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GEOFFREY CHAUCER

PROVERBS OF CHAUCER

WHAT should these clothes thus manifold,
Lo! this hot summer's day?
After great heate cometh cold;
No man cast his pilche* away. *pelisse, furred cloak
Of all this world the large compass
Will not in mine arms twain;
Who so muche will embrace,
Little thereof he shall distrain.* *grasp
The world so wide, the air so remuable,* *unstable
The silly man so little of stature;
The green of ground and clothing so mutable,
The fire so hot and subtile of nature;
The water *never in one* — what creature *never the same*
That made is of these foure <2> thus flitting,
May steadfast be, as here, in his living?
The more I go, the farther I am behind;
The farther behind, the nearer my war's end;
The more I seek, the worse can I find;
The lighter leave, the lother for to wend; <3>
The better I live, the more out of mind;
Is this fortune, *n'ot I,* or infortune;* *I know not* *misfortune
Though I go loose, tied am I with a loigne.* *line, tether

Notes to Proverbs of Chaucer

(Transcriber's Note: Modern scholars believe that Chaucer's may have been the author of the first stanza of this poem, but was not the author of the second and third).

2. These foure: that is, the four elements, of which man was believed to be composed.

3. The lighter leave, the lother for to wend: The more easy (through age) for me to depart, the less willing I am to go.