

## THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE. <1>

### THE PROLOGUE.

WHEN ended was the life of Saint Cecile, Ere we had ridden fully five mile,  
<2> At Boughton-under-Blee us gan o'ertake A man, that clothed was in  
clothes black, And underneath he wore a white surplice. His hackenay,\*  
which was all pomely-gris,\*\*           \*nag \*\*dapple-gray So sweated, that it  
wonder was to see; It seem'd as he had pricked\* miles three.  
\*spurred The horse eke that his yeoman rode upon So sweated, that  
unnethes\* might he gon.\*\*           \*hardly \*\*go About the peytrel <3>  
stood the foam full high; He was of foam, as \*flecked as a pie.\*  
\*spotted like a magpie\* A maile twyfold <4> on his crupper lay; It seemed  
that he carried little array; All light for summer rode this worthy man. And  
in my heart to wonder I began What that he was, till that I understood How  
that his cloak was sewed to his hood; For which, when I had long advised\*  
me,                   \*considered I deemed him some Canon for to be. His hat  
hung at his back down by a lace,\*                   \*cord For he had ridden  
more than trot or pace; He hadde pricked like as he were wood.\*  
\*mad A clote-leaf\* he had laid under his hood,                   \* burdock-leaf For  
sweat, and for to keep his head from heat. But it was joye for to see him  
sweat; His forehead dropped as a stillatory\*                   \*still Were full  
of plantain or of paritory.\*                   \*wallflower And when that he was  
come, he gan to cry, "God save," quoth he, "this jolly company. Fast have I  
pricked," quoth he, "for your sake, Because that I would you overtake, To  
riden in this merry company." His Yeoman was eke full of courtesy, And  
saide, "Sirs, now in the morning tide Out of your hostelry I saw you ride,  
And warned here my lord and sovereign, Which that to ride with you is full  
fain, For his disport; he loveth dalliance." "Friend, for thy warning God give  
thee good chance,"\*                   \*fortune Said oure Host; "certain it woulde seem  
Thy lord were wise, and so I may well deem; He is full jocund also, dare I  
lay; Can he aught tell a merry tale or tway, With which he gladden may this  
company?" "Who, Sir? my lord? Yea, Sir, withoute lie, He can\* of mirth and  
eke of jollity                   \*knows \*Not but\* enough; also, Sir, truste  
me,                   \*not less than\* An\* ye him knew all so well as do I,  
\*if Ye would wonder how well and craftily He coulde work, and that in  
sundry wise. He hath take on him many a great emprise,\*                   \*task,  
undertaking Which were full hard for any that is here To bring about, but\*  
they of him it lear.\*\*                   \*unless \*\*learn As homely as he rides amonges

you, If ye him knew, it would be for your prow: \*advantage Ye  
 woulde not forego his acquaintance For much good, I dare lay in balance  
 All that I have in my possession. He is a man of high discretion. I warn you  
 well, he is a passing\* man." \*surpassing, extraordinary Well," quoth our  
 Host, "I pray thee tell me than, Is he a clerk,\* or no? Tell what he is."  
 \*scholar, priest "Nay, he is greater than a clerk, y-wis,"\*  
 \*certainly Saide this Yeoman; "and, in wordes few, Host, of his craft  
 somewhat I will you shew, I say, my lord can\* such a subtlety  
 \*knows (But all his craft ye may not weet\* of me, \*learn And  
 somewhat help I yet to his working), That all the ground on which we be  
 riding Till that we come to Canterbury town, He could all cleane turnen up  
 so down, And pave it all of silver and of gold." And when this Yeoman had  
 this tale told Unto our Host, he said; "Ben'dicite! This thing is wonder  
 marvellous to me, Since that thy lord is of so high prudence, Because of  
 which men should him reverence, That of his worship\* recketh he so lite,\*\*  
 \*honour \*\*little His \*overest slop\* it is not worth a mite \*upper  
 garment\* As in effect to him, so may I go; It is all bawdy\* and to-tore also.  
 \*slovenly Why is thy lord so sluttish, I thee pray, And is of power better  
 clothes to bey,\* \*buy If that his deed accordeth with thy  
 speech? Telle me that, and that I thee beseech."

