
*The Canterbury Tales
and Other Poems
Part 7: The Wife of
Bath's Tale*



by Geoffrey Chaucer

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THE PROLOGUE

(*Note 1*)

Experience, though none authority¹
Were in this world, is right enough for me
To speak of woe that is in marriage:
For, lordings, since I twelve year was of age,
(Thanked be God that is etern on live²),
Husbands at the church door have I had five,
(*Note 2*)

For I so often have y-wedded be,
And all were worthy men in their degree.
But me was told, not longe time gone is
That sithen³ Christe went never but ones
To wedding, in the Cane⁴ of Galilee,
That by that ilk⁵ example taught he me,
That I not wedded shoulde be but once.
Lo, hearken eke a sharp word for the nonce⁶,
Beside a welle Jesus, God and man,
Spake in reproof of the Samaritan:

¹authoritative texts.

²lives eternally.

³since.

⁴Cana.

⁵same.

⁶occasion.

"Thou hast y-had five husbandes," said he;
 "And thilke⁷ man, that now hath wedded thee,
 Is not thine husband:" (*Note 3*) thus said he cer-
 tain;

What that he meant thereby, I cannot sayn.

But that I aske, why the fifthe man
 Was not husband to the Samaritan?
 How many might she have in marriage?
 Yet heard I never tellen in mine age⁸

Upon this number definitioun.

Men may divine, and glosen⁹ up and down;
 But well I wot, express without a lie,
 God bade us for to wax and multiply;
 That gentle text can I well understand.

Eke well I wot, he said, that mine husband
 Should leave father and mother, and take to me;
 But of no number mention made he,
 Of bigamy or of octogamy;

Why then should men speak of it villainy¹⁰?

Lo here, the wise king Dan¹¹ Solomon, (*Note 4*)

I trow that he had wives more than one;

As would to God it lawful were to me
 To be refreshed half so oft as he!

What gift¹² of God had he for all his wives?

No man hath such, that in this world alive is.

God wot, this noble king, as to my wit¹³,
 The first night had many a merry fit

With each of them, so well was him on live¹⁴,
 Blessed be God that I have wedded five!

⁷that.

⁸in my life.

⁹comment.

¹⁰as if it were a disgrace.

¹¹Lord.

¹²special favour, licence.

¹³as I understand.

¹⁴so well he lived.

Welcome the sixth whenever that he shall.
 For since I will not keep me chaste in all,
 When mine husband is from the world y-gone,
 Some Christian man shall wedde me anon.
 For then th' apostle saith that I am free
 To wed, a' God's half¹⁵, where it liketh me.
 He saith, that to be wedded is no sin;
 Better is to be wedded than to brin¹⁶,
 What recketh¹⁷ me though folk say villainy¹⁸
 Of shrewed¹⁹ Lamech, and his bigamy?
 I wot well Abraham was a holy man,
 And Jacob eke, as far as ev'r I can²⁰.
 And each of them had wives more than two;
 And many another holy man also.
 Where can ye see, in any manner age²¹,
 That highe God defended²² marriage (*Note 5*)
 By word express? I pray you tell it me;
 Or where commanded he virginity?
 I wot as well as you, it is no dread²³,
 Th' apostle, when he spake of maidenhead,
 He said, that precept thereof had he none:
 Men may counsel a woman to be one²⁴,
 But counseling is no commandement;
 He put it in our owen judgement.
 For, hadde God commanded maidenhead,

¹⁵on God's part.

¹⁶burn.

¹⁷care.

¹⁸evil.

¹⁹impious, wicked.

²⁰know.

²¹in any period.

²²forbade.

²³doubt.

²⁴a maid.

Then had he damned²⁵ wedding out of dread²⁶;
 And certes, if there were no seed y-sow²⁷,
 Virginity then whereof should it grow?
 Paul durste not commanden, at the least,
 A thing of which his Master gave no hest²⁸.
 The dart²⁹ is set up for virginity; (*Note 6*)
 Catch whoso may, who runneth best let see.
 But this word is not ta'en of every wight,
 But there as³⁰ God will give it of his might.
 I wot well that th' apostle was a maid,
 But natheless, although he wrote and said,
 He would that every wight were such as he,
 All is but counsel to virginity.
 And, since to be a wife he gave me leave
 Of indulgence, so is it no reprove³¹
 To wedde me, if that my make³² should die,
 Without exception³³ of bigamy;
 All were it³⁴ good no woman for to touch
 (He meant as in his bed or in his couch),
 For peril is both fire and tow t'assemble
 Ye know what this example may resemble.
 This is all and some, he held virginity
 More profit than wedding in frailty:
 (Frailty clepe I, but if³⁵ that he and she
 Would lead their lives all in chastity),
 I grant it well, I have of none envy

²⁵condemned.

²⁶doubt.

²⁷sown.

²⁸command.

²⁹goal.

³⁰except where.

³¹scandal, reproach.

³²mate, husband.

³³charge, reproach.

³⁴though it might be.

³⁵frailty I call it, unless.

Who maidenhead prefer to bigamy;
 It liketh them t' be clean in body and ghost³⁶;
 Of mine estate³⁷ I will not make a boast.
 For, well ye know, a lord in his household
 Hath not every vessel all of gold; (*Note 7*)
 Some are of tree, and do their lord service.
 God calleth folk to him in sundry wise,
 And each one hath of God a proper gift,
 Some this, some that, as liketh him to shift³⁸.
 Virginitie is great perfection,
 And continence eke with devotion:
 But Christ, that of perfection is the well³⁹,
 Bade not every wight he should go sell
 All that he had, and give it to the poor,
 And in such wise follow him and his lore⁴⁰:
 He spake to them that would live perfectly, –
 And, lordings, by your leave, that am not I;
 I will bestow the flower of mine age
 In th' acts and in the fruits of marriage.
 Tell me also, to what conclusion⁴¹
 Were members made of generation,
 And of so perfect wise a wight⁴² y-wrought?
 Trust me right well, they were not made for
 nought.
 Glose whoso will, and say both up and down,
 That they were made for the purgatioun
 Of urine, and of other thinges smale,
 And eke to know a female from a male:
 And for none other cause? say ye no?
 Experience wot well it is not so.

³⁶soul.

³⁷condition.

³⁸appoint, distribute.

³⁹fountain.

⁴⁰doctrine.

⁴¹end, purpose.

⁴²being.

So that the clerkes⁴³ be not with me wroth,
 I say this, that they were made for both,
 That is to say, for office, and for ease⁴⁴
 Of engendrure, there we God not displease.
 Why should men elles in their bookes set,
 That man shall yield unto his wife her debt?
 Now wherewith should he make his payement,
 If he us'd not his silly instrument?
 Then were they made upon a creature
 To purge urine, and eke for engendrure.
 But I say not that every wight is hold⁴⁵,
 That hath such harness⁴⁶ as I to you told
 To go and use them in engendrure;
 Then should men take of chastity no cure⁴⁷.
 Christ was a maid, and shapen⁴⁸ as a man,
 And many a saint, since that this world began,
 Yet ever liv'd in perfect chastity.
 I will not vie⁴⁹ with no virginity.
 Let them with bread of pured⁵⁰ wheat be fed,
 And let us wives eat our barley bread.
 And yet with barley bread, Mark tell us can,
 (*Note 8*)
 Our Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.
 In such estate as God hath cleped us⁵¹,
 I'll persevere, I am not precious⁵²,
 In wifehood I will use mine instrument
 As freely as my Maker hath it sent.

⁴³scholars.

⁴⁴for duty and for pleasure.

⁴⁵obliged.

⁴⁶equipment.

⁴⁷care.

⁴⁸.

⁴⁹contend.

⁵⁰purified.

⁵¹called us to.

⁵²over-dainty.

If I be dangerous⁵³ God give me sorrow;
 Mine husband shall it have, both eve and mor-
 row,
 When that him list come forth and pay his debt.
 A husband will I have, I will no let⁵⁴,
 Which shall be both my debtor and my thrall⁵⁵,
 And have his tribulation withal
 Upon his flesh, while that I am his wife.
 I have the power during all my life
 Upon his proper body, and not he;
 Right thus th' apostle told it unto me,
 And bade our husbands for to love us well;
 All this sentence me liketh every deal⁵⁶.

