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Gok and Her



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The Cok and Hen

Geoffrey Chaucer

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The Nomines Preestes Tale

of the

Book and Her

by

Geoffrey Chaucer

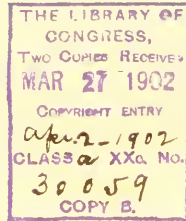
With Introduction by

William Cushing Bamberg



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To

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

this edition is dedicated as a token of
regard, affection and gratitude,—
would not Chaucer himself have done so
if he had known him who wrote
Friar Jerome's Beautiful Book?

To Chaucer



When break of day makes all the world so fair,
The sky so glorious in its dawning hue,
When all the pleasures of the morn accrue
From perfumes and swift songs borne on
the air,

With primal love we search some beauteous lair
In woodland copse, where stars still shine in dew,
Or yellow meadow, and beknown to few
Make of the roselit dawn a vigil rare,

So do we haunt the world that Chaucer limned,
Suffused with twilit glory never dimmed
By qualms or mysteries of a vast unknown,—
Each tale and romaunt vividly his own,
Born of a spirit like the morning fair
Shedding its young sweet beauty everywhere.

Introduction

Introduction

THERE have been many aphorisms cast in praise of Geoffrey Chaucer. He has been dubbed by Dryden, "the father of English poetry," as well as "a perpetual fountain of good sense"; he has been named "the first great painter of character because the first great observer of it"; he has been called "the brightest light in the Middle Ages in England," and likewise "the poet of the dawn"; Howell described him as "the pupil of manifold experience,—scholar, courtier, soldier, ambassador, who had known poverty as a housemate and been the companion of princes"; Oeeleve hailed him as "Maistre deare and fader reverent," wrote of him as "the floure of eloquence" and "mirrour of fructuous entendement"; Drayton sung of him that he was

" the first that ever broke
Into the Muses treasure and first spoke
In weighty numbers";

and Longfellow in measured sonnet wrote,

“ as I read
I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note
Of lark and linnet, and from every page
Rise odors of ploughed field and flowery mead.”

These and other chaplets placed upon the poet's brow by his worshippers are slowly being gathered by posterity to compose a greater crown, for the like of Geoffrey Chaucer has been paralleled but once. But Shakespeare wrote in an age when the language had first attained its clearness, its greatness, and its purity,— it was a perfect and melodious vehicle for his perfect and melodious genius. He became its master, and so dispersed his wealth of wisdom and imagination that he is the great god of literature who has left nothing unsaid.

Chaucer, however, came upon the English language at a period when the principal prowess was not supposed to lie in learning nor in poetry, but in the sword-hand. The language was childlike and bland, and so was he; his spirit grew to be singularly generous, though subject to the influence of a

motley existence in early years ; and the openness of his countenance was, no doubt, in strange contrast to the furtive and crafty glances of courtiers and gentlemen, or the expressionless ignorance of the peasantry of the time. Outstripping even his notable and moral friend Gower in ultimate fame, there is nothing in his or others' verses to reveal either the source or the inspiration of Chaucer's spirit or genius. Only from his own soul's desires could his poetic greatness have arisen. From the first he was a hearty man, o'er-bubbling with the health of high thoughts and genuine feelings ; and all that he wrote in that language which proved to be then in its transition between Anglo-Saxon and the plain but lucid English of the Elizabethan era, was the consummate outburst of that healthy and genuine spirit.

Pious, but without the vulgar taint of bigotry or hypocrisy, Chaucer's verse shows the influence of Wycliffe's preaching against the mediation of any earthly authority betwixt the soul and its Maker. That piety, linked with his honesty of thinking, and his reverence not for this world as he might have wished it to be but as it really was to him, were the basis of his faithful optimism, so opposed

to the lugubrious judgments of life put forth by the sombre Italian whose own hope was ever ready to be abandoned.

The freshness of Chaucer, the sunny vividness of his imagination,—not like the lightning, but like a crimson sunrise upon a world glistening with the dew spread under a starry heaven,—the frolicsome spirit of his gaiety, that shrewd jesting and quizzing, the mockery of all things no one should praise,—these qualities are but a tithe of all which call for praise from any reader who once marvels o'er his wealth of genius.

In Chaucer's poems and tales there is sufficient lore of books to prove his ready scholarship, agreeably divested of any musty odor of mediæval monastic libraries. It was fortunate for us that he lived at a time when learning was gradually ceasing to be the possession of the clergy alone, when humanity was creeping in to claim its meed of consideration,—Chaucer's interest in mankind being so honest, that lest he should bore his fellow men he constantly reveals his belief in man's innocent and primitive spirit. If he had been less a human poet, his images would have been less familiar and

less obvious to the eye of posterity; for his love is always friendly, his hatred a simple opposition to the existence of cant, evil, and falsity; his tenderness never somnolent, his satire never slothful; his wit as gentle as Fielding's and as direct as Hogarth's. It was only a rare genius that could make the pilgrims so democratic, though of diverse stations in life; and it was the same rare genius that individualized their conversations with keen discrimination, and in the tales, though cast in the form of narrative verse, revealed a dramatic spirit clear in purpose, each one written, not in a prevailing monotone as are the poems of Gower and Oecleve, but with an artistic skill not only in versification but in vivid and varied narration.

In his tale of Chanticleer and Pertelote, Chaucer has left to us a picture of farm-yard life not only so realistic as to forestall any later poet's success in similar description, but so full of his genius, with its burlesque fun, its serious digressions about dreams and superstitions, and with so witty a dénouement, that age cannot wither it. As a genre picture, Cypri or Teniers should have painted it, and as a drama in a farm-yard it is untheatrical and

simple enough to be served as a children's play. Even the banter between the cock and the hen is of that primitive order from which mankind has wandered into the cruel personality and baneful repartee of our modern world. Can we not feel the real amusement, the inimitable truth of the hen's remark to the cock, half in scorn, half in admonition,

“Have ye not a man's herte and have a beard?”

