WIT AND HUMOR,

SELECTED FROM THE ENGLISH POETS;

WITH AN ILLUSTRATIVE ESSAY,

AND CRITICAL COMMENTS.

BY

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CHAUCER.

BORN, 1324 ?—DIED, 1400 ?

THE graver portion of the genius of this great poet will be more fitly noticed in the volume to be entitled *Action and Passion*. He is here only in his gayer mood.

I retain the old spelling for three reasons:—first, because it is pleasant to know the actual words of such a writer, as far as they can be ascertained; second, because the antiquity is part of the costume; and third, because I have added a modern prose version, which removes all difficulty in the perusal. I should rather say I have added the version for the purpose of retaining the immortal man's own words, besides being able to show perhaps how strongly every word of a great poet tells in the most modern prose version, provided his ideas are not absolutely misrepresented. At all events, the reader may go uninterruptedly, if he pleases, through the version, and then turn to the original for the finer traits, and for a music equally correct and beautiful.

I wish I could have given more than one comic story out of Chaucer; but the change of manners renders it difficult at any time, and impossible in a book like the present. The subjects with which the court and gentry of the times of the Henries and Edwards could be entertained, are sometimes not only indecorous but revolting. It is a thousand pities that the unbounded sympathy of the poet with everything that interested his fellow-creatures did not know, in this instance, where to stop. Yet we must be cautious how we take upon ourselves to blame him. Even Shakspeare did not quite escape the infection of indecency in a

much later and highly refined age; and it may startle us to suspect, that what is readable in the gravest and even the most scrupulous circles in our own day, may not be altogether so a hundred years hence. Allusions and phrases which are thought harmless now, and that from habit really are so, may then appear in as different a light as those which we are astonished to think our ancestors could endure. Nay, opinions and daily practices exist, and are treated with respect, which may be regarded by our posterity as the grossest and cruellest barbarisms. We may, therefore, cease to wonder at the apparently unaccountable spectacle presented by such writers as Chaucer, who combine a license the most indelicate with the utmost refinements of thought and feeling.

When Chaucer is free from this taint of his age, his humor is of a description the most thoroughly delightful; for it is at once entertaining, profound, and good-natured. If this last quality be thought a drawback by some, as wanting the relish of personality, they may supply even that (as some have supplied it), by supposing that he drew his characters from individuals, and that the individuals were very uncomfortable accordingly. I confess I see no ground for the supposition beyond what the nature of the case demands. Classes must of course be drawn, more or less, from the individuals composing them; but the unprofessional particulars added by Chaucer to his characters (such as the Merchant's uneasy marriage, and the Franklin's prodigal son), are only such as render the portraits more true, by including them in the general category of human kind. The gangrene which the Cook had on his shin, and which has been considered as a remarkable instance of the gratuitous, is, on the contrary (besides its masterly intimation of the perils of luxury in general), painfully in character with a man accustomed to breathe an unhealthy atmosphere, and to be encouraging bad humors with tasting sauces and syrups. Besides, the Cook turns out to be a drunkard.

Chaucer's comic genius is so perfect, that it may be said to include prophetic intimations of all that followed it. The liberal-thinking joviality of Rabelais is there; the portraiture of Cervantes, moral and external; the poetry of Shakspeare; the learning of Ben Jonson; the manners of the wits of Charles the

Second; the *bonhomie* of Sterne; and the insidiousness, without the malice, of Voltaire. One of its characteristics is a certain tranquil detection of particulars, expressive of generals; as in the instance just mentioned of the secret infirmity of the Cook. Thus the Prioress speaks French; but it is "after the school of Stratford at Bow." Her education was altogether more showy than substantial. The lawyer was the busiest man in the world, and yet he "seemed busier than he was." He made something out of nothing, even in appearances.

Another characteristic is his fondness for seeing the spiritual in the material; the mind in the man's aspect. He is as studious of physiognomy as Lavater, and far truer. Observe, too, the poetry that accompanies it,—the imaginative sympathy in the matter of fact. His Yeoman, who is a forester, has a head "like a nut." His Miller is as brisk and healthy as the air of the hill on which he lives, and as hardy and as coarse-grained as his conscience. We know, as well as if we had ridden with them, his oily-faced Monk; his lisping Friar (who was to make confession easy to the ladies); his carbuncled Summoner or Church-Bailiff, the grossest form of ecclesiastical sensuality; and his irritable money-getting Reve or Steward, with his cropped head and calf-less legs, who shaves his beard as closely as he reckons with his master's tenants.

The third great quality of Chaucer's humor is its fair play,—the truth and humanity which induces him to see justice done to good and bad, to the circumstances which make men what they are, and the mixture of right and wrong, of wisdom and of folly, which they consequently exhibit. His worst characters have some little saving grace of good-nature, or at least of joviality and candor. Even the Pardoner, however impudently, acknowledges himself to be a "vicious man." His best people, with one exception, betray some infirmity. The good Clerk of Oxford, for all his simplicity and singleness of heart, has not escaped the pedantry and pretension of the college. The Good Parson seems without a blemish, even in his wisdom; yet when it comes to his turn to relate a story, he announces it as a "little" tale, and then tells the longest and most prosing in the book,—a whole sermonizing volume. This, however, might be an expression of

modesty; since Chaucer uses the same epithet for a similar story of his own telling. But the Good Parson also treats poetry and fiction with contempt. His understanding is narrower than his motives. The only character in Chaucer which seems faultless, is that of the Knight; and he is a man who has been all over the world, and bought experience with hard blows. The poet does not spare his own person. He describes himself as a fat, heavy man, with an "elvish" (wildish?) countenance, shy, and always "staring on the ground." Perhaps he paid for his genius and his knowledge with the consequences of habits too sedentary, and a vein, in his otherwise cheerful wisdom, of hypochondriacal wonder. He also puts in his own mouth a fairy-tale of chivalry, which the Host interrupts with contempt, as a tiresome commonplace. I take it to have been a production of the modest poet's when he was young; for in the midst of what looks like intentional burlesque, are expressions of considerable force and beauty.

This self-knowledge is a part of Chaucer's greatness; and these modest proofs of it distinguish him from every other poet in the language. Shakspeare may have had as much, or more. It is difficult to suppose otherwise. And yet there is no knowing what qualities, less desirable, might have hindered even his mighty insight into his fellow-creatures from choosing to look so closely into himself. His sonnets are not without intimations of personal and other defects; but they contain no such candid talking as Chaucer.

The father of English poetry was essentially a modest man. He sits quietly in a corner, looking down for the most part, and meditating; at other times eyeing everything that passes, and sympathizing with everything;—chuckling heartily at a jest, feeling his eyes fill with tears at sorrow, reverencing virtue, and not out of charity with vice. When he ventures to tell a story himself, it is as much under correction of the Host as the humblest man in the company; and it is no sooner objected to, than he drops it for one of a different description.

I have retained the grave character of the Knight in the selection, because he is leader of the cavalcade.

The syllables that are to be retained in reading the verses are marked with the brief accent ˘. The terminating vowels thus

distinguished were certainly pronounced during one period of our language, otherwise they would not have been written; though, by degrees, the comparative faintness of their utterance, and disuse of them in some instances, enabled writers to use them as they pleased; just as poets in our own day retain or not, as it suits them, the *e's* in the final syllable of participles and past tenses;—such as *belov'd, belovèd; swerv'd, swervèd,* &c. The French in their verses use their terminating vowels at this moment precisely as Chaucer did; though they drop them in conversation. I have no living Frenchman at hand to quote, but he writes in this respect as Boileau did:—

Ellĕ dit; et du vent de sa bouchĕ profanĕ
Lui souffle avec ces mots l'ardeur de la chicanĕ;
Le Prélat se reveillĕ; et, plein d'émotion,
Lui donnĕ toutĕfois la benediction.

(Discord waking the Dean in the *Lutrin*.)

CHARACTERS OF PILGRIMS.