Up start the Pardoner, and that anon;
 "Now, Dame," quoth he, "by God and by Saint
 John,

Ye are a noble preacher in this case.
 I was about to wed a wife, alas!
 What? should I bie⁵⁷ it on my flesh so dear?
 Yet had I lever⁵⁸ wed no wife this year."
 "Abide⁵⁹," quoth she; "my tale is not begun
 Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tun
 Ere that I go, shall savour worse than ale.
 And when that I have told thee forth my tale
 Of tribulation in marriage,
 Of which I am expert in all mine age,
 (This is to say, myself hath been the whip),
 Then mayest thou choose whether thou wilt sip
 Of thilke tunne⁶⁰, that I now shall broach.

⁵³sparing of my favours.

⁵⁴will bear no hindrance.

⁵⁵slave.

⁵⁶whit.

⁵⁷suffer for.

⁵⁸rather.

⁵⁹wait in patience.

⁶⁰that tun.

Beware of it, ere thou too nigh approach,
 For I shall tell examples more than ten:
 Whoso will not beware by other men,
 By him shall other men corrected be:
 These same wordes writeth Ptolemy;
 Read in his Almagest, and take it there."
 "Dame, I would pray you, if your will it were,"
 Saide this Pardoner, "as ye began,
 Tell forth your tale, and spare for no man,
 And teach us younge men of your practique."
 "Gladly," quoth she, "since that it may you like.
 But that I pray to all this company,
 If that I speak after my fantasy,
 To take nought agrief⁶¹ what I may say;
 For mine intent is only for to play.

Now, Sirs, then will I tell you forth my tale.
 As ever may I drinke wine or ale
 I shall say sooth; the husbands that I had
 Three of them were good, and two were bad
 The three were goode men, and rich, and old
 Unnethes mighte they the statute hold⁶²
 In which that they were bounden unto me.
 Yet wot well what I mean of this, pardie⁶³.
 As God me help, I laugh when that I think
 How piteously at night I made them swink⁶⁴,
 But, by my fay, I told of it no store⁶⁵:
 They had me giv'n their land and their treasure,
 Me needed not do longer diligence
 To win their love, or do them reverence.
 They loved me so well, by God above,

⁶¹to heart.

⁶²they could with difficulty obey the law.

⁶³by God.

⁶⁴labour.

⁶⁵by my faith, I held it of no account.

That I tolde no dainty⁶⁶ of their love.
 A wise woman will busy her ever-in-one⁶⁷
 To get their love, where that she hath none.
 But, since I had them wholly in my hand,
 And that they had me given all their land,
 Why should I take keep⁶⁸ them for to please,
 But⁶⁹ it were for my profit, or mine ease?
 I set them so a-worke, by my fay,
 That many a night they sange, well-away!
 The bacon was not fetched for them, I trow,
 That some men have in Essex at Dunmow. (*Note*
 9)

I govern'd them so well after my law,
 That each of them full blissful was and fawe⁷⁰
 To bringe me gay thinges from the fair.
 They were full glad when that I spake them fair,
 For, God it wot, I chid them spiteously⁷¹.
 Now hearken how I bare me properly.

Ye wise wives, that can understand,
 Thus should ye speak, and bear them wrong on
 hand⁷²,
 For half so boldely can there no man
 Swearn and lien as a woman can.
 (I say not this by wives that be wise,
 But if⁷³ it be when they them misadvise⁷⁴.)
 A wise wife, if that she can⁷⁵ her good,

⁶⁶cared nothing for.

⁶⁷constantly.

⁶⁸care.

⁶⁹unless.

⁷⁰fain.

⁷¹rebuked them angrily.

⁷²make them believe falsely.

⁷³unless.

⁷⁴act unadvisedly.

⁷⁵knows.

Shall beare them on hand⁷⁶ the cow is wood,
 And take witness of her owen maid
 Of their assent: but hearken how I said.
 "Sir olde kaynard, (*Note 10*) is this thine array?
 Why is my neigheboure's wife so gay?
 She is honour'd over all where⁷⁷ she go'th,
 I sit at home, I have no thrifty cloth⁷⁸.
 What dost thou at my neigheboure's house?
 Is she so fair? art thou so amorous?
 What row'n'st⁷⁹ thou with our maid? benedicite,
 Sir olde lechour, let thy japes⁸⁰ be.
 And if I have a gossip, or a friend
 (Withoute guilt), thou chidest as a fiend,
 If that I walk or play unto his house.
 Thou comest home as drunken as a mouse,
 And preachest on thy bench, with evil prefe⁸¹:
 Thou say'st to me, it is a great mischief
 To wed a poore woman, for costage⁸²:
 And if that she be rich, of high parage⁸³; (*Note*
 11)
 Then say'st thou, that it is a tormentry
 To suffer her pride and melancholy.
 And if that she be fair, thou very knave,
 Thou say'st that every holour⁸⁴ will her have;
 She may no while in chastity abide,
 That is assailed upon every side.
 Thou say'st some folk desire us for richness,
 Some for our shape, and some for our fairness,

⁷⁶make them believe.

⁷⁷wheresoever.

⁷⁸good clothes.

⁷⁹whisperest.

⁸⁰tricks.

⁸¹proof.

⁸²expense.

⁸³birth.

⁸⁴whoremonger.

And some, for she can either sing or dance,
 And some for gentiles and dalliance,
 Some for her handes and her armes smale:
 Thus goes all to the devil, by thy tale;
 Thou say'st, men may not keep a castle wall
 That may be so assailed over all⁸⁵.
 And if that she be foul, thou say'st that she
 Coveteth every man that she may see;
 For as a spaniel she will on him leap,
 Till she may finde some man her to cheap⁸⁶;
 And none so grey goose goes there in the lake,
 (So say'st thou) that will be without a make⁸⁷.
 And say'st, it is a hard thing for to weld⁸⁸
 A thing that no man will, his thankes, held⁸⁹.
 Thus say'st thou, lorel⁹⁰, when thou go'st to bed,
 And that no wise man needeth for to wed,
 Nor no man that intendeth unto heaven.
 With wilde thunder dint⁹¹ and fiery leven⁹²
 Mote⁹³ thy wicked necke be to-broke.
 Thou say'st, that dropping houses, and eke
 smoke,
 And chiding wives, make men to flee
 Out of their owne house; ah! ben'dicite,
 What aileth such an old man for to chide?
 Thou say'st, we wives will our vices hide,
 Till we be fast@wedded.@@, and then we will
 them shew.

⁸⁵everywhere.

⁸⁶buy.

⁸⁷mate.

⁸⁸wield, govern.

⁸⁹hold with his goodwill.

⁹⁰good-for-nothing.

⁹¹stroke.

⁹²lightning.

⁹³may.

Well may that be a proverb of a shrew⁹⁴.
 Thou say'st, that oxen, asses, horses, hounds,
 They be assayed at diverse stounds⁹⁵,
 Basons and lavers, ere that men them buy,
 Spoons, stooles, and all such husbandry,
 And so be pots, and clothes, and array⁹⁶,
 But folk of wives make none assay,
 Till they be wedded, – olde dotard shrew! –
 And then, say'st thou, we will our vices shew.
 Thou say'st also, that it displeaseth me,
 But if⁹⁷ that thou wilt praise my beauty,
 And but⁹⁸ thou pore alway upon my face,
 And call me faire dame in every place;
 And but⁹⁹ thou make a feast on thilke¹⁰⁰ day
 That I was born, and make me fresh and gay;
 And but thou do to my norice¹⁰¹ honour, (*Note*
 12)
 And to my chamberere¹⁰² within my bow'r,
 And to my father's folk, and mine allies¹⁰³;
 Thus sayest thou, old barrel full of lies.
 And yet also of our prentice Jenkin,
 For his crisp hair, shining as gold so fine,
 And for he squireth me both up and down,
 Yet hast thou caught a false suspicioun:
 I will him not, though thou wert dead to-
 morrow.
 But tell me this, why hidest thou, with sor-

⁹⁴ill-tempered wretch.

⁹⁵tested at various seasons.

⁹⁶raiment.

⁹⁷unless.

⁹⁸unless.

⁹⁹unless.

¹⁰⁰that.

¹⁰¹nurse.

¹⁰²chamber-maid.