How real, too, is the shy mistranslation into a contrary sense of Chanticleer's little scrap of Latin, when he is pompously talking to his Sultana in the night! and how full of life and bustling excitement is the hue and cry in the barn-yard when Chanticleer is being kidnapped by the fox!

The occasional obscurity of Chaucer's Anglo-Saxon cannot ever be sufficiently dark to conceal his genius from the reader who is willing to apply his interest to the antiquity of the poet's English out of love for great poetry and the pleasures of the literary chase. His mastery reaches its greatest strength in the Knight's, the Pardoner's, the Canon's Yeoman's, and the Nun's Priest's tales, all of whose

plots are pleasant and happy in conception. The last, here printed, is so simple (and still so far above commonplace) that there remains little to say of it beyond extolling its wisdom and its wit, except that it probably closed the second day's story-telling by the pilgrims to the shrine of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, for they were "faste by" Rochester ere the monk began his tragedies, and it was at that city that it has been decided they must have slept their second night away from the Tabard Inn.

Among the many essays on Chaucer, none are more illuminative than Dryden's in the preface to his "Fables, Ancient and Modern,"—1700,—though we have in our own Lowell's masterly essay the fruits of a critical acumen and sympathetic genius of rare powers. Chaucer can never be the cause of a cult,—he is simply a man's poet, not a poet's poet like Spenser, nor a poet of culture, like Browning; but at all times will Chaucer represent, as Burns does to the Scotch, that enlightened, philosophical, moral worldliness, which may be described as did Lowell in the comparison which he made of Chaucer with Dante: "Dante represents the justice of God and Chaucer his loving-kindness."

Chaucer, by Occleve.



The Prologue

Prologue

HO!’ quod the knight, ‘good sir, namore
of this,
That ye han seyde is right y-nough,
y-wis,
And moche more; for litel hevinesse
Is right y-nough to moche folk, I gesse.
I seye for me, it is a greet disese
Wher-as men han ben in greet welthe and ese,
To heren of hir sodeyn fal, allas!
And the contrarie is joie and greet solas,
As whan a man hath been in povre estaat,
And clymbeth up, and wereth fortunat,
And ther abydeth in prosperitee,
Swich thing is gladsom, as it thinketh me,
And of swich thing were goodly for to telle.’
‘Ye,’ quod our hoste, ‘by seint Poules belle,
Ye seye right sooth; this monk, he clappeth loude,

He spak how "fortune couered with a cloude"
 I noot neuer what, and als of a "Tragedie"
 Right now ye herde, and parde! no remedie
 It is for to bitwaille, ne compleyne
 That that is doon, and als it is a pepne,
 As ye han seyde, to here of hevinessse.
 Sir monk, na-more of this, so god yow blesse!
 Your tale anoyeth al this companye;
 Swich talking is nat worth a boterflye;
 For ther-in is ther no desport ne game.
 Wherfor, sir Monk, or dan Piers by your name,
 I preye you hertely, telle us somwhat elles,
 For sikerly, nere clinking of your belles,
 That on your brydal hange on euery spide,
 By heuen king, that for us alle dyde,
 I sholde er this han fallen down for slepe,
 Although the slough had neuer been so depe;
 Than had your tale al be told in vayne.
 For certeinly, as that thise clerkes seyn,
 "Wher-as a man may haue noon audience,
 Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence."

And wel I woot the substance is in me,
 If any thing shal wel reported be.
 Sir, sey somwhat of hunting, I yow preye.
 'Nay,' quod this Monk, 'I haue no lust to pleye;
 Now let another telle, as I haue told.'
 Than spak our host, with rude speche and bold,
 And scyde un-to the Nonnes Preest anon,
 'Com neer, thou preest, com hider, thou sir John,
 Tel us swich thing as may our hertes glade,
 Be blythe, though thou ryde up-on a jade.
 What though thyn hors be bothe foule and lene,
 If he wol serue thee, relike nat a bene;
 Look that thyn herte be mercy evermo.'
 'Nis, sir,' quod he, 'nis, host, so mote I go,
 But I be mercy, y-wis, I wol be blamed:—
 And right anon his tale he hath attained,
 And thus he scyde un-to us euerichon,
 This swete preest, this goodly man, sir John.
 Explicit.

From the *Dynson Chaucer*, *Reccerc* (circa).

The tale of the nonnes preest

This swete preest this godely man sir John

Here endith the prologue of the nonnes preest
And begynneth his tale



a poure wydowe somdele y stept in age
Was somtyme duellyng in a cotage
Besyde a groue stondyng in a dale
This wydowe of whiche I telle you my tale
Sithen that day that she was last alwyf
By pacience ledde a ful symple lyf
For tytel was her catel and her rent
By husbondry of suche as god her sent
She fonde her self and eke her doughtren two
Thre large sowes hadde she and no moo
Thre byne and eke a shepe that hight malle
Welle soty was her boure and eke her halle
By whiche she ete many a stender mece

The Nonnes Preestes Tale

Here biginneth the Nonnes Preestes Tale of the
Cok and Hen, Chauntecleer and Pertelote.

A Povre widwe somdel stope in age,
Was whylom dwelling in anarwe cotage,
Bisyde a grove, stondyng in a dale.
This widwe, of which I telle poww my tale,
Sin thilke day that she was last a wyf,
In pacience ladde a ful simple huf,
for litel was hir catel and hir rente ;
By housbondrye, of such as God hir sente,
She fond hir self, and eek hir doghtren two.
Thre large solwes hadde she, and namo,
Thre kyn, and eek a sheep that highte Walle.
ful sooty was hir boue, and eek hir halle,
In which she eet ful many a selendre meel.
Of poymaunt sauce hir neded never a deel.
No deyntee morsel passed thurgh hir throte ;
Hir dyete was accordant to hir cote.
Apleccionn ne made hir nevere syk ;

Attēprece dyete was al hir phisick,
And exercyse, and hertes suffisaunce.
The goutte lette hir no-thing for to daunce,
Ne poplexye shente nat hir heed ;
No wyn ne drank she, neither whyt ne reed ;
Hir bord was serued most with whyt and blak,
Milk and broun breed, in which she fond no lack,
Seynd bacoun, and somtyme an ey or tweye,
For she was as it were a maner deye.

