HAVEPOETRY.COM

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE PARDONER'S TALE

THE PROLOGUE.

OUR Hoste gan to swear as he were wood;
"Harow!" quoth he, "by nailes and by blood, <1>
This was a cursed thief, a false justice.
As shameful death as hearte can devise
Come to these judges and their advoca's.* *advocates, counsellors
Algate* this sely** maid is slain, alas! *nevertheless **innocent
Alas! too deare bought she her beauty.
Wherefore I say, that all day man may see
That giftes of fortune and of nature
Be cause of death to many a creature.
Her beauty was her death, I dare well sayn;
Alas! so piteously as she was slain.
[Of bothe giftes, that I speak of now
Men have full often more harm than prow,*] *profit
But truely, mine owen master dear,
This was a piteous tale for to hear;
But natheless, pass over; 'tis *no force.* *no matter*
I pray to God to save thy gentle corse,* *body
And eke thine urinals, and thy jordans,
Thine Hippocras, and eke thy Galliens, <2>
And every boist* full of thy lectuary, *box <3>
God bless them, and our lady Sainte Mary.
So may I the',* thou art a proper man, *thrive
And like a prelate, by Saint Ronian;
Said I not well? Can I not speak *in term?* *in set form*
But well I wot thou dost* mine heart to erme,** *makest **grieve<4>
That I have almost caught a cardiacle:* *heartache <5>
By corpus Domini <6>, but* I have triacle,** *unless **a remedy
Or else a draught of moist and corny <7> ale,
Or but* I hear anon a merry tale, *unless
Mine heart is brost* for pity of this maid. *burst, broken
Thou *bel ami,* thou Pardoner," he said, *good friend*
"Tell us some mirth of japes* right anon." *jokes
"It shall be done," quoth he, "by Saint Ronion.
But first," quoth he, "here at this ale-stake* *ale-house sign <8>
I will both drink, and biten on a cake."
But right anon the gentles gan to cry,

"Nay, let him tell us of no ribaldry.
Tell us some moral thing, that we may lear* *learn
Some wit,* and thenne will we gladly hear." *wisdom, sense
"I grant y-wis,"* quoth he; "but I must think *surely
Upon some honest thing while that I drink."
Notes to the Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale
1. The nails and blood of Christ, by which it was then a fashion to swear.
2. Mediaeval medical writers; see note 36 to the Prologue to the Tales.
3. Boist: box; French "boite," old form "boiste."
4. Erme: grieve; from Anglo-Saxon, "earme," wretched.
5. Cardiacle: heartache; from Greek, "kardialgia."
6. Corpus Domini: God's body.
7. Corny ale: New and strong, nappy. As to "moist," see note 39 to the Prologue to the Tales.
8. (Transcriber's Note)In this scene the pilgrims are refreshing themselves at tables in front of an inn. The pardoner is drunk, which explains his boastful and revealing confession of his deceits.
THE TALE <1>
Lordings (quoth he), in churche when I preach,
I paine me to have an hautein* speech, *take pains **loud <2>
And ring it out, as round as doth a bell,
For I know all by rote that I tell.
My theme is always one, and ever was;
Radix malorum est cupiditas.<3>
First I pronounce whence that I come,
And then my bulles shew I all and some;
Our liege lorde's seal on my patent,
That shew I first, *my body to warrent,* *for the protection
That no man be so hardy, priest nor clerk, of my person*
Me to disturb of Christe's holy werk.
And after that then tell I forth my tales.
Bulles of popes, and of cardinales,
Of patriarchs, and of bishops I shew,
And in Latin I speak a wordes few,
To savour with my predication,
And for to stir men to devotion
Then show I forth my longe crystal stones,
Y-crammed fall of cloutes* and of bones; *rags, fragments
Relics they be, as *weene they* each one. *as my listeners think*
Then have I in latoun* a shoulder-bone *brass
Which that was of a holy Jewe's sheep.
"Good men," say I, "take of my wordes keep;* *heed
If that this bone be wash'd in any well,
If cow, or calf, or sheep, or oxe swell,