Whannĕ that April with his shourĕs sote
The droughte of Marche hath percĕd to the rote,
And bathĕd every veine in swiche licòur,
Of whiche vertùe engendred is the flour;[1]
Whan Zephirus ekĕ with his sotĕ brethe
Enspirĕd hath in every holt and hethe
The tendre croppĕs, and the yongĕ sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfĕ cours yronne,
And smalĕ foulĕs maken melodie,
That slepen allĕ night with open eye,
So priketh hem natùrę in her coràges,
Than longen folk to gon on pilgrimàges,
And palmeres for to seken strangĕ strondes
To servĕ halwes couthe in sundry londes;

[1] When April with his sweet showers has pierced the drought of March to the root, and bathed every vein in the balm that produces flowers; when Zephyr too, with his sweet breath, has animated the tender green buds in the woods and on the heaths; and the young sun has run half his course in the Ram; and the little winged creatures, that sleep all night with their eyes open, begin their music (so irresistible in their hearts is Nature), then do people long to go on pilgrimages, and palmers to seek foreign shores in

And specially from every shire's ende
Of Englelond to Canterbury they wende,
The holy blissful martyr for to seke,[2]
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seke.
Befelle that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard[3] as I lay,
Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
To Canterbury with devoute courage,
At night was come into that hostelrie
Wel nine-and-twenty in a compagnie
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felawship, and pilgrimes were they alle
That toward Canterbury wolden ride.
The chambres and the stables weren wide,
And wel we weren esed atte beste.
And shortly, when the sonne was gon to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everich on,
That I was of hir felawship anon,
And made forword erly for to rise,
To take oure way ther, as I you devise.
But nathelès while I have time and space,
Or that I forther in this tale pace,
Me thinketh it accordant to reson
To tellen you alle the condition
Of eche of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degre;
And eke in what araie that they were inne;
And at a knight than wol I firste beginne.

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order to worship at famous shrines; and, above all, people crowd from every shire's end in England to that of the holy martyr at Canterbury, who has helped them when they were sick.

Now, at this season, it happened one day, while I was at the Tabard in Southwark, ready to set forth on my own devout journey to Canterbury, that there came into the inn a matter of nine-and-twenty people, who had joined company, and were all bound on the same visit. There was plenty of room in the place both for man and horse, and we were all very comfortable.

By sunset I had spoken with every one of these persons, and become one of the party: so I agreed to be up early in the morning, in order to lose no time.

While thus waiting between sunset and sunrise, it is but reason, methinks, that the reader should be told what sort of people my fellow-travellers were; of what rank in life, what characters, and even how they were dressed. And I will begin first with a knight.

A KNIGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the timĕ that he firste began
To riden out, he lovĕd chivalrie,
Trouthe and honòur, fredom and courtesie.
Ful worthy was he in his lordĕs werre,
And thereto hadde he ridden, no man ferre,
As well in Cristendom as in Hethenesse,
And ever honored for his worthinesse.
At Alisandre he was whan it was wonne.
Ful often time he hadde the bord begonne
Aboven allĕ natïons in Pruce:
In Lettowe hadde he reysĕd, and in Ruce,
No Cristen man so ofte of his degre:
In Gernade at the siege eke hadde he be
Of Algesir, and ridden in Belmarie:
At Leyes was he, and at Satalie,
Whan they were wonne; and in the Gretĕ See
At many a noble armee had he be.
At mortal batailles hadde he ben fiftene,
And foughten for our faith at Tramaissene
In listĕs thriĕs, and ay slain his fo.
This ilkĕ worthy Knight hadde ben also
Some timĕ with the Lord of Palatie
Agen another hethen in Turkìe,
And evermore he hadde a sovereigne pris,
And though that he was worthy, he was wise,
And of his port as meke as is a mayde.
He never yet no vilanie ne sayde
In alle his lif unto no manere wight:
He was a veray parfit gentil knight!

The KNIGHT was a man of great worth, who from the first moment of his setting out on his adventures, loved his profession with all his heart, and was an honor to it. He was full of truth, liberality, and courtesy. He was at Alexandria when it was taken. He had many times been placed at the head of the table in Prussia; had commanded oftener in Russia and Lithuania than any other man of his standing; had been at the siege of Algeziras in Granada; had served in Bellemarin; had assisted at the taking of Layas and Satalie; and been with many a noble armament in the Greek Sea. He had fought in fifteen mortal battles, and slain his combatant thrice in the lists at Thrasimene for the Christian faith. He had also been against the heathens in Turkey, with the lord of Palathia. Wherever he went, his services were rated at the highest price; yet his discretion was equal to his worth, and he was as meek in his carriage as a maiden. He never spoke a discourteous word in his life to a human being. He was a very perfect gentle Knight

But for to tellen you of his araie;
His hors was good, but he ne was not gaie.
Of fustïan he werĕd a gipon
Allĕ besmotred with his habergeon.
For he was late y come fro his viàge,
And wente for to don his pilgrimage.
With him ther was his sone, a yonge SQUIÈR,
A lover and a lusty bacheler,
With lockĕs crull as they were laide in presse;[5]
Of twenty yere of age he was, I gesse.
Of his statùre he was of even lengthe,
And wonderly deliver, and grete of strengthe,
And he had be sometime in chevachie
In Flaunders, in Artois, and in Picardie,
And borne him wel, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his ladies grace.
Embrouded was he, as it were a mede
All full of freshĕ flourĕs white and rede:
Singing he was, or floyting all the day:
He was as freshe as is the moneth of May:
Short was his goune, with slevĕs long and wide;
Wel coude he sitte on hors, and fayrĕ ride;
He coudĕ songĕs make, and wel endite,
Juste and eke dance, and wel pourtraie and write:
So hote he lovĕd, that by nightertale
He slept no more than doth the nightingale:
Curteis he was, lowly and servisable,
And carf before his fader at the table.[6]

As to his equipments, he had a good horse, but he made no show. His doublet was of fustian; and it was all smutted with his armor; for he was just come from abroad, and was bound on his pilgrimage.

With him there was his son, a young SQUIRE, who was a fine fellow, and in love. His locks were in as good curl as if they had been put in papers. I should take his age to have been twenty. He was well made, and of wonderful strength and activity. He had been out with the troopers in Flanders, Artois, and Picardy; and got up no little repute in a short space of time, in hope to cut a figure in the eyes of his mistress. He was like a meadow to look at, he was so embroidered with flowers. He used to be singing or playing the flute from morning to night. He was as fresh as the month of May. He had a short vest on, with big sleeves; and well could he sit his horse, and put it to its paces. He could compose a song too, and tell a good story, joust and dance, and take portraits, and write. He was such a serenader, that he slept no more than the nightingale. But he was courteous withal, deferential and attentive; and was the carver at his father's table.

A YEMAN hadde he, and servàntes no mo
At that time, for him luste to ridĕ so,
And he was cladde in cote and hode of grene;
A shefe of peacock arwes, bright and kene,
Under his belt he bare full thriftily:
Wel coude he dresse his takel yemanly:
His arwes droupĕd not with fetheres lowe,
And in his hond he bare a mighty bowe.
A not-hed had he, with a broune visàge:
Of wood-craft coude he wel alle the usàge;
Upon his arme he bare a gaie bracèr,
And by his side a sword and a bokeler,
And on that other side a gaie daggère,
Harneised wel, and sharp as point of spere:
A Cristofre on his brest of silver shene.
An horne he bare, the bandrik was of grene;
A forster was he sothely, as I gesse.
Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,
That of hir smiling was ful simple and coy;
Hire gretest othe n'as but by Seint Eloy,
And she was clepĕd Madame Eglentine;
Ful wel she sangĕ the servìce divine,
Entunĕd in hire nose ful swetĕly;
And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford attĕ Bowe,
For French of Paris was to hire unknowe.
At metĕ was she wel ytaughte withalle;
She lette no morsel from hire lippĕs falle,

It pleased the Knight to have no servant with him on this occasion but a YEOMAN. He was dressed in a green coat and hood, and had a sheaf stuck in his belt full of arrows with peacock feathers. Bright and keen were they. He had a right yeomanly hand at such tackle. His arrows never looked as if they were moulting. And in his hand he carried a mighty bow. His head was shaped like a nut, and his face sunburnt. He knew all about woods. His arm was defended by a showy bracer; he had a sword and buckler on one side; a fine dagger on the other, in capital condition; a bright silver image of St. Christopher on his breast; and he wore a horn by a green belt. A proper forester was he, you might be certain.

