

THE GENERAL PROLOGUE by Geoffrey Chaucer

WHEN that Aprilis, with his showers swoot*, *sweet
The drought of March hath pierced to the root,
And bathed every vein in such licour,
Of which virtue engender'd is the flower;
When Zephyrus eke with his swoote breath
Inspired hath in every holt* and heath *grove, forest
The tender croppes* and the younge sun *twigs, boughs
Hath in the Ram <1> his halfe course y-run,
And smalle fowles make melody,
That sleepen all the night with open eye,
(So pricketh them nature in their corages*); *hearts, inclinations
Then longe folk to go on pilgrimages,
And palmers <2> for to seeke strange strands,
To *ferne hallows couth* in sundry lands; *distant saints known* <3>
And specially, from every shire's end
Of Engleland, to Canterbury they wend,
The holy blissful Martyr for to seek,
That them hath holpen*, when that they were sick. *helped

Befell that, in that season on a day,
In Southwark at the Tabard <4> as I lay,
Ready to wenden on my pilgrimage
To Canterbury with devout corage,
At night was come into that hostelry
Well nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry folk, *by aventure y-fall *who had by chance fallen
In fellowship*, and pilgrims were they all, into company.* <5>
That toward Canterbury woulde ride.
The chamber, and the stables were wide,
And *well we weren eased at the best.* *we were well provided
And shortly, when the sunne was to rest, with the best*
So had I spoken with them every one,
That I was of their fellowship anon,
And made forword* early for to rise, *promise
To take our way there as I you devise*. *describe, relate

But natheless, while I have time and space,
Ere that I farther in this tale pace,
Me thinketh it accordant to reason,
To tell you alle the condition
Of each of them, so as it seemed me,
And which they weren, and of what degree;
And eke in what array that they were in:
And at a Knight then will I first begin.

A KNIGHT there was, and that a worthy man,
That from the time that he first began
To riden out, he loved chivalry,
Truth and honour, freedom and courtesy.
Full worthy was he in his Lorde's war,
And thereto had he ridden, no man farre*, *farther
As well in Christendom as in Heatheness,
And ever honour'd for his worthiness
At Alisandre <6> he was when it was won.
Full often time he had the board begun
Above alle nations in Prusse.<7>
In Lettowe had he reysed,* and in Russe, *journeyed
No Christian man so oft of his degree.
In Grenade at the siege eke had he be
Of Algesir, and ridden in Belmarie. <8>
At Leyes was he, and at Satalie,
When they were won; and in the Greate Sea
At many a noble army had he be.
At mortal battles had he been fifteen,
And foughten for our faith at Tramissene.
In listes thries, and aye slain his foe.
This ilke* worthy knight had been also *same <9>
Some time with the lord of Palatie,
Against another heathen in Turkie:
And evermore *he had a sovereign price*. *He was held in very
And though that he was worthy he was wise, high esteem.*
And of his port as meek as is a maid.
He never yet no villainy ne said
In all his life, unto no manner wight.
He was a very perfect gentle knight.
But for to telle you of his array,
His horse was good, but yet he was not gay.
Of fustian he weared a gipon*, *short doublet
Alle *besmotted with his habergeon,* *soiled by his coat of mail.*
For he was late y-come from his voyage,
And wente for to do his pilgrimage.

With him there was his son, a younge SQUIRE,
A lover, and a lusty bachelor,
With lockes crulle* as they were laid in press. *curled
Of twenty year of age he was I guess.
Of his stature he was of even length,
And *wonderly deliver*, and great of strength. *wonderfully nimble*
And he had been some time in chevachie*, *cavalry raids
In Flanders, in Artois, and Picardie,
And borne him well, *as of so little space*, *in such a short time*
In hope to standen in his lady's grace.
Embroider'd was he, as it were a mead
All full of freshe flowers, white and red.
Singing he was, or fluting all the day;
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
Short was his gown, with sleeves long and wide.
Well could he sit on horse, and faire ride.
He coulde songes make, and well indite,
Joust, and eke dance, and well pourtray and write.
So hot he loved, that by nightertale* *night-time
He slept no more than doth the nightingale.
Courteous he was, lowly, and serviceable,
And carv'd before his father at the table.<10>

A YEOMAN had he, and servants no mo'
At that time, for *him list ride so* *it pleased him so to ride*
And he was clad in coat and hood of green.
A sheaf of peacock arrows<11> bright and keen
Under his belt he bare full thriftily.
Well could he dress his tackle yeomanly:
His arrows drooped not with feathers low;
And in his hand he bare a mighty bow.
A nut-head <12> had he, with a brown visiage:
Of wood-craft coud* he well all the usage: *knew
Upon his arm he bare a gay bracer*, *small shield
And by his side a sword and a buckler,
And on that other side a gay daggere,
Harnessed well, and sharp as point of spear:
A Christopher on his breast of silver sheen.
An horn he bare, the baldric was of green:
A forester was he soothly* as I guess. *certainly

There was also a Nun, a PRIORESS,
That of her smiling was full simple and coy;
Her greatest oathe was but by Saint Loy;
And she was cleped* Madame Eglentine. *called
Full well she sang the service divine,

