

THE TALE.<1>

Pars Prima.

First part

At Sarra, in the land of Tartary, There dwelt a king that warrayed* Russie,
<2> *made war on Through which there died many a doughty man;
This noble king was called Cambuscan,<3> Which in his time was of so
great renown, That there was nowhere in no regioun So excellent a lord in
alle thing: Him lacked nought that longeth to a king, As of the sect of which
that he was born. He kept his law to which he was y-sworn, And thereto* he
was hardy, wise, and rich, *moreover, besides And piteous and just,
always y-lich;* *alike, even-tempered True of his word, benign and
honourable; *Of his corage as any centre stable;* *firm, immovable of
spirit* Young, fresh, and strong, in armes desirous As any bachelor of all his
house. A fair person he was, and fortunate, And kept alway so well his royal
estate, That there was nowhere such another man. This noble king, this
Tartar Cambuscan, Hadde two sons by Elfeta his wife, Of which the eldest
highte Algarsife, The other was y-called Camballo. A daughter had this
worthy king also, That youngest was, and highte Canace: But for to telle you
all her beauty, It lies not in my tongue, nor my conning;*
*skill I dare not undertake so high a thing: Mine English eke is insufficient,
It muste be a rhetor* excellent, *orator *That couth his
colours longing for that art,* * see <4>* If he should her describen
any part; I am none such, I must speak as I can.

And so befell, that when this Cambuscan Had twenty winters borne his
diadem, As he was wont from year to year, I deem, He let *the feast of his
nativity* *his birthday party* *Do crye,* throughout Sarra his
city, *be proclaimed* The last Idus of March, after the year.
Phoebus the sun full jolly was and clear, For he was nigh his exaltation In
Marte's face, and in his mansion <5> In Aries, the choleric hot sign: Full
lusty* was the weather and benign; *pleasant For which the
fowls against the sunne sheen,* *bright What for the season
and the younge green, Full loude sange their affections: Them seemed to
have got protections Against the sword of winter keen and cold. This
Cambuscan, of which I have you told, In royal vesture, sat upon his dais,
With diadem, full high in his palace; And held his feast so solemn and so
rich, That in this worlde was there none it lich.* *like Of
which if I should tell all the array, Then would it occupy a summer's day;
And eke it needeth not for to devise* *describe At every
course the order of service. I will not tellen of their strange sewes,*

mirror eke, that I have in mine hond, Hath such a might, that men may in it
 see When there shall fall any adversity Unto your realm, or to yourself also,
 And openly who is your friend or foe. And over all this, if any lady bright
 Hath set her heart on any manner wight, If he be false, she shall his treason
 see, His newe love, and all his subtlety, So openly that there shall nothing
 hide. Wherefore, against this lusty summer-tide, This mirror, and this ring
 that ye may see, He hath sent to my lady Canace, Your excellent daughter
 that is here. The virtue of this ring, if ye will hear, Is this, that if her list it
 for to wear Upon her thumb, or in her purse it bear, There is no fowl that
 flyeth under heaven, That she shall not well understand his steven,*

*speech, sound And know his meaning openly and plain, And answer him in
 his language again: And every grass that groweth upon root She shall eke
 know, to whom it will do boot,* *remedy All be his woundes
 ne'er so deep and wide. This naked sword, that hangeth by my side, Such
 virtue hath, that what man that it smite, Throughout his armour it will
 carve and bite, Were it as thick as is a branched oak: And what man is y-
 wounded with the stroke Shall ne'er be whole, till that you list, of grace, To
 stroke him with the flat in thilke* place *the same Where he is
 hurt; this is as much to sayn, Ye muste with the flatte sword again Stroke
 him upon the wound, and it will close. This is the very sooth, withoute
 glose;* *deceit It faileth not, while it is in your hold."

