

## CHAUCER'S DREAM.

[This pretty allegory, or rather conceit, containing one or two passages that for vividness and for delicacy yield to nothing in the whole range of Chaucer's poetry, had never been printed before the year 1597, when it was included in the edition of Speght. Before that date, indeed, a Dream of Chaucer had been printed; but the poem so described was in reality "The Book of the Duchess; or the Death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster" -- which is not included in the present edition. Speght says that "This Dream, devised by Chaucer, seemeth to be a covert report of the marriage of John of Gaunt, the King's son, with Blanche, the daughter of Henry, Duke of Lancaster; who after long love (during the time whereof the poet feigneth them to be dead) were in the end, by consent of friends, happily married; figured by a bird bringing in his bill an herb, which restored them to life again. Here also is showed Chaucer's match with a certain gentlewoman, who, although she was a stranger, was, notwithstanding, so well liked and loved of the Lady Blanche and her Lord, as Chaucer himself also was, that gladly they concluded a marriage between them." John of Gaunt, at the age of nineteen, and while yet Earl of Richmond, was married to the Lady Blanche at Reading in May 1359; Chaucer, then a prisoner in France, probably did not return to England till peace was concluded in the following year; so that his marriage to Philippa Roet, the sister of the Duchess Blanche's favourite attendant Katharine Roet, could not have taken place till some time after that of the Duke. In the poem, it is represented to have immediately followed; but no consequence need be attached to that statement. Enough that it followed at no great interval of time; and that the intimate relations which Chaucer had already begun to form with John of Gaunt, might well warrant him in writing this poem on the occasion of the Duke's marriage, and in weaving his own love-fortunes with those of the principal figures. In the necessary abridgement of the poem for the present edition, the subsidiary branch of the allegory, relating to the poet's own love affair, has been so far as possible separated from the main branch, which shadows forth the fortunes of John and Blanche. The poem, in full, contains, with an "Envoy" arbitrarily appended, 2233 lines; of which 510 are given here.] (Transcriber's note: modern scholars believe that Chaucer was not the author of this poem)

WHEN Flora, the queen of pleasance, Had wholly \*achievd the obeisance\*  
\*won the obedience\* Of the fresh and the new season, Thorough ev'ry  
region; And with her mantle \*whole covert\*                      \*wholly covered\*  
What winter had \*made discover,\* --                              \*stripped\*

On a May night, the poet lay alone, thinking of his lady, and all her beauty;  
and, falling asleep, he dreamed that he was in an island

Where wall, and gate, was all of glass, And so was closed round about, That  
leaveless\* none came in nor out;                   \*without permission Uncouth and  
strange to behold; For ev'ry gate, of fine gold, A thousand fanes,\* ay turning,  
\*vanes, weathercocks Entuned\* had, and birds singing                   \*contrived  
so as to emit Diversely, on each fane a pair,                   a musical  
sound With open mouth, against the air; <1> And \*of a suit\* were all the  
tow'rs,                   \*of the same plan\* Subtilly \*carven aft\* flow'rs  
\*carved to represent\* Of uncouth colours, \*during ay,\*  
\*lasting forever\* That never be none seen in May, With many a small turret  
high; But man alive I could not sigh,\*                   \*see Nor  
creatures, save ladies play,\*                   \*disporting themselves Which were  
such of their array, That, as me thought, \*of goodlihead\*                   \*for  
comeliness\* They passed all, and womanhead. For to behold them dance  
and sing, It seemed like none earthly thing;

And all were of the same age, save one; who was advanced in years, though  
no less gay in demeanour than the rest. While he stood admiring the  
richness and beauty of the place, and the fairness of the ladies, which had  
the notable gift of enduring unimpaired till death, the poet was accosted by  
the old lady, to whom he had to yield himself prisoner; because the  
ordinance of the isle was, that no man should dwell there; and the ladies'  
fear of breaking the law was enhanced by the temporary absence of their  
queen from the realm. Just at this moment the cry was raised that the  
queen came; all the ladies hastened to meet her; and soon the poet saw her  
approach -- but in her company his mistress, wearing the same garb, and a  
seemly knight. All the ladies wondered greatly at this; and the queen  
explained:

"My sisters, how it hath befall,\*                   \*befallen I trow ye know  
it one and all, That of long time here have I been Within this isle bidding as  
queen, Living at ease, that never wight More perfect joye have not might;  
And to you been of governance Such as you found in whole pleasance, <2>  
In every thing as ye know, After our custom and our law; Which how they  
firste founded were, I trow ye wot all the mannere. And who the queen is of  
this isle, -- As I have been this longe while, -- Each seven years must, of  
usage, Visit the heav'nly hermitage, Which on a rock so highe stands, In a  
strange sea, out from all lands, That for to make the pilgrimage Is call'd a  
perilous voyage; For if the wind be not good friend, The journey dureth to  
the end Of him which that it undertakes; Of twenty thousand not one

scapes. Upon which rock groweth a tree, That certain years bears apples  
three; Which three apples whoso may have, Is \*from all displeasance y-save\*  
\*safe from all pain\* That in the seven years may fall; This wot you well, both  
one and all. For the first apple and the hext,\* \*highest <3>  
Which groweth unto you the next, Hath three virtues notable, And keepeth  
youth ay durable, Beauty, and looks, ever-in-one,\*  
\*continually And is the best of ev'ry one. The second apple, red and green,  
Only with lookes of your eyne, You nourishes in great pleasance, Better than  
partridge or fesaunce,\* \*pheasant And feedeth ev'ry living  
wight Pleasantly, only with the sight. And the third apple of the three, Which  
groweth lowest on the tree, Whoso it beareth may not fail\*  
\*miss, fail to obtain That\* to his pleasance may avail. \*that  
which So your pleasure and beauty rich, Your during youth ever y-lich,\*  
\*alike Your truth, your cunning,\* and your weal, \*knowledge  
Hath flower'd ay, and your good heal, Without sickness or displeasance, Or  
thing that to you was noyance.\* \*offence, injury So that you  
have as goddesses Lived above all princesses. Now is befall'n, as ye may see;  
To gather these said apples three, I have not fail'd, against the day,  
Thitherward to take the way, \*Weening to speed\* as I had oft.  
\*expecting to succeed\* But when I came, I found aloft My sister, which that  
hero stands, Having those apples in her hands, Advising\* them, and nothing  
said, \*regarding, gazing on But look'd as she were \*well apaid:\*  
\*satisfied\* And as I stood her to behold, Thinking how my joys were cold,  
Since I these apples \*have not might,\* \*might not have\* Even  
with that so came this knight, And in his arms, of me unaware, Me took, and  
to his ship me bare, And said, though him I ne'er had seen, Yet had I long  
his lady been; Wherefore I shoulde with him wend, And he would, to his  
life's end, My servant be; and gan to sing, As one that had won a rich thing.  
Then were my spirits from me gone, So suddenly every one, That in me  
appear'd but death, For I felt neither life nor breath, Nor good nor harme  
none I knew, The sudden pain me was so new, That \*had not the hasty  
grace be\* \*had it not been for the Of this lady, that from the tree  
prompt kindness\* Of her gentleness so bled,\*  
\*hastened Me to comferten, I had died; And of her three apples she one Into  
mine hand there put anon, Which brought again my mind and breath, And  
me recover'd from the death. Wherefore to her so am I hold,\*  
\*beholden, obliged That for her all things do I wo'ld, For she was leach\* of all  
my smart, \*physician And from great pain so quit\* my  
heart. \*delivered And as God wot, right as ye hear, Me to  
comfort with friendly cheer, She did her prowess and her might. And truly  
eke so did this knight, In that he could; and often said, That of my woe he  
was \*ill paid,\* \*distressed, ill-pleased\* And curs'd the ship that him  
there brought, The mast, the master that it wrought. And, as each thing

must have an end, My sister here, our bother friend, <4> Gan with her words so womanly This knight entreat, and cunningly, For mine honour and hers also, And said that with her we should go Both in her ship, where she was brought, Which was so wonderfully wrought, So clean, so rich, and so array'd, That we were both content and paid;\* \*satisfied And me to comfort and to please, And my heart for to put at ease, She took great pain in little while, And thus hath brought us to this isle As ye may see; wherefore each one I pray you thank her one and one, As heartily as ye can devise, Or imagine in any wise."

