

FABLES:

CONSISTING OF SELECT PARTS

FROM

DANTE, BERNI, CHAUCER,
AND
ARIOSTO.

Imitated in English Heroic Verse

BY

RICHARD WHARTON, ESQ. M. P.

Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus
Interpres: nee desilies imitator in arctum
Unde pedem proferre pudor vetet, aut operis lex.

HOR. De Arte Poetica.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY T. BENSLEY, BOLT COURT,

FOR PAYNE AND MACKINLAY, 87, STRAND.

1804.

THE FRANKLEIN'S TALE.

FROM CHAUCER.

OUR sires, a gentle race, in times of old^c
Of various feats in native measures told:

^c The Franklein's Tale is, like the foregoing, an illustration of the quality of courtesy. I was induced to modernise it by the Lady to whose genius I have above expressed my obligations; and I publish my version in order to shew how the same idea was treated by poets of different countries and different eras. Chaucer died A.D. 1400, and Berni died A.D. 1548. Boccacio, who died A.D. 1372, tells a story very similar to this of Chaucer in the 5 Nov. 10 Gior. of the Decamerone. The word *Franklein* means a country gentleman: how different that character was in the time of Chaucer from what it is now, will appear from the subjoined account which Chaucer gives of the person whom he makes the relator of this tale.

The Franklein of a cheerful hue appear'd;
And white, as is a daisy, was his beard.
A sop he relish'd, steep'd in generous wine,
To brace his stomach ere 'twas time to dine;
And spent his life in one continued feast:
For he was Epicurus' son confess,
Who taught that pleasure is the scope and end
To which his thoughts a man of sense will bend.

These often they rehears'd on solemn days
 Or to their sounding harps attun'd the lays.
 Full many have I heard; and one my mind
 Remembers, for my task this night assign'd.

But, Sirs, it fits that I should first beseech
 Your pardon for my rude and uncouth speech:
 My state is humble; and it ill beseems
 Unlearned tongues to dwell on lofty themes.

A noble house he had and large domain;
 At home he was a new St. Julian:
 His ale might not be smaller in the least,
 Or bread less white; but always of the best.
 Without bak'd meats his larder ne'er was known,
 And fish and flesh, in such profusion,
 That in that house it snow'd good meat and drink
 And all nice things of which a man can think.
 Ev'n as throughout the year the seasons change
 Did he his diet to the month arrange;
 Full many a partridge had he in his mew,
 And many a Bream and many a Luce in stew.
 Woe was his Cook if auglit smacks were done;
 His sauce too sharp, or his roast meat too brown;
 And always in his hall the cloth was laid;
 Betwixt the meals with savory pasties spread.
 At Quarter Sessions he was King and Priest;
 And, though from publick duties now releas'd,
 High Sheriff he had been, and often sent
 Knight of the Shire to serve in Parliament.
 A hanger and a pouch of woven silk
 Hung at his girdle, white as morning's milk;
 And search the country round, you might not see
 A gentleman of more esteem than he.

Perhaps the Luce is the Pike, of which the name among the early
 writers was Lucius,

Ne'er sat I musing on the Delphian Hill,
 Or dipp'd in classic lore from Tully's quill:
 No colours know I, but the painter's dyes,
 Or such as Nature's boon in spring supplies;
 But ne'er on Rhetorick's colours did I pore,
 Quaint figure, trope, or hidden metaphor;
 And ill would such my homely style avail,
 Then hear with candour, ye that hear the tale.

In Brittany there liv'd a gallant youth
 Who serv'd the softer sex with knightly truth,
 And many a labour, many a peril shar'd,
 Ere for his love he won the due reward:
 For she to whom his constant vows were paid
 Among the lovely was the loveliest maid;
 And seem'd so great in blood and rich in gold
 That ne'er the homage of his heart he told;
 But still by lowly service sought to prove
 His steadfast faith, and win her to his love.
 Nor vainly did he sue; the grateful dame
 Struck by his modest mien and martial fame,
 Disdain'd her sex's pride; and pledg'd her word
 To take him for her only wedded lord,
 With such a power as Hymen's laws create
 To bless and not control the marriage state.
 He such soft rule disclaim'd, and freely swore
 To yield in all things to her sov'reign power;
 Constant and ever studious of her will
 As she were free and he a suitor still;

Retaining, but for pride of his degree,
 The name alone and shew of sovereignty.
 ' Sir,' said the damsel, ' since your courteous mind
 ' Free exercise of will for me design'd,
 ' To you a just observance will I pay,
 ' And like an humble handmaid still obey.
 ' Sir, I will be your true and lowly wife;
 ' Have here my troth, unchanging but with life.'

