and ashes on his hair; and there, the saddest of the company, the weeping Emilia. Three great white steeds were brought forth, trapped in glittering steel, bearing the arms of Arcite; one bore his shield, another his spear, and the third his bow. And so they rode in sorrow to the grove; the bier was borne on the shoulders of the noblest

Greeks, who passed with slow step, and red, wet eyes, through the chief streets of the city, draped with black. On the right hand went old Egeus, and on the left Duke Theseus, with fine gold vessels in their hands, full of honey and milk and blood and wine; then followed Palamon, and a great company; and after them the sorrowful Emilia with a torch in her hand, to do the office of the funeral service.

Mighty was the labour at the building of the pyre. It was twenty fathoms broad, and its green top reached to heaven; but how the pyre was built, and the names of the trees they used: such as oak, fir, birch, aspen, alder, holm, poplar, willow, elm, plane, ash, box, chestnut, lime, laurel, maple, thorn, beech, hazel, yew, and wippel: and how they were felled, of this I shall say nothing. Nor how the wood-gods ran up and down, nymphs, fauns, and hamadryads, dispossessed of their habitations; nor how the beasts and birds fled for fear, when the trees fell; nor how the ground, unused to seeing the sun, was frightened of the light; nor how the pyre was first covered with straw, then with dry sticks split in three, then with green wood and spices, and then with cloth of gold and precious stones, and garlands thick with flowers, myrrh, and sweet incense; nor how Arcite lay upon all this, nor what richness was all about him, nor how Emilia, according to custom, thrust in the funeral torch; nor how she swooned when she had made the fire, nor what she said, nor what she wished; nor what jewels men cast into the fire when it was blazing fast; nor how some cast in their shields, and some their spears, and the clothes they wore, and flung cups of wine and milk and blood into the fire that burned like mad; nor how the Greeks in a huge company rode three times round the fire with a great shouting, and thrice with clashing spears; nor how the women broke out

thrice a-crying; nor how Emilia was led homeward; nor how Arcite was burned to cold ashes; nor how the lyke-wake was held all night, nor of the rites with which the wake was held—of all this I say nothing: which naked wrestler, anointed with oil, was best, and who best bore himself in every trial. Nor will I tell how they returned to Athens, when all was done, but will come shortly to the point and make an end of my long tale.

After many years, the mourning and the tears of the Greeks came to an end. And now in Athens certain points arose and were discussed, as to how it would be good to have alliance with Thebes, and bring the Thebans under Athens' rule. Therefore the noble Theseus sent for the gentle Palamon, not telling him the reason; and he came sorrowfully at the command, in his black clothes. Then Theseus sent for Emilia; and when the court was assembled, and all voices were hushed, he sat awhile in thought, till wise words should come to him, and at last he spoke his mind.

'When he who first made all things, made the fair chain of love, great was his purpose and high was his intent; and with love's chain he confined fire, water, air, and earth in certain bounds from which they could not escape. And this same lord also ordered the days of our life, and set duration to everything that is born, from which space of time none of us can break away. Now the creator is fixed and eternal, for nothing in nature could start, grow, and decay, in anything that was not firmly rooted; and of his wisdom he has ordered that all things should come by successions, and not eternally endure in themselves. Lo, the oak, so slowly nourished from the time it begins to spring, that has so long a life, is yet at last a withered tree. And consider the hard stone under your foot, that wastes away even as it lies in the road. The broad river will

presently be dry. The great city declines and changes. By this I see that all things have an end.

'So may we also see how men and women change between the two terms of youth and age. The king will one day be dead, like his own page; some die in their beds, some in the deep sea, some in the open fields, they all must go their way. It is the will of Jupiter the king, the causer of all things, that all things shall die.

'Therefore it is but wisdom to make a virtue of necessity, and accept with a good heart what we cannot escape, and is common to us all. Whoever grumbles at it, is a fool; and certainly that man has most honour who dies in the flower of his excellence, when he is sure of his good name, and has done no shame, and suffered none; his friend should be gladder of his death, when his name is bright with honour, than when it is tarnished with age. Why should we grieve, then, because Arcite, the flower of chivalry, is departed with honour from the dark prison of this life? Why should his cousin and his betrothed mourn for his welfare? Can he thank them for it? Nay, not a wit, even though for his sake they hold off from their joy in each other.

'As the conclusion of all this, I say we should be merry, and thank Jupiter for his grace; and before we depart from this place, I say that we should make, out of two sorrows, one perfect joy that shall last for ever more; and looking to the greater of the sorrows, let us amend that first.

'Sister,' said he, 'this is my decree, which has the assent of all my council here: that you should, of your grace, take for your lord and husband the gentle Palamon, your own true knight, who serves you with his heart and will and strength, and has done ever since you knew each other. Give me your hand, and show us your womanly

tenderness. Why, he is a king's nephew, and even though he were only a poor knight, he has served you for so long, and suffered so much for your sake, that he deserves, believe me, your consideration. For compassion should be shown to those that need it.'

Then he turned to Palamon and said: 'I think you need a very little sermon to make you consent to this thing. Come here, and take your lady by the hand.'

The bond of marriage was confirmed between them, by all the council present. And so with bliss and song, Palamon and Emilia were wedded. God, who made the world, bless his love, that was so dearly bought. Now all is well with Palamon; he lives in bliss and health and fortune, so tenderly loved by Emilia, and serving her so nobly, that there is never word of jealousy between them, nor any other sorrow. This is the end of Palamon and Emilia; and God save this fair company. *Amen.*

THE MILLER'S PROLOGUE

WHEN the Knight had told his tale, everybody there, young and old, declared it was a noble story, and one to be remembered for ever.

'This is a right good start,' said our Host with a laugh. 'The game is well begun. Let's see who shall tell the next tale. Sir Monk, do you know anything to match the Knight's?'

The Miller, who had drunk himself pale, and could scarcely sit on his horse, bawled out, 'I know a noble tale, with which I can cap the Knight's.'

'Go slow, good Robin!' said our Host. 'Let a better man speak first. Go slow.'

'Not I, Host,' said the Miller. 'I'll either speak now, or be off.'

'Speak away, then,' said our Host, 'though it's plain your wits are fuddled.'

'Now listen to me, everybody,' said the Miller. 'First I wish to proclaim that I am tipsy, I can tell it by the sound of my voice; so if I speak amiss, put it down to the ale of Southwark, please. I'm going to tell you a yarn of a carpenter and his wife, and of a clerk who fooled the carpenter.'

The Reeve, who was himself a carpenter, spoke up. 'Hold your tongue! It's a shame to let you tell a tale when you're so tipsy, and are sure to speak ill of good men and their wives.'

'By your leave, brother Oswald,' said the Miller, 'I know as well as you do that there are a thousand good wives for one that is bad. I have a wife as well as you, I say! So just you leave my tale alone.'

And with that, the churl of a Miller told his story.

The Miller's Tale

THERE was a rich Carpenter once, and he lived at Oxford, and with him lived a poor scholar who knew all about astrology; and the Carpenter had a wife of eighteen years old, a pretty young thing, as neat as a weasel, but the Carpenter himself was old and crusty, and kept her at home as close as a bird in the cage.

So this scholar, his name was Nicholas, who was friendly to the young wife Alison, thought he would play a trick on the jealous old man, and make him look a fool before everybody, and they plotted it together one Saturday, when the Carpenter was gone to Osney. First Nicholas stocked his room with meat and drink enough for two days, and then he told Alison, when her husband returned

and asked for him, to say that she had not set eyes on him all day, and that he answered to nobody, so she was afraid he must be ill.

Well, sirs, this was done; Nicholas kept to his room for two days, eating and drinking as he pleased, while the Carpenter wondered what was the matter with him. At last he sent his boy to knock on the door with a stone, and the boy banged away like a madman, shouting, 'How now, Master Nicholas! are you going to sleep all day?' But not a word in reply! So he found a little cat-hole in the door, and peeping in saw Nicholas sitting quite still, staring up to heaven as though he was moonstruck. Down went the boy, and told his master what he had seen.

'Save us!' said the Carpenter, 'The man has fallen into an astronomical trance! I always knew how it would be! A man should leave God's works alone, and not be for ever prying into the secrets of the stars. But I'm sorry for our good Nicholas, and I'll shake him out of his reflections if I can. Get me a staff, Robin, and we'll heave up the door together.'

So they put themselves to the door till it fell in, and there was Nicholas as well as a stone, gaping into the air. The Carpenter shook him vigorously by the shoulder, crying, 'What, Nicholas! How now, man! Look down! Wake up! I set my cross on thee against elves and evil spirits!' And he repeated the night-spell against evil: 'From bad things and nightmares, Lord Jesus Christ deliver us!'

Then Nicholas heaved a great sigh, and groaned, 'Alas! and must the world be lost so soon?'

'What's that you say?' asked the Carpenter.

'Fetch me a drink,' said Nicholas, 'and I'll tell you in private what I'll tell no other man.'

The Carpenter went off and came back with a quart pot

of strong ale, and when each of them had drunk his share Nicholas shut the door, made the Carpenter sit down beside him, and said, 'John, my dear good host, swear on your honour not to repeat what I tell you, for it has to do with the workings of heaven, and if you tell it to any man you're lost, and will go mad.'

'Though I say it, I'm no blabber,' said the silly fellow, 'and I swear never to tell it to man, woman, or child.'

'Well, John,' said Nicholas, 'here's the truth of it. I have found by my astrology that next Monday at midnight a rain shall fall twice as great as Noah's Flood. The world shall be swamped in an hour, and mankind and his wife be drowned.'

'Oh, my poor wife!' moaned the Carpenter. 'What, shall Alison drench?' And staggering with grief he asked, 'Is there no help for it?'

'Why, yes,' said Nicholas, 'if you will act according to ancient lore, and not by your own wits. Follow my counsel, and I undertake to save her, and you, and myself. You've heard how Noah was saved by the Lord's warning?'

'Yes,' said the Carpenter, 'a long time ago.'

'And also,' said Nicholas, 'how Noah grieved because, when the time came, his wife had not a ship all to herself. Now we will do better than Noah, and we've no time to waste, either. You must get us a tub apiece, large enough to row in, and see they are provided with victuals for one day only; for by noon next day the water will be gone. And neither Robin, your boy, nor Gillian, your maid, must know of this, but don't ask why; I may not disclose to you all God's purposes. You must hang the three tubs high up in the roof, and have an axe ready to cut the ropes with so that we may launch ourselves when the water comes; and then we shall swim as merry as the white

duck after her drake, and I'll say, "Hello, Alison, hello, John, take heart, for the flood is ebbing!" and you'll say, "Hello, Nicholas, good morning to you, the day is ours!" and for the rest of our lives we'll be lords of the world, like Noah and his wife. But be warned of this: once we are aboard our tubs, none of us must utter a word or sound, for that is the will of heaven. This is all; tomorrow night, when everybody is asleep, we will creep into our tubs and sit there abiding the grace of God. Now go your way, and do what's necessary to save our lives.'

The foolish Carpenter obeyed him, and confided everything to his wife, who already knew it better than he; but she pretended to quake for fear, and begged him to save them all. And so catching is an infection that the Carpenter began to quake too; and, as a man may die by pure imagination, he really believed that he might soon see Noah's flood rolling up to drown his sweet Alison. So he ran in terror for the kneading-trough and a couple of tubs, hung them under the roof, and with his own hands made three ladders to climb up by; and he filled trough and tub with bread and cheese and a jug of good ale, enough for one day. Then he sent his maid and his boy off to London on some business, and on the Monday, at nightfall, he shut his door, blew out his candle, and up they climbed all three into their tubs.

'Now mum!' says Nicholas. And 'Mum!' says John, and 'Mum!' says Alison. And the Carpenter said his prayers and sat waiting for the rain. About the hour of Curfew he fell asleep. Then down their ladders crept Nicholas and Alison, and laughed and made merry till the bells began to ring, and the friars to sing in the chancel.

Now you must know that the Parish Clerk, whose name was Absalom, had taken a fancy to young Alison, the Carpenter's wife, and happening to pass through Osney

had been told that the Carpenter was from home, getting timber for the Abbot. So thinking he might have a word with Alison while the Carpenter was away, he rose at cockcrow on this very morn, dressed himself at point device, combed his hair, chewed licorice to sweeten his breath, and sped away to the Carpenter's house. There he stood under the window and sang:

'What are you doing, Alison, my honeycomb? My pretty bird, my cinnamon-stick, wake, sweetheart, and speak to me! I shall mourn like a turtle-dove till you give me a kiss.'

Nicholas and Alison laughed to hear him, and Alison opened the window saying, 'Get ready for your kiss!' The night was as black as pitch, and instead of Alison, Nicholas put out his head, and Absalom kissed him.

'What's this, what's this?' cried Absalom. 'A woman with a beard!' And Alison laughed 'Te-he!' and Nicholas laughed 'Ho-ho!' and Absalom knew they had played him a trick. But in his anger he said nothing, except to himself, 'I'll pay you out for this!' And back he sped to the village and sought the smith, who was making plough-shares at his forge.

Absalom knocked and cried, 'Gervase! let me in!'

'Who's there?'

'I, Absalom.'

'Absalom? Why so early? What's the matter?'

'Ask no questions, Gervase, but as you're my good friend lend me that hot iron in the chimney there.'

'If the iron were gold you should have the loan of it,' said Gervase. 'But what are you going to do with it?'

'Let that pass,' said Absalom. 'I'll tell you tomorrow.' He seized the iron by the cold end, and ran back with it to the Carpenter's. There he gave a little cough, and knocked on the window as before.

'Who's that knocking?' asked Alison.

''Tis Absalom, sweetheart,' said he, 'I've brought you a gold ring of my mother's, if you'll give me another kiss.'

So once more, for mischief, Nicholas put his face out of the window, and smack! he got the hot iron on his cheek.

At that, what a hullabaloo he set up! He began to yell, 'Water, water, for pity's sake!' and that woke up the Carpenter, and when he heard a voice crying, 'Water!' in a frenzy, he thinks, 'Here comes Noah's flood!' And he sat up and smote through the cords with his axe, thinking to be afloat; instead of which, down he went with a bump to the floor, and lay there stunned. At that, up started Alison, and she and Nicholas rushed out into the street howling, 'Help! help!' which fetched out the neighbours, big and little, who came running to the Carpenter to ask what was the matter. But every time he opened his mouth to tell them, Nicholas and Alison said he had gone mad, and imagined Noah's flood was come again, and in his folly had hung three tubs in the roof for the three of them to sit in. Then to hear how the folk all roared with laughter, and looked up into the roof, and roared again, and turned his injuries into a mighty jest! No matter what the Carpenter said, nobody listened to him, and his protests were drowned in the noise of their laughter and jeers.

'The man is mad, brother!' said one to another.

'Mad, dear brother, mad!' cried they all.

And so the Carpenter was held for a madman, and Nicholas was burned, and Absalom went home without his kiss, and the Carpenter's wife was merry. And that's the end of 'em, and God bless you all!

THE REEVE'S PROLOGUE

THE folk laughed heartily over the tale of Absalom, Nicholas, and the Carpenter; some said one thing, and some another, but for the most part they took it as a good joke. The only one who did not like it was Oswald the Reeve, because he himself was a carpenter. He grumbled out, 'Well, well! I could tell you as lusty a joke upon a Miller, if I weren't too old for joking; my grass-time is done, my harvest turned to hay, and my years are written in white hairs upon my head. Nothing is left to old folk but dotage, so I'll say nothing.'

But our Host took a high hand with him and his complaints. 'What's the meaning of this?' he said. 'Who cares whether your tale be of a miller, a sailor, or a doctor? Tell it without more ado, for it is past midday, and here we are at Deptford hard by Greenwich; so it's high time your tale was begun.'

'Well then,' said Oswald the Reeve, 'I hope none of you will mind if I return this tipsy Miller blow for blow.

He made game of carpenters because I am one, and I'll give him as good as I got. He can't see the beam in his own eye, though he can see the blade o' grass in mine!'

The Reeve's Tale

THERE was once a Miller whose mill stood by the brook at Trumpington, near Cambridge. This Miller was proud as a peacock; he could pipe, drink, fish, and shoot, wrestle and set traps as well as any man; he carried a long sword at his side, a bodkin in his pouch, a Sheffield knife in his stocking, and no man dared touch him except at his peril. His face was round, his nose crooked, and his skull as bald as an ape's. He was, moreover, a sly thief, and stole of the corn sent him to be ground into meal. His name was Simon, and his wife was the parson's daughter; she had brought a bagful of money with her for a dowry. Pert and proud as a pie was she, and a goodly pair they made on holidays, Simon in scarlet stockings, with his tippet bound about his head, and she in a scarlet gown. Everyone must call her *Madame*, if you please! and woe to the man who gave her a crooked look—Simon would have run him through with a sword, knife, or bodkin. These two had a daughter of twenty years, and a babe still in the cradle.

The Miller was kept busy grinding the corn of the countryside; and especially that of a great college hard by, known as the Soler-Hall of Cambridge. Now the Miller always stole with discretion of the corn belonging to the college; but once when the manciple was ill, and could not keep an eye on him, he stole most outrageously. The Warden kicked up a fuss, and accused the Miller; and the Miller swore that he had taken nothing.

So two poor scholars who lodged in the hall, and were fond of a lark, asked the Warden's leave to take the corn to the mill and see it ground. They swore they would not let the Miller steal so much as half-a-peck while they were by; and the Warden gave them leave. One was called John and the other Alain. Alain saddled the horse and loaded it with the sack of corn, and John led the way.

Arrived at the mill, Alain called out, 'Hello, Simon! How are your wife and daughter?'

'If it isn't John and Alain!' exclaimed the Miller. 'Welcome both. What's brought ye?'

'Necessity, Miller,' said John. 'Our manciple is ill, so Alain and I have brought the corn to be ground and taken home again. Be as quick as you can with it.'

'Done!' said Simon. 'And what will you do while I'm about it?'

'I shall stand by the hopper,' said John, 'and see the corn go in. I've never yet seen a hopper at work.'

'All right, John,' said Alain, 'then I'll stand by the trough and see the meal come out; for I'm as raw a miller as you are.'

The Miller laughed in his sleeve, and thought, 'They think I don't see through their trick! But I'll prove more cunning than they, and the more they try to catch me, the more I'll steal. Ho, ho! most of the meal they take home will be chaff!'

The Miller slipped through the door and found the clerks' horse tied under a shed behind the mill; he took off the bridle, and no sooner was it loose than the horse raced off whinnying to the fen where the wild mares were. Back went the Miller to his job, and kept joking with the clerks till all the corn was ground. When the meal was tied up in a sack, John went out, missed his horse, and

began to shout, 'Hi, hi! our horse is lost! Stir your stumps, Alain, quick! Our Warden's palfrey is gone!'

Alain forgot meal and corn, and ran out crying, 'Which way did he go?' and the Miller's wife called from the house, 'I saw him make for the wild mares in the fen, as fast as ever he could—thanks to them that tied him up so badly!'

'Oh, mercy!' groaned John. 'Throw down your sword, Alain, and I will mine, or they'll get in our way as we run. Why didn't you put the horse in the barn, you fool?'

The boys sped to the fen, and when they were well away, the Miller took half a bushel of the flour and gave it to his wife to knead into a cake. 'Run, lads, run!' he chuckled. 'Your horse is hard to catch, but the Miller is harder!' Meanwhile, the clerks ran up and down, bawling, 'Stop, stop! Halt there! Look out for yourself! You run that way, while I head him off this.' But the nag kept them on the run till nightfall, when they caught him at last in a ditch. Weary and soaked through, they led their Bayard back to the mill, while John groaned, 'Alack the day! see how we're brought to scorn! Our corn will be stolen, and everybody will think us fools, including the Miller himself.' It was dark when they reached the mill, and they found the Miller sitting by the fire.

'For pity's sake,' said Alain, 'what are we to do with ourselves at this time o' night?'

'Well,' said the Miller, 'my house is small, but what room there is in it is at your service.'

'Well said, Miller,' cried John. 'To begin with, let your daughter bring us meat and drink; we'll pay for it like honest men.'

The Miller tied up their horse, sent his daughter to buy ale and bread, and had a goose roasted, and a bed made up for them in his own room. Now at the foot of the Miller's

bed stood the cradle with the baby in it; and as soon as they heard the Miller snoring through his nose, the boys got up quietly and removed the cradle to the foot of their own bed. Then they prowled round the room in the dark, trying to find their way out. But they were heard by the Miller's wife, who started up, thinking there were thieves in the house; and seizing a stick from a corner of the room, she looked about her, while the lads crouched against the wall. Now there was a hole in the wall through which the moon shone, and by its faint glimmer she saw the cradle at the foot of the empty bed, which she therefore supposed must be the Miller's. But seeing a man in the bed without the cradle, she stole up with her stick, intending to hit the intruder a good crack—instead of which, she hit the Miller himself on the bald skull, and out of bed he rolled, bellowing, 'Help! help! I die!' And while she continued to beat him, the clerks slipped out of the room, took their horse from the stable, and at the mill door found, not only their bag of meal, but the great cake baked with half a bushel of their flour.

And so the proud Miller was well beaten, and lost the grinding of the meal, and had, moreover, stood the cost of a supper to Alain and John; and the proverb was proved, that no good comes to an evil-doer. God, who sits in judgement, save all this company, great and small. And now I am quits with you, Miller!

THE COOK'S PROLOGUE

WHEN the Reeve had spoken, the Cook of London clapped him on the back. 'Ha, ha!' cried he. 'That taught the Miller to take strangers in! May no man call me Hogg of Ware again if ever I heard a better joke upon a miller! But don't let's stop at that! I can cap it if you like with another little joke that happened in our town.'

'Tell away, Roger,' said our Host, 'and mind it's a good tale, none of your heavy pasties or warmed-up Dover Jacks! No offence meant, I will have my joke.'

'"True jest, bad jest," as the Dutchmen say,' said Roger. 'And therefore, Harry Bailey, don't you cut up rusty, though my tale should be about an innkeeper! However, that tale will keep; but I'll be even with you yet.'

And with a loud guffaw the Cook began his tale.

The Cook's Tale

THERE was once a prentice of our town, belonging to the Guild of Victuallers; he was gay as a goldfinch in a wood, and brown as a berry, with sleek black hair. He could dance so sprightly that they called him Perkin Reveller; and was full of love as a honeycomb of sugar—lucky the wench who fell in with him! He danced at every wedding, and drank at every tavern in the town; was good at singing, riding, gaming, and dicing, and emptied his master's till to pay for his sport. There was a jolly prentice for you! In the end, his master remembered the saying: Better throw out a rotten apple than let it rot the heap. 'Tis the same with a riotous servant—he'll spoil all the other servants in the house. So his master turned him out and bade him begone. Farewell, my jolly prentice! go riot where you please, I've had enough of you! I shan't make you my tale after all, I'll tell instead a tale of a knight and his three sons.

The Cook's Tale of Gamelyn

LISTEN, hearken, and give ear to me!

Sir John of Bounds was a doughty knight, and he had three sons. The eldest was a rascal. His brothers loved and respected their father, but the eldest deserved his curse, and in the end he got it.

This good old knight, the father, fell sick, and feeling death upon him sent for his friends and said, 'Sirs, I am not long for this life; hear how I wish to parcel out my lands between my three sons, so that Gamelyn, my youngest, may not be forgotten. John, my eldest, shall have the five plots that came to me from my father; my

second son shall have the five plots I got for myself; and all my other holdings, leases, goods, and horses, I bequeath to Gamelyn. And I beseech you, good sirs, for love of Gamelyn, to see that this is done.'

Soon after this, he lay as still as a stone.

He had not been long under ground, when the eldest brother tricked the youngest. Saying he would keep Gamelyn in his own house, he took over all the boy's lands and goods. But he clothed and fed Gamelyn wretchedly, and let his estates go to pieces.

Young Gamelyn grew up in his brother's mansion, and became the strongest of any; the boldest thought twice before he would wrestle with Gamelyn. One day as Gamelyn stood in his brother's yard, he began to feel his beard; and he considered his ruined parks, his fallen oaks, his stolen deer, and his good horses, of which not one was left him. The thought came to him that this was not as it should be. While he stood thinking his brother went by, and called to Gamelyn, 'Is dinner ready?'

Then Gamelyn grew angry, and cried, 'Bake it yourself, I am not your cook!'

'What, brother Gamelyn? I never heard you speak like this before!'

'Then, by my faith, it's time you did!' said Gamelyn. 'How about my neglected parks, my deer, my horses, and my arms? Everything my father left me is gone to rack and ruin. A curse upon you, brother!'

Then his brother said, 'Hold your tongue, vagabond! Don't I give you food and clothing? What more do you want?'

Then young Gamelyn said, 'A curse on him who calls me vagabond! My mother was a lady, and my father a knight.'

His brother dared not go near Gamelyn, so he called to his men and said, 'Beat this boy, and teach his tongue better manners.'

'Brother of mine,' said Gamelyn, 'if I'm to be beaten, you shall be too!'

Casting his eye around, he saw a staff standing against a wall; he leapt and seized it, and when his brother's men came running with their sticks, he drove them before him in a crowd. All were terrified; Gamelyn brandished his staff as fierce as a lion, and his brother ran for his life and locked himself up in the loft.

'How now!' cried Gamelyn. 'Run as soon as you start to fight?' and he followed his brother, who peeped at him out of the window.

'Come a little nearer, brother,' said Gamelyn, 'and I'll teach you how to play at cross-sticks!'

'Not while you have that staff in your hand,' said his brother. 'Throw it away, stop raging, and I'll make peace with you.'

'If I hadn't raged,' said Gamelyn, 'your men would have broken my bones.'

'Gamelyn,' said his brother, 'I'd never have seen it happen. I did all this for a joke, just to see how strong you were.'

'Then come down and grant my demands, and we'll be friends.'

Down came his false brother, terribly afraid of the staff. 'Blame me if I don't grant what you ask, brother Gamelyn.'

'Brother,' said Gamelyn, 'if we are to agree, you must give me all my father left me.'

'You shall have it, Gamelyn, I swear you shall! And your land shall be sowed, and your horses fattened.'

So swore this knight, thinking treason; and Gamelyn,

thinking none, went and kissed him. Alas! young Gamelyn little knew how false was his brother's kiss.

Listen and hearken and give me your ear!
And you the tale of young Gamelyn shall hear!

A great wrestling was to be held, with ram and ring. Gamelyn was eager to go and prove his strength.

'Brother,' said he, 'lend me a quick little nag to ride on. I must go upon an errand.'

'Choose the best steed in my stable,' said his brother. 'Tell me, whither are you riding?'

'To the wrestling that has been cried; it will bring renown to us all if I bear home the ring and the ram.'

A swift steed was smartly saddled, and Gamelyn rode out through the gate, while his false brother looked after him, and prayed heaven that the boy might break his neck in the wrestling. On reaching the spot, Gamelyn saw an old man wringing his hands and making moan.

'Good man,' said Gamelyn, 'why all this noise?'

'Alas!' said the old man, 'I had two stalwart sons, and the champion who wrestles here has slain them both. I would give ten pounds to the man that could throw him.'

'Hold my horse, good man,' said Gamelyn, 'and I'll go in and try my luck.'

Gamelyn took off his shoes, stripped, and went in, and all present wondered at him for opposing his strength to that of so doughty a champion. The champion himself started up, and strode towards young Gamelyn, saying, 'Who is your father, fool, that comes here?'

Gamelyn answered the champion, 'You knew my father well when he was alive. He was Sir John of Bounds, and I am Gamelyn.'

'Yes,' said the champion, 'I knew him well; and I've heard of you, Gamelyn, as a great scoundrel when you were young.'

'Now I am older,' said Gamelyn, 'you'll find me a greater.'

'When I get you in my hands,' said the champion, 'you'll be one no longer.'

Gamelyn and the champion came together, and the champion tried all his tricks on Gamelyn, who stood fast, and bade him do his best. Then he said to the champion, 'Now I've seen some of your tricks, see how you like one or two of mine.' Gamelyn needed to show him no more than one; he cast the champion down on his left side, and broke his arm and three of his ribs.

Then Gamelyn asked quickly, 'Shall that count for a throw or not?'

'Heaven help the man,' said the champion, 'that gets into your hands!'

'Bless the day that you were born, Gamelyn!' cried the old man whose sons were killed; and to the champion he said, 'This young fellow has taught you a lesson.'

'Since first I took to wrestling,' said the champion sullenly, 'I was never handled so sorely.'

Gamelyn stood alone in the place and cried, 'If there be any more, let them come! The champion, by the look of him, has had enough.' Then he stood stock still, waiting for the wrestlers, but he had dealt too roughly with the champion, and none came up.

Two gentlemen that kept the place now said to Gamelyn, 'Put on your shoes and stockings, for the fair is over.'

Said Gamelyn, 'Why, I have not yet sold half my wares!'

Said the champion, 'Only a fool would buy your wares, you sell them too dear.'

Said the old bereaved man, 'You, at least, got a good bargain, fellow!'

Last came the wardens of the wrestling, bringing Gamelyn the ram and the ring, and said, 'Here, Gamelyn, are the ram and the ring for the best wrestler that ever wrestled here.'

So Gamelyn bore off the ram and the ring, and went home with joy in the morning.

His brother saw him coming, with a great crowd behind him, and bade his porter shut him out; and the porter, afraid of his master, ran and bolted the gate.

Listen and hearken, both young and old!
And you shall hear frolics of Gamelyn the bold!

When Gamelyn found the gate bolted, he cried, 'Porter, open the gate to a good man's son.'

The porter answered, 'Gamelyn, you shall never come into this yard.'

'You lie!' said Gamelyn, and kicked the wicket with his foot, and broke the bolt. The porter, seeing there was no help for it, turned and ran. 'Save your pains,' said Gamelyn, 'for I am lighter of foot than you.' And in his wrath he overtook the porter, got him by the neck, and threw him down a well seven fathoms deep. At this, everyone in the yard drew back in fear of him and of the company he had brought with him; and Gamelyn threw open the gate and let in the rabble, crying, 'Welcome all! We'll be masters here, and none shall stop us. There are five tuns of wine in my brother's cellars, and we won't part company till every drop is drunk. My brother is a miser; what he has saved we will spend, and whoever begrudges us shall join the porter in the well.'

For seven days and nights Gamelyn kept his feast with

great jollity, while his brother lay fast in his little turret, and saw his goods wasted, and could say nothing. On the eighth day in the morning, the guests came to take their leave of Gamelyn.

'Whither away, masters?' said Gamelyn. 'The wine's not yet all drunk.' But they said they must go, bade Gamelyn good day, and departed.

Listen and hearken and hold your tongue,
And you shall hear frolics of Gamelyn the young!

While Gamelyn was holding his feast, his brother considered how he might avenge himself afterwards. As soon as he saw Gamelyn standing alone without his friends, he came out of hiding, and drew near and said, 'Why did you make so bold as to destroy all my stores?'

'Brother,' said Gamelyn, 'don't be angry! For sixteen years you've had the good of all the lands and beasts my father left me. In exchange for this, I have taken the meat and drink we have just consumed.'

Then the false knight said, 'Listen, Gamelyn! Since I have no son of my own, I swear by Saint John to make you my heir.'

'In that case,' said Gamelyn, 'God bless you!' He did not dream of treachery, so he was easily deceived.

'Gamelyn,' said his brother, 'one thing I must tell you. I was so angry when you threw the porter down the well, that I took an oath to bind you hand and foot for it. Now, dear Gamelyn, as you are my own brother, let me not be forsworn! Let me just bind you hand and foot, so that I may say I have kept my oath.'

