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MDCCCLVIII.

## THE TAPISER'S TALE.

ATTEMPTED IN THE MANNER OF CHAUCER.

BY LEIGH HUNT.

**A**MONG the Canterbury Pilgrims, of whom Chaucer, for the most part, has given such particular as well as admirable descriptions, mention is made of five, who appear only in their corporate capacity, as members of one and the same guild; to wit, a Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Webbe (webber or weaver), a Deyr (dyer), and a Tapiser—that is to say, a maker of tapestry. The same term designated an upholsterer: so common was it in the days of the poet to cover with tapestry the walls of apartments.

These persons, who are all represented as substantial citizens of no little importance, are said by the poet to have contributed their tales on the road to Canterbury, like the rest of the pilgrims; but none of the tales appear, Chaucer's great work having been either left unfinished, or unfortunate enough to have lost thus much of its copy.

From this deficiency in its requisite quantity of matter, occasion has here been taken to suppose that the Carpenter has just been telling a tale, which his hearers have found tedious, pretentious, and wanting in good fellowship; and that the Host of the Tabard Inn, who is the guide of the pilgrimage, and the constituted arbiter in such matters, feels himself warranted in rebuking the narrator, and in calling upon another person, after his wonted jovial fashion, for a tale of a different sort.

The groundwork of the story made its first English appearance in the pages of the once-vilified but now deservedly-respected old traveller, Sir John Mandeville; and the reader may find it repeated, *verbatim*, in the second volume, page fifty-four, of Mr. MacFarlane's excellent little work, the *Romance of Travel*; the only fault of which, by the way, though it has contrived to be copious too, is that it is too short.\* Mr. MacFarlane, after praising the legend itself, as well as its narrator, adds, that 'Hafez, whose song was all of the rose and nightingale, might have sung it in Persian verse; and Dan Chaucer, our traveller's contemporary, have introduced it into his *Canterbury Tales*, or have made another *Romaunt of the Rose* about it.'

Hence the present attempt;—with how much reverence for Chaucer, whether endeavouring to imitate his graver or his lighter manner, and how heartily prepared to admit objections from Chaucerophiles more devoted (if such there be), need not, it is hoped, be said. Reverence and want of reverence may equally attempt to give an idea of the manner of a master; but the one will do it with all submission, as a filial study; the other with feelings fit only to be disclaimed.

## THE PROLOGUE.

The Carpenter, whan that his tale was done,  
Which sette us nigh on sleepyng everych one,  
Al be it sorely smote us pilgryms gay,  
Who gat us too moche comfort by the way,  
Looked as big and highe, as thof his lore  
Gaf him Saint Joseph for his auncestor.  
Him seemèd, thof his eyne were somedele wry,  
Which in wise head breedeth humilitee,  
As he had been yborn and designate,  
By that same mark, to setten all things straight;  
And because termés of one craft he knew,  
Which, save of carpenters, are known of few,

\* The *Romance of Travel* is one of the many estimable publications originated by Mr. Charles Knight. It should be added, that the two volumes of which it consists concern only the eastern portion of the worl'd. Is it too late to hope that the northern, southern, and western portions may yet proceed from the same pen?

That he ne wanted nought to bring to schoole  
All craftés else, and rap hem with his rule.

Oure Host, good Harry Bailey, colde not bide  
The mannés folie; and right loude he cryed,  
'By corpus, and by bell, and holy Luke,  
Ful bitter and right foule is the rebuke  
Thy tale hath given, Maister Carpenterere,  
To all the good and worthie sinners here.  
God pardon me for saying worthie and good  
Of anie sort of men or multitude,  
For gentle and simple we are sinners all,  
Albeit some be grete and some be smalle,  
And sinnes of carpenteres none may espie,  
Save by some helpe of gymlet for the eie.  
But that which made thy bitternesse so strong,  
Sir Joyner, was, it was so veray long;  
For sette ye case, there colde be made of physick  
A draughte as long, who wolde not beare his tizzic,  
Blotches, or blaines, and rot in veray bonés,  
Sooner than draine swiche potion all at onés?  
Thou shouldst have thought, how often thou hast wishéd  
The sermon done while that thy meate was dishéd;  
For at swiche times men care but for their shinnes  
Of beef or pork, and nothing for their sinnes.'

