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GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE MONK'S TALE

THE PROLOGUE

WHEN ended was my tale of Melibee,
And of Prudence and her benignity,
Our Hoste said, "As I am faithful man,
And by the precious corpus Madrian,<1>
I had lever* than a barrel of ale, *rather
That goode lefe* my wife had heard this tale; *dear
For she is no thing of such patience
As was this Meliboeus' wife Prudence.
By Godde's bones! when I beat my knaves
She bringeth me the greate clubbed staves,
And crieth, 'Slay the dogges every one,
And break of them both back and ev'ry bone.'
And if that any neighebour of mine
Will not in church unto my wife incline,
Or be so hardy to her to trespace,* *offend
When she comes home she rampeth* in my face, *springs
And crieth, 'False coward, wreak* thy wife *avenge
By corpus Domini, I will have thy knife,
And thou shalt have my distaff, and go spin.'
From day till night right thus she will begin.
'Alas!' she saith, 'that ever I was shape* *destined
To wed a milksop, or a coward ape,
That will be overlad* with every wight! *imposed on
Thou darest not stand by thy wife's right.'
"This is my life, *but if* that I will fight; *unless
And out at door anon I must me dight,* *betake myself
Or elles I am lost, but if that I
Be, like a wilde lion, fool-hardy.
I wot well she will do* me slay some day *make
Some neighebour and thenne *go my way;* *take to flight*
For I am perilous with knife in hand,
Albeit that I dare not her withstand;
For she is big in armes, by my faith!
That shall he find, that her misdoth or saith. <2>
But let us pass away from this mattere.
My lord the Monk," quoth he, "be merry of cheer,
For ye shall tell a tale truely.

Lo, Rochester stands here faste by.
Ride forth, mine owen lord, break not our game.
But by my troth I cannot tell your name;
Whether shall I call you my lord Dan John,
Or Dan Thomas, or elles Dan Albon?
Of what house be ye, by your father's kin?
I vow to God, thou hast a full fair skin;
It is a gentle pasture where thou go'st;
Thou art not like a penant* or a ghost. *penitent
Upon my faith thou art some officer,
Some worthy sexton, or some cellarer.
For by my father's soul, *as to my dome,* *in my judgement*
Thou art a master when thou art at home;
No poore cloisterer, nor no novice,
But a governor, both wily and wise,
And therewithal, of brawnes* and of bones, *sinews
A right well-faring person for the nonce.
I pray to God give him confusion
That first thee brought into religion.
Thou would'st have been a treade-fowl* aright; *cock
Hadst thou as greate leave, as thou hast might,
To perform all thy lust in engendrure,* *generation, begettting
Thou hadst begotten many a creature.
Alas! why wearest thou so wide a cope? <3>
God give me sorrow, but, an* I were pope, *if
Not only thou, but every mighty man,
Though he were shorn full high upon his pan,* <4> *crown
Should have a wife; for all this world is lorn;* *undone, ruined
Religion hath ta'en up all the corn
Of treading, and we borel* men be shrimps: *lay
Of feeble trees there come wretched imps.* *shoots <5>
This maketh that our heires be so slender
And feeble, that they may not well engender.
This maketh that our wives will assay
Religious folk, for they may better pay
Of Venus' payementes than may we:
God wot, no lusheburghes <6> paye ye.
But be not wroth, my lord, though that I play;
Full oft in game a sooth have I heard say."
This worthy Monk took all in patience,
And said, "I will do all my diligence,
As far as *souneth unto honesty,* *agrees with good manners*
To telle you a tale, or two or three.
And if you list to hearken hitherward,

I will you say the life of Saint Edward;
Or elles first tragedies I will tell,
Of which I have an hundred in my cell.
Tragedy *is to say* a certain story, *means*
As olde bookes maken us memory,
Of him that stood in great prosperity,
And is y-fallen out of high degree
In misery, and endeth wretchedly.
And they be versified commonly
Of six feet, which men call hexametron;
In prose eke* be indited many a one, *also
And eke in metre, in many a sundry wise.
Lo, this declaring ought enough suffice.
Now hearken, if ye like for to hear.
But first I you beseech in this mattere,
Though I by order telle not these things,
Be it of popes, emperors, or kings,
After their ages, as men written find, *in chronological order*
But tell them some before and some behind,
As it now cometh to my remembrance,
Have me excused of mine ignorance."
Notes to the Prologue to The Monk's Tale
1. The Corpus Madrian: the body of St. Maternus, of Treves.
2. That her misdoth or saith: that does or says any thing to offend her.
3. Cope: An ecclesiastcal vestment covering all the body like a cloak.
4. Though he were shorn full high upon his pan: though he were tonsured, as the clergy are.
5. Imps: shoots, branches; from Anglo-Saxon, "impian," German, "impfen," to implant, ingraft. The word is now used in a very restricted sense, to signify the progeny, children, of the devil.
6. Lusheburghes: base or counterfeit coins; so called because struck at Luxemburg. A great importation of them took place during the reigns of the earlier Edwards, and they caused much annoyance and complaint, till in 1351 it was declared treason to bring them into the country.
THE TALE. <1>
I will bewail, in manner of tragedy,
The harm of them that stood in high degree,
And felle so, that there was no remedy
To bring them out of their adversity.
For, certain, when that Fortune list to flee,
There may no man the course of her wheel hold:
Let no man trust in blind prosperity;
Beware by these examples true and old.
At LUCIFER, though he an angel were,