'Brother,' said Gamelyn, 'you shan't be forsworn on my account.' So the false knight sent for fetters, and had Gamelyn bound hand and foot to a post in the hall. And there he left him, telling everyone who came that he was

mad; and Gamelyn had to stand upright day and night, without meat or drink.

'Brother,' said Gamelyn, 'I know you now! If I had guessed how false you were, I would have beat you well before I was bound.'

For two days and nights he stood there fasting in his bonds; then he called to his brother's steward, 'Adam spencer, I've fasted too long. Adam spencer, by the love you bore my father get at the keys and undo my fetters, and I will share my lands with you.'

Then said Adam the spencer, 'I have served your brother sixteen years; if I let you go, he will say I am a traitor.'

'Adam,' said Gamelyn, 'by my head, you shall find my brother false in the end; therefore, good Adam, loose me, and I'll share my lands with you.'

'If that is the case,' said Adam, 'I'll do my best.'

'Keep your word, Adam,' said Gamelyn, 'and I'll keep mine.'

When Adam's master was abed, Adam took the keys and unlocked Gamelyn's fetters, in hope of the advancement promised him. 'God be praised!' said Gamelyn. 'I am free. Now, could I only eat and drink my fill, there's none in this house should bind me again tonight.'

As quiet as a stone, Adam led Gamelyn to the buttery, and gave him a hearty supper. When he had eaten well and richly, and drunk deep of the red wine, 'Adam,' said Gamelyn, 'what do you think? Shall I go to my brother and cut off his head?'

'Not so, Gamelyn,' said Adam. 'I know a trick worth two of that. This Sunday we are to hold a great feast for the Abbots and Priors; you shall stand still by your post, as though you were bound, but I will leave your fetters unlocked. When they have eaten and washed their hands,

you shall beseech them to release you; if they are willing, so much the better, for you will be free and I blameless. But if they say nay, then I swear I'll stand by you; each of us shall have a good staff, and a curse on him who fails the other.'

'So say I!' said Gamelyn. 'Only warn me, brother Adam, when the fun begins.'

'Watch till you see me wink,' said Adam, 'then cast off your fetters, and come straight to me.'

'Bless you, Adam!' said Gamelyn. 'I'll do what you say, and woe to him who stops me.'

On the Sunday, all the people came to the feast, and as each one entered the hall his eyes fell on young Gamelyn; and while they sat at meat, the false knight his brother spoke as ill of him as he could. After they had eaten two or three courses, Gamelyn said, 'What about me? Must I stay fasting, while other men make merry?'

'The fellow is mad,' said the false knight; and Gamelyn made no answer, but kept his mind on Adam. But presently he spoke again to the guests at the banquet.

'For Christ's sake, masters,' he said, 'set Gamelyn free.'

An Abbot answered, 'Heaven will curse the man that frees you, and bless him that binds you.' And another said, 'If you were my brother, I'd cut off your head.' And a Prior added, 'It's a pity you're alive, boy.' And one after another spoke in the same fashion.

'Ho!' said Gamelyn, 'now I see who are my friends! Bad luck to him that ever does good to a Prior or an Abbot!'

Then Adam the spencer saw the time was come; he cleared the table, but instead of going to the pantry returned to the hall with two stout staves, and winked at Gamelyn. Gamelyn cast off his fetters, ran to Adam's side,

and seized one of the staves; and he and the spencer laid about them like madmen. The servants, who had small love for the churchmen, stood aside and did not interfere. Before long, Gamelyn had overthrown every abbot, prior, monk and canon in the hall.

'At 'em, good Gamelyn!' said Adam, 'while I hold the door that none may pass.'

'Never fear,' said Gamelyn; 'if you guard the door, I'll do the rest.'

They dealt so lustily with the monks, that those who had come to the feast on horseback went back again in carts. As for his brother, Gamelyn overthrew him with a blow on the backbone, and set him up in his own fetters. 'Sit there, brother,' said he, 'and cool your blood, as I did mine.'

Now all this was told to the Sheriff, who lived five miles off; and the Sheriff set forth to arrest Gamelyn.

Listen and hearken, give ear to my tongue,
And you shall hear frolics of Gamelyn the young!

Four-and-twenty bold young men came to the Sheriff, and offered to capture Gamelyn and Adam. The Sheriff gave them leave, and they hied with all speed and knocked on the gate. The porter was one who loved Gamelyn, and when he peeped through the hole and saw who was there, he kept the gate shut and asked what they wanted.

'Open the door and let us in,' said one.

'By my chin,' said the porter, 'not till you state your errand.'

'Tell Gamelyn and Adam we want a word with them.'

The porter went to Gamelyn and said, 'Sir, the Sheriff's men are at the gate to take you both.'

'Thanks, porter,' said Gamelyn. 'Go back and keep them talking, and you'll see some fun. But you, Adam,'

food, and even as he looked the chief of the outlaws espied him and Gamelyn through the trees.

'My lads,' said the chief, 'I don't like guests; yonder are two young men, and perhaps there are others at hand. Up, lads, and fetch them to me; we must know who they are.'

Seven of the outlaws sprang to their feet, and ran towards Gamelyn and Adam; when they were close enough, one called out, 'Yield us your bows and arrows, young men!'

'Never say yield to me!' said Gamelyn. 'I'll as soon fight twelve of you as seven.'

Seeing the young man's strength, they addressed him mildly: 'Come with us, and speak with our chief.'

'What manner of man is your chief, young men?'

'Our chief is crowned king of the outlaws.'

'Adam,' said Gamelyn, 'we will go with them. For shame's sake, this chief will not deny us meat and drink.'

'By Saint James,' said Adam, 'if harm comes of it, I shall at least have eaten.'

So Gamelyn and Adam went to the chief and greeted him; and the king of the outlaws said to them, 'What seek ye in the woods, young men?'

Gamelyn answered the king, 'He must needs walk in woods that daren't walk in towns. Sir, we shall do harm to none, unless it be a deer we may shoot for meat, because we are hungry.'

The chief was moved by Gamelyn's words and said, 'You shall have your fill,' and bade them sit and eat and drink of the best. As they made their meal the whisper went round, 'This is Gamelyn!' And the chief, being told who he was, and hearing from him all that had happened, made Gamelyn master of the outlaws, under himself.

The third week after this, tidings came to the chief out-

law that he had been pardoned, and could go home again. He called his young men together, told them the glad news, and said he was leaving them; on which Gamelyn was straightway made chief outlaw, and crowned their king.

While this was happening to Gamelyn in the greenwood, the false knight his brother had become Sheriff, and out of hate to his brother had indicted him as an outlaw. Some of his people who loved Gamelyn sped to the greenwood to warn him how the wind blew. When they had found him they fell on their knees and said, 'Sir, don't blame us for the bad news we bring you; your brother has become Sheriff, and has cried the wolf's-head on you.'

'Alas!' said Gamelyn, 'why was I so slack as not to break his neck instead of his backbone? Go tell him, with my greetings, that I will be seen when the next court sits, my life upon it!'

When his brother was presiding at the next sitting, Gamelyn strode boldly into the moot hall, and pulled down his hood before everybody. 'God save you, all here present! But not you, you broken-backed Sheriff! Why have you cried the wolf's-head on me?'

The false knight, set on vengeance, had Gamelyn seized without mercy, and bound and cast into prison before he could say more.

Now Gamelyn's second brother was called Sir Ote, and he was as good a knight as ever went on foot. So a messenger hastened to him, and told him of young Gamelyn's plight; and Sir Ote, much grieved, saddled his horse, and rode without delay to his two brothers.

'Sir,' said Sir Ote to the Sheriff his brother, 'three brothers are we, and shall never be more; and you have imprisoned the best of us all.'

'Sir Ote,' said the false knight, 'no hard words, or he

shall fare the worse for them. He lies in the king's prison, awaiting the justice.'

'Now sir,' said Sir Ote, 'let me go bail for Gamelyn till the next sitting, and then let him take his chance.'

'As you like, brother; but by my father's soul, that begat us both, if he fail to appear before the justice you shall pay the penalty.'

'So be it,' said Sir Ote. 'Take me to him.'

So Gamelyn was delivered over to his brother, and they spent that night together. In the morning Gamelyn said, 'Brother, I am anxious to go and see how my young men are faring.'

'That's hard hearing,' said Sir Ote. 'I let you go at my peril; for if you are not to be found when the justice sits, I shall be punished in your stead.'

'Never fear, brother,' said Gamelyn; 'when the justice sits I'll be there, if I'm alive.'

Then Sir Ote said to Gamelyn, 'I trust you, when the time comes, not to fail me.'

Listen and hearken, be still as you may,
And hear how young Gamelyn got his own way!

Gamelyn went back to the greenwood, and found his young men at their sports. Glad was he to be with them again, and hear tell of their adventures; and then he spoke of his own mishap, and of the false knight his brother, who would not rest till he was hanged. Gamelyn gazed upon the woods and copses and wild fields, and thought on Sir Ote his brother, for whose sake he must keep his word, and he said to his young men, 'Make ready, for when the justice sits, we must be there. My brother has gone bail for me, and will go to prison if I fail.'

'Say what you want done,' said his young men, 'and we will do it.'

And even while Gamelyn was on his way to the justice, the false knight his brother hired men for the hanging; for if they hanged not one brother, they would the other.

Gamelyn came riding in from the greenwoods, with his gallant young men behind him. 'I see the court is sitting,' said he. 'Go ahead, Adam, and find out what is happening.'

Adam went into the hall, and saw the great lords in their places, with Sir Ote bound in their midst; and he came out afraid, and said to Gamelyn, 'Sir Ote stands fettered in the moot hall.'

'Young men,' said Gamelyn, 'you have all heard! By God's grace, he shall suffer that put Sir Ote in chains. I will go speak with the justice in the hall! I will be avenged on the guilty! Let none escape by the door—on guard, young men! For I will be justice this day, and pass sentence. God speed my new work! Come, Adam, and act as my clerk.'

'Do your best,' answered his men, 'and when you have need of us you will find us ready.'

'Thanks, my lads,' said Gamelyn; and strode into the hall and stood before the justice. And as he took off his brother's fetters, 'Gamelyn,' said Sir Ote, 'you almost stayed too long. The order for my hanging has gone forth.'

'Brother,' said Gamelyn, 'they shall be hanged this day that gave the order, both the judge and the Sheriff.' Then he turned to the judge and said, 'Get up, your power is ended. You have passed bad sentences, and done much evil; now I will sit in your place and put all right.' But as the judge sat on in his place, Gamelyn struck him on the cheekbone, seized him by the arm, and threw him over the bar, so that his arm was broken; and nobody dared

protest, because of the company outside. So Gamelyn sat down in the judge's seat, with Sir Ote at his side and Adam at his feet.

Then the play began. Gamelyn had the judge and his brother fettered, and brought to the bar; he pressed them to name all who had been concerned in the order for his brother's hanging, and these too he had fettered, brought to the bar, and stood before him in a row.

'Hear me!' said the judge. 'Your brother the Sheriff is a villain.'

Gamelyn answered him, 'And you are the worst judge on the bench! You, and the twelve sisours that were concerned in this, shall be hanged today.'

Then the Sheriff cried to young Gamelyn, 'Mercy, mercy! You are my brother.'

'So much the worse for me,' said Gamelyn, 'if you, and not I, had now the upper hand.'

To make a long story short, he called on his men; and they strung up the judge and the Sheriff to swing on the rope and dry in the wind; and the twelve sisours also they hanged by the neck. So ended the false knight's treachery, who had spent his whole life in lying and folly; and so he may be said to have reaped his father's curse.

Sir Ote was now the elder, and Gamelyn the younger; and they went together to the king with all their friends, and made their peace with him. The king loved Sir Ote dearly, and made him a judge; and Gamelyn he made chief justice of all his forests east and west; and gave free pardons to his gallant young men, and set them in good offices.

So in the end Gamelyn won back his lands and his leases, and avenged himself on his enemies, and dealt them their due; and Sir Ote his brother made him

his heir. In the course of time, Gamelyn wedded a wife as fair as she was good, and they lived together in joy till Gamelyn went to his grave; as must we all, for no man can escape it. God give us joy everlasting.

Amen.

THE MAN OF LAW'S PROLOGUE

OUR Host, looking up at the sky, saw that the sun was in the fourth part of the arc, and the shadow of every tree was exactly as long as its own height. He knew it was the eighteenth of April, so reckoning by the shadows that it must be ten o'clock, he turned in his saddle and said, 'Masters, a quarter of the day has passed. Let us lose no more time, for time, whether stolen from us in our sleep, or lost through idleness in waking, is like a stream that never turns again. That old philosopher Seneca regrets the loss of time more than the loss of gold. If you lose a horse or a cow, says he, you may recover it, but lost time never! So let us not rot in idleness; we'll have another tale. And you, Sir Man of Law,' said he, 'shall come to judgement and tell it.'

'Host,' said the Man of Law, 'I assent. Your command is a debt, and I will acquit it; for a man who deals in the law should stand by the law. I'll tell you a lover's tale of

olden time, the sort of tale that Chaucer has often told as best he can in those poor rhymes of his. But I cannot call on the Muses like a poet. Let Chaucer sing in rhyme, I must follow him with plain fare, and speak prose.'

So saying, he began the following tale:

The Man of Law's Tale

O HATEFUL poverty! how shameful is thy state! Wise men say truly that it is better to die than to be poor. If you are poor your neighbours despise you, your brother hates you, and your friends avoid you. While the rich merchants, with their coffers full, dance merry at Christmas.

Praise to the prudent merchants, who travel abroad to gain gold, and are the bearers of tales and tidings from foreign parts. I myself should lack a tale to tell you now, if I had not heard this one from a merchant many a year ago.

In Syria there dwelt a rich guild of chapmen, who sent their spices, silks, and cloth of gold all over the world. Their goods were so cheap and so new, that people everywhere were eager to deal with them.

It came to pass that the masters of the guild went travelling to Rome, either on business or pleasure, and lodged there for awhile. During their sojourn they heard of nothing, day after day, but the excellent renown of the Emperor's daughter, Constance. This was the common report:

'The Emperor of Rome has such a daughter, that there was never her like for goodness and beauty since the beginning of the world. She ought to be queen of all Europe. She has beauty without vanity, youth without folly, virtue is her guide in everything, and pride is slain

in her by modesty; she is the very mirror of courtesy, her heart is the temple of holiness, and her hand the minister of charity.'

And the voice of the people spoke the truth.

The merchants, having seen this blessed maid, and laden their ships again, sailed back to Syria, where they stood in great favour with the Sultan. Whenever they returned from a journey, he welcomed them to the palace, to hear tidings of the countries they had come from.

This time the merchants told him so much of the Lady Constance that as they spoke the Sultan fell sick for love of her. He sent for his councillors, and told them he pined for Constance, and must die if they could not find a remedy. Some suggested one thing, some another; one spoke of medicine, another of magic; they reasoned, they argued, they disputed, and came to the conclusion at last that the only remedy was marriage.

But they foresaw a difficulty; 'for,' they said, 'no Christian Prince will willingly let his child wed under the law of Mohammed the Prophet.'

The Sultan answered, 'Rather than lose Constance, I will become a Christian. Argue no more if you would save my life, but go and get her who alone can cure me.'

No need to dwell on what followed; by embassies, and the mediation of the Pope, by the decline of Mohammed's law and the increase of Christ's, the marriage was agreed on, on condition of the Sultan and his court becoming Christians, and the payment of a sum of gold, I know not how much. Now, Constance, God protect you!

I have no time to describe the rich provision made by the Emperor for his daughter's wedding, or the bishops, knights, and ladies, who prepared to accompany her. The day for her departure arrived, the woeful, fatal day!

And Constance, pale with sorrow, rose to dress herself, there was no help for it. No wonder she wept to leave the friends who loved her, and go to a strange nation to wed an unknown man.

'Father,' she said, 'and you, dear mother, commend your unhappy child to the grace of Christ; I must go to Syria and shall never see you again. Women are under men's governance, and it is your will that I be sent to a barbarous nation; therefore, commend me to Christ.'

There was no such weeping heard at the fall of Troy as was heard in the room when she took leave of them; but go she must, whether she wept or sang.

Rash Emperor of Rome! Was there no sage in all thy town to warn thee?

The sorrowful maid was brought to the ship with pomp and circumstance. 'Christ be with you!' was her last farewell; and, seeking to compose herself, she sailed away. Now I must turn to other things.

The Sultan's mother was a wicked woman. When she knew her son's intention to abandon his faith, she sent for her own councillors, and spoke as follows:

'My lords, you have all heard how my son is about to renounce the laws of the Koran, spoken through God's messenger Mohammed. Now I have vowed to God that the life shall depart from my body before the law of Mohammed departs from my heart. What shall we reap, by renouncing the Prophet, but penance for our bodies and hell for our souls? My lords, will you abide by my wisdom, and trust in me to save us all for ever?'

They swore to stand by her to the death, and she spoke to them of the plot she had devised.

'At first we will feign to become Christians; a few drops of water won't hurt us; and I shall make such a feast and revel as will lull the Sultan's suspicions. But be his wife

christened never so white, she shall need a whole font of water to wash away the red.'

O wicked Sultana! O serpent in woman's skin! Malignant queen, O nest of every vice!

The Sultana dismissed her council secretly, and rode forth to the Sultan, and told him she would become a Christian, and repent of having been so long a heathen. And she beseeched the honour of holding a feast for the Christians.

'I will do my utmost to please them and you,' she said; and the Sultan answered, 'It shall be as you wish,' and knelt and thanked his mother, but hardly knew what to say, he was so glad. She kissed her son, and went away home.

The Christian folk arrived in Syria, and the Sultan sent word to his mother and everybody in the kingdom to go forth to greet his bride with honour. Magnificent was the meeting between the Syrians and the Romans. The old Sultana, in rich array, received Constance as a mother might her daughter; and they rode to the city as regally as Caesar in his triumph. But under her flattery, the Sultana, like a scorpion, prepared a deadly sting.

The Sultan came to meet them in great splendour, and welcomed his bride joyfully; so, in the very midst of their delight, I come to the fruit of the matter.

The day of the old Sultana's feast arrived, and all the Christians, young and old, were there. It was the costliest feast men ever sat down to, but they paid for it dearly before they rose.

O sudden woe! how swiftly dost thou follow worldly bliss! In a word, the Sultan and all the Christians present were struck down as they sat at table, by order of the cruel old crone who wished to rule the country. Not one of the Syrian converts escaped being hacked to pieces;

Constance alone was spared, and carried hot-foot to a rudderless ship, in which they bade her learn how to sail from Syria back to Italy. They gave her a store of food and clothes, and also the dowry which she had brought with her; and so she sailed forth upon the salt sea. O dear young Constance, the Lord now be thy helmsman!

She commended herself to the care of Christ, saying, 'Lamb of God, that saved the world from sin, preserve my life, or save my soul on the day I am drowned in the deep.'

For years and days Constance drifted about the Grecian seas, expecting many a death from the wild waves before she reached her resting-place. Men may ask, how came she not to die amidst such perils? To this I answer, who saved Daniel in the lions' den?

Or, you may ask, how came she not to be drowned in the sea? I answer again, who preserved Jonah in the maw of the whale?

Then how did this woman get her food and drink, three years and more? Who then fed Mary of Egypt in the desert? Who else but Christ, who could feed five thousand folk with two loaves and five fishes?

At last the winds drove her into our own seas, and under a wood in Northumberland, whose name I know not, a wave cast her boat upon the shore. It stuck so fast in the sand that the tide could not move it again. For here it was Christ's will she should abide.

The Constable of the castle came down to the shore to see the wreck, and found the unhappy woman, and the treasure she had brought with her. In her own tongue she begged him to end her life and her misery, speaking a sort of corrupt Latin which he was able to understand. When she had made her prayer, the Constable brought her safely to his castle, and there she knelt down and thanked

God; but who she was she would tell to no man. She gave out that, bewildered by the sea, she had lost her memory. The Constable and his wife took pity on her, and kept her with them; and she was so diligent to serve them, so eager to please, that all who looked upon her loved her.

The Constable and his wife Hermegyld were heathens; but Hermegyld loved Constance as her life, and after Constance had lodged there for some time, praying for her with tears, the Constable's wife was converted to the faith of Christ.

Now in that country Christians scarcely dared to live; the heathens had driven them out, and they had fled to Wales, the Christian refuge of the ancient Britons. But here and there a few Christians still lived secretly; and close by the castle dwelled three such men, one of whom was blind. One bright summer day the Constable, roaming with his wife and Constance by the sea, was met by this bent old man, with his blind eyes shut.

'In Christ's name, Lady Hermegyld,' cried the old Briton, 'give me my sight again!'

At these words, Hermegyld feared lest her husband should slay her for being a Christian, but Constance bade her be bold, and work the miracle, like a daughter of the holy church.

The Constable was amazed at the sight. 'What does this mean?' said he. Constance answered, 'Sir, Christ has the power to release people from the devil.' And she spoke to him so ardently, that before evening the Constable also was converted.

You must know that the Constable was not the lord of this place; he governed it for Alla, King of Northumberland, of whom more anon.

Now Satan, who lies in wait for us all, cast about for

means to undo Constance in her goodness; and he caused a young knight of that town to love her passionately. He wooed her in vain, she would have nought of him; so he considered how to bring her to a shameful death. Waiting till the Constable was absent, he crept to Hermegyld's room while she was sleeping, with Constance at her side. This knight, tempted by Satan, stole to the bed, cut Hermegyld's throat, and laid the bloody knife by the Lady Constance. Then he went away, and God requite him!

Soon after this the Constable returned, with Alla the King; and when he saw his dead wife he wept freely, and wrung his hands. What could Constance say, on whom the bloody knife was found? Her wits were almost turned, she could say nothing.

The dreadful deed was told to Alla the King, and also the tale of Constance's coming thither in the ship. The King's heart swelled for pity of the lovely creature brought to such a pass. She stood before him like an innocent lamb brought to the knife, while the guilty knight accused her before them all; and there was great mourning among the people, who could hardly believe that she could do such wickedness. Everyone in the Constable's house bore witness that she had lived virtuously, loving Hermegyld as her life. And the good king, moved by their testimony, decided to inquire deeper into the case.

O Constance, where is thy champion to fight for thee? Christ be thy shield, or guiltless thou must die!

Kneeling she said, 'Father in Heaven, who saved Susannah from false accusation, if I am innocent, succour me from death.'

Then pale of face she stood and looked about her: an Emperor's daughter standing there alone, far from her friends, with none to come to her aid.

The tears ran down from King Alla's eyes for pity.

'Fetch a book,' said he, 'and let the knight swear upon it that she slew the woman.'

A Book of the Evangels was brought, and on this he swore that she was guilty; the next moment a hand smote him on his neck-bone, and he fell down like a stone in everybody's sight. And a Voice, heard by all, said: 'Thou hast slandered an innocent daughter of the Church. Shalt thou do this, and I hold my peace?'

This miracle terrified the people. They stood amazed with fear, excepting only Constance. And by it, through the maiden's mediation, the King and many others were converted to the faith. Soon after, Alla married the holy maid with due solemnity, and so Christ raised the lovely Constance to be queen.

Only one face looked darkly on the wedding: the cruel face of Domegild, the King's mother. She hated her son's mating with this strange woman.

A little while after the wedding, Alla went to Scotland to fight his foes, leaving his wife in charge of the Constable and a bishop. Before his return, Constance bore him a son, whom she called Maurice; and the Constable wrote the glad news to the King, and dispatched a messenger with the letter. The messenger, to further his advantage, went first to the King's mother. 'Madam,' he saluted her, 'rejoice and thank God. The Queen has a child. I am bearing this sealed letter to the King; if you would also send him anything, I am your servant.'

Domegild answered, 'My letter is not written. Rest here tonight, and in the morning it will be ready for you.'

That night the messenger drank deep of ale and wine, and while he slept like a hog his letter was stolen from him, and replaced by a false letter as from the Constable to the King. It said that the Queen's child was so horrible

a monster that no one dared to stay in the castle; and that the mother herself was a witch, whom all men feared.

On reading the letter the King was stricken with grief, and wrote with his own hand: 'My Lord, I charge you keep both my wife and this child, be it foul or fair, until my home-coming. May God in His own time send me a better heir.' Weeping, he sealed this letter, and gave it to the messenger, to bear home again.

O witless messenger! O Domegild, for whom no words are bad enough!

The messenger returned on his way from the King, and rested, as before, at Domegild's court. Once more she made him welcome, and gave him to drink, so that he slept all night till the sun rose; once more she stole his letter, and counterfeited another: 'The King commands his Constable, on pain of hanging, that he shall not suffer Constance to remain in the kingdom longer than three days and an hour; he shall put her and her child and all her things, into the ship in which he found her, and launch her on the sea, charging her never to return.'

When the messenger woke in the morning, he made his way to the castle, and gave the letter to the Constable; who, when he had read it, mourned and sighed, 'Alas! how can the world endure, so full of sin? The wicked prosper, and the innocent suffer. O woe, that I must be your executioner, Constance, or die myself a shameful death.'

All wept to hear the letter of the King; and on the fourth day Constance, deadly pale, went to her ship. Yet still she submitted herself to the will of Christ, and kneeling on the shore she said, 'Christ, thy will be done! My trust is in thee, who kept me once before from harm on the salt sea.' Then she said tenderly to the weeping babe upon her arm, 'Peace, little son, I will do you no harm.'

And she took off her head-kerchief, and covered his eyes, and lulled him on her arm. 'Mother Mary,' said she, 'who saw her child slain before her eyes, O star of day, take pity on my little living child, that has never sinned. My little child, why would your father kill you? Mercy, dear Constable,' she begged, 'and let my child stay with you; or if you dare not, kiss him once in his father's name.' Then, looking backward to the land, she said, 'Farewell, pitiless husband!' and rose and walked to the ship with the crowd behind her; and never ceased to hush her child. She took her leave of all, blessed them, and got into the ship. It was provided abundantly with food, and everything that was necessary for a long voyage. And so she sailed away upon the sea. God shield her from wind and water, and bring her safe!

Soon after this, Alla the King came home to the castle, and asked for his wife and child. The Constable's heart turned cold; he told the King plainly all that had happened, just as you have heard it, and showed the royal seal on the letter, saying, 'Lord I have done as you commanded me, on pain of death.'

On this they sent for the messenger and questioned him closely, till they had got from him where he had stayed night by night on the way; and so they guessed at last the root of the matter. When he knew who had written the accursed letter, Alla went straight to his mother and slew her for her treachery; and that was the end of old Domegild.

Tongue cannot tell how Alla grieved, by night and day, for his wife and child. Let me turn to Constance, sailing the sea in sorrow, five years and more, before her ship touched land. She was cast ashore at last beneath a heathen castle, whose name I do not know. Out of the castle poured a stream of people, to gaze upon the ship, and on

her; and the steward of the castle, a rogue who had renounced our faith, would have seized her for himself, whether she would or no. She struggled with him, weeping piteously; and the blessed Mary saved her, for in the struggle he fell overboard into the sea, and was drowned. And do you ask whence this weak woman got the strength to defend herself against the villain? I answer, who gave David the power to slay Goliath, and Judith to deliver her people from Holofernes? Even so, God sent the power to Constance in her need.

Forth went her ship again, now west, now north or south, now east, for many a weary day; till the blessed Mother of Christ designed the end of her woe.

But let us leave Constance for awhile, and speak of the Roman Emperor, who had learned by letters from Syria of the slaughter of the Christians at the feast, and the dishonour done to his daughter by the Sultana long ago: for which the Emperor sent his senators and soldiers to take vengeance on the Syrians, by sword and fire; which done, they returned to Rome. On the way home, the ship of the chief Senator, returning victorious, met the little boat of Constance, in her piteous plight. Dressed as she was, he did not know her again, and she would rather have died than tell him. He took her back with him to Rome, and gave her and her little son into the care of his wife, and there she dwelt a long time, doing good works. And this same Senator's wife was, although she did not know it, her own aunt. Now leaving Constance in safe keeping, I will speak again of King Alla.

King Alla, having slain his mother, fell into a state of such repentance that he decided to go to Rome to do penance, and receive absolution of the Pope. The fame of his pilgrimage went before him by his servants, come to Rome to provide him with lodgings; and the Senator,

with many others, rode forth in state to welcome the King. Great honour did the Romans show to the King, and he to them again; and after a few days this Senator was bidden by King Alla to a feast, and the son of Constance went there in his company. And between the courses, as he had been bid by his mother, the child stood forth and looked in the King's face.

Alla, the King, wondered greatly at the child, and asked the Senator, 'Whose fair child stands yonder?'

'I only know,' said the Senator, 'that he has a mother, but no father.' And thereupon he told Alla how the child had been found. 'And never in my life,' the Senator added, 'have I seen so virtuous a woman as she, be it maid or wedded wife.'

Now this child was as like Constance as it is possible for a creature to be; and Alla, having his lady's face in remembrance, mused upon it, wondering whether the child's mother could be his wife. 'My head is full of phantoms,' he thought, 'for I should be sure by now that my wife is drowned in the salt sea.' But then he argued again, 'How do I know that Christ has not sent her safe hither, even as he sent her before into my country?' And when the Senator went home at noon, Alla went with him, to see if this were so.

The Senator, greatly honoured, sent for Constance to come to the King; and believe me, when she knew why she was sent for, she could scarcely stand upright on her feet.

When Alla saw his wife, he greeted her gladly, and wept freely; for at the first glance he knew that it was she. She stood before him dumb as a tree for sorrow; so distressed was her heart when she remembered his unkindness.

Twice she swooned before his very eyes; he wept, and

told her, 'By all the saints, I am as guiltless towards you as is Maurice, my son.'

But she sobbed long and bitterly before her heart was eased; I pray you to excuse me from speaking more of their sorrow, it grieves me too much.

When finally the truth was known, that Alla was innocent of wrong to her, they kissed a hundred times, and there was more joy between them than ever was before. Presently she entreated her husband to invite her father, the Emperor, to dine with him before long; but to say to him no word of herself. Some say that the child Maurice took the message to the Emperor; but I, for my part, think Alla would not send by any child a message to the flower of Christian sovereigns, and I believe he went himself, as was most fitting.

The Emperor courteously agreed to come to dinner, and Alla returned to his lodging and had the feast prepared.

When the morrow came, Alla and his wife rode forth to meet the Emperor; and on seeing her father in the street, she alit and fell at his feet. 'Father,' she said, 'your young daughter, Constance, is now clean out of your remembrance. But I am she whom you sent long since to Syria, I am she that was launched alone on the salt sea to die. I cry you mercy, good father! Send me no more to heathen lands, but thank my lord here for his kindness to me.'

What tongue can tell the joy between those three, now met together? The day goes by, and I must make an end. I leave these happy people sitting at meat in joy and bliss. Farewell! My tale is done. Christ send us all joy after sorrow, and have us in his keeping.

THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE

'WELL, sirs,' said she, 'nobody can speak better than I of the miseries of marriage; for since I was twelve years old I have been to the church door with five husbands, thank God, and all good men of their kind. True enough, Christ went but once to a wedding in Cana; and by that you may say I should have been married only once. But look at King Solomon! *He* had more than one wife, and I've the right to at least half his number, in husbands. So thank God for my five, and welcome to the sixth, when he comes along. When did God ever command a woman to keep single, tell me that! White bread for maids, barley bread for wives—and barley bread's as good as white bread, any day. No! Husbands I must and will have, and as long as I live I'll be my husband's master.'