¹⁰³relations.

row¹⁰⁴,
 The keyes of thy chest away from me?
 It is my good¹⁰⁵ as well as thine, pardie.
 What, think'st to make an idiot of our dame?
 Now, by that lord that called is Saint Jame,
 Thou shalt not both, although that thou wert
 wood¹⁰⁶,
 Be master of my body, and my good¹⁰⁷,
 The one thou shalt forego, maugre¹⁰⁸ thine eyen.
 What helpeth it of me t'inquire and spyen?
 I trow thou wouldest lock me in thy chest.
 Thou shouldest say, 'Fair wife, go where thee
 lest;
 Take your disport; I will believe no tales;
 I know you for a true wife, Dame Ales¹⁰⁹.'
 We love no man, that taketh keep¹¹⁰ or charge
 Where that we go; we will be at our large.
 Of alle men most blessed may he be,
 The wise astrologer Dan¹¹¹ Ptolemy,
 That saith this proverb in his *Almagest*: (*Note*
 13)
 'Of alle men his wisdom is highest,
 That recketh not who hath the world in hand.
 By this proverb thou shalt well understand,
 Have thou enough, what thar¹¹² thee reck or
 care
 How merrily that other folkes fare?
 For certes, olde dotard, by your leave,

¹⁰⁴sorrow on thee!

¹⁰⁵property.

¹⁰⁶furious.

¹⁰⁷property.

¹⁰⁸in spite of.

¹⁰⁹Alice.

¹¹⁰care.

¹¹¹Lord.

¹¹²needs, behoves.

Ye shall have (pleasure) (*Note 14*) right enough
at eve.

He is too great a niggard that will werne¹¹³

A man to light a candle at his lantern;

He shall have never the less light, pardie.

Have thou enough, thee thar¹¹⁴ not plaine¹¹⁵
thee

Thou say'st also, if that we make us gay

With clothing and with precious array,

That it is peril of our chastity.

And yet, – with sorrow! – thou enforcest thee,

And say'st these words in the apostle's name:

'In habit made with chastity and shame¹¹⁶

Ye women shall apparel you,' quoth he, (*Note 15*)

'And not in tressed hair and gay perrie¹¹⁷,

As pearles, nor with gold, nor clothes rich.'

After thy text nor after thy rubrich

I will not work as muchel as a gnat.

Thou say'st also, I walk out like a cat;

For whoso woulde singe the catte's skin

Then will the catte well dwell in her inn¹¹⁸;

And if the catte's skin be sleek and gay,

She will not dwell in house half a day,

But forth she will, ere any day be daw'd,

To shew her skin, and go a caterwaw'd¹¹⁹.

This is to say, if I be gay, sir shrew,

I will run out, my borel¹²⁰ for to shew.

Sir olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?

Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyen

¹¹³forbid.

¹¹⁴need.

¹¹⁵complain.

¹¹⁶modesty.

¹¹⁷jewels.

¹¹⁸house.

¹¹⁹caterwauling.

¹²⁰apparel, fine clothes.

To be my wardcorps¹²¹, as he can best
 In faith he shall not keep me, but me lest¹²²:
 Yet could I make his beard¹²³, so may I the.
 "Thou sayest eke, that there be thinges three¹²⁴,
 Which thinges greatly trouble all this earth,
 And that no wighte may endure the ferth¹²⁵:
 O lefe¹²⁶ sir shrew, may Jesus short¹²⁷ thy life.
 Yet preachest thou, and say'st, a hateful wife
 Y-reckon'd is for one of these mischances.
 Be there none other manner resemblances¹²⁸
 That ye may liken your parables unto,
 But if a silly wife be one of tho¹²⁹?
 Thou likenest a woman's love to hell;
 To barren land where water may not dwell.
 Thou likenest it also to wild fire;
 The more it burns, the more it hath desire
 To consume every thing that burnt will be.
 Thou sayest, right as wormes shend¹³⁰ a tree,
 Right so a wife destroyeth her husband;
 This know they well that be to wives bond."
 Lordings, right thus, as ye have understand,
 Bare I stiffly mine old husbands on hand¹³¹,
 That thus they saiden in their drunkenness;
 And all was false, but that I took witness
 On Jenkin, and upon my niece also.
 O Lord! the pain I did them, and the woe,

¹²¹body-guard.

¹²²unless I please.

¹²³make a jest of him.

¹²⁴thrive.

¹²⁵fourth.

¹²⁶pleasant.

¹²⁷shorten.

¹²⁸no other kind of comparison.

¹²⁹those.

¹³⁰destroy.

¹³¹made them believe.

'Full guilteless, by Godde's sweete pine¹³²;
 For as a horse I coulde bite and whine;
 I coulde plain¹³³, an'¹³⁴ I was in the guilt,
 Or elles oftentime I had been spilt¹³⁵
 Whoso first cometh to the nill, first grint¹³⁶;
 I plained first, so was our war y-stint¹³⁷.
 They were full glad to excuse them full blive¹³⁸
 Of things that they never aguilt their live¹³⁹.
 "Thou sayest eke, that there be thinges three¹⁴⁰
 Which thinges greatly trouble all this earth,
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 To consume every thing that burnt will be.

¹³²pain.

¹³³complain.

¹³⁴even though.

¹³⁵ruined.

¹³⁶is ground.

¹³⁷stopped.

¹³⁸quickly.

¹³⁹were guilty in their lives.

¹⁴⁰thrive.

¹⁴¹fourth.

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 O Lord! the pain I did them, and the woe,
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 I coulde plain¹⁴⁹, an'¹⁵⁰ I was in the guilt,
 Or elles oftentime I had been spilt¹⁵¹
 Whoso first cometh to the nill, first grint¹⁵²;
 I plained first, so was our war y-stint¹⁵³.
 They were full glad to excuse them full blive¹⁵⁴
 Of things that they never aguilt their live¹⁵⁵.
 Of wenches would I beare them on hand¹⁵⁶,
 When that for sickness scarcely might they
 stand,
 Yet tickled I his hearte for that he
 Ween'd¹⁵⁷ that I had of him so great cherte¹⁵⁸,
 (Note 16)
 I swore that all my walking out by night

¹⁴⁶destroy.

¹⁴⁷made them believe.

¹⁴⁸pain.

¹⁴⁹complain.

¹⁵⁰even though.

¹⁵¹ruined.

¹⁵²is ground.

¹⁵³stopped.

¹⁵⁴quickly.

¹⁵⁵were guilty in their lives.

¹⁵⁶falsely accuse them.

¹⁵⁷though.

¹⁵⁸affection.

Was for to espy wenches that he dight¹⁵⁹:
 Under that colour had I many a mirth.
 For all such wit is given us at birth;
 Deceit, weeping, and spinning, God doth give
 To women kindly, while that they may live¹⁶⁰.
 And thus of one thing I may vaunte me,
 At th' end I had the better in each degree,
 By sleight, or force, or by some manner thing,
 As by continual murmur or grudging¹⁶¹,
 Namely¹⁶² a-bed, there hadde they mischance,
 There would I chide, and do them no pleasance:
 I would no longer in the bed abide,
 If that I felt his arm over my side,
 Till he had made his ransom unto me,
 Then would I suffer him do his nicety¹⁶³. (*Note*
 17)

And therefore every man this tale I tell,
 Win whoso may, for all is for to sell;
 With empty hand men may no hawkes lure;
 For winning would I all his will endure,
 And make me a feigned appetite,
 And yet in bacon¹⁶⁴ had I never delight (*Note* 9)
 That made me that I ever would them chide.
 For, though the Pope had sitten them beside,
 I would not spare them at their owen board,
 For, by my troth, I quit¹⁶⁵ them word for word
 As help me very God omnipotent,
 Though I right now should make my testament
 I owe them not a word, that is not quit¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹adorned.

¹⁶⁰naturally.

¹⁶¹complaining.

¹⁶²especially.

¹⁶³folly.

¹⁶⁴i.e. of Dunmow.

¹⁶⁵repaid.

¹⁶⁶repaid.

I brought it so aboute by my wit,
 That they must give it up, as for the best
 Or elles had we never been in rest.
 For, though he looked as a wood¹⁶⁷ lion,
 Yet should he fail of his conclusion.
 Then would I say, "Now, goode lefe¹⁶⁸ tak
 keep¹⁶⁹
 How meekly looketh Wilken oure sheep!
 Come near, my spouse, and let me ba¹⁷⁰ thy
 cheek (*Note 18*)
 Ye shoulde be all patient and meek,
 And have a sweet y-spiced¹⁷¹ conscience,
 Since ye so preach of Jobe's patience.
 Suffer alway, since ye so well can preach,
 And but ye do, certain we shall you teach¹⁷²
 That it is fair to have a wife in peace.
 One of us two must bowe¹⁷³ doubtless:
 And since a man is more reasonable
 Than woman is, ye must be suff'able.
 What aileth you to grudge¹⁷⁴ thus and groan?
 Is it for ye would have my (love) (*Note 14*) alone?
 Why, take it all: lo, have it every deal¹⁷⁵,
 Peter! (*Note 19*) shrew¹⁷⁶ you but ye love it well
 For if I woulde sell my belle chose¹⁷⁷,
 I coulde walk as fresh as is a rose,
 But I will keep it for your owen tooth.

