HAVEPOETRY.COM

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE

THE PROLOGUE.

WHEN ended was the life of Saint Cecile,
Ere we had ridden fully five mile, <2>
At Boughton-under-Blee us gan o'ertake
A man, that clothed was in clothes black,
And underneath he wore a white surplice.
His hackenay,* which was all pomely-gris,** *nag **dapple-gray
So sweated, that it wonder was to see;
It seem'd as he had pricked* miles three. *spurred
The horse eke that his yeoman rode upon
So sweated, that unnethes* might he gon.** *hardly **go
About the peytrel <3> stood the foam full high;
He was of foam, as *flecked as a pie.* *spotted like a magpie*
A maile twyfold <4> on his crupper lay;
It seemed that he carried little array;
All light for summer rode this worthy man.
And in my heart to wonder I began
What that he was, till that I understood
How that his cloak was sewed to his hood;
For which, when I had long advised* me, *considered
I deemed him some Canon for to be.
His hat hung at his back down by a lace,* *cord
For he had ridden more than trot or pace;
He hadde pricked like as he were wood.* *mad
A clote-leaf* he had laid under his hood, * burdock-leaf
For sweat, and for to keep his head from heat.
But it was joye for to see him sweat;
His forehead dropped as a stillatory* *still
Were full of plantain or of paritory.* *wallflower
And when that he was come, he gan to cry,
"God save," quoth he, "this jolly company.
Fast have I pricked," quoth he, "for your sake,
Because that I would you overtake,
To riden in this merry company."
His Yeoman was eke full of courtesy,
And saide, "Sirs, now in the morning tide
Out of your hostelry I saw you ride,
And warned here my lord and sovereign,

Which that to ride with you is full fain,
For his disport; he loveth dalliance."
"Friend, for thy warning God give thee good chance,"* *fortune
Said oure Host; "certain it woulde seem
Thy lord were wise, and so I may well deem;
He is full jocund also, dare I lay;
Can he aught tell a merry tale or tway,
With which he gladden may this company?"
"Who, Sir? my lord? Yea, Sir, withoute lie,
He can* of mirth and eke of jollity *knows
Not but enough; also, Sir, truste me, *not less than*
An* ye him knew all so well as do I, *if
Ye would wonder how well and craftily
He coulde work, and that in sundry wise.
He hath take on him many a great emprise,* *task, undertaking
Which were full hard for any that is here
To bring about, but* they of him it lear.** *unless **learn
As homely as he rides amonges you,
If ye him knew, it would be for your prow:* *advantage
Ye woulde not forego his acquaintance
For muche good, I dare lay in balance
All that I have in my possession.
He is a man of high discretion.
I warn you well, he is a passing* man." *surpassing, extraordinary
Well," quoth our Host, "I pray thee tell me than,
Is he a clerk,* or no? Tell what he is." *scholar, priest
"Nay, he is greater than a clerk, y-wis,"* *certainly
Saide this Yeoman; "and, in wordes few,
Host, of his craft somewhat I will you shew,
I say, my lord can* such a subtlety *knows
(But all his craft ye may not weet* of me, *learn
And somewhat help I yet to his working),
That all the ground on which we be riding
Till that we come to Canterbury town,
He could all cleane turnen up so down,
And pave it all of silver and of gold."
And when this Yeoman had this tale told
Unto our Host, he said; "Ben'dicite!
This thing is wonder marvellous to me,
Since that thy lord is of so high prudence,
Because of which men should him reverence,
That of his worship* recketh he so lite;** *honour **little
His *overest slop* it is not worth a mite *upper garment*
As in effect to him, so may I go;

It is all baudy* and to-tore also. *slovenly
Why is thy lord so sluttish, I thee pray,
And is of power better clothes to bey,* *buy
If that his deed accordeth with thy speech?
Telle me that, and that I thee beseech."
"Why?" quoth this Yeoman, "whereto ask ye me?
God help me so, for he shall never the* *thrive
(But I will not avowe* that I say, *admit
And therefore keep it secret, I you pray);
He is too wise, in faith, as I believe.
Thing that is overdone, it will not preve* *stand the test
Aright, as clerkes say; it is a vice;
Wherefore in that I hold him *lewd and nice."* *ignorant and foolish*
For when a man hath over great a wit,
Full oft him happens to misusen it;
So doth my lord, and that me grieveth sore.
God it amend; I can say now no more."
"Thereof *no force,* good Yeoman, "quoth our Host; *no matter*
"Since of the conning* of thy lord, thou know'st, *knowledge
Tell how he doth, I pray thee heartily,
Since that be is so crafty and so sly.* *wise
Where dwelle ye, if it to telle be?"
"In the suburbes of a town," quoth he,
"Lurking in hernes* and in lanes blind, *corners
Where as these robbers and these thieves by kind* *nature
Holde their privy fearful residence,
As they that dare not show their presence,
So fare we, if I shall say the soothe."* *truth
"Yet," quoth our Hoste, "let me talke to thee;
Why art thou so discolour'd of thy face?"
"Peter!" quoth he, "God give it harde grace,
I am so us'd the hote fire to blow,
That it hath changed my colour, I trow;
I am not wont in no mirror to pry,
But swinke* sore, and learn to multiply. <5> *labour
We blunder* ever, and poren** in the fire, *toil **peer
And, for all that, we fail of our desire
For ever we lack our conclusion
To muche folk we do illusion,
And borrow gold, be it a pound or two,
Or ten or twelve, or many summes mo',
And make them weenen,* at the leaste way, *fancy
That of a pounde we can make tway.
Yet is it false; and aye we have good hope