A yerd she hadde, enclosed al aboute
With stikikes, and a drepe dich with-oute,
In which she hadde a cok, hight Chauntecleer,
In al the land of crowing nas his peer.
His vois was merier than the merpe orgon
On messe-dayes that in the chirche gon ;
Wel sikkerer was his crowing in his logge,
Than is a clokke, or an abbey orlogge.
By nature knew he ech ascencioun
Of equinoxial in thilke toun ;
For whan degrees fiftene were ascended,
Channe crew he, that it mighte nat ben amended.

His comb was redder than the fyn coral,
 And batailed, as it were a castel-wal.
 His bile was blak, and as the Feet it shoon;
 Ylk asur were his legges, and his toon;
 His nayles whytter than the lilie flour,
 And ylk the burned gold was his colour.
 This gentil colt hadde in his governaunce
 Sevene hennes, for to doon al his plesaunce,
 Whiche were his sustres and his paramours,
 And wonder ylk to him, as of colours.
 Of whiche the faireste helwed on hir throte
 Was cleped faire damoysele Pertelote.
 Curteys she was, discret, and debonaire,
 And compaignable, and bar hir-self so faire,
 Sin thilke day that she was seven night old,
 That trewely she hath the herte in hold
 Of Chauntecleer loken in every lith;
 He loved hir so, that wel him was therwith.
 But such a Ioye was it to here hem singe,
 Whan that the brighte sonne gan to springe,
 In swete accord, 'my lief is faren in londe.'

For thilke tyme, as I have understonde,
Bestes and briddes coude speke and singe.

And so bifel, that in a dawenyng,
As Chauntecleer among his wyves alle
Sat on his perche, that was in the halle,
And next him sat this faire Pertelote,
This Chauntecleer gan gronen in his throte,
As man that in his dreem is deceched sore.
And tohan that Pertelote thus herde him rore,
She was agast, and seyde, 'o herte decee,
What eyleth yow, to grone in this manere?
Ye ben a verray sleper, fy for shame!'
And he answerde and seyde thus, 'madame,
I pray yow, that ye take it nat agrief:
By God, me mette I was in swich meschief
Right now, that yet myn herte is sore aright.
Now God,' quod he, 'my swedene rede aright,
And keep my body out of foul prisoun!
Me mette, how that I romed up and down
Withinne our perche, wher as I saugh a beste,
Was lyk an hound, and wolde han maad areste

Upon my body, and wolde han had me deed.
His colour was bitwixe yelwe and reed;
And tipped was his tail, and bothe his eres
With blak, unlyk the remenant of his heres;
His snowote smal, with glowinge open tvepe.
Yet of his look for fere almost I depe;
This caused me my groning, douteles.'

'Avoop!' quod she, 'fy on yow, herteles!
Allas!' quod she, 'for, by that God above,
Now han ye lost myn herte and al my love;
I can nat love a colward, by my feith.
For certes, what so any womman seith,
We alle desyren, if it mighte be,
To han housbondes hardy, wyse, and free,
And secree, and no nigard, ne no fool,
Ne him that is agast of every tool,
Ne noon abauntour, by that God above!
How dorste ye sayn for shame unto youre love,
That any thing mighte make yow aferd?
Have ye no mannes herte, and han a berd?
Allas! and come ye been agast of stwebenis?

No-thing, God wot, but vanitee, in sweben is.
 Swebenes engendren of replecciouns,
 And ofte of fume, and of complecciouns,
 Whan humours been to habundant in a wight.
 Certes this dreem, which ye han met to-night,
 Cometh of the grete superfluitee
 Of poure rede colera, pardee,
 Which causeth folk to dremen in here dremes
 Of arwes, and of fyr with rede lemes,
 Of grete bestes, that they wol hem byte,
 Of contek, and of whelpes grete and lyte;
 Right as the humour of malencolpe
 Causeth ful many a man, in sleep, to crye,
 For fere of blake beres, or boles blake,
 Or elles, blake deveses wole him take.
 Of othere humours coude I telle also,
 That werken many a man in sleep ful wo;
 But I wol passe as lightly as I can.

To Catoun, which that was so wys a man,
 Seyde he nat thus, ne do no fors of dremes?
 Now, sire,' quod she, 'whan we flee fro the bemes,

For Goddes love, as tak som laxatp;
 Up peril of my soule, and of my lpf,
 I counseille pow the beste, I wol nat lpe,
 That both of colere, and of malencolpe
 Ye purge pow; and for ye shul nat tarie,
 Though in this toun is noon apotecarie,
 I shal my-self to herbes techen pow,
 That shul ben for your hele, and for your prow;
 And in our perd tho herbes shal I fynde,
 The whiche han of here propretee, by kynde,
 To purgen pow binethe, and eek above.
 Forget not this, for Goddes owene love!
 Ye been ful colerik of compleccioun.
 Ware the sonne in his ascencioun
 He fynde pow nat replect of humours hote;
 And if it do, I dar wel lepe a grote,
 That ye shul have a fevere terciane,
 Or an agu, that may be poure bane.
 A day or two ye shul have digestpbes
 Of wormes, er ye take your laxatpbes,
 Of lauriol, centaure, and fumetere,

Or elles of ellebor, that groweth there,
Of catapuce, or of gaptres herpis,
Of erbe pve, growing in our yerd, that mery is ;
Make hem up right as they growe, and ete hem in.
Be mery, housbond, for your fader kyn !
Dredeth no dreem ; I can say yow namore.'