Entuned in her nose full seemly;
And French she spake full fair and fetisly* *properly
After the school of Stratford atte Bow,
For French of Paris was to her unknow.
At meate was she well y-taught withal;
She let no morsel from her lippes fall,
Nor wet her fingers in her sauce deep.
Well could she carry a morsel, and well keep,
That no droppe ne fell upon her breast.
In courtesy was set full much her lest*. *pleasure
Her over-lippe wiped she so clean,
That in her cup there was no farthing* seen *speck
Of grease, when she drunken had her draught;
Full seemly after her meat she raught*: *reached out her hand
And *sickerly she was of great disport*, *surely she was of a lively
And full pleasant, and amiable of port, disposition*
And *pained her to counterfeite cheer *took pains to assume
Of court,* and be estately of mannere, a courtly disposition*
And to be holden digne* of reverence. *worthy
But for to speaken of her conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,* *full of pity
She woulde weep if that she saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled.
Of smalle houndes had she, that she fed
With roasted flesh, and milk, and *wastel bread.* *finest white bread*
But sore she wept if one of them were dead,
Or if men smote it with a yarde* smart: *staff
And all was conscience and tender heart.
Full seemly her wimple y-pinched was;
Her nose tretis;* her eyen gray as glass;<13> *well-formed
Her mouth full small, and thereto soft and red;
But sickerly she had a fair forehead.
It was almost a spanne broad I trow;
For *hardily she was not undergrow*. *certainly she was not small*
Full fetis* was her cloak, as I was ware. *neat
Of small coral about her arm she bare
A pair of beades, gauded all with green;
And thereon hung a brooch of gold full sheen,
On which was first y-written a crown'd A,
And after, *Amor vincit omnia.* *love conquers all*
Another Nun also with her had she,
[That was her chapelleine, and PRIESTES three.]

A MONK there was, a fair *for the mast'ry*, *above all others*<14>
An out-rider, that loved venery*; *hunting
A manly man, to be an abbot able.

Full many a dainty horse had he in stable:
And when he rode, men might his bridle hear
Jingeling <15> in a whistling wind as clear,
And eke as loud, as doth the chapel bell,
There as this lord was keeper of the cell.
The rule of Saint Maur and of Saint Benet, <16>
Because that it was old and somedeal strait
This ilke* monk let olde thinges pace, *same
And held after the newe world the trace.
He *gave not of the text a pulled hen,* *he cared nothing
That saith, that hunters be not holy men: for the text*
Ne that a monk, when he is cloisterless;
Is like to a fish that is waterless;
This is to say, a monk out of his cloister.
This ilke text held he not worth an oyster;
And I say his opinion was good.
Why should he study, and make himselfe wood* *mad <17>
Upon a book in cloister always pore,
Or swinken* with his handes, and labour, *toil
As Austin bid? how shall the world be served?
Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.
Therefore he was a prickasour* aright: *hard rider
Greyhounds he had as swift as fowl of flight;
Of pricking* and of hunting for the hare *riding
Was all his lust,* for no cost would he spare. *pleasure
I saw his sleeves *purfil'd at the hand *worked at the end with a
With gris,* and that the finest of the land. fur called "gris"*
And for to fasten his hood under his chin,
He had of gold y-wrought a curious pin;
A love-knot in the greater end there was.
His head was bald, and shone as any glass,
And eke his face, as it had been anoint;
He was a lord full fat and in good point;
His eyen steep,* and rolling in his head, *deep-set
That steamed as a furnace of a lead.
His bootes supple, his horse in great estate,
Now certainly he was a fair prelate;
He was not pale as a forpined* ghost; *wasted
A fat swan lov'd he best of any roast.
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

A FRIAR there was, a wanton and a merry,
A limitour <18>, a full solemne man.
In all the orders four is none that can* *knows
So much of dalliance and fair language.
He had y-made full many a marriage

Of younge women, at his owen cost.
Unto his order he was a noble post;
Full well belov'd, and familiar was he
With franklins *over all* in his country, *everywhere*
And eke with worthy women of the town:
For he had power of confession,
As said himselfe, more than a curate,
For of his order he was licentiate.
Full sweetely heard he confession,
And pleasant was his absolution.
He was an easy man to give penance,
There as he wist to have a good pittance: *where he know he would
For unto a poor order for to give get good payment*
Is signe that a man is well y-shrive.
For if he gave, he *durste make avant* , *dared to boast*
He wiste* that the man was repentant. *knew
For many a man so hard is of his heart,
He may not weep although him sore smart.
Therefore instead of weeping and prayeres,
Men must give silver to the poore freres.
His tippet was aye farsed* full of knives *stuffed
And pinnes, for to give to faire wives;
And certainly he had a merry note:
Well could he sing and playen *on a rote*; *from memory*
Of yeddings* he bare utterly the prize. *songs
His neck was white as is the fleur-de-lis.
Thereto he strong was as a champion,
And knew well the taverns in every town.
And every hosteler and gay tapstere,
Better than a lazar* or a beggere, *leper
For unto such a worthy man as he
Accordeth not, as by his faculty,
To have with such lazars acquaintance.
It is not honest, it may not advance,
As for to deale with no such pouraille* , *offal, refuse
But all with rich, and sellers of vitaille* . *victuals
And *ov'r all there as* profit should arise, *in every place where&
Courteous he was, and lowly of service;
There n'as no man nowhere so virtuous.
He was the beste beggar in all his house:
And gave a certain farme for the grant, <19>
None of his bretheren came in his haunt.
For though a widow hadde but one shoe,
So pleasant was his In Principio,<20>
Yet would he have a farthing ere he went;
His purchase was well better than his rent.

And rage he could and play as any whelp,
In lovedays <21>; there could he muchel* help. *greatly
For there was he not like a cloisterer,
With threadbare cope as is a poor scholer;
But he was like a master or a pope.
Of double worsted was his semicope*, *short cloak
That rounded was as a bell out of press.
Somewhat he lisped for his wantonness,
To make his English sweet upon his tongue;
And in his harping, when that he had sung,
His eyen* twinkled in his head aright, *eyes
As do the starres in a frosty night.
This worthy limitour <18> was call'd Huberd.

