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GEOFFREY CHAUCER

The Canterbury Tales

COMPLETE

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Chaucer's Life was written for The Riverside Chaucer by Martin M. Crow and Virginia E. Leland. It has been slightly condensed and occasionally revised for use in this volume.

IN COMPARISON with other major English writers of his time, Chaucer left abundant records of his life. We have no official documents for the life of the author of *Piers Plowman* or for the Gawain-poet; records of Gower's life are few and confused. But Chaucer, because he was a public servant, can be traced in the records of his offices. Publication of *Chaucer Life-Records* in 1966 brought together the 493 known items and provided a substantial basis for a Chaucer biography. These records of official acts rarely touch on his personal affairs and never mention his poetry; they do not give the year of his birth or the exact date of his marriage or death. But they do document a useful and eventful life.

Chaucer was a soldier, an esquire of the king’s household, a member of diplomatic missions, a controller of customs, a justice of the peace, a member of Parliament, the clerk of the king’s works in charge of building and repair at ten royal residences, and a forest official. On the king’s business he traveled over much of southeast England, to France a number of times, to Spain, and at least twice to Italy. Chaucer yet found time to write thousands of lines, among them some of the best poetry in English.

The Chaucer Family

Chaucer came from a well-to-do merchant family that had lived for several generations in Ipswich, some seventy miles northeast of London. The city exported wool to Flanders and imported wine from France. The family were vintners, wholesale dealers in wine, and also held positions in the customs service. As often happened in medieval families, they did not always use the same surname. Geoffrey Chaucer’s paternal great-grandfather was called Andrew de Dinnington; Andrew’s son, Robert Malyn le Chaucer; Robert’s son, John Chaucer. The name Chaucer, from the French, meant maker of shoes or hose; but none of Chaucer’s ancestors was, so far as is known, was a shoemaker or a hosier.

By the late thirteenth century Robert Chaucer, the grandfather, and his wife Mary had settled in London. Prosperous people, they continued to hold property in Ipswich. In 1324, John, son of Robert and Mary, was kidnapped by an aunt, who intended to marry him to her daughter in order to keep the Ipswich holdings in the family. Instead, the twelve-year-old boy was freed; the aunt and her accomplices went to prison and paid a heavy fine, proof that they were wealthy.

John later married Agnes, daughter of one John Copton and niece of Hamo de Copton, “moneyer” at the mint in the Tower of London. The couple continued to accumulate property. After Hamo’s death in 1349, a plague year, Agnes inherited, with Hamo’s other London property, twenty-four shops and two gardens. In the same year, John Chaucer inherited property from his half brother, Thomas Heyron. John and Agnes were, then, owners of substantial London property. John Chaucer was a vintner, as his father, stepfather, and half brother had been; like his father,
stepfather, and cousins, he also held positions in the customs service.

Geoffrey Chaucer’s parentage is clearly established; he described himself in a deed of 19 June 1381 as “son of John Chaucer, vintner, of London.” But the date and place of his birth are not precisely known. For the date, the clearest evidence comes from his deposition of 15 October 1386 in the famous Scrope-Grosvenor trial (discussed below). There he testified that he was forty years old “et plus” (and more), making the date of his birth no later than 1345. Some witnesses in that case guessed inaccurately at their ages; but Chaucer added a verifiable statement that supports his testimony. He said that he had borne arms twenty-seven years; he had in fact served in France in the campaign of 1359. It is usual, then, to accept a birth date in the early 1340s.

Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century records tell something of Chaucer’s descendants. A London lawsuit of Michaelmas term, 1396, identified “Thomas Chaucer, esquire, son of Geoffrey Chaucer, esquire.” Additional evidence that Thomas was the son of Geoffrey rests upon a statement by Dr. Gascoigne, chancellor of Oxford and a neighbor of Thomas, and on the use by Thomas of a seal with Geoffrey Chaucer’s coat of arms and name. A retinue roll compiled at Carmarthen Castle in 1403 lists Thomas Chaucer with Lewis Chaucer. Lewis seems to have been the lyte Lowys my sone of the tendir age of ten year for whom in 1391 the poet composed A Treatise on the Astrolabe. Two presumed daughters of Geoffrey Chaucer are also sometimes mentioned, Elizabeth Chaucy, a nun at Barking in 1381, and Agnes, an attendant at the coronation of Henry IV; but the records do not clearly identify them as daughters of the poet.

Nothing more is known of Lewis, Agnes, or Elizabeth, but many records attest to the distinguished career of Thomas Chaucer, as he became one of the wealthiest and most influential men in England. Enriched by marriage to a great heiress and by annuities from John of Gaunt, Richard II, and Henry IV, he served as chief butler to four kings, envoy to France, and, often, speaker of the House of Commons. His daughter Alice married as her third husband William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk; their grandson John, Earl of Lincoln, was designated heir to the throne of his uncle, Richard III. Richard’s defeat and death at Bosworth Field in 1485 effectively ended the possibility that a nephew of his could gain the crown. But John de la Pole and, after him, three of his brothers continued to assert the claim until the last of them died in about 1539, a prisoner in the Tower of London, thus ending the line of Chaucer’s male descendants.

Chaucer’s Early Home and Youth

Though Chaucer’s birthplace is unknown, it is known that his parents, Agnes and John Chaucer, held property in Vintry Ward, one of the two wealthiest wards in medieval London, and in what the sixteenth-century antiquary John Stow called “the middes and hart of the city.” One Chaucer “tenement” (property holding, not tenement in the modern sense) lay on Thames Street, which ran parallel to the river and a block north. It was largely inhabited by vintners, since wine landed at the quays on the Thames could easily be brought to their cellars for storage. Some of London’s leading merchants, among the richest men in the city, lived in the ward as well. Two of them, John Stodeye and Henry Picard, served as mayors and lent thousands of pounds to the king. John Chaucer’s name is associated with theirs in such records as wills and deeds. Nobles as well as merchants lived in Vintry Ward. Queen Philippa owned a dwelling there called Tower Royal; after her death it passed to her daughter-in-law, mother of Richard II, Joan of Kent, who took refuge there in 1381. Among the people living nearby were Gascon wine merchants, an Italian family, and Flemings; London in Chaucer’s boyhood was a cosmopolitan city.

Wills of neighbors, deeds, and inventories give some idea of the probable plan and furnishings of the Chaucer home. Above the cellars were the hall (not a passageway, but the principal room), the kitchen, a latrine, and upper rooms called “solars.” They were furnished comfortably with hangings for the walls and cushions for the benches, and such luxuries as heavy silver pitchers and cups engraved with the owners’ coats of arms.

No school records for Chaucer have survived, but it is possible to account for some of the knowledge of Latin classics shown in his works. London merchants’ sons in his time could receive a good education. Near the Chaucer home on Thames Street were three schools, among them the almonry school of St. Paul’s Cathedral, which has preserved the inventory of books
left in 1358 by a schoolmaster, William de Ravenstone, for the use of the pupils. As well as Latin grammars, treatises on theology, and a few music textbooks, there were classics—Virgil's *Georgics*; Claudian's *Rape of Proserpina*, cited three times in Chaucer's poems; ten books of Lucan; the *Thebaid* of Statius, quoted at the beginning of *The Knight's Tale* and partly summarized in *Troilus and Criseyde*; and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, Chaucer's favorite classical. Latin source. Chaucer probably did not know Homer directly, but, as Ravenstone's bequest makes clear, works of the four others were available at St. Paul's school.

The earliest known document actually naming Geoffrey Chaucer is a fragmentary household account book, June 1356 to April 1359, kept for Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster and wife of Lionel, a son of Edward III. It records purchases in April 1357 for Geoffrey Chaucer—a short jacket, a pair of red and black hose (?), and a pair of shoes; and, “for necessaries at Christmas,” there was recorded a gift to him of 2 shillings, 6 pence. The relative modesty of the gifts suggests that Chaucer was among the youngest and least important of the retainers of the countess, perhaps in his early teens, and perhaps a page.

Life in the countess's household would offer a young attendant a rich variety of experiences if he accompanied her on her almost constant travels. During the time covered by the accounts, she spent Christmas at Hatfield for a royal hunting party, along with her young brother-in-law John of Gaunt, who later became the richest and most powerful man in England; she purchased mourning in London for the funeral of the dowager queen, Isabella; she visited a royal relative at the convent of Stratford-atte-Bowe (where the Prioress learned her French; General Prologue I.125); and she visited a royal relative at the convent of Stratford-atte-Bowe (where the Prioress learned her French; General Prologue I.125); and she was a guest at King Edward's Great Feast of St. George at Windsor, the king's favorite castle.

Journeys and the Royal Court

From the household of the countess Chaucer seems to have followed her husband, Prince Lionel, into the king's army. In September 1359 King Edward and his sons, with a large expeditionary force, were invading France. The king, who held King John of France prisoner, hoped to take the city of Reims and to be crowned king of France in Reims Cathedral, traditional site of the coronation of French kings. Chaucer, according to his testimony in the Scrope-Grosvenor case (see below), was at the town of “Retters” (Rethel), near Reims, which Edward was besieging in December and early January 1359–60. Chaucer testified that he was captured, but the captivity was short. By 1 March 1360 the king had contributed 16 pounds to help pay Chaucer's ransom, and he was free. Edward's forces were at that date in the village of Béligny, in the vicinity of Chartres. The campaign had brought Chaucer within sight of the great cathedrals of Reims and probably Chartres.

The last record of Chaucer in the service of Prince Lionel dates from the peace negotiations at Calais in October 1360, when the prince paid Chaucer for carrying letters from Calais to England.

The expedition and messenger service of 1359–60 were the first of many journeys and commissions for Chaucer. No records have yet been found for him, however, for the years between 1360 and 1366. After the gap in the records the first document concerning Chaucer is a safe-conduct for the period of 22 February to 24 May 1366, granted to Chaucer by Charles II (Charles the Bad) of Navarre; it permitted “Geoffroy de Chauverre” with three companions, their servants, horses, and luggage, to travel through Navarre. Perhaps Chaucer was on a pilgrimage, like many others (and like the Wife of Bath; General Prologue I.466), to the popular shrine of Compostela in Galice at Seint-Jame; the customary pilgrimage route crossed Navarre. Or Chaucer may have been sent by the Black Prince to recall English mercenaries from the forces of Henry of Trastamara, against whom the prince was mounting an expedition. Another possible explanation for Chaucer's journey is that it was connected with arrangements for the later passage of English troops through Navarre into Castile, where in April of 1367 the prince was to win the battle of Nájera and restore to his throne Pedro the Cruel, called in *The Monk’s Tale* (VII.2375) *O noble, O worthy Petro, glorie of Spayne*.

Other events of 1366 may have been more important to Chaucer than the Navarrese journey: the evidence indicates that Chaucer's father died in that year and that Chaucer married. The last record of John Chaucer is dated 16 January 1366, when he and his wife Agnes signed a deed; on 13 July 1366 Agnes
inner Temple record “where Geffrye Chaucer was fined two shillings for beatinge a Franciscane Fryer in fletestreate.” It is now known that Master Buckley was at that time the keeper of the Inner Temple records, and that the fine was a customary amount. His testimony is accepted as very probably true. Mention of the Manciple (General Prologue 1.567) and of the career of the Man of Law (General Prologue I,309-30) seems to show familiarity with the Inns of Court and the lawyers there. In addition, Chaucer's later official positions, as controller of the customs and clerk of the king's works, demanded that he keep records in Chancery hand, and use French and Latin legal formulas, skills taught in the Inns of Court.