Up started the Pardoner. 'You're a nice preacher, dame!

I was about to marry a wife myself—but if the wife is master, I'd liefer marry no wife at all.'

'Wait a bit,' said she, 'my tale is not begun. Before I'm done telling the trials of marriage, you shall drink a bitterer draught than ale.'

'Tell your tale, dame, spare no man,' said the Pardoner, 'and teach us young men what you know.'

'Certainly,' said she, 'and let none here take offence if I speak in my own way. May I never drink wine or ale again, sirs, if I don't tell the truth. Three of my husbands were good, and two were bad; two of them were rich and old, as well as good. Lord! I can't help laughing when I think how I kept 'em under my thumb. They gave me everything they had in lands and money; but they'd never ha' got the Dunmow Flitch in Essex. Oh, I knew how to govern 'em, and make 'em bring me gewgaws from the fair! They were only too glad when I spoke nicely to 'em, for, Lord knows, I could scold like a shrew! I loved my fifth husband the best. His name was Jenkyn, and he had been a clerk. Before we were wed I would walk with him and my gossip in the fields. But after we were wed he would read all night in a book full of tales, about Eve who brought mankind to wretchedness, and Samson who had his hair cut while he slept, and Hercules who set himself afire, and Socrates who was troubled with two wives, and Lucy who poisoned her husband—but you'd never suppose how much his reading vexed me! One night, all of a sudden, I tore three leaves out of his book, and struck him on the cheek so that he fell over backward. Then up he jumped and knocked me down, and I lay on the floor as though I was dead. That gave him a fright! He would have made off, but I came out of my swoon and said, "You've killed me, you thief, all to get my money! Yet I'm not so dead that I can't kiss you."

So he came and kneeled down by me and said, "Dear Alison, I'll never strike you again. But it was all your fault." So I hit him on the cheek again, and said, "Take that, thief! Now I *am* dead, and can't speak a word." But there! we made it up at last, and he let me have my way in everything, and he burnt that book in the fire. God bless me! I was as kind a wife to him as you would find from Denmark to India. Rest his soul in peace. And now, if you like, I'll tell you my tale.'

The Friar laughed heartily. 'Well, well, dame,' said he, 'there's a long preamble to a story.'

'Ha!' said the Summoner. 'A friar must always be poking in.'

'You think so, Master Summoner!' said the Friar. 'Then I vow, when I tell my tale, it shall raise the laugh against a summoner.'

'And before we come to Sittingbourne,' said the Summoner, 'I will tell a tale of a friar that will make your heart sore.'

'Peace!' cried our Host, 'and let the woman tell her tale. You carry on like folk that have drunk too much. Come, let's have your tale, dame.'

'I'm ready, sir,' said she, 'if the Friar gives me leave.'

'Yes, dame,' said he, 'tell away, and I'll listen.'

The Wife of Bath's Tale

In the good old days of King Arthur, this land was filled with fairies, and the elf-queen and her jolly company danced in many a green meadow. So men said, at least; I speak of many hundreds of years ago, but no man sees the elves now. They've been driven out by the friars, who go through the land as thick as motes in a sunbeam, blessing

halls, chambers, kitchens and bowers, cities, towns and castles, villages, barns, sheepfolds, and dairies. Wherever an elf used to be, you'll find a friar now saying his prayers.

Well, it so happened that this King Arthur had among his knights a jolly young fellow, who, as he came riding one day from hawking, insulted a maiden he found walking alone. For which he was condemned to lose his head, and would have done, only the Queen and her ladies so pleaded with the King that at last he gave the Knight up to the Queen, to be slain or saved as she pleased. The Queen thanked the King heartily, and had the Knight brought to her.

'Don't be too certain of your life,' said she; 'I'll grant it you if you can tell me what thing it is that women desire most. Only this can save your neck. If you do not know the answer, I give you leave to travel for a twelvemonth and a day to find it. But before you go you must swear to present yourself when the time comes.'

The Knight sighed, but had no choice. He agreed to go and come again at the end of the year with whatever answer God had helped him to; and he took his leave, and set out. He went from house to house in the hope of discovering what thing women love most; but he could not find two men who were agreed upon this point. Some said women love riches best, some said honour, some said fun; some, fine dresses, some, being many times wedded and widowed; one said we like flattery better than anything—and he wasn't so far out, neither! for we may often be won with little attentions. And some said we like freedom best, and doing what we like with no man to reprove us. While some said that our delight is to be held so trustworthy that we will never betray a man's secret—but that opinion wasn't worth a pin! For we women can't keep secrets.

Well, when this Knight failed to find out for certain what it is that women love most, his heart was heavy in his breast. At last the day came when he must turn home. It happened that his way lay through a forest, and as he rode he saw at a little distance four-and-twenty ladies dancing. He went towards the dance, hoping to learn some wisdom of them; but before he reached them they vanished, he knew not where. No living thing remained except an old woman sitting on the grass, the ugliest old wretch you can imagine. This hag rose up and said, 'Sir Knight, there's no way out of the wood here. Tell me what you seek, for it may be I can help you; old folk know much,' said she.

'Good mother,' said the Knight, 'I am a dead man if I cannot find out what thing it is that women most desire. Tell me that, and I'll pay you well.'

'Plight your troth,' said she, 'to do the first thing I require of you, if it be in your power, and I will tell you the answer before nightfall.'

'By my troth I swear it,' said the Knight.

'Your life is saved,' said she, 'for I wager my life the Queen will agree with me; not even the proudest among women will dare say No to my wisdom.' Then she whispered in his ear, and bade him take heart.

When they reached the court, the Knight sent word that he had come with his answer, according to his promise. Many a noble wife, maid, and widow were assembled to hear him, the Queen herself presiding as the judge; the Knight was summoned, and silence was commanded, while he should tell the audience what thing women love best.

When the question had been put, the Knight spoke out in a manly voice that all the court could hear. 'My liege lady,' said he, 'a woman desires above all things to have

power over her husband, and to be his master. This is her greatest desire, though you kill me for it. Now do with me as you will.'

Not a wife, widow, or maid in all the court denied what he said; but agreed that he had earned his life. No sooner had they spoken than the old hag rose up before them.

'Mercy, Lady Queen!' said she, 'and see me righted. I taught this Knight the answer; for which he plighted himself to do the first thing I required, if it lay in his power. Before this court,' said she, 'I pray you, Sir Knight, to take me for your wife, for I, as you well know have saved your head; deny this if you can upon your oath!'

'Alas!' said the Knight, 'such was indeed the bargain. But for love of God choose again; take all I have, and let my body go.'

'No,' said she, 'old and poor and ugly as I am, I would not exchange you and your love for all the gold in the ground.'

'My love!' he cried. 'No, no, my curse! Horror, that any of my blood should come to this!'

But nothing availed him; in the end he was obliged by his oath to take her for his wife.

You would all, I suppose, like to hear of the joy and splendour of the marriage-feast; but to put it shortly, there was neither feast nor joy that day, only fasting and sorrow. For shame, he married her secretly in the morning, and all day hid himself like an owl, moping out of sight of his hideous bride. And at night he tossed in bed, and moaned for grief. But his old wife lay smiling at his side, and said, 'Bless you, dear husband! Is this how a knight should treat his bride? Is this King Arthur's law? I am your own love, your wife, she who saved your life; I never injured you, yet you behave towards me like a

madman. For the love of God, tell me my fault, and I'll mend it if I can.'

'Mend it!' groaned the Knight. 'Oh no, it can never be mended again! How can you wonder that I moan, when you are so old, so loathsome, and so lowly-born?'

'Is this the cause of your restlessness?' said she.

'It is,' said he, 'and no wonder!'

'Well, sir,' said she, 'I could mend all this if I liked, before three days were older, so you were kinder to me. You pride yourself on your gentle birth—bear yourself like a gentleman, then! I wouldn't give a hen for pride like yours. He is the greatest gentleman who does the gentlest deeds; and Christ was a greater gentleman than all your old nobility. What do your noble ancestors give you but a name that can be hurt? If nobleness were natural to all who bear noble names, then we should never see vice and villainy in the great. But many a lord's son has done a shameful thing; and he that boasts of his gentility, yet does ungentle things, is not a gentleman, whether he be duke or earl. From God alone comes gentleness; and therefore, dear husband, although my ancestors were common men, yet God may grant me grace to live virtuously.

'As for my poverty, God himself chose to live poor; reprove me no more for my poverty.

'As for my age, is it not written that you should reverence the aged?

'As for my ugliness, it is your surety, that no other man than you will ever love me.

'Now choose,' said she, 'one of these two things: either to have me old and ugly till I die, to be your true and humble wife, who never will displease you; or else to have me young and fair, and take your chance. Choose for yourself whichever you prefer.'

The Knight pondered, sighing deeply; but at last he answered her thus: 'My lady, my love, and my dear wife, I put myself in your hands. Choose that which will be most pleasant and honourable to us both, and what pleases you will content me.'

'Then I have got the mastery of you,' said she. 'And I may rule and choose as I like?'

'Yes, wife,' said he, 'I think it best.'

'Kiss me,' said she, 'and be angry no longer. For, by my troth, I will be both things to you, that is, I will be both beautiful and good. May I die witless if I am not as true a wife to you as any since the world was created; and do with me as you please, if tomorrow I am not as fair as any lady to be seen twixt east and west. Draw the curtains, and look on me.'

And when the Knight looked upon her, she was so young and fair that he took her in his arms for joy; and bathed in bliss they kissed a thousand times.

And so they lived in perfect joy to the end of their lives. May Jesus Christ send us all meek young husbands, and the power to rule them; and may he shorten all their lives that won't be governed by their wives. And as for all surly old niggards, a plague upon 'em!

THE FRIAR'S PROLOGUE

'WELL said, dame!' cried the mendicant Friar, who was always poking fun at the Summoner. 'Your tale has touched on a great problem. But let there be no preaching, I say, in these tales of ours! They should deal chiefly with jests, and I know a good one about a summoner. As you all know, nothing good can be said of a summoner.'

Our Host broke in: 'Come, sir, don't let's start quarrelling. Friars should be civil-spoken. Tell your tale, and let the Summoner be.'

'Nay,' said the Summoner, 'let him say what he likes. When my turn comes, I'll get even with him. I'll soon let him know what a fine thing it is to be a lying, flattering friar!'

'Peace, no more of this!' said our Host. And turning to the Friar he said, 'Tell your tale, dear master.'

The Friar's Tale

A GREAT Archdeacon once lived in my country, who was very severe upon evil-doers, and was kept busy dealing out punishments for witchcraft, scandal, cheating, and sins of all sorts. This Archdeacon had the slyest fellow in England for his Summoner, to hunt up the evil-doers and bring them to book: which Summoner was, as I don't mind telling you, a very vile man.

Here the Summoner broke in upon the Friar's tale. 'By Peter!' quoth he.

'Don't interrupt,' said our Host. 'Take no notice of the Summoner, but tell your tale and spare nothing, dear master.'

This thief of a summoner, said the Friar, had a band of spies who served him by prying out sinners; out of whom he made great profit, getting them to fill his purse by promising not to tell on them to the Archdeacon. Judas was not half the thief this Summoner was; he robbed his master of more than half his dues. He would catch sinners in the very act, and accept their bribes, saying, 'For your sake, friend, I'll cross you off the black list; count on me!' And so he made a pretty penny out of them.

One day this Summoner, ever on the look-out for prey, was riding to the house of an old widow, against whom he had made up a false charge, to get a bribe out of her. Presently he saw a jolly Yeoman riding ahead of him by the edge of a forest; the man carried a bow and a sheaf of bright arrows, and wore a short green cloak and a hat with black fringes.

'All hail, sir!' cried the Summoner.

You're welcome,' answered the other. 'Whither are you riding by the greenwood? Do you go far today?'

'Only a short way,' said the Summoner. 'I am going to collect a sum that is due to my master.'

'Oh, you're a bailiff, then?'

'Yes,' said he; he durst not, for very shame, confess he was that low thing, a summoner.

'There, now!' said the Yeoman, 'you're a bailey, brother, and I'm another. But I'm a stranger in these parts; so I'd be glad of your company. Let us be brothers. I've a chestful of gold and silver at home, and if ever you chance to come our way, you shall have as much as you want.'

'A thousand thanks!' said the Summoner; and grasping hands they swore the bond of brotherhood till death.

The Summoner, who was as full of curiosity as an adder of venom, began asking questions. 'Where do you live, brother,' he said, 'if ever I should want to look you up?'

'My dwelling is a long way up north,' replied the Yeoman, 'where I hope some day to see you. Before we part I'll instruct you so that you can't possibly miss my house.'

'Now, brother,' said the Summoner, 'seeing we're both bailiffs, teach me some of your cunning as we ride, and tell me how you manage.'

'Why, to tell the truth, brother,' answered the Yeoman, 'my wages are small, my master is strict, and my work is laborious; so I live by extortions, and take anything I can squeeze out of a man, by force or cunning. That's how I live from year to year, as I'm an honest man.'

'To tell the truth, so do I,' said the Summoner. 'Without extortions I could not live. So well met to you! And now, dear brother, tell me your name.'

The Yeoman smiled a little. 'Do you really want to know, brother?' said he. 'I am a devil, and my dwelling is in Hell. And like yourself I ride about the world, getting

the utmost out of men; and they pay me with their souls, which are my rents.'

'Bless me!' said the Summoner. 'I thought you were a real yeoman. You have a man's shape, like my own. Have you another shape in Hell?'

'No,' said he, 'in Hell we have no shape at all; but we can assume any shape we like, from an ape to an angel.'

'Why don't you keep to one shape?' asked the Summoner.

'Because,' said the devil, 'we always use the shape which will best catch our prey. Come, gallop, Summoner, gallop! I'll keep you company till you forsake me.'

'Nay, I won't do that,' said the Summoner. 'I'll keep my bond with you though you were Satan himself. We've sworn to be brothers; go about your business, getting what men will give you, and I'll do the same, and if either of us gets more than the other, he shall share it as with his own brother.'

'Agreed!' said the devil, and on they rode.

On their way they saw, at the end of a town, a carter driving a cart loaded with hay. The road was heavy-going, and the cart had stuck, and the carter was beating his horse like a madman.

'Come up, you beast!' cried he. 'Devil take you, body and bones! You're more trouble than you're worth. May the fiend fly away with cart, horse, and hay!'

The Summoner said to himself, 'Now we shall see something!' and he whispered in the devil's ear, 'Did you hear what the carter said? He has made you a present of his cart, his hay, and his nag!'

'Not a bit of it,' answered the devil, 'stand by awhile, and you'll see how much he means it.'

The carter thwacked his horse on the crupper, and it began to heave and pull. 'Come up, my own boy!' cried

the carter. 'God bless you! That was well done, good dapple! Long life to you, say I! My cart is out of the rut.'

'What did I tell you, brother?' said the devil. 'The carter said one thing, and thought another. Let us get on; I've nothing to gain here.'

When they had left the town behind them, the Summoner said to the devil, 'Brother, there's an old hag near here who'd almost rather have her neck wrung than part with a penny. But if I don't get twelvepence out of her, may another man have my job; even though she's committed no sin that I know of. Now mark me!' The Summoner knocked at the widow's door. 'Come out, old vixen!' he cried.

'Who knocks?' said the widow, coming to the door. 'God bless you, sir! What's your sweet pleasure?'

'I've a summons for you,' said he, 'and you must appear in court tomorrow, to answer to certain things before the Archdeacon.'

'Heaven help me,' said she, 'I can never go so far! I get such a stitch in the side. Can't I get a lawyer to answer the libel for me, whatever it may be?'

'Yes,' said the Summoner, 'if you'll pay me—let me see —say twelvepence, I'll let you off. Not that I shall get anything out of it! My master takes the profit, not I. Come, make haste, give me my twelvepence, for I'm in a hurry.'

'Twelvepence!' cried she. 'I haven't twelvepence in the world. You know how old and poor I am. Have mercy on a poor creature, do!'

'Devil take me if I let you off,' said the Summoner.

'But I haven't a penny,' said she.

'If you don't pay up,' said the Summoner, 'I swear by Saint Anne to take your new frying-pan, for that old debt you owe me.'

'You lie!' said she. 'I never owed you anything. May the devil take you along of my pan!'

When the devil heard her say this, he asked, 'Do you really mean it, good mother?'

'I do,' said she. 'If he doesn't repent, may the devil fetch him before his time, pan and all!'

'Repent, old hag!' said the Summoner. 'I'll repent of nothing I ever got out of you. I'd strip you of your last shred, if I could.'

'Softly, brother,' said the devil. 'The pan and your body have become mine, by right; and you shall go back to Hell with me this very night.'

And with that, the devil seized him; and he had to go, body and soul, to the rightful home of all summoners. May God, who made man in his own image, guide and protect us all, and teach this Summoner here repentance before the devil gets him.

THE SUMMONER'S PROLOGUE

THE Summoner stood up in his stirrup with rage, and shook like an aspen leaf, so wild was he with the Friar. 'Master,' he said, 'I only ask one thing; since you have listened to the Friar's lies, let me now tell *my* tale. This Friar boasts of his knowledge of Hell, and no wonder, say I! Did you ever hear of the friar that once went to Hell in a vision, and was led up and down by an angel, who showed him round the torments? But among all the tormented, he saw never a friar; so he asked the angel, "Pray, sir, are friars so favoured that none of them come to this place?" "Millions of them are here," said the angel; and he bade Satan lift up his tail, which was as broad as a mainsail. And as the devil lifted his tail, out ran twenty thousand friars, like bees swarming out of a hive. And that, sirs, is where they keep all the friars in Hell. I warrant you, this friar I speak of quaked for fear when he

came out of his trance! Well, God bless you all, except our friend the Friar here. My prologue's ended, and my tale's begun.'

The Summoner's Tale

THERE is in England a marshy land called Holderness, in which a mendicant Friar was wont to wander, first to preach and then to beg. He would stop to preach a sermon in some church, get all he could out of the folk who gathered to hear him, and then call at every house to poke and pry for whatever he could get: meal, or cheese, or corn, as might be. He wrote down on a pair of ivory tablets the names of all who gave to him, promising to pray for them.

'Give us a bushel of wheat,' he'd whine, 'give us some malt, or rye, or cheese, a penny, or a halfpenny; give us a cut off your brawn, good man, give us a scrap of your blanket, dear dame! Look, sister, I'll write your name down, for a portion of beef, or bacon, or anything else you can scrape up.' A servant went behind him with a sack, and everything he got was put into it; and as soon as he had left the door, he rubbed out the name he had last written in his tablet.

'Nay, there thou liest, Master Summoner!' cried the Friar.

'Don't interrupt!' said our Host. 'Tell your tale, Summoner, and spare nothing.'

'So I will,' said the Summoner.

At last this Friar came to a house in which he was used to find better refreshment than anywhere else. This day he found the master of the house lying sick upon his bed.

'God be with you, friend Thomas!' said the Friar softly,

and driving the cat off the bench with his staff, he laid down hat and scrip, and made himself at home.

'Well, dear Master Friar,' said the sick man, 'how have you fared this March? I haven't set eyes on you for a fortnight.'

'I've laboured hard,' said the Friar, 'and especially for your salvation. Where's your wife?'

'Out in the yard,' said the man, 'just coming in.'

The wife entered, saying, 'Eh, master, welcome! How do you do?'

'Right well, dame,' chirped the Friar, embracing her courteously. 'Your very good servant. There was not a woman in church today so fair as you.'

'You're always welcome,' she simpered.

'So I've found, dame. Now, seeing your husband is sick, shan't I probe his conscience a little, and shrive him? Your curates hereabouts are always too lazy to take trouble with a man's conscience.'

'Do, dear sir, and I give you leave to scold him soundly,' said she, 'for he's that peevish there's no pleasing him!'

'Oh fie, Thomas, fie!' said the Friar. 'Anger comes from the devil, and is forbidden by God. I'll say a word to him, dame, while you go get dinner; I don't want much, just the liver of a capon, and a slice of your white bread, and a roast pig's head to follow. Now, brother Thomas, take my word for it, we pray for you in our chapel day and night, and if we did not you would never thrive at all.'

'God knows,' fumed the sick man, 'I don't feel the good of it! Yet I've spent my money on all sorts of friars, till my gold is nearly gone.'

'But Thomas, why?' asked the Friar. 'What need have you of all sorts of friars? When a man has one perfect

doctor, why seek others? You only hurt yourself by this shilly-shallying. Leave it all to me and my convent. What! Give a half-quartern of oats to this convent, four-and-twenty groats to that, a penny to such-and-such a friar, and so on? No, no, Thomas, you shouldn't. What good is a farthing divided into twelve parts? United we stand, divided we fall. I tell you plainly, Thomas, that you are undoing all our labour for you. Isn't the workman worthy of his hire? Now, dear Thomas, don't get angry. Let me hear your confession.'

'No, by Saint Simon!' swore the sick man. 'I have already been shriven once today by my curate, and he knows all about me.'

'Then at least,' said the Friar, 'give me something towards the building of our cloister; we've hardly laid our foundation stone yet, and already owe forty pounds for stones. If you don't help us, we shall have to sell our books, and the world will be destroyed. So, for Saint Charity, Thomas!' And he went down on his knees.

By now the sick man saw through the Friar's tricks, and was nearly beside himself with rage. 'Well,' he said, 'there's one thing in my possession that I'll give to you and nobody else; on this condition only—you must first swear, dear brother Friar, that every friar in your convent shall share equally what I give you without fail or fraud.'

'I swear it, on my faith,' said the Friar.

'Then lean down to me,' said the sick man, 'for I keep this special thing under my tongue.'

'Ah,' thought the Friar, 'it must be some jewel he has tucked in his cheek!' But as he bent down, the sick man gave a great sounding sigh, and breathed the smell of onions full in the Friar's face.

The Friar started back like an enraged lion. 'Ha! you

false rogue!' he cried. 'You've done this out of spite. May you live to regret it!'

The sick man's household heard the noise, and running in they chased the Friar out of doors; and the Friar, grinding his teeth, went his way to the court of the Lord of the Manor, to whom he was confessor. He found the Lord at meat, and could scarcely splutter out his 'God be with you!' for fury.

The Lord looked up and said, 'Hello, Friar John! What's amiss?'

'Sir,' said the Friar, 'I have been spited this day by one in your village. I can hardly tell you how.'

'Still, tell me, and I'll see if it can be amended,' said the Lord. So the Friar told him what had passed.

The Lady of the house said, 'Well, well! what a tale!' and the Lord said, 'What a wit the fellow had! Was ever friar set such a problem before? For though he is on his oath to do it, how can he divide the sound of a sigh and the smell of an onion? It is an impossibility!'

Now the Lord's Squire, who carved his meat at table, had heard the tale too, and he said, 'By your leave, my lord, I wager a new gown that I could tell the Friar how to share this thing with his convent.'

'If you can,' said the Lord, 'by Saint John, you shall have your gown!'

'Then, my lord,' said the Squire, 'when it is a fine day, with no wind blowing, let a great cartwheel be brought into this hall, with all its twelve spokes; and since a convent consists of thirteen friars, let the other twelve friars be brought, your good confessor here making up the number. Let the twelve friars kneel down with one accord, and lay each a nose to the end of one of the twelve spokes; and let your confessor, having eaten well of onions, be set in the middle of the wheel, with his mouth

to the hub. Then let him utter a mighty sigh, and I vow, by this demonstration it will be proved that the sound of the sigh and the smell of the onions will travel equally to the ends of the spokes; and your worthy confessor will have enjoyed the first fruits. In this way, every friar in his convent will have an equal share in what he received today.'

The Lord and the Lady and every man present (with the exception of the Friar) said that the Squire had solved the problem as well as Euclid himself; and so young Jankyn won his new gown. My tale is done, and here we are at the town.

THE CLERK OF OXFORD'S PROLOGUE

'SIR CLERK OF OXFORD,' said our Host, 'you ride as quiet and modest as a newly-wed maid at the feast. I haven't heard you open your mouth today; no doubt you are deep in study, but there's a time for all things, as King Solomon said. Give over studying, and tell us a merry tale; for you must take your part in the game with the rest. And mind, no preaching to make us weep for our sins, like some old friar in Lent; nor let your tale send us to sleep, neither. A lively tale of adventure is what we like—and none of your learned terms and mathematics. Put aside all your long words, till you need 'em to write to the King; but speak to us plain men in plain words that we can understand.'

The Clerk answered mildly, 'Sir Host, I am under your orders, and will obey you as best I can. I will tell you a tale told me in Padua, by a beautiful writer who is now

dead. His name was Francis Petrarch, the laureate, and his sweet tongue lit up all Italy with poetry; yet he had to die, as we all must. This is his tale.'

The Clerk of Oxford's Tale

PART ONE

AT the western end of Italy, at the foot of Mount Vesulus, there is a fertile plain, rich in produce, where you may see, among other pleasant sights, many a town and castle founded in olden times by our fathers. The name of this noble province is Saluce.

A Lord once dwelt in that land who was served in perfect obedience by all his people, high and low; and, favoured by fortune, he lived in enjoyment, beloved and feared by both his lords and commons.

This young Lord's name was Walter, and he was of the gentlest blood in Lombardy. He was handsome, youthful, strong, and full of honour, and ruled his country prudently; yet he was not without faults. He was to blame in this, that he never thought on the future, but only of his present joy in hunting and hawking; all else he would let slide, and, worst of all, refused to take a wife.

His people felt this so sorely, that one day they flocked into his hall, and the wisest of them addressed him thus:

'Your mercy, noble Lord! Give us leave to tell you our complaint. Because you, my dear Lord, have always showed me favour, I dare ask audience for our request, and leave you to grant it as you may.

'My Lord, we love you so, and all your works, that we could not live in more felicity; except for one thing only:

if it were your will to be married, our hearts would be at rest.

'Bow then your neck under the happy yoke, not of service, but of wedlock; bethink you how, whether we sleep, or wake, or roam, or ride, time flies, and stays for no man. And though your green youth is still in its flower, age rolls towards you like a heavy stone.

'Let us then, Lord, with your consent, choose you a wife from the highest in the land. For if it should befall (as God forbid) that your line should die with you, and a strange inheritor succeed, Oh! woe upon us all! Therefore, we pray you, be quick to take a wife.'

Their humble prayer and pitiful faces moved the Lord deeply. 'My own dear people,' said he, 'you would constrain me to that I have never thought of; I have rejoiced in the liberty so seldom found in marriage; now I am free, then I might be bound. Nevertheless, I see the wisdom of your words; so of my own free will I consent to wed as soon as ever I may. But you must leave me to choose my wife for myself. And whoever she be, I charge you on your lives to worship her in word and deed as long as she lives, as though she were an emperor's daughter. If you will not agree to this, I pray you speak to me no more upon the matter.'

They took the oath heartily, and begged him, before they left, to set the wedding-day as soon as might be. So he named the day on which he would be wedded; and they knelt and thanked him humbly, and went home.

Straightway he commanded his stewards to prepare a banquet, and issued orders to his knights and squires; and each of them was diligent to serve him, and do honour to the feast.

PART TWO

Not far from the noble palace of this Lord, there stood a pleasant village where the poor folk tended their flocks and pastures, and toiled to get their living from the bounty of the land.

Among these poor folk dwelt a man who was the poorest of them all; yet Almighty God may bless even an ox's lowly stall. The man was called Janicula; he had a daughter fair to see, and the name of this young maiden was Griselda.

This modest beauty was one of the fairest under the sun; she had been reared in poverty and virtue, drank oftener of well-water than wine, and knew toil without ease. But though this maiden was of tender age, in her young breast were wisdom and steadfastness. She tended her poor old father with reverence, and span in the fields as she watched her few sheep. Griselda was never idle till she slept. Her bed was hard, she lived on herbs and simples, and her father was always her first thought and care.

Many a time when the Lord was out hunting his eye had fallen on this humble girl; he regarded her, not lightly, but seriously, and praised in his heart her womanliness and virtue, so much beyond her youth; and had told himself that, if ever he must wed, he would wed only her.

The day arrived, but no one knew the woman; and many wondered, 'Is our Lord still set upon his pleasures? Does he not mean to wed? Alas, if he should beguile us!'

Nevertheless, the Lord had had made for Griselda jewels, rings, and brooches, set in gold; and clothes made to the measure of a maid of Griselda's stature, and all the ornaments fitting to a bride.

When nine o'clock, the wedding hour, approached, the palace hall and chambers were decked out, and the larders stuffed with the rarest delicacies to be found from end to end of Italy.

Then the Lord, richly dressed, rode forth with the guests he had bidden to his wedding, and entered the poor village to strains of music.

Griselda, innocent that all this was for her, had gone to fetch water from a well, and hastened home, for she had heard say that this was the Lord's wedding-day, and she hoped to see something of the sight. She said to herself, 'I will hurry home and do my work as quick as I can, and then perhaps I will have time to stand at the door like my friends, and see the bride pass on her way to the castle.'

As she was about to cross the threshold, the Lord called to her, and she set down her water-pot beside the ox-stall, and went down on her knees, to listen meekly to her Lord's commands.

The Lord spoke gravely to the maid, and said, 'Where is your father, Griselda?' And she answered humbly, 'Lord, he is here.' And she went in, and brought her father to the Lord.

The Lord took the old man by the hand, led him aside, and said, 'Janicula, I can no longer hide my heart; by your leave, I will take your daughter with me to be my wife to the end of our lives. I know you love me and are my faithful servant, and I think that what contents me contents you too; yet tell me if you are content to take me for your son-in-law.'

The man turned red with amazement, and stood abashed and quaking, and could bring himself to say no more than this: 'Lord, my wish is your wish, you are my dear Lord and I would never go against your will. You shall do in this matter as you please.'

'Then I please,' said the Lord softly, 'that you and I and she should eat at table together in your room. Do you ask why? It is that I may ask her if she will be my wife, and ruled by me; and nothing shall be done out of your presence, or said out of your hearing.'

When they had gone into the room, the people gathered round the house, wondering at her tender care of her father; but Griselda's wonder was greater than theirs.

No wonder she was bewildered to see such a guest in such a place, no wonder her face turned pale as she looked at him. But the Lord spoke thus to the true and gentle maid.

'Griselda,' he said, 'you must know that your father and I desire that I should wed you, and if you desire it too it shall be so; but first,' said he, 'since all must be done quickly, I have certain demands to make which you must consider.

'I ask you this: are you prepared to submit to my pleasure with a good heart, and to let me cause you joy or pain as freely as I please, and never by night or day to make complaint; and when I say yes, never to say no, neither by word nor sullen looks? Swear this to me, and I will swear to wed you.'

Quaking with fear and wonder, she replied: 'Lord, I am unworthy of the honour you do me; but your will is my will, and I swear that I will never wittingly disobey you in deed or thought, even unto death, loth though I am to die.'

'It is enough, my Griselda,' he said. He went forth, and she followed after him, and he spoke to the people thus: 'This is my wife that stands here. Honour and love her, I pray you, all who love and honour me. There is no more to say.'

Then, so that she should bring none of her old clothes

into his house, he bade the women undress her, and it little pleased these ladies to touch her poor garments; and then they clothed her dazzling fairness all anew from head to foot. They combed her hair, that hung undressed about her, and with their delicate fingers set a crown on her head, and adorned her with jewels. When she was dressed, she was so transformed, that the people hardly knew her in her beauty.

The Lord espoused her with a ring brought for the purpose, and set her on a snow-white horse, and she was led to his palace by the joyous throng; and so they spent the day in revels till the sun went down.