Gentles, who hear the tale, learn this from me,
Love cannot bloom beneath authority.
 That union best endures where each receives
 A little grace, and each a little gives;
 For Love, if either strive to rule alone,
 Extends his wings and farewell! he is gone.
 Love is a thing as any spirit free,
 Lost by restraint and gain'd by liberty;
 For Woman, meek and mild, is fond of sway;
 And Man, to say the truth, will have his way.
 He that is calm and patient in his love
 With most success his amorous suit will move:

• Mr. Pope's imitation,
 Spreads his light wings and in a moment flies,
 however beautiful in the structure of the verse, is weaker than the original,
 Beateth his wings and farewell, he is gone—
 The active *flies* not conveying the idea of the immediate effect of authority
 so forcibly as the passive, *is gone*. Perhaps this may seem too fine a criti-
 cism; but it has induced me to preserve as much of Chaucer's line as
 was consistent with modern idiom.

For Patience, if my author tell me true,
 Where rigor fails, can oft the will subdue;
 Nor captious ought ye still to chide and frown
 At each untoward trifle said or done—
 Learn sufferance by degrees, while yet ye may!
 A sharper lesson waits the coming day:
 For none is in this world of mortal frame
 Exempt in every deed and word from blame:
 Wine, Sorrow, Sickness with her languid hour,
 Anger and Spleen and planetary Power,
 Teem with harsh acts and tip with gall the tongue;
 But hood-winked Prudence sees not every wrong;
 Pause but awhile; the gathering flame will cool,
 And Reason wonder why she wish'd to rule.

Arviragus for this in wisdom sware
 (However unask'd) his lady's rule to bear;
 And Dorigen refus'd the proffer'd sway
 (Not less discreet) and promis'd to obey:
 So was this wise accordance 'twixt them made,
 That each had power, and each a service paid;
 He was by wedlock lord, by love a slave;
 She duty giv'n by love, to wedlock gave:
 And thus with joyful heart and proud array
 Home to the knight's domain they sped their way.

Ye, that in Hymen's gentle train have lov'd,
 And ye alone can guess the bliss they prov'd.
 Long time unknown to grief they pass'd their lives
 Lapt in the tranquil joys that wedlock gives,

When Rumour told that mighty deeds were done
 In England's realm, and deathless glory won
 In tilts at court, in war's embattled pride,
 And single perils in the forest wide.

Then felt the Knight again his ardor rise,
 And martial trophies swam before his eyes;
 He seiz'd his lance, and forth in arms he rode,
 And two long years in England's court abode.

But Dorigen, meantime to grief a prey,
 Her absent lord lamented night and day.
 No sport could sooth, no cares her mind employ;
 Arviragus was gone, and all her joy;
 The pleasures of the world she set at nought,
 And to this theme alone confin'd her thought;
 For noble souls, when once to love resign'd,
 Doat with more passion than the vulgar mind.
 Her friends around their lenient arts applied,
 And every topic of consolation tried;
 And urg'd that tears could ne'er their cause remove,
 And sighs were fruitless to restore her love.

Marble, if long essay'd, at last will feel
 The slow impression of the sculptor's steel;
 And Dorigen, long deaf to every prayer,
 In time confess'd her lov'd companion's care.
 But joy more lively touch'd the anxious dame
 When missives from her lord from England came:
 For he whose thoughts on her, though distant, roll'd,
 Of all that had befallen by letters told,

And promis'd quick return ; she ceas'd to fear,
 And from her eyelids wip'd the trembling tear.
 But when new smiles now crept upon her cheek,
 Her friends of other solace dar'd to speak,
 And begg'd her from her palace to retire,
 As wonted objects wonted thoughts inspire ;
 Nor did she long their urgent suit disdain,
 But to the country went with all her train.

Her seat was on the margin of the sea ;
 There would she walk, from all observance free,
 Well pleas'd to view the numerous barks that plough'd,
 Each as her voyage lay, the restless flood.
 But still a melancholy thought would rise ;
 ‘ Is there no sail of all that meet my eyes ;
 ‘ Not one’ (within herself the dame would say)
 ‘ That wafts my lord upon his homeward way ?
 ‘ Ah ! were it so, no more my soul would taste
 ‘ Of doubt, and feel no more its anguish past.’
 And oft as from on high the rocks she spied,
 The griesly border of the tumbling tide,
 Fear o'er her limbs would shed its chilly dews,
 And her frail joints their offices refuse.
 Then, resting on the turf, she would survey
 The barrier cliffs, and thus in sadness say :
 ‘ Eternal God ! whose all-providing mind
 ‘ Rules the vast world by certain laws confin'd,
 ‘ Who nought in heav'n, on earth, or in the flood,
 ‘ Hast call'd to being, but for general good,

' Who above all thy works hast Man remov'd
 ' And stamp'd thine image on this best belov'd;
 ' Why wouldest thou this harmonious world deface
 ' With rocks, destructive to thy favor'd race?
 ' Rocks, that to Chaos might their birth have ow'd,
 ' And not to thee, the wise, all-giving God!
 ' For these, where'er they stretch their hateful chain,
 ' Nor bird, nor beast, nor sov'reign Man sustain;
 ' The common curse of all! in times of yore
 ' What crowds have perish'd on the rugged shore!
 ' And, ah! perchance in tempests yet to come
 ' Chiefs on this dreadful coast may meet their doom.