During this time Chaucer may have been experimenting with various popular verse forms, in French as well as in English. By their nature, most of them were likely ephemeral, but recent publication of fifteen French lyrics, with the siglum “Ch,” from a fourteenth-century French manuscript (Wimsatt, Chaucer and the Poems of “Ch”) raises the intriguing possibility that these poems might be by Chaucer. Even if they are not, these represent the kind of French verse Chaucer may well have written during his early years at court.

While he was the king's esquire and, presumably, studying among the lawyers, Chaucer also made a number of journeys overseas. Two years after the Navarre safe-conduct of 1366, he "passed at Dover" on 17 July 1368 and was absent from England for at most 106 days; in that length of time the king's envoys had been able to make the journey to Rome and return. It has, accordingly, been suggested that Chaucer was sent as a messenger to Prince Lionel in Milan. There, in May 1368, the prince had married a daughter of the immensely powerful Visconti family, despots of Milan. Chaucer may, however, have gone no farther than to France or Flanders on this journey.

The Book of the Duchess, Chaucer's first major poem, belongs to this period. It is an elegy for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's first wife, who died, it is now believed, on 12 September 1368. The duke remarried in 1371, but he continued to remember Blanche, paying 30 pounds on 12 September 1379 for memorial masses on the anniversary of her death and ten silver marks in 1382 to each of the chaplains chanting masses at her tomb in St. Paul's. In his will of 1398 he directed that he be buried beside his "very dear late consort, Blanche." It seems significant, then, that on 13 June 1374 John
of Gaunt granted a life annuity of 10 pounds to Chaucer "in consideration of the services rendered by Chaucer to the grantor" and "by the grantee's wife Philippa to the grantor's late mother and to his consort." A few days later, on 18 June 1374, the duke ordered alabaster from which the master mason, Henry Yevele, was to erect a tomb for Blanche. It is clear that in 1374 John of Gaunt was remembering Blanche; by his grant to Chaucer he may have been rewarding the author of *The Book of the Duchess*.

Another Lancaster connection was recorded in 1369, when Chaucer received 10 pounds as one of the members of the king's household who were to accompany John of Gaunt on a military expedition to Picardy (where the Squire of the General Prologue [I.86] served part of his military apprenticeship). There is no record of Chaucer's part in the 1369 campaign. Nor is it known what was the king's business that took Chaucer to "parts beyond the seas" in 1370. Having made four journeys abroad in four years, 1366–70, Chaucer undertook in 1372–73 a commission that gave him his first recorded contact with Italy. He accompanied two Italian merchants, Giovanni di Mari and Sir Jacopo di Provano, then residents of London, to negotiate on the king's behalf with the doge and people of Genoa, who wanted the use of an English port. The business discussed may have been partly military; Giovanni di Mari, Chaucer's associate, was in the same year hiring Genoese mercenaries for King Edward.

The commission given Chaucer before his departure did not name Florence; yet the expense account submitted on his return, 23 May 1373, recorded treating of the affairs of the king "in Genoa and Florence." The visit to Florence has seemed significant to Chaucer scholars because Petrarch and Boccaccio, still living, were in that region. Chaucer, if he did not meet them, could hardly have avoided hearing a great deal about them and about Dante, who, though he had died in exile fifty years earlier, was now revered in Florence. Quite possibly Chaucer obtained manuscripts of some of these authors' works on this visit. It is customary in this connection to mention the reference to Petrarch in The Clerk's Prologue (IV.31–33), but with the warning that it is the Clerk, and not Chaucer, who claims to have heard the story in The Clerk's Tale from Petrarch.

The journey of 1372–73, it was once thought, gave Chaucer his first acquaintance with the language and literature of Italy; but it is now agreed that Chaucer might well have been chosen for that mission because he already knew some Italian. The hundred days allowed by the 1372–73 journey would hardly have given Chaucer time to learn a language. London in Chaucer's youth provided better opportunities; many Italian families lived in London, some near the Chaucer house in the Vintry; Chaucer's father and grandfather had business dealings with Italians. In any event, Italy had become, by 1373, a part of Chaucer's firsthand experience.

A few months after his return from Florence, he had occasion to deal with Italians again. He was sent by the king to deliver a Genoese ship, detained at Dartmouth, to her master, a merchant of Genoa and an associate of Chaucer's fellow envoy, Giovanni di Mari. This commission has been taken as additional proof of Chaucer's knowledge of Italian. (It is also of interest because the piratical Shipman of the General Prologue [I.389] was of Dartemouthe.)

*Other Journeys and the Customhouse*

Chaucer seems to have had good fortune during the year after his return from Italy. On 23 April 1374, St. George's Day, while the king was celebrating the feast at Windsor, he made an unusual grant to Chaucer. Almost no other business was done on that holiday, but King Edward granted the poet a gallon pitcher of wine daily for life. The wine, it is sometimes suggested, may have been the reward for a poem presented to the king during the festivities. Chaucer collected the wine until the death of Edward III in 1377; Richard II, on his accession, immediately confirmed the gift and, on 18 April 1378, permitted Chaucer to commute it for an annuity of 20 marks, a respectable income.

In 1374, also, Chaucer obtained a home in London. On 10 May, Adam de Bury, mayor of London, and the aldermen leased to Chaucer, rent-free for life, the dwelling over Aldgate, one of the six gates in the city wall. Chaucer was to keep the apartment in good repair, to allow entry for purposes of defense in time of war, and he was not to sublet. Such a lease was not unusual; the city owned dwellings over other gates and sometimes leased them to city officials. Ralph Strode, Chaucer's friend, had a similar apartment over Aldersgate, Adam de Bury, whose name appears on Chaucer's lease, had been an associate of Chaucer's.
father, had been sent abroad on a mission by the king, and had held a customs office himself. It was once suggested that Chaucer owed the lease to the influence of King Edward's mistress, Alice Perrers, who owned property near Aldgate; but it is more likely that Adam de Bury, because of his contact with the Chaucer family, did, as the lease states, make the arrangement.

The dwelling over Aldgate became, as it turned out, very convenient, just a few minutes walk from the customhouse, where Chaucer was to be employed for the next twelve years. On 8 June 1374 Edward III appointed Chaucer controller of the export tax, or customs, on wool, sheepskins, and leather, in the port of London, and of the subsidy, a heavier tax on the same merchandise. He was to receive an annual salary of 10 pounds. Chaucer, the son and grandson of men who had held minor offices in the customs service, was taking up a family occupation.

His task was essential. Because wool was England's principal export, much depended on the wool customs and subsidy. These taxes had helped to finance King Edward's wars in the 1340s and 1350s and were paying for the smaller military expeditions of the 1370s and 1380s. Wool taxes paid the daily costs of government, including, often, royal grants and annuities, and supported the costly court of King Edward and, later, of his grandson, Richard II.

As controller, Chaucer worked with the collectors, the nominal heads of the customs organization for the port of London. The collectors were merchants and were making the king large loans on the security of the revenue from the customs. Among these collector-creditors while Chaucer was in office were the immensely rich Nicholas Brembre, John Philipot, and William Walworth, neighbors of the Chaucer family in Vintry Ward. These three men were leaders of the politically powerful victualers' guilds, riche and sellers of vitaille, like the friends of the Friar (General Prologue I.248). At the customhouse the collectors were expected to record each day's shipments and the amount of customs or subsidy collected. The controller, Chaucer, kept the "counter-rolls," independent lists against which theirs were checked. The controller had to monitor the honesty and efficiency of the collectors. Under these conditions, Chaucer's position at the customhouse demanded tact and astuteness.

He had a heavy responsibility because customs receipts while he was in office were large, averaging over a ten-year period 24,600 pounds a year. Dealing with such sums, the controller was, reasonably enough, expected to keep the rolls "with his own hand" and to exercise the office "in his own person." At the end of the fiscal year, at Michaelmas, controller and collectors were summoned to the "view," or audit, a complex and arduous process.

An incident connected with the customs gave Chaucer a sizable reward. He was granted, on 12 July 1376, the value (71 pounds, 4 shillings, and 6 pence) of wool forfeited by one John Kent, who had exported it without paying customs. The sum was important, more than seven times Chaucer's annual salary.

Chaucer seems to have been successful as controller. He was appointed on 20 April 1382 to the additional controllership of the petty customs, import and export duties on wine and other merchandise not assessed under the wool customs. He managed to collect his annual salary regularly, a considerable feat in itself. He remained in office twelve years, longer than any other controller of his time; and he received in most years an additional reward for his "unremitting labor and diligence."

One detail from his experience at the customhouse explains the background of the line from the General Prologue (I.277) in which we learn that the Merchant wants the sea protected from pirates bitwise Middelburgh and Orewelle: customed merchandise was, after 1384, shipped to a central "staple" at Middelburg across the sea from Orwell, the seaport for the Chaucers' home city of Ipswich.

While he held the office as controller, Chaucer was pursuing his literary interests. According to the Eagle the House of Fame (653–57), Geffrey, when he had made his rekenynges, went to his house to sit at another book. Presumably the reckonings were at the customhouse, and Chaucer went home to Aldgate to read and write. It is generally believed that during the years when he lived over Aldgate Chaucer was writing major poems: The Parliament of Fowls, The House of Fame, and Troilus and Criseyde. In addition he was translating the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius from the Latin. It has been observed that Chaucer was most prolific as a writer when he was apparently most busy with other affairs.

But he was too experienced an envoy to be allowed to devote himself entirely to his books and to the customhouse. In 1376, the year when Edward III and his heir, the Black Prince, were both dying, Sir John Burley,
knight, and Chaucer, esquire of the king, received payment for journeys “on secret business of the king.” The records do not show where they went or what matters they discussed. During 1377 Chaucer was sent overseas several times on royal business. In February he and Sir Thomas Percy were advanced sums for a mission to Flanders, also described as “the king’s secret business.” But the expense accounts submitted on their return do not mention Flanders. Instead, they note payment to Chaucer for travel to Paris and Montreuil, 17 February to 25 March, and to “parts of France,” 30 April to 26 June 1377. The French poet Eustache Deschamps, who in 1386 was to send Chaucer a well-known ballade in his praise, may have been in Paris at that time.

According to Froissart, Chaucer was a member of a mission attempting to negotiate a marriage between Richard and a French princess; but Froissart is frequently inaccurate, and no known English record names Chaucer as a member of such a mission until after the death of Edward III, 21 June 1377. In fact, the only official note concerning the purpose of Chaucer’s series of journeys to France is dated 6 March 1381. It speaks of Chaucer as having been in France “to treat of peace in time of Edward III and in time of Richard II to discuss a marriage between the king and a daughter [not named] of his adversary of France.” A French marriage did not take place, and war with France was renewed.

Chaucer’s next mission gave him another opportunity to visit Italy. He and Sir Edward Berkeley received funds on 28 May 1378 from “the king’s treasurers for war,” William Walworth and John Philipot, collectors of the London customs, for a journey to Lombardy to discuss “certain business concerning the king’s war” with Bernabò Visconti, lord of Milan, and Sir John Hawkwood, the Englishman who was Bernabò’s son-in-law and commander of mercenaries. Official records do not give the result of these secret negotiations, but they do indicate that Lombardy maintained relations with England. Exchequer accounts of December 1378 show King Richard’s rich gifts to messengers from Bernabò and Hawkwood.