It for to do, and after it we grope:* *search, strive
But that science is so far us beforn,
That we may not, although we had it sworn,
It overtake, it slides away so fast;
It will us make beggars at the last."
While this Yeoman was thus in his talking,
This Canon drew him near, and heard all thing
Which this Yeoman spake, for suspicion
Of menne's speech ever had this Canon:
For Cato saith, that he that guilty is, <6>
Deemeth all things be spoken of him y-wis;* *surely
Because of that he gan so nigh to draw
To his Yeoman, that he heard all his saw;
And thus he said unto his Yeoman tho* *then
"Hold thou thy peace,and speak no wordes mo':
For if thou do, thou shalt *it dear abie.* *pay dearly for it*
Thou slanderest me here in this company
And eke discoverest that thou shouldest hide."
"Yea," quoth our Host, "tell on, whatso betide;
Of all his threatening reck not a mite."
"In faith," quoth he, "no more do I but lite."* *little
And when this Canon saw it would not be
But his Yeoman would tell his privity,* *secrets
He fled away for very sorrow and shame.
"Ah!" quoth the Yeoman, "here shall rise a game;* *some diversion
All that I can anon I will you tell,
Since he is gone; the foule fiend him quell!* *destroy
For ne'er hereafter will I with him meet,
For penny nor for pound, I you behete.* *promise
He that me broughte first unto that game,
Ere that he die, sorrow have he and shame.
For it is earnest* to me, by my faith; *a serious matter
That feel I well, what so any man saith;
And yet for all my smart, and all my grief,
For all my sorrow, labour, and mischief,* *trouble
I coulde never leave it in no wise.
Now would to God my witte might suffice
To tellen all that longeth to that art!
But natheless yet will I telle part;
Since that my lord is gone, I will not spare;
Such thing as that I know, I will declare."

Notes to the Prologue to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale

"The introduction," says Tyrwhitt, "of the Canon's Yeoman to tell a Tale at a time when so many of the original characters remain to be called upon, appears a little

extraordinary. It should seem that some sudden resentment had determined Chaucer to interrupt the regular course of his work, in order to insert a satire against the alchemists. That their pretended science was much cultivated about this time, and produced its usual evils, may fairly be inferred from the Act, which was passed soon after, 5 H. IV. c. iv., to make it felony 'to multiply gold or silver, or to use the art of multiplication.'" Tyrwhitt finds in the prologue some colour for the hypothesis that this Tale was intended by Chaucer to begin the return journey from Canterbury; but against this must be set the fact that the Yeoman himself expressly speaks of the distance to Canterbury yet to be ridden.

2. Fully five mile: From some place which the loss of the Second Nun's Prologue does not enable us to identify.

3. Peytrel: the breast-plate of a horse's harness; French, "poitrail."

4. A maile twyfold: a double valise; a wallet hanging across the crupper on either side of the horse.

5. Multiply: transmute metals, in the attempt to multiply gold and silver by alchemy.

6. "Conscius ipse sibi de se putat omnia dici" ("The conspirator believes that everything spoken refers to himself") — "De Moribus," I. i. dist. 17.

THE TALE. <1>

With this Canon I dwelt have seven year,
And of his science am I ne'er the near* *nearer
All that I had I have lost thereby,
And, God wot, so have many more than I.
Where I was wont to be right fresh and gay
Of clothing, and of other good array
Now may I wear an hose upon mine head;
And where my colour was both fresh and red,
Now is it wan, and of a leaden hue
(Whoso it useth, sore shall he it rue);
And of my swink* yet bleared is mine eye; *labour
Lo what advantage is to multiply!
That sliding* science hath me made so bare, *slippery, deceptive
That I have no good,* where that ever I fare; *property
And yet I am indebted so thereby
Of gold, that I have borrow'd truely,
That, while I live, I shall it quite* never; *repay
Let every man beware by me for ever.
What manner man that casteth* him thereto, *betaketh
If he continue, I hold *his thrift y-do;* *prosperity at an end*
So help me God, thereby shall he not win,
But empty his purse, and make his wittes thin.
And when he, through his madness and folly,
Hath lost his owen good through jupartie,* *hazard <2>
Then he exciteth other men thereto,
To lose their good as he himself hath do'.

For unto shrewes* joy it is and ease *wicked folk
To have their fellows in pain and disease.* *trouble
Thus was I ones learned of a clerk;
Of that no charge;* I will speak of our work. *matter
When we be there as we shall exercise
Our elvish* craft, we seeme wonder wise, *fantastic, wicked
Our termes be so *clergial and quaint.* *learned and strange
I blow the fire till that mine hearte faint.
Why should I tellen each proportion
Of thinges, whiche that we work upon,
As on five or six ounces, may well be,
Of silver, or some other quantity?
And busy me to telle you the names,
As orpiment, burnt bones, iron squames,* *scales <3>
That into powder grounden be full small?
And in an earthen pot how put is all,
And, salt y-put in, and also peppere,
Before these powders that I speak of here,
And well y-cover'd with a lamp of glass?
And of much other thing which that there was?
And of the pots and glasses engluting,* *sealing up
That of the air might passen out no thing?
And of the easy* fire, and smart** also, *slow **quick
Which that was made? and of the care and woe
That we had in our matters subliming,
And in amalgaming, and calcining
Of quicksilver, called mercury crude?
For all our sleightes we can not conclude.
Our orpiment, and sublim'd mercury,
Our ground litharge* eke on the porphyry, *white lead
Of each of these of ounces a certain,* *certain proportion
Not helpeth us, our labour is in vain.
Nor neither our spirits' ascensioun,
Nor our matters that lie all fix'd adown,
May in our working nothing us avail;
For lost is all our labour and travail,
And all the cost, a twenty devil way,
Is lost also, which we upon it lay.
There is also full many another thing
That is unto our craft appertaining,
Though I by order them not rehearse can,
Because that I am a lewed* man; *unlearned
Yet will I tell them as they come to mind,
Although I cannot set them in their kind,

