

---

*The Canterbury Tales and  
Other Poems  
Part 4: The Reeve's Tale*

---



by Geoffrey Chaucer

Styled by [LimpidSoft](#)

# Contents

<b>THE PROLOGUE</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>NOTES TO THE PROLOGUE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE TALE</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NOTES TO THE TALE</b>	<b>22</b>

The present document was derived from text provided by Project Gutenberg (document 2383) which was made available free of charge. This document is also free of charge.

## THE PROLOGUE

*When* folk had laughed all at this nice case  
Of Absolon and Hendy Nicholas,  
Diverse folk diversely they said,  
But for the more part they laugh'd and play'd<sup>1</sup>;  
And at this tale I saw no man him grieve,  
But it were only Osewold the Reeve.  
Because he was of carpenteres craft,  
A little ire is in his hearte laft<sup>2</sup>;  
He gan to grudge<sup>3</sup> and blamed it a lite<sup>4</sup>.  
"So the<sup>5</sup> I," quoth he, "full well could I him quite<sup>6</sup>  
With blearing<sup>7</sup> of a proude miller's eye, (*Note 1*)  
If that me list to speak of ribaldry.  
But I am old; me list not play for age; (*Note 2*)  
Grass time is done, my fodder is now forage.  
This white top<sup>8</sup> writeth mine olde years;  
Mine heart is also moulded<sup>9</sup> as mine hairs;

---

<sup>1</sup>were diverted.

<sup>2</sup>left.

<sup>3</sup>murmur.

<sup>4</sup>little.

<sup>5</sup>thrive.

<sup>6</sup>match.

<sup>7</sup>dimming.

<sup>8</sup>head.

<sup>9</sup>grown mouldy.

And I do fare as doth an open-erse<sup>10</sup>; (*Note 3*)  
 That ilke<sup>11</sup> fruit is ever longer werse,  
 Till it be rotten in mullok or in stre<sup>12</sup>.  
 We olde men, I dread, so fare we;  
 Till we be rotten, can we not be ripe;  
 We hop<sup>13</sup> away, while that the world will pipe;  
 For in our will there sticketh aye a nail,  
 To have an hoary head and a green tail,  
 As hath a leek; for though our might be gone,  
 Our will desireth folly ever-in-one<sup>14</sup>:  
 For when we may not do, then will we speak,  
 Yet in our ashes cold does fire reek<sup>15</sup>. (*Note 4*)  
 Four gledes<sup>16</sup> have we, which I shall devise<sup>17</sup>,  
 Vaunting, and lying, anger, covetise<sup>18</sup>.  
 These foure sparks belongen unto eld.  
 Our olde limbes well may be unweld<sup>19</sup>,  
 But will shall never fail us, that is sooth.  
 And yet have I alway a coltes tooth, (*Note 5*)  
 As many a year as it is passed and gone  
 Since that my tap of life began to run;  
 For sickerly<sup>20</sup>, when I was born, anon  
 Death drew the tap of life, and let it gon:  
 And ever since hath so the tap y-run,  
 Till that almost all empty is the tun.  
 The stream of life now droppeth on the chimb.

---

<sup>10</sup>medlar.

<sup>11</sup>same.

<sup>12</sup>on the ground or in straw.

<sup>13</sup>dance.

<sup>14</sup>continually.

<sup>15</sup>smoke.

<sup>16</sup>coals.

<sup>17</sup>describe.

<sup>18</sup>covetousness.

<sup>19</sup>unwieldy.

<sup>20</sup>certainly.

(*Note 6*)

The silly tongue well may ring and chime  
Of wretchedness, that passed is full yore<sup>21</sup>:  
With olde folk, save dotage, is no more. (*Note 7*)

When that our Host had heard this sermoning,  
He gan to speak as lordly as a king,  
And said; "To what amounteth all this wit?  
What? shall we speak all day of holy writ?  
The devil made a Reeve for to preach,  
As of a souter<sup>22</sup> a shipman, or a leach<sup>23</sup>. (*Note 8*)  
Say forth thy tale, and tarry not the time: (*Note 9*)  
Lo here is Deptford, and 'tis half past prime: (*Note*  
10)

Lo Greenwich, where many a shrew is in.  
It were high time thy tale to begin."