¹⁶⁷ furious.

¹⁶⁸ dear.

¹⁶⁹ heed.

¹⁷⁰ kiss.

¹⁷¹ tender, nice.

¹⁷² unless.

¹⁷³ give way.

¹⁷⁴ complain.

¹⁷⁵ whit.

¹⁷⁶ curse.

¹⁷⁷ beautiful thing.

Ye be to blame, by God, I say you sooth."
 Such manner wordes hadde we on hand.
 Now will I speaken of my fourth husband.
 My fourthe husband was a revellour;
 This is to say, he had a paramour,
 And I was young and full of ragerie¹⁷⁸,
 Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a pie¹⁷⁹.
 Then could I dance to a harpe smale,
 And sing, y-wis¹⁸⁰, as any nightingale,
 When I had drunk a draught of sweete wine.
 Metellius, the foule churl, the swine,
 That with a staff bereft his wife of life
 For she drank wine, though I had been his wife,
 Never should he have daunted me from drink:
 And, after wine, of Venus most I think.
 For all so sure as cold engenders hail,
 A liquorish mouth must have a liquorish tail.
 In woman vinolent¹⁸¹ is no defence¹⁸²,
 This knowe lechours by experience.
 But, lord Christ, when that it rememb'reth me
 Upon my youth, and on my jollity,
 It tickleth me about mine hearte-root;
 Unto this day it doth mine hearte boot¹⁸³,
 That I have had my world as in my time.
 But age, alas! that all will envenime¹⁸⁴,
 Hath me bereft my beauty and my pith¹⁸⁵:
 Let go; farewell; the devil go therewith.
 The flour is gon, there is no more to tell,
 The bran, as I best may, now must I sell.

¹⁷⁸wantonness.

¹⁷⁹maggie.

¹⁸⁰certainly.

¹⁸¹full of wine.

¹⁸²resistance.

¹⁸³good.

¹⁸⁴poison, embitter.

¹⁸⁵vigour.

But yet to be right merry will I fand¹⁸⁶.
 Now forth to tell you of my fourth husband,
 I say, I in my heart had great despite,
 That he of any other had delight;
 But he was quit¹⁸⁷, by God and by Saint Joce:

(*Note 21*)

I made for him of the same wood a cross;
 Not of my body in no foul mannere,
 But certainly I made folk such cheer,
 That in his owen grease I made him fry
 For anger, and for very jealousy.
 By God, in earth I was his purgatory,
 For which I hope his soul may be in glory.
 For, God it wot, he sat full oft and sung,
 When that his shoe full bitterly him wrung¹⁸⁸.
 There was no wight, save God and he, that wist
 In many wise how sore I did him twist. (*Note 20*)
 He died when I came from Jerusalem,
 And lies in grave under the roode beam¹⁸⁹:
 Although his tomb is not so curious
 As was the sepulchre of Darius,
 Which that Apelles wrought so subtly.
 It is but waste to bury them preciously.
 Let him fare well, God give his soule rest,
 He is now in his grave and in his chest.

Now of my fifthe husband will I tell:
 God let his soul never come into hell.
 And yet was he to me the moste shrew¹⁹⁰;
 That feel I on my ribbes all by rew¹⁹¹,
 And ever shall, until mine ending day.
 But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,

¹⁸⁶try.

¹⁸⁷requited, paid back.

¹⁸⁸pinched.

¹⁸⁹cross.

¹⁹⁰cruel, ill-tempered.

¹⁹¹in a row.

And therewithal so well he could me glose¹⁹²,
 When that he woulde have my belle chose,
 Though he had beaten me on every bone,
 Yet could he win again my love anon.
 I trow, I lov'd him better, for that he
 Was of his love so dangerous¹⁹³ to me.
 We women have, if that I shall not lie,
 In this matter a quaint fantasy.
 Whatever thing we may not lightly have,
 Thereafter will we cry all day and crave.
 Forbid us thing, and that desire we;
 Press on us fast, and thenne will we flee.
 With danger¹⁹⁴ utter we all our chaffare¹⁹⁵;
 Great press at market maketh deare ware,
 And too great cheap is held at little price;
 This knoweth every woman that is wise.
 My fifthe husband, God his soule bless,
 Which that I took for love and no richness,
 He some time was a clerk of Oxenford¹⁹⁶,
 And had left school, and went at home to board
 With my gossip¹⁹⁷, dwelling in oure town:
 God have her soul, her name was Alisoun.
 She knew my heart, and all my privity,
 Bet than our parish priest, so may I the¹⁹⁸.
 To her betrayed I my counsel all;
 For had my husband pissed on a wall,
 Or done a thing that should have cost his life,
 To her, and to another worthy wife,
 And to my niece, which that I loved well,

¹⁹²flatter.

¹⁹³sparing, difficult.

¹⁹⁴difficulty.

¹⁹⁵merchandise.

¹⁹⁶a scholar of Oxford.

¹⁹⁷godmother.

¹⁹⁸thrive.

I would have told his counsel every deal¹⁹⁹.
 And so I did full often, God it wot,
 That made his face full often red and hot
 For very shame, and blam'd himself, for he
 Had told to me so great a privity²⁰⁰.
 And so befell that ones in a Lent
 (So oftentimes I to my gossip went,
 For ever yet I loved to be gay,
 And for to walk in March, April, and May
 From house to house, to heare sundry tales),
 That Jenkin clerk, and my gossip, Dame Ales,
 And I myself, into the fieldes went.
 Mine husband was at London all that Lent;
 I had the better leisure for to play,
 And for to see, and eke for to be sey²⁰¹
 Of lusty folk; what wist I where my grace²⁰²
 Was shapen for to be, or in what place²⁰³?
 Therefore made I my visitations
 To vigilies²⁰⁴, and to processions, (*Note 22*)
 To preachings eke, and to these pilgrimages,
 To plays of miracles, and marriages,
 And weared upon me gay scarlet gites²⁰⁵.
 These wormes, nor these mothes, nor these
 mites
 On my apparel frett²⁰⁶ them never a deal²⁰⁷
 And know'st thou why? for they were used²⁰⁸
 well.

¹⁹⁹jot.

²⁰⁰secret.

²⁰¹seen.

²⁰²favour.

²⁰³appointed,

²⁰⁴festival-eves.

²⁰⁵gowns.

²⁰⁶fed.

²⁰⁷whit.

²⁰⁸worn.

Now will I telle forth what happen'd me:
 I say, that in the fieldes walked we,
 Till truely we had such dalliance,
 This clerk and I, that of my purveyance²⁰⁹
 I spake to him, and told him how that he,
 If I were widow, shoulde wedde me.
 For certainly, I say for no bobance²¹⁰, (*Note 23*)
 Yet was I never without purveyance²¹¹
 Of marriage, nor of other thinges eke:
 I hold a mouse's wit not worth a leek,
 That hath but one hole for to starte²¹² to, (*Note*
 24)
 And if that faile, then is all y-do²¹³.
 (I bare him on hand²¹⁴ he had enchanted me.
 My dame taughte me that subtilty);
 And eke I said, I mette²¹⁵ of him all night,
 He would have slain me, as I lay upright,
 And all my bed was full of very blood;
 But yet I hop'd that he should do me good;
 For blood betoken'd gold, as me was taught.
 And all was false, I dream'd of him right naught,
 But as I follow'd aye my dame's lore,
 As well of that as of other things more.) (*Note*
 25)
 But now, sir, let me see, what shall I sayn?
 Aha! by God, I have my tale again.
 When that my fourthe husband was on bier,
 I wept algate²¹⁶ and made a sorry cheer²¹⁷,

²⁰⁹ foresight.

²¹⁰ boasting.

²¹¹ foresight.

²¹² es cape.

²¹³ done.

²¹⁴ falsely assured him.

²¹⁵ dreamed.

²¹⁶ always.

²¹⁷ countenance.