And not a man, at him I will begin.
For though Fortune may no angel dere,* *hurt
From high degree yet fell he for his sin
Down into hell, where as he yet is in.
O Lucifer! brightest of angels all,
Now art thou Satanas, that may'st not twin* *depart
Out of the misery in which thou art fall.
Lo ADAM, in the field of Damascene <2>
With Godde's owen finger wrought was he,
And not begotten of man's sperm unclean;
And welt* all Paradise saving one tree: *commanded
Had never worldly man so high degree
As Adam, till he for misgovernance* *misbehaviour
Was driven out of his prosperity
To labour, and to hell, and to mischance.
Lo SAMPSON, which that was annunciate
By the angel, long ere his nativity; <3>
And was to God Almighty consecrate,
And stood in nobless while that he might see;
Was never such another as was he,
To speak of strength, and thereto hardiness;* *courage
But to his wives told he his secre,
Through which he slew himself for wretchedness.
Sampson, this noble and mighty champion,
Withoute weapon, save his handes tway,
He slew and all to-rente* the lion, *tore to pieces
Toward his wedding walking by the way.
His false wife could him so please, and pray,
Till she his counsel knew; and she, untrue,
Unto his foes his counsel gan bewray,
And him forsook, and took another new.
Three hundred foxes Sampson took for ire,
And all their tailes he together band,
And set the foxes' tailes all on fire,
For he in every tail had knit a brand,
And they burnt all the combs of that lend,
And all their oliveres* and vines eke. *olive trees <4>
A thousand men he slew eke with his hand,
And had no weapon but an ass's cheek.
When they were slain, so thirsted him, that he
Was *well-nigh lorn,* for which he gan to pray *near to perishing*
That God would on his pain have some pity,
And send him drink, or elles must he die;
And of this ass's check, that was so dry,

Out of a wang-tooth* sprang anon a well, *cheek-tooth
Of which, he drank enough, shortly to say.
Thus help'd him God, as Judicum <5> can tell.
By very force, at Gaza, on a night,
Maugre* the Philistines of that city, *in spite of
The gates of the town he hath up plight,* *plucked, wrenched
And on his back y-carried them hath he
High on an hill, where as men might them see.
O noble mighty Sampson, lefe* and dear, *loved
Hadst thou not told to women thy secre,
In all this world there had not been thy peer.
This Sampson never cider drank nor wine,
Nor on his head came razor none nor shear,
By precept of the messenger divine;
For all his strengthes in his haires were;
And fully twenty winters, year by year,
He had of Israel the governance;
But soone shall he weepe many a tear,
For women shall him bringe to mischance.
Unto his leman* Dalila he told, *mistress
That in his haires all his strengthe lay;
And falsely to his foemen she him sold,
And sleeping in her barme* upon a day *lap
She made to clip or shear his hair away,
And made his foemen all his craft espien.
And when they founde him in this array,
They bound him fast, and put out both his eyen.
But, ere his hair was clipped or y-shave,
There was no bond with which men might him bind;
But now is he in prison in a cave,
Where as they made him at the querne* grind. *mill <6>
O noble Sampson, strongest of mankind!
O whilom judge in glory and richess!
Now may'st thou weepe with thine eyen blind,
Since thou from weal art fall'n to wretchedness.
Th'end of this caitiff* was as I shall say; *wretched man
His foemen made a feast upon a day,
And made him as their fool before them play;
And this was in a temple of great array.
But at the last he made a foul affray,
For he two pillars shook, and made them fall,
And down fell temple and all, and there it lay,
And slew himself and eke his foemen all;
This is to say, the princes every one;

And eke three thousand bodies were there slain
With falling of the great temple of stone.
Of Sampson now will I no more sayn;
Beware by this example old and plain,
That no man tell his counsel to his wife
Of such thing as he would *have secret fain,* *wish to be secret*
If that it touch his limbes or his life.
Of HERCULES the sov'reign conquerour
Singe his workes' land and high renown;
For in his time of strength he bare the flow'r.
He slew and reft the skin of the lion
He of the Centaurs laid the boast adown;
He Harpies <7> slew, the cruel birdes fell;
He golden apples reft from the dragon
He drew out Cerberus the hound of hell.
He slew the cruel tyrant Busirus. <8>
And made his horse to fret* him flesh and bone; *devour
He slew the fiery serpent venomous;
Of Achelous' two hornes brake he one.
And he slew Cacus in a cave of stone;
He slew the giant Antaeus the strong;
He slew the grisly boar, and that anon;
And bare the heav'n upon his necke long. <9>
Was never wight, since that the world began,
That slew so many monsters as did he;
Throughout the wide world his name ran,
What for his strength, and for his high bounte;
And every realme went he for to see;
He was so strong that no man might him let;* *withstand
At both the worlde's ends, as saith Trophee, <10>
Instead of boundes he a pillar set.
A leman had this noble champion,
That highte Dejanira, fresh as May;
And, as these clerkes make mention,
She hath him sent a shirte fresh and gay;
Alas! this shirt, alas and well-away!
Envenomed was subtilly withal,
That ere that he had worn it half a day,
It made his flesh all from his bones fall.
But natheless some clerkes her excuse
By one, that highte Nessus, that it maked;
Be as he may, I will not her accuse;
But on his back this shirt he wore all naked,
Till that his flesh was for the venom blaked.* *blackened

