

THE TALE <1>

Lordings (quoth he), in churche when I preach, I paine me to have an
hautein* speech, *take pains **loud <2> And ring it out, as round as
doth a bell, For I know all by rote that I tell. My theme is always one, and
ever was; Radix malorum est cupiditas.<3> First I pronounce whence that I
come, And then my bulles shew I all and some; Our liege lorde's seal on my
patent, That shew I first, *my body to warrent,* *for the protection
That no man be so hardy, priest nor clerk, of my person* Me to
disturb of Christe's holy werk. And after that then tell I forth my tales.
Bulles of popes, and of cardinales, Of patriarchs, and of bishops I shew, And
in Latin I speak a wordes few, To savour with my predication, And for to stir
men to devotion Then show I forth my longe crystal stones, Y-crammed fall
of cloutes* and of bones; *rags, fragments Relics they be, as
weene they each one. *as my listeners think* Then have I in latoun* a
shoulder-bone *brass Which that was of a holy Jewe's
sheep. "Good men," say I, "take of my wordes keep;*" *heed If
that this bone be wash'd in any well, If cow, or calf, or sheep, or oxe swell,
That any worm hath eat, or worm y-stung, Take water of that well, and wash
his tongue, And it is whole anon; and farthermore Of pockes, and of scab,
and every sore Shall every sheep be whole, that of this well Drinketh a
draught; take keep* of that I tell. *heed

"If that the goodman, that the beastes oweth,* *owneth Will
every week, ere that the cock him croweth, Fasting, y-drinken of this well a
draught, As thilke holy Jew our elders taught, His beastes and his store
shall multiply. And, Sirs, also it healeth jealousy; For though a man be fall'n
in jealous rage, Let make with this water his pottage, And never shall he
more his wife mistrust,* *mistrust *Though he the sooth of her
defaulte wist;* *though he truly All had she taken priestes two or
three. <4> knew her sin* Here is a mittain* eke, that ye may see;
*glove, mitten He that his hand will put in this mittain, He shall have
multiplying of his grain, When he hath sowen, be it wheat or oats, So that
he offer pence, or elles groats. And, men and women, one thing warn I you;
If any wight be in this churche now That hath done sin horrible, so that he
Dare not for shame of it y-shriven* be; *confessed Or any
woman, be she young or old, That hath y-made her husband cokewold,*
*cuckold Such folk shall have no power nor no grace To offer to my relics in
this place. And whoso findeth him out of such blame, He will come up and
offer in God's name; And I assoil* him by the authority
*absolve Which that by bull y-granted was to me."

a thing That shall by reason be to your liking; For though myself be a full
vicious man, A moral tale yet I you telle can, Which I am wont to preache,
for to win. Now hold your peace, my tale I will begin.

In Flanders whilom was a company Of younge folkes, that haunted folly, As
riot, hazard, stewes,* and taverns; *brothels Whereas with
lutes, harpes, and giterns,* *guitars They dance and play at
dice both day and night, And eat also, and drink over their might; Through
which they do the devil sacrifice Within the devil's temple, in cursed wise, By
superfluity abominable. Their oathes be so great and so damnable, That it is
grisly* for to hear them swear. *dreadful <6> Our blissful Lorde's
body they to-tear;* *tore to pieces <7> Them thought the Jewes rent
him not enough, And each of them at other's sinne lough.*
laughed And right anon in come tombesteres <8> Fetis and small, and
younge fruitesteres.** *dainty **fruit-girls Singers with harpes, baudes,*
waferers,** *revellers **cake-sellers Which be the very devil's officers, To
kindle and blow the fire of lechery, That is annexed unto gluttony. The Holy
Writ take I to my witness, That luxury is in wine and drunkenness. <9> Lo,
how that drunken Lot unkindely* *unnaturally Lay by his
daughters two unwittingly, So drunk he was he knew not what he wrought.
Herodes, who so well the stories sought, <10> When he of wine replete was
at his feast, Right at his owen table gave his hest*
*command To slay the Baptist John full guilteless. Seneca saith a good
word, doubtless: He saith he can no difference find Betwixt a man that is
out of his mind, And a man whiche that is drunkelew:* *a
drunkard <11> But that woodness,* y-fallen in a shrew,* *madness **one
evil-tempered Persevereth longer than drunkenness.