As sal-armoniac, verdigris, borace;
And sundry vessels made of earth and glass; <4>
Our urinales, and our descensories,
Phials, and croslets, and sublimatories,
Cucurbites, and alembikes eke,
And other suche, *dear enough a leek,* *worth less than a leek*
It needeth not for to rehearse them all.
Waters rubifying, and bulles' gall,
Arsenic, sal-armoniac, and brimstone,
And herbes could I tell eke many a one,
As egremoine,* valerian, and lunary,** *agrimony **moon-wort
And other such, if that me list to tarry;
Our lampes burning bothe night and day,
To bring about our craft if that we may;
Our furnace eke of calcination,
And of waters albification,
Unslaked lime, chalk, and *glair of an ey,* *egg-white
Powders diverse, ashes, dung, piss, and clay,
Seared pokettes,<5> saltpetre, and vitriol;
And divers fires made of wood and coal;
Sal-tartar, alkali, salt preparate,
And combust matters, and coagulate;
Clay made with horse and manne's hair, and oil
Of tartar, alum, glass, barm, wort, argoil,* *potter's clay<6>
Rosalgar,* and other matters imbibing; *flowers of antimony
And eke of our matters encorporing,* *incorporating
And of our silver citrination, <7>
Our cementing, and fermentation,
Our ingots,* tests, and many thinges mo'. *moulds <8>
I will you tell, as was me taught also,
The foure spirits, and the bodies seven,
By order, as oft I heard my lord them neven.* *name
The first spirit Quicksilver called is;
The second Orpiment; the third, y-wis,
Sal-Armoniac, and the fourth Brimstone.
The bodies sev'n eke, lo them here anon.
Sol gold is, and Luna silver we threpe* *name <9>
Mars iron, Mercury quicksilver we clepe;* *call
Saturnus lead, and Jupiter is tin,
And Venus copper, by my father's kin.
This cursed craft whoso will exercise,
He shall no good have that him may suffice;
For all the good he spendeth thereabout,
He lose shall, thereof have I no doubt.

Whoso that list to utter* his folly, *display
Let him come forth and learn to multiply:
And every man that hath aught in his coffer,
Let him appear, and wax a philosopher;
Ascaunce* that craft is so light to lear.** *as if **learn
Nay, nay, God wot, all be he monk or frere,
Priest or canon, or any other wight;
Though he sit at his book both day and night;
In learning of this *elvish nice* lore, * fantastic, foolish
All is in vain; and pardie muche more,
Is to learn a lew'd* man this subtlety; *ignorant
Fie! speak not thereof, for it will not be.
And *conne he letterure,* or conne he none, *if he knows learning*
As in effect, he shall it find all one;
For bothe two, by my salvation,
Concluden in multiplication* *transmutation by alchemy
Alike well, when they have all y-do;
This is to say, they faile bothe two.
Yet forgot I to make rehearsale
Of waters corrosive, and of limaile,* *metal filings
And of bodies' mollification,
And also of their induration,
Oiles, ablutions, metal fusible,
To tellen all, would passen any Bible
That owhere* is; wherefore, as for the best, *anywhere
Of all these names now will I me rest;
For, as I trow, I have you told enough
To raise a fiend, all look he ne'er so rough.
Ah! nay, let be; the philosopher's stone,
Elixir call'd, we seeke fast each one;
For had we him, then were we sicker* enow; *secure
But unto God of heaven I make avow,* *confession
For all our craft, when we have all y-do,
And all our sleight, he will not come us to.
He hath y-made us spende muche good,
For sorrow of which almost we waxed wood,* *mad
But that good hope creeped in our heart,
Supposing ever, though we sore smart,
To be relieved by him afterward.
Such supposing and hope is sharp and hard.
I warn you well it is to seeken ever.
That future temps* hath made men dissever,** *time **part from
In trust thereof, from all that ever they had,
Yet of that art they cannot waxe sad,* *repentant

For unto them it is a bitter sweet;
So seemeth it; for had they but a sheet
Which that they mighte wrap them in at night,
And a bratt* to walk in by dayelight, *cloak<10>
They would them sell, and spend it on this craft;
They cannot stint,* until no thing be laft. *cease
And evermore, wherever that they gon,
Men may them knowe by smell of brimstone;
For all the world they stinken as a goat;
Their savour is so rammish and so hot,
That though a man a mile from them be,
The savour will infect him, truste me.
Lo, thus by smelling and threadbare array,
If that men list, this folk they knowe may.
And if a man will ask them privily,
Why they be clothed so unthriftily,* *shabbily
They right anon will rownen* in his ear, *whisper
And sayen, if that they espied were,
Men would them slay, because of their science:
Lo, thus these folk betrayen innocence!
Pass over this; I go my tale unto.
Ere that the pot be on the fire y-do* *placed
Of metals, with a certain quantity
My lord them tempers,* and no man but he *adjusts the proportions
(Now he is gone, I dare say boldely);
For as men say, he can do craftily,
Algate* I wot well he hath such a name, *although
And yet full oft he runneth into blame;
And know ye how? full oft it happ'neth so,
The pot to-breaks, and farewell! all is go'.* *gone
These metals be of so great violence,
Our walles may not make them resistence,
But if they were wrought of lime and stone; *unless*
They pierce so, that through the wall they gon;
And some of them sink down into the ground
(Thus have we lost by times many a pound),
And some are scatter'd all the floor about;
Some leap into the roof withoute doubt.
Though that the fiend not in our sight him show,
I trowe that he be with us, that shrew;* *impious wretch
In helle, where that he is lord and sire,
Is there no more woe, rancour, nor ire.
When that our pot is broke, as I have said,
Every man chides, and holds him *evil apaid.* *dissatisfied*

