HAVEPOETRY.COM

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE

THE PROLOGUE.

Our Hoste saw well that the brighte sun
Th' arc of his artificial day had run
The fourthe part, and half an houre more;
And, though he were not deep expert in lore,
He wist it was the eight-and-twenty day
Of April, that is messenger to May;
And saw well that the shadow of every tree
Was in its length of the same quantity
That was the body erect that caused it;
And therefore by the shadow he took his wit*, *knowledge
That Phoebus, which that shone so clear and bright,
Degrees was five-and-forty clomb on height;
And for that day, as in that latitude,
It was ten of the clock, he gan conclude;
And suddenly he plight* his horse about. *pulled <1>
"Lordings," quoth he, "I warn you all this rout*, *company
The fourthe partie of this day is gone.
Now for the love of God and of Saint John
Lose no time, as farforth as ye may.
Lordings, the time wasteth night and day,
And steals from us, what privily sleeping,
And what through negligence in our waking,
As doth the stream, that turneth never again,
Descending from the mountain to the plain.
Well might Senec, and many a philosopher,
Bewaile time more than gold in coffer.
For loss of chattels may recover'd be,
But loss of time shendeth* us, quoth he. *destroys
It will not come again, withoute dread,*
No more than will Malkin's maidenhead,<2>
When she hath lost it in her wantonness.
Let us not moulde thus in idleness.
"Sir Man of Law," quoth he, "so have ye bliss,
Tell us a tale anon, as forword* is. *the bargain
Ye be submitted through your free assent
To stand in this case at my judgement.
Acquit you now, and *holde your behest*; *keep your promise*

Then have ye done your devoir* at the least." *duty
"Hoste," quoth he, "de par dieux jeo asente; <3>
To breake forword is not mine intent.
Behest is debt, and I would hold it fain,
All my behest; I can no better sayn.
For such law as a man gives another wight,
He should himselfe usen it by right.
Thus will our text: but natheless certain
I can right now no thrifty* tale sayn, *worthy
But Chaucer (though he *can but lewedly* *knows but imperfectly*
On metres and on rhyming craftily)
Hath said them, in such English as he can,
Of olde time, as knoweth many a man.
And if he have not said them, leve* brother, *dear
In one book, he hath said them in another
For he hath told of lovers up and down,
More than Ovide made of mentioun
In his Epistolae, that be full old.
Why should I telle them, since they he told?
In youth he made of Ceyx and Alcyon,<4>
And since then he hath spoke of every one
These noble wives, and these lovers eke.
Whoso that will his large volume seek
Called the Saintes' Legend of Cupid:<5>
There may he see the large woundes wide
Of Lucrece, and of Babylon Thisbe;
The sword of Dido for the false Enee;
The tree of Phillis for her Demophon;
The plaint of Diane, and of Hermion,
Of Ariadne, and Hypsipile;
The barren isle standing in the sea;
The drown'd Leander for his fair Hero;
The teares of Helene, and eke the woe
Of Briseis, and Laodamia;
The cruelty of thee, Queen Medea,
Thy little children hanging by the halse*, *neck
For thy Jason, that was of love so false.
Hypermnestra, Penelop', Alcest',
Your wifehood he commendeth with the best.
But certainly no worde writeth he
Of *thilke wick'* example of Canace, *that wicked*
That loved her own brother sinfully;
(Of all such cursed stories I say, Fy),
Or else of Tyrius Apollonius,

How that the cursed king Antiochus
Bereft his daughter of her maidenhead;
That is so horrible a tale to read,
When he her threw upon the pavement.
And therefore he, *of full avisement*, *deliberately, advisedly*
Would never write in none of his sermons
Of such unkind* abominations; *unnatural
Nor I will none rehearse, if that I may.
But of my tale how shall I do this day?
Me were loth to be liken'd doubteless
To Muses, that men call Pierides<6>
(Metamorphoseos <7> wot what I mean),
But natheless I recke not a bean,
Though I come after him with hawebake*; *lout <8>
I speak in prose, and let him rhymes make."
And with that word, he with a sober cheer
Began his tale, and said as ye shall hear.

Notes to the Prologue to The Man of Law's Tale

1. Plight: pulled; the word is an obsolete past tense from "pluck."
2. No more than will Malkin's maidenhead: a proverbial saying; which, however, had obtained fresh point from the Reeve's Tale, to which the host doubtless refers.
3. De par dieux jeo asente: "by God, I agree". It is characteristic that the somewhat pompous Sergeant of Law should couch his assent in the semi-barbarous French, then familiar in law procedure.
4. Ceyx and Alcyon: Chaucer treats of these in the introduction to the poem called "The Book of the Duchess." It relates to the death of Blanche, wife of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the poet's patron, and afterwards his connexion by marriage.
5. The Saintes Legend of Cupid: Now called "The Legend of Good Women". The names of eight ladies mentioned here are not in the "Legend" as it has come down to us; while those of two ladies in the "legend" — Cleopatra and Philomela — are her omitted.
6. Not the Muses, who had their surname from the place near Mount Olympus where the Thracians first worshipped them; but the nine daughters of Pierus, king of Macedonia, whom he called the nine Muses, and who, being conquered in a contest with the genuine sisterhood, were changed into birds.
7. Metamorphoseos: Ovid's.
8. Hawebake: hawbuck, country lout; the common proverbial phrase, "to put a rogue above a gentleman," may throw light on the reading here, which is difficult.

THE TALE. <1>

O scatheful harm, condition of poverty,
With thirst, with cold, with hunger so confounded;
To aske help thee shameth in thine hearte;
If thou none ask, so sore art thou y-wounded,
That very need unwrappeth all thy wound hid.

