

THE TALE. <1>

A Merchant whilom dwell'd at Saint Denise, That riche was, for which men held him wise. A wife he had of excellent beauty, And *companionable and revellous* was she, *fond of society and Which is a thing that causeth more dispence merry making* Than worth is all the cheer and reverence That men them do at feastes and at dances. Such salutations and countenances Passen, as doth the shadow on the wall; Put woe is him that paye must for all. The sely* husband algate** he must pay, *innocent **always He must us <2> clothe and he must us array All for his owen worship richely: In which array we dance jollily. And if that he may not, paraventure, Or elles list not such dispence endure, But thinketh it is wasted and y-lost, Then must another paye for our cost, Or lend us gold, and that is perilous.

This noble merchant held a noble house; For which he had all day so great repair,* *resort of visitors For his largesse, and for his wife was fair, That wonder is; but hearken to my tale. Amonges all these guesstes great and smale, There was a monk, a fair man and a bold, I trow a thirty winter he was old, That ever-in-one* was drawing to that place. *constantly This younge monk, that was so fair of face, Acquainted was so with this goode man, Since that their firste knowledge began, That in his house as familiar was he As it is possible any friend to be. And, for as muchel as this goode man, And eke this monk of which that I began, Were both the two y-born in one village, The monk *him claimed, as for cousinage,* *claimed kindred And he again him said not once nay, with him* But was as glad thereof as fowl of day; "For to his heart it was a great pleasance. Thus be they knit with etern' alliance, And each of them gan other to assure Of brotherhood while that their life may dure. Free was Dan <3> John, and namely* of dispence,** *especially **spending As in that house, and full of diligence To do pleasance, and also *great costage;* *liberal outlay* He not forgot to give the leaste page In all that house; but, after their degree, He gave the lord, and sithen* his meinie,** *afterwards **servants When that he came, some manner honest thing; For which they were as glad of his coming As fowl is fain when that the sun upriseth. No more of this as now, for it sufficeth.

But so befell, this merchant on a day Shope* him to make ready his array *resolved, arranged Toward the town of Bruges <4> for to fare, To buye there a portion of ware;* *merchandise For which he hath to Paris sent anon A messenger, and prayed hath Dan John That he should

come to Saint Denis, and play* *enjoy himself With him, and with
 his wife, a day or tway, Ere he to Bruges went, in alle wise. This noble
 monk, of which I you devise,* *tell Had of his abbot, as him
 list, licence, (Because he was a man of high prudence, And eke an officer out
 for to ride, To see their granges and their barnes wide); <5> And unto Saint
 Denis he came anon. Who was so welcome as my lord Dan John, Our deare
 cousin, full of courtesy? With him he brought a jub* of malvesie,
 jug And eke another full of fine vernage, <6> And volatile, as aye was his
 usage: *wild-fowl And thus I let them eat, and drink, and
 play, This merchant and this monk, a day or tway. The thirde day the
 merchant up ariseth, And on his needeis sadly him adviseth; And up into
 his countour-house* went he, *counting-house <7> To reckon with
 himself as well may be, Of thilke* year, how that it with him stood,
 *that And how that he dispended bad his good, And if that he increased
 were or non. His bookes and his bagges many a one He laid before him on
 his counting-board. Full riche was his treasure and his hoard; For which
 full fast his countour door he shet; And eke he would that no man should
 him let* *hinder Of his accountes, for the meane time: And
 thus he sat, till it was passed prime.

Dan John was risen in the morn also, And in the garden walked to and fro,
 And had his thinges said full courteously. The good wife came walking full
 privily Into the garden, where he walked soft, And him saluted, as she had
 done oft; A maiden child came in her company, Which as her list she might
 govern and gie,* *guide For yet under the yarde* was the maid.
 *rod <8> "O deare cousin mine, Dan John," she said, "What aileth you so
 rath* for to arise?" *early "Niece," quoth he, "it ought enough
 suffice Five houres for to sleep upon a night;' But* it were for an old
 appalled** wight, *unless **pallid, wasted As be these wedded men, that
 lie and dare,* *stare As in a forme sits a weary hare, Alle
 forstraught* with houndes great and smale; *distracted, confounded But,
 deare niece, why be ye so pale? I trowe certes that our goode man Hath you
 so laboured, since this night began, That you were need to reste hastily."
 And with that word he laugh'd full merrily, And of his owen thought he
 wax'd all red. This faire wife gan for to shake her head, And saide thus; "Yea,
 God wot all" quoth she. "Nay, cousin mine, it stands not so with me; For by
 that God, that gave me soul and life, In all the realm of France is there no
 wife That lesse lust hath to that sorry play; For I may sing alas and well-
 away! That I was born; but to no wight," quoth she, "Dare I not tell how that
 it stands with me. Wherefore I think out of this land to wend, Or elles of
 myself to make an end, So full am I of dread and eke of care."