Some said it was *long on* the fire-making; *because of <11>*
Some saide nay, it was on the blowing
(Then was I fear'd, for that was mine office);
"Straw!" quoth the third, "ye be *lewed and **nice, *ignorant **foolish
It was not temper'd* as it ought to be." *mixed in due proportions
"Nay," quoth the fourthe, "stint* and hearken me; *stop
Because our fire was not y-made of beech,
That is the cause, and other none, *so the'ch.* *so may I thrive*
I cannot tell whereon it was along,
But well I wot great strife is us among."
"What?" quoth my lord, "there is no more to do'n,
Of these perils I will beware eftsoon.* *another time
I am right sicker* that the pot was crazed.** *sure **cracked
Be as be may, be ye no thing amazed.* *confounded
As usage is, let sweep the floor as swithe;* *quickly
Pluck up your heartes and be glad and blithe."
The mullok* on a heap y-sweeped was, *rubbish
And on the floor y-cast a canevas,
And all this mullok in a sieve y-throw,
And sifted, and y-picked many a throw.* *time
"Pardie," quoth one, "somewhat of our metal
Yet is there here, though that we have not all.
And though this thing *mishapped hath as now,* *has gone amiss
Another time it may be well enow. at present*
We muste *put our good in adventure; * *risk our property*
A merchant, pardie, may not aye endure,
Truste me well, in his prosperity:
Sometimes his good is drenched* in the sea, *drowned, sunk
And sometimes comes it safe unto the land."
"Peace," quoth my lord; "the next time I will fand* *endeavour
To bring our craft *all in another plight,* *to a different conclusion*
And but I do, Sirs, let me have the wite;* *blame
There was default in somewhat, well I wot."
Another said, the fire was over hot.
But be it hot or cold, I dare say this,
That we concluden evermore amiss;
We fail alway of that which we would have;
And in our madness evermore we rave.
And when we be together every one,
Every man seemeth a Solomon.
But all thing, which that shineth as the gold,
It is not gold, as I have heard it told;
Nor every apple that is fair at eye,
It is not good, what so men clap* or cry. *assert

Right so, lo, fareth it amonges us.
He that the wisest seemeth, by Jesus,
Is most fool, when it cometh to the prefe;* *proof, test
And he that seemeth truest, is a thief.
That shall ye know, ere that I from you wend;
By that I of my tale have made an end.
There was a canon of religioun
Amonges us, would infect* all a town, *deceive
Though it as great were as was Nineveh,
Rome, Alisandre,* Troy, or other three. *Alexandria
His sleightes* and his infinite falseness *cunning tricks
There coulde no man writen, as I guess,
Though that he mighte live a thousand year;
In all this world of falseness n'is* his peer. *there is not
For in his termes he will him so wind,
And speak his wordes in so sly a kind,
When he commune shall with any wight,
That he will make him doat* anon aright, *become foolishly
But it a fiende be, as himself is. fond of him*
Full many a man hath he beguil'd ere this,
And will, if that he may live any while;
And yet men go and ride many a mile
Him for to seek, and have his acquaintance,
Not knowing of his false governance.* *deceitful conduct
And if you list to give me audience,
I will it telle here in your presence.
But, worshipful canons religious,
Ne deeme not that I slander your house,
Although that my tale of a canon be.
Of every order some shrew is, pardie;
And God forbid that all a company
Should rue a singular* manne's folly. *individual
To slander you is no thing mine intent;
But to correct that is amiss I meant.
This tale was not only told for you,
But eke for other more; ye wot well how
That amonges Christe's apostles twelve
There was no traitor but Judas himselve;
Then why should all the remenant have blame,
That guiltless were? By you I say the same.
Save only this, if ye will hearken me,
If any Judas in your convent be,
Remove him betimes, I you rede,* *counsel
If shame or loss may causen any dread.

And be no thing displeased, I you pray;
But in this case hearken what I say.
In London was a priest, an annualere, <12>
That therein dwelled hadde many a year,
Which was so pleasant and so serviceable
Unto the wife, where as he was at table,
That she would suffer him no thing to pay
For board nor clothing, went he ne'er so gay;
And spending silver had he right enow;
Thereof no force;* will proceed as now, *no matter
And telle forth my tale of the canon,
That brought this prieste to confusion.
This false canon came upon a day
Unto the prieste's chamber, where he lay,
Beseeching him to lend him a certain
Of gold, and he would quit it him again.
"Lend me a mark," quoth he, "but dayes three,
And at my day I will it quite thee.
And if it so be that thou find me false,
Another day hang me up by the halse."* *neck
This priest him took a mark, and that as swithe,* *quickly
And this canon him thanked often sithe,* *times
And took his leave, and wente forth his way;
And at the thirde day brought his money;
And to the priest he took his gold again,
Whereof this priest was wondrous glad and fain.* *pleased
"Certes," quoth he, *"nothing annoyeth me* *I am not unwiling*
To lend a man a noble, or two, or three,
Or what thing were in my possession,
When he so true is of condition,
That in no wise he breake will his day;
To such a man I never can say nay."
"What," quoth this canon, "should I be untrue?
Nay, that were *thing y-fallen all of new!* *a new thing to happen*
Truth is a thing that I will ever keep,
Unto the day in which that I shall creep
Into my grave; and elles God forbid;
Believe this as sicker* as your creed. *sure
God thank I, and in good time be it said,
That there was never man yet *evil apaid* *displeased, dissatisfied*
For gold nor silver that he to me lent,
Nor ever falsehood in mine heart I meant.
And Sir," quoth he, "now of my privity,
Since ye so goodly have been unto me,

