

“The Nun’s Priest’s Tale”

A poor widow, *somedel y-stept* in age, *somewhat advanced*
Was whilom dwelling in a poor cottage,
Beside a grove, standing in a dale.
This widow, of which I telle you my tale,
Since thilke day that she was last a wife,
In patience led a full simple life,
For little was *her chattel and her rent.* *her goods and her income*
By husbandry* of such as God her sent, *thrifty management
She found* herself, and eke her daughters two. *maintained
Three large sowes had she, and no mo';
Three kine, and eke a sheep that highte Mall.
Full sooty was her bow'r,* and eke her hall, *chamber
In which she ate full many a slender meal.
Of poignant sauce knew she never a deal.* *whit
No dainty morsel passed through her throat;
Her diet was *accordant to her cote.* *in keeping with her cottage*
Repletion her made never sick;
Attemper* diet was all her physic, *moderate
And exercise, and *hearte's suffisance.* *contentment of heart*
The goute *let her nothing for to dance,* *did not prevent her
Nor apoplexy shente* not her head. from dancing* *hurt

No wine drank she, neither white nor red:
Her board was served most with white and black,
Milk and brown bread, in which she found no lack,
Seind* bacon, and sometimes an egg or tway; *singed
For she was as it were *a manner dey.* *kind of day labourer* <2>
A yard she had, enclosed all about
With stickes, and a drye ditch without,
In which she had a cock, hight Chanticleer;
In all the land of crowing *n'as his peer.* *was not his equal*
His voice was merrier than the merry orgon,* *organ <3>
On masse days that in the churches gon.
Well sickerer* was his crowing in his lodge, *more punctual*
Than is a clock, or an abbay horloge.* *clock <4>
By nature he knew each ascension
Of th' equinoctial in thilke town;

For when degrees fiftene were ascended,
Then crew he, that it might not be amended.
His comb was redder than the fine coral,
Embattell'd <5> as it were a castle wall.
His bill was black, and as the jet it shone;
Like azure were his legges and his tone;* *toes
His nailes whiter than the lily flow'r,
And like the burnish'd gold was his colour,
This gentle cock had in his governance
Sev'n hennes, for to do all his pleasance,
Which were his sisters and his paramours,
And wondrous like to him as of colours.
Of which the fairest-hued in the throat
Was called Damoselle Partelote,
Courteous she was, discreet, and debonair,
And companiable,* and bare herself so fair, *sociable
Since the day that she sev'n night was old,
That truely she had the heart in hold
Of Chanticleer, locked in every lith;* *limb
He lov'd her so, that well was him therewith,
But such a joy it was to hear them sing,
When that the brighte sunne gan to spring,
In sweet accord, *"My lefe is fare in land."* <6> *my love is
For, at that time, as I have understand, gone abroad*
Beastes and birdes coulde speak and sing.

And so befell, that in a dawening,
As Chanticleer among his wives all
Sat on his perche, that was in the hall,
And next him sat this faire Partelote,
This Chanticleer gan groanen in his throat,
As man that in his dream is dretched* sore, *oppressed
And when that Partelote thus heard him roar,
She was aghast,* and saide, "Hearte dear, *afraid
What aileth you to groan in this mannere?
Ye be a very sleeper, fy for shame!"
And he answer'd and saide thus; "Madame,
I pray you that ye take it not agrief;* *amiss, in umbrage
By God, *me mette* I was in such mischief,** *I dreamed* **trouble
Right now, that yet mine heart is sore affright'.
Now God," quoth he, "my sweven* read aright *dream, vision.

And keep my body out of foul prisoun.
Me mette, how that I roamed up and down *I dreamed*
Within our yard, where as I saw a beast
Was like an hound, and would have *made arrest* *siezed*
Upon my body, and would have had me dead.
His colour was betwixt yellow and red;
And tipped was his tail, and both his ears,
With black, unlike the remnant of his hairs.
His snout was small, with glowing eyen tway;
Yet of his look almost for fear I dey;* *died
This caused me my groaning, doubtless."

