

# **The Canterbury Tales**

by

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*A READER-FRIENDLY EDITION*

*Put into modern spelling*

by

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**GENERAL PROLOGUE**

## GENERAL PROLOGUE

*The opening is a long, elaborate sentence about the effects of Spring on the vegetable and animal world, and on people. The style of the rest of the Prologue and Tales is much simpler than this opening. A close paraphrase of the opening sentence is offered at the bottom of this page.<sup>1</sup>*

	When that April with his showers soote	<i>its showers sweet</i>
	The drought of March hath piercèd to the root	
	And bathèd every vein in such liquor	<i>rootlet / liquid</i>
	Of which virtúe engendered is the flower; <sup>2</sup>	
5	When Zephyrus eke with his sweetè breath	<i>West Wind also</i>
	Inspirèd hath in every holt and heath	<i>grove &amp; field</i>
	The tender croppès, and the youngè sun	<i>young shoots / Spring sun</i>
	Hath in the Ram his halfè course y-run, <sup>3</sup>	<i>in Aries / has run</i>
	And smallè fowlès maken melody	<i>little birds</i>
10	That sleepen all the night with open eye	<i>Who sleep</i>
	(So pricketh them Natúre in their couráges),	<i>spurs / spirits</i>
	Then longen folk to go on pilgrimáges,	<i>people long</i>
	And palmers for to seeken strangè strands	<i>pilgrims / shores</i>
	To fernè hallows couth in sundry lands, <sup>4</sup>	<i>distant shrines known</i>
15	And specially from every shirè's end	<i>county's</i>
	Of Engéland to Canterbury they wend	<i>go</i>
	The holy blissful martyr for to seek,	<i>St. Thomas Becket</i>
	That them hath holpen when that they were sick.	<i>Who has helped them</i>

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<sup>1</sup> When April with its sweet showers has pierced the drought of March to the root and bathed every rootlet in the liquid by which the flower is engendered; when the west wind also, with its sweet breath, has brought forth young shoots in every grove and field; when the early sun of spring has run half his course in the sign of Aries, and when small birds make melody, birds that sleep all night with eyes open, (as Nature inspires them to) --THEN people have a strong desire to go on pilgrimages, and pilgrims long to go to foreign shores to distant shrines known in various countries. And especially they go from every county in England to seek out the shrine of the holy blessed martyr who has helped them when they were sick.

<sup>2</sup> 4: "By virtue (strength) of which the flower is engendered."

<sup>3</sup> 8: The early sun of Spring has moved part way through the sign of Aries (the Ram) in the Zodiac.

<sup>4</sup> 13-14: "Pilgrims seek foreign shores (to go) to distant shrines known in different lands." *Palmers*: pilgrims, from the palm-leaves they got in Jerusalem.

*At the Tabard Inn, just south of London, the poet-pilgrim falls in with a group of twenty nine other pilgrims who have met each other along the way.*

	Befell that in that season on a day	<i>It happened</i>
20	In Southwark at The Tabard as I lay	<i>inn name / lodged</i>
	Ready to wenden on my pilgrimage	<i>to go</i>
	To Canterbury with full devout couráge,	<i>spirit, heart</i>
	At night was come into that hostelry	<i>inn</i>
	Well nine and twenty in a company	<i>fully 29</i>
25	Of sundry folk by áventure y-fall	<i>by chance fallen ...</i>
	In fellowship, and pilgrims were they all	<i>...Into company</i>
	That toward Canterbury woulden ride.	<i>wished to</i>
	The chambers and the stables weren wide	<i>were roomy</i>
	And well we weren easèd at the best.	<i>entertained</i>
30	And shortly, when the sunnè was to rest,	<i>sun had set</i>
	So had I spoken with them every one	
	That I was of their fellowship anon,	
	And madè forward early for to rise	<i>agreement</i>
	To take our way there as I you devise.	<i>I shall tell you</i>
35	But natheless, while I have time and space,	<i>nevertheless</i>
	Ere that I further in this talè pace,	<i>Before I go</i>
	Methinketh it accordant to reason	<i>It seems to me</i>
	To tell you all the condition	<i>circumstances</i>
	Of each of them so as it seemèd me,	<i>to me</i>
40	And which they weren, and of what degree	<i>And who / social rank</i>
	And eke in what array that they were in;	<i>also / dress</i>
	And at a knight then will I first begin.	

*The Knight is the person of highest social standing on the pilgrimage though you would never know it from his modest manner or his clothes. He keeps his ferocity for crusaders' battlefields where he has distinguished himself over many years and over a wide geographical area. As the text says, he is not "gay", that is, he is not showily dressed, but is still wearing the military padded coat stained by the armor he has only recently taken off.*

A KNIGHT there was and that a worthy man  
 That from the timè that he first began  
 45 To riden out, he lovèd chivalry,  
 Truth and honóur, freedom and courtesy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 45-6: "He loved everything that pertained to knighthood: truth (to one's word), honor, magnanimity

Full worthy was he in his lordé's war,  
 And thereto had he ridden--no man farre  
 As well in Christendom as Heatheness  
 50 And ever honoured for his worthiness.

*lorde's = king's or God's  
 farther  
 heathendom*

*His campaigns*

At Alexandria he was when it was won.  
 Full often time he had the board begun  
 Aboven allè nations in Prussia.<sup>1</sup>  
 In Lithow had he reisèd and in Russia  
 55 No Christian man so oft of his degree.  
 In Gránad' at the siege eke had he be  
 Of Algesir and ridden in Belmarie.  
 At Leyès was he and at Satalie  
 When they were won, and in the Greatè Sea  
 60 At many a noble army had he be.  
 At mortal battles had he been fifteen  
 And foughten for our faith at Tramissene  
 In listès thricè, and ay slain his foe.<sup>2</sup>  
 This ilkè worthy knight had been also  
 65 Sometimè with the lord of Palatie  
 Against another heathen in Turkey,  
 And ever more he had a sovereign prize,<sup>3</sup>

*captured  
 table  
 Lithuania / fought  
 rank  
 Granada / also  
 Mediterranean  
 combat 3 times & always  
 same  
 always*

*His modest demeanor*

And though that he was worthy he was wise,  
 And of his port as meek as is a maid.  
 70 Ne never yet no villainy he said

*valiant / sensible  
 deportment  
 rudeness*

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(freedom), courtesy."

<sup>1</sup> 52-3: He had often occupied the seat of honor at the table of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia, where badges awarded to distinguished crusaders read "Honneur vainc tout: Honor conquers all." Though the campaigns listed below were real, and though it was perhaps just possible for one man to have been in them all, the list is probably idealized. The exact geographical locations are of little interest today. This portrait is generally thought to show a man of unsullied ideals; Jones (see Bibliography) insists that the knight was a mere mercenary.

<sup>2</sup> 63: "In single combat (*listes*) three times, and always (*ay*) killed his opponent."

<sup>3</sup> 64-67: The knight had fought for one Saracen or pagan leader against another, a common, if dubious, practice. *And ever more ...* may mean he always kept the highest reputation or that he always came away with a splendid reward or booty (*prize*).

	In all his life unto no manner wight. <sup>1</sup>	<i>no kind of person</i>
	He was a very perfect gentle knight.	
	But for to tellen you of his array:	
	His horse was good; but <i>he</i> was not gay. <sup>2</sup>	<i>well dressed</i>
75	Of fustian he wearèd a gipoun	<i>coarse cloth / tunic</i>
	All besmotered with his habergeon,	<i>stained / mail</i>
	For he was late y-come from his voyáge,	<i>just come / journey</i>
	And wentè for to do his pilgrimáge. <sup>3</sup>	

*The Knight's 20-year-old son is a striking contrast to his father. True, he has seen some military action, but it was to impress his lady not his Lord God. Unlike his parent, he is fashionably dressed. He is very much in love, he has cultivated all the social graces, and is also aware of his duty to serve as his father's squire*

	With him there was his son, a youngè SQUIRE,	
80	A lover and a lusty bachelor <sup>4</sup>	
	With locks curled as they were laid in press.	<i>as if in curlers</i>
	Of twenty years he was of age, I guess.	
	Of his staturè he was of even length,	<i>moderate height</i>
	And wonderly deliver and of great strength,	<i>very athletic</i>
85	And he had been sometime in chivachy	<i>on campaign</i>
	In Flanders, in Artois and Picardy,	
	And borne him well as in so little space <sup>5</sup>	<i>conducted / time</i>
	In hope to standen in his lady's grace.	<i>good graces</i>
	Embroidered was he as it were a mead	<i>meadow</i>
90	All full of freshè flowers white and red.	

<sup>1</sup> 70-71: Notice quadruple negative: "ne, never, no ... no" used for emphasis, perhaps deliberately excessive emphasis. It is not bad grammar. The four negatives remain in Ellesmer's slightly different version: "He never yet no villainy ne said ... unto no manner wight"

<sup>2</sup> 74: "He (the Knight) was not fashionably dressed." *horse was*: most MSS read *hors weere(n)* = "horses were." I have preferred the reading of MS Lansdowne.

<sup>3</sup> 75-78: The poor state of the knight's clothes is generally interpreted to indicate his pious anxiety to fulfill a religious duty even before he has had a chance to change his clothes. Jones thinks it simply confirms that the knight was a mercenary who had pawned his armor. *voyage*: MSS have *viage*. *Blessed viage* was the term often used for the holy war of the crusades.

<sup>4</sup> 79-80: A squire learned his future duties as a knight by attending on one. *Bachelor* is another word meaning a young man in training to be a knight.

<sup>5</sup> 87: "And distinguished himself, considering the short time he had been at it."