"Now, sirs," quoth then this Osewold the Reeve,  
I pray you all that none of you do grieve,  
Though I answer, and somewhat set his hove<sup>24</sup>,  
(*Note 11*)

For lawful is force off with force to shove<sup>25</sup>.  
This drunken miller hath y-told us here  
How that beguiled was a carpentere,  
Paraventure<sup>26</sup> in scorn, for I am one:  
And, by your leave, I shall him quite anon.  
Right in his churlish termes will I speak,  
I pray to God his necke might to-break.  
He can well in mine eye see a stalk,  
But in his own he cannot see a balk." (*Note 12*)

---

<sup>21</sup>long.

<sup>22</sup>cobbler.

<sup>23</sup>surgeon.

<sup>24</sup>hood.

<sup>25</sup>to repel force by force.

<sup>26</sup>perhqps.

## NOTES TO THE PROLOGUE

1. "With blearing of a proude miller's eye": dimming his eye; playing off a joke on him.
2. "Me list not play for age": age takes away my zest for drollery.
3. The medlar, the fruit of the mespilus tree, is only edible when rotten.
4. Yet in our ashes cold does fire reek: "ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires."
5. A colt's tooth; a wanton humour, a relish for pleasure.
6. Chimb: The rim of a barrel where the staves project beyond the head.
7. With olde folk, save dotage, is no more: Dotage is all that is left them; that is, they can only dwell fondly, dote, on the past.
8. Souter: cobbler; Scottice, "sutor;" from Latin, "suere," to sew.
9. "Ex sutore medicus" (a surgeon from a cobbler) and "ex sutore nauclerus" (a seaman or pilot from a cobbler) were both proverbial expressions in the Middle Ages.
10. Half past prime: half-way between prime and tierce; about half-past seven in the morning.

11. Set his hove; like "set their caps;" as in the description of the Manciple in the Prologue, who "set their aller cap". "Hove" or "houfe," means "hood;" and the phrase signifies to be even with, outwit.

12. The illustration of the mote and the beam, from Matthew.



# THE TALE

(Note 1)

At Trompington, not far from Cantebrig<sup>27</sup>,  
There goes a brook, and over that a brig,  
Upon the whiche brook there stands a mill:  
And this is very sooth<sup>28</sup> that I you tell.  
A miller was there dwelling many a day,  
As any peacock he was proud and gay:  
Pipen he could, and fish, and nettes bete<sup>29</sup>,  
And turne cups, and wrestle well, and shete<sup>30</sup>.  
Aye by his belt he bare a long pavade<sup>31</sup>.  
And of his sword full trenchant was the blade.  
A jolly popper<sup>32</sup> bare he in his pouch;  
There was no man for peril durst him touch.  
A Sheffield whittle<sup>33</sup> bare he in his hose.  
Round was his face, and camuse<sup>34</sup> was his nose.

(Note 2)

---

<sup>27</sup>Cambridge.

<sup>28</sup>complete truth.

<sup>29</sup>prepare.

<sup>30</sup>shoot.

<sup>31</sup>poniard.

<sup>32</sup>dagger.

<sup>33</sup>small knife.

<sup>34</sup>flat.

As pilled<sup>35</sup> as an ape's was his skull.  
He was a market-beter<sup>36</sup> at the full.  
There durste no wight hand upon him legge<sup>37</sup>,  
That he ne swore anon he should abegge<sup>38</sup>.  
A thief he was, for sooth, of corn and meal,  
And that a sly, and used well to steal.  
His name was hoten deinous Simekin<sup>39</sup>  
A wife he hadde, come of noble kin:  
The parson of the town her father was.  
With her he gave full many a pan of brass,  
For that Simkin should in his blood ally.  
She was y-foster'd in a nunnery:  
For Simkin woulde no wife, as he said,  
But she were well y-nourish'd, and a maid,  
To saven his estate and yeomanry:  
And she was proud, and pert as is a pie<sup>40</sup>.  
A full fair sight it was to see them two;  
On holy days before her would he go  
With his tippet<sup>41</sup> y-bound about his head;  
And she came after in a gite<sup>42</sup> of red, (*Note 3*)  
And Simkin hadde hosen of the same.  
There durste no wight call her aught but Dame:  
None was so hardy, walking by that way,  
That with her either durste rage or play<sup>43</sup>,  
But if<sup>44</sup> he would be slain by Simekin  
With pavade, or with knife, or bodekin.

---

<sup>35</sup>peeled, bald.

<sup>36</sup>brawler.

<sup>37</sup>lay.