'Madame,' quod he, 'graunt mercy of your lore.
But natheles, as touching daun Catoun,
That hath of wisdom such a gret renoun,
Though that he had no dreemes for to drede,
By God, men may in olde bokes rede
Of many a man, more of auctoritee
Than evere Catoun was, so moot I thee,
That al the revers seyn of this sentence,
And han wel founden by experience,
That dreemes ben significaciouns,
As wel of Joye as tribulaciouns
That folk enduren in this lyl present.
The nedeth make of this noon argument ;
The verray preve sheweth it in dede.
Oon of the gretteste auctours that men rede

Scith thus, that whylom two felawes wente
 On pilgrimage, in a ful good entente ;
 And happed so, thay come into a town,
 Wher as ther was swich congregacioun
 Of peple, and eek so streit of herbergage,
 That they ne founde as mucche as o cotage,
 In which they bothe mighte y-logged be.
 Wherfor thay mosten, of necessitee,
 As for that night, departen compaignye ;
 And eek of hem goth to his hostelrye,
 And took his logging as it wolde falle.
 That oon of hem was logged in a stalle,
 Fer in a perd, with oxen of the plough ;
 That other man was logged wel y-nough,
 As was his aventure, or his fortune,
 That us governeth alle as in commune.
 And so bifel, that, long er it were day,
 This man mette in his bed, ther as he lay,
 How that his felawe gan up-on him calle,
 And seyde, 'allas ! for in an oxes stalle
 This night I shal be mordred ther I lye.

Now help me, dere brother, or I dye;
 In alle haste com to me,' he sayde.
 This man out of his sleep for fere abrapde;
 But whan that he was wakned of his sleep,
 He turned him, and took of this no keep;
 Him thoughte his dreem nas but a vanitee.
 Thus twyes in his sleping dreemed he.
 And atte thridde tyme yet his felawe
 Com, as him thoughte, and seide, 'I am now slawe;
 Bihold my bloody woundes, depe and wyde!
 Arys up erly in the morwe-tyde,
 And at the west gate of the town,' quod he,
 'A carte ful of donge ther shaltow see,
 In which my body is hid ful prively;
 Do thilke carte arresten boldely.
 My gold caused my mordre, sooth to sayn;
 And tolde him every point how he was slayn,
 With a ful pitous face, pale of helwe.
 And truste wel, his dreem he fond ful trewe;
 For on the morwe, as sone as it was day,
 To his felawes in he took the way;

And whan that he cam to this oves stalle,
 After his felawe he bigan to calle.
 The hostiler answerde him anon,
 And seide, 'sire, your felawe is agon,
 As sone as day he wente out of the town.'
 This man gan fallen in suspecioun,
 Remembring on his dremes that he mette,
 And forth he goth, no lenger wolde he lette,
 Unto the west gate of the town, and fond
 A dong-carte, as it were to donge lond,
 That was arraped in that same wyse
 As ye han herd the dede man debyse ;
 And with an hardy herte he gan to crye
 Vengeaunce and Justice of this felome :—
 ' My felawe mordered is this same night,
 And in this carte he lyth gapinge upright.
 I crye out on the ministres,' quod he,
 ' That sholden kepe and reulen this citee ;
 Harroto ! allas ! her lyth my felawe slayn !'
 What sholde I more un-to this tale sayn ?
 The peple out-sterte, and caste the cart to grounde,

And in the middel of the dong they founde
The ded man, that mordered was al newe.

O blisful God, that art so Iust and trewe !
Lo, how that thou bitrepest mordre allway !
Mordre wol out, that se we day by day.
Mordre is so wlatson and abhominable
To God, that is so Iust and resonable,
That he ne wol nat suffre it heled be ;
Though it abyde a peer, or two, or thre,
Mordre wol out, this my conclusioun.
And right anoon, ministres of that town
Han hent the carter, and so sore him pynded,
And eek the hostiler so sore engyned,
That thay biknewe hir wikkednesse anoon,
And were an-hanged by the neckke-boon.

‘ Here may men seen that dreemes been to drede.
And certes, in the same book I rede,
Right in the nexte chapitre after this,
(I gabbe nat, so have I Ioye or blis,)
Two men that wolde han passed over see,
For certeyn cause, in-to a fer contree,

If that the wind ne hadde been contrarie,
 That made hem in a citee for to tarie,
 That stood ful mery upon an haven-syde.
 But on a day, agayn the even-tyde,
 The wind gan chaunge, and blew right as hem leste.
 Jolif and glad they wente un-to hir reste,
 And casten hem ful rely for to saille ;
 But to that oo man fel a greet merbaille.
 That oon of hem, in sleying as he lay,
 Him mette a wonder dreem, agayn the day ;
 Him thoughte a man stood by his beddes syde,
 And him comaunded, that he sholde abyde,
 And seyde him thus, ' if thou to-morwe wende,
 Thou shalt be dreynt ; my tale is at an ende.'
 He wook, and tolde his felawe what he mette,
 And preyde him his viage for to lette ;
 As for that day, he preyde him to abyde.
 His felawe, that lay by his beddes syde,
 Gan for to laughe, and scorned him ful faste.
 ' No dreem,' quod he, ' may so myn herte agaste,
 That I wol lette for to do my thinges.

I sette not a straw by thy dreminiges,
 For swevenes been but vanitees and Japes.
 Men dreme al-day of owles or of apes,
 And eek of many a mase therewithal;
 Men dreme of thing that nevere was ne shal.
 But sith I see that thou wolt heer abyde,
 And thus for-sleuthen wilfully thy tyde,
 God wot it reweth me; and have good day.⁷
 And thus he took his leve, and wente his way.
 But er that he hadde halfe his cours p-seyled,
 Root I nat why, ne what mischaunce it eyled,
 But casuelly the shippes botme rente,
 And ship and man under the water wente
 In sighte of othere shippes it byside,
 That with hem seyled at the same tyde.
 And therfor, faire Pertelote so dere,
 By swiche ensamples olde maistow here,
 That no man sholde been to recchelees
 Of dremes, for I sey thee, doutelees,
 That many a dreem ful sore is for to drede.
 ‘Lo, in the lpf of seint Kenelm, I rede,