Maugre thine head thou must for indigence
Or steal, or beg, or borrow thy dispence*. *expense
Thou blamest Christ, and sayst full bitterly,
He misdeparteth* riches temporal; *allots amiss
Thy neighebour thou witest* sinfully, *blamest
And sayst, thou hast too little, and he hath all:
"Parfay (sayst thou) sometime he reckon shall,
When that his tail shall *brennen in the glede*, *burn in the fire*
For he not help'd the needful in their need."
Hearken what is the sentence of the wise:
Better to die than to have indigence.
Thy selve neighebour will thee despise, *that same*
If thou be poor, farewell thy reverence.
Yet of the wise man take this sentence,
Alle the days of poore men be wick'*, *wicked, evil
Beware therefore ere thou come to that prick*. *point
If thou be poor, thy brother hateth thee,
And all thy friendes flee from thee, alas!
O riche merchants, full of wealth be ye,
O noble, prudent folk, as in this case,
Your bagges be not fill'd with *ambes ace,* *two aces*
But with *six-cinque*, that runneth for your chance;<2> *six-five*
At Christenmass well merry may ye dance.
Ye seeke land and sea for your winnings,
As wise folk ye knowen all th' estate
Of regnes*; ye be fathers of tidings, *kingdoms
And tales, both of peace and of debate*: *contention, war
I were right now of tales desolate*, *barren, empty.
But that a merchant, gone in many a year,
Me taught a tale, which ye shall after hear.
In Syria whilom dwelt a company
Of chapmen rich, and thereto sad* and true, *grave, steadfast
Clothes of gold, and satins rich of hue.
That widewhere* sent their spicery, *to distant parts
Their chaffare* was so thriftly** and so new, *wares **advantageous
That every wight had dainty* to chaffare** *pleasure **deal
With them, and eke to selle them their ware.
Now fell it, that the masters of that sort
Have *shapen them* to Rome for to wend, *determined, prepared*
Were it for chapmanhood* or for disport, *trading
None other message would they thither send,
But come themselves to Rome, this is the end:
And in such place as thought them a vantage
For their intent, they took their herbergage.* *lodging

Sojourned have these merchants in that town
A certain time as fell to their pleasance:
And so befell, that th' excellent renown
Of th' emperore's daughter, Dame Constance,
Reported was, with every circumstance,
Unto these Syrian merchants in such wise,
From day to day, as I shall you devise* *relate
This was the common voice of every man
"Our emperor of Rome, God him see*, *look on with favour
A daughter hath, that since the the world began,
To reckon as well her goodness and beauty,
Was never such another as is she:
I pray to God in honour her sustene*, *sustain
And would she were of all Europe the queen.
"In her is highe beauty without pride,
And youth withoute greenhood* or folly: *childishness, immaturity
To all her workes virtue is her guide;
Humbless hath slain in her all tyranny:
She is the mirror of all courtesy,
Her heart a very chamber of holiness,
Her hand minister of freedom for almess*." *almsgiving
And all this voice was sooth, as God is true;
But now to purpose* let us turn again. *our tale <3>
These merchants have done freight their shippes new,
And when they have this blissful maiden seen,
Home to Syria then they went full fain,
And did their needes*, as they have done yore,* *business **formerly
And liv'd in weal*; I can you say no more. *prosperity
Now fell it, that these merchants stood in grace* *favour
Of him that was the Soudan* of Syrie: *Sultan
For when they came from any strange place
He would of his benigne courtesy
Make them good cheer, and busily espy* *inquire
Tidings of sundry regnes*, for to lear** *realms **learn
The wonders that they mighte see or hear.
Amonges other thinges, specially
These merchants have him told of Dame Constance
So great nobless, in earnest so royally,
That this Soudan hath caught so great pleasance* *pleasure
To have her figure in his remembrance,
That all his lust*, and all his busy cure**, *pleasure **care
Was for to love her while his life may dure.
Paraventure in thilke* large book, *that
Which that men call the heaven, y-written was

With starres, when that he his birthe took,
That he for love should have his death, alas!
For in the starres, clearer than is glass,
Is written, God wot, whoso could it read,
The death of every man withoute dread.* *doubt
In starres many a winter therebeforn
Was writ the death of Hector, Achilles,
Of Pompey, Julius, ere they were born;
The strife of Thebes; and of Hercules,
Of Samson, Turnus, and of Socrates
The death; but mennes wittes be so dull,
That no wight can well read it at the full.
This Soudan for his privy council sent,
And, *shortly of this matter for to pace*, *to pass briefly by*
He hath to them declared his intent,
And told them certain, but* he might have grace *unless
To have Constance, within a little space,
He was but dead; and charged them in hie* *haste
To shape* for his life some remedy. *contrive
Diverse men diverse thinges said;
And arguments they casten up and down;
Many a subtle reason forth they laid;
They speak of magic, and abusion*; *deception
But finally, as in conclusion,
They cannot see in that none avantage,
Nor in no other way, save marriage.
Then saw they therein such difficulty
By way of reason, for to speak all plain,
Because that there was such diversity
Between their bothe lawes, that they sayn,
They trowe* that no Christian prince would fain** *believe **willingly
Wedden his child under our lawe sweet,
That us was given by Mahound* our prophete. *Mahomet
And he answered: "Rather than I lose
Constance, I will be christen'd doubteless
I must be hers, I may none other choose,
I pray you hold your arguments in peace,<4>
Save my life, and be not reckeless
To gette her that hath my life in cure,* *keeping
For in this woe I may not long endure."
What needeth greater dilatation?
I say, by treaty and ambassadry,
And by the Pope's mediation,
And all the Church, and all the chivalry,

That in destruction of Mah'metry,* *Mahometanism
And in increase of Christe's lawe dear,
They be accorded* so as ye may hear; *agreed
How that the Soudan, and his baronage,
And all his lieges, shall y-christen'd be,
And he shall have Constance in marriage,
And certain gold, I n'ot* what quantity, *know not
And hereto find they suffisant surety.
The same accord is sworn on either side;
Now, fair Constance, Almighty God thee guide!
Now woulde some men waiten, as I guess,
That I should tellen all the purveyance*, *provision
The which the emperor of his noblesse
Hath shapen* for his daughter, Dame Constance. *prepared
Well may men know that so great ordinance
May no man tellen in a little clause,
As was arrayed for so high a cause.
Bishops be shapen with her for to wend,
Lordes, ladies, and knightes of renown,
And other folk enough, this is the end.
And notified is throughout all the town,
That every wight with great devotioun
Should pray to Christ, that he this marriage
Receive *in gree*, and speede this voyage. *with good will, favour*
The day is comen of her departing, —
I say the woful fatal day is come,
That there may be no longer tarrying,
But forward they them dressen* all and some. *prepare to set out*
Constance, that was with sorrow all o'ercome,
Full pale arose, and dressed her to wend,
For well she saw there was no other end.
Alas! what wonder is it though she wept,
That shall be sent to a strange nation
From friendes, that so tenderly her kept,
And to be bound under subjection
of one, she knew not his condition?
Husbands be all good, and have been *of yore*, *of old*
That knowe wives; I dare say no more.
"Father," she said, "thy wretched child Constance,
Thy younge daughter, foster'd up so soft,
And you, my mother, my sov'reign pleasance
Over all thing, out-taken* Christ *on loft*, *except *on high*
Constance your child her recommendeth oft
Unto your grace; for I shall to Syrie,