	Singing he was or fluting all the day.	<i>whistling?</i>
	He was as fresh as is the month of May.	
	Short was his gown with sleeves long and wide.	
	Well could he sit on horse and faire ride.	<i>ride well</i>
95	He couldè songès make and well endite,	<i>write words &amp; music</i>
	Joust and eke dance, and well portray and write.	<i>also / draw</i>
	So hot he lovèd that by nightertale	<i>night(time)</i>
	He slept no more than does a nightingale.	
	Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,	
100	And carved before his father at the table. <sup>1</sup>	

*Knight and Squire are accompanied by their Yeoman. He is noticeably over-armed for a pilgrimage, which indicates probably suspicion of the big city by a man more at home in the forest.*

	A YEOMAN he had and servants no more <sup>2</sup>	
	At that timè, for him listè ridè so,	<i>it pleased him to</i>
	And he was clad in coat and hood of green.	
	A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen	
105	Under his belt he bore full thriftily.	<i>neatly</i>
	Well could he dress his tackle yeomanly—	<i>care for</i>
	His arrows droopèd not with feathers low,	
	And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.	
	A not-head had he with a brown viságe.	<i>cropped head</i>
110	Of woodcraft could he well all the uságe.	<i>knew all the skills</i>
	Upon his arm he bore a gay bracér	<i>elaborate armguard</i>
	And by his side a sword and a bucklér	<i>shield</i>
	And on that other side a gay daggér	<i>fine, splendid</i>
	Harnessed well and sharp as point of spear. <sup>3</sup>	<i>Finely wrought</i>
115	A Christopher on his breast of silver sheen.	<i>St C. medal / bright</i>
	A horn he bore, the baldrick was of green.	<i>cord</i>
	A forester was he soothly as I guess.	<i>truly</i>

*The Prioress is the head of a fashionable convent. She is a charming lady, none the less charming for her slight worldliness: she has a romantic name, Eglantine, wild rose; she has delicate table*

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<sup>1</sup> 100: The table would be occupied at only one side, so when the Squire carved for his father, the Knight, he stood before him across the table.

<sup>2</sup> 101: A servant of middle rank. This one looks after his master's forest land.

<sup>3</sup> 104-114: Why a forester should be so heavily armed on a pilgrimage is not clear.

*manners and is exquisitely sensitive to animal rights; she speaks French -- after a fashion; she has a pretty face and knows it; her nun's habit is elegantly tailored, and she displays discreetly a little tasteful jewelry: a gold brooch on her rosary embossed with the nicely ambiguous Latin motto: Amor Vincit Omnia, Love conquers all.*

	There was also a nun, a Prioress,	<i>head of a convent</i>
	That of her smiling was full simple and coy.	<i>modest</i>
120	Her greatest oath was but by Saint Eloy, <sup>1</sup>	
	And she was clepèd Madame Eglantine.	<i>called</i>
	Full well she sang the servicè divine	
	Entunèd in her nose full seemèly. <sup>2</sup>	
	And French she spoke full fair and fetisly	<i>nicely</i>
125	After the school of Stratford at the Bow,	
	For French of Paris was to her unknow. <sup>3</sup>	
	At meatè well y-taught was she withall:	<i>meals / indeed</i>
	She let no morsel from her lippès fall,	
	Nor wet her fingers in her saucè deep.	
130	Well could she carry a morsel and well keep	<i>handle</i>
	That no drop ne fell upon her breast.	<i>So that</i>
	In courtesy was set full much her lest:	<i>v. much her interest</i>
	Her over lippè wipèd she so clean	<i>upper lip</i>
	That in her cup there was no farthing seen	<i>small stain</i>
135	Of greasè, when she drunkèn had her draught.	
	Full seemèly after her meat she raught,	<i>reached for her food</i>
	And sikerly she was of great desport	<i>certainly / charm</i>
	And full pleasánt and amiable of port,	<i>behavior</i>
	And painèd her to counterfeitè cheer	<i>imitate the manners</i>
140	Of court, <sup>4</sup> and be estately of mannér,	
	And to be holden digne of reverence.	<i>thought worthy</i>

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<sup>1</sup> 120: The joke that presumably lurks in this line is not explained by the usual annotation that St. Eloy (or Loy or Eligius) was a patron saint of goldsmiths and of carters.

<sup>2</sup> 123: Another joke presumably, but again not adequately explained.

<sup>3</sup> 126: This is a snigger at the provincial quality of the lady's French, acquired in a London suburb, not in Paris. Everything about the prioress is meant to suggest affected elegance of a kind not especially appropriate in a nun: her facial features, her manners, her jewelry, her French, her clothes, her name. *Eglantine* = "wild rose" or "sweet briar." *Madame* = "my lady."

<sup>4</sup> 139-40: She took pains to imitate the manners of the (king's) court.

*She is very sensitive*

	But for to speaken of her consciënce:	<i>sensitivity</i>
	She was so charitable and so pitóus	<i>moved to pity</i>
	She wouldè weep if that she saw a mouse	
145	Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled.	
	Of smallè houndès had she that she fed	
	With roasted flesh or milk and wastel bread,	<i>fine bread</i>
	But sore wept she if one of them were dead	
	Or if men smote it with a yardè, smart;	<i>a stick smartly</i>
150	And all was consciënce and tender heart.	

*Her personal appearance*

	Full seemèly her wimple pinchèd was,	<i>headdress pleated</i>
	Her nose tretis, her eyen grey as glass,	<i>handsome / eyes</i>
	Her mouth full small and thereto soft and red,	<i>and also</i>
	But sikerly she had a fair forehead.	<i>certainly</i>
155	It was almost a spannè broad, I trow,	<i>handsbreadth / I guess</i>
	For hardily she was not undergrow.	<i>certainly / short? thin?</i>
	Full fetis was her cloak as I was 'ware.	<i>elegant / aware</i>
	Of small coral about her arm she bare	<i>bore, carried</i>
	A pair of beads gauded all with green,	<i>A rosary decorated</i>
160	And thereon hung a brooch of gold full sheen	<i>shining</i>
	On which was written first a crownèd A	
	And after: Amor Vincit Omnia. <sup>1</sup>	<i>Love Conquers All</i>

*Her traveling companions*

	Another Nunnè with her haddè she	<i>nun</i>
	That was her chapèlain, and priestès three. <sup>2</sup>	<i>companion</i>

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<sup>1</sup> 161-2: The gold brooch on her rosary had a capital "A" with a crown above it, and a Latin motto meaning "Love conquers all," a phrase appropriate to both sacred and secular love. It occurs in a French poem that Chaucer knew well, *The Romance of the Rose* (21327-32), where Courteoisie quotes it from Virgil's *Eclogue X*, 69, to justify the plucking of the Rose by the Lover, a decidedly secular, indeed sexual, act of "Amor".

<sup>2</sup> 164: The Prioress's traveling companion is called, confusingly, her chaplain. The priests are employees of the Prioress's well-to-do convent. Even in a market flooded with priests, bringing three along on the pilgrimage would be a display of celibate feminism and of conspicuous consumption as marked as the Prioress's jewelry and her choice of dog food. However, many scholars think that the words "and priests three" were inserted by a scribe.



*Another member of the church is the **Monk** who, like the Prioress, is supposed to stay in his monastery but who, like her, finds an excuse to get away from it, something he does a lot. He has long since lost any of the monastic ideals he may have set out with, and he now prefers travel, good clothes, good food, good hunting with well-equipped horses, in place of the poverty, study and manual labor prescribed by his monastic rule. He may not be a bad man, but he is not a good monk.*

165	A MONK there was, a fair for the mastery, An outrider that lovèd venery. <sup>1</sup> A manly man to be an abbot able, Full many a dainty horse had he in stable, And when he rode, men might his bridle hear	<i>a very fine fellow horseman / hunting</i>
170	Jingle in a whistling wind as clear And eke as loud as does the chapel bell There as this lord is keeper of the cell. <sup>2</sup> The rule of Saint Maur or of Saint Bennett Because that it was old and somedeal strait	<i>And also Where / annex [monastic] rule somewhat strict</i>
175	This ilké monk let oldè thingès pass And held after the newè world the space. He gave not of that text a pullèd hen That says that hunters be not holy men Nor that a monk, when he is reckless,	<i>This same / go modern ways now plucked careless of rules</i>
180	Is likened to a fish that's waterless, That is to say, a monk out of his cloister. But thilkè text held he not worth an oyster.	<i>monastery this saying he thought</i>

*The poet pretends to agree with his lax views*

	And I said his opiniõn was good; What! Should he study and make himselfen wood	<i>I = narrator himself mad</i>
185	Upon a book in cloister always to pore? Or swinken with his handès and labóur As Austin bids? How shall the world be served?	<i>or work St Augustine</i>

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Three priests would make the number of pilgrims 31 not 29, and only one is heard from again, in the *Nun's Priests Tale*.

<sup>1</sup> 166: *venery*: both "hunting" and the work of Venus, goddess of love. This description of the Monk is larded with sexual innuendo.

<sup>2</sup> 172: The lordly monk is in charge of an annex (*cell*) of the monastery.

Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.<sup>1</sup>

*His taste in sport and clothes*

	Therefore he was a prickasour aright.	<i>hunter, for sure</i>
190	Greyhounds he had as swift as fowl in flight.	
	Of pricking and of hunting for the hare	<i>tracking</i>
	Was all his lust, for no cost would he spare.	<i>his passion</i>
	I saw his sleevès purfled at the hand	<i>edged at the wrist</i>
	With gris, and that the finest of the land,	<i>fur</i>
195	And for to fasten his hood under his chin	
	He had of gold y-wrought a full curious pin —	<i>very elaborate</i>
	A love knot on the greater end there was.	

*His physical appearance*

	His head was bald, that shone as any glass	
	And eke his face, as he had been anoint.	<i>also / as if oiled</i>
200	He was a lord full fat and in good point,	<i>in good health</i>
	His eyen steep and rolling in his head	<i>eyes prominent</i>
	That steamèd as a furnace of a lead,	<i>lead furnace</i>
	His boots supple, his horse in great estate.	<i>in great shape</i>
	Now certainly he was a fair prelate.	<i>a fine cleric</i>
205	He was not pale as is a forpined ghost.	<i>tortured</i>
	A fat swan loved he best of any roast.	
	His palfrey was as brown as any berry.	<i>horse</i>

*The Friar, another cleric, is even less a man of God than the Monk. A member of a mendicant order of men who lived on what they could get by begging, he has become a professional fundraiser, the best in his friary because of some special skills: personal charm, a good singing voice, an attractive little lisp, a talent for mending quarrels and having the right little gift for the ladies, and a forgiving way in the confessional especially when he expects a generous donation. He can find good economic reasons to cultivate the company of the rich rather than the poor.*

A FRIAR there was, a wanton and a merry,	<i>lively</i>
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<sup>1</sup> 188: "Let Augustine keep his work." An unbecoming way for a monk to speak of the great saint whose rule, like that of St. Maurus and St. Benedict (*Maur and Bennett*, 173) prescribed study and physical labor for monks.