And when he saw none other remedy,
In hote coals he hath himselfe raked,
For with no venom deigned he to die.
Thus sterf* this worthy mighty Hercules. *died
Lo, who may trust on Fortune *any throw?* *for a moment*
For him that followeth all this world of pres,* *near <11>
Ere he be ware, is often laid full low;
Full wise is he that can himselfe know.
Beware, for when that Fortune list to glose
Then waiteth she her man to overthrow,
By such a way as he would least suppose.
The mighty throne, the precious treasor,
The glorious sceptre, and royal majesty,
That had the king NABUCHODONOSOR
With tongue unnethes* may described be. *scarcely
He twice won Jerusalem the city,
The vessels of the temple he with him lad;* *took away
At Babylone was his sov'reign see,* *seat
In which his glory and delight he had.
The fairest children of the blood royal
Of Israel he *did do geld* anon, *caused to be castrated*
And maked each of them to be his thrall.* *slave
Amonges others Daniel was one,
That was the wisest child of every one;
For he the dreames of the king expounded,
Where in Chaldaea clerkes was there none
That wiste to what fine* his dreames sounded. *end
This proude king let make a statue of gold
Sixty cubites long, and seven in bread',
To which image hathe young and old
Commanded he to lout,* and have in dread, *bow down to
Or in a furnace, full of flames red,
He should be burnt that woulde not obey:
But never would assente to that deed
Daniel, nor his younge fellows tway.
This king of kinges proud was and elate;* *lofty
He ween'd* that God, that sits in majesty, *thought
Mighte him not bereave of his estate;
But suddenly he lost his dignity,
And like a beast he seemed for to be,
And ate hay as an ox, and lay thereout
In rain, with wilde beastes walked he,
Till certain time was y-come about.
And like an eagle's feathers wax'd his hairs,

His nailes like a birde's clawes were,
Till God released him at certain years,
And gave him wit; and then with many a tear
He thanked God, and ever his life in fear
Was he to do amiss, or more trespace:
And till that time he laid was on his bier,
He knew that God was full of might and grace.
His sone, which that highte BALTHASAR,
That *held the regne* after his father's day, *possessed the kingdom*
He by his father coulde not beware,
For proud he was of heart and of array;
And eke an idolaster was he aye.
His high estate assured* him in pride; *confirmed
But Fortune cast him down, and there he lay,
And suddenly his regne gan divide.
A feast he made unto his lordes all
Upon a time, and made them blithe be,
And then his officeres gan he call;
"Go, bringe forth the vessels," saide he,
"Which that my father in his prosperity
Out of the temple of Jerusalem reft,
And to our highe goddes thanks we
Of honour, that our elders* with us left." *forefathers
His wife, his lordes, and his concubines
Aye dranke, while their appetites did last,
Out of these noble vessels sundry wines.
And on a wall this king his eyen cast,
And saw an hand, armless, that wrote full fast;
For fear of which he quaked, and sighed sore.
This hand, that Balthasar so sore aghast,* *dismayed
Wrote Mane, tekel, phares, and no more.
In all that land magician was there none
That could expounde what this letter meant.
But Daniel expounded it anon,
And said, "O King, God to thy father lent
Glory and honour, regne, treasure, rent;* *revenue
And he was proud, and nothing God he drad;* *dreaded
And therefore God great wreche* upon him sent, *vengeance
And him bereft the regne that he had.
"He was cast out of manne's company;
With asses was his habitation
And ate hay, as a beast, in wet and dry,
Till that he knew by grace and by reason
That God of heaven hath domination

O'er every regne, and every creature;
And then had God of him compassion,
And him restor'd his regne and his figure.
"Eke thou, that art his son, art proud also,
And knowest all these thinges verily;
And art rebel to God, and art his foe.
Thou drankest of his vessels boldely;
Thy wife eke, and thy wenches, sinfully
Drank of the same vessels sundry wines,
And heried* false goddes cursedly; *praised
Therefore *to thee y-shapen full great pine is.* *great punishment is prepared for thee*
"This hand was sent from God, that on the wall
Wrote Mane, tekel, phares, truste me;
Thy reign is done; thou weighest naught at all;
Divided is thy regne, and it shall be
To Medes and to Persians giv'n," quoth he.
And thilke same night this king was slaw* *slain
And Darius occupied his degree,
Though he thereto had neither right nor law.
Lordings, example hereby may ye take,
How that in lordship is no sickerness;* *security
For when that Fortune will a man forsake,
She bears away his regne and his richess,
And eke his friendes bothe more and less,
For what man that hath friendes through fortune,
Mishap will make them enemies, I guess;
This proverb is full sooth, and full commune.
ZENOBIA, of Palmyrie the queen, <12>
As write Persians of her nobless,
So worthy was in armes, and so keen,
That no wight passed her in hardiness,
Nor in lineage, nor other gentleness.* *noble qualities
Of the king's blood of Perse* is she descended; *Persia
I say not that she hadde most fairness,
But of her shape she might not he amended.
From her childhood I finde that she fled
Office of woman, and to woods she went,
And many a wilde harte's blood she shed
With arrows broad that she against them sent;
She was so swift, that she anon them hent.* *caught
And when that she was older, she would kill
Lions, leopards, and beares all to-rent,* *torn to pieces
And in her armes wield them at her will.