A MERCHANT was there with a forked beard,
In motley, and high on his horse he sat,
Upon his head a Flandrish beaver hat.
His bootes clasped fair and fetisly*. *neatly
His reasons aye spake he full solemnly,
Sounding alway th' increase of his winning.
He would the sea were kept <22> for any thing
Betwixte Middleburg and Orewell<23>
Well could he in exchange shieldes* sell *crown coins <24>
This worthy man full well his wit beset*; *employed
There wiste* no wight** that he was in debt, *knew **man
So *estately was he of governance* *so well he managed*
With his bargains, and with his chevisance*. *business contract
For sooth he was a worthy man withal,
But sooth to say, I n'ot* how men him call. *know not

A CLERK there was of Oxenford* also, *Oxford
That unto logic hadde long y-go*. *devoted himself
As leane was his horse as is a rake,
And he was not right fat, I undertake;
But looked hollow*, and thereto soberly**. *thin; **poorly
Full threadbare was his *overest courtepy*, *uppermost short cloak*
For he had gotten him yet no benefice,
Ne was not worldly, to have an office.
For him was lever* have at his bed's head *rather
Twenty bookes, clothed in black or red,
Of Aristotle, and his philosophy,
Than robes rich, or fiddle, or psalt'ry.
But all be that he was a philosopher,
Yet hadde he but little gold in coffer,
But all that he might of his friendes hent*, *obtain
On bookes and on learning he it spent,

And busily gan for the soules pray
Of them that gave him <25> wherewith to scholay* *study
Of study took he moste care and heed.
Not one word spake he more than was need;
And that was said in form and reverence,
And short and quick, and full of high sentence.
Sounding in moral virtue was his speech,
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.

A SERGEANT OF THE LAW, wary and wise,
That often had y-been at the Parvis, <26>
There was also, full rich of excellence.
Discreet he was, and of great reverence:
He seemed such, his wordes were so wise,
Justice he was full often in assize,
By patent, and by plein* commission; *full
For his science, and for his high renown,
Of fees and robes had he many one.
So great a purchaser was nowhere none.
All was fee simple to him, in effect
His purchasing might not be in suspect* *suspicion
Nowhere so busy a man as he there was
And yet he seemed busier than he was
In termes had he case' and doomes* all *judgements
That from the time of King Will. were fall.
Thereto he could indite, and make a thing
There coulde no wight *pinch at* his writing. *find fault with*
And every statute coud* he plain by rote *knew
He rode but homely in a medley* coat, *multicoloured
Girt with a seint* of silk, with barres small; *sash
Of his array tell I no longer tale.

A FRANKELIN* was in this company; *Rich landowner
White was his beard, as is the daisy.
Of his complexion he was sanguine.
Well lov'd he in the morn a sop in wine.
To liven in delight was ever his won*, *wont
For he was Epicurus' owen son,
That held opinion, that plein* delight *full
Was verily felicity perfite.
An householder, and that a great, was he;
Saint Julian<27> he was in his country.
His bread, his ale, was alway *after one*; *pressed on one*
A better envined* man was nowhere none; *stored with wine
Withoute bake-meat never was his house,
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous,

It snowed in his house of meat and drink,
Of alle dainties that men coulde think.
After the sundry seasons of the year,
So changed he his meat and his soupere.
Full many a fat partridge had he in mew*, *cage <28>
And many a bream, and many a luce* in stew**<29> *pike **fish-pond
Woe was his cook, *but if* his sauce were *unless*
Poignant and sharp, and ready all his gear.
His table dormant* in his hall always *fixed
Stood ready cover'd all the longe day.
At sessions there was he lord and sire.
Full often time he was *knight of the shire* *Member of Parliament*
An anlace*, and a gipciere** all of silk, *dagger **purse
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
A sheriff had he been, and a countour<30>
Was nowhere such a worthy vavasour<31>.

An HABERDASHER, and a CARPENTER,
A WEBBE*, a DYER, and a TAPISER**, *weaver **tapestry-maker
Were with us eke, cloth'd in one livery,
Of a solemn and great fraternity.
Full fresh and new their gear y-picked* was. *spruce
Their knives were y-chaped* not with brass, *mounted
But all with silver wrought full clean and well,
Their girdles and their pouches *every deal*. *in every part*
Well seemed each of them a fair burgess,
To sitten in a guild-hall, on the dais. <32>
Evereach, for the wisdom that he can*, *knew
Was shapely* for to be an alderman. *fitted
For chattels hadde they enough and rent,
And eke their wives would it well assent:
And elles certain they had been to blame.
It is full fair to be y-clep'd madame,
And for to go to vigils all before,
And have a mantle royally y-bore.<33>

A COOK they hadde with them for the nones*, *occasion
To boil the chickens and the marrow bones,
And powder merchant tart and galingale.
Well could he know a draught of London ale.
He could roast, and stew, and broil, and fry,
Make mortrewes, and well bake a pie.
But great harm was it, as it thoughte me,
That, on his shin a mormal* hadde he. *ulcer
For blanc manger, that made he with the best <34>

A SHIPMAN was there, *wonne far by West*: *who dwelt far
For ought I wot, be was of Dartemouth. to the West*
He rode upon a rouncy*, as he couth, *hack
All in a gown of falding* to the knee. *coarse cloth
A dagger hanging by a lace had he
About his neck under his arm adown;
The hot summer had made his hue all brown;
And certainly he was a good fellow.
Full many a draught of wine he had y-draw
From Bourdeaux-ward, while that the chapmen sleep;
Of nice conscience took he no keep.
If that he fought, and had the higher hand,
By water he sent them home to every land. *he drowned his
But of his craft to reckon well his tides, prisoners*
His streames and his strandes him besides,
His herberow*, his moon, and lodemanage**, *harbourage
There was none such, from Hull unto Carthage **pilotage<35>
Hardy he was, and wise, I undertake:
With many a tempest had his beard been shake.
He knew well all the havens, as they were,
From Scotland to the Cape of Finisterre,
And every creek in Bretagne and in Spain:
His barge y-cleped was the Magdelain.