That was Kenulphus sone, the noble king
 Of Mercenrike, how Kenelm mette a thing;
 A lyte er he was mordred, on a day,
 His mordre in his avisoun he say.
 His norice him expounded every del
 His swevene, and bade him for to kepe him wel
 For traisoun; but he nas but seven peer old,
 And therfore litel tale hath he told
 Of any dreem, so holp was his herte.
 By God, I hadde levere than my sherte
 That ye had rad his legende, as have I.
 Dame Pertelote, I sey yow trewely,
 Macrobeus, that writ the avisoun
 In Affrike of the worthy Cipoun,
 Aftermeth dreemes, and seith that they been
 Warning of thinges that men after seen.
 And forther more, I pray yow loketh wel
 In the olde testament, of Daniel,
 If he held dreemes any vanitee.
 Gced eek of Joseph, and ther shul ye see
 Wher dreemes ben somtyme (I sey nat alle)

Warning of thinges that shul after falle.
 Loke of Egypt the king, daun Pharao,
 His bakere and his boteler also,
 Wher they ne felte noon effect in dremes.
 Who so wol seken actes of sondry remes,
 May rede of dremes many a wonder thing.
 ' Lo Cresus, which that was of Lyde king,
 Wette he nat that he sat upon a tree,
 Which signified he sholde anhanged be ?
 Lo heer Andromacha, Ectores wyf,
 That day that Ector sholde lese his lpf,
 She dremed on the same night biforn,
 How that the lpf of Ector sholde be lorn,
 If thilke day he wente in-to bataille ;
 She warned him, but it mighte nat abaille ;
 He wente for to fighte natheles,
 But he was slayn anoon of Achilles.
 But thilke tale is al to long to telle,
 And eek it is ny day, I may nat dwelle.
 Shortly I seye, as for conclusioun,
 That I shal han of this advisioun

Adversitee; and I sepe forther-more,
That I ne telle of laratpves no store,
For they ben venimous, I woot it wel;
I hem despye, I love hem nebere a del.

‘ Now let us speke of mirthe, and stinte al this;
Madame Pertelote, so have I blis,
Of o thing God hath sent me large grace;
For whan I see the beautee of your face,
He ben so scarlet-reed about youre pen,
It maketh al my drede for to dyen;
For, also siker as In principio,
Mulier est hominis confusio;
Madame, the sentence of this Latin is —
Womman is mannes Joye and al his blis.

.
I am so ful of Joye and of solas
That I despye bothe sweven and dreem.’
And with that word he fley down fro the beam,
For it was day, and cekt his hennys alle;
And with a chuk he gan hem for to calle,
For he had founde a corn, lay in the perd.

Royal he was, he was namore aferd;
He loketh as it were a grim leoun;
And on his toos he rometh up and down,
Him depned not to sette his foot to grounde.
He chukket, whan he hath a corn y-founde,
And to him reimen thanne his wyves alle.
Thus royal, as a prince is in his halle,
Leve I this Chauntecleer in his pasture;
And after wol I telle his aventure.

Whan that the month in which the world bigan,
That highte March, whan God first maketh man,
Was complet, and y-passed were also,
Sin March bigan, thritty dayes and two,
Bifel that Chauntecleer, in al his pryde,
His seven wyves walking by his syde,
Caste up his eyen to the brighte sonne,
That in the signe of Taurus hadde y-ronne
Twenty degrees and oon, and somwhat more;
And knew by kynde, and by noon other lore,
That it was pryme, and crew with blisful stevene.
'The sonne,' he sayde, 'is clomben up on hevene

Fourty degreces and oon, and more, p-wis.
 Madame Pertelote, my worldes blis,
 Herkneeth thise blisful briddes how they singe,
 And see the fresshe floures how they springe;
 Ful is myn hert of revel and solas.
 But sodeinly him fil a sorweful cas;
 For evere the latter ende of Ioye is wo.
 Got woot that worldly Ioye is sone ago;
 And if a rether coude faire endyte,
 He in a chronique saufully mighte it write,
 As for a sovereyn notabilitie.
 Now every wys man, lat him herkne me;
 This storie is also trewe, I undertake,
 As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,
 That wommen holde in ful gret reverence.
 Now wol I torne agayn to my sentence.
 A col-fox, ful of sly iniquitee,
 That in the grove hadde woned peres thre,
 By heigh imaginacioun forn-cast,
 The same night thurgh-out the hegges brast
 Into the perd, ther Chauntecleer the faire

Was wont, and eek his wybes, to repaire;
 And in a bed of wortes stille he lay,
 Til it was passed undern of the day,
 Wapting his tyme on Chauntecleer to falle
 As gladly doon thise homicydes alle,
 That in alwayt ligger to mordre men.
 O false mordre, lurking in thy den!
 O newe Scariot, newe Genilon!
 False dissimilour, O Greck Simon,
 That broghtest Trophe al outrelp to sorwe!
 O Chauntecleer, acursed be that morwe,
 That thou into that perd flough fro the bemes!
 Thou were ful wel y-warned by thy dremes,
 That thilke day was perilous to thee.
 But what that God forwot mot nedes be,
 After the opinioun of certeyn clerkis,
 Witnesse on him, that any perfit clerk is,
 That in scole is gret altercacioun
 In this matere, and greet disputioun,
 And hath ben of an hundred thousand men.
 But I ne can not bulke it to the bren,

As can the holy doctour Augustyn,
 Or Boece, or the bishop Bradwardyn,
 Whether that Goddes worthy forwiting
 Streyneth me nedely for to doon a thing,
 (Nedely clepe I simple necessitee);
 Or elles, if free choys be graunted me
 To do that same thing, or do it noght,
 Though God forwot it, er that it was wrought;
 Or if his witing streyneth nevere a del
 But by necessitee condicionel.
 I wol not han to do of swich matere;
 My tale is of a colk, as ye may here,
 That took his counseil of his wif, with sorwe,
 To walken in the perd upon that morwe
 That he had met the dreem, that I of tolde.
 Wommennes counseils been ful ofte colde;
 Wommannes counseil broghte us first to wo,
 And made Adam fro paradys to go,
 Ther as he was ful mery, and wel at ese.
 But for I noot, to whom it mighte displese,
 If I counseil of women wolde blame,

Passé ober, for I seide it in my game.
Hede auctours, wher they trete of swich matere,
And what thap seyn of wommen ye may here.
Thise been the cokkes wordes, and nat myne ;
I can noon harme of no womman dibyne.

