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GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE MANCIPLE'S TALE

THE PROLOGUE.

WEET* ye not where there stands a little town, *know
Which that y-called is Bob-up-and-down, <1>
Under the Blee, in Canterbury way?
There gan our Hoste for to jape and play,
And saide, "Sirs, what? Dun is in the mire.<2>
Is there no man, for prayer nor for hire,
That will awaken our fellow behind?
A thief him might full* rob and bind *easily
See how he nappeth, see, for cocke's bones,
As he would falle from his horse at ones.
Is that a Cook of London, with mischance? <3>
Do* him come forth, he knoweth his penance; *make
For he shall tell a tale, by my fay,* *faith
Although it be not worth a bottle hay.
Awake, thou Cook," quoth he; "God give thee sorrow
What aileth thee to sleepe *by the morrow?* *in the day time*
Hast thou had fleas all night, or art drunk?
Or had thou with some quean* all night y-swunk,** *whore **laboured
So that thou mayest not hold up thine head?"
The Cook, that was full pale and nothing red,
Said to Host, "So God my soule bless,
As there is fall'n on me such heaviness,
I know not why, that me were lever* sleep, *rather
Than the best gallon wine that is in Cheap."
"Well," quoth the Manciple, "if it may do ease
To thee, Sir Cook, and to no wight displease
Which that here rideth in this company,
And that our Host will of his courtesy,
I will as now excuse thee of thy tale;
For in good faith thy visage is full pale:
Thine eyen daze,* soothly as me thinketh, *are dim
And well I wot, thy breath full soure stinketh,
That sheweth well thou art not well disposed;
Of me certain thou shalt not be y-glosed.* *flattered
See how he yawneth, lo, this drunken wight,
As though he would us swallow anon right.
Hold close thy mouth, man, by thy father's kin;

The devil of helle set his foot therein!
Thy cursed breath infecte will us all:
Fy! stinking swine, fy! foul may thee befall.
Ah! take heed, Sirs, of this lusty man.
Now, sweete Sir, will ye joust at the fan?<4>
Thereto, me thinketh, ye be well y-shape.
I trow that ye have drunken wine of ape,<5>
And that is when men playe with a straw."
And with this speech the Cook waxed all wraw,* *wrathful
And on the Manciple he gan nod fast
For lack of speech; and down his horse him cast,
Where as he lay, till that men him up took.
This was a fair chevachie* of a cook: *cavalry expedition
Alas! that he had held him by his ladle!
And ere that he again were in the saddle
There was great shoving bothe to and fro
To lift him up, and muche care and woe,
So unwieldy was this silly paled ghost.
And to the Manciple then spake our Host:
"Because that drink hath domination
Upon this man, by my salvation
I trow he lewedly* will tell his tale. *stupidly
For were it wine, or old or moisty* ale, *new
That he hath drunk, he speaketh in his nose,
And sneezeth fast, and eke he hath the pose <6>
He also hath to do more than enough
To keep him on his capel* out of the slough; *horse
And if he fall from off his capel eftsoon,* *again
Then shall we alle have enough to do'n
In lifting up his heavy drunken corse.
Tell on thy tale, of him *make I no force.* *I take no account*
But yet, Manciple, in faith thou art too nice* *foolish
Thus openly to reprove him of his vice;
Another day he will paraventure
Reclaime thee, and bring thee to the lure; <7>
I mean, he speake will of smalle things,
As for to *pinchen at* thy reckonings, *pick flaws in*
That were not honest, if it came to prefe."* *test, proof
Quoth the Manciple, "That were a great mischief;
So might he lightly bring me in the snare.
Yet had I lever* paye for the mare *rather
Which he rides on, than he should with me strive.
I will not wrathe him, so may I thrive)
That that I spake, I said it in my bourde.* *jest

And weet ye what? I have here in my gourd
A draught of wine, yea, of a ripe grape,
And right anon ye shall see a good jape.* *trick
This Cook shall drink thereof, if that I may;
On pain of my life he will not say nay."
And certainly, to tellen as it was,
Of this vessel the cook drank fast (alas!
What needed it? he drank enough beforn),
And when he hadde *pouped in his horn,* *belched*
To the Manciple he took the gourd again.
And of that drink the Cook was wondrous fain,
And thanked him in such wise as he could.
Then gan our Host to laughe wondrous loud,
And said, "I see well it is necessary
Where that we go good drink with us to carry;
For that will turne rancour and disease* *trouble, annoyance
T'accord and love, and many a wrong appease.
O Bacchus, Bacchus, blessed be thy name,
That so canst turnen earnest into game!
Worship and thank be to thy deity.
Of that mattere ye get no more of me.
Tell on thy tale, Manciple, I thee pray."
"Well, Sir," quoth he, "now hearken what I say."