With us there was a DOCTOR OF PHYSIC;
In all this worlde was there none him like
To speak of physic, and of surgery:
For he was grounded in astronomy.
He kept his patient a full great deal
In houres by his magic natural.
Well could he fortune* the ascendent *make fortunate
Of his images for his patient,.
He knew the cause of every malady,
Were it of cold, or hot, or moist, or dry,
And where engender'd, and of what humour.
He was a very perfect practisour
The cause y-know,* and of his harm the root, *known
Anon he gave to the sick man his boot* *remedy
Full ready had he his apothecaries,
To send his drugges and his lectuaries
For each of them made other for to win
Their friendship was not newe to begin
Well knew he the old Esculapius,
And Dioscorides, and eke Rufus;
Old Hippocras, Hali, and Gallien;
Serapion, Rasis, and Avicen;

Averrois, Damascene, and Constantin;
Bernard, and Gatisden, and Gilbertin. <36>
Of his diet measurable was he,
For it was of no superfluity,
But of great nourishing, and digestible.
His study was but little on the Bible.
In sanguine* and in perse** he clad was all *red **blue
Lined with taffeta, and with sendall*. *fine silk
And yet *he was but easy of dispense*: *he spent very little*
He kept *that he won in the pestilence*. *the money he made
For gold in physic is a cordial; during the plague*
Therefore he loved gold in special.

A good WIFE was there OF beside BATH,
But she was somedeal deaf, and that was scath*. *damage; pity
Of cloth-making she hadde such an haunt*, *skill
She passed them of Ypres, and of Gaunt. <37>
In all the parish wife was there none,
That to the off'ring* before her should gon, *the offering at mass
And if there did, certain so wroth was she,
That she was out of alle charity
Her coverchiefs* were full fine of ground *head-dresses
I durste swear, they weighede ten pound <38>
That on the Sunday were upon her head.
Her hosen weren of fine scarlet red,
Full strait y-tied, and shoes full moist* and new *fresh <39>
Bold was her face, and fair and red of hue.
She was a worthy woman all her live,
Husbands at the church door had she had five,
Withouten other company in youth;
But thereof needeth not to speak as nouth*. *now
And thrice had she been at Jerusalem;
She hadde passed many a strange stream
At Rome she had been, and at Bologne,
In Galice at Saint James, <40> and at Cologne;
She coude* much of wand'rng by the Way. *knew
Gat-toothed* was she, soothly for to say. *Buck-toothed<41>
Upon an ambler easily she sat,
Y-wimpled well, and on her head an hat
As broad as is a buckler or a targe.
A foot-mantle about her hippes large,
And on her feet a pair of spurres sharp.
In fellowship well could she laugh and carp* *jest, talk
Of remedies of love she knew perchance
For of that art she coud* the olde dance. *knew

A good man there was of religion,
That was a poore PARSON of a town:
But rich he was of holy thought and werk*. *work
He was also a learned man, a clerk,
That Christe's gospel truly woulde preach.
His parishens* devoutly would he teach. *parishioners
Benign he was, and wonder diligent,
And in adversity full patient:
And such he was y-proved *often sithes*. *oftentimes*
Full loth were him to curse for his tithes,
But rather would he given out of doubt,
Unto his poore parishens about,
Of his off'ring, and eke of his substance.
He could in little thing have suffisance. *he was satisfied with
Wide was his parish, and houses far asunder, very little*
But he ne left not, for no rain nor thunder,
In sickness and in mischief to visit
The farthest in his parish, *much and lit*, *great and small*
Upon his feet, and in his hand a staff.
This noble ensample to his sheep he gaf*, *gave
That first he wrought, and afterward he taught.
Out of the gospel he the wordes caught,
And this figure he added yet thereto,
That if gold ruste, what should iron do?
For if a priest be foul, on whom we trust,
No wonder is a lewed* man to rust: *unlearned
And shame it is, if that a priest take keep,
To see a shitten shepherd and clean sheep:
Well ought a priest ensample for to give,
By his own cleanness, how his sheep should live.
He sette not his benefice to hire,
And left his sheep eucumber'd in the mire,
And ran unto London, unto Saint Paul's,
To seeke him a chantery<42> for souls,
Or with a brotherhood to be withhold:* *detained
But dwelt at home, and kepte well his fold,
So that the wolf ne made it not miscarry.
He was a shepherd, and no mercenary.
And though he holy were, and virtuous,
He was to sinful men not dispitous* *severe
Nor of his speeche dangerous nor dign* *disdainful
But in his teaching discreet and benign.
To drawen folk to heaven, with fairness,
By good ensample, was his business:
But it were any person obstinate, *but if it were*
What so he were of high or low estate,

Him would he snibbe* sharply for the nones**. *reprove **nonce,occasion
A better priest I trow that nowhere none is.
He waited after no pomp nor reverence,
Nor maked him a *spiced conscience*, *artificial conscience*
But Christe's lore, and his apostles' twelve,
He taught, and first he follow'd it himselve.