At once there then men mighte see'n, A world of ladies fall on kneen Before my lady, --

Thanking her, and placing themselves at her commandment. Then the queen sent the aged lady to the knight, to learn of him why he had done her all this woe; and when the messenger had discharged her mission, telling the knight that in the general opinion he had done amiss, he fell down suddenly as if dead for sorrow and repentance. Only with great difficulty, by the queen herself, was he restored to consciousness and comfort; but though she spoke kind and hope-inspiring words, her heart was not in her speech,

For her intent was, to his barge Him for to bring against the eve, With certain ladies, and take leave, And pray him, of his gentleness, To \*suffer her\* thenceforth in peace, \*let her dwell\* As other princes had before; And from thenceforth, for evermore, She would him worship in all wise That gentlesse might devise; And \*pain her\* wholly to fulfil, \*make her utmost efforts\* In honour, his pleasure and will.

And during thus this knichte's woe, -- Present\* the queen and other mo', \*(there being) present\* My lady and many another wight, -- Ten thousand shippes at a sight I saw come o'er the wavy flood, With sail and oar; that, as I stood Them to behold, I gan marvail From whom might come so many a sail; For, since the time that I was born, Such a navy therebeforn Had I not seen, nor so array'd, That for the sight my hearte play'd Ay to and fro within my breast; For joy long was ere it would rest. For there were sailes \*full of flow'rs;\* \*embroidered with flowers\* After, castles with huge tow'rs, <5> Seeming full of armes bright, That wond'rous lusty\* was the sight; \*pleasant With large tops, and mastes long, Richly depaint' and \*rear'd among.\* \*raised among them\* At certain times gan repair Smalle birdes down from the air, And on the shippes' bounds\* about \*bulwarks Sat and sang, with voice full out, Ballads and lays right joyously, As they could in their harmony.

The ladies were alarmed and sorrow-stricken at sight of the ships, thinking that the knight's companions were on board; and they went towards the walls of the isle, to shut the gates. But it was Cupid who came; and he had already landed, and marched straight to the place where the knight lay. Then he chid the queen for her unkindness to his servant; shot an arrow into her heart; and passed through the crowd, until he found the poet's lady, whom he saluted and complimented, urging her to have pity on him that loved her. While the poet, standing apart, was revolving all this in his mind, and resolving truly to serve his lady, he saw the queen advance to Cupid, with a petition in which she besought forgiveness of past offences, and promised continual and zealous service till her death. Cupid smiled, and said that he would be king within that island, his new conquest; then, after long conference with the queen, he called a council for the morrow, of all who chose to wear his colours. In the morning, such was the press of ladies, that scarcely could standing-room be found in all the plain. Cupid presided; and one of his counsellors addressed the mighty crowd, promising that ere his departure his lord should bring to an agreement all the parties there present. Then Cupid gave to the knight and the dreamer each his lady; promised his favour to all the others in that place who would truly and busily serve in love; and at evening took his departure. Next morning, having declined the proffered sovereignty of the island, the poet's mistress also embarked, leaving him behind; but he dashed through the waves, was drawn on board her ship from peril of death, and graciously received into his lady's lasting favour. Here the poet awakes, finding his cheeks and body all wet with tears; and, removing into another chamber, to rest more in peace, he falls asleep anew, and continues the dream. Again he is within the island, where the knight and all the ladies are assembled on a green, and it is resolved by the assembly, not only that the knight shall be their king, but that every lady there shall be wedded also. It is determined that the knight shall depart that very day, and return, within ten days, with such a host of Benedicts, that none in the isle need lack husbands. The knight