That any worm hath eat, or worm y-stung,
Take water of that well, and wash his tongue,
And it is whole anon; and farthermore
Of pockes, and of scab, and every sore
Shall every sheep be whole, that of this well
Drinketh a draught; take keep* of that I tell. *heed
"If that the goodman, that the beastes oweth,* *owneth
Will every week, ere that the cock him croweth,
Fasting, y-drinken of this well a draught,
As thilke holy Jew our elders taught,
His beastes and his store shall multiply.
And, Sirs, also it healeth jealousy;
For though a man be fall'n in jealous rage,
Let make with this water his pottage,
And never shall he more his wife mistrist,* *mistrust
Though he the sooth of her defaulte wist; *though he truly
All had she taken priestes two or three. <4> knew her sin*
Here is a mittain* eke, that ye may see; *glove, mitten
He that his hand will put in this mittain,
He shall have multiplying of his grain,
When he hath sowen, be it wheat or oats,
So that he offer pence, or elles groats.
And, men and women, one thing warn I you;
If any wight be in this churche now
That hath done sin horrible, so that he
Dare not for shame of it y-shriven* be; *confessed
Or any woman, be she young or old,
That hath y-made her husband cokewold,* *cuckold
Such folk shall have no power nor no grace
To offer to my relics in this place.
And whoso findeth him out of such blame,
He will come up and offer in God's name;
And I assoil* him by the authority *absolve
Which that by bull y-granted was to me."
By this gaud* have I wonne year by year *jest, trick
A hundred marks, since I was pardonere.
I stande like a clerk in my pulpit,
And when the lewed* people down is set, *ignorant
I preache so as ye have heard before,
And telle them a hundred japes* more. *jests, deceits
Then pain I me to stretche forth my neck,
And east and west upon the people I beck,
As doth a dove, sitting on a bern;* *barn
My handes and my tongue go so yern,* *briskly

That it is joy to see my business.
Of avarice and of such cursedness* *wickedness
Is all my preaching, for to make them free
To give their pence, and namely* unto me. *especially
For mine intent is not but for to win,
And nothing for correction of sin.
I recke never, when that they be buried,
Though that their soules go a blackburied.<5>
For certes *many a predication *preaching is often inspired
Cometh oft-time of evil intention;* by evil motives*
Some for pleasance of folk, and flattery,
To be advanced by hypocrisy;
And some for vainglory, and some for hate.
For, when I dare not otherwise debate,
Then will I sting him with my tongue smart* *sharply
In preaching, so that he shall not astart* *escape
To be defamed falsely, if that he
Hath trespass'd* to my brethren or to me. *offended
For, though I telle not his proper name,
Men shall well knowe that it is the same
By signes, and by other circumstances.
Thus *quite I* folk that do us displeasances: *I am revenged on*
Thus spit I out my venom, under hue
Of holiness, to seem holy and true.
But, shortly mine intent I will devise,
I preach of nothing but of covetise.
Therefore my theme is yet, and ever was, —
Radix malorum est cupiditas. <3>
Thus can I preach against the same vice
Which that I use, and that is avarice.
But though myself be guilty in that sin,
Yet can I maken other folk to twin* *depart
From avarice, and sore them repent.
But that is not my principal intent;
I preache nothing but for covetise.
Of this mattere it ought enough suffice.
Then tell I them examples many a one,
Of olde stories longe time gone;
For lewed* people love tales old; *unlearned
Such thinges can they well report and hold.
What? trowe ye, that whiles I may preach
And winne gold and silver for* I teach, *because
That I will live in povert' wilfully?
Nay, nay, I thought it never truely.