Notes to the Prologue to the Manciple's Tale

1. Bob-up-and-down: Mr Wright supposes this to be the village of Harbledown, near Canterbury, which is situated on a hill, and near which there are many ups and downs in the road. Like Boughton, where the Canon and his Yeoman overtook the pilgrims, it stood on the skirts of the Kentish forest of Blean or Blee.

2. Dun is in the mire: a proverbial saying. "Dun" is a name for an ass, derived from his colour.

3. The mention of the Cook here, with no hint that he had already told a story, confirms the indication given by the imperfect condition of his Tale, that Chaucer intended to suppress the Tale altogether, and make him tell a story in some other place.

4. The quintain; called "fan" or "vane," because it turned round like a weather-cock.

5. Referring to the classification of wine, according to its effects on a man, given in the old "Calendrier des Bergiers," The man of choleric temperament has "wine of lion;" the sanguine, "wine of ape;" the phlegmatic, "wine of sheep;" the melancholic, "wine of sow." There is a Rabbinical tradition that, when Noah was planting vines, Satan slaughtered beside them the four animals named; hence the effect of wine in making those who drink it display in turn the characteristics of all the four.

6. The pose: a defluxion or rheum which stops the nose and obstructs the voice.

7. Bring thee to his lure: A phrase in hawking — to recall a hawk to the fist; the meaning here is, that the Cook may one day bring the Manciple to account, or pay him

off, for the rebuke of his drunkenness.

THE TALE. <1>

When Phoebus dwelled here in earth adown,
As olde bookes make mentioun,
He was the moste lusty* bacheler *pleasant
Of all this world, and eke* the best archer. *also
He slew Python the serpent, as he lay
Sleeping against the sun upon a day;
And many another noble worthy deed
He with his bow wrought, as men maye read.
Playen he could on every minstrelsy,
And singe, that it was a melody
To hearen of his cleare voice the soun'.
Certes the king of Thebes, Amphioun,
That with his singing walled the city,
Could never singe half so well as he.
Thereto he was the seemlieste man
That is, or was since that the world began;
What needeth it his features to descrive?
For in this world is none so fair alive.
He was therewith full fill'd of gentleness,
Of honour, and of perfect worthiness.
This Phoebus, that was flower of bach'lery,
As well in freedom* as in chivalry, *generosity
For his disport, in sign eke of victory
Of Python, so as telleth us the story,
Was wont to bearen in his hand a bow.
Now had this Phoebus in his house a crow,
Which in a cage he foster'd many a day,
And taught it speaken, as men teach a jay.
White was this crow, as is a snow-white swan,
And counterfeit the speech of every man
He coulde, when he shoulde tell a tale.
Therewith in all this world no nightingale
Ne coulde by an hundred thousand deal* *part
Singe so wondrous merrily and well.
Now had this Phoebus in his house a wife;
Which that he loved more than his life.
And night and day did ever his diligence
Her for to please, and do her reverence:
Save only, if that I the sooth shall sayn,
Jealous he was, and would have kept her fain.
For him were loth y-japed* for to be; *tricked, deceived
And so is every wight in such degree;

But all for nought, for it availeth nought.
A good wife, that is clean of work and thought,
Should not be kept in none await* certain: *observation
And truely the labour is in vain
To keep a shrewe,* for it will not be. *ill-disposed woman
This hold I for a very nicety,* *sheer folly
To spille* labour for to keepe wives; *lose
Thus writen olde clerkes in their lives.
But now to purpose, as I first began.
This worthy Phoebus did all that he can
To please her, weening, through such pleasance,
And for his manhood and his governance,
That no man should have put him from her grace;
But, God it wot, there may no man embrace
As to distrain* a thing, which that nature *succeed in constraining
Hath naturally set in a creature.
Take any bird, and put it in a cage,
And do all thine intent, and thy corage,* *what thy heart prompts
To foster it tenderly with meat and drink
Of alle dainties that thou canst bethink,
And keep it all so cleanly as thou may;
Although the cage of gold be never so gay,
Yet had this bird, by twenty thousand fold,
Lever* in a forest, both wild and cold, *rather
Go eate wormes, and such wretchedness.
For ever this bird will do his business
T'escape out of his cage when that he may:
His liberty the bird desireth aye. <2>
Let take a cat, and foster her with milk
And tender flesh, and make her couch of silk,
And let her see a mouse go by the wall,
Anon she weiveth* milk, and flesh, and all, *forsaketh
And every dainty that is in that house,
Such appetite hath she to eat the mouse.
Lo, here hath kind* her domination, *nature
And appetite flemeth* discretion. *drives out
A she-wolf hath also a villain's kind
The lewedeste wolf that she may find,
Or least of reputation, will she take
In time when *her lust* to have a make.* *she desires *mate
All these examples speak I by* these men *with reference to
That be untrue, and nothing by women.
For men have ever a lik'rous appetite
On lower things to perform their delight