With him there was a PLOUGHMAN, was his brother,
That had y-laid of dung full many a fother*. *ton
A true swinker* and a good was he, *hard worker
Living in peace and perfect charity.
God loved he beste with all his heart
At alle times, were it gain or smart*, *pain, loss
And then his neighebour right as himselve.
He woulde thresh, and thereto dike*, and delve, *dig ditches
For Christe's sake, for every poore wight,
Withouten hire, if it lay in his might.
His tithes payed he full fair and well,
Both of his *proper swink*, and his chattel** *his own labour* **goods
In a tabard* he rode upon a mare. *sleeveless jerkin

There was also a Reeve, and a Millere,
A Sompnour, and a Pardoner also,
A Manciple, and myself, there were no mo'.

The MILLER was a stout carle for the nones,
Full big he was of brawn, and eke of bones;
That proved well, for *ov'r all where* he came, *wheresoever*
At wrestling he would bear away the ram.<43>
He was short-shouldered, broad, a thicke gnarr*, *stump of wood
There was no door, that he n'old* heave off bar, *could not
Or break it at a running with his head.
His beard as any sow or fox was red,
And thereto broad, as though it were a spade.
Upon the cop* right of his nose he had *head <44>
A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs
Red as the bristles of a sowe's ears.
His nose-thirles* blacke were and wide. *nostrils <45>
A sword and buckler bare he by his side.
His mouth as wide was as a furnace.
He was a jangler, and a goliardais*, *buffoon <46>
And that was most of sin and harlotries.
Well could he steale corn, and tolle thrice
And yet he had a thumb of gold, pardie.<47>
A white coat and a blue hood weared he
A baggepipe well could he blow and soun',

And therewithal he brought us out of town.

A gentle MANCIPILE <48> was there of a temple,
Of which achatours* mighte take ensample *buyers
For to be wise in buying of vitaille*. *victuals
For whether that he paid, or took *by taile*, *on credit
Algate* he waited so in his achate**, *always **purchase
That he was aye before in good estate.
Now is not that of God a full fair grace
That such a lewed* mannes wit shall pace** *unlearned **surpass
The wisdom of an heap of learned men?
Of masters had he more than thries ten,
That were of law expert and curious:
Of which there was a dozen in that house,
Worthy to be stewards of rent and land
Of any lord that is in Engleland,
To make him live by his proper good,
In honour debtless, *but if he were wood*, *unless he were mad*
Or live as scarcely as him list desire;
And able for to helpen all a shire
In any case that mighte fall or hap;
And yet this Manciple *set their aller cap* *outwitted them all*

The REEVE <49> was a slender choleric man
His beard was shav'd as nigh as ever he can.
His hair was by his eares round y-shorn;
His top was docked like a priest befor
Full longe were his legges, and full lean
Y-like a staff, there was no calf y-seen
Well could he keep a garner* and a bin* *storeplaces for grain
There was no auditor could on him win
Well wist he by the drought, and by the rain,
The yielding of his seed and of his grain
His lorde's sheep, his neat*, and his dairy *cattle
His swine, his horse, his store, and his poultry,
Were wholly in this Reeve's governing,
And by his cov'nant gave he reckoning,
Since that his lord was twenty year of age;
There could no man bring him in arrearage
There was no bailiff, herd, nor other hine* *servant
That he ne knew his *sleight and his covine* *tricks and cheating*
They were adrad* of him, as of the death *in dread
His winning* was full fair upon an heath *abode
With greene trees y-shadow'd was his place.
He coulde better than his lord purchase
Full rich he was y-stored privily

His lord well could he please subtilly,
To give and lend him of his owen good,
And have a thank, and yet* a coat and hood. *also
In youth he learned had a good mistere* *trade
He was a well good wright, a carpentere
This Reeve sate upon a right good stot*, *steed
That was all pomely* gray, and highte** Scot. *dappled **called
A long surcoat of perse* upon he had, *sky-blue
And by his side he bare a rusty blade.
Of Norfolk was this Reeve, of which I tell,
Beside a town men clepen* Baldeswell, *call
Tucked he was, as is a friar, about,
And ever rode the *hinderest of the rout*. *hindmost of the group*

A SOMPNOUR* was there with us in that place, *summoner <50>
That had a fire-red cherubines face,
For sausefleme* he was, with eyen narrow. *red or pimply
As hot he was and lecherous as a sparrow,
With scalled browes black, and pilled* beard: *scanty
Of his visage children were sore afeard.
There n'as quicksilver, litharge, nor brimstone,
Boras, ceruse, nor oil of tartar none,
Nor ointement that woulde cleanse or bite,
That him might helpen of his whelkes* white, *pustules
Nor of the knobbes* sitting on his cheeks. *buttons
Well lov'd he garlic, onions, and leeks,
And for to drink strong wine as red as blood.
Then woulde he speak, and cry as he were wood;
And when that he well drunken had the wine,
Then woulde he speake no word but Latin.
A fewe termes knew he, two or three,
That he had learned out of some decree;
No wonder is, he heard it all the day.
And eke ye knowen well, how that a jay
Can clepen* "Wat," as well as can the Pope. *call
But whoso woulde in other thing him grope*, *search
Then had he spent all his philosophy,
Aye, Questio quid juris,<51> woulde he cry.

