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GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE

THE PROLOGUE.

"Ho!" quoth the Knight, "good sir, no more of this;
That ye have said is right enough, y-wis,* *of a surety
And muche more; for little heaviness
Is right enough to muche folk, I guess.
I say for me, it is a great disease,* *source of distress, annoyance
Where as men have been in great wealth and ease,
To hearen of their sudden fall, alas!
And the contrary is joy and great solas,* *delight, comfort
As when a man hath been in poor estate,
And climbeth up, and waxeth fortunate,
And there abideth in prosperity;
Such thing is gladsome, as it thinketh me,
And of such thing were goodly for to tell."
"Yea," quoth our Hoste, "by Saint Paule's bell.
Ye say right sooth; this monk hath clapped* loud; *talked
He spake how Fortune cover'd with a cloud
I wot not what, and als' of a tragedy
Right now ye heard: and pardie no remedy
It is for to bewaile, nor complain
That that is done, and also it is pain,
As ye have said, to hear of heaviness.
Sir Monk, no more of this, so God you bless;
Your tale annoyeth all this company;
Such talking is not worth a butterfly,
For therein is there no sport nor game;
Therefore, Sir Monke, Dan Piers by your name,
I pray you heart'ly, tell us somewhat else,
For sickerly, n'ere* clinking of your bells, *were it not for the
That on your bridle hang on every side,
By heaven's king, that for us alle died,
I should ere this have fallen down for sleep,
Although the slough had been never so deep;
Then had your tale been all told in vain.
For certainly, as these clerkes sayn,
Where as a man may have no audience,
Nought helpeth it to telle his sentence.
And well I wot the substance is in me,

If anything shall well reported be.
Sir, say somewhat of hunting, <1> I you pray."
"Nay," quoth the Monk, "I have *no lust to play;* *no fondness for
Now let another tell, as I have told." jesting*
Then spake our Host with rude speech and bold,
And said unto the Nunne's Priest anon,
"Come near, thou Priest, come hither, thou Sir John, <2>
Tell us such thing as may our heartes glade.* *gladden
Be blithe, although thou ride upon a jade.
What though thine horse be bothe foul and lean?
If he will serve thee, reck thou not a bean;
Look that thine heart be merry evermo'."
"Yes, Host," quoth he, "so may I ride or go,
But* I be merry, y-wis I will be blamed." *unless
And right anon his tale he hath attamed* *commenced <3>
And thus he said unto us every one,
This sweete priest, this goodly man, Sir John.

Notes to the Prologue to the Nun's Priest's Tale

1. The request is justified by the description of Monk in the Prologue as "an out-rider, that loved venery."

2. On this Tyrwhitt remarks; "I know not how it has happened, that in the principal modern languages, John, or its equivalent, is a name of contempt or at least of slight. So the Italians use 'Gianni,' from whence 'Zani;' the Spaniards 'Juan,' as 'Bobo Juan,' a foolish John; the French 'Jean,' with various additions; and in English, when we call a man 'a John,' we do not mean it as a title of honour." The title of "Sir" was usually given by courtesy to priests.

3. Attamed: commenced, broached. Compare French, "entamer", to cut the first piece off a joint; thence to begin.

THE TALE. <1>

A poor widow, *somedeal y-stept* in age, *somewhat advanced*
Was whilom dwelling in a poor cottage,
Beside a grove, standing in a dale.
This widow, of which I telle you my tale,
Since thilke day that she was last a wife,
In patience led a full simple life,
For little was *her chattel and her rent.* *her goods and her income*
By husbandry* of such as God her sent, *thrifty management
She found* herself, and eke her daughters two. *maintained
Three large sowes had she, and no mo';
Three kine, and eke a sheep that highte Mall.
Full sooty was her bow'r,* and eke her hall, *chamber
In which she ate full many a slender meal.
Of poignant sauce knew she never a deal.* *whit
No dainty morsel passed through her throat;

Her diet was *accordant to her cote.* *in keeping with her cottage*
Repletion her made never sick;
Attemper* diet was all her physic, *moderate
And exercise, and *hearte's suffisance.* *contentment of heart*
The goute *let her nothing for to dance,* *did not prevent her
Nor apoplexy shente* not her head. from dancing* *hurt
No wine drank she, neither white nor red:
Her board was served most with white and black,
Milk and brown bread, in which she found no lack,
Seind* bacon, and sometimes an egg or tway; *singed
For she was as it were *a manner dey.* *kind of day labourer* <2>
A yard she had, enclosed all about
With stickes, and a drye ditch without,
In which she had a cock, hight Chanticleer;
In all the land of crowing *n'as his peer.* *was not his equal*
His voice was merrier than the merry orgon,* *organ <3>
On masse days that in the churches gon.
Well sickerer* was his crowing in his lodge, *more punctual*
Than is a clock, or an abbay horloge.* *clock <4>
By nature he knew each ascension
Of th' equinoctial in thilke town;
For when degrees fiftene were ascended,
Then crew he, that it might not be amended.
His comb was redder than the fine coral,
Embattell'd <5> as it were a castle wall.
His bill was black, and as the jet it shone;
Like azure were his legges and his tone;* *toes
His nailes whiter than the lily flow'r,
And like the burnish'd gold was his colour,
This gentle cock had in his governance
Sev'n hennes, for to do all his pleasance,
Which were his sisters and his paramours,
And wondrous like to him as of colours.
Of which the fairest-hued in the throat
Was called Damoselle Partelote,
Courteous she was, discreet, and debonair,
And companiable,* and bare herself so fair, *sociable
Since the day that she sev'n night was old,
That truely she had the heart in hold
Of Chanticleer, locked in every lith;* *limb
He lov'd her so, that well was him therewith,
But such a joy it was to hear them sing,
When that the brighte sunne gan to spring,
In sweet accord, *"My lefe is fare in land."* <6> *my love is

For, at that time, as I have understand, gone abroad*
Beastes and birdes coulde speak and sing.
And so befell, that in a dawening,
As Chanticleer among his wives all
Sat on his perche, that was in the hall,
And next him sat this faire Partelote,
This Chanticleer gan groanen in his throat,
As man that in his dream is dretched* sore, *oppressed
And when that Partelote thus heard him roar,
She was aghast,* and saide, "Hearte dear, *afraid
What aileth you to groan in this mannere?
Ye be a very sleeper, fy for shame!"
And he answer'd and saide thus; "Madame,
I pray you that ye take it not agrief;* *amiss, in umbrage
By God, *me mette* I was in such mischief,** *I dreamed* **trouble
Right now, that yet mine heart is sore affright'.
Now God," quoth he, "my sweven* read aright *dream, vision.
And keep my body out of foul prisoun.
Me mette, how that I roamed up and down *I dreamed*
Within our yard, where as I saw a beast
Was like an hound, and would have *made arrest* *siezed*
Upon my body, and would have had me dead.
His colour was betwixt yellow and red;
And tipped was his tail, and both his ears,
With black, unlike the remnant of his hairs.
His snout was small, with glowing eyen tway;
Yet of his look almost for fear I dey;* *died
This caused me my groaning, doubteless."
"Away," <7> quoth she, "fy on you, hearteless!* *coward
Alas!" quoth she, "for, by that God above!
Now have ye lost my heart and all my love;
I cannot love a coward, by my faith.
For certes, what so any woman saith,
We all desiren, if it mighte be,
To have husbandes hardy, wise, and free,
And secret,* and no niggard nor no fool, *discreet
Nor him that is aghast* of every tool,** *afraid **rag, trifle
Nor no avantour,* by that God above! *braggart
How durste ye for shame say to your love
That anything might make you afear'd?
Have ye no manne's heart, and have a beard?
Alas! and can ye be aghast of swevenes?* *dreams
Nothing but vanity, God wot, in sweven is,
Swevens *engender of repletions,* *are caused by over-eating*