And from this day God set such grace upon the Lord's new lady, that it seemed as though she had been reared in an emperor's hall, rather than born and lodged in a rude hovel. She became so loved and adored by all, that even those who had known her from her birth could hardly believe she was the daughter of Janicula. She had always been virtuous; now eloquence and discretion increased her virtues. Her gentleness captured all hearts, and everyone who looked on her must love her. Her fame soon spread abroad; if one spoke well of her, another spoke better. Many people travelled to Saluce only to behold her.

And so Lord Walter, fortunately wedded, lived in peace at home, and was held to be a wise man for having seen where virtue lay hid. For Griselda proved to be not only a wise wife and mistress of her household, but knew how to redress wrongs and appease whatever discord appeared in the land. If her husband were absent, and there were quarrels among the people, she would amend them with such wise words, and so fair a judgement, that men thought she must be sent from heaven to help them.

Not long after Griselda was wedded, she bore a daugh-

ter. She would have given greater welcome to a son; but the Lord and the people rejoiced, for though a girl-child may come first, a boy is likely to follow in good time.

PART THREE

It happened, as it sometimes does, that before his child was weaned the Lord began to long to test his wife's obedience. He had often done it before, and always found her perfect; what need then to try her again and again? Yet he could not rid his heart of his desire.

Therefore he came to her alone by night, with a face full of trouble, and said, 'Griselda, you have not forgotten the day when I raised you from poverty to nobleness. I brought you into my house because you are dear to me; but with my courtiers it is otherwise. They say it shames them to serve one who was born in a humble village. They say this especially since your daughter was born; and as I desire to live at peace with them, I intend to do with your child, not what I would, but what my people will. And yet, God knows, I am loth to, and will not do it without your knowledge; yet I desire you too to consent to this thing. Show me now the patience you swore to me on the day of our marriage.'

When she had heard him, unchanged in word or look, not even seeming to be hurt, she said, 'Lord, it is as you please; my child and I are all yours, and you may save or spend what is your own. Do your will. I swear on my soul that nothing you please to do can displease me; I desire to have nothing, and dread to lose nothing, excepting you. This is the wish of my heart, and time and death cannot change it.'

The Lord rejoiced in her answer, but he hid his joy; and, leaving her room with a sad face, sent in to her a

faithful servant to whom he had confided his purpose. 'Madam,' said the servant, 'forgive what I am constrained to do; you know as well as I that our Lord's commands cannot be disobeyed. I am commanded to take away your child.' And, saying no more, he seized the child roughly, appearing as though he were about to kill it. Griselda suffered him, and sat as meek and quiet as a lamb, letting the cruel servant do his will.

Alas! she could only think from this man's aspect that he would slay the daughter whom she loved; yet she neither wept nor moaned, but bowed herself to her beloved husband's will.

At last she spoke, and gently begged the servant to let her kiss her child before it died. She laid her little child upon her arm, and blessed and lulled and kissed it; and spoke thus to it in her tender voice:

'Farewell, my child, I shall never see thee again; but I have marked thee with the cross, and He who died on a tree for us will bless thee. I commend thy soul to Him, my little child; tonight thou must die, for my sake.'

What nurse could have borne such sorrow, what mother would not have cried 'Alas'! But so steadfast was she that she endured her pain, and said meekly to the servant, 'Take the little maid again. Go now,' she said, 'and do my Lord's will. I pray only one thing of your grace, that, unless my Lord forbids it, you bury this little body in some place where beasts and birds cannot hurt it.' But he would promise nothing; he took the child and went his way.

The servant went back to his Lord, and told him how Griselda had borne it, and what she had said, word for word, and then he gave him the child. The Lord was sorry for her, yet his purpose still held; for lords will have their way. He bade the servant wrap the child tenderly,

and bear it without any man's knowledge to his sister, the wife of Count Panico of Bologna; he was to tell her everything, and beseech her to bring up the child, letting nobody know who it was.

The servant went and returned. Meanwhile the Lord watched Griselda closely, to see if she were changed in word or look; but he found her kind and faithful as before, as humble, and as ready to serve and love him, as she had always been. No shadow of grief was to be seen in her, and her daughter's name never passed her lips.

PART FOUR

Four years passed, and then Griselda bore Walter a beautiful boy; and the father, and all the land, rejoiced in the child.

When it was two years old, the Lord was suddenly seized with the wish to test his wife again. Oh, how needless was the test! Yet husbands with patient wives will try them past measure.

'Wife,' said the Lord, 'you know how the people regret our marriage, and worse than ever now that my son is born; their murmurings make me lose heart and courage. I hear them say: Shall the blood of Janicula succeed, when Walter is gone? I cannot be deaf to their murmurs, though they dare not speak openly. I wish to live in peace; therefore, as I served his sister, I must serve this boy. But I would not do it without warning you; I beg you, bear it patiently.'

Griselda answered, 'I say as I have always said, that I wish only what you please; I will not grieve, though first my daughter and now my son are slain at your commands, and my children have brought into my life nothing but sickness, grief, and pain. You are our lord; do not ask

my leave to do as you will with your own. When I left my clothing at home and came to you, I left my will and liberty also, and took on the clothing you gave me. Do your pleasure; if I could only know it before you say it, I would straightway do it; if I knew my death would make you easy, I would gladly die to please you. Death is nothing to me beside your love.'

At this proof of his wife's constancy, the Lord dropped his eyes, and wondered at her patience. And he left her with a sad face, and a happy heart.

The same servant that fetched away her daughter came for her beautiful little son; and patient as ever she showed no sign of sorrow, but kissed her son and blessed him. Only she begged that her child's tender limbs might be laid under the earth, safe from birds and beasts. But he gave her no answer; he went his way, and brought the child tenderly to Bologna.

More than ever her Lord wondered at her patience, and if he had not known how much she loved her children, he must have thought she was indifferent to them; but he knew that, after himself, she loved her children best.

I ask now of all women whether these trials were not enough? What more could a husband devise to prove his wife's constancy?

But there are people of a certain sort, who, when they are set upon a purpose, know not how to stop; so the Lord still wished to test his wife to the uttermost.

He watched to see if she was changed to him; but her heart and countenance never varied, indeed, she grew more true with years, if that were possible. It was as though there was but one will between them, and that Walter's.

And now the rumour began to spread abroad, that Walter had wickedly murdered his children in secret, be-

cause their mother was a poor woman. And as the slander increased, his people who had once loved him now hated him. Yet even this could not alter his purpose to test his wife again.

When his daughter was twelve years of age, he sent a message to the Court of Rome, asking a Bull to be devised to say that the Pope commanded him, for his people's sake, to take another wife. This false Bull he had published in full, so that the simple folk should believe he was giving up his wife by dispensation of the Pope, to heal the trouble between himself and his people. When the tidings reached Griselda, they must have broken her heart; but the gentle creature bore as patiently as ever this blow of fortune, and waited on his pleasure to whom she had given herself, heart and all.

Meanwhile, the Lord sent a secret letter to Bologna. In this he prayed the Earl, his sister's husband, to bring his two children home in great estate; but begged him still to tell no man who they were. He must only say that the maid was about to be wedded to the Lord of Saluce.

The Earl did as he was asked, and at daybreak set out with his company behind him, and the maiden riding between him and her young brother. The young girl was beautifully dressed for her wedding, her brother, now seven years old, as gaily-clad; and so they made the journey to Saluce with pomp and merriment.

PART FIVE

Meanwhile, the Lord once more felt his cruel desire to put his wife to the proof, and see if she was steadfast as before. So one day he addressed her boisterously, in all men's hearing.

'Hark ye, Griselda, I have known much pleasure in having you for my wife, owing, not to your birth and fortune, but your goodness and obedience. But a lord is not as free as a ploughman; my people cry out to me to take another wife, the Pope himself agrees to it for their sake, and so I must tell you that my new wife is on the way. Keep up your heart, leave your place empty for her, and return to your father's house with the dowry you brought me. No man can have prosperity for ever,' said he, 'and I bid you bear the turn of your fortunes with courage.'

Once more she answered him patiently: 'My Lord, I have always known that there was no comparison between your splendour and my poverty, and that I was never worthy to be your wife. I thank God and you that you have kept me so long in a state I have not deserved, and I will go back gladly to my father and live with him to the end of my life. In his house, where I was fostered as a child, I will live on as your widow, and will take no other husband. May God grant you joy with your new wife, to whom I freely yield the place in which I was so happy. But as to the dowry I brought you, I had nothing but my poor rags, which I do not know how to find again. O Heaven! how kind and gentle you were on the day we were married! How true it is, that love is never so old as when it is new. Be sure, dear Lord, that no turn of fortune can make me regret I gave you all my heart.

'My Lord, you will remember how you stripped me in my father's place, and clad me in richness; I brought you nothing but my faith, my nakedness, and my maidenhood. I restore to you for ever my rich clothes, and also my wedding-ring; all the jewels you have given me are in your room. Naked I came out of my father's house,' said

she, 'and naked return again. Yet, though I would fain please you in all things, I hope you will not let me go smockless out of your palace. Do not put me to shame before your people; remember, my own dear Lord, that, however unworthy, I was your wife. So, in exchange for my maidenhood which I brought to you, and cannot take back with me again, let me have a smock to go in, such as I was wont to wear; and then I will take leave of you, my own Lord, without grieving you further.'

'Go forth in the smock you have on your back,' said he. But he could scarcely speak, and turned away in pity. Then, before the people, she stripped herself to her smock, and went forth barefoot to her father's house.

The people followed her weeping, and cursing fate, but her eyes were dry of tears, and she uttered no word.

But when her father heard the tidings, he cursed the day that he was born, for the poor old man had always doubted this marriage, and believed that the Lord would soon wish to be rid of one so far beneath him. When he heard the noise of the people coming, he went forth hastily to meet his daughter, and weeping bitterly tried to cover her with her old cloak; but the stuff, still poorer than on the day when she was married, would no longer go about her body.

So for a time this flower of wifely patience dwelt with her father, and never showed by word or look, whether in company or when she was alone, that any injury had been done to her, nor did she bear herself as one who remembered her high estate.

Men speak of the humility of Job, and writers praise the steadfastness of men, but no man can be so humble as a woman, nor half so true as women are.

PART SIX

Count Panico is come from Bologna! His fame went before him, and everyone spoke of the Lord's new lady he brought with him, and how he rode in such pomp as had never been seen in Lombardy.

Before he arrived, the Lord sent for Griselda; and she came and knelt humbly before him, and greeted him sweetly.

'Griselda,' said he, 'I desire that this maiden whom I am to wed shall be received tomorrow as royally as possible into my house; and that every guest shall be fittingly entertained, according to his degree. I have no woman who knows my pleasure as you do, so I wish you to take in charge the arraying of the rooms, and all other duties for me, ill-dressed though you be.'

'I am glad to serve you, Lord,' said she.

So saying, she began to arrange the rooms, and set the tables, and make the beds, and do whatever else she could, urging the servants to hurry with their sweeping and shaking; and she did more than any, till every chamber in the great hall was arrayed.

At nine o'clock Count Panico arrived with his two noble charges, and all the people ran to see them in their wedding garments. And when they had set eyes upon the girl, they began to say, 'Lord Walter is no fool to change his wife! This young one is even fairer than Griselda, and their children will be beautiful. See, too, how handsome the boy her brother is!'

O fickle people, veering like the weathercock, delighting in whatever is new, and changeable as the moon! Your chatter is dear at a farthing, and he is a fool who trusts in you!

So said the serious people in the city, while the others gaped and stared, pleased with the novelty of having a new lady. But what of Griselda?

She was busy with everything necessary to the feast; unashamed of her ragged clothing, she went smiling to the gate to greet the lady. She received the guests so sweetly, with so perfect a knowledge of what was due to each, that all wondered who she could be, so poor in dress, so gentle and honourable in her bearing. While she on her side praised the maiden and her brother with all her heart.

At last the fine company was seated at meat; and then the Lord began to call for Griselda, who was busy in the hall.

'Griselda,' said he, still playing his part, 'how do you like my wife, and what think you of her beauty?'

'I like her well, my Lord,' said she, 'and I never saw a fairer lady. May God bless her, and send you both joy. One thing only I beseech you, Lord—not to torment this tender girl as you have me; for she is gently nurtured, and I do not think she could bear trouble like one who was nurtured in hardship.'

And when Walter saw her endless patience, and her sweet countenance without a shadow of malice, and the constancy with which she had met his injuries, remaining innocent through them all, his heart moved him at last to reward her wifely steadfastness.

'It is enough, my Griselda,' said he. 'Be grieved no more, the evil is at an end. No woman was ever so tried, or gave her husband such faith and tenderness. Now I know, my dear wife, how steadfast you are.' And he took her in his arms and kissed her.

But she, for wonder, scarcely understood him, she

could not hear what he said, she was as bewildered as one wakened suddenly from sleep.

'Griselda,' he said, 'by God who died for us, you are my wife, and I will have no other. This, whom you supposed to be my wife, is my daughter, this boy my heir; they are the children you bore me. They have grown up in secret at Bologna; take them again, and never say that you have lost your children. As for the people who have talked ill of me, let all men hear that I have done this thing, not for malice or cruelty, but to try your womanhood; not to slay my children (God forbid!) but to keep them concealed till I knew you heart and soul.'

At these words, she fell down in a swoon for joy, and when she came out of her swoon she called her children to her, and took them weeping in her arms, kissing them tenderly, and bathing their cheeks and eyes with a mother's tears.

It was a pitiful thing to see her swoon, and hear her humble voice. 'God bless you, Lord,' she said, 'for sparing my dear children. Oh, now that I stand in your love again, I do not think I can ever die! Oh my dear little ones, your mother thought you had been eaten by dogs or worms; but God, and your kind father, have been merciful.' And all in a moment, she slipped again to the ground. But she still held her two children so firmly, that even in her swoon it was hard to release them. The tears ran down the faces of the onlookers.

But Walter comforted her, and soothed her sorrow; she rose up abashed from her swoon, and everyone tended and comforted her till she was herself again. It was sweet to see the joy between herself and Walter.

Then the ladies led her to her chamber, and stripped her of her rags, and dressed her in cloth of gold, with a

jewelled crown on her head; and they brought her into the hall, where all did honour to her.

So the unhappy day had a happy ending; and it was spent in mirth and revels till the stars shone in the welkin; it was an even greater revel than their wedding-feast had been.

For many a year these two lived in peace and prosperity, and Walter married his daughter to one of the greatest lords in Italy, and he kept his wife's old father in his court till his soul crept out of his body.

In time his son succeeded him, and was also fortunate in his marriage; but he never sought to put his wife to the test.

The world is not as strong as it was of old. This story is told, not that women may copy Griselda, for they could not if they would; but that everyone may, in his own way, be as constant in misfortune as she was.

But nowadays, my Lords, you might search two or three towns, and not find one Griselda. For our golden women are now so mixed with brass, that when put to the test they would break before they bent.

On which same matter, laying aside all seriousness, for love of the Wife of Bath (to whom God give the mastery) I will sing you a jolly afterword to make you merry.

CHAUCER'S ENVOI

GRISELDA is dead, and her patience too; and both are buried at once in Italy. And I say to you all, let no husband be so rash as to try his wife's patience in the hope of finding another Griselda, for certainly he shall fail.

And to all wives I say, give no man cause to write Griselda's story of yourselves. Never let meekness nail your tongues up! Take example from Echo, who never keeps silent, but always answers back. Be swift to govern your husbands! You buxom wives, stand up to them! Fear them not, you slender wives, revere them not! For though your husband be armed in mail, the arrows of your bitter eloquence shall pierce him. Make him jealous, and he will crouch before you like a quail.

If you be fair, show yourselves off before all men. If you be plain, spend freely and get friends to toil for you. Always keep gay, as light as the leaf on the linden, and let him weep and wail and wring his hands.

THE MERCHANT'S PROLOGUE

'As to weeping and wailing and wringing of hands,' said the Merchant, 'I know them too well, and so do other men, that are married like me. I have the worst of wives, the veriest shrew. There's all the difference in the world between Griselda's patience and her scolding. If I were unwed, I'd never get snared again. We married men live in fret and care; no bachelor knows such pains as I suffer through a nagging wife.'

'Well, Merchant,' said our Host, 'since you know so much about it, tell us a tale.'

'Gladly,' said he, 'but not of my own troubles; of them I'll say no more.'

The Merchant's Tale

THERE was once a good old Knight dwelling in Pavia, in Lombardy, where he had long lived in great prosperity. And after having lived out the better part of his life as a jolly bachelor, he began to long to be married, and know for once the blissful life shared by husband and wife. 'No other life is worth a bean,' he said, 'I understand that wedlock is paradise on earth.' So said this wise old Knight, whose name was January.

So he sent for his friends and told them his purpose. 'Friends,' said he, 'I am a hoary old man, on the edge of the grave; and before it is too late I am determined to be a husband to some fair young maid. Advise me how to find one, for this is a matter that will not wait. And one thing I warn you, don't offer me an old woman of twenty years, I'll not have my wife a whit past sixteen. For the older I am, the younger should she be. What though my head is white as snow? My heart is as green as a tree.'

Then his friends spoke up, and all gave him different advice; some blamed marriage, while others praised it, and January's two brothers, Placebo and Justinus, took the two sides of the question.

Placebo said: 'Brother January, you need not have called us here to ask our advice; you are wise enough to follow the word of Solomon, who said, Take counsel with yourself, and you shall never regret it. If your heart is set on a young wife, by all means, have her.'

To this Justinus retorted: 'Hold, brother Placebo! Seneca says that a man should consider well to whom he will give away his land and his goods. How much more, then, should he consider to whom he will give his body! It's no child's play, I tell you, to take a wife, and when it

comes to taking a young and fair one, an old man should ask himself how long he is likely to please her.'

'Have you done?' said January. 'A straw for your Seneca! Wiser men than he and you think as I do.'

After disputing all day, his friends agreed with one accord that January should be married when he liked to whom he pleased.

So January set about finding a wife, and he looked amongst all the girls he knew for one to suit him, and first he thought he would take this one, who was beautiful, then that one, who was sweet-tempered, and then t'other, who was rich; and he was for ever taking his friends' opinions on them, and chopping and changing from day to day. But at last he decided on a young maiden in the town, famed for her beauty, though of humble birth, and he sent again for his friends, and told them that he had made up his mind at last to marry the lovely May, whose youth and beauty were all he desired.

The long and the short of it was that a marriage was quickly arranged between January and May, and they were wedded with great pomp and solemnity. And old January was as pleased as a cock in the morning, and set about making his household pleasant for his fresh young bride. He had his rooms decked out as fine as a king's, and a little garden made with walls of stone, the fairest little garden that ever was seen. It would need the god of gardens to tell of its beauties, and of the fountain that sprang there under an evergreen laurel tree. Many a time, men say, King Pluto, Queen Proserpine, and all their fairies danced and played and sang around that fountain. Old January always kept in his pouch the silver key to the little wicket-gate, and in the summer weather he would go there with his May, and nobody else was allowed to enter the garden but those two.

Now there was, in January's household, a young page called Damian, who longed to go into the little garden of whose beauties he had heard from May; and May was friendly to him, for being young, she often found him a pleasanter playfellow than withered old January, and she tried to find some means by which Damian could pass the wicket, and enjoy the beauty of the flowers and fruit trees there. But January kept the key so jealously, that she could not devise a way to give the page this pleasure.

Then suddenly in the midst of his joy and prosperity, calamity fell upon old January, and he was stricken blind. Alas, how he wept and wailed! But after a month or two his sorrow waned, and when he knew there was no help for it, he bore his adversity patiently, and decided to get what pleasure he could out of his garden, though he could see it no more. For the month was July, and the summer sun and scent of flowers were sweet. So on the morning of the eighth day of the month, he said to May, 'Rise up, my dove! The voice of the turtle is heard, and the winter rains are past. Let us go into the garden.'

As they passed through the hall, May made a sign to Damian to follow them, and when this blind old January opened the gate, the page slipped in, full of delight; and seeing a pear tree laden with fruit, climbed up it and began to enjoy himself. Seeing this, young May also began to long for a pear. And she made up her mind to use the old man's blindness to help her to one.

Bright was the day, the sun sent streams of gold from heaven to warm the hearts of the flowers, and it happened that Pluto, king of the fairies, had chosen this lovely morning to disport himself in the garden with Queen Proserpine and his elves. As they sat together on a green bank, he said to her, 'See, wife, how treacherous a woman is! This young May has taken advantage of her husband's

blindness, and allows his page to steal his fruit. And now she means to make game of him, and eat pears with Damian in the tree. To punish her, I will use my power to give back the old man his sight at the very moment she does it.'

'You will?' said Proserpine. 'Then I, for my part, swear by my mother, Ceres, to provide her tongue with a ready answer when he scolds her for it; for I am a woman myself, and I think it a shame that this old January should ever have wedded with the fresh young May.'

Then Pluto said, 'Why, now I think you are right, my queen. But I have taken an oath to give the old man his sight, and as I am a king I cannot be forsworn.'

'And as I am a queen,' said she, 'she shall have her answer. Do not let us quarrel about it; for I will never go against you again.'

Now to return to May and January, who were strolling through the green alleys. When they came round again to the pear tree in which young Damian was enjoying himself high up among the leaves, May gave a great sigh and said, 'Alas! my side! I have such a pain that I feel I shall die if I cannot have some of those small green pears up there! Do help me to get them.'

'Alas!' croaked he, 'if only I had a boy who could climb! Alas, alas,' said he, 'I cannot, for I am blind.'

'Yes, sir,' said she, 'but if you would be so good as to clasp the pear tree with your arms and let me climb on your shoulders, I could reach the pears myself.'

'By all means,' said old January; and he bent down so that she could stand on his back, then straightened himself, and up she went among the branches; and Damian, laughing, gave her a green pear.

At that very instant, by the power of Pluto, January got his sight again; and when he saw his wife laughing in the

tree with Damian, he set up a roar, and cried, 'Oh, oh! Out upon you! Help, help! Alas! Oh, you giddy young thing, what are you up to, and what is that boy doing in my tree?'

She answered quickly, 'Why, what's the matter, sir? Have patience! Be sensible! Don't you see I have helped you to regain your sight? For I was told the only way to heal your eyes was to slap a boy's face in a tree.'

'Slap!' said he. 'I saw him steal my pears, but may I be hanged if I saw you slap him!'

'Well then, my cure has failed,' said she, 'for you would not say these things if you could see aright. If you cannot see me slap him, your eyes must still be dim.' And so saying, she slapped Damian on the cheek.

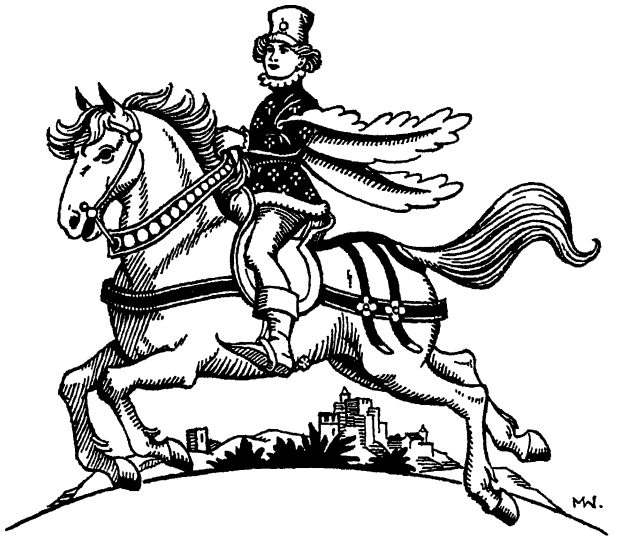
'Oh,' said old January, 'I saw that! I saw it with my two eyes! Now God be thanked, I see as well as ever! But I certainly thought I saw him eating my pears.'

'You were deceived, sir,' said May, 'and that's all the thanks I get for restoring your sight.'

'Now wife,' said January, 'forget it. Come down, my life, and forgive me for thinking I saw what I didn't see.'

'Why, sir,' said she, 'when a man wakes suddenly out of his sleep, he cannot always see clearly at first, and so may see a thing amiss. And it's the same with a blind man, he cannot see so well when his sight first comes back as he will when he has had his eyes a day or two. I dare say you'll see many a queer thing before your eyes are steady again!'

With that, she leaped down from the tree, and January kissed his naughty girl, full of gladness. May you, good friends, be as glad as he. Here ends my tale of January and May, with a God bless us all!



THE SQUIRE'S PROLOGUE

'MERCY!' said our Host. 'Preserve me from such a wife! The tricks these women play us! Now, Sir Squire, come forth, and please to tell us a love-story, for I am sure you know as much of love as any man.'

'Oh no, sir,' said the Squire, 'but I will say the best I can, for I will not rebel against your will. Excuse me, if I tell it badly, for I mean well; and this is my tale.'

The Squire's Tale

PART ONE

AT Sarray, in Tartary, there lived a famous king who was for ever harrying Russia, and killing the Russians. His

name was Cambuskan, and he was everything that a king should be, brave, wise, and rich, merciful and just, true to his word, and honourable in all things.

This Tartar King had two sons by his wife Elpheta; one was called Algarsyf, and the other Camballo. He also had a daughter, the youngest of the three, whose name was Canacee; only a poet could describe her beauty, it is not for my poor English, I may but speak as I can.

It fell out that when Cambuskan had worn his crown for twenty winters, he had his birthday feast cried through the streets of the city, as was his custom year by year; and, sitting on high on his dais in royal vesture and diadem, he solemnized his feast in his palace so sumptuously that men had never seen the like. It would take me a summer day to describe it all, with the order of the courses and the service: the strange sauces, the roasted swans and herons, and various things which men held to be delicacies in Tartary, though here we would care little for them. It so befell, that after the third course, as the King sat among his nobles listening to the delicious music of his minstrels, through the hall door there suddenly rode a Knight upon a horse of brass; in one hand he held a large mirror, on his thumb he had a gold ring, and by his side hung a naked sword. He rode straight up to the high table, and not a word was spoken in the hall, for wonder of the Knight; young and old gazed their fill at him.

The strange Knight, who was completely armed, except his head, saluted the King, the Queen, and all the lords in their order, with great reverence, and speech as courteous as that of the ancient knight Gawain, returned from the land of faery. And then, in a manly voice, he spoke his message:

'My liege lord,' said he, 'the King of Araby and India salutes you on your birthday, and in honour of the feast

sends you by me, his servant, his brazen horse, that can in the space of a day bear your body wherever your heart shall please, through drought or shower, fair weather or foul, without the least harm to you; and if you wish to fly through the air like an eagle, the horse will carry you safely till you are where you desire to be, even though you should sleep on his back on the way. For he who wrought this horse was full of cunning, and consulted many constellations before the work was finished.

'This mirror too, that I bear in my hand, possesses such a virtue, that in it you can see when any adversity threatens your kingdom or yourself, and who are your friends and foes. Besides this, if any fair lady has a lover, and he prove false to her, she shall see here the face of his new love, and none of his deceit shall be hidden from her. This mirror, therefore, my master sends to your excellent daughter, the Lady Canacee; and likewise this ring.

'The virtue of the ring is that whoever wears it on his thumb, or carries it in his pouch, shall understand the speech of every bird that flies, and be able to speak with it himself; and shall also know the healing-power of every herb that grows, and which will cure the worst and deepest wound.

'The virtue of this naked sword at my side is that, whatever man it smites, it shall cleave through his armour though it were as thick as the trunk of an oak; and whatever man is wounded by it shall never be healed, unless you please to stroke his wound with the flat of the blade; and then the wound will close again. All this is the very truth, without adornment.'

Having told his tale, the Knight rode out of the hall into the courtyard, and alighted from his horse, which stood there glittering like the sun and still as stone. The Knight was then led to his chamber, and was unarmed, and given

his seat at table. The sword and the mirror were taken to the high tower in charge of a special officer, and the ring was brought to Canacee where she sat at table; but the horse of brass could not be moved, it stood as though glued to the ground. So there they left it, till the Knight should tell them how to remove it. And a great crowd of people swarmed to gaze on it; for it was as tall and broad and strong as a horse of Lombardy, as fine-bred and bright-eyed as an Apulian courser, and without a fault from tail-tip to ear-tip; and all the people marvelled how, being of brass, it could run. It must be a fairy steed, they murmured; and they fell to naming strange magic horses, the winged Pegasus, and the wooden horse of Troy. 'I hope,' said one, 'there are no armed men hidden in it, to destroy the city!' And then they fell to marvelling about the mirror, the sword, and Canacee's ring. The chatter and conjectures went on till the King rose from table.

Then, with his minstrels playing heavenly music before him, he went to the great hall; and there sat on his throne while the people danced. The strange Knight led the dance with Canacee. The merry revels lasted until supper-time; and having eaten the spiced dishes and drunk deep of wine, they all repaired to the temple and, the service done, returned again to supper. After supper the King went out to see his brazen horse, and he asked the Knight to explain how it was controlled. The horse began to trip and dance as the Knight laid his hand upon the rein, saying, 'Sir, all you need do when you wish to ride anywhere is to turn a pin in the horse's ear, naming the place you wish to go to, and when you arrive you must bid him descend, turning this other pin; he will then fly down and remain fixed to the spot so that none can move him. Or if you wish him to depart, turn this third pin, and he will vanish in-

stantly out of sight of all present, and only return when you have called him in such a way as I shall tell you privately. And that is all.'

The King drew apart with the Knight, and was delighted when he had been instructed what to do; he had the horse's bridle taken to the tower to be kept among his jewels, and the horse vanished, I know not how; and then the King returned to the revels, and so we leave him feasting with his lords till daylight.

PART TWO

Sleep, the nurse of digestion, began to make them nod, warning them that rest follows work and play; so they went yawning to their beds, and dreamed no matter what, and slept till the prime of the morrow. But Canacee, who had gone early to bed, awoke after her first sleep, excited still about her mirror and her ring, of which she had dreamed all night. As soon as the sun began to rise, she called her old waiting-woman, and said she wished to rise too.

'What, so early, madam?' said the woman, 'All else are still asleep.'

'Still, I must rise and walk,' said Canacee, 'for I can sleep no longer.'

The old one called her other women, and they rose, some ten or twelve of them. Then Canacee herself rose, as fresh and bright as the young sun, who had scarcely begun his course when she was ready; and, dressed to suit the gay season, she went out to stroll, taking but five or six of her maids to walk and play with her. The white mists of morning made the sun look big and ruddy, and what with the fair morning, and the season of the year, and the singing of the birds, her heart was light; for by

power of her ring she could understand all they meant by their songs.

Now as Canacee was playing under the trees in the park, she heard a falcon overhead crying with so piteous a voice that the woods rang with it; and she had so beaten her breast with both her wings that the branch she perched on was red with her blood. As she cried she pecked herself so fiercely that a very tiger would have wept with grief for her. She seemed to be a peregrine falcon from a foreign land, and for beauty of shape and plumage was past describing. Presently, from lack of blood, she swooned and nearly fell from the tree. On this the King's fair daughter, Canacee, who by her ring had understood all that the falcon said, hastened to the tree and held out her skirt, to catch the bird when it fell. And as she waited below, she spoke to the falcon herself after this manner.

'What is the cause of your torment, if you may tell it? Is it death or love that makes you grieve? For these, I think, are the two causes which give most pain to gentle hearts. Come down from the tree, and as I am a king's daughter I will help you if I can, and heal your hurts with herbs.'