' That all is for the best, let clerks maintain:
 ' Dark points like this ill suit my barren brain—
 ' The cause and end of things let scholars know;
 ' But He that bids the wintry whirlwind blow
 ' Keep my lov'd lord! and in the abyss beneath
 ' Whelm yon black rocks, yon fearful beds of death.'

Thus would she pray, and little comfort drew
 From pastimes, if the coast appear'd in view.
 But still assiduous to relieve her grief,
 From other scenes her friends essay'd relief;
 Where'er the fringed fountain deck'd the plain
 Or limpid rill ran murmuring to the main;
 Where'er the face of Nature laugh'd around,
 The dance they marshall'd and the banquet crown'd.

For this, one morning ere Hyperion rose,
 A garden rich in flowers and groves they chose;

(What time prolific May with kindly showers
 Cloth'd in her freshest green the scented bowers)
 And music, viands, wines and fruits convey'd,
 For various pastime in the sheltering glade;
 There lavish Art her charms to Nature join'd;
 So many scarce in Eden were combin'd;
 So sweet the perfume, such the flow'rets hue,
 That every heart was lighten'd at the view.

Now all the dames, the sprightly banquet done,
 Rush'd to the dance, save Dorigen alone.
 What pleasure could the dance to her afford?
 Numbers she saw, but still she miss'd her lord;
 Pensive she mus'd on him, and sate apart,
 And imag'd his return; and comfort warm'd her heart.

Among the rest who in this sevel shar'd,
 A youth, below a knight's degree, appear'd:
 Ere nipt by hopeless love, this youth had been
 The brightest blossom of each rural scene;
 Handsome and strong and gorgeous in array,
 And fresher than the jolly month of May;
 Had sung and danc'd, and sung and danc'd so well
 That on the green he e'er had bora the bell;
 And there withal he had a gentle mind,
 To wisdom and to virtuous ways inclin'd.

But poor Aurelius two revolving years
 Had bow'd beneath a load of secret cares:
 For Dorigen he sigh'd, to her unknown;
 The bitterness of love he felt alone;

Nor ever of his inly pangs would speak,
 Save by the fading roses on his cheek,
 And lays, that others pain might seem to move,
 Plaints of neglected vows and elegies of love.
 He durst not urge his wish, but droop'd and sigh'd,
 Pale as the ghost of one that hopeless died,
 And pin'd; like her th' Arcadian youth disdain'd,
 Who wasted till her voice alone remain'd,
 No further in his suit he durst advance;
 Save too that sometimes in the festive dance
 (When gestures oft betray what secret lies
 And love gives language to the tell-tale eyes)
 A glance escap'd, by caution ill-control'd,
 That all his grief, and all his wishes told;
 A glance, as of a man that sues for grace,
 Half rais'd, and scarcely fixt upon her face;
 But she of all his love suspected nought,
 Nor guess'd that she was ever in his thought,
 And neither shun'd his company nor sought.

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Yet so it chanc'd that ere the sports were done,
 In converse, undesign'd, they sat alone.

‘Lady, I would to God,’ Arelius said,
 ‘When first your Lord to distant regions sped,
 ‘Me too my stars had doon'd so far to roam
 ‘That life had been too short to bring me home.
 ‘Well know I that my service is in vain;
 ‘A broken heart is all the prize I gain—

‘ Oh, pity me! one tender word might save,
 ‘ One frown remorseless doom me to the grave.
 ‘ No more—the gay assembly hither bends.
 ‘ Think on thy mercy this poor life depends.’
 ‘ Is this,’ the dame replied, ‘ your bold intent?
 ‘ I guess’d not what your meek observance meant:
 ‘ But by that Power I swear who gave me life,
 ‘ I ever will be found a faithful wife,
 ‘ Nor err in wish or thought, or deed or word—
 ‘ True to my vows and constant to my lord.’
 Thus spoke the dame the purpose of her breast;
 But added in ill time this scornful jest;
 ‘ Stay yet—one mighty work if you atchieve,
 ‘ This love, so much desir’d, you shall receive
 ‘ That day when every rock that lines the shore
 ‘ Shall sink in Ocean by your sov’reign power;
 ‘ When stone by stone this barrier you remove,
 ‘ That the light skiff with fearless sail shall rove,
 ‘ That day I swear to give you all my love.’ }
 ‘ Have you no other grace?’ the youth replied.
 ‘ None,’ said the dame; ‘ this wonder must be tried:
 ‘ To urge with lawless love another’s wife
 ‘ Ill suits the sober tenor of thy life:
 ‘ Cease then th’ unhallow’d object to pursue;
 ‘ Nought but this wonder can my faith subdue.’
 But now the tribe that revel’d on the green
 Or stray’d the coppic’d walks and bowers within,