	A limiter, a full solémpné man. <sup>1</sup>	<i>licensed beggar / v. impressive</i>
210	In all the orders four is none that can So much of dalliance and fair language. He had made full many a marriage Of youngè women at his ownè cost. <sup>2</sup> Unto his order he was a noble post.	<i>knows</i> <i>smooth manners</i>  <i>pillar</i>
215	Full well beloved and familiar was he With franklins over all in his country, And eke with worthy women of the town, For he had power of confession, As said himself, more than a curate,	<i>landowners</i> <i>And also</i>  <i>parish priest</i>
220	For of his order he was licentiate. <sup>3</sup>	<i>licensed</i>

*His manner in the confessional*

	Full sweetely heard he confession And pleasant was his absolution. He was an easy man to give penánce There as he wist to have a good pittánce,	<i>expected / offering</i>
225	For unto a poor order for to give Is signè that a man is well y-shrive, For if he gave, he durstè make avaunt He wistè that a man was répentant, <sup>4</sup> For many a man so hard is of his heart,	<i>confessed</i> <i>dared / boast</i> <i>knew</i>
230	He may not weep though that he sorè smart. Therefore, instead of weeping and [of] prayers Men may give silver to the poorè freres.	<i>it hurt him sharply</i>  <i>friars</i>

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<sup>1</sup> 208-9: A Friar (Fr. *frère*) was a member of one of four religious orders of men. Some were "mendicants," who depended on what they could get by begging. Our friar, a *limiter*, has a begging district within which he must stay. "Solempne" cannot mean *solemn* except as heavy irony. See l. 274

<sup>2</sup> 212-13: He had provided dowries for many young women, or he had performed the marriage ceremonies without a fee.

<sup>3</sup> 218-220: Sometimes the pope or bishop would reserve to himself or to a special delegate (*licenciate*) the right to hear the confessions of prominent public sinners, guilty of particularly heinous offences. This would have no relevance to the ordinary confession-goer, for whom the Friar had no more "power of confession" than the *curate* or *parson*.

<sup>4</sup> 227-8: "For if he (the penitent) gave (an offering), he (the Friar) would dare to say that he knew the man was truly repentant."

*His largess, his talents, and the company he cultivated*

	His tipet was ay farsèd full of knives	<i>hood was always packed</i>
	And pinnès for to given fairè wives.	<i>pretty</i>
235	And certainly he had a merry note—	
	Well could he sing and playen on a rote.	<i>stringed instrument</i>
	Of yeddings he bore utterly the prize.	<i>ballad songs</i>
	His neck was white as is the fleur de lys;	<i>lily</i>
	Thereto he strong was as a champion.	<i>But also / fighter</i>
240	He knew the taverns well in every town	
	And every hosteler and tappester	<i>innkeeper &amp; barmaid</i>
	Bet than a lazar or a beggester, <sup>1</sup>	<i>Better / leper or beggar</i>
	For unto such a worthy man as he	
	Accorded not as by his faculty	<i>Didn't suit his rank</i>
245	To have with sickè lazars ácquaintance.	<i>lepers</i>
	It is not honest, it may not advance	<i>proper / profit</i>
	For to dealen with no such poraille,	<i>poor people</i>
	But all with rich and sellers of vitaille.	<i>food</i>
	And overall there as profit should arise,	<i>everywhere that</i>
250	Courteous he was and lowly of service;	<i>humbly useful</i>

*His begging manner was so smooth he could, if necessary, extract money from the poorest*

	There was no man nowhere so virtuous. <sup>2</sup>	
	He was the bestè beggar in his house	
252a	And gave a certain farmè for the grant. <sup>3</sup>	
252b	None of his brethren came there in his haunt.	<i>district</i>
	For though a widow hadde not a shoe,	
	So pleasant was his "In Principio"	<i>his blessing</i>
255	Yet he would have a farthing ere he went.	<i>1/4 of a penny</i>
	His purchase was well better than his rent. <sup>4</sup>	

<sup>1</sup> 241-2: "Tapster, beggester": the "-ster" ending signified, strictly, a female. It survives (barely) in "spinster."

<sup>2</sup> 251: The meaning of *virtuous* ("obliging? effective?") would seem to depend on whether one takes 251 with the preceding or the following line.

<sup>3</sup> 252a: He had paid a certain fee (farm<sup>1</sup>) for the monopoly (*grant*) of begging in his district ('haunt'). The couplet 252 a-b occurs only in MS Hengwrt of the *Six Text*.

<sup>4</sup> 256: His income from the begging was much larger than his outlay for the monopoly.

*And he had other talents and attractions*

	And rage he could as it were right a whelp.	<i>frolic like a puppy</i>
	In lovèdays there could he muchel help,	<i>mediation days</i>
	For there he was not like a cloisterer <sup>1</sup>	
260	With a threadbare cope as is a poorè scholar,	<i>cloak</i>
	But he was like a master or a pope. <sup>2</sup>	
	Of double worsted was his semi-cope,	<i>short cloak</i>
	And rounded as a bell out of the press.	<i>the mold</i>
	Somewhat he lispèd for his wantonness	<i>affectation</i>
265	To make his English sweet upon his tongue,	
	And in his harping when that he had sung,	
	His eyen twinkled in his head aright	<i>eyes</i>
	As do the starrès in the frosty night.	<i>stars</i>
	This worthy limiter was clept Huberd.	<i>was called</i>

*The Merchant is apparently a prosperous exporter who likes to TALK of his prosperity; he is concerned about pirates and profits, skillful in managing exchange rates, but tightlipped about business details.*

270	A MERCHANT was there with a forkèd beard,	
	In motley, <sup>3</sup> and high on horse he sat,	
	Upon his head a Flandrish beaver hat,	<i>from Flanders</i>
	His boots claspèd fair and fetisly.	<i>neatly</i>
	His reasons he spoke full solémpnely,	<i>solemnly</i>
275	Sounding always the increase of his winning.	<i>profits</i>
	He would the sea were kept for anything	<i>he wished</i>
	Betwixt Middleburgh and Orèwell. <sup>4</sup>	
	Well could he in Exchangé shieldès sell. <sup>5</sup>	<i>currency</i>

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<sup>1</sup> 259: *cloisterer*: probably a "real" friar who stayed largely within his cloister, satisfied with poor clothes according to his vow of poverty.

<sup>2</sup> 261: *master*: possibly Master of Arts, a rather more eminent degree than it is now, though hardly making its holder as exalted as the pope.

<sup>3</sup> 271: (dressed in) *motley*: probably not the loud mixed colors of the jester, but possibly tweed.

<sup>4</sup> 276-7: "He wished above all that the stretch of sea between Middleburgh (in Flanders) and Orwell (in England) were guarded (*kept*) against pirates."

<sup>5</sup> 278: He knew the intricacies of foreign exchange. Scholars have charged the Merchant with gold smuggling or even coin clipping; but although *shields* were units of money, they were neither gold nor coins.

280	This worthy man full well his wit beset — There wistè no wight that he was in debt, So stately was he of his governance With his bargains and with his chevissance. Forsooth he was a worthy man withal, But sooth to say, I n'ot how men him call.	<i>used his brains          no person knew          management          money dealings          Truly / indeed          truth I don't know</i>
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*The Clerk is the first admirable church member we meet on the pilgrimage. "Clerk" meant a number of related things: a cleric, a student, a scholar. This clerk is all three, devoted to the love of learning and of God, the quintessential scholar, who would rather buy a book than a coat or a good meal, totally unworldly.*

285	A CLERK there was of Oxenford also That unto logic haddè long y-go. <sup>1</sup> As leanè was his horse as is a rake, And he was not right fat, I undertake, But lookèd hollow, and thereto soberly.	<i>Oxford          gone            he=the Clerk          gaunt &amp; also</i>
290	Full threadbare was his overest courtepy, For he had gotten him yet no benefice Nor was so worldly for to have office, For him was lever have at his bed's head Twenty bookès clad in black or red	<i>outer cloak          parish          secular job          For he would rather          bound</i>
295	Of Aristotle and his philosophy Than robès rich or fiddle or gay psalt'ry. But albeit that he was a philosopher, Yet haddè he but little gold in coffer, <sup>2</sup> But all that he might of his friendès hent	<i>stringed instrument          although          chest          get</i>
300	On bookès and on learning he it spent, And busily gan for the soulès pray Of them that gave him wherewith to scholay. Of study took he most care and most heed. Not one word spoke he morè than was need,	<i>regularly prayed for          study</i>

---

<sup>1</sup> 285-6: He had long since set out to study logic, part of the *trivium* or lower section of the university syllabus (the other two parts were rhetoric and grammar); hence his early college years had long since passed. *y-go* (gone) is the past participle of "go."

<sup>2</sup> 298: A joke. Although he was a student of philosophy, he had not discovered the "philosopher's stone," which was supposed to turn base metals into gold. The two senses of "philosopher" played on here are: a) student of the work of Aristotle b) student of science ("natural philosophy"), a meaning which shaded off into "alchemist, magician."

305 And that was spoke in form and reverence,  
 And short and quick and full of high sentence. *lofty thought*  
 Sounding in moral virtue was his speech,  
 And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.