He was a gentle harlot* and a kind; *a low fellow<52>
A better fellow should a man not find.
He woulde suffer, for a quart of wine,
A good fellow to have his concubine
A twelvemonth, and excuse him at the full.
Full privily a *finch eke could he pull*. *"fleece" a man*
And if he found owhere* a good fellow, *anywhere

He woulde teache him to have none awe
In such a case of the archdeacon's curse;
But if a manne's soul were in his purse; *unless*
For in his purse he should y-punished be.
"Purse is the archdeacon's hell," said he.
But well I wot, he lied right indeed:
Of cursing ought each guilty man to dread,
For curse will slay right as assoiling* saveth; *absolving
And also 'ware him of a significavit<53>.
In danger had he at his owen guise
The younge girles of the diocese, <54>
And knew their counsel, and was of their rede*. *counsel
A garland had he set upon his head,
As great as it were for an alestake*: *The post of an alehouse sign
A buckler had he made him of a cake.

With him there rode a gentle PARDONERE <55>
Of Ronceval, his friend and his compere,
That straight was comen from the court of Rome.
Full loud he sang, "Come hither, love, to me"
This Sompnour *bare to him a stiff burdoun*, *sang the bass*
Was never trump of half so great a soun'.
This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
But smooth it hung, as doth a strike* of flax: *strip
By ounces hung his lockes that he had,
And therewith he his shoulders oversprad.
Full thin it lay, by culpons* one and one, *locks, shreds
But hood for jollity, he weared none,
For it was trussed up in his wallet.
Him thought he rode all of the *newe get*, *latest fashion* <56>
Dishevel, save his cap, he rode all bare.
Such glaring eyen had he, as an hare.
A vernicle* had he sew'd upon his cap. *image of Christ <57>
His wallet lay before him in his lap,
Bretful* of pardon come from Rome all hot. *brimful
A voice he had as small as hath a goat.
No beard had he, nor ever one should have.
As smooth it was as it were new y-shave;
I trow he were a gelding or a mare.
But of his craft, from Berwick unto Ware,
Ne was there such another pardonere.
For in his mail* he had a pillowbere**, *bag <58> **pillowcase
Which, as he saide, was our Lady's veil:
He said, he had a gobbet* of the sail *piece
That Sainte Peter had, when that he went
Upon the sea, till Jesus Christ him hent*. *took hold of

He had a cross of latoun* full of stones, *copper
And in a glass he hadde pigge's bones.
But with these relics, whenne that he fond
A poore parson dwelling upon lond,
Upon a day he got him more money
Than that the parson got in moneths tway;
And thus with feigned flattering and japes*, *jests
He made the parson and the people his apes.
But truely to tellen at the last,
He was in church a noble ecclesiast.
Well could he read a lesson or a story,
But alderbest* he sang an offertory: *best of all
For well he wiste, when that song was sung,
He muste preach, and well afile* his tongue, *polish
To winne silver, as he right well could:
Therefore he sang full merrily and loud.

Now have I told you shortly in a clause
Th' estate, th' array, the number, and eke the cause
Why that assembled was this company
In Southwark at this gentle hostelry,
That highte the Tabard, fast by the Bell.<59>
But now is time to you for to tell
How that we baren us that ilke night, *what we did that same night*
When we were in that hostelry alight.
And after will I tell of our voyage,
And all the remnant of our pilgrimage.
But first I pray you of your courtesy,
That ye *arete it not my villainy*, *count it not rudeness in me*
Though that I plainly speak in this matter.
To tellen you their wordes and their cheer;
Not though I speak their wordes properly.
For this ye knowen all so well as I,
Whoso shall tell a tale after a man,
He must rehearse, as nigh as ever he can,
Every word, if it be in his charge,
All speak he ne'er so rudely and so large; *let him speak*
Or elles he must tell his tale untrue,
Or feigne things, or finde wordes new.
He may not spare, although he were his brother;
He must as well say one word as another.
Christ spake Himself full broad in Holy Writ,
And well ye wot no villainy is it.
Eke Plato saith, whoso that can him read,
The wordes must be cousin to the deed.
Also I pray you to forgive it me,

All have I not set folk in their degree, *although I have*
Here in this tale, as that they shoulde stand:
My wit is short, ye may well understand.

Great cheere made our Host us every one,
And to the supper set he us anon:
And served us with victual of the best.
Strong was the wine, and well to drink us lest*. *pleased
A seemly man Our Hoste was withal
For to have been a marshal in an hall.
A large man he was with eyen steep*, *deep-set.
A fairer burgess is there none in Cheap<60>:
Bold of his speech, and wise and well y-taught,
And of manhoode lacked him right naught.
Eke thereto was he right a merry man,
And after supper playen he began,
And spake of mirth amonges other things,
When that we hadde made our reckonings;
And saide thus; "Now, lordinges, truly
Ye be to me welcome right heartily:
For by my troth, if that I shall not lie,
I saw not this year such a company
At once in this herberow*, am is now. *inn <61>
Fain would I do you mirth, an* I wist* how. *if I knew*
And of a mirth I am right now bethought.
To do you ease*, and it shall coste nought. *pleasure
Ye go to Canterbury; God you speed,
The blissful Martyr *quite you your meed*; *grant you what
And well I wot, as ye go by the way, you deserve*
Ye *shapen you* to talken and to play: *intend to*
For truely comfort nor mirth is none
To ride by the way as dumb as stone:
And therefore would I make you disport,
As I said erst, and do you some comfort.
And if you liketh all by one assent
Now for to standen at my judgement,
And for to worken as I shall you say
To-morrow, when ye riden on the way,
Now by my father's soule that is dead,
But ye be merry, smiteth off mine head. *unless you are merry,
Hold up your hands withoute more speech. smite off my head*

Our counsel was not longe for to seech*: *seek
Us thought it was not worth to *make it wise*, *discuss it at length*
And granted him withoute more avise*, *consideration
And bade him say his verdict, as him lest.