For I will preach and beg in sundry lands;
I will not do no labour with mine hands,
Nor make baskets for to live thereby,
Because I will not beggen idlely.
I will none of the apostles counterfeit;* *imitate (in poverty)
I will have money, wool, and cheese, and wheat,
All* were it given of the poorest page, *even if
Or of the pooreste widow in a village:
All should her children sterve* for famine. *die
Nay, I will drink the liquor of the vine,
And have a jolly wench in every town.
But hearken, lordings, in conclusioun;
Your liking is, that I shall tell a tale
Now I have drunk a draught of corny ale,
By God, I hope I shall you tell a thing
That shall by reason be to your liking;
For though myself be a full vicious man,
A moral tale yet I you telle can,
Which I am wont to preache, for to win.
Now hold your peace, my tale I will begin.
In Flanders whilom was a company
Of younge folkes, that haunted folly,
As riot, hazard, stewes,* and taverns; *brothels
Where as with lutes, harpes, and giterns,* *guitars
They dance and play at dice both day and night,
And eat also, and drink over their might;
Through which they do the devil sacrifice
Within the devil's temple, in cursed wise,
By superfluity abominable.
Their oathes be so great and so damnable,
That it is grisly* for to hear them swear. *dreadful <6>
Our blissful Lorde's body they to-tear;* *tore to pieces <7>
Them thought the Jewes rent him not enough,
And each of them at other's sinne lough.* *laughed
And right anon in come tombesteres <8>
Fetis* and small, and younge fruitesteres.** *dainty **fruit-girls
Singers with harpes, baudes,* waferers,** *revellers **cake-sellers
Which be the very devil's officers,
To kindle and blow the fire of lechery,
That is annexed unto gluttony.
The Holy Writ take I to my witness,
That luxury is in wine and drunkenness. <9>
Lo, how that drunken Lot unkindely* *unnaturally
Lay by his daughters two unwittingly,

So drunk he was he knew not what he wrought.
Herodes, who so well the stories sought, <10>
When he of wine replete was at his feast,
Right at his owen table gave his hest* *command
To slay the Baptist John full guilteless.
Seneca saith a good word, doubteless:
He saith he can no difference find
Betwixt a man that is out of his mind,
And a man whiche that is drunkelew:* *a drunkard <11>
But that woodness,* y-fallen in a shrew,* *madness **one evil-tempered
Persevereth longer than drunkenness.
O gluttony, full of all cursedness;
O cause first of our confusion,
Original of our damnation,
Till Christ had bought us with his blood again!
Looke, how deare, shortly for to sayn,
Abought* was first this cursed villainy: *atoned for
Corrupt was all this world for gluttony.
Adam our father, and his wife also,
From Paradise, to labour and to woe,
Were driven for that vice, it is no dread.* *doubt
For while that Adam fasted, as I read,
He was in Paradise; and when that he
Ate of the fruit defended* of the tree, *forbidden <12>
Anon he was cast out to woe and pain.
O gluttony! well ought us on thee plain.
Oh! wist a man how many maladies
Follow of excess and of gluttonies,
He woulde be the more measurable* *moderate
Of his diete, sitting at his table.
Alas! the shorte throat, the tender mouth,
Maketh that east and west, and north and south,
In earth, in air, in water, men do swink* *labour
To get a glutton dainty meat and drink.
Of this mattere, O Paul! well canst thou treat
Meat unto womb,* and womb eke unto meat, *belly
Shall God destroye both, as Paulus saith. <13>
Alas! a foul thing is it, by my faith,
To say this word, and fouler is the deed,
When man so drinketh of the *white and red,* *i.e. wine*
That of his throat he maketh his privy
Through thilke cursed superfluity
The apostle saith, <14> weeping full piteously,
There walk many, of which you told have I, —

I say it now weeping with piteous voice, —
That they be enemies of Christe's crois;* *cross
Of which the end is death; womb* is their God. *belly
O womb, O belly, stinking is thy cod,* *bag <15>
Full fill'd of dung and of corruptioun;
At either end of thee foul is the soun.
How great labour and cost is thee to find!* *supply
These cookes how they stamp, and strain, and grind,
And turne substance into accident,
To fulfill all thy likerous talent!
Out of the harde bones knocke they
The marrow, for they caste naught away
That may go through the gullet soft and swoot* *sweet
Of spicery and leaves, of bark and root,
Shall be his sauce y-maked by delight,
To make him have a newer appetite.
But, certes, he that haunteth such delices
Is dead while that he liveth in those vices.
A lecherous thing is wine, and drunkenness
Is full of striving and of wretchedness.
O drunken man! disfgur'd is thy face,<16>
Sour is thy breath, foul art thou to embrace:
And through thy drunken nose sowneth the soun',
As though thous saidest aye, Samsoun! Samsoun!
And yet, God wot, Samson drank never wine.
Thou fallest as it were a sticked swine;
Thy tongue is lost, and all thine honest cure;* *care
For drunkenness is very sepulture* *tomb
Of manne's wit and his discretion.
In whom that drink hath domination,
He can no counsel keep, it is no dread.* *doubt
Now keep you from the white and from the red,
And namely* from the white wine of Lepe,<17> *especially
That is to sell in Fish Street <18> and in Cheap.
This wine of Spaine creepeth subtilly —
In other wines growing faste by,
Of which there riseth such fumosity,
That when a man hath drunken draughtes three,
And weeneth that he be at home in Cheap,
He is in Spain, right at the town of Lepe,
Not at the Rochelle, nor at Bourdeaux town;
And thenne will he say, Samsoun! Samsoun!
But hearken, lordings, one word, I you pray,
That all the sovreign actes, dare I say,