For Chaucer the journey meant a renewal of his acquaintance with Italian literature. The Visconti owned famous libraries and had been patrons of Petrarch. The strong impression they made on Chaucer was recorded in his poems. Bernabò himself, God of delight, and scourge of Lombardye, appears in The Monk’s Tale (VII.2399–2400). Observation of Bernabò and his brother, notorious tyrants, may have suggested to Chaucer the phrase tirauntz of Lombardye (LGWPro F 374).

By 19 September 1378 Chaucer had returned to London. He did not go overseas again until his work at the customhouse had ended.

While he was still controller, his name appeared in a record which is not yet fully understood. One Cecilia Chaumpaigne, daughter of a London baker, William Chaumpaigne, and his wife Agnes, acknowledged, on 4 May 1380, a release to Geoffrey Chaucer of all kinds of actions (i.e., legal procedures seeking redress) in respect of her raptus as well as of any other matter. The definition of the word raptus in the context of this 1380 incident has been discussed repeatedly. It could have meant physical rape; or it could have meant abduction, as it did in the account of John Chaucer’s kidnapping and in the case Chaucer was appointed to investigate in 1387, the abduction of a young heiress, Isabella atte Halle. The record, however, is clear; it means that Cecilia Chaumpaigne clears Chaucer of all responsibility. Additional facts, equally ambiguous, further complicate interpretation of these events. On 30 June 1380 Robert Goodchild, cutler, and John Grove, armorer, citizens of London, acknowledged a general release to Chaucer of all actions of law. On the same day Cecilia Chaumpaigne acknowledged a similar release to Goodchild and Grove. Then, in a recognizance dated 2 July 1380 Grove agreed to pay Cecilia at Michaelmas 10 pounds, a sum equivalent to Chaucer’s annual salary at the customhouse. It has been suggested that Grove served as an intermediary to bring about a settlement between Chaucer and Cecilia. It has also been suggested that Grove, because of his financial involvement, was the principal in the case and Chaucer only an accessory.

Students of medieval English law disagree on the interpretation of the records. What is undeniable is the high social standing of the witnesses to Chaucer’s release: Sir William Beauchamp, chamberlain of the king’s household; Sir William Neville, admiral of the king’s fleet; Neville’s friend, Sir John Clanvowe, author of a religious treatise; John Philipot, collector of customs; and Richard Morel, a merchant and member of Parliament who lived near Chaucer in Aldgate Ward.
The next year was marked by an event of much wider significance than the Chaumpaigne case: the Rising of 1381, the Peasants' Revolt. No record tells us whether Chaucer was at Aldgate when thousands of rebels entered London through that gate or whether he saw them burn John of Gaunt's palace, the Savoy, or whether he saw them behead Simon Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury and chancellor of the kingdom. A number of the victims came from Vintry Ward, where Chaucer still owned his father's house; they included Richard Lyons, merchant, who had profited by lending thousands of pounds to the king; and scores of Flemings, whose headless bodies were, according to the chroniclers, left piled in the streets near the river. When the Nun's Priest speaks casually of the noise made by the mob when that they wolden any Flemyng kille (NPT VIl.3396), Chaucer was talking of events that may once have been of a good deal more than casual importance to him.

The mob was brought under control with the help of John Philipot, Nicholas Brembre, and William Walworth, with all of whom Chaucer had worked at the customhouse. These "gode and worthi men of the city of London," as they were called in a popular account of the revolt, were immediately knighted by the king. Chaucer, on 19 June 1381, four days after the suppression of the revolt, quit-claimed his father's holdings on Thames Street to Henry Herbury, a merchant and a man of means.

Chaucer may have been gradually ending his connections with London. He was beginning to entrust the work of the customs to deputies. The terms of his appointment as controller of the petty customs on 20 April 1382 allowed him to name a deputy. During his earlier absences, in France, 1377, and in Italy, 1378, his work had been carried on by deputies. He was permitted to employ a deputy at the wool customs from 23 June to 1 November 1383, and again for a month beginning 25 November 1384. Finally, on 17 February 1385 he was given leave to appoint a permanent deputy.

Chaucer and Kent

The changes at the customhouse have been taken to suggest that Chaucer had already left London for nearby Kent, a county with which he had had earlier associations. In 1375 King Edward had granted him the wardship of two Kentish heirs, William Soles and Edmund Staplegate. Such wardships, often granted to the king's retainers, could be lucrative. Staplegate's father had left large holdings in Canterbury, and Chaucer's profit from the estate was 104 pounds.

By 1388, records described Chaucer as "of Kent." He may have been living in Greenwich. The Host's reference in the Reeve's Prologue (I.3907) to Grenewyche, ther many a shrewe [rascal] is inne has often been taken to mean that Chaucer himself was living in Greenwich and making one of his customary self-deprecating jokes.

Knowledge of two official positions Chaucer held in the 1380s strengthens the theory that he was then living in Kent. He was added on 12 October 1385 to a sixteen-member commission of peace for Kent. Other members were Sir Simon Burley, the Black Prince's friend, sometimes called the most influential man in the kingdom of the prince's son, King Richard II; representatives of leading Kentish families, Cobham, Culpepper, and Devereux; and six sergeants-at-law, men of the same high legal rank as Chaucer's Man of Law (General Prologue I.309). Membership on a Kentish peace commission in 1385-86 entailed a special responsibility because the French were at that time threatening to invade the south coast of England. In 1386 Cobham and Devereux were also appointed members of a "great and continual council given comprehensive powers over all matters of state" in the kingdom. Chaucer remained a member of the peace commission, with one brief and apparently accidental break, until 15 July 1389, a few days after he had been given another position.

Even more important than Chaucer's appointment as a justice of the peace was his election to Parliament in 1386 as one of the two "knights of the shire" (members of the House of Commons) to represent Kent. The Parliament to which he was sent was a turning point in King Richard's reign and in the history of medieval England. When it convened in October, troops had been called up to defend London against the threatened French invasion. But there were no funds to pay them; they were wandering the London streets searching for food and loot. In the sessions of Parliament, powerful noblemen, led by the king's youngest uncle, Thomas of Gloucester, attacked the chancellor and the treasurer of the realm and compelled Richard to dismiss them. Gloucester and his allies may have threatened to depose Richard
if he did not comply. Though knights of the shire took a prominent part in the attack, there is no record that Chaucer was more than a quiet observer. He had ties with both sides.

While he was at Westminster attending Parliament, Chaucer, on 15 October 1386, gave his oft-quoted deposition in the Scrape-Grosvenor case. He was testifying that his friends, the Scrape family, had long borne the coat of arms that the Grosvenors were attempting to make theirs. Chaucer had, he said, seen the device on Scrape armor at the time of the siege of Reims in 1359-60.

Personal Matters

One of the first tributes to Chaucer as poet came from France in 1385-86. Though France at that time was preparing to invade England, Chaucer’s friend, Sir Lewis Clifford, returned from France bringing Chaucer a poem of generous praise, written by the leading French poet of the time, Eustache Deschamps. Deschamps’s ballade, with the refrain “great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer,” stressed Chaucer’s role as a cultural intermediary who had made *Le roman de la rose* accessible to English readers. The poem praised Chaucer extravagantly for his brevity of speech, his wisdom, his practical learning. Deschamps himself, he wrote, would be only a nettle in Chaucer’s garden of poetry.

At about the same time, two English writers were commenting on Chaucer’s poetry. In late 1385, Thomas Usk, a London clerk, in his prose Testament of Love called Chaucer “the noble philosophical poet.” He declared that Chaucer surpassed all other poets in “goodness of manliche speche” and in sound sense. John Gower’s praise in his *Confessio amantis* (1390), in which he remarked that Chaucer had filled the land with “dites” and “songes glade,” was less emphatic. The remark disappears in the course of Gower’s later revision of the *Confessio*, but for structural reasons, it is now thought, not because of a quarrel between the poets.

On 19 February 1386, Philippa Chaucer was admitted to the fraternity of Lincoln Cathedral. In the same company were the future Henry IV, Henry of Derby, the eldest son of John of Gaunt, and Thomas Swynford and John Beaufort, sons of Philippa’s sister, Katherine Swynford. Both John of Gaunt and the Swynford family had been long associated with the cathedral.

Membership in the fraternity was something of a custom with the royal family. King Richard and Queen Anne themselves were enrolled on 26 March 1387 when they visited the cathedral, site of the shrine of the boy martyr, St. Hugh of Lincoln, who is mentioned in The Prioress’s Tale (VII.684). It has been argued that this tale was first read on that occasion.

In the late 1380s an important period of Chaucer’s life came to an end. On 5 October 1386 he gave up the lease of the Aldgate dwelling, where he had lived for twelve years. New controllers took his positions at the customhouse. Philippa Chaucer, to whom he had been married for at least twenty-one years, disappeared from the records after 18 June 1387 and is presumed to have died. When Chaucer was given a safe-conduct on 5 July 1387 to accompany his friend, Sir William Beauchamp, to Calais, he was making the last of a series of journeys overseas that he had begun in 1359, almost thirty years before. He had apparently reached a low point in his career.

Chaucer lived safely through 1388 when the king’s enemies, the Appellants, who dominated Parliament, caused the execution of three men with whom Chaucer had worked, Sir Nicholas Brembre of the customhouse, and two members of the Kent peace commission, Sir Simon Burley and Chief Justice Robert Tresilian. Whether or not Chaucer saw them moving through the London streets to their deaths, he described such a scene memorably in The Man of Law’s Tale (II.645-50):

*Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face,*  
*Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad*  
*Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,*  
*And swich a colour in his face hath had*  
*Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad*  
*Amonges alle the faces in that route?*

Chaucer himself seems to have been harmed during this time only by suits for debt. Twice, 16 and 25 April 1388, he was sued by John Churchman, collector of the customs at London. It is, therefore, sometimes believed that when he made over his annuities to a certain John Scalby on 1 May 1388, he was exchanging future income for cash with which to settle present debts.

Chaucer was not entirely free from official duties; he was still a member of the Kent peace commission.
XXII

INTRODUCTION

But between 1386 and 1389 he had leisure in which he could work on the General Prologue of The Canterbury Tales and a number of the tales themselves.

Clerk of the Works and Forester

New official tasks, however, soon demanded his attention. King Richard, who had regained power in May 1389, appointed Chaucer on 12 July 1389 to what was possibly his most arduous position: he became clerk of the king's works. He had responsibility for construction and repair at ten royal residences and other holdings of the king. One was the Tower of London, center of government as well as occasional dwelling for the royal family; the castle of Berkhamsted; and seven of Richard's favorite manors, including Eitham and Sheen, mentioned in The Legend of Good Women (Pro F 497). He was also overseer of hunting lodges in royal forests, the mews at Charing Cross for the king's falcons, parks (hunting preserves), gardens, mills, pools, and fences. He had purveyors who assisted him at most of these places and a controller who checked his accounts as he had checked those of the customs collectors.

Chaucer's clerkship represented a heavier and more direct responsibility than did the controllership. He was not dealing with such large sums of money as he had checked at the customhouse, but he supervised a great number of craftsmen and arranged for the purchase, transportation, and storage of large quantities of supplies. He had to find and pay the men, pursue them if they ran away, and, if necessary, imprison them; he had to choose, purchase, and store building materials, and to see that they were not stolen. Chaucer's wages, at 2 shillings a day, amounted to more than three and one-half times his base salary at the customhouse.

The importance of Chaucer's position is suggested by the achievements of the king's craftsmen on his payroll. One of them, master mason Henry Yeveley, planned the rebuilding of the naves of Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral, designed the tombs of Richard II and Queen Anne in the Abbey, and devised the rebuilding of Westminster Hall, sometimes called "the handsomest building in Europe."