This monk began upon this wife to stare, And said, "Alas! my niece, God

forbid That ye for any sorrow, or any dread, Fordo* yourself: but telle me
 your grief, *destroy Paraventure I may, in your mischief,*
 *distress Counsel or help; and therefore telle me All your annoy, for it shall
 be secre. For on my portos* here I make an oath, *breviary
 That never in my life, *for lief nor loth,* *willing or unwilling* Ne shall I
 of no counsel you bewray." "The same again to you," quoth she, "I say. By
 God and by this portos I you swear, Though men me woulden all in pieces
 tear, Ne shall I never, for* to go to hell, *though I should Bewray*
 one word of thing that ye me tell, *betray For no cousinage,
 nor alliance, But verily for love and affiance."* *confidence,
 promise Thus be they sworn, and thereupon they kiss'd, And each of them
 told other what them list. "Cousin," quoth she, "if that I hadde space, As I
 have none, and namely* in this place, *specially Then would I
 tell a legend of my life, What I have suffer'd since I was a wife With mine
 husband, all* be he your cousin. *although "Nay," quoth this
 monk, "by God and Saint Martin, He is no more cousin unto me, Than is the
 leaf that hangeth on the tree; I call him so, by Saint Denis of France, To
 have the more cause of acquaintance Of you, which I have loved specially
 Aboven alle women sickerly,* *surely This swear I
 you *on my professioun;* *by my vows of religion Tell me your grief,
 lest that he come adown, And hasten you, and go away anon."

"My deare love," quoth she, "O my Dan John, Full lief* were me this counsel
 for to hide, *pleasant But out it must, I may no more abide. My
 husband is to me the worste man That ever was since that the world began;
 But since I am a wife, it sits* not me *becomes To telle no
 wight of our privity, Neither in bed, nor in none other place; God shield* I
 shoulde tell it for his grace; *forbid A wife shall not say of her
 husband But all honour, as I can understand; Save unto you thus much I
 telle shall; As help me God, he is nought worth at all In no degree, the value
 of a fly. But yet me grieveth most his niggardy.* *stinginess
 And well ye wot, that women naturally Desire thinges six, as well as I. They
 woulde that their husbands shoulde be Hardy,* and wise, and rich, and
 thereto free, *brave And buxom* to his wife, and fresh in bed.
 yielding, obedient But, by that ilke Lord that for us bled,
 *same For his honour myself for to array, On Sunday next I muste needes
 pay A hundred francs, or elles am I lorn.* *ruined, undone Yet
 were me lever that I were unborn, *I would rather* Than me
 were done slander or villainy. And if mine husband eke might it espy, I were
 but lost; and therefore I you pray, Lend me this sum, or elles must I dey.*
 *die Dan John, I say, lend me these hundred francs; Pardie, I will not faile
 you, *my thanks,* *if I can help it* If that you list to do that I you
 pray; For at a certain day I will you pay, And do to you what pleasance and

service That I may do, right as you list devise. And but* I do, God take on
me vengeance, *unless As foul as e'er had Ganilion <9> of
France."

