

But it were eny persone obstinat,  
 What so he were, of high or lowe estat,  
 Him wolde he snybbē scharply for the nonēs.  
 A bettre preest I trowe ther nowher non is.  
 He waytede after no pompe ne reverencē,  
 Ne maked him a spiced consciencē, 525  
 But Cristēs lore, and his apostles twelvē,  
 He taught, and ferst he folwed it himselvē.  
 With him ther was a PLOUGHMAN, was his brother,  
 That hadde i-lad of dong ful many a fother. 530  
 A trewē swynkere and a good was hee,  
 Lyvyng in pees and parfyt charitee.  
 God loved he best with al his hoolē hertē  
 At allē tymēs, though him gamede or smertē,

522. *What so* = whatsoever, whoever.

523. *Snybbe* = snub. A Norse and Frisian word meaning to cut short.  
 Cf. *snub* nose, and Prov. Eng. *snoup*, a blow on the head.

*For the nones* (two syllables).—Promptly, on the spot.

525. *Waytede after*.—Sought or looked for.

526. *Spiced conscience*.—Over-scrupulous, pharisaical as we should say.  
 In a tract dated 1594 we read, "under pretence of spiced holiness;" and in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Mad Lover*, act iii., when Cleanthe offers a purse, the priestess says—

"Fie! no corruption . . . .  
 Cle. Take it, it is yours;  
 Be not so *spiced*; it is good gold;  
 And goodness is no gall to the conscience."

527. *Lore* = teaching. A.S. *lār*, Ger. *lehre*.

529. This line illustrates the humble social origin of the secular clergy, which enabled them to act as mediators between the peasantry to whom they belonged by ties of blood, and the proud nobles over whom they in their spiritual character possessed more or less power

530. *Fother*.—A cart-load. A. Sax. *fother*. The term *fodder*, like Ger. *fuder*, is still used for a weight of lead; lbs. 19½, 21½, or 22½ in different parts of England.

531. *Swynkere*.—Labourer. See line 188.

534. *Though him gamede or smerte*.—Whether it gave him pleasure or pain, i.e. whether his piety conduced to or conflicted with his worldly interests.

533-535.—Cf. Mark xii. 33.

And thanne his neighēbour right as himselvē. 535  
 He woldē thresshe, and therto dyke and delvē,  
 For Cristēs sake, with every pourē wight,  
 Withouten hyre, if it laye in his might.  
 His tythēs payede he ful faire and wel,  
 Bothe of his ownē swynk and his catel. 540  
 In a tabard he rood upon a mere.  
 Ther was also a Reeve and a Mellere,  
 A Sompnour and a Pardoner also,  
 A Maunciple, and my self, ther were no mo.  
 The MELLERE was a stout carl for the nonēs, 545  
 Ful big he was of braun, and eek of boonēs;

536. *And therto dyke and delve* = and also make dykes or ditches and dig. *Dike* is now used only in a special sense, having been ordinarily superseded by the softened form *ditch*. *To dig*, originally to make a *dike* or *ditch*, has taken the place of the more general word *delve*, which has almost become obsolete; the noun *ditcher*, however, is retained for a man whose special work is to make ditches,

537. *Wight*.—See on line 71.

540. *Swynk and catel*.—In labour or service rendered, and in kind or produce. *Catel*.—See on line 373.

541. *Tabard*.—A smock or short jacket. See on line 20. *Mere* = a mare.

542. *Reeve*.—Steward or bailiff. A.S. *gerefa*, whence *shire-reeve* = sheriff, *port-reeve*, *borough-reeve*. Cf. Ger. *burggraf*, &c. This reeve was, as the account of him proves, merely the bailiff or steward of some nobleman. The connection between the Eng. *reeve* and the German *graf* has been questioned, but the forms *grave*, *grefe*, *gerefe*, and *reeve*, all occur in Dr. Kreamer's Old High German Dictionary, and are explained as *begleiter*, *graf*, *präses*. *Mellere* = a miller.

543. *Sompnour*.—A summoner in the ecclesiastical courts, now called *apparitor*. The explanation of *p* in this word, as in the French *compter*, to count, is to be found in their Latin originals, *submoneo* and *computo*. In *solempne*, solemn, and *nempne*, name, it has been introduced through false analogy.

*Pardoner* = a seller of indulgences. Indulgences were invented in the eleventh century by Pope Urban II., as rewards to those who went in person to the Holy Land; but they were afterwards sold for money, and the trade reached such a pitch of extravagance and scandal as to rouse the indignation of Luther, and thereby contributed in no small degree to hasten the Reformation.

544. *Maunciple*.—Caterer to a college. L. *manceps*, a contractor.

545. *Carl*.—A.S. *ceorl*, Icel. *karl*, Ger. *kerl*, a countryman, then a strong

That prevede wel, for overal ther he cam,  
 At wrastlynge he wolde bere alwey the ram.  
 He was schort schuldred, broode, a thikkē knarrē,  
 Ther nas no dore that he nolde heve of harrē, 550  
 Or breke it with a rennyng with his heed.  
 His berd as ony sowe or fox was reed,  
 And thereto brood, as though it were a spade.  
 Upon the cop right of his nose he hade  
 A werte, and thereon stood a tuft of heres, 555  
 Reede as the berstles of a souwēs eeres.  
 His nosē-thurlēs blakē were and wydē.  
 A swerd and bocler baar he by his sidē.

hardy fellow, lastly degraded into *churl*, like the corresponding term *villain*. The proper name *Charles*, Ger. *Carl* or *Karl*, is the same word.