She durst the wilde beastes' dennes seek,
And runnen in the mountains all the night,
And sleep under a bush; and she could eke
Wrestle by very force and very might
With any young man, were he ne'er so wight;* *active, nimble
There mighte nothing in her armes stond.
She kept her maidenhood from every wight,
To no man deigned she for to be bond.
But at the last her friendes have her married
To Odenate, <13> a prince of that country;
All were it so, that she them longe tarried.
And ye shall understande how that he
Hadde such fantasies as hadde she;
But natheless, when they were knit in fere,* *together
They liv'd in joy, and in felicity,
For each of them had other lefe* and dear. *loved
Save one thing, that she never would assent,
By no way, that he shoulde by her lie
But ones, for it was her plain intent
To have a child, the world to multiply;
And all so soon as that she might espy
That she was not with childe by that deed,
Then would she suffer him do his fantasy
Eftsoon,* and not but ones, *out of dread.* *again *without doubt*
And if she were with child at thilke* cast, *that
No more should he playe thilke game
Till fully forty dayes were past;
Then would she once suffer him do the same.
All* were this Odenatus wild or tame, *whether
He got no more of her; for thus she said,
It was to wives lechery and shame
In other case* if that men with them play'd. on other terms
Two sones, by this Odenate had she,
The which she kept in virtue and lettrure.* *learning
But now unto our tale turne we;
I say, so worshipful a creature,
And wise therewith, and large* with measure,** *bountiful **moderation
So penible* in the war, and courteous eke, *laborious
Nor more labour might in war endure,
Was none, though all this worlde men should seek.
Her rich array it mighte not be told,
As well in vessel as in her clothing:
She was all clad in pierrie* and in gold, *jewellery
And eke she *lefte not,* for no hunting, *did not neglect*

To have of sundry tongues full knowing,
When that she leisure had, and for t'intend* *apply
To learne bookes was all her liking,
How she in virtue might her life dispend.
And, shortly of this story for to treat,
So doughty was her husband and eke she,
That they conquered many regnes great
In th'Orient, with many a fair city
Appertinent unto the majesty
Of Rome, and with strong hande held them fast,
Nor ever might their foemen do* them flee, *make
Aye while that Odenatus' dayes last'.
Her battles, whoso list them for to read,
Against Sapor the king, <14> and other mo',
And how that all this process fell in deed,
Why she conquer'd, and what title thereto,
And after of her mischief* and her woe, *misfortune
How that she was besieged and y-take,
Let him unto my master Petrarch go,
That writes enough of this, I undertake.
When Odenate was dead, she mightily
The regne held, and with her proper hand
Against her foes she fought so cruelly,
That there n'as* king nor prince in all that land, *was not
That was not glad, if be that grace fand
That she would not upon his land warray;* *make war
With her they maden alliance by bond,
To be in peace, and let her ride and play.
The emperor of Rome, Claudius,
Nor, him before, the Roman Gallien,
Durste never be so courageous,
Nor no Armenian, nor Egyptien,
Nor Syrian, nor no Arabien,
Within the fielde durste with her fight,
Lest that she would them with her handes slen,* *slay
Or with her meinie* putte them to flight. *troops
In kinges' habit went her sones two,
As heires of their father's regnes all;
And Heremanno and Timolao
Their names were, as Persians them call
But aye Fortune hath in her honey gall;
This mighty queene may no while endure;
Fortune out of her regne made her fall
To wretchedness and to misadventure.

Aurelian, when that the governance
Of Rome came into his handes tway, <15>
He shope* upon this queen to do vengeance; *prepared
And with his legions he took his way
Toward Zenobie, and, shortly for to say,
He made her flee, and at the last her hent,* *took
And fetter'd her, and eke her children tway,
And won the land, and home to Rome he went.
Amonges other thinges that he wan,
Her car, that was with gold wrought and pierrie,* *jewels
This greate Roman, this Aurelian
Hath with him led, for that men should it see.
Before in his triumphe walked she
With gilte chains upon her neck hanging;
Crowned she was, as after* her degree, *according to
And full of pierrie her clothing.
Alas, Fortune! she that whilom was
Dreadful to kinges and to emperours,
Now galeth* all the people on her, alas! *yelleth
And she that *helmed was in starke stowres,* *wore a helmet in
And won by force townes strong and tow'rs, obstinate battles*
Shall on her head now wear a vitremite; <16>
And she that bare the sceptre full of flow'rs
Shall bear a distaff, *her cost for to quite.* * to make her living*
Although that NERO were so vicious
As any fiend that lies full low adown,
Yet he, as telleth us Suetonius,<17>
This wide world had in subjectioun,
Both East and West, South and Septentrioun.
Of rubies, sapphires, and of pearles white
Were all his clothes embroider'd up and down,
For he in gemmes greatly gan delight.
More delicate, more pompous of array,
More proud, was never emperor than he;
That *ilke cloth* that he had worn one day, *same robe*
After that time he would it never see;
Nettes of gold thread had he great plenty,
To fish in Tiber, when him list to play;
His lustes* were as law, in his degree, *pleasures
For Fortune as his friend would him obey.
He Rome burnt for his delicacy;* *pleasure
The senators he slew upon a day,
To heare how that men would weep and cry;
And slew his brother, and by his sister lay.