Special occasions made special demands. After a storm that caused great damage along the Thames, Chaucer was appointed on 12 March 1390 to a royal commission "of walls and ditches" for the extensive marshes between Woolwich and Greenwich; he may then have been living in the latter town. In May and October of 1390, when King Richard invited knights from overseas to take part in his tournaments, Chaucer was in charge of putting up "scaffolds," seating for the royal and noble spectators, and lists for the combats at Smithfield. Construction of lists in The Knight's Tale (I.882-84, 1908, 2087-88) has sometimes been compared to Chaucer's task at Smithfield. One of the October guests was to be installed as a Knight of the Garter in St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, where the order had been founded; accordingly, on 12 July 1390, Chaucer was commissioned to repair the chapel, described as "ruinous and like to fall to the ground."

No large building projects were under way during Chaucer's clerkship. Average spending by his successors was two and one-half times as great as his. But one useful project, undertaken before Chaucer took office, continued throughout his term and beyond. It was the rebuilding and enlarging of the wharf beside the Tower of London, where wool was brought for customs levy. The wharf repairs and other works near the Tower cost more than half of all the money spent by Chaucer in the works office; and, appropriately, they were paid for by the revenue from wool customs. Chaucer's previous work as controller of customs had brought him daily to the wharf, and he knew well what improvements were needed.

At least once during his clerkship he encountered danger. In early September 1390, probably while traveling from one royal manor to another with money for payrolls, he was attacked by a gang of highwaymen and robbed. The robbers were caught, tried, and convicted. But the legal records differ so widely that it is not possible to determine whether there was one robbery or three; whether the loss was 10 pounds, or 20 pounds, 6 shillings, and 8 pence, or 9 pounds, 43 pence; whether the place was Westminster or Hatcham or the "Foule Oke," a place name or a tree, in Surrey or in Kent. It is certain, however, that Chaucer was not required to repay the king's money. Chaucer's clerkship of the works ended on 17 June 1391. The robbery, in which he was said to have been wounded, may have caused him to give up the office. Or he may have found the financial situation unsatisfactory; when Chaucer left office, the audit of his account showed more than 87 pounds still owing to him. This was
a large sum; it exceeded by 17 pounds the total amount of his wages during the entire term of his appointment.

When Chaucer left the clerkship, another place was waiting for him: at some time before 22 June 1391 he was appointed deputy forester of the royal forest at North Petherton in Somerset. Other royal servants received similar appointments.

The forestership, like Chaucer's earlier positions, was a responsible one, demanding skill in handling money and men, because forests in late medieval England were sources of revenue. Royal forests comprised entire regions that could, and at North Petherton did, include moor, marsh, pastureland, cultivated fields, and villages and their churches, as well as wooded areas. Royal forests yielded many kinds of income, such as fees for pasturing cattle and for allowing swine to feed on acorns and beech mast, and tolls for traveling forest roads.

According to tradition, Chaucer as deputy forester lived at Park House in the forest, though it is not clear whether his duties required that he live there. Wherever he lived, he did not lose touch with the court. In 1393 Chaucer received from King Richard a gift of 10 pounds "for good service." The next year Richard granted him an annuity of 20 pounds. Henry of Derby gave Chaucer fur to trim a gown of scarlet (a fine cloth) during the year 1395-96. In the same year, Chaucer delivered 10 pounds to Henry from the royal exchequer. King Richard, reminded of an earlier grant, certified to Chaucer in 1398 the yearly gift of a tun of wine.

Last Years

The mood of the court changed in 1397. After several years of peace and moderation Richard moved suddenly to take revenge on the Appellants, who had in 1388 caused the exile or death of a group of his friends. The king arrested his enemies, charged them with treason, and caused them to be imprisoned, exiled, or put to death. Henry, John of Gaunt's son, had been one of the Appellants; he was exiled in 1398. When John of Gaunt died in 1399, Richard seized his estates; Henry returned to claim them and took advantage of the opportunity to depose Richard and have himself crowned as Henry IV.

Of Chaucer in these years we know little. We know that his Petherton appointment was renewed, and that he may have taken his last recorded journey. A royal protection was issued on 4 May 1398 to "Geoffrey Chaucer, our beloved esquire going about divers parts of England on the king's arduous and pressing business."

Henry's accession seems at first glance to have made little difference in Chaucer's life. The poet and his wife had received annuities from Henry's father; Chaucer had written The Book of the Duchess as a memorial to Henry's mother; and during the last decade Chaucer had received a gift from Henry himself. As king, Henry renewed the grants Chaucer had received from Richard II and granted an additional 40 marks yearly for life. The envoy of a late poem, The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse, hailed Henry as true king by right of conquest, birth, and free election (line 23), though the Complaint itself suggests that the grants approved by the new king had not yet been paid.

Chaucer now provided himself with a home near the court. On 24 December 1399 he took a fifty-three-year lease of a house near the Lady Chapel of Westminster Abbey, on a site now occupied by the Chapel of King Henry VII. For a few months he collected, or others collected for him, his royal grants: on 21 February and 5 June 1400 he received partial payments of the arrears due on his exchequer annuities. No life records of later date have been found.

The inscription on Chaucer's tomb in Westminster Abbey gives the date of his death as 25 October 1400. The tomb may, however, have been erected as late as 1555, and there is no other evidence as to the exact date of his death. He was buried in the Abbey for several reasons, none of them, so far as we know, related to his being a poet. He had a right to burial there because he was a tenant of the Abbey and a member of the parish. Moreover, commoners who had been royal servants were beginning to be buried near the tombs of the kings they had served. No one in England in 1400 could foresee that Chaucer's tomb would be the beginning of Poets' Corner and that Chaucer would become the "stremes hede" of poetry in English.

A CHRONOLOGY OF CHAUCER'S LIFE AND TIMES

Note: The dates of birth and of the composition or publication of literary works are often approximations and should be used with caution.

1300 Dante's Divine Comedy.
1300 Birth of Guillaume de Machaut, French musician and poet.
1304 Birth of Francesco Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca).
1313 Birth of Giovanni Boccaccio.
1321 Death of Dante Alighieri (b. 1265).
1330 Birth of John Gower (d. 1408).
1335 Boccaccio begins Il Filostrato (source of "Troilus").
1337 Hundred Years War begins (ends 1453).
1337 Birth of Jean Froissart, French poet and chronicler (d. 1404).
1339 Boccaccio begins Il Tesiida delle Nozze d'Emilia (source of The Knight's Tale).
1340s Birth of Chaucer.
1346 English victory at Crecy.
1346 Birth of Eustache Deschamps, French poet (d. 1406).
1348–50 The Black Death.
1350–53 Boccaccio writes the Decameron.
1356 English victory at Poitiers.
1357 Chaucer serves in the household of the Countess of Ulster.
1359–60 Chaucer serves in the war in France.
1360 Chaucer, captured by the French, is ransomed (for 16 pounds).
1360 Peace with France, Treaty of Bretigny (halt in Hundred Years War; resumes in 1389).
1361–62 Severe recurrence of the Black Death.
1368–72 Chaucer writes "Fragment A" of The Romaunt of the Rose, The Book of the Duchess, probably a good many lyrics in French and English, now lost, and such lyrics as The Complaint unto Pity and A Complaint to His Lady.
1369 Chaucer serves with John of Gaunt's army in France.
1370 Birth of John Lydgate, admirer and imitator of Chaucer (d. 1449).
1370 Chaucer again serves with the army in France.
1372 Chaucer's wife, Philippa, serves in the household of John of Gaunt's wife.
1372 Chaucer travels to Italy (Genoa and Florence) on a diplomatic mission.
1374 Death of Petrarch.
1374 Chaucer granted a gallon pitcher of wine daily for life.
1374 Chaucer appointed controller of the customs; granted a lease on a dwelling over Aldgate.
1375 Death of Boccaccio.
1375 Chaucer and Otho de Graunson (French knight and poet on whose poems Chaucer drew for The Complaint of Venus) both receive grants from John of Gaunt.
1376–77 Chaucer makes several trips to France, negotiating for peace and the marriage of Richard.
1376 Edward III dies; Richard II becomes king.
1377 Pope Gregory XI condemns doctrines of John Wycliffe (d. 1384); Lollard movement grows.
1378 The "Great Schism"—rival popes in Rome (Urban) and Avignon (Clement); the schism ends 1409.
1378 Chaucer travels to Italy (Milan) on diplomatic mission.

1378 John Gower and Richard Forester have Chaucer's power of attorney while he travels abroad.

Late 1370s Chaucer writes *Saint Cecelia* (possibly later); *The House of Fame, Anelida and Arcite*.

1380 Cecily Chaumpaigne signs a document, releasing Chaucer from all actions “in the case of my rape” (*de raptu meo*).

1380 Birth of Chaucer's second son, Lewis.

1380–82 Chaucer writes *The Parliament of Fowls*.

1381 The Peasants' Revolt.

1381 Death of Chaucer's mother, Agnes.

1382 Chaucer's controllership of the customs renewed, with permission to have a deputy.

1382 The Bible is translated into English (the "Wyclif Bible"; a later version is made in 1388).

1382–86 Chaucer writes *Boece, Troilus and Criseyde*.

1385 Chaucer granted a permanent deputy in the customs.

1385 Eustache Deschamps sends Chaucer a poem of praise, hailing him as "great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer."

1385–87 Chaucer writes *Palamoun and Arcite* (later used as The Knight's Tale) and *The Legend of Good Women* (though some parts may be earlier and the Prologue was later revised).

1385–89 Chaucer serves as justice of peace for Kent, resigns from customs.

1386 Chaucer serves as member of Parliament for Kent (where he now probably lives).

1386–87 Chaucer praised as a poet of love and philosophy by Thomas Usk (1350–88), author of *The Testament of Love*.

1387–92 Chaucer begins *The Canterbury Tales*.

1388 Some of Richard II's closest supporters removed by the Lords Appellant; some (including Thomas Usk, an admirer of Chaucer) are executed.

1389 Chaucer appointed clerk of the works, with responsibility for Westminster, Tower of London, and other royal estates.

1390 John Gower "publishes" his *Confessio amantis* (later revised).

1390 As clerk of the works, Chaucer has scaffolds built for jousts in Smithfield.

1390 Chaucer is robbed of horse, goods, and a considerable amount of money at Hacham, Surrey (perhaps robbed again a bit later).

1391–92 Chaucer writes *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* (with additions 1393 and later).

1392–95 Chaucer writes most of *The Canterbury Tales*, including probably the "Marriage Group."

1394 King Richard II grants Chaucer an annuity of 20 pounds a year.

1396–1400 Chaucer writes the latest of the *Tales*, including probably The Nun's Priest's Tale, The Canon's Yeoman's Tale (though part is probably earlier), and The Parson's Tale, and several short poems, such as Lenvoy to Scogan and Lenvoy to Bukton, in which Bukton is urged to read "The Wife of Bath."

1398 Chaucer is granted a tun of wine a year.

1399 Richard II deposed; Henry IV becomes king.

1399 Henry IV confirms, and adds to, Chaucer's royal annuities.

1399 Chaucer leases a tenement, for 53 years, in the garden of the Lady Chapel at Westminster Abbey.

1400 Chaucer writes The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse.

1400 Chaucer's death (on 25 October, according to tradition).
Here bygynneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury.

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

A KNIGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
Ful worthy was he
Businesse, and of his devis.
In Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne.
And evere honoured for his worthynesse;
As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,
For in all his lyf he nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde
In his lyf unto no maner wight.