As wives must, for it is the usage;
 And with my kerchief covered my visage;
 But, for I was provided with a make²¹⁸,
 I wept but little, that I undertake²¹⁹
 To churche was mine husband borne a-morrow
 With neigheighbours that for him made sorrow,
 And Jenkin, oure clerk, was one of tho²²⁰:
 As help me God, when that I saw him go
 After the bier, methought he had a pair
 Of legges and of feet so clean and fair,
 That all my heart I gave unto his hold²²¹.
 He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,
 And I was forty, if I shall say sooth,
 But yet I had always a colte's tooth.
 Gat-toothed I was, and that became me well,
 (Note 26)

I had the print of Sainte Venus' seal.
 (As help me God, I was a lusty one,
 And fair, and rich, and young, and well be-
 gone²²²:

For certes I am all venerian²²³
 In feeling, and my heart is martian²²⁴;
 Venus me gave my lust and liquorishness,
 And Mars gave me my sturdy hardiness.) (Note
 25)

Mine ascendant was Taure²²⁵, and Mars therein:
 Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!
 I follow'd aye mine inclination
 By virtue of my constellation:

²¹⁸mate.

²¹⁹promise.

²²⁰those.

²²¹keeping.

²²²in a good way,

²²³under the influence of Venus.

²²⁴under the influence of Mars.

²²⁵Taurus.

That made me that I coulde not withdraw
 My chamber of Venus from a good fellow.
 (Yet have I Marte's mark upon my face,
 And also in another privy place.
 For God so wisly²²⁶ be my salvation,
 I loved never by discretion,
 But ever follow'd mine own appetite,
 All²²⁷ were he short, or long, or black, or white,
 I took no keep²²⁸, so that he liked me,
 How poor he was, neither of what degree.) (Note
 25)

What should I say? but that at the month's end
 This jolly clerk Jenkin, that was so hend²²⁹,
 Had wedded me with great solemnity,
 And to him gave I all the land and fee
 That ever was me given therebefore:
 But afterward repented me full sore.
 He woulde suffer nothing of my list²³⁰.
 By God, he smote me ones with his fist,
 For that I rent out of his book a leaf,
 That of the stroke mine eare wax'd all deaf.
 Stubborn I was, as is a lioness,
 And of my tongue a very jangleress²³¹,
 And walk I would, as I had done beforne,
 From house to house, although he had it
 sworn²³²:

For which he oftentimes woulde preach
 And me of olde Roman gestic²³³ teach
 How that Sulpitius Gallus left his wife

²²⁶certainly.

²²⁷whether.

²²⁸heed.

²²⁹courteous.

²³⁰pleasure.

²³¹prater.

²³²had sworn to prevent it.

²³³stories.

And her forsook for term of all his
 For nought but open-headed²³⁴ he her say²³⁵
 Looking out at his door upon a day.
 Another Roman (*Note 27*) told he me by name,
 That, for his wife was at a summer game
 Without his knowing, he forsook her eke.
 And then would he upon his Bible seek
 That ilke²³⁶ proverb of Ecclesiast,
 Where he commandeth, and forbiddeth fast,
 Man shall not suffer his wife go roll about.
 Then would he say right thus withoute doubt:
 "Whoso that buildeth his house all of shallows²³⁷,
 And pricketh his blind horse over the fallows,
 And suff'reth his wife to go seeke hallows²³⁸,
 Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows."
 But all for nought; I sette not a haw²³⁹
 Of his proverbs, nor of his olde saw;
 Nor would I not of him corrected be.
 I hate them that my vices telle me,
 And so do more of us (God wot) than I.
 This made him wood²⁴⁰ with me all utterly;
 I woulde not forbear²⁴¹ him in no case.
 Now will I say you sooth, by Saint Thomas,
 Why that I rent out of his book a leaf,
 For which he smote me, so that I was deaf.
 He had a book, that gladly night and day
 For his disport he would it read alway;
 He call'd it Valerie, (*Note 28*) and Theophrast,
 And with that book he laugh'd alway full fast.

²³⁴bare-headed.

²³⁵saw.

²³⁶same.

²³⁷willows.

²³⁸make pilgrimages.

²³⁹cared nothing for.

²⁴⁰furious.

²⁴¹endure.

And eke there was a clerk sometime at Rome,
 A cardinal, that highte Saint Jerome,
 That made a book against Jovinian,
 Which book was there; and eke Tertullian,
 Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise,
 That was an abbess not far from Paris;
 And eke the Parables²⁴² of Solomon,
 Ovide's Art, (*Note 29*) and bourdes²⁴³ many one;
 And alle these were bound in one volume.
 And every night and day was his custume
 (When he had leisure and vacation
 From other worldly occupation)
 To readen in this book of wicked wives.
 He knew of them more legends and more lives
 Than be of goodde wives in the Bible.
 For, trust me well, it is an impossible
 That any clerk will speake good of wives,
 (But if²⁴⁴ it be of holy saintes' lives)
 Nor of none other woman never the mo'.
 Who painted the lion, tell it me, who?
 By God, if women haddde written stories,
 As clerkes have within their oratories,
 They would have writ of men more wickedness
 Than all the mark of Adam (*Note 30*) may redress
 The children of Mercury and of Venus, (*Note 31*)
 Be in their working full contrarious.
 Mercury loveth wisdom and science,
 And Venus loveth riot and dispence²⁴⁵.
 And for their diverse disposition,
 Each falls in other's exaltation.
 As thus, God wot, Mercury is desolate
 In Pisces, where Venus is exaltate,
 And Venus falls where Mercury is raised. (*Note*

²⁴²Proverbs.

²⁴³jests.

²⁴⁴unless.

²⁴⁵extravagance.

32)

Therefore no woman by no clerk is praised.
 The clerk, when he is old, and may not do
 Of Venus' works not worth his olde shoe,
 Then sits he down, and writes in his dotage,
 That women cannot keep their marriage.
 But now to purpose, why I tolde thee
 That I was beaten for a book, pardie.

Upon a night Jenkin, that was our sire²⁴⁶,
 Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,
 Of Eva first, that for her wickedness
 Was all mankind brought into wretchedness,
 For which that Jesus Christ himself was slain,
 That bought us with his hearte-blood again.
 Lo here express of women may ye find
 That woman was the loss of all mankind.
 Then read he me how Samson lost his hairs
 Sleeping, his leman cut them with her shears,
 Through whiche treason lost he both his eyen.
 Then read he me, if that I shall not lien,
 Of Hercules, and of his Dejanire,
 That caused him to set himself on fire.
 Nothing forgot he of the care and woe
 That Socrates had with his wives two;
 How Xantippe cast piss upon his head.
 This silly man sat still, as he were dead,
 He wip'd his head, and no more durst he sayn,
 But, "Ere the thunder stint²⁴⁷ there cometh rain."
 Of Phasiphae, that was queen of Crete,
 For shrewedness²⁴⁸ he thought the tale sweet.
 Fy, speak no more, it is a grisly thing,
 Of her horrible lust and her liking.
 Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery

²⁴⁶goodman.

²⁴⁷ceases.

²⁴⁸wickedness.

That falsely made her husband for to die,
 He read it with full good devotion.
 He told me eke, for what occasion
 Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life:
 My husband had a legend of his wife
 Eryphile, that for an ouche²⁴⁹ of gold
 Had privily unto the Greekes told,
 Where that her husband hid him in a place,
 For which he had at Thebes sorry grace.
 Of Luna told he me, and of Lucie;
 They bothe made their husbands for to die,
 That one for love, that other was for hate.
 Luna her husband on an ev'ning late
 Empoison'd had, for that she was his foe:
 Lucia liquorish lov'd her husband so,
 That, for he should always upon her think,
 She gave him such a manner²⁵⁰ love-drink,
 That he was dead before it were the morrow:
 And thus algates²⁵¹ husbands hadde sorrow.
 Then told he me how one Latumeus
 Complained to his fellow Arius
 That in his garden growed such a tree,
 On which he said how that his wives three
 Hanged themselves for heart dispiteous.
 "O leve²⁵² brother," quoth this Arius,
 "Give me a plant of thilke²⁵³ blessed tree,
 And in my garden planted shall it be."
 Of later date of wives hath he read,
 That some have slain their husbands in their
 bed,
 And let their lechour dight them²⁵⁴ all the night,

²⁴⁹clasp, collar.

²⁵⁰sort of.

²⁵¹always.

²⁵²dear

²⁵³that.

²⁵⁴lover ride them.

While that the corpse lay on the floor upright:
 And some have driven nails into their brain,
 While that they slept, and thus they have them
 slain:

Some have them given poison in their drink:
 He spake more harm than hearte may bethink.
 And therewithal he knew of more proverbs,
 Than in this world there groweth grass or herbs.

"Better (quoth he) thine habitation
 Be with a lion, or a foul dragon,
 Than with a woman using for to chide.
 Better (quoth he) high in the roof abide,
 Than with an angry woman in the house,
 They be so wicked and contrarious:
 They hate that their husbands loven aye."
 He said, "A woman cast her shame away
 When she cast off her smock;" and farthermo',
 "A fair woman, but²⁵⁵ she be chaste also,
 Is like a gold ring in a sowe's nose.