Of victories in the Old Testament,
Through very God that is omnipotent,
Were done in abstinence and in prayere:
Look in the Bible, and there ye may it lear.* *learn
Look, Attila, the greate conqueror,
Died in his sleep, <19> with shame and dishonour,
Bleeding aye at his nose in drunkenness:
A captain should aye live in soberness
And o'er all this, advise* you right well *consider, bethink
What was commanded unto Lemuel; <20>
Not Samuel, but Lemuel, say I.
Reade the Bible, and find it expressly
Of wine giving to them that have justice.
No more of this, for it may well suffice.
And, now that I have spoke of gluttony,
Now will I you *defende hazardry.* *forbid gambling*
Hazard is very mother of leasings,* *lies
And of deceit, and cursed forswearings:
Blasphem' of Christ, manslaughter, and waste also
Of chattel* and of time; and furthermo' *property
It is repreve,* and contrar' of honour, *reproach
For to be held a common hazardour.
And ever the higher he is of estate,
The more he is holden desolate.* *undone, worthless
If that a prince use hazardry,
In alle governance and policy
He is, as by common opinion,
Y-hold the less in reputation.
Chilon, that was a wise ambassador,
Was sent to Corinth with full great honor
From Lacedemon, <21> to make alliance;
And when he came, it happen'd him, by chance,
That all the greatest that were of that land,
Y-playing atte hazard he them fand.* *found
For which, as soon as that it mighte be,
He stole him home again to his country
And saide there, "I will not lose my name,
Nor will I take on me so great diffame,* *reproach
You to ally unto no hazardors.* *gamblers
Sende some other wise ambassadors,
For, by my troth, me were lever* die, *rather
Than I should you to hazardors ally.
For ye, that be so glorious in honours,
Shall not ally you to no hazardours,

As by my will, nor as by my treaty."
This wise philosopher thus said he.
Look eke how to the King Demetrius
The King of Parthes, as the book saith us,
Sent him a pair of dice of gold in scorn,
For he had used hazard therebeforn:
For which he held his glory and renown
At no value or reputatioun.
Lordes may finden other manner play
Honest enough to drive the day away.
Now will I speak of oathes false and great
A word or two, as olde bookes treat.
Great swearing is a thing abominable,
And false swearing is more reprovable.
The highe God forbade swearing at all;
Witness on Matthew: <22> but in special
Of swearing saith the holy Jeremie, <23>
Thou thalt swear sooth thine oathes, and not lie:
And swear in doom* and eke in righteousness; *judgement
But idle swearing is a cursedness.* *wickedness
Behold and see, there in the firste table
Of highe Godde's hestes* honourable, *commandments
How that the second best of him is this,
Take not my name in idle* or amiss. *in vain
Lo, rather* he forbiddeth such swearing, *sooner
Than homicide, or many a cursed thing;
I say that as by order thus it standeth;
This knoweth he that his hests* understandeth, *commandments
How that the second hest of God is that.
And farthermore, I will thee tell all plat,* *flatly, plainly
That vengeance shall not parte from his house,
That of his oathes is outrageous.
"By Godde's precious heart, and by his nails, <24>
And by the blood of Christ, that is in Hailes, <25>
Seven is my chance, and thine is cinque and trey:
By Godde's armes, if thou falsely play,
This dagger shall throughout thine hearte go."
This fruit comes of the *bicched bones two,* *two cursed bones (dice)*
Forswearing, ire, falseness, and homicide.
Now, for the love of Christ that for us died,
Leave your oathes, bothe great and smale.
But, Sirs, now will I ell you forth my tale.
These riotoures three, of which I tell,
Long *erst than* prime rang of any bell, *before