"Away," <7> quoth she, "fy on you, hearteless!* *coward
Alas!" quoth she, "for, by that God above!
Now have ye lost my heart and all my love;
I cannot love a coward, by my faith.
For certes, what so any woman saith,
We all desiren, if it mighte be,
To have husbandes hardy, wise, and free,
And secret,* and no niggard nor no fool, *discreet
Nor him that is aghast* of every tool,** *afraid **rag, trifle
Nor no avantour,* by that God above! *braggart
How durste ye for shame say to your love
That anything might make you afear'd?
Have ye no manne's heart, and have a beard?
Alas! and can ye be aghast of swevenes?* *dreams
Nothing but vanity, God wot, in sweven is,
Swevens *engender of repletions,* *are caused by over-eating*
And oft of fume,* and of complexions, *drunkenness
When humours be too abundant in a wight.
Certes this dream, which ye have mette tonight,
Cometh of the great supefluity
Of youre rede cholera,* pardie, *bile
Which causeth folk to dreaden in their dreams
Of arrows, and of fire with redde beams,
Of redde beastes, that they will them bite,
Of conteke,* and of whelpes great and lite;** *contention **little
Right as the humour of melancholy
Causeth full many a man in sleep to cry,
For fear of bulles, or of beares blake,
Or elles that black devils will them take,

Of other humours could I tell also,
 That worke many a man in sleep much woe;
 That I will pass as lightly as I can.
 Lo, Cato, which that was so wise a man,
 Said he not thus, *Ne do no force of* dreams,'<8> *attach no weight to*
 Now, Sir," quoth she, "when we fly from these beams,
 For Godde's love, as take some laxatife;
 On peril of my soul, and of my life,
 I counsel you the best, I will not lie,
 That both of choler, and melancholy,
 Ye purge you; and, for ye shall not tarry,
 Though in this town is no apothecary,
 I shall myself two herbes teache you,
 That shall be for your health, and for your prow;* *profit
 And in our yard the herbes shall I find,
 The which have of their property by kind* *nature
 To purge you beneath, and eke above.
 Sire, forget not this for Godde's love;
 Ye be full cholerick of complexion;
 Ware that the sun, in his ascension,
 You finde not replete of humours hot;
 And if it do, I dare well lay a groat,
 That ye shall have a fever tertiane,
 Or else an ague, that may be your bane,
 A day or two ye shall have digestives
 Of wormes, ere ye take your laxatives,
 Of laurel, centaury, <9> and fumeterere, <10>
 Or else of elder-berry, that groweth there,
 Of catapuce, <11> or of the gaitre-berries, <12>
 Or herb ivy growing in our yard, that merry is:
 Pick them right as they grow, and eat them in,
 Be merry, husband, for your father's kin;
 Dreade no dream; I can say you no more."

"Madame," quoth he, "grand mercy of your lore,
 But natheless, as touching *Dan Catoun,* *Cato
 That hath of wisdom such a great renown,
 Though that he bade no dreames for to dread,
 By God, men may in olde bookes read
 Of many a man more of authority
 Than ever Cato was, so may I the,* *thrive

That all the reverse say of his sentence,* *opinion
And have well founden by experience
That dreames be significations
As well of joy, as tribulations
That folk endure in this life present.
There needeth make of this no argument;
The very preve* sheweth it indeed. *trial, experience
One of the greatest authors that men read <13>
Saith thus, that whilom two fellows went
On pilgrimage in a full good intent;
And happen'd so, they came into a town
Where there was such a congregatioun
Of people, and eke so *strait of herbergage,* *without lodging*
That they found not as much as one cottage
In which they bothe might y-lodged be:
Wherefore they musten of necessity,
As for that night, departe company;
And each of them went to his hostelry,* *inn
And took his lodging as it woulde fall.
The one of them was lodged in a stall,
Far in a yard, with oxen of the plough;
That other man was lodged well enow,
As was his aventure, or his fortune,
That us governeth all, as in commune.
And so befell, that, long ere it were day,
This man mette* in his bed, there: as he lay, *dreamed
How that his fellow gan upon him call,
And said, 'Alas! for in an ox's stall
This night shall I be murder'd, where I lie
Now help me, deare brother, or I die;
In alle haste come to me,' he said.
This man out of his sleep for fear abraid;* *started
But when that he was wak'd out of his sleep,
He turned him, and *took of this no keep;* *paid this no attention*
He thought his dream was but a vanity.
Thus twies* in his sleeping dreamed he, *twice
And at the thirde time yet his fellow again
Came, as he thought, and said, 'I am now slaw;* *slain
Behold my bloody woundes, deep and wide.
Arise up early, in the morning, tide,
And at the west gate of the town,' quoth he,

'A carte full of dung there shalt: thou see,
In which my body is hid privily.
Do thilke cart arroste* boldely. *stop
My gold caused my murder, sooth to sayn.'
And told him every point how he was slain,
With a full piteous face, and pale of hue.

