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GEOFFREY CHAUCER

CHAUCER'S A. B. C.

A.
ALMIGHTY and all-merciable* Queen, *all-merciful
To whom all this world fleeth for succour,
To have release of sin, of sorrow, of teen!* *affliction
Glorious Virgin! of all flowers flow'r,
To thee I flee, confounded in errour!
Help and relieve, almighty debonair,* *gracious, gentle
Have mercy of my perilous languour!
Vanquish'd me hath my cruel adversair.
B.
Bounty* so fix'd hath in thy heart his tent, *goodness, charity
That well I wot thou wilt my succour be;
Thou canst not *warne that* with good intent *refuse he who*
Asketh thy help, thy heart is ay so free!
Thou art largess* of plein** felicity, *liberal bestower **full
Haven and refuge of quiet and rest!
Lo! how that thieves seven <3> chase me!
Help, Lady bright, ere that my ship to-brest!* *be broken to pieces
C.
Comfort is none, but in you, Lady dear!
For lo! my sin and my confusion,
Which ought not in thy presence to appear,
Have ta'en on me a grievous action,* *control
Of very right and desperation!
And, as by right, they mighte well sustene
That I were worthy my damnation,
Ne were it mercy of you, blissful Queen!
D.
Doubt is there none, Queen of misericorde,* *compassion
That thou art cause of grace and mercy here;
God vouchesaf'd, through thee, with us t'accord;* *to be reconciled
For, certes, Christe's blissful mother dear!
Were now the bow y-bent, in such mannere
As it was first, of justice and of ire,
The rightful God would of no mercy hear;
But through thee have we grace as we desire.
E.
Ever hath my hope of refuge in thee be';

For herebefore full oft in many a wise
Unto mercy hast thou received me.
But mercy, Lady! at the great assize,
When we shall come before the high Justice!
So little fruit shall then in me be found,
That,* thou ere that day correcte me, *unless
Of very right my work will me confound.
F.
Flying, I flee for succour to thy tent,
Me for to hide from tempest full of dread;
Beseeching you, that ye you not absent,
Though I be wick'. O help yet at this need!
All* have I been a beast in wit and deed, *although
Yet, Lady! thou me close in with thy grace;
Thine enemy and mine, — Lady, take heed! — *the devil*
Unto my death in point is me to chase.
G.
Gracious Maid and Mother! which that never
Wert bitter nor in earthe nor in sea, <4>
But full of sweetness and of mercy ever,
Help, that my Father be not wroth with me!
Speak thou, for I ne dare Him not see;
So have I done in earth, alas the while!
That, certes, but if thou my succour be,
To sink etern He will my ghost exile.
H.
He vouchesaf'd, tell Him, as was His will,
Become a man, *as for our alliance,* *to ally us with god*
And with His blood He wrote that blissful bill
Upon the cross, as general acquittance
To ev'ry penitent in full creance;* *belief
And therefore, Lady bright! thou for us pray;
Then shalt thou stenten* alle His grievance, *put an end to
And make our foe to failen of his prey.
I.
I wote well thou wilt be our succour,
Thou art so full of bounty in certain;
For, when a soule falleth in errour,
Thy pity go'th, and haleth* him again; *draweth
Then makest thou his peace with his Sov'reign,
And bringest him out of the crooked street:
Whoso thee loveth shall not love in vain,
That shall he find *as he the life shall lete.* *when he leaves
life*

K.
Kalendares illumined be they *brilliant exemplars*
That in this world be lighted with thy name;
And whoso goeth with thee the right way,
Him shall not dread in soule to be lame;
Now, Queen of comfort! since thou art the same
To whom I seeke for my medicine,
Let not my foe no more my wound entame;* *injure, molest
My heal into thy hand all I resign.
L.
Lady, thy sorrow can I not portray
Under that cross, nor his grievous penance;
But, for your bothe's pain, I you do pray,
Let not our *aller foe* make his boastance, *the foe of us all —
That he hath in his listes, with mischance, Satan*
Convicte that ye both have bought so dear; *ensnared that which*
As I said erst, thou ground of all substance!
Continue on us thy piteous eyen clear.
M.
Moses, that saw the bush of flames red
Burning, of which then never a stick brenn'd,* *burned
Was sign of thine unwemmed* maidenhead. *unblemished
Thou art the bush, on which there gan descend
The Holy Ghost, the which that Moses wend* *weened, supposed
Had been on fire; and this was in figure. <5>
Now, Lady! from the fire us do defend,
Which that in hell eternally shall dure.
N.
Noble Princess! that never haddest peer;
Certes if any comfort in us be,
That cometh of thee, Christe's mother dear!
We have none other melody nor glee,* *pleasure
Us to rejoice in our adversity;
Nor advocate, that will and dare so pray
For us, and for as little hire as ye,
That helpe for an Ave-Mary or tway.
O.
O very light of eyen that be blind!
O very lust* of labour and distress! *relief, pleasure
O treasurer of bounty to mankind!
The whom God chose to mother for humbless!
From his ancill* <6> he made thee mistress *handmaid
Of heav'n and earth, our *billes up to bede;* *offer up our petitions*
This world awaiteth ever on thy goodness;