*The Sergeant of the Law is a successful but unostentatious, high-ranking lawyer who sometimes functions as a judge. We are told with just a touch of irony, that he is, like many of the pilgrims, the very best at what he does, a busy man, but "yet he seemèd busier than he was."*

A SERGEANT of the law, wary and wise *A ranking lawyer*  
 310 That often haddè been at the Parvise *lawyer's meeting place*  
 There was also, full rich of excellence.  
 Discreet he was and of great reverence;  
 He seemèd such, his wordès were so wise.  
 Justice he was full often in assize *judge / circuit court*  
 315 By patent and by plain commission.<sup>1</sup>  
 For his sciéncé and for his high renown *knowledge*  
 Of fees and robès had he many a one.  
 So great a purchaser was nowhere none; *easy money (pun)*  
 All was fee simple to him in effect. *faulted*  
 320 His purchasíngé might not be infect. *=ne was=was not*  
 Nowhere so busy a man as he there n'as,  
 And yet he seemèd busier than he was.  
 In termès had he case and doomès all *In books / judgements*  
 That from the time of King William were fall. *W. the Conqueror / handed down*  
 325 Thereto he could endite and make a thing; *Also / draw up*  
 There couldè no wight pinch at his writing.<sup>2</sup> *no person c. complain*  
 And every statute could he plein by rote. *knew completely by heart*  
 He rode but homely in a medley coat *simply / tweed?*  
 Girt with a ceint of silk with barrès small. *bound w. a belt / stripes*  
 330 Of his array tell I no longer tale.

*The Lawyer is accompanied by his friend, the **Franklin**, a prosperous country gentleman, prominent in his county. He is a generous extroverted man ("sanguine" the text says) who likes good food and drink and sharing them with others, somewhat like St Julian, the patron saint of hospitality*

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<sup>1</sup> 315: *patent / plain commission*: technical terms meaning by royal appointment.

<sup>2</sup> 326: "Nobody could fault any document he had drawn up" (*endited*). Clearly line 327 is a deliberate exaggeration.

	A FRANKELIN was in his company.	<i>rich landowner</i>
	White was his beard as is the daisy.	
	Of his complexion he was sanguine. <sup>1</sup>	<i>ruddy &amp; cheerful</i>
	Well loved he by the morrow a sop in wine.	<i>in the a.m.</i>
335	To livèn in delight was ever his wont,	<i>custom</i>
	For he was Epicurus's own son	
	That held opiniõn that plain delight	<i>total pleasure</i>
	Was very felicity perfite. <sup>2</sup>	<i>truly perfect happiness</i>
	A householder and that a great was he;	
340	Saint Julian he was in his country. <sup>3</sup>	
	His bread, his ale, was always after one.	<i>of one kind i.e. good</i>
	A better envinèd man was never none.	<i>with better wine cellar</i>
	Withouten bakèd meat was never his house	<i>meat = food</i>
	Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous	
345	It snowèd in his house of meat and drink	<i>food</i>
	Of allè dainties that men could bethink.	
	After the sundry seasons of the year	<i>According to</i>
	So changèd he his meat and his supper.	
	Full many a fat partridge had he in mew	<i>in a cage</i>
350	And many a bream and many a luce in stew.	<i>fish in pond</i>
	Woe was his cook but if his saucè were	
	Poignant and sharp, and ready all his gear. <sup>4</sup>	<i>tangy</i>
	His table dormant in his hall always	<i>set / always</i>
	Stood ready covered all the longè day.	
355	At sessions there was he lord and sire.	<i>law sessions</i>
	Full often time he was knight of the shire.	<i>member of Parliament</i>
	An anlace and a gipser all of silk	<i>dagger &amp; purse</i>
	Hung at his girdle white as morning milk.	
	A sherriff had he been, and a counter.	<i>tax overseer</i>
360	Was nowhere such a worthy vavasour. <sup>5</sup>	<i>gentleman</i>

---

<sup>1</sup> 333: *Complexion ... sanguine* probably means (1) he had a ruddy face and (2) he was of "sanguine humor" i.e. outgoing and optimistic because of the predominance of blood in his system. See ENDPAPERS: Humor

<sup>2</sup> 336-8: Epicurus was supposed, rightly or wrongly, to have taught that utmost pleasure was the greatest good (hence "epicure").

<sup>3</sup> 340: St Julian was the patron saint of hospitality

<sup>4</sup> 351-2: His cook would regret it if his sauce was not pungent and sharp ....

<sup>5</sup> 359-60: *sherriff*: "shire reeve," King's representative in a county. *counter*: overseer of taxes for the treasury. *vavasour*: wealthy gentleman, possibly also a family name.



*Somewhat lower in the social scale is a bevy of **Skilled Tradesmen** most of them connected with the fabric trades and belonging to a guild, a "fraternity". Their prosperity shows in their clothes, and their accouterments and the fact that they have brought their own cook, perhaps to replace the skills of the ambitious wives they have left at home.*

	A HABERDASHER and a CARPENTER, <sup>1</sup>	
	A WEBBER, a DYER and a TAPISER	
	And they were clothed all in one livery	<i>uniform</i>
	Of a solemn and a great fraternity.	<i>guild</i>
365	Full fresh and new their gear apikèd was:	<i>burnished</i>
	Their knives werè chapèd not with brass	<i>finished</i>
	But all with silver; wrought full clean and well	<i>made</i>
	Their girdles and their pouches everydeal.	<i>belts / every bit</i>
	Well seemèd each of them a fair burgess	<i>citizen</i>
370	To sitten in a Guildhall on a dais.	<i>[in City Council] / platform</i>
	Ever each for the wisdom that he can	<i>Every one / had</i>
	Was shapely for to be an alderman,	<i>fit to be councilman</i>
	For chattels haddè they enough and rent,	<i>property / income</i>
	And eke their wivès would it well assent	<i>also / agree</i>
375	And elsè certainly they were to blame:	<i>would be</i>
	It is full fair to be y-cleped "Madame,"	<i>called "My Lady"</i>
	And go to vigils all before	<i>evening services</i>
	And have a mantle royally y-bore.	<i>carried</i>

*They have a great chef with a gorge-raising affliction*

	A COOK they haddè with them for the nones	<i>the occasion</i>
380	To boil the chickens and the marrow bones	
	And powder merchant tart, and galingale.	<i>[names of spices]</i>
	Well could he know a draught of London ale.	
	He couldè roast and seeth and broil and fry	<i>simmer</i>

---

<sup>1</sup> 361-64: Haberdasher: a dealer in items of clothing and notions; Webber: weaver; Dyer: a dyer of cloth; Tapiser: tapestry maker--all connected with the cloth business. Since the Carpenter is a member of their "fraternity," but not of their trade group, commentators say that theirs was not a trade guild but a parish guild, with its own livery or uniform. Perhaps "Carpeter" was meant, although all MSS of *Six-Text* read "Carpenter" and there is no entry for "Carpeter" in *MED*.



From Gothland to the Cape of Finisterre  
 And every creek in Brittany and Spain.  
 410 His barge y-clepèd was the *Maudèlain*. *ship was called*

*The medical **Doctor** is also the best in his profession, and though his practice, typical of the period, sounds to us more like astrology and magic than medicine, he makes a good living at it.*

With us there was a DOCTOR of PHYSIC. *medicine*  
 In all this world ne was there none him like  
 To speak of physic and of surgery,  
 For he was grounded in astronomy:<sup>1</sup> *astrology*  
 415 He kept his patiēt a full great deal  
 In hours, by his magic natural.<sup>2</sup>  
 Well could he fórtunen the áscendent  
 Of his imáges for his patient.  
 He knew the cause of every malady  
 420 Were it of hot or cold or moist or dry  
 And where engendered and of what humor. *See Endpapers*  
 He was a very perfect practiser.  
 The cause y-know, and of his harm the root,<sup>3</sup> *known / source*  
 Anon he gave the sickè man his boote. *medicine, cure*

*His connections with the druggists*

425 Full ready had he his apothecaries *druggists*  
 To send him drugs and his letuaries, *medicines*  
 For each of them made other for to win;  
 Their friendship was not newè to begin.<sup>4</sup> *to profit*  
 Well knew he the old Esculapius  
 430 And Dioscorides and eke Rusus,<sup>5</sup> *also*

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<sup>1</sup> 414: *Astronomy* = astrology. Medieval medicine was less the practice of an applied science than of *magic natural* (white magic) including astrology.

<sup>2</sup> 415-18: These four lines are hard to render except by paraphrase: he treated his patient by "white magic" and he knew how to cast horoscopes and calculate astronomically the best hours to treat his patient.

<sup>3</sup> 423: "When the cause and root of his illness were diagnosed".

<sup>4</sup> 428: They were old colleagues.

<sup>5</sup> 429-434: This list of classical, Arabic and other medieval authorities on medicine functions somewhat like

Old Hippocras, Hali and Galen  
 Serapion, Rasis and Avicen,  
 Averrois, Damascene and Constantine,  
 Bernard and Gatesden and Gilbertine.

*His personal habits; his appearance*

435	Of his diet measurable was he For it was of no superfluity But of great nourishing and digestible. His study was but little on the Bible. <sup>1</sup>	moderate excess
440	In sanguine and in perse he clad was all Linèd with taffeta and with sendall, And yet he was but easy of dispense. He keptè what he won in pestilence. For gold in physic is a cordial, Therefore he lovèd gold in special. <sup>2</sup>	In red & blue silk thrifty spender during plague Because

*(Wife of Bath's portrait begins on next page)*

---

the list of the knight's battles, a deliberate exaggeration; here the result is mildly comic, intentionally.

<sup>1</sup> 438: Physicians were sometimes thought to tend towards atheism. Perhaps the rhyme here was just very French. Or was meant to be comic; it could work in modern English if so regarded, with "digestible" pronounced exaggeratedly to rime fully with modern "Bible."

<sup>2</sup> 443-4: A pun. Gold was used in some medications (*physic*); but *physic* is also the *practice* of medicine at which much gold can be made, especially in time of plague (*pestilence*), and that is good for the heart (*cordial*).