And kithed* to me so great gentleness, *shown
Somewhat, to quite with your kindeness,
I will you shew, and if you list to lear,* *learn
I will you teache plainly the mannere
How I can worken in philosophy.
Take good heed, ye shall well see *at eye* *with your own eye*
That I will do a mas'try ere I go."
"Yea," quoth the priest; "yea, Sir, and will ye so?
Mary! thereof I pray you heartily."
"At your commandement, Sir, truely,"
Quoth the canon, "and elles God forbid."
Lo, how this thiefe could his service bede!* *offer
Full sooth it is that such proffer'd service
Stinketh, as witnesse *these olde wise;* *those wise folk of old*
And that full soon I will it verify
In this canon, root of all treachery,
That evermore delight had and gladness
(Such fiendly thoughtes *in his heart impress*) *press into his heart*
How Christe's people he may to mischief bring.
God keep us from his false dissimuling!
What wiste this priest with whom that he dealt?
Nor of his harm coming he nothing felt.
O sely* priest, O sely innocent! *simple
With covetise anon thou shalt be blent;* *blinded; beguiled
O graceless, full blind is thy conceit!
For nothing art thou ware of the deceit
Which that this fox y-shapen* hath to thee; *contrived
His wily wrenches* thou not mayest flee. *snares
Wherefore, to go to the conclusioun
That referreth to thy confusion,
Unhappy man, anon I will me hie* *hasten
To telle thine unwit* and thy folly, *stupidity
And eke the falseness of that other wretch,
As farforth as that my conning* will stretch. *knowledge
This canon was my lord, ye woulde ween;* *imagine
Sir Host, in faith, and by the heaven's queen,
It was another canon, and not he,
That can* an hundred fold more subtlety. *knows
He hath betrayed folkes many a time;
Of his falseness it doleth* me to rhyme. *paineth
And ever, when I speak of his falsehead,
For shame of him my cheekes waxe red;
Algates* they beginne for to glow, *at least
For redness have I none, right well I know,

In my visage; for fumes diverse
Of metals, which ye have me heard rehearse,
Consumed have and wasted my redness.
Now take heed of this canon's cursedness.* *villainy
"Sir," quoth he to the priest, "let your man gon
For quicksilver, that we it had anon;
And let him bringen ounces two or three;
And when he comes, as faste shall ye see
A wondrous thing, which ye saw ne'er ere this."
"Sir," quoth the priest, "it shall be done, y-wis."* *certainly
He bade his servant fetche him this thing,
And he all ready was at his bidding,
And went him forth, and came anon again
With this quicksilver, shortly for to sayn;
And took these ounces three to the canoun;
And he them laide well and fair adown,
And bade the servant coales for to bring,
That he anon might go to his working.
The coales right anon weren y-fet,* *fetched
And this canon y-took a crosselet* *crucible
Out of his bosom, and shew'd to the priest.
"This instrument," quoth he, "which that thou seest,
Take in thine hand, and put thyself therein
Of this quicksilver an ounce, and here begin,
In the name of Christ, to wax a philosopher.
There be full few, which that I woulde proffer
To shewe them thus much of my science;
For here shall ye see by experience
That this quicksilver I will mortify,<13>
Right in your sight anon withoute lie,
And make it as good silver, and as fine,
As there is any in your purse, or mine,
Or elleswhere; and make it malleable,
And elles holde me false and unable
Amonge folk for ever to appear.
I have a powder here that cost me dear,
Shall make all good, for it is cause of all
My conning,* which that I you shewe shall. *knowledge
Voide* your man, and let him be thereout; *send away
And shut the doore, while we be about
Our privity, that no man us espy,
While that we work in this phiosophy."
All, as he bade, fulfilled was in deed.
This ilke servant right anon out yede,* *went

And his master y-shut the door anon,
And to their labour speedily they gon.
This priest, at this cursed canon's biddIng,
Upon the fire anon he set this thing,
And blew the fire, and busied him full fast.
And this canon into the croslet cast
A powder, I know not whereof it was
Y-made, either of chalk, either of glass,
Or somewhat elles, was not worth a fly,
To blinden* with this priest; and bade him hie** *deceive **make haste
The coales for to couchen* all above lay in order
The croslet; "for, in token I thee love,"
Quoth this canon, "thine owen handes two
Shall work all thing that here shall be do'."
"Grand mercy," quoth the priest, and was full glad, *great thanks*
And couch'd the coales as the canon bade.
And while he busy was, this fiendly wretch,
This false canon (the foule fiend him fetch),
Out of his bosom took a beechen coal,
In which full subtifly was made a hole,
And therein put was of silver limaile* *filings
An ounce, and stopped was withoute fail
The hole with wax, to keep the limaile in.
And understande, that this false gin* *contrivance
Was not made there, but it was made before;
And other thinges I shall tell you more,
Hereafterward, which that he with him brought;
Ere he came there, him to beguile he thought,
And so he did, ere that they *went atwin;* *separated*
Till he had turned him, could he not blin.* *cease <14>
It doleth* me, when that I of him speak; *paineth
On his falsehood fain would I me awreak,* *revenge myself
If I wist how, but he is here and there;
He is so variant,* he abides nowhere. *changeable
But take heed, Sirs, now for Godde's love.
He took his coal, of which I spake above,
And in his hand he bare it privily,
And while the prieste couched busily
The coales, as I tolde you ere this,
This canon saide, "Friend, ye do amiss;
This is not couched as it ought to be,
But soon I shall amenden it," quoth he.
"Now let me meddle therewith but a while,
For of you have I pity, by Saint Gile.

