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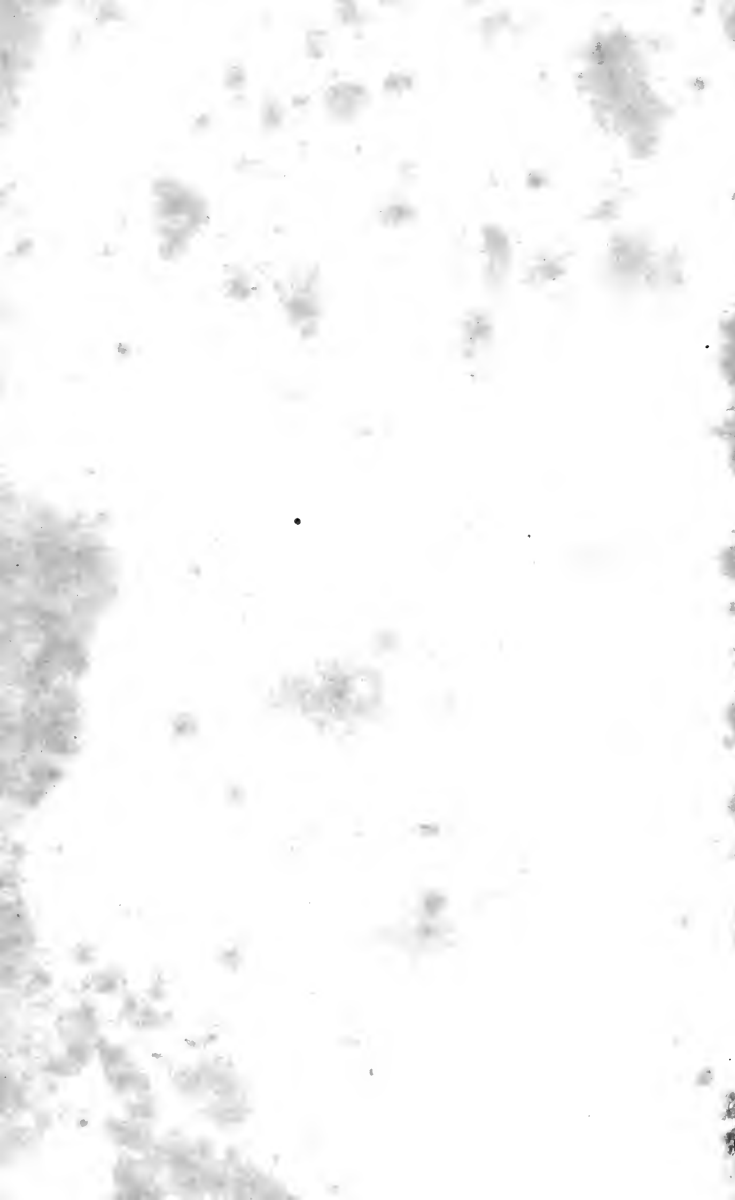


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SELECTIONS

FROM THE

POETICAL WORKS

OF

GEOFFRY CHAUCER:

WITH A CONCISE LIFE OF THAT POET, AND REMARKS ILLUSTRATIVE OF HIS GENIUS.

BY

CHARLES D. DESHLER.

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"OLD FRIENDS, OLD WINE, OLD BOOKS."  
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INTRODUCTION.



THAT the glorious old masters of English Song are so little known to the American people, is the source of real regret to the present writer. Save Shakspeare—whose mighty and universal genius has burst the trammels of time and circumstance—there is scarcely one of this noble galaxy, whose mere name is tolerably well known, or whose labors are universally appreciated. Upon a favored few indeed, does their melody fall

“ Like a silent dew ;
Or like those maiden showers,
Which, by the peep of day, do strew
A baptism o'er the flowers.”¹

They hoard their sayings, weep over their pathos, laugh over their rich and varied humor, are startled and astounded by the power of their descriptions and the gorgeousness of their imaginations. However favored they may be, unlike the votaries of Mammon or Fashion, these are neither selfish nor exclusive ; but being ardently desirous of widening the territory of Delight, and of multiplying the number of those with whom they may meet in sympathy and gratulation, they dispense with burning tongue and liberal hand, the bounties of which they have themselves partaken.

¹ Herrick.

If our reading public—we do not merely mean those who gorge themselves with an unlimited number of Novels and Tales per annum; nor that fastidious circle who lisp the monthly twaddle of our magazine literature—if these but knew of the many rare gems that might here be had, not by patient delving in the coarse and flinty earth, but for the mere plucking from fair trees, from whose boughs they hang in rich and tempting clusters; if they knew that “Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers old poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever may make the too-much loved Earth more lovely:”¹ then perhaps the eager rush for possession and enjoyment would be an ample apology for the present apathetic ignorance.

The ignorance and apathy of which we complain occasion the more poignant regret, because their objects are the wells from whence the great poets of England and our own land have drawn so freely, and with such salutary consequences. Years are wrecked by the mechanic who, unheeding the experience of the past, pits the inventions and combinations of his single mind against the thousands, his equals or superiors, that have gone before him; and who travels on, trusting to his own native genius for enlightenment and success. With the Artist the same holds equally true. He that is content with or trusts solely upon his own mind, and rejects or neglects the study of the past, may be sure of an insignificant mediocrity. So with the Poet; the pure fire of Genius may have been kindled upon the hearth-stone of his Imagination; but if it be not fostered and nurtured by the strong and wise counsel of those who now sleep with their perfect fame wrapped about them, it will only glimmer sadly and die. And as there is in the bosom of this broad land of ours, many rich veins of ore—either of lead, or iron, or gold—that only wait for the hand of art to hale them into the light of the sun, and to diffuse their blessings among the children of men: so may there not be among our millions, many a true child of Song in whose bosom glimmers the fire of Poesy, and who only waits till the plastic hand of education shall transform the glimmering spark into a fixed star?

When we speak of a poet's education, it is another thing from that which we every day call by the name. For a poet's education must be

¹ Sir Philip Sidney, *Def. Poesy*, p 10.

entrusted to none other than a poet; the draughts of the young immortal must be from a pure fountain head. He must sit at the feet of the great departed, and drink in the wisdom of their "reverend antiquity." He must compare and contrast the throbs of their hearts with his own, till at the last he will, by companionship with them, be elevated more nearly to their level. And his reason must be

"Ripened by years of toil and studious search,
And watch of Nature's silent lessons."—BRYANT.

Like a young eaglet, the youthful poet will dare to fly, while he can only flutter; and his daring spirit must not be held in charge by one who would fain clip his wings and fetter his pinions. He needs direction rather than governing. With a singular fatuity our colleges and universities will not waste a thought upon fostering and nurturing poets. Bending to the utilitarianism of our age and nation, their stereotype productions are lawyers, physicians and clergymen; and a professorship of poetry is a thing as yet unheard of in an American college. Therefore it is also, that instead of concentrating the attention of their charges upon the mighty men of old who gave consistency to our noble language—or upon any single point of mental discipline—they are content with dragging their listless victims into unwilling discussions upon Greek and Latin trivialties; and with causing them to dabble, now in Mathematics, now in Philosophy, now in Jurisprudence, until the literary character of an inmate of one of our colleges is aptly described by the apophthegm, "Sicut canis ad Nilum, bibens et fugiens." This too, while our own noble language, the language of Shakspeare and Milton, is less thoroughly understood, and its manifold beauties less appreciated, than those of any other that is taught; and while it teems with treasures neither deftly nor deeply hidden.

Chief among the throng with whom we burn to have our people familiar, and whose imperishable writings should make each name seem like the blast of a trumpet, are these: the father of English song, Chaucer; Milton's master, "the sage and serious Spenser;" Sidney, the Hero-Poet; "Rare old Ben" Jonson; and Chapman, and Marlowe, and Surrey, and Raleigh; Beaumont and Fletcher, and Carew and Herrick. These are some of the mighty men whose lips are unsealed to a

scanty few, when each nation that calls the Saxon tongue its own, should sit at their feet and drink in the harmony and wisdom.

Not anything has been done to introduce the writers above mentioned to the acquaintance of our reading public, save the publication about a year ago of "Lowell's Conversations," and more recently the re-publication of Leigh Hunt's "Fancy and Imagination," Lamb's "Selections," and Hazlitt's "Lectures." All of these, in accordance with the design of their several authors, cover considerable ground, and though they are glowing and highly meritorious critiques, are yet insufficient for the practical purposes of exemplars; for before one is fairly introduced to an author, they must part. With the view of filling a part of the vacuum which exists, the editor of this compilation has determined to introduce to his countrymen Geoffrey Chaucer, one as far from being universally known as any, and yet *the* one whom all poets delight to honor as the founder of English poetry. And at the same time, he would earnestly pray those who may favor these pages with their attention, not to be satisfied therewith, but to *study* the great poet, from whose exuberance these choice gems have been plucked.

TO THE READER OF CHAUCER.



DUE attention to the following remarks, by Tyrwhitt, upon the pronunciation and accent of words used by Chaucer, and their seeming metrical irregularity, will enable us to read him with ease and pleasure.

And first, with regard to such *offences against metre*, as arise from a *superfluity of syllables* :

“ With respect to this first species of irregularity, I have not taken notice of any superfluities in Chaucer’s verses, but what may be *reduced to just measure by the usual practices of modern poets*. They may all, I think, be comprehended in our language under this one general principle, that an English verse, though chiefly composed of feet of two syllables, is capable of receiving feet of three syllables in every part of it, provided only one of the three syllables be accented.”

Secondly, with reference to such offences as arise from the *deficiency of a syllable or two* :

“ In some of these, perhaps the defect may still be supplied from MSS., but for the greatest part I am persuaded no such assistance is to be expected ; and, therefore, supposing the text in these cases to be correct, it is worth considering whether the verse may not also be made correct, by *adopting in certain words a pronunciation*, different indeed from modern practice, but which, we have reason to believe, *was used by the author himself*.

“ For instance, in the genitive case singular and the plural number of nouns, there can be no doubt that such words as *shoures, croppes, shires, lordes, &c.*, were regularly pronounced as consisting of two syllables.

“ In like manner, we may be sure that *ed*, the regular termination of

the past tense and its participle, made, or contributed to make, a second syllable in the words, *perced, bathed, loved, wered, &c.*

“But nothing will be found of such extensive use for supplying the deficiencies of Chaucer’s metre as the pronunciation of the *e* feminine;¹ and as that pronunciation has been for a long time antiquated it may be proper here to suggest some reasons for believing that the final *e* in our ancient language was very generally pronounced, as the *e* feminine is at this day by the French.

“With respect to words imported directly from France, it is certainly quite natural to suppose, that, for some time, they retained their native pronunciation; whether they were nouns substantive, as *hoste, face*: adjectives, as *large, strange*: or verbs, as *grante, preche, &c.* And it cannot be doubted that in these and other similar words in the French language, the final *e* was always pronounced, as it still is, so as to make them dissyllables.

“We have not indeed so clear a proof of the original pronunciation of the Saxon part of our language; but when we find that a great number of those words which in Chaucer’s time ended in *e*, originally ended in *a*, we may reasonably presume that our ancestors first passed from the broader sound of *a* to the thinner sound of *e* feminine, and not at once from *a* to *e* mute.

“We may also presume, that in words terminated, according to the Saxon form, in *en*, such as the infinitive modes and plural numbers of verbs, and a great variety of adverbs and prepositions, the *n* only was at first thrown away, and the *e*, which then became final, continued for a long time to be pronounced as well as written. We may, therefore, safely conclude, that what is generally considered as an *e* mute in our language, either at the end or in the middle of words, was anciently pronounced, but obscurely, like the *e* feminine of the French.”

Thirdly, with reference to the *misapplication of accents*:

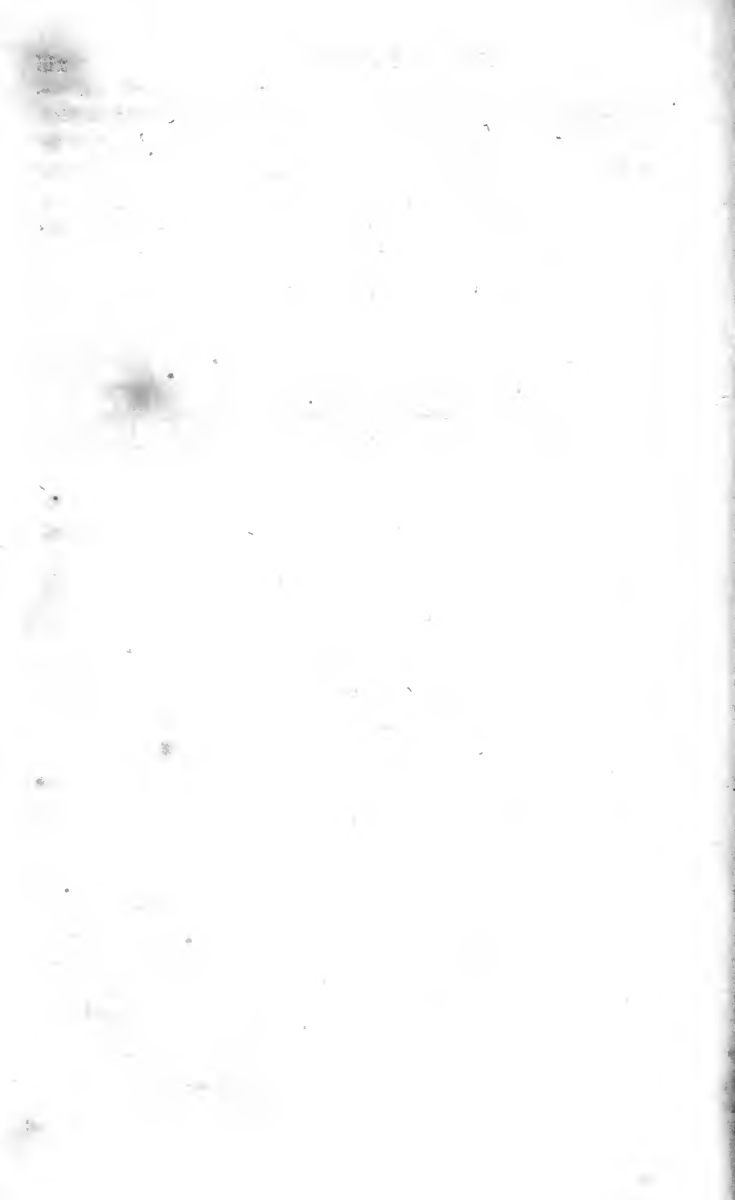
“We must be cautious of concluding too hastily that Chaucer accented the syllables that we do. On the contrary, I am persuaded that in his French words he most commonly laid his accent according to the French custom (upon the *last* syllable or the *last but one*, in words ending in *e*

¹ “The true *e* feminine is always to be pronounced with an obscure, evanescent sound, and is incapable of bearing any stress or accent.”—*Tyrwhitt*.

feminine), which, as is well known, is the very reverse of our practice. Thus he uses *licóur*, for *liquour*; *coráges*, for *courages*; *coráge*, for *courage*; *resón*, for *réason*; *viáge*, for *voyage*; *viságe*, for *visage*; *manère*, for *manner*; *labouère*, for *labour*; *prelát*, for *prélate*; *langáge*, for *language*; *muriáge*, for *márrriage*; *contrée*, for *country*; and so through the whole work.

“In the same manner he accents the last syllable of the participle present, as *wedding*, *coming*, for *wédding*, *cóming*; *living*, for *living*; *crying*, for *crying*; *brenning*, for *brénning*, &c., and as he does this in words of Saxon as well as of French growth, I should suppose that the old participle of the present tense, ending in *and*, was originally accented upon that syllable, as it certainly continued to be by the Scottish poets a long time after Chaucer.”—*Tyrwhitt's Essay on Lang. and Versif. Chaucer, sec. 13 to 17, inclusive.*

Concurrent with the above are Hazlitt's remarks upon Chaucer's versification. Says he: “Chaucer's versification, considering the time at which he wrote, and that versification is a thing in a great degree mechanical, is not one of his least merits. It has considerable strength and harmony, and its apparent deficiency in the latter respect arises chiefly from the alterations which have since taken place in the pronunciation or mode of accenting the words of the language. *The best general rule for reading him is to pronounce the final e, as in reading Italian.*”—*Lectures on Eng. Poets, art. Chaucer and Spenser.*



CHAUCER.



CHAPTER I.

Chaucer's birth and parentage.—His residence at Woodstock.—Fills various offices.—Probable visit to Petrarch.—House of Fame.—Embassage to France.—His difficulties, return of prosperity, and retirement.—Death.—Gleanings of his character, habits and appearance, from his writings.—Nature of his Satires.—His "Retractation."

WHEN we reflect that Chaucer was the prolific parent of that generous brood, who reared the grand and beautiful superstructure of English Poetry, our admiration of the Genius which shone so brightly in times rude and uncultivated, will be merged in our gratitude to the Author of so great good to man. It is to be presumed, therefore, that a concise narrative of the principal events of his life will be as acceptable an offering to the taste of his admirers, as it most assuredly has been a labor of love to its compiler.

Geoffry Chaucer, "the most illustrious ornament of the reign of Edward the Third, and his successor, Richard the Second," was born, as all agree, A.D., 1328. Of his parentage nothing is known, beyond the fact that his family were citizens of London, and were able to afford him a classical education. We may also say, upon the authority of the antiquarian Warton, that "he was educated at Oxford, where he made a rapid progress in the scholastic sciences as they were then taught: but the liveliness

of his parts, and the native gaiety of his disposition, soon recommended him to the patronage of a magnificent monarch, and rendered him a very popular and acceptable character to his brilliant court." Tyrwhitt, however, conjectures that Chaucer was not educated at Oxford, and asserts that to Cambridge belongs that honor. He rests his opinion upon the insufficient testimony that may be wrung from a portion of one of Chaucer's earliest productions, "The Court of Love," where a lady is fancied to propound the following question to her admirer—

"What is your name? rehearse it here I pray,
Of whence and where, of what condition
That ye ben of:"

To which the enamored swain thus replies—

"My name, alas my herte, why makes thou strange?
Philogenet I call'd am far and near
Of Cambridge clerk."

In order to evade the difficulty thus conjured up, most of his biographers insist that Chaucer was first educated at Cambridge, and from thence removed to Oxford, in order to complete his studies. But this conjecture of Tyrwhitt's is purely apocryphal, and owing to his fidelity and good judgment, which were proverbial, has been dignified into an importance which it scarcely deserves; for Philogenet is confessedly an assumed name, and all the circumstances which are ushered in with him are assumed. The truth is, we believe, Chaucer was narrating a fiction, whose details it were absurd to elevate into facts.

We may suppose that Edward and his noble Queen Philippa,¹ who were munificent patrons of Literature and Chivalry in the persons of Froissart and Walter De Manny, would not suffer a

¹ Queen Philippa was also the founder of Queen's College, Oxford.

genius—as brilliant as Chaucer’s proved itself at an early day—to die for lack of encouragement. We consequently find that through the greater part of his early life, he resided at or near the court; and a square stone house near the park gate, at Woodstock, is still called “Chaucer’s house,” from his having occupied it while in attendance upon the King. This mansion “commanded a prospect of the ancient magnificent royal palace, and of many beautiful scenes in the adjacent park; its last remains, chiefly consisting of what was called Chaucer’s bed-chamber, with an old oaken roof, evidently original, were demolished about fifteen years ago (1763). Among the ruins they found an ancient gold coin of the city of Florence. Before the grand rebellion, there was, in the windows of the church at Woodstock, an escutcheon in painted glass, of the arms of Sir Payne Ruet, a knight of Hainault, whose daughter Chaucer married.”¹ Some farther particulars in relation to “Chaucer’s house” may be gathered from the following lines, probably written in it; in which the Poet describes his awakening from a dream, and encountering the positive realities by which he was surrounded:

“From my bed I forth did lepe
Wening to be at the feast,
But when I woke, all was ceast,
For there n’as lady nor creature,
*Save on the walls old portraiture
Of horsemen, haukes and houndes,
And hurt deer full of woundes.*”

It was to this retreat that he subsequently retired from the persecutions of his enemies, in 1391, to write his famous treatise on the Astrolabe; and here, also, at the age of twenty, he is supposed to have written his “Court of Love,” and to have translated “Boethius de Consolatione Philosophiæ.”

¹ Warton’s Hist. Eng. Poetry, vol. ii., p. 44.

About ten years after this (A.D., 1359), he accompanied the army of Edward the Third in his expedition to France, and was made prisoner by the French, near the town of Retters ; but was released after a short imprisonment.

The first facts of a public nature which we possess, to prove that our poet had attracted the regard of his sovereign, are the grants to him by the King, of two several annuities, in the thirty-ninth and forty-fourth years of his age ; with the successive titles, "Our Yeoman" and "Our Squier." To the latter title was added, the honor of Envoy to Genoa, whither he went to negotiate for a supply of ships for the King's navy, and to treat with the Genoese authorities in reference to the opening of a port in England for their commerce.¹ While he fulfilled the duties of this station, it is said that he visited and conversed with Petrarch, and it is highly probable that he had the same gratification four years previously ; at which time he is said to have accompanied the Duke of Clarence, to his nuptials with Violante, daughter of Galeazzo, Duke of Milan.² That he had at some time seen and conversed familiarly with Petrarch, seems to be clear, for in addition to the presumption that he would never have visited Genoa—where he remained nearly a year—without traversing the short distance between it or Florence and Padua, in order to see that great Poet ; and to the tradition that they were both present at the marriage of the Duke of Clarence, we have the testimony of Chaucer himself, who, in his prologue to the Clerk's tale, says—

" I wol you tell a tale, which that I
 Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,
 As preved by his wordes and his work :
 He is now ded, and nailed in his chest,
 I pray to God to give his soule rest.

¹ Floyd's Biographia and Nicolas's Chaucer.

² Rev. T. Warton.

Francis Petrark, the laureat poete
Highte this clerk, whose rethorike sweet
Enlumined all Itaille of poetrie."

We have arrived at this belief in opposition to the learning of Tyrwhitt's arguments, and to the more voluminous but more tortuous and indefinite objections of Sir H. Nicolas. Both of these critics seem to have been excessively, and justly, angry with Godwin, who, in his *Life of Chaucer*, was guilty of the most intemperate use of his imagination; and they evidently make a merit of combating every deduction which his ingenuity could invent, or his industry search out. And although, in general, we would decline to acknowledge him as sufficient authority when opposed to these eminent men, yet we cannot but notice in this instance that their Pegasus is as halting as his is uncurbed. But if we had no other testimony in proof of this interesting visit, than that furnished by the lines above quoted, we would willingly rest upon that. For it is scarcely possible that any author, when narrating even a fiction—that is based upon real life—shall fail to identify some of his opinions, some of the various circumstances of *his* life, and the opinions and events he attributes to his ideal characters. All great poets, whose maxim has been, "Fool, look into thy heart and write," do this, and in modern times we have not ceased to invest our ideal creations with our own opinions, and to array them in the garniture of our own personal realities. It may also be noted that in the Prologues to his various tales, Chaucer always takes unusual license; they are the vehicle for his conversations with his audience or readers, and he seizes the occasion to allude to himself and his peculiar notions; and although he does not suffer himself to appear in person as the narrator of any other tales than "The Rime of Sire Thopas," and the "moral tale vertuous" of Melibeus, yet the character of the Clerk was kindred to his own, and he would

very naturally prefer to make him the organ of his ideas: for they both were of Oxford, both were scholars, and fonder of reading and study than of "robes riche or fiddle or sautrie;" both were philosophers, and ready to learn or dispense learning, and neither "spake a word more than was needed." Besides, whensoever he quotes from an author, Chaucer always manfully gives due credit. He pirates not at all. "Thus saith Dant;" "So Caton saith;" "As saith Senek;" "As telleth Titus Livius." This is the curt but honest mode in which he always adduces his originals. And the instance under examination is the solitary one in which he arrogates a personal knowledge of his author. And we think that he departs from his confirmed custom in this instance, "because," to use the language of Godwin, "he was eager to commemorate his interview with the venerable patriarch of Italian letters, and to record the pleasure he had reaped from his society. Chaucer could not do this more effectually than by mentioning his having learned from the lips of Petrarch a tale which had been previously drawn up and delivered to the public by another."¹

The result of his travels in Italy and of his conference with Petrarch, was his strenuous cultivation of the Italian and Provençal Poets; which, at the same time they added to his already overflowing stores of classical lore, provided him with a never-failing spring from whence to draw incidents and characters for his Muse, and enabled him to enrich and beautify his native tongue.

In his forty-sixth year, Chaucer, by the bounty of his royal master, was granted for life a pitcher of wine daily, and was also appointed Comptroller of the Customs of wools, wool-fells, and hides; a post which will appear neither inconsiderable nor unimportant, if we reflect that in his time "wool was the principal article of export and source of revenue;"² and possessing an in-

¹ Boccacio, from whose Decameron Petrarch translated it into Latin.

² Hallam, *Mid. Ag.*, vol. iv., p. 230.

come of one thousand pounds per annum:¹—and it was in the midst of severe personal application to the duties of this office, that he wrote the “House of Fame.” Tyrwhitt is highly incensed that Edward should have exposed Chaucer’s genius to the “petrifying” influence of Custom-house accounts; and departing from his usual gentleness denies to him “the gift of discerning or patronizing a great poet,” and asserts “that his majesty was either totally insensible of our author’s poetical talents, or at least had no mind to encourage him in the cultivation or exercise of them.” All this sourness on the part of that admirable critic, is owing to the following customary injunction, which the king entered in the patent granting to Chaucer the Comptrollership: “So that the said Jeffrey write with his own hand his rolls touching the said office, and continually reside there, and do and execute all things pertaining to the said office in his own proper person, and not by his substitute.” Mr. Ellis, more just than Tyrwhitt, observes that “it should be remembered that Chaucer voluntarily exposed his talents to an almost equal risk by composing a treatise on the astrolabe; that his mathematical skill was, perhaps, not very uselessly employed in unravelling the confusion of the public accounts; that the task imposed upon him was at least no mean compliment to his probity; and that, after all, it produced no fatal effect on his genius, since, as Mr. Tyrwhitt conjectures, it did not prevent him from writing his ‘House of Fame,’ during the intervals of his labor.”² That he fulfilled the duties of his office with diligence and integrity, we may presume, from the facts, that the year following he was appointed by the king to the honorable trust of guardian to Sir Edward Staplegate’s heir; and that shortly after, and in the last year of the reign of Edward the Third—whose favor he enjoyed to the last—he was sent to the Court of France, as one of a commission to treat of a marriage

¹ Equivalent to \$15,000 in our times.

² Ellis’s Specimens of Early Eng. Poetry.

between the Prince of Wales and a daughter of the French King. One of his associates upon this important expedition was Sir Guiscard D'Angle, a knight celebrated over all Europe for his heroic exploits; and who immediately upon the death of King Edward "was created Earl of Huntingdon, and the young King himself was placed under his tutorship with the approbation of all, to instruct him in the paths of virtue and honor."¹

After the death of Edward the Third, our poet enjoyed the favor of his grandson and successor Richard the Second, who, perceiving and appreciating Chaucer's diplomatic merit, employed him upon several important missions to the governments of France and Italy. In the early part of the turbulent reign of that unhappy Prince, and owing in part to his friendship for Wickliffe, but chiefly from his attachment to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (who afterwards married Chaucer's wife's sister²), he con-

¹ Froissart, p. 224.

² This lady whom the Duke of Lancaster married was his third wife; and as Froissart's account of an event, which materially influenced Chaucer's fortunes, is curious, we will transcribe it. "The lady whom the Duke of Lancaster married was called Catherine, and in her youth she had been of the household of the Duchess Blanche, of Lancaster. Before the Lady Blanche's death, and even when the Duke was married to his second wife Constance, the daughter of Don Pedro, he cohabited with the Lady Catherine de Roet, who was then married to an English knight now dead (Sir Hugh Swynford). The Duke of Lancaster had three children by her previous to marriage, two sons and a daughter: the eldest son was named John, Lord Beaufort of Lancaster; the other, Thomas, whom the Duke kept at the schools in Oxford, and made a great churchman and civilian. He was afterwards Bishop of Lincoln, which is the richest bishopric in the kingdom; from affection to these children the Duke married their mother, to the great astonishment of France and England, for Catherine Swynford was of base extraction in comparison to his two former duchesses, Blanche and Constance. When this marriage was announced to the ladies of high rank in England, such as the Duchess of Gloucester, the Countess of Derby, the Countess of Arundel, and others connected with the royal family, they were greatly shocked, and thought the Duke much to blame

nected himself with the Lollards, a popular party who espoused the religious principles of Wickliffe united to the political creed of John of Northampton, and who were protected by the Duke of Lancaster. This was an unfortunate step for Chaucer, and resulted in his temporary disgrace and imprisonment; which consequences were brought about by the active agency of Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, the great adversary of the Duke of Lancaster; and lasted for the space of two years. At the expiration of this period and in the autumn of 1386, he was elected a knight for the shire of Kent, and sat in the Parliament that convened in October of that year. This election, and not, as some have supposed, the King's disfavor, cost him the several offices which he had hitherto enjoyed, for during the whole time of his reverses he received continual proof of his royal master's favor, in the pensions which were bestowed upon him, and the offices that were secured to him. And in 1389 when the young King assumed the perils of government and recalled his uncle, John of Gaunt, Chaucer immediately received yet more substantial evidence of regard in his appointment to the office of "Clerk of the Works of the Lord the King within the palace of Westminster, Tower of London, and divers others the King's Castles and Mansions," and it was during the leisure thus afforded him that he composed his most celebrated work, *The Canterbury Tales*.

They said ' he had sadly disgraced himself by thus marrying his concubine,' and added, ' that since it was so she would be the second lady in the kingdom, and the queen would be dishonorably accompanied by her; but that for their parts they would leave her to do the honors alone, for they would never enter any place where she was. They themselves would be disgraced if they suffered such a base-born duchess who had been the Duke's concubine, a long time before and during his marriages, to take precedence, and their hearts would burst with grief were it to happen.' Catherine Roet, however, remained Duchess of Lancaster, and the second lady in England, as long as she lived. She was a lady accustomed to honors, for she had been brought up at court during her youth, and the Duke fondly loved the children he had by her, as he showed during his life, and at his death."

It is also alleged that during his imprisonment in the Tower, he consoled himself by composing one of his most celebrated prose works, "The Testament of Love." This fact, with most others relating to that period, is based upon passages in the Testament of Love, and must be received with many grains of allowance. Upon a still more uncertain authority, some of his biographers build a story of the details of his imprisonment; and forming their estimate of the doubtful or unknown parts of *his* history, from examples of modern political baseness, they hint rather than assert that he was released from confinement upon his making a confession to the court impeaching his associates; the truth of which confession, it is also said, he offered to maintain, according to the custom of that time, by personal combat. He was moved to this treachery, says the same veritable rumor, by the promise of pardon coupled with a poignant recollection of the ingratitude of his friends. And upon this gossip Hazlitt clutched, choosing to lend his name to sanction a lie, rather than to employ his acuteness in its dispersion; and unwilling to lose so tempting an opportunity for the display of one of his rounded and apothegmatic sentences: says he, "Chaucer was imprisoned, and made his peace with government, *as it is said*, by a discovery of his associates. *Fortitude does not appear at any time to have been the distinguishing virtue of poets.*" This reflection is itself a falsity, unless Hazlitt mentally reserved a long list of exceptions, in which must have appeared the illustrious names of Dante and Homer, of Gower and Douglas, of Sidney and Shakspeare, of Surrey, Herrick and Milton; men whose fortitude was as unwavering as their courage was undaunted. Over this period of Chaucer's life, there undoubtedly hangs a gloom which cannot be lifted; nevertheless we indignantly reject as an outrage upon our credibility, a story unadorned by the attributes of ingenuity or truthfulness, and unsupported by the most shadowy evidence. The character of the man for integrity; his writings which breathe

throughout a chivalrous and lofty nature ; his chosen companionship by Wickliffe and Gower, who were both undaunted and even stubborn champions of what they conceived to be the truth ; and the fact that he retained the uninterrupted friendship of John of Gaunt, as well as the favor of the King, emphatically disprove the fiction.

His circumstances, which had been severely straitened by the difficulties above alluded to, and by the approaching infirmities of age, were made more comfortable, at the accession of the son of his patron and brother-in-law to the throne, with the title of Henry the Fourth. But, in the meantime, we cannot disguise the fact, Chaucer tasted the commingled and bitter waters of penury and age ; and he was obliged to seek the protection of the King, who tenderly guarded the venerable poet and philosopher, and extended over his property and tenants his especial protection.¹ At the last, however, these murky clouds fled away, and fortune once more smiled upon our poet. His pensions were doubled, and comfort, if not luxurious abundance, blessed the last days of the noble old man. He shortly after visited London to secure or receive his pensions ; but the fatigue incident upon an attendance at court at his advanced age, overcame him, and he fell sick at a tenement in the garden of the “ Chapel of the Blessed Mary, of Westminster,” which he had temporarily rented. While lying upon his death bed he composed the following manly ballad, which has all the measured and stately cadence of a dirge :—

“ Fly from the prease² and dwell with sothfastnesse³
 Suffise⁴ unto thy good though it be small,
 For hoarding hath hate, and climbing tikelnesse,
 Prease hath envy, and wele is blent over all,

¹ Sir H. Nicolas, vol. i., pp. 52, 53.

² Crowd or press

³ Truth

⁴ Make sufficient, or be content with.

Savour no more than thee behove shall
 Rede well thyself that other folk would rede
 And Truth thee shall deliver, it is no drede.¹

Pain thou not each crooked to redress
 In trust of her that turneth as a ball,
 Great rest standeth in little businesse,
 Beware also to spurn against a nail,
 Strive not as doth a crocke² with a wall.
 Deme³ thyself that demest others' deed
 And Truth thee shall deliver, it is no drede.

'That thee is sent, receive in buxomnesse,⁴
 The wrestling of this world asketh a fall,
 Here is no home, here is but wilderness,
 Forth, Pilgrim! forth, beast, out of thy stall!
 Look up on high, and thank the God of all!
 Weive⁵ thy lusts, and let thy ghost thee lead,
 And Truth thee shall deliver, it is no drede."

He was buried in Westminster Abbey, and nearly a century and a half after his decease, a splendid tomb was reared over his remains by a gifted admirer of his writings. It still forms a conspicuous object in Poet's Corner.

In addition to what we have above collected, it is said, that in his youth, while studying at the Inner Temple, "Geoffry Chaucer was fined two shillings for beating a Franciscan Friar in Fleet-street;" that at the age of thirty, being of a fair and beautiful complexion, his lips red and full, "his size of a just medium, and his air polished and graceful,"⁶ he was married to Philippa Roet,

¹ There is no dread or doubt.

² An earthen pot or cup.

³ Judge

⁴ Obedience or contentment.

⁵ Forsake.

⁶ Floyd's Biographia

the daughter of a Hainault Knight; and that later in life he became corpulent, and contracted a habit of gazing on the ground. That his marriage was a happy one, we are assured by the following enthusiastic exclamation of his, which occurs in his latest production:—

“ Oh! who could tell, but he had wedded be,
The joye, the ese, and the prosperitee
That is betwix an hosband and his wife ?”¹

Or this one, which is still more satisfactory.

“ A wif! ah Saint Mary, benedicite,
How might a man have any adversitie
That hath a wif? certes I cannot say.
The blisse the which that is betwix them twey,
There may no tonge telle or herte thinke.
If he be poure, she helpeth him to swinke;²
She kepeth his good and wasteth never a del;³
All that hire hosband doth, hire liketh well:
She saith not ones nay, when he saith yea;
Do this, saith he; all ready, sire, saith she.

O blissful ordre, O wedlock precious,
Thou art so merry, and eke so vertuous,
And so commended and approved eke,
That every man that holds him worth a leke,
Upon his bare knees ought all his lif
Thanken his God, that hath him sent a wif,
Or elles pray to God him for to send
A wif, to last unto his lives end.”⁴

It is also recorded of the poet, that he was more “ facetious in

¹ Frankelein's Tale

² Work.

³ Not a bit.

⁴ Merchant's Tale

his tales than in his conversation, so much so that the Countess of Pembroke used to rally him, by saying that his silence was more agreeable to her than his conversation."¹

That he was the possessor of great and varied learning, we know from the graceful profusion with which it is strewn over his numerous productions; and also that his erudition was elegant as well as profound, for he possessed an intimate knowledge of the Greek, Latin, and Italian classics, in an age when few aspired to their passing acquaintance. His treatise upon the Astrolabe, moreover, was a chosen recreation from the storms and persecutions of life; and his translation of Boethius was the more serious effort of less mature years.

He was passionately fond of reading, as we may gather from his Prologue to the "Legend of Good Women;" in which he shows that his love of reading was subservient only to his love of Nature, especially as exhibited by rural sights and sounds. He says:

"And as for me, though I can but lite²
 On bookes for to rede I me delite,
 And to them give I faith and full credence,
 And in mine herte have them in reverence
 So hertely, that there is game none
 That fro my bookes maketh me to gone;
 But it be seldom on the holy day,
 Save certainly when that the month of May
 Is come, and that I hear the foules sing,
 And that the flowers guinen for to spring,
 Farewell my books and my devotion."

¹ D'Israeli: who also mentions the curious fact, that in the British Museum is preserved a black stone, on which nature has sketched a resemblance of the portrait of Chaucer.—Cur. Literature

² Know but little.

We have now the sum of the known incidents of this great man's life: for the rest we must turn to his imperishable writings. It is a singular and most unfortunate circumstance that we know literally nothing of the youth of the three greatest poets of whom our tongue can boast: Chaucer, Spenser and Shakspeare. It would seem as if it had been decreed that they could not be worthy compeers of Homer, unless their mortal parts were wrapped in an obscurity as dark as his. We say that the coincidence is an unfortunate one, because it is a truth, none the less true for being trite, that the example of great men is the best guide to greatness.

Mankind are very properly influenced in forming their estimate of a man, by a knowledge of the character and abilities of his associates, as well as from any supremacy which these may accord to him. The admirers of Chaucer advert, with much satisfaction, to the facts of his having been dignified by the intimate friendship of John of Gaunt, of Guiscard D'Angle, of Wickliffe, and of Gower; and that he was enthusiastically admired—nay worshipped—by Lydgate, Douglas, Occleve, and all others who were in that age eminent for rank, learning, or genius.

It is notable of Chaucer, as it is of all great men, that he lived far in advance of his age. We do not mean to pollute his fame by charging upon him that sentimentalism which, in our times, and under the name of "progress," denies experience to age, or wisdom to the past, and sees in its own erratic and arrogant dogmas all verity and knowledge: but that his acute mind singled out the abuses which fettered the growth of the national heart and mind; that he pioneered the way for Refinement and Truth; and that his perceptions of the Truth led, by an infallible process, to his enthusiastic adoption and defence of it, and to fearless encounters with Falsehood, in whatever shape it oppressed the land. Unlike his great contemporary and friend Wickliffe,

his satires do not sparkle with malignity, nor was his denunciation of error the fruit of personal enmity. "Wickliffe's attacks on superstition at first probably proceeded from resentment:"¹ but Chaucer's attacks upon the same grew out of his love for the Church in which he had been nurtured, and from an ardent desire to purify her, and from a living sympathy with his countrymen. Chaucer was not a mere reformer, and consequently his satires, whether upon the superstitions of the Church and the Age, or upon the abuses of Custom or Fashion, are not fierce and blind onslaughts, frightfully disproportioned to the desired end. They never overleap the bounds prescribed by wisdom or moderation. Hence it is that Chaucer's caricatures are at this day as universally applicable as they were when first written. Their truthfulness and perfect good nature recommend them to the very class whom he cauterizes. Or as it is roughly, but well expressed, by a youthful and accomplished writer of our own country:² "Chaucer's satire is of quite another complexion from Pope's. A hearty laugh and a thrust in the ribs are his weapons. He makes free of you to your face, and, even if you wince a little, you cannot help joining in his mirth. He does not hate a vice because he has a spite against the man who is guilty of it."

A marked feature of Chaucer's character was his abhorrence of superstition and imposture; and his most severe satires upon any class are those directed against the clergy, who swarmed over the land in countless varieties; and who, although usually ranged in fierce hostility against each other, agreed in riveting the bands of their several degraded and unholy superstitions upon the popular mind. Some have inferred, from his continual thrusts at the clergy, that therefore he was not a Catholic; but we are

¹ Rev. T. Warton. See also Mosheim, who was no unfriendly historian, *Eccl. Hist.*, vol. iii., p. 332.

² James Russel Lowell. *Conversations*, p. 22.

inclined to believe with Tyrwhitt, that he was "as good a Catholic as men of his understanding and rank in life have generally been." The inference more generally deducible from his course is, that the clergy were greatly depraved, and that he honestly desired to work a reformation among them, and to counteract their baleful influence upon his countrymen. Of the fact that the clergy were awfully depraved, there is plentiful evidence in every history relating to that period; but no single instrument details the specific charges so systematically, or is so intrinsically curious, as Bishop Wykeham's injunctions in 1373 to his commissioners for correcting the abuses in the religious houses in his diocese.¹ This document censures the clergy for neglecting to perform the various services of the church; for the excessive ignorance of some of their number; for their continued and open violation of the rules of their order; for their love of hounds and hunting-matches; for their vanity and their foppishness in dress; for their personal filthiness, and their habit of pawning their holy vestments, or the books, plate, and even the relics belonging to their establishments; and for obscenity and wantonness in their very choirs and cloisters.

As the superiors of these ecclesiastical sinners were unable to govern or restrain them, intelligent men among the laity perceived that they themselves must apply the remedy, before the lower orders, and the youth and females generally of the land—upon whom the clergy exercised the most malign influence—became wholly corrupted. Longland and Chaucer, who seem to have been providentially adapted to this crisis, almost simultaneously observed the evil and the remedy, and applied it. Knowing the power of ridicule, and aware of its universal adaptation to the natural understandings of all classes, and directing it with consummate good sense, they defied the power and the arts of

¹ White's Antiquities of Selborne. Appendix.

the clergy; and stripping them of the reverence which superstition had spun around their order, they held them aloft in their naked deformity, and bade all ranks behold and detest their rottenness. This was the first blow which the people administered to priestly arrogance and imposture.

At the end of the "Parson's Tale,"—which is a series of prolix essays upon general morality and the various points of Christian doctrine,—there is a prayer usually called "Chaucer's Retraction." And as the tradition connected with it reflects upon Chaucer's character for stability and firmness, and presents him to us in the lamentable guise of an old man bereft of his strength of mind, and practised upon by fear and superstition, we think it proper in this place to devote some attention to it. The impression to which this tradition ministers, is, that Chaucer, having throughout his work unfairly and dishonestly satirized the *Religious*, he,—later in life, when age and penitence enabled him to see more clearly,—regretted his falsehood, and endeavored to atone for it in this prayer, by publishing to the world his sorrow and his shame. Critics agree, however, that this impression is false; and believe that the portion of the prayer which gives color to it, is an interpolation by the monks, who were anxious to destroy the effect of Chaucer's scourgings of their order. They also argue that the prayer relates only to the "Parson's Tale," and not to his works generally; and that so much of it as is genuine is in perfect unison with the character of the good parson, who was not

"Of his speche dangerous, ne digne,
But in his teaching discrete and benign;"

and who, in his humility and modesty, feared that in his tale he had given offence, and very naturally desired not to wound the feelings of his hearers, who were composed of all classes and sects. It is also alleged that this is an interpolation, since it is

not contained in some of the best manuscripts, and one of the most objectionable of his works, "The Romance of the Rose," is not in the list of books condemned by it. But if we consider, in addition to these arguments, that the *Canterbury Tales* were written when Chaucer was over three-score, and yet that they reflect with far more severity upon the clergy than any or all of his earlier and more impulsive performances, we must be persuaded that they are expressive of his deliberate opinions; and must reject, as an imposture, the oblitative section of the alleged "Retractation,"—which is, itself, a portion of these *Tales* which it condemns.

As the prayer is a curiosity, and its perusal will afford one mode of arriving at a judgment as to the point in dispute, we here insert it, marking with brackets that portion which the best critics have pronounced interpolated :

"Now pray I to them all that heare this little treatise, or read it, that if there be anything in it that liketh them, that thereof they thanken our Lord Jesu Crist: of whom proceedeth all witte and all goodnesse: and if there be anything that displeaseth them, I pray them also that they arrete¹ it to the defaute of myn unkonning,² and not to my wille, that would fain have sayd better if I had had konning; for our boke sayth, all that is writen is writen for our doctrine, and that is myn intente: Wherefore, I beseech you, mekely, for the mercy of God, that ye pray for me, that Crist have mercie of me, and foryeve me my guiltes [and namely of myn translations and enditinges of worldly vanities, the which I revoke in my *Retractations*, as the boke of *Troilus*, the boke also of *Fame*, the boke of the *five-and-twenty Ladies*, the boke of the *Duchesse*, the boke of *Saint Valentine's Day*, of the *Parlement of Briddes*, the *Tales of Canterbury*, thilke *Sonnen unto Sin*, the boke of the *Leon*, and many another boke, if they were in my remembrance, and many a song and many a lecherous

¹ Impute.

² Ignorance

lay, Crist, of his grete mercie, foryeve me the sin : But, of the translation of Boes of Consolation, and other bokes of legends of Saintes and of Omelies, and moralitie and devotion, that thank I our Lord Jesu Crist, and his blissful mother, and all the Seintes in heven, beseeching them that they from henceforth unto my live's end send me grace to bewaile my giltes, and to studien the salvation of my soule] and graunte me grace of very penance, confession and satisfaction to do in this present life, through the benign grace of Him, that is King of Kings, and Preste of all Prestes, that bought us with the precious blood of His herte, so that I may be one of them at the last day of doom, that shall be saved : qui cum Deo patre et Spiritu Sancto vivis et regnas Deus per omnia secula. Amen."

CHAPTER II.

The effect produced upon the English language by Chaucer's writings.—
The grade and quality of his genius

It will not be deemed presumptuous, perhaps, if, without venturing to pronounce critically upon the effect that Chaucer's writings had upon the English language and English poetry, we bring together the judgments of those who may be rightfully esteemed "doctors" upon that question.

It is worthy of observation that the two principal censors of Chaucer's style, are men who made no pretensions to poetical sensibility. They were mere verbal pedants, and their censures are based upon a servile adhesion to those rules of philology, which their minds recognized as of the first importance. Honest old Verstegan, and long after him Skinner, the celebrated philologist, censure Chaucer as having "*deformed* the English idiom by an immoderate admixture of French words." Diametrically opposed to these, and yet belonging to the same family of error, are they who deny that Chaucer imported words from the French, and who insist that he kept the language precisely as he found it. The most judicious critics stand upon a middle ground, and agree that he naturalized words both from the French and Provencal, and thereby improved and softened our barren and harsh tongue. This is the testimony of Dryden, who also asserts that from him the purity of the English tongue began. Warton also, the learned and elegant author of "The History of English Poetry," says, "Edward the Third, while he perhaps intended only to banish a badge of conquest, greatly contributed to establish the national

dialect, by abolishing the use of the Norman tongue in the public and judicial proceedings, and by substituting the national language of the country. But Chaucer first taught his countrymen to write English, and formed a style by naturalizing words from the Provencal, at that time the most polished dialect of any in Europe, and the best adapted to the purposes of poetical expression."¹ A kindred writer, Henry Hallam, endorses this opinion with a slight reservation: "As the first original English poet, if we except Langland, as an improver, though with too much innovation, of our language, and as a faithful witness to the manners of his age, Chaucer would deserve our reverence, if he had not also intrinsic claims for excellences which do not depend upon any collateral considerations." Ritson, the querulous but indefatigable collector of Ancient English Metrical Romances, also affirms that "the language was greatly improved and enlarged by Chaucer," but thinks at the same time, that owing to the poverty of our tongue, he was forced to borrow words from the French and Provencal, especially in his translations. And lastly, Tyrwhitt, the eminent critic upon Chaucer, and the ablest editor of his works, proves beyond cavil, by an appeal to antecedent and contemporaneous history, the falsity of the charge that Chaucer had *corrupted* the language by an immoderate admixture of Gallicisms, inasmuch as that evil was chiefly attributable to the Nor-

¹ The following is an extract from the famous statute to which Warton refers:—"For this that it is oftentimes shown to the King, by the prelates, dukes, earls, barons, and all the commonalty, the great mischiefs which are come to many of this realm, for this that the laws, customs and statutes of the realm are not commonly known in the same realm, because they are pleaded, shown and judged in the French language, which is too much unknown in the same realm, so that the persons who plead or are impleaded in the courts of the King, and the courts of others, have not understanding of that which is said for or against them by their sergeants and other pleaders, be it ordained that all pleas which shall be to plead, be pleaded in the English language."

man Conquest, from the effects of which the language was just recovering. He admits that Chaucer selected and naturalized many words and phrases from the French and Provençal, but contends for the truth of the general principle, "that the English language must have imbibed a strong tincture of the French long before the age of Chaucer; and, consequently, that he ought not to be charged as the importer of words and phrases, which he only used after the example of his predecessors, and in common with his contemporaries." If we add to this, that Horne Tooke quotes him continually, and with more frequency than any of his contemporaries, as authority for his Saxon derivations, the case would seem to be conclusively in favor of the more moderate theory.