Nor shall I ever see you more with eye.
"Alas! unto the barbarous nation
I must anon, since that it is your will:
But Christ, that starf* for our redemption, *died
So give me grace his hestes* to fulfil. *commands
I, wretched woman, *no force though I spill!* *no matter though
Women are born to thraldom and penance, I perish*
And to be under mannes governance."
I trow at Troy when Pyrrhus brake the wall,
Or Ilion burnt, or Thebes the city,
Nor at Rome for the harm through Hannibal,
That Romans hath y-vanquish'd times three,
Was heard such tender weeping for pity,
As in the chamber was for her parting;
But forth she must, whether she weep or sing.
O firste moving cruel Firmament,<5>
With thy diurnal sway that crowdest* aye, *pushest together, drivest
And hurtlest all from East till Occident
That naturally would hold another way;
Thy crowding set the heav'n in such array
At the beginning of this fierce voyage,
That cruel Mars hath slain this marriage.
Unfortunate ascendant tortuous,
Of which the lord is helpless fall'n, alas!
Out of his angle into the darkest house;
O Mars, O Atyzar,<6> as in this case;
O feeble Moon, unhappy is thy pace.* *progress
Thou knittest thee where thou art not receiv'd,
Where thou wert well, from thennes art thou weiv'd. <7>
Imprudent emperor of Rome, alas!
Was there no philosopher in all thy town?
Is no time bet* than other in such case? *better
Of voyage is there none election,
Namely* to folk of high condition, *especially
Not *when a root is of a birth y-know?* *when the nativity is known*
Alas! we be too lewed*, or too slow. *ignorant
To ship was brought this woeful faire maid
Solemnely, with every circumstance:
"Now Jesus Christ be with you all," she said.
There is no more,but "Farewell, fair Constance."
She *pained her* to make good countenance. *made an effort*
And forth I let her sail in this manner,
And turn I will again to my matter.
The mother of the Soudan, well of vices,

Espied hath her sone's plain intent,
How he will leave his olde sacrifices:
And right anon she for her council sent,
And they be come, to knowe what she meant,
And when assembled was this folk *in fere*, *together*
She sat her down, and said as ye shall hear.
"Lordes," she said, "ye knowen every one,
How that my son in point is for to lete* *forsake
The holy lawes of our Alkaron*, *Koran
Given by God's messenger Mahomete:
But one avow to greate God I hete*, *promise
Life shall rather out of my body start,
Than Mahomet's law go out of mine heart.
"What should us tiden* of this newe law, *betide, befall
But thraldom to our bodies, and penance,
And afterward in hell to be y-draw,
For we *renied Mahound our creance?* *denied Mahomet our belief*
But, lordes, will ye maken assurance,
As I shall say, assenting to my lore*? *advice
And I shall make us safe for evermore."
They sworen and assented every man
To live with her and die, and by her stand:
And every one, in the best wise he can,
To strengthen her shall all his friendes fand.* *endeavour<8>
And she hath this emprise taken in hand,
Which ye shall heare that I shall devise*; *relate
And to them all she spake right in this wise.
"We shall first feign us *Christendom to take*; *embrace Christianity*
Cold water shall not grieve us but a lite*: *little
And I shall such a feast and revel make,
That, as I trow, I shall the Soudan quite.* *requite, match
For though his wife be christen'd ne'er so white,
She shall have need to wash away the red,
Though she a fount of water with her led."
O Soudaness*, root of iniquity, *Sultaness
Virago thou, Semiramis the second!
O serpent under femininity,
Like to the serpent deep in hell y-bound!
O feigned woman, all that may confound
Virtue and innocence, through thy malice,
Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice!
O Satan envious! since thilke day
That thou wert chased from our heritage,
Well knowest thou to woman th' olde way.

Thou madest Eve to bring us in servage*: *bondage
Thou wilt fordo* this Christian marriage: *ruin
Thine instrument so (well-away the while!)
Mak'st thou of women when thou wilt beguile.
This Soudaness, whom I thus blame and warray*, *oppose, censure
Let privily her council go their way:
Why should I in this tale longer tarry?
She rode unto the Soudan on a day,
And said him, that she would *reny her lay,* *renounce her creed*
And Christendom of priestes' handes fong*, *take<9>
Repenting her she heathen was so long;
Beseeching him to do her that honour,
That she might have the Christian folk to feast:
"To please them I will do my labour."
The Soudan said, "I will do at your hest,*" *desire
And kneeling, thanked her for that request;
So glad he was, he wist* not what to say. *knew
She kiss'd her son, and home she went her way.
Arrived be these Christian folk to land
In Syria, with a great solemne rout,
And hastily this Soudan sent his sond,* *message
First to his mother, and all the realm about,
And said, his wife was comen out of doubt,
And pray'd them for to ride again* the queen, *to meet
The honour of his regne* to sustene. *realm
Great was the press, and rich was the array
Of Syrians and Romans met *in fere*. *in company*
The mother of the Soudan rich and gay
Received her with all so glad a cheer* *face
As any mother might her daughter dear
And to the nexte city there beside
A softe pace solemnely they ride.
Nought, trow I, the triumph of Julius
Of which that Lucan maketh such a boast,
Was royaller, or more curious,
Than was th' assembly of this blissful host
But O this scorpion, this wicked ghost,* *spirit
The Soudaness, for all her flattering
Cast* under this full mortally to sting. *contrived
The Soudan came himself soon after this,
So royally, that wonder is to tell,
And welcomed her with all joy and bliss.
And thus in mirth and joy I let them dwell.
The fruit of his matter is that I tell;

When the time came, men thought it for the best
That revel stint,* and men go to their rest. *cease
The time is come that this old Soudaness
Ordained hath the feast of which I told,
And to the feast the Christian folk them dress
In general, yea, bothe young and old.
There may men feast and royalty behold,
And dainties more than I can you devise;
But all too dear they bought it ere they rise.
O sudden woe, that ev'r art successour
To worldly bliss! sprent* is with bitterness *sprinkled
Th' end of our joy, of our worldly labour;
Woe *occupies the fine* of our gladness. *seizes the end*
Hearken this counsel, for thy sickerness*: *security
Upon thy glade days have in thy mind
The unware* woe of harm, that comes behind. *unforeseen
For, shortly for to tell it at a word,
The Soudan and the Christians every one
Were all *to-hewn and sticked* at the board, *cut to pieces*
But it were only Dame Constance alone.
This olde Soudaness, this cursed crone,
Had with her friendes done this cursed deed,
For she herself would all the country lead.
Nor there was Syrian that was converted,
That of the counsel of the Soudan wot*, *knew
That was not all to-hewn, ere he asterted*: *escaped
And Constance have they ta'en anon foot-hot*, *immediately
And in a ship all steereless,* God wot, *without rudder
They have her set, and bid her learn to sail
Out of Syria *again-ward to Itale.* *back to Italy*
A certain treasure that she thither lad,* *took
And, sooth to say, of victual great plenty,
They have her giv'n, and clothes eke she had
And forth she sailed in the salte sea:
O my Constance, full of benignity,
O emperores younge daughter dear,
He that is lord of fortune be thy steer*! *rudder, guide
She bless'd herself, and with full piteous voice
Unto the cross of Christ thus saide she;
"O dear, O wealful* altar, holy cross, *blessed, beneficent
Red of the Lambes blood, full of pity,
That wash'd the world from old iniquity,
Me from the fiend and from his clawes keep,
That day that I shall drenchen* in the deepe. *drown