<sup>38</sup>suffer the penalty.

<sup>39</sup>called "Disdainful Simkin".

<sup>40</sup>maggie.

<sup>41</sup>hood.

<sup>42</sup>gown.

<sup>43</sup>use freedom.

<sup>44</sup>unless.

For jealous folk be per'lous evermo':  
Algate<sup>45</sup> they would their wives wende so<sup>46</sup>  
And eke for she was somewhat smutterlich<sup>47</sup>,  
She was as dign<sup>48</sup> as water in a ditch,  
And all so full of hoker<sup>49</sup>, and bismare<sup>50</sup>.  
Her thoughte that a lady should her spare<sup>51</sup>,  
What for her kindred, and her nortelrie<sup>52</sup>  
That she had learned in the nunnery.

One daughter hadde they betwixt them two  
Of twenty year, withouten any mo,  
Saving a child that was of half year age,  
In cradle it lay, and was a proper page<sup>53</sup>.  
This wenche thick and well y-grown was,  
With camuse<sup>54</sup> nose, and eyen gray as glass;  
With buttocks broad, and breastes round and high;  
But right fair was her hair, I will not lie.  
The parson of the town, for she was fair,  
In purpose was to make of her his heir  
Both of his chattels and his messuage,  
And strange he made it<sup>55</sup> of her marriage.  
His purpose was for to bestow her high  
Into some worthy blood of ancestry.  
For holy Church's good may be dispended<sup>56</sup>  
On holy Church's blood that is descended.

---

<sup>45</sup>unless.

<sup>46</sup>so behave.

<sup>47</sup>dirty.

<sup>48</sup>nasty.

<sup>49</sup>ill-nature.

<sup>50</sup>abusive speech.

<sup>51</sup>not judge her hardly.

<sup>52</sup>nurturing, education.

<sup>53</sup>boy.

<sup>54</sup>flat.

<sup>55</sup>he made it a matter of difficulty.

<sup>56</sup>spent.

Therefore he would his holy blood honour  
Though that he holy Churche should devour.

Great soken<sup>57</sup> hath this miller, out of doubt,  
With wheat and malt, of all the land about;  
And namely<sup>58</sup> there was a great college  
Men call the Soler Hall at Cantebreg, (*Note 4*)  
There was their wheat and eke their malt y-  
ground.

And on a day it happed in a stound<sup>59</sup>,  
Sick lay the manciple<sup>60</sup> of a malady, (*Note 5*)  
Men weened wisly<sup>61</sup> that he shoulde die.  
For which this miller stole both meal and corn  
An hundred times more than befor.  
For theretofore he stole but courteously,  
But now he was a thief outrageously.  
For which the warden chid and made fare<sup>62</sup>,  
But thereof set the miller not a tare<sup>63</sup>;  
He crack'd his boast<sup>64</sup>, and swore it was not so.

Then were there younge poore scholars two,  
That dwelled in the hall of which I say;  
Testif<sup>65</sup> they were, and lusty for to play; (*Note 6*)  
And only for their mirth and revelry  
Upon the warden busily they cry,  
To give them leave for but a little stound<sup>66</sup>  
To go to mill, and see their corn y-ground:

---

<sup>57</sup>toll taken for grinding.

<sup>58</sup>especially.

<sup>59</sup>suddenly.

<sup>60</sup>steward.

<sup>61</sup>thought certainly.

<sup>62</sup>fuss.

<sup>63</sup>he cared not a rush.

<sup>64</sup>talked big.

<sup>65</sup>headstrong .

<sup>66</sup>short time.

And hardily<sup>67</sup> they durste lay their neck,  
The miller should not steal them half a peck  
Of corn by sleight, nor them by force bereave<sup>68</sup>  
And at the last the warden give them leave:  
John hight the one, and Alein hight the other,  
Of one town were they born, that highte Strother,  
(*Note 7*)

Far in the North, I cannot tell you where.  
This Alein he made ready all his gear,  
And on a horse the sack he cast anon:  
Forth went Alein the clerk, and also John,  
With good sword and with buckler by their side.  
John knew the way, him needed not no guide,  
And at the mill the sack adown he lay'th.