"And, truste well, his dream he found full true;
For on the morrow, as soon as it was day,
To his fellowes inn he took his way;
And when that he came to this ox's stall,
After his fellow he began to call.
The hostelere answered him anon,
And saide, 'Sir, your fellow is y-gone,
As soon as day he went out of the town.'
This man gan fallen in suspicioun,
Rememb'ring on his dreames that he mette,* *dreamed
And forth he went, no longer would he let,* *delay
Unto the west gate of the town, and fand* *found
A dung cart, as it went for to dung land,
That was arrayed in the same wise
As ye have heard the deade man devise;* *describe
And with an hardy heart he gan to cry,
'Vengeance and justice of this felony:
My fellow murder'd in this same night
And in this cart he lies, gaping upright.
I cry out on the ministers,' quoth he.
'That shoulde keep and rule this city;
Harow! alas! here lies my fellow slain.'
What should I more unto this tale sayn?
The people out start, and cast the cart to ground
And in the middle of the dung they found
The deade man, that murder'd was all new.
O blissful God! that art so good and true,
Lo, how that thou bewray'st murder alway.
Murder will out, that see we day by day.
Murder is so wlatson* and abominable *loathsome
To God, that is so just and reasonable,
That he will not suffer it heled* be; *concealed <14>
Though it abide a year, or two, or three,
Murder will out, this is my conclusioun,

And right anon, the ministers of the town
Have hent* the carter, and so sore him pined,** *seized **tortured
And eke the hosteler so sore engined,* *racked
That they beknew* their wickedness anon, *confessed
And were hanged by the necke bone.

"Here may ye see that dreames be to dread.
And certes in the same book I read,
Right in the nexte chapter after this
(I gabbe* not, so have I joy and bliss), *talk idly
Two men that would, have passed over sea,
For certain cause, into a far country,
If that the wind not hadde been contrary,
That made them in a city for to tarry,
That stood full merry upon an haven side;
But on a day, against the even-tide,
The wind gan change, and blew right *as them lest.* *as they wished*
Jolly and glad they wente to their rest,
And caste* them full early for to sail. *resolved
But to the one man fell a great marvail
That one of them, in sleeping as he lay,
He mette* a wondrous dream, against the day: *dreamed
He thought a man stood by his bedde's side,
And him commanded that he should abide;
And said him thus; 'If thou to-morrow wend,
Thou shalt be drown'd; my tale is at an end.'
He woke, and told his fellow what he mette,
And prayed him his voyage for to let;* *delay
As for that day, he pray'd him to abide.
His fellow, that lay by his bedde's side,
Gan for to laugh, and scorned him full fast.
'No dream,' quoth he, 'may so my heart aghast,* *frighten
That I will lette* for to do my things.* *delay
I sette not a straw by thy dreamings,
For swevens* be but vanities and japes.** *dreams **jokes,deceits
Men dream all day of owles and of apes,
And eke of many a maze* therewithal; *wild imagining
Men dream of thing that never was, nor shall.
But since I see, that thou wilt here abide,
And thus forslothe* wilfully thy tide,** *idle away **time
God wot, *it rueth me,* and have good day.' *I am sorry for it*

And thus he took his leave, and went his way.
But, ere that he had half his course sail'd,
I know not why, nor what mischance it ail'd,
But casually* the ship's bottom rent, *by accident
And ship and man under the water went,
In sight of other shippes there beside
That with him sailed at the same tide.

"And therefore, faire Partelote so dear,
By such examples olde may'st thou lear,* *learn
That no man shoulde be too reckeless
Of dreames, for I say thee doubteless,
That many a dream full sore is for to dread.
Lo, in the life of Saint Kenelm <15> I read,
That was Kenulphus' son, the noble king
Of Mercenrike, <16> how Kenelm mette a thing.
A little ere he was murder'd on a day,
His murder in his vision he say.* *saw
His norice* him expounded every deal** *nurse **part
His sweven, and bade him to keep* him well *guard
For treason; but he was but seven years old,
And therefore *little tale hath he told* *he attached little
Of any dream, so holy was his heart. significance to*
By God, I hadde lever than my shirt
That ye had read his legend, as have I.
Dame Partelote, I say you truely,
Macrobius, that wrote the vision
In Afric' of the worthy Scipion, <17>
Affirmeth dreames, and saith that they be
'Warnings of thinges that men after see.
And furthermore, I pray you looke well
In the Old Testament, of Daniel,
If he held dreames any vanity.
Read eke of Joseph, and there shall ye see
Whether dreams be sometimes (I say not all)
Warnings of thinges that shall after fall.
Look of Egypt the king, Dan Pharaoh,
His baker and his buteler also,
Whether they felte none effect* in dreams. *significance
Whoso will seek the acts of sundry remes* *realms
May read of dreames many a wondrous thing.