Lordings (quoth he), now hearken for the best;
But take it not, I pray you, in disdain;
This is the point, to speak it plat* and plain. *flat
That each of you, to shorten with your way
In this voyage, shall tellen tales tway,
To Canterbury-ward, I mean it so,
And homeward he shall tellen other two,
Of adventures that whilom have befall.
And which of you that bear'th him best of all,
That is to say, that telleth in this case
Tales of best sentence and most solace,
Shall have a supper *at your aller cost* *at the cost of you all*
Here in this place, sitting by this post,
When that ye come again from Canterbury.
And for to make you the more merry,
I will myselfe gladly with you ride,
Right at mine owen cost, and be your guide.
And whoso will my judgement withsay,
Shall pay for all we spenden by the way.
And if ye vouchesafe that it be so,
Tell me anon withoute wordes mo*", *more
And I will early shape me therefore."

This thing was granted, and our oath we swore
With full glad heart, and prayed him also,
That he would vouchesafe for to do so,
And that he woulde be our governour,
And of our tales judge and reportour,
And set a supper at a certain price;
And we will ruled be at his device,
In high and low: and thus by one assent,
We be accorded to his judgement.
And thereupon the wine was fet* anon. *fetched.
We drunken, and to reste went each one,
Withouten any longer tarrying
A-morrow, when the day began to spring,
Up rose our host, and was *our aller cock*, *the cock to wake us all*
And gather'd us together in a flock,
And forth we ridden all a little space,
Unto the watering of Saint Thomas<62>:
And there our host began his horse arrest,
And saide; "Lordes, hearken if you lest.
Ye *weet your forword,* and I it record. *know your promise*
If even-song and morning-song accord,
Let see now who shall telle the first tale.
As ever may I drinke wine or ale,

Whoso is rebel to my judgement,
Shall pay for all that by the way is spent.
Now draw ye cuts*, ere that ye farther twin**. *lots **go
He which that hath the shortest shall begin."

"Sir Knight (quoth he), my master and my lord,
Now draw the cut, for that is mine accord.
Come near (quoth he), my Lady Prioress,
And ye, Sir Clerk, let be your shamefastness,
Nor study not: lay hand to, every man."
Anon to drawen every wight began,
And shortly for to tellen as it was,
Were it by a venture, or sort*, or cas**, *lot **chance
The sooth is this, the cut fell to the Knight,
Of which full blithe and glad was every wight;
And tell he must his tale as was reason,
By forword, and by composition,
As ye have heard; what needeth wordes mo'?
And when this good man saw that it was so,
As he that wise was and obedient
To keep his forword by his free assent,
He said; "Sithen* I shall begin this game, *since
Why, welcome be the cut in Godde's name.
Now let us ride, and hearken what I say."
And with that word we ridden forth our way;
And he began with right a merry cheer
His tale anon, and said as ye shall hear.

Notes to the Prologue

1. Tyrwhitt points out that "the Bull" should be read here, not "the Ram," which would place the time of the pilgrimage in the end of March; whereas, in the Prologue to the Man of Law's Tale, the date is given as the "eight and twenty day of April, that is messenger to May."

2. Dante, in the "Vita Nuova," distinguishes three classes of pilgrims: palmieri - palmers who go beyond sea to the East, and often bring back staves of palm-wood; peregrini, who go the shrine of St Jago in Galicia; Romei, who go to Rome. Sir Walter Scott, however, says that palmers were in the habit of passing from shrine to shrine, living on charity -- pilgrims on the other hand, made the journey to any shrine only once,

immediately returning to their ordinary avocations. Chaucer uses "palmer" of all pilgrims.

3. "Hallows" survives, in the meaning here given, in All Hallows -- All-Saints -- day. "Couth," past participle of "conne" to know, exists in "uncouth."

4. The Tabard -- the sign of the inn -- was a sleeveless coat, worn by heralds. The name of the inn was, some three centuries after Chaucer, changed to the Talbot.

5. In y-fall, "y" is a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon "ge" prefixed to participles of verbs. It is used by Chaucer merely to help the metre. In German, "y-fall," or y-falle," would be "gefallen", "y-run," or "y-ronne", would be "geronnen."

6. Alisandre: Alexandria, in Egypt, captured by Pierre de Lusignan, king of Cyprus, in 1365 but abandoned immediately afterwards. Thirteen years before, the same Prince had taken Satalie, the ancient Attalia, in Anatolia, and in 1367 he won Layas, in Armenia, both places named just below.

7. The knight had been placed at the head of the table, above knights of all nations, in Prussia, whither warriors from all countries were wont to repair, to aid the Teutonic Order in their continual conflicts with their heathen neighbours in "Lettowe" or Lithuania (German. "Litthauen"), Russia, &c.

8. Algesiras was taken from the Moorish king of Grenada, in 1344: the Earls of Derby and Salisbury took part in the siege. Belmarie is supposed to have been a Moorish state in Africa; but "Palmyrie" has been suggested as the correct reading. The Great Sea, or the Greek sea, is the Eastern Mediterranean. Tramissene, or Tremessen, is enumerated by Froissart among the Moorish kingdoms in Africa. Palatie, or Palathia, in Anatolia, was a fief held by the Christian knights after the Turkish conquests -- the holders paying tribute to the infidel. Our knight had fought with one of those lords against a heathen neighbour.

9. Ilke: same; compare the Scottish phrase "of that ilk," -- that is, of the estate which bears the same name as its owner's title.