546. *Braun*.—Originally, as here, simply muscle, but now used only of a particular dish of pork; the adjective *brauny*, however, retains the primary meaning.
547. *That prevede wel*.—Literally, proved well, *i.e.* served him well. Cf. L. *multum valere*, Fr. *beaucoup valoir*.  
*Overal ther*.—Wherever. *Overal*, like the Ger. *überall* = every-where, *ther* = where. Literally, everywhere where he came.
548. *The ram*.—The usual prize at wrestling-matches.
549. *Knarre*.—A thick-set fellow. O.E. *gnarr*, a knot, retained in the expression *gnarled*, said of an oak or other tree.
550. *Harre*.—O.E. *herre*, A.S. *heor*, a hinge.  
*Nolde*.—Past tense of the verb *nyllan*; the negative of *willan*, as L. *nolle*, to be unwilling, of *velle*, to be willing; it is now obsolete. J. Wesley is perhaps the latest writer who has used the phrase, "whether he will or nill." The meaning of the line is, "There was no door that he would not heave off its hinges."
551. *Rennyng*.—Running, at a run.
554. *Cop*.—Tip or top. Cf. Ger. *kopf*, head. *Cob* nuts are the best, or as we might say colloquially, "tiptop nuts." *Coping* of a wall, *cap* on the head, *cobs* or large pitcoals, are kindred words. Rich and powerful men are called by Udall "the rich *cobs* of this world."
556. *Berstles* = bristles, by a common transposing of the letters. In German a brush is *bürste*.
557. *Nose-thurles*.—Now corrupted into *nostrils*. A.S. *thirlian*, to drill or pierce; *thirel*, a hole. *Drill*, *thrill*, *through*, and even *door*, are all from the same root.

His mouth as wyde was as a great forneys.  
 He was a jangler, and a golyardeys, 560  
 And that was most of synne and harlotries.  
 Wel cowde he stelē corn, and tollen thries;  
 And yet he had a thombe of gold pardé.  
 A whit cote and a blew hood wered he.  
 A baggēpipe wel cowde he blowe and sownē, 565  
 And therwithal he brought us out of towne.  
 A gentil MAUNCIPLE was ther of a temple,  
 Of which achātours mighten take exemple

559. *Forneys*.—Mr. Earle remarks that to Chaucer as a Kentish man furnaces were familiar objects, for the ironstone which abounds in the weald of Kent and Sussex was largely smelted, until the substitution of coal for wood as fuel transferred the industry to the Black Country and to Wales.
560. *Jangler* = a talker, babbler. An Old French word.  
*Golyardeys*.—A buffoon at rich men's tables. Etymology unknown, unless from *Golias*, the assumed author of the *Apocalypse of Golias* and other pieces in burlesque Latin rime. The authorship has been attributed to one Walter Map. It was a popular jest-book of the twelfth century.
561. *That*, viz. his talk and jokes.
562. *Stele*.—Steal or appropriate part of the corn intrusted to him to grind, a practice common in the trade.  
*Tollen thries*.—Demand payment over again.
- 563.—An immense amount of ingenuity has been expended in endeavours at explaining the proverb, "Every honest miller has a golden thumb;" but, "After all, is not the old proverb satirical, inferring that all millers who *have not golden thumbs* are rogues—argal, as Shakespeare says, that all millers are rogues?" (*Notes and Queries*, May, 1869, p. 407. Dr. Morris). If not, the most plausible notion involves an allusion to the advantage derived from a highly cultivated sense of touch in judging of the quality of meal by rubbing it between the fore finger and thumb, which latter becoming broad and flattened, has suggested the name of miller's-thumb for a well-known fish whose head has that peculiar form.  
*Pardé*.—Fr. *par Dieu*, by God. *Yet* may imply that in spite of his roguery he was most prosperous.
565. *Baggēpipe*.—We are accustomed to look on this instrument as peculiarly Scottish, only because it has been retained longer by that people than by others. The earliest mention of the bagpipe in Scotland is an item for the pay of "Inghis pyparis" in the

For to be wys in byynge of vitaillē.  
 For whether that he payde, or took by taillē, 570  
 Algate he waytede so in his achate,  
 That he was ay biforn and in good state.  
 Now is not that of God a ful fair gracē,  
 That such a lewēd mannēs wit schal pacē  
 The wisdom of an heep of lernede men? 575  
 Of maystres hadde moo than thries ten,  
 That were of lawe expert and curious;  
 Of which ther were a doseyen in that hous,

court of James IV. On a Greek sculpture now at Rome, and of great antiquity, is a representation of a man playing on a genuine bagpipe, and instruments made on the same principle are still used in Calabria and Transylvania.

*Sowne*.—Sound, a different word from *sowmen*, to tend or conduce to, occurring in line 307.

567. *A temple*.—The Inns of Court, so called, were anciently the residence of the Knights Templars. At the suppression of that order their buildings were purchased by the professors of common law, and divided into the Inner and Middle Temples, in relation to Essex House, which, though not appropriated by the lawyers, was long known as the Outer Temple. By the expression "a temple," he would seem to mean simply any one of the Inns of Court.

568. *Achatour*.—A purchaser or caterer. Fr. *acheter* = to buy.