He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght.
And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,
With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse.
Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.
Of fustian he wered a gypon
And born hym weel, as of so litel space,
With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse.
Of his port as meeke as is a mayde.

And of his lyf he al his lyf unto no maner wight.

This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also
Somtyme with the lord of Palatye
Palatye: Balat (in modern Turkey)
At the seige had he been somtyme in chyvachie
Al bismotered with his habergeon

In Tramyssene
Tramyssene: Tlemcen (near Morocco)

For he was late ycome from his viage,
Syngynge he was, or lloytynge, al the day;

And at a knyght than wol I first bigyne.
Short was his gowne, with sleeves longe and wyde. 
Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde. 
He koude songes make and wel endite, 
Juste and eek daunce, and weelpurtreye and write, 
He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale. 
He koude songes make and wel endite, 
At that tymei1'or1wm liste ride so, 
His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe, 
A not heed hadde he, with a broun visage; 
A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene, 
And in his hand he baar a myghty bowe. 
And he was cladi~ cote and hood of grene. 
Under his belt he bar ful thriftily 
Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer, 
So hoote he loved~ _that by nyghtertale 
(Wei koude he dresse his take! yemanly; 
Harneised wel and sharp as point of .spere; 
A forster was he, soothly, as I .gesse. 
An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of grene; 
And on that oother syde a gay daggere 
And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler, 
A Cristopher on his brest of silver sheene. 
Ofwodecraft wel koude he al the usage. 
That ofhir smylyng was ful symple and coy; 
Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne, 
And she was cleped madame Eglentyne. 

94 koude: knew how to
96 Juste: joust
eek: also wel
97 purtreye: draw
98 sleep: slept
99 hoote: passionately
100 nyghtertale: at nighttime
101 Yeman: yeoman, freeborn servant
102 namo: no other
103 bar ful thriftily: bore very properly
104 gay: bright
105 bokeler: buckler, small shield
106 carf: carved
107 bar ful thrifty: bore very properly
108 drouped: did not fall short because of poorly adjusted
109 feet: indeed
110 bard: bard
111 bearer's
112 head
113 yarke: yoke in the manner
114 outh: oath
115 conditio: condition
116 seint: Saint
117 of: of
118 an: a
119 arm: arm guard
120 bow: bow
121 of: of
122 of: of
123 of: of
124 endite: endite
125 of: of
But sikerly she hadde a fair forehead;
It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe;
For, hardly, she was nat undergroe.
Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.
Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,
And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after *Amor vincit omnia*.

Another NONNE with hire hadde she,
That was hire chapeleyne, and preestes thre.
A MONK ther was, a fair for the maistrie,
An outridere, that lovede venerie,
Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.

But sikerly she hadde a fair forehead;
That shoon as any glas,
With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;
And eek as loude as dooth the chapel bell.
That was hir chapeleyne, and preestes thre.
The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit—
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,
That was hir chapeleyne, and preestes thre.
The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit—
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,
And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere.
That was hir chapeleyne, and preestes thre.

Another NONNE with hire hadde she,
That was hire chapeleyne, and preestes thre.
A MONK ther was, a fair for the maistrie,
An outridere, that lovede venerie,
Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.

But sikerly she hadde a fair forehead;
That shoon as any glas,
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The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit—
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,
That was hir chapeleyne, and preestes thre.
The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit—
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,
And over al, ther as profit sholde arise, 
Curteis he was and lowel of servyse; 
Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous.

He was the beste begger in his hous; 
[And yaf a certeyn ferme for the graunt; 
Noon of his bretheren cam ther in his haunt:] 
For thogh a wydwe hadde noght a sho, 
So plesaunt was his "In principio," 
Yet wolde he have a ferthynge, er he wente. 
His purchas was wel better than his rente.

And rage he koude, as it were right a whelpe. 
In love-dayes ther koude he muchel help, 
For ther he was nat lyk a cloysterer 
With a thredbare cope, as is a povre scoler, 
But he was lyk a maister or a pope. 
Of double worstede was his semycope, 
That rounded as a belle out of the presse. 
Somwhat he lipsed, for his wantownesse, 
To make his English sweete upon his tonge;

And in his harpyng, whan that he hadde songe, 
His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght 
As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght. 
This worthy lymytour was cleped Hubert:

A Marchant was ther with a forked berd, 
In mottelee, and hye on horse he sat; 
Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bever hat,

His bootes clasped faire and fetisly, 
Bet than a lazor or a beggestere, 
For unto swich a worthy man as he 
Acorded nat, as by his facultee, 
To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce, 
In mottelee, and hye on horse he sat; 
Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bever hat, 
His bootes clasped faire and fetisly, 
Bet than a lazor or a beggestere, 
For unto swich a worthy man as he 
Acorded nat, as by his facultee, 
To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.
Wel koude he en eschaunge sheeldes selle. This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:
Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette,
So estatly was he of his governaunce
With his bargaynes and with his chevyssaunce.
For sothe he was a worthy man with alle,
But, sooth to seyn, I noutil how men hym calle.
A CLERK ther was of Oxfenford also,
That unto logyk hadde longe ygo.
As leone was his hors as is a rake,
And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
But looked holowe, and therto sobrely.
Ful thredbare was his overeste courtepy,
Ne was so worldly for to have office.
Twenty bookes, clad in blak of rered, ·
Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette,
This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:
289 holwe: emaciated sobrely: grave, serious
284 bargaynes: buying and selling chevyssaunce: financial arrangements,
War: prudent
278 sheeldes: A shield was a unit of exchange; selling shields was a way of borrowing
money, often at a cost to the seller.
279 his wit bisette: used his wits
281 estatly: dignified governaunce: behavior, management
282 bargaynes: buying and selling chevyssaunce: financial arrangements,
283 noot =
282 For sothe: the word can mean either philosopher or
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That heclli opiniou that pleyn delit
Was verray felicitee parfit.
An housholdere, and that a greet, was he;
Seint Julian he was in his contree.
His breed, his ale, was alweys after oon;
Withoute bake mete was nevere his hous,
Was verray felicitee parfit.
A bettre envyned man was nowher noon.
That heeld opinioun that pleyn delit
Poynaunt and sharp, and redy al his geere.
Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe,
His table dormant in his halle alway
After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
And they were clothed alle in o lyveree
An anlaas and a gipser al of silk
An housholdere,.and that a greet, was he;
Of alfe deyntees that men koude thynke,
But al with silver, wroght ful clene and weel,
Hir knyves were chaped noght with bras
Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire.
Heeng at his girdel, whit as morne milk.
Wo was his cook but if his sauce were
Was nowher swich a worthy vavasour. 360
Aid many a breem and many a luce in stuwe. 350
A WEBBE, a DYERE, and a TAPYCER-
At sessiouns ther was he lord and sire; 355
A shirreve hadde he been, and a contour.
Seint Julian he was in his contree. 340
So chaunged he his mete and his soper.
For catel hadde they ynogh and rente,
To sitten in a yeldehalle on a deys. 370
Everich, for the wisdom·that he kan,
To boille the chiknes with the marybones,
And have a mantel roialliche ybore.
Wel koude he knowe a draughte ofLondoun ale.
He rood upon a rouncy, as he kouthe,
For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.
A SHIPMAN was ther, wonynge fer by weste;
For aught I woot, he was ofDertemouthe.
He rode upon a rouncy, as he kouthe,
In a gowne of faldyng to the knee.
A daggere hanguyng on a laas hadde he
Aboute his nekke, under his arm adoun.
The hoote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun;
And certeinly he was a good felawe. 395
Ful many a draughte of wyn had he ydrawe
Fro Burdeux-ward, whil that the chapman sleep.
Of nyce conscience took he no keep.
If that he fought and hadde the hyer bond,
By water he sente hem hoom to every lond.

But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes,
By water he sente hem hoom to every lond. 400
Of nyce conscience took he no keep.
The cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote,
Ther nas noon swich from Hulle to Cartage.

For ech of hem made oother for to wynne.
His barge ycleped was the Maudelayne.
He was a verray, parfit praktisour:
He knew the cause
He kepte his pacient a
For he was grounded in astronomye.
Anon he yafthe sike man his boote.
And where they engendred, and of what humour.
Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye, 420
Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye,
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Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye,
But thereof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe.
And thines hadde she been at Jerusalem;
She hadde passed many a strange streem;
At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,
In Galice at Sainte-Jame, and at Coloigne.
She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye,
Gat-toshted was she, soothly for to seye.
Upon his feet, and in his hand a sta£
And was a povre Persoun ofhehooly thoghand werk.
His parishions devoutly wolde he t<;che.
And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe.
As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;
Ywympled wel, and on hir heed an hat
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;
But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,
Ful looth were hym to cursen for his titm:es,
Benygne he was, and wonder diligent,
He was also a lemed man, a clerk,
In litel thyng have suffisauns.evi-
Wid was l:iii ,J;la.ri,~he, and houses fer so"rider,
And was a povre PERSOUN OF
Of his offryng and eek of his substaunce.
But it were any persone
Ne of his offryng and eek of his substaunce.
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But it were any persone
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But Cristes loore and his apostles twelve
He taughte; but first he folowed it hymselfe.
With hym ther was a Plowman, was his brother,
That hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother;
A trewe swynkere and a good was he,
Lyvynge in pees and parfit charitee.
God love him best with al his hoole herte
At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte, and mayd of tonge
And thanne his neighbor right as hymselfe.
He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve,
For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,
His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,
Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght.
A trewe swynkere and a good was he.
His nosethirles blake were and wyde.
Reed as the brustles of a sowes erys;
He taughte; but first he folwed it hymselve.
For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,
His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,
Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght.
A trewe swynkere and a good was he.
For wheither that he payde or took by taille,
Algate he wayted so in his achaat
That he was ay of brawn, and eek of bones.
He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve,
He taughte; but first he folwed it hymselve.
For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,
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For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,
His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,
Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght.
A trewe swynkere and a good was he.
His heer was by his erys ful round yshorn;
Ful Ylyk a staf;
The yeldynge
Ther was noon auditour koude on him wynne.
His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrye
His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerye,
And by his covenant yaf the rekenynge,
 Wei wiste he by the droghte and by the reyn
Wei koude he kepe a gemer and a bynne;
That he ile knew his sleighte and
Ther nas baillif, ne hierde,
Ther koude no man brynge hym
He koude bettre than his lord purchace.
Syn t!1.at his lord was twenty yeer
This Reve sat upon
They were adrfld of hym as
To yeve and lene hym
In
He 'Yas a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.
His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly,
Ful riche he was astored pryvely.
His wonyng was ful faire upon an heeth;
And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood.
That was al pomely grey and highte Scot.
Biside a toun men clepen Baldeswelle.
And by his syde he baar a rusty blade.
A long surcote
Of Northfolk was this Reve
His heer was by his erys ful round yshorn;
Ful longe were his legges and ful lene,
Ylyk a staf; ther was no calf ysene.
Wel koude he kepe a gernere and a bymne;
Ther was noon auditour koude on hym wynne.
The yeldynge
Ther was noon auditour koude on him wynne.
His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerye,
And by his covenant yaf the rekenynge,
Wei wiste he by the droghte and by the reyn
Wei koude he kepe a gemer and a bynne;
That he ile knew his sleighte and
Ther nas baillif, ne hierde,
Ther koude no man brynge hym
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Biside a toun men clepen Baldeswelle.
And by his syde he baar a rusty blade.
A long surcote
Of Northfolk was this Reve

621 Tukked he was as is a frere aboute,
And evere he rood the hyndreste of oure route.
A SOMONOUR was ther with us in that place,
That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,
For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe.
As hooit he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
With scalled browes blake and piled berd.
Of his visage children were aferd.
Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,
Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon,
Ne oynement that wolde clenese and byte,
That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white,
Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chokes.
Wel loved he gar leek, oynons, and eek lekes,
And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood;
Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood.
And whan that he weal dronken hadde the wyn,
Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn.
A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,
That he had lerned out of som decree—
No wonder is, he herde it al the day;
And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay
Kan clepen "Watte" as wel as kan the pope.
But whoso koude in oother thynge hym grope,
Thanne hadde he spent al, his philosophie;
Ay "Questio quid juris" wolde he crie.
He was a gentil harlot and a kynde;
A bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde.
He wolde suffre for a quart of wyn
A good felawe to have his concubyn
A twelf month, and excus hym atte fulle;
Ful privelie a fynch eek koude he pylle.