There was also a nun among us, a PRIORESS, who was very careful how she smiled, and did it with wonderful simplicity. Her strongest affirmation was by St. Elias. They called her Madame Eglantine. She sang divine service in the sweetest of nasal tones; and spoke French to a nicety, after the fashion of the school of Stratford-at-Bow; for she didn't know Paris French. She was so well brought up, that she never let anything

Ne wette hire fingres in hire saucĕ depe;
Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
Thattĕ no drope ne fell upon hire brest.
In curtesie was sette full moche hire lest:
Hire over lippĕ wipĕd she so clene,
That in hire cuppĕ was no ferthing sene
Of gresĕ when she dronken hadde hire draught;
Full semĕly after hire mete she raught:
And sikerly she was of grete disport,
And ful pleasànt and amiable of port,
And peinĕd hire to contrefeten chere
Of court, and ben estatelich of manère,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.
But for to speken of hire conscïence,
She was so charitable and so pitòus
She woldĕ wepe if that she saw a mous
Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded, or bledde.
Of smalĕ houndĕs hadde she, that she fedde
With roasted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede,
But sore wept she, if on of hem were dede,
Or if men smote it with a yerdĕ smert;
And all was conscïence and tendre herte.[1]
Ful semĕly hire wimple ypinched was,
Hire nose tretis, hire eyen grey as glas;
Hire mouth full smale and thereto soft and red:
But sikerly she had a fayre forehed:
It was almost a spannĕ brode, I trowe,
For hardily she was not undergrowe.

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slip out of her mouth at table, nor wetted her fingers with the sauce. Admirably could she achieve the morsel. Not a particle of it fell on her bosom. She delighted to show her good breeding. She was particularly careful in wiping her lips before she drank; and took up her meat in a style the most decorous. To say the truth, she was an amiable creature, full of goodwill to everybody; and it cost her a great deal of trouble to give herself the airs of her condition, and obtain people's reverence.

As to her conscience, she was so full of tenderness and charity, that she would weep if she saw a mouse hurt in a trap. She kept delicate little hounds, which she fed with milk, roast meat, and fancy-bread; and sorely did she lament when any one of them died, or if anybody struck it. She was all conscience and tender heart.

Her neckerchief was plaited in the nicest manner. She had a delicate straight nose, eyes of a clear grey, a small, soft, red mouth, and a handsome forehead. I think it must have been a span broad. In truth she was no way stinted in her growth.

Ful fetise was hire cloke, as I was ware.
Of smale coràll about hire arm she bare
A pair of bedës gauded all with grene,
And thereon heng a broche of gold ful shene
On whiche was first ywritten a crouned A,
And after *Amor vincit omma.*
Another NONNE also with hire hadde she
That was hire chapelleine, and PREESTES thre.[9]
A MONK ther was, a fayre for the maistrie,
An out-rider that loved venerie; (hunting)
A manly man to ben an abbot able;
Ful many a deintë hors hadde he in stable,
And whan he rode, men mighte his bridel here
Gingeling in a whistling wind, as clere,
And eke as loude as doth the chapell belle
Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.
The reule of Seint Maure and of Seint Beneit,
Because that it was olde and somdele streit,
This ilke monk lette oldë thingës pace,
And helde after the newë world 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 rekkëles
Is like to a fish that is waterles;
This is to say, a monk out of his cloistre;
This ilkë text held he not worth an oistre;
And I say his opinïon was good.
What shulde he studie and make himselven wood,

The cloak she wore was extremely well cut. She had a chaplet of coral beads about her arm, ornamented with green; and to the chaplet was appended a fine gold trinket made into a crowned letter A, with the device, *Amor vincit omnia.*

She had a NUN with her, who was her chaplain; and three PRIESTS.

A MONK may come next, a masterly specimen of his order; a lover of hunting, always foremost of the horsemen; a manly man, fit to be an abbot. Many a dainty horse had he in his stable; and when he was on the road, men might hear his bridle jingling in the wind as loud and clear as the chapel bell.

He had no great regard, this Monk, for the rules of Saint Maur and Saint Benedict. He thought them old and too particular; and he was for letting old things go their ways, and taking after the new. The notion that sportsmen are no saints, he valued no more than a plucked hen; and he set as little store by the saying, that a monk out of his cell is like a fish out of water. He swallowed it as easily as he would an oyster. And in my opinion he was right. Why should a man study, and turn his

Upon a book in cloistre alway to pore,
Or swinken with his hondĕs, and labòure,
As Austin bit? how shall the world be served?
Let Austin have his swink to him reserved:
Therefore he was a prickasoure 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.
I saw his sleves purfilĕd at the hond
With gris, 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 greter ende ther was:
His hed was balled, and shone as any glas;
And eke his face, as it hadde ben anoint;
He was a lord ful fat, and in good point:
His eyen stepe, and rolling in his hed,
That stemĕd as a fornèis of a led;
His bootes souple, his hors in gret estat;
Now certainly he was a fayre prelàt:
He was not pale as a forpinĕd gost;
A fat swan loved he best of any rost:
His palfrey was as broune as is a bery.
A FRERE ther was, *a wanton and a mery,*
A limitour, *a ful solempnĕ man:*[10]
In all the ordres foure is non that can

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brains, and be always poring over a book, mewed up in a cloister, and labor and toil with his hands, because Austin bade him? How is the world to be served at that rate? Let Austin be accommodated with as much labor as he pleases. Our monk preferred good riding. He had a pack of greyhounds as swift as birds, and cared for nothing but horses and the chase. It was no matter what they cost him.

I beheld with my own eyes his sleeves bordered with fur, and that too the finest in the land. To fasten his hood under the chin he had a gold pin, curiously wrought into a love-knot. His head was bald, and shone as if it had been glazed. So did his face, as if it had been anointed. He was a glorious jolly personage. There was not a point about him but was perfect. His eyes were sunk in fat, and his head smoked like a furnace. His boots were supple, his horse in the highest condition: in short, he was the model of a dignified clergyman. He was no ghost of a man, pale and wasted away. The dish he loved best was a fat swan. His palfrey was as brown as a berry.

A FRIAR was there too, a very facetious fellow; wonderfully solemn withal. He was one of the friars that are licensed to beg. In all the

So moche of dalïance and fayre langàge:
He hadde ymade ful many a marïage
Of yongĕ wimmen at his owĕn cost:
Until his ordre he was a noble post.
Ful wel beloved and familier was he
With frankeleins over all in his contrèe,
And eke with worthy wimmen of the toun,
For he had powĕr of confessïon,
As saide himselfĕ, more than a curàt;
For of his ordre he was a licentiat.
Ful swetĕly heard he confessïon,
And plesant was his absolutïon.
He was an esy man to give penànce
Ther as he wiste to han a good pitànce,
For unto a poure ordre for to give
Is signĕ that a man is wel yshrive;
For if he gave he dorstĕ make avànt
He wistĕ that a man was rèpentant;
For many a man so hard is of his herte,
He may not wepe although him sorĕ smerte;
Therefore in stede of weping and praières
Men mote give silver to the pourĕ freres.
His tippet was ay farsĕd ful of knives
And pinnĕs for to given fayrĕ wives;
And certainly he hadde a mery note;
Wel coude he singe and plaien on a rote.

Four Orders he had not his match for an affectionate approach and wheedling speeches. He had read the marriage-service to heaps of young women for nothing. He was an amazing support to his order; quite a pillar. There was not a rich farmer in his county with whom he was not a favorite. And as much might be said of the good women in the towns: for (as he used to observe) he had license to hear confession wherever he pleased, and was not confined to one spot like a poor curate. Sweet was his mode of hearing confession, and pleasant was his absolution. He was an easy man at ordering penance, where he expected a just return; for he was of opinion, that to give handsomely to the poor friars was a sign that a man had confessed to some purpose. He would grow quite exalted on this point, and swear that such a man must be a true penitent: for (argued he) weeping proves nothing; a man may be very sorry, yet not able to weep; therefore the way to make his repentance manifest is neither to weep nor pray, but to come down with his money to the poor friars.