Faire in the sond, to bathe hire mercily,
Uyth Pertelote, and alle hir sustres by,
Agayn the sonne ; and Chauntecleer so free
Song merier than the mermayde in the see ;
For Physiologus seith sikerly,
How that they singen wel and mercily.
And so bifel, that as he caste his pē,
Among the wortes, on a boterslye,
He was war of this fox that lay ful lowe.
No-thing ne liste him thanne for to crowe,
But cryde anon, 'cok, cok,' and up he sterte,
As man that was affrayed in his herte.
For naturelly a beest despreth flee
Fro his contrarie, if he may it see,
Though he never erst had seyn it with his pē.

This Chauntecleer, whan he gan him espye,

He wolde han fled, but that the fox anon
 Seyde, 'Gentil sire, allas! wher wol ye gon?
 Be ye affrayed of me that am your freend?
 Now certes, I were worse than a feend,
 If I to you wolde harm or vileinye.
 I am nat come your counseil for tresppe;
 But trewely, the cause of my cominge
 Was only for to herkne how that ye singe.
 For trewely ye have as mery a stevene,
 As eny aungel hath, that is in hevene;
 Therwith ye han in musik more felinge
 Than hadde Boece, or any that can singe.
 My lord your fader (God his soule blesse!)
 And eek your moder, of hir gentillesse,
 Han in myn hous y-been, to my gret ese;
 And certes, sire, ful fayn wolde I you please.
 But for men speke of singing, I wol sape,
 So mote I brouke wel myn eyen tweye,
 Save you, I herde nevere man so singe,
 As dide your fader in the mortweninge;
 Certes, it was of herte, al that he song.

And for to make his boys the more strong,
 He wolde so peyne him, that with both his pen
 He moste winke, so loude he wolde cryen,
 And stonden on his tiptoon therewithal,
 And stretche forth his necke long and smal.
 And eek he was of swich discrecioun,
 That ther nas no man in no regioun
 That him in song or wisdom mighte passe.
 I have weel rad in daun Burnel the Assse,
 Among his vers, how that ther was a cok,
 For that a prestes sone gaf him a knok
 Upon his leg, whyl he was pong and nyce,
 He made him for to lese his benefyce.
 But certepn, ther nis no comparisoun
 Bitwix the wisdom and discrecioun
 Of your fader, and of his subtiltee.
 Now singeth, sire, for scinte charitee,
 Let se, conne ye your fader countrefete ?
 This Chauntecleer his winges gan to bete,
 As man that coude his tresoun nat espye,
 So was he ravissshed with his flaterye.

Alas! ye lordes, many a fals flatour
Is in pour courtes, and many a losengeour,
That plesen yow wel more, by my feith,
Than he that soothfastnesse unto yow seith.
Fideth Ecclesiaste of flaterye ;
Beth war, ye lordes, of hir trecherye.

This Chauntecleer stood hye up=on his toos,
Strecching his necke, and held his eyn cloos,
And gan to crowe loude for the nones ;
And daun Russel the fox sterte up at ones,
And by the gargat hente Chauntecleer,
And on his bak toward the wode him beer,
For yet ne was ther no man that him serwed.
O destinee, that mayst nat ben eschewed !
Alas, that Chauntecleer fleigh fro the bemes !
Alas, his wyf ne roghte nat of dremes !
And on a friday til al this meschaunce.
O Venus, that art goddesse of plesaunce,
Sin that thy seruant was this Chauntecleer,
And in thy service dide al his poweer,
More for delyt, than world to multiplie,

Why woldestow suffre him on thy day to dye ?
 O Gaufred, dere mapster soberayn,
 That, whan thy worthy king Richard was slayn
 With shot, compleynedest his deth so sore,
 Why ne hadde I now thy sentence and thy lore,
 The Friday for to chide, as diden ye ?
 (For on a Friday soothly slayn was he.)
 That wolde I shewe yow how that I coude pleyne
 For Chauntecleres drede, and for his peyne.

Certes, swich cry ne lamentacioun
 Was nevere of ladies maad, whan Alioun
 Was wonne, and Pirrus with his streite swerd,
 Whan he hadde hent king Priam by the berd,
 And slayn him (as saith us Eneydos),
 As maden alle the hennes in the clos,
 Whan they had seyn of Chauntecleer the sighte.
 But sovereynly dame Pertelote shrighite,
 Ful louder than dide Hasdrubales wyf,
 Whan that hir housbond hadde lost his luf,
 And that the Romayns hadde brend Cartage,
 She was so ful of torment and of rage,

That wilfully into the fyr she sterte,
And brende hir selven with a stedfast herte.
O woful hennes, right so cryden ye,
As, whan that Nero brende the citee
Of Rome, cryden senatoures wyves,
For that hir housbondes losten alle hir lyves;
Withouten gilt this Nero hath hem slayn.
Now wol I torne to my tale agayn :

This sely widwe, and eek hir doghtres two,
Herden thise hennes crye and maken wo,
And out at dores sterten thay anoon,
And spen the fox toward the grove goon,
And bar upon his bak the cok away;
And cryden, 'Out! harrow! and weplaway!
Ha, ha, the fox!' and after him they ran,
And eek with staves many another man;
Han Colle our dogge, and Calbot, and Gerland,
And Halkin, with a distaf in hir hand;
Han cow and calf, and eek the berray hogges
So were they fered for berking of the dogges
And shouting of the men and twimmen eke,