And when this knight had thus his tale told, He rode out of the hall, and
 down he light. His steede, which that shone as sunne bright, Stood in the
 court as still as any stone. The knight is to his chamber led anon, And is
 unarmed, and to meat y-set.* *seated These presents be
 full richely y-fet,* -- *fetched This is to say, the sword and the
 mirrour, -- And borne anon into the highe tow'r, With certain officers
 ordain'd therefor; And unto Canace the ring is bore Solemnely, where she
 sat at the table; But sickerly, withouten any fable, The horse of brass, that
 may not be remued.* *removed <12> It stood as it were to the
 ground y-glued; There may no man out of the place it drive For no engine of
 windlass or polive; * *pulley And cause why, for they *can
 not the craft;* *know not the cunning And therefore in the place they
 have it laft, of the mechanism* Till that the knight hath taught them
 the mannere To voide* him, as ye shall after hear. *remove

Great was the press, that swarmed to and fro To gauren* on this horse that
 stooode so: *gaze For it so high was, and so broad and long,
 So well proportioned for to be strong, Right as it were a steed of Lombardy;
 Therewith so horsely, and so quick of eye, As it a gentle Poileis <13> courser
 were: For certes, from his tail unto his ear Nature nor art ne could him not
 amend In no degree, as all the people wend.* *weened, thought

But evermore their moste wonder was How that it coulde go, and was of
 brass; It was of Faerie, as the people seem'd. Diverse folk diversely they
 deem'd; As many heads, as many wittes been. They murmured, as doth a
 swarm of been,* *bees And made skills* after their
 fantasies, *reasons Rehearsing of the olde poetries, And said
 that it was like the Pegasee,* *Pegasus The horse that hadde
 winges for to flee;* *fly Or else it was the Greeke's horse
 Sinon,<14> That broughte Troye to destruction, As men may in the olde
 gestes* read. *tales of adventures Mine heart," quoth one, "is
 evermore in dread; I trow some men of armes be therein, That shape* them
 this city for to win: *design, prepare It were right good that all
 such thing were know." Another rownded* to his fellow low,
 *whispered And said, "He lies; for it is rather like An apparence made by
 some magic, As jugglers playen at these feastes great." Of sundry doubts
 they jangle thus and treat. As lewed* people deeme commonly
 *ignorant Of thinges that be made more subtilly Than they can in their
 lewdness comprehend; They *deeme gladly to the badder end.* *are
 ready to think And some of them wonder'd on the mirroure, the
 worst* That borne was up into the master* tow'r, *chief <15>
 How men might in it suche thinges see. Another answer'd and said, it might
 well be Naturally by compositions Of angles, and of sly reflections; And saide
 that in Rome was such a one. They speak of Alhazen and Vitellon,<16> And
 Aristotle, that wrote in their lives Of quainte* mirrors, and of prospectives,
 *curious As knowe they that have their bookes heard. And other folk have
 wonder'd on the swerd,* *sword That woulde pierce
 throughout every thing; And fell in speech of Telephus the king, And of
 Achilles for his quainte spear, <17> For he could with it bothe heal and
 dere,* *wound Right in such wise as men may with the swerd
 Of which right now ye have yourselves heard. They spake of sundry
 hard'ning of metal, And spake of medicines therewithal, And how, and
 when, it shoulde harden'd be, Which is unknowen algate* unto me.
 *however Then spake they of Canacee's ring, And saiden all, that such a
 wondrous thing Of craft of rings heard they never none, Save that he,
 Moses, and King Solomon, Hadden *a name of conning* in such art.
 *a reputation for Thus said the people, and drew them apart.
 knowledge* Put natheless some saide that it was Wonder to maken of fern
 ashes glass, And yet is glass nought like ashes of fern; *But for* they have y-
 knowen it so ferne** *because **before <18> Therefore ceaseth their
 jangling and their wonder. As sore wonder some on cause of thunder, On
 ebb and flood, on gossamer and mist, And on all things, till that the cause is
 wist.* *known Thus jangle they, and deemen and devise, Till that
 the king gan from his board arise.

park went she. *sunken path The vapour, which up from the
 earthe glode,* *glided Made the sun to seem ruddy and broad:
 But, natheless, it was so fair a sight That it made all their heartes for to
 light,* *be lightened, glad What for the season and the morrowning, And
 for the fowles that she hearde sing. For right anon she wiste* what they
 meant *knew Right by their song, and knew all their intent.
 The knotte,* why that every tale is told, *nucleus, chief matter If it be
 tarried* till the list* be cold *delayed **inclination Of them that have it
 hearken'd *after yore,* *for a long time* The savour passeth ever
 longer more; For fulsomness of the prolixity: And by that same reason
 thinketh me. I shoulde unto the knotte condescend, And maken of her
 walking soon an end.