Who coulde ween²⁵⁶, or who coulde suppose
 The woe that in mine heart was, and the pine²⁵⁷?
 And when I saw that he would never fine²⁵⁸
 To readen on this cursed book all night,
 All suddenly three leaves have I plight²⁵⁹
 Out of his book, right as he read, and eke
 I with my fist so took him on the cheek,
 That in our fire he backward fell adown.
 And he up start, as doth a wood lion²⁶⁰,
 And with his fist he smote me on the head,
 That on the floor I lay as I were dead.
 And when he saw how still that there I lay,

²⁵⁵except.

²⁵⁶thibk.

²⁵⁷pain.

²⁵⁸finish.

²⁵⁹plucked.

²⁶⁰furious.

He was aghast, and would have fled away,
 Till at the last out of my swoon I braid²⁶¹,
 "Oh, hast thou slain me, thou false thief?" I said
 "And for my land thus hast thou murder'd me?
 Ere I be dead, yet will I kisse thee."
 And near he came, and kneeled fair adown,
 And saide", "Deare sister Alisoun,
 As help me God, I shall thee never smite:
 That I have done it is thyself to wite²⁶²,
 Forgive it me, and that I thee beseek²⁶³."
 And yet eftsoons²⁶⁴ I hit him on the cheek,
 And saidde, "Thief, thus much am I awreak²⁶⁵.
 Now will I die, I may no longer speak."
 But at the last, with mucche care and woe
 We fell accorded²⁶⁶ by ourselves two:
 He gave me all the bridle in mine hand
 To have the governance of house and land,
 And of his tongue, and of his hand also.
 I made him burn his book anon right tho²⁶⁷.
 And when that I had gotten unto me
 By mast'ry all the sovereignty,
 And that he said, "Mine owen true wife,
 Do as thee list²⁶⁸, the term of all thy life,
 Keep thine honour, and eke keep mine estate;
 After that day we never had debate.
 God help me so, I was to him as kind
 As any wife from Denmark unto Ind,
 And also true, and so was he to me:
 I pray to God that sits in majesty

²⁶¹woke.

²⁶²blame.

²⁶³beseech.

²⁶⁴immediately; again.

²⁶⁵avenged.

²⁶⁶agreed.

²⁶⁷then.

²⁶⁸as pleases thee.

So bless his soule, for his mercy dear.
Now will I say my tale, if ye will hear. –

The Friar laugh'd when he had heard all this:
"Now, Dame," quoth he, "so have I joy and bliss,
This is a long preamble of a tale."

And when the Sompnour heard the Friar
gale²⁶⁹,

"Lo," quoth this Sompnour, "Godde's armes two,
A friar will intermete²⁷⁰ him evermo': (*Note 33*)

Lo, goode men, a fly and eke a frere
Will fall in ev'ry dish and eke mattere.

What speak'st thou of perambulation²⁷¹?

What? amble or trot; or peace, or go sit down:

Thou lettest²⁷² our disport in this mattere."

"Yea, wilt thou so, Sir Sompnour?" quoth the
Frere;

"Now by my faith I shall, ere that I go,
Tell of a Sompnour such a tale or two,
That all the folk shall laughen in this place."

"Now do, else, Friar, I beshrew²⁷³ thy face,"
Quoth this Sompnour; "and I beshrewe me,

But if²⁷⁴ I telle tales two or three

Of friars, ere I come to Sittingbourne,
That I shall make thine hearte for to mourn:
For well I wot thy patience is gone."

Our Hoste cried, "Peace, and that anon;"

And saide, "Let the woman tell her tale.

Ye fare²⁷⁵ as folk that drunken be of ale.

Do, Dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best."

²⁶⁹speak.

²⁷⁰interpose.

²⁷¹preamble.

²⁷²hinderesst.

²⁷³curse.

²⁷⁴unless.

²⁷⁵behave.

"All ready, sir," quoth she, "right as you lest²⁷⁶,
If I have licence of this worthy Frere."

"Yes, Dame," quoth he, "tell forth, and I will
hear."

²⁷⁶please.

THE TALE

(*Note 1*)

In olde dayes of the king Arthour,
Of which that Britons speake great honour,
All was this land full fill'd of faerie²⁷⁷;
The Elf-queen, with her jolly company,
Danced full oft in many a green mead
This was the old opinion, as I read;
I speak of many hundred years ago;
But now can no man see none elves mo',
For now the great charity and prayeres
Of limitours²⁷⁸, and other holy freres, (*Note 2*)
That search every land and ev'ry stream
As thick as motes in the sunne-beam,
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchenes, and bowers,
Cities and burghes, castles high and towers,
Thorpes²⁷⁹ and barnes, shepens²⁸⁰ and dairies,
(*Note 3*)

This makes that there be now no faeries:
For there as²⁸¹ wont to walke was an elf,

²⁷⁷fairies.

²⁷⁸begging friars.

²⁷⁹villages.

²⁸⁰stables.

²⁸¹where.

There walketh now the limitour himself,
 In undermeles²⁸² and in morrowings²⁸³, (*Note 4*)
 And saith his matins and his holy things,
 As he goes in his limitatioun²⁸⁴.

Women may now go safely up and down,
 In every bush, and under every tree;
 There is none other incubus (*Note 5*) but he;
 And he will do to them no dishonour.

And so befell it, that this king Arthour
 Had in his house a lusty bachelor,
 That on a day came riding from river: (*Note 6*)
 And happen'd, that, alone as she was born,
 He saw a maiden walking him beforne,
 Of which maiden anon, maugre²⁸⁵ her head,
 By very force he reft her maidenhead:
 For which oppression was such clamour,
 And such pursuit unto the king Arthour,
 That damned²⁸⁶ was this knight for to be dead
 By course of law, and should have lost his head;
 (Paraventure such was the statute tho²⁸⁷),
 But that the queen and other ladies mo'
 So long they prayed the king of his grace,
 Till he his life him granted in the place,
 And gave him to the queen, all at her will
 To choose whether she would him save or
 spill²⁸⁸

The queen thanked the king with all her might;
 And, after this, thus spake she to the knight,
 When that she saw her time upon a day.
 "Thou standest yet," quoth she, "in such ar-

²⁸²evenings.

²⁸³mornings.

²⁸⁴begging district.

²⁸⁵in spite of.

²⁸⁶condemned.

²⁸⁷then.

²⁸⁸destroy.

ray²⁸⁹,
 That of thy life yet hast thou no surety;
 I grant thee life, if thou canst tell to me
 What thing is it that women most desiren:
 Beware, and keep thy neck-bone from the
 iron²⁹⁰
 And if thou canst not tell it me anon,
 Yet will I give thee leave for to gon
 A twelvemonth and a day, to seek and lear²⁹¹
 An answer suffisant²⁹² in this matter.
 And surety will I have, ere that thou pace²⁹³,
 Thy body for to yelden in this place."
 Woe was the knight, and sorrowfully siked²⁹⁴;
 But what? he might not do all as him liked.
 And at the last he chose him for to wend²⁹⁵,
 And come again, right at the year's end,
 With such answer as God would him purvey²⁹⁶:
 And took his leave, and wended forth his way.

He sought in ev'ry house and ev'ry place,
 Where as he hoped for to finde grace,
 To learne what thing women love the most:
 But he could not arrive in any coast,
 Where as he mighte find in this matter
 Two creatures according in fere²⁹⁷.
 Some said that women loved best richness,
 Some said honour, and some said jolliness,

²⁸⁹a position.

²⁹⁰executioner's axe.

²⁹¹learn.

²⁹²satisfactory.

²⁹³go.

²⁹⁴sighed.

²⁹⁵depart.

²⁹⁶provide.

²⁹⁷agreeing together.

Some rich array, and some said lust²⁹⁸ a-bed,
 And oft time to be widow and be wed.
 Some said, that we are in our heart most eased
 When that we are y-flatter'd and y-praised.
 He went full nigh the sooth²⁹⁹, I will not lie;
 A man shall win us best with flattery;
 And with attendance, and with business
 Be we y-limed³⁰⁰, bothe more and less.
 And some men said that we do love the best
 For to be free, and do right as us lest³⁰¹,
 And that no man reprove us of our vice,
 But say that we are wise, and nothing nice³⁰²,
 (Note 7)

For truly there is none among us all,
 If any wight will claw us on the gall³⁰³
 That will not kick, for that he saith us sooth:
 Assay³⁰⁴, and he shall find it, that so do'th.
 For be we never so vicious within,
 We will be held both wise and clean of sin.
 And some men said, that great delight have we
 For to be held stable and eke secre³⁰⁵,
 And in one purpose steadfastly to dwell,
 And not bewray³⁰⁶ a thing that men us tell.
 But that tale is not worth a rake-stele³⁰⁷.
 Pardie, we women canne nothing hele³⁰⁸, (Note
 9)

²⁹⁸pleasure.