Anon into a little barge Brought was, late against an eve, Where of all he took his leave. Which barge was, as a man thought, Aft\* his pleasure to him brought;  
\*according to\* The queen herself accustom'd ay In the same barge to play.\* \*take her sport It needed neither mast nor rother\* \*rudder (I have not heard of such another), Nor master for the governance;\* \*steering It sailed by thought and pleasance, Without labour, east and west; All was one, calm or tempest. <6> And I went with, at his request, And was the first pray'd to the feast.\* \*the bridal feast When he came unto his country, And passed had the wavy sea, In a haven deep and large He left his

rich and noble barge, And to the court, shortly to tell, He went, where he was wont to dwell, --

And was gladly received as king by the estates of the land; for during his absence his father, "old, and wise, and hoar," had died, commending to their fidelity his absent son. The prince related to the estates his journey, and his success in finding the princess in quest of whom he had gone seven years before; and said that he must have sixty thousand guests at his marriage feast. The lords gladly guaranteed the number within the set time; but afterwards they found that fifteen days must be spent in the necessary preparations. Between shame and sorrow, the prince, thus compelled to break his faith, took to his bed, and, in wailing and self-reproach,

-- Endur'd the days fifteen, Till that the lords, on an evning,\*  
\*evening Him came and told they ready were, And showed in few wordes  
there, How and what wise they had \*purvey'd \*provided suitably  
For his estate,\* and to him said, to his rank\* That twenty  
thousand knights of name, And forty thousand without blame, Alle come of  
noble ligne\* \*line, lineage Together in a company Were  
lodged on a river's side, Him and his pleasure there t'abide. The prince then  
for joy uprose, And, where they lodged were, he goes, Withoute more, that  
same night, And there his supper \*made to dight;\* \*had  
prepared\* And with them bode\* till it was day. \*abode, waited\*  
And forthwith to take his journey, Leaving the strait, holding the large, Till  
he came to his noble barge: And when the prince, this lusty knight, With his  
people in armes bright, Was come where he thought to pass,\*  
\*cross to the isle And knew well none abiding was Behind, but all were there  
present, Forthwith anon all his intent He told them there, and made his  
cries\* \*proclamation Thorough his hoste that day twice,  
Commanding ev'ry living wight There being present in his sight, To be the  
morrow on the rivage,\* \*shore There he begin would  
his voyage.

The morrow come, the \*cry was kept\* \*proclamation was obeyed\* But  
few were there that night that slept, But \*truss'd and purvey'd\* for the  
morrow; \*packed up and provided\* For fault\* of ships was all their  
sorrow; \*lack, shortage For, save the barge, and other two, Of  
shippes there I saw no mo'. Thus in their doubt as they stood, Waxing the  
sea, coming the flood, Was cried "To ship go ev'ry wight!" Then was but \*hie  
that hie him might,\* \*whoever could hasten, did\* And to the barge, me  
thought, each one They went, without was left not one, Horse, nor male\*,  
truss, nor baggage, \*trunk, wallet Salad\*, spear, gardebrace,\*\*  
nor page, \*helmet<7> \*\*arm-shield<8> But was lodged and room

enough; At which shipping me thought I lough,\*   \*laughed  
 And gan to marvel in my thought, How ever such a ship was wrought.\*  
 \*constructed For \*what people that can increase,\*       \*however the numbers  
 increased\* Nor ne'er so thick might be the prease,\*   \*press, crowd  
 But alle hadde room at will; There was not one was lodged ill. For, as I trow,  
 myself the last Was one, and lodged by the mast; And where I look'd I saw  
 such room As all were lodged in a town. Forth went the ship, said was the  
 creed;<9> And on their knees, \*for their good speed,\*       \*to pray for  
 success\* Down kneeled ev'ry wight a while, And prayed fast that to the isle  
 They mighte come in safety, The prince and all the company. With worship  
 and withoute blame, Or disclander\* of his name,   \*reproach,  
 slander Of the promise he should return Within the time he did sojourn In  
 his lande bidding\* his host;   \*waiting for This was their  
 prayer least and most: To keep the day it might not be'n, That he appointed  
 with the queen.