The great merit of Chaucer's style is not, however, the selection of words or phrases, and their naturalization from any foreign idiom: but consists in his judicious combination and apt choice of such as, by their strength, simplicity, and musical inflexion, most fully express the sentiment he aims to convey. And his proficiency here was owing to that "perpetual fountain of good sense," which irrigates all his writings, and which "taught him what to say, and when to leave off, and caused him to *follow* nature everywhere, but restrained him from the boldness of *going beyond* her."¹

Thus much for the matter of Chaucer's style. The quality and grade of his genius now remain to be examined; and the effect that his writings produced upon English poetry. We can arrive at a more correct notion of the former point, perhaps, if we first examine the latter.

The translations and inventions of Chaucer first admitted the people who spoke our tongue, to a companionship with the Muses; and laid the foundations upon which the English language was elevated to its present dignity. Before, and until the time of our

¹ Dryden's Preface to *Palamon and Arcite*.

poet, the language was considered semi-barbarous, both at home and abroad, and there was no institution of learning where English was suffered to be taught. "Children in scole (says a nearly contemporaneous writer),¹ agens the usage and manir of all other nations, beeth compelled for to leve hire own language, and for to construe hir lessons and hir thynges in Frenche: also gentilmen's children beeth taught to speke Frensche from the time that they beeth rokked in hire cradles." Late in the reign of Edward the Third, this custom was somewhat changed, as Treviza bears witness, but Chaucer's youthful Muse was found to struggle with it; and it followed him on close to manhood, for the students of the Universities were also compelled to converse in French or Latin. So prevalent was this language, that not only the letters and dispatches of the King were always written in French,² but "the minutes of the corporation of London, recorded in the Town Clerk's office, were in French, as well as the proceedings of Parliament."³ Joined to these obstacles, was the intense ignorance which so universally prevailed during this century, that it was quite an unusual thing for a layman, even of the higher ranks, to know how to sign his name or read; and Kings and Emperors shared the barren heritage. Books were scarce as rubies and as highly prized; and the transfer of one from one library to another, was an event duly recorded, and invested with many solemn legal observances. Wickliffe's Bible was not yet written; and Sir John Mandeville's Book of Travels—the first English book—was written, A.D., 1356, when Chaucer was in his twenty-eighth year, and after he had written the Court of Love and translated Boethius. There was not a single historian in English prose, even among the clergy, before A.D., 1385,⁴ in the reign of Richard the Second, when a translation of Randal Higden's Polychronicon, by John Treviza, was dignified by the name of History. And

¹ Higden, who lived in the time of Richard the Second.

² Ritson.

³ Hallam's Lit. Eur., p. 47, vol. 1.

⁴ Ritson.

the voluminous labors of Robert of Gloucester, and Robert De Brunne—the only two versifiers or translators of any note, who wrote in English before the time of Chaucer—are saved from being contemptible, simply by their antiquity. It was Chaucer who rescued our noble language from chaos; and the instrument which he used was the same that has in all ages been the founder and polisher of every written language, Poetry. Anterior to his time, the poetry of the country or its miserable substitute, was in the keeping of the clergy, the heralds, and the minstrels. The two latter classes were uneducated, save for the duties and requirement of war, tournaments, and of feastings: while the education of the former was as inflexible as an armor of sheet-iron, and ran into the channels of legendary and saintly lore, or of quaint superstitions, many of which were also conveyed in a foreign tongue. The classics of Greece and Rome were little known, and so were the Rhapsodists and Romancers of more southern and polished climes. The language was barren and uncouth, and a savage and uncultivated taste was as characteristic of a magnificent but semi-barbarous court, as it was of the common people. The only “amusement which deserved the name of literary, was old metrical and prose romances, and what had yet much less merit, and more absurdity, wild and unintelligible books of prophecies in rhyme.”¹ In the formal and precise language of Dr. Johnson, “Chaucer was the first English versifier who wrote poetically.” He was, we may say, the first English poet “who came with a tale which held children from play, and old men from the chimney corner.”² He was the first man of the world, the first educated English layman whose genius spurned the fetters which bound his class, and who dared to lay his profane hands upon the altar of Poesy. He was, to use the glowing language of one not given to praise unduly—the poet Wordsworth—“The Morning Star of English Poetry,” and “ever to be

¹ Tytler's Univ. Hist.

² Sir Philip Sidney.

honored." Nor was Wordsworth the only poet who bowed before the majesty of Chaucer's hoar antiquity. Spenser, the first after him whose genius could stand alone, reverently hails him as the "well of English undefiled," and more than once intimates that the "soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body; and that he was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease." Indeed, he was so studious an admirer of Chaucer, that he offended the taste of the critics of his time by his frequent and plenteous copyings, and was thus curtly defended from them by quaint and sturdy old Fuller: "The many Chaucerisms used (for I could not say affected) by him, are thought by the ignorant to be blemishes, but known by the learned to be beauties to his book."¹

In the estimation of Dryden, also, whose opinion was the result of a view of the rapid growth of poetry immediately after the reign of Richard II., Chaucer was the "Father of English Poetry," and as such, "was held by him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer." In his Preface to the Fables, he adds further, "I prefer in Chaucer, far above all his other stories, the noble poem of Palamon and Arcite, which is of the epic kind, and perhaps not much inferior to the Iliad or Eneid: the story is more pleasing than either of them, the manner as perfect, and the disposition full as artful." And again, in his epistle to the Duchess of Ormond, he says,

"The bard who first adorned our native tongue
Tuned to his British lyre this ancient song:
Which Homer might without a blush rehearse,
And leaves a doubtful palm in Virgil's verse.
He matched their beauties, where they most excel;
Of love sung better, and of arms as well."

"But," it may be objected, "Chaucer was chiefly a translator, and lacked the first requisite of a great poet, Invention." A

¹ Worthies of England.

sufficient reply to the latter part of this objection is, that if a poet's indebtedness to another for the story or vehicle of his fancies is incompatible with his possession of the "creative faculty," then Chaucer must fall; but his ruin will be shared by Shakespeare and Milton. By a similar argument, this precious endowment, the creative faculty, may be denied to any poet who applies the mechanism invented by another, as the vehicle of his fancies; and consequently, whosoever writes an epic, must of necessity be inferior to its great inventor. So also, the rank of the poets, whose pathetic stories of Ugolino's and of Lear's sufferings excite our deep sympathies and anguish, will be made subservient to the crude historians whose homely narratives of barren facts they embodied and transfigured. The error of those friendly to this theory lies in the notion they entertain, that the "creative genius" of a poet is of the same kind with that tremendous power which the Deity exercised when

"The Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos;"

MILTON.

and that, like the Deity, out of nothing the poet evokes his sublime fancies. Divine, however, as the poet's calling is, greatly inferior to this is the degree of his power. He more nearly resembles the architect who, by his genius, creates from rude and shapeless stones a temple whose awful majesty shall command the veneration of ages; or the sculptor, under whose hands the dull and senseless block shall become instinct with life and beauty—principles which before had no existence there. Like these, the poet broods over the chaos of nature, and gives birth to conceptions that men shall "never willingly let die." It is useless, however, to discuss an objection which is as unsound as the collateral charge is untrue. For, an appeal to his works, and a comparison of them with the imitations or translations by Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth and others, will fully establish Chau-

cer's claim to originality; while the most malevolent objector against his genius must confess that as a translator he has been rarely equalled. Indeed, critics generally agree, that so many new beauties are made apparent; so much eloquent simplicity, so much tenderness and manliness, are added by his translations, to the best works of the greatest poets of his age, that they bear all the air of originality, and surpass the models that he emulated.

It would seem, then, that when Chaucer appeared, it was "with all the lustre and dignity of a true poet, in an age which compelled him to struggle with a barbarous language and a national want of taste." That he

"In times

Dark and untaught, began with charming verse

To tame the rudeness of his native land;" AKENSIDE.

and that his efforts first constructed a taste by which he and all subsequent poets were to be adjudged and enjoyed, and his genius aroused the glorious tide of Song, which still swells and surges like the billows of the great deep. That his powerful example gave life and vigor to Gower and Douglas, and successively thereafter to Lydgate,¹ to Surrey, and to Wyatt, until he was reproduced in Spenser. And that the voice of Genius has ever delighted to honor him with the sober reverence due to a parent. What then shall we conclude to be the grade and quality of his genius?

If results are ever to be considered the measure of a cause—if the strength and skill of a warrior or a statesman are to be ascertained from the nature of the difficulty overcome, of the conquest gained, or of the good accomplished; if a more august fame is the award of those brave men who spurn opposing circumstances, and in their spite attain a goal, which few dare hope to reach

¹ See Appendix B.

with all their powerful aid ; then, surely, we may claim for Chaucer a proud place in the Temple of Fame.

It is agreed that he who combines simplicity of diction and of thought with an earnest and truthful spirit—who possesses a grand but healthy imagination, and a lively fancy—whose power of observation is seconded by his faculty of description—whose sensibility is as delicate as his judgment is manly and profound ; and whose command of language is commensurate with the unclogged exhibition of these several faculties, enabling him to control the humors, the emotions, and even the affections and passions of his readers—it is agreed that such an one deservedly ranks among the first of poets. And such was Chaucer, who everywhere is vigorous and manly ; frank, bold and truthful ; sublimely imaginative, yet sternly simple ; fanciful, yet direct ; eminently a master of the pathetic, yet humorous and gleesome ; while his descriptive powers, whether of a lark, a daisy, a May morning, or of the “ gloomy sanctuary of the tremendous temple of Mars,” are unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled. We therefore affirm—and we shelter ourselves under the authority we have adduced, the intrinsic merits of his writings, and their powerful effects upon literature—that Chaucer must be classed with Homer and Dante, with Spenser, Shakspeare and Milton.

CHAPTER III.

Characteristics of Chaucer's Poetry—His estimate of Woman, and fondness for birds, flowers and rural scenery—Control over language—Omission to celebrate the great personages of his age and nation.

AN examination into the characteristics of Chaucer's Poetical Compositions will not be inappropriate to the plan of this work; nor will the inquiry prove uninteresting, since his most beautiful creations are as much fruits of a necessity of his nature, as the full-grown oak is of the planted acorn; and their exhibition is but a more thorough introduction to the man, and will lead to a more perfect acquaintance with his character and feelings.

And first, we notice, that he excelled all who passed before or who have followed after him—save only Shakspeare—in his chivalrous estimate of, and ability to portray, feminine loveliness, delicacy and modesty; and in his unbounded trust in woman's virtue and truth. Dante's Beatrice and the Laura of Petrarch are beauteous visions, but yet are not invested with the same flesh-and-blood attributes and affections, which distinguish Chaucer's and Shakspeare's portraitures. And Portia, Rosalind and Imogen—the most perfect of Shakspeare's women—do not exalt our love for woman, do not challenge for her implicit faith, unwavering trust and ardent affection, any more powerfully than Chaucer's numberless paintings. Without pausing to comment upon his truthful delineation of womanly virtue in the character of Dorigene; or his more impassioned description of Griselda's conjugal affection and faith; where shall we find a picture so dignified, and yet so subdued and piteous as that of Custance when

she is led "with a dedly pale face" to what seemed a lingering and horrible death :—

"Hire little child lay weeping in hire arm,
 And kneeling, pitously to him she said,
 Pees, little son, I wol do thee no harm!
 With that, her coverchief off hire head she braid¹
 And over his little eyen she it laid,
 And in hire arm she lulleth it full fast,
 And into the heaven hire eyen up she cast."

And again; what can be more simple and delicate than the description of Griselda as she sat spinning on the field while she tended her sheep, or as she plucked "worts and other herbes" on her homeward way at even; or what can be conceived more submissively filial than the picture of this "tendre mayden" as

"In great reverence and charitee
 Hire olde poure fader fostered she,
 And ay² she kept her fader's life on loft
 With every obeisance and diligence
 That child may don to fadre's reverence?"

Or, where are descriptions of womanly beauty more luxuriant and blooming; as fresh, healthful and buoyant, and yet so simple and pure; so *unangelic*, so perfectly human, and worthy of the affection as well as homage of a manly heart, as our glimpses of the golden-haired Emilie in the garden, who

"fairer was to seen
 Than is the lily on his stalke greene?"

or of that Roman's daughter who was

"faire in excellent beautee
 Aboven any wight that man may see?"

¹ Tore.

² Always

It is worthy of remark that Chaucer's descriptions of woman never invest her with any Juno-like attributes; but she is ever as mild, patient and submissive, as she is beauteous; and is always accompanied and adorned by the fireside virtues. This is particularly noteworthy, because the sentiment was far in advance of the age, which delighted to worship woman sparkling with imperious beauty, and elated by the triumph of her conquests; or gracing the tournament with her presence, and even partaking with man the fierce enthusiasm of battle. Such was not Chaucer's woman. Nor was she the houris of a Mahomedan's paradise, much less the ideal abstraction of Spenser's beautiful allegories. She was the sharer of man's joys, the minister to his comfort, the partner of his griefs,

“ A creature not too bright or good
 For human nature's daily food
 For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
 Praise, love, blame, kisses, tears and smiles.”¹

Although, throughout Chaucer's writings, it is plainly observable that he placed a high estimate upon woman's nature in the points of virtue and purity; yet in his Miller's and Wife of Bath's tales, and in some other compositions, he describes with apparent zest, women who are far from virtuous, who are indeed libidinous and adulterous. Without being able or willing entirely to defend his election of a plan, which necessarily drew these characters into the action of his plots, it still should be remembered that he pictured the age in which he lived—perhaps all too truly in the particulars of its lewdness and licentiousness; and that when he entered into the person of each fancied narrator, he possessed the wizard power of assuming for the time his character, even to the most trivial peculiarity. We have no right to assume that there-

¹ Wordsworth.

fore he himself was lewd and licentious, or that he was an unbeliever in woman's faith and chastity. On the contrary, these comparisons serve at once to engender disgust for the depravity which they describe, and by their powerful contrast with the purer examples of Custance, Griselda and Lucrece, to heighten our admiration for their virtuous beauty. Nor should we forget—to use the language of the young gentleman before quoted—that though “the uncleanness of Chaucer's age has left a smooch here and there upon his poems, yet it is only in the margin, and may be torn off without injury to the text.”¹

The same faculty that observed and prized in woman the beauteous virtues of modesty and simplicity, keenly perceived her foibles and affectations; those petty vices, which appearing in individuals, diminish the lustre of the class to which they belong. How perfect and yet how gentle, is Chaucer's ridicule of that artificiality of her nature, which caused the “tender-hearted Prioress” to dignify trivialties and formalities into a high importance, at the expense of real perfections and accomplishments; and which led her to lavish upon insignificant objects, affections that are based upon deep and abiding principles of humanity. This was a ready mean for lowering and degrading those holy sympathies of our nature which can only be shared with our fellow-mortals, and the desecration of them cannot be atoned for by the most exquisite kindness to the lower creation. This Chaucer saw, and he limned the vice so truthfully that we of this remote generation and New World are profited and instructed thereby. Our language in reference to this good lady's failings sounds harsh beside the poet's gentle correction; but it was not in the nature of the creator of Custance and Griselda to deal otherwise than most tenderly with woman. Indeed, his sharpest corrections of the sex fall upon it like the pattering May-shower upon a rose, serving to cleanse and purify it from the dross and

¹ Lowell's Conversations.

dirt which disfigure it, and leaving it more fragrant than before. His description of the good Prioress and her foibles serves to contrast with the nobler characters we have just considered, and points out their virtues no less strongly than the coarser pictures of the "gap-toothed Wife of Bath" or the unfaithful Alison.

“ At mete was she well ytaught withall ;
 She lette no morsel from her lippes falle,
 Ne wette hire fingers in hire sauce depe.
 Well coude she carry a morsel and wel kepe
 That no drop ne fell upon hir brest.
 In curtsie was sett full much hire lest.¹
 Hire over lippe wiped she so clene,
 That in hire cuppe was no farthing seene
 Of grese, when she dronken had her draught.
 But for to speken of hire conscience,
 She was so charitable and pitous,
 She wolde wepe if that she saw a mouse
 Caughte in a trap, if it were dede or bled.
 Of smalle houndes hadde she, that she fedde
 With rosted flesh, and milk and wastel² brede.
 But sore wept she if one of hem was dedde,
 Or if men smote it with a yerde smerte :
 And all was conscience and tendre heart.”

Entirely congenial with Chaucer's admiration and love of woman, was his passionate fondness for birds, and flowers, and rural life. Although he has described with terrific ability, scenes which awaken the fiercer passions of the human heart, causing it like his own war-horse "to stert like the fire;" yet his imagination—taking its hue perhaps from his affections—dwelt fondly upon scenes of rural enjoyment and innocence; and we gladly linger

¹ Pleasure.

² Fine.

with him as he lounges upon the "meadowes softe, sweet, and grene;" or, under a tree beside a well, listen with him to the rippling of waters and the melody of birds, and watch the gambols of "the prettie conies,"

"The dredeful roe, the buck, the hart, the hind,
Squirrels and beastes small of gentil kind."

There is no poet—certainly no English poet—at all comparable with him in the enthusiastic love of these beautiful children of nature, birds and flowers; and in all his writings scarcely a description of rural scenery occurs from which all are omitted. And we have his own confession that, when "sickness sate on his herte" he sought relief by rising anon and going

"Into the woodes, to hear the birdes sing;"

or by rambling through fields whose "flowers of many diverse hues spread their leaves against the sun," and sparkled like silver with dew that was "as any baume sweet."

Not less enthusiastic was his love of Spring, and the sportful pleasures that genial season ushered in. His writings may be called a continuous poem in praise of Woman, Flowers, Rural pleasures and the Spring. And if bold Robin Hood had lived in his time we might easily have fancied them to be warm friends: for Chaucer's love of sylvan sports, and his intimacy with the denizens of the woods, was entirely in Robin's own vein: nor do we recollect to have seen anywhere so perfect and so sprightly a description of the bold forester, as is limned from the life in Chaucer's portrait of the Squier's Yeman:

"He was cladde in cote and hode of grene,
A sheaf of peacock arwes bright and kene

Under his belt he bare full thriftily.
 Well coude he dress his takle yemanly :
 His arwes drooped not with featheres lowe,
 And in his hand he bore a mighty bowe.

A not-hed hadde he, with a brown visage,
 Of woodcraft coud' he well all the usage.
 A cristofre,² on his brest of silver shene.
 An horn he bare, the baudrik was of grene ;
 A forster was he sothly as I gesse."

Such is the magic of Chaucer's descriptions of Spring, that even in mid-winter we dream not of the sharp, biting cold, and of fires ; but fancy ourselves exulting in the bright and cheering sunshine, or breathing in the pure, fresh air, and hearkening to the singing of birds, the clucking of fowls, the lowing of cattle, and the teeming hum of a new insect creation ; while our sky is filled with soft, fleecy clouds, such as the gentle Spring ever brings with it.

As the first intellectual effort of Man in Paradise was to give names to those creations of the Deity by which he found himself surrounded ; thus figuring forth by language his ideas of their characters and natures : so the first and chief delight of the earliest great poets of every country has been to describe such operations of nature as are most obvious and striking. They have chosen to deal with effects rather than speculate upon their causes. And, as their minds are not fatigued by searching out rules and models ; or in studying the ornaments of composition, and observing the practices and precedent of their predecessors ; their descriptions are signalized by simplicity, fidelity and enthusiasm. Each succeeding generation chronicles a further departure from those necessary accompaniments of high poetical endowment : and although refined minds will never fail to appre-

¹ Knew.

² An image of St Christopher, who was the patron of field sports.

ciate the beauties and point out the features of these requisites ; yet at each step of advancement in the rules of critical analysis, and the refinement of intellectual art, new and insurmountable barriers raise. To express it in a Poet's phrase,

“ Invention, Nature's child, flees step-dame Study's blows.”¹

We know no better illustration of this observation, than is afforded by a comparison of Wordsworth—the most natural, if not the greatest poet of this age, and yet the most artistical—with Chaucer. Both are fond of describing similar natural scenes, and are intent upon discerning beauty in identical objects. But how widely does the modern poet depart from the ancient ! The one seems to be obsequiously obeying an imposed duty, or fulfilling a necessity of the poet's calling ; the other carols as blithely and heartily as his own birds. One never rejects a phrase or an idea because it is homely : he cares not if it happen to outrage the ear or disturb the serenity of the over-sensitive. The other picks his words and phrases as daintily as the perfumed and jewelled exquisite does his way through a muddy street.

This train of thought has been suggested by Chaucer's fondness for detailing morning scenes ; and by his frequent and enthusiastic descriptions of the joyous walks that ushered in the sunrise. His love of these walks rivalled his love of woman ; and well might he love them, for he tells us that “ the blissful sight ” of sunrise as he “ walked on the mead, softened all his sorrows.” Spenser, also, was fond of describing sunrise, but plainly builds upon Chaucer's original, wheresoever he is truly English. Moreover, he labors so heavily with figures introduced from the Greek and Latin classics that, in these particular descriptions, our attention is employed upon them, at the expense of the

¹ Sir Philip Sidney.

object he may be professedly portraying. For the purpose of contrasting these two builders of English Song, we subjoin examples from both. The following is a celebrated description of sunrise from Spenser :

“ The joyous day gan early to appear,
 And fair Aurora from the dewy bed
 Of aged Tithon, gan herself to rear,
 With rosie cheeks, for shame all blushing red ;
 Her golden locks for haste were loosely shed
 About her ears, when Una her did mark
 Climb to the charet all with flowers spread,
 From Heaven high to chase the cheerless dark ;
 With merry note, her loud salutes the mountain lark.”¹

Now hearken to Chaucer :

“ The busy lark, the messenger of day,
 Saluteth in her song the morrow gray ;
 And fiery Phœbus riseth up so bright
 That all the orient laugheth at the sight,
 And with his streams he drieth in the greves²
 The silver droppes hanging on the leaves.”

These paintings, so freely scattered over Chaucer's works—and which without being disjointed from his narratives are distinguishable from them, and deserve to rank by themselves as distinct and perfect compositions—are worthy of a critical examination. For although this high art is no uncommon attendant upon the gift of song, and must, indeed, be possessed by all true poets ; yet Chaucer's paintings demand particular attention from the singular rapidity, brevity and fidelity of their execution, and the vividness of their

¹ Faëry Queen, book i., canto ii., stanza 51.

² Groves

coloring. Few poets describe so accurately and fully, with so few touches. Timotheus-like, his

“ flying fingers touched the lyre,”

and with the careless power of a master he wielded language to the expression of his rich fancies. Instead of engendering a weak climax by servilely recounting the details of a subject—its conception, birth and gradual growth, until it safely reaches a logical perfection—he seizes it at the moment of its highest completeness, and by a peculiar faculty of description he causes to flash upon our fancy—as vividly as if he had portrayed it all—its whole progress from the faint beginning to its ripened glory. In his descriptions of sunrise, for instance, as in the one we have been considering, he does not, like Spenser, perplex us with a display of classical lore, in a merciless pursuit of the allegorical connexion between Aurora and Tithon. He declines to lessen the majestic beauty of this glorious sight by likening it to the uprising of a youthful maiden from the spiritless embraces of an imbecile old man. On the contrary, by a few simple touches he plants us in the midst of natural scenery where, as the grey morning breaks upon us, we are greeted by the gay song of the lark ; we see the fresh and sparkling dew hanging from leaf and flower ; and we behold the misty vapors of morning rising like an incense “ with many a wholesome air ” from the joyous earth.

But when we speak of Chaucer’s *paintings*, we more especially allude to his portraitures of individuals of the human kind—including his various impersonations—and of the nobler classes of the inferior animal creation, or to his condensed descriptions of natural objects. And we cannot refrain from expressing the belief that our painters, as well as poets, have neglected to study them : else, why is his matchless gallery of

paintings unappropriated, when it contains landscapes as lovely as ever eyes dwelt upon; barnyard and rural pictures, where-with many a heart might be gladdened; and groupings of god-like forms and countenances, worthy to lead the conception of the most rapt painter. Nor is this wonderful collection any less remarkable for its diversity than it is for its excellence, for here are heroes than whom none are more majestic, women than whom none are lovelier; here are sights of nature in her gayest and mildest moods, and of the fierce strife of battle; here are portly monks and smiling nuns; choleric stewards and burly millers; mumbling friars, lecherous clerks, cuckolded husbands and gamesome wives. All this have we disposed and arranged into multiform combinations by sublime genius, and yet the great world wags on and heeds them not.

It is a curious circumstance, when the chivalrous bias of his nature is considered, that throughout Chaucer's voluminous writings, scarcely anything is said of the throng of fair and virtuous women that ornamented the brilliant court of Edward the Third and his lovely Queen Philippa; or of the host of great and gallant men who swelled the armies of their sovereign, and made his arms invincible. In the same age with the poet, and in his own land, lived warriors with whose exploits all Europe resounded, and which even vied with the fabulous deeds of Arthur and his round table knights. It was a period prolific in heroes, among whom none were bolder or more courageous than his own countrymen, or more signalized by the virtues of gentleness, honor and generosity. The great battles of Cressy and Poitiers had just been fought, and Europe yet rang with the fame of the victors' prowess, and the story of their knightly courtesy. But Chaucer marks them not. We listen, in silent expectation, to hear a tide of exulting song poured from the bounding strings of his harp, as our imagination pictures him,

“ With all a poet’s ecstasy
In varying cadence, soft or strong,
Sweeping the sounding chords along ;”

But the vision fades away ; his strings are mute ; the harp

“ is dumb
That knew all tones of passion.”

And while we sit musing, Fancy again claims its prerogative ; we see the Black Prince and his brother, scar-worn John of Gaunt, the chivalrous De Mauny, the heroic Chandois and the brave Derby, stalk mournfully past, seeming to reproach the poet who refused to celebrate their fame.

It is less to be wondered at that he refrained from celebrating the achievements of King Edward himself, or of his brother the Duke of Lancaster, for the pride of Chaucer was of that noble kind which disdained adulation. But it is truly singular, that a poet, whose pictures of women are so exquisitely tender and delicate, should neglect to do homage to the matchless purity of Queen Philippa, whom all hearts loved ; and who was of such “ distinguished beauty that the statuaries of those days used to make her their model for images of the Virgin Mary, who was always figured young and beautiful.”¹

If we further consider, that Chaucer was a poet who delighted to describe splendid pageants and processions ; that he was himself a favorite inmate of a court, which was occupied by frequent spectacles of tournaments and martial exercises, and which has been justly named “ the theatre of romantic elegance ;” that King Edward was from inclination and policy the enthusiastic patron of chivalry and romance ; and that he had just instituted the order of the blue garter out of his love for the virtuous

¹ Hearne.

Countess of Salisbury, in the midst of feasts and joustings that had been proclaimed throughout Europe ; and which were graced by the beautiful and brave of France, Scotland, and Brabant ; of Germany, Hainault and Burgundy. If we pause over these facts, it will also appear remarkable, that upon these rich themes—which only required a faithful description to have rendered them as deeply interesting as the most romantic fiction—Chaucer utters no sound. And we vent our disappointment by censuring him because he did not celebrate such noble deeds and brilliant scenes with the same magic pen that transferred to immortality the simple habits and customs of his countrymen, and the rural scenery of his native land ; with the melody of its birds ; the fragrance of its flowers, its cool and limpid waters, its balmy mornings, and its gladsome months of May.

CHAPTER IV.

Resemblances of Poets.—Chaucer and Spenser.—Chaucer and his Translators and Imitators.—Specimens of Dryden's powers as a Translator of Chaucer.

To trace the imitations of poets, or their casual resemblances to one another, would be an occupation far from uninteresting. Not that we could, for an instant, countenance that paltry, envious and dastardly disposition which charges wilful plagiarism upon all resemblances. But the speculation would be curious, as exhibiting to us identical subjects variously considered by master minds; would present to our view, each new beauty or modification of beauty, at the moment of its engraftment; would enable us to institute comparisons between the various artists, and to pronounce intelligently upon the different degrees of skill and ingenuity, or of freshness and originality displayed; and would, finally, cause us to award to each author, with some precision, his particular rank, and yield to him his lawful share of our homage and veneration. It would be delightful and instructive, for instance, to trace the strong and terse thoughts of Chaucer, through the accumulating dust and rubbish of intervening poets, till their rough and manly quaintness are exchanged for Spenser's dreamy visions and daring metaphors, or for Shakspeare's fluent and almost inspired reasonings: and thence again, to witness it, like a pure stream, sink into the earth and roll on, hidden from ordinary sight, till in due time it bursts forth sparkling with the stately and awful imagery of Milton, the elegant finish of Dryden, or the quiet ease and dignity of Wordsworth.

Such a study would prove no less absorbing to the philosopher than genial to the poet; and if systematically pursued would challenge the attention of both. Without daring to lay claim to either of these august titles, the writer of these pages has ventured to jot down a few resemblances, which, while they were yet freshly perceived, occasioned throes of thought that have since been rendered doubly pleasant, by the charm which memory ever throws around its objects.

Those poets who follow nature most closely; who quell not, but mark the impulses of their own hearts; and who narrowly study their fellow-men in the varied ramifications of their habits, passions and affections; who endorse upon a broad and generous fund of common sense (that best abused of all terms), the higher and more attractive attributes of fancy and imagination, and who spurn the tyrannical guidance of custom, disdain the manifold trickeries to which the poetical mob resorts; will necessarily possess the highest originality, and the most enduring power; and be the wells from whence their more artistical and perhaps refined brethren will draw inspiration. To the former, these bear—in theory, as certainly as they do in chronological fact—the same relation as Columbus does to modern navigators. They are the gifted discoverers of new regions in the world of thought, which a later, more polished, and more scientific generation shall explore, and cultivate, and beautify. We do not mean to assert the eminently fallacious dogma, that Nature—which is the soul of Poetry—can only be found in a state of semi-barbarism, or amid scenes of rural or pastoral life. For it dwells no less constantly in the great city, the populous mart, and the most advanced stages of society, than in the secluded forest or the earliest youth of a nation. The inmates of the stateliest palace are as truly her children, and bow to the supremacy of her laws no less reverentially than their humbler brethren of the field or mountain. The gilded hall and the whitewashed cot, both are

her temples. Pride is no less natural than humility. But it is in the crowded city that nature may be discerned in her noblest form, arrayed in a vesture of many hues. It is there that the common charities of man, and his as common miseries, whatsoever lightens, and whatsoever oppresses, or that in any manner concerns the noblest work of a Divine hand—all cluster. There the cheerful and strong voice of labor may be heard commingled with the sharp cry of passion or of pain, and their sad accompaniments of sobs and tears. There exuberant health leaps and sings hard by the wretched victim of disease, and the feeble moan of famine ascends beside the mansion of wealth and plenty. There the awful imprecation and the devout prayer are wafted to the presence of Omnipotence by the same breath of air; while, regardless alike of the cry of the joyous or the despairing, heedless of merriment or of woe—the steady, monotonous hum of the base and greedy followers of pleasure and mammon, rolls up to the glorious heaven, and obscures it with an atmosphere as dim and murky as Milton's hell. Here, too, the poet may see the hideous and loathsome figure of vice, and the spotless and beauteous form of mercy, of fierce hate and bountiful love, in such artistical juxtaposition as only a Divine Artist could order and execute. Here he may dream dreams and see visions, that shall be a foresight of that better bliss which another life promises; or he may behold models from whence to draw the black and fiendish outlines of a damned world. In fine; here that wonderful complexity, the heart of man, ebbs and flows, and pours in rapid torrents its flood of hopes and fears, of joy, anguish and remorse.

Although we thus perceive that nature is as actually present in the thronged city and the most advanced stage of society, as it is in the earlier periods of social being; yet it is, nevertheless, undoubtedly true that, as refinement and civilisation, with their handmaidens the arts and sciences, commerce and manufactures, advance to perfection, the mind of Man is oppressed, his imagina-

tion is fettered, his fancy becomes bewildered and his attention distracted, by the countless variety of objects which his position in the world's life forces upon him. His reason, like the muscles of his body, is enlarged and developed by constant use ; and it encroaches upon the other faculties, which it also disdains, and reaches a monstrous growth, while they either recede, or at best remain stationary. And thus the poetic faculty oftentimes lies buried or hindered.

Occasionally, however, in the course of a nation's existence, and contrasting with the surrounding barrenness, there well forth from the arid soil, fresh and cooling springs of poesy, rejoicing the heart with their invigorating waters, and delighting the eye with their shadowed and verdant banks. Such were Chaucer, Shakspeare, and Milton ; founts which have gladdened the spirits of thousands, and at which, throughout all time, genius will delight to drink inspiration.

Spenser, whom we have omitted from this list, was not the true child of nature that his master, Chaucer, was. It is true that his verse is more accurate and his rhyme more perfect ; but he has neither contrived to excite for his characters our affection and concern, nor to awaken our dislike and disgust. His descriptions are beautiful or grand ; and his metaphors and allegories are the legitimate offspring of an imagination at once restless and gorgeous. But in his portraitures of individual and real characters he is so often tamely classical, that they do not excite in the breasts of his readers any higher emotion than that of admiration ; excepting always, however, his touching description of the desolate Una and her faithful Lion. His personifications, also, are usually so overladen with images, his comparisons so wire-drawn and redundant, that they are supernatural and tiresome. His men and women belong to no age or nation, and do not describe any class. Hence, necessarily, his writings are not imbued with that strong dramatic interest which particularly signalizes Chaucer's

compositions, and which is inseparable from the highest poetic efforts. It is this quality which lends to Chaucer's portraitures of men, or of the passions, and other attributes of humanity, the strongest individual concern. He describes an abstraction as though it were a reality, and makes it as tangible as if it were possessed of physical properties. Thus, in his descriptions of Richesse, Mirth, Hate, Beauty, Gladnesse, and Venus, he invests each of them with an air of humanity and an individuality that challenge emotions as various as the characters introduced, and we admire or dislike, pity or love, at his bidding. "In arranging themselves under his dominion, these abstract ideas of unsubstantial existence take a visible and substantial form, distinguished by the attributes, the insignia, and the effects of Reality."¹

Without pausing to examine the servile and almost numberless imitations of Chaucer, by his immediate followers, Lydgate and Occleve, or the frequent resemblances that occur in Douglas, and at a still later and more auspicious period were apparent in the writings of Surrey and Sidney; we will, for a short space longer, linger with the great poet who is also justly esteemed one of the principal landmarks of our literature.

Glimmering through Spenser's tortuous and inverted style, and sparkling amid the complicated and continuous drove of metaphors, which both beautify and deform his writings, we however find frequent resemblances to Chaucer; especially in his paintings of imaginary characters. In the limnings of Avarice and Envy, whom he introduces in the guise of "sage Counsellors" to Pride, Spenser not only maintains a strong general resemblance to Chaucer's powerful paintings of these characters, but he observes the same order and preserves the same relative dependence of one upon the other. Moreover, both poets strive to create a disgust for these base personages by the same instrumentality, namely, by clothing them with filthy rags and an "evil hued"

¹ Adapted from Roscoe's *Lorenzo De Medici*, Vol. i., p. 234

and sallow skin, and by causing them to elect a craving and hungry belly, rather than part with their ill-begotten wealth. We award the superiority, in this instance, to Chaucer's descriptions, not merely from their having been the originals from which Spenser drew, but because they are also more fully detailed without degenerating into the catalogue and inventory style; and are more boldly conceived and executed.¹

Another striking resemblance to Chaucer may be observed in Spenser's figure of Danger. These closely approximate; and as the passage illustrating the likeness is brief, we quote from the two poets, commencing with Spenser.

“With him went Danger, cloth'd in ragged weed
 Made of beare's skin, that him more dredeful made:
 Yet his own face was dredeful, nor did need
 Strange horror to deform his griesly shade.”

This is seemingly epitomized from Chaucer's more detailed description:

“With that anon, out stert Dangere
 Out of the place where he was hid:
 Full grete he was and black of hewe,
 Sturdy and hideous, who so him knewe;
 Like sharp urchons³ his haire was grow
 His eyen red and sparkling as the fire glow,
 His nose frounced full kyked⁴ stood,
 And he come criand as he were wood.”⁵

¹ Compare F. Queen, book I., canto iv., st. 27, 28, and 29, with Rom. Ros., vs. 209 to 300.

² F. Queen, book III., Canto xii., st. 11.

³ Hedgehog bristles.

⁴ Crooked.

⁵ Mad.

Spenser's frequent resemblances to Chaucer shadow forth the high reverence which he felt for him; and suggest the pleasant fancy, that while his own immortal progeny was being ushered into life, he was ministered to by the ripe thoughtfulness and gorgeous imaginings of the elder poet. It is right pleasant thus then to fancy the poet of Queen Elizabeth's time bending, studiously and reverentially, over the massive, and even then antiquated, black-letter folios of his great master of a less refined period; and signaling and perpetuating his homage of admiration by embalming their contents in his own sweet verse. It is delightful thus to witness the accord of noble minds, and to note their generous strife for the purest fame. Nor indeed do we merely fancy pleasant dreams; for how else shall we account for the coincidence furnished by the following lines from Chaucer's *Frankeleyn's Tale*,

“Love wol not be constrained by maistrie,
When maistrie cometh, the God of love anone,
Beteth his wings, and farewell, he is gone;”

and these from Spenser's *Fairy Queen*?

“Ne may love be compelled by mastery;
For soon as maistre comes sweet love anone
Takes to his nimble wings and soon away is gone:”¹

Unless indeed, we suppose, what is yet more flattering to Chaucer, that Spenser drew it and its numerous companions from the treasure house of his memory.

Although much force is due to the argument that two minds of powerful and poetic mould must arrive at similarity of thought

¹ *F. Queen*, book III., canto i., st. 25

and expression when occupied upon the same point; yet we think it chiefly applies to natural or real objects, and not to chimeras or visions of the imagination. Hence we have been accustomed, also, to look upon his celebrated description of the House of Morpheus, as an artistic enlargement by Spenser upon Chaucer: the most notable difference between them consisting in the superfluosness of classical allusions which encumber and characterize the former. And yet it were unjust not to notice that Spenser very judiciously, and with the truest poetical taste, heightens the notion of drowsiness, by his introduction of an "ever drizzling rain, mixt with a murmuring wind." Indeed the figure seems thereby transformed into reality. But let each bard strike the lyre with his own hand:—

“ He making speedy way through spersed ayre,
 And through the world of waters wild and depe,
 To Morpheus’ house doth hastily repair,
 Amid the bowels of the earth full stepe,
 And low, where dawning day doth never peepe,
 His dwelling is; there Tethys his wet bed
 Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth stepe
 In silver dew his ever-drooping head,
 Whiles sad Night over him her mantle black doth spread.

Whose double gates he findeth locked fast;
 The one fair fram’d of burnisht ivory,
 The other all with silver overcast;
 And wakeful dogges before them far doe lye,
 Watching to banish Care, their enemy,
 Who oft is wont to trouble gentle Sleep.
 By them the Sprite doth passe in quietly,
*And unto Morpheus comes, whom drowned deepe,
 In drowsie fit he finds; of nothing takes he kepe.*

And, more, to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe;
 And ever drizzling raine upon the loft,
 Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
 Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne,
 No other noise, nor people's troublous cries,
 As still are wont t' annoy the walled town,
 Might there be heard; but carelesse Quiet lyes
 Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemyes."¹

Thus sang Spenser: hearken now to Chaucer:

"This messenger tooke leve and went
 Upon his way, and never did he stent,
 Till he came to the darke valley
 That stant betweene rockes twey,
 There never yet grew corne ne grass,
 Ne tree, ne naught that aught was,
 Beast ne man, ne naught else,
Save that there were a few wells
Came rennen fro the cliffes adowne
That made a dedly sleeping sowne,
 And rennen down right by a cave
 That was under a rocke ygrave,
 Amid the valley wonder deepe,
There these goddes lay aslepe
 Morpheus and Eclympastiere
 That was the god of slepe's heir,
That slept, and did none other werke."

Spenser's description of Archimago's hermitage has been highly lauded:

¹ F. Queen, book I., canto 1., st. 39, 40, 41.

“ A little lowly hermitage it was,
Down in a dale, hard by a forest’s side ;”

almost identical with the widowe’s cottage, in the Nonnes Preeste’s Tale :

“ A poure widowe, somdel stoupen in age,
Was whilom dwelling *in a narwe cotage,*
Beside a grove, standing in a dale.”

Indeed Chaucer thoroughly understood what were the requisites of a “ snuggery.” Describing the Reve’s house, he says :

“ His wonning was full faire upon an heth,
With grene trees yshadowed was the place.”

These resemblances might be followed out almost indefinitely, particularly in descriptions of rural scenery and the music of birds: but we refrain, lest it prove distasteful, or be tortured into a reflection upon the genius or honor of Spenser; who could easily dispense with the title over much more than we dare claim as Chaucer’s, and would still be rich in the stores of his own glorious fancies.

We are now very naturally led to a consideration of the professed imitations or translations of Chaucer, by Prior, Pope, Gay, Wordsworth, Dryden, and others. Of these, Dryden’s only are worthy of notice. Prior’s attempts are disgusting for their obscenity, and are totally destitute of poetic merit; and Gay’s insignificant imitations deserve a similar meed. Those by Pope were the effusions of precocious youth, and are characterized by a pert smartness entirely unlike Chaucer. They suggest the idea of infancy assuming the “ port and gesture ” of robust manhood, or the wig and staff of “ venerable eld.” Wordsworth, at the same time that he manifests the highest deference for his original, and is careful to preserve its integrity complete, infuses

upon it and through it an artistic smartness and coldness, and a modern twang, which contrasts strangely with its startling and antique ideas. It is as if a worn, old painting were transferred to a new frame sparkling with gilt and varnish. The result is unqualified dissonance. The same points, in a less degree, lie against Dryden that have been adduced in censure of Wordsworth, while he is far less scrupulous in his regard for Chaucer's original, which he amplifies and dilutes: and his rank as an inferior poet is made more plainly evident from his prolonged measuring of his powers by that of his superior. But Dryden's "Tales" are something more than mere translations, and merit the title of complete and independent poems. They do not abound in awkward comminglings of old and new phrases; nor do we observe in them the still greater outrages upon taste and good sense which signalize the other numerous imitations of our poet, and which consist in graceless collocations of antique and modern ideas, or in the mere fitting of an antiquated style upon insignificant and unmeaning thoughts. His translations are an honorable and laborious tribute to Chaucer's genius, and a powerful attempt, in opposition to high authority, to introduce to his countrymen the Father of English Poetry. They are characterized by ease, energy, and harmony, and, we may add, by no small degree of self-confidence—a property in which "glorious John" was by no means deficient. For, having observed a want of polish, a mingling of "trivial things with those of greater moment," and an "excess of conceits" in Chaucer, he rashly dared to polish, to prune, and to adorn him. He thus defends his course: "Having observed this redundancy in Chaucer (as it is an easy matter for a man of ordinary parts to find a fault in one of greater), I have not tied myself to a literal translation; *but have often omitted* what I judged unnecessary, or not of dignity enough to appear in company of better thoughts. I have presumed farther, in some places, *and added somewhat of my own,*

when I thought my author was deficient, and had not given his thoughts their true lustre, for want of words in the beginning of our language." Not content with this, but spirited on by his first rashness, to still higher presumption, he adds proudly, "what beauties I lose in some places, I give to others which had them not originally."

Usually it is the fate of a great poet who falls into the hands of translators, to be shorn of many a gem, and to have his shining vesture parted among them. Such is Chaucer's lot even with Dryden, who unhappily forgets that Chaucer's beauties and his own are very different affairs, possessing different degrees of intrinsic value; and that, although he may elevate his own thoughts by engrafting them upon Chaucer's original, he at the same time debases it. Hence, when we take up his translations, it is not Chaucer whom we read: just as Allston's *Belshazzar's Feast* by Mr. Spear is nevertheless not Allston's. It is true, Dryden generally preserves the beauties of his original—or, rather, "imparts noble hints" of them—but they are shorn of their simplicity, and obscured by a fluent loquaciousness, and rendered effeminate and wearisome by being appareled in a constantly recurring triplet, and a regular and perfect rhyme. This last, however, was an essential feature of the Dryden and Pope school, by which such trivialties were raised to a monstrous significance, and for which they discarded the—to us—far more valuable quality that Dryden observed in Chaucer's style, and which he compared to the "rude sweetness of a Scotch tune."

While most of our great poets unite in sounding the praise of Chaucer, we cannot fail to observe that Spenser and Dryden only studied him. Even they were directed by totally different views. Spenser sought to give vigor to his muse by nurturing it at the feet of his great master, and by training it under his guidance and companionship. With dignified humility he prayed that his master's mantle might fall upon him, and in his writings was re-

produced the electric spark of Chaucer's mighty genius. Spenser's homage of the elder poet was profoundly reverential; for he was an undoubted child of song, and owed to his ancestor a filial regard. Dryden, on the contrary, the father of a modern school of poetry, owed him no allegiance of affection. He did not study him duteously as a model, but carpingly as a critic. A second Canute, he arrogantly prescribed rules for, and would fain fetter, the mighty billows of genius. A child of art, he was chiefly solicitous for artistic excellence, and prided himself upon the skilful disposition of words, and the construction of splendid or musical sentences. He was more careful to shape sentiments by the measure of critical propriety, than he was able to evoke such as should be radiant with originality. Consequently he is more desirous to clothe Chaucer in a modern garb, of unexceptionable fashion and finish, than he is to exhibit the wondrous grace, and symmetry, and strength of the form which it protects. He covers him with glittering ornaments, that are nearly fatal to the beauty he would make apparent: and we heartily long to see the limbs of the old-time poet clad in those appropriate and simple robes, so necessary to their freedom, and dignity, and ease.

Although Dryden's study of our poet did not in any wise affect his original compositions—not so far as to lend them a single beauty; yet the "Tales" display a simplicity and manliness, an earnest sense of the pathetic and beautiful, and a descriptive and dramatic power foreign to himself and worthy of the poet he copies. With him, ordinarily, passion is the offspring or slave of reason, and always appears under the same form and garb; but while he translates from Chaucer he is transported with real and impulsive passion. Nevertheless, not even by Dryden is the full stature of our poet shown; his descriptions are more studied, and owe their perfection to repeated and labored touches; they partake more of the exquisite though petty finish of a miniature, than of the lofty dignity of an historical, or the witching beauty of a landscape,

painting. In his satire also—and satire was Dryden's peculiar element—there is less of the calm self-possession of power, far less of that honest indignation which is void of malice, and boldly hurls its shaft at principles, regardless of men; and more of acridness, and venom, and peevish selfishness. Though immeasurably superior to all other translations or imitations of Chaucer, they are yet like the French translations of Shakspeare's tragedies; often forcing a smile where the simple pathos of the original would have compelled a tear.

In proof of the truth of the foregoing strictures upon Dryden's *Tales*, compare the following description of a painting in the Temple of Venus with the original.

“The goddess' self, some noble hand had wrought;
Smiling she seem'd and full of pleasing thought:
From Ocean as she first began to rise,
And smoothed the ruffled seas, and cleared the skies;
She trode the brine, all bare below the breast,
And the green waves but ill-concealed the rest;
A lute she held; and on her head was seen
A wreath of roses red and myrtles green:
Her turtles fann'd the buxom air above;
And by his mother stood an infant Love;
With wings unfledg'd, his eyes were banded o'er,
His hands a bow, his back a quiver bore,
Supply'd with arrows bright and keen, a deadly store.”

Still more apparent is Dryden's inferiority, in his translation of Chaucer's grand description of the Temple of Mars.

“The landscape was a forest wide and bare;
Where neither beast nor human kind repair;
The fowl that scent afar, the borders fly,

And shun the bitter blast, and wheel about the sky.
A cake of scurf lies baking on the ground
And prickly stubs, instead of trees are found ;
Or woods with knots, and knares deformed and old ;
Headless the most and hideous to behold ;
A rattling tempest through the branches went,
That stripped them bare, and one sole way they bent.
Heav'n froze above, severe, the clouds congeal !
And thro' the crystal vault appear'd the standing hail.
Such was the face without, a mountain stood
Threat'ning from high and overlooked the wood ;
Beneath the lowering brow, and on a bent,
The temple stood of Mars armipotent ;
The frame of burnished steel, that cast a glare
From far, and seemed to thaw the freezing air.
A straight, long entry, to the temple led,
Blind with high walls and horror over head ;
Then issued such a blast, and hollow roar,
As threatened from the hinge to heave the door ;
In, through that door, a northern light there shone ;
'Twas all it had, for windows were there none,
The gate was adamant ; eternal frame !
Which hewed by Mars himself, from Indian quarries came.
The labor of a god ; and all along
Tough iron plates were clench'd to make it strong.
A tun about was every pillar there ;
A polished mirror shone not half so clear.
There saw I how the secret felon wrought,
And treason laboring in the traitor's thought ;
And midwife time the ripened plot, to murder brought.
There the red anger dared the pallid fear ;
Next stood hypocrisy, with holy leer :
Soft smiling and demurely looking down,

But hid the dagger underneath the gown :
Th' assassinating wife, the household fiend ;
And far the blackest there, the traitor friend.
On t'other side there stood destruction brave ;
Unpunished rapine, and a waste of war.
Contest, with sharpened knives in cloysters drawn,
And all with blood bespread the holy lawn.
Loud menaces were heard, and foul disgrace,
And bawling infamy, in language base ;
Till sense was lost in sound, and silence left the place.
The slayer of himself yet saw I there,
The gore congealed was clotted in his hair ;
With eyes half closed, and gaping mouth he lay,
And grin, as when he breathed his sullen soul away.
In midst of all the dome, misfortune sat,
And gloomy discontent, and fell debate ;
And madness laughing in his ireful mood,
And arm'd complaint and theft ; and cries of blood.
There was the murdered corpse in covert laid,
And violent death in thousand shapes displayed :
The city to the soldier's rage resigned ;
Successless wars, and poverty behind ;
Ships burnt in fight, or forc'd on rocky shores,
And the rash hunter strangled by the boars ;
The new born babe by nurses overlaid,
And the cook caught within the raging fire he made.
All ill of Mars his nature, flame and steel ;
The gasping charioteer, beneath the wheel
Of his own car ; the ruin'd house that falls
And intercepts her lord betwixt the walls :
The whole division that to Mars pertains,
All trades of Death that deal in steel for gains,
Were there ; the butcher, armorer, and smith,

Who forges sharpened falchions, or the scythe.
The scarlet conquest on a tower was placed,
With soldiers' shouts and acclamations graced :
A pointed sword hung threatening o'er his head,
Sustained but by a slender twine of thread."