570. *Took by taillē*.—Bought on credit or by *tally*, originally an account scored in notches on a piece of wood, from Fr. *tailler* to cut, whence also our word *tailor*, as Ger. *schneider*, from *schneiden*, to cut.

571. *Algate* = always. *Gate* and *way* are from Scandinavian and German sources respectively. *Gata* in Swedish and Icelandic is way, path, or street. *Swagate* (i.e. so ways), thus, is found in O.E. Our word *gait* is another form.

*Waytede so in his achate*.—Watched or attended to his purchases.

572. *Ay biforn*.—Ever before (others).

573. Cf. James i. 17.

574. *Lewed*.—See on l. 502. *Wit*.—See on l. 279. *Pace* = pass or surpass.

576. The members of the Temple.

577. *Curious*.—Careful, studious, from *cura* = care. Also inquiring, and in a depreciatory sense prying, inquisitive. All these uses are found in Latin authors, and in English before the eighteenth century. Since that time the last only has been retained, though even it is obsolescent; and the word has most absurdly come to signify unusual, remarkable, quaint, or strange.

Worthi to ben stiwardes of rente and lond  
 Of any lord that is in Engelond, 580  
 To maken him lyve by his propre good,  
 In honour detteles, but-if he were wood,  
 Or lyve as scarsly as him list desire;  
 And able for to helpen al a schire  
 In any caas that mightē falle or happē; 585  
 And yit this maunciple sette here aller cappē.

The REEVĒ was a sklendre colerik man,  
 His berd was schave as neigh as evere he can.  
 His heer was by his eres ful round i-schorn. 590  
 His top was dockēd lyk a preest biforn.  
 Ful longē wern his leggēs, and ful lenē,  
 Al like a staff, ther was no calf y-senē.  
 Wel cowde he kepe a gerner and a bynnē;  
 Ther was non auditour cowde on him wynnē.  
 Wel wiste he by the droughte, and by the reyn, 595  
 The yeeldyng of his seed, and of his greyn.

579. *Stiwardes*.—A *steward*, or *stedeward*, is a keeper (*warder*) of the *stede* or establishment of his lord.

581. To enable him to live on his own private (*proper*) means.

582. *But-if he were wood*.—Unless he were mad. Our word *but* = *be-out*, like *except*, excluding such a thing or proposition; it is therefore not convertible with the Fr. *mais* = L. *magis*, preferably, commonly though erroneously considered as its equivalent; the two words corresponding only in a certain number of instances.

*Wood*. A.S. *wod*, mad. *Wud* is still used in Scotland.

583. Co-ordinate with line 581, not with "but-if he were wood," which is parenthetical. *Him* refers to the steward: thus if the lord would only live as sparingly as it pleased his steward to desire or advise him.

584. *Al a* = a whole.

585. *Caas*.—Event or misfortune.

586. *Here aller cappe* = the caps of them (the lawyers) all. *To set a man's cap* meant to outwit, overreach, or surpass him. He outdid them all.

587. *Reeve* = a bailiff.

590. *Dockēd* in front (before), like the tonsure of a priest.

594. *Auditour* = accountant.

*On him wynnē*.—Outmatch him.

His lordes scheep, his neet, and his dayerie,  
 His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrie,  
 Was holly in this reevës governynge,  
 And by his covenant gaf the rekenynge, 600  
 Syn that his lord was twenti yeer of agē;  
 Ther couthe noman bringe him in arreragē.  
 Ther nas ballif, ne herde, ne other hyne,  
 That he ne knew his sleight and his covyne;  
 They were adrad of him, as of the dethē. 605  
 His wonyng was ful fair upon an hethē,  
 With grenē trees i-schadwed was his placē.  
 He coudē bettrē than his lord purchacē.  
 Ful riche he was i-storēd prively,  
 His lord wel couthe he plesē subtilly, 610  
 To geve and lene him of his ownē good,  
 And have a thank, a cote, and eek an hood.  
 In youthe he lerned hadde a good mester;  
 He was a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.  
 This reevē sat upon a ful good stot, 615

597. *Neet* = cattle. *Dayerie* (Old E. *deye*, a female servant) = dairy, the woman's department in the farm.  
 598. *Stoor*.—Farm stock. O.Fr. *estor*, Mid. L. *staurum*, store.  
 599. *Holly* = wholly.  
 602. *Arreage* = arrears.  
 603. *Herde* = herdsman. The modern sense of a flock is the original one. *Hyne* = hind, farm-labourer.  
 604. *Sleight* = craft, astuteness, from Icel. *slæg* = sly. *Covyne* = deceit. O.Fr. *covin*, from L. *convenire*, to come between or together.  
 605. *Adrad*.—In dread. As *afeard* = in fear of.  
 606. *Wonyng*.—Dwelling. Ger. *wohnung*. See line 388.  
 609. *I-stored*.—From *stoor*, see line 598.  
 611. *Lene*, &c.—Lend to him of his own thrift.  
 613. *Mester* = trade. Fr. *métier*. Had learned his business well.  
 614. *Wrighte*.—*Wright* was originally a workman of any kind. Cf. *wheelwright*, *cartwright*, *playwright*. Akin to the verbal form *wrought*.  
 615. *Stot*.—A stallion, or sometimes a young horse (*Bailey's Dictionary*, 1735). In German, however, *stute* is a mare.  
 616. *Pomely* (*pomme*).—Same as *dappled* (*apple*), patched with colour like an apple.