They ranne so, hem thoughte hir herte breke.
 They pelleden as seendes doon in helle;
 The dokes cryden as men wolde hem quelle;
 The gees for fere flowne ober the trees;
 Out of the hybe cam the swarm of bees;
 So hidous was the noyse, a! benedicite!
 Certes, he Jakke Straw, and his meynee,
 He maden nevere shoutes half so shrille,
 Whan that they wolden any Fleming kille,
 As thilke day was maad upon the fox.
 Of bras thay broghten bemes, and of box,
 Of horn, of boon, in whiche they blewe and pouped,
 And therwithal thay shryked and they houped;
 It semed as that hevene sholde falle.
 Now, gode men, I pray yow herkneþ alle!
 Lo, how fortune turneth sodenly
 The hope and pryde eek of hir enemy!
 This cok, that lay upon the fores bak,
 In al his drede, un-to the fox he spak,
 And seyde, 'sire, if that I were as ye,
 Yet sholde I seyn (as wis God helpe me),

Turneth agayn, ye proude cherles alle!
 A verray pestilence up=on yow falle!
 Now am I come un-to this wodys spde,
 Haugree pour heed, the cok shal heer abyde;
 I wol him ete in feith, and that anon.—
 The fox answerde, ‘In feith, it shal be don,’—
 And as he spak that word, al sodeinly
 This cok brak from his mouth deliverly,
 And heighe up=on a tree he fleigh anon.
 And whan the fox saugh that he was y=gon,
 ‘Allas!’ quod he, ‘O Chauntecleer, allas!
 I have to yow,’ quod he, ‘y=doon trespas,
 In=as=muche as I maked yow aferd,
 Whan I yow hente, and broghte out of the perd;
 But, sire, I dide it in no wikke entente;
 Com down, and I shal telle yow what I mente.
 I shal sepe sooth to yow, God help me so.’
 ‘Nay than,’ quod he, ‘I shrewe us bothe two,
 And first I shrewe my=sel, bothe blood and bones,
 If thou bigyle me ofter than ones.
 Thou shalt namore, thurgh thy flaterye

Do me to singe and winke with myn yē.
For he that winketh, whan he sholde see,
All wilfully, God lat him never thee!
'Nay,' quod the fox, 'but God yive him meschaunce,
That is so undiscreet of governaunce,
That iangleth whan he sholde holde his pees.'

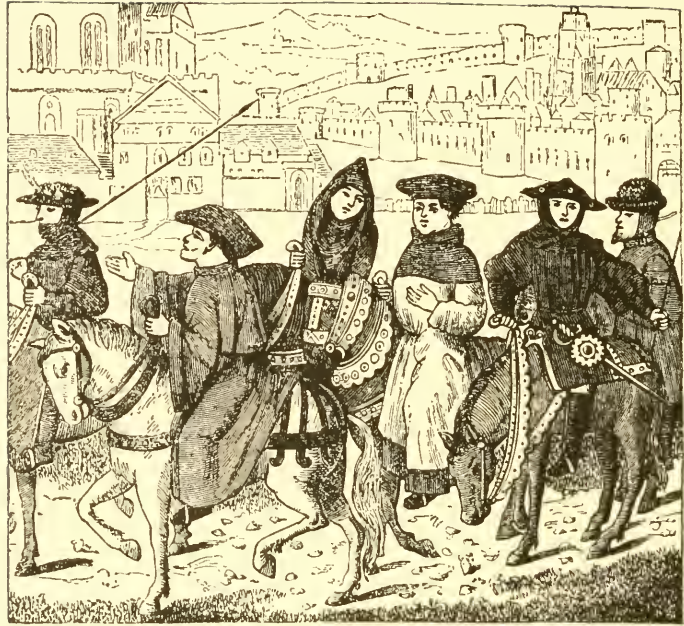
To, swich it is for to be recchelees,
And necligent, and truste on flaterye.
But ye that holden this tale a folpe,
As of a fox, or of a cok and hen,
Taketh the moralitee, good men.
For seint Paul seith, that al that writen is,
To our doctryne it is y-write, y-wis.
Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille.

Now, gode God, if that it be thy wille,
As seith my lord, so make us alle good men;
And bringe us to his heighe blisse. Amen.

Here is ended the Romes Preestes Tale.

L. of C.

The Canterbury Pilgrims.
From a miniature in the British Museum.



Epilogue

Epilogue



'**IN POPPES PREEST,**' our hoste
seyde anoon,
'Blessed be thy breche, and every
stoon!

This was a mery tale of Chauntecleer.
But, by my trouthe, if thou were secular,
Thou woldest been a trede-foul a-right.
For, if thou have corage as thou hast might,
Thee were nede of hennes, as I wene,
Ha, mo than seven tymes seventene.
See, whiche braunes hath this gentil Preest,
So greet a nekke, and swich a large breeste!
He loketh as a sperhawk with his pën;
Him nedeth nat his colour for to dpen
With brasil, ne with greyn of Portingale.
Now sire, faire falle yow for yowre tale!
And after that he, with ful mery chere,
Seide to another, as ye shullen here.

Note

Note



THE text of this edition is based on the Ellesmere MS., which, as the spelling is remarkable for clearness and intelligibility, and is fairly uniform in character, is the most desirable. No attempt has been—or should be—made to modernize Chaucer's words, for general alterations would destroy his sweet style, and to paraphrase his verses would be only covering the sheen of his gold with a coating of base brass. No better example of this can be found than in the comparison of Dryden's

“So take the corn and leaue the chaff behind”

with Chaucer's

“Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille.”

The germ of the *Donnes Preestes Tale* has been found in a fable of thirty-eight lines, “*Dou Coc et dou Werpil*,” in the poems of Marie de France,

which is amplified in the fifth chapter of the ancient French Roman du Renart of four hundred and fifty lines. It has also been shown that Marie's poem resembles one found in a Latin collection of Aesopian fables in a manuscript at Göttingen. The Reverend Professor Walter W. Skeat has translated Marie's fable, and it is here reprinted for comparative reading:

A Cock our story tells of, who
High on a dunghill stood and crew.
A Fox, attracted, straight drew nigh,
And spake soft words of flattery,
 'Dear Sir!' said he, 'your look's divine;
I never saw a bird so fine!
I never heard a voice so clear
Except your father's — ah! poor dear!
His voice rang clearly, loudly, — but
Most clearly, when his eyes were shut!' —
 'The same with me!' the Cock replies,
And flaps his wings, and shuts his eyes.
Each note rings clearer than the last —
The fox starts up and holds him fast;
Towards the wood he hies apace.
 But as he crossed an open space,

The shepherds spy him ; off they fly ;
The dogs give chase with hue and cry.
The fox still holds the Cock, though fear
Suggests his case is growing queer.—
'Tush!' cries the Cock, 'cry out, to grieve 'em,
"The Cock is mine ! I'll never leave him !"'