Ye be right hot, I see well how ye sweat;
Have here a cloth, and wipe away the wet."
And while that the prieste wip'd his face,
This canon took his coal, — *with sorry grace,* — *evil fortune
And layed it above on the midward attend him!*
Of the croslet, and blew well afterward,
Till that the coals beganne fast to brenn.* *burn
"Now give us drinke," quoth this canon then,
"And swithe* all shall be well, I undertake. *quickly
Sitte we down, and let us merry make."
And whenne that this canon's beechen coal
Was burnt, all the limaile out of the hole
Into the crosselet anon fell down;
And so it muste needes, by reasoun,
Since it above so *even couched* was; *exactly laid*
But thereof wist the priest no thing, alas!
He deemed all the coals alike good,
For of the sleight he nothing understood.
And when this alchemister saw his time,
"Rise up, Sir Priest," quoth he, "and stand by me;
And, for I wot well ingot* have ye none; *mould
Go, walke forth, and bring me a chalk stone;
For I will make it of the same shape
That is an ingot, if I may have hap.
Bring eke with you a bowl, or else a pan,
Full of water, and ye shall well see than* *then
How that our business shall *hap and preve* *succeed*
And yet, for ye shall have no misbelieve* *mistrust
Nor wrong conceit of me, in your absence,
I wille not be out of your presence,
But go with you, and come with you again."
The chamber-doore, shortly for to sayn,
They opened and shut, and went their way,
And forth with them they carried the key;
And came again without any delay.
Why should I tarry all the longe day?
He took the chalk, and shap'd it in the wise
Of an ingot, as I shall you devise;* *describe
I say, he took out of his owen sleeve
A teine* of silver (evil may he cheve!**) *little piece **prosper
Which that ne was but a just ounce of weight.
And take heed now of his cursed sleight;
He shap'd his ingot, in length and in brede* *breadth
Of this teine, withouten any drede,* *doubt

So slily, that the priest it not espied;
And in his sleeve again he gan it hide;
And from the fire he took up his mattere,
And in th' ingot put it with merry cheer;
And in the water-vessel he it cast,
When that him list, and bade the priest as fast
Look what there is; "Put in thine hand and grope;
There shalt thou finde silver, as I hope."
What, devil of helle! should it elles be?
Shaving of silver, silver is, pardie.
He put his hand in, and took up a teine
Of silver fine; and glad in every vein
Was this priest, when he saw that it was so.
"Godde's blessing, and his mother's also,
And alle hallows,* have ye, Sir Canon!" *saints
Saide this priest, "and I their malison* *curse
But, an'* ye vouchesafe to teache me *if
This noble craft and this subtility,
I will be yours in all that ever I may."
Quoth the canon, "Yet will I make assay
The second time, that ye may take heed,
And be expert of this, and, in your need,
Another day assay in mine absence
This discipline, and this crafty science.
Let take another ounce," quoth he tho,* *then
"Of quicksilver, withoute wordes mo',
And do therewith as ye have done ere this
With that other, which that now silver is. "
The priest him busied, all that e'er he can,
To do as this canon, this cursed man,
Commanded him, and fast he blew the fire
For to come to th' effect of his desire.
And this canon right in the meanewhile
All ready was this priest eft* to beguile, *again
and, for a countenance,* in his hande bare *stratagem
An hollow sticke (take keep* and beware); *heed
Of silver limaile put was, as before
Was in his coal, and stopped with wax well
For to keep in his limaile every deal.* *particle
And while this priest was in his business,
This canon with his sticke gan him dress* *apply
To him anon, and his powder cast in,
As he did erst (the devil out of his skin
Him turn, I pray to God, for his falsehead,

For he was ever false in thought and deed),
And with his stick, above the crosselet,
That was ordained* with that false get,** *provided **contrivance
He stirr'd the coales, till relente gan
The wax against the fire, as every man,
But he a fool be, knows well it must need.
And all that in the sticke was out yede,* *went
And in the croslet hastily* it fell. *quickly
Now, goode Sirs, what will ye bet* than well? *better
When that this priest was thus beguil'd again,
Supposing naught but truthe, sooth to sayn,
He was so glad, that I can not express
In no mannere his mirth and his gladness;
And to the canon he proffer'd eftsoon* *forthwith; again
Body and good. "Yea," quoth the canon soon,
"Though poor I be, crafty* thou shalt me find; *skilful
I warn thee well, yet is there more behind.
Is any copper here within?" said he.
"Yea, Sir," the prieste said, "I trow there be."
"Elles go buy us some, and that as swithe.* *swiftly
Now, goode Sir, go forth thy way and hie* thee." *hasten
He went his way, and with the copper came,
And this canon it in his handes name,* *took <15>
And of that copper weighed out an ounce.
Too simple is my tongue to pronounce,
As minister of my wit, the doubleness
Of this canon, root of all cursedness.
He friendly seem'd to them that knew him not;
But he was fiendly, both in work and thought.
It wearieth me to tell of his falseness;
And natheless yet will I it express,
To that intent men may beware thereby,
And for none other cause truely.
He put this copper in the crosselet,
And on the fire as swithe* he hath it set, *swiftly
And cast in powder, and made the priest to blow,
And in his working for to stoope low,
As he did erst,* and all was but a jape;** *before **trick
Right as him list the priest *he made his ape.* *befooled him*
And afterward in the ingot he it cast,
And in the pan he put it at the last
Of water, and in he put his own hand;
And in his sleeve, as ye beforehand
Hearde me tell, he had a silver teine;* *small piece