That was a pomely gray, and hightē Scot.  
 A long surcote of pers uppon he haddē,  
 And by his side he bar a rusty bladdē.  
 Of Northfolk was this reeve of which I tellē, 620  
 Byside a toun men callen Baldeswellē.  
 Tukked he was, as is a frere, aboutē,  
 And ever he rood the hyndreste of the routē.  
 A Sompnour was ther with us in that place,  
 That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynēs face,  
 For sawcēflem he was, with eyghen narwē. 625  
 \* \* \* \* \*

617. *Pers*.—See note on line 439.

*Uppon* seems here to be used as an adverb: overall, outside.

620. *Byside* = near; not living in the town but in the country near it.

621. *Tukked aboute*.—Dressed up, from A.S. *tucian*, to clothe; O.E. *tuck*, Ger. *tuch*, cloth.

622. *Hyndreste* = hindmost. Cf. *overeste*, l. 290.

*Route*.—An O.Fr. word, Ger. *rotte*, a crowd; not the Mod. Fr. *route*, road or course.

623. *Sompnour*.—See line 543.

624. *Fyr-reed cherubynēs face*.—H. Stephens, *Apol. Herod.* i. cap. 30, quotes the same expression from a French epigram: "Nos grands docteurs au cherubin visage." Comp. "His face was red as any cherubyn:" Thynne (ob. 1611 A.D.), *Debate between Pride and Lowlines*. Properly the singular is *cherub*, the plural *cherubim*.

625. *Sawcēflem* (or *sawcēflem*).—Having a red pimpled face. Tyrwhitt in his *Glossary* gives a quotation from the Bodl. MS. 2463 which explains the etymology of the word. "Unguentum contra *salsum flegma*, scabim," &c., that is, an ointment against the salt phlegm, scab, &c. So Galen in Hippocrat. *De Aliment. Comment.* iii. p. 227, plainly points to a skin disease produced by the excessive use of salt food, so general among our forefathers. In the *Prompt. Parv.* we have *flew* and *flewme* as equivalents of *flegma*. Tyrwhitt quotes the term from an old French physics book, and also from the old work A Thousand Notable Things, "a sovereign ointment for *sawcēfleme*, and all kind of scabies."

It may be well to remind the student that our word *sauce* is derived through the French from the It. *salso*, L. *salsus*, and means originally *salted* or *pickled* articles of food, and *sausage* is from the same.

*Narwe* = narrow.

With skallēd browēs blake and pilēd berd:  
 Of his visagē children werēn aferd.  
 Ther nas quyksilver, litarge, nē bremstoon,  
 Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartrē noon, 630  
 Ne oynēment that woldē clense and bytē,  
 That him might helpen of his whelkēs whitē,  
 Ne of the knobbēs sitting on his cheekēs.  
 Wel loved he garleek, oynouns, and ek leekēs,  
 And for to drinkē strong wyn reed as blood. 635  
 Thanne wolde he speke, and crye as he were wood.  
 And whan that he wel dronken hadde the wyn,  
 Than wolde he spekē no word but Latyn.  
 A fewē termēs hadde he, tuo or thre,  
 That he haddē lernēd out of som decree; 640  
 No wonder is, he herde it al the day,  
 And eek ye knowen wel, how that a jay

627. *Skalled*.—Having the *scall* or scales, scurfy. Cf. vulg. “*scald* head.”

*Piled*.—Bald or bare in patches. Norse *pila*, to pluck, thence the Fr. *pillier*, to pillage. Cf. line 177, and note.

629. *Quyksilver*.—Quicksilver or mercury = living silver, so called from its mobility.

*Litarge*, or oxide of lead, Gr. *lithargyros* (*lithos*, a stone, and *argyros*, silver), silver-stone, from the presence in the ore of a certain amount of silver.

*Bremstoon*.—Brimstone; formerly *brynstan*, a Scandinavian word meaning burning-stone.

630. *Boras*.—Borax, or baborate of soda. From an Arabic word *bourach*.

*Ceruce*.—L. *cerussa*. White-lead or carbonate of lead.

*Oille of tartrē*.—Probably cream of tartar, bitartrate of potash. *Tartar*, a fanciful name given by the alchemists to the dregs of anything, especially, and afterwards solely, to the crystalline deposit of impure bitartrate of potash which, under the name of *argal* or *argol*, is collected from the hogsheads in which wine has been long kept.

All the above-mentioned substances are or have been used in ointments or cosmetics.

632. *Whelkes*.—Blotches, scabs.

636. *Wood*.—See on line 582.

Can clepen Watte, as wel as can the popē.  
 But who so wolde in other thing him gropē,  
 Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie, 645  
 Ay, *Questio quid juris*, wolde he crye.  
 He was a gentil harlot and a kyndē;  
 A bettre felawe schulde men nowher fyndē.

And prively a fynch eek cowde he pullē.  
 And if he fond owher a good felawe,  
 He woldē techē him to have non awe

643. Can say Watte or Walter, as a parrot says Poll.

644. *Him grope*.—“If any one knew how to try or test (his knowledge of Latin) in other things (than the phrases he had got by rote). *Grope* is to feel with the hands, akin to *grip*, *grab*, &c.