The fox attempts, in scorn, to shout,
And opens his mouth ; the Cock slips out,
And, in a trice, has gained a tree.

Too late the fox begins to see
How well the Cock his game has play'd ;
For once his tricks have been repaid.
In angry language, uncontrolled,
He 'gins to curse the mouth that's bold
To speak, when it should silent be.

'Well,' says the Cock, 'the same with me ;
I curse the eyes that go to sleep
Just when they ought sharp watch to keep
Lest evil to their lord befall.'

Thus fools contrariously do all :
They chatter when they should be dumb,
And, when they ought to speak, are mum.

The Nonnes Preestes Tale

Glossary

NOTE.— In reading Chaucer, E, ED, EN, ES, final except in the case of a few very common words, are always to be sounded, unless the following word begins with a vowel. On the other hand, EL, EN, ER, ETH, OM, final, are often to be very lightly pronounced. TO, THE, and NE are occasionally run into the word which follows. Words of French origin have sometimes the French, sometimes the English accentuation, but are fully sounded, so that, e. g., CREATURE, SOUEREIGNETÉ are respectively of FOUR and FIVE syllables. The greater number of Chaucer's verses have a slightly sounded extra syllable at the end; a very few have only one syllable in the first foot.

A. W. POLLARD.

Many of Chaucer's words are spelt phonetically, and need no especial translation.

abrayde, awoke
alle, always
anhanged, hung up
attamed, broached
attempree, a temperate
auctoritee, authority
auctours, authors
avoy, fie!

bar, bore, carried
batailed, embattled
bemes, horns, trumpets
beth war, beware
bile, bill
boles, bulls
boteler, butler
brasil, a dye
brast, burst
braunes, muscles
bren, meal
brend, burned
bridides, birds

brouke, to enjoy
bulte, bolted

catapuce, garden spurge
Catoun, Cato
cherles, churls
Cipioun, Scipio Africanus
clepe, summoned
cleped, called
colere, cholera
col-fox, treacherous fox
commune, commoners
contek, contest
cryden, cried out
curteys, courteous

dan or daun, lord
dawenyng, dawning
del, part, whit
desyren, desire
doon, take, make, cause
drecched, troubled
dreynt, drowned

eek, also	herte, heart
Eneydos, Æneas	hewed, hued, colored
engendren, are produced	hight, highte, was called
engyned, tortured	hostiler, inn keeper
ensamples, examples	hote, hotly
everichon, everyone	housbandrye, economy
ey, egg	
eyen, eyes	iapes, jests, tricks
eyled, ailed	in, inn
felawes, fellows, comrades	jeet, jet
fil, fell	jolif, joyful
flatour, flatterer	
fond, provided for	keep, take care!
forn-cast, forecast	
fors, force	ladde, led, carried
forsleuthen, to lose thro' sloth	lemes, gleams, flames
forwiting, foreknowledge	leoun, lion
forwot, foreknows	lese, to lose
fume, effects of gluttony	leste, pleased
fumetere, fumitory, a plant	levere, liefer
	lief is faren on londe, my love is gone away
gabbe, to lie	liggen, lying
gargat, throat	lith, limb
Gaufred, Geoffrey de Vinsauf	logge, lodge
gaytres, berries of the dogwood	loken, locked up
goth, goeth	lorn, lost
graunt mercy, give thanks	Lyde, Lydia
	lyte, little
han, have	
Harrow! a cry of distress	maistow, mayst thou
heed, head	maner deye, a sort of dairy maid
hegges, hedges	mase, a wild fancy
heled, hidden	Mercenrike, Mercia
hem, them	mette, dreamed
hent, seize	meynee, domestics
her, their	morwe, morrow
herbergage, lodging	mosten, must
heres, hairs	

namo, no more	shaltow, shalt thou
nas, none was	shente, hurt
nedely, of necessity	shoon, shone
nekke-boon, neckbone	siker, sikerer, sure
noon, none	sikerly, certainly
noot, knew not	somdel, somewhat
	soothly, truly
o, oo, one	stope, advanced
oftter, oftener	swevene, dream
orlogge, clock	swich, such
outrely, utterly	
outsterte, started out	thilke, the like
	thridde, the third
pardee, par Dieu	thurgh, through
perfit, perfect	toon, toes
pitous, piteous	tweye, two
pleyne, grieve	
povre, poor	undern, time of mid-day meal
poynaunt, poignant	
preve, prove	viage, voyage
prow, profit	
	war, aware
quelle, kill	ware, beware
	wight, any person
rad, read	wikke, wicked
reed, counsel	witing, knowledge
remes, realms	wlatsom, loathsome
rennen, running	woldestow, wouldst thou
roghte, cared for	woned, dwelt
Russel, a common name for the Fox	woot, know
	wortes, herbs
saufly, safely	yaf, gave
secree, secret	yën, eyes
sely, simple, poor	yelwe, yellow
seyn, seen	yive, give
seynd, singed, broiled	

¶ Of this edition of the *Donnes Preestes Tale of the Cok and Hen*, published in the month of March, 1902, by The Grafton Press, of the City of New York, there have been printed by Theodore V. De Vinne & Co., four numbered copies on Japanese vellum, twenty-six lettered copies on Whatman paper with illuminated title-pages and initials, and one hundred and one rubricated copies on Whatman paper. No other copies will be published. ¶ The copies lettered A to Z have been illuminated by William Cushing Bamburgh. ¶ The number of this copy is



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