Were set them in a tavern for to drink;
And as they sat, they heard a belle clink
Before a corpse, was carried to the grave.
That one of them gan calle to his knave,* *servant
"Go bet," <26> quoth he, "and aske readily
What corpse is this, that passeth here forth by;
And look that thou report his name well."
"Sir," quoth the boy, "it needeth never a deal;* *whit
It was me told ere ye came here two hours;
He was, pardie, an old fellow of yours,
And suddenly he was y-slain to-night;
Fordrunk* as he sat on his bench upright, *completely drunk
There came a privy thief, men clepe Death,
That in this country all the people slay'th,
And with his spear he smote his heart in two,
And went his way withoute wordes mo'.
He hath a thousand slain this pestilence;
And, master, ere you come in his presence,
Me thinketh that it were full necessary
For to beware of such an adversary;
Be ready for to meet him evermore.
Thus taughte me my dame; I say no more."
"By Sainte Mary," said the tavernere,
"The child saith sooth, for he hath slain this year,
Hence ov'r a mile, within a great village,
Both man and woman, child, and hind, and page;
I trow his habitation be there;
To be advised* great wisdom it were, *watchful, on one's guard
Ere* that he did a man a dishonour." *lest
"Yea, Godde's armes," quoth this riotour,
"Is it such peril with him for to meet?
I shall him seek, by stile and eke by street.
I make a vow, by Godde's digne* bones." *worthy
Hearken, fellows, we three be alle ones:* *at one
Let each of us hold up his hand to other,
And each of us become the other's brother,
And we will slay this false traitor Death;
He shall be slain, he that so many slay'th,
By Godde's dignity, ere it be night."
Together have these three their trothe plight
To live and die each one of them for other
As though he were his owen sworen brother.
And up they start, all drunken, in this rage,
And forth they go towardes that village

Of which the taverner had spoke beforn,
And many a grisly* oathe have they sworn, *dreadful
And Christe's blessed body they to-rent;* *tore to pieces <7>
"Death shall be dead, if that we may him hent."* *catch
When they had gone not fully half a mile,
Right as they would have trodden o'er a stile,
An old man and a poore with them met.
This olde man full meekely them gret,* *greeted
And saide thus; "Now, lordes, God you see!"* *look on graciously
The proudest of these riotoures three
Answer'd again; "What? churl, with sorry grace,
Why art thou all forwrapped* save thy face? *closely wrapt up
Why livest thou so long in so great age?"
This olde man gan look on his visage,
And saide thus; "For that I cannot find
A man, though that I walked unto Ind,
Neither in city, nor in no village go,
That woulde change his youthe for mine age;
And therefore must I have mine age still
As longe time as it is Godde's will.
And Death, alas! he will not have my life.
Thus walk I like a resteless caitife,* *miserable wretch
And on the ground, which is my mother's gate,
I knocke with my staff, early and late,
And say to her, 'Leve* mother, let me in. *dear
Lo, how I wane, flesh, and blood, and skin;
Alas! when shall my bones be at rest?
Mother, with you I woulde change my chest,
That in my chamber longe time hath be,
Yea, for an hairy clout to *wrap in me.'* *wrap myself in*
But yet to me she will not do that grace,
For which fall pale and welked* is my face. *withered
But, Sirs, to you it is no courtesy
To speak unto an old man villainy,
But* he trespass in word or else in deed. *except
In Holy Writ ye may yourselves read;
'Against* an old man, hoar upon his head, *to meet
Ye should arise:' therefore I you rede,* *advise
Ne do unto an old man no harm now,
No more than ye would a man did you
In age, if that ye may so long abide.
And God be with you, whether ye go or ride
I must go thither as I have to go."
"Nay, olde churl, by God thou shalt not so,"