Than on their wives, be they never so fair,
Never so true, nor so debonair.* *gentle, mild
Flesh is so newefangled, *with mischance,* *ill luck to it*
That we can in no thinge have pleasance
That *souneth unto* virtue any while. *accords with
This Phoebus, which that thought upon no guile,
Deceived was for all his jollity;
For under him another hadde she,
A man of little reputation,
Nought worth to Phoebus in comparison.
The more harm is; it happens often so,
Of which there cometh muche harm and woe.
And so befell, when Phoebus was absent,
His wife anon hath for her leman* sent. *unlawful lover
Her leman! certes that is a knavish speech.
Forgive it me, and that I you beseech.
The wise Plato saith, as ye may read,
The word must needs accorde with the deed;
If men shall telle properly a thing,
The word must cousin be to the working.
I am a boistous* man, right thus I say. *rough-spoken, downright
There is no difference truely
Betwixt a wife that is of high degree
(If of her body dishonest she be),
And any poore wench, other than this
(If it so be they worke both amiss),
But, for* the gentle is in estate above, *because
She shall be call'd his lady and his love;
And, for that other is a poor woman,
She shall be call'd his wench and his leman:
And God it wot, mine owen deare brother,
Men lay the one as low as lies the other.
Right so betwixt a *titleless tyrant* *usurper*
And an outlaw, or else a thief errant, *wandering
The same I say, there is no difference
(To Alexander told was this sentence),
But, for the tyrant is of greater might
By force of meinie* for to slay downright, *followers
And burn both house and home, and make all plain,* *level
Lo, therefore is he call'd a capitain;
And, for the outlaw hath but small meinie,
And may not do so great an harm as he,
Nor bring a country to so great mischief,
Men calle him an outlaw or a thief.

But, for I am a man not textuel, *learned in texts
I will not tell of texts never a deal;* *whit
I will go to my tale, as I began.
When Phoebus' wife had sent for her leman,
Anon they wroughten all their *lust volage.* *light or rash pleasure*
This white crow, that hung aye in the cage,
Beheld their work, and said never a word;
And when that home was come Phoebus the lord,
This crowe sung, "Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!"
"What? bird," quoth Phoebus, "what song sing'st thou now?
Wert thou not wont so merrily to sing,
That to my heart it was a rejoicing
To hear thy voice? alas! what song is this?"
"By God," quoth he, "I singe not amiss.
Phoebus," quoth he, "for all thy worthiness,
For all thy beauty, and all thy gentleness,
For all thy song, and all thy minstrelsy,
For all thy waiting, bleared is thine eye *despite all thy watching,
With one of little reputation, thou art befooled*
Not worth to thee, as in comparison,
The mountance* of a gnat, so may I thrive; *value
For on thy bed thy wife I saw him swive."
What will ye more? the crow anon him told,
By sade* tokens, and by wordes bold, *grave, trustworthy
How that his wife had done her lechery,
To his great shame and his great villainy;
And told him oft, he saw it with his eyen.
This Phoebus gan awayward for to wrien;* *turn aside
Him thought his woeful hearte burst in two.
His bow he bent, and set therein a flo,* *arrow
And in his ire he hath his wife slain;
This is th' effect, there is no more to sayn.
For sorrow of which he brake his minstrelsy,
Both harp and lute, gitern* and psaltery; *guitar
And eke he brake his arrows and his bow;
And after that thus spake he to the crow.
"Traitor," quoth he, "with tongue of scorpion,
Thou hast me brought to my confusion;
Alas that I was wrought!* why n'ere** I dead? *made **was not
O deare wife, O gem of lustihead,* *pleasantness
That wert to me so sad,* and eke so true, *steadfast
Now liest thou dead, with face pale of hue,
Full guilteless, that durst I swear y-wis!* *certainly
O rakel* hand, to do so foul amiss *rash, hasty