And oft of fume,* and of complexions, *drunkenness
When humours be too abundant in a wight.
Certes this dream, which ye have mette tonight,
Cometh of the great supefluity
Of youre rede cholera,* pardie, *bile
Which causeth folk to dreaden in their dreams
Of arrows, and of fire with redde beams,
Of redde beastes, that they will them bite,
Of conteke,* and of whelpes great and lite;** *contention **little
Right as the humour of melancholy
Causeth full many a man in sleep to cry,
For fear of bulles, or of beares blake,
Or elles that black devils will them take,
Of other humours could I tell also,
That worke many a man in sleep much woe;
That I will pass as lightly as I can.
Lo, Cato, which that was so wise a man,
Said he not thus, *'Ne do no force of* dreams,'<8> *attach no weight to*
Now, Sir," quoth she, "when we fly from these beams,
For Godde's love, as take some laxatife;
On peril of my soul, and of my life,
I counsel you the best, I will not lie,
That both of choler, and melancholy,
Ye purge you; and, for ye shall not tarry,
Though in this town is no apothecary,
I shall myself two herbes teache you,
That shall be for your health, and for your prow;* *profit
And in our yard the herbes shall I find,
The which have of their property by kind* *nature
To purge you beneath, and eke above.
Sire, forget not this for Godde's love;
Ye be full choleric of complexion;
Ware that the sun, in his ascension,
You finde not replete of humours hot;
And if it do, I dare well lay a groat,
That ye shall have a fever tertiane,
Or else an ague, that may be your bane,
A day or two ye shall have digestives
Of wormes, ere ye take your laxatives,
Of laurel, centaury, <9> and fumeterere, <10>
Or else of elder-berry, that groweth there,
Of catapuce, <11> or of the gaitre-berries, <12>
Or herb ivy growing in our yard, that merry is:
Pick them right as they grow, and eat them in,

Be merry, husband, for your father's kin;
Dreade no dream; I can say you no more."
"Madame," quoth he, "grand mercy of your lore,
But natheless, as touching *Dan Catoun,* *Cato
That hath of wisdom such a great renown,
Though that he bade no dreames for to dread,
By God, men may in olde bookes read
Of many a man more of authority
Than ever Cato was, so may I the,* *thrive
That all the reverse say of his sentence,* *opinion
And have well founden by experience
That dreames be significations
As well of joy, as tribulations
That folk enduren in this life present.
There needeth make of this no argument;
The very preve* sheweth it indeed. *trial, experience
One of the greatest authors that men read <13>
Saith thus, that whilom two fellowes went
On pilgrimage in a full good intent;
And happen'd so, they came into a town
Where there was such a congregatioun
Of people, and eke so *strait of herbergage,* *without lodging*
That they found not as much as one cottage
In which they bothe might y-lodged be:
Wherefore they musten of necessity,
As for that night, departe company;
And each of them went to his hostelry,* *inn
And took his lodging as it woulde fall.
The one of them was lodged in a stall,
Far in a yard, with oxen of the plough;
That other man was lodged well enow,
As was his aventure, or his fortune,
That us governeth all, as in commune.
And so befell, that, long ere it were day,
This man mette* in his bed, there: as he lay, *dreamed
How that his fellow gan upon him call,
And said, 'Alas! for in an ox's stall
This night shall I be murder'd, where I lie
Now help me, deare brother, or I die;
In alle haste come to me,' he said.
This man out of his sleep for fear abraid;* *started
But when that he was wak'd out of his sleep,
He turned him, and *took of this no keep;* *paid this no attention*
He thought his dream was but a vanity.

Thus twies* in his sleeping dreamed he, *twice
And at the thirde time yet his fellaw again
Came, as he thought, and said, 'I am now slaw;* *slain
Behold my bloody woundes, deep and wide.
Arise up early, in the morning, tide,
And at the west gate of the town,' quoth he,
'A carte full of dung there shalt: thou see,
In which my body is hid privily.
Do thilke cart arroste* boldely. *stop
My gold caused my murder, sooth to sayn.'
And told him every point how he was slain,
With a full piteous face, and pale of hue.
"And, truste well, his dream he found full true;
For on the morrow, as soon as it was day,
To his fellowes inn he took his way;
And when that he came to this ox's stall,
After his fellow he began to call.
The hostelere answered him anon,
And saide, 'Sir, your fellow is y-gone,
As soon as day he went out of the town.'
This man gan fallen in suspicioun,
Rememb'ring on his dreames that he mette,* *dreamed
And forth he went, no longer would he let,* *delay
Unto the west gate of the town, and fand* *found
A dung cart, as it went for to dung land,
That was arrayed in the same wise
As ye have heard the deade man devise;* *describe
And with an hardy heart he gan to cry,
'Vengeance and justice of this felony:
My fellow murder'd in this same night
And in this cart he lies, gaping upright.
I cry out on the ministers,' quoth he.
'That shoulde keep and rule this city;
Harow! alas! here lies my fellow slain.'
What should I more unto this tale sayn?
The people out start, and cast the cart to ground
And in the middle of the dung they found
The deade man, that murder'd was all new.
O blissful God! that art so good and true,
Lo, how that thou bewray'st murder alway.
Murder will out, that see we day by day.
Murder is so wlatsom* and abominable *loathsome
To God, that is so just and reasonable,
That he will not suffer it heled* be; *concealed <14>

Though it abide a year, or two, or three,
Murder will out, this is my conclusioun,
And right anon, the ministers of the town
Have hent* the carter, and so sore him pined,** *seized **tortured
And eke the hostelere so sore engined,* *racked
That they beknew* their wickedness anon, *confessed
And were hanged by the necke bone.
"Here may ye see that dreames be to dread.
And certes in the same book I read,
Right in the nexte chapter after this
(I gabbe* not, so have I joy and bliss), *talk idly
Two men that would, have passed over sea,
For certain cause, into a far country,
If that the wind not hadde been contrary,
That made them in a city for to tarry,
That stood full merry upon an haven side;
But on a day, against the even-tide,
The wind gan change, and blew right *as them lest.* *as they wished*
Jolly and glad they wente to their rest,
And caste* them full early for to sail. *resolved
But to the one man fell a great marvail
That one of them, in sleeping as he lay,
He mette* a wondrous dream, against the day: *dreamed
He thought a man stood by his bedde's side,
And him commanded that he should abide;
And said him thus; 'If thou to-morrow wend,
Thou shalt be drown'd; my tale is at an end.'
He woke, and told his follow what he mette,
And prayed him his voyage for to let;* *delay
As for that day, he pray'd him to abide.
His fellow, that lay by his bedde's side,
Gan for to laugh, and scorned him full fast.
'No dream,' quoth he,'may so my heart aghast,* *frighten
That I will lette* for to do my things.* *delay
I sette not a straw by thy dreamings,
For swevens* be but vanities and japes.** *dreams **jokes,deceits
Men dream all day of owles and of apes,
And eke of many a maze* therewithal; *wild imagining
Men dream of thing that never was, nor shall.
But since I see, that thou wilt here abide,
And thus forslothe* wilfully thy tide,** *idle away **time
God wot, *it rueth me;* and have good day.' *I am sorry for it*
And thus he took his leave, and went his way.
But, ere that he had half his course sail'd,

I know not why, nor what mischance it ail'd,
But casually* the ship's bottom rent, *by accident
And ship and man under the water went,
In sight of other shippes there beside
That with him sailed at the same tide.
"And therefore, faire Partelote so dear,
By such examples olde may'st thou lear,* *learn
That no man shoulde be too reckeless
Of dreames, for I say thee doubteless,
That many a dream full sore is for to dread.
Lo, in the life of Saint Kenelm <15> I read,
That was Kenulphus' son, the noble king
Of Mercenrike, <16> how Kenelm mette a thing.
A little ere he was murder'd on a day,
His murder in his vision he say.* *saw
His norice* him expounded every deal** *nurse **part
His sweven, and bade him to keep* him well *guard
For treason; but he was but seven years old,
And therefore *little tale hath he told* *he attached little
Of any dream, so holy was his heart. significance to*
By God, I hadde lever than my shirt
That ye had read his legend, as have I.
Dame Partelote, I say you truely,
Macrobius, that wrote the vision
In Afric' of the worthy Scipion, <17>
Affirmeth dreames, and saith that they be
'Warnings of thinges that men after see.
And furthermore, I pray you looke well
In the Old Testament, of Daniel,
If he held dreames any vanity.
Read eke of Joseph, and there shall ye see
Whether dreams be sometimes (I say not all)
Warnings of thinges that shall after fall.
Look of Egypt the king, Dan Pharaoh,
His baker and his buteler also,
Whether they felte none effect* in dreams. *significance
Whoso will seek the acts of sundry remes* *realms
May read of dreames many a wondrous thing.
Lo Croesus, which that was of Lydia king,
Mette he not that he sat upon a tree,
Which signified he shoulde hanged be? <18>
Lo here, Andromache, Hectore's wife, <19>
That day that Hector shoulde lose his life,
She dreamed on the same night beforn,