And thereupon whiles laughen all yfere,  
Oure Host he turnd him to the Tapisere,  
And said, 'Sir Tapisere, as ay tis mete  
That long and bitter end in short and swete,  
In Goddés name telleth us sodenlie  
Some littel mirthe or lovely tragedie,  
Some veray lumpe of sugar of a tale,  
Or ellés certés we all fainte and fayle,  
And may not ride but sick into the town.  
Grete choyce of tales hast thou, as is reasoun,  
Seeing what store thy needle hath ytolde  
In wol and flax; yea, and in cloth of gold;  
What griesly gestés\* and sweete histories  
Of Judiths, and of Jacs, and Sir Guys,  
Of Arthurs, Esthers, Troy and Seneca,  
Saint Theseus, and the grete Duke Joshua,  
With hundreds moe than I may telle or think,  
John Prester, and the lovely Tree of Drink;  
And what, I note, so pleaseth clerkly pen,  
Susanna and the twey false aldermen.†  
Therefore, say on. Only, in anie sort,  
Deare and belovéd Tapisere, be short.'

The Tapisere, who was a worthy man,  
Said, 'I wol do my beste,' and so began.

#### THE TALE.

Within a mile or twey of Bethlem toun,  
As holy bookés maketh mencion,  
Lyeth a feeld men clepe Feeld Floridus;  
For al so sickler as in May with us  
The feeldés ben daysies and cuppés alle,  
Which n'are but brighté weedés, chepe and smalle,

\* *Gesta*, deeds, exploits.

† The word anciently used for *elders* of any importance.

This feeld, though it lye lone as anie plaine,  
 And tended is of nought save sunne and raine,  
 Bloometh with roses all, both redde and whyte,  
 That everych yere men runnen to the sighte;  
 Ne marvel is it, though a wondrous thing,  
 For it is Goddés owné gardening;  
 For these were the first roses ever made;  
 And why they were, sirs, now shall it be sayd.

In oldé dayes of King Gomerus,  
 Which was the first king after Noachus,  
 There bode in Bethlem a poore orphan mayd,  
 Gladsome by kind, by change of fortune staid,  
 Who wrongfully, by gealous frenesie,  
 Was brought to judgment for unchastitie,  
 And maugre all her truc, beseechynge breth,  
 Was dampned to the dredfull fiery deth,  
 The likest helle on erthe, even the stake.

Oh puré blood, swiche feendlich thirst to slake!  
 Alas for the soft flesche and gentil herbe!  
 Alas, why colde she not fro life avertere  
 Softlie and sodenlie, with no moe care!  
 Alas, that strongé men, which wol not beare  
 The prycking of a thorne, but they must curse,  
 And rage, and ban, and shew themselven worse  
 Than manie a Pagan, yet, sirs, can desire  
 To put a poore young creature to the fire!  
 I n'ot how they colde beare the nights and dayes,  
 That wasted her with frights and with amase  
 For constant thinking of that paise of helle.  
 Beare it I may not, I, nor you it telle;  
 And so I hasten th' executioun.

Come is the daye, and crowded by the toun  
 Is Felon's Feeld, all save the stakés place,  
 And there full soone is seen the simple face,  
 All redde at first, then whyte, and nothing stern,  
 That fro the spinning-wheele was tane to burne.

And 'Oh, grete God!' thus dumbly prayeth she,  
 'That willest me to beare this miserie  
 For some just cause, though it I may not finde  
 In the remembraunce of my feeble minde,  
 I praye thee adde it not to mine offence  
 If speedilie I wolde be burnéd hence,  
 And ask the grace thereto at mannés hand.'

And, with the wordes, a littel from her stand  
 She yearned to the man that readie stood  
 To put the lighted torche unto the wood,  
 And said, 'Hast thou a wife, or female child?'  
 And he said, 'Both.' And she in a sort smiled  
 For comfort of the kindred of the man,  
 And said, 'For their sakes I beseeche thee than,  
 That thou wilt put the wood a litel higher  
 About me, that the sooner by the fire  
 I may be reachéd in the throat and breth,  
 And so be ended.' And the man of deth,  
 The whiles he gaunted her the dredfull grace,  
 For veray pity turnd away his face,  
 And swiftly as he colde the fagots lit.  
 But manie in the croud colde bearen it

No moe, mothers and wives in speciall,  
But gat them holpen back unto the wall :  
They felt the unborn babe stir at their hertes ;  
So piteous swete, and void of ill desertes,  
She lookéd, somedele shrinking at the flame ;  
Then hid her face, not to behold the same,  
And bowd her hed, and shope her for to die.

But what is this, that maketh heavenlie  
The aire, with smell of flowrés strange and new,  
As if from veray Paradise it blew,  
Or Heaven has opend, flowr-like, on the place ?  
And lo ! the stake ; and lo ! the blissful face ;  
All blissful is the face, but now so lorne,  
For, of the fagots, all just lit beforne  
Are turnd to trees of roses, redde and brighte,  
And all, not lit, are turnd to roses whyte !  
Her foes are gone, feeble with dredfull feare ;  
And all the croud, whiles such as standen neare  
Drawe back to make moe wyde the holy ring,  
Fall downe to kneelynge and to worshippinge ;  
And there she standeth, shining all abrede,  
Like to an angell, paradysd in dede.