The falcon uttered the most pitiful scream of all, and fell swooning to the ground like a stone. Canacee took her in her lap, and as she came out of her swoon the falcon said, in her own tongue, 'I see, fair Canacee, you have the gentle heart in which true pity lives, and therefore I will tell you my grief. I was born (alas the day!) on a rock of grey marble, and fostered so tenderly that, until I reached full flying-strength, I did not know what evil was. Hard by a tercelet dwelled, who seemed all gentleness; yet he was deep-dyed in fickleness and treason. Like a serpent hid under flowers, he waited till he could see his

time to bite. With this intent, for many a year he wooed me, with tears and oaths of fealty, till my too tender heart, innocent of his guile, feared he would die. I granted him my love, on condition he would love and honour me for ever, which he took oath to do. For a year or two this tiger, this deceiver, counterfeited love with so ravishing an air, that it would have borne the wisest woman up to heaven; and during this time I thought nothing but good of him. At last it fell out that he was obliged to depart from the place where I dwelled, and our parting was the pain of death to me; and truly, I believed that he felt it as much as I. Yet thinking he was true, and would soon come again, and must go for honour's sake, I made a virtue of necessity, and hid my sorrow from him as best I might. "I am all yours," I said; "be to me what I have always been to you." What use to tell his answer? None could speak better than he, or do worse. And so he went his way, flying where he pleased. Alas! birds are as changeable in love as men, and do not cleave to their kind. One day my tercelet saw a kite on the wing, and suddenly he loved this kite so that all his love for me was clean gone. He betrayed his troth; and now the kite has my love in her service, and I am lorn, and have no remedy.'

With this the falcon began to weep, and swooned on Canacee's bosom. Great was the sorrow of Canacee and her women for the falcon's injury; they knew not how to comfort her. Canacee gently bore her home, and salved the wounds she had inflicted on herself. She busied herself day and night, seeking rare herbs in the grass, and making fine salves with which to heal the falcon. At her own bed-head she made a falcon's mew, and hung it with blue velvet as a sign of the truth that is in women; and on the outside of the mew, which was green, were painted

such false fowl as tercelets and owls, with magpies beside them, to chide and cry out on them for shame.

Here I leave Canacee, caring for her falcon, and will at present speak no more of her ring until the time is come to tell how the falcon got her love again, by the help of Camballo, the King's son, of whom I told you. But now I will proceed to speak of marvellous battles and adventures.

First I will relate how Cambuskan won many a city; and then how Algarsyf, his son, won Theodora to wife, and how, in his greatest peril, he was helped by the horse of brass. And after that how Camballo fought in the lists for Canacee. And where I left off, I will pick up my tale again.

(*At this point the Squire's Tale breaks off; Chaucer left it unfinished*)

THE FRANKLIN'S PROLOGUE

'FAITH, Squire,' said the Franklin, 'you have acquitted yourself well. You have spoken with such wit and feeling, considering your youth, that I think, if you live, no man will equal you in eloquence. I have a son myself, and I'd give twenty pound if he had your discretion. But, rebuke him as I may, he will always be playing dice, and would sooner talk with a lackey than a gentleman, through whom he might learn gentility.'

'A straw for your gentility!' cried our Host. 'The point is, Franklin, that each of you must tell a tale, or break his pledge.'

'I know it, sir,' replied the Franklin, 'and I beg you not to take it amiss that I have passed a word or two with this gentleman.'

'Your tale, your tale without more words.'

'I obey you gladly, Sir Host,' said the Franklin. 'I'll do my best not to offend you in any way, and as long as my

tale pleases the company, it will serve. The good old Britons used to make up songs of adventures, the first that were ever rhymed in the British tongue. I remember one, which I will relate as well as I can. But to begin with, sirs, I beg you to excuse my common speech, for I am a humble man who never learned rhetoric, or slept on Mount Parnassus, or read Cicero. I know nothing about the colours of words, I only know such colours as grow in the fields, and therefore what I say must be bare and plain.'

The Franklin's Tale

THERE was once a Knight who lived and loved in Armorica, which we call Brittany. He loved a lady, and performed many a labour before he won her. She was the fairest under the sun, and came of a noble family, so that he lacked the courage to tell her how he loved her. But her eye had fallen upon him, and she had determined secretly to take him for her lord and master—or such mastery as men may have over their wives! And when he knew her mind, he swore by his knighthood never to master her against her will, or to be jealous of her, but to obey her in all things like a lover. And she thanked him, saying, 'Sir, since in your goodness you grant me so much, I will be your own true humble wife till my heart stops beating.' And so they were at perfect ease together. For sirs, let me tell you this: love between friends will not be constrained by force; when force comes in, love takes to his wings. For love is a spirit, and must be free; and women, as well as men, desire their liberty. And so, her servant in love and her lord in marriage, the Knight took his wife home to his own country, not

far from Penmark; where, for a year or so, they lived in bliss.

Then, so the story goes, this Knight, who was called Arviragus, was set on going to England for a year or two, to seek honour by deeds of arms. When he had departed, Dorigen his wife, who loved him as her heart's life, spent the time in weeping and sighing; she longed for him so much that the world was nothing to her. Her friends tried to comfort her, and begged her to give over her sorrow; and when in time letters came from Arviragus, telling of his welfare, her grief lessened a little, and she consented once more to leave her room, and go roaming in their company.

Her castle stood close to the sea, and now she often walked on the cliff with her friends, watching the ships and barges sailing the ocean; and Dorigen would say to herself, 'Is there no ship among all I see that will bring me home my lord?'

At other times she would sit gazing down upon the grim, black rocks, and her heart would quake for fear, and she would say, 'Almighty God, why, among all thy works, didst thou create the rocks? The dreadful rocks have slain a hundred thousand bodies of mankind! For my dear husband's sake, I would all rocks were sunk as deep as Hell. These rocks destroy my heart with fear.' And then she would weep bitterly.

Her friends, finding the sea saddened her, devised sports for her elsewhere, by springs and rivers, and other delightful spots; where they danced, and played at chess and backgammon. One morning early they went forth to spend the whole day in a garden, where food had been provided; the month of May had painted with soft showers the flowers and leaves, and man's craft had so laid out the garden that it was a paradise of scents and

colours. After their dinner, they began to dance and sing in the pleasaunce; but Dorigen went apart and sang of her sorrow that her husband was absent.

Among the dancers was a young Squire, as fresh and gay as the month of May itself. He sang and danced better than any man since the beginning of the world; he was indeed in all things one of the best endowed men alive, young, strong, and virtuous, and well-beloved. And all unknown to Dorigen, this Squire, who was called Aurelius, had loved her for two years above all women; but he had never dared to tell her so. Only he composed many songs and roundelays of how he languished for her love, as Echo did for Narcissus, which he would sing in her hearing; and in the dance he would look pleadingly at her, as one who asks for a favour, yet she never guessed his meaning.

But on this day it happened that they talked together, for she had long known and liked him as her neighbour; and when Aurelius saw his chance, he spoke to his purpose.

'Madam, if it had been pleasing to you, I would that the day your Arviragus went to sea I had gone too, and never returned again. For I know well that my love for you is vain, and my only reward will be a broken heart. Madam, take pity on my pain, for you can slay me or spare me as with a sword. Would I could die here at your feet! I can say no more, but if you do not have mercy on me, sweet, I shall die.'

She looked upon Aurelius, saying, 'Is this really true? I never understood you till now. But, by God who gave me my soul and my life, I will never in word or deed be faithless to my husband.' Then, trying to make light of it, she added, 'This is my final word, Aurelius: on the day when you have removed all the rocks, stone by stone,

from end to end of Brittany, so that they shall be no more a peril to ship or boat—I say, when you have made those coasts so clean of rocks that there is not a pebble to be seen, I will grant you my love, and love you better than any other man, I swear it!'

'Is there no more grace in you than this?' said he.

'No, by the Lord who made me,' said she. 'I know well that I have asked what cannot be done. So let this madness pass out of your heart.'

'Madam,' groaned Aurelius, 'that is impossible.' And with that word, he left her.

Her friends now came about her, and they roamed among the alleys, and began anew their revels, and at nightfall went joyously home. Only the wretched Aurelius, alas! went home with a heavy heart, and, almost out of his wits, he fell upon his knees, lifted his hands to heaven, and prayed: 'Apollo, god and governor of plants, herbs, trees, and flowers, cast your merciful eye on the wretched Aurelius! and bid your bright sister Lucina, queen of the sea, to help you. You know, lord, how she is quickened and lighted by your fire, and follows your will as the tides follow hers. Wherefore I pray of you a miracle, O Phoebus! Let her bring about so great a flood, that it shall o'ertop the highest rock in Brittany by five fathoms, and let this flood last two years. Then may I surely say to my lady: Your behest is done, the rocks are gone. Lord Phoebus, do this miracle for me, behold the tears on my cheek, and have pity on my pain!' So saying, he fell down in a swoon, and lay long in a trance. His brother, who knew his grief, took him up and bore him to bed, not knowing whether he would live or die.

And now the flower of chivalry, Arviragus, is come home again in glory. O now thou art blissful, Dorigen,

with thy husband in thy arms! All was dancing, and feasting, and making good cheer.

But sweet Aurelius lay two years in anguish and torment, and got no comfort all this time of any save his brother, who was a scholar. He grieved in private over his brother's trouble; till at last he remembered a book dealing with natural magic, which he had seen when he was a student in Orleans in France. His fellow-student, a bachelor of law, had left the book upon his desk, and being curious he had looked into it, and read much about the strange operations of the mansions of the moon, and other crazy things, which nowadays we should not value at a fly. But, remembering this book, his heart danced for joy, and he said to himself, 'Here lies my brother's cure! for I am sure there are sciences by which men can work wonders and apparitions. Now if I could find in Orleans some old fellow who has studied the moon and other natural magic, he should easily help my brother to his love; such a magician could make the rocks of Brittany appear to disappear for a year or two; and then the lady must either keep her word, or be shamed for ever.'

On hearing this, Aurelius took such heart that he started up at once to go to Orleans. When they were almost come to that city, they met a young clerk roaming by himself, who greeted them in Latin; after which he amazed them by saying, 'I know the cause of your coming.' And before they went a step further, he told them all their purpose. Aurelius sprang down from his horse, and went with the magician to his house. Never in his life had he seen such luxury and splendour. Before they went to supper, the magician showed him forests and parks full of wild deer, and falcons slaying herons, and knights jousting on a plain, and last he showed him his own lady dancing, and Aurelius himself seemed to be dancing with

her. Suddenly the magician clapped his hands, and farewell! the revel vanished. All the time they had seen these marvels they had never moved out of the house, but were still sitting in his study among his books. And then they went to supper.

After supper they discussed what the magician's reward should be for removing all the rocks of Brittany from Gironde to the mouth of the Seine. He said he would not do it for less than a thousand pounds. To this the happy Aurelius cried out, 'What is a thousand pounds? If I were lord of the wide world, which men say is round, I would give it all to seal our bargain. I swear to pay you truly; but let there be no negligence or sloth—let us not tarry here beyond tomorrow.'

'My faith upon it,' said the magician.

Aurelius went to bed and rested well, in his new hope of bliss; and in the morning they went to Brittany, and there took up their lodging. This was in the cold and frosty season of December, when the old sun was the colour of pale brass, instead of burnished gold. Aurelius urged the magician to do at once the work which should end his pain. The subtle clerk bade him be patient till the time was right for juggleries and illusions, by which he should make it appear that the rocks of Brittany had vanished; and at last, according to astrology (of which I know nothing), the time arrived for him to put into practice his wretched tricks and superstitions. Then, by means of his astronomical tables, his charts, his compasses, his roots, proportions and equations, he calculated which of the moon's mansions was favourable to his operations, and without further delay worked such a spell, that all the rocks appeared to vanish from men's sight.

Aurelius, now hoping, now despairing, had waited night and day for the accomplishment of the miracle.

When he knew the obstacle to his wishes was removed, he fell down at his master's feet and thanked him in the name of Venus. Then he made his way back to the temple where he knew he would find his lady; and in due time saluted her with a trembling heart. 'My sovereign lady,' said this unhappy man, 'whom I fear and love with all my might, and would displease least of any in this world, did I not love you so that I could die at your feet: O madam, you remember what you promised. I claim nothing of you but your grace, and your remembrance of what you said to me once in a garden; heaven knows you said it, unworthy though I am. Madam, as much for your honour's sake as to save my life, I come to tell you that I have done what you commanded; go see for yourself, and then say whether I am to live or die. For the rocks of Brittany have vanished.'

Then he left her, and she stood stunned and white of face; she had never dreamed of being caught in such a trap. 'Alas!' said she, 'that this should ever happen. I never thought such a monstrous marvel possible; it is against the law of nature.' And she went home sorrowfully, and wept for two days. Arviragus was absent at the time, and she told no one of her distress, but, moaning and often swooning, determined that rather than leave her husband she would kill herself. On the third night Arviragus returned, and found her weeping; and when he asked her why, she wept more bitterly still.

'Alas, that ever I was born!' said she. 'Hear what I am sworn to do.' And she told him all you know already.

Her husband, looking tenderly at her, said, 'Is this all, Dorigen?'

'All?' said she. 'Though it be God's will, it is too much.'

'Wife,' said he, 'you must keep your word. God pardon

me, my love for you is so great, that I had rather suffer than that you should break your troth. His troth is the greatest thing man has to keep.' Then he wept, and said, 'On pain of death, I bid you tell this to no one as long as you live. I will endure my hurt as best I can; and you must not even look sad, lest folk should guess anything.' Then he called a squire and a maid. 'Go with Dorigen,' he said, 'and escort her to such-and-such a place.' And they went forth with her, not knowing why she went.

It chanced that the loving Aurelius met her in the street on her way to the garden where she had given him her promise; for he, too, was on his way there. He greeted her joyously, and asked her where she was going; and she answered, as though she were half-mad, 'To the garden, as my husband bids me, to keep my troth, alas, alas!'

Aurelius began to ponder, and his heart ached for her and her sorrow, and for Arviragus the noble knight, who had bade her keep her promise. He was so torn with pity that he knew he had rather lose his love than do an ill thing against such goodness and generosity. So he said simply to her:

'Madam, tell your lord Arviragus that, because of your distress, and because of his great gentleness, which would rather suffer shame (and that were a pity) than you should break your troth: I myself would rather suffer for ever, than part the love between you two. I release you, madam, from every bond and oath you ever made me, and I plight my troth never to ask anything of you again, and so I take my leave of the best and truest wife I ever knew. For a squire can do a gentle deed, as well as a knight.'

She thanked him on her knees, and went home to her husband and told him all; and it is impossible for me to describe his joy. What need to speak more of Arviragus

and his wife Dorigen? They lived their lives in utter bliss, there was never anger between them, he cherished her as though she were a queen, and she was true to him for evermore. You get no more of me about these two.

But Aurelius, left forlorn, cursed the day he was born. 'Alas!' said he. 'How shall I pay the magician? What shall I do? I must sell my heritage, and go forth a beggar, for I cannot stay here to shame my kindred with my poverty. But first I will go to him and see whether he will let me pay him a little, year by year. He may do me this grace; but whether or no, I will keep my troth with him.'

With a heavy heart he took from his coffers five hundred pounds in gold, and brought them to the magician, and besought him to allow him time to pay the rest, saying, 'Master, I can boast that I never yet failed in my troth; I will pay my debt to you though it leaves me a beggar in nothing but my shirt. But if you will take my surety and grant me a respite of two or three years, I need not sell my heritage.'

The magician heard him out, and answered gravely, 'Have I not kept my bargain with you?'

'Yes, well and truly,' said he.

'Have you not had your lady?'

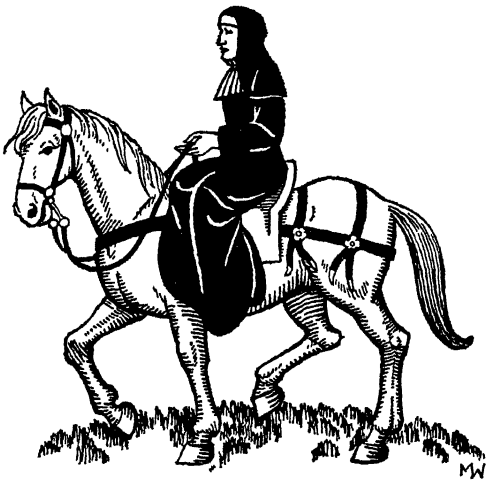
'No, no,' he said sorrowfully.

'Why not? Tell me.'

So Aurelius told him what you already know. He told how Arviragus was so noble that he would rather die of sorrow than that his wife should be false to her word; and he told of Dorigen's distress, and how she would rather die than leave her husband; and that she had given her troth in innocence, knowing nothing of the powers of magic. 'That filled me with such pity for her, that as freely as her husband sent her to me, I sent her back to him. There is no more to say.'

The magician then said, 'Dear brother, each of you has done nobly by the other; you are a squire, and he is a knight, and God forbid that clerk cannot do a noble thing as well as either of you. Sir, I release you from your thousand pounds, as freely as though we had never known each other; and I will not take a single penny from you for my wisdom or my work. You paid for my keep, and that is enough, and so farewell and good day.' And he got on his horse and went his way.

My lords, I would ask you this question: which of them was the noblest? My tale is ended.



The Second Nun's Tale

LET us all shun the minister and nurse of vice called in plain English Idleness; this devil is always waiting on the sly to catch us in his net, so, in order to escape him, we ought to work and be industrious. To get the better of Idleness I have made it my business to translate the legend of the glorious life of her whose garlands were the rose and lily, I mean the maid and martyr Saint Cecilia. And I pray you that hear me to forgive and amend my work for yourselves, for I cannot use words cleverly.

First I will tell you what the name Cecilia means, as expounded in her story; you may say that, in English, Cecilia means heavenly lily, for she was as sweet and as chaste as the lily. Or you may say Cecilia means light to the blind, for she was that too in her example and teaching. Or you may say that this bright maiden's name means heaven, for as the sun and the moon and the stars are

seen in heaven, so were faith and goodness and excellence seen in her. Now I have told you about her name.

This maiden, the bright Cecilia, was a Roman of noble family, brought up from her cradle in the faith of Christ. And she never ceased to pray God to keep her a virgin always.

And when this maid was to be married at a tender age to one who was called Valerian, she bore herself meekly, and wore a hair shirt under her golden robe. And while the organs made melody, she sang to God alone in her heart: 'Oh Lord, I give my body and soul to Thee.'

That night she said to her husband, 'I have an angel that loves me with a great love, and watches over me while I wake and sleep, and if you should harm me in any way he would slay you, even in your youth, but if you love me purely he will love you as he does me, and show himself to you in all his brightness.'

Valerian answered, 'If I am to believe you, let me see that angel.'

Cecilia answered again, 'If you desire to see the angel, you must be baptized and believe in Christ. Go forth to the Via Appia, three miles outside the town, and say to the poor folk who dwell there that Cecilia bids them take you to the good old Saint Urban; and when he has purged you from sin, you shall see that angel.'

Valerian went to the palace, and found the holy Urban, and told him the message; and Urban threw up his hands for joy, and the tears fell from his eyes.

'Almighty Lord, Jesus Christ,' said he, 'see how thine own child, Cecilia, serves thee always like a busy bee, and sends thee her wedded husband, who, fierce as a lion, yet comes as gentle as a lamb.'

As he spoke, there appeared an old man clad in pure white clothes, with a book written in gold in his hands;

and he read from the book these words: 'O Lord, there is one God and no more in Christendom, one Father of us all, above all, and over all.' When he had read these golden words, the old man said, 'Do you believe this thing or no? Say yea or nay.'

'I believe this thing,' said Valerian. Then the old man vanished, and Pope Urban christened him where he stood.

Valerian went home, and found Cecilia in his room, and by her stood an angel. The angel had two crowns of roses and lilies, and he gave one to Cecilia and the other to Valerian. 'With thought and body undefiled, keep these crowns well,' said he. 'I have brought them to you from Paradise, and they shall never rot or lose their sweet smell, and no man that is not pure shall see them with his eyes. Now say, Valerian, what you desire, and because you have followed good counsel you shall have your boon.'

'I have a brother,' said Valerian, 'whom I love more than any man in the world. I pray you, give my brother grace to know the truth, even as I do.'

The angel said, 'Your request is pleasing to God, and you shall both come to him bearing the palm of martyrdom.'

With that, Tiberius, Valerian's brother, appeared, and when he smelt the sweetness coming from the roses and lilies, he began to wonder in his heart. 'Where,' he said, 'can the sweet smell of roses and lilies come from at this time of year? I could not smell them stronger if I had them in my hands, and the sweet smell, that seems to be in my heart, makes me another man.'

Valerian said, 'We have two crowns, snow-white and rose-red, which your eyes cannot see; but as you can smell them you shall soon see them too, dear brother, if you will believe the truth.'

Tiberius answered, 'Do you speak to me in sooth, or do I hear you in a dream?'

'We have been in a dream till now, brother,' said Valerian, 'but from this hour truth is our dwelling.'

Then Cecilia spoke and showed him plainly that his idols were but dumb things, and charged him to leave them for one God. And Tiberius believed her, and she embraced him, saying, 'This day I take thee for my ally.' And after this, Tiberius went with Valerian to Saint Urban, and was christened.

Then Tiberius got such grace, that at all times in all places he saw the angel of God, and every boon he asked of God was instantly granted.

I could not tell you how many wonders Jesus wrought for them. At last the sergeant of the town of Rome brought them before Almachius the Prefect, who was their enemy; and he ordered them to be taken to the image of Jupiter, saying, 'Hear my sentence! Whoever will not sacrifice to Jupiter shall have his head chopped off.'

The Prefect's officer who had charge of them was one Maximus, and when he led the saints forth he wept for pity. When he had heard them speak, he got leave of their tormentors to take them to his house; and there they preached to Maximus and all his people of the true faith. At night Cecilia came with priests, who tremblingly christened them all; and when the day came she said to them, 'Now, dear knights of Christ, cast away all gloom, and arm yourselves with brightness; you have fought a great battle, and have won the crown of everlasting life.'

Then they were led forth to do the sacrifice to Jupiter. But when they came to the temple, they would neither burn incense nor do sacrifice, but knelt with humble hearts and prayed to God, and so they lost their heads.

And when Maximus related with tears how he had seen their souls glide up to heaven, accompanied by bright angels, many were converted by his words; for which Almachius had him whipped to death.

Cecilia buried him under one stone with Valerian and Tiberius, and soon after Almachius bade his officers fetch Cecilia into his presence to make the public sacrifice to Jupiter. But even these men believed her word, and wept. When Cecilia stood before him, Almachius began to question her.

'What manner of woman are you?' said he.

'I am a gentlewoman born,' said she.

'What are your religion and belief?'

'A foolish question,' said she, 'which expects two answers.'

'Whence got you your rude answers?'

'Whence?' said she. 'From my conscience and my faith.'

'Do you not fear my power?'

'Man's power is like a bladder full of wind; it can be undone with the prick of a needle.'

'Do you not know our great princes have commanded that every Christian shall suffer, unless he denies his faith?'

'Your princes err,' said Cecilia, 'and try, by unjust sentences, to make the innocent guilty; they make it a crime in us to love the name of Christ.'

Almachius said, 'Choose one of these two things: either do sacrifice to Jupiter, or else deny Christ, and you shall go free.'

At this the holy maid began to laugh, and said to her judge, 'O judge, confused with folly, would you that I denied innocence?'

'Unhappy wretch,' Almachius replied, 'do you not

know my power? My princes have given me authority over life and death. Why do you speak so proudly to me?'

'I speak steadfastly, not proudly,' said she. 'And if you do not fear to hear the truth, I tell you that yours is a barren power, for you are only the minister of death, not life.'

'Enough of your impudence,' said Almachius. 'Sacrifice to our gods before you go. Whatever you say of me, I can bear like a philosopher, but I will not endure the wrong you speak of our gods.'

'O foolish man,' said Cecilia, 'every word you say betrays your folly. Let your hand fall upon the stone you call a god; test it, and you shall find it stone, since your eyes are too blind to see this for themselves. And people will laugh at you and scorn you for your blindness.'

Then he grew angry, and bade his men take her to her house: 'And there,' said he, 'burn her in a bath of fire.'

And as he bade, they did; they shut her in a bath, and night and day kindled a fire beneath it. And the whole of the night and day she sat cool in the bath, and did not even sweat a single drop. Almachius then sent a message that they should slay her in the bath, and the executioner struck three blows upon her neck, but could not smite her head off; and there was a law that no man should strike a fourth blow when three had failed, and so he left her there half dead, and went his way.

The Christian folk about her wrapped her in sheets, and she lay for three days in her pain, and never ceased teaching them the faith; she commended them all to the care of Saint Urban, and bade them deliver to him all her goods and turn her house into a church for ever.

When she was dead Saint Urban fetched her body, and buried it secretly by night among the other saints. And her house was called the Church of Saint Cecilia. And Saint Urban consecrated it, and there to this day men do their service to Christ and to his saints.

THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S PROLOGUE

WE had scarcely ridden five miles after the life of Saint Cecilia was ended, when at Boughton-under-Blee we were overtaken by a man in a black cloak and a white surplice. I took him to be a canon of some sort. His hat hung on his back, and his cloak was sewn to his hood; he had placed a burdock-leaf under it to keep off the heat, but his pony, a dapple-grey, and his Yeoman's horse, were flecked like magpies with foam up the breastbone, and the men's foreheads dropped with sweat. On reaching us he cried, 'God save this jolly company! I have ridden fast to overtake and ride with you.'

His Yeoman added courteously, 'Sirs, I saw you ride out of your inn this morning, and told my master here, for he loves sport and good company.'

'Thanks, friend,' said our Host. 'Your master seems to

be a sensible man, and I wager he's a jolly one too. Can he tell a good tale or two to entertain us?'

'Who, sir? My master? Yes, and that's no lie. If you knew him as well as I, you'd be surprised at him. He's a man in a thousand, believe me.'

'What is your master?' asked our Host. 'A scholar, perhaps?'

'Something more than a scholar,' said the Yeoman. 'To tell his craft in a few words (yet, though I help him in it, I could not tell you all his craft!) he is so clever, that he could turn the road from here to Canterbury upside down, and pave it with silver and gold.'

'*Benedicite!*' said our Host. 'There's a wonder for you! But if this is the case, why is your master so slovenly dressed, when, according to you, he could afford to buy rich cloth for his gown?'

'Why?' said the Yeoman. 'Why, do you ask me? Because (but don't tell him I said so!) his craft is so great that it defeats its own ends. For which I hold him a fool. For when a man has too much wit, and misuses it, he becomes a fool, like my master here, worse luck.'

'What does your master do with all this craft of his?' asked our Host. 'And where do you live?'

'In the suburbs of a town, skulking in the stews and alleys where thieves and robbers hide themselves. That's where we live, and that's the truth.'

'And, to talk of yourself,' said our Host, 'how come you to be so black in the face?'

'Saint Peter!' said the Yeoman, 'from blowing my master's fires; that's how I came to change colour. You'll never catch me prinking in a looking-glass; my part is to sweat, and learn to calculate, and puff and pant, and keep the fires going, while we try to find out how gold is made. And yet we never seem to get the thing right; though we

keep up the story among the folk, and borrow a pound here, or ten pound there, telling them that we can turn one pound into two. Yet we can't. But all the same, we hope to. Only science slips so fast ahead of us, that we cannot overtake it; and in the end it will make beggars of us.'

While the Yeoman chattered, the Canon drew near, and hearing what he was saying, muttered, 'Hold your peace! You'll be sorry for it if you give me away to this company, and tell what you ought to keep dark.'

'Never mind his threats,' said our Host, 'but tell away.'

'So I will!' said he; and when the Canon saw that he could not stop his man's mouth, he hurried away for shame.

'Aha!' said the Yeoman. 'Now I can tell you everything! Devil take him! I'll have no more to do with him. I've dwelt with this same Canon seven years, and learned none of his science, and lost all I possessed; and so, heaven knows, have many others as well. Once I wore gay clothes, now I may bind my head with an old stocking; once I had a rosy face, now it's the colour of lead. There's all the good your science does for you! But as to our work: when we were practising our craft, we made ourselves appear wonderfully wise, with our quaint and learned terms: and I would blow the fire till my heart failed. How can I tell you of the strange things we mixed in their proportions?—silver and burnt bones, iron filings, salt, and what not, all ground to fine powder, and put into an earthen pot, enclosed in a glass lamp. And how we sealed up pot and glass, to keep the air out? and how our eyes smarted from the fire? and of the trouble we had in refining, and amalgamating, and calcining our quicksilver or mercury? not to mention our arsenic, and salammoniac and brimstone, our herbs such as agrimony and

valerian, our matters combustible and coagulate, and our albification of waters! All in search of the Philosopher's Stone, that shall teach a man how to make gold. Yet for all our cunning, we never got any result. Before the pot went to the firing, my master would temper it; yet as often as we made the attempt, the pot would break, and good-bye to everything! For the metals we put into it were so violent that nothing could resist them, and as the pot burst they would spatter floor and ceiling, and many a pound's-worth would be lost; and sometimes we would think it was for one reason, sometimes for another; but the end of it all is, that we never discovered the secret how to make gold out of other things.

'All the same, there was a religious Canon lived near us, that knew how to get gold out of a fool by his cunning ways and words; and men would ride miles to seek and be beguiled by him. If you like, I'll tell you his tale, here in your presence; and only pray all you religious people not to think I am slandering your holy orders, although my tale is about a canon. For a bad man can be found in every order. So don't be displeased, I beg, but take the tale as it comes.'

The Canon's Yeoman's Tale

THERE was once a Priest in London who had lived there many years, and made himself so pleasant to the wives of the houses he called at, that none of them charged him for board or lodging, and he always went well-dressed and had plenty of silver to spend. And my tale is about a Canon who brought this Priest to confusion.

This sly Canon came one day to the Priest's room, and begged the loan of a certain sum of gold, which he pro-

mised to repay. 'Lend me one mark,' said he, 'and if I do not pay you back in three days, hang me by the neck.' The Priest lent the mark, and the Canon thanked him and took his leave; and on the third day brought the Priest his gold again.

The Priest was delighted, and said, 'I'd never say no to a borrower who keeps his word, though he wanted to borrow a noble or two, or three, or anything else I had.'

'Why shouldn't I keep my word?' said the Canon. 'Praise God, no man ever lost by lending to me yet. And since you have been so good to me, sir, I'll repay your kindness by showing you how I manage, if you like. Before I go, I'll work a bit of magic for you.'

'What, will you really, sir?' said the Priest. 'Do, do, I pray you heartily.'

'At your orders, sir,' replied the Canon.

Now, sirs, do not take this cunning old fox to be my master; it was another Canon, not he, who played on the silly Priest's covetousness and deceived him. Listen to what he did.

'Sir,' he said to the Priest, 'send your man for two or three ounces of quicksilver, and then you shall see wonders.'

'Sir,' said the Priest, 'it shall be done.' And he bade his man go for the quicksilver, and soon brought the three ounces to the Canon; who next sent the servant for coals, to start his work. Then the Canon took from his bosom a little vessel which he gave to the Priest. 'Begin the work yourself,' said he, 'by putting an ounce of quicksilver in this; and under your very eyes I will mortify the quicksilver and turn it into pure silver, by virtue of a costly powder I have here, which is the secret of all my cunning. There are few men I'd let into my secret like this. Send

your man away, and keep the door locked, while we apply our philosophy.'