How that the life of Hector should be lorn,* *lost
If thilke day he went into battaile;
She warned him, but it might not avail;
He wente forth to fighte natheless,
And was y-slain anon of Achilles.
But thilke tale is all too long to tell;
And eke it is nigh day, I may not dwell.
Shortly I say, as for conclusion,
That I shall have of this avision
Adversity; and I say furthermore,
That I ne *tell of laxatives no store,* *hold laxatives
For they be venomous, I wot it well; of no value*
I them defy,* I love them never a del.** *distrust **whit
"But let us speak of mirth, and stint* all this; *cease
Madame Partelote, so have I bliss,
Of one thing God hath sent me large* grace; liberal
For when I see the beauty of your face,
Ye be so scarlet-hued about your eyen,
I maketh all my dreade for to dien,
For, all so sicker* as In principio,<20> *certain
Mulier est hominis confusio.<21>
Madam, the sentence* of of this Latin is, *meaning
Woman is manne's joy and manne's bliss.
For when I feel at night your softe side, —
Albeit that I may not on you ride,
For that our perch is made so narrow, Alas!
I am so full of joy and of solas,* *delight
That I defy both sweven and eke dream."
And with that word he flew down from the beam,
For it was day, and eke his hennes all;
And with a chuck he gan them for to call,
For he had found a corn, lay in the yard.
Royal he was, he was no more afear'd;
He feather'd Partelote twenty time,
And as oft trode her, ere that it was prime.
He looked as it were a grim lion,
And on his toes he roamed up and down;
He deigned not to set his feet to ground;
He chucked, when he had a corn y-found,
And to him ranne then his wives all.
Thus royal, as a prince is in his hall,
Leave I this Chanticleer in his pasture;
And after will I tell his aventure.
When that the month in which the world began,

That highte March, when God first maked man,
Was complete, and y-passed were also,
Since March ended, thirty days and two,
Befell that Chanticleer in all his pride,
His seven wives walking him beside,
Cast up his eyen to the brighte sun,
That in the sign of Taurus had y-run
Twenty degrees and one, and somewhat more;
He knew by kind,* and by none other lore,** *nature **learning
That it was prime, and crew with blissful steven.* *voice
"The sun," he said, "is clomben up in heaven
Twenty degrees and one, and more y-wis.* *assuredly
Madame Partelote, my worlde's bliss,
Hearken these blissful birdes how they sing,
And see the freshe flowers how they spring;
Full is mine heart of revel and solace."
But suddenly him fell a sorrowful case;* *casualty
For ever the latter end of joy is woe:
God wot that worldly joy is soon y-go:
And, if a rhetor* coulde fair indite, *orator
He in a chronicle might it safely write,
As for *a sov'reign notability* *a thing supremely notable*
Now every wise man, let him hearken me;
This story is all as true, I undertake,
As is the book of Launcelot du Lake,
That women hold in full great reverence.
Now will I turn again to my sentence.
A col-fox, <22> full of sly iniquity,
That in the grove had wonned* yeares three, *dwelt
By high imagination forecast,
The same night thorough the hedges brast* *burst
Into the yard, where Chanticleer the fair
Was wont, and eke his wives, to repair;
And in a bed of wortes* still he lay, *cabbages
Till it was passed undern <23> of the day,
Waiting his time on Chanticleer to fall:
As gladly do these homicides all,
That in awaite lie to murder men.
O false murd'rer! Rouking* in thy den! *crouching, lurking
O new Iscariot, new Ganilion! <24>
O false dissimuler, O Greek Sinon,<25>
That broughtest Troy all utterly to sorrow!
O Chanticleer! accursed be the morrow
That thou into thy yard flew from the beams;* *rafters

Thou wert full well y-warned by thy dreams
That thilke day was perilous to thee.
But what that God forewot* must needes be, *foreknows
After th' opinion of certain clerkes.
Witness on him that any perfect clerk is,
That in school is great altercation
In this matter, and great disputation,
And hath been of an hundred thousand men.
But I ne cannot *boult it to the bren,* *examine it thoroughly <26>*
As can the holy doctor Augustine,
Or Boece, or the bishop Bradwardine,<27>
Whether that Godde's worthy foreweeting* *foreknowledge
Straineth me needly for to do a thing *forces me*
(Needly call I simple necessity),
Or elles if free choice be granted me
To do that same thing, or do it not,
Though God forewot* it ere that it was wrought; *knew in advance
Or if *his weeting straineth never a deal,* *his knowing constrains
But by necessity conditionel. not at all*
I will not have to do of such mattere;
My tale is of a cock, as ye may hear,
That took his counsel of his wife, with sorrow,
To walken in the yard upon the morrow
That he had mette the dream, as I you told.
Womane's counsels be full often cold;* *mischievous, unwise
Womane's counsel brought us first to woe,
And made Adam from Paradise to go,
There as he was full merry and well at case.
But, for I n'ot* to whom I might displease *know not
If I counsel of women woulde blame,
Pass over, for I said it in my game.* *jest
Read authors, where they treat of such mattere
And what they say of women ye may hear.
These be the cocke's wordes, and not mine;
I can no harm of no woman divine.* *conjecture, imagine
Fair in the sand, to bathe* her merrily, *bask
Lies Partelote, and all her sisters by,
Against the sun, and Chanticleer so free
Sang merrier than the mermaid in the sea;
For Physiologus saith sickerly,* *certainly
How that they singe well and merrily. <28>
And so befell that, as he cast his eye
Among the wortes,* on a butterfly, *cabbages
He was ware of this fox that lay full low.

Nothing *ne list him thenne* for to crow, *he had no inclination*
But cried anon "Cock! cock!" and up he start,
As man that was affrayed in his heart.
For naturally a beast desireth flee
From his contrary,* if be may it see, *enemy
Though he *ne'er erst* had soon it with his eye *never before*
This Chanticleer, when he gan him espy,
He would have fled, but that the fox anon
Said, "Gentle Sir, alas! why will ye gon?
Be ye afraid of me that am your friend?
Now, certes, I were worse than any fiend,
If I to you would harm or villainy.
I am not come your counsel to espy.
But truely the cause of my coming
Was only for to hearken how ye sing;
For truely ye have as merry a steven,* *voice
As any angel hath that is in heaven;
Therewith ye have of music more feeling,
Than had Boece, or any that can sing.
My lord your father (God his soule bless)
And eke your mother of her gentleness,
Have in mnine house been, to my great ease:* *satisfaction
And certes, Sir, full fain would I you please.
But, for men speak of singing, I will say,
So may I brooke* well mine eyen tway, *enjoy, possess, or use
Save you, I hearde never man so sing
As did your father in the morrowning.
Certes it was of heart all that he sung.
And, for to make his voice the more strong,
He would *so pain him,* that with both his eyen *make such an exertion*
He muste wink, so loud he woulde cryen,
And standen on his tiptoes therewithal,
And stretche forth his necke long and small.
And eke he was of such discretion,
That there was no man, in no region,
That him in song or wisdom mighte pass.
I have well read in Dan Burnel the Ass, <29>
Among his verse, how that there was a cock
That, for* a prieste's son gave him a knock *because
Upon his leg, while he was young and nice,* *foolish
He made him for to lose his benefice.
But certain there is no comparison
Betwixt the wisdom and discretion
Of youre father, and his subtilty.