"Victorious tree, protection of the true,
That only worthy were for to bear
The King of Heaven, with his woundes new,
The white Lamb, that hurt was with a spear;
Flemer* of fiendes out of him and her *banisher, driver out
On which thy limbes faithfully extend,<10>
Me keep, and give me might my life to mend."
Yeares and days floated this creature
Throughout the sea of Greece, unto the strait
Of Maroc*, as it was her a venture: *Morocco; Gibraltar
On many a sorry meal now may she bait,
After her death full often may she wait*, *expect
Ere that the wilde waves will her drive
Unto the place *there as* she shall arrive. *where
Men mighten aske, why she was not slain?
Eke at the feast who might her body save?
And I answer to that demand again,
Who saved Daniel in the horrible cave,
Where every wight, save he, master or knave*, *servant
Was with the lion frett*, ere he astart?** *devoured ** escaped
No wight but God, that he bare in his heart.
God list* to shew his wonderful miracle *it pleased
In her, that we should see his mighty workes:
Christ, which that is to every harm triacle*, *remedy, salve
By certain meanes oft, as knowe clerkes*, *scholars
Doth thing for certain ende, that full derk is
To manne's wit, that for our, ignorance
Ne cannot know his prudent purveyance*. *foresight
Now since she was not at the feast y-slaw,* *slain
Who kepte her from drowning in the sea?
Who kepte Jonas in the fish's maw,
Till he was spouted up at Nineveh?
Well may men know, it was no wight but he
That kept the Hebrew people from drowning,
With drye feet throughout the sea passing.
Who bade the foure spirits of tempest,<11>
That power have t' annoye land and sea,
Both north and south, and also west and east,
Annoye neither sea, nor land, nor tree?
Soothly the commander of that was he
That from the tempest aye this woman kept,
As well when she awoke as when she slept.
Where might this woman meat and drinke have?
Three year and more how lasted her vitaille*? *victuals

Who fed the Egyptian Mary in the cave
Or in desert? no wight but Christ *sans faille.* *without fail*
Five thousand folk it was as great marvaille
With loaves five and fishes two to feed
God sent his foison* at her greate need. *abundance
She drived forth into our ocean
Throughout our wilde sea, till at the last
Under an hold*, that nempnen** I not can, *castle **name
Far in Northumberland, the wave her cast
And in the sand her ship sticked so fast
That thennes would it not in all a tide: <12>
The will of Christ was that she should abide.
The Constable of the castle down did fare* *go
To see this wreck, and all the ship he sought*, *searched
And found this weary woman full of care;
He found also the treasure that she brought:
In her language mercy she besought,
The life out of her body for to twin*, *divide
Her to deliver of woe that she was in.
A manner Latin corrupt <13> was her speech,
But algate* thereby was she understond. *nevertheless
The Constable, when him list no longer seech*, *search
This woeful woman brought he to the lond.
She kneeled down, and thanked *Godde's sond*; *what God had sent*
But what she was she would to no man say
For foul nor fair, although that she should dey.* *die
She said, she was so mazed in the sea,
That she forgot her minde, by her truth.
The Constable had of her so great pity
And eke his wife, that they wept for ruth:* *pity
She was so diligent withoute slouth
To serve and please every one in that place,
That all her lov'd, that looked in her face.
The Constable and Dame Hermegild his wife
Were Pagans, and that country every where;
But Hermegild lov'd Constance as her life;
And Constance had so long sojourned there
In orisons, with many a bitter tear,
Till Jesus had converted through His grace
Dame Hermegild, Constabless of that place.
In all that land no Christians durste rout;* *assemble
All Christian folk had fled from that country
Through Pagans, that conquered all about
The plages* of the North by land and sea. *regions, coasts

To Wales had fled the *Christianity *the Old Britons who
Of olde Britons,* dwelling in this isle; were Christians*
There was their refuge for the meanewhile.
But yet n'ere* Christian Britons so exiled, *there were
That there n'ere* some which in their privity not
Honoured Christ, and heathen folk beguiled;
And nigh the castle such there dwelled three:
And one of them was blind, and might not see,
But* it were with thilk* eyen of his mind, *except **those
With which men maye see when they be blind.
Bright was the sun, as in a summer's day,
For which the Constable, and his wife also,
And Constance, have y-take the righte way
Toward the sea a furlong way or two,
To playen, and to roame to and fro;
And in their walk this blinde man they met,
Crooked and old, with eyen fast y-shet.* *shut
"In the name of Christ," cried this blind Briton,
"Dame Hermegild, give me my sight again!"
This lady *wax'd afrayed of that soun',* *was alarmed by that cry*
Lest that her husband, shortly for to sayn,
Would her for Jesus Christe's love have slain,
Till Constance made her hold, and bade her wirch* *work
The will of Christ, as daughter of holy Church
The Constable wax'd abashed* of that sight, *astonished
And saide; *"What amounteth all this fare?"* *what means all
Constance answered; "Sir, it is Christ's might, this ado?*
That helpeth folk out of the fiendes snare:"
And *so farforth* she gan our law declare, *with such effect*
That she the Constable, ere that it were eve,
Converted, and on Christ made him believe.
This Constable was not lord of the place
Of which I speak, there as he Constance fand,* *found
But kept it strongly many a winter space,
Under Alla, king of Northumberland,
That was full wise, and worthy of his hand
Against the Scotes, as men may well hear;
But turn I will again to my mattere.
Satan, that ever us waiteth to beguile,
Saw of Constance all her perfectioun,
And *cast anon how he might quite her while;* *considered how to have
And made a young knight, that dwelt in that town, revenge on her*
Love her so hot of foul affectioun,
That verily him thought that he should spill* *perish