His tippet was always stuffed full of knives and pins, to give to pretty women. It is astonishing what a pleasant tongue he had. He could sing,

Of yeddinges he bare utterly the pris;
His nekke was whitĕ as the flour-de-lis;
Thereto he strong was as a champïoun,
And knew wel the tavèrnes in every toun,
And every hosteler and gay tapstère,
Better than a lazar or a beggère;
For unto swiche a worthy man as he
Accordeth nought, as by his faculte
To haven with sike lazars acquaintance:
It is not honest, it may not avance,
As for to delen with no swiche pourdille,
But all with riche and sellers of vitaille.
And over all, ther as profit shuld arise,
Curteis he was, and lowly of servise:
Ther n'as no man no wher so vertuous;
He was the beste begger in all his hous,
And gave a certaine fermĕ for the grant
Non of his bretheren came in his haunt:
For though a widewe haddĕ but a shoo,
(*So plesant was his* "IN PRINCIPIO")
Yet wold he have a ferthing or he went;
His pourchas was wel better than his rent.
A CLERK ther was of Oxenford also,
That unto logike haddĕ long ygo.
As lenĕ was his hors as is a rake,
And he was not right fat, I undertake,
But lokĕd holwe, and therto soberly.
Ful thredbare was his overest courtepy,

---

and play on the *rote*. There was nobody to be compared with him for a good story.

His neck was as white as a lily, but that did not hinder his being a very champion for strength. He knew every tavern-keeper, tapster, and ostler about the country, better than he did any beggar, sick or well. Indeed, it is not proper for such as he to go herding with sick beggars. It would not be respectable or useful. The friar's duty lies among the rich, and with people who keep eating-houses.

Where any profit could come of it, who could humble himself as he did? who show so much activity? He was the best beggar of his house, and rented the district he went about in, so that none of his brethren might interfere. If a widow had but an old shoe, he would get a farthing out of it ere he left her; so pleasant was his *in principio*. He made a great deal more of his lease than he paid for it.

An OXFORD SCHOLAR was among us, who had long passed his examination. His horse was as lean as a rake, and he himself was not much fatter. He had hollow cheeks, a grave expression of countenance, and a

For he hadde goten him yet no benefice
Ne was nought worldly to have an offìce;
For him was lever han at his beddes hed
Twenty bokĕs, clothĕd in blake or red,
Of Aristotle and his philosophie
Then robĕs riche, or fidel or sautrie:
But all be that he was a philosòphre,
Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre,[11]
But all that he might of his frendĕs hente
On bokĕs and on learning he it spente,
And besily gan for the soulĕs praie
Of hem that yave him wherewith to scolaie,
Of studie toke he mostĕ cure and hede;
Not a word spake he morĕ than was nede,
And that was said in form and reverence,
And short and quike, and ful of high sentènce.
Souning in moral vertue was his speche,
And gladly wold he lerne and gladly teche.[12]
A Sergeant of the Lawe warĕ and wise,
That often hadde yben at the paruìs,
Ther was also, ful riche of excellence;
Discrete he was, and of grete reverence;
He semĕd swiche, his wordĕs were so wise:
For his sciènce and for his high renoun
Of fees and robĕs had he many on:
So grete a pourchasour was no wher non:
All was fee simple to him in effect;
His pourchasing might not ben in suspect:

coarse threadbare cloak; for he had got no living yet, and he was not the man to push for one. The finest clothes and the merriest playing on the fiddle were nothing in his estimation compared with a score of old books at his bed's head, of Aristotle and his philosophy, bound in red or black. His philosophy was no philosopher's stone. All the money that friends gave him, he laid out on books and learning; and the moment he received it, he would begin praying for their souls. Study, study was what he cared for. He never used more words than were necessary, and they were all according to form and authority, very emphatical and sententious. Everything which he uttered tended to a moral purpose; and gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.

We had a Sergeant-at-Law with us, a very wary and knowing gentleman Many a consultation had been held with him. You might know what authority he had, his words were so oracular. His knowledge and fame together had brought him a prodigious number of fees and fine things. Everything in fact turned to fee-simple in his hands, and all with a justice

No wher so besy a man as he ther n' as ;
And yet he semed besier than he was.[18]
In termĕs hadde he cas and domĕs alle
That fro the time of King Will, weren falle ;
Thereto he coude endite and make a thing ;
Ther coude no wight pinche at his writing ;
And every statute coude he plaine by rote.
He rode but homely in a medlee cote
Girt with a seint of silk with barrĕs smale.
A SHIPMAN was ther, wonĕd fer by west ;
For ought I wote he was of Dertĕmouth :
He rode upon a rouncie, as he couthe,
All in a goune of falding to the knee.
A dagger hanging by a las hadde hee
About his nekke under his arm adoun ;
The hote summer hadde made his hewe all broun ,
And certainly he was good felàw ;
Ful many a draught of win he haddĕ draw
From Burdeux ward while that the chapman slepe :
Of nicĕ conscïence toke he no kepe.
If that he faught and hadde the higher hand,
By water he sent hem home to every land.
But of his craft to reken wel his tides,
His stremĕs and his strandĕs him besides,
His herberwe, his mone, and his lodemanàge,
There was non swiche from Hull unto Cartàge.

---

and propriety that nobody could think of disputing. There wasn't such a busy man in existence; and yet he seemed busier than he was. He knew every case and judgment that had been recorded since the time of King William; and could draw out a plea with such perfection, not a flaw was to be found in it. As to the statutes, he knew them all by heart. He was dressed plainly enough in a suit of mixed colors, with a silken sash all over small bars.

There was a CAPTAIN OF A SHIP there, who came a long way out of the West. I think he was from Dartmouth. He had got a horse upon hire, which he rode as well as he was able. He wore a *falding* that reached to his knee, with a dirk hanging under his arm from a string round the neck; and his skin was all tanned with the sun. A jovial companion was he. He had helped himself to many a swig of wine at Bourdeaux, while the merchant was asleep. Conscience was not in his line. If he got the better of a vessel at sea, he always sent the men home by water. As to his seamanship and his pilotage, his knowledge of rivers and coasts, of sun and moon, and his heavings of the lead, there wasn't such another from Hull to Carthage. He was both audacious and cautious. With many a tempest

Hardy he was, and wise, I undertake;
With many a tempest hadde his berd be shake:
He knew wel alle the havens as they were
Fro Gotland to the Cape de Finistere,
And every creke in Bretagne and in Spaine:
His barge yclepĕd was the Magdelaine.[14]

had his beard been shaken. He knew the soundings of every harbor from Gothland to Cape Finisterre, and every creek in Brittany and Spain. His vessel was called the *Magdalen.*

[1] "*Whannĕ that April,*" &c.—What freshness and delicacy in this exordium! It seems as if the sweet rains entered the ground, purely to reappear, themselves as flowers.

[2] "*The holy blissful martyr.*"—Thomas à Becket—the great pantomimic shifter from a favorite into a saint.

[3] "*In Southwerk at the Tabard.*"—Readers hardly need be told, that this *Tabard* inn is still extant, under the misnomer of the *Talbot.* It is worthy of any gentleman's "pilgrimage," from the remotest regions of May-Fair. The Borough is one of the most classical spots in England. It has Chaucer at one end, and Shakspeare at the other (in the Globe Theatre); besides Gower, and Fletcher, and Massinger, lying in the churches.

[4] "*He was a veray parfit gentil knight.*"—And a very perfect line is it that so describes him. It would be a pity it did not conclude the portrait, but for the good sense and sobriety of what follows, and the smutted state of the knight's doublet, caused by his coat of mail. This renders the conclusion still better, by showing the crowning point of his character, which is the preference of substance to show, and action before the glory of it. He is a man who would rather conclude with being a perfect knight than with being called one.

[5] "*With lockĕs crull as they were laide in presse.*"—And perhaps the sly poet meant us to understand that they were; for manliness in youth is not always above the little arts of foppery.

[6] "*And carf before his fader at the table.*"—A custom of the time, and a far more civilized one than that of assigning the office to old gentlemen and delicate ladies.

[7] "*And all was conscïence and tendre herte.*"—A lovely verse.