He silly took it out, this cursed heine* *wretch
(Unweeting* this priest of his false craft), *unsuspecting
And in the panne's bottom he it laft* *left
And in the water rumbleth to and fro,
And wondrous privily took up also
The copper teine (not knowing thilke priest),
And hid it, and him hente* by the breast, *took
And to him spake, and thus said in his game;
"Stoop now adown; by God, ye be to blame;
Helpe me now, as I did you whilere;* *before
Put in your hand, and looke what is there."
This priest took up this silver teine anon;
And thenne said the canon, "Let us gon,
With these three teines which that we have wrought,
To some goldsmith, and *weet if they be aught:* *find out if they are
For, by my faith, I would not for my hood worth anything*
But if they were silver fine and good, *unless
And that as swithe* well proved shall it be." *quickly
Unto the goldsmith with these teines three
They went anon, and put them in assay* *proof
To fire and hammer; might no man say nay,
But that they weren as they ought to be.
This sotted* priest, who gladder was than he? *stupid, besotted
Was never bird gladder against the day;
Nor nightingale in the season of May
Was never none, that better list to sing;
Nor lady lustier in carolling,
Or for to speak of love and womanhead;
Nor knight in arms to do a hardy deed,
To standen in grace of his lady dear,
Than had this priest this crafte for to lear;
And to the canon thus he spake and said;
"For love of God, that for us alle died,
And as I may deserve it unto you,
What shall this receipt coste? tell me now."
"By our Lady," quoth this canon, "it is dear.
I warn you well, that, save I and a frere,
In Engleland there can no man it make."
"No force," quoth he; "now, Sir, for Godde's sake, *no matter
What shall I pay? telle me, I you pray."
"Y-wis,"* quoth he, "it is full dear, I say. *certainly
Sir, at one word, if that you list it have,
Ye shall pay forty pound, so God me save;
And n'ere* the friendship that ye did ere this *were it not for

To me, ye shoulde paye more, y-wis."
This priest the sum of forty pound anon
Of nobles fet,* and took them every one *fetched
To this canon, for this ilke receipt.
All his working was but fraud and deceit.
"Sir Priest," he said, "I keep* to have no los** *care **praise <16>
Of my craft, for I would it were kept close;
And as ye love me, keep it secre:
For if men knewen all my subtlety,
By God, they woulde have so great envy
To me, because of my philosophy,
I should be dead, there were no other way."
"God it forbid," quoth the priest, "what ye say.
Yet had I lever* spenden all the good *rather
Which that I have (and elles were I wood*), *mad
Than that ye shoulde fall in such mischief."
"For your good will, Sir, have ye right good prefe,"* *results of your
Quoth the canon; "and farewell, grand mercy." *experiments*
He went his way, and never the priest him sey * *saw
After that day; and when that this priest should
Maken assay, at such time as he would,
Of this receipt, farewell! it would not be.
Lo, thus bejaped* and beguil'd was he; *tricked
Thus made he his introduction
To bringe folk to their destruction.
Consider, Sirs, how that in each estate
Betwixte men and gold there is debate,
So farforth that *unnethes is there none.* *scarcely is there any*
This multiplying blint* so many a one, *blinds, deceive
That in good faith I trowe that it be
The cause greatest of such scarcity.
These philosophers speak so mistily
In this craft, that men cannot come thereby,
For any wit that men have how-a-days.
They may well chatter, as do these jays,
And in their termes set their *lust and pain,* *pleasure and exertion*
But to their purpose shall they ne'er attain.
A man may lightly* learn, if he have aught, *easily
To multiply, and bring his good to naught.
Lo, such a lucre* is in this lusty** game; *profit **pleasant
A manne's mirth it will turn all to grame,* *sorrow <17>
And empty also great and heavy purses,
And make folke for to purchase curses
Of them that have thereto their good y-lent.

Oh, fy for shame! they that have been brent,* *burnt
Alas! can they not flee the fire's heat?
Ye that it use, I rede* that ye it lete,** *advise **leave
Lest ye lose all; for better than never is late;
Never to thrive, were too long a date.
Though ye prowl aye, ye shall it never find;
Ye be as bold as is Bayard the blind,
That blunders forth, and *peril casteth none;* *perceives no danger*
He is as bold to run against a stone,
As for to go beside it in the way:
So fare ye that multiply, I say.
If that your eyen cannot see aright,
Look that your minde lacke not his sight.
For though you look never so broad, and stare,
Ye shall not win a mite on that chaffare,* *traffic, commerce
But wasten all that ye may *rape and renn.* *get by hook or crook*
Withdraw the fire, lest it too faste brenn;* *burn
Meddle no more with that art, I mean;
For if ye do, your thrift* is gone full clean. *prosperity
And right as swithe* I will you telle here *quickly
What philosophers say in this mattere.
Lo, thus saith Arnold of the newe town, <18>
As his Rosary maketh mentioun,
He saith right thus, withouten any lie;
"There may no man mercury mortify,<13>
But* it be with his brother's knowledging." *except
Lo, how that he, which firste said this thing,
Of philosophers father was, Hermes;<19>
He saith, how that the dragon doubteless
He dieth not, but if that he be slain
With his brother. And this is for to sayn,
By the dragon, Mercury, and none other,
He understood, and Brimstone by his brother,
That out of Sol and Luna were y-draw.* *drawn, derived
"And therefore," said he, "take heed to my saw. *saying
Let no man busy him this art to seech,* *study, explore
But if that he th'intention and speech *unless
Of philosophers understande can;
And if he do, he is a lewed* man. *ignorant, foolish
For this science and this conning,"* quoth he, *knowledge
"Is of the secret of secrets <20> pardie."
Also there was a disciple of Plato,
That on a time said his master to,
As his book, Senior, <21> will bear witness,