This gentle monk answer'd in this mannere; "Now truely, mine owen lady
dear, I have," quoth he, "on you so greate ruth,* *pity That I
you swear, and plighte you my truth, That when your husband is to
Flanders fare,* *gone I will deliver you out of this care, For I
will bringe you a hundred francs." And with that word he caught her by the
flanks, And her embraced hard, and kissed her oft. "Go now your way,"
quoth he, "all still and soft, And let us dine as soon as that ye may, For by
my cylinder* 'tis prime of day;*portable sundial Go now, and be
as true as I shall be ." "Now elles God forbidde, Sir," quoth she; And forth
she went, as jolly as a pie, And bade the cookes that they should them hie,*
*make haste So that men mighte dine, and that anon. Up to her husband is
this wife gone, And knocked at his contour boldely. *"Qui est la?"* quoth he.
"Peter! it am I," *who is there?* Quoth she; "What, Sir, how longe all
will ye fast? How longe time will ye reckon and cast Your summes, and your
bookes, and your things? The devil have part of all such reckonings! Ye have
enough, pardie, of Godde's sond.* *sending, gifts Come down to-
day, and let your bagges stonde.* *stand Ne be ye not ashamed,
that Dan John Shall fasting all this day elenge* gon? *see note
<10> What? let us hear a mass, and go we dine." "Wife," quoth this man,
"little canst thou divine The curious businesse that we have; For of us
chapmen,* all so God me save, *merchants And by that lord
that cleped is Saint Ive, Scarcely amonges twenty, ten shall thrive
Continually, lasting unto our age. We may well make cheer and good visage,
And drive forth the world as it may be, And keepen our estate in privity, Till
we be dead, or elles that we play A pilgrimage, or go out of the way. And
therefore have I great necessity Upon this quaint* world to advise** me.
*strange **consider For evermore must we stand in dread Of hap and
fortune in our chapmanhead.* *trading To Flanders will I go
to-morrow at day, And come again as soon as e'er I may: For which, my
deare wife, I thee beseek *beseech As be to every wight
buxom* and meek, *civil, courteous And for to keep our good be
curious, And honestly governe well our house. Thou hast enough, in every
manner wise, That to a thrifty household may suffice. Thee lacketh none
array, nor no vitail; Of silver in thy purse thou shalt not fail."

And with that word his contour door he shet,* *shut And down
he went; no longer would he let;* *delay, hinder And hastily a
mass was there said, And speedily the tables were laid, And to the dinner
faste they them sped, And richely this monk the chapman fed. And after

dinner Dan John soberly This chapman took apart, and privily He said him thus: "Cousin, it standeth so, That, well I see, to Bruges ye will go; God and Saint Austin speede you and guide. I pray you, cousin, wisely that ye ride: Gouverne you also of your diet Attemperly,* and namely** in this heat. *moderately Betwixt us two needeth no *strange fare;* *ado, ceremony* Farewell, cousin, God shielde you from care. If any thing there be, by day or night, If it lie in my power and my might, That ye me will command in any wise, It shall be done, right as ye will devise. But one thing ere ye go, if it may be; I woulde pray you for to lend to me A hundred frankes, for a week or twy, For certain beastes that I muste buy, To store with a place that is ours (God help me so, I would that it were yours); I shall not faile surely of my day, Not for a thousand francs, a mile way. But let this thing be secret, I you pray; For yet to-night these beastes must I buy. And fare now well, mine owen cousin dear; *Grand mercy* of your cost and of your cheer." *great thanks*

This noble merchant gentilly* anon *like a gentleman Answer'd and said, "O cousin mine, Dan John, Now sickerly this is a small request: My gold is youres, when that it you lest, And not only my gold, but my chaffare;* *merchandise Take what you list, *God shielde that ye spare.* *God forbid that you But one thing is, ye know it well enow should take too little* Of chapmen, that their money is their plough. We may creance* while we have a name, *obtain credit But goldless for to be it is no game. Pay it again when it lies in your ease; After my might full fain would I you please."

These hundred frankes set he forth anon, And privily he took them to Dan John; No wight in all this world wist of this loan, Saving the merchant and Dan John alone. They drink, and speak, and roam a while, and play, Till that Dan John rode unto his abbay. The morrow came, and forth this merchant rideth To Flanders-ward, his prentice well him guideth, Till he came unto Bruges merrily. Now went this merchant fast and busily About his need, and buyed and creanced;* *got credit He neither played at the dice, nor danced; But as a merchant, shortly for to tell, He led his life; and there I let him dwell.

The Sunday next* the merchant was y-gone, *after To Saint Denis y-comen is Dan John, With crown and beard all fresh and newly shave, In all the house was not so little a knave,* *servant-boy Nor no wight elles that was not full fain For that my lord Dan John was come again. And shortly to the point right for to gon, The faire wife accorded with Dan John, That for these hundred francs he should all night Have her in his armes bolt upright; And this accord performed was in deed. In mirth all

night a busy life they lead, Till it was day, that Dan John went his way, And
bade the meinie* "Farewell; have good day." *servants For none of
them, nor no wight in the town, Had of Dan John right no suspicioun; And
forth he rode home to his abbay, Or where him list; no more of him I say.