CHAPTER V.

Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.—Analysis of the Prologue.

THE several elegant critics who have undertaken to point out the beauties of Chaucer, unite in expressing the warmest admiration for the felicitous prologue with which he prefaces his *Canterbury Tales*; and by which he unfolds the plan of his fable and displays his characters. Especially have they united in commending the rich humor which impregnates it; and in noticing that by it "is transmitted to posterity, such an accurate contemporaneous picture of ancient manners, of the pursuits and employments, the customs and diversions of our ancestors, copied from the life and represented with equal truth and spirit, as is possessed by no other nation."¹

Some, however, have been dissatisfied because Chaucer did not here delineate the characteristics, the foibles, the graces, and the employments of the nobility of his age, as well as of the lower classes. But it should be remembered that every essential char-

¹ Warton's *Hist. Eng. Poetry*, Vol. 1. To which those who desire a more intimate acquaintance with Chaucer are also referred, for an elegant and sprightly analysis of the characters in the Prologue; as well as for a discriminating criticism of that poet's writings generally. This admirable performance ought always to be published with the author whom it so beautifully illustrates. Indeed, it is chiefly to the fine taste of Warton, and the critical sagacity of Tyrwhitt, that we and our posterity owe the warmest gratitude, for having rescued from a mass of literary ruin, the riches of our old-time Bard. And we here acknowledge that to them and the polished George Ellis, the writer is indebted for the readings and interpretations of Chaucer which appear in these pages.

acteristic of the nobility, finds its counterpart in the great mass composed of the middling and lower classes. And that they not only form and direct the opinions of an age, but also furnish the most universal picture of real life. Those poets whose names are immortal have preferred to describe man as a species, and have seldom confined themselves to a class. They seize upon those universal attributes of humanity which are paramount to the artificial divisions of society, or the more arbitrary ones of time. They choose for their burden the gigantic crimes of man, or the nobler and more genial theme of his virtues, rather than the trappings of his social condition. They never caricature the whole race, for the sake of hitting off the staring outlines of an eccentric individual; but from the round of manners and habits, of emotions, passions, affections and processes of thought, select such as are held in common, though shared in varying degrees by all mankind. When, for instance, Shakspeare portrays the ignoble vice of cowardice in the person of Parolles, the vice does not depend upon the military gewgaws which invest it to excite our ridicule or disgust. Nor is the "infinite humor" of invincible Sir John Falstaff dependent upon his baronetcy or his obesity. That most vicious tyrant Richard the Third, whose detestable treachery our immortal Bard has depainted in such terrific characters, is the object of our hatred, just so far as he was a most abandoned and cruel man. The revengeful and obdurate Shylock excites our repugnance, and causes our hands to clench in anger, not because he is a Jew or a Miser, but because he repudiates and outrages the tenderest attributes of our humanity. And here lies the universal intelligibility and success of Shakspeare, that the crimes or virtues, the passions and customs delineated, are peculiar to no class or rank; but will apply to all of the species, in every age.

If Chaucer displayed wisdom by his choice of the middle classes, as the best point from which to observe and describe the men of England in the fourteenth century; it is by his skilful groupings

of the characters drawn from thence ; by his happy arrangement of the petty peculiarities of each individual ; and by his harmonious blending of the variant lights and shadows of their diverse characters, that his artistical ability and his poetical sensibility is chiefly made evident. And thus is his poetry impregnated with that invaluable quality which, without derogating from its higher attributes, affords us at this remote day a more accurate description of persons ; their manners, habits, customs and apparel ; and of the different degrees of superstition, of education, and of refinement possessed by each, than we can derive from the most creditable contemporaneous historians. Observe the ample fulness mingled with sententious brevity which signalize the following selections, descriptive of a young "SQUIER" and his "YEMAN." At one glance we scan their persons and habiliments ; we note the shades of gaiety or of respectful sobriety apposite to each ; we perceive the light-hearted gallantry, the refinements and accomplishments, together with the fondness for dress and finery so gracefully appropriate to him who was "as fresh as is the month of May ;" and also the less dazzling, but equally picturesque and manly decorations of his humbler companion. And we insensibly become as well acquainted with their several avocations, as if we were contemporaries or spectators.

" With him ther was his sone a young Squier,
 A lover and a lusty bachelor,
 With lockes crull¹ as they were laid in presse.
 Of twenty yere of age he was I gesse.
 Of his stature he was of even lengthe,²
 And wonderly deliver,³ and grete of strengthe.
 Embrouded⁴ was he, as it were a mede
 Alle ful of fresshe floures, white and rede.
 Singing he was, or floyting⁵ alle the day,

¹ Curled.² Of a medium size.³ Wonderfully agile or nimble.⁴ Embroidered.⁵ Playing upon the flute.

He was as fresshe as is the moneth of May.
Short was his goune, with sleves long and wide.
Wel coude he sitte on hors, and fayre ride.
He coude songes make, and wel endite,
Juste and eke dance, and wel pourtraie and write.

Curteis he was, lowly and servisable,
And carf before his fader at the table.

A Yeman hadde he, and servantes no mo
At that time, for him luste to ride so ;
And he was cladde in cote and hode of grene.
A shefe of peacock arwes bright and kene
Under his belt he bare ful thriftily .

Wel coude he dresse his takel yemanly :
His arwes drouped not with fetheres lowe,
And in his hond he bare a mighty bowe.

A not-hed hadde he, with a broune visage,
Of wood-craft coude he wel alle the usage.
Upon his arme he bare a gaie bracier,
And by his side a swerd and bokeler,
And on that other side a gaie daggere,
Harneised wel, and sharp as point of spere :
A Cristofre on his brest of silver shene.
An horne he bare, the baudrik was of grene.
A forster was he sothely as I gesse."

The "tendre hearted Prioress" having already occupied our attention,¹ we pass on to the next character in Chaucer's panoramic description. This is a MONK, one of those drones who fed upon the toil and sweat of the people ; and at the same time forged the iron chain of superstition, which bowed their necks in disgraceful servitude. Right merrily does Chaucer belabor his lusty shoulders.

¹ See page 34.

First he recounts the tastes and accomplishments of this son of the cross :

“ A Monk ther was, a fayre for the maistrie,
 An outrider, that loved venerie ;¹
 A manly man to ben an abbot able.
 Ful many a dainte hors hadde he in stable :
 And whan he rode, men mighte his bridel here
 Gingeling² in a whistling wind as clere,
 And eke as loude, as doth the chapell belle
 Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.”

He remarks the scrupulous attention of this holy man to the rules of his order, and encouragingly defends his logic and his practice :

“ The rule of Seint Maure and of Seint Benoit,
 Because *that it was olde and somdele streit*,
 This ilke³ monke lette olde thinges pace,
 And held after the newe worlde the trace.
 He yave not of the text a pulled hen,
 That saith, that hunters ben not holy men ;
 Ne that a monk, whan he is rekkeles,⁴
 Is like to a fish that is waterles ;
 And I say his opinion was good.
 What shulde he studie, and make himselven wood,

¹ Hunting

² Anciently, no person seems to have been gallantly equipped on horseback, unless the horse's bridle was stuck full of bells. Wickliffe, in his Trialoge, inveighs against the Priests for their “ fair hors, and jolly and gay saddles, and bridles ringing by the way.”—Warton's His. Eng. Poetry, Vol. i., p. 164.

³ Same

⁴ Lawless.

Upon a book in cloistre alway to pore,
 Or swinken with his hondes, and laboure
 As Austin bit¹ how shal the world be served ?
 Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.
 Therefore he was a prickasour² a right ;
 Greihoundes he hadde as swift as foul of flight :
 Of pricking and of hunting for the hare
 Was all his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.”

Instead of being clothed in coarse hair-cloth, and showing signs of his vigorous mortification of a sinful body, the poet says :—

“I saw his sleeves purfled at the hond
 With gris,³ and that the finest of the lond.
 And for to fasten his hood under his chinne
 He hadde of gold ywrought a curious pinne :
 A love-knotte in the greater end ther was.
 His hed 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 stepe and rolling in his hed,
 That stemed as a forneis of a led.
 His boutes souple, his hors in gret estat,
Now certainly he was a fayre prelat.
 He was not pale as a forpined⁴ gost
 A fat swan he loved best of any rost.”

The most disgusting characters in Chaucer's picture of his times, are this ungodly and greasy monk, and his compeers the FREERE and the PARDONERE. In position they sink far below the vulgar Miller ; who, though licentious and quarrelsome, was yet

¹ Bid.

² A hard rider.

³ Edged with fur or minever.

⁴ Wasted.

a "stout carle for the nones," and relieved his ruffianly ferocity by manliness and blunt wit. Hiding his lasciviousness under the appearance of a "ful solempne man," the Frere ravaged the country as a confessor to stupid men and simple women; fleeing the pockets of the one and debasing the honor of the other.

"In all the ordres four is non that can
 So moche of daliance and fayre langage.
 Ful swetely herde he confession
 And plesant was his absolution.
 He was an esy man to give penance
 There as he wiste to han a good pitance.
 His tippet was ay farsed^t ful of knives
 And pinnes for to given fayre wives.
 And certainly he hadde a merry note,
 Wel coude he singe and plaien on a rote.
 And in his harping, whan that he hadde songe,
 His eyen twinkled in his hed aright,
 As don the sterres in a frosty night.
 Thereto he strong was as a champioun,
 And knew wel the tavernes in every toune,
 And every hosteler and gay tapstere,
 Better than a lazar or a beggere,
 For unto swiche a worthy man as he
 Accordeth naught, as by his faculte
 To haven with sike lazars acquaintance.
 It is not honest, it may not avance."

Equally caustic and humorous is his ridicule of the PARDONERE. His hair is yellow and smooth as flax; and it overspreads his shoulders with curls. As he rode thus, with his hood off and "trussed up in his wallet," being also "bret-ful of pardon, come from Rome all hote."

Stuffed.

“ Ful loude he sang, Come hither, love, to me.
 A vois he hadde, as small as hath a gote,
 No berd hadde he, ne never non shulde have,
 As smoothe it was as it were newe shave ;
 I trow he were a gelding or a mare.”

After thus artfully making us aware of his lecherous disposition and his effeminate appearance, the poet displays the wares in which this sleek sinner dealt, and with which it was his custom (and perhaps his boast), to make the “ parson and the people his apes.”

“ In his mail he hadde a pilwebere,¹
 Which, as he saide, was our ladies veil :
 He saide, he hadde a gobbet² of the seyl
 Thatte Seint Peter had, whan that he went
 Upon the see, till Jesu Crist him hent,³
 He had a crois of laton⁴ ful of stones,
 And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.
 But with these relikes, whanne that he fond
 A poure persone dwelling up on land
 Upon a day he gat him more monie
 Than that the parsone gat in monethes tweie.”

Of such as these were the religious orders composed, when Chaucer, and Wickliffe, and Longland, in a spirit of honest patriotism, determined to expose their vile courses. To England, they were like the plague of lice, which of old covered all the borders of Egypt. Swarming over the land in countless numbers, “as thick as motes in the sonne-beme,” hostile to each other it is true, but leagued together in fastening their superstitions and deceptions

¹ Covering of a pillow, or pillow-case.

² Morsel or bit.

³ Saved.

⁴ A cross of brass metal.

upon the people—it might truly be said of these reptiles, that they “came up into the houses, and into the bed-chambers, and upon the beds, and into the houses of the servants, and upon the people.” Or, they were like the lean kine in Pharaoh’s dream, that destroyed those that were “well favored and fat-fleshed.” For, these foreign mendicants were first introduced, in order to correct the licentiousness, dissipation and negligence of the regular monastics: whom, indeed, they soon eradicated, after having adopted their vices; which were also engrafted upon ambition the most unbounded, arrogance the most intolerable, and the most degraded superstitions. They also became an intolerable burthen to the state—in affairs of which they presumed to meddle and direct—since they were endowed by the Pope, among other immunities, with the privilege of travelling everywhere without liability to charge, and were absolved from all municipal taxes, had access to all ranks, and were the accredited confessors, the commissioned instructors of the youth and the women of the land. Even the garb of religion was thrown off unblushingly; that respect to appearances which policy has usually required to be observed, was disregarded. The most palpable frauds and artifices were used in order to enrich and enlarge the various convents; and the most licentious desires, the most damnable crimes were hidden under the flimsy coverings of the grey, white, or black friars.¹ As was perfectly natural, these mendicants were the creatures of the Pope, and stubbornly maintained his supremacy in opposition to the authority of the prelates of the Anglican Church. Hence they become equally obnoxious to the patriot and the Christian.

We should not apply the corrupt practices of these infamous

¹ A century and three quarters before Chaucer’s time, the mendicant orders had begun to be scandalized by the intolerable licentiousness of individuals of their class. And a curious specimen of poetical raiillery, addressed against them, in the twelfth century, is yet extant, and is quoted in the appendix.

beings to the native rural clergy; who, several centuries earlier, having been despoiled of the licentiousness which prevailed among them, at the same time with their wealth and luxury, had in the time of Chaucer, become generally a pure and simple-minded class, probably delineated from the life in the character of the "POURE PERSONNE." This noble character, contrasting brightly against the lurid pictures of vice we have been considering, affords a model for imitation to this day. It was appropriated by Dryden—who also amended and enlarged without improving it—to the celebrated Bishop Ken.

“He was a poure Personne of a town :
 But rich he was of holy thought and werk.
 He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
 That Criste’s gospel trewely wolde preche.
 Benigne hé was, and wonder diligent,
 And in adversitie full patient :
 Ful loth were him to cursen for his tithes,
 But rather wolde he yeven¹ out of doute,
 Unto his poure parishens² about,
 Of his offering, and eke of his substance.
 Wide was his parish, and houses far asonder,
 But he ne left nought for no rain ne thonder,
 In sikenesse and in mischief to visite,
 The ferrest in his parish, moche and lite,³
 Upon his fete, and in his hand a staf.
 This noble ensample to his shepe he yaf,
 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 shuld iron do ?

¹ Give.² Parishioners.³ Great and small

For if a preest be foule, on whom we trust,
 No wonder is a lewed man to rust,
 And shame it is, if that a preest take kepe,
 To see a foule shepherd, and clene shepe.
 Wel ought a preest ensample for to yeve,
 By his clenenesse, how his shepe shulde live.
 He dwelt at home, and kepte wel his folde,
 So that no wolf ne made it not miscarrie.
 He was a shepherd and no mercenarie.
 And though he holy were, and vertuous,
 He was to sinful men not dispitous,¹
 Ne of his speche dangerous ne digne,²
 But in his teching discrete and benigne.
 To drawn folk to heven, with fairenesse,
 By good ensample, was his besinesse:
 He waited after no pompe ne reverence,
 Ne maked him no spiced conscience,
 But Criste's love, and his Apostles twelve
 He taught, but first he folwed it himselve."³

The burly MILLER is a thorough John Bull of the lower class; straight-forward, blunt, fearless, independent, and with a steady eye to the main-chance; given moreover, as all true Millers in every age and country are, to feats of strength and to the recital of marvellous tales. His portrait is nobly executed.

"Ful bigge he was of braun, and eke of bones;
 That proved wel, for over all there he came,
 At wrastling he wold bere away the ram.
 He was short shouldered, brode, a thikke gnarre,⁴
 Ther n'as⁴ no dore, that he n'olde⁵ heve of barre,

¹ Angry in excess.

² Proud.

³ Knot.

⁴ Was not.

⁵ Would not.

Or breke it at a renning with his hede.
 His berd as any sowe or fox was rede,
 And thereto brode, as though it were a spade.
 Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
 A wert, and thereon stode a tuft of haire,
 Rede as the bristles of a sowe's eares.
 His nose-thirles, blacke were and wide.
 A swerd and bokeler bare he by his side.
 His mouth as wide was as a forneis.
 He was a jangler¹ and a goliardeis,²
 And that was most of sinne, and harlotries.
 Wel coude he stelen corne, and tollen thries.
 And yet he had a thombe of gold parde³.
 A white cote, and a blew hode wered he.
 A bagge pipe wel coude he blowe and sounne,
 And therewithal he brought us out of toune."

The good WIF OF BATHE, as self-assured as Miss Abby Kelly, and we opine, in addition thereto, a "curst shrew," merits our passing attention. Masculine and severe, she was also tidy and industrious; with notions of finery as peculiar to her age and station, as they are appropriate to Chaucer's humorous picture of her.

"Hire coverchiefs weren full fine of ground;
 I dorste swere they weyeden a pound,
 That on the Sondag were upon hire hed.
 Hire hosen were of fine scarlet rede,
 Ful strait yteyed, and shoon ful moist and newe;
 Upon an ambler esily she sat,
 Ywimpled⁴ wel, and on hire hede an hat,

¹ A great talker.

² A joker.

³ An honest miller was said to have a thumb of gold.

⁴ Covered with a hood or wimple.

As brode as is a bokeler, or a targe.
 A fote-mantel¹ about hire hippes large,
 And on her fete a pair of spurres sharpe."

Although not remarkably straight-laced in her morality, she was yet a scrupulous attendant upon the church services, at which she bore a prominent part, and "thries hadde she been at Jerusalem."

"In al the parish, wif ne was ther none
 That to the offering before hire shulde gon,
 And if ther did, certain so wroth was she
 That she was out of alle charitee."

The principal remaining characters are a Reve, a Frankelein, a Sompnour, a Doctor, a Shipman or Sailor, and a Clerk of Oxenforde. These few personages, and the tales which they relate, effectually introduce to our presence most of the various classes that then existed in England. The REVE was at that period an officer of great importance to his master, whose affairs he guided; to the yeomanry with whom he was brought in frequent contact, as the tenants, clients and dependents of his master, and to the lesser gentry by whom he was frequently consulted upon various matters of police, of farming, and of traffic, as the representative of his lord. As his likeness is drawn with great care it is subjoined, somewhat at length.

"The Reve was a slendre colerike man,
 His berd was shave, as neighe as ever he can:
 His hair was by his eres round yshorne.
 His top was docked like a preest beforne;
 Ful longe were his legges, and ful lean,
 Ylike a staff, ther was no calf ysene.
 Wel coude he keep a garner and a binne:
 Ther was non auditor coude on him winne.

¹ A riding skirt.

Wel wiste he by the drought and by the rain,
 The yelding of his seed, and of his grain.
 His lordes shepe, his nete, and his deirie,¹
 His swine, his hors, his store, and his pultrie,
 Were holly in this reves governing,
 And by his covenant yave he rekening,
 Sin that his lord was twenty yere of age ;
 Ther coude no man bring him in average.
 Ther n'as bailliff, ne herde, ne other hine,
 That he ne knew his sleight and his covine :
 They were adradde of him, as of the deth.
 His wonning² was full fayre upon an heth,
 With grene trees yshadewed was his place.
 He coude better than his lord purchase,
 Ful riche he was ystored privily.
 His lord wel coude he plesen subtilly,
 To yeve³ and lene him of his owen good,
 And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood.
 In youthe he lerned hadde a good mistere,
 He was a wel good wright, a carpentere.
 This reve sate upon a right good stot⁴
 That was all pomelee grey, and highte Scot.
 A long surcote of perse⁵ upon he hade,
 And by his side he bare a rusty blade.
 Tucked he was, as is a frere, aboute,
 And ever he rode the hinderest of the route."

The FRANKELEIN, like the Miller, is a true John Bull, elevated and adorned by the characteristic virtue of the English country gentleman,—hospitality ; as well as by those softer shadows which must be supposed to have meliorated the lot of one so far the

¹ Dairy.² Dwelling.³ Give and lend.⁴ Stallion.⁵ Sky-colored cloth.

social superior of the other. To make his resemblance to the hearty class above-mentioned more perfect, it must also be remembered that he was a great lover of good wine:—

“ An housholder and that a grete was he ;
 Seint Julian¹ he was in his contree.
 His brede, his ale, was always after on ;
 A better envyned² man was no wher non.
 Withouten bake meat never was his hous,
 Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous,
 It snewed in his hous of meat and drinke,
 Of alle deinties that men coud of thinke,
 After the sondry sesons of the yere,
 So changed he his mete and his soupere.
 Ful many a partrich hadde he in mewe,
 And many a breme,³ and many a luce⁴ in stewe.*
 Wo was his coke, but if his sauce were
 Poinant and sharp, and redy all his gear.
 His table dormant in his halle alway
 Stode redy covered alle the longe day.”

The *SOMPNOUR* is a memento of an execrable class long since happily extinguished. He was an officer of one of the ecclesiastical courts, with duties and a rank analogous to those of our constable. Being the incumbent of an office that was far from respectable or popular, he was also very ignorant; and his drunken attempts to display his learning are supremely ludicrous. The gross and disgusting nature of his tastes and vices is made apparent by the foul diseases which have the mastery over him; and thus by a fine touch of art the poet possesses us with the same personal repugnance for an abandoned and mercenary class, as actuated himself and his countrymen. For the *Sompnour* of

¹ St. Julian was the patron of housekeepers.

² A kind of fish.

³ Pike.

⁴ Stored with wine.

^{*} Pond.

the days of Edward the Third was as little beloved by the people, as the collector of tithes or of the excise is at this day in Scotland and Ireland.

“He hadde a fire-red cherubinne’s face,
 For sausefleme¹ he was, with eyen narwe.
 As hote he was, and likerous as a sparwe,
 With scalled² browes blake, and pilled berd ;
 Of his visage children were sore aferd.
 Ther n’as quicksilver, litarge, ne brimston,
 Boras, ceruse, ne oile of tartre non,
 Ne oinement that wolde clense or bite,
 That him might helpen of his whelkes white,³
 Ne of the knobbes sitting on his chekes.
 Wel loved he garlike, onions, and lekes,
 And for to drinke strong win as rede as blood.
 And whan that he well dronken had the win,
 Then wold he speken no word but Latin.
 A fewe terms coude he, two or three,
 That he had lerned out of some decree.
 He was a gentil harlot and a kind ;
 A better felaw shulde a man not find.
 He wulde suffre for a quart of wine,
 A good felaw to have his concubine,
 A twelve-month, and excuse him at the full.”

The CLERKE OF OXENFORDE throve not so well upon his love of learning as did the Sompnour upon his “garlike, onions, and lekes,” and “strong win as rede as blood.” His whole equipage and apparel give evidence of the severe mortification which poverty often visits upon the followers of literature :—

¹ Red and pimples.

² Scabby.

³ Foul running sores.

“As lene was his hors as is a rake,
 And he was not right fat, I undertake;
 But loked holwe,¹ and therto soberly.
 Ful thredbare was his overest courtepy.²
 He was nought worldly to have an office.”

Exquisitely drawn, also, are the descriptions of the Shipman or Sailor, and the Doctor of Physike. The frank and fierce nature of the one contrasts powerfully against the cold and pedantic manners of the other. And yet we must acknowledge that, if we should encounter the former upon a lone highway, it would be with strong misgivings. For, although we have Chaucer's word for it that he “certainly was a good felaw,” still we fancy not the dagger which is so ostentatiously suspended from his neck; and think we can discern in his face, so “brown of hewe,” that brave but unscrupulous and piratical spirit which a century or two later covered the seas with freebooters, and laid the foundations of England's mighty naval power. Nor do we experience an increase of confidence in him, as we read the list of his questionable graces:

“Ful many a draft of winne he hadde draw
 From Burdeaux ward, while that the chapman slepe.
 If that he fought, and hadde the higher hand,
 By water he sent hem home to every land.
 Hardy he was and wise I undertake,
 With many a tempest hadde his berd be shake.”

The literal frankness of the closing lines of this quotation, and their perfect embodiment of the most poetical aspect of a sailor's rough fortunes, are inimitable.

We now turn to the genial character of the Hoste of the Tabard, delineated with such signal ability by our poet. “Oure

¹ Hollow.

² His short cloak.

hoste" is "bold of his speche," yet "wise and well ytaught," and respectful to rank and worth. He is the possessor of strong good sense, an indomitable will, and great physical strength. Having mingled freely with men of all ranks, under cover of the license of a convivialist, he was thus naturally fitted to assume the leadership of a promiscuous mass, and to detect and control the conflicting interests and fiery tempers of the least scrupulous portion of it. Chaucer has chosen to make him a principal figure, and trusts to him for keeping alive the action of his plot. To a company accidentally gathered under his roof, this prince of landlords proposes that they should enliven their journey to Canterbury, whither they were wending, upon a pilgrimage, by telling tales and making mirth. In no wise distrustful of himself, he proffers his companionship and guidance. His offer is gladly accepted, and he is duly installed governor of the party, and the "juge and reporter of their tales." Thus, by common consent, "oure hoste," in addition to his being *ex-officio* caterer and marshal, is invested with a sort of critical prerogative; a power which he fearlessly uses, roundly to censure a prolix or tiresome speaker, and even to silence him, to curb his satires upon some companion, or to silence the clamors of those who may have been thus assailed.

This investiture of an inn-keeper with the robes of a critic, and the authority of leader over so numerous and respectable a company, may appear singular enough at this day: but was not so absolutely incongruous with the customs of the period when Chaucer wrote. At that time, a host was public property. His roof was common to all, and the same room, and even the same table, was often occupied by all the extremes of rank. From the bustling business qualities of his calling, and his habitude to marshal and array these various ranks in their just order, he was well and naturally calculated for an emergency like the present. His bold, self-confident, and boisterous manner recommended him

to the gentler class of pilgrims, whom it relieved from any obligations to entertain their companions of a day, and also shielded them from any undue familiarities.

But although "oure hoste" was thus bold, boisterous, self-reliant, and fit

"For to have been a marshall in an hall,"

yet, like many a wiser man, he succumbed to the "power of mighty love." For we have the passionate confession of this same Harry Bailly—frank and roystering Harry Bailly—that he had a wife "that of hire tongue a labbing (*blabbing*) shrewe was she!" That this "thorn in the side" of honest Harry was a most loveable helpmeet we do not doubt, if she possessed but a tithe of the accomplishments below enumerated :

"When ended was my tale of Melibee,
 And of Prudence, and hire benignitee,
 Our hoste saide ; as I am faithful man,
 And by the precious *corpus Madrian*,
 I had lever than a barrell of ale
 That good lefe¹ my wif had herde this tale ;
 For she n'is no swiche thing of patience
 As was this Melibeus wif Prudence.

By Goddes bones, whan I beat my knaves,
 She bringeth me the grete clobbed staves,
 And cryeth : Slee the dogges everich one,
 And breke hem bothe bak and every bone.

And if that any neighebor of mine,
 Wol not in chirche to my wife encline,
 Or be so hardy to hire to trespase,
 Whan she cometh home she rampeth² in my face,

¹ Dear.

² Flieth.

And cryeth : false coward, wreke¹ thy wif ;
 By *corpus Domini*, I wol have thy knif,
 And thou shalt have my distaff and go spinne,
 Fro day til night right thus she will beginne.

Alas, she saith, that ever I was yshape²
 To wed a milksop or a coward ape,
 That wol ben overlade with every wight !
 Thou darest not standen by thy wives right.

This is my lif, but if³ that I wol fight,
 And out at dore anon I mote⁴ me dight,
 Or elles I am lost, but if that I
 Be like a wilde leon, fool-hardy.

I wote wel she wol do me slee⁵ som day
 Som neighebour, and thanne go my way,
 For I am perilous with my knife in hond,
 Al be it that I dare not hire withstand ;
 For she is bigge in armes, by my faith,
 That shall he find, that hire misdoth or saith.
 But let us passe away fro this matere.

We leave the contemplation of this " charming woman " with as much satisfaction as honest Harry himself, and will now cover our retreat from a pleasing task by the exhibition of his compact and formidable portrait, as he proposed to be their companion and guide :

" Great chere made oure hoste us everich one,
 And to the souper sette he us anon :
 And served us with vittaile of the best.
 Strong was the wine, and wel to drinke us leste.⁶
 A semely man our hoste was with us alle
 For to han ben a marshal in an halle.

¹ Revenge.

² Fated.

³ Unless.

⁴ Must

⁵ She will cause me to slay.

⁶ We chose.

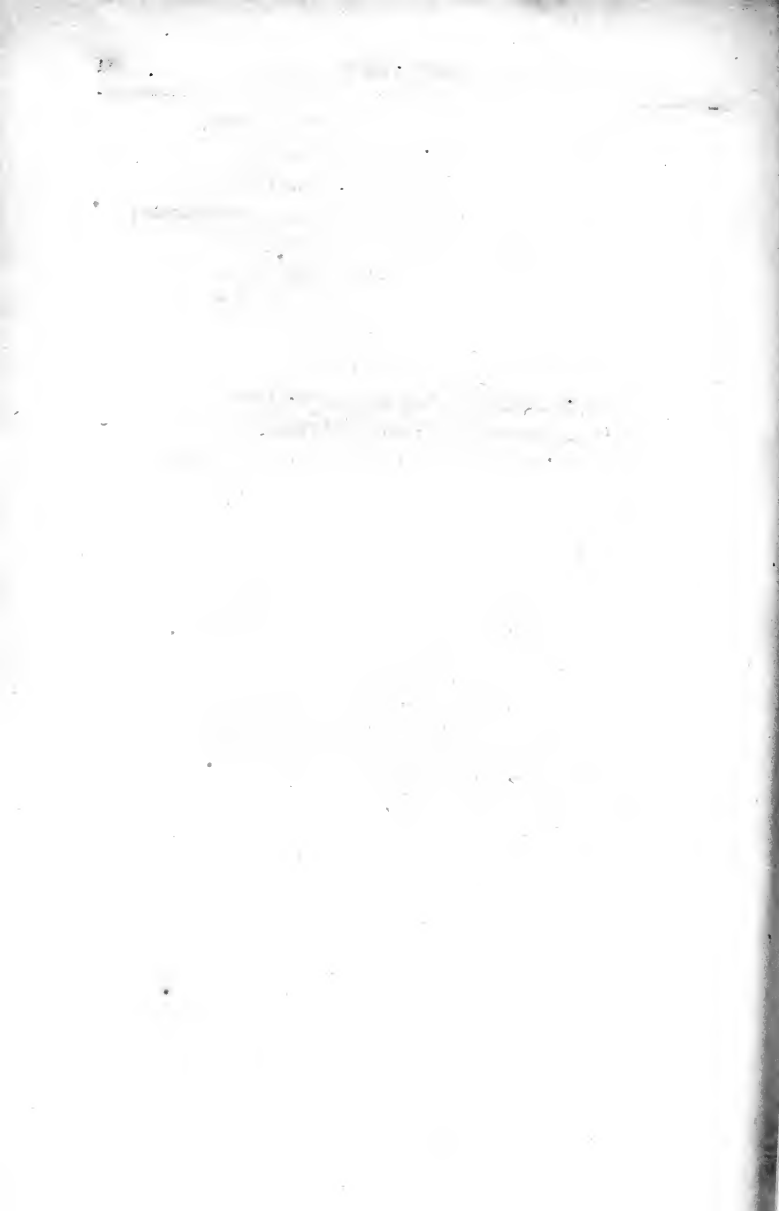
A large man he was with eyen stepe,
 A fairer burgess is there non in Chepe :¹
 Bold of his speche, and wise and well ytaught,
 And of manhood him lacked righte naught.
 Eke therto was he right a merry man,
 And after souper plaien he began,
 And spake of mirthe amonges other thinges,
 Whan that we hadden made our rekenninges ;
 And saide thus ; Now, lordinges, trewely
 Ye ben to me right welcome heartily :
 For by my trouthe, if that I shall not lie,
 I saw not this yere swiche a compaignie
 At ones in this herberwe,² as is now.
 Fayn wolde I do you mirth, and I wiste how.
 And of a mirthe I am right now bethought,
 To don you ease, and it shall cost you nought.
 Ye gon to Canterbury ; God you spede,
 The blissful martyr quite you your mede ;³
 And wel I wot, as ye gon by the way,
 Ye shapen you to talken and to play :
 For trewely comfort ne mirthe is non
 To riden by the way dombe as the ston ;
 And therfore wold I maken you disport,
 As I said erst, and don you some comfort.
 And if you liketh, alle by one assent
 Now for to stonden at my jugement :
 And for to werken as I shall you say
 To-morwe when ye riden on the way,
 Now by my fathers soule that is ded
 But ye be merry, smiteth off my hed.
 Holde up your hondes withouten more speche.
 Our conseil was not longe for to seche :⁴

¹ Cheapside.² Inn.³ Desert.⁴ Seek.

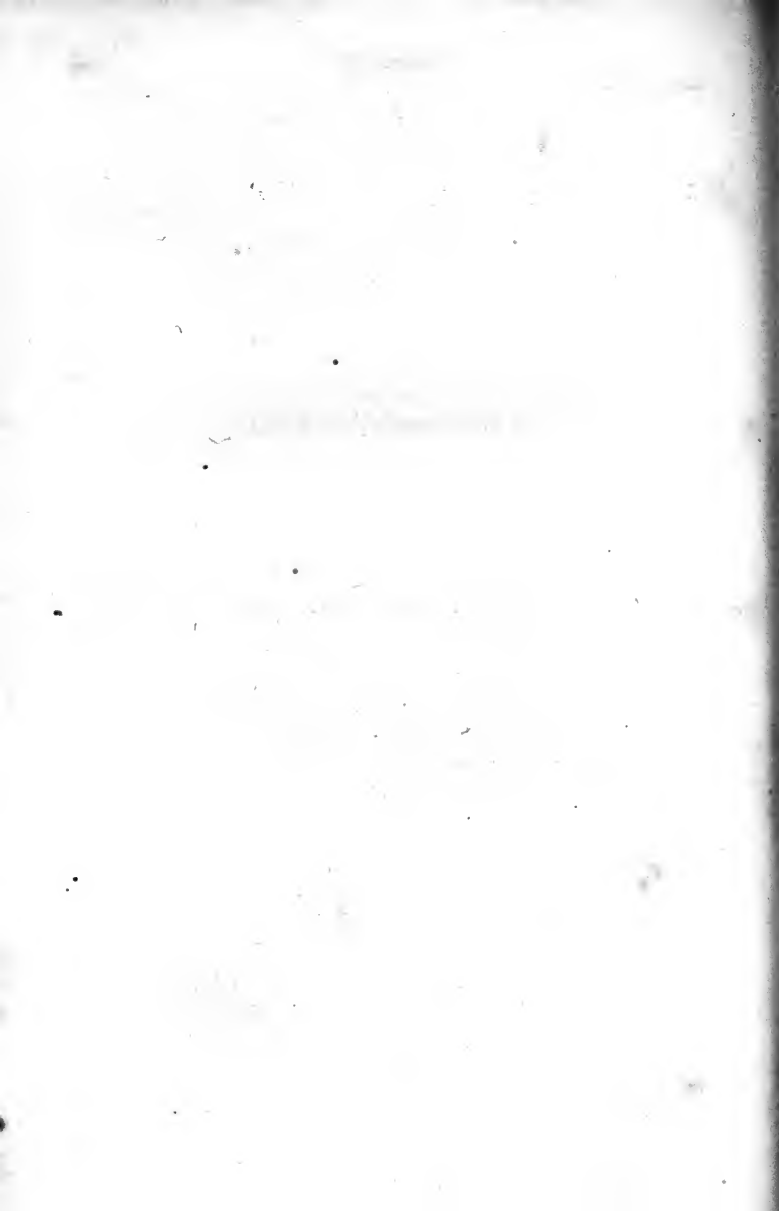
Us thought it was not worth to make it wise,
And granted him withouten more avise,
And bade him say his verdit as him leste.

Lordinges, quod he, now herkeneth for the beste ;
But take it not I pray you in disdain ;
This is the point, to speke it plat and plain,
That eche of you to shorten with your way,
In this viage, shal tellen tales twey,
To Canterbury-ward, I mene it so,
And homeward he shall tellen other two
Of adventures that whilom han befallē.
And which of you that beareth him best of alle,
That is to sayn, that telleth in this case
Tales of best sentence and most solas,
Shall have a souper at youre aller¹ cost
Here in this place, sitting by this post,
When that ye comen agen from Canterbury.
And for to maken you the more merry,
I wol myselven gladly with you ride,
Right at my owen cost, and be your guide.
And who that will my jugement withsay,
Shal pay for alle we spenden by the way.
And if ye vouchsafe that it be so,
Telle me anon, withouten wordes mo,
And I wol erly shapen me therefore.”

¹ At the cost of all.



SELECTIONS FROM CHAUCER.



I.

RURAL DESCRIPTIONS.



I.

A WALK.

I ROSE anone and thought I woulde gone
Into the woode to hear the birdes sing,
Whan that the misty vapour was agone,
And cleare and faire was the morning,
The dewe also like silver in shining
Upon the leaves, as any baume swete,
Till firy Titan with his persant¹ hete

Had dried up the lusty licour newe,
Upon the herbes in the grene mede,
And that the floures of many divers hue,
Upon hir² stalkes gon for to sprede,
And for to splay³ out *hir* leues in brede
Againe the Sunne, gold burned in his spere,
That doune to hem cast his beames clere.

¹ Piercing.

² Their.

³ Unfold or open.

And by a river forth I gan costay,¹
 Of water clere, as birell or cristall,
 Till at the last I found a little way,
 Toward a parke, enclosed with a wall,
 In compace rounde, and by a gate small,
 Who so that would, freely might gone
 Into this parke, walled with grene stone.

And in I went to heare the birdes song,
 Which on the branches, both in plaine and vale,
 So loud sang, that all the wood rong,
 Like as it should shiver in peeces small,
 And as me thought, that the nightingale
 With so great might, her voice gan out wrest
 Right as her herte for love would brest.²

The soil was plaine, smooth, and wonder soft,
 All oversprad with tapettes³ that Nature
 Had made herselfe : covered eke aloft
 With bowes grene, the floures for to cure,⁴
 That in *hir* beauty they may long endure
 From all assaut of Phebus fervent fere,⁵
 Which in his sphere so hote shone and clere.

The aire attempre,⁶ and the smooth wind
 Of Zepherus among the blosomes white,
 So holsome was, and so nourishing by kind,
 That smale buddes, and round blosomes lite,
 In maner gan of hir brethe delite,
 To yeve us hope there fruit shall take
 Ayenst autumnne redy for to shake.

¹ I went coastwise.² Burst.³ Tapestries.⁴ Save.⁵ Fire⁶ Temperate

I saw the Daphene closed under rinde,
 Greene laurer,¹ and the holsome pine,
 The mirre also that wepeth ever of kinde,
 The cedres hie, upright as a line,
 The filbert eke, that lowe doth encline
 Her bowes grene to the earth adoune
 Unto her knight called Demophoun.²

There sawe I eke the fresh hawthorne
 In white motley, that so swete doth smell,
 Ashe, firre and oke, with many a young acorn,
 And many a tree mo than I can tell,
 And me beforne I saw a little well
 That had his course, as I gan beholde,
 Under an hill with quicke stremes colde.

The gravel gold, the water pure as glasse,
 The bankes round the well envyrning,
 And soft as velvet the yonge grasse
 That thereupon lustily came springyng,
 The sute of trees about compassyng.
Hir shadow cast, closing the well round,
 And all the herbes growing on the ground.

And I that had through daunger and disdain
 So drye a thurst, thought I would assay
 To taste a draught of this welle or twain,
 My bitter languor if it might alay,

¹ Laurel.

² Chaucer alludes to the story of Phillis, daughter of Sithon, King of Thrace, who was betrothed to Demophoön, a son of Theseus. "A day had been fixed for their nuptials, but he not appearing at the appointed time, she fancied herself deserted, and hanged herself. The trees that sprang up around her tomb, were said at a certain season to mourn her untimely fate, by their leaves withering and falling to the ground."

And on the banke anone doune I lay,
 And with mine head unto the well I raught,¹
 And of the water dranke I a good draught.

Complaint of the Black Knight.

II.

ANOTHER WALK.

ANONE as I the day aspide,²
 Ne longer would I in my bed abide,
 But unto a wood that was fast by,
 I went forth alone boldely,
 And held the way down by a brooke side.

Till I came to a laund of white and grene,
 So faire one had I never in been,
 The ground was grene, ypoudred with daisie,
 The flowres and the greves on hie,
 All greene and white, was nothing els seene.

There sate I downe among the faire flours,
 And saw the birdes trip out of *hir* bours,
 There as they rested hem³ all the night,
 They were so joyful of the dayes light,
 They began of May for to done honours.

They coud⁴ that service all by rote,
 There was many a lively note,

¹ Reached.

² Espied.

³ Them.

⁴ Knew.

Some song loud as they had plained,
 And some in other manner voice yfained,
 And some all out with the full throte.¹

They proyned² *hem*, and made *hem* right gay,
 And daunceden and lepten on the spray,
 And evermore two and two in fere,³
 Right so as they had chosen *hem* to yere
 In Feverere upon Saint Valentine's day.⁴

And the river that I sate upon,
 It made such a noise as it ron,
 Accordaunt with the birdes armony,
 Me thought it was the best melody
 That might ben yheard of any mon.

And for delite, I wote never how
 I fell into a slomber and a swow,
 Nat all aslepe, nor fully waking.

The Cuckow and the Nightingale.

¹ *I. e.* Some sang with loud wailings; some imitated various other notes and voices, and some poured out their exuberantly joyous melody "with their full throte."

² Whosoever possesses one of those sweet children of Nature, a canary bird, can testify to the exquisite poetry contained in this couplet. Next to listening to its melody, it is most delightful to watch this little creature as it leaps and dances from sprig to sprig, and cleanses its feathers; "proyning" off such as are dead or useless, and restoring an elasticity, a lightness and freshness which had faded from them.

³ In companionship.

⁴ Alluding to the fancy that birds chose their mates upon St. Valentine's Day.

III.

A WALK IN MAY.

THAT it was May, thus dreamed me,
 In time of love and jollity,
 That all thing ginneth waxen gay :
 For there is neither busk nor hay¹
 In May, that it n'ill² shrouded bene,
 And it with newe leves wrene :³
 These woodes eke recovered grene,
 That drie in winter ben to sene,
 And the erth waxeth proud withall,
 For swote dewes that on it fall,
 And the poore estat forget,
 In which that winter had it set :
 And than become the ground so proude,
 That it wol have a newe shroude,
 And maketh so queint his robe and faire,
 That it had hewes an hundred paire,
 Of grasse and floures, of Inde and Pers,⁴
 And many hewes full divers.

The birdes that han left their song,
 While they han suffred cold full strong,
 In wethers grille⁵ and dark to sight,
 Ben in May for the Sunne bright,
 So glad, that they shew in singing,
 That in hir heart is such liking,
 That they mote singen and ben light :
 Then doth the nightingale her might,

¹ Bush nor hedge.² Will not.³ Bedeck.⁴ Of an azure or blue color.⁵ Horrible (Webster says, "Shaking with cold.")

To maken noise and singen blithe :
 Then is blissful many a sithe,¹
 The chelandre and the popingaye,²
 Then younge folke entenden aye,
 For to ben gay and amorous,
 The time is then so savorous.³

Harde is his heart that loveth nought
 In May, when all this mirth is wrought,
 When he may on these braunches here
 The smalle birdes singen clere
 Hir blissful swete song piteous,
 And in this season delitious⁴
 When love affirmeth⁵ all thing,
 Methought one night, in my sleeping,
 Right in my bed full readily,
 That it was by the morrow early,
 And up I rose, and gan me cloth,
 Anone I wysse⁶ mine hondes both,
 A silver needle forth I drow,
 Out of an aguiler⁷ queint ynow,
 And gan this needle thread ynone,
 For out of towne me list to gone,
 The sound of birdes for to heare
 That on the *buskes* singen clere,
 In the swete season that lefe is,
 With a thred basting my slevis
 Alone I went in my playing,
 The smal foules song hearkening,
 That payned *hem* full many a paire,
 To sing on bowes blossomed faire :

¹ Tunes.³ Pleasant.⁵ Confirmeth or establisheth.² The goldfinch and parrot.⁴ Delightful.⁶ Wash. ⁷ A curious needle-case.

Jolife and gay, full of gladnesse,
 Toward a river gan I me dresse,
 That I heard renne² faste by,
 For fairer playing none saw I
 Than playen me by the rivere :
 For from an hill that stood there nere,
 Come down the stream full stiffe and bold
 Clere was the water, and as cold
 As any well is, sooth to saine³
 And somedele lesse it was than Saine,⁴
 But it was straiter, welaway,
 And never saw I ere that day,
 The water that so wele liked me,
 And wonder⁵ glad was I to see
 That lusty place, and that rivere
 And with that water that ran so clere,
 My face I *wysse*, tho⁶ saw I wele
 The bottom ypaved everidele⁷
 With gravel, full of stones shene,
 The meadowes softe, sote⁸ and grene,
 Beet right upon the water side,
 Full clere was than⁹ the morrowe tide,
 And full attempre out of drede,¹⁰
 Tho gan I walken thorow the mede,
 Downward aye¹¹ in my playing,
 The river's side coösting."

Romaunt of the Rose.

¹ To address in the sense of approach.

⁴ The Seine.

⁷ Every bit.

¹⁰ Without doubt.

² Run.

⁵ Wondrous.

⁸ Sweet.

¹¹ Ever.

³ Sooth to *say*.

⁶ Then.

⁹ Then.

IV.

A WALK, AN ARBOR,¹ AND BIRDS. .

WHEN shoures sweet of raine descended soft,
 Causing the ground fele¹ times and oft,
 Up for to give many an wholesome aire,
 And every plaine was clothed faire

With new grene, and maketh small floures
 To springen here and there in field and mede,
 So very good and wholsome be the shoures,
 That it renueth that was old and dede,
 In winter time ; and out of every sede
 Springeth the hearbe, so that every wight
 Of this season wexeth glad and light.

And I so glad of the season swete,
 Was happed thus upon a certain night,
 As I lay in my bed, sleepe full unmete,
 Was unto me, but why that I ne might
 Rest, I ne wist : for there n'as² earthly wight
 As I suppose had more hert's ease
 Than I ; for I n'ad³ sickness nor disease.

Wherefore I mervaile greatly of my selfe,
 That I so long withouten sleepe lay,
 And up I rose three houres after twelfe,
 About the springen of the day,
 And on I put my geare and mine array,
 And to a pleasant grove I gan passe,
 Long er⁴ the bright Sunne up risen was.

¹ Many³ Had not.² Was not.⁴ Ere.

In which were okes great, streight as a line,
 Under the which the grasse so fresh of hew,
 Was newly sprong, and an eight foot or nine
 • Every tree well fro his fellow grew,
 With branches brode, laden with leves newe,
 That sprongen out agen¹ the sunne-shene,
 Some very red, and some a glad light greene.

Which as me thought was right a pleasant sight,
 And eke the briddes songe for to here,
 Would have rejoiced any earthly wight,
 And I that couth not yet in no manere
 Heare the nightingale of all the yeare,
 Full besily hearkened with herte and with eare,
 If I her voice perceive coud any where.

And at the last a path of little brede²
 I found, that greatly had not used be,
 For it forgrown³ was with grasse and weede,
 That well unneth⁴ a wighte might it see :
 Thought I, this path some whider goth, parde ;⁵
 And so I followed, till it me brought
 To right a pleasaunt herber⁶ well ywrought,

That benched was, and with turfes⁷ new
 Freshly turved, whereof the grene gras,
 So small, so thicke, so short, so fresh of hew,
 That most like unto green wool wot I it was :
 The hegge⁸ also that yede⁹ in compass,
 And closed in all the greene *herbere*,
 With sicamours was set and eglatere ;¹⁰

¹ Against.² Breadth.³ Overgrown.⁴ Scarcely.⁵ An affirmative oath, synonymous with surely.⁶ Arbor.⁷ Turf⁸ The hedge.⁹ Went.¹⁰ Eglantine.

Wrethen in fere¹ so well and cunningly,
 That every branch and leafe grew by measure,
 Plaine as a bord, of an height by and by,
 I sie never thing I you ensure,
 So well done ; for he that took the cure
 It to make ytrow,² did all his peine
 To make it passe all tho that men have seine.

And shapen was this *herber* rooffe and all
 As a prety parlour ; and also
 The *hegge* as thicke as a castle wall,
 That who that list without to stond or go,
 Though he would all day prien to and fro,
 He should not see if there were any wight
 Within or no ; but one within well might

Perceive all *tho* that *yeden* there without,
 In the field, that was on every side
 Covered with corn and grasse, that out of doubt
 Though one would seeke all the world wide,
 So rich a fielde coud not be espide
 On no coast, as of the quantity,
 For of all good thing there was plenty :

And I that all this pleasaunt sight sie,
 Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire
 Of the *eglentere*, that certainly
 There is no hert, I deme, in such dispaire,
 Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,
 So overlaid, but it should soone have bote,³
 If it had ones felt this savour *sote*.

¹ Together.² I trow³ Help or comfort.

And as I stood and cast aside mine eie,
 I was ware of the fairest medlar¹ tree
 That ever yet in all my life I sie,
 As full of blossomes as it mighte be,
 Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile²
 Fro bough to bough; and as him list, he eet
 Here and there of buds and floures sweet.