Now singe, Sir, for sainte charity,
Let see, can ye your father counterfeit?"
This Chanticleer his wings began to beat,
As man that could not his treason espy,
So was he ravish'd with his flattery.
Alas! ye lordes, many a false flattour* *flatterer <30>
Is in your court, and many a losengeour, * *deceiver <31>
That please you well more, by my faith,
Than he that soothfastness* unto you saith. *truth
Read in Ecclesiast' of flattery;
Beware, ye lordes, of their treachery.
This Chanticleer stood high upon his toes,
Stretching his neck, and held his eyen close,
And gan to crowe loude for the nonce
And Dan Russel <32> the fox start up at once,
And *by the gorge hente* Chanticleer, *seized by the throat*
And on his back toward the wood him bare.
For yet was there no man that him pursu'd.
O destiny, that may'st not be eschew'd!* *escaped
Alas, that Chanticleer flew from the beams!
Alas, his wife raughte* nought of dreams! *regarded
And on a Friday fell all this mischance.
O Venus, that art goddess of pleasance,
Since that thy servant was this Chanticleer
And in thy service did all his powere,
More for delight, than the world to multiply,
Why wilt thou suffer him on thy day to die?
O Gaufrid, deare master sovereign, <33>
That, when thy worthy king Richard was slain
With shot, complainedest his death so sore,
Why n'had I now thy sentence and thy lore,
The Friday for to chiden, as did ye?
(For on a Friday, soothly, slain was he),
Then would I shew you how that I could plain* *lament
For Chanticleere's dread, and for his pain.
Certes such cry nor lamentation
Was ne'er of ladies made, when Ilion
Was won, and Pyrrhus with his straighte sword,
When he had hent* king Priam by the beard, *seized
And slain him (as saith us Eneidos*),<34> *The Aeneid
As maden all the hennes in the close,* *yard
When they had seen of Chanticleer the sight.
But sov'reignly* Dame Partelote shright,** *above all others
Full louder than did Hasdrubale's wife, **shrieked

When that her husband hadde lost his life,
And that the Romans had y-burnt Carthage;
She was so full of torment and of rage,
That wilfully into the fire she start,
And burnt herselfe with a steadfast heart.
O woeful hennes! right so cried ye,
As, when that Nero burned the city
Of Rome, cried the senatores' wives,
For that their husbands losten all their lives;
Withoute guilt this Nero hath them slain.
Now will I turn unto my tale again;
The sely* widow, and her daughters two, *simple, honest
Hearde these hennes cry and make woe,
And at the doors out started they anon,
And saw the fox toward the wood is gone,
And bare upon his back the cock away:
They cried, "Out! harow! and well-away!
Aha! the fox!" and after him they ran,
And eke with staves many another man
Ran Coll our dog, and Talbot, and Garland;
And Malkin, with her distaff in her hand
Ran cow and calf, and eke the very hogges
So fear'd they were for barking of the dogges,
And shouting of the men and women eke.
They ranne so, them thought their hearts would break.
They yelled as the fiendes do in hell;
The duckes cried as men would them quell;* *kill, destroy
The geese for feare flewen o'er the trees,
Out of the hive came the swarm of bees,
So hideous was the noise, ben'dicite!
Certes he, Jacke Straw,<35> and his meinie,* *followers
Ne made never shoutes half so shrill
When that they woulden any Fleming kill,
As thilke day was made upon the fox.
Of brass they broughte beames* and of box, *trumpets <36>
Of horn and bone, in which they blew and pooped,* **tooted
And therewithal they shrieked and they hooped;
It seemed as the heaven shoulde fall
Now, goode men, I pray you hearken all;
Lo, how Fortune turneth suddenly
The hope and pride eke of her enemy.
This cock, that lay upon the fox's back,
In all his dread unto the fox he spake,
And saide, "Sir, if that I were as ye,

Yet would I say (as wisly* God help me), *surely
'Turn ye again, ye proude churles all;
A very pestilence upon you fall.
Now am I come unto the woode's side,
Maugre your head, the cock shall here abide;
I will him eat, in faith, and that anon.'"
The fox answer'd, "In faith it shall be done:"
And, as he spake the word, all suddenly
The cock brake from his mouth deliverly,* *nimbly
And high upon a tree he flew anon.
And when the fox saw that the cock was gone,
"Alas!" quoth he, "O Chanticleer, alas!
I have," quoth he, "y-done to you trespass,* *offence
Inasmuch as I maked you afear'd,
When I you hent,* and brought out of your yard; *took
But, Sir, I did it in no wick' intent;
Come down, and I shall tell you what I meant.
I shall say sooth to you, God help me so."
"Nay then," quoth he, "I shrew* us both the two, *curse
And first I shrew myself, both blood and bones,
If thou beguile me oftener than once.
Thou shalt no more through thy flattery
Do* me to sing and winke with mine eye; *cause
For he that winketh when he shoulde see,
All wilfully, God let him never the."* *thrive
"Nay," quoth the fox; "but God give him mischance
That is so indiscreet of governance,
That jangleth* when that he should hold his peace." *chatters
Lo, what it is for to be reckeless
And negligent, and trust on flattery.
But ye that holde this tale a folly,
As of a fox, or of a cock or hen,
Take the morality thereof, good men.
For Saint Paul saith, That all that written is,
To our doctrine it written is y-wis. <37> *is surely written for
Take the fruit, and let the chaff be still. our instruction*
Now goode God, if that it be thy will,
As saith my Lord, <38> so make us all good men;
And bring us all to thy high bliss. Amen.

Notes to the Nun's Priest's Tale

1. The Tale of the Nun's Priest is founded on the fifth chapter of an old French metrical "Romance of Renard;" the same story forming one of the fables of Marie, the translator of the Breton Lays. (See note 2 to the Prologue to the Franklin's Tale.) Although Dryden was in error when he ascribed the Tale to Chaucer's own invention,

still the materials on which he had to operate were out of cornparison more trivial than the result.
2. Tyrwhitt quotes two statutes of Edward III, in which "deys" are included among the servants employed in agricultural pursuits; the name seems to have originally meant a servant who gave his labour by the day, but afterwards to have been appropriated exclusively to one who superintended or worked in a dairy.
3. Orgon: here licentiously used for the plural, "organs" or "orgons," corresponding to the plural verb "gon" in the next line.
4. Horloge: French, "clock."
5. Embattell'd: indented on the upper edge like the battlements of a castle.
6. My lefe is fare in land: This seems to have been the refrain of some old song, and its precise meaning is uncertain. It corresponds in cadence with the morning salutation of the cock; and may be taken as a greeting to the sun, which is beloved of Chanticleer, and has just come upon the earth — or in the sense of a more local boast, as vaunting the fairness of his favourite hen above all others in the country round.
Transcriber's note: Later commentators explain "fare in land" as "gone abroad" and have identified the song:
My lefe is fare in lond
Alas! Why is she so?
And I am so sore bound
I may not come her to.
She hath my heart in hold
Where ever she ride or go
With true love a thousand-fold.
(Printed in The Athenaeum, 1896, Vol II, p. 566).
7. "Avoi!" is the word here rendered "away!" It was frequently used in the French fabliaux, and the Italians employ the word "via!" in the same sense.
8. "Ne do no force of dreams:" "Somnia ne cares;" — Cato "De Moribus," 1 ii, dist. 32
9. Centaury: the herb so called because by its virtue the centaur Chiron was healed when the poisoned arrow of Hercules had accidentally wounded his foot.
10. Fumetere: the herb "fumitory."
11. Catapuce: spurge; a plant of purgative qualities. To its name in the text correspond the Italian "catapuzza," and French "catapuce" — words the origin of which is connected with the effects of the plant.
12. Gaitre-berries: dog-wood berries.
13. One of the greatest authors that men read: Cicero, who in his book "De Divinatione" tells this and the following story, though in contrary order and with many differences.
14. Haled or hylled; from Anglo-Saxon "helan" hid, concealed
15. Kenelm succeeded his father as king of the Saxon realm of Mercia in 811, at the age of seven years; but he was slain by his ambitious aunt Quendrada. The place of his burial was miraculously discovered, and he was subsequently elevated to the rank of a saint and martyr. His life is in the English "Golden Legend."
16. Mercenrike: the kingdom of Mercia; Anglo-Saxon, Myrcnarice. Compare the