Wherefore the prince slept neither day nor night, till he and his people  
 landed on the glass-walled isle, "weening to be in heav'n that night." But ere  
 they had gone a little way, they met a lady all in black, with piteous  
 countenance, who reproached the prince for his untruth, and informed him  
 that, unable to bear the reproach to their name, caused by the lightness of  
 their trust in strangers, the queen and all the ladies of the isle had vowed  
 neither to eat, nor drink, nor sleep, nor speak, nor cease weeping till all were  
 dead. The queen had died the first; and half of the other ladies had already  
 "under the earth ta'en lodging new." The woeful recorder of all these woes  
 invites the prince to behold the queen's hearse:

"Come within, come see her hearse Where ye shall see the piteous sight That  
 ever yet was shown to knight; For ye shall see ladies stand, Each with a  
 greate rod in hand, Clad in black, with visage white, Ready each other for to  
 smite, If any be that will not weep; Or who makes countenance to sleep.  
 They be so beat, that all so blue They be as cloth that dy'd is new."

Scarcely has the lady ceased to speak, when the prince plucks forth a  
 dagger, plunges it into his heart, and, drawing but one breath, expires.

For whiche cause the lusty host, Which [stood] in battle on the coast, At  
 once for sorrow such a cry Gan rear, thorough\* the company,  
 \*throughout That to the heav'n heard was the soun', And under th'earth as  
 far adown, And wilde beastes for the fear So suddenly affrayed\* were,  
 \*afraid That for the doubt, while they might dure,\*       \*have a chance of  
 safety They ran as of their lives unsure, From the woodes into the plain, And  
 from valleyes the high mountain They sought, and ran as beastes blind, That

clean forgotten had their kind.\*

\*nature

The lords of the laggard host ask the woebegone lady what should be done; she answers that nothing can now avail, but that for remembrance they should build in their land, open to public view, "in some notable old city," a chapel engraved with some memorial of the queen. And straightway, with a sigh, she also "pass'd her breath."

Then said the lordes of the host, And so concluded least and most, That they would ay in houses of thack\*                      \*thatch Their lives lead, <10> and wear but black, And forsake all their pleasancess, And turn all joy to penances; And bare the dead prince to the barge, And named \*them should\* have the charge;                      \*those who should\* And to the hearse where lay the queen The remnant went, and down on kneen, Holding their hands on high, gan cry, "Mercy! mercy!" \*evereach thry; \*each one thrice\* And curs'd the time that ever sloth Should have such masterdom of troth. And to the barge, a longe mile, They bare her forth; and, in a while, All the ladies, one and one, By companies were brought each one. And pass'd the sea, and took the land, And in new hearses, on a sand, Put and brought were all anon, Unto a city clos'd with stone, Where it had been used ay The kinges of the land to lay, After they reigned in honours; And writ was which were conquerours; In an abbey of nunnes black, Which accustom'd were to wake, And of usage rise each a-night, To pray for ev'ry living wight. And so befell, as is the guise, Ordain'd and said was the service Of the prince and eke of the queen, So devoutly as mighte be'n; And, after that, about the hearses, Many orisons and verses, Withoute note\* <11> full softly                      \*music Said were, and that full heartily; That all the night, till it was day, The people in the church gan pray Unto the Holy Trinity, Of those soules to have pity.

And when the nighte past and run Was, and the newe day begun, -- The young morrow with rayes red, Which from the sun all o'er gan spread, Attemper'd\* cleare was and fair,                      \*clement, calm And made a time of wholesome air, -- Befell a wondrous case\* and strange \*chance, event Among the people, and gan change Soon the word, and ev'ry woe Unto a joy, and some to two.