And to the *herber* side was joyning
 This faire tree, of which I have you told,
 And at the last the brid³ began to sing,
 Whan he had eaten what he eat wold;
 So passing sweetly, that by manifold
 It was more pleasaunt than I could devise,
 And whan his song was ended in this wise,

The nightingale with so merry a note
 Answered him, that all the wood rong
 So sodainly, that as it were a sote,⁴
 I stood astonied, so was I with the song
 Thorow⁵ ravished, that till late and long,
 I ne wist in what place I was, ne where;
 And ayen,⁶ me thought, she song ever by mine ere.

Wherefore I waited about busily
 On every side, if I might her see;
 And at the last I gan full well aspy
 Where she sat in a fresh grene *laurer* tree,
 On the further side even right by me,
 That gave so passing a delicious smell,
 According to the *eglentere* full well.

¹ Mespilus⁴ A fool.² Prettily.⁵ Thoroughly.³ Bird.⁶ Again.

Whereof I had inly so great pleasure,
 That, as me thought, I surely ravished was
 Into Paradise, where my desire
 Was for to be, and no fether passe
 As for that day, and on the *sote grasse*
 I sat me downe, for as for mine entent,
 The birdes song was more convenient,

And more pleasaunt to me by many fold,
 Than meat or drink, or any other thing,
 Thereto¹ the *herber* was so fresh and cold,
 The wholesome savors eke so comforting,
 That as I demed, sith² the beginning
 Of the world was never seene ere then
 So pleasaunt a ground of none earthly man.

The Flower and the Leaf.

V.

A GARDEN AND A WELL.

THE garden was by measuring
 Right even and square in compassing
 It as long was as it was large,
 Of fruit had every tree his charge.
 There were, and that wote I full well,
 Of pomgranettes a full gret dele;
 And trees there were great foison,³
 That baren nuts in *hir* season,
 Such as menne nutmegges call,

¹ Add to that, or thereto.

² Since.

³ Plenty.

That swote of savour been withal,
 And almandres¹ great plentee,
 Figges, and many a date tree
 There weren, if menne had nede,
 Through the gardin in length and brede.

There was eke waxing² many a spice,
 As clove, gilofre, and licorice,
 Gingere, and grein de Paris,
 Canell, and setewale of pris,³
 And many a spice delitable,
 To eaten when men rise fro table.

And many homely trees were there,
 That peaches, coines,⁴ and apples bere,
 Médllars,⁵ plummes, peeres, chesteinis,⁶
 Cherries, of which many one faine is,
 Notes, aleis, and bolas,⁷
 That for to seene it was solas,
 With many high *laurer* and pine,
 Was ranged clene all that gardine.

There were elmes great and strong,
 Maples, ashe, oke, aspes, planes long,⁸
 Fine ewe, popler, and lindes faire,⁹
 And other trees full many a paire.

These trees were set that I devise,¹⁰
 One from another in assise¹¹
 Five fadom or six, I trowe so
 But they were high and great also :
 And for to keep out well the Sunne

¹ Almond-trees.

² Growing.

³ Valerian of price, or great value.

⁴ Quinces.

⁵ The fruit of the *Mesphilus*.

⁶ Chestnu'ts.

⁷ Plum.

⁸ The plane-tree, *platanus*.

⁹ Linden

¹⁰ That I relate of

¹¹ In situation.

The croppes¹ were so thicke yrunne,
 And every branch in other knitte,
 And full of grene leaves sitte,²
 That Sunne might there non descend,
 Least the tendre grasses shend.³
 There might menne does and roes ysee,
 And of squirrels full gret plentee,
 From bough to bough alway leping,
 Conies there were also playing,
 That comen out of *hir* clapers⁴
 Of sundry colours and maners,
 And maden many a tourneying⁵
 Upon the freshe grasse springing.

In places saw I welles there,
 In whiche there no frogges were,
 And faire in shadow was every well ;
 About the brinckes of these wells
 And by the stremes over all els⁶
 Sprang up the grasse, as thicke yset
 And soft as any velvet,
 On which man might his lemman⁷ lay
 As on a feather bed to play,
 For the earth was full soft and swete :
 Through moisture of the well wete
 Sprung up the *sote* grene gras,
 As faire, as thicke, as mister⁸ was.
 But much amended it the place,
 That thearth⁹ was of such a grace
 That it of floures hath plente,

¹ The branches.² Set.³ Hurt.⁴ Burrows.⁵ Tumbling.⁶ Over all beside.⁷ Literally *love-man*, beloved man or woman.⁸ As need was.⁹ The earth

That both in summer and winter be.

There sprang the violet all new,
 And fresh pervinke¹ rich of hewe,
 And floures yellow, white and rede,
 Such plenty grew there never in mede :
 Full gay was all the ground and queint,
 And poudred, as men had it peint,
 With many a fresh and sundry flour,
 That casten up full good savour.

And so befel, I rested mee
 Besides a well under a tree,
 Which tree in Fraunce men call a pine,
 But sith the time of King Pepine
 Ne grew there tree in mannes sight
 So faire, ne so well woxe in hight,
 In all that yard so high was none.
 And springing in a marble stone
 Had nature set, the sooth to tell,
 Under that pine tree a well,
 And on the border all without
 Was written on the stone about
 Letters small, that saiden thus
 Here starfe the faire Narcissus.

Unto this well then went I me,
 And downe I louted² for to see
 The clere water in the stone,
 And eke the gravell, which that shone
 Downe in the bottom, as silver fine :
 For of the well, this is the fine,³
 In world is none so clear of hewe,
 The water is ever fresh and newe

¹ Periwinkle.

² Bowed.

³ End.

That welmeth up with waves bright
 The mounenance of two finger hight :
 About it is grasse springing
 For moist¹ so thick and well liking
 That it ne may in winter die
 No more than may the see be drie.
 Down at the bottom set saw I
 Two christal stones craftely
 In thilke² fresh and faire well :
 But o³ thing soothly⁴ dare I tell,
 That ye woll hold a great mervaile
 Whan it is told withouten faile.
 For whan the Sunne clere in sight
 Cast in that well his beames bright,
 And that the heat descended is,
 Then taketh the christal stone ywis,
 Againe⁵ the Sunne an hundred hewis,
 Blew, yellow, and red, that fresh and new is :
 Yet hath the mervailous christall
 Such strengthe, that the place over all⁶
 Both foule and tree, and leaves grene,
 And all the yerd in it is seene :
 And for to done⁷ you to understand,
 To make ensample will I fond :
 Right as a mirror openly
 Sheweth all thing that stondeth thereby,
 As well the colour as the figure
 Withouten any coverture :⁸
 Right so the christall stone shining,
 Withouten any deceiving,

¹ By reason of moisture.² This.³ One.⁴ Truly.⁵ Against.⁶ All that is in the whole place.⁷ Make.⁸ Covering.

The entrees of the yerd accuseth ;
 To him that in the water museth
 For ever in which half ye bee,
 Ye may well halfe the garden see :
 And if he turne, he may right wele
 Seene the remnaunt every *dele* :
 For there is none so little thing
 So hid ne closed with shything¹
 That it is ne seene, as though it were
 Painted in the christall there.

Romance of the Rose.

VI.

THE DAISY.

OF all the floures in the mede,
 Than love I most these floures white and rede,
 Soch that men callen daisies in our town ;
 To hem I have so great affection,
 As I said erst, whan comen is the May,
 That in my bedde there daweth me no day,
 That I nam² up and walking in the mede,
 To seene this flour ayenst the Sunne sprede,
 Whan it up riseth early by the morow,
 That blissful sight softeneth all my sorow,
 So glad am I, whan that I have the presence
 Of it, to done it all reverence,
 And ever I love it, and ever ylike newe,
 And ever shall, till that mine herte die
 All³ swere I not, of this I will not lie.

There loved no wight hotter in his life,

¹ Shutting.

² That I am not.

³ Although I swear not.

And whan that it is eve, I renne blithe,¹
 As soone as ever the Sunne ginneth west,²
 To seene this floure, how it woll go to rest,
 For feare of night, so hateth she darknesse,
 Her chere is plainly spred in the brightnesse
 Of the Sunne, for there it will unclose :
 Alas that I ne had English rime, or prose
 Suffisaunt, this flour to praise aright,
 But helpeth me, ye that han cunning and might.

My busie gost, that thursteth alway newe,
 To seen this flour so yong, so fresh of hew,
 Constrained me, with so greedy desire,
 That in my herte I fele yet the fire,
 That made me rise ere it were day,
 And this was now the first morow of May,
 With dreadfull³ herte, and glad devotion
 For to been at the resurrection
 Of this floure, whan that it should unclose
 Againe the Sunne, that rose as redde as rose.
 And doune on knees anon right I me sette,
 And as I could, this fresh floure I grette,
 Kneeling alway, till it unclosed was,
 Upon the small, soft, swete gras,
 That was with floures swete embrouded all,
 Of such swetenesse, and such odour overall⁴
 That for to speke of gomme, herbe, or tree,
 Comparison may not ymaked be,
 For it surmounteth plainly all odoures,
 And of rich beaute of floures.
 And Zephirus, and Flora gentelly,
 Yave to these floures soft and tenderly,

¹ I ran blithely.

² Timorous

³ Beginneth to sink in the west.

⁴ Above all others.

Hir swote breth, and made hem for to sprede,
 As god and goddesse of the flourie mede,
 In which me thoughte I might day by day,
 Dwellen alway, the joly month of May,
 Withouten slepe, withouten meat or drinke :
 Adoune full softly I gan to sinke,
 And leaning on my elbow and my side,
 The long day I shope¹ me for to abide,
 For nothing els, and I shall nat lie,
 But for to looke upon the daisie,
 That well by reason men it call may
 The daisie, or els the eye of the day,
 The empress and floure of floures all,
 I pray to God that faire mote she fall,²
 And all that loven floures for her sake.

Legend of Good Women.

VII.

FLOWERS AND A GROVE.

Down by a flowery grene we went
 Full thicke of grasse, full soft and sweet,
 With floures fele,³ faire under feet,
 And little used, it seemed thus,
 For both Flora and Zepherus,
 They two that make the floures grow
 Had made hir dwelling there I trow,
 For it was on⁴ to behold
 As though the earth envye wold

¹ Schemed or planned.

² That fair or good luck may befall her.

³ Many.

⁴ To look upon.

To be gayer than the heven,
 To have more floures such seven,
 As in the welkin starres be :
 It had forgot the poverté
 That winter through his cold morrowes
 Had made it suffer, and his sorrowes,
 All was foryeten,¹ and that was seene,
 For all the wood was woxen grene,
 Sweetness of dewe had made it waxe.

It is no need eke for to axe
 Where there were many grene greves,
 Or thick² of trees, so full of leves ;
 And every tree stood by himselve
 Fro other, wel tenne foot or twelve,
 So great trees, so huge of strength,
 Of fortie or fiftie fadome length,
 Cleane without bowe or sticke,
 With croppes³ brode, and eke as thicke ;
 They were not an inch asunder,
 That it was shade over all under,
 And many a hart, and many a hind
 Was both before me and behind,
 Of fawnes, sowers,⁴ buckes, does,
 Was full the wood, and many roes,
 And many squirrels, that sete
 Full high upon the trees, and ete,
 And in her maner maden feasts. . . .

Boke of the Dutchesse.

¹ Forgotten.

² Thicket.

³ Branches.

⁴ Bucks of four years old.

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VIII.

A GARDEN AND BIRDS.

AND with that my hand in his he toke anone,
 Of which I comfourt caught, and went in fast,
 But Lord so I was glad, and well begon,
 For over all, where I mine eyen cast,
 Were trees clad with leaves, that aie shall last
 Eche in his kind, with colour fresh and grene,
 As emeraude,¹ that joy it was to seene.

The bilder² oke, and eke the harde asshe,
 The piller³ elme, the coffre unto caraine,
 The boxe pipe tree, holme to whippes lache,
 The sailing firre, the cipres deth to plaine,
 The shooter ewe, the aspe for shaftes plaine,
 The olive of peace, and eke the dronken vine,
 The victor palme, the laurer too divine.

A garden saw I, full of blossomed bowis,
 Upon a river, in a grene mede,
 There as sweetnesse evermore inough is,
 With floures white, blewe, yelowe and rede,
 And cold welle streames, nothing dede,
 That swommen full of smale fishes light,
 With finnes rede, and scales silver bright.

On every bough the birdes heard I sing,
 With voice of angell in hir armonie,
 That busied hem, hir birdes forth to bring ;

¹ Emerald.² The oak used in building.³ Pillar.

The little pretty conies to hir play gan hie,
 And further all about I gan espie,
 The dredeful roe, the buck, the hart, and hind,
 Squirrels, and beastes small of gentle kind.

Of instruments of stringes in accorde,
 Heard I so play a ravishing swetnesse,
 That God, that maker is of all and Lorde,
 Ne heard never better, as I gesse ;
 Therewith a wind, unneth¹ it might be lesse,
 Made in the leaves grene a noise soft,
 Accordant to the foules song on loft.²

The aire of the place so attempre was,³
 That never was ther grevance of hot ne cold,
 There was eke every holsome spice and gras,
 Ne no man may there waxe sicke ne old,
 Yet was there more joy o⁴ thousand fold,
 Than I can tell or ever could or might,
 There is ever clere day, and never night.

Assembly of Foules.

IX.

SINGING OF BIRDS.

ME thought thus, that it was May,
 And in the dawning there I lay,
 Me mette⁵ thus in my bed all naked,
 And looked forth for I was waked,
 With smale foules a grete hepe,

¹ Scarcely.

² On high.

³ Temperate

⁴ One.

⁵ Dreamed.

That had afraied¹ me out of my slepe
 Through noise and swetnesse of hir song ;
 And as me *mette*, they sat among²
 Upon my chamber roof without
 Upon the tyles over all about.
 And everiche³ song in his wise
 The most solemne servise
 By note, that ever man I trow
 Had heard, for some of hem sang low,
 Some high, and all of one accord ;
 To tell shortly at one word
 Was never heard so sweet steven⁴
 But it had be a thing of heaven ;
 So merry a sowne, so sweet entunes,⁵
 That certes for the towne of Tewnes
 I n'olde but I had heard hem sing,
 For all my chamber gan to ring
 Through singing of hir ermony ;
 For instrument nor melody,
 Was no where heard yet half so sweet,
 Nor of accord halfe so mete,
 For there was none of hem that fained
 To sing, for each of hem him paine
 To find out many crafty notes,
 They ne spared nat hir throttes.
 And sooth to saine my chambre was⁶
 Full well depainted, and with glas

¹ Aroused.

² Together.

³ Each one.

⁴ Voice or burden.

⁵ Songs.

⁶ This description of Chaucer's chamber is given, not for its poetical beauty, but because it illustrates the customs of the times. The glass which is so prominently noticed, was yet a rarity, and was considered a luxury and a mark of great magnificence.

Were all the windows well yglased
 Ful clere, and nat an hole ycrased,¹
 That to behold it was great joy ;
 For wholly all the story of Troy
 Was in the glaising ywrought thus,
 Of Hector, and of King Priamus,
 Of Achilles, and of King Laomedon,
 And eke of Medea, and Jason,
 Of Paris, Helene, and of Lavine,
 And all the walls with colours fine
 Were paint, both text and glose,
 And all the Romaunt of the Rose :
 My windows weren shit echone,
 And through the glasse the Sunne shone
 Upon my bed with bright bemes,
 With many glad glidy² stremes,
 And eke the welkin was so faire,
 Blew, bright, clere was the aire,
 And full *attempre*, for sooth it was,
 For neyther too cold ne hote it n'as
 Ne in all the welkin was no cloud.

Boke of the Dutchesse.

X.

AN EAGLE NEAR THE SUN.

MINE eyen to the Heaven I cast,
 And was I ware, lo, at the last,
 That fast by the Sunne on hye,
 As kenne might I with mine eye,
 Me thought I saw an egle sore,
 But that it seemed much more

¹ Broken.

² Sparkling.

Than I had any egle ysein,
 This is as sooth as death certain,¹
 It was of gold, and shone so bright,
 That never saw men such a sight,
 But if the Heaven had ywonne
 All newe of God another Sunne
 So shonne the egles fetheres bright,
 And somewhat downward gan it light.

The House of Fame.

XI.

SONG OF BIRDS

IN PRAISE OF LOVE AND MAY.

ON May day whan the larke began to rise,
 To matens went the lusty nightingale,
 Within a temple shapen hauthorn wise,
 He might not slepe in all the nightertale,²
 But "*Domine labia*," gan he cry and gale,
 "My lippes open lord of love I cry,
 And let my mouth thy preising now bewry."³

The egle sang "*Venite* bodies all,
 And let us joy to love that is our health,"
 And to the deske anon they gan to fall,
 And who came late he pressed in by stealth :
 Then said the falcon our own hertes wealth,
 "*Domine Dominies noster* I wote
 Ye be the God that done us brenne so hote."

¹ This is as true as death is certain.

² In the night-time.

³ Discover.

“*Cæli enarrant*,” said the poppingay,
 “Your might is told in Heaven and firmament.”
 And then came in the gold-finche freshe and gay,
 And said this psalm with hertily glad intent
 “*Domini est terra*” (this laten intent,¹
 The god of love hath yerth in governaunce):
 And then the wren gan skippen and to daunce.

“*Jube Domino*, O Lord of love, I pray
 Commaund we well this lesson for to rede,
 This legende is of all that woulden dey
 Martires for love, God yet their souls spede:
 And to thee, Venus, sing we out of drede,
 By influence of all thy vertue great
 Beseeching thee to keepe us in our heat.”

The second lesson Robin redbreast sang,
 “Haile to the god and goddess of our lay,”
 And to the lectorne amorously he sprong,
 “Haile now” (quod eke), “O fresh season of May,
 Our moneth glad that singen on the spray
 Haile to thy floures rede and white and blewe,
 Which by their virtue² maketh our lust new.”

The third lesson the turtill dove took up,
 And thereat lough³ the mavis⁴ in a scorne,
 He said, “O God, as mote I dine or suppe,
 This foolish dove will give us all an horne,
 There ben right here a thousand better borne
 To rede this lesson, which as well as he,
 And eke as hote, can love in all degree.”

¹ This Latin meaneth.

² Efficacy.

³ Laughed.

⁴ The thrush

The turtill dove said, "Welcome, welcome, May,
 Gladsome and light to lovers that ben trew :
 I thanke thee lord of love that doth purvey¹
 For me to rede this lesson al of dewe,
 For in good sooth of corage I pursue,
 To serve my make² till death us must depart,"
 And then "*Tu autem*" sang he all apart.

"*Te deum amoris*," sang the throstel cocke,
 Tuball himself, the first musician,
 With key of armony coude not unlocke
 So swete tune as that the throstel can :
 "The lorde of love we praisen" (quod he then
 And so done all the foules great and lite),
 "Honour we May, in false lovers despite."

"*Dominus regnavit*" said the pecocke there,
 "The lord of love, that mighty prince ywis,
 He is received here and every where.
 Now *Jubilate* sing :"—"What meaneth this ?"
 Said then the linnet ; "welcome, lord of blisse :"
 Out sterte the owle with "*Benedicite*,
 What meaneth all this merry fare" (quod he).

"*Laudate*," sang the lark, with voice full shrill,
 And eke the kite, "*O admirabile*,
 This quere³ will thorow⁴ mine ears pers⁵ and thril,
 But what, welcome this May season" (quod he),
 "And honour to the lord of love mote be,
 That hath this feste so solempne and so hie,"
 "Amen," said all and so said eke the pye.

¹ Provide.² Mate.³ Choir.⁴ Trough.⁵ Pierce

And forth the cockow gan proceede anon,
 With "*Benedictus*," thanking God in hast,
 That in this May would visite them echon,¹
 And gladden them all while the feast should last :
 And therewithal a laughter out he brast,²
 "I thanke it God that I shuld end the song
 And all the service which hath ben so long."

Thus sang they all the service of the feast,
 And that was done right early to my dome,³
 And forth goth all the court, both moste and leste,⁴
 To fetch the flowers fresh, and braunch and blome,⁵
 And namely hauthorne brought both page and grome.
 With fresh garlants party blew and white,
 And then rejoysen in their great delite.

Eke each at other threw the floures bright,
 The primerose, the violete, and the gold,
 So then as I behold this royall sight,
 My lady gan me sodenly behold,
 And with a trew love plited⁶ many a fold,
 She smote me through the very heart, as I blive,⁷
 And Venus yet I thonke I am alive.

Court of Love.

Note to Rural Descriptions.—Chaucer's allusions to the "season of May," and to the amorous and vivifying influence that it exerted upon man and beast, are very frequent. Most of these selections teem with them. He seems indeed to be really transported with delight whensoever he contemplates this lovely season: and in this he faithfully represents the feelings of his

¹ Each one.

² Burst.

³ Judgment.

⁴ Great and small.

⁵ Blossom.

⁶ Plaited.

⁷ I believe.

age. For numberless were the customs and observances that had been instituted by his spring-loving countrymen in honor of May; or that perhaps had been suggested to them by reason of its fresh and balmy days, which offered immunity from toil, and from the rigorous cold that had just passed away. Prominent amid these customs, and universally diffused throughout England, were the sports and pastimes which ushered in and attended May-Day. This was, in an especial manner, the festival of the young, and, with many others, had its origin in that mysterious and instinctive appreciation of the fit and the beautiful impregnated by the spirit of poetry which characterizes the fresh and simple ages of society. The terms *mysterious* and *instinctive* are used, because the real poetry which invests and hallows the customs, and even superstitions, of the peasantry of every country, will allow no origin for them in cold-blooded design or studied invention. Year by year, upon the simple custom or observance are grafted the grotesque imaginings or subtle fancies of poetical spirits. And thus they progress, and by the aid of tradition become indelibly impressed upon the minds of an unlettered people, till at last their origin, and also that of the nucleus round which they cluster, is lost in the "palpable obscure" of antiquity.

Most appropriate to this fresh and balmy season was the favorite idea of Chaucer, that then such of the passions of man as are founded upon the affections developed themselves: that then the sexes were impelled together by a mutual and irresistible attraction: that then Love reigned predominant, causing even the birds to choose their mates, and possessing the beasts of the field with frisky wantonness. For the year was new, and "everythyng was in its myght." The skies looked smilingly upon the bursting buds and blossoms, and (as a most poetical writer says) "it seemed just the chosen period for heaven, and earth, and youth, to mingle their gladness together."

Nor was Chaucer the only one who considered this month the peculiar season for youthful pleasures, and of sexual attrition. Herrick, in his "Hesperides," has a noble hymn in honor of May-Day, in which he describes felicitously and in detail the customs that obtained in his time; most of which were identical with those participated in by Chaucer, and so fondly loved by him. As I should otherwise still more unduly transgress the legitimate limits of a note, this little poem, so illustrative of an almost forgotten but Arcadian custom, is given in the Appendix.

In some of the old calendars, also, the utmost vigor of youth and the delights of love are symbolized by the month of May. In these the young are represented as sitting upon the grass, the men ornamenting the heads of the girls with flowers, and enjoying the pleasures of dalliance and courtship. Everything, animate or inanimate, was now supposed to have reached perfection, nor were any signs of decay yet visible.¹

Other more modern poets have perpetuated the frequent allusions of Chaucer, his predecessors, and contemporaries, to the influences, the sports and observances peculiar to this month. Spenser, in his magnificent poem of "Mutabilitie," thus takes up the burden in honor of May.

"Then came fair May, the fairest maid on ground,
Deck'd all with dainties of her season's pride,
And throwing flowers out of her lap around :
Upon two brethren's shoulders she did ride,
The twins of Leda ; which, on either side,
Supported her like to their sovereign queen.
Lord ! how all creatures laugh'd when her they spied
And leap'd, and danc'd, as they had ravished been ;
And Cupid's self about her flutter'd all in green."

¹ See Douce's *Illus. Shaks.*, pp. 45 and 424.

And again, in his Shepherd's Calendar :

“ Young folk now flocken in everywhere
 To gather May baskets,¹ and smelling brere ;²
 And home they hasten the posts to dight,
 And all the kirk pillars ere daylight :
 With hawthorne buds, and sweet eglantine,
 And garlands of roses, and sops-in-wine.
 Then to the green-wood they speeden hem all,
 To fetchen home May and their musicall,
 And home they bringen, in a royal throne,
 Crouned as king, and his queen attone,
 Was Lady Flora, on whome did attend
 A faire flock of fairies, and a fresh band
 Of lovely nymphs. O that I were there
 To helpen the ladies their May-bush beer.”³

Milton also frequently glances at this delightful time, and the following would seem to have been composed by him, Spenser in hand :

“ Now the bright morning star, day's harbinger,
 Comes dancing in the east, and leads with her
 The flowery May, who from her green lap throws
 The yellow cowslip, and the pale primrose.
 Hail, bounteous May, that doth inspire
 Mirth, and youth, and young desire ;
 Woods and groves are of thy dressing,
 Hill and dale doth boast thy blessing.
 Thus we salute thee with our early song,
 And welcome thee, and wish thee long.”

¹ Bushes

² Sweet Briar.

³ Bear.

II.

PAINTINGS.—FEMALE CHARACTERS.



I.

BEAUTY. AN IMPERSONATION.

THE god of love jolife¹ and light,
Led on his honde a lady bright,
Of high prise,² and of gret degre,
This ladie called was BEAUTE ;
Ne she was derke,³ ne browne, but bright
And cleare as the moone light ;
Againe⁴ whom all the starres seemen
But small candles as we demen :⁵
Her flesh was tender as dewe of flower,
Her cheare⁶ was simple as bird in bower,
As white as lilly or rose in rise :⁷
Her tresses yellow, and long straughten,⁸

¹ Joyful.

² Praise or value.

³ Dark.

⁴ Against, or in contrast with whom.

⁵ Judge.

⁶ Appearance or demeanor. ⁷ The rose bursting its bud. ⁸ Stretching.

Unto her heeles down they raughten :¹
 Her nose, her mouth, and eye and cheke
 Wel wrought, and all the remnaunt eke.
 A full gret savour and a swote ;
 Me thoughte in mine herte rote,
 As helpe me God, when I remember
 Of the fashion of every member,
 In world is none so faire a wight :
 For yong she was, and hewed bright
 Sore plesant and fetis² with all,
 Gentle and in her middle small.

Romaunt of the Rose.

II.

CRESEIDE.

CRESEIDE was this ladies name aright,
 As to my dome³ in all Troies city
 Most fairest ladie, passing every wight
 So angelike shone her native beaute,
 That no mortal thing seemed she :
 And therewith was she so perfect a creature,
 As she had be made in scorning of Nature.

And so befell, whan comen was the time
 Of Aprill, whan clothed is the mede,
 With new greene, of lustie veer⁴ the prime,
 And with sweet smelling floures white and rede
 In sundry wise shewed, as I rede,
 The folke of Troie, their observances old,
 Palladion's⁵ feste went for to hold.

¹ Reaching. ² Well made. ³ Judgment.

⁴ Spring. ⁵ Feast in honor of Pallas, the tutelar deity of the Trojans.

Unto the temple in all their best wise,
 Generally there went many a wight,
 To hearken of Palladion's servise,
 And namely many a lustie knight,
 And many a ladie fresh and maiden bright,
 Full well arraied bothe most and least,
 Both for the season and the high feast.

Among these other folke was Creseida,
 In widowes habite black; but natheless¹
 Right as our first letter is now a,
 In beautie first so stood she matchless,
 Her goodly looking gladded all the prees,²
 Was never seene thing to be praised so dere,
Nor under cloude blacke so brighte starre.

Creseide meane³ was of her stature,
 Thereto of shape, of face and eke of chere,
 There might ben no fairer creature,
 And ofte time this was her manere,
 So gone ytressed with her haire clere
 Downe by her colere⁴ at her baok behind,
 Which with a thred of gold she woulde bind.

And save her browes joyneden yfere,⁵
 There nas⁶ no lacke, in aught I can espie;
 But for to speken of her eyen clere,
 So, truly they written that her seien,⁷
 That Paradis stood formed in her eien,
 And with her riche beauty evermore
Strove love in her, aie which of hem was more.

¹ Nevertheless. ² The crowd. ³ Was of mean or ordinary stature.

⁴ Collar. ⁵ Together. ⁶ Was. ⁷ Seen.

She sobre was, eke simple, and wise withall,
 The best ynorished¹ eke that might bee,
 And goodly of her speche in generall,
 Charitable, estately, lusty and free,
 Ne nevermore ne lacked her pitee,
 Tender hearted sliding of corage,
 But truly I can not tell her age.²

Troilus and Creseide.

III.

R O S I A L L .

FOR if I shall all fully her describe,
 Her head was round by compasse of nature,
 Her haire as gold, she passed all on live ;
 A lilly forehead had this creature,
 With lively browes, yellow, of color pure,
 Betwene the which was meane³ disceveraunce
 From every brow, to shew a due distaunce.

Her nose directed streight, and even as a line
 With forme and shape therto convenient,⁴
 In which the goddes milk white path doth shine ;
 And eke her eyen twain ben bright and orient,
 As is the smaragde,⁵ unto my judgement,
Or yet those sterres Heavenly small and bright ;
 Her visage is of lovely rede and white.

¹ Educated.

² Chaucer's humor here breaks out against the sensitiveness which ladies of all ages exhibit in regard to their own age. ³ Due.

⁴ Agreeable.

⁵ Emerald.

Her mouth is short and shut in little space
 Flaming somedeale,¹ not over redde I mean,
 With pregnant lips, and thicke to kisse percase ;²
 For lippes thinne, not fat, but ever lene,
 They serve of naught, they be not worth a bene ;
 For if the basse ben full, there is delight,
 Maximian truly thus doth he write.

But to my purpose, I say white as snow
 Been all her teeth, and in order they stond
 Of one stature, and eke her breath I trow,
 Surmounteth all odours that ever I found
 In swetenesse, and her body, face and hond
 Been sharply slender, so that from the head
 Unto the foot, all is but womanhead.

I hold my peace, of other thinges hidde,
 Here shall my soule and not my tong bewray ;
 But how she was arraied, if ye me bidde,
 That shall I well discover you and say :
A bend⁴ of gold and silke, full fresh and gaie,
 With her intresse,⁵ broudered full wele,
Right smoothly kept and shining everydele.⁶

About her necke a flower of fresh devise,⁷
 With rubies set, that lusty were to sene,
 And she in gown was light and summer wise,
 Shapen full well, the colour was of grene,
 With aureat sent about her sides clene,
 With divers stones precious and rich,
 Thus was she rayed, yet saw I never her lich.⁸

¹ Somewhat.² Perchance.³ Discover.⁴ Band.⁵ With hair intressed.⁶ Every bit.⁷ Design.⁸ Like or equal

And softly gan her colour to appeare,
 As rose so red throughout her visage all,
 Wherefore me think it is according here,
 That she of right be cleped ¹ *Rosiall*.

Court of Love.

IV.

EMELIE THE BRIGHT.

THUS passeth yere by yere, and day by day,
 Till it felle ones in a morwe of May,
 That Emelie, that fayrer was to sene,
 Than is the lillie upon his stalke grene,
 And fressher than the May with floures newe
 (For with the rose colour strove hire hewe ;
 I n'ot ² which was the finer of hem two),
 Ere it was day, as she was wont to do,
 She was arisen, and all redy dight.
 For May wol have no slogardie ³ a-night.
 The seson pricketh every gentil herte,
 And maketh him out of his slepe to sterte,
 And sayeth, arise, and do thine observance.⁴

This maketh Emelie han remembrance
 To don honour to May, and for to rise.
 Y'clothed was she fresh for to devise.
*Hire yelwe here was broided in a tresse,
 Behind hire back, a yerde long I gesse.*
 And in the gardin at the sonne uprist ⁵
 She walketh up and doun wher as hire list.

¹ Called.

² I know not.

³ Sloth.

⁴ Alluding to the beautiful custom explained in note at page 113, and in the Appendix.

⁵ Uprising.

She gathereth floures, partie white and red,
 To make a sotel garlond for hire hed,
 And as an angel hevenlich she song.

The Knightes Tale

V.

VENUS AND CUPID.

THE statue of Venus glorious for to see
 Was naked fleting¹ in the large see,
 And fro the navel doun all covered was
 With waves grene, and bright as any glas.
 A citole² in hire right hand hadde she,
 And on hire hed, ful seemely for to see,
 A rose gerlond fresshe and well smelling,
 Above hire hed, hire doves fleckering³
 Before hire stood hire sone Cupido,
 Upon his shoulders winges had he two;
 And blind he was, as it is often sene;
 A bow he bare and arwes bright and kene.

The Knightes Tale.

VI.

ALISOUN.

FAYRE was this yonge wif, and therewithal
 As any wesel hire body gent⁴ and smal.
 A seint⁵ she wered, barred all of silk,
 A barme-cloth⁶ eke as white as morwe⁷ milk

¹ Floating. ² A musical instrument. ³ Fluttering. ⁴ Neat.

⁵ A girdle or cincture. ⁶ An apron. ⁷ Morning's milk.

Upon hire lendes,¹ ful of many a gore.
 White was hire smok, and brouded all before,
 And eke behind on hire colere aboute
 Of cole-black silk, within and eke withoute.
 The tapes of hire white volupere²
 Were of the same suit of hire colere ;
 Her fillet brode of silk and set full hye ;
 And sikerly she had a likerous eye.
 Full smal ypulled were hire browes two,
 And they were bent,³ and black as any slo.
 She was more blisful on to see,⁴
 Than is the newe perjenete⁵ tree ;
 And softer than the wool is of a wether.

And by hire girdel heng a purse of leather,
 Tasseled with silk and perled with latoun.⁶
 Ful brighter was the shining of hire hewe
 Than in the tower the noble forged newe.
 But of hire song, it was as loud and yerne⁷
 As any swallow sitting on a berne.⁸
 Thereto she coude skip, and make a game,
 As any kid or calf, folowing his dame.
 Hire mouth was sweet as braket or the meth,⁹
 Or hord of apples laid in hay or heth.¹⁰
 Winsing¹¹ she was as is a jolly colt,
 Long as a mast and upright as a bolt.
 A broche she bare upon hire low colere,
 As brode as is the bosse of a bokelere.¹²
 Hire shoon were laced on hire legges hie :
 She was a primerole, a piggesnie¹³

¹ Loins.² Tapes of her cap.³ Arched.⁴ To look upon.⁵ Pear.⁶ Fringed with cloth of gold.⁷ Early.⁸ Barn.⁹ A drink made of honey and spices.¹⁰ Heather.¹¹ Pranksome.¹² Buckler.¹³ A primrose, a puppet

For any lorde to ligger¹ in his bedde,
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.

The Milleres Tale.

VII.

VIRGINIUS' DAUGHTER.

FAIRE was this maid in excellent beautee
Aboven every wight that man might see :
For nature hath with soveraine diligence
Yformed hire in so gret excellence,
As though she wolde say, Lo ! I Nature,
Thus can I forme and peint a creature.

This maid of age twelf yere was and tway,²
In whiche that nature hadde swiche delit.
For right as she can peint a lilly white
And red a rose, right with swich peinture
She peinted hath this noble creature
Ere she was born, upon hire limmes free,
Whereas by right swiche colours shulden be :
And Phebus died hath hire tresses grete,
Like to the stremes of his burned hete.

And if that excellent were hire beautee
A thousand fold more virtuous was she.
As wel in gost as body, chaste was she :
For which she floured in virginite,
With all humility and abstinence,
With all attemperance and patience,
With measure eke of bearing and array.
Discrete she was in answering alway.

¹To lay.

²Two.

No countrefeited termes hadde she
 To semen¹ wise ; but after hire degree
 She spake, and all hire wordes more and lesse
 Souning² in vertue and in gentilnesse.
 Shamefast³ she was in maiden's shamefastnesse,
 Constant in herte, and ever in besinesse
 To drive hire out of idle slogardie :
 And in hire living maidens mighten rede
 As in a book, every good word and dede,
 That longeth⁴ to a maiden vertuous ;
 She was so prudent and so bounteous.
 For which the fame of her outsprong on every side
 Both of hire beutee and hire bountee wide :
 That through the lond, they preised hire each one
 That loved virtue, save envie alone,
 That sory is of other mannes wele,
 And glad is of his sorrow and unhele.⁵

The Doctoures Tale.

VIII.

GLADNESSE.

THESE folke, of which I tell you so
 Upon a carol wenten tho :
 A ladie carolled hem, that hight
 Gladnesse, blissful and light,
 Wel coude she sing and lustely
 None halfe so well and semely :
 And coude make in song such refraining,

¹ Seem.

² Sounding.

³ Modest.

⁴ Belongeth

⁵ Misfortune.

It sate her wonder well to sing.
 Her voice full clere was and full swete.
 She was not rude ne unmete.
 Both was she faire and bright of hew,
 She semed like a rose new
 Of colours, and her flesh so tender,
 That with a brere¹ small and tender,
 Men might it cleve, I dare well say :
 Her forehead frounceles all play,
 Bent² also were her browes two,
 Her eyen gray and glad also,
 That laughden aye in her semblaunt,
 First or the mouth by covaunt.
 I wot not of her nose I shall describe,
 So faire hath no woman alive :
 Her haire was yellow, and clere shining,
 I wote no lady so liking.

Romaunt of the Rose.

IX.

RICHESSE.

BESIDE Beaute yede³ Richesse,
 An high ladie of great noblesse,
 And great of price in every place :
 But who so durst to her trespace
 Or till her folke, in werke or dede,
 He were full hardie out of drede.

Richesse a robe of purple on had,
 Ne trow not that I lie or mad :
 For in this world is none it liche,⁴
 Ne by a thousand deale so riche,

¹ Briar.

² Arched.

³ Went.

⁴ Like.

Ne none so faire, for it full weale
 With orfrais¹ laid was every dele,
 And purtraid² in the ribanings³
 Of dukes stories and of kings ;
 And with a bend⁴ of gold tassiled
 And knopes⁵ fine of gold amiled ;
 About her necke of gentile entayle⁶
 Was shet the riche chevesaile,⁷
 In which there was full great plente
 Of stones clere, and faire to see.

Richesse a girdle had upon,
 The bokell of it was of stone
 Of virtue great and mokel might :
 For whoso bare this stone so bright
 Of venim durst him nothing doubt⁸
 While he the stone had him about :
 That stone was greatly for to love,
 And till a rich mannes behove¹⁰
 Worth all the gold in Rome and Frise :¹¹
 The mordaunt wrought in noble gise
 Was of a stone full precious,
 That was so fine and virtuous,
 That whole a man it couthe make.

Upon the tresses of Richesse
 Was set a circle of noblesse
 Of brende gold, that full light shone,
 So faire I trowe was never none.
 But he were cunning for the nones
 That could devise all the stones

¹ Gold embroideries.² Portrayed.³ Laces.⁴ Band.⁵ Buttons.⁶ Shape.⁷ Necklace.⁸ Muckle.⁹ Fear.¹⁰ So a rich man's behoof or choice.¹¹ Friezland.

That in that circle shewen clere,
 It is a wonder thing to here.
 For no man coud preise or gesse
 Of hem the value or richesse :
 Rubies there were, sapphires, ragounces¹
 And emeraudes more than two ounces.
 But all before full subtilly
 A fine carbuncle set saw I,
 The stone so clere was and bright,
 That all so soon as it was night
 Menne might seene to go for need
 A mile or two in length or brede.
 Such light ysprang out of the stone,
 That Richesse wonder bright yshone
 Both her head and eke her face
 And eke about her all the place.²

The Romaunt of the Rose.

X.

IDLENESS.

THE door of this entre³
 A maiden curteous opened me :
 Her haire was as yellowe of hewe

¹ Jacinth.

² Warton has very justly remarked, "Nothing can be more sumptuous and superb than the robe and other ornaments of Richesse or Wealth. They are imagined with great strength of fancy. But it should be remembered that this was an age of magnificence and show; when a profusion of the most splendid and costly materials were lavished on dress, generally with little taste and propriety, but often with much art and invention."—*Hist. Eng. Poetry*, vol. i., pp. 375 and 376.

³ Entrance.

As any bason scoured newe,
 Her flesh as tender as is a chicke,
 With bente browes, smooth and slicke,
 And by measute large were
 The opening of her eyen clere ;
 Her nose of good proportion,
 Her eyen graie, as is a faucon,¹
 With swete brethe and well favoured,
 Her face white and well coloured ;
 With little mouth and round to see ;
 A clove chinne eke hadde she :—
 Fro Jerusalem to Burgoine
 There n'is² a fairer necke ywis,³
 To fele how smooth and soft it is.
 Her throte also white of hewe,
 As snowe on braunche snowed newe.
 Of bodie full well wrought was she,
 Men neden not in no countrie
 A fairer body for to seke :
 And of fine orfrais⁴ had she eke
 A chapelet, so semely on
 Ne wered never maid upon ;
 And faire, above that chapelet
 A rosy garlond had she set.
 Well semed by her apparaile
 She was not wont to great travaile.⁵
 For whan she kempt⁶ was fetously⁷
 And well arraied and richely,
 Then had she done all her journee
 For merry and well begon⁸ was she.
 She led a lustie life in May

¹ Falcon.² Is not.³ Certainly.⁴ Gold embroideries.⁵ Labor.⁶ Combed.⁷ Neatly.⁸ In a good way.

She had no thought by night ne day
 Of nothing, but if it were onely
 To graithe¹ her well and uncouthely.²
 She was not yet twelve years of age,
 With herte wild, and thought volage.³
 Nice she was, but she ne ment
 None harm ne sleight in her entent,
 But onely lust and jollity.
 For yonge folk, wel weten ye
 Have little thought but on hire play.
 Her lemman was beside alway,
 In such a guise that he her kist
 At all times that so him list,
 That all the daunce⁴ might it see
 They make no force of privitee
 For whoso spake of hem evil or wele,
 They were ashamed never adele,⁵
 But men might seene hem kisse there
 As it two yonge doves were.

The Romaunt of the R

XI.

LARGESSE.

LARGESSE had on a robe fresh
 Of rich purpure sarlinish;⁶
 Wel formed was her face and clere,
 And opened has she hir colere;

¹ Array.

² Oddly.

³ Giddy.

⁴ *I.e.*, Those engaged in dancing, or composing the dance

⁵ A bit.

⁶ Purple sarcenet.

And through her smocke wrought with silke,
 The flesh was seene as white as milke :
 Largesse that worthy was and wise
 Held by the hond a knight of prise,¹
 Was sibbe² to Arthur of Bretaigne
 Her moste joie was ywis,
 When that she yave, and saied, have this.
 Not Avarice the foule caitiffe
 Was halfe to gripe so ententive³
 As Largesse is to yeve and spend
 And God alway ynough her send,⁴
 So that the more she gave away,
 The more ywis she had alway.

The Romaunt of the Rose

XII.

FRAUNCHISE.

AND next him daunced dame Fraunchise
 Arrayed in full noble guise :
 She was not broune ne dunne of hew,
 But white as snow yfallen newe :
 Her nose was wrought at point devise,
 For it was gentil and tretise ;⁵
 With eyen glad, and browes bent,
 Her haire downe to her heles went ;
 And she was simple as dove on tree,
 Full debonair⁶ of heart was she.
 And she had on a suckeny,⁷

¹ Renown.

² Related.

³ Attentive.

⁴ Sent.

⁵ Her nose was exactly and well proportioned.

⁶ Gentle, courteous

⁷ Loose frock.

That not of hempe herdes¹ was,
 So faire was non in all Arras ;
 Lord, it was riddled² fetisly—
 Full well yclothed was Fraunchise,
 For there is no cloth sitteth bette
 On damosell, than doth rokette :³
 A woman well more fetise is
 In rokette than in cote ywis,
 The white rokette ridede faire
 Betokeneth, that full debonaire
 And swete was she that it beare.

The Romaunt of the Rose.

XIII.

N A T U R E .

THEN was I ware, where there sate a queen
 That as of light the sommer Sunne shene⁴
 Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure,
 She fairer was than every creature.

And in a lande, upon an hill of floures
 Was set this noble goddessse Nature,
 Of branches were her halles and her boures
 Ywrought after her craft and her mesure ;
 Ne there was foul that cometh of engendure,
 That there ne were pressed in her presence,
 So take hire dome and yeve hire audience.

For this was on Sainct Valentine's day,

¹ Of hempen-flax. ² No clothing sitteth better, or is more becoming

³ Loose gown.

⁴ Sunshine.

When every foule cometh to choose hir make,
 Of every kind that men thinke may ;
 And then so huge a noise gan they make
 That earth, sea, and tree, and every lake,
 So full was, that unneth there was space
 For me to stand, so full was all the place.

But to the point : Nature held on her hond,
 A formell egle,¹ of shape the gentilest,
 That ever she among her workes found,
 The most benigne, and eke the goodliest,
 In her was every virtue, at his rest
 So farforth, that Nature her selfe had blisse,
 To looke on her, and oft her beak to kisse.

The Assembly of Foule

XIV.

A BEAUTEOUS LADY.

It happed that I came on a day,
 Into a place, there that I sey²
 Truly, the fairest companie
 Of ladies, that ever man with eie
 Had seene together in one place.
 Among these ladies thus echone³
 Sooth to saine,⁴ I saw one,
 That was like none of the rout,
 For I dare swere withoute doubt,
 That as the summer's Sunne bright
 Is fairer, clerer, and hath more light

¹ Female Eagle.

² Saw.

³ Each one.

⁴ Sooth to say.

Than any other planet in Heaven,
 The Moone, or the sterres seven,
 For all the world so hadde she
 Surmounten hem all of beautee,
 Of manner, and of comelinesse,
 Of stature and of well set gladnesse,
 Of goodliheed, and so well besey'¹
 Shortly what shall I more sey ?

I sawe her daunce so comely,
 Carol and sing so swetely,
 Laugh, and play so womanly,
 And looke so debonairly,²
 So goodly speke³ and so friendly
 That certes I trowe that evermore,
 Nas⁴ sene so blissful a tresore :⁵
 For every here upon her head,
 Sothe to say, it was not red,
 So neither yellowe nor broune it was,
 Me thought most like gold it was.
 And swiche eyen my lady had
 Debonaire, good, glad and sad,
 Simple,⁶ of good mokel⁶ and not too wide.

And such a simple, swete speche
 Had that swete, my lives leech,
 So friendly, and so well ygrounded,
 Upon all reason so well yfounded,
 And so trefable⁷ to all good,
 That I dare swere well by the wod (rood)

¹ Beseen.

² The measure of this poem is powerfully suggestive of Milton's L'Allegro.

³ Speech. ⁴ Was not. ⁵ Treason. ⁶ Of good make or shape.

⁷ Disposed.

Of eloquence was never fonde
 So sweet a souning faconde ;
 Her throte, as I have now memorie
 Seemed as a round toure of yvorie,¹
 Of good greatnesse and not too grete,
 And faire white she hete,²
 That was my ladies name right,
 She was thereto faire and bright,
 She had not her name wrong :
 Right faire shoulders, and body long
 She had, and arms ever lith.
 Right white hands and nailes rede,
 Round brestes, and of good brede
 Her lippes were ;
 And I dare swere well, if that she
 Had among ten thousand be,
 She would have be at the beste
 A chefe myrroure of the feste.

The Boke of the Dutchesse.

XV.

A GROUP OF LADIES, AND OF KNIGHTS.

AND as I sat the birds hearkening thus,
 Me thought that I heard voices sodainly,
 The most sweetest and most delicious
 That ever any wight I trow truly
 Heard in their life, for the armony
 And sweet accord was in so good musicke,
 That the voice to angels was most like.

¹ Ivory.

² Hight, or was called—the ladies name was Blanche

At the last, out of a grove even by,
 That was right goodly and pleasaunt to sight,
 I see where there came singing lustily
 A world of ladies ; but to tell aright
 Their great beauty, it lieth not in my might,
 Nor their array : nevertheles I shall
 Tell you a part, though I speak not of all.

The surcotes white of velvet wele sitting
 They were in cladde : and the semes echone,
 As it were a manere garnishing,
 Was set with emerauds one and one,
 By and by ; but many a riche stone
 Was set on the purfiles¹ out of dout,
 Of colors, sleeves, and traines round about.

As great pearles round and orient,
 Diamonds fine and rubies red,
 And many another stone of which I went²
 The names now ; and everich on her head
 A rich fret of gold, which without dread³
 Was full of stately riche stones set,
 And every lady had a chapelet

On her head of braunches fresh and grene,
 So well wrought and so mervelously,
 That it was a noble sight to sene ;
 Some of laurer, and some full pleasantly
 Had chapelets of woodbind, and sadly
 Some of *agnus castus* wear also
 Chapelets fresh ; but there were many of tho

¹ Edging of minever or fur.

² Want.

³ Without doubt

That daunced, and eke song full sobrelly,
 But all they yede in manner of compace,¹
 But one there yede in mid the company,
 Sole by her selfe, but all followed the pace
 That she kepte, whose hevenly figured face
 So pleasaunt was, and her well shape person,
 That of beauty she past hem everichone.

And more richly beseene, by many fold
 She was also in every manner thing,
 On her head full pleasaunt to behold,
 A crown of golde riche for any king,
 A branch of *agnus castus* eke bearing
 In her hand: and to my sight trully,
 She lady was of all the company.

And she began a roundell lustely,
 That "*Suse le foyle, devers moy*" men call,
 "*Siene et mon joly couer est endormy,*"²
 And then the company answered all
 With voices sweet entuned, and so small,
 That me thought it the sweetest melody
 That ever I heard in my life sothely.

And thus they came, dauncing and singing
 Into the middes of the mead echone,
 Before the herber³ where I was sitting,
 And, God wot, methought I was wel bigone,⁴
 For then I might avise⁵ hem one by one,

¹ Their appearance was within the bounds of ordinary beauty.