O gluttony, full of all cursedness; O cause first of our confusion, Original of
our damnation, Till Christ had bought us with his blood again! Looke, how
deare, shortly for to sayn, Abought* was first this cursed villainy:
*atoned for Corrupt was all this world for gluttony. Adam our father, and his
wife also, From Paradise, to labour and to woe, Were driven for that vice, it
is no dread.* *doubt For while that Adam fasted, as I read, He
was in Paradise; and when that he Ate of the fruit defended* of the tree,
*forbidden <12> Anon he was cast out to woe and pain. O gluttony! well
ought us on thee plain. Oh! wist a man how many maladies Follow of excess
and of gluttonies, He woulde be the more measurable*
*moderate Of his diete, sitting at his table. Alas! the shorte throat, the
tender mouth, Maketh that east and west, and north and south, In earth, in
air, in water, mendo swink* *labour To get a glutton dainty
meat and drink. Of this mattere, O Paul! well canst thou treat Meat unto
womb,* and womb eke unto meat, *belly Shall God destroye

both, as Paulus saith. <13> Alas! a foul thing is it, by my faith, To say this word, and fouler is the deed, When man so drinketh of the *white and red,*
 i.e. wine That of his throat he maketh his privy Through thilke cursed
 superfluity The apostle saith, <14> weeping full piteously, There walk many,
 of which you told have I, -- I say it now weeping with piteous voice, -- That
 they be enemies of Christe's crois;* *cross Of which the end
 is death; womb*is their God. *belly O womb, O belly, stinking is
 thy cod,* *bag <15> Full fill'd of dung and of corruption; At
 either end of thee foul is the soun. How great labour and cost is thee to
 find!* *supply These cookes how they stamp, and strain, and
 grind, And turne substance into accident, To fulfill all thy likerous talent!
 Out of the harde bones knocke they The marrow, for they caste naught away
 That may go through the gullet soft and swoot* *sweet Of
 spicery and leaves, of bark and root, Shall be his sauce y-maked by delight,
 To make him have a newer appetite. But, certes, he that haunteth such
 delices Is dead while that he liveth in those vices.

A lecherous thing is wine, and drunkenness Is full of striving and of
 wretchedness. O drunken man! disfigur'd is thy face,<16> Sour is thy breath,
 foul art thou to embrace: And through thy drunken nose sowneth the soun',
 As though thou saidest aye, Samsoun! Samsoun! And yet, God wot,
 Samson drank never wine. Thou fallest as it were a sticked swine; Thy
 tongue is lost, and all thine honest cure;* *care For
 drunkenness is very sepulture* *tomb Of manne's wit
 and his discretion. In whom that drink hath domination, He can no counsel
 keep, it is no dread.* *doubt Now keep you from the white
 and from the red, And namely* from the white wine of Lepe,<17>
 *especially That is to sell in Fish Street <18> and in Cheap. This wine of
 Spaine creepeth subtilly -- In other wines growing faste by, Of which there
 riseth such fumosity, That when a man hath drunken draughtes three, And
 weeneth that he be at home in Cheap, He is in Spain, right at the town of
 Lepe, Not at the Rochelle, nor at Bourdeaux town; And thenne will he say,
 Samsoun! Samsoun! But hearken, lordings, one word, I you pray, That all
 the sovreign actes, dare I say, Of victories in the Old Testament, Through
 very God that is omnipotent, Were done in abstinence and in prayere: Look
 in the Bible, and there ye may it lear.* *learn Look, Attila, the
 greate conqueror, Died in his sleep, <19> with shame and dishonour,
 Bleeding aye at his nose in drunkenness: A captain should aye live in
 soberness And o'er all this, advise* you right well *consider, bethink
 What was commanded unto Lemuel; <20> Not Samuel, but Lemuel, say I.
 Reade the Bible, and find it expressly Of wine giving to them that have
 justice. No more of this, for it may well suffice.