Lo Croesus, which that was of Lydia king,
 Mette he not that he sat upon a tree,
 Which signified he shoulde hanged be? <18>
 Lo here, Andromache, Hectore's wife, <19>
 That day that Hector shoulde lose his life,
 She dreamed on the same night beforne,
 How that the life of Hector should be lorn,* *lost
 If thilke day he went into battaile;
 She warned him, but it might not avail;
 He wente forth to fighte natheless,
 And was y-slain anon of Achilles.
 But thilke tale is all too long to tell;
 And eke it is nigh day, I may not dwell.
 Shortly I say, as for conclusion,
 That I shall have of this avision
 Adversity; and I say furthermore,
 That I ne *tell of laxatives no store,* *hold laxatives
 For they be venomous, I wot it well; of no value*
 I them defy,* I love them never a del.** *distrust **whit

"But let us speak of mirth, and stint* all this; *cease
 Madame Partelote, so have I bliss,
 Of one thing God hath sent me large* grace; liberal
 For when I see the beauty of your face,
 Ye be so scarlet-hued about your eyen,
 I maketh all my drede for to dien,
 For, all so sicker* as In principio,<20> *certain
 Mulier est hominis confusio.<21>
 Madam, the sentence* of of this Latin is, *meaning
 Woman is manne's joy and manne's bliss.
 For when I feel at night your softe side, —
 Albeit that I may not on you ride,
 For that our perch is made so narrow, Alas!
 I am so full of joy and of solas,* *delight
 That I defy both sweven and eke dream."
 And with that word he flew down from the beam,
 For it was day, and eke his hennes all;
 And with a chuck he gan them for to call,
 For he had found a corn, lay in the yard.
 Royal he was, he was no more afear'd;
 He feather'd Partelote twenty time,

And as oft trode her, ere that it was prime.
He looked as it were a grim lion,
And on his toes he roamed up and down;
He deigned not to set his feet to ground;
He chucked, when he had a corn y-found,
And to him ranne then his wives all.
Thus royal, as a prince is in his hall,
Leave I this Chanticleer in his pasture;
And after will I tell his aventure.

When that the month in which the world began,
That highte March, when God first maked man,
Was complete, and y-passed were also,
Since March ended, thirty days and two,
Befell that Chanticleer in all his pride,
His seven wives walking him beside,
Cast up his eyen to the brighte sun,
That in the sign of Taurus had y-run
Twenty degrees and one, and somewhat more;
He knew by kind,* and by none other lore,** *nature **learning
That it was prime, and crew with blissful steven.* *voice
"The sun," he said, "is clomben up in heaven
Twenty degrees and one, and more y-wis.* *assuredly
Madame Partelote, my worlde's bliss,
Hearken these blissful birdes how they sing,
And see the freshe flowers how they spring;
Full is mine heart of revel and solace."
But suddenly him fell a sorrowful case;* *casualty
For ever the latter end of joy is woe:
God wot that worldly joy is soon y-go:
And, if a rhetor* coulde fair indite, *orator
He in a chronicle might it safely write,
As for *a sov'reign notability* *a thing supremely notable*
Now every wise man, let him hearken me;
This story is all as true, I undertake,
As is the book of Launcelot du Lake,
That women hold in full great reverence.
Now will I turn again to my sentence.