Press'd round the dame; the pipe was heard again,
 The dance renew'd, the song, the feast began;
 And scarce I ween the rural sport was done
 Till deeper crimson ting'd the setting sun,
 And Earth, revolving from the western sky,
 Hid his resplendent beams from Europe's eye.
 Then to the town, though late, the joyous crew
 Pleas'd with the pastimes of the day, withdrew,
 All, save Aurelius: wrapt in silent thought
 He, unobserv'd, his lonely mansion sought.
 Scarce his chill blood crept in each flaccid vein,
 And sorrow almost craz'd his sounder brain;
 He rais'd his hands to Heaven and would have pray'd,
 But Hope gives birth to prayer, and Hope was fled.
 At length by grief at once and love oppress'd,
 Phœbus, his patron God, he thus address'd.
 ' Phœbus! oh, master of the various train
 ' Herb, flower and tree, that grace the verdant plain;
 ' Whose beam, attemper'd as thy orb declines
 ' Through the just order of the sacred signs,
 ' Gives life to each, their torpid fibres warms
 ' And wakes the long succession of their charms;
 ' Oh Phœbus! cast on me thy pitying eye,
 ' Doom'd by the virtuous Dorigen to die.
 ' These tears from no offence but love arise—
 ' To mercy give, what she to loves denies!
 ' Save, for thou canst; thy powerful aid can give
 ' A balm for slighted love, and bid me live—

' Oh! call thy Sister Queen! whose influence guides
 ' With undiscover'd force the raging tides,
 ' Old Ocean's empress; whom the Nereids own
 ' And Neptune fears upon his pearly throne:
 ' For, as her measur'd march is rul'd by thee,
 ' That march directs the subjugated sea;
 ' And as her orb its varying phases shews,
 ' Obsequious Ocean ebbs, obsequious flows.
 ' Thou, when in Leo next thy fervid ray
 ' Gives her full sphere its lustre to display,
 ' Then stop her course! her monthly change forego,
 ' Nor check her influence on the tides below;
 ' That undiminish'd from their inmost caves
 ' Her power may summon the tumultuous waves
 ' Upward to press, in wide confusion hurl'd
 ' Beyond the level of the watery world,
 ' And far beneath their foaming surface whelm
 ' Each rugged rock that girds th' Armorick realm.
 ' Then stop her course—till to the dame I say,
 ' " Lo! at the voice of Love, the rocks give way."
 ' Oh! till thou twice renew th' expecting year
 ' Shine with full radiance on her silver sphere;
 ' Or woo this kindred power, whose triple sway
 ' Rules the dark realms impervious to the day,
 ' To sink these rocks to her infernal reign,
 ' Far from the searching eye of Dorigen.
 ' Oh! look upon the tears that scald my cheek,
 ' And grant, in mercy grant, the aid I seek;

‘ So may I with my grateful offerings roam
 ‘ A barefoot pilgrim to the Delphian dome.’

He ceas’d; a cloud of grief his mind o’ercast;
 He sunk, and sinking seem’d to breathe his last;
 But watchful of his woe, his brother caught
 The fainting youth and to his chamber brought;
 There in despair let poor Aurelius lie,
 His balance equal pois’d, to live or die.

Meantime, in bloom of health and high in fame,
 Arviragus from noble England came—
 What need I tell the bliss of Dorigen
 To clasp her long-regretted Lord again?
 He too, unconscious, revel’d in her arms,
 Nor dreamt of any rival to her charms;
 But careless took his fill of all delight;
 By day the tourney and the dance by night.

Thus liv’d for many a month this blissful pair,
 While sad Aurelius, sunk with amorous care,
 Nor, left his bed of sickness, weak and wan;
 Nor listen’d to the cheering voice of man;
 Nor felt the breath of Heav’n, delightful blow;
 Nor saw the Sun, that gladdens all below.
 His unpropitiotis Love and dark despair
 He scarcely trusted to a brother’s ear;
 And brooding still in silence on his woes,
 Ne’er felt the comfort that from pity flows.
 Without, his breast betray’d no bruise or scar;
 The wound was all within, and rankled there:

And surgeons think that sore will dang'rous prove,
Which festering at the bottom, heals above.