Saide this other hazardor anon;
"Thou partest not so lightly, by Saint John.
Thou spakest right now of that traitor Death,
That in this country all our friendes slay'th;
Have here my troth, as thou art his espy;* *spy
Tell where he is, or thou shalt it abie,* *suffer for
By God and by the holy sacrament;
For soothly thou art one of his assent
To slay us younge folk, thou false thief."
"Now, Sirs," quoth he, "if it be you so lief* *desire
To finde Death, turn up this crooked way,
For in that grove I left him, by my fay,
Under a tree, and there he will abide;
Nor for your boast he will him nothing hide.
See ye that oak? right there ye shall him find.
God save you, that bought again mankind,
And you amend!" Thus said this olde man;
And evereach of these riotoures ran,
Till they came to the tree, and there they found
Of florins fine, of gold y-coined round,
Well nigh a seven bushels, as them thought.
No longer as then after Death they sought;
But each of them so glad was of the sight,
For that the florins were so fair and bright,
That down they sat them by the precious hoard.
The youngest of them spake the firste word:
"Brethren," quoth he, "*take keep* what I shall say; *heed*
My wit is great, though that I bourde* and play *joke, frolic
This treasure hath Fortune unto us given
In mirth and jollity our life to liven;
And lightly as it comes, so will we spend.
Hey! Godde's precious dignity! who wend* *weened, thought
Today that we should have so fair a grace?
But might this gold he carried from this place
Home to my house, or elles unto yours
(For well I wot that all this gold is ours),
Then were we in high felicity.
But truely by day it may not be;
Men woulde say that we were thieves strong,
And for our owen treasure do us hong.* *have us hanged
This treasure muste carried be by night,
As wisely and as slily as it might.
Wherefore I rede,* that cut** among us all *advise **lots
We draw, and let see where the cut will fall:

And he that hath the cut, with hearte blithe
Shall run unto the town, and that full swithe,* *quickly
And bring us bread and wine full privily:
And two of us shall keepe subtilly
This treasure well: and if he will not tarry,
When it is night, we will this treasure carry,
By one assent, where as us thinketh best."
Then one of them the cut brought in his fist,
And bade them draw, and look where it would fall;
And it fell on the youngest of them all;
And forth toward the town he went anon.
And all so soon as that he was y-gone,
The one of them spake thus unto the other;
"Thou knowest well that thou art my sworn brother,
Thy profit will I tell thee right anon. *what is for thine
Thou knowest well that our fellow is gone, advantage*
And here is gold, and that full great plenty,
That shall departed* he among us three. *divided
But natheless, if I could shape* it so *contrive
That it departed were among us two,
Had I not done a friende's turn to thee?"
Th' other answer'd, "I n'ot* how that may be; *know not
He knows well that the gold is with us tway.
What shall we do? what shall we to him say?"
"Shall it be counsel?"* said the firste shrew;** *secret **wretch
"And I shall tell to thee in wordes few
What we shall do, and bring it well about."
"I grante," quoth the other, "out of doubt,
That by my truth I will thee not bewray."* *betray
"Now," quoth the first, "thou know'st well we be tway,
And two of us shall stronger be than one.
Look; when that he is set,* thou right anon *sat down
Arise, as though thou wouldest with him play;
And I shall rive* him through the sides tway, *stab
While that thou strugglest with him as in game;
And with thy dagger look thou do the same.
And then shall all this gold departed* be, *divided
My deare friend, betwixte thee and me:
Then may we both our lustes* all fulfil, *pleasures
And play at dice right at our owen will."
And thus accorded* be these shrewes** tway *agreed **wretches
To slay the third, as ye have heard me say.
The youngest, which that wente to the town,
Full oft in heart he rolled up and down

The beauty of these florins new and bright.
"O Lord!" quoth he, "if so were that I might
Have all this treasure to myself alone,
There is no man that lives under the throne
Of God, that shoulde have so merry as I."
And at the last the fiend our enemy
Put in his thought, that he should poison buy,
With which he mighte slay his fellows twy.* *two
For why, the fiend found him *in such living,* *leading such a
That he had leave to sorrow him to bring. (bad) life*
For this was utterly his full intent
To slay them both, and never to repent.
And forth he went, no longer would he tarry,
Into the town to an apothecary,
And prayed him that he him woulde sell
Some poison, that he might *his rattes quell,* *kill his rats*
And eke there was a polecat in his haw,* *farm-yard, hedge <27>
That, as he said, his eapons had y-slaw:* *slain
And fain he would him wreak,* if that he might, *revenge
Of vermin that destroyed him by night.
Th'apothecary answer'd, "Thou shalt have
A thing, as wisly* God my soule save, *surely
In all this world there is no creature
That eat or drank hath of this confecture,
Not but the mountance* of a corn of wheat, *amount
That he shall not his life *anon forlete;* *immediately lay down*
Yea, sterve* he shall, and that in lesse while *die
Than thou wilt go *apace* nought but a mile: *quickly*
This poison is so strong and violent."
This cursed man hath in his hand y-hent* *taken
This poison in a box, and swift he ran
Into the nexte street, unto a man,
And borrow'd of him large bottles three;
And in the two the poison poured he;
The third he kepte clean for his own drink,
For all the night he shope him* for to swink** *purposed **labour
In carrying off the gold out of that place.
And when this riotour, with sorry grace,
Had fill'd with wine his greate bottles three,
To his fellows again repaired he.
What needeth it thereof to sermon* more? *talk, discourse
For, right as they had cast* his death before, *plotted
Right so they have him slain, and that anon.
And when that this was done, thus spake the one;