His mother made he in piteous array;
For he her wombe slitte, to behold
Where he conceived was; so well-away!
That he so little of his mother told.* *valued
No tear out of his eyen for that sight
Came; but he said, a fair woman was she.
Great wonder is, how that he could or might
Be doomesman* of her deade beauty: *judge
The wine to bringe him commanded he,
And drank anon; none other woe he made,
When might is joined unto cruelty,
Alas! too deepe will the venom wade.
In youth a master had this emperour,
To teache him lettrure* and courtesy; *literature, learning
For of morality he was the flow'r,
As in his time, *but if* bookes lie. *unless
And while this master had of him mast'ry,
He made him so conning and so souple,* *subtle
That longe time it was ere tyranny,
Or any vice, durst in him uncouple.* *be let loose
This Seneca, of which that I devise,* *tell
Because Nero had of him suche dread,
For he from vices would him aye chastise
Discreetly, as by word, and not by deed;
"Sir," he would say, "an emperor must need
Be virtuous, and hate tyranny."
For which he made him in a bath to bleed
On both his armes, till he muste die.
This Nero had eke of a custumance* *habit
In youth against his master for to rise;* *stand in his presence
Which afterward he thought a great grievance;
Therefore he made him dien in this wise.
But natheless this Seneca the wise
Chose in a bath to die in this mannere,
Rather than have another tormentise;* *torture
And thus hath Nero slain his master dear.
Now fell it so, that Fortune list no longer
The highe pride of Nero to cherice;* *cherish
For though he were strong, yet was she stronger.
She thoughte thus; "By God, I am too nice* *foolish
To set a man, that is full fill'd of vice,
In high degree, and emperor him call!
By God, out of his seat I will him trice!* *thrust <18>
When he least weeneth,* soonest shall he fall." *expecteth

The people rose upon him on a night,
For his default; and when he it espied,
Out of his doors anon he hath him dight* *betaken himself
Alone, and where he ween'd t'have been allied,* *regarded with
He knocked fast, and aye the more he cried friendship
The faster shutte they their doores all;
Then wist he well he had himself misgied,* *misled
And went his way, no longer durst he call.
The people cried and rumbled up and down,
That with his eares heard he how they said;
"Where is this false tyrant, this Neroun?"
For fear almost out of his wit he braid,* *went
And to his goddes piteously he pray'd
For succour, but it mighte not betide
For dread of this he thoughte that died,
And ran into a garden him to hide.
And in this garden found he churles tway,
That satte by a fire great and red;
And to these churles two he gan to pray
To slay him, and to girdon* off his head, *strike
That to his body, when that he were dead,
Were no despite done for his defame.* *infamy
Himself he slew, *he coud no better rede;* *he knew no better
Of which Fortune laugh'd and hadde game. counsel*
Was never capitain under a king,
That regnes more put in subjectioun,
Nor stronger was in field of alle thing
As in his time, nor greater of renown,
Nor more pompous in high presumptioun,
Than HOLOFERNES, whom Fortune aye kiss'd
So lik'rously, and led him up and down,
Till that his head was off *ere that he wist.* *before he knew it*
Not only that this world had of him awe,
For losing of richess and liberty;
But he made every man *reny his law.* *renounce his religion <19>
Nabuchodonosor was God, said he;
None other Godde should honoured be.
Against his hest* there dare no wight trespace, *command
Save in Bethulia, a strong city,
Where Eliachim priest was of that place.
But take keep* of the death of Holofern; *notice
Amid his host he drunken lay at night
Within his tente, large as is a bern;* *barn
And yet, for all his pomp and all his might,

Judith, a woman, as he lay upright
Sleeping, his head off smote, and from his tent
Full privily she stole from every wight,
And with his head unto her town she went.
What needeth it of king ANTIOCHUS <20>
To tell his high and royal majesty,
His great pride, and his workes venomous?
For such another was there none as he;
Reade what that he was in Maccabee.
And read the proude wordes that he said,
And why he fell from his prosperity,
And in an hill how wretchedly he died.
Fortune him had enhanced so in pride,
That verily he ween'd he might attain
Unto the starres upon every side,
And in a balance weighen each mountain,
And all the floodes of the sea restrain.
And Godde's people had he most in hate
Them would he slay in torment and in pain,
Weening that God might not his pride abate.
And for that Nicanor and Timothee
With Jewes were vanquish'd mightily, <21>
Unto the Jewes such an hate had he,
That he bade *graith his car* full hastily, *prepare his chariot*
And swore and saide full dispiteously,
Unto Jerusalem he would eftsoon,* *immediately
To wreak his ire on it full cruelly
But of his purpose was he let* full soon. *prevented
God for his menace him so sore smote,
With invisible wound incurable,
That in his guttes carf* it so and bote,** *cut **gnawed
Till that his paines were importable;* *unendurable
And certainly the wreche* was reasonable, *vengeance
For many a manne's guttes did he pain;
But from his purpose, curs'd* and damnable, *impious
For all his smart he would him not restrain;
But bade anon apparaile* his host. *prepare
And suddenly, ere he was of it ware,
God daunted all his pride, and all his boast
For he so sore fell out of his chare,* *chariot
That it his limbes and his skin to-tare,
So that he neither mighte go nor ride
But in a chaire men about him bare,
Alle forbruised bothe back and side.