His brother, who at Orleans long had staid,
And books that dealt in every science read,
Still curious, high and low, of every lore
Somewhat for use or pastime to explore ;
Now pondering on Aurelius' wretched state,
And musing how his grief to mitigate,
Bethought him that at Orleans once he saw
A book that spoke of natural magic's law.
This on his fellow's desk by chance he spied
(A graduate in the laws, and learn'd beside,)
And read what crafty subtleties were done
By the twice fourteen mansions of the Moon,
And all the sleights, that in those days were priz'd,
Though by our better wisdom now despis'd ;
For rules of holy Church our faith maintain,
And quaint illusions tempt our thoughts in vain.
Recalling to his mind this wond'rous book
Joy sprung within his breast, and thus he spoke—
‘ The cure is in our hands ; he shall not die :
‘ Magic its powerful influence shall supply ;
‘ For sure there is a subtle craft or sleight
‘ That blinds the judgment or deceives the sight,
‘ Such as our jugglers use, who entertain,
‘ In taverns and at wakes, the vulgar train ;
‘ And make a stream along the chamber flow,
‘ With various vessels moving to and fro :

' A lion on the pale spectators glare;
 ' A tower embattled frown upon the war;
 ' Or flowers with ev'ry tint of beauty bloom,
 ' Or vines with purple clusters deck the room.
 ' What then remains? To Orleans must I speed,
 ' To search for one in natural magic read,
 ' To whom the aspects of the stars are known,
 ' And all the mansions of the changeful Moon:
 ' Through such a man Aurelius yet may win
 ' (Spite of her terms propos'd) this haughty queen;
 ' He with such potent spells may taint the air
 ' That not one rock shall on the shores appear,
 ' Nor cliff above or craggy shelf below
 ' Turn from the level shore the fearless prow:
 ' Till Dorigen the promis'd boon afford,
 ' Or break—she dare not break—her plighted word.'

But forward with the tale; at once he went
 And told the bedrid lover his intent;
 At once the scheme Aurelius understood,
 And hope again through all his bosom glow'd;
 In preparation little time they spent,
 But eagerly their course to Orleans bent.

When now within some furlongs of the gate
 They spied a clerk, who by the pathway sate:
 He stay'd them as in haste they past along,
 And fair bespokē them in the Latin tongue;
 And (judge ye how the gaping brothers star'd)
 Told them what men they were, and whence they far'd,

And wherefore to that learned place they came,
 And all the courtship of the Breton dame.
 'Now,' said Aurelius, 'I shall sure succeed;
 'This man is just the scholar that I need.'
 Th' acquaintance soon was made; the scholar knew
 All that the love-sick traveller had in view;
 And he, convinc'd by what the clerk had said,
 No farther sought, or look'd for other aid.
 Dismounting, they embrac'd; with courtly air
 He led them to his house, and welcom'd there
 With smiles and soft repose and comfortable fare.

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But ere the feast was serv'd, their host beguil'd
 Their eyes with magic shapes and visions wild.
 Upon the wall appear'd a forest drear
 Peopled with herds of many-colour'd deer;
 The buck, the roe, the stag with antlers high,
 That toss'd his head and seem'd to scorn to fly:
 The chace began; the huntsman's winged wound
 Here prostrate laid his pride, and here the hound:
 Anon this pageant from the wall was clear'd,
 And the gay sports of falconry appear'd;
 The river fill'd with boats, the busy train,
 The hawks flown upward and the heron slain;
 Then Chivalry with all its pomp was seen,
 And well appointed knights that justed on the green.
 Then came the dance; the figures seem'd to live;
 That you could hear the music you'd believe;

And Dorigen appear'd to trip along
 Led by Aurelius' self amid the throng :
 But when the Master, who this wonder wrought,
 Now saw the vision to perfection brought,
 Ere yet they fancied half the pageant done
 He clapt his hands, and all at once was gone.
 This feat no craft or art mechanic play'd ;
 Magic, and magic only, lent him aid.
 The whole within his library was done ;
 And with him, save the stranger youths, were none.

The supper o'er, to bargain they began,
 What meed should recompense this learned man
 Could he remove from sight the rocky chain
 That girds th' Armorick province to the Seine.
 His terms the crafty scholar still advanc'd,
 The difficulty, toil, expence enhanc'd,
 And rais'd the value of his art so high,
 That nought but brain-sick passion could comply.
 ' Ask ye so little, Sir ? ' Aurelius said ;
 ' By such a gift your skill were ill repaid ;
 ' He that could make your meed this earthly sphere,
 ' For skill so great would scarcely pay too dear.
 ' Have here my hand—the bargain this secures ;
 ' Atchieve the point and what you ask is yours—
 ' But look you sleep not; no neglect or sloth—'
 ' Tis done,' the Clerk replied ; ' I pledge my troth.'

Now free from care Aurelius sought his bed,
 And slumber'd without opium in his head :

His limbs the journey's toil to rest inclin'd,
 And hope of bliss approaching lull'd his mind;
 But anxious still he rose before the day
 And wak'd his friends and urg'd them on their way,
 Nor dallied in the journey, till they came
 Where dwelt Aurelius and the Breton dame.