For thou ne failedst never wight at need.
P.
Purpose I have sometime for to enquere
Wherefore and why the Holy Ghost thee sought,
When Gabrielis voice came to thine ear;
He not to war* us such a wonder wrought, *afflict
But for to save us, that sithens us bought:
Then needeth us no weapon us to save,
But only, where we did not as we ought,
Do penitence, and mercy ask and have.
Q.
Queen of comfort, right when I me bethink
That I aguilt* have bothe Him and thee, *offended
And that my soul is worthy for to sink,
Alas! I, caitiff, whither shall I flee?
Who shall unto thy Son my meane* be? *medium of approach
Who, but thyself, that art of pity well?* *fountain
Thou hast more ruth on our adversity
Than in this world might any tongue tell!
R.
Redress me, Mother, and eke me chastise!
For certainly my Father's chastising
I dare not abiden in no wise,
So hideous is his full reckoning.
Mother! of whom our joy began to spring,
Be ye my judge, and eke my soule's leach;* *physician
For ay in you is pity abounding
To each that will of pity you beseech.
S.
Sooth is it that He granteth no pity
Withoute thee; for God of his goodness
Forgiveth none, *but it like unto thee;* *unless it please
He hath thee made vicar and mistress thee*
Of all this world, and eke governess
Of heaven; and represseth his justice
After* thy will; and therefore in witness *according to
He hath thee crowned in so royal wise.
T.
Temple devout! where God chose his wonning,* *abode
From which, these misbeliev'd deprived be,
To you my soule penitent I bring;
Receive me, for I can no farther flee.
With thornes venomous, O Heaven's Queen!
For which the earth accursed was full yore,

I am so wounded, as ye may well see,
That I am lost almost, it smart so sore!
V.
Virgin! that art so noble of apparail,* *aspect
That leadest us into the highe tow'r
Of Paradise, thou me *wiss and counsail* *direct and counsel*
How I may have thy grace and thy succour;
All have I been in filth and in errour,
Lady! *on that country thou me adjourn,* *take me to that place*
That called is thy bench of freshe flow'r,
There as that mercy ever shall sojourn.
X.
Xpe <7> thy Son, that in this world alight,
Upon a cross to suffer his passioun,
And suffer'd eke that Longeus his heart pight,* <8> *pierced
And made his hearte-blood to run adown;
And all this was for my salvatioun:
And I to him am false and eke unkind,
And yet he wills not my damnation;
This thank I you, succour of all mankind! *for this I am
indebted to you*
Y.
Ysaac was figure of His death certain,
That so farforth his father would obey,
That him *ne raughte* nothing to be slain; *he cared not*
Right so thy Son list as a lamb to dey:* *die
Now, Lady full of mercy! I you pray,
Since he his mercy 'sured me so large,
Be ye not scant, for all we sing and say,
That ye be from vengeance alway our targe.* *shield, defence
Z.
Zachary you calleth the open well <9>
That washed sinful soul out of his guilt;
Therefore this lesson out I will to tell,
That, n'ere* thy tender hearte, we were spilt.** *were it not for
Now, Lady brighte! since thou canst and wilt, *destroyed, undone*
Be to the seed of Adam merciable;* *merciful
Bring us unto that palace that is built
To penitents that be *to mercy able!* *fit to receive mercy*
Explicit.* *The end
Notes to Chaucer's A. B. C.
Chaucer's A. B. C. — a prayer to the Virgin, in twenty three verses, beginning with the letters of the alphabet in their order — is said to have been written "at the request of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, as a prayer for her private use, being a woman in her

religion very devout." It was first printed in Speght's edition of 1597.
2. La Priere De Nostre Dame: French, "The Prayer of Our Lady."
3. Thieves seven: i.e. the seven deadly sins
4. Mary's name recalls the waters of "Marah" or bitterness (Exod. xv. 23), or the prayer of Naomi in her grief that she might be called not Naomi, but "Mara" (Ruth i. 20). Mary, however, is understood to mean "exalted."
5. A typical representation. See The Prioress's Tale, third stanza.
6. The reference evidently is to Luke i. 38 — "Ecce ancilla Domini," ("Behold the handmaid of the Lord") the Virgin's humble answer to Gabriel at the Annunciation.
7. "Xpe" represents the Greek letters chi rho epsilon, and is a contraction for "Christe."
8. According to tradition, the soldier who struck the Saviour to the heart with his spear was named Longeus, and was blind; but, touching his eyes by chance with the mingled blood and water that flowed down the shaft upon his hands, he was instantly restored to sight.
9. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. xiii. 1).