The servant was dismissed, the door was locked, and the work began. The Priest at the Canon's bidding prepared the vessel, and blew up the fire; and the Canon threw into the vessel a powder, either of chalk or glass, or something that was not worth a fly, and bade the Priest heap up the coals to cover the vessel: 'for,' said he, 'your own two hands shall do it all.' And while the Priest was busily employed, the sly Canon took from his bosom a knot of beechwood in which a hole had been made and filled with silver filings, and then stopped up with wax; for he had come prepared with this bit of trickery, and other things of which I shall tell later. Concealing this in his hand, he said to the Priest, who was busy heaping the coals, 'Friend, you're doing that wrong; but I'll soon heap them as they should be. Saint Giles, how you sweat! Wipe your face with this cloth.' While the Priest was wiping his face, the Canon dropped his beech-knot into the middle of the vessel, and blew up the fire till the coals were flaming fast. 'Now,' said the Canon, 'let's sit and drink and make merry till all's ready.'

Of course, as the beech-knot burned, the silver ran out of the hole and dropped into the vessel; and when the alchemist had given it time, he said, 'Get up, Sir Priest, and bring a chalk-stone and a bowl of water; and so that you may not mistrust me, I will go with you, that nothing be done out of your presence.' So they unlocked the door, locked it again behind them, fetched the chalk-stone and the bowl of water, and returned again. Then the Canon made a hollow in the chalk, the shape and size of an ingot, and took the vessel from the fire, and poured its contents into the stone, and threw it into the bowl of water; and after a little said to the Priest, 'Go and feel

with your hand, and I think you will find silver.' And what the devil else should he find? since silver is silver!

The Priest put in his hand, and to his delight took out the silver ingot. 'The Saints preserve you, Canon!' said the Priest. 'Only teach me your craft, and I am yours in all things.'

'Well,' said the Canon, 'we'll do it all again, so that you may become expert, and able to do the thing yourself in my absence. Take the second ounce of quicksilver, and do as you did before.' So once again the Priest busied himself with the fire, and the Canon took from his bosom a hollow stick, which was filled with an ounce of silver filings as before, and stopped with wax. Then, standing beside the Priest, he cast his false powder into the vessel, and stirred it with his stick; and as the wax melted with the heat, as anyone but a fool would know it must, the silver ran out of the stick into the vessel as before. The Priest, a second time beguiled, was beside himself for joy.

Then the Canon said, 'This is not all. Have you any copper in the place? If not, send out for some.' The copper was quickly brought, and the Canon weighed out an ounce of it and put it in the vessel on the fire, and once more cast in the powder, and made the Priest stoop low to blow the fire. Then he poured the melted copper into the ingot, and put it again into the bowl of water; but as he did so, he slipped out the copper, and slipped in a silver plate, weighing an ounce, which he had up his sleeve. Then he said, 'Put in your hand, and take what is there.' And the Priest took out the third silver plate.

'Now,' said the Canon, 'let us take the three silver plates to a goldsmith, to see if they are good.' So they went to the goldsmith, who tested the plates by fire and hammer; and could not say they were anything but what they ought to be.

Who so glad as the besotted Priest? He was as glad as a nightingale in May, or a knight loved by his lady. And he longed to learn the secret of this craft, and said to the Canon, 'For the love of God, what is the cost of the receipt?'

'It costs a lot,' said the Canon, 'for nobody in England knows it but myself and one friar. You will have to pay forty pounds for it, and but for the friendship between us it would cost you more.'

The Priest counted out the sum of forty pounds in good fat nobles, and gave them to the Canon, who in return gave him his false receipt for turning quicksilver and copper into silver. 'But keep it secret, Priest,' said he, 'for if men knew my cunning power, they would kill me out of envy.'

'Trust me,' said the Priest. 'I'd lose all I have, rather than you should come to harm.'

'Thanks, sir, and farewell,' said the Canon. And he went his way, and the Priest never saw him again.

And when the Priest tried the receipt for himself, good-bye to it! it would not work, no matter how often he tried it. And he knew he had been fooled.

And the end of it is this: God never meant man to find the Philosopher's Stone, and whoever goes against his will shall never thrive, however long he lives. And there's my tale. God send every true man his remedy against evil.

THE DOCTOR OF PHYSIC'S PROLOGUE

WHEN the Yeoman had ended his tale of the sly Canon, our Host said, 'Truly, this Priest was nicely duped! The Canon not only tricked the gold out of his coffer, but made a fool of him as well, instead of a philosopher. Well, let it pass. Sir Doctor of Physic, can you tell us a tale about something honest?'

'I can, if you will listen,' said the Doctor; and at once began his tale.

The Doctor of Physic's Tale

THERE was once, as Titus Livius tells, a knight called Virginius, who had honours, friends, and riches; and, by his wife, one daughter. This maid was more beautiful than any other to be seen; it was as though nature, in creating her, had set out to prove that the works of God

were more excellent than those of the sculptor Pygmalion or the painter Apelles. The maid had reached the charming age of fourteen, and nature had painted her with the red of the rose and the white of the lily, and had dyed her hair in the streams of the sun. And if her beauty was surpassing, her virtue was more so. She was the very flower of young virgins, gentle in bearing, modest in her dress, and, though she was as wise as Pallas, simple in her speech. She needed no elder woman to watch over her; her own virtue was a book whose words and deeds might well be studied by all living maidens. One day this maid, after the custom of young girls, went with her mother to the temple in the town.

Now the Governor of those parts was a justice in the town, and it happened that his eye fell upon the maid as she passed by. His heart was caught by her beauty, and he said to himself, 'This maid shall be mine.' But he knew he could only win her by a trick, for she had so many friends that he could not take her by force. So he sent for a cunning clerk, called Claudius, who lived in the town, told him his purpose, and swore him to secrecy; and when the clerk had consented to do his bidding, the judge gave him many rich gifts.

The next time that the judge, whose name was Appius, was sitting in judgement on the cases brought before him, Claudius stepped forward and said, 'My lord, I pray you see me righted of the wrong set forth in this paper, in which I call Virginius to account, and, though he deny it, can prove by witnesses that he has wronged me.'

The judge answered, 'I cannot give sentence in his absence; let him be called, and I will hear the case.'

Virginius was summoned before the judge, and the accusation was read out as follows:

'To you, my dear lord Appius, your humble servant

Claudius declares that a knight called Virginius now holds, against the law and my will, one of my servants, who is my slave by right; she was stolen one night from my house when she was very young, as I can prove by witnesses; she is not his daughter, whatever he may say. Therefore I pray you, my lord judge, to recover my slave for me.'

Even such was the purport of the bill.

Virginius started up to confront the clerk; but before he could tell his own story, and call witnesses to prove it, the judge gave judgement hastily, saying thus:

'I decree that this clerk shall have his slave again. Go bring her forth, and place her in our care; this is my sentence.'

When Virginius saw that he must give his daughter into the keeping of the wicked judge, he went home, sat down in his hall, and had his dear child called to him; and he looked upon her gentle face with a stricken heart, yet even a father's pity could not change his purpose.

'Daughter, my dear Virginia,' he said, 'you will have to suffer by one of two ways, shame or death. Alas that I was born! Dear daughter, who never deserved to die by the knife, whom I have brought up so lovingly that you were never out of my thoughts: O daughter, jewel of purity, my life's last joy and sorrow, choose death with patience! This is my sentence on you, that you must die for love, not hate, and my pitiful hand must strike the blow.' Then he cried out on Appius, and told her all the case as you have heard it.

'Mercy, dear father,' said the maid; she laid both her arms about his neck, as she so often did, the tears sprang to her eyes, and she said, 'Good father, must I die? Is there no remedy?'

'No, none, my own dear daughter,' said he.

'Then give me leave, my father,' said she, 'to mourn for my death a little; for even Jephthah let his daughter mourn before he slew her, and God knows it was not a sin in her that she ran to be the first to see her father.' So saying, she fell down swooning, and when her swoon had passed she rose again, and said to her father, 'Blessed be God that I shall die a maid. Give me death, rather than shame, and do with your child as you will.'

Then she prayed him to smite her gently with his sword; and so she fell down again in a swoon. And her father, with a sorrowful heart, struck off her head, and holding it by the hair, took it to the judge, where he sat in his court. When Appius saw it, so the story tells, he commanded that Virginius should be hanged. But on that all the crowd thrust forward in pity and anger to save the knight, for the iniquity had become known. They had suspected, by the manner of the clerk's accusation, that it had been made with the assent of Appius, whom they knew to be a wicked man. So they cast Appius himself into prison, where he slew himself; and Claudius was sentenced to be hanged upon a tree, but Virginius, out of pity, prayed mercy for him, and he was exiled. But all the rest concerned in this villainy were hanged.

Here may men see how sin has its reward; and I counsel all of you to give up sin, before sin shall give you up.

THE PARDONER'S PROLOGUE

OUR Host began to swear in fury. 'By the nails on the Cross!' he cried, 'this accursed thief, this false judge, deserved as shameful a death as the heart can devise! Alas! the maid paid too dearly for her beauty; her beauty was her death. Truly, dear master, this was a piteous tale to hear, and my heart is broken for pity of the maid. I shall need some of your physic, or a draught of barley ale, or else a merry tale to cure me! So, good friend the Pardoner,' said he, 'tell us a tale, for you must know many.'

'I will anon,' said he; 'but here's an ale-house! First let me drink and bite a bit of cake.'

The gentlefolk in the company exclaimed, 'None of your coarse jests, Pardoner! Tell us some moral tale, that we may profit by it.'

'Gladly,' said he. 'I'll look for it in my cup, while I am drinking.'

Then he spoke as follows: 'My Lords, when I preach in church, I take pains to speak up in a ringing voice, as loud as a bell; I speak by heart, and my theme is always the same: Greed is the root of all Evil. First I announce my arrival; then I display the Bulls and seals given to me by popes and cardinals, patriarchs and bishops; then I speak a few words in Latin, to flavour my sermon and stir men to devotion; then I show my relics, my stones and rags and bones, including the shoulder-blade of a holy Jewish sheep; and I say that by these relics I can shrive the sins of all who will pay for it. But (I say) if there be any man or woman in this church that has committed a sin so horrible that he dare not name it for shame, let him not come up to be shrived, for my relics will do him no good. But all others may come, and make their offerings. And so everybody comes, and by this means I get a hundred marks a year. Then I preach my sermon, and stretch my neck all round the pulpit over the people sitting under me, and keep my hands and tongue going so busily that it's a joy to see and hear me. My text is always Greed, and the need to give freely. And so I get a lot out of them. For why should I live in poverty, as long as preaching brings in gold and silver? Why should I labour, or turn basket-maker, when by begging I can get money, cloth, cheese, and wheat out of everybody, from the Priest's servant to the poorest widow in the village? So I drink wine and have my sport in every town I go to. Well, sirs, you want a tale of me. I've drunk my barley ale, and I hope you'll like what I say; though I have my faults, I can tell a moral tale, so hold your peace, and listen.'

The Pardoner's Tale

THERE was once in Flanders a company of young people who lived a riotous life, gaming, and eating, and drinking, and dancing, and dicing to excess, both day and night; and swearing most abominable oaths.

Late one night, as three of these rioters sat drinking in a tavern, they heard a bell ringing a dead man to the grave; and one of them called to his boy and said, 'Go and ask whose body passes by.'

'No need, sir,' said the boy; 'for I was told who it would be two hours before you came here. It is an old boon companion of yours, who died suddenly tonight; for as he sat drunk upon his seat, the thief whom men call Death stole up and slew him. He has already slain a thousand in the plague; and I think, sir, you should be prepared to meet this enemy yourself.'

'The child says truly,' said the innkeeper. 'In the village a mile away, Death has taken his toll this year of man and woman, child and peasant. I think he must live there; and it were well to take precautions to avoid him.'

'What!' cried the rioter, 'is Death such a dangerous fellow? I vow I'll seek him in every street and alley! Listen, lads, we three are as one; let us swear to be brothers, and go forth to slay this false traitor Death!'

The three plighted their troth to live and die by each other, as though they were brothers born; and they started up, in a drunken rage, to go to the village of which the innkeeper had spoken; swearing with grisly oaths that Death should die.

They had not gone half a mile when they met a poor old man, who greeted them humbly, saying, 'God save you, masters!'

The proudest of the three rioters answered him, 'What, wretch! why are you swaddled up to the eyes; and how comes it that you have managed to live to so great an age?'

'Because, sir,' said the old man, 'I cannot find a man in town or village that will exchange his youth for my years; and so I must keep my age as long as God will. Death, alas! will not take my life, though I walk early and late, knocking with my staff on the door of my mother, the earth, saying, "Dear mother, let me in, that I may rest." But she will not; and that is why my face is pale and wrinkled. But, sirs, you should not speak ill to an old man who has done no wrong. You may live to be as old as he. God bless you, wherever you go! I must be going too.'

'Not yet, old churl!' said the rioter. 'You spoke just now of that same traitor Death, who goes about slaying our friends. Tell us where he is, old spy, or you shall die yourself!'

'Why, sirs, if you are so eager to find Death, turn up this crooked path, for I left him in that grove yonder under a tree, and there he is still. Nor will he run away, for all your threats. Do you see that oak? there shall you find him. And so, God that saved mankind save you.'

The rioters ran until they reached the tree, and there they found some seven bushels of florins coined in gold. They no longer thought of seeking Death, but rejoicing in the sight of the bright florins, sat down by the precious hoard. The youngest of them spoke first.

'Brothers,' he said, 'heed what I say. This treasure has been given to us that we may live in mirth and jollity; and we will spend it as easily as we have got it. Who would have dreamed that we should meet such fortune today? But since the gold is not ours, we had better carry it home

to one of our houses. We dare not do this by daylight; for men might say that we were thieves, and hang us. We must carry the treasure cunningly by night. So I propose that we now draw lots, to see which of us shall slip off to the town to bring back bread and wine, while the other two guard the treasure; and when it is night, we will carry the treasure to whatever place we are agreed on.'

They prepared the lots, and drew; and the cut fell to the youngest, who at once set out for town.

As soon as he was gone, one said to the other, 'You are my sworn brother, are you not? and here is much gold, to be divided between three. But suppose I could devise how it might be divided between us two, would I not have done you a good turn?'

The other answered, 'I do not see how we can, for he knows he has left the gold with us. What could we say to him? What could we do?'

'Why,' said the first, 'two are stronger than one. When he is sitting eating, rise up as though you would have some sport with him; while you pretend to wrestle with him, I will thrust my dagger into his side, and see you do the same. Then, my dear friend, we can share all the gold between us.'

And so these two bad men agreed to slay the third.

Meanwhile the youngest, on his way to the town, seemed to feel the bright new florins rolling round his heart. 'O Lord!' said he. 'If only I could have all the gold to myself! No man under the sun would then live so merry as I.'

At last the devil, our enemy, put it into his mind to buy poison to kill his companions with; so he sought out an apothecary in the town, and told him he needed poison to exterminate his rats, and a polecat who killed his chickens.

The apothecary answered, 'Here is a poison which will kill anything that eats so much as a grain of it; it is so strong that he would die before you could go a mile.'

The wretched man took the box of poison in his hand, and hurried to the next street, where he bought three big bottles. In two of them he poured the poison; the third he kept clean for his own drink, for he expected to toil all night, carrying the gold away from the place by himself. Having filled his three big bottles with wine, he went back to his companions.

What need of more words? For even as they had agreed upon his death, so they killed him, and that at once. And this done, one said to the other, 'Now let us sit and drink and make merry, and then we'll bury his body.' And he drank from one of the poisoned bottles, and passed it to his comrade; and so they both died.

O cursed sin! O treacherous homicide! O wickedness! O gluttony, luxury, and gaming! Good men, repent of your trespasses, and keep from the sin of greed! Come, for a noble, or a crown, or any ring or jewel you have on you, I will shrive you! And you, good wives, for a length of cloth I'll enter your names on my roll. How lucky you are that I am of your fellowship! for I can assoil you all. And first I will begin with our Host, who is the most enveloped in sin. Come forth, Sir Host! For a groat you shall kiss every one of my relics. Unbuckle your purse!'

'Not I,' said he, 'though I be cursed for it! You would make me kiss a rag of your old breeches, and swear it was the relic of a saint.'

The Pardoner was too angry to reply.

'Well,' said our Host, 'I'll play with you no more, nor with any other angry man.'

But the good Knight, when he saw that everybody was

laughing, said, 'This has gone far enough. Sir Pardoner, do not frown, and you, Sir Host, who are so dear to me, I pray you kiss the Pardoner. And I pray you, Pardoner, draw near, and let us laugh and jest as we did before.'

And so they kissed, and rode on their way.

THE SHIPMAN'S PROLOGUE

Our Host stood up in his stirrups and cried, 'That was a right good tale! Come, Sir Parish Priest, tell us as good a one, for you learned men know much old lore, I dare swear.'

'What need to swear?' said the Priest.

'Oh, are you there, Jankyn!' answered our Host. 'Masters, I think I smell a Lollard in the wind! And we're likely to be having a sermon from our Priest here.'

'That we shall not!' said the Shipman. 'No preaching, please! I'll get in before him with a jolly tale that shall ring merry as a bell; but there'll be none of your philosophy in it, nor terms of law and physic—for I haven't much Latin, and that's the truth.'

The Shipman's Tale

A MERCHANT once lived in Saint Denis, who was so rich that he was held to be wise. And he had a most companionable wife, of excellent beauty; but so fond of feasting, dancing, and fine clothes, that she cost him a great deal. Because he was generous and his wife was fair, the Merchant's house was much frequented by guests, amongst whom there was a Monk, a handsome man of about thirty winters. This young Monk had known the goodman from his earliest years, and was as much at home in his house as a friend can be. They had been born in the same village, and the Monk claimed him as his kinsman; which pleased the Merchant as much as dawn pleases the cock, and he never denied it. Each of them swore to be the other's brother as long as life should last. So Dan John, the Priest, was free of the house, and was pleasant and liberal to everybody in it; whenever he came he brought gifts for all, from the Merchant down to the scullion. So everyone was as glad of his coming as a bird of the rising sun.

One day it fell out that the Merchant decided to journey to Bruges, to buy wares; and he sent a messenger to Paris, entreating Dan John to come and spend a day or two at Saint Denis with him and his wife before he departed. The Monk got leave of his abbot to ride forth to oversee the granges and barns of the monastery; and in due course he came to Saint Denis. Who so welcome as my lord Dan John, our very dear cousin? He brought with him a cask of malvoisie and another of Verona wine; so for a day or two I leave the Merchant and the Monk to eat, drink, and make merry.

On the third day the Merchant arose, and went to his

counting-house to reckon up the year's accounts, and see how he stood. Having laid out his books and money-bags on the counter, he locked himself in, with orders that no man should disturb him; and there he sat till after midday.

Dan John had also risen early, to walk in the garden and say his prayers. As he was walking, the goodwife came into the garden, and saluted him sweetly.

'Dear Cousin John,' said she, 'what makes you rise so soon?'

'Niece,' said he, 'five hours' sleep is enough for any man, except he be old. But you look pale and troubled. What's the matter?'

The goodwife shook her head, and said, 'Alas! I dare tell nobody what's the matter. But I am so full of trouble that I shall either have to leave the country, or put an end to myself.'

'God forbid, niece!' said the Monk. 'Tell me your trouble. Perhaps I can help you. Whatever you tell me shall be secret, I swear on my oath.'

'I swear the same to you,' said she. 'Whatever you tell me shall be secret, and I'll never betray a word of it to anybody.' Having sworn, they kissed each other, and felt free to speak.

'Cousin,' said she, 'there is not time enough for me to tell you all I have suffered at the hands of my husband, your cousin.'

'Nay,' said the Monk, 'he's no more my cousin than this leaf on the tree. So don't hesitate to confide in me.'

'Oh, Dan John,' sighed she, 'my husband is the worst that ever was! But there, a wife mustn't talk against her husband. I'll just tell you this much, that he is worth no more than a fly, and the worst of him all is his niggardliness. Now merely to do him credit I am obliged to dress myself handsomely, and by next Sunday I must pay out a hun-

dred francs or be disgraced. I'd rather be unborn than dishonoured, yet if my husband discover it, I am lost. Lend me this hundred francs and save my life, Sir John, and I will thank you for ever, and pay you faithfully on a certain day.'

The kind Monk answered her, 'Truly, dear lady, I am so sorry for you, that I will bring you the hundred francs as soon as your husband is gone to Flanders. So go and order dinner with a light heart.'

'I will,' said she, and went away as jolly as a magpie, and bade the cook make haste. Then she went up and knocked on her husband's door.

'*Qui est là?*' cried he.

'Peter! it is I,' said she. 'How long do you mean to fast? How long are you going on reckoning up your sums and books and things? Aren't you ashamed to keep Dan John waiting for his dinner? Come down, I say.'

'Wife,' said the man, 'you have no idea how busy we merchants have to be, and how quickly we can be overtaken by bad luck. That is why I must go to Flanders tomorrow; but I'll return as soon as I can, and meanwhile, see you look after things thriftily for me here at home.' So saying, he left the counting-house, and after hearing a mass, went to dinner, where he entertained the Monk lavishly. After dinner, Dan John took him aside and said quietly, 'Cousin, may God and Saint Austin guard you on your journey; be careful of your diet, and if there is anything I can do for you while you are away, command me. One thing before you go: I would be glad if you could lend me a hundred francs for a week or two, to pay for certain cattle I must buy. I will not fail you on the day, but I must pay for the beasts tonight. And please tell nobody about it.'

The good Merchant answered, 'A mere nothing, dear

Cousin John; my gold and goods are yours, take what you want. But remember, a merchant's money is his plough, and without gold he can produce nothing. So pay the money when you can; I'm only too glad to serve you.'

He counted out the hundred francs, and lent them to Dan John; and none but those two knew of the loan. Then they drank, gossiped, and made merry till it was time for Dan John to ride back to his abbey. The next day the Merchant set out for Flanders; and, arrived at Bruges, he went about his business and wasted no time on pleasure.

The Sunday after the Merchant had gone, Dan John returned to Saint Denis, and everybody was glad to see him, down to the smallest page. The goodwife made him welcome, and entertained him well; he gave her the hundred francs, and went back next day to his abbey.

His business ended, the Merchant returned in due course to Saint Denis; and after greeting his wife warmly, told her his goods had cost so much that he must needs raise a loan, as he was due to pay twenty thousand crowns. For this purpose he went to Paris, to borrow certain moneys of his friends, and the first he visited was Dan John; not in the way of business, but as a friend. Dan John welcomed him heartily, and heard all the news of his journey, and how he had this big loan to raise.

'Well, I am glad you are home again, safe and sound,' said Dan John; 'and if I were rich you should not lack your twenty thousand crowns, if only for your kindness the other day in lending me money. As to that same money, by the way, I returned it to your wife last Sunday, so you had better ask her for it. And greet her kindly from me when you do so.'

The Merchant finished his business in town, raised his loan, paid his debt to the Lombards in the city, and went home merry as a popinjay; for by the sale of his new

goods he was sure of a profit of a thousand francs. His wife ran to meet him at the gate, and they passed a pleasant evening over their good fortune; but in the midst of their merriment the Merchant remembered, and said, 'Now I am just a little vexed with you, wife, do you know why? It is because you might have made a misunderstanding between me and my cousin Dan John. You ought to have told me, before I went to Paris, that he had paid you back a hundred francs; when I mentioned the loan I had to raise, I thought he looked a little out of countenance, as though he expected me to ask him to repay his debt to me (though indeed I never thought of such a thing!). So pray, wife, be careful after this always to tell me when a debtor has in my absence returned the money to you, else I might ask him for what he has already paid.'

The wife was no whit abashed, but answered him boldly at once: 'Well! To think that rascal Dan John should play me such a trick! It is quite true he brought me a sum of gold, but I believed it was a gift, out of love and kinship to you; for you know how generous he always is. But since it appears that I owe you this money, you shall not find me a slack debtor; only I shall have to pay you bit by bit, for, to tell you the truth, I have spent it all on dress, that I may be a credit to you when I go out. So do not be cross with me; for I am your own dear wife, and will pay you, as a wife should, in kisses.'

The Merchant saw there was no help for it; so instead of chiding her, he laughed. 'Well, wife, I forgive you,' he said; 'but don't be so extravagant another time, and take better care of what is in your charge.'

And that's the end of my story. May we never lack for good stories as long as we live.

THE PRIORESS'S PROLOGUE

'WELL said, by my bones!' cried our Host. 'Long may you live to sail the coast, Shipman, good Sir Shipman! Now who of this company will tell the next tale?' And he added, as courteously as though he had been a maid, 'My Lady Prioress, if I thought it were not troubling you, I would decree that you should tell the next tale. Will you vouchsafe us, my dear lady?'

'Gladly,' said she, and spoke as follows:

The Prioress's Tale

O LORD, how marvellous is thy name! (said she). Thy goodness is witnessed by the mouths of children, who praise thee even at the breast. Wherefore in praise of thee and thy white lily flower, the Maid, I will tell my story.

O maiden mother, mother maid, help me to tell my tale! My wits are weak, I am as a child of twelve months

or less, that can hardly say a word; I pray you, guide my song.

In a great city in Asia there was a Jewry, sustained among the Christian folk by the lord of the country for the sake of usury, so hateful to Christ and his Apostles. The street of the Jews was open from end to end, and it was free for men to go through.

At the farther end there stood a little school for Christian children, who came in their numbers year by year to learn to sing and read, as little children must.

Among these children was a widow's son, a little scholar seven years of age, who went daily to the school; and passing the image of Christ's Mother on his way, he used to kneel down, as his own mother had taught him, and say his Ave Maria. Good children are quick to learn, and he never forgot it.

As he read his primer in the school, this little child heard the older children singing *O Alma Redemptoris* from their song book; and he drew as near as he dared, listening to the words and music, until he knew the first verse by heart. He was too young and tender to know what the Latin meant; but one day he begged his companion to explain the song to him, and tell him why it was sung. His companion, who was older than he, answered, 'I have heard say that this song was made to salute Our Lady, and pray her to be our help and succour when we die. I cannot explain it further; I learn singing, not grammar.'

'And is this song made in reverence of Christ's Mother?' said the innocent. 'Then I will do my best to learn it all, before Christmas is gone; even though I be scolded and beaten for not knowing my lessons, I will learn the song in my Lady's honour.'

His companion taught him the song every day as they went home, till he knew it by heart, and could sing it well

and clearly. Twice a day it passed through his throat, as he went to and from school, for all his heart was set on the Mother of Christ. Her sweetness so possessed him, that he could not stop singing her praise by the way; and so this little child passed through the Jewry, always merrily singing *O Alma Redemptoris*.

Then our first enemy, the serpent Satan, who had his wasps' nest in the heart of the Jews, said to them: 'O Hebrew people! is it to your honour that such a boy walks freely among you, singing a song that is against your law?'

Thenceforth the Jews conspired to remove the innocent out of the world; and they hired a murderer who lived in a secret alley, and as the child was passing this false Jew seized him fast, and cut his throat, and threw him down a pit.

O cursed folk! O Herods come again! How shall your sin avail you? Murder will out, and the child's blood cries out upon your deed.

O little martyr (said she) now you may sing for ever in the train of the white celestial Lamb! For John the Evangelist in Patmos said that all pure innocents sing with the Lamb in heaven.

The poor widow waited all night for her little child, but he did not come. As soon as it was day, she sought him, with pale face and anxious heart, at the school and elsewhere, until she learned that he had last been seen in the Jewry. Like one half out of her mind, she bore the mother's sorrow in her breast to every place in which she might find her child; she ever cried on the gentle Mother of Christ, and at last she sought her child among the Jews.

She implored every Jew in the place to tell her if he had seen her child go by. They answered no; but Jesus

put it into her mind to search the pit in which her son had been cast.

Great God, whose praise comes from the mouth of innocents, lo! as this gem of chastity, this jewel of martyrdom lay there with his throat cut, he began to sing *O Alma Redemptoris* so loud that all the place rang.

The Christian folk who were passing ran up for wonder, and sent hastily for the provost; he came at once, and praised Christ and his Mother, and after that he had the Jews bound fast.

With piteous lamentations they took up the child, always singing his song; and in a great procession they carried him with honour to the nearest abbey. His mother lay, like another Rachel, swooning by the bier; the people could hardly tear her from it.

Each of the Jews that had known of the murder died in torment; the provost would not overlook their wickedness, but had them drawn with wild horses, and then hung.

Meanwhile the innocent lay upon his bier before the high altar where the mass was said; and after that the abbot and his monks came to bury him; and as they sprinkled him with holy water, the child began to sing *O Alma Redemptoris Mater*.

The abbot, who was a holy man, as a monk should be, began to conjure the young child, saying: 'O dear child, in the name of the holy Trinity, tell me how you come to sing, although your throat is cut.'

'My throat is cut to the bone,' said the child, 'and because of it I should have been dead long ago; but Jesus Christ allows me, for the glory of his Mother, still to sing *O Alma* loud and clear. I always loved Christ's sweet Mother, the fountain of mercy, and when I should have lost my life she came to me and bade me sing the song you

have heard as I died; and when I had sung it, I thought she laid a grain under my tongue. Therefore I sing, and still must sing, in honour of the holy maid, until the grain is taken from under my tongue; and she said to me, "My little child, when the grain is taken from thy tongue I will fetch thee; do not be afraid, I will not forsake thee."

The holy abbot drew the child's tongue out, and took the grain away; and he softly gave up the ghost. And when the abbot had seen this wonder, his salt tears ran down like rain, and he fell on the ground and lay quite still. The monks too lay on the pavement, weeping and praising Christ's dear Mother; then, rising, they bore the martyr from his bier, and enclosed his little body in a tomb of white marble stones. There he is now, may we meet him in heaven.

O young Hugh of Lincoln! slain also, not long since, by the wicked Jews, pray for us weak and sinful folk, that merciful God will show us his great mercy, for love of his Mother Mary. *Amen.*

PROLOGUE TO SIR TOPAS

WHEN this miracle had been related, every sober man fell silent with wonder, until our Host began to joke again. And looking towards me, he said: 'What man are you? You are for ever staring at the ground as though you were trying to find a hare. Draw up, and look merry. Way for this man, my masters! His figure is as shapely as my own—a pretty poppet, this, for any woman to put her arm about! He's small and fair of face, and has an elvish look. Say something, sir, since other folk have spoken; and tell us a merry tale.'

'I'm sorry, Host,' I said, 'but the only tale I know is an old rhyme I learned once long ago.'

'Yes, that will do,' said he. 'Now, by this man's air, I think we shall hear something pretty.'

The Tale of Sir Topas

THE FIRST FIT

LISTEN, my lords, and listen well,
While I the very truth do tell
To cheer you and solace!
All of a knight a tale I say,
The first in tourney and affray,
His name was Sir Topas.

Born was he in a far country
In Flanders right across the sea,
Poperyng was the place;
His father was the lord so free
Who ruled and governed that country
According to God's grace.

Sir Topas was a mighty lad,
A face fair as new bread he had,
His lips as red as rose,
As for the nose of this same youth,
It was, if you would know the truth,
A very seemly nose.

The saffron hair upon his crown,
And in his yellow beard, ran down
Until it reached his belt;
His hose of Bruges were brown enough,
His robe was made of costly stuff,
And much good money spelt.

He chased the wild deer in the land,
And with his goshawk on his hand
He would a-hawking go;
He also was an archer good,
And in the wrestling when he stood
He every man could throw.

And so it fell upon a day,
I tell it as I tell it may,
Sir Topas went to ride,
And on a dappled horse did prance,
And in his hand he bore a lance,
And a long sword at his side.

He cantered through a forest fair,
And many a wild beast was there,
And herbs sprang of the best,
The clove-flower and the licorice,
And nutmeg, good brown ale to spice,
Or linen in a chest.