The merchant, when that ended was the fair, To Saint Denis he gan for to
repair, And with his wife he made feast and cheer, And tolde her that
chaffare* was so dear, *merchandise That needes must he make
a chevisance;* *loan <11> For he was bound in a recognisance
To paye twenty thousand shields* anon. *crowns, ecus For
which this merchant is to Paris gone, To borrow of certain friendes that he
had A certain francs, and some with him he lad.* *took And
when that he was come into the town, For great cherte* and great affectioun
*love Unto Dan John he wente first to play; Not for to borrow of him no
money, Bat for to weet* and see of his welfare, *know And
for to telle him of his chaffare, As friendes do, when they be met in fere.*
*company Dan John him made feast and merry cheer; And he him told
again full specially, How he had well y-bought and graciously (Thanked be
God) all whole his merchandise; Save that he must, in alle manner wise,
Maken a chevisance, as for his best; And then he shoulde be in joy and rest.
Dan John answered, "Certes, I am fain* *glad That ye in
health be come borne again: And if that I were rich, as have I bliss, Of
twenty thousand shields should ye not miss, For ye so kindly the other day
Lente me gold, and as I can and may I thanke you, by God and by Saint
Jame. But nathelless I took unto our Dame, Your wife at home, the same
gold again, Upon your bench; she wot it well, certain, By certain tokens that
I can her tell Now, by your leave, I may no longer dwell; Our abbot will out of
this town anon, And in his company I muste gon. Greet well our Dame, mine
owen niece sweet, And farewell, deare cousin, till we meet.

This merchant, which that was full ware and wise, *Creanced hath,* and
paid eke in Paris *had obtained credit* To certain Lombards ready in
their hond The sum of gold, and got of them his bond, And home he went,
merry as a popinjay.* *parrot For well he knew he stood in
such array That needes must he win in that voyage A thousand francs,
above all his costage.* *expenses His wife full ready met him at
the gate, As she was wont of old usage algate* *always
And all that night in mirthe they beset;* *spent For he was
rich, and clearly out of debt. When it was day, the merchant gan embrace
His wife all new, and kiss'd her in her face, And up he went, and maked it
full tough.

"No more," quoth she, "by God ye have enough;" And wantonly again with

him she play'd, Till at the last this merchant to her said. "By God," quoth he,
 "I am a little wroth With you, my wife, although it be me loth; And wot ye
 why? by God, as that I guess, That ye have made a *manner strangeness*
 a kind of estrangement Betwixte me and my cousin, Dan John. Ye should
 have warn'd me, ere I had gone, That he you had a hundred frankes paid
 By ready token; he *had him evil apaid* *was displeas'd* For that
 I to him spake of chevisance,* *borrowing (He seemed so as by
 his countenance); But natheless, by God of heaven king, I thoughte not to
 ask of him no thing. I pray thee, wife, do thou no more so. Tell me alway, ere
 that I from thee go, If any debtor hath in mine absence Y-pay'd thee, lest
 through thy negligence I might him ask a thing that he hath paid."

This wife was not afeared nor afraid, But boldely she said, and that anon;
 "Mary! I defy that false monk Dan John, I keep* not of his tokens never a
 deal:** *care **whit He took me certain gold, I wot it well. --
 What? evil thedom* on his monke's snout! -- *thriving For, God
 it wot, I ween'd withoute doubt That he had given it me, because of you, To
 do therewith mine honour and my prow,* *profit For
 cousinage, and eke for belle cheer That he hath had full often here. But
 since I see I stand in such disjoint,* *awkward position I will answer
 you shortly to the point. Ye have more slacke debtors than am I; For I will
 pay you well and readily, From day to day, and if so be I fail, I am your wife,
 score it upon my tail, And I shall pay as soon as ever I may. For, by my
 troth, I have on mine array, And not in waste, bestow'd it every deal. And,
 for I have bestowed it so well, For your honour, for Godde's sake I say, As be
 not wroth, but let us laugh and play. Ye shall my jolly body have *to wed;*
 in pledge By God, I will not pay you but in bed; Forgive it me, mine owen
 spouse dear; Turn hitherward, and make better cheer."

The merchant saw none other remedy; And for to chide, it were but a folly,
 Since that the thing might not amended be. "Now, wife," he said, "and I
 forgive it thee; But by thy life be no more so large;* *liberal,
 lavish Keep better my good, this give I thee in charge." Thus endeth now my
 tale; and God us send Taling enough, until our lives' end!