*In the **Wife of Bath** we have one of only three women on the pilgrimage. Unlike the other two she is not a nun, but a much-married woman, a widow yet again. Everything about her is large to the point of exaggeration: she has been married five times, has been to Jerusalem three times and her hat and hips are as large as her sexual appetite and her love of talk.*

445	A good WIFE was there of besidè Bath	<i>near</i>
	But she was somedeal deaf, and that was scath.	<i>somewhat d. / a pity</i>
	Of clothmaking she haddè such a haunt	<i>skill</i>
	She passèd them of Ypres and of Gaunt. <sup>1</sup>	<i>surpassed</i>
	In all the parish, wife ne was there none	
450	That to the offering before her shouldè gon. <sup>2</sup>	<i>go</i>
	And if there did, certain so wroth was she	
	That she was out of allè charity.	<i>patience</i>
	Her coverchiefs full finè were of ground;	<i>finely woven</i>
	I durstè swear they weighèdèn ten pound	<i>I dare</i>
455	That on a Sunday were upon her head.	
	Her hosèn werèn of fine scarlet red	<i>her stockings were</i>
	Full straight y-tied, and shoes full moist and new.	<i>supple</i>
	Bold was her face and fair and red of hue.	<i>color</i>
	She was a worthy woman all her life.	
460	Husbands at churchè door she had had five, <sup>3</sup>	
	Withoutèn other company in youth,	<i>not counting</i>
	But thereof needeth not to speak as nouth.	<i>now</i>
	And thrice had she been at Jerusalem.	<i>3 times</i>
	She had passèd many a strangè stream.	<i>many a foreign</i>
465	At Romè she had been and at Boulogne,	
	In Galicia at St James and at Cologne.	<i>[famous shrines]</i>

(cont'd)

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<sup>1</sup> 448: Ypres, Ghent (Gaunt): Famous cloth-making towns across the English Channel.

<sup>2</sup> 449-452: There was no woman in the whole parish who dared to get ahead of her in the line to make their offering (in church). If anyone did, she was so angry that she had no charity (or patience) left.

<sup>3</sup> 460: Weddings took place in the church porch, followed by Mass inside.

	She couldè much of wandering by the way. <sup>1</sup>	<i>knew much</i>
	Gat-toothèd was she, soothly for to say.	<i>Gap-toothed / truly</i>
	Upon an ambler easily she sat	<i>slow horse</i>
470	Y-wimpled well, <sup>2</sup> and on her head a hat	
	As broad as is a buckler or a targe,	<i>kinds of shield</i>
	A foot mantle about her hippes large,	<i>outer skirt</i>
	And on her feet a pair of spurs sharp.	
	In fellowship well could she laugh and carp.	<i>joke</i>
475	Of remedies of love she knew perchance	<i>by experience</i>
	For she could of that art the oldè dance. <sup>3</sup>	<i>she knew</i>

*The second good cleric we meet is more than good; he is near perfection. The priest of a small, obscure and poor parish in the country. He has not forgotten the lowly class from which he came. Unlike most of the other pilgrims, he is not physically described, perhaps because he is such an ideal figure.*

	A good man was there of Religïon	
	And was a poorè PARSON of a town,	<i>parish priest</i>
	But rich he was of holy thought and work.	
480	He was also a learnèd man, a clerk,	<i>a scholar</i>
	That Christè's gospel truly wouldè preach.	
	His parishens devoutly would he teach.	<i>parishioners</i>
	Benign he was and wonder diligent	<i>wonderfully</i>
	And in adversity full patient,	
485	And such he was y-provèd often sithes.	<i>times</i>
	Full loath was he to cursèn for his tithes <sup>4</sup>	
	But rather would he givèn out of doubt	
	Unto his poor parishioners about	
	Of his offering and eke of his substance.	<i>also / possessions</i>
490	He could in little thing have suffisance.	<i>enough</i>

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<sup>1</sup> 467: "She knew plenty about travelling". Chaucer does not explain, and the reader is probably not expected to ask, how the Wife managed to marry five husbands and be a renowned maker of cloth while taking in pilgrimage as a kind of third occupation. Going to Jerusalem from England *three* times was an extraordinary feat in the Middle Ages. This list is, like some of those already encountered, a deliberate exaggeration, as is everything else about the Wife.

<sup>2</sup> 470: A wimple was a woman's cloth headgear covering the ears, the neck and the chin.

<sup>3</sup> 476: She was an old hand at this game.

<sup>4</sup> 486: "He was very reluctant to excommunicate a parishioner for not paying tithes," i.e. the tenth part of one's income due to the Church.

*He ministers to his flock without any worldly ambition*

Wide was his parish and houses far asunder  
 But he ne leftè not, for rain nor thunder *did not fail*  
 In sickness nor in mischief, to visit  
 The furthest in his parish, much and little, *rich and poor*  
 495 Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave. *stick*  
 This noble example unto his sheep he gave  
 That first he wrought and afterwards he taught: *practiced*  
 Out of the gospel he those wordès caught  
 And this figúre he added eke thereto: *saying*  
 500 "That if gold rustè, what shall iron do?"  
 For if a priest be foul (in whom we trust)  
 No wonder is a lewèd man to rust *layman*  
 And shame it is, if that a priest take keep, *thinks about it*  
 A shitèn shepherd and a cleanè sheep. *a dirty*

*He sets a good example and practises what he preaches*

505 Well ought a priest example for to give  
 By his cleanness, how that his sheep should live.  
 He sette not his benefice to hire *his parish*  
 And let his sheep encumbred in the mire *left (not)*  
 And ran to London unto Saintè Paul's *ran (not)*  
 510 To seekèn him a chantèry for souls  
 Or with a brotherhood to be withhold,<sup>1</sup> *hired*  
 But dwelt at home, and keptè well his fold,  
 So that the wolf ne made it not miscarry;  
 He was a shepherd and not a mercenary.  
 515 And though he holy were and virtuous,  
 He was to sinful men not despitous *contemptuous*  
 Nor of his speechè daungerous nor digne, *cold nor haughty*  
 But in his teaching díscreet and benign.  
 To drawèn folk to heaven with fairness  
 520 By good example, this was his business.

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<sup>1</sup> 507-12: The "not" that goes with "set" also goes with "let" and "ran" (508-9). It was not uncommon for a priest in a parish in the country to rent the parish to a poorer priest, and take off to London to look for a better job, like saying mass every day for people who had died leaving money in their wills for that purpose (*chantries for souls*), or doing the light spiritual work for a brotherhood or fraternity of the kind to which the guildsmen belonged (see above 361-4). Our parson did not do this, but stayed in his parish and looked after his parishioners (*sheep, fold*) like a good shepherd.

	But it were any person obstinate,	<i>But if</i>
	What so he were of high or low estate,	<i>Whether</i>
	Him would he snibben sharply for the nonès.	<i>rebuke / occasion</i>
	A better priest I trow there nowhere none is.	<i>I guess</i>
525	He waited after no pomp and reverence	<i>did not expect</i>
	Nor makèd him a spicèd conscience,	<i>oversubtle</i>
	But Christ's lore, and his apostles' twelve	<i>teaching</i>
	He taught, but first he followed it himself. <sup>1</sup>	

*His brother, the **Plowman**, probably the lowest in social rank on the pilgrimage is one of the highest in spirituality, the perfect lay Christian, the secular counterpart of his cleric brother.*

	With him there was a PLOUGHMAN was his brother	<i>who was</i>
530	That had y-laid of dung full many a fodder.	<i>spread / a load</i>
	A true swinker and a good was he,	<i>worker</i>
	Living in peace and perfect charity.	
	God loved he best with all his wholè heart	
	At allè timès, though him gamed or smart,	<i>pleased or hurt him</i>
535	And then his neighèbour right as himself.	
	He wouldè thresh, and thereto dike and delve	<i>ditch &amp; dig</i>
	For Christè's sake, with every poorè wight	<i>person</i>
	Withoutèn hire, if it lay in his might.	<i>Without pay</i>
	His tithès payèd he full fair and well	<i>10% of income</i>
540	Both of his proper swink and his chattel. <sup>2</sup>	
	In a tabard he rode upon a mare.	<i>smock</i>

*We now come to a group of rogues and churls with whom the poet amusingly lumps himself.  
You may well ask what some of these people are doing on a **pilgrimage**.*

There was also a REEVE and a MILLÉR  
A SUMMONER and a PARDONER also,  
A MANCIPLÉ and myself, there were no more.

*The **Miller** is a miller of other people's grain, who does not always give honest weight. He is a big, brawny, crude man whose idea of fun is smashing doors down with his head or telling vulgar stories.*

---

<sup>1</sup> 527-8: "He taught Christ's doctrine and that of His twelve apostles, but first he practised it himself."

<sup>2</sup> 540: The phrase seems to mean "from the wages for his work (*swink*), and the value of his property (*chattel*)" or possibly that he paid his tithes to the church partly in work, partly in kind.



545	The MILLER was a stout carl for the nones. Full big he was of brawn and eke of bones That provèd well, for over all there he came At wrestling he would have always the ram. He was short-shouldered, broad, a thickè knarre.	<i>strong fellow &amp; also wherever prize rugged fellow</i>
550	There was no door that he n'ould heave off harre <sup>1</sup> Or break it at a running with his head. His beard as any sow or fox was red, And thereto broad as though it were a spade.	<i>And also tip</i>
555	A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs Red as the bristles of a sowè's ears. His nostrils blackè were and wide. A sword and buckler bore he by his side.	<i>shield</i>
560	He was a jangler and a goliardese And that was most of sin and harlotries. Well could he stealen corn and tollèn thrice, And yet he had a thumb of gold pardee. <sup>2</sup> A white coat and a blue hood wearèd he.	<i>talker &amp; joker dirty talk take triple toll by God</i>
565	A bagpipe well could he blow and sound And therewithal he brought us out of town.	<i>with that</i>

*The Manciple is in charge of buying provisions for a group of Lawyers in London, but is shrewder in his management than all of them put together.*

570	A gentle MANCIPIE was there of a temple <sup>3</sup> Of which achatours mightè take example For to be wise in buying of vitaille; For whether that he paid or took by taille Algate he waited so in his achate	<i>buyers victuals, food by tally, on credit Always / buying</i>
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<sup>1</sup> 550: "There was no door that he could not heave off its hinges (*harre*)."