[8] "*Amor vincit omnia.*"—Love conquers all things. We are to take this quotation from Ovid in a religious sense; whatever charitable thoughts towards others the good nun might combine with it.

[9] "*Preestĕs thre.*"—The Prioress, for all her fine boarding-school breeding, fed heartily as well as nicely, and was in good buxom condition. We are not to suppose that the "Preestĕs thre" were less so, or fared ill at her table. One of them, indeed, who is called a "sweete Preest," and a "goodly man," is described as having a "large breast," and looking like "a sparrow-hawk with his eyen." It is he that tells the pleasant fable of the *Cock and the Fox.*

[10] "*A Frere ther was, a wanton and a mery,*
A limitour, a ful solempnĕ man."

This audacity of style, making the Friar at once merry and solemn, is in the richest comic taste. He is a "*ful* solempnĕ man;" that is to say, excessively and ultra solemn, *while he is about it;* so much so, that you see the lurking merriment in the excess. He shakes his head and cheeks, speaks hollow in the throat, and in a nasal tone of disapprobation. He particularly excels in deprecating what he approves. Next to money-getting, he would object to luxury. He had joined numbers of young women in marriage "at his own cost;" that is to say, for no better pay than being the merriest fellow at the wedding-dinner, and looking forward to every possible good thing in the household. If a widow had but a "shoe" left, he would get a farthing out of it. I have seen such jolly beggars in Italy. One of them, a fine handsome young man, who was having his panniers filled at a farmer's door (for he went about with a donkey), invited me to a pinch of snuff with all the unaffected grace of his country; and on my praising the beauty of the place (it was at Maiano, on the Fiesolan hills, looking towards Florence), he acquiesced with a sort of deprecating admission of the fact, worthy of his brother in Chaucer; observing, while he piously turned up his eyes, that it was "good enough *for this world.*"

[11] "*Litel gold in cofre.*"—A hit at the philosopher's stone; or, by inference, at the poverty of philosophy in general.

Povera e nuda vai, Filosofia.
Petrarch.

Naked and poor goest thou, Philosophy.

But the twenty books at the bed's head pay for all.

[12] "*And gladly wold he lerne and gladly teche.*"—The consummation of a real unaffected lover of knowledge. Yet I cannot help being of opinion with Warton, that the three lines beginning "not a word spake he," are intended to imply a little innocent pedantry. Tyrwhitt supposes the credit of good letters to be concerned in our thinking otherwise. (Moxon's edition of Chaucer, p. 175.) But Chaucer thought that good letters could bear a little banter, without losing their credit. All purely serious scholars in those times had a tendency to pedantry and formality. Chaucer only escaped it himself by dint of the gayer part of his genius.

[13] "*No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as;*
And yet he semĕd besier than he was."

One is never tired of repeating this exquisite couplet. So Lawyer Dowling, in *Tom Jones*, wishes he could cut himself into I forget how many pieces, in order that he might see to all the affairs which he had to settle.

[14] "*His barge yclepĕd was the Magdelaine.*"—This gentle penitential name has a curious effect in connection with a man who had no nicety of conscience. Was it meant to show the frequently irrelevant nature of the names of ships? or to imply that the rough seaman had a soft corner in his heart for penitents of the fair saint's description? The line about the tempest-shaken beard is an effusion of the finest poetry. It invests the homely man with a sudden grandeur; as though a storm itself had risen in the horizon, dignifying his rude vessel with danger.

THE FRIAR'S TALE;

OR,

THE SUMMONER AND THE DEVIL.

A Summoner finds himself riding in company with a Devil, and makes an agreement with him which turns out to be of an unexpected nature.

A Summoner was a church officer, who cited offenders into the ecclesiastical court. The friars and the dignified clergy were at great variance in Chaucer's time; and therefore it is a friar who relates the following amusing and exquisitely complete story, in which I have omitted nothing but a superfluous exordium.

—And so befell, that onĕs on a day
This Sompnour, waiting ever on his prey,
Rode forth to sompne a widewe, an old ribibe,*
Feining a cause, for he wold han a bribe.
And happed, that he saw beforn him ride
A gay yeman under a forest side;
A bow he bare; and arwes bright and kene
He had upon a courtepy of grene,
And hat upon his hed with frenges blake.
Sire, quod the Sompnour, haile and wel atake.
Welcome, quod he, and every good felàw.
Whider ridest thou under this grene shaw?
(Saide this yeman) wolt thou fer to-day?

A summoner, who was ever on the watch for prey, rode forth one morning to cheat a poor old woman, against whom he pretended to have a complaint. His track lay by a forest-side; and it chanced, that he saw before him, under the trees, a yeoman on horseback, gaily equipped with a bow and arrows. The stranger was in a short green cloak: and he had a hat with a black fringe.

"Good-morrow, sir," quoth the summoner, overtaking him.

"The same to you," quoth the yeoman, "and to every other jolly companion. What road are you bound upon to-day through the green wood? Are you going far?"

* *Ribibe* was a word for the musical instrument called also a *rebec* (a sort of guitar). Why it was applied to old women the commentators cannot say; Tyrwhitt thinks, perhaps on account of its sharp tone.

This Sompnour him answerd, and saide, Nay,
Here fastè by (quod he) is min entent
To riden, for to reisen up a rent
That longeth to my lordĕs duĕtee.
A! art thou than a baillif? Ye, quod he.
(*He dorstè not, for veray filth and shame,*
Say that he was a Sompnour, for the name).
De par Dieux, quod this yeman, leve brother,
Thou art a baillif, and I am another;
I am unknowĕn as in this contrèe;
Of thin acquaintance I wol prayen thee,
And eke of brothered, if that thee list.
I have gold and silver lying in my chist;
If that thee hap to come into our shire,
Al shal be thin, right as thou wolt desire.
Grand mercy, quod this Sompnour, by my faith.
Everich in others hond his trouthĕ laith
For to be swornĕ brethren til they dey.
In daliaunce they riden forth and pley.
This Sompnour, which that was as ful of jangles,
As ful of venime ben thise *wariangles*,*
And ever enquering upon everything,
Brother, quod he, wher is now your dwelling,
Another day if that I shuld you seche?
This yeman him answerd in softè speche,

"No," replied the summoner. "My business is close at hand. I'm only going about a rent that's owing to my master."

"Oh, what, you are a bailiff, then?" quoth the yeoman.

"Just so," returned the summoner. He had not the face to own himself what he was; the very name of summoner was such a disgrace.

"Well now; that's good," said the stranger; "for I'm a bailiff myself; and as I am not very well acquainted with this part of the country, I shall be glad of your good offices, if you have no objection to my company. I have plenty of money at home; so if you travel into our parts, you shall want for nothing."

"Many thanks," cried the summoner; "I'm yours, with all my heart."

The new friends gave their hands to one another, and pushed on their horses merrily.

The summoner, who always had an eye to business, and was besides of an inquisitive nature, and as fond of poking his nose into everything as a wood-pecker, lost no time in asking the stranger where he lived, in case he should come to see him.

The yeoman, in a tone of singular gentleness, answered, that he should

* Wariangles, *wood-peckers*.

Brother, quod he, fer in the north contrèe,*
Wher as I hope sometime I shall thee see.
Or we depart I shall thee so wel wisse,
That of min hous ne shalt thou never misse.
Now brother, quod this Sompnour, I you pray
Teche me, while that we riden by the way
(Sith that ye ben a baillif as am I)
Som subtiltee, and tell me faithfully
In min office how I may mostĕ winne;
And spareth not for conscience or for sinne,
But, as my brother, tell me how do ye.
Now by my trouthĕ, brother min, said he,
As I shal tellen thee a faithful tale,
My wages ben ful strait and eke ful smale;
My lord is hard to me and dangerous,
And min offĭce is ful laborious,
And therefore by *extortïon* I leve;
Forsoth I take all that men wol me yeve:
Al gates by sleightè or by violence
Fro yere to yere I win all my dispence:
I can no better tellen faithfully.
Now certes (quod this Sompnour) so fare I;
I sparĕ not to taken, God it wote,
But if it be to hevy or to hote.
What I may gete in conseil prively,
No maner conscïence of that have I.
N'ere min extortïon I might not liven,
Ne of swiche japès wol I not be shriven.

be very glad of his visit; that he lived indeed a great way off, in the north; but that before they parted, he would instruct him so well in the locality, that it should be impossible for him to miss it.