"Why?" quoth this Yeoman, "whereto ask ye me? God help me so, for he  
 shall never the\* \*thrive (But I will not avowe\* that I say,  
 \*admit And therefore keep it secret, I you pray); He is too wise, in faith, as I  
 believe. Thing that is overdone, it will not preve\* \*stand the test  
 Aright, as clerkes say; it is a vice; Wherefore in that I hold him \*lewd and  
 nice."\* \*ignorant and foolish\* For when a man hath over great a wit, Full  
 oft him happens to misusen it; So doth my lord, and that me grieveth sore.  
 God it amend; I can say now no more."

"Thereof \*no force,\* good Yeoman, "quoth our Host; \*no matter\* "Since  
 of the conning\* of thy lord, thou know'st, \*knowledge Tell how he  
 doth, I pray thee heartily, Since that he is so crafty and so sly.\*  
 \*wise Where dwelle ye, if it to telle be?" "In the suburbes of a town," quoth  
 he, "Lurking in hernes\* and in lanes blind, \*corners Where  
 as these robbers and these thieves by kind\* \*nature Holde their  
 privy fearful residence, As they that dare not show their presence, So fare  
 we, if I shall say the soothe."\* \*truth "Yet," quoth our Hoste,  
 "let me talke to thee; Why art thou so discolour'd of thy face?" "Peter!" quoth  
 he, "God give it harde grace, I am so us'd the hote fire to blow, That it hath  
 changed my colour, I trow; I am not wont in no mirror to pry, But swinke\*  
 sore, and learn to multiply. <5> \*labour We blunder\* ever, and  
 poren\*\* in the fire, \*toil \*\*peer And, for all that, we fail of our

desire For ever we lack our conclusion To muche folk we do illusion, And  
 borrow gold, be it a pound or two, Or ten or twelve, or many summes mo',  
 And make them weenen,\* at the leaste way, \*fancy That of a  
 pounce we can make tway. Yet is it false; and aye we have good hope It for  
 to do, and after it we grope:\* \*search, strive But that science is  
 so far us beforne, That we may not, although we had it sworn, It overtake, it  
 slides away so fast; It will us make beggars at the last." While this Yeoman  
 was thus in his talking, This Canon drew him near, and heard all thing  
 Which this Yeoman spake, for suspicion Of menne's speech ever had this  
 Canon: For Cato saith, that he that guilty is, <6> Deemeth all things be  
 spoken of him y-wis;\* \*surely Because of that he gan so nigh  
 to draw To his Yeoman, that he heard all his saw; And thus he said unto his  
 Yeoman tho\* \*then "Hold thou thy peace, and speak no  
 wordes mo': For if thou do, thou shalt \*it dear abie.\* \*pay dearly for it\*  
 Thou slanderest me here in this company And eke discoverest that thou  
 shouldest hide." "Yea," quoth our Host, "tell on, whatso betide; Of all his  
 threatening reck not a mite." "In faith," quoth he, "no more do I but lite."\*  
 \*little And when this Canon saw it would not be But his Yeoman would tell  
 his privy,\* \*secrets He fled away for very sorrow and  
 shame.

"Ah!" quoth the Yeoman, "here shall rise a game;\* \*some diversion All  
 that I can anon I will you tell, Since he is gone; the foule fiend him quell!\*"  
 \*destroy For ne'er hereafter will I with him meet, For penny nor for pound, I  
 you behete.\* \*promise He that me broughte first unto that  
 game, Ere that he die, sorrow have he and shame. For it is earnest\* to me,  
 by my faith; \*a serious matter That feel I well, what so any man  
 saith; And yet for all my smart, and all my grief, For all my sorrow, labour,  
 and mischief,\* \*trouble I coulde never leave it in no wise. Now  
 would to God my witte might suffice To tellen all that longeth to that art! But  
 natheless yet will I telle part; Since that my lord is gone, I will not spare;  
 Such thing as that I know, I will declare."