<sup>2</sup> 563: A phrase hard to explain. It is sometimes said to allude to a saying that an honest miller had a thumb of gold, i.e. there is no such thing as an honest miller. But the phrase "And yet" after the information that the miller is a thief, would seem to preclude that meaning, or another that has been suggested: his thumb, held on the weighing scale, produced gold.

<sup>3</sup> 567: A manciple was a buying agent for a college or, as here, for one of the Inns of Court, the Temple, an association of lawyers, once the home of the Knights Templar. Clearly the meaning of the word "gentle" here as with the Pardoner later, has nothing to do with good breeding or "gentle" birth. Presumably it does not mean "gentle" in our sense either. Its connotations are hard to be sure of. See "ENDPAPERS."

	That he was aye before and in good state.	<i>always ahead</i>
	Now is not that of God a full great grace	
	That such a lewèd manne's wit shall pass	<i>uneducated / brains</i>
575	The wisdom of a heap of learned men?	
	Of masters had he more than thricè ten	<i>more than thirty</i>
	That were of law expért and curious	<i>skilled</i>
	Of which there were a dozen in that house	
	Worthy to be stewardès of rent and land	
580	Of any lord that is in Engéland	
	To make him livè by his proper good	<i>on his own income</i>
	In honor debtless, but if he were wood,	<i>unless he was mad</i>
	Or live as scarcely as him list desire; <sup>1</sup>	<i>frugally as he wished</i>
	And able for to helpèn all a shire	<i>capable / county</i>
585	In any case that mightè fall or hap.	<i>befall or happen</i>
	And yet this manciple set their aller cap.	<i>fooled all of them</i>

*The Reeve is the shrewd manager of a country estate. Old and suspicious, he is also a choleric man, that is he has a short temper that matches his skinny frame.*

	The REEVÈ was a slender, choleric man. <sup>2</sup>	<i>irritable</i>
	His beard was shaved as nigh as ever he can.	<i>as close</i>
	His hair was by his ears full round y-shorn,	<i>shorn, cut</i>
590	His top was dockèd like a priest befor.	<i>shaved / in front</i>
	Full longè were his leggès and full lean	
	Y-like a staff; there was no calf y-seen.	
	Well could he keep a garner and a bin;	<i>granary</i>
	There was no auditor could on him win.	<i>fault him</i>
595	Well wist he by the drought and by the rain	<i>knew he</i>
	The yielding of his seed and of his grain.	
	His lordè's sheep, his neat, his dairy,	<i>cattle</i>
	His swine, his horse, his store and his poultry	<i>"horse" is plur.</i>
	Was wholly in this Reeve's governing,	
600	And by his covenant gave the reckoning	<i>contract / account</i>
	Since that his lord was twenty years of age.	
	There could no man bring him in árrearáge.	<i>find / in arrears</i>
	There was no bailiff, herd nor other hine	<i>herdsman or worker</i>

<sup>1</sup> 576-583: He worked for more than thirty learned lawyers, at least a dozen of whom could manage the legal and financial affairs of any lord in England, and who could show him how to live up to his rank (in honor) within his income (debtless), unless he was mad; or how to live as frugally as he wished.

<sup>2</sup> 587: A reeve was a manager of a country estate.

That he ne knew his sleight and his covine. *tricks & deceit*  
 605 They were adread of him as of the death. *the plague*

*Though he has made sure that no one takes advantage of **him**, he seems to have taken advantage of his young lord.*

His woning was full fair upon a heath: *His dwelling*  
 With greenè trees y-shadowed was his place.  
 He couldè better than his lord purchase.  
 Full rich he was astorèd privily. *secretly*  
 610 His lord well could he pleasèn subtly  
 To give and lend him of his ownè good,<sup>1</sup>  
 And have a thank and yet a coat and hood. *And get thanks*  
     In youth he learnèd had a good mystér: *trade*  
 He was a well good wright, a carpentér. *very good craftsman*  
 615 This Reeve sat upon a well good stot *very good horse*  
 That was a pomely grey, and hightè Scot. *dappled / called*  
 A long surcoat of perse upon he had *overcoat of blue*  
 And by his side he bore a rusty blade.  
 Of Norfolk was this Reeve of which I tell  
 620 Beside a town men clepèn Baldèswell. *call*  
 Tuckèd he was, as is a friar, about, *Rope-belted*  
 And ever he rode the hindrest of our rout. *hindmost / group*

*The unlovely **Summoner**, and his unsavory habits*

A SUMMONER was there with us in that place<sup>2</sup>  
 That had a fire-red cherubinnè's face,<sup>3</sup> *cherub's*  
 625 For saucèfleme he was with eyen narrow. *leprous / eyes*  
 And hot he was and lecherous as a sparrow.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 610-11: It is not clear whether the Reeve sometimes lends money to his master from his (i.e. the Reeve's) resources or from his lord's own resources but giving the impression that the Reeve is the lender.

<sup>2</sup> 623: A Summoner was a man who delivered summonses for alleged public sinners to appear at the Archdeacon's ecclesiastical court when accused of public immorality. The job offered opportunities for serious abuse such as bribery, extortion, and especially blackmail of those who went with prostitutes, many of whom the summoner used himself, and all of them in his pay. His disgusting physical appearance is meant to suggest his wretched spiritual condition.

<sup>3</sup> 624: Medieval artists painted the faces of cherubs red. The summoner is of course less cherubic than satanic, his appearance being evidence of his vices.

<sup>4</sup> 626: Sparrows were Venus's birds, considered lecherous presumably because they were so many.

	With scalèd browès black, and pilèd beard,	<i>scaly / scraggly</i>
	Of his viságè children were afeared.	
	There n'as quicksilver, litharge nor brimstone,	<i>was no</i>
630	Boras, ceruse, nor oil of tartar none,	<i>[medications]</i>
	Nor ointément that wouldè cleanse and bite	
	That him might helpèn of his whelkès white,	<i>boils</i>
	Nor of the knobbès sitting on his cheeks.	<i>lumps</i>
	Well loved he garlic, onion and eke leeks,	<i>&amp; also</i>
635	And for to drinkèn strong wine red as blood;	
	Then would he speak and cry as he were wood.	<i>mad</i>
	And when that he well drunkèn had the wine,	
	Then would he speakè no word but Latin.	
	A fewè termès had he, two or three,	<i>knew</i>
640	That he had learnèd out of some decree.	
	No wonder is; he heard it all the day.	
	And eke you knowèn well how that a jay	<i>also / jaybird</i>
	Can clepèn "Wat" as well as can the Pope.	<i>call out</i>
	But whoso could in other things him grope,	<i>whoever / test</i>
645	Then had he spent all his philosophy.	<i>learning</i>
	Aye, "Questio quid juris" would he cry. <sup>1</sup>	<i>"What is the law?"</i>
	He was a gentle harlot, and a kind.	<i>rascal</i>
	A better fellow shouldè men not find:	
	He wouldè suffer for a quart of wine	<i>allow</i>
650	A good fellow to have his concubine	<i>keep his mistress</i>
	A twelvemonth, and excuse him at the full.	<i>let him off</i>
	Full privily a finch eke could he pull. <sup>2</sup>	<i>secretly</i>
	And if he found owhere a good fellow,	<i>anywhere</i>
	He wouldè teachèn him to have no awe	
655	In such a case, of the archdeacon's curse,	
	But if a manne's soul were in his purse,	<i>Unless</i>
	For in his purse he should y-punished be.	
	"Purse is the archdeacon's hell," said he.	
	But well I wot, he lièd right indeed.	<i>I know</i>
660	Of cursing ought each guilty man to dread,	
	For curse will slay right as assoiling saveth	<i>absolution</i>
	And also 'ware him of "Significavit." <sup>3</sup>	<i>let him beware</i>

<sup>1</sup> 646: "The question is: What is the law?" This is a lawyer's phrase which the Summoner heard regularly in the archdeacon's court.

<sup>2</sup> 652: "Secretly he would enjoy a girl himself" or "He could do a clever trick."

<sup>3</sup> 662: The writ of excommunication began with the word "Significavit."

In daunger had he, at his ownè guise *In his power / disposal*  
 The youngè girlès of the diocese <sup>1</sup>  
 665 And knew their counsel and was all their redde. *secrets / adviser*  
 A garland had he set upon his head  
 As great as it were for an alèstake. *tavern sign*  
 A buckler had he made him of a cake.<sup>2</sup> *shield*

*With the disgusting Summoner is his friend, his singing partner and possibly his lover,  
 the even more corrupt **Pardoner***

With him there rode a gentle PARDONER <sup>3</sup>  
 670 Of Rouncival, his friend and his compeer *colleague*  
 That straight was comèn from the court of Rome. *had come directly*  
 Full loud he sang "Come hither love to me." <sup>4</sup>  
 This Summoner bore to him a stiff burdoun. *bass melody*  
 Was never trump of half so great a sound. *trumpet*  
 675 This pardoner had hair as yellow as wax  
 But smooth it hung as does a strike of flax. *hank*  
 By ounces hung his lockès that he had, *By strands*  
 And therewith he his shoulders overspread.  
 But thin it lay, by colpons, one by one, *clumps*  
 680 But hood, for jollity, wearèd he none,  
 For it was trussèd up in his wallet: *bag*  
 Him thought he rode all of the newè jet, *fashion*  
 Dishevelled; save his cap he rode all bare. *W. hair loose*  
 Such glaring eyen had he as a hare. *eyes*  
 685 A vernicle had he sewed upon his cap.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 664: *girls* probably meant "prostitutes," as it still can. See "Friars Tale," 1355 ff for further information on the activities of summoners.

<sup>2</sup> 667: A tavern "sign" was a large wreath or broom on a pole. Acting the buffoon, the Summoner has also turned a thin cake into a shield.

<sup>3</sup> 669: The Pardoner professes to give gullible people pardon for their sins in exchange for money, as well as a view of his pretended holy relics which will bring them blessings. He too is physically repellent. His high voice and beardlessness suggest that he is not a full man but something eunuch-like, again a metaphor for his sterile spiritual state. His headquarters were at Rouncival near Charing Cross in London. See ENDPAPERS; and also for "gentle".