"Now let us sit and drink, and make us merry,
And afterward we will his body bury."
And with that word it happen'd him *par cas* *by chance
To take the bottle where the poison was,
And drank, and gave his fellow drink also,
For which anon they sterved* both the two. *died
But certes I suppose that Avicen
Wrote never in no canon, nor no fen, <28>
More wondrous signes of empoisoning,
Than had these wretches two ere their ending.
Thus ended be these homicides two,
And eke the false empoisoner also.
O cursed sin, full of all cursedness!
O trait'rous homicide! O wickedness!
O glutt'ny, luxury, and hazardry!
Thou blasphemer of Christ with villany,* *outrage, impiety
And oathes great, of usage and of pride!
Alas! mankinde, how may it betide,
That to thy Creator, which that thee wrought,
And with his precious hearte-blood thee bought,
Thou art so false and so unkind,* alas! *unnatural
Now, good men, God forgive you your trespass,
And ware* you from the sin of avarice. *keep
Mine holy pardon may you all warice,* *heal
So that ye offer *nobles or sterlings,* *gold or silver coins*
Or elles silver brooches, spoons, or rings.
Bowe your head under this holy bull.
Come up, ye wives, and offer of your will;
Your names I enter in my roll anon;
Into the bliss of heaven shall ye gon;
I you assoil* by mine high powere, *absolve <29>
You that will offer, as clean and eke as clear
As ye were born. Lo, Sires, thus I preach;
And Jesus Christ, that is our soules' leech,* *healer
So grante you his pardon to receive;
For that is best, I will not deceive.
But, Sirs, one word forgot I in my tale;
I have relics and pardon in my mail,
As fair as any man in Engleland,
Which were me given by the Pope's hand.
If any of you will of devotion
Offer, and have mine absolution,
Come forth anon, and kneele here adown
And meekely receive my pardoun.

Or elles take pardon, as ye wend,* *go
All new and fresh at every towne's end,
So that ye offer, always new and new,
Nobles or pence which that be good and true.
'Tis an honour to evereach* that is here, *each one
That ye have a suffisant* pardonere *suitable
T'assoile* you in country as ye ride, *absolve
For aventures which that may betide.
Paraventure there may fall one or two
Down of his horse, and break his neck in two.
Look, what a surety is it to you all,
That I am in your fellowship y-fall,
That may assoil* you bothe *more and lass,* *absolve
When that the soul shall from the body pass. *great and small*
I rede* that our Hoste shall begin, *advise
For he is most enveloped in sin.
Come forth, Sir Host, and offer first anon,
And thou shalt kiss; the relics every one,
Yea, for a groat; unbuckle anon thy purse.
"Nay, nay," quoth he, "then have I Christe's curse!
Let be," quoth he, "it shall not be, *so the'ch.* *so may I thrive*
Thou wouldest make me kiss thine olde breech,
And swear it were a relic of a saint,
Though it were with thy *fundament depaint'.* *stained by your bottom*
But, by the cross which that Saint Helen fand,* *found <30>
I would I had thy coilons* in mine hand, *testicles
Instead of relics, or of sanctuary.
Let cut them off, I will thee help them carry;
They shall be shrined in a hogge's turd."
The Pardoner answered not one word;
So wroth he was, no worde would he say.
"Now," quoth our Host, "I will no longer play
With thee, nor with none other angry man."
But right anon the worthy Knight began
(When that he saw that all the people lough*), *laughed
"No more of this, for it is right enough.
Sir Pardoner, be merry and glad of cheer;
And ye, Sir Host, that be to me so dear,
I pray you that ye kiss the Pardoner;
And, Pardoner, I pray thee draw thee ner,* *nearer
And as we didde, let us laugh and play."
Anon they kiss'd, and rode forth their way.