second member of the compound in the German, "Frankreich," France; "Oesterreich," Austria.
17. Cicero ("De Republica," lib. vi.) wrote the Dream of Scipio, in which the Younger relates the appearance of the Elder Africanus, and the counsels and exhortations which the shade addressed to the sleeper. Macrobius wrote an elaborate "Commentary on the Dream of Scipio," — a philosophical treatise much studied and relished during the Middle Ages.
18. See the Monk's Tale for this story.
19. Andromache's dream will not be found in Homer; It is related in the book of the fictitious Dares Phrygius, the most popular authority during the Middle Ages for the history of the Trojan War.
20. In principio: In the beginning; the first words of Genesis and of the Gospel of John.
21. Mulier est hominis confusio: This line is taken from the same fabulous conference between the Emperor Adrian and the philosopher Secundus, whence Chaucer derived some of the arguments in praise of poverty employed in the Wife of Bath's Tale proper. See note 14 to the Wife of Bath's tale. The passage transferred to the text is the commencement of a description of woman. "Quid est mulier? hominis confusio," &c. ("What is Woman? A union with man", &c.)
22. Col-fox: a blackish fox, so called because of its likeness to coal, according to Skinner; though more probably the prefix has a reproachful meaning, and is in some way connected with the word "cold" as, some forty lines below, it is applied to the prejudicial counsel of women, and as frequently it is used to describe "sighs" and other tokens of grief, and "cares" or "anxieties."
23. Undern: In this case, the meaning of "evening" or "afternoon" can hardly be applied to the word, which must be taken to signify some early hour of the forenoon. See also note 4 to the Wife of Bath's tale and note 5 to the Clerk's Tale.
24. Ganilion: a traitor. See note 9 to the Shipman's Tale and note 28 to the Monk's Tale.
25. Greek Sinon: The inventor of the Trojan Horse. See note 14 to the Squire's Tale
26. Boult it from the bren: Examine the matter thoroughly; a metaphor taken from the sifting of meal, to divide the fine flour from the bran.
27. Thomas Bradwardine, Archbishop of Canterbury in the thirteenth century, who wrote a book, "De Causa Dei," in controversy with Pelagius; and also numerous other treatises, among them some on predestination.
28. In a popular mediaveal Latin treatise by one Theobaldus, entitled "Physiologus de Naturis XII. Animalium" ("A description of the nature of twelve animals"), sirens or mermaids are described as skilled in song, and drawing unwary mariners to destruction by the sweetness of their voices.
29. "Nigellus Wireker," says Urry's Glossary, "a monk and precentor of Canterbury, wrote a Latin poem intituled 'Speculum Speculorum,' ('The mirror of mirrors') dedicated to William Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, and Lord Chancellor; wherein, under the fable of an Ass (which he calls 'Burnellus') that desired a longer tail, is represented the folly of such as are not content with their own condition. There is introduced a tale of a cock, who having his leg broke by a priest's son (called Gundulfus) watched an

opportunity to be revenged; which at last presented itself on this occasion: A day was appointed for Gundulfus's being admitted into holy orders at a place remote from his father's habitation; he therefore orders the servants to call him at first cock-crowing, which the cock overhearing did not crow at all that morning. So Gundulfus overslept himself, and was thereby disappointed of his ordination, the office being quite finished before he came to the place." Wireker's satire was among the most celebrated and popular Latin poems of the Middle Ages. The Ass was probably as Tyrwhitt suggests, called "Burnel" or "Brunel," from his brown colour; as, a little below, a reddish fox is called "Russel."

30. Flattour: flatterer; French, "flatteur."

31. Losengeour: deceiver, cozener; the word had analogues in the French "losengier," and the Spanish "lisongero." It is probably connected with "leasing," falsehood; which has been derived from Anglo-Saxon "hlisan," to celebrate — as if it meant the spreading of a false renown

32. Dan Russel: Master Russet; a name given to the fox, from his reddish colour.

33. Geoffrey de Vinsauf was the author of a well-known mediaeval treatise on composition in various poetical styles of which he gave examples. Chaucer's irony is therefore directed against some grandiose and affected lines on the death of Richard I., intended to illustrate the pathetic style, in which Friday is addressed as "O Veneris lachrymosa dies" ("O tearful day of Venus").

34. "Priamum altaria ad ipsa trementem Traxit, et in multo lapsantem sanguine nati Implicuitque comam laeva, dextraque coruscum Extulit, ac lateri capulo tenus abdidit ensem. Haec finis Priami fatorum." ("He dragged Priam trembling to his own altar, slipping on the blood of his child; He took his hair in his left hand, and with the right drew the flashing sword, and hid it to the hilt [in his body]. Thus an end was made of Priam") — Virgil, Aeneid. ii. 550.

35. Jack Straw: The leader of a Kentish rising, in the reign of Richard II, in 1381, by which the Flemish merchants in London were great sufferers.

36. Beams: trumpets; Anglo-Saxon, "bema."

37. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." — 2 Tim. iii. 16.

THE EPILOGUE <1>

"Sir Nunne's Priest," our hoste said anon,
"Y-blessed be thy breech, and every stone;
This was a merry tale of Chanticleer.
But by my truth, if thou wert seculere,* *a layman
Thou wouldest be a treadefowl* aright; *cock
For if thou have courage as thou hast might,
Thee were need of hennes, as I ween,
Yea more than seven times seventeen.
See, whate brawnes* hath this gentle priest, *muscles, sinews
So great a neck, and such a large breast
He looketh as a sperhawk with his eyen

Him needeth not his colour for to dyen
With Brazil, nor with grain of Portugale.
But, Sir, faire fall you for your tale'."
And, after that, he with full merry cheer
Said to another, as ye shall hear.

Notes to the Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's Tale

1. The sixteen lines appended to the Tale of the Nun's Priest seem, as Tyrwhitt observes, to commence the prologue to the succeeding Tale — but the difficulty is to determine which that Tale should be. In earlier editions, the lines formed the opening of the prologue to the Manciple's Tale; but most of the manuscripts acknowledge themselves defective in this part, and give the Nun's Tale after that of the Nun's Priest. In the Harleian manuscript, followed by Mr Wright, the second Nun's Tale, and the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, are placed after the Franklin's tale; and the sixteen lines above are not found — the Manciple's prologue coming immediately after the "Amen" of the Nun's Priest. In two manuscripts, the last line of the sixteen runs thus: "Said unto the Nun as ye shall hear;" and six lines more evidently forged, are given to introduce the Nun's Tale. All this confusion and doubt only strengthen the certainty, and deepen the regret, that "The Canterbury Tales" were left at Chaucer's, death not merely very imperfect as a whole, but destitute of many finishing touches that would have made them complete so far as the conception had actually been carried into performance.

THE SECOND NUN'S TALE <1>

The minister and norice* unto vices, *nurse
Which that men call in English idleness,
The porter at the gate is of delices;* *delights
T'eschew, and by her contrar' her oppress, —
That is to say, by lawful business,* — *occupation, activity
Well oughte we to *do our all intent* *apply ourselves*
Lest that the fiend through idleness us hent.* *seize
For he, that with his thousand cordes sly
Continually us waiteth to beclap,* *entangle, bind
When he may man in idleness espy,
He can so lightly catch him in his trap,
Till that a man be hent* right by the lappe,** *seize **hem
He is not ware the fiend hath him in hand;
Well ought we work, and idleness withstand.
And though men dreaded never for to die,
Yet see men well by reason, doubteless,
That idleness is root of sluggardy,
Of which there cometh never good increase;
And see that sloth them holdeth in a leas,* *leash <2>
Only to sleep, and for to eat and drink,
And to devouren all that others swink.* *labour
And, for to put us from such idleness,