² The opening stanzas of an old French rondeau.

³ Arbor.

⁴ In a good way.

⁵ Observe.

Who fairest was, who best coud dance or sing,
Or who most womanly was in all thing.

They had not daunced but a little throw,¹
When that I heard ferre off sodainly,
So great a noise of thundering trumpes blow,
As though it should have departed the skie ;
And after that within a while I sie,
From the same grove where the ladies came out,
Of men of armes comming such a rout,

As all the men on earth had been assembled
In that place ; wel horsed for the nones,
Stering² so fast, that all the earth trembled :
But for to speke of riches and of stones,
And men and horse, I trow the large wones³
Of Pretir John, ne all his tresory
Might not unneth have boght the tenth party

Of their array, who so list heare more,
I shall rehearse, so as I can, a lite.
Out of the grove, that I spake of before,
I sie come first, all in their clokes white
A company, that ware for their delite,
Chapelets fresh of okes seriall,
Newly sprong, and trumpets wore they all.

On every trumpe hanging, a broad banere
Of fine tartarium were full richely bete,
Every trumpet his lords armes bere,
About their neckes with great pearles sete
Collers broad, for cost they would not lete,

¹ A little while.

² Driving.

³ Heaps.

As it would seem, for their schochones¹ echone,
Were set about with many a precious stone.

Their horse harneis was alle white also,
And after them next in one company,
Came kings of armes, and no mo,
In clokes of white cloth of gold richely ;
Chaplets of greene on their heads on high,
The crowns that they on their schochones bare
Were set with pearl, with ruby and saphere,

And eke great diamondes every one :
But all their horse harneis and other geare
Was in a sute according everichone,
As ye have heard the foresaid trumpets were ;
And by seeming they were nothing to lere²
And their judging they did so manerly
And after hem came a great company

Of heraudes³ and pursevauntes eke
Arraid in clothes of white velvet,
And hardily they were nothing to seke,
How they on them should the harneis set ;
And every man had on a chapelet ;
Schochones and eke harneis indeed,
They had in sute of hem that 'fore hem yede.

Next after hem came in armour bright
All save their heades, seemely knights nine,
And every claspe and naile, as to my sight,
Of their harneis were of red golde fine,

¹ Escutcheons. ² They had nothing to learn. ³ Heralds and Pursuivants.

With cloth of gold ; and furred with ermine
Were the trappoures¹ of their steedes strong,
Wide and large, that to the ground did hong.

And every bosse of bridel and paitrell²
That they had, was worth, as I would wene,
A thousand pound ; and on their heades well
Dressed were crownes of laurer grene,
The beste made that ever I had seene,
And every knight had after him riding
Three henchmen on him awaiting.

Of which every first, on a short truncheon
His lordes helme bare, so richly dight,
That the worst was worthe the ransoun
Of any king ; the second a shield bright
Bare at his backe ; the thred³ bare upright
A mighty spere, full sharpe ground and kene,
And every childe ware of leaves grene

A fresh chapelet upon his haire bright ;
And clokes fine of white velvet they ware,
Their steedes trapped and arraied right
Without difference, as their lordes were ;
And after hem on many a fresh corsere
There came of armed knights such a rout,
That they bespread the large field about.

And all they ware after their degrees
Chapelets newe made of laurer grene,
Some of the oke, and some of other trees,

¹ Trappings

² Breast-plate.

³ The third

Some in their honds bare boughes shene,¹
 Some of laurer, and some of okes kene,
 Some of hauthorne, and some of the woodbina
 And many mo which I had not in mind.

And so they came, their horses freshly stering,
 With bloody sownes of hir trompes loud ;
 There sie I many an uncouth disguising
 In the array of these knightes proud ;
 And at the last as evenly as they coud,
 They took their places in middes of the mede,
 And every knight turned his horses hede

To his fellow, and lightly laid a spere
 In the rest ; and so justes began
 On every part, about, here and there ;
 Some brake his spere, some drew down hors and man,
 About the fieldes astray the steedes ran ;
 And to behold their rule and governaunce,
 I you ensure it was a great pleasauce.

And so the justes last an houre and more ;
 But tho,² that crowned were in laurer grene,
 Wan the prise : their dintes³ were so sore,
 That there was none ayenst hem might sustene,
 And the justing all was left off clene,
 And fro their hors the ninth alight anone
 And so did all the remnaunt everichone.

And forth they yede⁴ together, twain and twain
 That to behold, it was a worthy sight ;
 Toward the ladies on the greene plain,

¹ Shining.² Those.³ Blows.⁴ Rode.

That sung and danced as I said now right :¹
 The ladies as soone as they goodly might
 They brake of both the song and daunce,
 And yede² to meet hem with full glad semblaunce.³

And every lady took full womanly
 By the hond a knight, and forth they yede
 Unto a faire laurer that stood fast by,
 With leaves lade the boughes of great brede ;⁴
 And to my dome⁵ there never was indede
 Man, that had seene halfe so faire a tree ;
 For underneath there might it well have be

An hundred persons at their own pleasaunce
 Shadowed fro the heat of Phebus bright,
 So that they should have felt no grevaunce
 Of raine ne haile that hem hurte might,
 The savour, eke, rejoyce would any wight
 That had be sike or melancholious ;
 It was so very good and virtuous.

And with great reverence they inclined low
 To the tree so soot⁶ and faire of hew,
 And after that within a little throw,
 They began to sing and daunce of new,
 Some song of love, some plaining of untrue,
 Environing the tree that stood upright ;
 And ever yede a lady and a knight.

The Flower and the Leaf.

Note to Paintings.—Female Characters.—We cannot more appropriately close this division of our selections from Chaucer,

¹ Just now.

² Went.

³ Cheerful demeanor.

⁴ Breadth.

⁵ Judgment.

⁶ Sweet.

than by quoting a portion of an indignant outbreak, against those who asperse the character of woman, contained in "A Praise of Women." This Poem is usually printed with Chaucer's works, and was considered genuine, till the judicious Tyrwhitt invested it with doubts. And although this eminent critic is of the opinion that it ought not to be imputed to him, considering it as he does, "A part of the heap of rubbish added by John Stowe to the edition of 1561,"¹ yet we cannot but observe in it many of the characteristic peculiarities both of style and thought, which distinguish Chaucer. At all events, and if it be a forgery, it will still serve as an illustration of Chaucer, since the copyist was obliged to conform as closely as possible to the sentiments of the author whom he counterfeited.

ALL tho that list of women evil to speke,
 And sain of hem worse than they deserve,
 I pray to God that hir neckes to breke,
 Or on some evil death mote the janglers² sterve;
 For every man were holden hem to serve
 And do hem worship, honour, and servise,
 In every manner that they best coud devise.

For we ought first to think on what manere
 They bring us forth, and what pain they endure
 First in our birth, and sitte³ fro yere to yere,
 How busely they done their busie cure,⁴
 To keepe us fro every misaventure
 In our youth whan we have no might
 Our selfe to keepe, neither by day nor night.

¹ Tyrwhitt's account of Chaucer's Works.

² May the praters perish.

³ Since.

⁴ Care or occupation.

Alas, how may we say on hem but wele,¹
 Of whom we were yfostered and ybore,
 And ben all our succour, and ever true as steele,
 And for our sake full oft they succour sore ;
 Without women were all our joy lore,²
 Wherefore we ought all women to obey
 In all goodnesse, I can no more say.

Lo ! what gentilnesse these women have,
 If we coud know it for our rudenesse
 How busie they be us for to keepe and save
 Both in heale, and also in sicknesse,
 And alway right sorrie for our distresse :
 In every manner, thus shew they routh,³
 That in hem is all goodnesse and truth.

And sith we find in hem gentillnesse and trouth,
 Worship, bountie, and kindnesse evermore,
 Let never this gentillnesse throug your slouth
 In hir kind trouth be aught forlore,
 That in woman is, and hath ben full yore,
 For in reverence of the Heaven's Queene,
 We ought to worship all women that beene.

For of all creatures that ever wer gat and borne,
 This wote we wele, a woman was the best ;
 By her recovered was the bliss that we had lorne,
 And throug the woman shall we come to rest,
 And ben ysaved, if that our selfe lest ;⁴
 Wherefore me thinketh, if that we had grace,
 We oughten honor women in every place.

¹ How may we say other than well of them.

² Lorn, or undone.

³ Pity

⁴ Choose.

Therefore I rede,¹ that to our lives end,
Fro this time forth, while that we have space,
That we have trespassed pursue² to amend,
Praying our ladie well of alle grace
To bring us unto that blissful place,
There as she and all good women shall be in fere³
In Heaven above, among the angels clere.

¹ Advise.

² Strive.

³ In companionship

III.

PAINTINGS.—MASCULINE CHARACTERS



I.

LYCURGE.

THERE mayst thou se coming with Palamon
Lycurge himself, the grete King of Thrace :
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face.
The cercles of his eyen in his hed,
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,
And like a griffon looked he about,
With kemped¹ haire on his browes stout :
His limmes gret, his braunes² hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe.
And as the guise was in his contree,
Full high upon a chair of gold stood he,
With four white bolles in the trais.³
Instead of cote-armure on his harneis,
With nailes yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempt behind his bak
As any ravens fether it shone for blake.

¹ Combed.

² Muscles.

³ Traces.

A wreath of gold arm-gret,¹ of huge weight,
 Upon his head sate ful of stones bright,
 Of fine rubins and diamants.²
 About his chair their wenten white alauns,³
 Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere,
 To huntun at the leon or the dere,
 And folwed him, with mosel⁴ fast ybound,
 Colored with gold, and torettes⁵ filed round.
 An hundred lordes had he in his route,
 Armed full well, with hertes sterne and stout.

The Knights Tale

II.

EMETRIUS.

WITH Arcita, in stories as men find,
 The great Emetrius the King of Inde,
 Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
 Covered with cloth of gold, diapred⁶ wele,
 Came riding like the god of armes Mars.
 His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,⁷
 Couched⁸ with perles, white and round and grete.
 His sadel was of brent gold new ybete ;
 A mantelet⁹ upon his shouldres hanging
 Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
 His crisper hair like ringes was yronne,
 And that was yelwe, and glittered as the sonne.

¹As thick as the arm. ²Rubies and diamonds. ³Mastiff dogs. ⁴Muzzle.
⁵Rings, similar to those now used on horse-harness, and which were
 ranged or *filed* around the collars of dogs for the purpose of fastening the
 hawk's leash to the jesses.

⁶ Figured.

⁷ A kind of silk.

⁸ Inlaid.

⁹ A mantle.

His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
 His lippes round, his colour was sanguin,¹
 A fewe fraknes² in his face yspreint,³
 Betwixen yelwe and blacke somdel ymeint,⁴
 And as a leon he his loking caste.
 His berd was wel begonnen for to spring,
 His vois was as a trompe thondering.
 Upon his head he weared of laurer grene
 A gerlond fresshe and lusty for to sene.
 Upon his hand he bare for his deduit⁵
 An egle tame, as any lilly white.
 An hundred lordes had he with him there,
 All armed save hir hedes in all hir gere,
 Full richely in alle manere thinges.
 For trusteth well, that erles, dukes, and kinges
 Were gathered in this noble companie,
 For love, and for encrease of chevalrie,
 About this king ther ran on every part,
 Full many a tame leon and leopart.

The Knightes Tale.

III.

MIRTH.

FULL faire was Mirthe, full long and high,
 A fairer man I never sigh:⁶
 As round as apple was his face,
 Full roddie and white in every place :

¹ He was fair complexioned.

³ Sprinkled.

⁵ Pleasure or delight.

² Freckles.

⁴ Mingled.

⁶ Saw.

Fetis he was and wel besey,¹
 With meetly mouth and eyen gray,
 His nose by measure wrought full right,
 Crispe was his haire and eke full bright :
 His shoulderes of a large brede,²
 And smallish in the girdlestede :³
 He seemed like a purtreiture,
 So noble he was of his stature,
 So faire, so jolly, and so fetise,
 With limmes wrought at point devise,
 Deliver,⁴ smart, and of great might :
 Ne saw thou never man so light.
 Of beard unneth he had nothing,
 For it was in the firste spring ;
 Full yong he was, and merry of thought,
 And in samette, with birdes wrought,
 And with gold beaten full fetously,
 His bodie was clad full richely :
 Wrought was his robe in straunge gise,
 And all to-slittered for queinteise
 In many a place, low and hie,
 And shode he was with great maistrie,
 With shoon decoped, and with lace ;
 By druerie, and by solace,⁵
 His lefe⁶ a rosen chapelet
 Had made, and on his head it set.

And wete ye who was his lefe
 Dame Gladnesse there was him so lefe,
 That singeth so well with glad corage,
 That from she was twelve year of age,

¹ Of a fine appearance.

² Breadth.

³ The waist.

⁴ Active.

⁵ Out of gallantry and sport.

⁶ His love.

She of her love graunt¹ him made :
 Sir Mirth her by the finger hade
 Dauncing, and she him also ;
 Great love was atwixt them two,
 And both were faire and bright of hewe.

The Romaunt of the Rose.

IV.

TROILUS.

THIS Troilus sat on his baie steed
 All armed, save his head, full richely,
 And wounded was his horse, and gan to blede,
 On which he rode a pace full softly :
 But such a knightly sight truely
 As was on him, was nat withouten faile
 To loke on Mars, that god is of battaile.

So like a man of armes, and a knight,
 He was to seen, fulfilled of high prowesse,
 For both he had a body, and might
 To doen gret thing, as well as hardinesse,
 And eke to seen him in his geare dresse,
 So fresh, so yong, so weldy seemeth he,
 It was an heaven upon him for to see.

His helme to hewen was in twenty places
 That by a tissue hong, his backe behind,
 His shelde to dashed with swerdes and with maces,
 In which men might many an arrow find,

¹ Gift.

That thirled¹ had both horn, nerfe,² and rind :
 And aye the people cried " Here comes our joie,
 And next his brother, helder up of Troie."

For which he wext a little redde for shame,
 Whan he so heard the people upon him crien.
 That to behold it was a noble game,
 How soberliche he cast adoun his eyen :

* * * *

In suffisaunce,³ in blisse, and in singings
 This Troilus gan all his life to lede,
 He spendeth, jousteth, and maketh feestings,
 He giveth freely oft, and chaungeth wede,⁴
 He helde about him alway out of drede
 A world of folke, as come him wel of kind⁵
 The freshest and the best he coulde find.

In alle needes for the townes werre
 He was, and aye, the first in armes dight,
 And certainly but if that bookes erre,
 Save Hector, most ydradde⁶ of any wight,
 And this increase of hardinesse and might
 Come him of love, his ladies' thanke to win
 That altered his spirit so within.

In time of truce on hauking would he ride,
 Or els hunt bore, beare or lioun,
 The smalle bestes let he gon beside,
 And whan that he come riding into toun,

¹ Pierced.

² Nerve.

³ Enjoyment.

⁴ Garments.

⁵ Such as became his birth.

⁶ Dreaded.

Full oft his ladie from her window doun,
 As fresh as faucon, comen out of mew,
 Full redely was him goodly to salue.

Troilus and Creseide.

V.

A PARISH CLERK.

Now was ther of that chirche a parish clerk,
 The which that was ycleped¹ Absolon.
 Crulle² was his here, and as the gold it shone,
 And strouted as a fanne large and brode :
 Full streight and even lay his joly shode,
 His rode was red, his eyen grey as goos,
 With Poules³ windows corven on his shoes ;
 In hosen red he went full fetisly.
 Yeladde he was full small and properly
 All in a kirtle of a light watchet ;
 Full faire and thicke ben the pointes set,
 And thereupon he had a gay surprise,
 As white as is the blosme upon the rise.⁴

A merry child he was, so God me save ;
 Wel coud he letten blood, and clippe and shave,
 And make a chartre of lond, and a quitance.
 In twenty manners coud he trip and daunce
 (After the scole of Oxenforde tho),
 And with his legges casten to and fro ;

¹ Called.

² Curled.

³ T. Warton thought that this phrase applied to any device or ornament. Tyrwhitt supposes that the " shoes were cut in squares like panes of glass."

⁴ Hawthorn-bush.

And playen songs on a small ribible ;
Thereto he song sometime a loud quible,
And as well coude he play on a giterne.
In all the toun n'as brewhous ne taverne,
That he ne visited with his solas,¹
There as that any galliard² tapstere was.

The Milleres Tale.

¹ Mirth.

² Gay.

IV.

NARRATIVE POETRY.

I.

THE YOUNG MARTYR.

THEY was in Asie, in a gret citie,
Amonges Cristen folk a Jewerie,¹
Sustened by a lord of that contree
For foule usure, and lucre of villanie,
Hateful to Criste, and to his compaignie :
And thurgh the strete men mighten ride and wend,
For it was free, and open at either ende.

A littel scole of Cristen folk ther stood
Doun at the farther ende, in which ther were
Children an hepe comen of Cristen blood,
That lerned in that scole yere by yere,
Swiche maner doctrines as men used there :
This is to say, to singen and to rede,
As smalle children don in hir childhede

Among these children was a widewes sone,
A litel clergion, sevene yere of age,

¹ A district appropriated to Jews.

That day by day to scole was his wone,¹
 And eke also, whereas he sey the image
 Of Cristes moder, had he in usage
 As him was taught, to knele adoun, and say,
Ave Marie as he goth by the way.

Thus hath this widewe hire litel sone ytaught
 Our blissful Lady, Cristes modere dere,
 To worship aye, and he forgate it naught:
 For sely² child wol alway sone lere.³
 But aye, when I remembre on this matere,
 Seint Nicholas stant⁴ ever in my presence,
 For he so yong to Crist did reverence.

This litel childe his litel book lerning,
 As in the scole he sate at his primere,
 He *Alma redemptoris* herde singe,
 As children lered hir antiphonere:⁵
 And as he dorst, he drow him nere and nere,
 And hearkened ay the wordes and the note,
 Till he the firste verse coude⁶ all by rote.

Nought wist he what this Latin was to say,
 For he so yong and tendre was of age:
 But on a day his fellow gan he pray
 To expounden him this songe in his langage,
 Or telle him why this songe was in usage:
 This prayde he him to construe and declare,
 Full often time upon his knees bare.

His felaw, that which elder was than he,

¹ Custom.

² Simple.

³ Learn.

⁴ Stands.

⁵ Their hymns or anthems.

⁶ Knew.

Answered him thus: This song, I have herd say,
 Was maked of our blissful Lady free,
 Hire to salue, and eke hire for to pray
 To ben our help, and succour when we dey.
 I can no more expound in this matere:
 I lerne song, I can but small grammere.

And is this song maked in reverence
 Of Cristes moder? said this innocent;
 Now certes I wol do my diligence
 To con it alle, or Cristemasse be went¹
 Though that I for my primer shall be shent,²
 And shal be beten thries³ in an hour,
 I wol it conne, our Ladie for to honour.

His felaw taught him homeward prively
 Fro day to day, till he coude it by rote,
 And then he song it wel and boldely
 Fro word to word according with the note:
 Twies a day it passed through his throte,
 To scoleward and homeward whan he wente:
 On Cristes moder set was his entente.

As I have said, throughout this Jewerie
 This litel child as he came to and fro,
 Full merily than wold he sing and crie,
O Alma redemptoris, ever mo:
 The swetenesse hath his herte persed⁴ so
 Of Cristes moder, that to hire to pray
 He cannot stint of singing by the way.

¹ Be past.² Punished.³ Thrice.⁴ Pierced.

Our firste foe, the serpent Sathanas,
 That hath in Jewes herte his waspes nest,
 Up swale¹ and said, O Ebraike peple, alas!
 Is this to you a thing that is honest,
 That swiche a boy shall walken as him leste
 In your despite, and sing of swiche sentence,
 Which is again our lawes reverence?

From thennesforth the Jewes han conspired
 This innocent out of the world to chace:
 An homicide² therto han they hired,
 That in an alleye had a privee place,
 And as the child gan forthby to pace,
 This cursed Jew him hent,³ and held him fast,
 And cut his throte, and in a pit him cast.

I say that in a wardrope⁴ they him threwe,
 Where as this Iewes purgen their entraille.
 O cursed folk, of Herodes alle newe,
 What may your evil entente you availle?
 Mordre wol out, certein it wol not faille,
 And namely ther⁵ the honour of God shall sprede:
 The blood outcrieth on the cursed deed.

O martyr souted⁶ in virginitee,
 Now mayst thou singe, and folwen ever in on
 The white lamb celestiall, quod she,
 Of which the great Evangelist Seint John
 In Pathmos wrote, which sayth that they that gon
 Beforn this lamb, and singe a song al newe,
 That never fleshly woman they ne knewe.

¹ Up-swelled.² A murderer.³ Seized.⁴ A house of office—a privy.⁵ Thereby.⁶ Consolidated

This poure widewe awaiteth all that night
 After hire litel childe, and he came nought :
 For which as sone as it was dayes light,
 With face pale of drede and busy thought,
 She hath at scole and elleswher him sought,
 Till finally she gan so far espie,
 That he last seen was in the Jewerie.

With mothers pitie in hire brest enclosed
 She goth, as she were halfe out of hire minde,
 To every place, wher she hath supposed
 By likelihed hire litel child to finde :
 And ever on Cristes moder meke and kinde
 She cried, an at the laste thus she wrought,
 Among the cursed Jewes she him sought.

She freyneth,¹ and she praieth pitously
 To every Jew that dwelleth in thilke place,
 To tell hire, if hire childe went ought forthby :
 They sayden, nay ; but Jesu of his grace
 Yave in hire thought, within a litel space,
 That in that place after hire sone she cried,
 Ther he was casten in a pit beside.

O grete God, that parfourest thy laude
 By mouth of innocentes, lo here they might !
 This gemme of chastitee, this emeraude,
 And eke of martyrdom the rubie bright,
 Ther he with throte ycorven² lay upright,
 He *Alma redemptoris* gan to singe
 So loude, that all the place gan to ringe.

¹ Asketh² Cut.

The Cristen folk, that through the strete went,
 In comen, for to wondre upon this thing :
 And hastily they for the provost sente.
 He came anon withouten tarrying,
 And herieth¹ Crist, that is of heven king,
 And eke his moder, honour of mankind,
 And after that the Jewes let he bind.

This childe with pitous lamentation
 Was taken up, singing his song alway :
 And with honour and gret procession,
 They carrien him unto the next abbey.
 His mother swouning by the bere lay ;
 Unnethes might the people that was there
 This newe Rachel bringen fro his bere.

With torment and with shameful deth eche on
 This provost doth these Jewes for to sterve,²
 That of this mordre wiste, and that anon ;
 He n'olde³ no swiche cursedness observe :
 Evil shal he have, that evil wol' deserve.
 Therefore with wilde hors he did hem drawe,
 And after that he heng hem by the lawe.

Upon his bere ay lith⁴ this innocent
 Before the auter⁵ while the masse last :
 And after that, the abbot with his covent⁶
 Han spedde hem for to berie him full fast :
 And whan they holy water on him cast,
 Yet spake this child, when spreint⁷ was the holy water.
 And sang, *O Alma redemptoris mater.*

¹ Praiseth.² Perish.³ Would not.⁴ Lieth.⁵ Altar.⁶ Convent.⁷ Sprinkled.

This abbot which that was an holy man,
 As monkes ben, or elles ough to be,
 This yonge child to conjure he began,
 And said; O dere child, I halse¹ thee
 In vertue of the holy Trinitee,
 Tell me what is thy cause for to sing,
 Sith that thy throte is cut to my seeming.

My throte is cutte unto my nekke-bone
 Saide this child, and as by way of kinde
 I shuld have dyed, ye longe time agon:
 But Jesu Crist, as ye in bookes finde,
 Wol that his glory last and be in minde,
 And for the worship of his modre dere,
 Yet may I sing *O Alma* loude and clere.

This welle of mercie, Cristes moder swete,
 I loved alway, as after my conning:
 And whan that I my lif should forlete,²
 To me she came, and bade me for to sing
 This antem veraily in my dying,
 As ye han herde, and, whan that I had songe
 Methought she laid a grain upon my tongue.

Wherefore I sing, and sing I mote³ certain
 In honour of that blissful maiden free,
 Til fro my tongue, of taken is the grain.
 And after that thus saide she to me;
 My litel childe, then wol I fetchen thee,
 Whan that the grain is fro thy tong ytake.
 Be not aghast, I wol thee not forsake

¹ Conjure.² Give over, or quit.³ Must.

This holy monk, this abbot him mene I,
 His tongue out caught, and toke away the grain :
 And he yave up the gost full softly.
 And whan this abbot had this wonder sein,
 His salte teres trilled¹ adoun as rein :
 And groff² he fell all platte³ upon the ground,
 And still he lay, as he had ben ybound.

The covent lay eke upon the pavement
 Weping and herying Cristes moder dere.
 And after that they risen, and forth ben went,
 And toke away this martir fro his bere,
 And in a tombe of marble stones clere,
 Enclosen they his litel body swete :
 Ther he is now, God lene⁴ us for to mete.

The Prioresses Tale.

II.

A RESURRECTION.⁵

THIS Knight
 During the time slept not a night,
 Such was his wo and his disease,
 For doubt he should the queene displease.

¹ Trickled.

² Prostrate.

³ Flat.

⁴ *Where* he is now God *lend*, that we may mete.

⁵ A knight having betrothed himself to the queen of a certain island, departs from her to make preparations for their nuptials, promising to return by a certain time. Being prevented, by untoward circumstances, from returning at the promised time, the lady fancies that he has proved unfaithful, and overcome by shame and disappointment, dies. Our narrative commences with the knight's return

Forth goeth the ship with such spede
 Right as the prince for his great nede
 Desire would after his thought,
 Till it unto the yle him brought ;
 Where in haste upon the sand,
 He and his people tooke the land,
 With hertes glad and chere light,
 Weening to be in Heaven that night :
 But or¹ they passed a while,
 Entering in toward that yle
 All clad in blacke with cheere piteous,
 A lady which never dispitious²
 Had be in all her life tofore,³
 With sory chere, and herte to tore,
 Unto this prince where he gan ride,
 Come and said, “ Abide, abide,
 And have no hast, but fast retourne,
 No reason is ye here sojourne,
 For your untruth hath us discried ;⁴
 Wo worth⁵ the time we us allied
 With you, that are so soone untrew,
 Alas the day that we you knew !
 Alas the time that ye were bore !
 For all this lond by you is lore,⁶
 Accursed be he you hider brought,
 For all your joy is turned to nought.”
 “ Alas, madame,” quoth then this knight,
 And with that from his horse he light,
 With colour pale, and cheekes lene,
 “ Alas what is this for to mene ?

¹ Ere.² Violently angry.³ Before.⁴ Destroyed.⁵ Unhappy be !⁶ Lorn.

What have ye said, why be ye wroth ;
 You to displeas I would be loth ;
 Know ye not well the promesse
 I have made to your princesse,
 Which to parfourn is mine intent,
 So mote I speed as I have meant,
 And as I am her very true,
 Without change or thought new,
 And also fully her servand,
 As creature or man livand¹
 May be to lady or princesse,
 For she mine Heaven, and whole richesse
 Is, and the lady of mine heale,²
 My worldes joy and all my weale ;
 What may this be, whence coms this speche,
 Tell me, madame, I you beseech,
 For sith the first of my living,
 Was I so fearful of no thing,
 As I am now to heare you speke,
 For dout I feele mine herte breake :”
 “ Alas” (quod she), “ that ye were bore
 For, for your love this land is lore ;
 The queene is dead and that is routh,³
 For sorrow of your great untrouth.
 For whan the time ye set was past,
 The queen to counsaile sone in hast,
 What was to do, and said great blame,
 Your acquaintaunce cause would and shame,
 And the ladies of their avise⁴
 Prayed, for need was to be wise

¹ Servant.² Living.³ Health.⁴ Pity.⁵ Advice.

In eschewing tales and songs,
 That of them make would ille tongues.
 For every wight of them would say
 Their closed yle an open way
 Was now become to every wight,
 And well approved by a knight,
 Which he, alas, without paysaunce,¹
 Had soone achieved thobeisaunce :²
 All this was moved at consell thrise,
 And concluded daily wise,
 That bet was die without blame
 Than lose the riches of their name ;
 This knight then in armes twain
 This lady took and gan her saine,³
 "Alas my birth, wo worth my life,"
 And even with that he drew a knife
 And through gowne, doublet, and shert,
 He made the blood come from his herte,
 And set him doune upon the greene,
 And full repent⁴ closed his eene,
 And save that once he drew his breath,
 Without more, thus he tooke his death.
 For which cause his lusty host,
 Which in a bataille⁵ on the coast,
 At once for sorrow such a cry,
 Gan rere⁶ thorou the company,
 That to the Heaven heard was the sowne,
 And under the earth also far downe ;
 That wild beasts for the feare
 So sodainly afrayed were,

¹ Resistance.² Obedience.³ Began to say to her.⁴ Full of repentance.⁵ Which were embattled.⁶ Rise.

That for the doubt, while they might dure,¹
 They ran as of their lives unsure,
 From the woods unto the plaine,
 And from the valleys the high mountaine
 They sought, and ran as beastes blind,
 That cleane forgotten had their kind.

Then said the lordes of this host,
 And so concluded least and most,
 That they would ever in houses of thacke,²
 Their lives lead, and weare but blacke,
 And forsake all their pleasaunces,
 And turn all joy to penaunces,
 And bear the dead prince to his barge,
 And named them should have the charge ;
 And to the hearse where lay the queen
 The remenaunt went, and down on kneen,
 Holding their hands on high can cry
 " Mercy, mercy, everich thrie,"³
 And cursed the time that ever slouth
 Should have such masterdome of trouth ;
 And to the barge a longe mile
 They bare her forth, and in a while
 Put and brought were all anon
 Unto a city closed with stone,
 Where it had been used aye⁴
 The kings of the land to lay,
 After they reigned in honours,
 And writ was which were conquerours ;
 And all the night, till it was day,
 The people in the church con pray

¹ Endure.

² Thatch.

³ Everlasting three—referring to the Trinity.

⁴ It had ever been the custom.

Unto the holy Trinity,
 Of those soules to have pity.
 And when the night past and ronne
 Was, and the newe day begonne,
 The yong morrow with rayes red,
 Which from the Sunne over all gan spread,
 Attempted clere was and faire,
 And made a time of wholesome air ;
 Befel a wonder case and strange,
 Among the people, and gan change
 Soone the word and every woo,
 Unto a joy, and some to two :
 A bird all fedred blew and greene,
 With bright rayes like gold betweene,
 As small thred over every joynt,
 All full of colour strange and coint,¹
 Uncouth and wonderful to sight,
 Upon the queene's herse con light,
 And sung ful lowe and softely,
 Three songs in hire harmony,
 Unletted² of every wight ;
 Till at the last an aged knight,
 Which seemed a man in great thought,
 Like as he set all thing at nought,
 With visage and eyen all forwept,³
 And pale, as man long unslept,
 By the hearses as he stood,
 With hasty hondling⁴ of his hood
 Unto a prince that by him past,
 Made the bridde somewhat agast ;
 Wherefore she rose and left her song,

¹ Quaint.² Unhindered.³ Swollen with weeping.⁴ Doffing

And depart¹ from us among,
 And spred her winges for to passe
 By the place he entred was,
 And in hir haste, shortly to tell,
 Him hurt, and backward downe he fell,
 From a window richly peint²
 With lives of many divers seint,
 And bete his wings and bled fast
 And of the hurt thus died and past,
 And lay there well and houre or more ;
 Till at the last of briddes a score
 Come and sembled at the place
 Where the window broken was,
 And made swiche waimentacioun,³
 That pity was to hear the sowne,
 And the warbles of their throtes,
 And the complaint of their notes,
 Which from joy cleane was reversed.
 And of them one the glass sone persed,
 And in his beake of colours nine,
 An herbe he brought flouresse, all grene,
 Full of smalle leaves and plaine,
 Swart⁴ and long with many a vaine ;
 And where his fellow lay thus dede
 This hearbe down laid by his hede
 And dressed it full softly,
 And hong his head and stood thereby ;
 Which herbe in lesse than halfe an houre
 Gan over all knit, and after floure⁵
 Full out and wexe ripe the seed,

¹ Departed.² Painted.³ Lamentation.⁴ Dark colored⁵ Flowered

And right as one another feed
 Would, in his beake he tooke the graine,
 And in his fellowes beake certaine
 It put, and thus within the third¹
 Up stood, and pruned him the bird,
 Which dead had be in all our sight,
 And both together forth their flight
 Tooke singing from us, and their leve²
 Was non disturben would, ne greve ;
 And when they parted were and gone,
 Th' abbesse the seeds soone echone
 Gadred had, and in her hand
 The herb she tooke, well avisand³
 The leafe, the seed, the stalke, the floure,
 And said it had a good savour,
 And was no common herb to find,
 And well approved of uncouth kind,
 And than other more vertuouse ;
 Whoso have it might, for to use
 In his need, flowre, leafe, or graine,
 Of thire heale might be certaine :
 And laid it downe upon the herse
 Where lay the queene, and gan reherse
 Eche one to other that they had seene,
 And taling⁴ thus the sede waxen greene,
 And on the dry herse gan spring,
 Which me thought a wondrous thing ;
 And after that floure⁵ and new seed,
 Of which the people all tooke heed,
 And said, it was some great miracle

¹ Third hour or quarter hour.² Desire.³ Observing.⁴ Discoursing.⁵ Flowers.

Or medicine fine more than triacle,
And were well done there to assay
If it might ease in any way,
The corses, which with torch light,
They waked had there alle that night,
Soone did the lords there consent,
And all the people thereto content,
With easie words and little fare,
And made the queenes visage bare,
Which showed was to all about,
Wherefore in swoune fell whole the rout,
And were so sory, most and least,
That long of weping they not ceast,
For of their lord the remembraunce
Unto them was such displeasaunce,
That for to live they called a paine
So were they very true and plaine,¹
And after this the good abbesse,
Of the grains gan choose and dresse
Three, with her fingers clene and small,
And in the queenes mouth by tale,²
One after other full easily,
She put and full cenningly,
Which shewed soone such vertue,
The preved was the medicine true,
For with a smiling countenaunce
The queene uprose, and of usaunce
As she was wont to every wight
She made good cheer, for which sight,
The people kneeling on the stones,
Thought they in Heaven were soule and bones;

¹ Sorrowful.² Count.

And to the prince where he lay,
 They went to make the same assay ;
 And when the queene it understood,
 And how the medicine was good,
 She prayed she might have the graines
 To releve him from the paines
 Which she and he had both endured,
 And to him went and so him cured,
 That within a little space,
 Lusty and fresh on live¹ he was,
 And in good hele,² and hole of speeche,
 And lough,³ and said, "Gramercy⁴ leech,"
 For which the joy throughout the town,
 So great was that the bells sowne
 Afraied⁵ the people, a journey,
 About the city every way,
 And come and asked cause and why
 They rongen were so statelily.

And thus when passed was the sorrow,
 With mickel joye soone on the morrow,
 The kinge, the queene, and every lord,
 With all the ladies by one accord,
 A generall assembly
 Great cry through the country,
 The which after as their intent
 Was turned to a parlement,
 Where was ordained and avised,
 Everything and devised,
 That please might to most and least,⁶

¹ Alive.² Health.³ Laughed.⁴ Grand-mercic—many thanks.⁵ Aroused.⁶ That might give pleasure to great and small.

And there concluded was, the feast
 Within the yle to be hold
 With full consent of young and old ;
 And shipped and thither went
 And into straunge realmes sent,
 To kings, queenes, and duchesses,
 To divers princes and princesses
 Of their linage, and can pray
 That it might like them at that day
 Of mariage, for their sport,
 Come see the yle, and them disport,
 Where should be joustes and turnaies
 And armes¹ done in other waies ;
 Signifying over all, the day
 After April within May.²

The morrow come, and the service
 Of mariage, in such a wise
 Said was, that with more honour,
 Was never prince ne conquerour
 Wedde, ne with such company,
 Of gentilnesse in chivalrie,
 Ne of ladies so great routes³
 Ne so beseen as all abouts
 They were there, I certifie
 You on my life withouten lie.
 And the feast hold was in tentis,⁴
 As to tell you mine intent is,
 I a roomy, large plaine
 Under a wood in a champaine,
 Betwixt a river and a welle,
 Where never had abbay, ne selle⁵

Deeds of arms.
⁴ Tents.

² May-day.
⁵ Cell.

³ Assemblages.

Ben, ne kirke, house, ne village
 In time of any mans age :
 And dured¹ three months the feast,
 In one estate² and never cesed,
 From early the rising of the Sunne
 Till the day spent was and yronne,
 In justing, dauncing and lustinesse,
 And all that sowned to gentilnesse.

Chaucer's Dream.

III.

FABLE OF THE CROW.

WHAN Phebus dwelled here in earth adoun,
 As olde bookes maken mentioun,
 He was the moste lusty bachelor
 Of all this world, and eke the best archer.
 He slow³ Phiton the serpent as he lay
 Sleeping agains the sonne upon a day ;
 And many another noble worthy dede
 He with his bow wrought, as men mowen⁴ rede.

Playen he coude on every minstralcie,
 And singen, that it was a melody
 To heren of his clere voice the soun.
 Certes the king of Thebes, Amphioun,
 That with his singing walled the citee,
 Coud never singen half so wel as he.
 Therto⁵ he was the semelieste man
 That is or was, sithen⁶ the world began ;
 What nedeth it his feature to describe ?

¹ Endured.

² Condition.

³ Slew.

⁴ May.

⁵ In addition.

⁶ Since

For in this world n'is non so faire on live.
 He was therewith fullfilled of gentillnesse,
 Of honour, and of parfytte worthinesse.

Now had this Phebus in his hous a crowe,
 Which in a cage he fostred many a day,
 And taught it speken, as men teche¹ a jay.
 White was this crowe, as is a snow-white swan,
 And contrefete the speche of every man
 He coude, whan he shulde tell a tale.
 Therewith in all this world no nightingale
 Ne coude by an hundred thousand del²
 Singen so wonder merily and wel.

Now had this Phebus in his hous a wif,
 Which that he loved more than his life,
 And night and day did ever his diligence
 Hire for to please, and don hire reverence :
 Save only, if that I the soth³ shall sain,
 Jealous he was, and wold have kept her fain,
 For him were loth yjaped⁴ for to be ;
 And so is every wight in swiche degree :
 But all for nought, for it availeth nought.
 A good wif, that is clene of werke and thought,
 Should not be kept in non await⁵ certain :
 And trewely the labour is in vain
 To kepe a shrewe, for it will not be.
 This hold I for a veray nicetie,⁶
 To spillen labour for to kepen wives ;
 Thus writen olde clerkes in hir lives.

But now to purpos, as I first began.
 This worthy Phebus doth all that he can
 To plesen hire, wening through swiche pleasaunce,

¹ Teach² Times.³ Truth.⁴ Tricked⁵ Should not be kept *watch* upon.⁶ True folly.

And for his manhood and his governance,
 That no man shulde put him from hire grace :
 But God it wote, ther may no man embrace
 As to destreine¹ a thinge, which that nature
 Hath naturelly set in a creature.

Take any brid, and put it in a cage,
 And do all thine entente, and thy corage,
 To fostre it tenderly with mete and drinke
 Of all daintees that thou canst bethinke,
 And kepe it alle so clenely as thou may ;
 Although the cage of gold be never so gay,
 Yet had this brid, by twenty thousand fold,
 Lever² in a forest, that is wilde and colde,
 Gon eten³ wormes, and swiche wretchednesse.
 For ever this brid will don his business
 To escape out of his cage whan that he may :
 His libertee the brid desireth aye.

Let take a cat, and fostre hire with milke
 And tendre flesh, and make hire couch of silke,
 And let hire see a mous go by the wall,
 Anon she weiveth⁴ milke and flesh and all,
 And every daintee that is in that house,
 Swiche appetite hath she to ete the mous.
 Lo, here hath kind hire domination
 And appetite flemeth⁵ discretion.

This Phebus, which that thought upon no gile,
 Deceived was for all his jolitee ;
 For under him another hadde she,
 A man of litel reputation,
 Nought worth to Phebus in comparison :
 The more harme is ; it happeth often so ;

¹ Constrain.² Rather.³ Go eat⁴ Forsaketh.⁵ Banisheth.

Of which ther cometh mochel harme and wo.

And so befell, when Phebus was absent,
His wif anon hath for hire lemman sent.
Hire lemman ? certes that is a knavish speche.
Foryeve it me, and that I you beseeche.

The wise Plato sayth, as ye may rede,
The word must needs accorden¹ with the dede,
If men shuln² tellen proprely a thing,
The word must cosin be to the werking.
I am a boistous³ man, right thus say I ;
There is no difference trewely
Betwix a wif that is of high degree,
(If of hire body dishonest she be)
And any poure wenche, other than this
(If so be they werken both amis):
But, for the gentil is in estat above,
She shall be cleped⁴ his lady and his love ;
And, for that other is a poure woman,
She shall be cleped his wenche and his lemman :
And God it wote,⁵ mine owen dere brother
Men lay as low that one, as lith⁶ that other.

Whan Phebus wif had sent for hire lemman,
Anon they wroughten all hir lust volage.⁷
This white crowe, that heng ay in the cage,
Beheld hir werke, and sayde never a word :
And whan that home was come Phebus the lord,
This crowe song, "Cuckow, cuckow, cuckow."

What ? brid, quod Phebus, what song singest thou now ?
Ne were thou wont so merily to sing,
That to my herte it was a rejoysing

¹ Agree.

² Should or would.

³ Rough.

⁴ Called.

⁵ The colloquialism "*God knows.*"

⁶ Lieth.

⁷ Their giddy lust.

To here thy voice ? alas ! what song is this ?

By God, quod he, I singe not amis.

Phebus (quod he), for all thy worthinesse,
 For all thy beautee, and all thy gentilnesse,
 For all thy song, and all thy minstralcie,
 For all thy waiting,¹ blered is thine eye,
 With one of litel reputation,
 Not worth to thee as in comparison
 The mountance² of a gnat, so mote I thrive,
 For on thy bedde thy wif I saw him swive.³

What wol you more ? the crowe anon him told,
 By sade tokenes, and by wordes bold,
 How that his wif had done his lecherie
 Him to gret shame,⁴ and to great vilanie ;
 And told him oft, he sawe it with his eyen.

This Phebus gan awayward for to wrien ;⁵
 Him thought his woful herte brast atwo.
 His bowe he bent, and set therin a flo,⁶
 And in his ire he hath his wif yslain :
 This is the effect, ther is no more to sain.
 For sorwe of which he brake his minstralcie,
 Both harpe and lute, giterne, and sautrie ;
 And eke he brake his arwes, and his bowe ;
 And after that thus spake he to the crowe.

Traitour, quod he, with tongue of scorpion
 Thou hast me brought to my confusion .
 Alas that I was wrought ! why n'ere I dede ?

O dere wif, o gemme of lustyhede,⁷
 That were to me so sade and eke so trewe,
 Now liest thou ded with face pale of hewe,

¹ Watching.

² Value.

³ Defile.

⁴ To his great shame

⁵ To turn.

⁶ An arrow.

⁷ Pleasur.

Full gilteles, that durst I swere ywis.
 O rakel¹ hond, to do so foul a mis.²
 O troubled wit, o ire reccheles³
 That unavised, smitest gilteles.
 O wantrust,⁴ ful of false suspicion,
 Wher was thy wit and thy discretion?
 O, every man beware of rakelnesse,⁵
 Ne trowe⁶ no thinge withouten strong witsnesse.
 Smite not too sone, ere that ye weten why,
 And beth avised wel and sikerly,⁷
 Or⁸ ye do any execution
 Upon your ire for suspecion.
 Alas! a thousand folk hath rakel ire
 Fully fordon,⁹ and brought hem in the mire,
 Alas! for sorwe I wol myselfen sle.

And to the crowe, O false thefe, said he,
 I wol thee quite¹⁰ anon thy false tale.
 Thou song whilom, like any nightingale,
 Now shalt thou, false thefe, thy song forgon,
 And eke thy white fethers everichone,
 Ne never in all thy life ne shalt thou speke;
 Thus shul men on a traitour ben awreke.
 Thou and thin offspring ever shul be blake,
 Ne never swete noise shul ye make,
 But ever crie ageins¹¹ tempest and rain,
 In token that through thee my wif is slain.

And to the crowe he stert,¹² and that anon,
 And pulled his white fethers everichone,
 And made him blak, and raft¹³ him all his song

¹ Rash hand.² Wrong.³ Reckless.⁴ Distrust or jealousy.⁵ Rashness.⁶ Believe.⁷ Surely.⁸ Before.⁹ Undone.¹⁰ Requit.¹¹ Against.¹² Started.¹³ Bereft.

And eke his speche, and out at dore him flung
 Unto the devil, which I him betake ;
 And for this cause ben alle crowes blake.

Lordings, by this example, I you pray,
 Beth ware, and taketh kepe what ye say ;
 Ne never telleth man in all your lif,
 How that another man hath dight his wif ;
 He wol you haten mortally, certain.
 Dan Solomon, as wise clerkes sain,
 Techeth a man to kepe his tonge well ;
 But as I said, I am not textuel.
 But natheles' thus taughte me my dame ;
 My sone, thinke on the crowe a² Goddes name.
 My sone, kepe wel thy tonge, and kepe thy frend ;
 A wicked tonge is werse than a fiend :
 My sone, from a fiend men may hem blesse.
 My sone, God of his endeles goodenesse
 Walled a tonge with teeth, and lippes eke,
 For man shuld him avisen³ what he speke.
 My sone, full often for too mochel speche
 Hath many a man ben spilt, as clerkes teche ;
 But for a litel speche avisedly
 Is no man shent,⁴ to speken generally.
 My sone, thy tongue shuldest thou restraine
 At alle time, but whan thou dost thy peine
 To speke of God in honour and prayere.
 The first vertue, sone, if thou wolt lere,⁵
 Is to restraine, and kepen wel thy tongue ;
 Thus leren children, whan that they be yonge.
 My sone, of mochel speking evil avised,

¹ Nevertheless.

² In.

³ Consider.

⁴ Hurt.

⁵ Learn.

Wher lesse speking had ynough suffised,
 Cometh mochel harme ; thus was me told and taught ;
 In mochel speche sinne wanteth naught.
 Wost thou whereof a rakel tonge serveth ?
 Right as a swerd forcutteth and forkerveth
 An arme atwo, my dere sone, right so
 A tonge cutteth frendship all atwo.
 A jangler¹ is to God abhominable,
 Rede Salomon, so wise and honourable,
 Rede David in his Psalmes, rede Senek,
 My sone, speke not, but with thyn hed thou beck.
 Dissimule² as thou were defe, if that thou here
 A janglour speke of perilous matere.
 The Fleming sayth, and lerne if that thee lest,³
 That litel jangling causeth mochel rest.
 My sone, if thou no wicked word hast said,
 Thee then not dreden for to be bewraied ;⁴
 But he that hath missaid, I dare wel sain,
 He may by no way clepe⁵ his word again.
 Thing that is sayed is sayed, and forth it goth,
 Though him repent, or be him never so loth,
 He is his thrall, to whom that he hath sayd
 A tale, of which he is now evil apaid.
 My sone, beware, and be non aucthour newe
 Of tidings, whether they ben false or trewe ;
 Wher so thou come, amonges high or lowe,
 Kepe wel thy tongue, and thinke upon the crowe.

The Manciples Tale.

¹ A prater or slanderer.

² Dissemble. ³ Choose.

⁴ Discovered.

⁵ Call

IV.

DEATH AND THE THREE RIOTERS.

IN Flandres whilom was a compaignie
 Of yong folke, that haunteden¹ folie,
 As hasard,² riot, stewes,³ and tavernes ;
 Whereas with harpes, lutes, and giternes,
 They dance and plaie at dis⁴ bothe day and night,
 And ete also, and drinke over their might ;
 Through which they don the devil sacrifice
 Within the devils temple, in cursed wise,
 By superfluitee abhominable.
 Hir othes ben so gret and so damnable,
 That it were grisly⁵ for to here hem swere.
 Our blissful lordes body they to-tere ;
 Hem thought the Jewes rent him not ynough ;
 And eche of hem at others sinne lough.⁶

And right anon in comen tombesteres⁷
 Fetis and small, and yonge fruitesteres⁸
 Singers with harpes, baudes, wafereres,⁹
 Which ben the veray devils officeres,
 To kindle and blow the fire of lecherie,
 That is annexed unto glotonie.

These riotoures three of which I tell
 Long erst or prime rong of any bell
 Were set hem in a tavernne for to drinke :
 And as they sat, they herd a belle clinke
 Beforn a corpse, was caried to his grave :
 That one of hem gan callen to his knave,

¹ Frequented.² Gaming.³ Bawdy houses.⁴ Dice.⁵ Dreadful.⁶ Laughed.⁷ Dancing women.⁸ Fruit women.⁹ Female cake vender.

Go bet,¹ quod he, and axe redily,
 What corps is this, that passeth here forth by :
 And loke that thou report his name wel.

Sire, quod the boy, it nedeth never a del ;
 It was me told or ye came here two houres ;
 He was parde an old felaw of youres,
 And sodenly he was yslain to-night,
 Fordronken² as he sat on his benche upright,
 Ther cam a privee thief, men clepen Deth,
 That in this countree alle the peple sleth,
 And with his spere he smote his herte atwo,
 And went his way withouten wordes mo.
 He hath a thousand slain this pestilence ;
 And, maister, or ye come in his presence,
 Me thinketh that it were ful necessarie,
 For to beware of swiche an adversarie ;
 Beth redy for to mete him evermore.
 Thus taughte me my dame, I say no more.