And, now that I have spoke of gluttony, Now will I you *defende hazardry.*
 forbid gambling Hazard is very mother of leasings,*
 *lies And of deceit, and cursed forswearings: Blasphem' of Christ,
 manslaughter, and waste also Of chattel* and of time; and furthermo'
 property It is reprove, and contrar' of honour, *reproach For
 to be held a common hazardour. And ever the higher he is of estate, The
 more he is holden desolate.* *undone, worthless If that a
 prince use hazardry, In alle governance and policy He is, as by common
 opinion, Y-hold the less in reputation.

Chilon, that was a wise ambassador, Was sent to Corinth with full great
 honor From Lacedemon, <21> to make alliance; And when he came, it
 happen'd him, by chance, That all the greatest that were of that land, Y-
 playing atte hazard he them fand.* *found For which, as
 soon as that it mighte be, He stole him home again to his country And saide
 there, "I will not lose my name, Nor will I take on me so great diffame,*
 reproach You to ally unto no hazardors. *gamblers
 Sende some other wise ambassadors, For, by my troth, me were lever* die,
 *rather Than I should you to hazardors ally. For ye, that be so glorious in
 honours, Shall not ally you to no hazardours, As by my will, nor as by my
 treaty." This wise philosopher thus said he. Look eke how to the King
 Demetrius The King of Parthes, as the book saith us, Sent him a pair of dice
 of gold in scorn, For he had used hazard therebeforn: For which he held his
 glory and renown At no value or reputatioun. Lordes may finden other
 manner play Honest enough to drive the day away.

Now will I speak of oathes false and great A word or two, as olde bookes
 treat. Great swearing is a thing abominable, And false swearing is more
 reprobable. The highe God forbade swearing at all; Witness on Matthew:
 <22> but in special Of swearing saith the holy Jeremie, <23> Thou that
 swear sooth thine oathes, and not lie: And swear in doom* and eke in
 righteousness; *judgement But idle swearing is a cursedness.*
 *wickedness Behold and see, there in the firste table Of highe Godde's
 hestes* honourable, *commandments How that the second
 best of him is this, Take not my name in idle* or amiss.
 in vain Lo, rather he forbiddeth such swearing, *sooner
 Than homicide, or many a cursed thing; I say that as by order thus it
 standeth; This knoweth he that his hests* understandeth,
 *commandments How that the second hest of God is that. And farthermore,
 I will thee tell all plat,* *flatly, plainly That vengeance shall not parte
 from his house, That of his oathes is outrageous. "By Godde's precious
 heart, and by his nails, <24> And by the blood of Christ, that is in Hailes,
 <25> Seven is my chance, and thine is cinque and trey: By Godde's armes, if

thou falsely play, This dagger shall throughout thine hearte go." This fruit comes of the *bicched bones two,* *two cursed bones (dice)* Forswearing, ire, falseness, and homicide. Now, for the love of Christ that for us died, Leave your oathes, bothe great and smale. But, Sirs, now will I ell you forth my tale.

These riotoures three, of which I tell, Long *erst than* prime rang of any bell,
before Were set them in a tavern for to drink; And as they sat, they heard a belle clink Before a corpse, was carried to the grave. That one of them gan calle to his knave, *servant "Gobet," <26> quoth he, "and aske readily What corpse is this, that passeth here forth by; And look that thou report his name well." "Sir," quoth the boy, "it needeth never a deal;* *whit It was me told ere ye came here two hours; He was, pardie, an old fellow of yours, And suddenly he was y-slain to-night; Fordrunk* as he sat on his bench upright, *completely drunk There came a privy thief, men clepe Death, That in this country all the people slay'th, And with his spear he smote his heart in two, And went his way withoute wordes mo'. He hath a thousand slain this pestilence; And, master, ere you come in his presence, Me thinketh that it were full necessary For to beware of such an adversary; Be ready for to meet him evermore. Thus taughte me my dame; I say no more." "By Sainte Mary," said the tavernere, "The child saith sooth, for he hath slain this year, Hence ov'r a mile, within a great village, Both man and woman, child, and hind, and page; I trow his habitation be there; To be advised* great wisdom it were, *watchful, on one's guard Ere* that he did a man a dishonour."
*lest