Alein spake first; "All hail, Simon, in faith,  
How fares thy faire daughter, and thy wife."  
"Alein, welcome," quoth Simkin, "by my life,  
And John also: how now, what do ye here?"  
"By God, Simon," quoth John, "need has no peer<sup>69</sup>  
Him serve himself behoves that has no swain<sup>70</sup>,  
Or else he is a fool, as clerkes sayn.  
Our manciple I hope<sup>71</sup> he will be dead,  
So workes aye the wanges<sup>72</sup> in his head: (*Note 8*)  
And therefore is I come, and eke Alein,  
To grind our corn and carry it home again:  
I pray you speed us hence as well ye may."  
"It shall be done," quoth Simkin, "by my fay.  
What will ye do while that it is in hand?"  
"By God, right by the hopper will I stand,"

---

<sup>67</sup>boldly.

<sup>68</sup>take away.

<sup>69</sup>equal.

<sup>70</sup>servant.

<sup>71</sup>expect.

<sup>72</sup>cheek-teeth.

Quoth John, "and see how that the corn goes in.  
Yet saw I never, by my father's kin,  
How that the hopper waggess to and fro."  
Alein answered, "John, and wilt thou so?  
Then will I be beneath, by my crown,  
And see how that the meale falls adown  
Into the trough, that shall be my disport<sup>73</sup>:  
For, John, in faith I may be of your sort;  
I is as ill a miller as is ye."

This miller smiled at their nicety<sup>74</sup>,  
And thought, "All this is done but for a wile.  
They weenen<sup>75</sup> that no man may them beguile,  
But by my thrift yet shall I blear their eye, (Note 9)  
For all the sleight in their philosophy.  
The more quaint knackes<sup>76</sup> that they make,  
The more will I steal when that I take.  
Instead of flour yet will I give them bren<sup>77</sup>,  
The greatest clerkes are not the wisest men,  
As whilom to the wolf thus spake the mare: (Note  
10)  
Of all their art ne count I not a tare."  
Out at the door he went full privily,  
When that he saw his time, softly.  
He looked up and down, until he found  
The clerkes' horse, there as he stood y-bound  
Behind the mill, under a lewesell<sup>78</sup>: (Note 11)  
And to the horse he went him fair and well,  
And stripped off the bridle right anon.  
And when the horse was loose, he gan to gon  
Toward the fen, where wilde mares run,

---

<sup>73</sup>amusement.

<sup>74</sup>simplicity.

<sup>75</sup>think.

<sup>76</sup>odd little tricks.

<sup>77</sup>bran.

<sup>78</sup>arbour.

Forth, with "Wehee!" through thick and eke  
through thin.

This miller went again, no word he said,  
But did his note<sup>79</sup>, and with these clerkes play'd,  
(*Note 12*)

Till that their corn was fair and well y-ground.  
And when the meal was sacked and y-bound,  
Then John went out, and found his horse away,  
And gan to cry, "Harow, and well-away!  
Our horse is lost: Alein, for Godde's bones,  
Step on thy feet; come off, man, all at once:

Alas! our warden has his palfrey lorn<sup>80</sup>.  
This Alein all forgot, both meal and corn;  
All was out of his mind his husbandry<sup>81</sup>.

"What, which way is he gone?" he gan to cry.

The wife came leaping inward at a renne<sup>82</sup>,  
She said; "Alas! your horse went to the fen  
With wilde mares, as fast as he could go.

Unthank<sup>83</sup> come on his hand that bound him so  
And his that better should have knit the rein."

"Alas!" quoth John, "Alein, for Christes pain  
Lay down thy sword, and I shall mine also.

I is full wight<sup>84</sup>, God wate<sup>85</sup>, as is a roe.

By Godde's soul he shall not scape us bathe<sup>86</sup>.  
(*Note 13*)

Why n' had thou put the capel<sup>87</sup> in the lathe<sup>88</sup>?

---

<sup>79</sup>business.

<sup>80</sup>lost.

<sup>81</sup>careful watch over the corn.

<sup>82</sup>run.

<sup>83</sup>ill luck, a curse.

<sup>84</sup>swift.

<sup>85</sup>knows.

<sup>86</sup>both.

<sup>87</sup>horse.

<sup>88</sup>barn.