Amid a tree fordry*, as white as chalk, *thoroughly dried up There
 sat a falcon o'er her head full high, That with a piteous voice so gan to cry;
 That all the wood resounded of her cry, And beat she had herself so
 piteously With both her wings, till the redde blood Ran endelong* the tree,
 there as she stood *from top to bottom And ever-in-one* always she
 cried and shrigh; ** *incessantly **shrieked And with her beak herselfe she
 so pight,* *wounded That there is no tiger, nor cruel beast,
 That dwelleth either in wood or in forest; But would have wept, if that he
 weepe could, For sorrow of her; she shriek'd always so loud. For there was
 never yet no man alive, If that he could a falcon well describe; *
 *describe That heard of such another of fairness As well of plumage, as of
 gentleness; Of shape, of all that mighte reckon'd be. A falcon peregrine
 seemed she, Of fremde* land; and ever as she stood *foreign
 <28> She swooned now and now for lack of blood; Till well-nigh is she fallen
 from the tree.

This faire kinge's daughter Canace, That on her finger bare the quaint ring,
 Through which she understood well every thing That any fowl may in his
 leden* sayn, **language <29> And could him answer in his
 leden again; Hath understoode what this falcon said, And well-nigh for the
 ruth* almost she died;. *pity And to the tree she went, full
 hastily, And on this falcon looked piteously; And held her lap abroad; for
 well she wist The falcon muste falle from the twist* *twig,
 bough When that she swooned next, for lack of blood. A longe while to waite
 her she stood; Till at the last she awoke in this mannere Unto the hawk, as
 ye shall after hear: "What is the cause, if it be for to tell, That ye be in this
 furial* pain of hell?" *raging, furious Quoth Canace unto this hawk
 above; "Is this for sorrow of of death; or loss of love? For; as I trow,* these be
 the causes two; *believe That cause most a gentle hearte woe:
 Of other harm it needeth not to speak. For ye yourself upon yourself

corpse, which that ye wet, Such was this hypocrite, both cold and hot; And
in this wise he served his intent, That, save the fiend, none wiste what he
meant: Till he so long had weeped and complain'd, And many a year his
service to me feign'd, Till that mine heart, too piteous and too nice,*
*foolish, simple All innocent of his crowned malice, *Forfeared of his death,*
as thoughte me, *greatly afraid lest Upon his oathes and his surety
he should die* Granted him love, on this condition, That evermore mine
honour and renown Were saved, bothe *privy and apert;* *privately
and in public* This is to say, that, after his desert, I gave him all my heart
and all my thought (God wot, and he, that *other wayes nought*), *in
no other way* And took his heart in change of mine for aye. But sooth is
said, gone since many a day, A true wight and a thiefe *think not one.*
do not think alike And when he saw the thing so far y-gone, That I had
granted him fully my love, In such a wise as I have said above, And given
him my true heart as free As he swore that he gave his heart to me, Anon
this tiger, full of doubleness, Fell on his knees with so great humbleness,
With so high reverence, as by his cheer,* *mien So like a
gentle lover in mannere, So ravish'd, as it seemed, for the joy, That never
Jason, nor Paris of Troy, -- Jason? certes, nor ever other man, Since Lamech
<31> was, that alderfirst* began *first of all To love two, as write
folk befor, Nor ever since the firste man was born, Coulde no man, by
twenty thousand Counterfeit the sophimes* of his art; *sophistries,
beguilements Where doubleness of feigning should approach, Nor worthy
were t'unbuckle his galoche,* *shoe <32> Nor could so thank a
wight, as he did me. His manner was a heaven for to see To any woman,
were she ne'er so wise; So painted he and kempt,* *at point devise,*
*combed, studied As well his wordes as his countenance. *with perfect
precision* And I so lov'd him for his obeisance, And for the truth I deemed in
his heart, That, if so were that any thing him smart,* *pained
All were it ne'er so lite,* and I it wist, *little Methought I felt
death at my hearte twist. And shortly, so farforth this thing is went,*
*gone That my will was his wille's instrument; That is to say, my will obey'd
his will In alle thing, as far as reason fill,* *fell; allowed Keeping
the boundes of my worship ever; And never had I thing *so lefe, or lever,*
so dear, or dearer As him, God wot, nor never shall no mo'.