O troubled wit, O ire reckeless,
That unadvised smit'st the guilteless!
O wantrust,* full of false suspicion! *distrust <3>
Where was thy wit and thy discretion?
O! every man beware of rakelness,* *rashness
Nor trow* no thing withoute strong witness. *believe
Smite not too soon, ere that ye weete* why, *know
And *be advised* well and sickerly** *consider* *surely
Ere ye *do any execution *take any action
Upon your ire* for suspicion. upon your anger*
Alas! a thousand folk hath rakel ire
Foully fordone, and brought them in the mire.
Alas! for sorrow I will myself slee* *slay
And to the crow, "O false thief," said he,
"I will thee quite anon thy false tale.
Thou sung whilom* like any nightingale, *once on a time
Now shalt thou, false thief, thy song foregon,* *lose
And eke thy white feathers every one,
Nor ever in all thy life shalt thou speak;
Thus shall men on a traitor be awreak. *revenged
Thou and thine offspring ever shall be blake,* *black
Nor ever sweete noise shall ye make,
But ever cry against* tempest and rain, *before, in warning of
In token that through thee my wife is slain."
And to the crow he start,* and that anon, *sprang
And pull'd his white feathers every one,
And made him black, and reft him all his song,
And eke his speech, and out at door him flung
Unto the devil, *which I him betake;* *to whom I commend him*
And for this cause be all crowes blake.
Lordings, by this ensample, I you pray,
Beware, and take keep* what that ye say; *heed
Nor telle never man in all your life
How that another man hath dight his wife;
He will you hate mortally certain.
Dan Solomon, as wise clerkes sayn,
Teacheth a man to keep his tongue well;
But, as I said, I am not textuel.
But natheless thus taughte me my dame;
"My son, think on the crow, in Godde's name.
My son, keep well thy tongue, and keep thy friend;
A wicked tongue is worse than is a fiend:
My sone, from a fiend men may them bless.* *defend by crossing
My son, God of his endeless goodness themselves

Walled a tongue with teeth, and lippes eke,
For* man should him advise,** what he speak. *because **consider
My son, full often for too muche speech
Hath many a man been spilt,* as clerkes teach; *destroyed
But for a little speech advisedly
Is no man shent,* to speak generally. *ruined
My son, thy tongue shouldest thou restrain
At alle time, *but when thou dost thy pain* *except when you do
To speak of God in honour and prayere. your best effort*
The firste virtue, son, if thou wilt lear,* *learn
Is to restrain and keepe well thy tongue;<4>
Thus learne children, when that they be young.
My son, of muche speaking evil advis'd,
Where lesse speaking had enough suffic'd,
Cometh much harm; thus was me told and taught;
In muche speeche sinne wanteth not.
Wost* thou whereof a rakel** tongue serveth? *knowest **hasty
Right as a sword forcutteth and forcarveth
An arm in two, my deare son, right so
A tongue cutteth friendship all in two.
A jangler* is to God abominable. *prating man
Read Solomon, so wise and honourable;
Read David in his Psalms, and read Senec'.
My son, speak not, but with thine head thou beck,* *beckon, nod
Dissimule as thou wert deaf, if that thou hear
A jangler speak of perilous mattere.
The Fleming saith, and learn *if that thee lest,* **if it please thee*
That little jangling causeth muche rest.
My son, if thou no wicked word hast said,
Thee thar not dreade for to be bewray'd; *thou hast no need to
But he that hath missaid, I dare well sayn, fear to be betrayed*
He may by no way call his word again.
Thing that is said is said, and forth it go'th, <5>
Though him repent, or be he ne'er so loth;
He is his thrall,* to whom that he hath said *slave
A tale, *of which he is now evil apaid.* *which he now regrets*
My son, beware, and be no author new
Of tidings, whether they be false or true; <6>
Whereso thou come, amonges high or low,
Keep well thy tongue, and think upon the crow."

Notes to the Manciple's Tale

1. "The fable of 'The Crow,' says Tyrwhitt, "which is the subject of the Manciple's Tale, has been related by so many authors, from Ovid down to Gower, that it is impossible to say whom Chaucer principally followed. His skill in new dressing an old story was

never, perhaps, more successfully exerted."
2. See the parallel to this passage in the Squire's Tale, and note 34 to that tale.
3. Wantrust: distrust — want of trust; so "wanhope," despair - - want of hope.
4. This is quoted in the French "Romance of the Rose," from Cato "De Moribus," 1. i., dist. 3: "Virtutem primam esse puta compescere linguam." ("The first virtue is to be able to control the tongue")
5. "Semel emissum volat irrevocabile verbum." ("A word once uttered flies away and cannot be called back") — Horace, Epist. 1., 18, 71.
6. This caution is also from Cato "De Moribus," 1. i., dist. 12: "Rumoris fuge ne incipias novus auctor haberi." ("Do not pass on rumours or be the author of new ones")