A col-fox, <22> full of sly iniquity,
That in the grove had wonned* yeares three, *dwelt

By high imagination forecast,
 The same night thorough the hedges brast* *burst
 Into the yard, where Chanticleer the fair
 Was wont, and eke his wives, to repair;
 And in a bed of wortes* still he lay, *cabbages
 Till it was passed undern <23> of the day,
 Waiting his time on Chanticleer to fall:
 As gladly do these homicides all,
 That in awaite lie to murder men.
 O false murd'rer! Rouking* in thy den! *crouching, lurking
 O new Iscariot, new Ganilion! <24>
 O false dissimuler, O Greek Sinon,<25>
 That broughtest Troy all utterly to sorrow!
 O Chanticleer! accursed be the morrow
 That thou into thy yard flew from the beams;* *rafters
 Thou wert full well y-warned by thy dreams
 That thilke day was perilous to thee.
 But what that God forewot* must needes be, *foreknows
 After th' opinion of certain clerkes.
 Witness on him that any perfect clerk is,
 That in school is great altercation
 In this matter, and great disputation,
 And hath been of an hundred thousand men.
 But I ne cannot *boulte it to the bren,* *examine it thoroughly <26>*
 As can the holy doctor Augustine,
 Or Boece, or the bishop Bradwardine,<27>
 Whether that Godde's worthy foreweeting* *foreknowledge
 Straineth me needly for to do a thing *forces me*
 (Needly call I simple necessity),
 Or elles if free choice be granted me
 To do that same thing, or do it not,
 Though God forewot* it ere that it was wrought; *knew in advance
 Or if *his weeting straineth never a deal,* *his knowing constrains
 But by necessity conditionel. not at all*
 I will not have to do of such mattere;
 My tale is of a cock, as ye may hear,
 That took his counsel of his wife, with sorrow,
 To walken in the yard upon the morrow
 That he had mette the dream, as I you told.
 Womane's counsels be full often cold;* *mischievous, unwise
 Womane's counsel brought us first to woe,

And made Adam from Paradise to go,
There as he was full merry and well at case.
But, for I n'ot* to whom I might displease *know not
If I counsel of women woulde blame,
Pass over, for I said it in my game.* *jest
Read authors, where they treat of such mattere
And what they say of women ye may hear.
These be the cocke's wordes, and not mine;
I can no harm of no woman divine.* *conjecture, imagine
Fair in the sand, to bathe* her merrily, *bask
Lies Partelote, and all her sisters by,
Against the sun, and Chanticleer so free
Sang merrier than the mermaid in the sea;
For Physiologus saith sickerly,* *certainly
How that they singe well and merrily. <28>
And so befell that, as he cast his eye
Among the wortes,* on a butterfly, *cabbages
He was ware of this fox that lay full low.
Nothing *ne list him thenne* for to crow, *he had no inclination*
But cried anon "Cock! cock!" and up he start,
As man that was affrayed in his heart.
For naturally a beast desireth flee
From his contrary,* if be may it see, *enemy
Though he *ne'er erst* had soon it with his eye *never before*
This Chanticleer, when he gan him espy,
He would have fled, but that the fox anon
Said, "Gentle Sir, alas! why will ye gon?
Be ye afraid of me that am your friend?
Now, certes, I were worse than any fiend,
If I to you would harm or villainy.
I am not come your counsel to espy.
But truely the cause of my coming
Was only for to hearken how ye sing;
For truely ye have as merry a steven,* *voice
As any angel hath that is in heaven;
Therewith ye have of music more feeling,
Than had Boece, or any that can sing.
My lord your father (God his soule bless)
And eke your mother of her gentleness,
Have in mnine house been, to my great ease:* *satisfaction
And certes, Sir, full fain would I you please.

But, for men speak of singing, I will say,
So may I brooke* well mine eyen tway, *enjoy, possess, or use
Save you, I hearde never man so sing
As did your father in the morrowning.
Certes it was of heart all that he sung.
And, for to make his voice the more strong,
He would *so pain him,* that with both his eyen *make such an exertion*
He muste wink, so loud he woulde cryen,
And standen on his tiptoes therewithal,
And stretche forth his necke long and small.
And eke he was of such discretion,
That there was no man, in no region,
That him in song or wisdom mighte pass.
I have well read in Dan Burnel the Ass, <29>
Among his verse, how that there was a cock
That, for* a prieste's son gave him a knock *because
Upon his leg, while he was young and nice,* *foolish
He made him for to lose his benefice.
But certain there is no comparison
Betwixt the wisdom and discretion
Of youre father, and his subtilty.
Now singe, Sir, for sainte charity,
Let see, can ye your father counterfeit?"