Ill hail, Alein, by God thou is a fonne<sup>89</sup>."  
These silly clerkes have full fast y-run  
Toward the fen, both Alein and eke John;  
And when the miller saw that they were gone,  
He half a bushel of their flour did take,  
And bade his wife go knead it in a cake.  
He said; I trow, the clerkes were afeard,  
Yet can a miller make a clerkes beard<sup>90</sup>, (Note 15)  
For all his art: yea, let them go their way!  
Lo where they go! yea, let the children play:  
They get him not so lightly, by my crown."  
These silly clerkes runnen up and down  
With "Keep, keep; stand, stand; jossa<sup>91</sup>, warderere.  
Go whistle thou, and I shall keep<sup>92</sup> him here."  
But shortly, till that it was very night  
They coulde not, though they did all their might,  
Their capel catch, he ran alway so fast:  
Till in a ditch they caught him at the last.

Weary and wet, as beastes in the rain,  
Comes silly John, and with him comes Alein.  
"Alas," quoth John, "the day that I was born!  
Now are we driv'n till hething<sup>93</sup> and till scorn.  
Our corn is stol'n, men will us fonne<sup>94</sup>  
Both the warden, and eke our fellows all,  
And namely<sup>95</sup> the miller, well-away!"  
Thus plained John, as he went by the way  
Toward the mill, and Bayard<sup>96</sup> in his hand.

---

<sup>89</sup>fool.

<sup>90</sup>cheat a scholar.

<sup>91</sup>turn.

<sup>92</sup>catch.

<sup>93</sup>mockery.

<sup>94</sup>fools.

<sup>95</sup>especially.

<sup>96</sup>the bay horse.



The miller sitting by the fire he fand<sup>97</sup>.  
 For it was night, and forther<sup>98</sup> might they not,  
 But for the love of God they him besought  
 Of herberow<sup>99</sup> and ease, for their penny.  
 The miller said again, " If there be any,  
 Such as it is, yet shall ye have your part.  
 Mine house is strait, but ye have learned art;  
 Ye can by arguments maken a place  
 A mile broad, of twenty foot of space.  
 Let see now if this place may suffice,  
 Or make it room with speech, as is your guise<sup>100</sup>."  
 "Now, Simon," said this John, "by Saint Cuthberd  
 Aye is thou merry, and that is fair answer'd.  
 I have heard say, man shall take of two things,  
 Such as he findes, or such as he brings.  
 But specially I pray thee, hoste dear,  
 Gar (*Note 16*) us have meat and drink, and make us  
     cheer,  
 And we shall pay thee truly at the full:  
 With empty hand men may not hawkes tull<sup>101</sup>.  
 Lo here our silver ready for to spend."  
 This miller to the town his daughter send  
 For ale and bread, and roasted them a goose,  
 And bound their horse, he should no more go  
     loose:  
 And them in his own chamber made a bed.  
 With sheetes and with chalons<sup>102</sup> fair y-spread,  
     (*Note 17*)  
 Not from his owen bed ten foot or twelve:  
 His daughter had a bed all by herselfe,

---

<sup>97</sup>found.

<sup>98</sup>go their way.

<sup>99</sup>lodging.

<sup>100</sup>fashion.

<sup>101</sup>allure.

<sup>102</sup>blankets.

Right in the same chamber by and by<sup>103</sup>:  
It might no better be, and cause why,  
There was no roomer herberow<sup>104</sup> in the place.  
They suppen, and they speaken of solace,  
And drinken ever strong ale at the best.  
Aboute midnight went they all to rest.  
Well had this miller varnished his head;  
Full pale he was, fordrunken, and nought red<sup>105</sup>.  
He yoxed<sup>106</sup>, and he spake thorough the nose,  
As he were in the quakke<sup>107</sup>, or in the pose<sup>108</sup>.  
To bed he went, and with him went his wife,  
As any jay she light was and jolife<sup>109</sup>,  
So was her jolly whistle well y-wet.  
The cradle at her beddes feet was set,  
To rock, and eke to give the child to suck.  
And when that drunken was all in the crock<sup>110</sup>  
(*Note 18*)  
To bedde went the daughter right anon,  
To bedde went Alein, and also John.  
There was no more; needed them no dwale. (*Note*  
*19*)  
This miller had, so wisly<sup>111</sup> bibbed ale,  
That as a horse he snorted in his sleep,  
Nor of his tail behind he took no keep<sup>112</sup>.  
His wife bare him a burdoun<sup>113</sup>, a full strong; (*Note*  
*20*)

---

<sup>103</sup>side by side.

<sup>104</sup>roomier lodging.

<sup>105</sup>without his wits.

<sup>106</sup>hiccuped.

<sup>107</sup>grunting.