That cause is of so great confusion,
I have here done my faithful business,
After the Legend, in translation
Right of thy glorious life and passion, —
Thou with thy garland wrought of rose and lily,
Thee mean I, maid and martyr, Saint Cecilie.
And thou, thou art the flow'r of virgins all,
Of whom that Bernard list so well to write, <3>
To thee at my beginning first I call;
Thou comfort of us wretches, do me indite
Thy maiden's death, that won through her merite
Th' eternal life, and o'er the fiend victory,
As man may after readen in her story.
Thou maid and mother, daughter of thy Son,
Thou well of mercy, sinful soules' cure,
In whom that God of bounte chose to won;* *dwell
Thou humble and high o'er every creature,
Thou nobilest, *so far forth our nature,* *as far as our nature admits*
That no disdain the Maker had of kind,* *nature
His Son in blood and flesh to clothe and wind.* *wrap
Within the cloister of thy blissful sides
Took manne's shape th' eternal love and peace,
That of *the trine compass* Lord and guide is *the trinity*
Whom earth, and sea, and heav'n, *out of release,* *unceasingly
Aye hery; and thou, Virgin wemmeless,* *forever praise* *immaculate
Bare of thy body, and dweltest maiden pure,
The Creator of every creature.
Assembled is in thee magnificence <4>
With mercy, goodness, and with such pity,
That thou, that art the sun of excellence,
Not only helpest them that pray to thee,
But oftentime, of thy benignity,
Full freely, ere that men thine help beseech,
Thou go'st before, and art their lives' leech.* *healer, saviour.
Now help, thou meek and blissful faire maid,
Me, flemed* wretch, in this desert of gall; *banished, outcast
Think on the woman Cananee that said
That whelpes eat some of the crumbes all
That from their Lorde's table be y-fall;<5>
And though that I, unworthy son of Eve,<6>
Be sinful, yet accepte my believe.* *faith
And, for that faith is dead withoute werkes,
For to worke give me wit and space,
That I be *quit from thennes that most derk is;* *freed from the most

O thou, that art so fair and full of grace, dark place (Hell)*
Be thou mine advocate in that high place,
Where as withouten end is sung Osanne,
Thou Christe's mother, daughter dear of Anne.
And of thy light my soul in prison light,
That troubled is by the contagion
Of my body, and also by the weight
Of earthly lust and false affection;
O hav'n of refuge, O salvation
Of them that be in sorrow and distress,
Now help, for to my work I will me dress.
Yet pray I you, that reade what I write, <6>
Forgive me that I do no diligence
This ilke* story subtilly t' indite. *same
For both have I the wordes and sentence
Of him that at the sainte's reverence
The story wrote, and follow her legend;
And pray you that you will my work amend.
First will I you the name of Saint Cecilie
Expound, as men may in her story see.
It is to say in English, Heaven's lily,<7>
For pure chasteness of virginity;
Or, for she whiteness had of honesty,* *purity
And green of conscience, and of good fame
The sweete savour, Lilie was her name.
Or Cecilie is to say, the way of blind;<7>
For she example was by good teaching;
Or else Cecilie, as I written find,
Is joined by a manner conjoining
Of heaven and Lia, <7> and herein figuring
The heaven is set for thought of holiness,
And Lia for her lasting business.
Cecilie may eke be said in this mannere,
Wanting of blindness, for her greate light
Of sapience, and for her thewes* clear. *qualities
Or elles, lo, this maiden's name bright
Of heaven and Leos <7> comes, for which by right
Men might her well the heaven of people call,
Example of good and wise workes all;
For Leos people in English is to say;
And right as men may in the heaven see
The sun and moon, and starres every way,
Right so men ghostly,* in this maiden free, *spiritually
Sawen of faith the magnanimity,

And eke the clearness whole of sapience,
And sundry workes bright of excellence.
And right so as these philosophers write,
That heav'n is swift and round, and eke burning,
Right so was faire Cecilie the white
Full swift and busy in every good working,
And round and whole in good persevering, <8>
And burning ever in charity full bright;
Now have I you declared *what she hight.* *why she had her name*
This maiden bright Cecile, as her life saith,
Was come of Romans, and of noble kind,
And from her cradle foster'd in the faith
Of Christ, and bare his Gospel in her mind:
She never ceased, as I written find,
Of her prayere, and God to love and dread,
Beseeching him to keep her maidenhead.
And when this maiden should unto a man
Y-wedded be, that was full young of age,
Which that y-called was Valerian,
And come was the day of marriage,
She, full devout and humble in her corage,* *heart
Under her robe of gold, that sat full fair,
Had next her flesh y-clad her in an hair.* *garment of hair-cloth
And while the organs made melody,
To God alone thus in her heart sang she;
"O Lord, my soul and eke my body gie* *guide
Unwemmed,* lest that I confounded be." *unblemished
And, for his love that died upon the tree,
Every second or third day she fast',
Aye bidding* in her orisons full fast. *praying
The night came, and to bedde must she gon
With her husband, as it is the mannere;
And privily she said to him anon;
"O sweet and well-beloved spouse dear,
There is a counsel,* an'** ye will it hear, *secret **if
Which that right fain I would unto you say,
So that ye swear ye will it not bewray."* *betray
Valerian gan fast unto her swear
That for no case nor thing that mighte be,
He never should to none bewrayen her;
And then at erst* thus to him saide she; *for the first time
"I have an angel which that loveth me,
That with great love, whether I wake or sleep,
Is ready aye my body for to keep;

"And if that he may feelen, *out of dread,* *without doubt*
That ye me touch or love in villainy,
He right anon will slay you with the deed,
And in your youthe thus ye shoulde die.
And if that ye in cleane love me gie,"* *guide
He will you love as me, for your cleanness,
And shew to you his joy and his brightness."
Valerian, corrected as God wo'ld,
Answer'd again, "If I shall truste thee,
Let me that angel see, and him behold;
And if that it a very angel be,
Then will I do as thou hast prayed me;
And if thou love another man, forsooth
Right with this sword then will I slay you both."
Cecile answer'd anon right in this wise;
"If that you list, the angel shall ye see,
So that ye trow* Of Christ, and you baptise; *know
Go forth to Via Appia," quoth she,
That from this towne stands but miles three,
And to the poore folkes that there dwell
Say them right thus, as that I shall you tell,
"Tell them, that I, Cecile, you to them sent
To shewe you the good Urban the old,
For secret needes,* and for good intent; *business
And when that ye Saint Urban have behold,
Tell him the wordes which I to you told
And when that he hath purged you from sin,
Then shall ye see that angel ere ye twin* *depart
Valerian is to the place gone;
And, right as he was taught by her learning
He found this holy old Urban anon
Among the saintes' burials louting;* *lying concealed <9>
And he anon, withoute tarrying,
Did his message, and when that he it told,
Urban for joy his handes gan uphold.
The teares from his eyen let he fall;
"Almighty Lord, O Jesus Christ,"
Quoth he, "Sower of chaste counsel, herd* of us all; *shepherd
The fruit of thilke* seed of chastity *that
That thou hast sown in Cecile, take to thee
Lo, like a busy bee, withoute guile,
Thee serveth aye thine owen thrall* Cicile, *servant
"For thilke spouse, that she took *but now,* *lately*
Full like a fierce lion, she sendeth here,

As meek as e'er was any lamb to owe."
And with that word anon there gan appear
An old man, clad in white clothes clear,
That had a book with letters of gold in hand,
And gan before Valerian to stand.
Valerian, as dead, fell down for dread,
When he him saw; and he up hent* him tho,** *took **there
And on his book right thus he gan to read;
"One Lord, one faith, one God withoute mo',
One Christendom, one Father of all also,
Aboven all, and over all everywhere."
These wordes all with gold y-written were.
When this was read, then said this olde man,
"Believ'st thou this or no? say yea or nay."
"I believe all this," quoth Valerian,
"For soother* thing than this, I dare well say, *truer
Under the Heaven no wight thinke may."
Then vanish'd the old man, he wist not where
And Pope Urban him christened right there.
Valerian went home, and found Cecilie
Within his chamber with an angel stand;
This angel had of roses and of lily
Corones* two, the which he bare in hand, *crowns
And first to Cecile, as I understand,
He gave the one, and after gan he take
The other to Valerian her make.* *mate, husband
"With body clean, and with unwemmed* thought, *unspotted, blameless
Keep aye well these corones two," quoth he;
"From Paradise to you I have them brought,
Nor ever more shall they rotten be,
Nor lose their sweet savour, truste me,
Nor ever wight shall see them with his eye,
But he be chaste, and hate villainy.
"And thou, Valerian, for thou so soon
Assented hast to good counsel, also
Say what thee list,* and thou shalt have thy boon."** *wish **desire
"I have a brother," quoth Valerian tho,* *then
"That in this world I love no man so;
I pray you that my brother may have grace
To know the truth, as I do in this place."
The angel said, "God liketh thy request,
And bothe, with the palm of martyrdom,
Ye shalle come unto this blissful rest."
And, with that word, Tiburce his brother came.