A bird, all feather'd blue and green, With brighte rays like gold between, As small thread over ev'ry joint, All full of colour strange and coint,\* \*quaint Uncouth\* and wonderful to sight,                      \*unfamiliar Upon the queene's hearse gan light, And sung full low and softly Three songes in their harmony, \*Unletted of\* every wight; \*unhindered by\* Till at the last an aged knight, Which seem'd a man in





least, That long of weeping they not ceas'd; For of their lord the  
 remembrance Unto them was such displeasance.\* \*cause of  
 grief That for to live they called pain, So were they very true and plain. And  
 after this the good abbess Of the grains gan choose and dress\*  
 \*prepare Three, with her fingers clean and smale,\* \*small  
 And in the queenes mouth, by tale, One after other, full easily She put, and  
 eke full cunningly.\* \*skilfully Which showed some such  
 virtue. That proved was the medicine true. For with a smiling countenance  
 The queen uprose, and of usance\* \*custom As she was  
 wont, to ev'ry wight She \*made good cheer;\* for whiche sight  
 \*showed a gracious The people, kneeling on the stones,  
 countenance\* Thought they in heav'n were, soul and bones; And to the  
 prince, where that he lay, They went to make the same assay.\*  
 \*trial, experiment And when the queen it understood, And how the medicine  
 was good, She pray'd that she might have the grains, To relieve him from the  
 pains Which she and he had both endur'd. And to him went, and so him  
 cur'd, That, within a little space, Lusty and fresh alive he was, And in good  
 heal, and whole of speech, And laugh'd, and said, \*"Gramercy, leach!"\*  
 \*"Great thanks, For which the joy throughout the town my  
 physician!"\* So great was, that the belles' soun' Affray'd the people a  
 journey\* \*to the distance of About the city ev'ry way;  
 a day's journey\* And came and ask'd the cause, and why They rungen were  
 so stately.\* \*proudly, solemnly And after that the queen,  
 th'abbess, Made diligence, <14> ere they would cease, Such, that of ladies  
 soon a rout\* \*company, crowd Suing\* the queen was all  
 about; \*following And, call'd by name each one and told,\*  
 \*numbered Was none forgotten, young nor old. There mighte men see joyes  
 new, When the medicine, fine and true, Thus restor'd had ev'ry wight, So  
 well the queen as the knight, Unto perfect joy and heal, That \*floating they  
 were in such weal\* \*swimming in such As folk that woulden in no  
 wise happiness\* Desire more perfect paradise.

On the morrow a general assembly was convoked, and it was resolved that  
 the wedding feast should be celebrated within the island. Messengers were  
 sent to strange realms, to invite kings, queens, duchesses, and princesses;  
 and a special embassy was despatched, in the magic barge, to seek the  
 poet's mistress -- who was brought back after fourteen days, to the great joy  
 of the queen. Next day took place the wedding of the prince and all the  
 knights to the queen and all the ladies; and a three months' feast followed,  
 on a large plain "under a wood, in a champaign, betwixt a river and a well,  
 where never had abbey nor cell been, nor church, house, nor village, in time  
 of any manne's age." On the day after the general wedding, all entreated the  
 poet's lady to consent to crown his love with marriage; she yielded; the



8. Gardebrace: French, "garde-bras," an arm-shield; probably resembling the "gay bracer" which the Yeoman, in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, wears on his arm.

9. Confession and prayer were the usual preliminaries of any enterprise in those superstitious days; and in these days of enlightenment the fashion yet lingers among the most superstitious class -- the fisher-folk.

10. The knights resolved that they would quit their castles and houses of stone for humble huts.

11. The knight and lady were buried without music, although the office for the dead was generally sung.

12. Avisand: considering; present participle from "avise" or "advise."

13. Treacle; corrupted from Latin, "therisca," an antidote. The word is used for medicine in general.

14. The abbess made diligence: i.e. to administer the grain to the dead ladies.