646. *Questio quid juris?*—This kind of question occurs frequently in Ralph de Hengham. After having stated a case, he adds, *quid juris?* and then proceeds to give the answer to it.

647. *Harlot*.—On the class of mediæval society variously designated as rihalds, harlots, and golyardeys Earle in his *Philology of the English Tongue*, § 54, says, “One of the ways, and almost the only way, in which a man of low birth who had no inclination to the religious life of the monastery could rise into some sort of importance and consideration was by entering the service of some powerful baron. He lived in coarse abundance at the castle of his patron, and was ready to perform any service of whatever nature. He was a rollicking sort of a bravo or swashbuckler. He was his patron’s parasite, bulldog and tool.”

Wycliffe translates the *scurrilitas* of the Vulgate by *harlotrie*, and Shakespeare in the same sense speaks of *harlotry* players.

*Gentil and kynde*.—That is, though a “harlot” he was not a bully, but a genial, jovial sort of fellow. *Kind* has but recently acquired the sense of tender-hearted. It meant originally natural, as in the Litany, “the kindly fruits of the earth;” and in Sir Thomas More’s *Life of King Richard III.* we are told how he murdered his two nephews in order that he might be accounted a “kindly king” [1], that is, the legitimate sovereign, being in their absence the next in succession to the throne, the natural heir.

648. *A bettre fellawe*.—A jollier companion, in a somewhat disparaging sense.

652. *Pulle a fynch* (pluck a finch or pigeon) was a proverbial expression for cheating a novice.

653. *Owher*.—Anywhere.

In such caas of the archēdeknēs curs ; 655  
 But-if a mannēs soule were in his purs ;  
 For in his purs he scholde y-punyssched be.  
 " Purs is the ercēdeknēs helle," quod he.  
 But wel I woot he lyede right in dede ;  
 Of cursyng oghte ech gulty man him drede ; 660  
 For curs wol slee right as assoillyng saveth ;  
 And also ware him of a *significavit*.  
 In daunger he hadde at his ownē gise  
 The yongē gurlēs of the dioicise,  
 And knew here counseil, and was al here reed. 665  
 A garland had he set upon his heed,  
 As gret as it were for an alē-stake ;  
 A bokeler had he maad him of a cake.  
 With him ther rood a gentil PARDONER  
 Of Rouncival, his frend and his comper, 670  
 That streyt was comen from the court of Romē.

659-662. Chaucer himself does not look on excommunication as a joke, but considers that the spiritual injury inflicted by it is as real as the blessing conferred in absolution.

661. *Assoillyng*.—Fr. *assoiller*, L. *absolvere*, absolution.

662.—*Ware him*.—Warn him, bid him beware of. *Significavit*.—A writ "*De excommunicato capiendo*," which usually began "*Significavit nobis venerabilis frater*," etc.

663. *In daunger*.—In his jurisdiction, within control of his office. See l. 517.  
*At his owne gise*.—After his own fashion. *Guise* is the same as *wise* in *likewise*, *otherwise*.

665. *Al here reed*.—The adviser of them all. Cf. Ger. *rath*, *geheimrath*.

666, 667. *A garland*.—Probably of ivy. An ivy bush was affixed to the sign-board (the *ale-stake*) of taverns, for a picture of which see Hotten's *Book of Signboards*. The proverb "Good wine needs no bush" means, no sign to recommend or call attention to it.

668. A burlesque fancy in keeping with his roistering jovial character.

670. Tyrwhitt has this note: "I can hardly think that Chaucer meant to bring his pardoner from Roncevaux in Navarre, and yet I cannot find any place of that name in England. An hospital Beatæ Mariæ de Runcyvalle, in Charing, London, is mentioned in the *Monast.* tom. ii. p. 443; and there was a Runceval Hall in Oxford (Stevens, vol. ii. p. 262). So that it was perhaps the name of some fraternity."  
*His frend and his comper*.—A sly hit at the character of the pardoner.

Ful lowde he sang, Come hider, lovē, to me.  
 This sompnour bar to him a stif burdoun,  
 Was nevere trompe of half so gret a soun.  
 This pardoner hadde heer as yelwe as wax, 675  
 But smothe it heng, as doth a strike of flex ;  
 By unces hynghe his lokkēs that he haddē,  
 And therwith he his schuldres overspraddē  
 Ful thinne it lay, by culpons on and oon,  
 But hood, for jolitee, ne werede he noon, 680  
 For it was trussed up in his walēt.  
 Him thought he rood al of the newē get,  
 Dischevelē, sauf his cappe, he rood al bare.  
 Suche glaryng eygen hadde he as an hare.  
 A vernicle hadde he sowēd on his cappē. 685  
 A voys he hadde as smale as eny goot.

672. *Come hider*, etc.—Probably the burden of some song.

673. Sang to him or accompanied him in a deep bass. Fr. *bourdon*, the name of a deep organ-stop.

674. There was never a trumpet of so deep a sound as the sompnour's voice.

676. *Strike* or hank of flax, as if *stroked* or spread out.

677. *Unces*.—*Uncia*, in Latin, is the twelfth part of anything; an ounce = one twelfth of a pound, an inch one twelfth of a foot. Then *unce* in English, as *uncia* in Latin, was used for a small quantity. Here it means probably tufts.

679. *Culpons*.—Shreds, bundles. Fr. *coupon*, from *couper*, O. Fr. *colper*, to cut.