<sup>108</sup>catarrh.

<sup>109</sup>jolly.

<sup>110</sup>pitcher.

<sup>111</sup>certainly.

<sup>112</sup>heed.

<sup>113</sup>bass.

Men might their routing<sup>114</sup> hearken a furlong.  
 The wenche routed eke for company.  
 Alein the clerk, that heard this melody,  
 He poked John, and saide: "Sleepest thou?  
 Heardest thou ever such a song ere now?  
 Lo what a compline (*Note 21*) is y-mell<sup>115</sup> them all.  
 A wilde fire upon their bodies fall,  
 Who hearken'd ever such a ferly<sup>116</sup> thing? (*Note*  
 22)  
 Yea, they shall have the flow'r of ill ending!  
 This longe night there tides me<sup>117</sup> no rest.  
 But yet no force<sup>118</sup>, all shall be for the best.  
 For, John," said he, "as ever may I thrive,  
 If that I may, yon wenche will I swive<sup>119</sup>.  
 Some easement<sup>120</sup> has law y-shapen<sup>121</sup> us  
 For, John, there is a law that sayeth thus,  
 That if a man in one point be aggriev'd,  
 That in another he shall be reliev'd.  
 Our corn is stol'n, soothly it is no nay,  
 And we have had an evil fit to-day.  
 And since I shall have none amendement  
 Against my loss, I will have easement:  
 By Godde's soul, it shall none, other be."  
 This John answer'd; Alein, advise thee<sup>122</sup>:  
 The miller is a perilous man," he said,  
 "And if that he out of his sleep abraid<sup>123</sup>,

---

<sup>114</sup>snoring.

<sup>115</sup>among.

<sup>116</sup>strange.

<sup>117</sup>comes to me.

<sup>118</sup>matter.

<sup>119</sup>enjoy carnally.

<sup>120</sup>satisfaction.

<sup>121</sup>provided.

<sup>122</sup>have a care.

<sup>123</sup>awaked.

He mighte do us both a villainy<sup>124</sup>.  
 Alein answer'd; "I count him not a fly.  
 And up he rose, and by the wench he crept.  
 This wenche lay upright, and fast she slept,  
 Till he so nigh was, ere she might espy,  
 That it had been too late for to cry:  
 And, shortly for to say, they were at one.  
 Now play, Alein, for I will speak of John.  
 This John lay still a furlong way (*Note 23*) or two,  
 And to himself he made ruth<sup>125</sup> and woe.  
 "Alas!" quoth he, "this is a wicked jape<sup>126</sup>;  
 Now may I say, that I is but an ape.  
 Yet has my fellow somewhat for his harm;  
 He has the miller's daughter in his arm:  
 He auntred<sup>127</sup> him, and hath his needes sped,  
 And I lie as a draff-sack in my bed;  
 And when this jape is told another day,  
 I shall be held a daffe<sup>128</sup> or a cockenay (*Note 24*)  
 I will arise, and auntre<sup>129</sup> it, by my fay:  
 Unhardy is unsely, (*Note 25*) as men say."  
 And up he rose, and softely he went  
 Unto the cradle, and in his hand it hent<sup>130</sup>,  
 And bare it soft unto his beddes feet.  
 Soon after this the wife her routing lete<sup>131</sup>,  
 And gan awake, and went her out to piss  
 And came again and gan the cradle miss  
 And groped here and there, but she found none.  
 "Alas!" quoth she, "I had almost misgone

---

<sup>124</sup>mischief.

<sup>125</sup>wail.

<sup>126</sup>trick.

<sup>127</sup>adventured.

<sup>128</sup>coward.

<sup>129</sup>attempt.

<sup>130</sup>took.

<sup>131</sup>stopped snoring.

I had almost gone to the clerkes' bed.  
 Ey! Benedicite, then had I foul y-sped."  
 And forth she went, till she the cradle fand.  
 She groped alway farther with her hand  
 And found the bed, and thoughte not but good<sup>132</sup>  
 Because that the cradle by it stood,  
 And wist not where she was, for it was derk;  
 But fair and well she crept in by the clerk,  
 And lay full still, and would have caught a sleep.  
 Within a while this John the Clerk up leap  
 And on this goode wife laid on full sore;  
 So merry a fit had she not had full yore<sup>133</sup>  
 He pricked hard and deep, as he were mad.