But* he of her might ones have his will. *unless
He wooed her, but it availed nought;
She woulde do no sinne by no way:
And for despite, he compassed his thought
To make her a shameful death to dey;* *die
He waiteth when the Constable is away,
And privily upon a night he crept
In Hermegilda's chamber while she slept.
Weary, forwaked* in her orisons, *having been long awake
Sleepeth Constance, and Hermegild also.
This knight, through Satanas' temptation;
All softetly is to the bed y-go,* *gone
And cut the throat of Hermegild in two,
And laid the bloody knife by Dame Constance,
And went his way, there God give him mischance.
Soon after came the Constable home again,
And eke Alla that king was of that land,
And saw his wife dispiteously* slain, *cruelly
For which full oft he wept and wrung his hand;
And ill the bed the bloody knife he fand
By Dame Constance: Alas! what might she say?
For very woe her wit was all away.
To King Alla was told all this mischance
And eke the time, and where, and in what wise
That in a ship was founden this Constance,
As here before ye have me heard devise:* *describe
The kinges heart for pity *gan agrise,* *to be grieved, to tremble*
When he saw so benign a creature
Fall in disease* and in misaventure. *distress
For as the lamb toward his death is brought,
So stood this innocent before the king:
This false knight, that had this treason wrought,
Bore her in hand that she had done this thing: *accused her falsely*
But natheless there was great murmuring
Among the people, that say they cannot guess
That she had done so great a wickedness.
For they had seen her ever virtuous,
And loving Hermegild right as her life:
Of this bare witness each one in that house,
Save he that Hermegild slew with his knife:
This gentle king had *caught a great motife* *been greatly moved
Of this witness, and thought he would inquere by the evidence*
Deeper into this case, the truth to lear.* *learn
Alas! Constance, thou has no champion,

Nor fighte canst thou not, so well-away!
But he that starf for our redemption, *died
And bound Satan, and yet li'th where he lay,
So be thy stronge champion this day:
For, but Christ upon thee miracle kithe,* *show
Withoute guilt thou shalt be slain *as swithe.* *immediately*
She set her down on knees, and thus she said;
"Immortal God, that savedest Susanne
From false blame; and thou merciful maid,
Mary I mean, the daughter to Saint Anne,
Before whose child the angels sing Osanne,* *Hosanna
If I be guiltless of this felony,
My succour be, or elles shall I die."
Have ye not seen sometime a pale face
(Among a press) of him that hath been lad* *led
Toward his death, where he getteth no grace,
And such a colour in his face hath had,
Men mighte know him that was so bestad* *bested, situated
Amonges all the faces in that rout?
So stood Constance, and looked her about.
O queenes living in prosperity,
Duchesses, and ye ladies every one,
Have some ruth* on her adversity! *pity
An emperor's daughter, she stood alone;
She had no wight to whom to make her moan.
O blood royal, that standest in this drede,* *danger
Far be thy friendes in thy greate need!
This king Alla had such compassioun,
As gentle heart is full filled of pity,
That from his eyen ran the water down
"Now hastily do fetch a book," quoth he;
"And if this knight will sweare, how that she
This woman slew, yet will we us advise* *consider
Whom that we will that shall be our justice."
A Briton book, written with Evangiles,* *the Gospels
Was fetched, and on this book he swore anon
She guilty was; and, in the meanewhiles,
An hand him smote upon the necke bone,
That down he fell at once right as a stone:
And both his eyen burst out of his face
In sight of ev'rybody in that place.
A voice was heard, in general audience,
That said; "Thou hast deslander'd guilteless
The daughter of holy Church in high presence;

Thus hast thou done, and yet *hold I my peace?"* *shall I be silent?*
Of this marvel aghast was all the press,
As mazed folk they stood every one
For dread of wreake,* save Constance alone. *vengeance
Great was the dread and eke the repentance
Of them that hadde wrong suspicion
Upon this sely* innocent Constance; *simple, harmless
And for this miracle, in conclusion,
And by Constance's mediation,
The king, and many another in that place,
Converted was, thanked be Christe's grace!
This false knight was slain for his untruth
By judgement of Alla hastily;
And yet Constance had of his death great ruth;* *compassion
And after this Jesus of his mercy
Made Alla wedde full solemnely
This holy woman, that is so bright and sheen,
And thus hath Christ y-made Constance a queen.
But who was woeful, if I shall not lie,
Of this wedding but Donegild, and no mo',
The kinge's mother, full of tyranny?
Her thought her cursed heart would burst in two;
She would not that her son had done so;
Her thought it a despite that he should take
So strange a creature unto his make.* *mate, consort
Me list not of the chaff nor of the stre* *straw
Make so long a tale, as of the corn.
What should I tellen of the royalty
Of this marriage, or which course goes beforn,
Who bloweth in a trump or in an horn?
The fruit of every tale is for to say;
They eat and drink, and dance, and sing, and play.
They go to bed, as it was skill* and right; *reasonable
For though that wives be full holy things,
They muste take in patience at night
Such manner* necessaries as be pleasings *kind of
To folk that have y-wedded them with rings,
And lay *a lite* their holiness aside *a little of*
As for the time, it may no better betide.
On her he got a knave* child anon, *male <14>
And to a Bishop and to his Constable eke
He took his wife to keep, when he is gone
To Scotland-ward, his foemen for to seek.
Now fair Constance, that is so humble and meek,

So long is gone with childe till that still
She held her chamb'r, abiding Christe's will
The time is come, a knave child she bare;
Mauricius at the font-stone they him call.
This Constable *doth forth come* a messenger, *caused to come forth*
And wrote unto his king that clep'd was All',
How that this blissful tiding is befall,
And other tidings speedful for to say
He* hath the letter, and forth he go'th his way. *i.e. the messenger
This messenger, to *do his avantage,* *promote his own interest*
Unto the kinge's mother rideth swithe,* *swiftly
And saluteth her full fair in his language.
"Madame," quoth he, "ye may be glad and blithe,
And thanke God an hundred thousand sithe;* *times
My lady queen hath child, withoute doubt,
To joy and bliss of all this realm about.
"Lo, here the letter sealed of this thing,
That I must bear with all the haste I may:
If ye will aught unto your son the king,
I am your servant both by night and day."
Donegild answer'd, "As now at this time, nay;
But here I will all night thou take thy rest,
To-morrow will I say thee what me lest.*" *pleases
This messenger drank sadly* ale and wine, *steadily
And stolen were his letters privily
Out of his box, while he slept as a swine;
And counterfeited was full subtilly
Another letter, wrote full sinfully,
Unto the king, direct of this mattere
From his Constable, as ye shall after hear.
This letter said, the queen deliver'd was
Of so horrible a fiendlike creature,
That in the castle none so hardy* was *brave
That any while he durst therein endure:
The mother was an elf by aventure
Become, by charmes or by sorcery,
And every man hated her company.
Woe was this king when he this letter had seen,
But to no wight he told his sorrows sore,
But with his owen hand he wrote again,
"Welcome the sond* of Christ for evermore *will, sending
To me, that am now learned in this lore:
Lord, welcome be thy lust* and thy pleasance, *will, pleasure
My lust I put all in thine ordinance.