²⁹⁹came very near the truth.

³⁰⁰caught with bird-lime.

³⁰¹whatever we please.

³⁰²foolish.

³⁰³see note 8

³⁰⁴try.

³⁰⁵discreet.

³⁰⁶give away.

³⁰⁷rake-handle.

³⁰⁸hide.

Witness on Midas; will ye hear the tale?
 Ovid, amonges other thinges smale³⁰⁹
 Saith, Midas had, under his longe hairs,
 Growing upon his head two ass's ears;
 The whiche vice he hid, as best he might,
 Full subtly from every man's sight,
 That, save his wife, there knew of it no mo';
 He lov'd her most, and trusted her also;
 He prayed her, that to no creature
 She woulde tellen of his disfigure.
 She swore him, nay, for all the world to win,
 She would not do that villainy or sin,
 To make her husband have so foul a name:
 She would not tell it for her owen shame.
 But natheless her thoughte that she died,
 That she so longe should a counsel hide;
 Her thought it swell'd so sore about her heart
 That needes must some word from her astart
 And, since she durst not tell it unto man
 Down to a marish fast thereby she ran,
 Till she came there, her heart was all afire:
 And, as a bittern bumbles³¹⁰ in the mire,
 She laid her mouth unto the water down
 "Bewray me not, thou water, with thy soun"
 Quoth she, "to thee I tell it, and no mo',
 Mine husband hath long ass's eares two!
 Now is mine heart all whole; now is it out;
 I might no longer keep it, out of doubt."
 Here may ye see, though we a time abide,
 Yet out it must, we can no counsel hide.
 The remnant of the tale, if ye will hear,
 Read in Ovid, and there ye may it lear³¹¹.
 This knight, of whom my tale is specially,
 When that he saw he might not come thereby,

³⁰⁹small.

³¹⁰makes a humming noise.

³¹¹learn.

That is to say, what women love the most,
 Within his breast full sorrowful was his ghost³¹².
 But home he went, for he might not sojourn,
 The day was come, that homeward he must
 turn.

And in his way it happen'd him to ride,
 In all his care³¹³, under a forest side,
 Where as he saw upon a dance go
 Of ladies four-and-twenty, and yet mo',
 Toward this ilke³¹⁴ dance he drew full yern³¹⁵,
 (Note 10)

The hope that he some wisdom there should
 learn;

But certainly, ere he came fully there,
 Y-vanish'd was this dance, he knew not where;
 No creature saw he that bare life,
 Save on the green he sitting saw a wife,
 A fouler wight there may no man devise³¹⁶.
 Against³¹⁷ this knight this old wife gan to rise,
 And said, "Sir Knight, hereforth³¹⁸ lieth no way.
 Tell me what ye are seeking, by your fay.
 Paraventure it may the better be:
 These olde folk know muche thing." quoth she.
 My leve³¹⁹ mother," quoth this knight, "certain,
 I am but dead, but if³²⁰ that I can sayn
 What thing it is that women most desire:
 Could ye me wiss, I would well quite your

³¹²spirit.

³¹³trouble, anxiety.

³¹⁴same.

³¹⁵eagerly.

³¹⁶imagine, tell.

³¹⁷to meet.

³¹⁸from here.

³¹⁹dear.

³²⁰unless.

hire³²¹." (*Note 11*)
 "Plight me thy troth here in mine hand³²²,"
 quoth she,
 "The nexte thing that I require of thee
 Thou shalt it do, if it be in thy might,
 And I will tell it thee ere it be night."
 "Have here my trothe," quoth the knight; "I
 grant."
 "Thenne," quoth she, "I dare me well avaunt³²³,
 Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby,
 Upon my life the queen will say as I:
 Let see, which is the proudest of them all,
 That wears either a kerchief or a caul,
 That dare say nay to that I shall you teach.
 Let us go forth withoute longer speech
 Then rownded she a pistel³²⁴ in his ear,
 And bade him to be glad, and have no fear.
 When they were come unto the court, this knight
 Said, he had held his day, as he had hight³²⁵,
 And ready was his answer, as he said.
 Full many a noble wife, and many a maid,
 And many a widow, for that they be wise, –
 The queen herself sitting as a justice, –
 Assembled be, his answer for to hear,
 And afterward this knight was bid appear.
 To every wight commanded was silence,
 And that the knight should tell in audience,
 What thing that worldly women love the best.
 This knight he stood not still, as doth a beast,
 But to this question anon answer'd
 With manly voice, that all the court it heard,
 "My liege lady, generally," quoth he,

³²¹instruct.

³²²reward you.

³²³boast, affirm.

³²⁴she whispered a secret.

³²⁵promised.

"Women desire to have the sovereignty
 As well over their husband as their love
 And for to be in mast'ry him above.
 This is your most desire, though ye me kill,
 Do as you list, I am here at your will."
 In all the court there was no wife nor maid
 Nor widow, that contraried what he said,
 But said, he worthy was to have his life.
 And with that word up start that olde wife
 Which that the knight saw sitting on the green.

"Mercy," quoth she, "my sovereign lady queen,
 Ere that your court departe, do me right.
 I taughte this answer unto this knight,
 For which he plighted me his trothe there,
 The firste thing I would of him requere,
 He would it do, if it lay in his might.
 Before this court then pray I thee, Sir Knight,"
 Quoth she, "that thou me take unto thy wife,

For well thou know'st that I have kept³²⁶ thy
 life.

If I say false, say nay, upon thy fay³²⁷."
 This knight answer'd, "Alas, and well-away!
 I know right well that such was my behest³²⁸.
 For Godde's love choose a new request
 Take all my good, and let my body go."

"Nay, then," quoth she, "I shrew³²⁹ us bothe two,
 For though that I be old, and foul, and poor,
 I n'ould³³⁰ for all the metal nor the ore,
 That under earth is grave³³¹, or lies above
 But if thy wife I were and eke thy love."

³²⁶preserved.

³²⁷faith.

³²⁸promise.

³²⁹curse.

³³⁰would not.

³³¹buried.

"My love?" quoth he, "nay, my damnation,
 Alas! that any of my nation
 Should ever so foul disparaged be.
 But all for nought; the end is this, that he
 Constrained was, that needs he muste wed,
 And take this olde wife, and go to bed.

Now woulde some men say paraventure
 That for my negligence I do no cure³³²
 To tell you all the joy and all th' array
 That at the feast was made that ilke³³³ day.
 To which thing shortly answeren I shall:
 I say there was no joy nor feast at all,
 There was but heaviness and muche sorrow:
 For privily he wed her on the morrow;
 And all day after hid him as an owl,
 So woe was him, his wife look'd so foul
 Great was the woe the knight had in his thought
 When he was with his wife to bed y-brought;
 He wallow'd, and he turned to and fro.
 This olde wife lay smiling evermo',
 And said, "Dear husband, benedicite,
 Fares every knight thus with his wife as ye?
 Is this the law of king Arthoures house?
 Is every knight of his thus dangerous³³⁴?
 I am your owen love, and eke your wife
 I am she, which that saved hath your life
 And certes yet did I you ne'er unright.
 Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?
 Ye fare like a man had lost his wit.
 What is my guilt? for God's love tell me it,
 And it shall be amended, if I may."
 "Amended!" quoth this knight; "alas, nay, nay,
 It will not be amended, never mo';

³³²take no pains.

³³³same.

³³⁴fastidious, niggardly.

Thou art so loathly, and so old also,
 And thereto³³⁵ comest of so low a kind,
 That little wonder though I wallow and wind³³⁶;
 So woulde God, mine hearte woulde brest³³⁷!"
 "Is this," quoth she, "the cause of your unrest?"
 "Yea, certainly," quoth he; "no wonder is."
 "Now, Sir," quoth she, "I could amend all this,
 If that me list, ere it were dayes three,
 So well ye mighte bear you unto me³³⁸
 But, for ye speaken of such gentleness
 As is descended out of old richness,
 That therefore shalle ye be gentlemen;
 Such arrogancy is not worth a hen³³⁹.
 Look who that is most virtuous alway,
 Prive and apert³⁴⁰, and most intendeth aye
 To do the gentle deedes that he can;
 And take him for the greatest gentleman.
 Christ will³⁴¹, we claim of him our gentleness,
 Not of our elders³⁴² for their old richness.
 For though they gave us all their heritage,
 For which we claim to be of high paragage³⁴³,
 Yet may they not bequeathe, for no thing,
 To none of us, their virtuous living
 That made them gentlemen called to be,
 And bade us follow them in such degree.
 Well can the wise poet of Florence,
 That highte Dante, speak of this sentence³⁴⁴,

³³⁵in addition.