And this was his demand in soothfastness:
"Tell me the name of thilke* privy** stone." *that **secret
And Plato answer'd unto him anon;
"Take the stone that Titanos men name."
"Which is that?" quoth he. "Magnesia is the same,"
Saide Plato. "Yea, Sir, and is it thus?
This is ignotum per ignotius. <22>
What is Magnesia, good Sir, I pray?"
"It is a water that is made, I say,
Of th' elementes foure," quoth Plato.
"Tell me the roote, good Sir," quoth he tho,* *then
"Of that water, if that it be your will."
"Nay, nay," quoth Plato, "certain that I n'ill.* *will not
The philosophers sworn were every one,
That they should not discover it to none,
Nor in no book it write in no mannere;
For unto God it is so lefe* and dear, *precious
That he will not that it discover'd be,
But where it liketh to his deity
Man for to inspire, and eke for to defend'* *protect
Whom that he liketh; lo, this is the end."
Then thus conclude I, since that God of heaven
Will not that these philosophers neven* *name
How that a man shall come unto this stone,
I rede* as for the best to let it gon. *counsel
For whoso maketh God his adversary,
As for to work any thing in contrary
Of his will, certes never shall he thrive,
Though that he multiply term of his live. <23>
And there a point;* for ended is my tale. *end
God send ev'ry good man *boot of his bale.* *remedy for his sorrow*

Note to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale

1. The Tale of the Canon's Yeoman, like those of the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner, is made up of two parts; a long general introduction, and the story proper. In the case of the Wife of Bath, the interruptions of other pilgrims, and the autobiographical nature of the discourse, recommend the separation of the prologue from the Tale proper; but in the other cases the introductory or merely connecting matter ceases wholly where the opening of "The Tale" has been marked in the text.

2. Jupartie: Jeopardy, hazard. In Froissart's French, "a jeu partie" is used to signify a game or contest in which the chances were exactly equal for both sides.

3. Squames: Scales; Latin, "squamae."

4. Descensories: vessels for distillation "per descensum;" they were placed under the fire, and the spirit to be extracted was thrown downwards. Croslets: crucibles; French, "creuset.". Cucurbites: retorts; distilling-vessels; so called from their likeness in shape

to a gourd — Latin, "cucurbita." Alembikes:stills, limbecs.
5. Seared poketteS: the meaning of this phrase is obscure; but if we take the reading "cered poketts," from the Harleian manuscript, we are led to the supposition that it signifies receptacles — bags or pokes — prepared with wax for some process. Latin, "cera," wax.
6. Argoil: potter's clay, used for luting or closing vessels in the laboratories of the alchemists; Latin, "argilla;" French, "argile."
7. Citrination: turning to a citrine colour, or yellow, by chemical action; that was the colour which proved the philosopher's stone.
8. Ingots: not, as in its modern meaning, the masses of metal shaped by pouring into moulds; but the moulds themslves into which the fused metal was poured. Compare Dutch, "ingieten," part. "inghehoten," to infuse; German, "eingiessen," part. "eingegossen," to pour in.
9. Threpe: name; from Anglo-Saxon, "threapian."
10. Bratt: coarse cloak; Anglo-Saxon, "bratt." The word is still used in Lincolnshire, and some parts of the north, to signify a coarse kind of apron.
11. Long on: in consequence of; the modern vulgar phrase "all along of," or "all along on," best conveys the force of the words in the text.
12. Annualere: a priest employed in singing "annuals" or anniversary masses for the dead, without any cure of souls; the office was such as, in the Prologue to the Tales, Chaucer praises the Parson for not seeking: Nor "ran unto London, unto Saint Poul's, to seeke him a chantery for souls."
13. Mortify: a chemical phrase, signifying the dissolution of quicksilver in acid.
14. Blin: cease; from Anglo-Saxon, "blinnan," to desist.
15. Name: took; from Anglo-Saxon, "niman," to take. Compare German, "nehmen," "nahm."
16. Los: praise, reputataion. See note 5 to Chaucer's tale of Meliboeus.
17. Grame: sorrow; Anglo-Saxon, "gram;" German, "Gram."
18. Arnaldus Villanovanus, or Arnold de Villeneuve, was a distinguished French chemist and physician of the fourteenth century; his "Rosarium Philosophorum" was a favourite text-book with the alchemists of the generations that succeeded.
19. Hermes Trismegistus, counsellor of Osiris, King of Egypt, was credited with the invention of writing and hieroglyphics, the drawing up of the laws of the Egyptians, and the origination of many sciences and arts. The Alexandrian school ascribed to him the mystic learning which it amplified; and the scholars of the Middle Ages regarded with enthusiasm and reverence the works attributed to him — notably a treatise on the philosopher's stone.
20. Secret of secrets: "Secreta Secretorum;" a treatise, very popular in the Middle Ages, supposed to contain the sum of Aristotle's instructions to Alexander. Lydgate translated about half of the work, when his labour was interrupted by his death about 1460; and from the same treatise had been taken most of the seventh book of Gower's "Confessio Amantis."
21. Tyrwhitt says that this book was printed in the "Theatrum Chemicum," under the title, "Senioris Zadith fi. Hamuelis tabula chymica" ("The chemical tables of Senior

Zadith, son of Hamuel"); and the story here told of Plato and his disciple was there related of Solomon, but with some variations.

22. Ignotum per ignotius: To explain the unknown by the more unknown.

23. Though he multiply term of his live: Though he pursue the alchemist's art all his days.