By Seinte Marie, sayd this tavernere,
 The child sayth soth, for he hath slain this yere
 Hence over a mile, within a gret village,
 Both man and woman, child, and hind, and page :
 I trowe his habitation be there :

Ye!³ Goddes armes, quod this riotour,
 Is it swiche⁴ peril with him for to mete ?
 I shall him seke by stile and eke by strete.
 I make a vow by Goddes digne bones.
 Hearkeneth, felawes, we three ben alle ones :
 Let eche of us hold up his hond to other,
 And eche of us becomen others brother,
 And we wol slen⁵ this false traitour Deth ;

¹ Go, you had better.

² Very drunken.

³ Yea.

⁴ Such.

⁵ Stay.

He shall be slain, he that so many sleth,
By Goddes dignitee, or it be night.

Togeder han' thise three hir trouthes plight
To live and dien eche of hem for other,
As though he were his owen boren² brother.
And up they stert al dronken in this rage,
And forth they gon towards that village,
Of which the taverner had spoke befor,
And many a grisly oth then have they sworn,
And Cristes blessed body they to-rent,
Deth shall be ded, if that we may him hent.³

When they had gon not fully halfe a mile,
Right as they would han trodden over a stile,
An olde man and a poure with hem mette.
This olde man ful mekely hem grette,⁴
And sayde thus: Now, lordes, God you see.⁵

The proudest of these riotoures three
Answered agen; What? cherl, with sory grace,
Why are thou all forwrapped⁶ save thy face?
Why livest thou so long in so grete age?

This olde man gan loke in his visage,
And sayde thus; For⁷ I ne cannot finde
A man, though that I walked into Inde,
Neither in citee, ne in no village,
That wolde change his youthe for mine age;
And therefore mote⁸ I han mine age still
As longe time as it is Goddes will.
Ne deth, alas! ne will not han my life.
Thus walke I like a restlesse caitif,
And on the ground, which is my modres gate,

¹ Have.

⁴ Greeted them.

⁷ Because.

² Born.

⁵ "God save you."

⁸ Must.

³ Catch.

⁶ Wrapped up.

I knocke with my staf, erlich¹ and late,
 And ay to hire, Leve² mother, let me in.
 Lo how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin.
 Alas! whan shal my bones ben at reste?

But, sirs, to you it is no curtesie
 To speke unto an olde man vilanie,³
 But⁴ he trespase in word or elles in dede.
 In holy writ ye may yourselve rede;
 Ageins an olde man, hore upon his head,
 Ye should arise; therefore I yeve you rede,
 Ne doth⁵ unto an olde man harme no,
 No more than that ye would a man did you
 In age, if that ye may so long abide.
 And God be with you, where you go or ride.
 I must go thider⁶ as I have to go.

Nay, olde cherl, by God thou shalt not so,
 Sayde this other hasardour⁷ anon;
 Thou partest not so lightly by Seint John.
 Thou spake right now of thilke traitour Deth,
 That in this contree all our frendes sleth;
 Have here my trowth as thou art his espie;⁸
 Tell wher he is, or thou shalt it abie,⁹
 By God and by the holy Sacrament;
 For sothly¹⁰ thou art on of his assent
 To slen us yonge folk; thou false thefe.

Now, sires, quod he, if it be you so lefe
 To finden Deth, tourne up this croked way,
 For in that grove I left him, by my fay,¹¹
 Under a tree, and ther he wol abide;

¹ Early² Dear³ Vilely.⁴ Unless.⁵ Do not.⁶ Thither.⁷ Gambler.⁸ Spy.⁹ Abide¹⁰ Truly.¹¹ By my faith.

Nor for your boast he wol him nothing hide.
 See ye that oak ? right ther ye shal him find.
 God save you, that bought agen mankind,
 And you amende ; thus sayde this olde man.

And everich¹ of these riotoures ran,
 Till they came to the tree, and ther they found
 Of floreins fine of gold ycoined round,
 Wel nigh an eighte bushels, as hem thought :
 No longer as than after Deth they sought,
 But eche of hem so glad was of the sight,
 For that the floreins ben so faire and bright,
 That down they sette hem by the precious hord.²
 The worste of hem, he spake the firste word,

Brethren, quod he, take kepe what I shal say ;
 My wit is gret, though that I bourde³ and play.
 This tresour hath fortune unto us yeven,
 In mirth and jolite our life to liven,
 And lightly as it cometh, so wol we spend.
 Ey, Goddes precious dignitee, wno wend
 To-day, that we shuld han so fair a grace ?
 But might this gold be caried fro this place
 Hom to myn hous, or elles unto youres
 (For wel I wote that all this gold is oures),
 Thanne were we in high felicitee,
 But trewely by day it may not bee ;
 Men wolden say that we were theeves strong,
 And for our owen tresour don us hong.⁴
 This tresour must ycaried be by night,
 As wisely and as sleighly as it might.
 Wherefore I rede, that cut among us alle
 We drawe, and let see wher the cut wol falle :
 And he that hath the cut, with herte blith

¹ Every one. ² Hoard. ³ Jest. ⁴ Cause us to be hung.

Shal rennen to the town, and that full swith,¹
 And bring us bred and wine full privily ;
 And two of us shall kepen subtilly
 This treasour wel : and if he wol not tarien,
 Whan it is night, we wol this treasour carien
 By on assent, wher as us thinketh best.

That one of hem the cut brought in his fest,²
 And bad hem drawe and loke wher it wold falle,
 And it fell on the yongest of hem alle ;
 And forth toward the toun he went anon.

And al so sone as that he was agon,
 That on of hem spake thus unto that other ;
 Thou wotest wel thou art my sworn brother
 Thy profit wol I tel thee right anon.
 Thou wost³ wel that our felaw is agon,
 And here is gold, and that full great plentee,
 That shall departed⁴ ben among us three.
 But natheless, if I can shape it so,
 That it departed ben among us two,
 Had I not don a frendes turn to thee ?

That other answered, I n'ot⁵ how that may be :
 He wote wel that the gold is with us tweye.
 What shuln we don ? what shuln we to him seye ?

Shal it be conseil ?⁶ sayd the firste shrewe :
 And I shall tellen thee in wordes fewe
 What we shuln don, and bring it wele aboute.

I grante, quod that other, out of doute,
 That by my trowth I wol thee not bewraie.

Now, quod the first, thou wast wel we ben tweie,
 And tweie of us shall strenger be than one.

¹ Swiftly.

² Fist.

³ Wottest or knowest

⁴ Divided

⁵ Know not.

⁶ Fellow-counsel.

Loke, whan that he is set, thou right anon
 Arise, as though thou woldest with him play ;
 And I shall rive¹ him through the sides tway,
 While that thou stroglest with him as in game,
 And with thy dagger loke thou do the same ;
 And than shall all this gold departed be,
 My dere frend, betwixen thee and me :
 Than moun² we bothe our lustes all fulfille,
 And play at dis right at our owen wille.
 And thus accorded ben thise shrewes tweye,
 To slen the thridde, as ye han herd me seye.

This yongest, which that wente to the toun
 Ful oft in herte he rolleth up and down
 The beautie of these floreins newe and bright.
 O Lord, quod he, if so were that I might
 Have all this treasour to myself alone,
 There n'is no man that liveth under the trone³
 Of God, that shulde live so mery as I.
 And at the last, the fiend our enemy
 Putte in his thought, that he shuld poison beye,⁴
 With which he mighten slen his felaws tweye.
 For why, the fend fond⁵ him in swiche living,
 That he had leve to sorwe him to bring.
 For this was outrelly⁶ his ful entente
 To slen hem both, and never to repente.

And forth he goth, no lenger would he tary,
 Into the toun unto a Potecary,
 And praied him that he him wolde sell
 Som poison, that he might his ratouns⁷ quell.
 And eke ther was a polecat in his hawe,⁸

¹ Split.² May.³ Throne.⁴ Buy.⁵ Found.⁶ Utterly.⁷ Rats.⁸ Yard.

That, as he sayd, his capons had yslawe ;
 And fayn he wold him wreken, if he might,
 Of vermine, that destroyed hem by night.

The Potecary answered, Thou shalt have
 A thing, as wisly God my soule save,
 In all this world ther n'is no creature,
 That ete or dronke hath of this confecture,
 Not but the mountance of a corne of whete,
 That he ne shal his life anon forlete ;¹
 Ye, sterve he shal, and that in lesse while
 Than thou wolt gon a pas not but a mile ;
 This poison is so strong and violent.

This cursed man hath in his hond yhent
 This poison in a box, and swithe² he ran
 Into the nexte strete unto a man,
 And borwed of him large botelles three ;
 And in the two the poison poured he ;
 The thridde he kepte cleane for his drinke,
 For all the night he shope him for to swinke³
 In carying of the gold out of that place.

And when this riotour, with sory grace,
 Hath filled with win his grete botelles three,
 To his felawes agen repaireth he.

What nedeth it thereof to sermon more ?
 For right as they had cast his deth before
 Right so they han him slain, and that anon.
 And whan that this was don, thus spake that one ;
 Now let us sit and drinke, and make us merry,
 And afterward we wiln his body berry.
 And with that word it happed him *par cas*,⁴
 To take the botelle, ther the poison was,

¹ Quit.² Swiftly.³ Labor.⁴ By chance.

And dronke, and yave his felaw drinke also,
For which anon they storven¹ bothe two.

But certes I suppose that Avicenne
Wrote never in no canon, ne in no fenne,²
Mo³ wonder signes of empoisoning,
Than had thise wretches two or hir ending,
Thus ended ben thise homicides two,
And eke the false empoysoner also.

The Pardoneres Tale.

V.

THE COCK AND THE FOX.

A POURE widewe somdel⁴ stoupen in age,
Was whilom dwelling in a narwe cotage,
Beside a grove, standing in a dale.
This widewe, which I tell you of my tale,
Sin thilke day that she was last a wif,
In patience led a ful simple lif.
For litel was hire cattel and hire rente ;
By husbondry of swiche as God hire sente,
She found herself, and eke hire doughtren two.
Three large sowes had she, and no mo :
Three kine, and eke a shepe that highte Malle.
Full sorty⁵ was hire boure, and eke hire halle,
In which she ete many a slender mele.
Of poinant⁶ sauce ne knew she never a dele.
No deintee morsel passed through hire throte ;

¹ Perished.

² The name of the Sections of Avicenne's great work.—*Tyrwhitt.*

³ More wondrous.

⁴ Somewhat bent with age.

⁵ Sweet savored.

⁶ High seasoned.

Hire diete was accordant to hire cote,
 Repletion ne made hire never sike;¹
 Attempre diet was all hire physike,
 And exercise, and hertes suffisance.
 The goute left hire nothing for to dance,
 No apoplexie shente² not hire hed.
 No win ne dranke she, neyther white ne red:
 Hire bord was served most with white and black,
 Milk and broun bred, in which she fond no lack,
 Seinde bacon, and sometime an ey³ or twey;
 For she was as it were a maner dey.

A yard she had, enclosed all about
 With stickes, and a drie diche without,
 In which she had a cok highte Chaunteclere,
 In all the land of crowing n'as his pere.⁴
 His vois was merier than the mery organ,
 On masse daies that in the chirches gon.
 Wel sickerer⁵ was his crowing in his loge,⁶
 Than is a clock, or any abbey orloge.⁷

His combe was redder than the fin corall,
 Embatteled as it were a castel wall.
 His bill was blak, and as the jet it shone;
 Like azure were his legges and his tone;⁸
 His nailes whiter than the lily flour,
 And like the burned gold was his colour.

This gentil cok had in his governance
 Seven hennes, for to don all his pleasance,
 Which were his susters and his paramours,
 And wonder like to him as of colours.
 Of which the fairest hewed in the throte,

¹ Sick.² Hurt.³ Egg.⁴ Equal or peer.⁵ Much truer.⁶ Lodge or coop.⁷ Horologe.⁸ Toes.

Was cleped faire damoselle Pertelote.
 Curteis she was, discrete, and debonaire,
 And compenable, and bare hireself so faire,
 Sithen¹ the day that she was sevensight old,
 That trowelich² she hath the herte in hold
 Of Chaunteclere, loken in every lith,³
 He loved hire so, that wel was him therewith.
 But swiche a joy it was to here hem sing,
 Whan that the brighte sonne gan to spring,
 In swete accord ; my lefe is fare in lond.

For thilke time, as I have understand,
 Bestes and briddes couden speke and sing.

And so befell, that in a dawening,⁴
 As Chaunteclere among his wives alle
 Sate on his perche, that was in the halle,
 And next him sate his faire Pertelote,
 This Chaunteclere gan gronen in his throte,
 As man that in his dreame is dretched⁵ sore.
 And when that Pertelote thus herd him rore,
 She was agast, and saide, herte dere,
 What aileth you to grone in this manere ?
 Ye ben a veray sleper, fy for shame.

And he answered and sayde thus ; madame,
 I pray you, that ye take it not agreffe :
 By God me mette⁶ I was in swiche mischefe
 Right now, that yet min herte is sore affright.
 Now God (quod he), my sweven⁷ recche⁸ a right,
 And kepe my body out of foule prisoun.

Me mette, how that I romed up and down
 Within our yerde, wher as I saw a beste,

¹ Since.² Truly.³ Locked in every limb.⁴ Day-break.⁵ Vexed.⁶ Dreamed.⁷ Dream.⁸ Care.

Was like an hound, and wold han made areste
 Upon my body, and han had me ded.
 His colour was betwix yelwe and red ;
 And tipped was his tail, and both his eres
 With black, unlike the remenant of his heres.
 His snout was smal, with glowen eyen twey ;
 Yet for his loke almost for fere I dey :
 This caused me my groning douteles.

Avoy,¹ quod she, fy on you herteles,
 Alas! quod she, for by that God above
 Now han ye lost myn herte and all my love ;
 I cannot love a coward by my faith.
 For certes, what so any woman saith,²
 We all desiren, if it mighte be,
 To have an husband hardy, wise and free,
 And secree, and non niggard, ne no fool,
 Ne him that is agast of every tool,
 Ne non avantour³ by that God above.
 How dorsten ye for shame say to your love,
 That anything might maken you aferde ?
 Han ye no mannes herte, and han a berde ?
 Alas! and con ye ben agast of swevenis?⁴
 Nothing but vanitee, God wote, in sweven is.

Swevenes engendren⁵ of repletions,
 And oft of fume, and of complexions,
 Whan humours ben to habundant in a wight.
 Certes this dreme, which ye han met to-night,
 Cometh of the grete superfluitee
 Of youre rede *colera* parde,
 Which causeth folke to dreden in hire dremes

¹ Away.² Whatsoever any woman may say³ Boasted against.⁴ Dream⁵ Are engendered

Of arwes, and of fire with rede lemes,¹
 Of rede bestes, that they wol hem bite,
 Of conteke,² and of waspes grete and lite ;
 Right as the humour of melancholie
 Causeth ful many a man in slepe to crie,
 For fere of bolles³ and of beres blake,
 Or elles that blake devils wol hem take.

Of other humours coud I telle also,
 That werken many a man in slepe much wo :
 But I wol passe, as lightly as I can.

Lo Caton, which that was so wise a man,
 Said he not thus ? Ne do no force of dremes.

Now, Sire, quod she, whan we flee fro the bemes,
 For Goddes love, as take som laxatif :
 Up pereil of my soule and of my lif,
 I conseil you the best, I wol not lie,
 That both of coler, and of melancolie,
 Ye purge you ; and for ye shul not tarie,
 Though in this toun be non apotecarie,
 I shall myself two herbes techen you,
 That shall be for your hele, and for your prow ;⁴
 And in our yerde, the herbes shall I finde,
 The which han of hir propertee by kinde
 To purgen you benethe and eke above.
 Sire, forgete not this for Goddes love ;
 Ye ben ful colerike of complexion ;
 Ware⁵ that the sonne in his ascentioun
 Ne finde you not replete of humours hote ;
 And if it do, I dare wel lay a grote,
 That ye shuln han a fever tertiane,

¹ Flames.² Battles.³ Bulls.⁴ Benefit.⁵ Beware.

Or elles an ague, that may be your bane.
 A day or two ye shul han digestives
 Of wormes, or ye take your laxatives,
 Of laureole,¹ centaurie, and fumetere,²
 Or elles of ellebore, that groweth there,
 Of catapuce,³ or of gaitre-berries,⁴
 Or herbe ive growing in our yerd, that mery is.
 Picke hem right as they grow, and ete hem in.
 Bethe mery, husbond, for your fader kin ;
 Dredeth⁵ no dreme ; I can you say no more.

Madame, quod he, grand mercy of your lore.
 But natheles, as touching dan Caton,
 That hath of wisdom swiche a gret renoun,
 Though that he bade no dremes for to drede,
 By God, men moun in olde bookes rede,
 Of many a man, more of auctoritee
 Than ever Caton was, so mote I the,
 That all the revers sayn of his sentence,
 And han wel founden by experience,
 That dremes ben significations
 As wel of joye, as tribulations,
 That folke endure in this lif present.
 Ther nedeth make of this non argument ;
 The veray preve sheweth it indede.

One of the grettest aucthours that men rede,
 Saith thus ; that whilom twey felawes wente
 On pilgrimage in a ful good entente ;
 And happed so, they came into a toun,
 Wher ther was swiche a congregatioun
 Of people, and eke so streit of herbergage,⁶

¹ Spurge-laurel.² Fumitory.³ Euphorbia.⁴ Dogwood berriel.⁵ Dread.⁶ Shelter or lodging.

That they ne founde as moche as a cotage,
 In which they bothe might ylogged be :¹
 Wherefore they musten of necessitee,
 As for that night, departen compaignie ;
 And eche of hem goth to his hostelrie,
 And toke his logging as it wolde falle,

That one of hem was logged in a stalle,
 Fer in a yerd, with oxen of the plough ;
 That other man was logged wel ynough,
 As was his aventure, or his fortune,
 That us governeth all, as in commune.

And so befell, that, long or it were day,
 This man met² in his bed, ther as he lay,
 How that his felaw gan upon him calle,
 And said, alas ! for in an oxe's stalle
 This night shall I be mordred, ther I lie.
 Now helpe me, dere brother, or I die ;
 In alle haste come to me, he sayde.

This man out of his slepe for fere abraide ;³
 But whan that he was waked of his slepe,
 He turned him, and toke of it no kepe ;⁴
 He thought his dreame was but a vanitee.
 Thus twies in his sleping dremed he.

And at the thridde time yet his felaw
 Came, as him thought, and said, I now am slaw :⁵
 Behold my blody woundes, depe and wide.
 Arise up erly in the morwe tide,
 And at the West gate of the toun (quod he)
 A carte ful of dong ther shalt thou see,
 In which my body is hid privily.

¹ Lodged.² Dreamed.³ Awaked.⁴ He paid no attention to it.⁵ Slain.

Do thilke carte arresten boldely.
 My gold caused my mordre, soth to sain.
 And told him every point how he was slain
 With a ful pitous face, pale of hewe.
 And trusteth well, his dreme he found ful trewe,
 For on the morwe, as sone as it was day,
 To his felawes inne he toke his way :
 And whan that he came to this oxes stalle,
 After his felaw he began to calle.

The hosteler answered him anon,
 And saide, Sire, your felaw is agon,
 As sone as day he went out of the toun.

This man gan fallen in suspicion
 Remembring on his dremes that he mette,
 And forth he goth, no lenger wold he lette,¹
 Unto the West gate of the toun, and fond
 A dong carte, as² it went for to dong lond,
 That was araied in the same wise
 As ye han herd the dede man devise :
 And with an herdy herte he gan to crie,
 Vengeance and justice of this felonie :
 My felaw mordred is this same night,
 And in this cart he lith, gaping upright.
 I crie out on the ministres, quod he,
 That shulden kepe and reulen this citee ;
 Harow !³ alas ! here lith my felaw slain.

What shuld I more unto this tale sain ?
 The peple out stert, and cast the cart to ground,
 And in the middel of the dong they fond
 The dede man, that mordred was all newe.

¹ Linger.

² As *though* it went.

³ An exclamation signifying vehement and clamorous grief.

O blissful God, that art so good and trewe,
 Lo, how thou bewreyest¹ mordre alway.
 Mordre wol out, that see we day by day.
 Mordre is so wlatome² and abhominable
 To God, that is so just and resonable,
 That he ne wol not suffer it hylled³ be.
 Though it abide a yere, or two, or three,
 Mordre wol out, this is my conclusioun.

And right anon, the ministres of the toun
 Han hent the carter, and so sore him pined,
 And eke the hosteler so sore engined,⁴
 That they beknew hir wickednesse anon,
 And were ananged by the necke bone.

Here moun ye see that dremes ben to drede.
 But thilke tale is al to long to telle,
 And eke it is nigh day, I may not dwelle.
 Shortly I say, as for conclusion,
 That I shall han of this avision
 Adversitee: and I say forthermore,
 That I ne tell of laxatives no store,
 For they ben venemous, I wot it wel:
 I hem deffie,⁵ I love hem never a del.

But let us speke of mirthe and stinte all this;
 Madame Pertelote, so have I blis,
 Of o⁶ thing God hath sent me large grace:
 For whan I see the beautee of your face,
 Ye ben so scarlet red about your eyen,
 It maketh all my drede for to dien,
 For, al so siker as *in principio*,
Mulier est hominis confusio

¹ Discoverest.² Loathsome.³ Hidden.⁴ Racked; pined means pained or tortured.⁵ Defy.⁶ One.

(Madame, the sentence of this Latine is
 Woman is mannes joye and mannes blis).
 For whan I fele a-night your softe side,
 Al be it that I may not on you ride,
 For that our perche is made so narwe, alas !
 I am so ful of joye and of solas,
 That I deffie bothe sweven and dreme.

And with that word he fleu down fro the beme,
 For it was day, and eke his hennes alle ;
 And with a chuk he gan hem for to calle,
 For he had found a corn, lay in the yerd.
 Real¹ he was, he was no more aferd ;
 He fethered Pertelote twenty time,
 And trade hire eke as oft, ere it was prime.
 He loketh as it were a grim leoun.
 And on his toes he rometh up and doun,
 Him deigneth not to set his feet to ground :
 He chukketh, whan he hath a corn yfound,
 And to him rennen than his wives alle.

Thus real, as a prince is in his halle,
 Leve I this Chaunteclere in his pasture ;
 And after wol I telle his aventure.

Whan that the month in which the world began,
 That highte March, whan God first maked man,
 Was complete, and ypassed were also,
 Sithen² March ended, thritty dayes and two,
 Befel that Chaunteclere in all his pride,
 His seven wives walking him beside,
 Cast up his eyen to the brighte sonne,
 That in the signe of Taurus hadde yronne
 Twenty degrees and one, and somewhat more :

¹ Kingly.

² Since.

He knew by kind,¹ and by non other lore,
 That it was prime, and crew with blissful steven.²
 The sonne, he said, is clomben up on heven
 Twenty degrees and one, and more ywis.
 Madame Pertelote, my worldes blis,
 Herkeneth this blissful briddes how they sing,
 And see the freshe floures how they spring;
 Ful is mine herte of revel and solas.

But sodenly him fel a sorweful cas ;
 For ever the latter end of joye is wo ;
 God wote that worldly joye is sone ago :
 And if a rethor³ coude faire endite,
 He in a chronicle might it sauflly write
 As for a souveraine notabilitee.

Now every wise man let him hearken me :
 This story is al so trewe, I undertake,
 As is the book of Launcelot du lake,
 That women holde in ful gret reverence,
 Now wol I turne again to my sentence.

A col⁴ fox, full of sleigh⁵ iniquitee,
 That in the grove had wonned⁶ yeres three,
 By high imagination forecast,⁶
 The same night throughout the hegges brast⁷
 Into the yerd, ther Chaunteclere the faire
 Was wont, and eke his wives, to repaire :
 And in a bedde of wortes still he lay,
 Till it was passed undern⁹ of the day,
 Waiting his time on Chaunteclere to falle ;
 As gladly don these homicides alle,

¹ By instinct.

² Voice.

³ Writer.

⁴ Dog-fox, or male-fox.

⁵ Sly

⁶ Dwelled.

⁷ He had subsisted by means of his forecast.

⁹ Burst through the hedges.

⁹ Nine o'clock

That in await ligen to mordre men.

Faire in the sond, to bath hire merily,
Lith Pertelote, and all hire susters by,
Agein' the sonne, and Chaunteclere so free
Sang merier than the Mermaid in the see,
For Physiologus sayth sikerly,
How that they singen wel and merily.

And so befel that as he cast his eye
Among the wortes on a boterflie,
He was ware of this fox that lay ful low.
Nothing ne list him thanne for to crow,
But cried anon cok, cok, and up he sterte,
As man that was affraied in his herte.
For naturally a beest desireth flee
Fro his contrairie, if he may it see,
Though he never erst² had seen it with his eye.

This Chaunteclere, whan he gan him espie,
He wold han fled, but that the fox anon
Said: gentil sire, alas! what wol ye don?
Be ye affraid of me that am your frend?
Now certes, I were werse than any fiend,
If I to you wold harme or vilanie.
I n'am not come your conseil to espie.
But trewely the cause of my coming
Was only for to herken how ye sing:
For trewely ye han as mery a steven,
As any angel hath, that is in heven;
Therwith ye han of musike more feling,
Than had Boece, or any that can sing.
My lord your fader (God his soule blesse)
And eke your moder of hire gentilnesse
Han in myn hous yben, to my gret ese:

¹ Against.

² Before.

And certes, sire, ful fain wold I you plese.
 But for men speke of singing, I wol sey,
 So mote I brouken¹ wel mine eyen twey,
 Save you, ne herd I never man so sing,
 As did your fader in the morwening.
 Certes it was of herte all that he song.
 And for to make his vois the more strong,
 He wold so peine him, that with both his eyen
 He muste winke, so loud he wolde crien,
 And stonden on his tiptoon therewithal,
 And stretchen forth his necke long and smal.
 And eke he was of swiche discretion,
 There n'as no man in no region,
 That him in song or wisdom mighte passe.
 I have wel red in dan Burnel the asse
 Among his vers, how that there was a cok,
 That, for² a preestes sone yave him a knob
 Upon his legge, while he was yonge and nice,
 He made him for to lese³ his benefice.
 But certaine there is no comparison
 Betwix the wisdom and discretion
 Of youre fader, and his subtiltie.
 Now singeth,⁴ sire, for Saint Charitee,
 Let see, can ye your fader contrefete?
 This Chaunteclere his winges gan to bete,
 As man that coud not his treson espie,
 So was he ravished with his flaterie.
 Alas! ye lordes, many a false flatour⁵
 Is in your court, and many a losengour,⁶
 That pleseth you wel more, by my faith,
 Than he that sothfastnesse⁷ unto you saith.

¹ Brook or credit.² Because.³ Lose.⁴ Now sing.⁵ Flatterer.⁶ Lying flatterer.⁷ Truthfulness.

Redeth Ecclesiast of flaterie,
Beth ware, ye lordes, of hise trecherie.

This Chaunteclere stood high upon his toos
Stretching his necke, and held his eyen cloos,
And gan to crowen loude for the nones :
And dan Russel the fox stert up at ones,
And by the gargat¹ hente Chaunteclere,
And on his backe toward the wood him bare.
For yet was no man that him sued.

O destinee, that maist not ben eschued !
Alas, that Chaunteclere flew fro the bemes !
Alas, his wif ne raughte² not of dremes !
And on a Friday fell all this meschance.

O Venus, that art the goddesse of pleasance,
Sin that thy servant was this Chaunteclere,
And in thy service did all his powere,
More for delit, than world to multiplie,
Why wolt thou suffre him on thy day to die ?

Certes swiche cry, ne lamentation
Na's never of ladies made, whan Ilion
Was wonne, and Pirrus with his streite swerd
Whan he had hent king Priam by the berd,
And slain him (as saith us *Eneidos*),
As maden all the hennes in the cloos,
Whan they had seen of Chaunteclere the sight.
But soveraiuly dame Pertelote shrigh³,
Ful louder than did Hasdruballes wife,
Whan that the Romaines hadden brent Cartage,
She was so ful of turment and of rage,
That willfully into the fire she sterte,
And brent herselven with a stedfast heart.

O woful hennes, right so criden ye,

¹ The throat.

² Recked or cared.

³ Shrieked

As, whan that Nero brente the citee
 Of Rome, cried the senatoures wives,
 For that hir husbonds losten alle hir lives ;
 Withouten guilt this Nero had hem slain.

Now wol I turne unto my tale again ;
 The sely widowe and hire doughtren two,
 Herden these hennes erie and maken wo,
 And out at the dores sterten they anon,
 And saw the fox toward the wode is gon,
 And bare upon his back the cok away :
 They crieden, out ! harow and wala wa !
 A ha the fox ! and after him they ran,
 And eke with staves many another man ;
 Ran Colle our dogge, and Talbot, and Gerlond,
 And Malkin, with hire distaf in hire hond ;
 Ran cow and calf, and eke the veray hogges
 So fered¹ were for berking of the dogges,
 And shouting of the men and women eke,
 They ronnen so, hem thoughte hir hertes breke.
 They yelleden as fendes don in helle :
 The dokes crieden as men wold him quelle ;²
 The geese for fere flowen over the trees,
 Out of the hive came the swarme of bees,
 So hidous was the noise, a *benedicite* !
 Certes he Jakke Straw, and his meinic,³
 Ne maden never shoutes half so shrille,
 Whan that they wolden any Fleming kille,
 As thilke day was made upon the fox.
 Of bras they broughten bemes,⁴ and of box,
 Of horn and bone, in whiche they blew and pouped,
 And therewithal they shrieked and they houped ;
 It semed, as that the heven shulde falle.

¹ Affrighted.² Kill.³ Company.⁴ Trumpets.

Now, goode men, I pray you hearkeneth alle ;
 Lo, how fortune turneth sodenly
 The hope and pride eke of hire enemy.
 This cok that lay upon the foxes bake,
 In all his drede, unto the fox he spake,
 And sayde ; sire, if that I were as ye,
 Yet wolde I sayn (as wisly God helpe me),
 Turneth again, ye proude cherles alle ;
 A veray pestilence upon you falle.
 Now am I come unto the woodes side,
 Maugre¹ your hed, the cok shal here abide ;
 I wol him ete, in faith, and that anon.

The fox answered, in faith it shal be done :
 And as he spake the word, al sodenly
 The cok brake from his mouth deliverly,²
 And high upon a tree he flew anon.

And whan the fox saw that the cok was gon,
 Alas ! quod he, O Chaunteclere, alas !
 I have (quod he) ydon to you trespas,
 In as moche as I maked you aferd,
 Whan I you hente, and brought out of your yerd ;
 But, sire, I did it in no wikke³ entente :
 Come doun, and I shal tell you what I mente.
 I shall say soothe⁴ to you, God helpe me so.

Nay then, quod he, I shrewe⁵ us bothe two.
 And first I shrewe myself, both blood and bones,
 If thou begile me oftener than ones.
 Thou shalt no more thurgh thy flaterie
 Do me to sing and winken with myn eye.
 For he that winketh, whan he shulde see,
 Al wilfully, God never let him the.

Nay, quod the fox, but God yeve⁶ him meschance,

¹ Despite. ² Nimbly. ³ Wicked. ⁴ Truth. ⁵ Curse. ⁶ Give.

That is so indiscrete of governance,
 That jangleth,¹ whan that he shuld hold his pees.
 Lo, which it is for to be reccheles²
 And negligent, and trust on flaterie !
 But ye that holden this tale a folie,
 As of a fox, or of a cok, or hen,
 Taketh³ the moralitee thereof, good men.
 For Seint Poule sayth, That all that written is,
 To our doctrine it is ywritten, ywis.
 Taketh the fruit, and let the chaf be stille.”

The Nonnes Preestes Tale.

Note to the Tale of the Cock and the Fox.—“The fable of the Cock and the Fox,” says Tyrwhitt, “which makes the ground of the *Nonnes Preestes Tale*, is clearly borrowed from a collection of Æsopian and other Fables, by *Marie*, a French poetess.” He then introduces her Fable because it is short, well told and rare ; and also “because it furnishes a convincing proof how able Chaucer was to work up an excellent tale out of very small materials.”

In this tale, Chaucer’s various and perpetual humor is as favorably exhibited as in any other of his compositions ; nor will it suffer by a comparison with the same quality in any other writer or poet. His wit is not an impalpable essence—but is hearty, joyous, and smacks of the substantiality of every-day life. Now it is broad, now sly, or it is grave almost to solemnity, yet racking one with cachinnatory throes. His aim is not to keep you gay by a malignant display of the foibles of your fellow beings,—after the manner of that hybrid class, the orthodox satirist. For his caricatures are universally well-natured, and sparkle with fun rather than malice. He only departs from this, his natural habit, when he satirizes the variegated follies and

¹ Prateth.

² Careless

³ Take.

crimes of the clergy ; then he speaks in the lofty language of an indignant Englishman, who compassionates the case of his countrymen, and detests those who would debase them. It is patriotism that directs his ridicule, but never mere malice.

In his description of the appearance of the Cock, he admirably satirizes the "rethors and minstrels" of his day, who were apt to employ the wildest hyperbole when recounting the array of their heroes. And at the same time, he happily hits off the affected magnificence, and the stateliness of the heroes themselves, which gave occasion to these sycophants. His subsequent description of the "faire damosell Pertelote,"—Chaunteclere's "worldes blis,"—who was so "scarlet red about the eyen" as to cause all fear to vanish, and the touch of whose "softe side" administered a fruition of "joye and of solas"—is a quiet though pungent ridicule of the extravagant praises which the neophytes of chivalry and romance were accustomed to heap upon their chosen ladies.

The inclination to place great faith in dreams, which prevailed then as now, is also a legitimate subject of raillery. Accordingly a grave discussion is opened forthwith, betwixt Chaunteclere and his beauteous mistress ; which is more learned perhaps than similar gossipings of the wonder-loving and credulous, but yet is sufficiently amusing. Dame Pertelote, unlike females generally, is a confirmed sceptic ; and with blunt common sense quaintly asserts that, such vulgar agents as bile, or wind, or repletion, are far more likely to occasion dreams than any preternatural cause. And then, *like* a true woman, she recommends those panaceas which her long experience in the ills of chickenhood indicates. This elicits a learned and rather indignant reply from her lord, who maintains his point by words of "learned length and thundering sound," and by the introduction of just such legends as dreamers of this nineteenth century are wont to use when proving the infallibility of their nocturnal talent. In de-

fiance of the rule which generally governs controversies, this one terminates in mutual compliments; for Chaunteclere, to cut the matter short, and perhaps to prevent a reply which his logical sensibilities dreaded, suddenly professes to be overwhelmed by the beauties of his lady love. A sensible plan, it must be allowed, which hen-pecked husbands would do well to imitate.

Then we have a peaceful barn-yard scene, which serves to give a deeper coloring to the following picture of successful art and specious hypocrisy. Poor Chaunteclere, though startled and alarmed by the unwonted sight of his enemy, is first soothed and then miserably duped. Praised for an accomplishment to which he could not lay the shadow of a claim, he yet listens eagerly to the strain of adulation, stifling his natural antipathies, and forgetting the warnings of his dream. Like many another biped, he was overcome by flattery, who could have successfully resisted a more open assault. For thus is it ever. Compliment an ugly man for good looks; attribute wealth to the poor man; *ton* to the unfashionable man; gracefulness to the ungainly one, or mental superiority to the dunce: administer to the vacillating man of feeble purposes, the praise of steadfastness, and cause him to suppose that you think he leads and directs those whose supple tool he knows he is, and straightway you reach his heart and obtain his confidence. So, subtle Reynard found music in the shrill clamor of our galliard Cock, who for his part willingly lends himself to the pleasant delusion that he had no rival in the angelic choir.

And this brings us to Chaucer's detail of Chaunteclere's awkward efforts at music. This description is exquisitely ludicrous, particularly so to those who can discern in it the graphic outlines of the genus singing-school-master—that biped of passage, whose native home is the land of steady habits, but whose haunts are to be discovered in every hamlet and village. This is his portrait:

"To make his vois the more strong,
 He wold so peine him, that with both his eyen
 He muste winke, so loud he wolde crien,
 And stonden on his tiptoon therewithal,
 And stretchen forth his necke long and smal."

The uproar in the barn-yard, which Chaunteclere's misfortune occasions, is admirably managed. There are few denizens of the country who have not witnessed its counterpart, although never perhaps to so mirth-moving an extent as our poet sets forth. Dryden's paraphrase of this stirring scene, which we now quote for the purpose of comparing with the original at pages 202 and 203, appears absolutely frigid beside it. And we quell the inclination to quote more largely, which is upon us, because we have already dwelt at some length upon the comparative qualities of these two great poets, and their respective claims to genius.

"Now to my story I return again.

The trembling widow and her daughters twain,
 This woful cackling cry with horror heard,
 Of those distracted damsels in the yard ;
 And starting up beheld the heavy sight,
 How Reynard to the forest took his flight,
 And cross his back, as in triumphant scorn,
 The hope and pillar of the house was borne.

The fox, the wicked fox, was all the cry,
 Out from his house ran every neighbor nigh ;
 The vicar first, and after him the crew,
 With forks and staves the felon to pursue ;
 Ran Coll our dog, and Talbot with the band,
 And Malkin, with her distaff in her hand ;
 Ran Cow and Calf, and family of hogs,
 In panic horror of pursuing dogs,

With many a deadly grunt and doleful squeak,
 Poor swine, as if their pretty hearts would break.
 The shouts of men, the women in dismay,
 With shrieks augment the terror of the day.
 The ducks that heard the proclamation cry'd
 And fear'd a persecution might betide,
 Full twenty mile from town their voyage take,
 Obscure in rushos of the liquid lake.
 The geese fly o'er the barn ; the bees in arms,
 Drive headlong from their waxen cells in swarms.
 Jack Straw, at London Stone with all his rout,
 Struck not the city with so loud a shout :
 Not when with English hate they did pursue
 A Frenchman, or an unbelieving Jew :
 Not when the welkin rung with one and all :
 And echoes bounded back from Fox's hall :
 Earth seem'd to sink beneath, and heaven above to fall.
 With might and main they chas'd the murd'rous fox,
 With brazen trumpets and inflated box,
 To kindle Mars with military sounds
 Nor wanted horns t'inspire sagacious hounds."

Dryden's Cock and Fox.

VI.

HUGELIN OF PISE.

Of the erl Hugelin of Pise the langour
 Ther may no tonge tellen for pitee.
 But litel out of Pise stant a tour,
 In which tour in prison yput was he,

And with him ben his litel children three,
 The eldest scarsely five yere was of age :
 Alas ! fortune, it was gret crueltee
 Swiche briddes for to put in swiche a cage.

Dampned¹ was he to die in that prison,
 For Roger, which that bishop was of Pise,
 Had on him made a false suggestion,
 Through which the people gan upon him rise,
 And put him in prison, in swiche a wise,
 As ye han herd ; and mete and drinke he had
 So smale, that wel unneth it may suffice,
 And therewithal it was ful poure and bad.

And on a day befell, that in that houre,
 Whan that his mete wont was to be brought,
 The gailer shutte the dores of the toure ;
 He hered it wel, but he spake right nought.
 And in his herte anon ther fell a thought,
 That they for hunger wolden do him dien ;²
 Alas ! quod he, alas that I was wrought !
 Therewith the teres fellen fro his eyen.

His yonge sone, that three yere was of age,
 Unto him said, fader, why do ye wepe ?
 Whan wil the gailer bringen our potage ?
 Is ther no morsel bred that ye do kepe ?
 I am so hungry that I may not slepe.
 Now wolde God that I might slepen ever,
 Than shuld not hunger in my wombe crepe ;
 Ther n'is no thing, sauf³ bred, that me were lever.⁴

¹ Condemned.² Cause him to die.³ Save or except.⁴ That were dearer to me.

Thus day by day this childe began to crie,
 Til in his fadres barme¹ adoun it lay,
 And saide ; farewel, fader, I mote² die ;
 And kist his fader, and dide the same day.
 And whan the woful fader did it sey,³
 For wo his armes two he gan to bite,
 And saide, alas ! fortune, and wala wa !
 Thy false whele my wo all may I wite.⁴

His children wenden,⁵ that for hunger it was
 That he his armes gnowe,⁶ and not for wo,
 And sayden ; fader, do not so, alas !
 But rather ete the flesh upon us two.
 Our flesh thou yaf⁷ us, take our flesh us fro,
 And ete ynough : right thus they to him seide,
 And after that, within a day or two,
 They laide hem in his lappe adoun, and deide.

Himself despeired, eke for hunger starf,
 Thus ended is this mighty Erl of Pise :
 From high estat fortune away him carf.
 Of this tragedie it ought ynough suffice ;
 Who so wol here it in a longer wise,
 Redeth the grete poete of Itaille,
 That highte Dante, for he can it devise
 Fro point to point, not o word wol he faille.

The Monkes Tale.

Note to Hugelin of Pise.—It is needless to observe that the original of this Poem is the story of Ugolino in Dante's Inferno, canto 33. To this fine composition Chaucer has added several

¹ Bosom.

² Must.

³ See.

⁴ May I impute to.

⁵ Weened.

⁶ Gnaw.

⁷ Gave.

pathetic touches. By Dante, is presented the terrific outlines of the sufferings of a parent, whose actions have involved himself and his children in irrecoverable ruin, and of a father whose physical tortures are lessened only by the spectacle of his children's ravening hunger and death. But there is scarcely a glimmer of affection visible; the whole picture being dark, frozen, and casting a blight upon the spirit of the beholder. It wants the softening and elevating influence of that benign quality which Chaucer transfuses upon his sufferer. Twice only, does Dante's Ugolino seem affected by emotions more spiritual than physical or at best stupidly passive: at all other times he is tearless and like the passionless stone. Once, when the active agony of his mind at the sight of his children's sufferings—the passion and remorse engendered thereby—impelled him to pain his body that he might quell his struggling feelings. And again, when all his children lying dead before him and himself grown blind, he groped

“Over them all, and for three days aloud
Called on them who were dead.”

This is terrible; this is grief in its intensity. The bereaved father, newly struck with blindness—having no ray from without to mitigate the black gloom within—strives to recall the lineaments of his loved ones by groping over their faces, now dank and cold with death.

But if Chaucer has imbued the principal figure—the Father—with emotions that elevate it, and are not to be found in the original; he has, in like manner, invested the children with the purest, the most touching filial reverence, confidence and love. A more special examination will maintain these assertions.

In the opening of the original story, Ugolino is made to say of his children, in terms almost cold,

“My sons (for they were with me) weep and ask
For bread.”

As if betrayed into a touch of natural tenderness, he shortly afterwards calls one of them "my little Anselm." Now Chaucer, with the communicativeness of a kind heart, and by a simple, unaffected, and seemingly circumstantial narrative, at once awakens our sympathies, which Dante leaves untouched. Says he of these children,

"And with him ben his litel children three,
The eldest scarsely five yere was of age :
Alas ! fortune, it was gret crueltee
Swiche briddes for to put in swiche a cage."

Thus, by his artlessness and simplicity, both the extreme youth of the sufferers, and the barbarous and unsuitable nature of their punishment, are made more apparent.

After abruptly mentioning that one of Ugolino's sons had died, Dante frigidly recounts the mere physical deaths of the others—which also occurred in regular numerical succession. Thus :

"When we came
To the fourth day, then Gaddo at my feet,
Outstretched did fling him, crying, "Hast no help
For me, my father?" Then he died ; and e'en
Plainly as thou seest me, saw I the three
Fall one by one, 'twixt the fifth day and the sixth."

The touching description of the death of the little one "that three yere was of age," which Chaucer seizes this point to introduce, is altogether his own. It is one of the gems of our language. At the moment that this suffering innocent, in the gentleness of its nature, strives with lispings tongue to solace its wretched father, he unconsciously adds new fuel to the flame that already consumes him. For with a reproachful and soliciting

look—such an one as those who have beheld a dying infant may remember—he murmurs a prayer to that father for bread to satisfy the fierce want which so destroys them all. In his infantile simplicity he looks confidently to his father for that protection and comfort he is wont to receive ; and his childish importunities add to the already overflowing cup of misery which is pressed to Ugolino's lips. The wretched father cannot relieve the wants of his tender child. But listen to the poet :

“ Fader, why do ye wepe ?
 When wil the gailer bringen our potage ?
 Is ther no morsel bred that ye do kepe ?
 I am so hungry that I may not slepe :
 Now wolde God that I might slegen ever,
 Then shuld not hunger in my wombe crepe ;
 Ther n'is no thing, sauf bred, that me were lever.”

The sweet innocent having thus plained day by day, at last

“ In his fadres barme adoun it lay,
 And saide ; farewel, fader I mote die :
 And kist his fader, and dide the same day.”

Where can there be found elsewhere a more powerful exhibition of the tenderest affection in the midst of intolerable rigors ? Can any father contemplate this picture and deny the “tribute of a tear ?” Each parent will clasp his own loved ones closer to his bosom, and pray that if they must needs die, they may “lay hem in hire lappe adoun and dey,” but God preserve them from the awful death of Ugolino de Gherardeschi's children !

VII.

THE WIF OF BATHES TALE.

In olde dayes of the King Artour,
 Of which that Bretons speken gret honour,
 All was this lond fullfilled of faerie ;
 The Elf-quene, with hire jolly compaignie,
 Danced ful oft in many a grene mede.
 This was the old opinion as I rede ;
 I speke of many hundred years ago ;
 But now can no man see non elves mo,¹
 For now the grete charitee and prayeres
 Of limitours and other holy freres,
 That serchen every land and every streme,
 As thikke as motes in the sonne-beam,
 Blissing halles, chambres, kichenes, and boures,
 Citees and burghes, castles highe and toures,
 Thropes² and bernes, shepenes³ and dairies,
 This maketh that ther ben no faeries :
 For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
 Ther walketh now the limitour himself.
 Women may now go safely up and down,
 In every bush, and under every tree,
 Ther is non other incubus but he,
 And he ne will don hem no dishonour.

And so befel it, that this King Artour
 Had in his hous a lusty bachelor,
 That on a day came riding fro river :
 And happed, that, alone as she was borne,
 He saw a maiden walking him beforne,
 Of which maid he anon, maugre hire hed,
 By veray force beraft hire maidenhead :

¹ No elves more.² Villages.³ Stables.

For which oppression was swiche clamour,
 And swiche pursuite unto the King Artour,
 That damned was this knight for to be dead
 By cours of lawe, and shuld have lost his hed
 (Paraventure swiche was the statute tho),
 But that the queene and other ladies mo
 So longe praieden the king of grace,
 Til he his lif him granted in the place,
 And yaf him to the quene, al at hire will
 To chese¹ whether she wold him save or spill.

The quene thanketh the king with all hire might,
 And after this thus spake she to the knight,
 Whan that she saw hire time upon a day.

Thou standest yet (quod she) in swiche array,
 That of thy life yet hast thou no seuretee;
 I grant thee lif, if thou canst tellen me,
 What thing is it that women most desiren:
 Beware, and kepe thy nekke-bone from yren.
 And if thou canst not tell it me anon,
 Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
 A twelvemonth and a day, to seke and lere²
 An answer suffisant in this matere.
 And seuretee³ wol I have, or³ that thou pace,
 Thy body for to yelden in this place.

Wo was the knight, and sorrowfully he siketh;⁴
 But what? he may not don all as him liketh.
 And at the last he chese him for to wende
 And come again right at the yeres ende
 With swiche answer, as God wold him purvay:
 And taketh his leve, and wendeth forth his way.

He seketh every hous and every place,
 Wher as he hopeth for to finden grace,

¹ Choose.² Learn.³ Before.⁴ Sigheth.

To lernen what thing women loven moste :
 But he ne coude ariven in no coast,
 Where as he mighte find in this matere
 Two creatures according in fere.¹
 Some saiden, women loven best richesse,
 Some saiden honour, some saiden jolinesse,
 Some riche array, some saiden lust abed,
 And oft time to be widewe and to be wedde.

Some saiden, that we ben in herte most esed
 Whan that we ben yflattered and ypraised.
 He goth full nigh the sooth,² I will not lie ;
 A manne shall winne us best with flatterie ;
 And with attendance, and with besinesse,
 Ben we ylymed bothe more and lesse.

And some men saiden, that we loven best
 For to be free, and do right as us lest,³
 And that no man repreve us of our vice,
 But say that we ben wise, and nothing nice.
 And some saiden, that gret delit han we
 For to be holden stable and eke secre,
 And in o⁴ purpose stedfastly to dwell,
 And not bewreyen thing that men us tell.
 But that tale is not worth a rake-stéel.
 Parde we women connen nothing hele,⁵
 Witnessse on Mida : wol ye hear the tale ?

Ovide, amonges other thinges smale,
 Said, Mida had under his longe heres
 Growing upon his hed two asses eres ;
 The whiche vice he hid, as he beste might,
 Full subtilly from every mannes sight,
 That, save his wif, there wist of it no mo ;
 He loved hire most, and trusted hire also ;

¹ Together. ² Truth. ³ As we list or desire. ⁴ One. ⁵ Hide

He praied hire, that to no creature
She n'olde tellen of his disfigure.

She swore him, nay, for all the world to winne,
She n'olde do that vilanie, ne sinne,
To make hire husband han so foule a name ;
She n'olde not tell it for hire owen shame.
But natheles hire thoughte that she died,
That she so longe shuld a conseil¹ hide ;
Hire thought it swal² so sore about hire herte,
That nedely³ som word hire must astate ;
And sith she dorst not telle it to no man,
Doun to a mareis⁴ faste by she ran,
Til she came ther, hire herte was a-fire ;
And as a bitore⁵ bumbleth in the mire,
She laid hire mouth unto the water doun.
Bewrey me not, thou water, with thy soun,
Quod she, to thee I tell it, and no mo,
Min husband hath long asses eres two.
Now is min herte all hole, now is it out,
I might no longer kepe it out of dout.