<sup>4</sup> 672: The Pardoner's relationship to the Summoner is not obvious but appears to be sexual in some way. The rhyme *Rome / to me* may have been forced or comic even in Chaucer's day; it is impossible or ludicrous today.

<sup>5</sup> 685: *vernicle*: a badge with an image of Christ's face as it was believed to have been imprinted on the veil of Veronica when she wiped His face on the way to Calvary. Such badges were frequently sold to pilgrims.

His wallet lay before him in his lap *bag*  
 Bretfull of pardons, come from Rome all hot. *crammed*  
 A voice he had as small as hath a goat. *thin*  
 No beard had he nor never should he have;  
 690 As smooth it was as it were late y-shave. *recently shaved*  
 I trow he were a gelding or a mare. *guess*

*His "relics"*

But of his craft, from Berwick unto Ware *trade*  
 Ne was there such another pardoner,  
 For in his mail he had a pillowber *bag / pillowcase*  
 695 Which that he saidè was Our Lady's veil. *O.L's = Virgin Mary's*  
 He said he had a gobbet of the sail *piece*  
 That Saintè Peter had when that he went  
 Upon the sea, till Jesus Christ him hent. *pulled him out*  
 He had a cross of latten full of stones *brass*  
 700 And in a glass he haddè piggès' bones.

*His skill in reading, preaching and extracting money from people*

But with these "relics" when that he [had] found  
 A poorè parson dwelling upon land, *in the country*  
 Upon one day he got him more money  
 Than that the parson got in monthès tway; *two*  
 705 And thus, with feignèd flattery and japes *tricks*  
 He made the parson and the people his apes. *fools, dupes*  
 But trully, to tellèn at the last, *the facts*  
 He was in church a noble ecclesiast. *churchman*  
 Well could he read a lesson and a story.  
 710 But alderbest he sang an offertory <sup>1</sup> *best of all*  
 For well he wistè when that song was sung *knew*  
 He mustè preach and well afile his tongue *sharpen*  
 To winne silver as he full well could. *knew how*  
 Therefore he sang the merrierly and loud.

*This is the end of the portraits of the pilgrims.*

---

<sup>1</sup> 710: The offertory was that part of the Mass where the bread and wine were first offered by the priest. It was also the point at which the people made their offerings to the parish priest, and to the Pardoner when he was there. The prospect of money put him in good voice.

- 715 Now have I told you soothly in a clause *truly / briefly*  
 Th'estate, th'array, the number, and eke the cause *rank / condition*  
 Why that assembled was this company  
 In Southwark at this gentle hostelry *inn*  
 That hight The Tabard, fastè by The Bell. *was called / close*
- 720 But now is timè to you for to tell  
 How that we borèn us that ilkè night *conducted ourselves / same*  
 When we were in that hostelry alight; *dismounted*  
 And after will I tell of our viage *journey*  
 And all the remnant of our pilgrimage.

*The poet offers a comic apologia for the matter and language of some of the pilgrims.*

- 725 But first I pray you of your courtesy  
 That you n'arrette it not my villainy <sup>1</sup> *blame / bad manners*  
 Though that I plainly speak in this matter  
 To tellè you their wordès and their cheer, *behavior*  
 Not though I speak their wordès properly, *exactly*
- 730 For this you knowen all as well as I: *as well*  
 Whoso shall tell a tale after a man  
 He must rehearse as nigh as ever he can *repeat as nearly*  
 Ever each a word, if it be in his charge, *Every / if he is able*  
 All speak he ne'er so rudèly and large, *Even if / coarsely & freely*
- 735 Or elsè must he tell his tale untrue  
 Or feignè things or findèn wordès new. *invent things*  
 He may not spare, although he were his brother. *hold back*  
 He may as well say one word as another.  
 Christ spoke himself full broad in Holy Writ *very bluntly / Scripture*
- 740 And well you wot no villainy is it. *you know*  
 Eke Plato sayeth, whoso can him read: *Also / whoever*  
 "The wordès must be cousin to the deed."  
 Also I pray you to forgive it me  
 All have I not set folk in their degree *Although / social ranks*
- 745 Here in this tale as that they shouldè stand.  
 My wit is short, you may well understand. *My intelligence*

---

<sup>1</sup> 726: "That you do not blame it on my bad manners." *Villainy* means conduct associated with villeins, the lowest social class. This apologia by Chaucer (725-742) is both comic and serious: comic because it apologizes for the way fictional characters behave as if they were real people and not Chaucer's creations; serious in that it shows Chaucer sensitive to the possibility that part of his audience might take offence at some of his characters, their words and tales, especially perhaps the parts highly critical of Church and churchmen, as well as the tales of sexual misbehavior. Even the poet Dryden (in the Restoration!) and some twentieth-century critics have thought the apology was needed.

*After serving dinner, Harry Bailly, the fictional Host or owner of the Tabard Inn originates the idea for the Tales:*

	Great cheerè made our HOST us every one, <sup>1</sup>	<i>welcome / for us</i>
	And to the supper set he us anon.	<i>quickly</i>
	He servèd us with victuals at the best.	<i>the best food</i>
750	Strong was the wine and well to drink us lest.	<i>it pleased us</i>
	A seemly man our Hostè was withall	<i>fit</i>
	For to be a marshall in a hall.	<i>master of ceremonies</i>
	A largè man he was with eyen steep	<i>prominent eyes</i>
	A fairer burgess was there none in Cheap.	<i>citizen / Cheapside</i>
755	Bold of his speech and wise and well y-taught	
	And of manhood him lackèdè right naught.	
	Eke thereto he was right a merry man,	<i>And besides</i>
	And after supper playèn he began	<i>joking</i>
	And spoke of mirthè amongst other things,	
760	(When that we had made our reckonings),	<i>paid our bills</i>
	And saidè thus: "Now, lordings, truly	<i>ladies and g'men</i>
	You be to me right welcome heartily,	
	For by my truth, if that I shall not lie,	
	I saw not this year so merry a company	
765	At oncè in this harbor as is now.	<i>this inn</i>
	Fain would I do you mirthè, wist I how,	<i>Gladly / if I knew</i>
	And of a mirth I am right now bethought	<i>amusement</i>
	To do you ease, and it shall costè naught.	
	You go to Canterbury, God you speed.	
770	The blissful martyr 'quitè you your meed.	<i>give you reward</i>
	And well I wot, as you go by the way,	<i>I know / along the road</i>
	You shapèn you to talèn and to play;	<i>intend to tell tales &amp; jokes</i>
	For truly, comfort nor mirth is none	
	To ridèn by the way dumb as a stone;	
775	And therefore would I makèn you desport	<i>amusement for you</i>
	As I said erst, and do you some comfort.	<i>before</i>
	And if you liketh all by one assent	<i>if you please</i>
	For to standen at my judgèment	<i>abide by</i>
	And for to workèn as I shall you say,	
780	Tomorrow when you ridèn by the way,	

---

<sup>1</sup> 747: "The Host had a warm welcome for every one of us." The Host is the innkeeper of The Tabard, Harry Bailly.



Now by my father's soulè that is dead,<sup>1</sup>  
 But you be merry, I'll give you my head. *If you're not*  
 Hold up your hands withoutèn morè speech."  
 Our counsel was not longè for to seek. *Our decision*

*The pilgrims agree to hear his idea*

785 Us thought it was not worth to make it wise, *not worthwhile / difficult*  
 And granted him withoutèn more advice, *discussion*  
 And bade him say his verdict as him lest. *as pleased him*

*To pass the time pleasantly, every one will tell a couple of tales on the way out  
 and a couple on the way back.*

"Lordings," quod he, "now hearkèn for the best, *Ladies & g'men*  
 But take it not, I pray you, in disdain.  
 790 This is the point -- to speakèn short and plain:  
 That each of you to shorten with our way  
 In this viage, shall tellèn talès tway *journey / two*  
 To Canterbury-ward, I mean it so, *on the way to C.*  
 And homeward he shall tellèn other two  
 795 Of áventures that whilom have befall. *events / in past*

*The teller of the best tale will get a dinner paid for by all the others at Harry's inn, The Tabard,  
 on the way back from Canterbury. He offers to go with them as a guide*

And which of you that bears him best of all,  
 That is to say, that telleth in this case  
 Talès of best senténcè and most soláce, *instruction / amusement*  
 Shall have a supper at our aller cost *at expense of all of us*  
 800 Here in this place, sitting by this post  
 When that we come again from Canterbury.  
 And for to makèn you the morè merry  
 I will myselfèn goodly with you ride *gladly*  
 Right at mine ownè cost, and be your guide.  
 805 And whoso will my judgèment withsay *whoever / contradict*  
 Shall pay all that we spendèn by the way,<sup>2</sup> *on the trip*

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<sup>1</sup> 781: "Now, by the soul of my dead father ..."

<sup>2</sup> The host will be the Master of Ceremonies and judge. Anyone who revolts against the Host's rulings will have to pay what the others spend along the way.

And if you vouchesafe that it be so, *agree*  
 Tell me anon withouten wordès mo' *now / more*  
 And I will early shapèn me therefore." *prepare*

*They all accept, agreeing that the Host be MC, and then they go to bed.*

810 This thing was granted and our oathès swore  
 With full glad heart, and prayèd him also  
 That he would vouchèsafe for to do so *agree*  
 And that he wouldè be our governor  
 And of our talès judge and reporter,  
 815 And set a supper at a certain price,  
 And we will rulèd be at his device *direction*  
 In high and low; and thus by one assent  
 We been accorded to his judgèment. *agreed*  
 And thereupon the wine was fetched anon.  
 820 We dranken, and to restè went each one  
 Withoutèn any longer tarrying.