And when that he the savour undernome* *perceived
Which that the roses and the lilies cast,
Within his heart he gan to wonder fast;
And said; "I wonder, this time of the year,
Whence that sweete savour cometh so
Of rose and lilies, that I smelle here;
For though I had them in mine handes two,
The savour might in me no deeper go;
The sweete smell, that in my heart I find,
Hath changed me all in another kind."
Valerian said, "Two crownes here have we,
Snow-white and rose-red, that shine clear,
Which that thine eyen have no might to see;
And, as thou smellest them through my prayere,
So shalt thou see them, leve* brother dear, *beloved
If it so be thou wilt withoute sloth
Believe aright, and know the very troth. "
Tiburce answered, "Say'st thou this to me
In soothness, or in dreame hear I this?"
"In dreames," quoth Valorian, "have we be
Unto this time, brother mine, y-wis
But now *at erst* in truth our dwelling is." *for the first time*
How know'st thou this," quoth Tiburce; "in what wise?"
Quoth Valerian, "That shall I thee devise* *describe
"The angel of God hath me the truth y-taught,
Which thou shalt see, if that thou wilt reny* *renounce
The idols, and be clean, and elles nought."
[And of the miracle of these crownes tway
Saint Ambrose in his preface list to say;
Solemnely this noble doctor dear
Commendeth it, and saith in this mannere
"The palm of martyrdom for to receive,
Saint Cecilie, full filled of God's gift,
The world and eke her chamber gan to weive;* *forsake
Witness Tiburce's and Cecilie's shrift,* *confession
To which God of his bounty woulde shift
Corones two, of flowers well smelling,
And made his angel them the crownes bring.
"The maid hath brought these men to bliss above;
The world hath wist what it is worth, certain,
Devotion of chastity to love."] <10>
Then showed him Cecilie all open and plain,
That idols all are but a thing in vain,
For they be dumb, and thereto* they be deave;** *therefore **deaf

And charged him his idols for to leave.
"Whoso that troweth* not this, a beast he is," *believeth
Quoth this Tiburce, "if that I shall not lie."
And she gan kiss his breast when she heard this,
And was full glad he could the truth espy:
"This day I take thee for mine ally."* *chosen friend
Saide this blissful faire maiden dear;
And after that she said as ye may hear.
"Lo, right so as the love of Christ," quoth she,
"Made me thy brother's wife, right in that wise
Anon for mine ally here take I thee,
Since that thou wilt thine idoles despise.
Go with thy brother now and thee baptise,
And make thee clean, so that thou may'st behold
The angel's face, of which thy brother told."
Tiburce answer'd, and saide, "Brother dear,
First tell me whither I shall, and to what man?"
"To whom?" quoth he, "come forth with goode cheer,
I will thee lead unto the Pope Urban."
"To Urban? brother mine Valerian,"
Quoth then Tiburce; "wilt thou me thither lead?
Me thinketh that it were a wondrous deed.
"Meanest thou not that Urban," quoth he tho,* *then
"That is so often damned to be dead,
And wons* in halkes** always to and fro, *dwells **corners
And dare not ones putte forth his head?
Men should him brennen* in a fire so red, *burn
If he were found, or if men might him spy:
And us also, to bear him company.
"And while we seeke that Divinity
That is y-hid in heaven privily,
Algate* burnt in this world should we be." *nevertheless
To whom Cecilie answer'd boldely;
"Men mighte dreade well and skilfully* *reasonably
This life to lose, mine owen deare brother,
If this were living only, and none other.
"But there is better life in other place,
That never shall be loste, dread thee nought;
Which Godde's Son us tolde through his grace
That Father's Son which alle thinges wrought;
And all that wrought is with a skilful* thought, *reasonable
The Ghost,* that from the Father gan proceed, *Holy Spirit
Hath souled* them, withouten any drede.** *endowed them with a soul
**doubt

By word and by miracle, high God's Son,
When he was in this world, declared here.
That there is other life where men may won."* *dwell
To whom answer'd Tiburce, "O sister dear,
Saidest thou not right now in this mannere,
There was but one God, Lord in soothfastness,* *truth
And now of three how may'st thou bear witness?"
"That shall I tell," quoth she, "ere that I go.
Right as a man hath sapiences* three, *mental faculties
Memory, engine,* and intellect also, *wit <11>
So in one being of divinity
Three persones there maye right well be."
Then gan she him full busily to preach
Of Christe's coming, and his paines teach,
And many pointes of his passion;
How Godde's Son in this world was withhold* *employed
To do mankinde plein* remission, *full
That was y-bound in sin and cares cold.* *wretched <12>
All this thing she unto Tiburce told,
And after that Tiburce, in good intent,
With Valerian to Pope Urban he went.
That thanked God, and with glad heart and light
He christen'd him, and made him in that place
Perfect in his learning, and Godde's knight.
And after this Tiburce got such grace,
That every day he saw in time and space
Th' angel of God, and every manner boon* *request, favour
That be God asked, it was sped* full anon. *granted, successful
It were full hard by order for to sayn
How many wonders Jesus for them wrought,
But at the last, to telle short and plain,
The sergeants of the town of Rome them sought,
And them before Almach the Prefect brought,
Which them apposed,* and knew all their intent, *questioned
And to th'image of Jupiter them sent.
And said, "Whoso will not do sacrifice,
Swap* off his head, this is my sentence here." *strike
Anon these martyrs, *that I you devise,* *of whom I tell you*
One Maximus, that was an officere
Of the prefect's, and his corniculere <13>
Them hent,* and when he forth the saintes lad,** *seized **led
Himself he wept for pity that he had.
When Maximus had heard the saintes lore,* *doctrine, teaching
He got him of the tormentores* leave, *torturers

And led them to his house withoute more;
And with their preaching, ere that it were eve,
They gonnen* from the tormentors to reave,** *began **wrest, root out
And from Maxim', and from his folk each one,
The false faith, to trow* in God alone. *believe
Cecilia came, when it was waxen night,
With priestes, that them christen'd *all in fere;* *in a company*
And afterward, when day was waxen light,
Cecile them said with a full steadfast cheer,* *mien
"Now, Christe's owen knightes lefe* and dear, *beloved
Cast all away the workes of darkness,
And arme you in armour of brightness.
Ye have forsooth y-done a great battaile,
Your course is done, your faith have ye conserved; <14>
O to the crown of life that may not fail;
The rightful Judge, which that ye have served
Shall give it you, as ye have it deserved."
And when this thing was said, as I devise,* relate
Men led them forth to do the sacrifice.
But when they were unto the place brought
To telle shortly the conclusion,
They would incense nor sacrifice right nought
But on their knees they sette them adown,
With humble heart and sad* devotion, *steadfast
And loste both their heades in the place;
Their soules wente to the King of grace.
This Maximus, that saw this thing betide,
With piteous teares told it anon right,
That he their soules saw to heaven glide
With angels, full of clearness and of light
Andt with his word converted many a wight.
For which Almachius *did him to-beat* *see note <15>*
With whip of lead, till he his life gan lete.* *quit
Cecile him took, and buried him anon
By Tiburce and Valerian softely,
Within their burying-place, under the stone.
And after this Almachius hastily
Bade his ministers fetchen openly
Cecile, so that she might in his presence
Do sacrifice, and Jupiter incense.* *burn incense to
But they, converted at her wise lore,* *teaching
Wepte full sore, and gave full credence
Unto her word, and cried more and more;
"Christ, Godde's Son, withoute difference,