580 eys: oon round yshorn: closely cropped
590 tops: top of his head dokked: cut short bifrom: in the foot
592 Ylyk a staf: like a stick
593 gernere: granary bymne: his (for storing grain)
594 on hime wynnes: earn anything (by catching him out)
597 neet: castle dayerse: herd of dairy cattle
598 hors: horses shote: livestock pultrye: poultry
600 covynement: agreement, contract
601 Syn that: since yeer: years
602 averrages: arrears
603 nas = no nas was not: bailiff manager of a farm
604 sleighte: trickery covyn: treachery
605 adrad: afraid the deeth: the plague (17); see n.
606 anomynge: dwelling
608 purs: byuy: property
609 riche: richly
610-12 He could please his lord by lending him some of his (the lord's) own possessions
(i.e., what he had stolen from him) and thus obtain thanks and a reward besides (R.).
613 myster: catch
615 stro: horse
616 pomely: grey highte: was called
617 sarcoite: corn coat pers: dark blue
620 clepen: call
And if he found ower a good felawe,
He wolde techen him to have non awe
In swich cases of the ercedekenes curs,
But if a mannes soule were in his purs;
For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed be.
"Purs is the ercedekenes helle," seyde he.
But wel I woot he lyed right in dede;
Of cursyng oghte ech glity man him drede.
For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,
And also war hym of a Significavit.
In daunger hadde he at his owene gise
The yonge girles of the diocise,
And if he fond owher a good felawe,
"Purs is the ercedekenes helle," seyde he.
This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,
But wel I woot he lyed right
For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,
But of his craft, fro Berwyk into Ware
Ne was ther swich another pardoner. —
For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer.
Which that he seyde was Oure Lady veyl;
He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seyli
That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he wente
Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hym hente.
He hadde a croys of latoun ful of stones,
And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.
But with these relikes, whan that he fond
A povre person dwellynge upon lond,
Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye
Than that the person gat in monthes tweye;
And thus, with Feyned fatereye and japes,
He made the person and the peple his apes.
But trewely to tellen atte laste,
He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste.
Wel koud he rede a lessoun or a storie,
But alderbest he song an offertorie;
He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste.
Wel koud he rede a lessoun or a storie,
But alderbest he song an offertorie;
He made the person and the pep le his apes.
For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,
That the person gat in monthes tweye;
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For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,
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And thus, with feyned fatereye and japes,
He made the person and the peple his apes.
Why that assembled was this compagnye
In Southwerk at this gentil hostelrye
That highte the Tabard, faste by the Belle.
But now is tyme to yow for to telle
How that we baren us that ilye nyght,
When we were in that hostelrye alyth;
And after wol I telle of our viage
And al the remenaut of oure pilgrimage.
But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
That ye n'arette it nat my vileynye,
But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
That ye n'arette it nat my vileynye,

That ye n'arette it nat my vileynye,
Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.
Thogh that I pleynly speke in this mateere,
To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
That ye n'arette it nat my vileynye,
But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
How that we baren us that ilke nyght,
Whan we were in that hostelrie alyght;
He moot rehearse as ny as evere he kan
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
And al the remenaunt of oure pilgrimage.
And after wol I telle of our viage

The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede.
He moot as wel seye en word as another.
Eek Plato seith, whoso kan hym rede,
Everich a word, if it be
He miiy nat spare, althogh he were his brother;
And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,

Greet chiere made oure Hoost us everichon,
And to the soper sette he us anon.
Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde.
My wit is short, ye may wel understond.

Our conseil was nat longe for to seche.
Us thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys,
And granted hym withouten moore avys,
A semely man Oure Hooste was withalle
For to been a marchal in an halle.
A large man he was with eyen stepe—
A fairer burgyes was ther noon in Chepe—
Boold of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught,
And of manhod hym lakkeede right naught.
Eek theerto he was right a myrie man;
And after soper pleyen he bigan,
And spak of myrthe amonge other thynges,
When that we hadde made oure rekenynges,
And seyde thus: "Now, lordynges, trewely,
Ye been to me right welcome, hertely;
For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,
I saugh nat this yeer so myrie a compagnye
Atones in this herberwe as is now.
Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how.
And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght,
To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.
"Ye goon to Caunterbury—God yow speede,
The blissful martir quite yow youre meede!
And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;
And therfore wol I maken yow disport,
And if yow liketh alle by one assent
As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort.
And if yow liketh alle by one assent
For to stonden at my jugement,
And for to werken as I shal yow seye,
Tomorwe, when ye ridden by the weye,
Now, by my fader soule that is deed,
But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow myn heed!
Hooli! up yeure honde, withouten moore speche."
And bad him seye his voirdit as hym leste.

"Lordynges," quod he, "now herkneth for the beste;
That taak it nought, I prey yow, in desdeyn.
This is the poyn, to spoken short and pleyn,
Of aventures that whilom han bifalle.
And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle—
That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas
That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye,
In this viage shal telle tales tweye
That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas
That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye,
In this viage shal telle tales tweye
To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,
And homward he shal tellen othere two,
Of aventures that whilom han bifalle.

Amorwe, whan that day bigan to sprynge, 
Up roos oure Hoost, and was oure aller cok,
And gacredhe us to gider alle in a flok,
And forth we riden a litel more than pass,
Unto the Watervyn of Seint Thomas;
And there oure Hoost bigan his hors areste
And seythe, "Lordynges, herkneth, if yow leste.
Ye woot youre foreward, and I it yow recorde.
If even-song and morwe-song accorde,
Lat se now who shall telle the firste tale.
As evere mote I drynke wyn or ale,
Whoso be rebel to my juggement
Shal paye for alle that by the wey is spent.
Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynne;
He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne.
Sire Knyght," quod he, "my mayster and my lord,
Now draweth cut, for that is myn accord.
Cometh neer," quod he, "my lady Prioresse.
And ye, sire Clerk, lat be your shamefastnesse,
Ne studieth noght; ley hond to, every man!
And therupon the wyn was fet anon;
We dronken, and to reste wente echon
Withouten any lenger taryynge.
For, pardee, Jepte yaf his doghter grace
For to compleyne, er he hir slow, allas!
And, God it woot, no thyng was hir trespas,
But for she ran hir fader first to see,
To welcome hym with greet solemnitatee."
And with that word she fil aswowne anon,
And after, whan hir swownyng is agon,
She riseth up, and to hir fader sayde,
"Blissed be God that I shal dye a mayde!
Yif me my deeth, er that I have a shame;
Dooth with youre child youre wyl, a Goddes name!"
And with that word she preyed hym ful ofte
That with his swerd he wolde smyte softe;
And with that word aswowne doun she fil.
Hir fader, with ful sorweful herte and wil,
Hir heed of smoot, and by the top it hente,
And to the juge he gan it to presente,
As he sat yet in doom in consistorie.
And whan the juge it saugh, as seith the storie,
He bad to take hym and anhange hym faste;
But right anon a thousand peple in thraste
To save the knyght, for routhe and for pitee,
For knowen was the false iniquitee.
The peple anon had suspect in this thyng,
By manere of the cherles chalangyng,
That it was by the assent of Apius;
They wisten wel that he was lecherus.
For which unto this Apius they gon
And caste hym in a prisoyn right anon,
That servant was unto this Apius,
Was demed for to hange upon a tree,
But that Virginius, of his pitee,
That servant was unto this Apius,
Was demed for to hange upon a tree,
But that Virginius, of his pitee,
So preyde for hym that he was exiled;
And elles, certes, he had been bigyled.
The remenant were anhanged, moore and lesse,
That were consentant of this cursednesse.
Heere is ended the Phisiciens Tale.

The Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale

The wordes of the Hoost to the Phisicien and the Pardoner.

Oure Hooste gan to swere as he were wood;
"Harrow!" quod he, "by nyales and by blood!
This was a fals cherl and a fals justise.
As shameful deeth as herte may devyse
Come to thise juges and hire advocatz!
Algate this sely mayde is slayn, allas!
Allas, so pitously as she was slayn!
Of bothe yiftes that I speke of now
Men han ful ofte moore for harm than prow.
But trewely, myn owene maister deere,
Wherfore I seye al day that men may see
That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature
Been cause of deeth to many a creature.
Hire beautee was hire deeth, I dar wel sayn.
Allas, so pitously as she was slayn!
Of bothe yiftes that I speke of now
Men han ful ofte moore for harm than prow.
But trewely, myn owene maister deere,
This is a pitous tale for to heere,
But nathelees, passe over; is no fors.
I pray to God so save thy gentil cors,
And eek thyne urynals and thy jurdones,
Thyn ypocras, and eek thy galiones,
And every boyste ful of thy letuarie;
Corpus bones! but I have triacle,
Or elles a draughte of moyste and corny ale,

Or but I heere anon a myrie tale.
Myn herte is lost for pitee of this mayde.
Thou beel amy, thou Pardoner, he sayde,
"Telle us som myrthe or japes right anon."
"It shal be doon," quod he; "by Seint Ronyon!"
"But first," quod he, "heere at this alestake
I wol bothe drynke and eten of a cake."
Thanne shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be so book!, ne preest ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk.
And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon.
Thanne have I in latoun a sholder-boon
Which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep.
"Goode men," I seye, "taak of my wordes keep;
If that this boon be wasshe in any welle,
If cow, or calf, or sheep, or oxe swelle
That any worm hath ete, or worm ystonge,
That shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be so book!, ne preest ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk.
And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon.
Thanne have I in latoun a sholder-boon
Which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep.
Whish that was of an holy Jewes sheep.
That shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be so book!, ne preest ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk.
And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon.
Thanne have I in latoun a sholder-boon
Which that was of an holy Jewes sheep.
Whish that was of an holy Jewes sheep.
Taak water of that welle and wassh his tonge,  
And it is hooal an; and fortheimore,  
Of pokkes and of scabbe, and every soore  
Shal every sheep be hool that of this welle  
Drynketh a draughte. Taak kep eek what I telle:  
If that the good-man that the beestes oweth  
Wol every wyke, er that the cok hym croweth,  
Fastynge, drynken of this welle a draughte,  
As thilke hoolly Jewoure eldres taughte,  
He shal have multipliyng of his grayn,  
When he hath sowen, be it whete or otes,  
So that he offer pens, or elles grotes.  

'And, sires, also it heeleth jalousie;  
For though a man be falle in jalous rage,  
Lat maken with this water his potage,  
And nevere shal he moore his wyf mystriste,  
Though he the soothe of hir defaute wiste,  
Al had she taken prestes two or thre.  