"This lasted longer than a year or two, That I supposed of him naught but
good. But finally, thus at the last it stood, That fortune woulde that he
muste twin* *depart, separate Out of that place which that I was
in. Whe'er* me was woe, it is no question; *whether I cannot
make of it description. For one thing dare I telle boldely, I know what is the
pain of death thereby; Such harm I felt, for he might not byleve.*
*stay <33> So on a day of me he took his leave, So sorrowful eke, that I

ween'd verily, That he had felt as much harm as I, When that I heard him
speak, and saw his hue. But natheless, I thought he was so true, And eke
that he repaire should again Within a little while, sooth to sayn, And reason
would eke that he muste go For his honour, as often happ'neth so, That I
made virtue of necessity, And took it well, since that it muste be. As I best
might, I hid from him my sorrow, And took him by the hand, Saint John to
borrow,* *witness, pledge And said him thus; 'Lo, I am youres all; Be
such as I have been to you, and shall.' What he answer'd, it needs not to
rehearse; Who can say bet* than he, who can do worse?

*better When he had all well said, then had he done. Therefore behoveth him
a full long spoon, That shall eat with a fiend; thus heard I say. So at the last
he muste forth his way, And forth he flew, till he came where him lest. When
it came him to purpose for to rest, I trow that he had thilke text in mind,
That alle thing repairing to his kind Gladdeth himself; <34> thus say men,
as I guess; *Men love of [proper] kind newfangleness,* *see note
<35>* As birdes do, that men in cages feed. For though thou night and day
take of them heed, And strew their cage fair and soft as silk, And give them
sugar, honey, bread, and milk, Yet, *right anon as that his door is up,*
*immediatly on his He with his feet will spurne down his cup, door
being opened* And to the wood he will, and wormes eat; So newefangle be
they of their meat, And love novelties, of proper kind; No gentleness of
bloode may them bind. So far'd this tercelet, alas the day! Though he were
gentle born, and fresh, and gay, And goodly for to see, and humble, and free,
He saw upon a time a kite flee,* *fly And suddenly he
loved this kite so, That all his love is clean from me y-go: And hath his
trothe falsed in this wise. Thus hath the kite my love in her service, And I
am lorn* withoute remedy." *lost, undone

And with that word this falcon gan to cry, And swooned eft* in Canacee's
barne** *again **lap Great was the sorrow, for that hawke's
harm, That Canace and all her women made; They wist not how they might
the falcon glade.* *gladden But Canace home bare her in her lap,
And softly in plasters gan her wrap, There as she with her beak had hurt
herselve. Now cannot Canace but herbes delve Out of the ground, and make
salves new Of herbes precious and fine of hue, To heale with this hawk;
from day to night She did her business, and all her might. And by her
bedde's head she made a mew,* *bird cage And cover'd it with
velouettes* blue,<36> *velvets In sign of truth that is in
woman seen; And all without the mew is painted green, In which were
painted all these false fowls, As be these tidifes,* tercelets, and owls;
*titmice And pies, on them for to cry and chide, Right for despite were
painted them beside.

Thus leave I Canace her hawk keeping. I will no more as now speak of her
ring, Till it come eft* to purpose for to sayn *again How that
this falcon got her love again Repentant, as the story telleth us, By
mediation of Camballus, The kinge's son of which that I you told. But
henceforth I will my process hold To speak of adventures, and of battailes,
That yet was never heard so great marvailles. First I will telle you of
Cambuscan, That in his time many a city wan; And after will I speak of
Algarsife, How he won Theodora to his wife, For whom full oft in great peril
he was, *N'had he* been holpen by the horse of brass. *had he not*
And after will I speak of Camballo, <37> That fought in listes with the
brethren two For Canace, ere that he might her win; And where I left I will
again begin. <38>