The wreche* of God him smote so cruelly, *vengeance
That through his body wicked wormes crept,
And therewithal he stank so horribly
That none of all his meinie* that him kept, *servants
Whether so that he woke or elles slept,
Ne mighte not of him the stink endure.
In this mischief he wailed and eke wept,
And knew God Lord of every creature.
To all his host, and to himself also,
Full wlatsem* was the stink of his carrain;** *loathsome **body
No manne might him beare to and fro.
And in this stink, and this horrible pain,
He starf* full wretchedly in a mountain. *dies
Thus hath this robber, and this homicide,
That many a manne made to weep and plain,
Such guerdon* as belongeth unto pride. *reward
The story of ALEXANDER is so commune,
That ev'ry wight that hath discretion
Hath heard somewhat or all of his fortune.
This wide world, as in conclusion,
He won by strength; or, for his high renown,
They were glad for peace to him to send.
The pride and boast of man he laid adown,
Whereso he came, unto the worlde's end.
Comparison yet never might be maked
Between him and another conqueror;
For all this world for dread of him had quaked
He was of knighthood and of freedom flow'r:
Fortune him made the heir of her honour.
Save wine and women, nothing might assuage
His high intent in arms and labour,
So was he full of leonine courage.
What praise were it to him, though I you told
Of Darius, and a hundred thousand mo',
Of kinges, princes, dukes, and earles bold,
Which he conquer'd, and brought them into woe?
I say, as far as man may ride or go,
The world was his, why should I more devise?* *tell
For, though I wrote or told you evermo',
Of his knighthood it mighte not suffice.
Twelve years he reigned, as saith Maccabee
Philippe's son of Macedon he was,
That first was king in Greece the country.
O worthy gentle* Alexander, alas *noble

That ever should thee falle such a case!
Empoison'd of thine owen folk thou were;
Thy six <22> fortune hath turn'd into an ace,
And yet for thee she wepte never a tear.
Who shall me give teares to complain
The death of gentiless, and of franchise,* *generosity
That all this worlde had in his demaine,* *dominion
And yet he thought it mighte not suffice,
So full was his corage* of high emprise? *spirit
Alas! who shall me helpe to indite
False Fortune, and poison to despise?
The whiche two of all this woe I wite.* *blame
By wisdom, manhood, and by great labour,
From humbleness to royal majesty
Up rose he, JULIUS the Conquerour,
That won all th' Occident,* by land and sea, *West
By strength of hand or elles by treaty,
And unto Rome made them tributary;
And since* of Rome the emperor was he, *afterwards
Till that Fortune wax'd his adversary.
O mighty Caesar, that in Thessaly
Against POMPEIUS, father thine in law, <23>
That of th' Orient had all the chivalry,
As far as that the day begins to daw,
That through thy knighthood hast them take and slaw,* slain*
Save fewe folk that with Pompeius fled;
Through which thou put all th' Orient in awe; <24>
Thanke Fortune that so well thee sped.
But now a little while I will bewail
This Pompeius, this noble governor
Of Rome, which that fled at this battaile
I say, one of his men, a false traitor,
His head off smote, to winne him favor
Of Julius, and him the head he brought;
Alas! Pompey, of th' Orient conqueror,
That Fortune unto such a fine* thee brought! *end
To Rome again repaired Julius,
With his triumphe laureate full high;
But on a time Brutus and Cassius,
That ever had of his estate envy,
Full privily have made conspiracy
Against this Julius in subtle wise
And cast* the place in which he shoulde die, *arranged
With bodekins,* as I shall you devise.** *daggers **tell

This Julius to the Capitole went
Upon a day, as he was wont to gon;
And in the Capitol anon him hent* *seized
This false Brutus, and his other fone,* *foes
And sticked him with bodekins anon
With many a wound, and thus they let him lie.
But never groan'd he at no stroke but one,
Or else at two, *but if* the story lie. *unless
So manly was this Julius of heart,
And so well loved *estately honesty *dignified propriety*
That, though his deadly woundes sore smart,* *pained him
His mantle o'er his hippes caste he,
That ne man shoulde see his privity
And as he lay a-dying in a trance,
And wiste verily that dead was he,
Of honesty yet had he remembrance.
Lucan, to thee this story I recommend,
And to Sueton', and Valerie also,
That of this story write *word and end* *the whole* <25>
How that to these great conquerores two
Fortune was first a friend, and since* a foe. *afterwards
No manne trust upon her favour long,
But *have her in await for evermo';* *ever be watchful against her*
Witness on all these conquerores strong.
The riche CROESUS, <26> whilom king of Lyde, —
Of which Croesus Cyrus him sore drad,* — *dreaded
Yet was he caught amiddes all his pride,
And to be burnt men to the fire him lad;
But such a rain down *from the welkin shad,* *poured from the sky*
That slew the fire, and made him to escape:
But to beware no grace yet he had,
Till fortune on the gallows made him gape.
When he escaped was, he could not stint* *refrain
For to begin a newe war again;
He weened well, for that Fortune him sent
Such hap, that he escaped through the rain,
That of his foes he mighte not be slain.
And eke a sweven* on a night he mette,** *dream **dreamed
Of which he was so proud, and eke so fain,* *glad
That he in vengeance all his hearte set.
Upon a tree he was set, as he thought,
Where Jupiter him wash'd, both back and side,
And Phoebus eke a fair towel him brought
To dry him with; and therefore wax'd his pride.