'Heere is a miteyn eek, that ye may se.  
He that his hand wol putte in this mitayn,  
He shal have multipliyng of his grayn,  
Whan he hath sowen, be it whete or otes,  
So that he offer pens, or elles grotes.  

'Goode men and wommen, o thyng wame I yow:  
If any wyll be in this chirche now  
That hath doon synne horrible, that he  
Dar nat, for shame, of it yshryven be,  
Or any womman, be she yong or old,  
That hath ymaketh hir housbonde cokewold,  
Swinch folk shal have no power ne no grace  
To offren to my relikes in this place.  
And whoso fyndeth hym out of swich blame,  
He wol come up and offre a Goddes name,  
I assoille him by the auctoritee  
Which that by bulle ygraunted was to me.'  

"By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer,  
An hundred mark sith I was pardoner.  
I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,  
And whan the lewed pep le is doun yset,  
I preche so as ye han herd bifoore  
And telle an hundred false japes moore.  

"But shortly myn entente I wol devyse:  
Therfore my theme is yet, and evere was;  
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.  
Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice  
Which that I use, and that is avarice.  
But though myselfe be gilty in that synne,  
Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne  
From avarice and soore to repente.  
But that is nat my principal entente;  
I preche nothyng but for coveitise.  
Of this mateere it oghte ynogh suffise.  

"Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon  
Of olde stories longe tyme agoon.  
For lewed peple loven tales olde;  
Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde.  
What, trowe ye, that whiles I may preche,  
And wynne gold and silver for I teche,  
Of olde stories longe tymes agoon.
That I wol lyve in povertye wilfully?
Nay, nay, I thoughte it nevere, trewely!
For I wol preche and begge in sondry landes;
I wol nat do no labour with myne handes,
Ne make baskettes and lyve therby, . 445
By cause I wol nat beggen ydelly.
I wol noon of the apostles countrefete;
I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete,
Al were it yeven of the povereste page,
Or of the povereste wydwe in a village,
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne. 450

Nay, I wol drynke licour of the vyne
And have ajoly wenche in every toun.
But herkneth, lordynges,
in conclusioun:
Youre likyng is that I shal telle a tale. 455
Now have I dronke a draughte of corny ale,
By God, I hope I shal yow telle a thyng
That shal by reson been at youre likyng.
For though myself be a ful vicious man,
A moral tale yet I yow telle kan, 460
Which I am wont to preche for to wynne.
Now hoold youre pees! My tale I wol bigynne.

The Pardoner’s Tale

In Flaundres whilom was a compaignye
Of yonge folk that haunteden folye,
As riot, hasard, stywes, and tavernes, 465
Where as with harpes, lutes, and gyternes;
They daunce and pleyen at dees bothe day and nyght,
And eten also and drynken over hir myght,
Thurgh which they <loon the <level sacrifise
Withinne that develes temple 470
By superfluytee abhomynable.
Hir othes been so grete and so dampnable
That it is grisly for to heere hem swere.
Oure blissed Lordes body they totere—
Hem thoughte that Jewes rente hym noght ynough—
And ech of hem at otheres synne lough. 476
And right anon thanne come tombesteres
Fetys and smale, and yonge frutesteres,
Syngeres with harpes, baudes, wafereres,
Whiche been the verray develes ofliceres
To kyndle and blowe the fyr of lecherye,
That is annexed unto glotonye.

The hooly writ take I to my witnesse
That luxurie is in wyn and dronkenesse.
Lo, how that dronken Looth, unkyndely, 485
Lay by his doghtres two, unwityngly;
So dronke he was, he nyste what he wroghte.
Herodes, whoso wel the stories soghte,
Whan he of wyn was repleet at his feeste,
Right at his owene table he yaf his heeste
To sleen the Baptist John, ful giltelees.
Senec seith a good word doutelees;
He seith he kan no difference fynde
Bitwix a man that is out of his mynde
And a man which that is dronkelewe,~~ 495
But that woodnesse, yfallen in a shrewe,
Persevereth lenger than,doth dronkenesse.
O glotonye, ful of cursednesse!
O cause first of oure confusion!
O original of oure damnicacion,
Til Crist hadde boght us with his blood agayn! 500
Lo, how deere, shortly for to sayn,
Aboght was thilke cursed vileynye!
Corrupt was al this world for glotonye.

441 in poverte wilfully: in voluntary poverty (like a monk)
442 wilfully: in vain
446 ydelly: in vain
448 povereste: poorest
449 corny: malty, strong
456 corny: malty, strong
456 corny: malty, strong
457 goth: murdered
458 nyste = ne wiste, did not know
459 Senec seith a good word doutelees;
He seith he kan no difference fynde
460 Senec: Seneca
Adam oure fader, and his wyf also, 505
Fro Paradys to labour and to wo 509
Were dryven for that vice, it is no drede.

For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede,
He was in Paradys; and whan that he 510
eet of the fruyt deffended on the tree,
Anon he was out cast to wo and peyne.

O glotonye, on thee wel oghte us pleyne!
0, wiste a man how manye maladyes 515
Folwen of excesse and of glotonyes,
He wolde been the moore mesurable 520
Of his diete, sittynge at his table.

Allas, the shorte throte; the tendre mouth,
Maketh that est and west and north and south 525
In erthe, in eir, in water, men to swynke
To gete a glotoun deyntee mete and drynke!
Of this matiere, 0 Paul, wel kanstow trete:
"Mete unto wombe, and wombe eek unto mete,
Shal God destroyen bothe," as Paulus seith.

Allas, a foul thyng is it, by my feith,
To seye this word, and fouler is the dede, 535
Whan man so drynketh of the white and rede
That of his throte he maketh his pryvee
Thurgh thilke cursed superfluitee;
The apostel wepyng seith ful pitously,
"Ther walken manye of whiche yow too Id have 540
I seye it now wepyng, with pitous voys--
They been enemys of Cristes croys,
Of whom that drynke hath dominacioun
He kan no conseil kepe; it is no drede.
Now kepe yow fro the white and fro the rede,
And namely fro the white wyn of Lepe
That is to selle in Fysshstrete or in Chepe.
This wyn of Spaigne crepeth subtily
In othere wynes, growynge faste by,
Of which ther ryseth swich fumositee
That whan a man hath dronken draughtes thre,
And weneth that he be at hoom in Chepe,
He is in Spaigne, right at the toune of Lepe:- 550
Nat at the Rochele, ne at Burdeux toun-
And thanne wol he seye "Sampsoun, Sampsoun!"
But herkneth, lordynges, o word, I yow preye,
That alle the sovereyn actes, dar I seye,
Of victories in the OIMTestament, 555
Thurgh verray God, that is omnipotent,
Looketh the Bible; and ther ye may it leere.

Looke, Attilia, the grete conquerour,
Deyde in his sleep, with shame and dishonour, 560
Bledyng ay at his nose in dronkenesse.
A capitayn sholde lyve in sobrenesse.
And over al this, avyseth yow right wel
What was comanded unto Lamuel—
Nat Samuel, but Lamuel, seye I; 585
Redeth the Bible, and fynde it expressly
Of wyn-yevyng to hem that han justise.
Namaore of this, for it may wel suffice.
And now that I have spoken of glotonye,
Now wol I yow defenden hasardyse. 590
Hasard is verray mooder of lesynges,
And of deceite, and cursed forswerynges,
Blaspheme of Crist, manslaughtre, and wast also
Of catel and of tymne; and forthermo,
It is repreve and contrarie of honour
For to ben holde a commune hasardour.
And ever the hyer he is of estata,
The moore is he yholden desolaat.
If that a prynce useth hasardrye,
In alle governaunce and policye
He is, as by commune opinion,
Yholde the lasse in reputacioun.
Stilboun, that was a wys embassadour,
Was sent to Corynthe in ful greet honour
Fro Lacidomye to make hire alliaunce. 605
And whan he cam, hym happede, par chaunce,
That alle the grt:ltteste that were of that lond,
Pleyynge atte hasard he hem fond.
For which, as soone as it myghte be,
He stal hym hoom agayn to his .contree,
And seyde, “Ther wol I nat Iese my name,
Ne I wol nat take on me so greet defame,
Yow for to allie unto none hasardours.
Sendeth othere wise embassadours;
For ye, that been so glorious in honours,
Shul nat allyen yow.with hasardours
As by my wyl, ne as by my tretee.”
This wise philosophre, thus seyde he.
Looke eek that to the kyng Demetrius
The kyng of Parthes, as the book seith us,
Sente him a paire of dees of gold in scorn,
For he hadde used hasard ther-biforn;
For which, as soone as it myghte be,
He stal hym hoom agayn to his contree,
And seyde. “Ther wol I nat lese my name,
Ne I wol nat take on me so greet defame,
Yow for to allie unto none hasardours.
Sendeth othere wise embassadours;
For, by my trouthe, me were levere dye
Than I yow sholde to hasardours allye.
For ye, that been so glorious in honours,
Shul nat alwen yow with hasardours
As by my wyl, ne as by my tretee.”
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Sente him a paire of dees of gold in scorn,
For he hadde used hasard ther-biforn;
For which he heeld his glorics or his renoun
At no value or reputacioun.

The CANTERBURY TALES

Lordes may fynder oother maner pley
Honest ynoough to dryve the day awey.
Now wol I speke o other false and grete
A word or two, as olde bookes trete.
Gret sweryng is a thyng abominable,
And fals sweryng is yet moore reprevable.
The heighe God forbad sweryng at al,
Witnesse on Mathew; but in special
Of sweryng seith the hooly Jeremye,
“The hou shalt swere sooth thyne othes, and nat lyfe,
And were in doom and eek in rightwisnesse”;
But ydel sweryng is a cursednesse.
Bihoold and se that in the firste table
Of heighe Goddes heestes honurable,
Hou that the seconde heeste of hym is this:
“Take nat my name in ydel or amys.”
Lo, rather he forbedeth swich sweryng
Than homycide or many a cursed thyng;
I seye that, as by ordre, thus it stondeth;
This knoweth, that his heestes understandeth,
How that the seconde heeste of God is that.
And forther over, I wol thee telle al plat
That vengeance shal nat parten from his hous
That of his othes is too outrageous.
By Goddes precious herte,” and “By his nayles,”
And “By the blood of Crist that is in Hayles,
Sevene is my chaunce, and thyn is cynk and treye!”
“By Goddes armes, if thou falsly pleye,
This daggere shal thurghout thyn herte go!”
This fruyt cometh of the bicched bones two,
Forsweryng, ire, falsnesse, homycide.
Now, for the love of Crist, that for us dyde,
Lete youre othes, bothe grete and smale.
But, sires, now wol I telle forth my tale.
Thise riotoures thre of whiche I telle,
Longe erst er prime rong of any belle.
Were set hem in a taverne to drynke,
And as they sat, they herde a belle clynke
Biforn a cors, was caried to his grave. 665
That oon of hem gan callen to-his knave:
"Go bet," quod he, "and axe redily
What cors is this that passeth heer forby;
And looke that thou reporte his name weel."
"Sire," quod this boy, "it nedeth never-a-deel;
It was me toold er ye cam heer two houres:
He was, pardee, an old felawe of youres,
And sodeynly he was yslayn to-nyght,
Fordronke, as he sat on his bench upright.
Ther cam a privee theef men clepeth Deeth, 675
That in this contree al the peple sleeth,
And with his spere he smoot his herte atwo,
And wente his wey withouten wordes mo.
He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence.
And, maister, er ye come in his presence, 680
Me thynketh that it were necessarie
For to be war of swich an adversarie.
Beth redy for to meete hym everemoore;
Thus taughte me my dame; I sey namoore."
"By Seinte Marie!" seyde this taverner,
"The child seith sooth, for he hath slayn this yeer,
Henne over a mile, withinne a greet village,
Bothe man and womman, child, and hyne, and page;
I trowe his habitacioun be there.
To been avysed greet wysdom it were, 690
Er that he dide a man a dishonour."