The birds so sang upon the way,
Both sparrowhawk and popinjay,
It was a joy to hear,
The throstle-cock gave out his lay,
The wood-dove too upon the spray
Her song sang loud and clear.

When all the birds began to sing,
Sir Topas fell in love-longing,
And laid him down and sighed:
'I dreamed last night a fairy queen
My lady and my love had been!
To find her I will ride.'

Once more he to the saddle strode,
And over stick and stone he rode
An elf queen for to spy,
And at the end of his long chase,
He found within a secret place
The Land of Faëry.

And there he met a great giant
Who called himself Sir Oliphant,
Fearful in word and deed.
He swore an oath, 'Child, by my fay,
Unless you ride another way
I'll straightway slay your steed
With mace!
Know that the Queen of Faëry
With harp and lute and symphony,
Is dwelling in this place.'

The child replied, 'Take warning too!
Tomorrow I will meet with you
When I myself can arm,
And by the luck of fate or chance
I hope that you, by this my lance,
Will come to certain harm.
Your throat
I mean to pierce if I have time
Before the day is past its prime,
And on this spot I'll do't!'

The giant from his sling cast stones,
But Topas with unbroken bones
Escaped back to the town.
Lo, Lords! here endeth my first fit.
If you will any more of it,
I'll tell it up and down.

THE SECOND FIT

Now hold your mouth, *par charitee*,
Both gentle knight and lady free,
  And listen to my spell;
Of battles and of nobleness
And of fair ladies' love-duress
  I am about to tell.

Upon a day——

PROLOGUE TO MELIBEUS

'No more of this, for God's sake!' said our Host. 'Upon my soul, I've had enough of your trash! It makes my very ears ache. To the devil with your doggerel!'

'It's the best rhyme I can do,' I said. 'Why do you stop my tale when you stopped none of the others?'

'Because, to put it plainly,' said he, 'your rhyming is not worth a brass farthing; you're only wasting our time. In a word, sir, you shall rhyme no more; let's see whether you can't do better in prose.'

'Gladly,' I said. 'I know a little thing in prose that you ought to like: a moral virtuous tale, told by sundry folk in sundry ways, just as the Evangelists told the story of Jesus Christ each in his own way, without repeating everything his fellows said; yet, Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, the conclusion was all one. So, masters, if I seem to be telling you something you already know, and vary

it in the telling, don't blame me; I shall reach the right conclusion in the end. Listen, pray, and let me tell my tale out.'

The Tale of Melibeus

A RICH and mighty man, by name Melibeus, had by his wife, Prudence, a daughter called Sophia. One day he went to take his sport in the fields, leaving his wife and daughter at home with the doors fast shut. But three of his enemies, who had seen him go, set ladders to the walls of his house, entered by the window, beat his wife, and wounded his daughter with five mortal wounds; and leaving her for dead, went away.

When Melibeus returned to his house and saw the mischief, he began to weep and cry and tear his clothes like a madman. Prudence, his wife, begged him to cease weeping, but he only wept more than ever. His noble wife then remembered the words of Ovid in *The Remedy of Love*: 'He is a fool who restrains a mother from weeping at the death of her child, till she has wept her fill; after which you may beg her to stay her tears, and do your best to comfort her with gentle words.' So Prudence suffered her husband to weep for a certain time, and then she said, 'Alas, my lord! it is not like a wise man to give vent to such sorrow. Your daughter, by God's grace, may be healed; but even if she die, you must not destroy yourself.'

Then Melibeus said to his wife Prudence, 'You are right, but my heart is so troubled with grief that I know not what to do.'

'Summon your truest friends and wisest kinsmen,' said Prudence, 'tell them your grievance, hear their counsel,

and be governed by what they say. For Solomon says, "Do all things by counsel, and you will never regret it."'

Following her advice, Melibeus summoned a great council of people, young and old, surgeons, physicians, and, among others, certain old enemies who he believed were reconciled to him, and certain neighbours who reverenced him more out of fear than love. There came also many subtle flatterers, and learned advocates of the law. When these folk were all assembled together, Melibeus put his unhappy case to them, showing plainly by his manner that his heart was bitter and ready to do vengeance on his foes, and eager to make war on them at once. Nevertheless, he asked their counsel in this matter.

Then up rose a doctor and said, 'Sir, it is not the surgeon's part to support war, but to heal the hurts it makes. And sometimes, when two parties have hurt each other, the same surgeon heals them both. We will do our best to heal your daughter of her grievous wounds, and by the grace of God she will soon be whole.' So said the other doctors; but one or two added that, even as maladies are often cured by their opposites, so men might sometimes remedy war by opposing it with its contrary. And all the envious neighbours and false flatterers made much of Melibeus, praising his power, and despising that of his adversaries; and declared outright that he should avenge himself upon them and begin the war.

Then up rose a wise advocate, and said, 'My lords, it would be a pity to err by acting too quickly. We counsel you, Melibeus, to set a guard upon yourself, and to garrison your house, but we cannot decide in so short a time whether it will be profitable to go to war. Therefore we ask some leisure to deliberate upon the case.' On this all the young folk started up and poured scorn on the wise

old man, saying, 'Strike while the iron's hot!' and with one voice they shouted, 'War! war!'

Then up rose the oldest and wisest, and lifted his hand for silence and leave to speak. 'My lords,' said he, 'many a man who cries "War! war!" little knows what war is. The entrance to war is so open, that at the beginning every man may enter easily to find it; but he shall not as easily know what is the end of it. When war is once begun, many an unborn child shall starve in its youth because of this same war, or else live in sorrow and die in wretchedness. Therefore, before any war be begun, men must hold solemn council and great deliberation.' But when this old man tried to enforce his argument by reasons, almost everybody broke in and stopped him; and as he could not get a hearing, the wise man sat down sadly. Only a few spoke privately in the ear of Melibeus, and counselled him against the general will. And Melibeus, having seen that the greater part of his council was for war, consented and confirmed their sentence.

When Prudence saw that her husband was determined to make war upon his enemies, she awaited her time, and then addressed him humbly: 'My lord, I beseech you, as earnestly as I can, not to act too hastily; for the proverb says, "He makes most speed who knows how to wait."'

Then Melibeus answered, 'I do not mean to act on your advice, for many reasons; everybody would hold me for a fool if, because of your counsel, I changed things which have been counselled otherwise by so many. Besides, all women are wicked and none of them good; Solomon says, "Among a thousand men I have found one good man, but I never found one good woman among women." And he says, "Never give thy wife the power over thyself."'

Dame Prudence listened patiently, and answered, 'My lord, your first reason is easily answered; it is not folly to

change one's counsel when the thing itself is changed, or looks different from what it was at first. And though your enterprise is ordained by a great number of people, yet you are not bound to do it unless you like; and you will find that truth and profit are found rather among a few wise folk than in the multitude of people, where every man chatters as he lists. As to your second reason, that all women are wicked, could our Lord Jesus Christ have been born of a woman if that were true? And though Solomon says he never found one good woman, certainly many another man has found many a good, true woman. Have you not often tested my patience and my silence, and found that I can both help and hide things? And if you should now ask my counsel, it would not give me the mastery over you, for the choice to follow it would still be yours. There was once a scholar who asked, "What is better than gold? Jasper. And what is better than jasper? Wisdom. And what is better than wisdom? Woman. And what is better than a good woman? Nothing." Then, sir, since many women are good, their counsel must be good; and if you will seek mine, I will restore your daughter to you, whole and sound, and will only advise what will be to your honour in this case.'

Melibeus, when he had heard these words of his wife Prudence, answered, 'In sooth, Solomon speaks truly when he says, "Words spoken in discretion are honeycombs that give sweetness to the soul and health to the body." Wife, for your sweet words, and because I have often tried your truth and wisdom, I will be governed by your counsel in all things.'

'Then, sir,' said Prudence, 'let me tell you how to govern yourself in choosing your counsel. You should begin by beseeching God to be your counsellor; and then you should drive three things from your heart that are

against good counsel: anger, greed, and hastiness. For anger makes a man think he may do things he may not, and so confuses his judgement that he cannot take good counsel with himself, and it makes him talk viciously, which stirs others to anger and ire. Greed too, sir, you must drive out of your heart, for greed is the root of all evil; and you must also drive out hastiness, and not mistake a sudden thought for the best one. When you have deliberated well, keep your own counsel, and call about you those of your friends only whom you hold the truest and wisest. Eschew the counsel of fools and flatterers, and especially the flatterers; for the Book saith you should rather fly from the sweet words of flatterers than from the acid words of your friend who tells the truth.

'Now, sir, having chosen your counsel, and considered well the thing on which you wish to be advised, you should tell them the tale plainly. And your decision should then be considered according to reason, your power to do what you have decided, and the agreement of the better part of your councillors; you should also consider what things will come of your decision, such as hate, peace, war, grace, profit, or damage, and many other things besides. And when you have resolved by council what you can undertake, carry it out firmly to the end.

'As to the time when you may change your counsel without blame, surely a man may change his purpose when the cause is at an end, or when a new cause appears; or if you find your counsel was dishonest. Take this for a general rule, that that counsel is wrong which is so strongly fixed that it cannot be changed under any conditions whatever.'

When Melibeus had heard his wife Prudence's doctrine, he answered, 'Dame, you have taught me well, in general, how I should act in choosing my councillors; but

tell me, in particular, what you think of the councillors we have already chosen.'

'My lord,' she said, 'I humbly beseech you not to be angry if I say what displeases you. The council you called cannot be called a council, but rather an act of madness. You erred first in gathering to your council a multitude of noisy people and flatterers, young folk and old enemies, instead of a few tried friends who are wise and true; and you erred further in showing them by your words that you were inclined to war and vengeance, so that they flattered you by counselling the same. You know well that there are more fools than wise men in the world; therefore it is better, in taking counsel, to trust to the wisdom of the few than to the voice of the many.'

Melibeus replied, 'I see well that I have erred; and as you have already proved that he is not to blame who changes his councillors in certain cases, I am ready to change mine. For the proverb says, "To sin is human, but to continue in sin is the work of the devil."'

'Let us see, then,' said Prudence, 'who spoke best among your councillors. The doctors spoke wisely in saying that it was their office to cure and not to wound. But what did you understand them to mean when they said that a malady is cured by its contrary?'

'Why,' said Melibeus, 'that as my enemies have acted contrary to me, and done me wrong, I should act contrary to them, and avenge myself.'

'Lo!' said Prudence, 'how a man judges after his own desire! Sir, you have understood the doctors wrong; for wickedness is not contrary to wickedness, nor vengeance to vengeance; they are the same thing, therefore vengeance is not cured by vengeance, nor wrong by wrong, but each of these will aggravate the other. You should have understood the doctors thus: Good and evil are two

contraries, and peace and war, and vengeance and sufferance, and discord and accord; and therefore evil is cured by good, and war by peace, and so on. And now tell me what you understood your councillors to mean who bade you be provident in garrisoning your house.'

Melibeus answered, 'Why, I understood them to mean that I should provide my house with towers and armour and artillery; and by such things protect my person and defend my house against my enemies.'

To this Prudence answered, 'Providing high towers costs much money and labour; and when they are provided they will not be worth a straw unless they are defended by true friends. Know that the greatest garrison a rich man can have for himself and his possessions is to be beloved by his servants and his neighbours. And when your wise old councillors said you should do nothing in haste, but should only act after great deliberation, they spoke well. But what of the counsel of your neighbours, your old enemies, and your flatterers, who say one thing to you in private, and another in public? What of the young, who are all for war and vengeance? I say, Melibeus, that you have forgotten our Lord Jesus Christ when you let vengeance enter your heart.'

'But,' said Melibeus, 'vengeance destroys the wicked men, and distinguishes them from the good ones. For it is written, "If thou dost not avenge a wrong, thou leavest the enemy free to do a new wrong. And there are things which no man can suffer."'

'I grant,' said Prudence, 'that a man can suffer too much, but it does not follow that he who is wronged can cure it by taking vengeance. It is for the judges to avenge wrongs and injuries. But put it that you do not leave it to them, and have the right to avenge yourself: still I say that you are acting too hastily, without taking time to

learn the power of your enemies. Their condition may be better than yours, and so I say that you should be more patient. For patience, says Saint James in his Epistle, is one of the virtues of perfection.'

'It is true, Dame,' said Melibeus, 'that patience is a virtue; but every man is not perfect, and neither am I, for my heart will never be at peace until it is avenged. And if my enemies could do me a wrong without counting the danger, I ought not to be reproved if I put myself in some danger to avenge myself, and repay one outrage with another.'

'Ah!' said Dame Prudence, 'now you are speaking in the heat of your desires; but in no case in the world should one outrage be avenged by another. For Cassidorus says that he who avenges himself by an outrage is as bad as him who did the outrage. And Solomon says that he who loves danger shall fall in danger.'

'It is plain, Dame,' said Melibeus, 'by your fair words and reasons, that you do not like this war at all. But I have yet to hear your own counsel as to what I should do.'

'Then,' said she, 'I counsel that you should make peace with your enemies and forgive them. For did not our Lord Jesus Christ say to his Apostles, "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they are the children of God"?'

'Ah,' cried Melibeus, 'I see that you do not love my honour and good name! You know that my adversaries have begun this wrong, and do not come to ask for peace themselves; and would you have me go and cry them mercy?'

Then Dame Prudence seemed roused to anger, and said, 'Sir, by your grace, I love your honour and good name as I love my own; yet in telling you to make peace I have said nothing amiss. For the sage says, "Though the quarrel begin in one man, the reconciliation begins in

thyself." And the prophet says, "Flee from wrath and do goodness, seek peace and follow it, as much as in you lies."'

When Melibeus saw Dame Prudence angry, he said to her, 'Dame, I pray you not to be displeased with the things I say, for you know I am angry, and no wonder; and those who are angry know not what they do or say. For the prophet says, Troubled eyes cannot see clearly. So counsel me as you please, and I am ready to do as you desire. And if you reprove me for my madness, I will but love and praise you more.'

Then Dame Prudence felt free at last to discover to him her wishes, and she said, 'First, above all, I counsel you to make your peace with God, who suffered this tribulation to fall upon you; and after that God will send your enemies to you, and make them fall at your feet, ready to do your will. For he who is pleasing to God changes the hearts of his enemies, and constrains them to seek grace of him. And I pray you let me speak with your enemies in a private place, without their knowing it is by your consent; and when I know their intentions I can counsel you better.'

'Dame,' said Melibeus, 'do your will and pleasure, I put myself wholly at your disposition.'

Then Dame Prudence took thought with herself as to how she might bring all this to a good end. And she sent for the adversaries to meet her privately, and showed them what great good comes of peace, and what great harm of war; and told them, with fair words, that they ought to repent deeply of the wrong they had done to Melibeus, her lord, and to her daughter and herself. When they had heard the good words of Dame Prudence, they were so surprised and ravished, that their joy in her was past telling. 'Ah, lady!' they said, 'you have showed

us what a blessing sweetness is; and you have given us of your own free will the forgiveness of which we are not worthy, and which we ought to ask with contrition and humility. Now we see how true was the wisdom of Solomon who said, "Sweet words multiply friends, and make the wicked gentle." We put ourselves gladly in your hands, and are ready to obey the commands of my lord Melibeus. We know we have injured him out of all reason and measure, for which we cannot make enough amends; but perhaps in his wrath he will enjoin on us a heavier sentence than we can bear; therefore, merciful lady, we beseech you to help us in our need, lest we be destroyed by our own madness.'

'Do not mistrust my lord,' said Dame Prudence, 'for know well that he is sweet-tempered, gentle, generous, and courteous; and further, I am sure he will do nothing in this matter without my counsel; and by the grace of God, I will do all in my power to make you reconciled to us.'

They answered with one voice, 'Worshipful lady, we are wholly at your disposal, and are ready to come on any day you name, to fulfil your will and that of Lord Melibeus.'

Prudence then bade them depart secretly, and returned to Melibeus, and told him that she had found his adversaries repentant, acknowledging their sins, ready to suffer punishment, and begging his mercy.

Then Melibeus said, 'He who acknowledges and not excuses his sin, is worthy of forgiveness. Seneca says, "Where there is confession there is remission, for confession is neighbour to innocence." Therefore I consent to make peace; but we will do nothing without the consent of our friends.'

Then Prudence was joyful, and said, 'Sir, you are well

advised; for just as you were stirred by the counsel of your friends to make war, you shall not, without their counsel, make peace with your enemies.' She quickly sent messengers to their kinsmen and true friends; and Melibeus told them how the matter stood, and prayed them to give their counsel upon it. And, after examining it from all sides, they counselled Melibeus to make peace, and receive his adversaries with a forgiving heart.

When Dame Prudence had heard that the counsel of Melibeus and his friends accorded with her own, she was glad at heart, and said, 'There is an old proverb which says, "Do not put off till tomorrow what you may do today"; therefore, send trusty messengers to your adversaries, telling them that if they want peace they must come without tarrying.' Which thing was done; and when the adversaries received the message they were right glad, and took their way at once to the court of Melibeus, bringing with them certain friends who would stand surety for them.

When they had come into his presence, Melibeus said:

'The case stands thus. Without cause or reason you have done great injuries to me, to my wife Prudence, and to my daughter also, for which all men know that you deserve to die; therefore I ask whether you will leave the punishment of your misdeeds in the hands of myself and my wife, Dame Prudence, or whether you will not.'

The wisest of them answered for all, saying, 'Sir, we know we are unworthy to come to the court of so great a lord, and have deserved death for our offence. We submit ourselves to your high excellence and goodness, beseeching only that in mercy you will consider our repentance and submission. Let your mercy reach further into goodness than our guilt reached into wickedness, damnable though our sin against you was.'

Melibeus raised them kindly from the ground, and received their bonds on oath to appear before his court on a certain day to receive their sentence; which done, every man returned to his own house. And when Prudence saw her time, she asked her lord what vengeance he thought to take upon his adversaries. To which Melibeus answered, 'Why, I think to disinherit them of everything they possess, and to exile them for ever.'

'Surely,' said Dame Prudence, 'this is a cruel sentence, and against reason. For you are already rich enough, and have no need of other men's possessions; and you might easily get a name for greed, which is a vice. It would be better for you to lose your own goods than to take theirs in this manner. Rather lose with honour, than gain with shame. And touching the exile of your adversaries, that again seems to me against reason, and out of measure. Consider the power over themselves that they have given you; it is written that he who misuses the power that is given him, deserves to lose it. And such a punishment might easily bring us back to war. If you wish men to honour and obey you, you must give lighter sentence and a gentler judgement. Seneca says, "He who masters his own heart, is twice master"; therefore I beg you now to master your heart, and forbear to do vengeance, so that your good name may be preserved; and men have cause to praise your mercy, and you have none to repent of what you do. For Saint James says in his Epistle, "Judgement without mercy shall be shown to him that has no mercy upon another."'

When Melibeus had listened to the skilful reasoning and wise teaching of his Dame Prudence, his heart began to incline to his wife's desire; he consented to act according to her counsel, and thanked God, from whom all goodness comes, for sending him so discreet a wife. And

when the day came for his adversaries to appear in his presence, he spoke them fair, and said as follows:

'Although in your pride, presumption, and madness, and in thoughtlessness and ignorance, you have trespassed against me, yet, because I see your humility and repentance, I am constrained to show you mercy. Therefore I receive you into my favour, and forgive you utterly all the offences, injuries, and wrongs that you have done to me and mine, that when we come to die, God, in His endless mercy, may forgive us our sins, and our trespasses against Him on earth. For doubtless if we are sorry and repent of our sins in the sight of God, He who is so liberal and merciful will forgive us our guilt and bring us to bliss without end.' *Amen.*

THE MONK'S PROLOGUE

WHEN I had ended my tale of Melibeus and Prudence, our Host said, 'As I am an honest man, I had rather my wife had heard this tale, than have a barrel of ale! For she has not half the patience of Melibeus' wife Prudence. Why, when I beat my lads, she'll bring me the cudgel herself, crying, "Kill the dogs! Break their bones for 'em!" and if any neighbour does not bow to her in church, she comes ramping home, crying, "Oh, you coward, not to avenge your wife! By my bones, I ought to have your knife, and you my distaff!" From morning to night she will wail, "Alas! that I have wed a milksop who dare not stand up for his wife!" And if I don't make myself scarce, I'm lost. Some day, I know, she'll egg me on to sticking my knife in our neighbour, and then I'll have to run for it. I am a very lion with a knife in my hand! Yet for all that, I can't stand up to her, she's too big in the arm. Well, enough of this! My lord, Sir Monk,' said he, 'cheer up, and tell us a tale. Here we

are, almost at Rochester; so ride forth, my lord, and keep the ball rolling. I don't know your name—shall I call you Dan John, Dan Thomas, Dan Albon? Whatever your name is, you're a proper fellow, and if you had not been a monk would have made a good man. No offence meant, my lord! Many a true word's spoken in jest.'

The Monk took all patiently, and said, 'I will do my best to tell you a tale, or two, or three; I know a hundred tragedies of men of high degree, who lived in prosperity, fell into misery, and died wretchedly: all done in verses of six feet, which we call hexameters. I'll tell you some of them, if you like, but forgive me if I don't tell them in their order. My tales are of popes, kings, and emperors, and I shall tell them anyhow, just as they come to my mind.'

The Monk's Tale

HEAR me lament, in the vein of tragedy, the evil that befell people of high degree, who fell so low that nothing could help them out of their adversity! Be warned by their examples, and trust not in blind fortune, for when she deserts you no man can stay the course of her wheel.

LUCIFER

I will begin with Lucifer, though he was an angel and not a man. Fortune is powerless to hurt the angels, yet through his own sin he fell from his high degree down into Hell, where he still is. O Lucifer, brightest of angels, now thy name is Satan, and thou canst never escape from the misery into which thou hast fallen.

Adam

Lo! Adam was made with God's own finger in the Garden of Eden, and owned all Paradise, saving one tree. No worldly man was of such estate as Adam, till through his own misguidedness he was driven from high prosperity to toils, to accidents, and to damnation.

Samson

Lo! Samson, announced by the angel before he was born, was consecrate to God, and lived in honour as long as he could see. There was never another such as he for strength and courage. He slew with his two naked hands the lion on the way as he walked to his wedding; in a fit of rage he tied three hundred foxes together by their tails; he slew a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass; and all his strength was in the hair on his head. O noble Samson! had you not told your secret to a woman, you would have had no peer in all the world. To his false wife Delilah he told the secret; and as he lay asleep upon her bosom, she clipped his hair and sold him to his enemies, who put out both his eyes. Then they made a feast in a great temple, and brought him in to play the fool for them; but at last he shook two pillars of the temple till they fell; down fell the temple and all, and under it he lay dead with all his foemen. Be warned by his example never to tell your secret to your wife.

Hercules

Sing praise of the works of Hercules the mighty! He was the flower of strength of his times; he slew and stripped the lion of its skin; he laid the Centaurs low; he killed the Harpies; he took the golden apple from the

dragon; he drove the hound Cerberus out of Hell; he slew the giant Antaeus; and for some time bore heaven on his neck. No man, since the beginning of the world, has slain so many monsters as Hercules; his name ran round the earth. This noble champion had a sweetheart, Dejanira, fresh as May, who sent to him a gay new shirt. Alas! the shirt was poisoned, and he had not worn it half a day before the flesh fell from his bones. I will not accuse her, though; for certain scholars say it was the plot of one called Nessus, who had made the shirt. So died the great and noble Hercules. Lo! who can trust the hazard of fortune? She lies in wait to overthrow her man in the way he dreams of least.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Tongue cannot describe the mighty throne, the precious treasure, the glorious sceptre, and the royal majesty of King Nebuchadnezzar! His royal court was at Babylon, in which he had his glory and delight. The fairest children of the blood royal of Israel were his slaves; among them was Daniel, the wisest child of all, who expounded the king's dreams. This proud king had a statue made of gold, sixty cubits long and seven broad; and he commanded young and old to love and fear it, or be burnt in a furnace of red flames. But Daniel and his young companions would not do that thing. This king of kings was proud and haughty; he thought that even God could not deprive him of his estate; but suddenly his dignity fell from him, and he became like an animal. He ate hay like an ox, lay out in the rain, and walked with the wild beasts; his hairs grew like eagles' feathers, his hands like birds' claws, till God, after a certain time gave him back his wits. Then he thanked God with many a tear, and from

that time to the day he died, he knew that God was mightier than he.

Zenobia

Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, was surpassed by none in courage and feats of arms. She was descended from the Kings of Persia; I will not say that she was the most beautiful of women, but none was more nobly shaped than she. From her childhood she fled from the duties of women, and went to the woods, to shoot the hart with her broad arrows; and so swift was she that she could overtake the running deer. When she was older, she killed lions, leopards, and bears, holding them at her mercy in her arms. She sought out the wild beasts' dens, ran by night in the mountains, and slept under a bush; and she could overthrow any young man in wrestling, were he never so strong. But she would marry no man; till at last she consented to take Odenake, a prince of the city, by whom she had two gallant sons. She went clothed in gold and precious stones; and for all her hunting, studied languages. And, to be brief, she and her doughty husband conquered many kingdoms in the Orient, that had been held by Rome. When Odenake was dead, she led her armies herself against her foes, and her two sons, Hermanno and Themaleo, went with her dressed like kings; Egyptians, Syrians, and Arabians all feared her, and even Claudius, the Emperor of Rome.

But when Aurelian ruled in Rome, he descended with his legions on Zenobia, put her to flight, and captured her at last; and she and her two children were borne back to Rome in fetters. Aurelian rode through the streets in her golden car which he had taken; and Zenobia, in her crown and jewelled clothing, walked before him with

gilt chains hanging on her neck. Alas, fortune! she who had once been dreadful to kings and emperors, must now become a common show for the people; she that had worn a helmet must henceforth cover her head with a shawl, and she that had borne a sceptre twined with flowers, must sit and spin with a distaff for her keep.

Hugolino, Count of Pisa

What pitiful tongue can tell the grief of Hugolino, Count of Pisa? A little way out of Pisa stood a tower, in which he was shut up with his three children, of whom the eldest was scarce five years old. Cruel, to put such birds into a cage! He was condemned, on the false accusation of Roger, Bishop of Pisa, to die in the tower; and so little food and drink were given them, and that so poor and bad, that it could not suffice them. When the gaoler had brought his daily food, he wept to hear the shutting of the doors, and knew that they must die of hunger. His youngest son, that was three years old, said, 'Father, why do you weep? When will the gaoler bring us soup? Haven't you kept a little bit of bread for me? I am so hungry, I can't sleep. I would rather have bread than anything.' So the child cried from day to day, till at last he lay in his father's breast and said, 'Good-bye, father, I must die.' And he kissed his father and died that day. And his father gnawed his arms, and moaned, 'Alas, cruel fortune!' His other children knew he gnawed his arms for hunger, and said, 'Father, don't do that! Rather eat us. You gave us our flesh, take it from us again, and eat.' Within a day or two, they also lay down in his lap and died. And he too died of hunger in despair. So ended the mighty Earl of Pisa, torn by fortune from his high estate. Whoever would hear more, may read this tale in the great poet of Italy, Dante.

Nero

Although Nero was as vicious as the worst of devils, he had the wide world in subjection. He delighted in gems, and his clothes were all embroidered in rubies, sapphires, and white pearls. So pompous was he that he would not wear the same clothes twice; he fished in the Tiber with nets of gold; and his will was law. He had Rome burned for his pleasure; he killed his Senators, to hear how men can cry; he slew his own mother, and had his wise old master Seneca bled to death in a bath, because he had said, 'Sir, an emperor should be virtuous and hate tyranny.' But fortune at last refused to cherish longer the pride of Nero; for though he was strong, she was stronger, and she thought, 'By God! I will turn this vicious emperor off his throne when he least suspects it!' The people rose up against him in the night, and when he saw them he ran out of doors and knocked on every house for shelter; but the more he cried out, the faster the doors were shut against him. At last he went his way, daring to call no more. He heard the crowd rushing up and down, shouting, 'Where is this false traitor, where is Nero?' and out of his wits with fear he ran into a garden to hide. In the garden he found two fellows sitting by a fire, and he begged them to kill him and see that no shame was done to his body. In the end he slew himself, and fortune had the laugh of him.

Alexander the Great, Son of Philip of Macedon

The story of Alexander is so common, that everybody has heard something of his fortunes. He was the conqueror of the world, and wherever he went laid low the boasts of men. No comparison can be made between him and any other conqueror, the whole world quaked before

him, he was the flower of knighthood, the heir of fortune, and he had the courage of a lion. He conquered Darius, and a hundred thousand other kings and princes, dukes and earls; but if I wrote or talked for ever, it would not suffice to tell you of his prowess. He reigned twelve years, and was son to Philip of Macedon. O noble Alexander, that this should come to pass! You were poisoned by your own people, and fortune never shed a tear for you.

Julius Caesar

By wisdom, manhood, and great labour, Julius the Conqueror rose up from humbleness to royal majesty. He won the Western world by land and sea, and made it tributary to Rome, where he commanded. In Thessaly he fought against his own father-in-law, Pompey, who had gained his glory in the Eastern world. Most of Pompey's people fled before him; but one of them, a traitor, smote off Pompey's head and brought it to Julius, to win his favour. So Pompey, the Orient conqueror, was brought to a sad end by fortune, and Julius repaired to Rome, crowned with laurels. But Brutus and Cassius, who had ever envied him, conspired in secret that he should be slain with bodkins in the Capitol on a certain day. When the day came, and Julius entered the Capitol, the false Brutus and his other foes struck him with their knives and he fell with many a wound; but groaned at one blow only, or perhaps two, if the tale is true. I commend you to read in Lucan this story of how fortune was first the friend and then the foe of these two great conquerors.

Croesus

Croesus, the rich king of Lydia, whom even Cyrus dreaded, was caught in the midst of his pride, and brought

to the fire to be burned; but such a rain fell down from heaven that the fire was quenched and he escaped. Yet his escape brought him not to grace; he could not refrain from going to war again, for he believed that fortune, who had sent the rain, wished him so well that she would not let him be slain by his enemies. One night he had a dream that swelled his pride. He dreamed he sat upon a tree, and Jupiter washed his body, and Phoebus brought a fair towel to dry him with, and therefore he was proud. And he asked his daughter, who could expound dreams, what this one meant.

'The tree,' said she, 'is the gallows-tree, and Jupiter betokens snow and rain, and Phoebus with his clean towel is the sunlight. Father, thou shalt be hanged for certain, and the rain shall wash thee and the sun shall dry thee.'

And Croesus the proud king was hanged in the end, for all his royal throne. Tragedy is no other thing than this: that fortune will strike with unwary stroke the proud; and she will fail the man who trusts in her, and cover her bright face with a cloud.

THE NUN'S PRIEST'S PROLOGUE

'Ho!' said the Knight. 'No more of this, good sir. What you have said is true enough, I know; but to me it is an ill to hear of the sudden fall of men who have been fortunate. The contrary is the joy and comfort of a man who has been born in poor estate, grown fortunate, and lived thereafter in prosperity. Such things are happy, and it is good to tell of them.'

'Yes,' said our Host, 'by the bell of Saint Paul's you are right. This monk has talked a deal of fortunes under a cloud—but there! there's no help for what is over and done with, and as you say, it is a sad thing to hear of tragedies. So no more of this, Sir Monk, God bless you; your tales annoy us all. Such talk is not worth a butterfly, there's no fun in it. Please, Dan Peter, if that's your name, tell us something else; I vow, if it had not been for the jingling of the bells on your bridle, I would have fallen asleep, and your tale have gone for nothing. For it is of no use for a man to talk without an audience. Yet I make

a good listener if a tale is well told. Sir, say something about hunting, I beg.'