This Chanticleer his wings began to beat,
As man that could not his treason espy,
So was he ravish'd with his flattery.
Alas! ye lordes, many a false flattour* *flatterer <30>
Is in your court, and many a losengeour, * *deceiver <31>
That please you well more, by my faith,
Than he that soothfastness* unto you saith. *truth
Read in Ecclesiast' of flattery;
Beware, ye lordes, of their treachery.
This Chanticleer stood high upon his toes,
Stretching his neck, and held his eyen close,
And gan to crowe loude for the nonce
And Dan Russel <32> the fox start up at once,
And *by the gorge hente* Chanticleer, *seized by the throat*
And on his back toward the wood him bare.
For yet was there no man that him pursu'd.
O destiny, that may'st not be eschew'd!* *escaped

Alas, that Chanticleer flew from the beams!
Alas, his wife raughte* nought of dreams! *regarded
And on a Friday fell all this mischance.
O Venus, that art goddess of pleasance,
Since that thy servant was this Chanticleer
And in thy service did all his powere,
More for delight, than the world to multiply,
Why wilt thou suffer him on thy day to die?
O Gaufrid, deare master sovereign, <33>
That, when thy worthy king Richard was slain
With shot, complainedest his death so sore,
Why n'had I now thy sentence and thy lore,
The Friday for to chiden, as did ye?
(For on a Friday, soothly, slain was he),
Then would I shew you how that I could plain* *lament
For Chanticleere's dread, and for his pain.

Certes such cry nor lamentation
Was ne'er of ladies made, when Ilion
Was won, and Pyrrhus with his straighte sword,
When he had hent* king Priam by the beard, *seized
And slain him (as saith us Eneidos*), <34> *The Aeneid
As maden all the hennes in the close,* *yard
When they had seen of Chanticleer the sight.
But sov'reignly* Dame Partelote shrigh, ** *above all others
Full louder than did Hasdrubale's wife, **shrieked
When that her husband hadde lost his life,
And that the Romans had y-burnt Carthage;
She was so full of torment and of rage,
That wilfully into the fire she start,
And burnt herselfe with a steadfast heart.
O woeful hennes! right so cried ye,
As, when that Nero burned the city
Of Rome, cried the senatores' wives,
For that their husbands losten all their lives;
Withoute guilt this Nero hath them slain.
Now will I turn unto my tale again;

The sely* widow, and her daughters two, *simple, honest
Hearde these hennes cry and make woe,
And at the doors out started they anon,

And saw the fox toward the wood is gone,
And bare upon his back the cock away:
They cried, "Out! harow! and well-away!
Aha! the fox!" and after him they ran,
And eke with staves many another man
Ran Coll our dog, and Talbot, and Garland;
And Malkin, with her distaff in her hand
Ran cow and calf, and eke the very hogges
So fear'd they were for barking of the dogges,
And shouting of the men and women eke.
They ranne so, them thought their hearts would break.
They yelled as the fiendes do in hell;
The duckes cried as men would them quell;* *kill, destroy
The geese for feare flew en o'er the trees,
Out of the hive came the swarm of bees,
So hideous was the noise, ben'dicite!
Certes he, Jacke Straw, <35> and his meinie,* *followers
Ne made never shoutes half so shrill
When that they would en any Fleming kill,
As thilke day was made upon the fox.
Of brass they brought beames* and of box, *trumpets <36>
Of horn and bone, in which they blew and pooped,* **tooted
And therewithal they shrieked and they hooped;
It seemed as the heaven shoulde fall

Now, goode men, I pray you hearken all;
Lo, how Fortune turneth suddenly
The hope and pride eke of her enemy.
This cock, that lay upon the fox's back,
In all his dread unto the fox he spake,
And saide, "Sir, if that I were as ye,
Yet would I say (as wisly* God help me), *surely
'Turn ye again, ye proude churles all;
A very pestilence upon you fall.
Now am I come unto the woode's side,
Maugre your head, the cock shall here abide;
I will him eat, in faith, and that anon."
The fox answer'd, "In faith it shall be done:"
And, as he spake the word, all suddenly
The cock brake from his mouth deliverly,* *nimble
And high upon a tree he flew anon.