The Winter was in prime; the Sun, grown old,
 Had chang'd to duller brass his orb of gold,
 Nor rush'd impatient from the Indian flood
 While yet the western sky with purple glow'd.
 But frost and bitter sleet deform'd the year;
 The plains were brown, the forest stark and bare;
 Then sat old Janus with his double beard
 By the clear fire and still the embers stirr'd,
 And carv'd the red brawn of the tusky swine,
 And crown'd his bugle horn with foaming wine:
 Sport and good cheer was found in every hall,
 And many a merry Christmas wish'd by all.

Be sure Aurelius spar'd no care or cost
 For him who should restore his comfort lost;
 And still he pray'd him to begin his course
 Of magic rites, for still his pains grew worse;
 And often in his mood, he would unsheathe
 His sword, and seek to end his woes in death.

Such anguish with regret the Scholar fill'd;
 And much he wish'd th' expected cure to yield;
 And watch'd a favoring time, for magic power
 To spread such strange illusion o'er the shore

That all who look'd might think the rocks destroy'd
 Or many a fathom sunk beneath the tide.
 At last the hour arriv'd; his spells he brought,
 And instruments and schemes with falsehood fraught,
 And tables, fram'd to shew when every star
 Would in each mansion of its march appear
 Corrected by himself: he nought forgot;
 Collects and prayers, the square and cubic root,
 And algebra, to find equations due;
 All that his process wanted well he knew.
 By his eight spheres in calculation
 He plainly found how far Alnath was gone
 From the Ram's Head, which in the ninth is plac'd;
 And this he in a subtle figure cast;
 And when the first house by the scheme appear'd,
 The remnant by proportion was inferr'd;
 And when the Moon would rise, and what her phase,
 And all that magic taught in heathen days;
 Nor paus'd he, till his charm so powerful grew,
 That the rocks seem'd to vanish from the view.

Meantime the youth, who knew his woe or weal
 Hung on the working of this wond'rous spell,
 Nor slept, nor mov'd, but watch'd both day and night
 Till one by one the rocks deceiv'd his sight.
 Then at the Scholar's feet his thanks he pour'd,
 And Venus, blissful queen, with vows ador'd,
 And instant to the Temple took his way
 Where lovely Dorigen was us'd to pray;

And when he saw his time, with flutt'ring breast
 And humble mien, this suppliant speech address'd.

‘ Oh, Lady! whose displeasure most I fear,
 ‘ Whose charms I love, whose virtues I revere,
 ‘ Think not my anguish e'er should utterance find
 ‘ To wound the blest repose of such a mind,
 ‘ But that despair at last rejects the rein
 ‘ And tells me I must perish or complain.
 ‘ My life perhaps you may not wish to save;
 ‘ But think upon the promise once you gave:
 ‘ Each god that views us from the realms above
 ‘ Feels that you punish no offence but love;
 ‘ The ftoth each god remembers pledg'd by you;—
 ‘ Not that I claim your pity as my due;
 ‘ But at a rural feast—’tis long ago—
 ‘ Full well the purport of your oath you know:
 ‘ You vow'd (to witness every Power I call),
 ‘ Mean as I am, to love me best of all:
 ‘ ’Tis for your honor, Lady, that I speak;
 ‘ No remedy for sorrow do I seek:
 ‘ But what you then exacted, I have done—
 ‘ Now ’tis your turn to act; the rocks are gone.
 ‘ He ceas'd, and left her; she astonish'd stood;
 There was not in her face one drop of blood,
 ‘ Alas! she said, ‘ How little I foresaw
 ‘ This chance, so strange, so passing Nature's law;
 ‘ Who that has sense or knowledge could believe
 ‘ That mortal skill could such a deed atchieve?’

And home she hied her in such deep dismay
 That scarce her limbs could bear her on the way ;
 And sigh'd and wept, but told the cause to none,
 For from his house it chanc'd her lord was gone ;
 And pondering on her fate, to death inclin'd,
 Revolv'd the deeds of old and question'd thus her mind.

‘ Oh, Fortune ! ’tis of thee that I complain ;
 ‘ Thou that hast wrapp'd me in thy cruel chain ;
 ‘ A chain, from which to scape no chance is left
 ‘ Save or of honour or of life bereft.
 ‘ Why do I name the dire alternative ?
 ‘ Oh ! conscious of dishonor, can I live,
 ‘ And feel (howe'er conceal'd from busy fame)
 ‘ That I have purchas'd life by secret shame ?
 ‘ No ; Death, and Death alone, can set me free ;
 ‘ His ghastly visage wears a smile to me.
 ‘ Of old ’twas common for the sex to save
 ‘ Their honor, in a voluntary grave.
 ‘ When Phidon, by the Athenian lords oppress'd,
 ‘ Was slain, inhuman ! at the genial feast,
 ‘ And his fair daughters, ere the blood was dry,
 ‘ (Expos'd uncover'd to each gloting eye)
 ‘ Were led their horrid lust to satisfy,
 ‘ They, when the tyrants thought their prey secure,
 ‘ Leapt to a deep draw-well and perish'd pure.
 ‘ So when Messene for her warrior's arms
 ‘ Chose fifty from the flower of Spartan charms,