"Good," returned the summoner. "And now, as we are of one accord and one occupation, pray let me into a secret or two, how I may prosper in my employment. Don't mince the matter as to conscience or sin, or any of that kind of nonsense; but tell me plainly how you transact business yourself.

"Why, to say the truth," answered the yeoman, "I have a very hard master and very little wages; and so I live by extortion. I take all that people give me, and a good deal more besides. I couldn't make both ends meet else; and that's the plain fact."

"Precisely my case," cried the summoner. "I take everything I can lay my hands on, unless it be too heavy or too hot. To the devil with

* The supposed locality of devils.

Stomak ne conscïencè know I non;
I shrew thise shriftè faders everich on:
Wel be we met, by God and by Seint Jame.
But, levè brother, tell me than thy name,
Quod this Sompnour. *Right in this menè while*
This yeman gan a litel for to smile.
Brother, quod he, wolt thou that I thee tell?
I am *a fend*, my dwelling is in hell;
And here I ride about my pourchasing
To wote wher men wol give me anything:
Mý pourchas is th' effect of all my rent;
Loke how thou ridest for the same entent:
To winnen good thou rekest never how:
Right so fare I, *for riden wol I now*
Unto the worldĕs endĕ for a prayè.
A, quod this Sompnour, *benedicite! what say ye?*
I wend ye were a yeman trewèly;
Ye have a mannès shape as wel as I:
Have ye then a figùre determinat
In hellè, ther ye ben in your estat?
Nay, certainly, quod he, ther have we non;
But whan us liketh we can take us on,
Or ellĕs make you wene that we ben shape
Sometimĕ like a man, or like an ape,
Or like an angel can I ride or go;
It is no wonder thing though it be so;
A lousy jogelour can deceiven thee,
And pardĕ yet can I more craft than he.

---

conscience and repentance, say I. Catch me at confession who can. Well are we met, by the Lord. What is your name, my dear fellow?"

The yeoman began smiling a little at this question. "Why, if you must know," quoth he, "my name, betwixt you and me, is Devil. I am a fiend, and live in hell; and I am riding hereabouts to see what I can get. Your business and mine is precisely the same. You don't care how you get anything provided you succeed; nor do I. I'll ride to the world's end, for instance, this very morning, sooner than not meet with a prey."

"God bless me," cried the summoner, crossing himself, "a 'devil' do you say? I thought you were a man like myself. You have a man's shape. Have you no particular shape then of your own?"

"Not a bit of it," quoth the stranger. "We take what likeness we please; sometimes a man's, sometimes a monkey's; nay, an angel's, if it suits us. And no marvel. For a common juggler can deceive your eyes in such matters; and it is hard if a devil can't do it better than a juggler."

Why, quod the Sompnour, ride ye than or gon
In sondry shape, and not alway in on ?
For we, quod he, wol us swiche formĕ make
As most is able our preyè for to take.
What maketh you to han al this labòur !
Ful many a causĕ, levĕ Sire Sompnour,
Saidĕ this fend. But allĕ thing hath time;
The day is short, and it is passed prime,
And yet ne wan I nothing in this day;
I wol entend to winning if I may,
And not intend our thingĕs to declare;
For, brother min, thy wil is al to bare
To understand, although I told hem thee.
But for thou axest why labouren we ?
For sometime we be Goddĕs instruments,
And menĕs to don his commandĕments
Whan that him list, upon his crĕatures
In divers actes and in divers figùres:
Withouten him we have no might certàin,
If that him list to stonden theragain.
And sometime at our praiĕre han we leve
Only the body and not the soul to greve;
Witnesse on Job, whom that we diden wo;
And sometime han we might on bothĕ two
This is to sain, on soule and body eke:
And sometime be we suffered for to seke
Upon a man, and don his soule unrest
And not his body, and all is for the beste.
Whan he withstandeth our temptatïon,
It is a cause of his salvatïon;

"But why," inquired the summoner, "not be content with some one shape in particular ?"

"Because," replied the other, "the more disguises, the more booty."

"That is taking a great deal of trouble, is it not ?" asked the summoner. "Why couldn't you take less ?"

"For many reasons, good Master Summoner," quoth the devil. "But all in good time. The day wears, and I have got nothing yet, so I must attend to business. Besides, you couldn't understand the matter, if I told it. You haven't wit enough for its comprehension. But if you ask why we trouble ourselves at all, you must know, that God wills it, and that devils themselves are but instruments in his hands. We can do nothing at all if he doesn't choose it; and do what we may, we can sometimes go no further than the body. We are not always permitted to touch the soul. Witness the case of Job. Sometimes, on the other hand, we are permitted to torment a man's soul, and not his body: and all is for the best. Our very temptations are the cause of a man being saved, if he resists them.

Al be it that it was not our entente
He shuld be sauf, but that we wold him hente.
And sometime be we servants unto man,
As to the Archébishop Seint Dunstàn,
And to the Apostle servant eke was I.
  Yet tell me, quod this Sompnour, faithfully,
Make ye you newĕ bodies thus alway
Of elements? The fend answerĕd, Nay.
Sometime we feine, and sometime we arise
With dedè bodies, in ful sondry wise,
And speke as re'nably, and faire, and wel,
As to the Phitonesse did Samuel;
And yet wol som men say it was not he:
I do no force of your divinitee.
But o thing warne I thee, I wol not jape;
Thou wolt algatĕs wete how we be shape;
Thou shalt hereafterward, my brother dere,
Com wher thee nedeth not of me to lere,
For thou shalt by thin owen experïence
Conne in a chaière rede of this sentence
Bet than Virgìlè, while he was on live,
Or Dant also. Now let us riden blive,
For I wol holden compagnie with thee
Til it be so that thou forsakĕ me.
  Nay, quod this Sompnour, that shal never betide.
I am a yeman knowen is ful wide;
My trouthè wol I hold to thee, my brother,
As I have sworne, and eche of us to other,

Not that we have any such good intention. Our design is to carry him away with us, body and soul. Sometimes we are even compelled to be servants to a man. Archbishop Dunstan had a devil for a servant; and I served an Apostle myself."

"And have you a new body every time you disguise yourselves," inquired the summoner; "or is it only a seeming body?"

"Only a seeming body sometimes," answered the devil. "Sometimes also we possess a dead body, and give people as good substantial words, as Samuel did to the witch; though some learned persons are of opinion that it was not Samuel whom she raised, but only his likeness. Be all this as it may, of one thing you may be certain, my good friend; and that is, that you shall know more of us by-and-by, and be able to talk more learnedly about it, than Virgil did when he was living, or Dante himself. At present, let us push on. I like your company vastly; and will stick to you, as long as you do not choose to forsake mine."

"Nay," cried the summoner, "never talk of that. I am very well known for respectability; and I hold myself as firmly pledged to you, as

For to be trewè brethren in this cas,
And bothe we gon abouten our pourchas.
Take thou thy part, what that men wol thee yeve,
And I shall min, thus may we bothĕ leve;
And if that any of us have more than other,
Let him be trewe, and part it with his brother.
I grauntè, quod the devil, by my fay;
And with that word they riden forth her way;
And right at entring of the tounĕs ende
To which this Sompnour shope him for to wende,
They saw a cart that chargĕd was with hay,
Which that a carter drove forth on his way.
Depe was the way, for which the cartè stood;
The carter smote, and cried as he were wood,
Heit, Scot; heit, Brok; what, spare ye for the stones?
The fend (quod he) you fecche, body and bones,
As ferforthly as ever ye were foled,
So mochel wo as I have with you tholed.
The devil have al, bothe hors, and cart, and hay.
The Sompnour sayde, Here shal we have a praye;
And nere the fend he drow, as nought ne were,
Ful privèly, and rounĕd in his ere;
Herken, my brother, herken, by thy faith;
Herest thou not how that the carter saith?
Hent it anon, for he hath yeve it thee,
Both hay and cart, and eke his caples three.
Nay, quod the devil, God wot, never a del!
It is not his entente, trust thou me wel:
Axe him thyself, if thou not trowest me;
Or ellĕs stint awhile, and thou shalt see.