And to his daughter that stood him beside,
Which he knew in high science to abound,
He bade her tell him what it signified;
And she his dream began right thus expound.
"The tree," quoth she, "the gallows is to mean,
And Jupiter betokens snow and rain,
And Phoebus, with his towel clear and clean,
These be the sunne's streames* sooth to sayn; *rays
Thou shalt y-hangeth be, father, certain;
Rain shall thee wash, and sunne shall thee dry."
Thus warned him full plat and eke full plain
His daughter, which that called was Phanie.
And hanged was Croesus the proude king;
His royal throne might him not avail.
Tragedy is none other manner thing,
Nor can in singing crien nor bewail,
But for that Fortune all day will assail
With unware stroke the regnes* that be proud:<27> *kingdoms
For when men truste her, then will she fail,
And cover her bright face with a cloud.
O noble, O worthy PEDRO, <28> glory OF SPAIN,
Whem Fortune held so high in majesty,
Well oughte men thy piteous death complain.
Out of thy land thy brother made thee flee,
And after, at a siege, by subtlety,
Thou wert betray'd, and led unto his tent,
Where as he with his owen hand slew thee,
Succeeding in thy regne* and in thy rent.** *kingdom *revenues
The field of snow, with th' eagle of black therein,
Caught with the lion, red-colour'd as the glede,* *burning coal
He brew'd this cursedness,* and all this sin; *wickedness, villainy
The wicked nest was worker of this deed;
Not Charles' Oliver, <29> that took aye heed
Of truth and honour, but of Armorike
Ganilien Oliver, corrupt for meed,* *reward, bribe
Broughte this worthy king in such a brike.* *breach, ruin
O worthy PETRO, King of CYPRE <30> also,
That Alexandre won by high mast'ry,
Full many a heathnen wroughtest thou full woe,
Of which thine owen lieges had envy;
And, for no thing but for thy chivalry,
They in thy bed have slain thee by the morrow;
Thus can Fortune her wheel govern and gie,* *guide
And out of joy bringe men into sorrow.

Of Milan greate BARNABO VISCOUNT,<30>
God of delight, and scourge of Lombardy,
Why should I not thine clomben* wert so high? *climbed
Thy brother's son, that was thy double ally,
For he thy nephew was and son-in-law,
Within his prison made thee to die,
But why, nor how, *n'ot I* that thou were slaw.* *I know not* *slain*
Of th' Earl HUGOLIN OF PISE the languour* *agony
There may no tongue telle for pity.
But little out of Pisa stands a tow'r,
In whiche tow'r in prison put was he,
Aud with him be his little children three;
The eldest scarcely five years was of age;
Alas! Fortune, it was great cruelty
Such birdes for to put in such a cage.
Damned was he to die in that prison;
For Roger, which that bishop was of Pise,
Had on him made a false suggestion,
Through which the people gan upon him rise,
And put him in prison, in such a wise
As ye have heard; and meat and drink he had
So small, that well unneth* it might suffice, *scarcely
And therewithal it was full poor and bad.
And on a day befell, that in that hour
When that his meate wont was to be brought,
The jailor shut the doores of the tow'r;
He heard it right well, but he spake nought.
And in his heart anon there fell a thought,
That they for hunger woulde *do him dien;* *cause him to die*
"Alas!" quoth he, "alas that I was wrought!"* *made, born
Therewith the teares fell from his eyen.
His youngest son, that three years was of age,
Unto him said, "Father, why do ye weep?
When will the jailor bringen our pottage?
Is there no morsel bread that ye do keep?
I am so hungry, that I may not sleep.
Now woulde God that I might sleepen ever!
Then should not hunger in my wombe* creep; *stomach
There is no thing, save bread, that one were lever."* *dearer
Thus day by day this child begun to cry,
Till in his father's barme* adown he lay, *lap
And saide, "Farewell, father, I must die;"
And kiss'd his father, and died the same day.
And when the woeful father did it sey,* *see

For woe his armes two he gan to bite,
And said, "Alas! Fortune, and well-away!
To thy false wheel my woe all may I wite."* *blame
His children ween'd that it for hunger was
That he his armes gnaw'd, and not for woe,
And saide, "Father, do not so, alas!
But rather eat the flesh upon us two.
Our flesh thou gave us, our flesh take us fro',
And eat enough;" right thus they to him said.
And after that, within a day or two,
They laid them in his lap adown, and died.
Himself, despaired, eke for hunger starf.* *died
Thus ended is this Earl of Pise;
From high estate Fortune away him carf.* *cut off
Of this tragedy it ought enough suffice
Whoso will hear it *in a longer wise,* *at greater length*
Reade the greate poet of ltale,
That Dante hight, for he can it devise <32>
From point to point, not one word will he fail.

Notes to the Monk's Tale

1. The Monk's Tale is founded in its main features on Bocccacio's work, "De Casibus Virorum Illustrium;" ("Stories of Illustrious Men") but Chaucer has taken the separate stories of which it is composed from different authors, and dealt with them after his own fashion.

2. Boccaccio opens his book with Adam, whose story is told at much greater length than here. Lydgate, in his translation from Boccaccio, speaks of Adam and Eve as made "of slime of the erth in Damascene the felde."