"Keepe* this child, albeit foul or fair, *preserve
And eke my wife, unto mine homecoming:
Christ when him list may send to me an heir
More agreeable than this to my liking."
This letter he sealed, privily weeping.
Which to the messenger was taken soon,
And forth he went, there is no more to do'n.* *do
O messenger full fill'd of drunkenness,
Strong is thy breath, thy limbes falter aye,
And thou betrayest alle secretness;
Thy mind is lorn,* thou janglest as a jay; *lost
Thy face is turned in a new array;* *aspect
Where drunkenness reigneth in any rout,* *company
There is no counsel hid, withoute doubt.
O Donegild, I have no English dign* *worthy
Unto thy malice, and thy tyranny:
And therefore to the fiend I thee resign,
Let him indite of all thy treachery
'Fy, mannish,* fy! O nay, by God I lie; *unwomanly woman
Fy, fiendlike spirit! for I dare well tell,
Though thou here walk, thy spirit is in hell.
This messenger came from the king again,
And at the kinge's mother's court he light,* *alighted
And she was of this messenger full fain,* *glad
And pleased him in all that e'er she might.
He drank, and *well his girdle underpight*; *stowed away (liquor)
He slept, and eke he snored in his guise under his girdle*
All night, until the sun began to rise.
Eft* were his letters stolen every one, *again
And counterfeited letters in this wise:
The king commanded his Constable anon,
On pain of hanging and of high jewise,* *judgement
That he should suffer in no manner wise
Constance within his regne* for to abide *kingdom
Three dayes, and a quarter of a tide;
But in the same ship as he her fand,
Her and her younge son, and all her gear,
He shoulde put, and crowd* her from the land, *push
And charge her, that she never eft come there.
O my Constance, well may thy ghost* have fear, *spirit
And sleeping in thy dream be in penance,* *pain, trouble
When Donegild cast* all this ordinance.** *contrived **plan, plot
This messenger, on morrow when he woke,
Unto the castle held the nexte* way, *nearest

And to the constable the letter took;
And when he this dispiteous* letter sey,** *cruel **saw
Full oft he said, "Alas, and well-away!
Lord Christ," quoth he, "how may this world endure?
So full of sin is many a creature.
"O mighty God, if that it be thy will,
Since thou art rightful judge, how may it be
That thou wilt suffer innocence to spill,* *be destroyed
And wicked folk reign in prosperity?
Ah! good Constance, alas! so woe is me,
That I must be thy tormentor, or dey* *die
A shameful death, there is no other way.
Wept bothe young and old in all that place,
When that the king this cursed letter sent;
And Constance, with a deadly pale face,
The fourthe day toward her ship she went.
But natheless she took in good intent
The will of Christ, and kneeling on the strond* *strand, shore
She saide, "Lord, aye welcome be thy sond* *whatever thou sendest
"He that me kepte from the false blame,
While I was in the land amonges you,
He can me keep from harm and eke from shame
In the salt sea, although I see not how
As strong as ever he was, he is yet now,
In him trust I, and in his mother dere,
That is to me my sail and eke my stere."* *rudder, guide
Her little child lay weeping in her arm
And, kneeling, piteously to him she said
"Peace, little son, I will do thee no harm:"
With that her kerchief off her head she braid,* *took, drew
And over his little eyen she it laid,
And in her arm she lulled it full fast,
And unto heav'n her eyen up she cast.
"Mother," quoth she, "and maiden bright, Mary,
Sooth is, that through a woman's eggement* *incitement, egging on
Mankind was lorn,* and damned aye to die; *lost
For which thy child was on a cross y-rent:* *torn, pierced
Thy blissful eyen saw all his torment,
Then is there no comparison between
Thy woe, and any woe man may sustene.
"Thou saw'st thy child y-slain before thine eyen,
And yet now lives my little child, parfay:* *by my faith
Now, lady bright, to whom the woeful cryen,
Thou glory of womanhood, thou faire may,* *maid

Thou haven of refuge, bright star of day,
Rue* on my child, that of thy gentleness *take pity
Ruest on every rueful* in distress. *sorrowful person
"O little child, alas! what is thy guilt,
That never wroughtest sin as yet, pardie?* *par Dieu; by God
Why will thine harde* father have thee spilt?** *cruel **destroyed
O mercy, deare Constable," quoth she,
"And let my little child here dwell with thee:
And if thou dar'st not save him from blame,
So kiss him ones in his father's name."
Therewith she looked backward to the land,
And saide, "Farewell, husband rutheless!"
And up she rose, and walked down the strand
Toward the ship, her following all the press:* *multitude
And ever she pray'd her child to hold his peace,
And took her leave, and with an holy intent
She blessed her, and to the ship she went.
Victualed was the ship, it is no drede,* *doubt
Abundantly for her a full long space:
And other necessaries that should need* *be needed
She had enough, heried* be Godde's grace: *praised <15>
For wind and weather, Almighty God purchase,* *provide
And bring her home; I can no better say;
But in the sea she drived forth her way.
Alla the king came home soon after this
Unto the castle, of the which I told,
And asked where his wife and his child is;
The Constable gan about his heart feel cold,
And plainly all the matter he him told
As ye have heard; I can tell it no better;
And shew'd the king his seal, and eke his letter
And saide; "Lord, as ye commanded me
On pain of death, so have I done certain."
The messenger tormented* was, till he *tortured
Muste beknow,* and tell it flat and plain, *confess <16>
From night to night in what place he had lain;
And thus, by wit and subtle inquiring,
Imagin'd was by whom this harm gan spring.
The hand was known that had the letter wrote,
And all the venom of the cursed deed;
But in what wise, certainly I know not.
Th' effect is this, that Alla, *out of drede,* *without doubt*
His mother slew, that may men plainly read,
For that she traitor was to her liegeance:* *allegiance