---

you do yourself to me. We are to ride and prosper together. You are to take what people give you; I am to take what I can get; and if the profits turn out to be unequal, we divide them."

"Quite right," said the devil; and so they push forward.

They were now entering a town; and before them was a hay-cart which had stuck in the mud. The carter, who was in a rage, whipped his horses like a madman. "*Heit*, Scot! *heit*, Brok!" cried he to the beasts; "What! it's the stones, is it, that make you so lazy? The devil take ye both, say I. Am I to be thwacking and thumping all day? The devil take you, hay, cart, and all."

"Ho, ho!" quoth the summoner, "here's something to be got." He drew close to his companion, and whispered him: "Don't you hear?" said he. "The carter gives you his hay, cart, and three horses."

"Not he," answered the devil. "He says so, but he doesn't mean it. Ask him, if he does. Or wait a little, and you'll see."

This carter thakketh his hors upon the croupe,
And they begonne to drawen and to stoupe.
Heit now, quod he; *ther, Jesu Crist you blesse*,
And all his hondĕs werk, bothe mŏre and lesse!
That was wel twight, mine owĕn Liard boy:
I pray God save thy body and Seint Eloy.
Now is my cart out of the slough, pardè.
Lo, brother, quod the fend, what told I thee.
Here may ye seen, mine owĕn dere brother,
The cherl spake o thing, but he thought another.
Let us go forth abouten our viàge;
Here win I nothing upon this cariàge.
Whan that they comen somwhat out of toun,
This Sompnour to his brother gan to roune;
Brother, quod he, here woneth an old rebekke,
That had almost as lefe to lese hire nekke
As for to yeve a peny of hire good:
I wol have twelf pens, though that she be wood,
Or I wol somone hire to our offìce;
And yet, God wot, of hire know I no vice;
But for thou canst not as in this contree
Winnen thy cost, take here ensample of me.
This Sompnour clappeth at the widewes gate;
Come out, he sayd, thou oldè very trate;
I trow thou hast som frere or preest with thee.
Who clappeth? said this wif, benedicite!

The carter thwacked his horses again, and they began to stoop and to draw. "*Heit* now;—*gee up;—matthy wo;*—ah,—God bless 'em—there they come. That was well twitched, Grey, my old boy. God bless you, say I, and Saint Elias to boot. My cart's out of the slough at last."

"There," said the devil; "You see how it is. The fellow said one thing, but he thought another. We must e'en push on. There's nothing to be got here.

The companions continued their way through the town, and were just quitting it, when the summoner, pulling his bridle as he reached a cottage door, said, "There's an old hag living here, who would almost as soon break her neck as part with a halfpenny I'll get a shilling out of her, for that, though it drive her mad. She shall have a summons else, and that'll be worse for her. Not that she has committed any offence, God knows. That's quite another business. But mark me now: and see what you must do, if you would get anything in these parts."

The summoner rattled the old woman's gate, crying, "Come out, old trot;—come out;—you've got some friar or priest with you!"

"Who's there?" said the woman. "Lord bless us! God save you, sir! What is your will?"

God save you, sire, what is your swetè will?
I have, quod he, of somons here a bill:
Up peine of cursing lokè that thou be
To-morwe before the archèdekenes knee,
To answere to the court of certain thinges.
Now Lord, quod she, Christ Jesu, King of kinges,
So wisely helpè me as I ne may,
I have been sike, and that full many a day:
I may not go so fer (quod she) ne ride
But I be ded, *so priketh it my side.*
May I not axe a libel, Sire Sompnòur,
And answere ther by my procùratour
To swiche thing as men wold apposen me?
Yes, quod this Sompnour, pay anon, let see,
'Twelf pens to me, and I will thee acquite:
I shall no profit han therby but lite;
My maister hath the profit and not I.
Come of, and let me riden hastily;
Yeve me twelf pens, I may no lenger tarie.
Twelf pens! quod she; now Lady Seint Marie
So wisly helpe me out of care and sinne,
This widè world though that I shuld it winne,
Ne have I not twelf pens within my hold.
Ye knowen wel that I am poure and old;
Kithe your almessè upon me, poure wretche.
Nay then, quod he, the foulè fend me fetche

"I've a summons for you," said the man. "You must be with the archdeacon to-morrow, on pain of excommunication, to answer to certain charges."

"Charges!" cried the poor woman. "Heaven help me! there can be no charges against a poor sick body like me. How am I to come to the archdeacon? I can't even go in a cart, it gives me such a pain in my side. Mayn't I have a summons on paper, and so get the lawyer to see to it?"

"To be sure you may," answered the summoner, "provided you pay me down—let me see—ay, a shilling. That will be your quittance, and all. I get nothing by it, I assure you. My master has all the fees. Come, make haste, for I must be going. A shilling. Do you hear?"

"A shilling?" exclaimed she. "Heaven bless us and save us! Where, in all the wide world, am I to get a shilling? You know I haven't a penny to save my life. It's myself, that ought to have a shilling given to me, poor wretch!"

"Devil fetch me then, if you won't be cast," said the summoner; "for I shan't utter a syllable in your favor."

If I thee excuse, though thou shuldest be spilt.
Alas! quod she, God wot I have no gilt.
Pay me, quod he, or by the swete Seinte Anne
As I wol bere away thy newè panne
For dettè which thou owest me of old,
Whan that thou madest thyn husbond cokèwold,
I paied at home for thy correctïon.
Thou liest, quod she, by my salvatïon;
Ne was I never or now, widew ne wif,
Sompned unto your court in all my lif,
Ne never I n'as but of my body trewe.
Unto the devil rough and blake of hewe
Yeve I thy body and my panne also.
And whan the devil herd hire cursen so
Upon hire knees, he sayd in this manere;
Now, Mabily, min owèn moder dere,
Is this your will in earnest that ye say?
The devil, quod she, so fetche him or he dey,
And panne and all, but he wol him repent.
Nay, oldè stot, that is not min entent,
Quod this Sompnour, for to repenten me
For anything that I have had of thee:
I wold I had thy smok and every cloth.
Now, brother, quod the devil, *be not wroth;*
Thy body and this panne ben min by right:
Thou shalt with me to hellè yet to-night,

"Alas!" cried she, "God knows I'm innocent! I've done nothing in the world."

"Pay me," interrupted the summoner, "or I'll carry away the new pan I see yonder. You have owed me as much years ago, for getting you out of that scrape about your husband."

"Scrape about my husband!" cried the old widow. "What scrape! You are a lying wretch. I never was in any scrape about my husband, or anything; nor ever summoned into your court in all my born days. Go to the devil yourself. May he take you and the pan together."

The poor old soul fell on her knees as she said these words, in order to give the greater strength to the imprecation.

"Now, Mabel, my good mother," cried the devil, "do you speak this in earnest?"

"Ay, marry do I," cried she "May the devil fetch him, pan and all; that is to say, unless he repents."

"Repent!" exclaimed the summoner: "I'd sooner take every rag you have on your bones, you old reprobate."

"Now, brother," said the devil, "calm your feelings. I'm very sorry, but you must e'en go where the old woman desires. You and the pan are

Wher thou shall knowèn of our privetee
More than a maister of divinitee.
And with that word the foulè fend him hent
Body and soule: *he with the devil went*
Wher as thise Sompnours han hir heritage.

THE PARDONER'S WAY OF PREACHING.

Lordings, quod he, in chirchĕ whan I preche,
I peinĕ me to have an hautein speche,
And ring it out as round as goth a bell,
For I can all by rotĕ that I tell.
My teme is always on, and ever was,
"RADIX MALORUM EST CUPIDITAS."[1]
* * * * *
Than peine I me to stretchen forth my necke,
And est and west upon the peple I becke,
As doth a dove sitting upon a berne:
Myn hondĕs and my tongĕ gon so yerne,
That it is joye to see my besinesse.
Of avarice and swichè cursednesse
Is all my preching, for to make hem free
To yeve hire pens, *and namely, unto me;*
For min entente is not but for to winne,
And nothing for correction of sinne:

---

mine. We must arrive to-night; and then you'll know more about us all and our craft, than ever was discovered by Doctor of Divinity,"

And with these words, sure enough, the devil carried him off. He took him to the place where summoners are in the habit of going.