³³⁶writhe, turn about.

³³⁷burst.

³³⁸if you could conduct yourself well towards me.

³³⁹worth nothing.

³⁴⁰in private and public.

³⁴¹wills, requires.

³⁴²ancestors.

³⁴³birth, descent.

³⁴⁴sentiment.

Lo, in such manner³⁴⁵ rhyme is Dante's tale.
 'Full seld'³⁴⁶ upriseth by his branches smale
 Prowess of man, for God of his goodness
 Wills that we claim of him our gentleness;' (*Note*
 12)

For of our elders may we nothing claim
 But temp'ral things that man may hurt and
 maim.

Eke every wight knows this as well as I,
 If gentleness were planted naturally
 Unto a certain lineage down the line,
 Prive and apert, then would they never fine³⁴⁷
 To do of gentleness the fair office
 Then might they do no villainy nor vice.
 Take fire, and bear it to the darkest house
 Betwixt this and the mount of Caucasus,
 And let men shut the doores, and go thence³⁴⁸,
 Yet will the fire as fair and lighte brenne³⁴⁹,
 As twenty thousand men might it behold;
 Its office natural aye will it hold³⁵⁰,
 On peril of my life, till that it die.
 Here may ye see well how that gentery³⁵¹
 Is not annexed to possession,
 Since folk do not their operation
 Always, as doth the fire, lo, in its kind³⁵²
 For, God it wot, men may full often find
 A lorde's son do shame and villainy.
 And he that will have price³⁵³ of his gent'ry,

³⁴⁵kind of.

³⁴⁶seldom.

³⁴⁷cease.

³⁴⁸thence.

³⁴⁹burn.

³⁵⁰it will perform its natural duty.

³⁵¹gentility, nobility.

³⁵²from its very nature

³⁵³esteem, honour.

For³⁵⁴ he was boren of a gentle house,
 And had his elders noble and virtuous,
 And will himselfe do no gentle deedes,
 Nor follow his gentle ancestry, that dead is,
 He is not gentle, be he duke or earl;
 For villain sinful deedes make a churl.
 For gentleness is but the renomee³⁵⁵
 Of thine ancestors, for their high bounte³⁵⁶,
 Which is a strange thing to thy person:
 Thy gentleness cometh from God alone.
 Then comes our very³⁵⁷ gentleness of grace;
 It was no thing bequeath'd us with our place.
 Think how noble, as saith Valerius,
 Was thilke³⁵⁸ Tullius Hostilius,
 That out of povert' rose to high
 Read in Senec, and read eke in Boece,
 There shall ye see express, that it no drede³⁵⁹ is,
 That he is gentle that doth gentle deedes.
 And therefore, leve³⁶⁰ husband, I conclude,
 Albeit that mine ancestors were rude,
 Yet may the highe God, – and so hope I, –
 Grant me His grace to live virtuously:
 Then am I gentle when that I begin
 To live virtuously, and waive³⁶¹ sin.
 "And whereas ye of povert' me reprove³⁶²,
 The highe God, on whom that we believe,
 In wilful povert' chose to lead his life:
 And certes, every man, maiden, or wife

³⁵⁴because.

³⁵⁵renown.

³⁵⁶goodness, worth.

³⁵⁷true.

³⁵⁸that.

³⁵⁹doubt.

³⁶⁰dear.

³⁶¹forsake.

³⁶²reproach.

May understand that Jesus, heaven's king,
 Ne would not choose a virtuous living.
 Glad povert'³⁶³ is an honest thing, certain;
 This will Senec and other clerkes sayn
 Whoso that holds him paid of³⁶⁴ his povert',
 I hold him rich though he hath not a shirt.
 He that coveteth is a poore wight
 For he would have what is not in his might
 But he that nought hath, nor coveteth to have,
 Is rich, although ye hold him but a knave³⁶⁵
 Very povert' is sinne³⁶⁶, properly.
 Juvenal saith of povert' merrily:
 The poore man, when he goes by the way
 Before the thieves he may sing and play (*Note*
 13)
 Povert' is hateful good, (*Note 14*) and, as I guess,
 A full great bringer out of business³⁶⁷;
 A great amender eke of sapience
 To him that taketh it in patience.
 Povert' is this, although it seem elenge³⁶⁸ (*Note*
 15)
 Possession that no wight will challenge
 Povert' full often, when a man is low,
 Makes him his God and eke himself to know
 Povert' a spectacle³⁶⁹ is, as thinketh me
 Through which he may his very³⁷⁰ friendes see.
 And, therefore, Sir, since that I you not grieve,
 Of my povert' no more me repreve³⁷¹.

³⁶³poverty cheerfully endured.

³⁶⁴is satisfied with.

³⁶⁵slave, abject wretch.

³⁶⁶the only true poverty is sin.

³⁶⁷deliver from trouble.

³⁶⁸strange.

³⁶⁹a pair of spectacles.

³⁷⁰true.

³⁷¹reproach.

"Now, Sir, of elde³⁷² ye reprove me:
 And certes, Sir, though none authority³⁷³
 Were in no book, ye gentles of honour
 Say, that men should an olde wight honour,
 And call him father, for your gentleness;
 And authors shall I finden, as I guess.
 Now there ye say that I am foul and old,
 Then dread ye not to be a cokewold³⁷⁴.
 For filth, and elde, all so may I the³⁷⁵,
 Be greate wardens upon chastity.
 But natheless, since I know your delight,
 I shall fulfil your wordly appetite.
 Choose now," quoth she, "one of these thinges
 tway,
 To have me foul and old till that I dey³⁷⁶,
 And be to you a true humble wife,
 And never you displease in all my life:
 Or elles will ye have me young and fair,
 And take your aventure of the repair³⁷⁷
 That shall be to your house because of me, –
 Or in some other place, it may well be?
 Now choose yourselfe whether that you liketh.

 This knight adviseth³⁷⁸ him and sore he
 siketh³⁷⁹.
 But at the last he said in this mannere;
 "My lady and my love, and wife so dear,
 I put me in your wise governance,
 Choose for yourself which may be most plea-

³⁷²age.

³⁷³text, dictum.

³⁷⁴cuckold.

³⁷⁵thrive.

³⁷⁶die.

³⁷⁷resort.

³⁷⁸considered.

³⁷⁹sighed.

sance
 And most honour to you and me also;
 I do no force³⁸⁰, the whether of the two:
 For as you liketh, it sufficeth me."
 "Then have I got the mastery," quoth she,
 "Since I may choose and govern as me lest³⁸¹."
 "Yea, certes wife," quoth he, "I hold it best."
 "Kiss me," quoth she, "we are no longer
 wroth³⁸²,
 For by my troth I will be to you both;
 This is to say, yea, bothe fair and good.
 I pray to God that I may sterve wood³⁸³,
 But³⁸⁴ I to you be all so good and true,
 As ever was wife since the world was new;
 And but³⁸⁵ I be to-morrow as fair to seen,
 As any lady, emperess or queen,
 That is betwixt the East and eke the West
 Do with my life and death right as you
 lest@please.@@.
 Cast up the curtain, and look how it is."
 And when the knight saw verily all this,
 That she so fair was, and so young thereto,
 For joy he hent³⁸⁶ her in his armes two:
 His hearte bathed in a bath of bliss,
 A thousand times on row³⁸⁷ he gan her kiss:
 And she obeyed him in every thing
 That mighte do him plesance or liking.
 And thus they live unto their lives' end
 In perfect joy; and Jesus Christ us send

³⁸⁰care not

³⁸¹pleases.

³⁸²at variance.

³⁸³die mad.

³⁸⁴unless.

³⁸⁵unless.

³⁸⁶took.

³⁸⁷in succession.

Husbandes meek and young, and fresh in bed,
And grace to overlive them that we wed.
And eke I pray Jesus to short their lives,
That will not be governed by their wives.
And old and angry niggards of dispence³⁸⁸,
God send them soon a very pestilence!

³⁸⁸expense.