This knight of whiche my tale is specially,
Whan that he saw he might not come thereby
(This is to sayn, what women loven most),
Within his brest ful sorweful was his gost.
But home he goth, he mighte not sojourne,
The day was come, that homeward must he turne.
And in his way, it happed him to ride
In all his care, under a forest side,
Whereas he saw upon a dance go
Of ladies foure and twenty, and yet mo.
Toward this ilke dance he drow ful yerne,⁶
In hope that he some wisdom shulde lerne ;

¹ Secret. ² Swelled. ³ Necessarily. ⁴ Marsh. ⁵ Bittern. ⁶ Eagerly.

But certainly, er he came fully there,
 Yvanished was this dance, he n'iste not where;
 No creature saw he that bare lif,
 Save on the grene he saw sitting a wif,
 A fouler wight ther may no man devise.
 Againe this knight this olde wif gan rise,
 And said: sire knight, here forth ne lith no way.
 Tell me what that ye seken by your fay.
 Paraventure it may the better be:
 These olde folke con' mochel thing, quod she.

My leve² mother, quod this knight, certain,
 I n'am but ded, but if that I can sain,
 What thing it is that women most desire:
 Coude ye me wisse,³ I wolde quite wel your hire.
 Plight me thy trouth here in myn hond, quod she,
 The nexte thing that I require of thee
 Thou shalt it do, if it be in thy might,
 And I wol tel it you, or it be night.

Have here my trouthe, quod the knight, I graunte.

Thanne, quod she, I dare me wel avaunte,⁴
 Thy lif is sauf,⁵ for I wol stond thereby,
 Upon my life the quene wol say as I:
 Let see, which is the proudest of hem alle,
 That wereth on a kerchef or a calle,⁶
 That dare sayn nay of that I shall you teche,
 Let us go forth withouten longer speche.

Whan they ben comen to the court, this knight
 Said, he had hold his day, as he had hight,
 And redy was his answer, as he saide.
 Ful many a noble wif, and many a maide,
 And many a widewe, for that they ben wise
 (The queene hireself, sitting as a justice)

¹ Know. ² Dear. ³ Teach. ⁴ Boast. ⁵ Safe. ⁶ Cap.

Assembled ben, his answe're for to here,
 And afterward this knight was bade appear.

To every wight commanded was silence,
 And that the knight shulde tell in audience,
 What thing that worldly women loven best.
 This knight ne stood not still, as doth a best,¹
 But to this question anon answerd
 With manly vois, that all the court it herd.

My liege lady, generally, quod he,
 Women desiren to han soveraintee,
 As wel over hir husbond as hir love,
 And for to ben in maistrie him above.
 This is your most desire, though ye me kill,
 Doth as you list, I am here at your will.

In all the court ne was ther wif ne maide,
 Ne widewe, that contraried that he saide,
 But said, he was worthy to han his lif.

And with that word up stert this olde wif,
 Which that the knight saw sitting on the grene.
 Mercy, quod she, my soveraine lady quene,
 Ere that your court depart, as doth me right.
 I taught this answer unto this knight,
 For which he plighte me his trouthe there,
 The firste thing I wold of him requere,
 He wold it do, if it lay in his might.
 Before this court then pray I thee, sire knight,
 Quod she, that thou me take unto thy wif,
 For wel thou wost,² that I have kept thy lif:
 If I say false, say nay upon thy fay.³

This knight answered, alas and wala wa!
 I wot right wel that swiche was my behest.
 For Goddes love as chese a new request:

¹ Beast² Wottest³ Faith.

Take all my good, and let my body go.

Nay then, quod she, I shrewe us bothe two.
 For though that I be olde, foule, and pore,
 I n'olde for all the metal ne the ore,
 That under erthe is grave, or lith above,
 But if thy wif I were, and eke thy love.

My love? quod he, nay, my dampnation.
 Alas! that any of my nation
 Shuld ever so foule disparaged be,
 But all for nought: the end is this, that he
 Constrained was, he nedes must hire wed,
 And taketh this old wif, and goth to bed.

Now wolden some men sayn paraventure,
 That for my negligence I do no cure
 To tellen you the joye and all the array,
 That at the feste was that ilke day.

To which thing shortly answeren I shall:
 I say ther was no joye ne feste at all,
 Ther n'as¹ but hevinesse and mochel sorwe:
 For privily he wedded hire on the morwe,
 And all day after hid him as an owl,
 So wo was him, his wif loked so foule.

Gret was the wo the knight had in his thought,
 When he was with his wif a-bed ybrought,
 He walweth,² and he turneth to and fro.

This olde wif lay smiling evermo,
 And saide: O dere husbond, *benedicite*,
 Fareth every knight thus with his wif as ye?
 Is this the lawe of King Artoures hous?
 Is every knight of his thus dangerous?
 I am your owen love, and eke your wif,
 I am she, which that saved hath your lif,

¹ Was.

² Tumbleth.

And certes yet did I you never unright.
 Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?
 Ye faren like a man hath lost his wit.
 What is my gilt? for Goddes love tell it,
 And it shall be amended, if I may.

Amended? quod this knight, alas! nay, nay,
 It wol not ben amended never mo;
 Thou art so lothly, and so olde also,
 And thereto comen of so low a kind,
 That litel wonder is though I walwe and wind;
 So wolde¹ God, win herte wold brest.

Is this, quod she, the cause of your unrest?
 Ye certainly, quod he, no wonder is.

Now sire, quod she, I coude amend all this,
 If that me list, er it were dayes three,
 So wel ye mighten bere you unto me.
 Now sire, ye sain that I am foule and old,
 Then drede ye not to ben a cuckewold.
 For filthe, and elde also, so mote I the,
 Ben grete wardeins upon chastitie.
 But natheles, sin² I know your delit
 I shall fulfil your worldly appetite.
 Chese now (quod she) on³ of these thinges twey,⁴
 To han me foule and old till that I dey,
 And be to you a trewe humble wif,
 And never you displease in all my life:
 Or elles⁵ wol ye han me yong and faire,
 And take your aventure of the repaire,
 That shal be to your hous because of me,
 Or in some other place it may wel be?
 Now chese yourselves whether⁶ that you liketh.

This knight aviseth him, and sore siketh,⁷

¹ Would to God.

² Since.

³ One.

⁴ Two.

⁵ Else.

⁶ Whichever.

⁷ Sigheth.

But at the last he said in this manere ;
 My lady and my love, and wif so dere,
 I put me in your wise governance,
 Cheseth yourself which may be most plesance
 And most honour to you and me also,
 I do no force the whether of the two :
 For as you liketh, it sufficeth me.

Than have I got the maisterie, quod she,
 Sin I may chese and governe as me lest.
 Ye certes, wif, quod he, I hold it best.

Kisse me, quod she, we be no lenger wrothe,
 For by my trouthe I wol be to you bothe,
 This is to sayn, ye bothe faire and good.
 I pray to God that I mote sterven wood,¹
 But I to you be al so good and trewe,
 As ever was wif, sin that the world was newe ;
 And but I be to-morwe as faire to seene,
 As any lady, emperice, or queen,
 That is betwix the East and eke the West,
 Doth with my lif and deth, right as you lest.
 Cast up the curtein, loke how that it is.

And whan the knight saw veraily all this
 That she so faire was, and so yong therto,
 For joye he hent hire in his armes two :
 His herte bathed in a bath of blisse
 A thousand time a-row he gan hire kisse :
 And she obeyed him in every thing,
 That mighte don him plesance or liking.
 And thus they live unto hir lives ende
 In parfit² joye, and Jesu Crist us sende
 Husbondes meke and yonge, and freshe abed
 And grace to overlive hem that we wed.

¹ I may die mad.

² Perfect.

V.

MISCELLANEOUS.

I.

THE TEMPLE OF MARS.

WHY shulde I not as wel eke tell you all
The purtreiture, that was upon the wall
Within the temple of mighty Mars the rede ?
All painted was the wall in length and brede
Like to the estres¹ of the grisly² place,
That highte the gret temple of Mars in Trace,³
In thilke colde and frosty region,
Ther as Mars hath his souveraine mansion.

First on the wall was painted a forest,
In which ther wonneth⁴ neyther man ne best,
With knotty knarry⁵ barrein trees old
Of stubbles sharpe and hidous to behold ;
In which ther ran a romble⁶ and a swough,⁷
As though a storme shuld bresten every bough :
And downward from an hill under a bent,⁸
Ther stood the temple of Mars armipotent,

¹ Inside.

² Dreadful.

³ Thrace.

⁴ Dwelleth

⁵ Covered with knobs.

⁶ A rumble.

⁷ Sound or noise.

⁸ Declivity

Wrought all of burned stele, of which th' entree¹
 Was longe and streite, and gastly for to see.
 And thereout came a rage and swiche a vise,²
 That it made all the gates for to rise.
 The northern light in at the dore shone,
 For window on the wall ne was ther none,
 Through which men mighten any light discerne.
 The dore was all of adamant eterne,³
 Yelenced overthwart and endelong
 With yven tough, and for to make it strong,
 Every pillar the temple to sustene
 Was tonne-gret,⁴ of yren bright and shene.

Ther saw I first the derke imagining
 Of felonie, and alle the compassing ;
 The cruel ire, red as any glede,⁵
 The pikepurse, and eke the pale drede ;⁶
 The smiler with the knif under the cloke,
 The shepen⁷ brenning with the blake smoke ;
 The treson of the mord'ring in the bedde,
 The open werre, with woundes all bebledde ;
 Conteke⁸ with bloody knife, and sharp manace.⁹
 All full of chirking¹⁰ was that sory place.
 The sleer of himself yet saw I there,
 His herte-blood hath bathed all his hair :
 The naile ydriven in the shode on hight,
 The colde deth, with mouth gaping upright.
 Amiddes of the temple sate mischance,
 With discomfort and sory countenance.
 Yet saw I wodenesse¹¹ laughing in his rage,

¹ Entry.² Violence.³ Everlasting.⁴ As large round as a tun. ⁵ Live coal.⁶ Fear.⁷ The stable.⁸ Contention.⁹ Threats or menaces. ¹⁰ Unpleasant sounds.¹¹ Madness

Armed complaint, outhees,¹ and fierce outrage ;
 The carrion in the bush, with throte ycorven²
 A thousand slaine, and not of qualme ystorven ;³
 The tyrant, with the prey by force yraft ;
 The toun destroyed, ther was nothing laft.
 Yet saw I brent the shippes hoppesteres,⁴
 The hunte ystrangled with the wild beres :
 The sow freting⁵ the child right in the cradel ;
 The coke yscalled, for all his long ladel.
 Nought was foryete by th' infortune of Marte
 The carter overridden with his carte ;
 Under the wheel ful low he lay adoun.

Ther were also of Martes division,
 Th' armerer, and the bowyer, and the smith,
 That forgeth sharpe swerdes on his stith.⁶
 And all above depeinted in a tour
 Saw I conquest, sitting in gret honour,
 With thilke sharpe swerd over his head
 Yhanging by a subtile twined thred.
 Depeinted was the slaughter of Julius,
 Of gret Nero, and of Antonius :
 All⁷ be that thilke time they were unborne,
 Yet was hir deth depeinted therebeforne,⁸
 By manacing⁹ of Mars, right by figure,
 So was it shewed in that purtreiture
 As is depeinted in the cercles above,
 Who shall be slaine, or elles ded for love.
 Sufficeth on ensample in stories olde,
 I may not reckon hem alle, though I wolde.

The statue of Mars upon a carte stood

¹ Outcries.

² Cut or carved.

³ Not perished by sickness

⁴ The dancing ships. ⁵ Devouring.

⁶ Stithy or anvil.

⁷ Albeit.

⁸ Before that.

⁹ Threatening.

Armed, and loked grim as he were wood,¹
 And over his hed ther shinen two figures
 Of sterres, that ben cleped in scriptures²
 That one Puella, that other Rubeus.
 This god of armes was arrayed thus :
 A wolf ther stood beforne him at his feet
 With eyen red, and of a man he ete :
 With subtil pensil peinted was this storie,
 In redoubting of Mars and of his glorie.

The Knights Tale.

II.

REPARATIONS FOR A TOURNAMENT

GREAT was the feste in Athenes thilke day ;
 And eke³ the lusty seson of that May
 Made every wight to ben in swiche plesance,⁷
 That all that monday justen they and dance,
 And spenden it in Venus highe servise.
 But by the cause that they shulden rise
 Erly a-morwe for to seen the fight.
 Unto hir reste wenten they at night.
 And on the morwe when the day gan spring,
 Of hors and harneis noise and clattering
 Ther was in the hostelries all aboute :
 And to the paleis rode ther many a route
 Of lordes, upon stedes and palfries,
 Ther mayst thou see devising⁴ of harneis
 So uncouth and so riche, and wrought so wele
 Of goldsmithry, of brouding,⁵ and of stele ;
 The shieldes brighte, testeres, and trappures :⁶

¹ Mad.

² Writings.

³ Also or moreover

⁴ Choosing.

⁵ Embroidering.

⁶ Head-pieces and trappings.

Gold-hewen helmes, hauberkes, cote-armures ;
 Lordes in parementes¹ on hir coursers,
 Knightes of retenue, and eke squires,
 Nailing the speres, and helmes bokeling,
 Gniding² of shieldes, with lainers³ lacing ;
 Ther as nede is, they were nothing idel :
 The fomy stedes on the golden bridel
 Gnawing, and fast the armureres also
 With file and hammer priking to and fro ;
 Yemen on fote, and communes many on
 With shorte staves, thicke as they may gon ;
 Pipes, trompes, nakeres,⁴ and clariounes,
 That in the bataille blowen bloody sounes ;
 The paleis ful of peple up and down,
 Here three, ther ten, holding hir questioun,
 Devining⁵ of the Theban knightes two.
 Som sayden thus, som sayde il shal be so :
 Som helden with him with the blacke berd,
 Som with the balled, som with the thick haired ;
 Som saide he loked grim, and wolde fighte :
 He hath a sparth⁶ of twenty pound of weight.

Thus was the halle full of devining
 Long after that the sonne gan up spring.
 The great Theseus that of his slepe is waked
 With minstralcie and noise that was ymaked,
 Held yet the chambre of his paleis riche,
 Till that the Theban knightes both yliche⁷
 Honoured were, and to the paleis fette.⁸

Duke Theseus is at a windowe sette,
 Araied right as he were a god in trone :⁹

¹ Rich clothing.

² Rubbing.

³ Straps or thongs.

⁴ Drums of brass.

⁵ Discussing

⁶ An axe.

⁷ Alike.

⁸ Brought

⁹ Enthroned.

The peple presseth thitherward ful sone
 Him for to seene, and don high reverence,
 And eke to herken his heste and his sentence.

An herald on a scaffold made an o,¹
 Till that the noise of the peple was ydo :
 And whan he saw the peple of noise all still,
 Thus shewed he the mighty dukes will.

The lord hath of his high discretion
 Considered that it were destruction
 To gentil blood, to fighten in the guise
 Of mortal bataille now in this emprise ;²
 Wherefore to shapen that they shul not die,
 He wol his firste purpos modifie.

No man therefore, on peine of losse of lif,
 No manner shot, ne pollax, ne short knif
 Into the listes send, or thider bring,
 Ne short swerd for to stike with point biting
 Ne man may draw, ne bear it by his side.
 Ne no man shall unto his felaw ride
 But o³ course, with a sharpe ygrounden spere .
 Foin⁴ if him list on foot, himself to were.⁵
 And he that is at meschief, shal be take,
 And not slaine, but be brought unto the stake,
 That shall be ordeined on either side,
 Thider he shall by force, and ther abide.
 And if so falle, the chevetain⁶ be take
 On either side, or elles sleth his make,⁷
 No longer shall the tourneying ylast.
 God spede you ; goth forth and lay on fast.
 With longe swerd and with mase fighteth your fill.
 Goth now your way, this is the lordes will.

¹ Crieu • *Oyez.*"

² Cause.

³ One.

⁴ Push or pass

⁵ To defend.

⁶ Chieftain.

⁷ Mate.

The vois of the peple touched to the heven,
 So loude cried they with mery steven :¹
 God save swiche a lorde that is so good,
 He wilneth no destruction of blood.

The Knightes Tale.

III.

THE TOURNAMENT.

Up gon the trompes and the melodie,
 And to the listes rit² the compaignie
 By ordinance, thurghout the citie large,
 Hanged with cloth of gold, and not with sarge.
 Ful like a lord this noble duke gan ride,
 And these two Thebans upon eyther side :
 And after rode the quene and Emelie,
 And after that another compaignie
 Of one and other, after hir³ degree
 And thus they passen thurghout the citee,
 And to the listes comen they betime :
 It n'as not of the day yet fully prime.

When set was Theseus ful rich and hie,
 Ipolita the quene, and Emelie,
 And other ladies in degrees aboute ;
 Unto the setes preseth all the route.
 And westward, through the gates under Mart,⁴
 Arcite, and eke the hundred of his part,
 With banner red is entred right anon ;
 And in the selve⁵ moment Palamon

¹ Voice.

² Rode.

³ Their.

⁴ The statue of Mars.

⁵ Selfsame.

Is, under Venus, estward in the place,
 With banner white, and hardy chere and face.
 In all the world to seken up and doun,
 So even without variatioun
 There n'ere¹ swich compagnies never twey.²
 For ther was non so wise that coude sey,
 That any had of other avantage
 Of worthinesse, ne of estat, ne age,
 So even were they chosen for to gesse.
 And in two ringes fayre they hem dresse.
 Whan that hir names red were everich³ one,
 That in hire nombre gile were ther non,
 Tho were the gates shette, and cried was loude ;
 Do now your devoir, yonge knightes proude.

The heralds left hir priking up and doun,
 Now ringen trompes loud and clarioun.
 There is no more to say, but east and west
 In gon the speres sadly⁴ in the rest ;
 In goth the sharpe spore⁵ into the side.
 Ther see men who can juste and who can ride.
 Ther shiveren shaftes upon sheldes thicke ;
 He feleth thurgh the herte-spone the pricke.
 Up springen speres twenty foote on highte ;
 Out gon the swerdes as the silver bright.
 The helmes they to-hewen, and to-shrede ;⁶
 Out brest the blood, with sterne stremes rede.
 With mighty maces the bones they to-breste.
 He thurgh the thickest of the throng gan threste.⁷
 Ther stomblen stedes strong, and doun goth all.
 He rolleth under foot as doth a ball.

¹ Never was.² Two.³ Every.⁴ Steadily.⁵ Spur⁶ Torn.⁷ Thrust.

He foineth on his foo¹ with a truncheon,
 And he him hurtleth with his hors adoun.
 He thurgh the body is hurt, and sith ytake²
 Maugre his hed, and brought unto the stake,
 As forword³ was, right ther he must abide.
 Another lad is on that other side.
 And sometime doth⁴ hem Theseus to rest,
 Hem to refresh and drinken if hem lest.

Ful ofte a day han thilke Thebanes two
 Togeder met, and wrought eche other wo:
 Unhorsed hath eche other of hem twey.
 Ther n'as no tigre in the vale of Galaphey⁵
 When that hire whelpe is stolen, when it is lite,⁶
 So cruel on the hunt, as is Arcite
 For jelous heart upon this Palamon:
 Ne in Belmarie ther n'is so fell⁷ leon,
 That hunted is, or for his hunger wood,⁸
 Ne of his prey desireth so the blood,
 As Palamon to sleen his foo Arcite.
 The jelous strokes on hir⁹ helmes bite;
 Out renneth blood on both hir sides rede.

Somtime an ende ther is of every dede.
 For er the sonne unto the reste went,
 The stronge King Emetrius gan hent¹⁰
 This Palamon, as he fought with Arcite,
 And made his swerd depe in his flesh to bite.
 And by the force of twenty is he take
 Unyolden,¹¹ and ydrawen to the stake.

¹ Foe. ² Since taken. ³ Agreement. ⁴ Doeth or causeth.

⁵ Galaphey and Belmarie are by Tyrwhitt supposed to be provinces of Mauritania.

⁶ Little. ⁷ Furious lion. ⁸ Mad. ⁹ Their.

¹⁰ Seize. ¹¹ Not having surrendered

And in the rescous¹ of this Palamon
 The stronge King Licurge is borne adoun :
 And King Emetrius for all his strengthe
 Is borne out of his sadel a swerdes length,
 So hitte him Palamon or² he were take :
 But all for nought, he was brought to the stake :
 His herdy herte might him helpen naught,
 He must abiden, whan that he was caught
 By force, and eke by composition.

Who sorweth now but woful Palamon ?
 That must no more gon again to fight.
 And whan that Theseus hath seen that sight,
 Unto the folke that foughten thus eche on,
 He cried, ho ! no more, for it is don.
 I wol be trewe juge, and not partie,
 Arcite of Thebes shall have Emelie,
 That by his fortune hath hire fayre ywonne.

The Knightes Tale.

IV.

DEATH OF ARCITE.

THE fierce Arcite hath off his helm ydon,
 And on a courser for to show his face
 He priketh endelong the large place,
 Loking upward upon his Emelie ;
 And she again³ him cast a friendlich eye,
 And was all his in chere, as his in herte.
 Out of the ground a fire infernal sterte,

¹ Rescue.

² Before.

³ Against or upon.

From Pluto sent, at requeste of Saturne,
 For which his hors for fere gan to turne,
 And lepte aside, and foundered as he lepe :
 And ere that Arcite may take any kepe,
 He pight¹ him on the pomel of his head,
 That in the place he lay as he were ded,
 His brest to-broken with his sadel bow.
 As blake he lay as any cole or crow,
 So was the blood yronnen in his face.

Anon he was yborne out of the place
 With herte sore, to Theseus paleis.
 Tho was he corven² out of his harneis,
 And in a bed ybrought ful fayre and blive,³
 For he was yet in memorie and live,⁴
 And alway crying after Emelie.

Swelleth the brest of Arcite, and the sore
 Encreseth at his herte more and more.
 The clotered⁵ blood, for any leche-craft,
 Corrupeth,⁶ and is in his bouke⁷ ylaft,
 That neither veine-blood, ne ventousing,⁸
 Ne drinke of herbes may ben his helping.
 The pipes of his longes gan to swelle,
 And every lacerte⁹ in his brest adoun
 Is shent with venime and corruptioun.
 Him gaineth neyther, for to get his lif,
 Vomit upward, ne downward laxatif ;
 All is to-brosten thilke region ;
 Nature hath now no domination.
 And certainly ther nature wol not werche,
 Farewel physike ; go bere the man to cherche.

¹ ritched.² Then he was cut out of, &c.³ Quickly⁴ Life.⁵ Clotted.⁶ Corrupted.⁷ Body.⁸ Cupping.⁹ Wound.

This is all and some, that Arcite muste die.
 For which he sendeth after Emelie,
 And Palamon, that was his cosin dere.
 Then sayd he thus, as ye shuln after hear.

Nought may the woful spirit in myn herte
 Declare o' point of all my sorwes smerte
 To you, my lady, that I love most ;
 But I bequeath the servis of my gost
 To you aboven every creature,
 Sin that my lif ne may no lenger dure.²

Alas the wo ! alas the peines stronge,
 That I for you have suffered, and so longe !
 Alas the deth ! alas min Emelie !
 Alas departing of our compaignie !
 Alas min hertes quene ! alas my wif !
 Min hertes ladie, ender of my lif !
 What is this world ? what axen men to have ?
 Now with his love, now in his colde grave
 Alone withouten any compaignie.
 Farewel my swete, farewel min Emelie,
 And softe take me in your armes twey,
 For love of God, and herkeneth what I sey.

I have here with my cosin Palamon
 Had strif and rancour many a day agon
 For love of you, and for my jalousie.
 And Jupiter so wis³ my soule gie,⁴
 To speken of a servant proprely,
 With alle circumstances trewely,
 That is to sayn, trowth, honour, and knighthede,
 Wisdom, humblesse, estate and high kindrede,
 Freedom, and all that longeth⁵ to that art,

¹ One.² Last.³ Certainly⁴ Guide.⁵ Belongeth.

So Jupiter have of my soule part,
 As in this world right now ne know I none
 So worthy to be loved as Palamon,
 That serveth you, and wol don¹ all his life.
 And if that ever ye shall be his wif,
 Foryete² not Palamon, the gentil man.

And with that word his speche to faille began.
 For from his feet up to his brest was come
 The cold of deth, that had him overnome.
 And yet moreover in his armes two
 The vital strength is lost, and all ago.
 Only the intellect, withouten more,
 That dwelled in his herte sike and sore,
 Gan failen, whan the herte felte deth ;
 Dusked his eyen two, and failed his breth.
 But on his ladie yet cast he his eye ;
 His laste word was ; Mercy, Emelie !
 His spirit changed hous, and wente ther,
 As I came never I cannot tellen where.

The Knightes Tale.

V.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GENTLEMAN.

“VILLANIE³ at the beginning
 I woll,” said LOVE, “over all thing
 Thou leave, if thou wolt ne be
 False and trespase ayenst⁴ me :
 I curse and blame generally
 All hem that loven villany,

¹ Will do.

² Forget.

³ Anything unbecoming the character of a gentleman.

⁴ Against.

For villanie maketh villeine
 And by his deeds a chorle is seene.

These villaines arne without pitie,
 Friendship, love, and all bountie,
 I nill¹ receive into my servise
 Hem that been villaines of emprise²

But understand in thine entent³
 That this is not mine entendement,
 To clepe⁴ no wight in no ages
 Onely gentil⁵ for his linages :
 But who so is vertuous,
 And in his port not outrageous,
 When such one thou seest thee beforne,
 Though he be not gentil born,
 Thou mayest wel sayn this in sooth,
 That he is gentil, because he doth
 As longeth⁶ to a gentleman :
 Of hem none other deme⁷ I can,
 For certainly withouten dreede,²
 A chorle is demed by his deede,
 Of high or low, as ye may see,
 Or of what kindred that he bee:
 Ne say nought for none evil will,
 Thing that is to holden still,
 It is no worship⁹ to mis-saie,
 Thou mayest ensample take of Kaye,
 That was sometime for mis-sayeng,
 Hated both of old and yong :
 As far as Gawein the worthie,
 Was praised for his curtesie.

¹ Will not.

² By choice or profession.

³ Understanding.

⁴ Call.

⁵ Noble.

⁶ Belongeth.

⁷ Judgment.

⁸ Doubt.

⁹ Credit.

Kaye was hated, for he was fell,
 Of word dispitous¹ and cruell ;
 Wherefore be wise and acquaintance,
 Goodly of word and resonable :
 Both to lesse, and eke to mare,²
 And whan thou comest there men are
 Looke that thou have in custome ay³
 First to salve⁴ hem if thou may :
 And if it fall, that of hem some
 Salve the first, be no dumb,
 But quite⁵ him courtesly anone
 Without abiding,⁶ ere they gone.

For nothing eke thy tongue applie
 To speken wordes of ribaldrie,
 To villaine speche in no degree
 Let never thy lippe unbounden bee :
 For I nought hold him in good faith
 Curteous, that foule wordes saith :
 And all women to serve and preise,
 And to thy power their honour raise :
 And if that any missayer⁷
 Despise women, that thou mayest hear,
 Blame him, and bid him hold him still,
 And set thy might and all thy will
 Women and ladies for to plese,
 And to do thing that may hem ease,
 That they ever speake good of thee,
 For so thou maiest best praised bee.

Looke from pride thou keepe thee wele,
 For thou mayest both perceiue and feele,
 That pride is both follie and sin,

¹ Angry.² To less and greater³ Ever.⁴ Salute.⁵ Requite.⁶ Delaying.⁷ Slar derer.

And he that pride hath him within,
 Ne may his herte in no wise,
 Maken ne souplen¹ to service :
 For Pride is found in every part
 Contrarie unto Loves art.

Romaunt of the Rose.

VI.

APPAREL AND DEMEANOR OF
 THE GALLANTS OF CHAUCER'S TIME.²

He that loveth truly,
 Should him conteine jollily,
 Without pride in sondrie wise,³
 And him disguisen in queinteise,⁴
 For queint array, without drede
 Is nothing proude, who taketh hede,
 For fresh array, as men may see
 Without pride may ofte bee.

Maintaine thyself after thy rent⁵
 Of robe and eke of garment,
 For many sithe⁶ faire clothing
 A man amendeth in much thing.

And looke alway that they be shape
 (What garment that thou shalt make),
 Of him that can best do,
 With all that partaineth thereto,

¹ Pliant.

² This selection is made less for its poetical merits, than because it is a curious and truthful portraiture of the gallants of a chivalrous age; with whom—as indeed with all of the higher classes—there prevailed an excessive fondness for dress and extravagant magnificence.

³ In various modes. ⁴ Excessive neatness. ⁵ Income. ⁶ Times.

Pointes and sleeves be well sittand,¹
 Right and streight on the hand,
 Of shoone² and bootes, new and faire,
 Looke at the least you have a paire,
 And that they sit so fetously,³
 That these rude may utterly
 Marvaile, sith that they sit so plaine,
 How that they come on or off again.
 Weare streighte gloves with aumere⁴
 Of silke: and alway with good chere
 Do yeve,⁵ if thou have richesse,
 And if thou have nought, then spend the lesse.
 Alway be merry, if thou may,
 But waste not thy good alway:
 Have hatte of floures fresh as May,
 Chapelet of roses of Whitsunday,
 For such array ne costeth but lite.
 Thine hondes wash, thy teeth make white,
 And leth no filth upon thee bee,
 Thy nailes blacke, if thou mayst see,
 Voide it all-way deliverly,
 And kembe thine head right jollily:
 Farce⁶ not thy visage in no wise,
 For that of love is not th' emprise,⁷
 For love doth haten, as I finde
 A beautee that cometh not of Kinde:
 Alway in herte I rede⁸ thee,
 Glad and merry for to bee,
 And be as joyful as thou can,
 Love hath no joy of sorrowful man,
 For ever of love the sikenesse

¹ Fitting.² Shoes.³ Properly.⁴ Purse.⁵ Give.⁶ Disguise or paint.⁷ Characteristic.⁸ Advise.

Is meint¹ with sweet and bitternesse.
 The sore of love is marvailous,
 For now the lover is joyous,
 Now can he plaine, now can he groan,
 Now can he singen, now maken moan,
 To-day he plaineth for heavinesse,
 To-morrow he plaineth for jolynesse :
 The life of love is full contrarie,
 Which stoundemele² can oft varie :
 But if thou canst mirthes make,
 That men in gre³ woll gladly take,
 Doe it goodly I command thee,
 For men should, wheresoever they be,
 Doe thing that hem fitting is,
 For thereof cometh good loos⁴ and pris.
 Wherof that⁵ thou be vertuous
 Ne be not strange ne daungerous :⁶
 For it that thou good rider be,
 Pricke gladly that men may see :
 In armes also if thou conne⁷
 Pursue till thou a name hast wonne :
 And if thy voice be faire and clere
 Thou shalt maken no gret daungere,
 When to sing they goodly pray,
 It is thy worship to obay :
 Also to you it longeth aye,
 To harpe and citterne, daunce and playe,
 For if he can well foot and daunce,
 It may him greatly doe avaunce,⁸

¹ Mingled.² Momentarily.³ Pleasure.⁴ Los, or renown.⁵ On account of that⁶ Coy, difficult.⁷ Art able.⁸ Profit.

Emong¹ eke for thy lady sake,
 Looke that no man thee scarce² may hold
 For that may greeve³ thee manifold:
 Reson woll that a lover bee
 In his yestes more large and free
 Than chorles that ben not of loving.

Yet with o thing I thee charge,
 That is to say, that thou be large⁴
 Unto the maid, thy lif doth serve,
 So best her thanke thou shalt deserve.
 Yeve her giftes and gette her grace,
 For so thou may thanke purchase,⁵
 That she thee worthy hold and free,
 Thy ladie, and all that may thee see.
 Also her servants worship aie
 And please as muche as thou maie,
 Great good through hem may come to thee.
 Because with her they ben privee:
 They shall her tell how they thee fand⁶
 Curteous and wise, and well doand,⁷
 And she shall preise well thee more.
 Looke out of lond thou be no fore,⁸
 And if such cause thou have, that thee
 Behoveth to gone out of countree
 Leave hole⁹ thine hearte in hostage,
 Till thou againe make thy passage,
 Thinke long to see the swete thing
 That hath thine hearte in her keeping.

Romaunt of the Rose.

¹ Among.

² Parsimonious.

³ Injure.

⁴ Generous.

⁵ Purchase things.

⁶ Found.

⁷ Doing.

⁸ Thou be not far.

⁹ All.

VII.

FORTUNE.

It is of Love, as of Fortune,
 That chaungeth oft and nill contune;¹
 Which whylome² woll on folke smile
 And glombe³ on hem another while,
 Now friend, now foe, shalt her feele,
 For a twinkling tourneth her whele.
 She can writhe her head away,
 This is the concourse⁴ of her play,
 She can areise⁵ that doth mourne,
 And whirle adoune, and overtourne,
 Who sitteth highest, but as her lust,⁶
 A foole is he that will her trust.

The Romaunt of the Rose

VIII.

REASON'S CHARACTER OF LOVE.

Love is an hatefull pees,
 A free acquitaunce without relees,
 And through the fret⁷ full of falshede,
 A sikernesse⁸ all set in drede,
 In herte is a despairing hope,
 And full of hope it is wanhope,⁹
 Wise wodenesse,¹⁰ and void¹¹ reasoun,
 A swete perill in to droun,
 A heavy burthen light to beare,

¹ Continue.

² Once on a time. ³ Gloomed, or looked gloomy

⁴ Natural course.

⁵ Lift up those.

⁶ As she chooses. ⁷ Brim.

⁸ Security set in doubt. ⁹ Despair.

¹⁰ Madness.

¹¹ Empty

A wicked wave away to weare.
 It is Carybdis perillous,
 Disagreable and gracious,
 It is discordaunce that can accord,
 And accordaunce to discord,
 It is conning without science,
 Wisdom without sapience,
 Witte without discretion,
 Havoire¹ without possession ;
 It is like heal and hole sikenesse,
 A trust drowned and dronkenesse,
 And health full of maladie,
 And charitee full of envie,
 And anger full of abundance
 And a greedie suffisaunce.
 Delight right full of heavinesse,
 And drerihed² full of gladnesse,
 Bitter sweetnesse and swete errour,
 Right evil savoured good savour,
 Sin that pardon hath within,
 And pardon spotted without sin ;
 A paine also it is joyous,
 And felonie right pitous,³
 Also play that selde⁴ is stable,
 And stedfastness right moveable,
 A strength wicked to stond upright,
 And feebleness full of might,
 Witte unavised, sage follie,
 And joy full of tourmentrie,
 A laughter it is weeping aye,
 Rest that travaileth night and day ;
 Also a swete Hell it is,

¹ Wealth. ² Sorrowfulness. ³ Violence full of mercy. ⁴ Seldom.

And a sorrowful Paradeis,
 A pleasant gaile and easie prisoun
 And full of froste summer seasoun :
 Prime temps¹ full of frostes white
 And May devoid of all delite ;
 With sere braunches, blossomes ungrene,
 And new fruit filled with winter tene ;
 It is a slowe² may not forbear
 Ragges ribaned³ with gold to wear :
 And if thou wolt well love eschew,
 For to escape out of his mew⁴
 And make all hole thy sorow to slake,
 No better counsaile maist thou take
 Than thinke to fleen well ywis,
 May nought helpe else : for wite⁵ thou this
 If thou fly it, it shall flee thee,
 Follow it, and followen shall it thee.

The Romaunt of the Rose.

IX.

SEPULCHRE OF PITY.

I ROSE and yede⁶ my way,
 And in the temple as I yede, I sey⁷

A shrine surmounting all in stones rich,
 Of which the force was pleasaunce to mine ey,
 With diamond or saphire, never liche
 I have none seene, ne wrought so wonderly.

¹ Spring.

² Moth.

³ Bordered.

⁴ Cage.

⁵ Know.

⁶ Went.

⁷ Saw.

So when I met with Philobone in hie
 I gan demand, who is this sepulture ?
 "Forsooth," quod she, "a tender creature

Is shrined there, and Pity is her name ;
 She saw an eagle wreke him on a fly,
 And pluck his wing, and eke him in his game,
 And tender herte of that hath made her die."

The Court of Love

X.

HOUSE OF FAME.

It stood upon so high a rock,
 Higher standeth none in Spaine ;
 But up I clambe¹ with moch paine,
 And though to climbe greeved me,
 Yet I ententife was to see,
 And for to poren wonder low
 If I coude any wise yknow
 What manner stone this roche² was,
 For it was like a limed³ glass,
 But that it shone full more clere ;
 But of what congeled matere
 It was, I n'iste redely,⁴
 But at the last espied I
 And found that it was every dele⁵
 A roche of yse⁶ and not of stele :

¹ Clambered.

I wist not readily.

² Rock.

⁵ Every bit.

³ Polished

⁶ Ice.

Thought I, "By Saint Thomas of Kent,
 This were a feeble foundement¹
 To builden on a place hie,
 He oughte him little to glorifie,
 That hereon bilte, God so me save."²

Then sawe I all the hall ygrave
 With famous folkes names fele,³
 That had been in much wele
 And their fames wide yblow,⁴
 But wel unneth⁵ might I know
 And letters for to rede
 Hir names by, for, out of drede,⁶
 They weren almost out thawed so,
 That of the letters one or two
 Were molte⁶ away of every name,
 So unfamous was waxed hir fame ;
 But men say, what may ever last ?

Then gan I in mine herte cast,
 That they were molte away for heate
 And not away with stormes beate,
 For on that other side I sey,⁷
 Of this hill that northward lay,
 How it was written full of names
 Of folke that had afore great fames,
 Of old time, and yet they were
 As fresh as men had written hem there
 The self-day, or that houre
 That I on hem began to poure.

House of Fame.

¹ Foundation.

² Many.

³ Blown.

⁴ Scarcely.

⁵ Doubt.

⁶ Melted

⁷ Saw.

XI.

FAME S HALL AND THE GODDESS OF FAME.

Of this hall, now what need is
 To tellen you that every wall
 Of it, and roof and floor with all,
 Was plated half a foote thicke
 Of golde, and that n'as not wicke,¹
 But for to prove in all wise
 As fine as ducket in Venise,
 Of which too little in my pouche is,
 And they were set as thicke of ouches²
 Fine, of the finest stones faire,
 That men reden in a lapidare,
 Or as grasses growen in a mede,
 But it were all too long to rede
 The names, and therefore I pace ;³
 But in this lustie and riche place
 That Fames hall called was,
 Full much prees of folke ther n'as,
 Ne crouding, for too much prees,
 But all on hie above a dees⁴
 Satte in a see⁵ imperial,
 That made was of rubie royall,
 Which that a carbuncle is ycalled,
 I sawe perpetually installed,
 A feminine creature,
 That never formed by nature
 Was such another thing I saie :
 For alderfirst,⁶ soth to saie

¹ Base.² Broches.³ Pass.⁴ Dais.⁵ Seat.⁶ As the first.

Me thought that she was so lite
 That the length of a cubite
 Was longer than she semed be,
 But thus soone in a while she
 Her self thus wonderly streight,¹
 That with her feet she th' erthe reight,²
 And with her hedde she touched Heaven,
 There as shineth the sterres seven.
 And thereto yet, as to my wit,
 I saw a greater wonder yet
 Upon her eyen to behold,
 But certainly I hem never told³
 For as fele⁴ eyen had she
 As fethers upon foules be,
 Or weren on the bestes foure
 That Goddes trone can honour,
 As writeth John in the Apocalips,
 Her hair that was oundie and crips⁵
 As burned gold it shone to see.⁶

And sooth to tellen, also shee
 Had also fele up standing eares,
 And tonges, as on best been heres,⁷
 And on her feete waxen saw I
 Partriche winges redily.

But Lord the perrie⁸ and the richesse
 I saw sitting on the goddesse,
 And the heavenly melodie
 Of songes full of armonie
 I heard about her throne ysong,
 That all the palais wall rong,

¹ Outstretched.² Reached.³ Counted.⁴ Many.⁵ Waving and curled.⁶ Sight.⁷ As on beasts are hairs.⁸ Jewels.

So song the mighty muse, she
 That cleped is Caliope,
 And her seven sisterne eke
 That in hir faces seemen meke,
 And evermore eternally
 They song of Fame, thus heard I,
 "Heried¹ be thou and thy name,
 Goddess of renoun and of Fame."

Then was I ware at the last
 As I mine eyen gan up cast,
 That this ilke² noble queene
 On her shoulders gan sustene
 Both the armes and the name
 Of those that had large fame,
 And thus found I sitting this goddessse
 In noble honour and richesse,
 Of which I stinte awhile now
 Other thing to tellen you.

House of Fame

XII.

THE TRUMP OF SLANDER OR DIF FAME.

WHAT did this Eolus, but he
 Tooke out his blacke trump of brass
 That fouler than the devil was,
 And gan this trompe for to blow
 As all the world should overthrow.
 Throughout every regioun
 Went this foule trumpes soun,

¹ Praised.

² Same.

As swifte as a pellet¹ out of a gunne
 When fire is in the poudre runne,
 And such a smoke gan out wende
 Out of the foule trumpes ende,
 Blacke, blue, grenish, swartish, red,
 As doth where that men melte lead,
 So, all on hie from the tewell;²
 And therto saw I one thing well
 That the farther that it ranne
 The greater wexen it beganne,
 As doth a river from a well,
 And it stanke as the pitte of Hell.

House of Fame.

XIII.

THE HOUSE OF RUMOUR.

THEN sawe I stand in a valley
 Under the castle faste³ by,
 An house, that it of Dedali
 That Laborintus cleped⁴ is,
 N'as⁵ made so wonderly ywis,
 Ne halfe so queintly ywrought;
 And evermore, as swift as thought,
 This queint house about went,
 That nevermore it still stant,⁶
 And there came out so great a noise
 That had it stonde upon Oise

¹ Ball.

² Funnel or chimney.

³ Near by.

⁴ Called.

⁵ Was not.

⁶ Stood.

Men might have heard it easily
 To Rome, I trowe sikerly.¹
 And all this house of which I rede,
 Was made of twigges, salow,² rede,
 And green eke, and some were white,
 Such as men to the cages twite,³
 Or maken of these panniers.
 Or els hutches or doffers,
 That for the swough⁴ and for the twigges,
 This house was also full of gigges,⁵
 And also full eke of chirking⁶
 And of many other werkings,
 And eke this house hath of entrees⁷
 As many as leves ben on trees
 In summer when they ben greene,
 And on the roof yet men may seene
 A thousand holes, and wel mo,
 To letten the soun out go,
 And by day in every tide
 Bene all the dores open wide,
 And by night eche one unshet,
 Ne porter is there none to let
 No maner tidings in to pace,⁸
 Ne never rest is in that place
 That it n'is filled full of tidings
 Either loud or of whisperings,
 And ever all the houses angles
 Is full of rownings⁹ and of jangles,¹⁰
 Of warres, of peace, of marriages,
 Of restes, and of labour, of viages,¹¹

¹ Surely.² Yellow.³ Twist.⁴ Sound.⁵ Odd sounds.⁶ Chirpings.⁷ Entrances.⁸ Pass.⁹ Whisperings.¹⁰ Babblings.¹¹ Voyages.

Of abode, of death, and of life,
 Of love, of hate, accord, of strife,
 Of losse, of lore, and of winnings,
 Of heale, of sickness, or of lesings,¹
 Of faire weather, and eke of tempests,
 Of qualme, of folke, and of beests,
 Of divers transmutacions,
 Of estates and eke of regions,
 Of trust, of doubt, of jelousy,
 Of witte, of winning, of folie,
 Of plenty, and of great famine,
 Of chepe,² dearth, and of ruine,
 Of good or misgovernment,
 Of fire, and of divers accident.

And lo, this house of which I write,
 Sure be ye it n'as not lite,³
 For it was sixtie mile of length,
 Al⁴ was the timber of no strength
 Yet it is founded to endure,
 While that it list to aventure,
 That is the mother of tidings,
 As the sea of wells and springs,
 And it was shaped like a cage.
 And at a window I was brought
 That in this house was at me thought,
 And therewithal me thought it stent
 And nothing it about went ;
 But such a great congregacioun
 Of folke as I sawe roam about,
 Some within and some without.
 Na's never seene, ne shall be este,⁵

¹ Lyings or lies

² Cheapness.

³ Little.

⁴ Although.

⁵ Again.

That certes, in this world n'is lefte
 So many formed by nature,
 Ne need so many a creature,
 That wel unneth in that place
 Had I a foote brede of space :
 And every wight that I saw there
 Rownd¹ everich in others eere,
 A new tiding privily,
 Or else he told it openly
 Right thus, and said, " Know'st thou
 That is betidde,² lo, right now ?"
 " No," quod he, " tell me what :"
 And then he told him this and that,
 And swore thereto that it was sooth,³
 Thus hath he said, and thus he doth,
 And this shall be, and thus heard I say,
 That shall be found that dare I lay :
 That all the folke that is on live,
 Ne have the conning to describe⁴
 Those things that I heard there,
 What aloud and what in ear :
 But all the wonder most was this,
 When one had heard a thing ywis,
 He came streight to another wight
 And gan him tellen anon right,
 The same that him was told
 Or⁵ it a furlong way was old,
 And gan somewhat for to eche⁶
 To this tiding in his speake,
 More than ever it spoken was,
 And not so sone departed n'as

1 Whispered

2 Happened.

3 Truth.

4 Describe.

5 Before.

6 To eke or add.

Tho fro him that he ne mette
 With the third, and ere he lette
 Any stound he told him also,
 Where the tidings sothe or false :
 Yet wold he tell it nathelesse
 And evermore with more increase
 Than it was erst : thus north and south
 Went every tiding fro mouth to mouth,
 And that encreasing evermo
 As fire is wont to quicken and go
 From a sparkle sprongen amis
 Til a citie brent up is.

House of Fame.

XIV.

THE TOWER OF JEALOUSY.

Now it is time shortly that I
 Tell you something of Jelousy,
 That was in so great suspicion :¹
 About him left he no mason,
 That stone could lay, ne querrou,²
 He hired hem to make a tour :
 And first, the roses for to kepe,
 About him made he a diche deepe,
 Right wonder large, and also broad,
 Upon the which also stode
 Of squared stone a sturdy wall,
 Which on a cragge was founded alle ;
 And right great thickness eke it bare,
 About it was founded square

¹ So suspicious.

² Workers in stone.

An hundred fadome on every side,
 It was all liche long and wide,
 Least any time it was assailed
 Full well about it was battailed,¹
 And round environ eke were set
 Full many a rich and fair tournet,²
 At every corner of this wall
 Was set a toure full principall
 And everiche had, without fable,
 A portcullise defensable
 To keepe off enemies, and to greve,
 That there hir force would preve.³

And eke amid this purprise⁴
 Was made a tour of great maistrise,⁵
 A fairer saw no man with sight,
 Large and wide, and of great might,
 They dradde none assaut,
 Of ginne, gonne, nor skaffaut,⁶
 The tempere of the mortere
 Was made of liquor wonder dear
 Of quicklime persant and egre⁷
 The which was tempred with vinegre.

The stone was hard of adamaunt
 Whereof they made the foundemaunt,
 The toure was round made in compas,
 In all this world no richer was,
 Ne better ordained therewithall ;
 About the tour was made a wall
 So that betwixt that and the tour,
 Roses were set of sweet savour,
 With many roses that they bere ;

¹ Embattled.² Turret.³ Prove.⁴ Inclosure.⁵ Workmanship.⁶ Wooden tower.⁷ Piercing and sharp.

And eke within the castle were
 Springolds,¹ gonns, bowes and archers,
 And eke about at corners
 Men seen over the wall stond
 Great engines, who were nere hond,
 And in the kernels² here and there
 Of arblasters³ great plentie were.
 None armour might hir stroke withstand,
 It were folly to prease to hand ;
 Without the diche were listes made
 With wall battailed large and brade,
 For men and horse should not attaine
 Too nigh the diche over the plain.
 Thus Jelousy hath environ
 Sette about his garrison,
 With walles round and diche deepe,
 Onely the roser for to keepe.
 And Danger early and late
 The keyes kept of the outer gate,
 The which opened toward the east,
 And he had with him at the least
 Thirtie servants, echone by name.

The Romaunt of the Rose

XV.

GLUTTONY.

O GLOTONIE ! full of cursednesse ;
 O cause first of our confusion
 O original of our damnation,

¹ Machines for throwing stones.

³ Engines for casting darts.

² Battlements.

⁴ Broad.

Til Christ had bought us with his blood again,
 Look how dear, shortly for to saine,
 Abought was this cursed vilanie :
 Corrupt was all this world for glotonie.

Adam our father, and his wif also,
 Fro Paradise, to labour and to wo,
 Were driven for that vice, it is no drede.
 For while that Adam fasted, as I rede,
 He was in Paradise, and when that he
 Ete of the fruit defended on a tree,
 Anon he was cast out to wo and paine,
 O glotonie, on the wel ought us to plaine.

O wist a man how many maladies
 Folwen of excesse and of glotonies,
 He wolde ben the more mesurable,
 Of his diete, sitting at his table.

Alas ! the shorte throat, the tendre mouth
 Maketh that east and west, and north and south,
 In erthe, in air, in water, men to-swinke,¹
 To gete a glutton deintee mete and drinke.

The Pardoner's Tale

XVI.