Notes to the Pardoner's Tale

1. The outline of this Tale is to be found in the "Cento Novelle Antiche," but the

original is now lost. As in the case of the Wife of Bath's Tale, there is a long prologue, but in this case it has been treated as part of the Tale.
2. Hautein: loud, lofty; from French, "hautain."
3. Radix malorum est cupiditas: "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim.vi. 10)
4.All had she taken priestes two or three: even if she had committed adultery with two or three priests.
5. Blackburied: The meaning of this is not very clear, but it is probably a periphrastic and picturesque way of indicating damnation.
6. Grisly: dreadful; fitted to "agrise" or horrify the listener.
7. Mr Wright says: "The common oaths in the Middle Ages were by the different parts of God's body; and the popular preachers represented that profane swearers tore Christ's body by their imprecations." The idea was doubtless borrowed from the passage in Hebrews (vi. 6), where apostates are said to "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."
8. Tombesteres: female dancers or tumblers; from Anglo- Saxon, "tumban," to dance.
9. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess." Eph. v.18.
10. The reference is probably to the diligent inquiries Herod made at the time of Christ's birth. See Matt. ii. 4-8
11. A drunkard. "Perhaps," says Tyrwhitt, "Chaucer refers to Epist. LXXXIII., 'Extende in plures dies illum ebrii habitum; nunquid de furore dubitabis? nunc quoque non est minor sed brevior.'" ("Prolong the drunkard's condition to several days; will you doubt his madness? Even as it is, the madness is no less; merely shorter.")
12. Defended: forbidden; French, "defendu." St Jerome, in his book against Jovinian, says that so long as Adam fasted, he was in Paradise; he ate, and he was thrust out.
13. "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats; but God shall destroy both it and them." 1 Cor. vi. 13.
14. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." Phil. iii. 18, 19.
15. Cod: bag; Anglo-Saxon, "codde;" hence peas-cod, pin-cod (pin-cushion), &c.
16. Compare with the lines which follow, the picture of the drunken messenger in the Man of Law's Tale.
17. Lepe: A town near Cadiz, whence a stronger wine than the Gascon vintages afforded was imported to England. French wine was often adulterated with the cheaper and stronger Spanish.
18. Another reading is "Fleet Street."
19. Attila was suffocated in the night by a haemorrhage, brought on by a debauch, when he was preparing a new invasion of Italy, in 453.
20. "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink; lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted." Prov. xxxi. 4, 5.
21. Most manuscripts, evidently in error, have "Stilbon" and "Calidone" for Chilon and Lacedaemon. Chilon was one of the seven sages of Greece, and flourished about B.C.

590. According to Diogenes Laertius, he died, under the pressure of age and joy, in the arms of his son, who had just been crowned victor at the Olympic games.
22. "Swear not at all;" Christ's words in Matt. v. 34.
23. "And thou shalt swear, the lord liveth in truth, in judgement, and in righteousness." Jeremiah iv. 2
24. The nails that fastened Christ on the cross, which were regarded with superstitious reverence.
25. Hailes: An abbey in Gloucestershire, where, under the designation of "the blood of Hailes," a portion of Christ's blood was preserved.
26. Go bet: a hunting phrase; apparently its force is, "go beat up the game."
27. Haw; farm-yard, hedge Compare the French, "haie."
28. Avicen, or Avicenna, was among the distinguished physicians of the Arabian school in the eleventh century, and very popular in the Middle Ages. His great work was called "Canon Medicinae," and was divided into "fens," "fennes," or sections.
29. Assoil: absolve. compare the Scotch law-term "assoilzie," to acquit.
30. Saint Helen, according to Sir John Mandeville, found the cross of Christ deep below ground, under a rock, where the Jews had hidden it; and she tested the genuineness of the sacred tree, by raising to life a dead man laid upon it.