682. *Him thought*.—The old impers., retained only in *methinks*; the pronoun is in the dative, and the meaning is, it seemed to him, not he thought.  
*He rood*.—He rode.

*Al of the newe get*.—All in the newest fashion.

683. *Dischevele* = Fr. *dechevelé*, with the hair (*cheveux*, L. *capilla*) hanging loose. *Sauf his cappe*.—Saving or except his cap, for he wore no hood, as was explained in line 680.

685. *Vernicle*.—A veronicle or miniature copy of the likeness of our Lord on a relic known as St. Veronica's handkerchief, preserved in St. Peter's at Rome. The legend is that she was a holy woman who followed our Lord to Calvary wiping the sweat from his brow with a napkin, on which a picture of his features afterwards miraculously appeared. Facsimiles or copies of relics were sold or given to pilgrims, who kept them as evidences of the various shrines they had visited. See *Piers Plowman* (ed. Skeat), A. p. 67:—

No berd hadde he, ne never scholdē havē,  
As smothe it was as it were late i-schavē; 690

But trewely to tellen attē laste,  
He was in churchē a noble ecclesiaste.

Wel cowde he rede a lessoun or a storye,  
But altherbest he sang an offertorie; 710

For wel he wystē, whan that song was songē,  
He mostē preche, and wel affyle his tongē,  
To wynnē silver, as he right wel cowdē:  
Therefore he sang ful meriely and lowdē.

Now have I told you schortly in a clause 715  
Thestat, tharray, the nombre, and eek the cause

Why that assembled was this companye  
In Southwerk at this gentil ostelrie,

That highte the Tabbard, fastē by the Bellē.  
But now is tymē to yow for to tellē 720

How that we bare us in that ilkē night,  
Whan we were in that ostelrie alight;

And after wol I telle of oure viagē,  
And al the remenaunt of oure pilgrimagē.

But ferst I pray you of your curtesie, 725

"A bolle and a bagge he bar by his syde;  
An hundred of ampulles on his hat seten,  
Signes of Synay, and shelles of Galice,  
And many a crouche on his cloke, and Keyes of Rome,  
And the vernicle bifore, for men sholde knowe  
And se bi hise signes, whom he sought hadde."

709. *Storye*.—From the lives of the saints or such like legends.

712. *Affyle*.—File or polish. Fr. *affiler*.

713. *Wynne* = gain. *Cowde*.—Knew how to.

716. *Thestat, tharray*.—The estate, the array, i.e. the social position, and the dress, etc., of each.

719. *The Belle*.—Thomas Wright says that he can find no mention of such an inn in that place, though Stowe speaks of one near the Tabard with the sign of the Bull.

721. How we conducted ourselves in that same night. A.S. *ylc*, Scot. *ilk*,

722. *Were alight* = had alighted at. A.S. *alihtan*, to descend.

That ye ne rette it nat my vileinye,  
Though that I speke al pleyn in this matere,  
To tellē you here wordēs and here cheere;  
Ne though I speke here wordēs proprely. 730  
For this ye knowen al so wel as I,

Who so schal telle a tale after a man,  
He moot reheree, as neigh as evere he can,

Everych a word, if it be in his chargē,  
Al speke he nevere so rudelychē and largē;

Or ellēs he moot telle his tale untrewē,  
Or feynē thing, or fyndē wordēs newē. 735

He may not spare, although he were his brother;  
He moot as wel sey oo word as another.

Crist spake himself ful broode in holy writ,  
And wel ye woot no vileinye is it. 740

Eke Plato seith, who so that can him redē,  
The wordēs mot be cosyn to the dedē.

Also I pray you to forgeve it me,  
Al have I nat set folk in here degrē

736. *Ne rette*.—The Ellesm. MS. has "narrette;" *rette* or *arette* means to ascribe, deem, impute. Icel. *retta*, to set right (from *rettr* = right), in A.S. *aretan*. It has no connection with *arrest*, Fr. *arrêter* (from L. *restare*), which means to cause to stop, in O.E. *arresten*.

The sense of this line is, "that you do not ascribe it to my ill-breeding or coarseness"—*vileinye*, as we should say vulgarity.

738. *Here cheere*.—Their expression or behaviour.

734. *All*.—Here as in l. 744 = although. *Large*.—Same as *broode*, l. 739.

739. *Broode*.—We still speak of a "broad joke," meaning one rather coarse or vulgar.

741. Chaucer drew this saying of Plato from Boethius de Cons. Phil. lib. iiii. par. 12.

742. *Cosyn*.—Kindred, i.e. the words must correspond to the things described.

Chaucer's purpose in writing these tales being to depict the manners, morals, and character of every class in the middle grades of society, and at the same time to expose the vices and hold up to ridicule the impostures of the religious orders, he felt himself constrained to give a plain and unvarnished description without reticence or disguise, although he might by so doing unavoidably lay himself open to the charge of coarseness and even of obscenity.