Thus ended olde Donegild with mischance.
The sorrow that this Alla night and day
Made for his wife, and for his child also,
There is no tongue that it telle may.
But now will I again to Constance go,
That floated in the sea in pain and woe
Five year and more, as liked Christe's sond,* *decree, command
Ere that her ship approached to the lond.* *land
Under an heathen castle, at the last,
Of which the name in my text I not find,
Constance and eke her child the sea upcast.
Almighty God, that saved all mankind,
Have on Constance and on her child some mind,
That fallen is in heathen hand eftsoon* *again
In point to spill, as I shall tell you soon! *in danger of perishing*
Down from the castle came there many a wight
To gauren* on this ship, and on Constance: *gaze, stare
But shortly from the castle, on a night,
The lorde's steward, — God give him mischance, —
A thief that had *renied our creance,* *denied our faith*
Came to the ship alone, and said he would
Her leman* be, whether she would or n'ould. *illicit lover
Woe was this wretched woman then begone;
Her child cri'd, and she cried piteously:
But blissful Mary help'd her right anon,
For, with her struggling well and mightily,
The thief fell overboard all suddenly,
And in the sea he drenched* for vengeance, *drowned
And thus hath Christ unwemmed* kept Constance. *unblemished
O foul lust of luxury! lo thine end!
Not only that thou faintest* manne's mind, *weakenest
But verily thou wilt his body shend.* *destroy
Th' end of thy work, or of thy lustes blind,
Is complaining: how many may men find,
That not for work, sometimes, but for th' intent
To do this sin, be either slain or shent?
How may this weake woman have the strength
Her to defend against this renegate?
O Goliath, unmeasurable of length,
How mighte David make thee so mate?* *overthrown
So young, and of armour so desolate,* *devoid
How durst he look upon thy dreadful face?
Well may men see it was but Godde's grace.

Who gave Judith courage or hardiness
To slay him, Holofernes, in his tent,
And to deliver out of wretchedness
The people of God? I say for this intent
That right as God spirit of vigour sent
To them, and saved them out of mischance,
So sent he might and vigour to Constance.
Forth went her ship throughout the narrow mouth
Of *Jubaltare and Septe,* driving alway, *Gibraltar and Ceuta*
Sometime west, and sometime north and south,
And sometime east, full many a weary day:
Till Christe's mother (blessed be she aye)
Had shaped* through her endeless goodness *resolved, arranged
To make an end of all her heaviness.
Now let us stint* of Constance but a throw,** *cease speaking
And speak we of the Roman emperor, **short time
That out of Syria had by letters know
The slaughter of Christian folk, and dishonor
Done to his daughter by a false traitor,
I mean the cursed wicked Soudaness,
That at the feast *let slay both more and less.* *caused both high and low to be killed*
For which this emperor had sent anon
His senator, with royal ordinance,
And other lordes, God wot, many a one,
On Syrians to take high vengeance:
They burn and slay, and bring them to mischance
Full many a day: but shortly this is th' end,
Homeward to Rome they shaped them to wend.
This senator repaired with victory
To Rome-ward, sailing full royally,
And met the ship driving, as saith the story,
In which Constance sat full piteously:
And nothing knew he what she was, nor why
She was in such array; nor she will say
Of her estate, although that she should dey.* *die
He brought her unto Rome, and to his wife
He gave her, and her younge son also:
And with the senator she led her life.
Thus can our Lady bringen out of woe
Woeful Constance, and many another mo':
And longe time she dwelled in that place,
In holy works ever, as was her grace.
The senatores wife her aunte was,

But for all that she knew her ne'er the more:
I will no longer tarry in this case,
But to King Alla, whom I spake of yore,
That for his wife wept and sighed sore,
I will return, and leave I will Constance
Under the senatores governance.
King Alla, which that had his mother slain,
Upon a day fell in such repentance;
That, if I shortly tell it shall and plain,
To Rome he came to receive his penitance,
And put him in the Pope's ordinance
In high and low, and Jesus Christ besought
Forgive his wicked works that he had wrought.
The fame anon throughout the town is borne,
How Alla king shall come on pilgrimage,
By harbingers that wente him beforn,
For which the senator, as was usage,
Rode *him again,* and many of his lineage, *to meet him*
As well to show his high magnificence,
As to do any king a reverence.
Great cheere* did this noble senator *courtesy
To King Alla and he to him also;
Each of them did the other great honor;
And so befell, that in a day or two
This senator did to King Alla go
To feast, and shortly, if I shall not lie,
Constance's son went in his company.
Some men would say,<17> at request of Constance
This senator had led this child to feast:
I may not tellen every circumstance,
Be as be may, there was he at the least:
But sooth is this, that at his mother's hest* *behest
Before Alla during *the meates space,* *meal time*
The child stood, looking in the kinges face.
This Alla king had of this child great wonder,
And to the senator he said anon,
"Whose is that faire child that standeth yonder?"
"I n'ot,"* quoth he, "by God and by Saint John; *know not
A mother he hath, but father hath he none,
That I of wot:" and shortly in a stound* *short time <18>
He told to Alla how this child was found.
"But God wot," quoth this senator also,
"So virtuous a liver in all my life
I never saw, as she, nor heard of mo'

Of worldly woman, maiden, widow or wife:
I dare well say she hadde lever* a knife *rather
Throughout her breast, than be a woman wick',* *wicked
There is no man could bring her to that prick.* *point
Now was this child as like unto Constance
As possible is a creature to be:
This Alla had the face in remembrance
Of Dame Constance, and thereon mused he,
If that the childe's mother *were aught she* *could be she*
That was his wife; and privily he sight,* *sighed
And sped him from the table *that he might.* *as fast as he could*
"Parfay,"* thought he, "phantom** is in mine head. *by my faith
I ought to deem, of skilful judgement, **a fantasy
That in the salte sea my wife is dead."
And afterward he made his argument,
"What wot I, if that Christ have hither sent
My wife by sea, as well as he her sent
To my country, from thennes that she went?"
And, after noon, home with the senator.
Went Alla, for to see this wondrous chance.
This senator did Alla great honor,
And hastily he sent after Constance:
But truste well, her liste not to dance.
When that she wiste wherefore was that sond,* *summons
Unneth* upon her feet she mighte stand. *with difficulty
When Alla saw his wife, fair he her gret,* *greeted
And wept, that it was ruthe for to see,
For at the firste look he on her set
He knew well verily that it was she:
And she, for sorrow, as dumb stood as a tree:
So was her hearte shut in her distress,
When she remember'd his unkindeness.
Twice she swooned in his owen sight,
He wept and him excused piteously:
"Now God," quoth he, "and all his hallows bright* *saints
So wisly* on my soule have mercy, *surely
That of your harm as guilteless am I,
As is Maurice my son, so like your face,
Else may the fiend me fetch out of this place."
Long was the sobbing and the bitter pain,
Ere that their woeful heartes mighte cease;
Great was the pity for to hear them plain,* *lament
Through whiche plaintes gan their woe increase.
I pray you all my labour to release,