Is very God, this is all our sentence,* *opinion
That hath so good a servant him to serve
Thus with one voice we trowe,* though we sterve.** *believe **die
Almachius, that heard of this doing,
Bade fetch Cecilie, that he might her see;
And alderfirst,* lo, this was his asking; *first of all
"What manner woman arte thou?" quoth he,
"I am a gentle woman born," quoth she.
"I aske thee," quoth he,"though it thee grieve,
Of thy religion and of thy believe."
"Ye have begun your question foolishly,"
Quoth she, "that wouldest two answers conclude
In one demand? ye aske lewedly."* *ignorantly
Almach answer'd to that similitude,
"Of whence comes thine answering so rude?"
"Of whence?" quoth she, when that she was freined,* *asked
"Of conscience, and of good faith unfeigned."
Almachius saide; "Takest thou no heed
Of my power?" and she him answer'd this;
"Your might," quoth she, "full little is to dread;
For every mortal manne's power is
But like a bladder full of wind, y-wis;* *certainly
For with a needle's point, when it is blow',
May all the boast of it be laid full low."
"Full wrongfully begunnest thou," quoth he,
"And yet in wrong is thy perseverance.
Know'st thou not how our mighty princes free
Have thus commanded and made ordinance,
That every Christian wight shall have penance,* *punishment
But if that he his Christendom withsay,* *deny
And go all quit, if he will it renay?"* *renounce
"Your princes erren, as your nobley* doth," *nobility
Quoth then Cecile, "and with a *wood sentence* *mad judgment*
Ye make us guilty, and it is not sooth:* *true
For ye that knowe well our innocence,
Forasmuch as we do aye reverence
To Christ, and for we bear a Christian name,
Ye put on us a crime and eke a blame.
"But we that knowe thilke name so
For virtuous, we may it not withsay."
Almach answered, "Choose one of these two,
Do sacrifice, or Christendom renay,
That thou may'st now escape by that way."
At which the holy blissful faire maid

Gan for to laugh, and to the judge said;
"O judge, *confused in thy nicety,* *confounded in thy folly*
Wouldest thou that I reny innocence?
To make me a wicked wight," quoth she,
"Lo, he dissimuleth* here in audience; *dissembles
He stareth and woodeth* in his advertence."** *grows furious **thought
To whom Almachius said, "Unsely* wretch, *unhappy
Knowest thou not how far my might may stretch?
"Have not our mighty princes to me given
Yea bothe power and eke authority
To make folk to dien or to liven?
Why speakest thou so proudly then to me?"
"I speake not but steadfastly," quoth she,
Not proudly, for I say, as for my side,
We hate deadly* thilke vice of pride. *mortally
"And, if thou dreade not a sooth* to hear, *truth
Then will I shew all openly by right,
That thou hast made a full great leasing* here. *falsehood
Thou say'st thy princes have thee given might
Both for to slay and for to quick* a wight, — *give life to
Thou that may'st not but only life bereave;
Thou hast none other power nor no leave.
"But thou may'st say, thy princes have thee maked
Minister of death; for if thou speak of mo',
Thou liest; for thy power is full naked."
"Do away thy boldness," said Almachius tho,* *then
"And sacrifice to our gods, ere thou go.
I recke not what wrong that thou me proffer,
For I can suffer it as a philosopher.
"But those wronges may I not endure,
That thou speak'st of our goddes here," quoth he.
Cecile answer'd, "O nice* creature, *foolish
Thou saidest no word, since thou spake to me,
That I knew not therewith thy nicety,* *folly
And that thou wert in *every manner wise* *every sort of way*
A lewed* officer, a vain justice. *ignorant
"There lacketh nothing to thine outward eyen
That thou art blind; for thing that we see all
That it is stone, that men may well espyen,
That ilke* stone a god thou wilt it call. *very, selfsame
I rede* thee let thine hand upon it fall, *advise
And taste* it well, and stone thou shalt it find; *examine, test
Since that thou see'st not with thine eyen blind.
"It is a shame that the people shall

So scorne thee, and laugh at thy folly;
For commonly men *wot it well over all,* *know it everywhere*
That mighty God is in his heaven high;
And these images, well may'st thou espy,
To thee nor to themselves may not profite,
For in effect they be not worth a mite."
These wordes and such others saide she,
And he wax'd wroth, and bade men should her lead
Home to her house; "And in her house," quoth he,
"Burn her right in a bath, with flames red."
And as he bade, right so was done the deed;
For in a bath they gan her faste shetten,* *shut, confine
And night and day great fire they under betten.* *kindled, applied
The longe night, and eke a day also,
For all the fire, and eke the bathe's heat,
She sat all cold, and felt of it no woe,
It made her not one droppe for to sweat;
But in that bath her life she must lete.* *leave
For he, Almachius, with full wick' intent,
To slay her in the bath his sonde* sent. *message, order
Three strokes in the neck he smote her tho,* *there
The tormentor,* but for no manner chance *executioner
He might not smite her faire neck in two:
And, for there was that time an ordinance
That no man should do man such penance,* *severity, torture
The fourthe stroke to smite, soft or sore,
This tormentor he durste do no more;
But half dead, with her necke carven* there *gashed
He let her lie, and on his way is went.
The Christian folk, which that about her were,
With sheetes have the blood full fair y-hent; *taken up
Three dayes lived she in this torment,
And never ceased them the faith to teach,
That she had foster'd them, she gan to preach.
And them she gave her mebles* and her thing, *goods
And to the Pope Urban betook* them tho;** *commended **then
And said, "I aske this of heaven's king,
To have respite three dayes and no mo',
To recommend to you, ere that I go,
These soules, lo; and that *I might do wirch* *cause to be made*
Here of mine house perpetually a church."
Saint Urban, with his deacons, privily
The body fetch'd, and buried it by night
Among his other saintes honestly;

Her house the church of Saint Cecilie hight;* *is called
Saint Urban hallow'd it, as he well might;
In which unto this day, in noble wise,
Men do to Christ and to his saint service.

Notes to the Nun's Priest's Tale

1. This Tale was originally composed by Chaucer as a separate work, and as such it is mentioned in the "Legend of Good Women" under the title of "The Life of Saint Cecile". Tyrwhitt quotes the line in which the author calls himself an "unworthy son of Eve," and that in which he says, "Yet pray I you, that reade what I write", as internal evidence that the insertion of the poem in the Canterbury Tales was the result of an afterthought; while the whole tenor of the introduction confirms the belief that Chaucer composed it as a writer or translator — not, dramatically, as a speaker. The story is almost literally translated from the Life of St Cecilia in the "Legenda Aurea."

2. Leas: leash, snare; the same as "las," oftener used by Chaucer.

3. The nativity and assumption of the Virgin Mary formed the themes of some of St Bernard's most eloquent sermons.

4. Compare with this stanza the fourth stanza of the Prioress's Tale, the substance of which is the same.

5. "But he answered and said, it is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." — Matthew xv. 26, 27.

6. See note 1.

7. These are Latin puns: Heaven's lily - "Coeli lilium"; The way of blind - "Caeci via"; Heaven and Lia - from "Coeli", heaven, and "Ligo," to bind; Heaven and Leos - from Coeli and "Laos," (Ionian Greek) or "Leos" (Attic Greek), the people. Such punning derivations of proper names were very much in favour in the Middle Ages. The explanations of St Cecilia's name are literally taken from the prologue to the Latin legend.

8. This passage suggests Horace's description of the wise man, who, among other things, is "in se ipse totus, teres, atque rotundus." ("complete in himself, polished and rounded") — Satires, 2, vii. 80.

9. Louting: lingering, or lying concealed; the Latin original has "Inter sepulchra martyrum latiantem" ("hiding among the tombs of martyrs")

10. The fourteen lines within brackets are supposed to have been originally an interpolation in the Latin legend, from which they are literally translated. They awkwardly interrupt the flow of the narration.

11. Engine: wit; the devising or constructive faculty; Latin, "ingenium."

12. Cold: wretched, distressful; see note 22 to the Nun's Priest's Tale.

13. Corniculere: The secretary or registrar who was charged with publishing the acts, decrees and orders of the prefect.

14. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" — 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

15. Did him to-beat: Caused him to be cruelly or fatally beaten; the force of the "to" is intensive.