3. Judges xiii. 3. Boccaccio also tells the story of Samson; but Chaucer seems, by his quotation a few lines below, to have taken his version direct from the sacred book.

4. Oliveres: olive trees; French, "oliviers."

5. "Liber Judicum," the Book of Judges; chap. xv.

6. Querne: mill; from Anglo-Saxon, "cyrran," to turn, "cweorn," a mill,

7.Harpies: the Stymphalian Birds, which fed on human flesh.

8. Busiris, king of Egypt, was wont to sacrifice all foreigners coming to his dominions. Hercules was seized, bound, and led to the altar by his orders, but the hero broke his bonds and slew the tyrant.

9. The feats of Hercules here recorded are not all these known as the "twelve labours;" for instance, the cleansing of the Augean stables, and the capture of Hippolyte's girdle are not in this list — other and less famous deeds of the hero taking their place. For this, however, we must accuse not Chaucer, but Boethius, whom he has almost literally translated, though with some change of order.

10. Trophee: One of the manuscripts has a marginal reference to "Tropheus vates Chaldaeorum" ("Tropheus the prophet of the Chaldees"); but it is not known what author Chaucer meant — unless the reference is to a passage in the "Filostrato" of

Boccaccio, on which Chaucer founded his "Troilus and Cressida," and which Lydgate mentions, under the name of "Trophe," as having been translated by Chaucer.
11. Pres: near; French, "pres;" the meaning seems to be, this nearer, lower world.
12 Chaucer has taken the story of Zenobia from Boccaccio's work "De Claris Mulieribus." ("Of Illustrious Women")
13. Odenatus, who, for his services to the Romans, received from Gallienus the title of "Augustus;" he was assassinated in A.D. 266 — not, it was believed, without the connivance of Zenobia, who succeeded him on the throne.
14. Sapor was king of Persia, who made the Emperor Valerian prisoner, conquered Syria, and was pressing triumphantly westward when he was met and defeated by Odenatus and Zenobia.
15. Aurelain became Emperor in A.D. 270.
16. Vitremite: The signification of this word, which is spelled in several ways, is not known. Skinner's explanation, "another attire," founded on the spelling "autremite," is obviously insufficient.
17. Great part of this "tragedy" of Nero is really borrowed, however, from the "Romance of the Rose."
18. Trice: thrust; from Anglo-Saxon, "thriccan."
19. So, in the Man of Law's Tale, the Sultaness promises her son that she will "reny her lay."
20. As the "tragedy" of Holofernes is founded on the book of Judith, so is that of Antiochus on the Second Book of the Maccabees, chap. ix.
21. By the insurgents under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus; 2 Macc. chap. viii.
22. Six: the highest cast on a dicing-cube; here representing the highest favour of fortune.
23. Pompey had married his daughter Julia to Caesar; but she died six years before Pompey's final overthrow.
24. At the battle of Pharsalia, B.C. 48.
25. Word and end: apparently a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon phrase, "ord and end," meaning the whole, the beginning and the end.
26. At the opening of the story of Croesus, Chaucer has copied from his own translation of Boethius; but the story is mainly taken from the "Romance of the Rose"
27. "This reflection," says Tyrwhttt, "seems to have been suggested by one which follows soon after the mention of Croesus in the passage just cited from Boethius. 'What other thing bewail the cryings of tragedies but only the deeds of fortune, that with an awkward stroke, overturneth the realms of great nobley?'" — in some manuscripts the four "tragedies" that follow are placed between those of Zenobia and Nero; but although the general reflection with which the "tragedy" of Croesus closes might most appropriately wind up the whole series, the general chronological arrangement which is observed in the other cases recommends the order followed in the text. Besides, since, like several other Tales, the Monk's tragedies were cut short by the impatience of the auditors, it is more natural that the Tale should close abruptly, than by such a rhetorical finish as these lines afford.
28. Pedro the Cruel, King of Aragon, against whom his brother Henry rebelled. He was

by false pretences inveigled into his brother's tent, and treacherously slain. Mr Wright has remarked that "the cause of Pedro, though he was no better than a cruel and reckless tyrant, was popular in England from the very circumstance that Prince Edward (the Black Prince) had embarked in it."

29. Not the Oliver of Charlemagne — but a traitorous Oliver of Armorica, corrupted by a bribe. Ganilion was the betrayer of the Christian army at Roncevalles (see note 9 to the Shipman's Tale); and his name appears to have been for a long time used in France to denote a traitor. Duguesclin, who betrayed Pedro into his brother's tent, seems to be intended by the term "Ganilion Oliver," but if so, Chaucer has mistaken his name, which was Bertrand — perhaps confounding him, as Tyrwhttt suggests, with Oliver du Clisson, another illustrious Breton of those times, who was also Constable of France, after Duguesclin. The arms of the latter are supposed to be described a little above

30. Pierre de Lusignan, King of Cyprus, who captured Alexandria in 1363 (see note 6 to the Prologue to the Tales). He was assassinated in 1369.

31. Bernabo Visconti, Duke of Milan, was deposed and imprisoned by his nephew, and died a captive in 1385. His death is the latest historical fact mentioned in the Tales; and thus it throws the date of their composition to about the sixtieth year of Chaucer's age.

32. The story of Ugolino is told in the 33rd Canto of the "Inferno."