*The next morning they set out and draw lots to see who shall tell the first tale.*

A-morrow, when the day began to spring  
 Up rose our Host, and was our aller cock,<sup>1</sup>  
 And gathered us together in a flock,  
 825 And forth we rode a little more than pace *no great speed*  
 Unto the watering of St Thomas.  
 And there our Host began his horse arrest, *halt*  
 And saidè: "Lordings, hearken if you lest. *if you please*  
 You wot your forward (and I it you record) *promise / remind*  
 830 If evensong and morrowsong accord.<sup>2</sup>  
 Let see now who shall tell the firstè tale.  
 As ever may I drinkèn wine or ale,  
 Whoso be rebel to my judgèment *Whoever is*  
 Shall pay for all that by the way is spent.  
 835 Now drawèth cut, ere that we further twinn; *draw lots before we go*

---

<sup>1</sup> 823: "He was the cock (rooster) for all of us." That is, he got us all up at cockcrow.

<sup>2</sup> 825-30: They set out at a gentle pace, and at the first watering place for the horses, (*the watering of St. Thomas*) the Host says: "Ladies and gentlemen, listen please. You know (*wot*) your agreement (*forward*), and I remind (*record*) you of it, if evening hymn and morning hymn agree," i.e. if what you said last night still holds this morning.

He which that has the shortest shall begin.

Sir Knight," quod he, "my master and my lord,

Now drawèth cut, for that is mine accord.

Come near," quod he, "my lady Prioress.

840 And you, Sir Clerk, let be your shamefastness,

Nor study not. Lay hand to, every man."

*said he*

*draw lots / wish*

*shyness*

*They all draw lots. It falls to the Knight to tell the first tale*

Anon to drawen every wight began

And shortly for to tellen as it was,

Were it by aventure or sort or cas,

845 The sooth is this, the cut fell to the knight,

Of which full blithe and glad was every wight.

And tell he must his tale as was reason

By forward and by composition

As you have heard. What needeth wordès mo'?

850 And when this good man saw that it was so,

As he that wise was and obedient

To keep his forward by his free assent,

He saidè: "Since I shall begin the game,

What! welcome be the cut, in God's name.

855 Now let us ride, and hearken what I say."

And with that word we riden forth our way

And he began with right a merry cheer

His tale anon, and said as you may hear.

*person*

*Whether by fate, luck or fortune*

*The truth / the lot*

*very happy / person*

*By promise & contract*

*more*

*his agreement*

*with great good humor*

*at once*

**ENDPAPERS / SPECIAL GLOSSARY**

**AUTHORITY, Auctoritee, Authors:** The literate in the Middle Ages were remarkably bookish in spite of or because of the scarcity of books. They had a great, perhaps inordinate, regard for "authority," that is, established "authors": philosophers of the ancient world, classical poets, the Bible, the Church Fathers, historians, theologians, etc. Citing an "authority" was then, as now, often a substitute for producing a good argument, and then, as now, always useful to bolster an argument.

The opening line of the Wife of Bath's Prologue uses "authority" to mean something like "theory"--what you find in books-- as opposed to "experience"--what you find in life.

**CLERK:** Strictly speaking a member of the clergy, either a priest or in the preliminary stages leading up to the priesthood, called "minor orders." Learning and even literacy were largely confined to such people, but anyone who could read and write as well as someone who was genuinely learned could be called a clerk. A student, something in between, was also a clerk. The Wife of Bath marries for her fifth husband, a man who had been a clerk at Oxford, a student who had perhaps had ideas at one time of becoming a cleric.

**"CHURL, churlish":** At the opposite end of the social scale and the scale of manners from "gentil" (See below). A "churl" (OE "ceorl") was a common man of low rank. Hence the manners to be expected from a person of such "low birth" were equally low and vulgar, "churlish." "Villain" and "villainy" are rough equivalents also used by Chaucer.

**COMPLEXION:** See Humor below

**COURTESY, Courteous, Courtoisie, etc.:** Courtesy was literally conduct appropriate to the court of the king or other worthy. This, no doubt, included our sense of "courtesy" but was wider in its application, referring to the manners of all well bred people. The Prioress's concern to "counterfeit cheer of court" presumably involves imitating all the mannerisms thought appropriate to courtiers. Sometimes it is used to mean something like right, i.e. moral, conduct.

**DAUN, Don: Sir.** A term of respect for nobles or for clerics like the monk. The Wife of Bath refers to the wise "king Daun Solomon," a place where it would be wise to leave the word untranslated. But Chaucer uses it also of Gervase, the blacksmith in the "Miller's Tale." And Spenser used it of Chaucer himself.

**DAUNGER, Daungerous:** These do not mean modern "danger" and "dangerous." "Daunger" (from OF "daungier") meant power. The Summoner is said to have the prostitutes in his "daunger". In romantic tales it is the power that a woman had over a man who was sexually attracted by her. She

was his "Mistress" in the sense that she had power over him, often to refuse him the least sexual favor. Hence "daungerous" was a word often used of a woman who was "hard-to-get" or over-demanding or disdainful, haughty, aloof.

"GENTLE, Gentil, Gentillesse, Gentleness: "Gentillesse" (Gentleness) is the quality of being "gentil" or "gentle" i.e. born into the upper class, and having "noble" qualities that were supposed to go with noble birth. It survives in the word "gentleman" especially in a phrase like "an officer & a gentleman" since officers traditionally were members of the ruling class. Chaucer seems to have had a healthy sceptical bourgeois view of the notion that "gentillesse" went always with "gentle" birth. See the lecture on the subject given by the "hag" in the Wife of Bath's Tale (1109-1176). But since "gentle" is used also to describe the Tabard Inn and the two greatest scoundrels on the pilgrimage, the Summoner and the Pardoner, one must suppose that it had a wide range of meanings, some of them perhaps ironic.

HUMOR ( Lat. humor--fluid, moisture)./ COMPLEXION: Classical, medieval and Renaissance physiologists saw the human body as composed of four fluids or humors: yellow bile, black bile, blood and phlegm. Perfect physical health and intellectual excellence were seen as resulting from the presence of these four humors in proper balance and combination.

Medieval philosophers and physiologists, seeing man as a microcosm, corresponded each bodily humor to one of the four elements--fire, water, earth, air. As Antony says of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*

His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world "This was a man"  
(V,v,73-75).

Pain or illness was attributed to an imbalance in these bodily fluids, and an overabundance of any single humor was thought to give a person a particular personality referred to as "humor" or "complexion." The correspondences went something like this:

Fire--Yellow or Red Bile (Choler)--Choleric, i.e. prone to anger  
Earth-- Black Bile-- melancholic i.e. prone to sadness  
Water-- Blood-- sanguine--inclined to cheerfulness, optimism  
Air -- Phlegm -- phlegmatic--prone to apathy, slow

Too much red bile or choler could make you have nightmares in which red things figured; with too much black bile you would dream about black monsters. (See *Nun's Priest's Tale*, ll. 4120-26). "Of his complexion he was sanguine" is said of the Franklin in the General Prologue. Similarly, "The Reeve was a slender choleric man" (G.P. 589). The Franklin's "complexion" (i.e. humor) makes him cheerful, and the Reeve's makes him cranky. A person's temperament was often visible in his face, hence our modern usage of "complexion." Even when the physiological theory of humors had long been abandoned, the word "humor" retained the meaning of "mood" or "personality." And we still speak of being in a good or bad humor.

**LORDINGS:** Something like "Ladies and Gentlemen." The first citation in OED contrasts "lordings" with "underlings." "Lordings" is used by both the Host and the Pardoner to address the rest of the pilgrims, not one of whom is a lord, though the Host also calls them "lords."

**NONES:** For the Nones; For the Nonce: literally "for the once," "for the occasion" , but this meaning often does not fit the context in Chaucer, where the expression is frequently untranslatable, and is used simply as a largely meaningless tag, sometimes just for the sake of the rime.

**PARDONER:** The Church taught that one could get forgiveness for one's sins by confessing them to a priest, expressing genuine regret and a firm intention to mend one's ways. In God's name the priest granted absolution, and imposed some kind of penance for the sin. Instead of a physical penance like fasting, one might obtain an "indulgence" by, say, going on pilgrimage, or giving money to the poor or to another good cause like the building of a church.

There were legitimate Church pardoners licenced to collect moneys of this kind and to assure the people in the name of the Church that their almsgiving entitled them to an "indulgence." Even with the best of intentions, this practice was liable to abuse. For "where there is money there is muck," and illegitimate pardoners abounded in spite of regular Church prohibitions. They were sometimes, presumably, helped by gullible or corrupt clerics for a fee or a share of the takings. Our Pardoner tells ignorant people that if they give money to a good cause--which he somehow represents-- they will be doing penance for their sins and can even omit the painful business of confession; that, in fact, he can absolve them from their sins for money. This was, of course, against all Church law and teaching.

**SHREW:** "Shrew, shrewed, beshrew" occur constantly in the Tales and are particularly difficult to gloss. The reader is best off providing his own equivalent in phrases like "old dotard shrew" (291) or "I beshrew thy face."

**SILLY, Sely:** Originally in Old English "saelig" = "blessed." By ME it still sometimes seems to retain some of this sense. It also means something like "simple" , including perhaps "simpleminded" as in

the case of the Carpenter John in the "Millers Tale." The Host's reference to the "silly maid" after the Physician's Tale means something like "poor girl." and the "sely widow" of "Nuns Priests Tale" is a "poor widow" in the same sense. The Wife of Bath refers to the genital organ of the male as "his silly instrument."

**SUMMONER:** A man who delivered summonses for accused people to appear before an ecclesiastical court for infringements of morals or of ecclesiastical laws. He operated in a society where sin and crime were not as sharply differentiated as they are in our society. This inevitably led to abuse. Our summoner abuses his position by committing the very sins he is supposed to be chastising. The Friars Tale, about a summoner, gives more details of the abuses: using information from prostitutes to blackmail clients; extracting money from others on the pretence that he had a summons when he had none, etc.

**SOLACE:** Comfort, pleasure, often of a quite physical, indeed sexual, nature, though not exclusively so.

**WIT:** Rarely if ever means a clever verbal and intellectual sally, as with us. It comes from the OE verb "witan," to know, and hence as a noun it means "knowledge" or "wisdom" "understanding" "comprehension," "mind," "intelligence" etc.