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' Not one of all the fifty would survive
 ' So foul an outrage, or polluted live.
 ' So too, when fierce Aristocles strove
 ' To force Simphalidessa to his love;
 ' Beset her palace and her father kill'd,
 ' And urg'd with fearful threats the dame to yield,
 ' Unseen of all to Dian's fane she past,
 ' And the cold image with her arms embrac'd
 ' As close as if together they had grown
 ' That force was vain to tear her from the stone;
 ' Till the fell king, defrauded of his prey,
 ' Lopt, as she clung, her beauteous limbs away.
 ' If maidens thus have died, how light should life
 ' Weigh 'gainst dishonor in a noble wife?
 ' She, who would not endure the stain alone,
 ' But guards her husband's honor in her own,
 ' Thus the bold wife of Punic Hasdrubal,
 ' When in his country's cause she saw him fall,
 ' When Afric fled before all-conqu'ring Rome
 ' And haughty Carthage nodded to her doom,
 ' Snatch'd her pale babes, her brows with chaplets
 crown'd,
 ' And leapt into the flames that rag'd around.
 ' Lucretia too, the Roman pride, disdain'd
 ' To lead a loathsome life, by Tarquin stain'd.
 ' In Melesie, the savage Gaul enslav'd
 ' Eight virgins, who by death their honor sav'd,

' When Abradas was slain, his faithful wife
 ' Pour'd in his veins the current of her life;
 ' And smiling in her utmost agony
 ' She welcom'd death, from foul dishonor free.
 ' But why shou'd I such strong examples cite?
 ' Of many thousands more historians write
 ' Whose virtue more than death pollution fear'd
 ' And self-destruction of the two preferr'd.
 ' Then wherefore am I doubtful? never dame
 ' Stood nearer to the slippery verge of shame.
 ' Oh! let me fall, Demotius, like thy child
 ' Lamented in my fate and undefil'd.
 ' Oh, Sedasus! what wretch unmov'd can read
 ' How in their honor's cause thy daughters bled?
 ' Or how Nicanor, Macedonia's lord,
 ' Fierce in his lust the Theban maid deflow'r'd,
 ' And she by such a deed her fame restor'd?
 ' Why should I speak of Nicerates' wife,⁴
 ' Who gladly for her fame exchang'd her life?
 ' Or of that Grecian dame, who chose to die
 ' Lest unentomb'd her slaughter'd lord should lie?
 ' Why of Alcestis or Penelope,
 ' Renown'd in earliest times for chastity?

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⁴ The bad taste of Chaucer in this uninteresting speech is kept in countenance by Petrarch; that poet, in his *Trionfi*, not content with giving us a muster-roll of names like this passage in Chaucer, mingles characters from fabulous, sacred, and profane history, with no more remorse or discrimination than Lingo in his assemblage of 'great old heroes—Homer, Moses, Hercules, and Wat Tyler.'

' Why of Laodamia's constant soul?
 ' Of Artemise? of Portia's burning coal?
 ' Of Theuta, whom no force or art could move?
 ' Of Rodogune's or Oaleria's love?
 ' All, all the sacred flame of virtue breathe
 ' And teach me to protect my fame by death.'

Thus Dorigen her fate awhile deplor'd
 Till jocund to his home return'd her lord.
 But when he heard her sighs, and saw her tears,
 Love fill'd his fancy with a thousand fears—
 ' Alas!' she said, ' that ever I was born!
 ' Hear what in fatal mockery I have sworn'—
 And told him what the love-sick youth had pray'd,
 And of th' unhappy compact she had made—
 ' All may be well,' the Knight with sighs replied,
 ' Each must endure the sufferings that betide.
 ' Your promise you must keep: sincerity
 ' Stands first of human attributes with me:
 ' And rather would I lose my best heart's blood
 ' Than you should fail to make this compact good.'
 He said and wept; then starting—' Ne'er proclaim,
 ' I charge you never tell our mutual shame!
 ' Let not your voice, your look, your eye betray
 ' The curst mischance of this detested day;
 ' Let none have ev'n the slightest cause to guess,
 ' Or babbling slander glance at our distress.'
 Then calling from within her 'squire and maid,
 He bad them on their way their Lady lead;

Submiss they bow'd; unconscious where she went
And unsuspicious of her strange intent.

But gay Aurelius in the public street
By chance the melancholy fair one met,
And greeting her with soft and amorous mien,
‘Where goes,’ he said, ‘the lovely Dorigen?’
‘Where goes she?’ said the dame with haggard air
Like madness ripening from a deep despair,
‘You, Sir, she seeks, commanded by her lord,
‘To pay the monstrous forfeit of her word.’
She said; and standing fix'd upon the place,
A storm of sorrow blacken'd all her face:
Her lips not clos'd, she turn'd her streaming eye
To heav'n, and clasp'd her hands in speechless agony.