Here in this tale, as that thei schuldē stondē; 745  
 My wit is schorte, *ye* may wel understandē.  
 Greet cheerē made oure host us everichon,  
 And to the souper sette he us anon;  
 And servede us with vitaille attē bestē.  
 Strong was the wyn, and wel to drynke us lestē. 750  
 A semely man our hoost he was withallē  
 For to han been a marschal in an hallē;  
 A largē man was he with eygen stepē,  
 A fairer burgeys was ther noon in Chepē:  
 Bold of his speche, and wys and well i-taught, 755  
 And of manhedē him lakkede right naught.  
 Eke therto he was right a mery man,  
 And after soper playen he bygan,  
 And spak of myrthe amongēs othre thingēs,  
 Whan that we haddē maad oure rekenyngēs; 760  
 And saydē thus; "Lo, lordynges, trewely  
 Ye ben to me right welcōme hertily:  
 For by my trouthe, if that I schal not lye,  
 I saugh *noȝt* this *yeer* so mery a companye  
 At oonēs in this herbergh as is now. 765  
 Fayn wold I don *yow* mirthē, wiste I how.  
 And of a mirthe I am right now bythought,  
 To doon *you* eese, and it schal costē nought.  
 Ye goon to Caunturbury; God *you* speedē,

744, 745. He has not concerned himself with questions of precedence, or at least has attempted only an approximate order.

750. *Wel us leste*.—It pleased (*lusted*) us well to, etc.

752. *Marschal in an halle*.—Steward in a college or hall. *Marshal* = Fr. *maréchal*, from L.L. *mariscalcus*, and that from O. Ger. *marah*, a horse, and *scal* (Mod. Ger. *schalk*), an attendant, is one of those titles which have undergone the most diverse changes of meaning.

754. The wealthiest burgesses or citizens of London lived in Cheapside.

761. *Lordynges*.—A dim. of *lords*. Not an uncommon term of civility, when we should now say gentlemen.

765. *Herbergh*.—Inn. See line 403, and note.

766. *Fayn*.—Gladly. A.S. *fægan*, O.E. *fawen*, to be glad.

*Don yow mirthe*.—Entertain you. *Don*, inf. of *do* = *do-en*.

The blisful martir quyte *you* *youre* meede! 770  
 And wel I woot, as *ye* gon by the weyē,  
 Ye schapen *yow* to talen and to pleyē;  
 For trewely comfort ne merthe is noon,  
 To rydē by the weye domb as a stoon;  
 And therefore wol I maken *you* disport, 775  
 As I seyde erst, and do *you* som confort.  
 And if *yow* liketh alle by oon assent  
 Now for to standen at my juggēment;  
 And for to werken as I schal *you* seyē,  
 To morwē, whan *ye* riden by the weyē, 780  
 Now by my fader soulē that is deed,  
 But *ye* be merye, I wol *yeve* myn heed.  
 Hold up *youre* hond withoutē morē spechē."  
 Oure counseil was not longē for to sechē;  
 Us thoughte it nas nat worth to make it wys, 785  
 And graunted him withoutē more avys,  
 And bad him seie his verdite, as him lestē.

770. *Quyte you youre meede* = give you your reward. *Blisful martir*, see line 17. *Med. mede*, or *meede* = reward, is akin to Ger. *mieth*, and is seen in *midwife*, a woman paid (for a certain duty). *Quyte*, in *requite* and *acquit*, and in the expression "to get or be *quit* of," is the L. *quietus*, quiet, at rest, thence free of (all claims).

771. *Ye gon*.—You go, pres. plural.

772. *Ye schapen yow*.—You will purpose or prepare yourselves. A.S. *scapan*, to create or form. *Gesceap*, creation. Cf. Ger. *schöpfung*, creation. *To talen* = to tell tales.

782. *But* = unless, if you be not.

*Heed* = head = my sense or advice, not caution, as in the phrase "to give or take heed," although that may be originally from the same word. Cf. *heed* in this line with *hond* in the next.

782. *I wol yeve*.—Harl. MS. only reads *smyteth of*.

783. *Hond*, so Harl. Ellesmere, and Corpus; all others read *hondes*.

784. *Seche* = seek. Ger. *suchen*.

785. *To make it wys* = to make it a matter of wisdom or serious deliberation.

786. *Graunted*.—Assented or yielded.

*Avys* = advice, consideration. O.Fr. *avis*, It. *avviso*, from L. *ad*, to, and *video*, *visum*, to see.

787. *Verdite*.—Verdict, opinion. L. *verum dictum*.



“Lordynges,” quoth he, “now herkneth for the bestē;  
 But taketh it not, I pray you, in disdayn;  
 This is the poynt, to speken schort and playn, 790  
 That ech of you to schortē with oure weīð,  
 In this viage, schal tellē talēs tweyð,  
 To Caunturburi-ward, I mene it so.  
 And hom-ward he schal tellen other tuo,  
 Of aventūres that whilom han bifallē. 795  
 And which of you that bereth him best of allē,  
 That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas  
 Tales of best sentence and of most solas,  
 Schal han a soper at oure alther cost  
 Here in this placē sittynge by this post, 800  
 Whan that we comen ageyn from Canturbury.  
 And for to maken you the morē mery,  
 I wol myselven gladly with you rydē,  
 Right at myn owēn cost, and be youre gydē.  
 And who so wole my juggēment withseið 805  
 Schal paye for al we spenden by the weyð.  
 And if ye vouchēsauf that it be so,  
 Telle me anoon, withouten wordēs moo,  
 And I wole erely schapē me therefore.”

788, 789. *Herkneth, taketh*.—Second pers. plu.

791. *To schorte* = shorten.

795. *Whilom*.—A.S. *hwitum*, from A.S. *hwile* = time. The *um* or *om* is an adverbial termination or old case-ending, seen in seldom, and O.E. *ferrum*, from *afar*. *Whilom* means, therefore, “once on a time.”