"Yea, Godde's armes," quoth this riotour, "Is it such peril with him for to meet? I shall him seek, by stile and eke by street. I make a vow, by Godde's digne* bones." *worthy Hearken, fellows, we three be alle ones:* *at one Let each of us hold up his hand to other, And each of us become the other's brother, And we will slay this false traitor Death; He shall be slain, he that so many slay'th, By Godde's dignity, ere it be night." Together have these three their trothe plight To live and die each one of them for other As though he were his owen sworn brother. And up they start, all drunken, in this rage, And forth they go towardes that village Of which the taverner had spoke befor, And many a grisly* oathe have they sworn, *dreadful And Christe's blessed body they to-rent;* *tore to pieces <7> "Death shall be dead, if that we may him hent."* *catch When they had gone not fully half a mile, Right as they would have trodden o'er a stile, An old man and a poore with them met. This olde man full meekely them gret,* *greeted And saide thus; "Now, lordes, God you see!"* *look on graciously The proudest of these

riotoures three Answer'd again; "What? churl, with sorry grace, Why art
 thou all forwrapped* save thy face? *closely wrapt up Why livest thou
 so long in so great age?" This olde man gan look on his visage, And saide
 thus; "For that I cannot find A man, though that I walked unto Ind, Neither
 in city, nor in no village go, That woulde change his youthe for mine age;
 And therefore must I have mine age still As longe time as it is Godde's will.
 And Death, alas! he will not have my life. Thus walk I like a resteless
 caitife,* *miserable wretch And on the ground, which is my
 mother's gate, I knocke with my staff, early and late, And say to her, 'Leve*
 mother, let me in. *dear Lo, how I wane, flesh, and blood,
 and skin; Alas! when shall my bones be at rest? Mother, with you I woulde
 change my chest, That in my chamber longe time hath be, Yea, for an hairy
 clout to *wrap in me.'* *wrap myself in* But yet to me she will not
 do that grace, For which fall pale and welked* is my face.
 *withered But, Sirs, to you it is no courtesy To speak unto an old man
 villainy, But* he trespass in word or else in deed. *except In
 Holy Writ ye may yourselves read; 'Against* an old man, hoar upon his
 head, *to meet Ye should arise:' therefore I you rede,*
 *advise Ne do unto an old man no harm now, No more than ye would a man
 did you In age, if that ye may so long abide. And God be with you, whether
 ye go or ride I must go thither as I have to go."

"Nay, olde churl, by God thou shalt not so," Saide this other hazardor anon;
 "Thou partest not so lightly, by Saint John. Thou spakest right now of that
 traitor Death, That in this country all our friendes slay'th; Have here my
 troth, as thou arthis espy;* *spy Tell where he is, or thou
 shalt it abie,* *suffer for By God and by the holy sacrament; For
 soothly thou art one of his assent To slay us younge folk, thou false thief."
 "Now, Sirs," quoth he, "if it be you so lief* *desire To finde
 Death, turn up this crooked way, For in that grove I left him, by my fay,
 Under a tree, and there he will abide; Nor for your boast he will him nothing
 hide. See ye that oak? right there ye shall him find. God save you, that
 bought again mankind, And you amend!" Thus said this olde man; And
 evereach of these riotoures ran, Till they came to the tree, and there they
 found Of florins fine, of gold y-coined round, Well nigh a seven bushels, as
 them thought. No longer as then after Death they sought; But each of them
 so glad was of the sight, For that the florins were so fair and bright, That
 down they sat them by the precious hoard. The youngest of them spake the
 firste word: "Brethren," quoth he, "*take keep* what I shall say;
 heed My wit is great, though that I bourde* and play *joke, frolic
 This treasure hath Fortune unto us given In mirth and jollity our life to
 liven; And lightly as it comes, so will we spend. Hey! Godde's precious
 dignity! who wend* *weened, thought Today that we should have