This jolly life have these two clerkes had,  
 Till that the thirde cock began to sing.  
 Alein wax'd weary in the morrowing,  
 For he had swonken<sup>134</sup> all the longe night,  
 And saide; "Farewell, Malkin, my sweet wight.  
 The day is come, I may no longer bide,  
 But evermore, where so I go or ride,  
 I is thine owen clerk, so have I hele<sup>135</sup>."  
 "Now, deare leman<sup>136</sup>," quoth she, "go, fare wele:  
 But ere thou go, one thing I will thee tell.  
 When that thou wendest homeward by the mill,  
 Right at the entry of the door behind  
 Thou shalt a cake of half a bushel find,  
 That was y-maked of thine owen meal,  
 Which that I help'd my father for to steal.  
 And goode leman, God thee save and keep."  
 And with that word she gan almost to weep.

---

<sup>132</sup>had no suspicion.

<sup>133</sup>for a long time.

<sup>134</sup>laboured.

<sup>135</sup>health.

<sup>136</sup>sweetheart.

Alein uprose and thought, "Ere the day daw  
 I will go creepen in by my fellow:"  
 And found the cradle with his hand anon.  
 "By God!" thought he, "all wrong I have misgone:  
 My head is totty of my swink<sup>137</sup> to-night,  
 That maketh me that I go not aright.  
 I wot well by the cradle I have misgo';  
 Here lie the miller and his wife also."  
 And forth he went a twenty devil way  
 Unto the bed, there as the miller lay.  
 He ween'd<sup>138</sup> t' have creeped by his fellow John,  
 And by the miller in he crept anon,  
 And caught him by the neck, and gan him shake,  
 And said; "Thou John, thou swines-head, awake  
 For Christes soul, and hear a noble game!  
 For by that lord that called is Saint Jame,  
 As I have thries in this shorte night  
 Swived the miller's daughter bolt-upright,  
 While thou hast as a coward lain aghast<sup>139</sup>."  
 "Thou false harlot," quoth the miller, "hast?  
 Ah, false traitor, false clerk," quoth he,  
 "Thou shalt be dead, by Godde's dignity,  
 Who durste be so bold to disparage<sup>140</sup>  
 My daughter, that is come of such lineage?"  
 And by the throate-ball<sup>141</sup> he caught Alein,  
 And he him hent<sup>142</sup> dispiteously<sup>143</sup> again,  
 And on the nose he smote him with his fist;  
 Down ran the bloody stream upon his breast:  
 And in the floor with nose and mouth all broke

---

<sup>137</sup>giddy from my labour.

<sup>138</sup>thought.

<sup>139</sup>afraid.

<sup>140</sup>disgrace.

<sup>141</sup>Adam's apple.

<sup>142</sup>seized.

<sup>143</sup>angrily.

They wallow, as do two pigs in a poke.  
 And up they go, and down again anon,  
 Till that the miller spurned<sup>144</sup> on a stone,  
 And down he backward fell upon his wife,  
 That wiste nothing of this nice strife:  
 For she was fall'n asleep a little wight<sup>145</sup>  
 With John the clerk, that waked had all night:  
 And with the fall out of her sleep she braid<sup>146</sup>.  
 "Help, holy cross of Bromeholm," (*Note 26*) she  
 said;  
 "In manus tuas! (*Note 27*) Lord, to thee I call.  
 Awake, Simon, the fiend is on me fall;  
 Mine heart is broken; help; I am but dead:  
 There li'th one on my womb and on mine head.  
 Help, Simkin, for these false clerks do fight"  
 This John start up as fast as e'er he might,  
 And groped by the walles to and fro  
 To find a staff; and she start up also,  
 And knew the estres<sup>147</sup> better than this John,  
 And by the wall she took a staff anon:  
 And saw a little shimmering of a light,  
 For at an hole in shone the moone bright,  
 And by that light she saw them both the two,  
 But sickerly<sup>148</sup> she wist not who was who,  
 But as she saw a white thing in her eye.  
 And when she gan this white thing espy,  
 She ween'd<sup>149</sup> the clerk had wear'd a volupere<sup>150</sup>;  
 And with the staff she drew aye nere<sup>151</sup> and

---

<sup>144</sup>stumbled.

<sup>145</sup>while.

<sup>146</sup>woke.

<sup>147</sup>apartment.

<sup>148</sup>certainly.

<sup>149</sup>supposed.

<sup>150</sup>night-cap.