'Nay,' said the Monk, 'I'm not in the mood for fun; let another tell a tale, for mine is told.'

Then our Host spoke boisterously to the Nun's Priest: 'Come nearer, Priest, come nearer, Sir John, tell us something to gladden our hearts; be blithe, even if you do ride on a poor, lean jade. So long as he carries you, never care a bean, and keep a merry heart.'

'Yes, sir, yes, Host,' said he, 'and so I do. I know I shall be blamed if I be not merry.' And this sweet Priest, the good Sir John, began his tale at once.

The Nun's Priest's Tale

A POOR widow, bent with age, once lived in a humble cottage by a grove in a valley. Since her widowhood she had lived a patient, simple life, for her goods and means were few. She and her two daughters possessed no more than three big sows, three cows, and a sheep called Malle; the room in which she ate her slender meals was dark and smoky; her fare was as plain as her dress, no dainties ever passed her throat, so she was never ill from repletion, and her only physic was a temperate diet. Gout would never stop her from dancing; she had nothing to fear from apoplexy, for she drank neither white wine nor red, and her board was mostly set with white and black—milk and brown bread in plenty, with singed bacon, and now and then an egg or two. She had a yard enclosed in a paling, with a dry ditch round about it; and here she kept a cock called Chanticleer. In all the land he had not his peer for crowing. His voice was merrier than the merry organ on mass days in church; and he was more punctual in his

crowing than a clock. He knew by nature the ascension of the equinox, and when fifteen degrees were ascended he crowed, neither before nor after. His comb was redder than coral, and battlemented like a castle wall; his shining bill was black as jet; his legs and toes were azure; his nails were whiter than the lily flower, and his plumage was like burnished gold. This noble cock had under him seven hens, of whom the fairest was Dame Partlet. She was courteous, discreet, gay, and companionable, and from the age of seven days had borne herself so well that she had utterly captured the heart of Chanticleer; for love of her he was content with life. It was a joy to hear them sing in harmony, when the bright sun rose, 'My love is gone away.' For at that time birds and beasts could speak and sing.

It befell one day at dawn, as Chanticleer sat by Partlet on his perch among his wives, that he began to groan like a man in a nightmare. When Partlet heard him she was alarmed and said, 'Dear heart, what ails you? You must be still asleep, more shame to you!'

'Madam,' he said, 'do not take it too much to heart; but I am quaking with the evil dream I had. I thought that I was roaming up and down our yard, when I saw a beast like a hound that would have seized my body and killed me. His colour was between red and yellow; his tail and ears were tipped with black; his snout was pointed and his two eyes glowed; I almost died at the sight of him. This is what made me groan.'

'Fie on you, faint-heart! Alas,' cried she, 'I cannot love a coward. Every woman wants a hardy husband. How dare you shame your love by saying that anything could frighten you? What! have you a man's beard, and not his heart? What! frightened by a dream? Dreams, which only come from over-eating? Did not that wise man Cato

say that we should pay no heed to dreams? Now, sir, take my word for it, what you need is physic. Eat of the herbs, husband, growing in our yard: centaury, fumitory, hellebore, dogwood berries, and herb ivy; pick them and swallow them wherever you find them growing, and in a day or two you will be cured of dreams. Come, cheer up, husband, and cast away your dread.'

'Dame,' said he, 'I thank you for your lore. But wise as Cato was, there are old books written by men of still greater authority than he which tell us that our dreams are signs of the joys and tribulations folk must endure in their lives. So, dear and lovely Partlet, I think, from the examples given by these sages, no man should be regardless of his dreams. But no more of this! let us speak only of what is happy. Dame Partlet, for one thing God in his grace has sent me, I am most happy; all my fear dies when I see the beauty of your face, and the scarlet of your eyes. *In principio, mulier est hominis confusio*—this is Latin, Dame, and it means, Woman is man's joy and his bliss. And when I feel your soft feathers next to me on the perch, I am so full of joy that I defy all dreams!'

With that he flew down from the beam, it being day; and he began to chuck to his hens, for he had found a corn in the yard. He was his royal self, and afraid no more; he looked like a rampant lion, and stepped up and down on his toes, scarce deigning to set his foot to the ground; and when he found a grain of corn he chucked, and all his wives came running. Like a prince in his hall, Chanticleer reigned in his yard; and now I will relate his adventure.

When March, the month in which the world began, was at an end, and two months and two days had passed beside, it befell that Chanticleer, walking in all his pride with his seven wives beside him, cast up his eyes to the

bright sun; and knowing by instinct alone that it was noon, crowed blissfully.

'The sun is up,' said he. 'Dame Partlet, my world's bliss, hark to the singing of the happy birds, and see how fresh the flowers grow. My heart is full of mirth.'

But in the height of his joy, misfortune fell upon him. For the latter end of joy is always woe.

An artful fox, who had dwelled three years in the grove, that night had broken through the hedge into the yard, where Chanticleer was wont to walk with his wives; and he lay hidden in a bed of cabbages, waiting his time to fall on Chanticleer, like a murderer lying in wait for his victim. O Judas Iscariot! O false traitor! Accursed was this day, O Chanticleer, when you flew from your beam down to the yard. Had you not been warned by dreams that this day was perilous to you? Wise men dispute and wrangle about dreams—no matter! My tale is of a cock that took his wife's counsel to walk as usual in the yard the day after he had had his dream. And women's counsels are too often wrong; woman's counsel brought Adam out of Paradise. But let that pass.

Snug in the sand, Partlet and her sisters lay basking in the sun; while Chanticleer sang merrier than a mermaid in the sea. And it so happened, that as he cast his eye upon a butterfly among the cabbages, he became aware of the fox who was crouching there. That put an end to his crowing! Crying 'Chuck, chuck!' he started up like a man with fear in his heart. For it is the instinct of all creatures to flee from their opposite, though they have never set eyes on it before.

So when Chanticleer saw the fox he would have fled, but the fox said quickly, 'Good sir, why would you be gone? Are you afraid of me that am your friend? Upon my word, I would be worse than a devil if I meant you

any harm. I have not come to spy upon you, truly the only cause of my coming was to hear you sing, for you have as merry a voice as an angel in heaven. You have more music in you than Boethius. My lord your father (God bless his soul!), and your lady mother, often did me the pleasure of visiting my house—ah, if you talk of singing, I never heard anyone, with the exception of yourself, who could sing like your father in the morning! His heart was in his song; and he sang so loud his eyes blinked as he stood on tiptoe and strained his neck as far as it would go. Now pray, sir, do you sing, and let me see if you can copy your father.'

Ravished with this flattery, Chanticleer flapped his wings, suspecting nothing; and he stood high on his toes, stretched his neck, closed his eyes, and began to crow as loud as he could. On the instant, up sprang Dan Russel the fox, seized Chanticleer by the throat, and bore him away to the wood.

O destiny, that cannot be escaped! Alas, that Chanticleer flew down from his beam! Alas, that his wife set no store by dreams! And all this happened on a Friday. Venus, goddess of pleasure, how could you suffer your servant Chanticleer to die upon your day?

There was not so much crying and lamentation among the Trojan women when Troy fell, as was made by the hens in the yard when they saw Chanticleer carried away by the fox. Dame Partlet screamed louder than Hasdrubal's wife for the death of her husband at the burning of Carthage.

The widow and her two daughters heard the hens screaming, and running out of the house they saw the fox going towards the grove with the cock in his mouth. 'Help, help!' they cried. 'The fox, the fox!' And they ran after him, and were joined by men with sticks; ran Colle

the dog, and Talbot, and Garland, and Malkyn with a distaff in her hand; ran cow and calf, and even the very hogs, frightened by the barking of the dogs and the shouting of the men and women, ran hard enough to burst their hearts, and yelled like the fiends in hell; the ducks quacked, the geese flew over the trees for fear, the bees swarmed out of the hive: and such a clamour of noise was raised that day after the fox as was never raised by Jack Straw and his followers, shouting shrilly as they killed a Fleming. They came with trumpets of brass and wood and horn, on which they blew and tooted; and they shrieked and they whooped fit to make the heavens fall.

Now hearken, good men, how fortune can turn upon her enemy. The cock, caught in terror in the fox's jaws, spoke to the fox and said, 'Sir, if I were in your place, I should say: "Turn back, vain fools! A pestilence upon you! In spite of you all I am come to the wood, and here the cock shall stay! In faith, I will eat him up, and that right soon!"'

The fox answered, 'In faith, and so I will!' And as he spoke the word, the cock broke quickly from his jaws and flew up a tree. When the fox saw that he had escaped, he whined, 'Alas, dear Chanticleer! it was wrong of me to terrify you by carrying you off from the yard! But sir, I did it with no evil intent; come down, and I will explain all. I speak in all honesty, as God is my witness.'

'Nay,' said the cock, 'I blame the pair of us. But I should blame myself most if I let you beguile me more than once. Never again, for all your flattery, shall you get me to shut my eyes and sing; he that blinks when he should see, let him never prosper.'

'And ill befall him,' said the fox, 'that chatters when he ought to hold his tongue.'

Lo, this is what comes of being rash, and trusting to flattery. And if this fable of a fox, a cock, and a hen, seems foolish to you, friends, consider the moral; take the grain, and leave the chaff. May God in his goodness make us all good men, and bring us to heavenly bliss. *Amen.*

THE MANCIPLE'S PROLOGUE

Do you know a little town called Bob-up-and-down, under the Blee, on the way to Canterbury? Here our Host began to jape and joke, saying, 'What, sirs, stuck in the mire? Is there no man among us who, for love or money, will wake our comrade in the rear? A thief might bind and rob him while he naps. He'll fall off his horse in a minute! Is it the Cook of London, by any chance? Let him come forth, he knows his debt to us; and he shall tell a tale, though it is worth no more than a truss of hay. Wake up, Cook, sit up! What's the matter with you, that you go to sleep by day? Have you been awake all night, or are you so drunk that you can't hold your head up?'

The Cook, who had lost all his colour, said, 'I don't know, Host, how I come to be so heavy, but I'd rather have a sleep than a gallon of the best wine in Chepe.'

'In that case, Cook,' said the Manciple, 'if you and all else here are willing, and our Host permits, I'll tell a tale

in your place; for your breath smells so of drink that everyone here will thank you to keep your mouth shut.'

At this the Cook grew angry, and for lack of words he began to wag his head at the Manciple, which made him tumble off his horse; and there he lay till he was picked up again. A fine horseman of a cook for you! He'd better have stuck to his ladle. Before he was in the saddle again, there was a mighty ado to lift the pasty-faced wretch, as we shoved his great unwieldy body about.

Then our Host said to the Manciple, 'Drink has got the better of this man, and he would tell but a sorry tale in his present state; it is as much as he can do to keep his pony out of the mire, and if he goes on falling off, *we* shall have enough to do picking him up again. Still, Manciple, you are too quick to reprove him for his fault; on another day he might call you to account for yours.'

'That would be a pity,' said the Manciple. 'I'd rather pay for the mare he rides on than quarrel with him. I won't anger him any more, I only said what I did in jest. And look here! I have a skinful of grape-wine here, and the Cook shall have a drink of it; I warrant he won't say no!'

To tell the truth, the Cook gulped the wine down, and handed back the skin to the Manciple very well pleased, thanking him as well as he could. Then our Host roared with laughter, and said, 'I see it is necessary for us to carry good drink along with us; for it turns rancour and hate to love and harmony. Blessed be the name of Bacchus, who can turn earnest to jest in a moment. Well, no more of this. Manciple, tell your tale.'

'Well, sir,' said he, 'hearken to what I say.'

The Manciple's Tale

WHEN Phoebus, as the old books tell us, came down to dwell upon the earth, he was not only the greatest knight, but also the best archer in the world. He slew Python the serpent as he lay sleeping in the sun, and did many another noble deed with his bow; he could play on every instrument, and sing so that it was music only to hear his voice. Even Amphion, King of Thebes, who raised the walls of that city with his singing, could not sing half so well as he. Moreover, he was the comeliest man that is or was since the beginning of the world. No need to describe his features; enough that there was none so fair alive, and his beauty was completed by his honour and nobility.

This Phoebus, flower of knighthood, had in his house a crow which he kept in a cage, and taught to speak as men may teach a jay. The crow was snow-white as a swan, and could imitate the speech of every man. There was no nightingale in the world that sang a hundred-thousandth part so sweet. Now Phoebus had a wife in his house whom he loved more than life, and sought to please by day and night; save only in this, that he was very jealous, and kept her close. But you cannot constrain a thing against its nature. Take any bird and put it in a cage, and do your utmost to foster it tenderly with food and drink, and every dainty you can think of; and be you never so kind, and its golden cage never so bright, yet this bird would rather twenty thousand times be in the wild, cold forest, eating worms, and will be for ever trying to escape from its cage when it can, so much the bird desires its liberty. Or take a cat and foster it on milk and dainty meat, and give him a silken bed, yet let a mouse run by the wall and he will desert milk, meat, and all, in his appetite for the

mouse. For such is the nature of things, that we often prefer the worst to the best.

Even so the wife of Phoebus, who had the best man in the world, was fond of another who could not compare with Phoebus. And once, when Phoebus was away, she sent for this man to keep her company. The white crow in its cage saw them together, but never said a word. And when Phoebus returned home, the crow sang 'Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!'

'Why, bird, what song is this?' said Phoebus. 'It is not the song with which you are wont to rejoice my heart.'

'I do not sing amiss,' said the crow. 'Phoebus, for all your beauty and nobility, for all your songs and music, your wife is deceiving you; I have seen it for myself.' And the crow told him what had happened in his absence. Then Phoebus felt his heart break into two; he bent his bow, and set an arrow to it, and slew his wife in anger. And then for grief he broke his harp and lute, his gittern and psaltery, and his bow and arrows; and after that he spoke to the crow.

'Traitor with scorpion's tongue! thou has brought me to misery. Alas, that I was born! Why can I not die? O my dear wife, who liest there dead so pale of face, now I dare swear that thou wert innocent! Rash hand, that slew thee! O mind distraught, O reckless ire, that smote the guiltless thus! Let all men beware of hastiness, nor believe anything without a witness. Alas! I could kill myself for sorrow.' Then to the crow: 'False thief,' he said, 'I will punish thee for thy lie! Thou, who didst sing like the nightingale, shalt lose thy song, and thy white feathers too; never again in all thy life shalt thou speak the speech of men; thou and thy offspring shall all be black for ever; never again shalt thou make sweet sounds, but shalt croak

in tempest and rain, because, through thee, my wife lies slain.'

Then going to the crow he pulled out his white feathers, and turned him black, and took from him his song and speech; and he flung him out of doors for the devil to take. And this is the reason why all crows are black.

Masters, take example by this, and heed what I say: never tell a man what you know of his wife, or he will hate you mortally for ever. I am not so wise as Solomon, who bade a man guard his tongue; but this is my text, as taught me by my mother:

'My son, remember the crow. Hold your tongue and keep your friend. God has walled our tongues in with teeth and lips, that we may think before we speak. Few words are good words; from many words comes harm. Who has once spoken ill, can never unsay his word; for the thing that is said, is said. Therefore, my son, beware of being a tale-bearer, whether the tale be false or true; and

> Wherever you go, among high or low,
> Hold your tongue and remember the crow.'

THE PARSON'S PROLOGUE

By the time the Manciple had ended his tale, the sun was sinking; I thought it must be about four o'clock, for I was throwing a shadow eleven foot long, and as we came to a town the moon was rising. Our Host, guiding our jolly company as usual, said, 'My masters, we lack but one tale to carry out my decree; my commands are all but fulfilled. Sir Priest,' said he, 'are you a vicar or a parson? Whichever you be, do not fail us in the game, for every man but you has told his tale. Let's see what you have in your budget; by the look of you, it should be something good. Tell us a fable, come!'

The Parson answered him, 'You will get no fable from me, for Paul, writing to Timothy, reproves the maker of tales and fables and all such trash. Why should I broadcast chaff, when I can sow wheat? If you will hear of morality and virtue, I will do my best to please you, with Christ's help. Remember, I can neither jest nor sport nor

rhyme for you, but if you will I will tell you a tale in prose to wind up the festival and make an end; and may Jesus send me grace to lead you, by the way of this pilgrimage of ours, to the glory of Jerusalem. With your permission I will begin my meditation, though I am no scholar, and am ready to stand corrected by those who are.'

We all agreed to hear his sermon, for it seemed good to us to end with virtuous words; and we bade our Host say that we begged him to tell his tale. Our Host spoke for us all: 'Good luck to you, Sir Priest! say on, and we will listen gladly to your sermon. But make haste, for the sun is going down. Be as fruitful as you can in a little space, and may God bless you and send you good words.'

The Parson's Tale

OUR sweet Lord God of heaven, who will save all men that come to knowledge of Him and the blissful life everlasting, bids us by the Prophet Jeremiah to walk in the path of virtue and find refreshment for our souls. Many are the spiritual ways that lead folk to our Lord Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of glory; and the noblest of all, which never fails man or woman, is called penitence. Therefore men should inquire with all their hearts what penitence is, and why it is called penitence, and how many kinds of penitence there are, and what things belong to penitence, and by what things penitence is disturbed.

Three things belong to perfect penitence; contrition of heart, verbal confession, and penance for sins. Penitence, says Saint John Chrysostom, constrains a man to accept gladly every pain these three things enjoin upon him; this is the fruitful penitence that may be likened to a tree.

The root of the tree is Contrition, and from this root Contrition springs a stalk bearing the branches and leaves of Confession and the fruit of Penance. And you shall know the tree by the fruit, and not by the root that is hidden in man's heart, nor by the branches and leaves of confession. And from this root springs also a seed of grace, whose heat is the love of God, which makes the heart of man hate his own sin.

And now it behoves me to tell you which are the deadly sins, from which all other sins spring. The root of the tree of sin is pride, and from this root spring many branches: such as anger, envy, sloth, avarice, and gluttony: and each of these sins has its smaller branches and twigs, as I will now show you.

Pride

No man can tell the number of twigs that come from Pride, but here are a few of them. There are disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, spite, arrogance, impudence, insolence, elation, impatience, strife, quarrelsomeness, presumption, irreverence, vainglory, and many another twig.

Now there are two kinds of pride: one that reigns within a man's heart, and the other without; of which the things I have named are within. Nevertheless, the outward kinds will often be a sign of the other, as the bush at the tavern door is a sign of the wine in the cellar. And these may be seen in such things as speech, and bearing, and outrageous dress. Sometimes such dress is in excess, with a waste of rich material, and too much money spent on embroidering, slashing, furring, and such superfluity in length that, whether the wearer be afoot or on horse, the gown trails in the dirt and is spoiled, and much good cloth ruined that might have been given to the poor. On

the other hand, outrageous dress may be too scanty, and you will often see, by the attire of women who look sweet and modest, that they are full of pride and vanity. Then there is pride of the table, where rich men invite themselves to an excess of meats and drinks, highly coloured and wreathed in frills, and eaten off precious vessels to the sound of music, all of which stirs a man to greater luxury. These are all due to riches; and the man that prides himself upon his riches is a fool, for he who is a lord in the morning may be a beggar by night, and a man's riches may even cause his death.

Remedy against Pride

The remedy against pride is humility, a virtue through which a man has true knowledge of himself; and so knows his own deserts, and considers his own frailty, that he cannot pride or over-prize himself. There are three kinds of humility: humility of the heart, by which a man holds himself humble in God's sight, despises no man, cares not if he is despised, and accepts humiliation serenely: humility of mouth, by which a man is temperate and humble in his speech: and humility of act, in which he puts all other men above him, chooses the lowest place of all, follows good counsel gladly, and stands aside for his betters. This is the work of humility.

Of Envy

After pride I will speak of envy which is sorrow at other men's prosperity, and joy at their harm. This foul sin is flat against the Holy Ghost, for as surely as kindness comes from the Holy Ghost, so surely envy comes from malice, and is the work of the devil. Envy is of two sorts: first, sorrow in another man's goodness and prosperity, which should be matter for kindly joy, and then envy is a

sin against kind. The second sort is joy in another man's harm. From these two sorts spring backbiting, followed by grumbling and complaining against God and man. Sometimes envy comes from private hatred, or bitterness of heart, which makes every good deed of his neighbour unsavoury to a man. And then follows discord, which unbinds all kinds of friendship; and the scorning of your neighbour, though he do never so well; then follows accusation, and that is followed by malignity, through which a man will annoy his neighbour in private if he can, or if he cannot, yet he lacks not the evil will to do so.

Remedy against Envy

The remedy against the foul sin of envy is first the love of God, and then the love of one's neighbour as oneself; for in truth, one cannot be without the other. And in the name of your neighbour is comprehended your enemy as well as your friend; for you must even do good to those that hate you. Your friend you shall love in God, and your enemy by God's commandment. Against your enemy's hatred you shall set your love; against his chiding, your prayers; and against his wicked deeds, your bounty. Nature compels us to love our friends; and so our enemies have more need of love than our friends. And to those who have need, men must do good. The more difficult this love is to perform, the greater is the merit, for the loving of our enemy confounds the devil and wounds him to death. Surely then love is the medicine that casts out the poison of envy from a man's heart.

Of Anger

After envy I will describe the sin of anger; for he who has envy of his neighbour will soon find matter for wrath against him whom he envies. Yet you must know there

are two kinds of anger, one good and one bad. The good is that through which a man is wrath with wickedness; it is not wrath with man, but with man's misdeeds. And the wicked anger is of two kinds: sudden ire, which comes without reason, and then it is a venial sin: and the ire which comes from the felony of a man's heart, with his will to do vengeance and his person consenting to it. This is the anger which is the deadly sin; from it are engendered evil things like discord, war, and murder, cursing and chiding; and the defaming of a man's good name, and the menacing of him with threats. These are some of the sins that come from anger, and there are many others.

Remedy Against Anger

The remedy against anger is a virtue that men call gentleness, and another that men call patience. Gentleness so restrains the stirrings and movements of a man's heart, that they never leap for anger; and patience suffers sweetly all the annoyance and wrongs that men do to men. Gentleness will do harm to none; and is not heated against reason by the harm done to itself. This virtue is sometimes man's by nature; but when it is sprung from grace it is still lovelier. Patience, the other remedy against anger, suffers wicked words sweetly; this virtue makes a man like God, and destroys his enemy. Therefore, saith the sage, if you would vanquish your enemy, learn to suffer. There was once a philosopher who would have beaten his pupil for some sin, and when the child saw the rod he said to his master, 'What are you going to do?' 'To beat you,' said the master, 'for your correction.' 'Indeed,' said the child, 'you should first correct yourself for having lost patience with a sinful child.' 'Indeed,' said the master weeping, 'you say truly; take the rod, dear son,

and correct me for my impatience.' From patience comes obedience, through which a man obeys Christ, and those to whom he owes obedience in Christ. And know that obedience is perfect, when a man does what he should do gladly and eagerly, with all his heart.

Of Sloth

After the sin of envy and anger, I will now speak of sloth; for envy sours the heart of a man, and anger troubles him, and sloth makes him heavy and wretched. Envy and anger make the heart bitter, and bitterness is the mother of sloth, which undermines the love of goodness; for sloth becomes the misery of a troubled heart. Sloth does no thing with diligence; he does all things with vexation, unwillingness, slackness, and excuses, and is the enemy of every estate of man. Out of sloth come despair, coldness, and weariness of the soul and body; so that a man can neither sing in church nor work with his hands with any pleasure, but feels appalled. Then he grows slow and dull, and will soon be angry and incline to hate and envy. Then comes the sin of worldly sorrow, that slays both body and soul; for the man who has lost the taste for his own life shortens it before its natural time.

Remedy Against Sloth

Against the horrible sin of sloth and what comes of it, there is a virtue called fortitude or strength, through which a man can despise all troublesome things. This virtue is so vigorous, that it can withstand the devil, and wrestle against his assaults; for it enhances and reinforces the soul, just as sloth abates and enfeebles it. This virtue has many kinds; the first is called magnanimity, or high spirit, which prevents the soul from being drowned

in the despair that follows sloth; this virtue makes men undertake hard and grievous things of their own free will. Then there is the virtue of faith and hope in God; and then comes security, and the power to perform great works; and glory, to accomplish what has been begun. For the glorious reward of a good work lies in its accomplishment. Then there is constancy, that is, steadiness of spirit, which a man shows in his steadfast heart, and in his deeds and bearing. And one more special remedy against sloth is the high grace of the Holy Ghost, which gives a man the power to fulfil his good purpose.

Of Avarice

After sloth I will speak of avarice and covetousness; which sin, says Saint Paul, is the root of all evil. For in truth when the heart of man is troubled and the soul has lost the comfort of God, then he seeks the idle solace of worldly things. Avarice is the heart's lust to have worldly things. It is to possess earthly things, and give nothing to those in need. And know that avarice exists not only in land and goods, but men can be covetous of learning, and glory, and many other strange things. The difference between avarice and covetousness is this: covetousness is to covet such things as you have not, and avarice is to withhold such things as you have. Through this accursed sin of avarice and covetousness come these tyrannous states which make some men thralls to others, who extort from them without mercy. Such masters are like wolves, who devour the possessions of poor folk wrongfully and without measure. Avarice makes merchants cheat each other, and lie, and deceive, and swear false oaths. Then follow gambling, with all its appurtenances, such as raffles and lotteries, from which come cheating, waste of goods, and time misspent; and then follows theft and false

witness, borrowing without intent to pay, and at last spiritual sacrilege: which leads villains to rob churches, and tear holy things from holy places.

Remedy Against Avarice

Now you should understand that the relief of avarice is mercy and compassion freely used. Men may ask how these can relieve avarice, for the avaricious man shows neither mercy nor pity to the man in need. But mercy is a virtue whereby the spirit of a man is stirred by the misery of him that is misused; and pity follows mercy in performing charitable works, and comforting the unhappy. The nature of mercy is to love and to give, to forgive and to release, and to have pity in one's heart. Another remedy against avarice is reasonable generosity, but not the foolish generosity we call waste. And he that gives for the sake of vainglory and his own renown, is like a horse that drinks of muddy water, rather than the water of a clear well.

Of Gluttony

After avarice comes gluttony, which is expressly against the commandment of God. Gluttony is the unreasonable and disordered appetite for meat and drink. This sin, which corrupted the whole world, has many species. The first is drunkenness which is the grave of man's reason; and for a man to lose his reason is a deadly sin. But if a man unused to strong drink is caught unawares to drink more than he can stand, it is a venial sin. A second sort of gluttony is when a man devours his food in an unmannerly way; and another when, through overeating, he makes himself ill. To eat before the time to eat: or only because you are offered delicacies: or when you eat more than you want: or take too much time and

trouble over dressing your food: or eat too greedily—these are the five fingers on the devil's hand, by which he draws men into sin.

Remedy Against Gluttony

Against gluttony the remedy is abstinence; but if it is done only for the health of the body, I do not think it of much merit. Abstinence should be practised for virtue, and with a good will, and for the sake of heavenly bliss. The comrades of abstinence are temperance, that holds the mean in all things; shame, that avoids dishonesty; sufficiency, that seeks not rich or curious food and drink; measure, that restrains appetite in eating; soberness, that restrains outrageousness in drinking; and sparingness, that restrains men from dallying overlong at table.

Of Penitence

Now I have described these deadly sins to you, and some of their branches and remedies, I will speak of the second part of penitence, which is verbal confession. True confession should be done quickly; for certainly, if a man had a deadly wound, the longer he delayed to heal himself the more it would corrupt and hasten his death. And so will sin do, as long as a man is unshriven. As often as you fall, so often may you rise by confession.

The third part of penitence is satisfaction, which generally consists in giving alms, and in bodily penance. There are three ways of giving alms; the first is the heart's contrition, whereby a man offers himself to God; the second, to have pity on your neighbour's fault; the third, in giving good counsel and comfort, spiritual and bodily, of which men are in need; for man in general has need of these things, food, clothing, and lodging, and also of good counsel, visiting in prison and sickness, and in his

burial. And if you cannot visit in person, then visit by gift and messages. And give your alms privately, if you can; but if you cannot, do not forbear to give them, but let men see that it is done not for the world's praise, but in praise of Jesus Christ.

Now as to bodily penance, this lies in prayers and watches, fasts, and virtuous teaching. Prayers must be truly said, and spoken in perfect faith; and watching goes with praying, that you enter not into temptation; and fasting means forbearing from meat and drink, from worldly pleasures, and from sin.

The things that disturb penance are four: fear, shame, hope, and despair. To speak first of fear, he who fears the pains of penance should think how short is bodily pain, and how long the pains of hell. As to shame, the men that will not shrive themselves for shame should think that if they have not been ashamed to do ugly things, they should not be ashamed to do so fair and good a thing as confession. Now to speak of those who are slow to shrive themselves through hope. These hope to live long, enjoy their riches, and at last shrive themselves—they think there is always time to come to shrift. Let them think that there is nothing certain in our life, and that all the riches of the world will pass as a shadow on the wall. Despair is of two kinds: the first is despair of Christ's mercy, the other despair of persevering long in goodness. The first despair comes to a man from thinking that he has sinned so much and so often that he cannot be saved. Against this cursed despair let him think that the love of Christ is stronger to unbind than sin is strong to bind. Against the second despair let him think that, as often as he falls, he may rise again by penitence; and though he has been never so long in sin, Christ's mercy is always ready to receive him.

So shall men know what is the fruit of penance: according to the word of Jesus Christ, it is the endless bliss of heaven, where joy is without woe, penance, or grievance; where all the harms of this life are passed; where there is security from the pains of hell; where is the blissful company wherein everyone rejoices in the other's joy; where the body of man, that was ugly and dark, is brighter than the sun; where the body of man that was once sick and frail, feeble and mortal, is immortal, and so strong and whole that nothing has power over it; where there is neither hunger, nor thirst, nor cold, but every soul is replenished with the sight of the perfect knowledge of God. This blissful kingdom men may purchase by spiritual poverty; and the glory of humility, the plenty that lies in hunger and thirst, the rest that lies in labour, and the life by death and mortification of sin; to this life He brings us that bought us with His precious blood. *Amen.*

Now I pray all of you who hear or read this little treatise, that if there is anything in it that pleases you, thank our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom proceed all wit and goodness; and if there is anything that displeases you, I pray you set it down to the fault of my ignorance, and not my will, that would have said things better had I been wiser. So I beseech you humbly to pray to God for mercy upon me, that I may be forgiven my sins, and especially my translations and writing upon worldly vanities, all of which I retract: such as the book of Troilus, the book of Fame, the book of the Twenty-five Ladies, the book of the Duchess, the book of Saint Valentine's Day and of the Parliament of Birds, the Tales of Canterbury, the book of the Lion, and many other books that I cannot call to mind, and many a song and frivolous lay, for which Christ in his mercy forgive me. But for the translation of Boethius' *De Consolacione*, and of legends of lives of saints, and homilies and moralities, and of devotions, I thank our Lord Jesus Christ and his blessed mother, and all the saints in heaven, beseeching them that they send me grace, from henceforth to the end of my life, to regret my sins, and to study the salvation of my soul; and grant me grace and space for true repentance, penitence, confession, and atonement in this present life, through the benign grace of him that is King of Kings, and Priest above all priests, who bought us with the precious blood of his heart, so that I may be one of them that shall be saved upon the day of doom. *Qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivis et regnas Deus per omnia secula. Amen.*