so fair a grace? But might this gold he carried from this place Home to my
 house, or elles unto yours (For well I wot that all this gold is ours), Then
 were we in high felicity. But truely by day it may not be; Men woulde say
 that we were thieves strong, And for our owen treasure do us hong.*
 *have us hanged This treasure muste carried be by night, As wisely and as
 slily as it might. Wherefore I rede,* that cut** among us all *advise
 **lots We draw, and let see where the cut will fall: And he that hath the cut,
 with hearte blithe Shall run unto the town, and that full swithe,*
 *quickly And bring us bread and wine full privily: And two of us shall keepe
 subtilly This treasure well: and if he will not tarry, When it is night, we will
 this treasure carry, By one assent, where as us thinketh best." Then one of
 them the cut brought in his fist, And bade them draw, and look where it
 would fall; And it fell on the youngest of them all; And forth toward the town
 he went anon. And all so soon as that he was y-gone, The one of them
 spake thus unto the other; "Thou knowest well that thou art my sworn
 brother, *Thy profit* will I tell thee right anon. *what is for thine
 Thou knowest well that our fellow is gone, advantage* And here
 is gold, and that full great plenty, That shall departed* he among us three.
 divided But natheless, if I could shape it so *contrive That
 it departed were among us two, Had I not done a friende's turn to thee?" Th'
 other answer'd, "I n'ot* how that may be; *know not He knows
 well that the gold is with us tway. What shall we do? what shall we to him
 say?" "Shall it be counsel?"* said the firste shrew;** *secret **wretch
 "And I shall tell to thee in wordes few What we shall do, and bring it well
 about." "I grante," quoth the other, "out of doubt, That by my truth I will
 thee not bewray."* *betray "Now," quoth the first, "thou
 know'st well we be tway, And two of us shall stronger be than one. Look;
 when that he is set,* thou right anon *sat down Arise, as
 though thou wouldest with him play; And I shall rive* him through the sides
 tway, *stab While that thou strugglest with him as in game;
 And with thy dagger look thou do the same. And then shall all this gold
 departed* be, *divided My deare friend, betwixte thee and me:
 Then may we both our lustes* all fulfil, *pleasures And play at
 dice right at our owen will." And thus accorded* be these shrewes** tway
 *agreed **wretches To slay the third, as ye have heard me say.

The youngest, which that wente to the town, Full oft in heart he rolled up
 and down The beauty of these florins new and bright. "O Lord!" quoth he, "if
 so were that I might Have all this treasure to myself alone, There is no man
 that lives under the throne Of God, that shoulde have so merry as I." And at
 the last the fiend our enemy Put in his thought, that he should poison buy,
 With which he mighte slay his fellows twy.* *two For why,
 the fiend found him *in such living,* *leading such a That he had

leave to sorrow him to bring. (bad) life* For this was utterly his
 full intent To slay them both, and never to repent. And forth he went, no
 longer would he tarry, Into the town to an apothecary, And prayed him that
 he him woulde sell Some poison, that he might *his rattes quell,* *kill
 his rats* And eke there was a polecat in his haw,* *farm-yard, hedge
 <27> That, as he said, his eapons had y-slaw:* *slain And
 fain he would him wreak,* if that he might, *revenge Of vermin
 that destroyed him by night. Th'apothecary answer'd, "Thou shalt have A
 thing, as wisly* God my soule save, *surely In all this
 world there is no creature That eat or drank hath of this confecture, Not but
 the mountance* of a corn of wheat, *amount That he shall not
 his life *anon forlete;* *immediately lay down* Yea, sterue* he shall, and
 that in lesse while *die Than thou wilt go *apace* nought but a
 mile: *quickly* This poison is so strong and violent." This cursed
 man hath in his hand y-hent* *taken This poison in a box,
 and swift he ran Into the nexte street, unto a man, And borrow'd of him
 large bottles three; And in the two the poison poured he; The third he kepte
 clean for his own drink, For all the night he shope him* for to swink**
 *purposed **labour In carrying off the gold out of that place. And when this
 riotour, with sorry grace, Had fill'd with wine his greate bottles three,