And when the fox saw that the cock was gone,
"Alas!" quoth he, "O Chanticleer, alas!
I have," quoth he, "y-done to you trespass,* *offence
Inasmuch as I maked you afear'd,
When I you hent,* and brought out of your yard; *took
But, Sir, I did it in no wick' intent;
Come down, and I shall tell you what I meant.
I shall say sooth to you, God help me so."
"Nay then," quoth he, "I shrew* us both the two, *curse
And first I shrew myself, both blood and bones,
If thou beguile me oftener than once.
Thou shalt no more through thy flattery
Do* me to sing and winke with mine eye; *cause
For he that winketh when he shoulde see,
All wilfully, God let him never the."* *thrive
"Nay," quoth the fox; "but God give him mischance
That is so indiscreet of governance,
That jangleth* when that he should hold his peace." *chatters

Lo, what it is for to be reckeless
And negligent, and trust on flattery.
But ye that holde this tale a folly,
As of a fox, or of a cock or hen,
Take the morality thereof, good men.
For Saint Paul saith, That all that written is,
To our doctrine it written is y-wis. <37> *is surely written for
Take the fruit, and let the chaff be still. our instruction*

Now goode God, if that it be thy will,
As saith my Lord, <38> so make us all good men;
And bring us all to thy high bliss. Amen.

Notes to the Nun's Priest's Tale

1. The Tale of the Nun's Priest is founded on the fifth chapter of an old French metrical "Romance of Renard;" the same story forming one of the fables of Marie, the translator of the Breton Lays. (See note 2 to the Prologue to the Franklin's Tale.) Although Dryden was in error when he ascribed the Tale to Chaucer's own invention, still the materials on which he had to operate were out of comparison more trivial than the result.

2. Tyrwhitt quotes two statutes of Edward III, in which "deys" are included among the servants employed in agricultural pursuits; the name seems to have originally meant a servant who gave his labour by the day, but afterwards to have been appropriated exclusively to one who superintended or worked in a dairy.

3. Orgon: here licentiously used for the plural, "organs" or "orgons," corresponding to the plural verb "gon" in the next line.

4. Horloge: French, "clock."

5. Embattell'd: indented on the upper edge like the battlements of a castle.

6. My lefe is fare in land: This seems to have been the refrain of some old song, and its precise meaning is uncertain. It corresponds in cadence with the morning salutation of the cock; and may be taken as a greeting to the sun, which is beloved of Chanticleer, and has just come upon the earth — or in the sense of a more local boast, as vaunting the fairness of his favourite hen above all others in the country round.

Transcriber's note: Later commentators explain "fare in land" as "gone abroad" and have identified the song:

My lefe is fare in lond
Alas! Why is she so?
And I am so sore bound
I may not come her to.
She hath my heart in hold
Where ever she ride or go
With true love a thousand-fold.

(Printed in The Athenaeum, 1896, Vol II, p. 566).

7. "Avoi!" is the word here rendered "away!" It was frequently used in the French fabliaux, and the Italians employ the word "via!" in the same sense.

8. "Ne do no force of dreams:" "Somnia ne cares;" — Cato "De Moribus," 1 ii, dist. 32

9. Centaury: the herb so called because by its virtue the centaur Chiron was healed when the poisoned arrow of Hercules had accidentally wounded his foot.

10. Fumetere: the herb "fumitory."

11. Catapuce: spurge; a plant of purgative qualities. To its name in the text correspond the Italian "catapuzza," and French "catapuce" — words the origin of which is connected with the effects of the plant.

12. Gaitre-berries: dog-wood berries.

13. One of the greatest authors that men read: Cicero, who in his book "De Divinatione" tells this and the following story, though in contrary order and with many differences.

14. Haled or hyllid; from Anglo-Saxon "helan" hid, concealed

15. Kenelm succeeded his father as king of the Saxon realm of Mercia in 811, at the age of seven years; but he was slain by his ambitious aunt Quendrada. The place of his burial was miraculously discovered, and he was subsequently elevated to the rank of a saint and martyr. His life is in the English "Golden Legend."

16. Mercenrike: the kingdom of Mercia; Anglo-Saxon, Myrcnarice. Compare the second member of the compound in the German, "Frankreich," France; "Oesterreich," Austria.

17. Cicero ("De Republica," lib. vi.) wrote the Dream of Scipio, in which the Younger relates the appearance of the Elder Africanus, and the counsels and exhortations which the shade addressed to the sleeper. Macrobius wrote an elaborate "Commentary on the Dream of Scipio," — a philosophical treatise much studied and relished during the Middle Ages.

18. See the Monk's Tale for this story.

19. Andromache's dream will not be found in Homer; It is related in the book of the fictitious Dares Phrygius, the most popular authority during the Middle Ages for the history of the Trojan War.