DRUNKENNESS.

A LECHEROUS thing is wine ; and dronkenesse
 Is full of striving and of wretchednesse.
 O drunken man, disfigured is thy face,
 Sour is thy breath, foul art thou to embrace :
 And through this drunken nose, seemeth the soun
 As though thou saidest ay, Sampson, Sampson :

¹ Labor.

And yet, God wot, Sampson dronk never no wine.
 Thou fallest, as it were a sticked swine :
 Thy tonge is lost, and all thine honest cure,¹
 For dronkenesse is veray sepulture
 Of mannes wit, and his discretion.
 In whom that drinke hath domination,
 He can no counsel kepe, it is no drede.²
 Now kepe you fro the white and fro the rede,
 And namely fro the wine white of Lepe³
 That is to sell in Fishstrete and in Chepe.⁴
 This wine of Spaine crepeth subtilly
 In other wines growing faste by,
 Of which there riseth swiche fumositee,
 That when a man hath dronken draughtes three,
 And weneth that he is at home in Chepe,
 He is in Spaigne, right at the toun of Lepe,
 Not at the Rochell, ne at Burdeux toun ;
 And thanne wol he say Sampson, Sampson.

But hearkeneth, lordings, one word, I you pray,
 That all the soveraine actes, dare I say,
 Of victories in the Olde Testament,
 Through veray God that is omnipotent,
 Were don in abstinence and in prayer :
 Loketh the Bible, and there ye may it lere.

Loke Attila, the grete conqueror
 Died in his slepe, with shame and dishonor,
 Bleding ay at his nose in dronkenesse :
 A capitaine shulde live in sobrenesse.

The Pardoneres Tale.

¹ Care.

² Doubt.

³ A Spanish town.

⁴ Cheapside.

XVII.

GAMBLING.

HASARD¹ is veray mother of lesinges,
 And of deceite, and cursed foresweringes :
 Blaspheming of Christ, manslaughter, and wast² also
 Of catel, and of time ; and furthermo
 It is repreve, and contrary of honour
 For to ben hold a common hasardour.
 And ever the higher he is of estate
 The more he is holden desolate.
 If that a Prince useth hasardie
 He is, as by common opinion,
 Yhold the lesse in reputation.

Stilbon, that was a wise embassadour,
 Was sent to Corinth with full gret honour,
 For Callidone, to maken hem alliance.
 And when he came it happed him *par chance*,
 That all the gretest that were of that lond
 Yplaying atte hazard he hem found.
 For which, as sone as that it mighte be,
 He stole him home again to his countree,
 And sayde there, I wol not lese my name,
 Ne wol not take on me so great diffame
 You for to allie unto non hasardours.
 Sendeth some other wise embassadours,
 For by my trouthe, me lever were to die
 Than I you shuld to hasardours allie.
 For ye that ben so glorious in honours
 Shal not allie you to none hasardours,
 As by my wille, ne as by my treetee.
 This wise philosopher thus sayd he.

The Pardoner's Tale

¹ Gambling.

² Waste.

XVIII.

SWEARING.

Now wol I speke of othes false and grete
 A word or two, as olde bookes trete,
 Gret swering is a thing abhominable,
 And false swering is yet more reprevable.
 The highe God forbad swering at all,
 Witnessse on Matthew : but in special
 Of swering saith the holy Jeremie,
 Thou shalt swere soth thine othes, and not lie :
 And swere in dome, and eke in rightwisenesse,
 But idle swering is a cursednesse.

Behold and see, that in the firste table
 Of highe Goddes hestes honorable,
 How that the second hest of him is this,
 Take not my name in idel or amis.
 Lo, rather he forbiddeth swiche swering,
 Than homicide, or many another thing.
 I say that as by order thus it stondesth ;
 This knoweth he that his hestes understondesth,
 How that the second hest of God is that.
 And furthermore, I wol thee tell all plat,¹
 That vengeance shall not parten from his house
 That of his othes is outrageous.
 By Goddes precious herte, and by his nailes,
 And by the blood of Crist, that is in Hailes,²
 Seven is my chance, and thine is cink and traye :
 By Goddes armes, if thou falsely playe,
 This dagger shul throughout thine herte go.

¹ Plainly.² The Abbey of Hailes in Gloucestershire.

This fruit cometh of the bicchel bones¹ two,
Forswering, ire, falsenesse, and homicide.

Now for the love of Christ that for us dide,
Leteth² your othes, bothe great and small.

¹ Dice made of bones

² Leave.

APPENDIX.



BELIEVING that some quotations from a few of the rare old authors alluded to in the text, will not be incompatible with my subject, and will at the same time prove interesting, both as affording an opportunity to measure the stature of Chaucer's genius by his contemporaries, and as illustrating the power of his example; I have ventured to bring together some selections from Gower, Douglas and Lydgate. These are selected from the host that proclaimed Chaucer to be the model which they had studied, because like Saul they were a head and shoulders taller than their fellows, and by their labors made an impression upon our literature, which is (not faintly) discernible at this remote time. Their genius may not command our veneration, but we cannot deny that they did good service in clearing away the obstacles, and in levelling the rocks and chasms which beset the path so soon to be honored by the august presence of Spenser.

[A.]

Gower.—John Gower did not write anything in English before Chaucer had first led the way. Nor is it probable that he would have done so then, were it not that the king (Richard II.), “having met him rowing on the Thames, invited him into the royal

barge, and after much conversation requested him to 'book some new thing.'"¹ In obedience to this command he wrote the *Confessio Amantis*, upon which principally his reputation as a poet depends. All his commentators discover in this work a union of pedantry and good sense, severe maxims of morality, and the most romantic amatory affectations. Art and learning are everywhere visible, but his fancy is cold and his invention barren. His first productions were written either in the French or Latin languages, which he wrote with great facility; and it is said of his manuscripts that they were more richly illuminated and more sumptuously finished than the works of any other poet of that time.

Some critics have accused him of being "given to change with the turns of state," and of having deserted the fortunes of his royal patron when it became dangerous any longer to adhere to them. But a cowardly vacillation is incompatible with his character, which was sober, dignified and severe. Indeed the charge is in the highest degree improbable, for when Richard was at the summit of his power, and ordered the book referred to above to be written, with the understanding that it was to be one "in which he himself might often look," Gower, with the freedom of a true patriot, took occasion severely to censure the follies and foibles of both king and court, in especial satirizing the vice which was the great blot upon the character of the youthful king, and finally cost him his crown, his foolish fondness for favorites. A daring so unusual in a courtier of that time, strongly contradicts the inferential charge of desertion or ingratitude.

It is Gower's chief praise, that he was the intimate friend of Chaucer, who loved him warmly, and applied to him an epithet which will always be coupled with his memory, "the moral Gower." From some circumstances that have been inveigled

¹ Ellis's *Spec. Eng. Poets*, vol. i., p. 137, and Warton's *Hist. Eng. Poets*, vol. ii., p. 3.

into an appearance of probability, it has been inferred that this friendship suffered an interruption late in their lives. But as it requires all the learning of an elaborate critic to elucidate this knotty point, we merely allude to it, as a theme upon which much useless learning may be very gracefully bestowed.

Gower was born about A. D. 1326, and died A. D. 1402. A monument was erected to his memory in the church of St. Saviour in Southwark, where it may be seen to this day. This church, which is said to be a beautiful specimen of the lighter Gothic architecture, was chiefly built by his munificence.¹

Our reasons for choosing the following selection from Gower's writings are contained in the extract we here give from Ellis's *Specimens of Early English Poetry*. Says that elegant critic: "It is usual to couple the names of Gower and Chaucer, as if these contemporary poets had possessed similar talents: the fairest method, therefore, to form an estimate of both, will be to give from the one a subject which has been attempted by the other. Gower's *Florent*, which he appears to have taken from the *Gesta Romanorum*, is generally supposed to be the original of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*. The story has considerable merit; and it is told in Gower's best manner. These reasons, it is hoped, will excuse the insertion of so long a specimen from an author who was once extremely popular, and whom we have been accustomed to venerate, upon trust, as one of the fathers of English poetry."

There was, whilom, by dayes old,
 A worthy knight, as menne told:
 He was nephew to the emperor,
 And of his court a cortier:
 Wife-less he was, Florent he hight.
 He was a man that mochel might:²

¹ Warton's *Hist. Eng. Poetry*, vol. ii., p. 3.

² That could do much.

Of armes he was desirous,
 Chevalerous, and amorous,
 And, for the fame of worlde's speche,
 Strange aventures for to seche
 He rode the marches all about.

And fell a time, as he was out,
 Fortune (which may every threde
 To-break and knit of mannes spede)
 Shope, as this knight rode in a pass,
 That he by strength y-taken was ;
 And to a castle they him *lad*¹
 Where that he fewe friendes had.
 For so it fell, that ilke stound²
 That he hath, with a deadly wound,
 Fighting (with) his own hande slain
 Branchus, which to the captain
 Was son and heir, whereof ben wroth
 The father and the mother both ;
 And fain they woulde do vengeance
 Upon Florent, but remembrance
 That they took of his worthinesse
 Of knighthood, and of gentlenesse,
 And how he stood of cosinage
 To th' emperor, made them assuage,
 And durst not slayen him for fear.
 In great disputeson they were
 Among themself, what was the best.

There was a lady, the sliest
 Of all that menne knew tho:³
 So old she might unnethes go,
 And was grandame unto the dead :

¹ Led.² At that same time.³ Then.

And she with that began to rede,¹
 And said how she will bring him in,
 That she shall him to death win,
 All onely of his owen grant
 Through strength of very covenant,
 Without blame of any wight.
 Anon she sent for this knight,
 And of her sonne she aleyd²
 The death, and thus to him she said :

“ Florent, howso thou be to-wyte
 Of Branchus’ death, men shall respite
 As now³ to take avengement,
 Be so thou stand in judgement,
 Upon certain condition :
 That thou unto a question
 Which I shall aske shalt answer.
 And, over this, thou shalt eke swere,
 That if thou of the sothe⁴ fail,
 There shall none other thing avail,
 That thou ne shalt thy death receive.
 And (for men shall thee nought deceive)
 That thou thereof might ben advised,
 Thou shalt have day and time assised ;
 And leave safely for to wend :
 Be so that at thy dayes end
 Thou come again with thine advise.⁵

This knight, which worthy was, and wise,
 This lady pray’th that he may wyt,⁶
 And have it under seales writ,
 What question it shoulde be,
 For which he shall, in that degree,

¹ Advise.² Accused.³ At present.⁴ Truth.⁵ Opinion.⁶ Know.

Stand of his life in jeopardy.
 With that she feigneth company,
 And saith, "Florent, on lore it hongeth,
 All that to mine askinge 'longeth ;
 WHAT ALLE WOMEN MOST DESIRE,
 This will I ask : and in th' empire,
 Whereas thou hast most knowledging,
 Take counsel upon this asking."

Florent this thing hath undertake ;
 The day was set, the time take :
 Under his seal he wrote his oath
 In such a wise, and forth he goth
 Home to his eme's¹ court again :
 To whom his aventure plain
 He told of that him is befell ;
 And upon that they weren all,
 The wisest of the land assent !²

But natheless of one assent
 They mighte not accorde plat :³
 One saide this, another that.
 To some women it is pleasaunce,
 That to another is grievance :
 And thus Florent withoute cure
 Must stand upon his aventure. .

When time came, he took his leave,
 That longer would he not beleve,⁴
 And prayeth his eme he be not wroth,
 For that is a point of his oath,
 He saith, that no man shall him wreak,⁵
 Though afterward men heare speake
 That he peraventure die.

¹ Uncle's.² Sent for.³ Plain.⁴ Remain.⁵ Revenge.

And thus he wente forth his way
Alone as knight aventurous.

And as he rode alone so,
And came nigh there he shoulde be,
In a forest under a tree,
He saw where sat a creature,
A loathly womanish figure,
That for to speak of flesh and bone,
So foul yet saw he never none.

This knight beheld her redily,
And, as he would have passed by,
She cleped him, and bade abide :
And he his horse's head aside
Tho¹ turned, and to her he rode,
And there he hev'd and abode
To wite what she woulde mean.

And she began him to bemene,²
And saide, " Florent, by thy name !
Thou hast on hande such a game,
That, but thou be the better avised,
Thy deth is shapen and devised,
That all the world ne may thee save
But if that thou my counsel have."

Florent, when he this tale heard,
Unto this olde wight answer'd,
And of her counsel he her pray'd,
And she again to him thus said :
" Florent, if I for thee so shape,
That thou through me thy death escape,
And take worship of thy deed,
What shall I have to my meed ?"
" What thing," quod he, " that thou wilt axe."

¹ Then.

² Bemoan.

“I bidde never a better taxe,”
 Quod she, “but first, or thou be sped,
 Thou shalt me leave such a wed¹
 That I will have thy troth on hand
 That thou shalt be mine houseband.”

“Nay,” said Florent, “that may not be!”

“Ride thenne forth thy way!” quod she.

“And if thou go forth without rede²
 Thou shalt be sekerliche³ dead.”

Florent behight⁴ her good enow,
 Of land, of rent, of park, of plough,
 But all that counteth she at nought.

Tho fell this knight in mochel thought.

Now go’th he forth, now com’th again,

He wot not what is best to sayn,

And thought as he rode to and fro,

That choose he must one of the two ;

Or for to take her to his wife,

Or elles for to lose his life :

And then he cast his avantage,

That she was of so great an age,

That she may live but a while ;

And thought to put her in an isle,

Where that no man her shulde know

Til she with death were overthrow.

And thus this younge lusty knight

Unto this olde loathly wight

Tho said : “ If that none other chance

May make my deliverance

But only thilke same speche

Which as thou sayst thou shalt me teche,

Have here mine hond, I shall thee wed.”

¹ Pledge.

² Counsel.

³ Surely.

⁴ Promised.

With that she frounceth¹ up her brow :
 “ This covenant I will allow ;”

She saith, “ if any other thing
 But that thou hast of my teaching,
 Fro death thy body may respite,
 I will thee of thy troth acquite ;
 And elles, by none other way.
 Now hearken me what I shall say.

“ That thou shalt say—*Upon this mold*²

That ALLE WOMEN LIEVEST WOULD

BE SOVEREIGN OF MANNES LOVE :

For, what woman is so above

She hath (as who sayth) *all her will :*

And elles may she not fulfill

What thing her were lievest have.

With this answeare thou shalt save

Thy self, and otherwise nought :

And when thou hast thine ende wrought

Come here again, thou shalt me find,

And let no thing out of thy mind.”

He go'th him forth with heavy cheer,

As he that n'ot³ in what manere

He may this worldes joye attain.

For if he die he hath a pain :

And if he live, he must him bind

To such one, which if alle kind

Of women is th' unseemliest.

Thus wote he not what is the best.

But, be him lief, or be him loth,

Unto the castle forth he go'th,

His full answeare for to give,

Or for to die, or for to live.

· Wrinkleth

² Earth

³ Knew not.

Forth with his council came the lord,
 The thinges stooden of record,
 He sent up for the lady soon :
 And forth she came, that olde mone¹
 In presence of the remenaunt ;
 The strength of all the cove-naunt
 Tho was rehearsed openly,
 And to Florent she bade forthi²
 That he shall tellen his advise
 As he that wote what is the price.

Florent saith all that ever he couth,³
 But such word came there none to mouth,
 That he for gift or for behest
 Might any wise his death arrest.
 And thus he tarrieth long and late
 Till that this lady bade algate
 That he shall for the doom final
 Give his answer in special
 Of that she had him first opposed.

And then he hath truly supposed
 That he him may of nothing yelp⁴
 But if so be tho⁵ werdes help
 Which as the woman hath him taught :
 Wherof he hath an hope caught
 That he shall be excused so,
 And told out plain his wille tho.

And when that this matrone heard
 The manner how this knight answerd,
 She said, " Ha ! treason ! woe thee be !
 That hast thus told the privity
 Which alle women most desire.
 I woulde that thou were a-fire !"

¹ Monkey.² Forthwith.³ Knew.⁴ Prate.⁵ Those

But natheless, in such a plight
 Florent of his answer is quite.
 And tho began his sorrow new :
 For he must gone, or be untrue
 To-hire which his trothe had.
 But he, which alle shame dred,
 Go'th forth in stead of his penance,
 And taketh the fortune of his chance,
 As he that was with troth affayted.

This old wight him hath awaited
 In place where he as hire left.
 Florent his woeful head up-lift,
 And saw this vecke¹ where she sit,
 Which was the loathliest wight
 That ever man cast on his eye.
 Her nose bas,² her browes high,
 Her eyen smalle, and depe-set.
 Her cheekes ben with teres wet,
 And rivelen³ as an empty skin
 Hangende⁴ down unto the chin.
 Her lippes shrunken ben for age ;
 There was no grace in her visage.
 Her front was narrow, her locks hoar ;
 She looketh forth as doth a Moor.
 Her neck is short, her shoulders courb,⁵
 That might a mannes lust distourb.
 Her body, great, and nothing small :
 And, shortly to describe her all,
 She hath no lyth⁶ without a lack,
 But like unto a wolle-sack.

She proffered her unto this knight,

¹ Old woman.

² Low.

³ Shrivelled.

⁴ Hanging.

⁵ Distorted.

⁶ Limb

And bade him as he hath behight :¹
 And by the bridle she him seizeth,
 But God wot how that she him pleaseth !
 Of suche wordes as she speaketh,
 Him thinketh wel-nigh his heart breaketh
 For sorrow that he may not flee,
 But if he would untrue be.

He would algate his trouthe hold,
 And every knight thereto is told,
 What hap soever him befall.
 Though she be the foulest of all,
 Yet, to honour of woman-hed,
 Him thought he shoulde taken heed :
 So that, for pure gëntiless,
 As he her couthe best address,
 In ragges as she was to-tore,
 He set her on his horse to-fore,
 And forth he taketh his way soft.

No wonder though he sigheth oft !
 But, as an owl flyeth by night
 Out of all other birdes sight,
 Right so this knight on dayes broad
 In close him held, and shope his road
 On nighte's time, till the tide²
 That he come there he would abide :
 And privily, without noise,
 He bringeth this foule great coise³
 To his castell in such a wise
 That no man might her shape advise
 Till she into the chamber came
 Where he his privy council name⁴
 Of suche men as he moste trust ;

¹ Promised.² Time.³ Incumbrance.⁴ Took.

And told them that he needes must
 This beste wedde to his wife,
 For elles had he lost his life.

The privy women were a-sent,
 That shoulde ben of his assent :
 Her ragges they anon off draw,
 And, as it was that time law,
 She hadde bath, she hadde rest,
 And was arrayed to the best.
 But with no craft of combes brode
 They might her hore lockes shode,¹
 And she ne woulde nought be shore²
 For no counsel : and they therefore,
 With such attire as tho was used,
 Ordainen that it was excused,
 And hid so craftily about
 That no man mighte seen them out.

But when she was fully array'd,
 And her attire was all assayed,
 Tho was she fouler unto see !
 But yet it may none other be :
 They were wedded in the night :
 So woe-begone was never knight
 As he was then of marriage !
 And she began to play and rage,
 As who saith I am well enough.
 (But he thereof nothing ne lough³)
 For she took thenne cheer on hand
 And clepeth⁴ him her houseband,
 And saith, " My Lord, go we to bed !
 For I to that intent thee wed,
 That thou shalt be my worldes bliss ;"

¹ Separate.

² Shorn.

³ Laughed.

⁴ Calleth.

And proffer'th him with that to kiss,
 As she a lusty lady were.
 His body mighte well be there ;
 But as of thought, and of memoire,
 His hearte was in purgatoire.
 And when they were a-bedde naked,
 Withoute sleep he was awaked ;
 He turneth on that other side,
 For that he would his eyen hide
 Fro looking of that foule wight.
 The chamber was all full of light ;
 The curtains were of sendall¹ thin :
 This newe bride which lay within,
 Though it be nought with his accord,
 In armes she beclipt her lord,
 And pray'd as he was turned fro,
 He would him turn again-ward tho.
 For "now," she saith, "we be both one ;"
 But he lay still as any stone ;
 And ever in one she spake and pray'd,
 And bade him think on that he said
 When that he took her by the hond.

He heard and understood the bond,
 How he was set to his penance :
 And, as it were a man in trance,
 He turneth him all suddenly,
 And saw a lady lie him by
 Of eighteene wintere age,
 Which was the fairest of visage
 That ever in all the world he sigh ;²
 And as he would have take her nigh,
 She put her hand and by his leve³

¹ Silk.² Saw.³ Love

Besought him that he woulde leave,
 And say²th, that for to win or lese¹
 He mote one of two thinges chese,²
 Wher³ he will have her such o'night,
 Or elles upon dayes light,
 For he shall not have bothe two.

And he began to sorrow tho,
 In many a wise, and cast his thought,
 But for all that, yet could he nought
 Devise himself which was the best :
 And she that woulde his hearte rest,
 Pray⁴th that he shuld chuse algate :
 Till at the laste, long and late
 He said, " O ye, my life's hele,⁴
 Say what ye list in my querele,⁵
 I wil, that ye be my mistress,
 For I can nought myselve guess
 Which is the best unto my choice.
 Thus grant I you mine whole voice ;
 Chuse for us bothen, I you pray !
 And, what as ever that ye say,
 Right as ye wille, so will I."

" My lord," she saide, " grand-merci !⁶
 For of this word that ye nou sayn
 That ye have made me sovereign,
 My destiny is over passed ;
 That never hereafter shall be lassed⁷
 My beauty which that now I have,
 Till I betake unto my grave.
 Both night and day, as I am now
 I shall always be such to you.

¹ Lose.² Choose.³ Whether.⁴ Medicine⁵ Quarrel.⁶ Many thanks.⁷ Lessened.

The kinges daughter of Sicile
 I am ; and fell but sith a while,
 As I was with my father late,
 That my step-mother, for an hate
 Which toward me she had begun,
 For-shope¹ till I hadde won
 The love and the soveraintee
 Of what knight that in his degree
 All other passeth of good name :
 And, as men sayn, ye be the same,
 The deede proveth it is so,
 Thus am I yours for evermo.

Tho was pleasance and joy enough ;
 Each one with other play and lough ;
 They lived long, and well they far'd,
 And clerkes, that this chance heard,
 They written it in evidence,
 To teach, how that obedience
 May well fortune a man to love,
 And set him in his lust above.²

[B.]

Lydgate.—It has been the custom with many respectable critics, such as Bishop Percy, Ritson, Pinkerton, and Ellis, to decry Lydgate's talents. The cry was first raised by Ritson, who was at once an acute critic and a thorough literary black-guard ; with prejudices so violent against the clergy in especial, that he was the bitter contemner of the lowest of the order. Indeed the argument upon which he principally relied to uncanon-

¹ Misshaped.

² Ellis's Spec. Early Eng. Poets, vol. 1., p. 142. Compare this selection with p. 215 of this work.

ize Lydgate was that he was a "stinking monk ;" and with haste commensurate to his fury he anathematizes the venerable poet's writings, as "cart-loads of rubbish of a voluminous poetaster ; a prosaic and drivelling monk."

In opposition to Ritson and his associates—if the names of Percy and Ritson may be associated without the risk of an explosion—we find the poets Gray and Coleridge, and Thomas Warton. They rank themselves on the side of Lydgate, and claim for him a just measure of consideration, in compensation for the volumes of contempt that had been poured upon him. And we are the more willing to trust the taste and discernment of these "children of fancy," because they re-echo the sentence which Lydgate's contemporaries pronounced, and which the enthusiastic favor of two centuries confirmed. For it is an indisputable historical fact, that during that period his popularity was unbounded, and diffused through all classes. The prince and the peasant, the courtier and the warrior, the merchant, the artisan, and the scholar, all were his fervent admirers: and we dare not nor do we wish to denounce generations of men who lived "lang syne," as being destitute of taste and refinement. We are willing to abide by Gray's judicious observation, "that it is a folly to judge of the understanding of those times by our own. They loved, I will not say tediousness, but length, and a train of circumstances in a narrative. The vulgar do so still ; it gives an air of reality to facts ; it fixes the mind ; raises and keeps in suspense their attention, and supplies the defects of their lifeless and barren imaginations ; and it keeps pace with the slow motion of their own thoughts. Circumstances ever were and ever will be the life and essence both of Oratory and Poetry." If therefore a poet wished to be appreciated, or even understood, how much soever he was in advance of his age, it was necessary that his style and machinery should be adapted to his readers or hearers.

John Lydgate was born in the year 1375 ; some authorities

say at Bury, and others at Lydgate. He was educated at Oxford, and travelled through France, Germany, and Italy; where it is inferred that he was received with open arms by his brethren of the clergy, and by them admitted to the vast stores of manuscripts over which they were the jealous guardians. He so improved these opportunities, that upon his return to England he became renowned for his polite learning, and was induced to open a school in the Abbey at Bury (of which he was a monk) for the education of the children of the nobility.

His principal works were, *The Fall of Princes*, *The Story of Thebes*, and *The Troy Tale*. The former was composed at the request of Humphrey, the good Duke of Gloucester; and the latter by command of Henry V. But besides these, his writings are numbered at two hundred and forty, ranging from the unpretending ballad to the voluminous epic. Although candor must award to him a great share of ability, it cannot be disguised that Lydgate's claims to genius are not commensurate with the size and quantity of his productions. We nevertheless believe that he was a true child of song. For if his genius be overshadowed by that of his master Chaucer, they yet had many things in common; the same enthusiastic admiration of flowers and birds; the same passionate love of feminine loveliness and purity; the same fellowship with Nature in her bright and gay moods: and much of the same wizard power of expressing his sentiments simply and earnestly. The following portrait of Lydgate's literary character is by Thomas Warton, and is limned with the proverbial grace and elegance of that amiable writer. "Whether Lydgate's subject be the life of a hermit or a hero, of Saint Austin or of Guy Earl of Warwick, ludicrous or legendary, religious or romantic, a history or an allegory, he writes with facility. His transitions were rapid from works of the most serious and laborious kind, to sallies of wit and pieces of popular entertainment. His muse was of universal access; and he was not only

the poet of the monastery but of the world in general. If a disguising was intended by the company of goldsmiths; a mask before his majesty of Eltham; a May game for the sheriffs and aldermen of London; a mumming before the lord mayor; a procession of pageants from the Creation, for the festival of Corpus Christi; or a carol for the coronation, Lydgate was consulted and gave the poetry."¹

Like all our old English poets, who were close observers and lovers of nature, Lydgate excels in description; and although his pedantry constantly obtrudes itself before our attention, it is impossible to deny to the following selections the merit of being fanciful, spirited, and harmonious.

A COOL RETREAT.²

AND at the last, amonge the bowes glade,
 Of adventure, I caught a plesaunt shade;
 Ful smooth and playn, and lusty for to sene,
 And softe as velvette was the yonge grene:
 Where from my hors I did alight as fast,
 And on a bough aloft his reyne cast.
 So faynte and mate of wearynesse I was.
 That I me layd adowne upon the gras,
 Upon a brincke, shortly for to telle,
 Beside the river of a crystall welle;
 And the water, as I reherse can,
 Like quicksilver in his streames yran,
 Of which the gravell, and the bryghte stone,
 As any golde, agaynst the sun yshone.³

¹ Wharton's His. Eng. Poetry, vol. ii., p. 53.

² Compare with Chaucer, p. 99.

³ Troye Boke.

CAIUS MARIUS.

BLACKE was his weed, and his habyte also,
 His hed unkempt, his lockes hore and gray,
 His loke downcast in token of sorowe and wo :
 And on his cheke the salte teres lay.
 His robe stayned was with Romaine blode,
 His sworde aye redy whet to do vengeaunce ;
 Lyke a tyraunt most furyouse and wode,
 In slaughter and murdre was set his plesaunce.¹

VENUS.²

AND she stant naked in a wavy sea,
 Environ her with goddesses thre,
 That be assign'd with busy attendance
 To wait on her and do her observance.
 And floures fresh, blue, red, and white,
 Be her about, the more for to delight.
 And on her hed she hath a chapelet
 Of roses red full pleasauntly yset,
 And from the head down unto her foote
 With sundry gums and ointementes soote
 She is enointe, sweeter for to smelle.
 And all alofte, as these poets tell,
 Be doves white, fleeing, and eke sparrows,
 And her beside Cupide with his arrows.³

¹ Fall of Princes. ² Compare with Chaucer, p. 123. ³ Troy Boke

[C.]

Douglas.—Gawin Douglas was born in Scotland, A. D. 1475, and was the third son of Archibald, the great Earl of Angus. He had a classical education, to which he superadded the advantage of long travel in Germany and France, where his high birth and great acquirements commanded the notice of the most polished men. In his thirty-ninth year he was presented by the queen-mother, then regent of Scotland, to the Abbey of Aberbrotho, and soon after to the archbishopric of Saint Andrew's; but the Pope having refused to confirm his nomination he never assumed the title. In the next year he became Bishop of Dunkeld, and after a long struggle obtained peaceable possession of that see. He was a man of great and varied learning, and the possessor of numerous virtues. He, however, suffered from the violent persecution in which his family was involved; and was at length compelled to seek an asylum in England. He accordingly removed to London, where he died of the plague in April, 1522, and was buried in the Savoy Church.¹

The works which have transmitted to us a knowledge of his genius are, *King Hart*, *The Palice of Honour*, and a translation of Virgil's *Eneid*. This last is greatly esteemed, and by competent critics is lauded for its ability and the truth of its rendering. It is a durable monument to our author's genius and learning: for it was the first metrical version of any classic into English, and was executed within the space of sixteen months. Each of the thirteen books into which it is divided is prefaced by a prologue in which David Hume, the historian of his life, says, "he showeth a natural and ample vein of poetry, pure, pleasant, and judicious." That more refined critic, T. Warton, says of them, "the several books are introduced with metrical prologues, which are

¹ These and the following facts are selected from Hollinshed, Floyd, Warton, and Ellis.

often highly poetical, and show that Douglas's proper walk was original poetry." The extracts we shall make, will confirm this observation. He describes rural pleasures and the comforts of domestic life with great felicity. After the fashion of his day, his writings abound in allegory, but they always pointed to some high and noble end, and always classified vice with dishonor and unmanliness, virtue and piety with true honor and happiness.

Several of the extracts from Douglas which follow, strongly resemble our previous selections from Chaucer, whom indeed he studied and venerated, and whom in the Palace of Honour he associates with Homer, Ovid, and Virgil, applying to him the praise of being

“ *A per se sans pair*
In his vulgare.”

A GARDEN.

QUHEN¹ pale Aurora with face lamentabill
Her russet mantel borderit all with sable
Lappit² about by hevinly circumstance,
The tender bed and aires honorabill
Of Flora quene, till³ flowris amiabill,
In May I rais to do my observance :
And enterit in a gardyne of plesance
With sol depaint, as Paradiçe delectabill,
And blissful bewis,⁴ with bloomed varyance.

So craftily dame Flora had over fret
Hir hevinly bed, powderit with mony a set
Of ruby, topas, perle and emerant,

¹ When.

² Skirted.

³ To.

⁴ Boughs.

With balmy dew, bathit¹ and kindly wet ;
 Quhill² vapours hote right freshe and weil ybet,
 Dulce of odour, of flour, most fragrant,
 The silver droppis on dasies distillant :
 Quhilk verdour³ branches over the alars yet
 With smoky sense the mists reflectant.

The fragrand flowris bloomand in thair seis,
 Oer spread the levis of natures tapestries ;
 Above the qhilk⁴ with hevinly harmonies
 The birdis sat on twistes⁵ and on greis,⁶
 Melodiously makand thair kyndlie gleis,⁷
 Whose shrill nottis fordynned all the skyis.
 Of repurcust air the echo cryis.
 Among the branches of the blooming tries
 And on the laurers silver droppis lyis.

While that I rowmed in that Paradice,
 Replenischit, and full of all delice,⁸
 Out of the see Eous alift his heid,
 I mene the hors which drawis at device
 The affiltrie⁹ and golden chair of price
 Of Titan : which at morrow seemis red ;
 The new colour that all the night lay dead
 Is restorit, both fowlis, flowris and rise. ¹⁰

Recomfort was, through Phebus goodliehead.¹¹

¹ Bathed. ² While. ³ Green. ⁴ Which. ⁵ Branches.

⁶ Groves. ⁷ Gleans. ⁸ Delight. ⁹ Polished. ¹⁰ Foliage.

¹¹ Prol. to Palice Honor. Pinkerton's Scot. Poems, pp. 53, 54.

THE MUSES AT A WELL.

BESIDE a crystall well sweet and digest,
 Them to repos, thair hors refresche and rest,
 Alighted down these muses clear of hew.
 The companie all wholly, least and best,
 Thrang to the well to drink, which ran south west,
 Through out one mede where alkin¹ flouris grew.
 Among the laif² full fast I did pursue
 To drink, but so the great preis me opprest,
 That of the water I micht not taste a drew.³

Our horsis pasturit in ane plesand plain,
 Low at the fute of ane fair greene mountaine,
 Amid ane mede schadowit⁴ with cedar tries.
 Safe fro all heit, thair micht we well remain.
 All kindes of herbis, flouris, frute and greine,
 With every growing tree thair men might cheis⁵
 The beryall streams rinn and over stanerie greis,⁶
 Made sober nois : the schaw duinet⁷ agane
 For birdis sang, and sounding of the bees.

The ladyis fair on divers instrumentis,
 Went playand, singand, dansand, over the bentis,⁸
 Full angelik and hevenly was their soun.
 What creature amid his hart imprintis
 The fresh beutie, the goodly representis,
 The merrie speche, fair havings, hie renown,
 Of thame,⁹ would set a wise man half in swoun.¹⁰

¹ All kinds. ² Rest. ³ Draught. ⁴ Shadowed. ⁵ Choose.
⁶ Stony gravel. ⁷ The wood dinned again. ⁸ Little hills
⁹ Them. ¹⁰ Pal. Hon. Pink. Scot. Poems, p. 100.

MARS.¹

UPON a barded courser stout and bold,
 Mars god of strife enarmit in burneist geir :
 Everie invasibill² weapon on him he bare,
 His look was grym, his body large and squair,
 His lymmis wele entailyiet³ to be strang,
 His neck was greit a span length well or mair,
 His visage braid with crisp brown curling hair,
 Of stature not over greit, nor yet over lang.⁴

MAY, ITS SIGHTS AND SOUNDS.

FOR to hehold it was ane⁵ glorie to see
 The stablyt windis, and the calmyt sea,
 The soft seasoune, the firmament serene,
 The clear illuminate air and firth amene ;⁶
 And silver-scalit fishes on the grete.⁷

* * * * *

And lusty Flora did her blossomes sprede
 Under the feet of Phebus' sulyeast steed.
 The swarded soil enbrode⁸ with selcouth⁹ hues,
 Wood and forest odumbrate with bewis ;
 Whais blissful branches portrayed on the ground
 With shadows sheen shew roechis¹⁰ rubicund,
 Towers, turrets, kirnallis,¹¹ and pinnacles high,
 Of castles, kirkis and ilk¹² fair city,
 Stood painted every fane by their own umbrage.¹³

¹ Compare with Lycurge, at p. 147.. ² Hostile. ³ Shaped.

⁴ Pal Hon. Pink. Scot. Poems, p. 76. ⁵ One glory or a glory.

⁶ Gentle frith. ⁷ Gravel. ⁸ Embroidered. ⁹ Uncommon.

¹⁰ Rocks. ¹¹ Battlements. ¹² Each. ¹³ Shade.

* * * * *

And blissful blossoms in the blooming yard
 Submit their heads in the young sun's saf-gard.
 Ivy levis rank oerspred the barmkyn¹ wall,
 The bloomit hawthorne clad his pykis² all :
 Forth of fresh burgeons³ the wyne grapis yyng,
 Endlong the trellis did on twistis hing.
 The lockit buttons on the gemmyt trees,
 Oerspreding leaves of naturis tapestries.
 Soft grassy verdure after balmy shouris
 On curland stalkis smiling to the flowris,
 Beholdand them so many divers hue,
 Some peirs,⁴ some pale,⁵ some burnet⁶ and some blew,
 And some depaint in frecklis, red and white,
 Some bright as gold, with aureate lyte.
 The daisy did unbrede her crownel small,
 And every flower un-lappit in the dale.

* * * * *

Sere downis small on dandelion sprung,
 The young green bloomit strawberry leaves among,
 Gimp gilliflowers their own leaves un shet
 Fresh primrose and the purple violet.

* * * * *

Among the bronis⁷ of the olive twistis
 Sere smalle fowlis, worked crafty nestis
 Endlang the hedges thick, and on rank akis⁸
 Each bird rising with their mirthful makis.⁹
 In corners and clere fenesteris¹⁰ of glas
 Full busily wevand Arachne was,
 To knit her nettis, and hir webbes sly

¹ Rampart.

² Thorns.

³ Sprigs.

⁴ Light blue

⁵ Light yellow.

⁶ Brown.

⁷ Branches.

⁸ Oaks.

⁹ Mates.

¹⁰ Windows.

Therewith to catch the litel midge¹ or fly.

* * * * *

The cushat crouds and pykkis on the rise,²

The sterling changes divers steunnys nise,³

The sparrow chirpis in the walles cleft,

Goldspink and linnet fordynnand the lyft.⁴

The cuckow galis,⁵ and so twitteris the quail,

While rivers reirdit,⁶ schaws and every dale,

And tender twistis tremble on the trees,

For birdes song and bemyng of the bees.

And all small fowlis singin on the spray,

“Welcome thou lord of light, and lampe of day,

Welcome thou fosterer of herbis grene,

Welcome quickener of freshest flouris shene,

Welcome support of every root and vein,

Welcome comfort of al kind frute and grein,

Welcome depainter of the blooming meads,

Welcome the life of every thing that spreads,

Welcome restorer of all kind bestial,

Welcome be thy bright bemes gladding all.⁷

[D.]

The following “Story of Cockagne” is quoted to substantiate the text, which favors the idea that the monks of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were, as a body, idle, luxurious and unchaste. And also as a refutation, by contemporaneous testimony, of an attempt by a recent writer to prove that the mediæval world was greatly “indebted to the Monastic Orders,” not merely because they were safe repositories for manuscripts and

¹ Gnat.

² The dove crows and picks on the bush.

³ Tuneful voices.

⁴ Heaven.

⁵ Cries.

⁶ Sounded.

⁷ Prologue to twelfth book of Eneid. See Warton's *His. Eng. Poetry*, vol. ii., p. 282.

the centres for diffusing very imperfect learning ; but as " places where (it may be imperfectly, yet better than elsewhere) God was worshipped—and as a shelter of respectful sympathy for the orphan maiden and the desolate widow."¹¹

FAR in sea, by West Spain
 Is a land ihote² Cokaygne,
 There n'is land under heaven³ rich
 Of wel⁴ of goodness it ylike.
 Though Paradise be merry and bright,
 Cokaygne is of fairer sight.
 What is there in Paradise
 But grass, and flower, and green-rise ?⁵
 Though there be joy and great dute⁶
 There n'is meat but fruit.
 There n'is hall, bure⁷ no bench ;
 But water, man-is thirst to quenche.
 Beth there no men but two,
 Hely⁸ and Enoch also.
 Clinglich may they go⁹
 Where there wonneth no men mo,
 In Cokaygne is meat and drink,
 Without care, how¹⁰ and swink.¹¹
 The meat is trie,¹² the drink so clear,
 To noon, russin,¹³ and suppere ;
 I sigge¹⁴ (for sooth both were¹⁵)
 There n'is land on earth its peer.

¹ "The Dark Ages," by Rev. S. R. Maitland.

² Called.

³ Heaven.

⁴ Wealth.

⁵ Foliage.

⁶ Pleasure.

⁷ Bower.

⁸ Elias.

* "The sense seems to be," says Ellis, "it is easy for them to be *clean* and of pure heart, because they are only two." ¹⁰ Anxiety.

¹¹ Labor.

¹² Choice.

¹³ A meal between dinner and supper

¹⁴ Affirm.

¹⁵ Truth best were.

Under heaven n'is land I wis
Of so mochil joy and bliss.

There is many swete sight :
All is day, n'is there no night ;
There n'is baret¹ nother strife,
N'is there no death ac² ever life.
There n'is lack of meat nor cloth ;
There n'is man nor woman wroth ;
There n'is serpent, wolf, no fox,
Horse nor capil,³ cow nor ox ;
There n'is sheep, nor swine, nor goat ;
Nor none horwyla,⁴ God it wot,
Nother harate,⁵ nother stud :
The land is full of other good.
N'is there fly, flea, nor louse,
In cloth, town, bed nor house.
There n'is dunnir,⁶ sleet, nor hail ;
Nor none vile worm, nor snail :
Nor none storm, rain, nor wind :
There n'is man nor woman blind :
Ok⁷ all is game, joy and glee.
Well is him that there may be !

There beth rivers, great and fine,
Of oil, milk, honey, and wine.
Water serveth there to no thing
But to siyt⁸ and to washing.
There is al manner fruit :
All is solace and dedute.

There is a wel-fair Abbey
Of white monkes, and of grey ;
There beth bowers, and halls ;

¹ Wrangling.² But.³ Steed.⁴ Groom.⁵ Place where horses are bred.⁶ Thunder.⁷ But.⁸ Boil.

All of pasties beth the walls,
 Of flesh, of fish, and a rich meat,
 The likefullest that man may eat.
 Flouren-cakes beth the shingles all
 Of church, cloister, bowers, and hall.
 The pinnes¹ beth fat puddings,
 Rich meat to princes and kings.
 Man may there of eat enoy,
 All with riyt, and nought with woy ²
 All is common to young and old,
 To stout and stern, meek and bold.

There beth birdes many and fele,³
 Throstle, thrush, and nightingale,
 Chalandre and wood-wale,⁴
 And other birdes without tale,
 That stinteth never by har might
 Merry to sing day and night.
 Yet I do you mo to wit,
 The geese yroasted on the spit
 Flee to that abbey, God it wot
 And gredith,⁵ " Geese all hot ! all hot !"

N'is no speech of no drink ;
 All take enough without swink.⁶
 When the monkes geeth to mass,
 All the finistres,⁷ that beth of glass,
 Turneth into chrystal bright,
 To give monkes more light.
 The young monkes each day
 After meat goeth to play :
 N'is there hawk nor fowl so swift
 Better fleeing by the lift

¹ Towers. ² At the right of all and not weighed.

⁴ Gold-finch and wood-lark. ⁵ Crieth. ⁶ Labor.

³ Numerous

⁷ Windows.

Than the monkes, high of mood,
 With hir sleeves and hir hood.
 Whan the abbot seeth ham flee
 That he holds for much glee.
 Ac natheless, all there among,
 He biddeth ham light to eve song.
 The monkes lighteth nought adown,
 Ac far fleeth into randun ;¹
 Whan the abbot him yseeth
 That his monkes from him fleeth,
 He taketh maiden of the route,
 And turneth up her white toute ;²
 And beateth the tabor with his hand,
 To make his monkes light to land.
 When his monkes that yseeth
 To the maid down hi³ fleeth,
 And goeth the wench all aboute
 And thwacketh all her white toute ;
 And sith after hir swink,
 Wendeth meekly home to drink.

Another abbey is thereby,
 Forsooth a fair great nunnery :
 Up a river of sweet milk
 Where is plenty great of silk.
 When the summer's day is hote,
 The young nunnes taketh a boat,
 And doth hem forth in that rivere
 Both with oares and with steer.
 When hi beth far from the abbey
 Hi maketh ham naked for to play,

¹ Random.

² An equivocal gong, but as persuasive to the young monks, as the modern dinner gong is to the epicure.

³ They.

And lieth down into the brim,
 And doth hem slyly for to swim.
 The young monkes that hem seeth
 Hi doth hem up, and forth hi fleeth,
 And cometh to the nunnes anon.
 And each monke him taketh one,
 And snellich¹ forth beareth har prey
 To the mochil gray abbey.
 And teacheth the nunnes an orison
 With jambrenc² up and down.
 The monke that wol be stout and good
 And can set aright his hood,³
 He shall have without dangere
 Twelve wives each yere.
 Of him is hope, God it wot,
 To be sone father abbot.
 Whoso will come that land to,
 Full great penance he mot do.
 Seven yeres in swine's dritte⁴
 He mot wade, wol ye ywitte,⁵
 All anon up to the chin ;
 So he hall this land win.⁶

[E.]

GOING A MAYING.

GET up, get up, for shame, the blooming morn
 Upon her wings presents the god unshorn.

¹ Swiftly.

² Gambols.

³ Set his cap.

⁴ Dirt.

⁵ You must know.

⁶ Warton and Ellis from Hickeys' Thesaur.

See how Aurora throws her fair
Fresh-quilted colours through the air ;
Get up, sweet slug-a-bed, and see
The dew bespangling herb and tree.

Each flower has wept, and bow'd toward the east
Above an hour since, yet you not drest,
Nay ! not so much as out of bed ;
When all the birds have matins said,
And sung their thankful hymns ; 'tis sin,
Nay, profanation to keep in,
When as a thousand virgins on this day
Spring, sooner than the lark, to fetch in May.

Rise, and put on your foliage, and be seen
To come forth, like the spring time, fresh and green,
And sweet as Flora. Take no care
For jewels for your gown or hair ;
Fear not, the leaves will strew
Gems in abundance upon you ;

Besides the childhood of the day has kept
Against you come, some orient pearls unwept.
Come, and receive them while the light
Hangs on the dew-locks of the night ;
And Titan on the eastern hill
Retires himself, or else stands still,
Till you come forth. Wash, dress, be brief in praying ;
Few beads are best, when once we go a Maying.

Come, my Corinna, come, and coming, mark
How each field turns a street, each street a park
Made green, and trimmed with trees ; see how
Devotion gives each house a bough,
Or branch ; each porch, each door, ere this,
An ark, a tabernacle is,

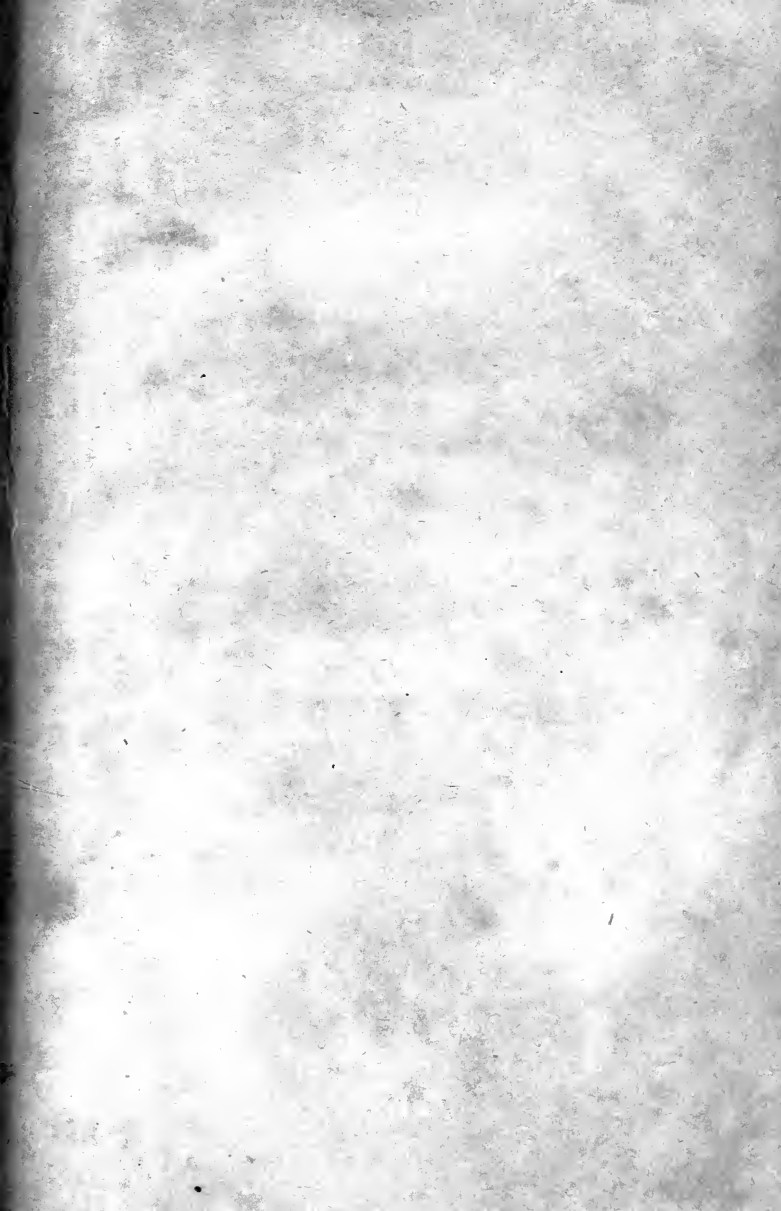
Made up of white-thorn neatly interwove ;
As if here were those cooler shades of love.
 Can such delights be in the street
 And open fields, and we not see it ?
 Come, we'll abroad, and let's obey
 The proclamation made for May :
And sin no more, as we have done, by staying ;
But, my Corinna, come, let's go a Maying.

Come, let us go, while we are in our prime,
And take the harmless folly of the time.
 We shall grow old apace and die
 Before we know our liberty.
 Our life is short, and our days run
 As fast away as doth the Sun ;
And as doth a vapour, or a drop of rain
Once lost can ne'er be found again ;
 So when or you or I are made
 A fable, song, or fleeting shade ;
 All love, all liking, all delight,
 Lies drowned with us in endless night.
Then while time serves, and we are but decaying,
Come, my Corinna, come, let's go a Maying.¹

¹ Herrick's *Hesperides*, vol. ii., p. 22.









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