10. It was the custom for squires of the highest degree to carve at their fathers' tables.

11. Peacock Arrows: Large arrows, with peacocks' feathers.
12. A nut-head: With nut-brown hair; or, round like a nut, the hair being cut short.
13. Grey eyes appear to have been a mark of female beauty in Chaucer's time.
14. "for the mastery" was applied to medicines in the sense of "sovereign" as we now apply it to a remedy.
15. It was fashionable to hang bells on horses' bridles.
16. St. Benedict was the first founder of a spiritual order in the Roman church. Maurus, abbot of Fulda from 822 to 842, did much to re-establish the discipline of the Benedictines on a true Christian basis.
17. Wood: Mad, Scottish "wud". Felix says to Paul, "Too much learning hath made thee mad".
18. Limitour: A friar with licence or privilege to beg, or exercise other functions, within a certain district: as, "the limitour of Holderness".
19. Farme: rent; that is, he paid a premium for his licence to beg.
20. In principio: the first words of Genesis and John, employed in some part of the mass.
21. Lovedays: meetings appointed for friendly settlement of differences; the business was often followed by sports and feasting.
22. He would the sea were kept for any thing: he would for anything that the sea were guarded. "The old subsidy of tonnage and poundage," says Tyrwhitt, "was given to the king 'pour la saufgarde et custodie del mer.' -- for the safeguard and keeping of the sea" (12 E. IV. C.3).
23. Middleburg, at the mouth of the Scheldt, in Holland; Orwell, a seaport in Essex.
24. Shields: Crowns, so called from the shields stamped on them; French, "ecu;" Italian, "scudo."

25. Poor scholars at the universities used then to go about begging for money to maintain them and their studies.
26. Parvis: The portico of St. Paul's, which lawyers frequented to meet their clients.
27. St Julian: The patron saint of hospitality, celebrated for supplying his votaries with good lodging and good cheer.
28. Mew: cage. The place behind Whitehall, where the king's hawks were caged was called the Mews.
29. Many a luce in stew: many a pike in his fish-pond; in those Catholic days, when much fish was eaten, no gentleman's mansion was complete without a "stew".
30. Countour: Probably a steward or accountant in the county court.
31. Vavasour: A landholder of consequence; holding of a duke, marquis, or earl, and ranking below a baron.
32. On the dais: On the raised platform at the end of the hall, where sat at meat or in judgement those high in authority, rank or honour; in our days the worthy craftsmen might have been described as "good platform men".
33. To take precedence over all in going to the evening service of the Church, or to festival meetings, to which it was the fashion to carry rich cloaks or mantles against the home-coming.
34. The things the cook could make: "marchand tart", some now unknown ingredient used in cookery; "galingale," sweet or long rooted cyprus; "mortrewes", a rich soup made by stamping flesh in a mortar; "Blanc manger", not what is now called blancmange; one part of it was the brawn of a capon.
35. Lodemanage: pilotage, from Anglo-Saxon "ladman," a leader, guide, or pilot; hence "lodestar," "lodestone."
36. The authors mentioned here were the chief medical text-books of the middle ages. The names of Galen and Hippocrates were then usually spelt "Gallien" and "Hypocras" or "Ypocras".
37. The west of England, especially around Bath, was the seat

of the cloth-manufacture, as were Ypres and Ghent (Gaunt) in Flanders.

38. Chaucer here satirises the fashion of the time, which piled bulky and heavy waddings on ladies' heads.

39. Moist; here used in the sense of "new", as in Latin, "mustum" signifies new wine; and elsewhere Chaucer speaks of "moisty ale", as opposed to "old".

40. In Galice at Saint James: at the shrine of St Jago of Compostella in Spain.

41. Gat-toothed: Buck-toothed; goat-toothed, to signify her wantonness; or gap-toothed -- with gaps between her teeth.

42. An endowment to sing masses for the soul of the donor.

43. A ram was the usual prize at wrestling matches.

44. Cop: Head; German, "Kopf".

45. Nose-thirles: nostrils; from the Anglo-Saxon, "thirlian," to pierce; hence the word "drill," to bore.

46. Goliardais: a babbler and a buffoon; Goliath was the founder of a jovial sect called by his name.

47. The proverb says that every honest miller has a thumb of gold; probably Chaucer means that this one was as honest as his brethren.

48. A Manciple -- Latin, "manceps," a purchaser or contractor -
- was an officer charged with the purchase of victuals for inns of court or colleges.

49. Reeve: A land-steward; still called "grieve" -- Anglo-Saxon, "gerefa" in some parts of Scotland.

50. Sompnour: summoner; an apparitor, who cited delinquents to appear in ecclesiastical courts.

51. Questio quid juris: "I ask which law (applies)"; a cant law-Latin phrase.

52 Harlot: a low, ribald fellow; the word was used of both

sexes; it comes from the Anglo-Saxon verb to hire.

53. Significavit: an ecclesiastical writ.

54. Within his jurisdiction he had at his own pleasure the young people (of both sexes) in the diocese.

55. Pardoner: a seller of pardons or indulgences.

56. Newe get: new gait, or fashion; "gait" is still used in this sense in some parts of the country.

57. Vernicle: an image of Christ; so called from St Veronica, who gave the Saviour a napkin to wipe the sweat from His face as He bore the Cross, and received it back with an impression of His countenance upon it.

58. Mail: packet, baggage; French, "malle," a trunk.

59. The Bell: apparently another Southwark tavern; Stowe mentions a "Bull" as being near the Tabard.

60. Cheap: Cheapside, then inhabited by the richest and most prosperous citizens of London.

61. Herberow: Lodging, inn; French, "Herberge."

62. The watering of Saint Thomas: At the second milestone on the old Canterbury road.