Gentlemen (said the pardoner), whenever I preach in the pulpit, I make a point of being as noisy as possible, ringing the whole sermon out as loud as a bell; for which purpose I get it by heart. My text is always the same, and ever was:—

"Radix malorum est cupiditas."

I stretch forth my neck and nod on the congregation right and left, like a dove sitting on a barn; and my hands and my tongue go so busily together, that it is a pleasure to see me. I preach against nothing but avarice, and cursed vices of that sort; for my only object is to make the people disburse freely; *videlicet*, unto myself. My sermon has never any other purpose.

I recke never whan that they be beried,
Though that hire soulĕs gon a blake-beried.
* * * * *
Therefore my teme is yet, and ever was,
RADIX MALORUM EST CUPIDITAS.

[1] "*Radix malorum est cupiditas.*"—Covetousness is the root of all evil.—Those critics who supposed that Chaucer, notwithstanding his intimacy with the Latin and Italian poets, and his own hatred of "mis-metre," had no settled rules of versification, would have done well to consider the rhythmical exactitude with which he fits Latin quotations into his lines. See another instance in the extract entitled *Gallantry of Translation*. He is far more particular in this respect than versifiers of later ages.

THE MERCHANT'S OPINION OF WIVES.

A wif is Goddĕs yeftĕ verily;
All other maner yeftĕs hardĕly,
As londĕs, rentĕs, pasture, or commùne,
Or meblĕs, all ben yeftĕs of Fortùne,
That passen as a shadow on the wall:
But drede thou not if plainly speke I shal;
A wif wol last and in thin hous endure
Wel lenger than thee list—paràventure.
* * * * *

I care nothing for the amendment of the disbursers. When the sexton is ready for them, I have done with them. They may go where they please for me, by millions, like black-berries. Therefore my only text, I say, is still, and always was,

"*Radix malorum est cupiditas.*"

A wife is the gift of Heaven!—there's no doubt of it. Every other kind of gift, such as lands, rents, furniture, right of pasture or common,—these are all mere gifts of fortune, that pass away like shadows on a wall; but you have to apprehend no such misfortune with a wife. Your wife will last longer, perhaps, even than you may desire.

A wif? A! Seinte Marie, benedicite!
How might a man have any adversite
That hath a wif? certĕs I cannot seye.
The blisse the which that is betwix hem tweye
Ther may no tongĕ telle or hertĕ thinke.
If he be poure, she helpeth him to swinke;
She kepeth his goods, and wasteth never a del;
All that hire husbond doth, hire liketh wel:
She saith not onĕs, Nay, whan he saith, Ye.
Do this, saith he; Al redy, sire, saith she.
O blissful ordre, o wedlok precïous!
Thou art so *mery* and *eke so vertuous*,
And *so commended* and *approvĕd* eke,
That every man that holt him worth a leke,
Upon his barĕ knees ought, all his lif,
Thanken his God that him hath sent a wif,
Or ellĕs pray to God him for to send
A wife to last unto his livĕs end;
For than his lif is set in sikerness,
He may not be deceivĕd, as I gesse,
So that he werche after his wivĕs rede;
Than may he boldly berĕn up his hede,
They ben so trewe, and therwithal so wise;
For which, if thou wilt werchen as the wise,
Do alway so as women wol thee rede.

A wife? Why, bless my soul, how can a man have any adversity that has a wife? Answer me that. Tongue cannot tell, nor heart think, of the felicity there is between a man and his wife. If he is poor, she helps him to work. She takes care of his money for him, and never wastes anything. She never says "yes," when he says "no." "Do this," says he. "Directly," says she.

O blessed institution! O precious wedlock! thou art so joyous, and at the same time so virtuous, and so recommended to us all, and so approved by us all, that every man who is worth a farthing should go down on his bare knees, every day of his existence, and thank Heaven for having sent him a wife; or if he hasn't got one, he ought to pray for one, and beg that she may last him to his life's end; for his life, in that case, is set in security. Nothing can deceive him.

He has only to act by his wife's advice, and he may hold up his head with the best. A wife is so true,—so wise. Oh! ever while you live, take your wife's advice, if you would be thought a wise man.

GALLANTRY OF TRANSLATION.

In the fable of the *Cock and the Fox*, the Cock, who has been alarmed by a dream, and consulting about it with his wife Dame Partlet, quotes a Latin sentence which tells us, that "woman is man's confusion," but he contrives at once to retain the satire, and make the lady feel grateful for it, by the following exquisite version :—

> But let us speke of mirthe, and stinte all this.
> Madàmĕ Pertelot, so have I blis,
> Of o thing God hath sent me largĕ grace :
> For whan I see *the beautee of your face,*
> *Ye ben so scarlet red about your eyen,*
> It maketh all my dredĕ for to dien ;
> For, al so sicker as IN PRINCIPIO,
> MULIER EST HOMINIS CONFUSIO.
> *Madame, the sentence of this Latine is,*
> *Woman is mannĕs joye and mannĕs blis.*[1]

[1] "*Woman is mannĕs joy and mannĕs blis.*"—Or as the same words would have been written at a later day :—

> Woman is man his joy and man his bliss.

The Latin quotation is from the writings of a Dominican friar, Vincent de Beauvais. Sir Walter Scott was much taken with this wicked jest of Chanticleer's. "The Cock's polite version," says he, "is very ludicrous." (Edition of Drydon, vol. xi., p. 340.) Dryden's translation of the passage is very inferior to the original :—

> "Madam, the meaning of this Latin is,
> That woman is to man his sovereign bliss."

But let us speak of mirth, and put an end to all this. Madame Partlet, as I hope to be saved, Heaven has shown me special favor in one respect; for when I behold the beauty of your face, you are so scarlet red about the eyes, it is impossible for me to dread anything.

There is an old and a true saying, the same now as it was in the beginning of the world, and that is, *Mulier est hominis confusio.* Madam, the meaning of this Latin is,—Woman is man's joy and man's bliss.

The conventional phrase "sovereign bliss," is nothing compared with the grave repetition and enforcement of the insult in Chaucer:—

Woman is manněs *joy* and manněs *blis*.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE FAIRIES.

In oldě dayěs of the King Artòur,
Of which that Bretons speken gret honòur,
All was this lond fulfilled of Faerìe;
The Elf quene with hire joly compagnie
Dancěd ful oft in many a greně mede;
This was the old opinion, as I rede;
I speke of many hundred yeres ago,
But now can no man see non elvěs me;
For now the grete charitee and prayěres
Of limitoures and other holy freres,
That serchen every land and every streme,
As thikke as motěs in the sonne beme,
Blissing halles, chambres, kicheněs, and boures,
Citeěs and burghěs, castles highe and toures,
Thropěs and berněs, shepěněs and dairies,
This maketh that ther ben no Faëries:
For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the limitour himself
In undermelěs and in morwěninges,
And sayth his matines and his holy thinges
As he goth in his limitatïoun.
Women may now go safely up and down;

In the old days of King Arthur, which the Bretons hold in such high estimation, this land was all full of fairies. The Elf-Queen, with her merry attendants, was always dancing about the green meads. Such at least was the opinion a long time ago,—many hundred years. Nowadays we see them no longer; for the charity and piety of the begging friars, and others of their holy brethren, who make search everywhere by land and water, as thick as the motes in the sun-beams, blessing our halls, chambers, kitchens, bowers, cities, boroughs, towers, castles, villages, barns, dairies, and sheep-folds, have caused the fairies to vanish; for where the fairy used to be, there is now the friar himself. You are sure to meet him before breakfast and dinner, saying his matins and holy things, and going about with his wallet. Women may now go up and down in

In every bush, and under every tree,
Ther is non other Incubus but he.[1]

safety; for though they may see things in the bushes and under the trees, it's only the friar. There is no other incubus but he.

[1] "*Ther is non other incubus but he.*"—The incubus was the successor of the ancient Faun; and, though a mischievous spirit, was supposed to be sometimes in love. Hence a twofold satire in the allusion.