To his fellows again repaired he. What needeth it thereof to sermon* more?
 talk, discourse For, right as they had cast his death before,
 *plotted Right so they have him slain, and that anon. And when that this
 was done, thus spake the one; "Now let us sit and drink, and make us
 merry, And afterward we will his body bury." And with that word it happen'd
 him *par cas* *by chance To take the bottle where the poison was,
 And drank, and gave his fellow drink also, For which anon they sterved*
 both the two. *died But certes I suppose that Avicen
 Wrote never in no canon, nor no fen, <28> More wondrous signes of
 empoisoning, Than had these wretches two ere their ending. Thus ended be
 these homicides two, And eke the false empoisoner also.

O cursed sin, full of all cursedness! O trait'rous homicide! O wickedness! O
 glutt'ny, luxury, and hazardry! Thou blasphemmer of Christ with villany,*
 *outrage, impiety And oathes great, of usage and of pride! Alas! mankinde,
 how may it betide, That to thy Creator, which that thee wrought, And with
 his precious hearte-blood thee bought, Thou art so false and so unkind,*
 alas! *unnatural Now, good men, God forgive you your
 trespass, And ware* you from the sin of avarice. *keep
 Mine holy pardon may you all warice,* *heal So that ye
 offer *nobles or sterlings,* *gold or silver coins* Or elles silver
 brooches, spoons, or rings. Bowe your head under this holy bull. Come up,

ye wives, and offer of your will; Your names I enter in my roll anon; Into the bliss of heaven shall ye gon; I you assoil* by mine high powere,
 *absolve <29> You that will offer, as clean and eke as clear As ye were born.
 Lo, Sires, thus I preach; And Jesus Christ, that is our soules' leech,*
 *healer So grante you his pardon to receive; For that is best, I will not deceive.

But, Sirs, one word forgot I in my tale; I have relics and pardon in my mail,
 As fair as any man in Engleland, Which were me given by the Pope's hand. If
 any of you will of devotion Offer, and have mine absolution, Come forth
 anon, and kneele here adown And meekely receive my pardoun. Or elles
 take pardon, as ye wend,* *go All new and fresh at
 every towne's end, So that ye offer, always new and new, Nobles or pence
 which that be good and true. 'Tis an honour to evereach* that is here,
 each one That ye have a suffisant pardonere *suitable
 T'assoile* you in country as ye ride, *absolve For adventures
 which that may betide. Paraventure there may fall one or two Down of his
 horse, and break his neck in two. Look, what a surety is it to you all, That I
 am in your fellowship y-fall, That may assoil* you bothe *more and lass,*
 *absolve When that the soul shall from the body pass. *great and
 small* I rede* that our Hoste shall begin, *advise For he
 is most enveloped in sin. Come forth, Sir Host, and offer first anon, And
 thou shalt kiss; the relics every one, Yea, for a groat; unbuckle anon thy
 purse.

"Nay, nay," quoth he, "then have I Christe's curse! Let be," quoth he, "it shall
 not be, *so the'ch.* *so may I thrive* Thou wouldest make me kiss thine
 olde breech, And swear it were a relic of a saint, Though it were with thy
 fundament depaint'. *stained by your bottom* But, by the cross which
 that Saint Helen fand,* *found <30> I would I had thy coilons* in
 mine hand, *testicles Instead of relics, or of sanctuary. Let cut
 them off, I will thee help them carry; They shall be shrined in a hogge's
 turd." The Pardoner answered not one word; So wroth he was, no worde
 would he say.

"Now," quoth our Host, "I will no longer play With thee, nor with none other
 angry man." But right anon the worthy Knight began (When that he saw
 that all the people lough*), *laughed "No more of this, for it is
 right enough. Sir Pardoner, be merry and glad of cheer; And ye, Sir Host,
 that be to me so dear, I pray you that ye kiss the Pardoner; And, Pardoner, I
 pray thee drawthee ner,* *nearer And as we didde, let us
 laugh and play." Anon they kiss'd, and rode forth their way.