20. In principio: In the beginning; the first words of Genesis and of the Gospel of John.

21. Mulier est hominis confusio: This line is taken from the same fabulous conference between the Emperor Adrian and the philosopher Secundus, whence Chaucer derived some of the arguments in praise of poverty employed in the Wife of Bath's Tale proper. See note 14 to the Wife of Bath's tale. The passage transferred to the text is the commencement of a description of woman. "Quid est mulier? hominis confusio," &c. ("What is Woman? A union with man", &c.)

22. Col-fox: a blackish fox, so called because of its likeness to coal, according to Skinner; though more probably the prefix has a reproachful meaning, and is in some way connected with the word "cold" as, some forty lines below, it is applied to the prejudicial counsel of women, and as frequently it is used to describe "sighs" and other tokens of grief, and "cares" or "anxieties."

23. Undern: In this case, the meaning of "evening" or "afternoon" can hardly be applied to the word, which must be taken to signify some early hour of the forenoon. See also note 4 to the Wife of Bath's tale and note 5 to the Clerk's Tale.

24. Ganilion: a traitor. See note 9 to the Shipman's Tale and note 28 to the Monk's Tale.

25. Greek Sinon: The inventor of the Trojan Horse. See note 14 to the Squire's Tale

26. Boulte it from the bren: Examine the matter thoroughly; a metaphor taken from the sifting of meal, to divide the fine flour from the bran.

27. Thomas Bradwardine, Archbishop of Canterbury in the thirteenth century, who wrote a book, "De Causa Dei," in controversy with Pelagius; and also numerous other treatises, among them some on predestination.

28. In a popular mediæval Latin treatise by one Theobaldus, entitled "Physiologus de Naturis XII. Animalium" ("A description of the nature of twelve animals"), sirens or mermaids are described as skilled in song, and drawing unwary mariners to destruction by the sweetness of their voices.

29. "Nigellus Wireker," says Urry's Glossary, "a monk and precentor of Canterbury, wrote a Latin poem intituled 'Speculum Speculorum,' ('The mirror of mirrors') dedicated to William Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, and Lord Chancellor; wherein, under the fable of an Ass (which he calls 'Burnellus') that desired a longer tail, is represented the folly of such as are not content with their own condition. There is introduced a tale of a cock, who having his leg broke by a priest's son (called Gundulfus) watched an opportunity to be revenged; which at last presented itself on this occasion: A day was appointed for Gundulfus's being admitted into holy orders at a place remote from his father's habitation; he therefore orders the servants to call him at first cock-crowing, which the cock overhearing did not crow at all that morning. So Gundulfus overslept himself, and was thereby disappointed of his ordination, the office being quite finished before he came to the place." Wireker's satire was among the most celebrated and popular Latin poems of the Middle Ages. The Ass was probably as Tyrwhitt suggests, called "Burnel" or "Brunel," from his brown colour; as, a little below, a reddish fox is called "Russel."

30. Flattour: flatterer; French, "flatteur."

31. Losengeour: deceiver, cozenor; the word had analogues in the French "losengier," and the Spanish "lisongero." It is probably connected with "leasing," falsehood; which has been derived from Anglo-Saxon "hlisan," to celebrate — as if it meant the spreading of a false renown

32. Dan Russel: Master Russet; a name given to the fox, from his reddish colour.

33. Geoffrey de Vinsauf was the author of a well-known mediaeval treatise on composition in various poetical styles of which he gave examples. Chaucer's irony is therefore directed against some grandiose and affected lines on the death of Richard I., intended to illustrate the pathetic style, in which Friday is addressed as "O Veneris lachrymosa dies" ("O tearful day of Venus").

34. "Priamum altaria ad ipsa trementem Traxit, et in multo lapsantem sanguine nati Implicuitque comam laeva, dextraque coruscum Extulit, ac lateri capulo tenus abdidit ensem. Haec finis Priami fatorum." ("He dragged Priam trembling to his own altar, slipping on the blood of his child; He took his hair in his left hand, and with the right drew the flashing sword, and hid it to the hilt [in his body]. Thus an end was made of Priam") — Virgil, Aeneid. ii. 550.

35. Jack Straw: The leader of a Kentish rising, in the reign of Richard II, in 1381, by which the Flemish merchants in London were great sufferers.

36. Beams: trumpets; Anglo-Saxon, "bema."

37. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." — 2 Tim. iii. 16.