I may not tell all their woe till to-morrow,
I am so weary for to speak of sorrow.
But finally, when that the *sooth is wist,* *truth is known*
That Alla guiltless was of all her woe,
I trow an hundred times have they kiss'd,
And such a bliss is there betwixt them two,
That, save the joy that lasteth evermo',
There is none like, that any creature
Hath seen, or shall see, while the world may dure.
Then prayed she her husband meekely
In the relief of her long piteous pine,* *sorrow
That he would pray her father specially,
That of his majesty he would incline
To vouchesafe some day with him to dine:
She pray'd him eke, that he should by no way
Unto her father no word of her say.
Some men would say,<17> how that the child Maurice
Did this message unto the emperor:
But, as I guess, Alla was not so nice,* *foolish
To him that is so sovereign of honor
As he that is of Christian folk the flow'r,
Send any child, but better 'tis to deem
He went himself; and so it may well seem.
This emperor hath granted gentilly
To come to dinner, as he him besought:
And well rede* I, he looked busily *guess, know
Upon this child, and on his daughter thought.
Alla went to his inn, and as him ought
Arrayed* for this feast in every wise, *prepared
As farforth as his cunning may suffice. *as far as his skill*
The morrow came, and Alla gan him dress,* *make ready
And eke his wife, the emperor to meet:
And forth they rode in joy and in gladness,
And when she saw her father in the street,
She lighted down and fell before his feet.
"Father," quoth she, "your younge child Constance
Is now full clean out of your remembrance.
"I am your daughter, your Constance," quoth she,
"That whilom ye have sent into Syrie;
It am I, father, that in the salt sea
Was put alone, and damned* for to die. *condemned
Now, goode father, I you mercy cry,
Send me no more into none heatheness,
But thank my lord here of his kindeness."

Who can the piteous joye tellen all,
Betwixt them three, since they be thus y-met?
But of my tale make an end I shall,
The day goes fast, I will no longer let.* *hinder
These gladde folk to dinner be y-set;
In joy and bliss at meat I let them dwell,
A thousand fold well more than I can tell.
This child Maurice was since then emperor
Made by the Pope, and lived Christianly,
To Christe's Churche did he great honor:
But I let all his story passe by,
Of Constance is my tale especially,
In the olde Roman gestes* men may find *histories<19>
Maurice's life, I bear it not in mind.
This King Alla, when he his time sey,* *saw
With his Constance, his holy wife so sweet,
To England are they come the righte way,
Where they did live in joy and in quiet.
But little while it lasted, I you hete,* *promise
Joy of this world for time will not abide,
From day to night it changeth as the tide.
Who liv'd ever in such delight one day,
That him not moved either conscience,
Or ire, or talent, or *some kind affray,* *some kind of disturbance*
Envy, or pride, or passion, or offence?
I say but for this ende this sentence,* *judgment, opinion*
That little while in joy or in pleasance
Lasted the bliss of Alla with Constance.
For death, that takes of high and low his rent,
When passed was a year, even as I guess,
Out of this world this King Alla he hent,* *snatched
For whom Constance had full great heaviness.
Now let us pray that God his soule bless:
And Dame Constance, finally to say,
Toward the town of Rome went her way.
To Rome is come this holy creature,
And findeth there her friendes whole and sound:
Now is she scaped all her aventure:
And when that she her father hath y-found,
Down on her knees falleth she to ground,
Weeping for tenderness in hearte blithe
She herieth* God an hundred thousand sithe.** *praises **times
In virtue and in holy almes-deed
They liven all, and ne'er asunder wend;

Till death departeth them, this life they lead:
And fare now well, my tale is at an end
Now Jesus Christ, that of his might may send
Joy after woe, govern us in his grace
And keep us alle that be in this place.

Notes to the Man of Law's Tale

1. This tale is believed by Tyrwhitt to have been taken, with no material change, from the "Confessio Amantis" of John Gower, who was contemporary with Chaucer, though somewhat his senior. In the prologue, the references to the stories of Canace, and of Apollonius Tyrius, seem to be an attack on Gower, who had given these tales in his book; whence Tyrwhitt concludes that the friendship between the two poets suffered some interruption in the latter part of their lives. Gower was not the inventor of the story, which he found in old French romances, and it is not improbable that Chaucer may have gone to the same source as Gower, though the latter undoubtedly led the way. (Transcriber's note: later commentators have identified the introduction describing the sorrows of poverty, along with the other moralising interludes in the tale, as translated from "De Contemptu Mundi" ("On the contempt of the world") by Pope Innocent.)

2. Transcriber' note: This refers to the game of hazard, a dice game like craps, in which two ("ambes ace") won, and eleven ("six-cinque") lost.

3. Purpose: discourse, tale: French "propos".

4. "Peace" rhymed with "lese" and "chese", the old forms of "lose" and "choose".

5. According to Middle Age writers there were two motions of the first heaven; one everything always from east to west above the stars; the other moving the stars against the first motion, from west to east, on two other poles.

6. Atyzar: the meaning of this word is not known; but "occifer", murderer, has been suggested instead by Urry, on the authority of a marginal reading on a manuscript. (Transcriber's note: later commentators explain it as derived from Arabic "al-ta'thir", influence - used here in an astrological sense)

7. "Thou knittest thee where thou art not receiv'd, Where thou wert well, from thennes art thou weiv'd" i.e. "Thou joinest thyself where thou art rejected, and art declined or departed from the place where thou wert well." The moon portends the fortunes of Constance.

8. Fand: endeavour; from Anglo-Saxon, "fandian," to try

9. Feng: take; Anglo-Saxon "fengian", German, "fangen".

10. Him and her on which thy limbes faithfully extend: those who in faith wear the crucifix.

11. The four spirits of tempest: the four angels who held the four winds of the earth and to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea (Rev. vii. 1, 2).

12. Thennes would it not in all a tide: thence would it not move for long, at all.

13. A manner Latin corrupt: a kind of bastard Latin.

14. Knave child: male child; German "Knabe".

15. Heried: honoured, praised; from Anglo-Saxon, "herian." Compare German, "herrlich," glorious, honourable.

16. Beknow: confess; German, "bekennen."
17. The poet here refers to Gower's version of the story.
18. Stound: short time; German, "stunde", hour.
19. Gestes: histories, exploits; Latin, "res gestae".