As though he were his·owene ybore brother.
And up they stirte, al dronken in this rage, 705
And forth they goon towards that village
Of which the taverner hadde spoke biforn.
And many a grisly ooth thanne han they sworn,
And Cristes blessed body they torente—
Deeth shal be deed, if that they may hym hente! 710

Whan they han goon nat fully half a mile,
Right as they wolde han troden over a stile,
An oold man and a povre with hem mette.
This olde man ful mekely hem grette,
And seyde thus, "Now, lordes, God yow see!" 715

The proudeste of thise riotoures three
Answerde agayn, "What, carl, with sory grace!
Why artow al forwrapped save thy face? 720
Why lyvestow so longe in so greet age?"
This olde man gan looke in his visage,
And seyde thus: "For I ne kan nat fynde
A man, though that I walked into Ynde,
Neither in citee ne in no village,
That wolde chaunge his youthe for myn age; 725
As longe tyme as it is Goddes wille.
Ne Deeth, allas, ne wol nat han my lyf.
Thus walke I, lyk a restelees kaityf,
And on the ground, which is my moodres gate,
I knokke with my staf, bothe erly and late, 730
And seye, 'Leeve mooder, leet me in!
Lo how I vanysshe, flessh, and blood, and skyn!
Allas, whan shul my bones been at reste?
Mooder, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste
That in my chambre longe tyme hath be, 735
Ye, for an heyre clowt to wrappe me!'
But yet to me she wol nat do that grace,
For which ful pale and welked is my face.
"But, sires, to yow it is no curteisye
To speken to an old man vileynye, 740
But he trespasse in word or elles in dede.
In Hooly Writ ye may yourselfwel rede:
'Agayns an oold man, hoor upon his heed,
Ye sholde arise;' wherfore I yeve yow reed,
Ne dooth unto an oold man noon harm now, 745
Namoore than that ye wolde men did to yow

665 core: corpse
666 Go bet: go quickly
670 boy: servant
671 Go bet: never-a-deel; it is not at all necessary
675 men elepeth: one calls, is called
679 end pestilente: during this plague
682 maister: mother
687 Henne: hence, from here
688 hynce: bird, farm worker
689 wyse: foresworn
692 brothre: sworn brother
700 twentir: two to pieces
715 God you se: may God look after you
716 earl: fellow
718 forwrapped: completely wrapped up
722 Ynde: India
723 hynce: wench
731 leerer: dear
733 vanysshe: wasted away
734 cheister: strongbox for valuables
735 heyre clowt: headcloth
738 welked: wasted
In age, if that ye so longe abyde.
And God be with yow, where ye go or ryde!
I moot go thider as I have to go."

"Nay, olde cherl, by God, thou shalt nat so," 
Seyde this oother hasardour anon;
"Thou partest nat so lightly, by Seint John!
Thou spak right now of thilke traytour Deeth,
That in this contree alle oure freendes sleeth.
Have heer my trouthe, as thou art his espye,
For soothly thou art oon of his assent
To sleen us yonge folk, thou false theef!

"Now, sires," quod he, "if that yow be so leef
To fynde Deeth, turne up this croked wey,
For in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey,
Under a tree, and there he wole abyde;
Noght for youre boost he wole him no thyng hyde.
Se ye that ook? Right there ye shal hym fynde.
God save yow, that boghte agayn mankynde,
And yow amende!" Thus seyde this aide man;
And everich of thise riotoures ran
Til he cam to that tree, and ther they founde
Of floryns fyne of gold ycoyned rounde
Wei ny an eighte busshels, as hem thoughte.
No lenger thanne after Deeth they soughte,
But ech of hem so glad was of that sighte,
For that the floryns been so faire and brighte,
That doun they sette hem by this precious hoard.
The worste of hem, he spak the firste word.
"Bretheren," quod he, "taak kep what that I seye;
My wit is greet, though that I bourde and pleye.
This tresor hath Fortune unto us yiven
In myrthe and joliftee oure lyfto lyven,
And lightly as it comth, so wol we spende.
Ey, Goddes precious dignitee! Who wende
To-day that we sholde hari so fair a grace?
But trewely, by daye it may nat bee.

Men wolde seyn that we were theves stronge,
And for oure owene tresor doon us honge.
This tresor moste ycaried be by nyghte
As wisely and as slyly as it myghte.
Wherfore I rede that cut among us alle
Be drawe, and lat se wher the cut wol falle;
And he that hath the cut with herte blithe
Shal remne to the town, and that ful swithe,
And brynge us breed and wyn ful prively.
And two of us shul kepen subtilly
This tresor wel; and if he wol nat tarie,
Whan it is nyght, we wol this tresor carie,
By oon assent, where as us thynketh best.
That oon of hem the cut brighte in his fest,
And bad hem drawe and looke where it wol falle;
And it fil on the yongeste of hem alle,
And forth toward the town he wente anon.
And also soone as that he was gon,
That oon of hem spak thus unto that oother:
"Thow knowest wel thou art my sworeri brother;
Thy profit wol I telle thee anon.
Thou woost wel that oure felawe is agon.
And heere is gold, and that ful greet plentee,
That shal departed been among us thre.
But nathelees, if I kan shape it so
That it departed were among us two,
Haddre I nat doon a freendes torn to thee?"
That oother answerde, "I noot hou that may be.
He woot that the gold is with us tweye;
What shal we doon? What shal we to hym seye?"
"Shal it be conseil?" seyde the firste shrewe,
And I shal telle in a words fewe
What we shal doon, and brynge it wel aboute.
"I graunte," quad 11iat oother, "out of doute,
That, by my trouthe, I wol thee nat biwreye.
"Now," quod the firste, "thou woost wel we be
tweye,
And two of us shul strenger be than oon.
Looke whan that he is set, that right anoon
Arys as though thou woldest with hym pleye,
And I shal ryve hym thurgh the sydes tweye
Whil that thou strogelest with hym as in game,
And with thy daggere looke thou do the same;
And thanne shal al this gold departed be,
My deere frend, bitwixen me and thee.
Thanne may we bothe oure histes all fulfille,
And pleye at dees right at oure owene wille.

And thus acorded been thise shrewes tweye
To sleen the thridde, as ye han herd me seye.

This yongeste, which that wente to the toun,
Ful ofte in herte he rolleth up and doun
The beautee ofthise floryns newe and brighte.
"O Lord!" quod he, "if so were that I myghte
Have al this tresor to myself allone,
Ther is no man that lyveth under the trone
Of God that sholde lyve so murye as I!"

And atte laste the feend, oure enemy,
Putte in his thought that he sholde poyson beye,
With which he myghte sleen his felawes tweye;
For-why the feend foond hym in swich lyvynge
That he hadde leve him to sorwe brynge.
For this was outrely his fulle entente,
To sleen hem bothe and nevere to repente.
And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he tarie,
Into the toun, unto a pothecarie,
And preyde hym that he hym wolde selle
Som poyson, that he myghte his rattes quale;
And eek ther was a polcat in his hawe,
That, as he seyde, his capouns hadde yslawe,
And fayn he wolde wreke hym, if he myghte,
On vermyn that destroyed hym by nyghte.

The pothecarie answerde, "And thou shalt have
A thyng that, also God my soule save,
In al this world ther is no creature
That eten or dronken hath of this confiture
Noght but the montance of a corn of whete,
That he ne shal his lif anon forlete;
Ye, sterve he shal, and that in lasse while
Than thou wolt goon a paas nat but a mile,
This poysoun is so strong and violent."

This cursed man hath in his hond yhent
This poysoun in a box, and sith he ran
Into the nexte strete unto a man,
And bowerd [of] hym large botelles thre,
And in the two his poysoun poured he;

The thriddle he keppe cleane for his drynke.
For al the nyght he shoop hym for to swynte
In cariynge of the gold out of that place.
And what this rotour, with sory grace,
Hadd hadde with wyn his grete botelles thre,
To his felawes agayn respireth he.

What nedeth it to sermone of it moore?
For right as they hadde cast his deeth bifore,
Right so they han hym slayn, and that anon.
And what that this was doon, thus spak that oon:
"Now lat us sitte and pleye, and make us merie,
And afterward we wol his body berie."

And whan this was doon, thus spak that oon:
"Now lat us sitte and drynke, and make us merie,
And afterward we wol his body berie."

Thus ended been thise homycides two,
And eek the false empoysonere also.

0 cursed synne of alle cursednesse!
0 traytours homycide, 0 wikkednesse!
0 glotonye, luxurie, and hasardrye!
Blasphemour of Crist with vileynye
And othes grete, of usage and of pride!
Allas, mankynde, how may it bitide
That to thy creatour, which that the wroghte
And with his precious herte-blood thee boghte,
Thou art so fals and so unkynde, alias?

Now, goode men, God foryeve yow youre trespas,
And ware yow fro the synne of avarice!
Myn hooly pardoun may yow alle warice,
So that ye offre nobles or sterlynges,
Or elles silver broches, spoones, rynges.

Youre names I entre beer in my rolle anon;
Into the blisse of hevene shul ye gon.

VI (C).831-912]
I yow assoille, by myn heigh power,
Yow that wol offre, as clene and eek as cleer
As ye were born.—And lo, sires, thus I preche.
And Jhesu Crist, that is our soules leche,
So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve.
—But, sires, o word forgot I in my tale:
I have relikes and pardoun in my male,
As faire as any man in Engelond,
Whiche were me yeven by the popes hond.
If any of yow wol, of devocion,
Offren and han myn absolucion,
Com forth anon, and kneleth heere adoun,
And mekely receyveth my pardoun;
Or elles taketh pardoun as ye wende,
Al newe and fressh at every miles ende,
So that ye offren, alwey newe and newe,
Nobles or pens, whiche that be goode and trewe.
It is an honour to everich that is heer
That ye mowe have a suflisant pardorieer
T'assoille yow in contree as ye ryde,
For aventures whiche that may bityde.
Paraventure ther may fallen oon or two
Doun of his hors and breke his nekke atwo.
Looke which a seuretee is it to yow alle
That I am in youre felaweshipe yfalle,
That may assoille yow, bothe moore and lasse,
Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.
I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
For he is moost envoluped in synne.
Com forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon,
And thou shalt kiss the reliques everychon,
Ye, for a grote! Unbokele anon thy purs.
"Nay, nay!" quod he, "thanne have I Cristes curs!
Lat be," quod he, "it shal nat be, so theech!
Thou woldest make me kiss thyn olde breech,
And swere it were a relyk of a seint,
Though it were with thy fundement depeint!
But, by the croses which that Seint Eleyne fond,
I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond
In stide of reliques or of seintuarie.
Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie;
They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!"
This Pardoner answerde nat a word;
So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye.
"Now," quod oure Hoost, "I wol no lenger pleye
With thee, ne with noon oother angry man."
But right anon the worthy Knyght bigan,
Whan that he saugh that al the peple lough,
"Namoore of this, for it is right ynough!
Sire Pardoner, be glad and myrie of cheere;
And ye, sire Hoost, that been to me so deere,
I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner.
And Pardoner, I prey thee, drawe thee neer,
And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye."
Anon they kiste, and ryden forth hir weye.

Heere is ended the Pardoners Tale.