<sup>151</sup>nearer.

nere<sup>152</sup>,  
And ween'd to have hit this Alein at the full,  
And smote the miller on the pilled<sup>153</sup> skull;  
That down he went, and cried, " Harow! I die."  
These clerkes beat him well, and let him lie,  
And greithen<sup>154</sup> them, and take their horse anon,  
And eke their meal, and on their way they gon:  
And at the mill door eke they took their cake  
Of half a bushel flour, full well y-bake.  
Thus is the proude miller well y-beat,  
And hath y-lost the grinding of the wheat;  
And payed for the supper every deal<sup>155</sup>  
Of Alein and of John, that beat him well;  
His wife is swived, and his daughter als<sup>156</sup>;  
Lo, such it is a miller to be false.  
And therefore this proverb is said full sooth,  
"Him thar not winnen well<sup>157</sup> that evil do'th,  
A guiler shall himself beguiled be:"  
And God that sitteth high in majesty  
Save all this Company, both great and smale.  
Thus have I quit<sup>158</sup> the Miller in my tale.

---

<sup>152</sup>nearer.

<sup>153</sup>bald.

<sup>154</sup>make ready, dress.

<sup>155</sup>every bit.

<sup>156</sup>also.

<sup>157</sup>he deserves not to gain.

<sup>158</sup>made myself quits with.



## NOTES TO THE TALE

1. The incidents of this tale were much relished in the Middle Ages, and are found under various forms. Boccaccio has told them in the ninth day of his "Decameron".

2. Camuse: flat; French "camuse", snub-nosed.

3. Gite: gown or coat; French "jupe."

4. Soler Hall: the hall or college at Cambridge with the gallery or upper storey; supposed to have been Clare Hall. (Transcribers note: later commentators identify it with King's Hall, now merged with Trinity College)

5. Manciple: steward; provisioner of the hall. See also note 47 to the prologue to the Tales.

6. Testif: headstrong, wild-brained; French, "entete."

7. Strother: Tyrwhitt points to Anstruther, in Fife: Mr Wright to the Vale of Langstroth, in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Chaucer has given the scholars a dialect that may have belonged to either district, although it more immediately suggests the more northern of the two. (Transcribers note: later commentators have identified it with a now vanished village near Kirknewton in Northumberland. There was a well-known Alein of Strother in Chaucer's lifetime.)

8. Wanges: grinders, cheek-teeth; Anglo-Saxon, "Wang," the cheek; German, "Wange."

9. See note 1 to the Prologue to the Reeves Tale

10. In the "Centio Novelle Antiche," the story is told of a mule, which pretends that his name is written on the bottom of his hind foot. The wolf attempts to read it, the mule kills him with a kick in the forehead; and the fox, looking on, remarks that "every man of letters is not wise." A similar story is told in "Reynard the Fox."

11. Levesell: an arbour; Anglo-Saxon, "lefe-setl," leafy seat.

12. Noth: business; German, "Noth," necessity.

13. Bathe: both; Scottice, "baith."

14. Capel: horse; Gaelic, "capall;" French, "cheval;" Italian, "cavallo," from Latin, "caballus."

15. Make a clerkes beard: cheat a scholar; French, "faire la barbe;" and Boccaccio uses the proverb in the same sense.

16. "Gar" is Scotch for "cause;" some editions read, however, "get us some".

17. Chalons: blankets, coverlets, made at Chalons in France.

18. Crock: pitcher, cruse; Anglo-Saxon, "crocca;" German, "krug;" hence "crockery."

19. Dwale: night-shade, *Solanum somniferum*, given to cause sleep.

20. Burdoun: bass; "burden" of a song. It originally means the drone of a bagpipe; French, "bourdon."

21. Compline: even-song in the church service; chorus.

22. Ferly: strange. In Scotland, a "ferlie" is an unwonted or remarkable sight.

23. A furlong way: As long as it might take to walk a furlong.

24. Cockenay: a term of contempt, probably borrowed from the kitchen; a cook, in base Latin, being termed "coquinarius." compare French "coquin," rascal.

25. Unhardy is unsely: the cowardly is unlucky; "nothing venture, nothing have;" German, "unselig," unhappy.

26. Holy cross of Bromholm: A common adjuration at that time; the cross or rood of the priory of Bromholm, in Norfolk, was said to contain part of the real cross and therefore held in high esteem.

27. In manus tuas: Latin, "in your hands".