798. *Sentence*.—L. *sententia*, judgment, good sense.

799. *Oure alther cost* = at the cost of us all. *Oure* and *alther* are genitives plur.

805. *Withseið*.—The prefix is not our prep. *with*, but *with* (of which *with*er was a comparative form), the A.S. prefix meaning *against*, as in *withstand*, *withdraw*. Cf. *gainsay*.

807. *Vouchesauf*.—Vouchsafe, grant. O.Fr. *voucher* is not simply to vouch for or attest, but rather to cite a matter in a lawsuit, to call to one's aid. *Vouchsafe* too meant originally to promise or grant secure possession, and was written as two words. “The king *vouches* it *safe*” (Rob. Brunne).

This thing was graunted, and oure othes swore 810  
 With ful glad herte, and prayden him also  
 That he wolde vouchēsauf for to doon so,  
 And that he woldē ben oure governour,  
 And of oure talēs jugge and reportour,  
 And sette a souper at a certeyn prys; 815  
 And we wolde rewlēd be at his devys,  
 In heygh and lowe; and thus by oon assent  
 We been accorded to his juggēment.  
 And therupon the wyn was fet anoon;  
 We dronken, and to restē wente echoon, 820  
 Withouten eny lengere taryngē.  
 A morwē whan the day bigan to spryngē,  
 Up roos oure host, and was our alther cok,  
 And gadered us togidre alle in a flok,  
 And forth we riden a litel more than paas, 825  
 Unto the waterynge of seint Thomas:  
 And there oure host bigan his hors arestē,  
 And seyde; “Lordes, herkneth if you lestē.  
 Ye woot youre forward, and I it you recordē.  
 If even-song and morwē-song acordē, 830  
 Lat se now who schal tellē ferst a tale.

810. *Oure othes swore*.—We swore our oaths.

816. *Devys*.—Decision, direction.

817. *In heygh and lowe*.—Law Latin *in* or *de alto et basso*, Fr. *de haut en bas*, were expressions of entire submission on one side and sovereignty on the other.

819. *Fet* = fetched. A.S. *fettan*.

820. *Echoon*.—Each one.

822. *A morwē*.—On the morrow, the 18th of April.

823. *Oure alther cok*.—Cook for us all. See note on line 799.

825. At little more than a foot or walking pace.

826. The watering of St. Thomas was at the second milestone on the old Canterbury road. It is frequently mentioned by the early dramatists.

827. *Areste*.—To pull up, bring to rest.

829. *Ye woot youre forward*.—You know your promise. *Forward* = A.S. *foreweard*, a covenant or agreement made beforehand.

831. *Lat se*.—Let us see.

As evere I moote drinkē wyn or ale,  
 Who so be rebel to my juggement  
 Schal paye for al that by the weye is spent.  
 Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynnē; 835  
 He which that hath the schortest schal bygynnē."  
 "Sire knight," quoth he, "my maister and my lord,  
 Now draweth cut, for that is myn acord.  
 Cometh ner," quoth he, "my lady prioressē;  
 And ye, sir clerk, lat be your schamfastnessē, 840  
 Ne studieth nat; ley hand to, every man."  
 Anon to drawen every wight bigan,  
 And schortly for to tellen as it was,  
 Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,  
 The soth is this, the cut fil to the knight, 845  
 Of which ful glad and blithe was every wight;  
 And telle he moste his tale as was resoun,  
 By forward and by composicioun,  
 As ye han herd; what needeth wordēs moo?  
 And whan this goodē man seigh that it was so, 850

835. *Draweth cut*.—Draw lots; second pers. plur. Froissart says "*tirer a longue paille*," lots drawn by pulling the longest straw from a stack; so cuts mean the broken lengths of the straws.

835. *Ferrer*, so Ellesmere and Heng., others read *ferther*.  
*Twynne*.—To depart, literally to part in twain.

840. *Sir* was a common appellation of clergy, at least of the secular, who were not Father or Brother.

Let be your modesty or shyness. *Shamefast*, modest, is like *steadfast*, and has been erroneously spelled *shamefacedness* in 1 Tim. ii. 9.

842. *Wight*.—See on line 71.

844. *Aventure, or sort, or cas*.—*Sort* (L. *sors*), *cas* (L. *casus*), are almost synonymous words, as luck and chance.

845. *Soth*.—The truth. Cf. *soothsayer*.

847. He must, as was reasonable.

848. *Forward*.—See line 829.

*Composicioun*.—Agreement or arrangement. This sense is still retained in speaking of bankruptcy: *compounding* or effecting a *composition* with one's creditors.

850. *Seigh* = saw. The final *w* (as in *saw*) often points to a guttural either in A.S. or allied Teutonic languages.

As he that wys was and obedient  
 To kepe his forward by his fre assent,  
 He seyde; "Syn I schal bygynne the game,  
 What, welcome be thou cut, a Goddes name!  
 Now lat us ryde, and herkneþ what I seyð." 855  
 And with that word we riden forth oure weyð;  
 And he bigan with right a merie chere  
 His tale anon, and seide in this manere.

853. *Syn*.—Since.

*Schal* bears here its original meaning of moral compulsion or duty, as in German, where also *schuld* is a debt or obligation.

854. *A Goddes name*.—In God's name.