Amaz'd Aurelius stood; his noble mind
Could in such grief a moral lesson find.
Quick to his feeling breast each pang appear'd
Her lord had suffer'd when the tale he heard;
And all the struggle of the princely pair
Ere they so foul a stain could stoop to bear.
Then what he once had deem'd a virtuous love,
Pure, just, and pleasing to the gods above,
Seem'd black and horrid in his alter'd eye,
Like a base outrage on the nuptial tie.
Far better then it seem'd to yield again
A pleasure purchas'd by such cureless pain,
And all his long-protracted hopes forego,
Than dash their union with eternal woe.

To Dorigen he said; ' Lament no more:
 ' Extinguish'd is the frenzy you deplore.
 ' Return, and tell your lord, that since I see
 ' His honor and his high sincerity;
 ' Since, when within my grasp this bliss I view,
 ' I witness all the misery felt by you,
 ' The anguish by my hateful passion wrought,
 ' I yield a pleasure with such horrors bought;
 ' Unmindful what regret my soul endures,
 ' If I but cease to wound a love like yours.
 ' Go then, untainted in the eye of Heav'n,
 ' And spotless as before your promise giv'n.
 ' But henceforth, warn'd by you, let dames beware
 ' And think upon their compacts ere they swear;
 ' And let the world be told, that courtesy
 ' Dwells not alone in lords of high degree!'

What fancy can conceive, what mortal tongue
 Describe the joy that in her bosom sprung?
 Her lowly thanks, her winged speed to clear
 Arviragus, and bid him cease to fear;
 His rapture, of the youth their mutual praise,
 The blissful tenor of their after days,
 His unabating love, her constancy,
 Sweet though the theme, ye may not hear from me.
 My story must of sad Aurelius tell
 Still bound to give the meed he promis'd for the spell.
 ' Alas! unhappy youth!' Aurelius said,
 ' The price of joys untasted must be paid:

‘ How? where shall I procure so vast a sum?
 ‘ Bare beggary at last must be my doom:
 ‘ My lands I needs must sell and quit the place,
 ‘ Lest my reduc’d estate my kin disgrace;
 ‘ And little recks this Clerk how I may grieve,
 ‘ So he the stipulated price receive.
 ‘ But I will try him yet; a longer day
 ‘ Perchance he may concede this sum to pay;
 ‘ Perchance he may accept a part in hand,
 ‘ A part next year; nor all at once demand;
 ‘ But I must wait his pleasure, good or ill;
 ‘ His part is done, and I must mine fulfil.’

He said; and sighing, from a secret chest
 Took all the gold and treasure he possest:
 This to the chamber of the Clerk he brought,
 And for the rest some further time besought:
 And, ‘ Sir,’ quoth he, ‘ I may full safely boast
 ‘ My credit to this day I never lost;
 ‘ The whole I owe you shall be justly paid
 ‘ Though I from door to door should beg my bread;
 ‘ But if in gentleness you now receive
 ‘ Half your reward, and further respite give,
 ‘ A year, or two; my state might yet be well;
 ‘ Else I my fathers heritage must sell.’

Thus sadly spoke the youth; the Clerk replied,
 ‘ Say, with my promise have not I complied?
 ‘ And have not you your amorous wish enjoy’d?’

‘ Ah, no ! ’ Aurelius said; and from his breast
 A sigh, deep drawn, his penitence exprest.
 ‘ But why ? the Scholar said; the rocks away,
 ‘ What cause can now your forfeit bliss delay ?
 Then point by point the tale that I have told
 The youth began in order to unfold ;
 How Dorigen preferr’d the loss of life
 To the least error that might stain a wife ;
 And pledg’d her faith in pleasantry alone
 Nor dreamt the thing exacted could be done.
 How on his part Arviragus preferr’d
 The forfeit, to the failure of her word ;
 How he that forfeit had refus’d to take,
 Too generous to accept so dear a stake ;
 And how his virtue had return’d the dame,
 Pure from his love as from her lord she came.

The Scholar said, ‘ Good brother, I confess
 ‘ In both your acts an equal gentleness :
 ‘ He is by rank a knight, and you a ’squire ;
 ‘ But God may in his mercy yet inspire,
 ‘ Ev’n of a clerk like me, the humble breast,
 ‘ The palm of courteous actions to contest.
 ‘ Sir, from the forfeit sum you are as free
 ‘ As if you ne’er had dealt with spells or me :
 ‘ I will not have one penny for my aid,
 ‘ Nor for the toilsome journey I have made :

‘ I in this courteous contest wish to bear
‘ (Howe’er behind you both) a little share.’
Which of these three display’d the noblest soul?
Resolve me, Lords; for you have heard the whole,