**The Franklin’s Prologue**

1 These ancient gentle Bretons, in their days,

2 Of divers high adventures made great lays

3 And rhymed them in their primal Breton tongue,

4 The which lays to their instruments they sung,

5 Or else recited them where joy might be;

6 And one of them have I in memory,

7 Which I shall gladly tell you, as I can.

8 But, sirs, because I am an ignorant man,

9 At my beginning must I first beseech

10 You will excuse me for my vulgar speech;

11 I never studied rhetoric, that's certain;

12 That which I say, it must be bare and plain.

13 I never slept on Mount Parnassus, no,

14 Nor studied Marcus Tullius Cicero.

15 Colours I know not, there's no doubt indeed,

16 Save colours such as grow within the mead,

17 Or such as men achieve with dye or paint.

18 Colours of rhetoric I find but quaint;

19 My spirit doesn't feel the beauty there.

20 But if you wish, my story you shall hear.

**The Franklin’s Tale**

1 In old Armorica, now Brittany,

2 There was a knight that loved and strove, did he

3 To serve a lady in the highest wise;

4 And many a labour, many a great emprise

5 He wrought for her, or ever she was won.

6 For she was of the fairest under sun,

7 And therewithal come of so high kindred

8 That scarcely could this noble knight, for dread,

9 Tell her his woe, his pain, and his distress.

10 But at the last she, for his worthiness,

11 And specially for his meek obedience,

12 Had so much pity that, in consequence,

13 She secretly was come to his accord

14 To take him for her husband and her lord,

15 Of such lordship as men have over wives;

16 And that they might be happier in their lives,

17 Of his free will he swore to her, as knight,

18 That never in his life, by day or night,

19 Would he assume a right of mastery

20 Against her will, nor show her jealousy,

21 But would obey and do her will in all

22 As any lover of his lady shall;

23 Save the name and show of sovereignty,

24 Those would he have, lest he shame his degree

25 She thanked him, and with a great humbleness

26 She said: Since, sir, of your own nobleness

27 You proffer me to have so loose a rein

28 Would God there never come between us twain,

29 For any guilt of mine, a war or strife.

30 Sir, I will be your humble, faithful wife,

31 Take this as truth till heart break in my breast.

32 Thus were they both in quiet and in rest.

33 For one thing, sirs, I safely dare to say,

34 That friends each one the other must obey

35 If they'd be friends and long keep company.

36 Love will not be constrained by mastery;

37 When mastery 'comes, the god of love anon

38 Beats his fair wings, and farewell! He is gone!

39 Love is a thing as any spirit free;

40 Women by nature love their liberty,

41 And not to be constrained like any thrall,

42 And so do men, if say the truth I shall.

43 Observe who is most patient in his love,

44 He is advantaged others all above.

45 Patience is virtue high, and that's certain;

46 For it does vanquish, as these clerks make plain,

47 Things that oppression never could attain.

48 One must not chide for trifles nor complain.

49 Learn to endure, or else, so may I go,

50 You'll have to learn it, whether you will or no.

51 For in this world, it's certain, no one is

52 Who never does or says sometimes amiss.

53 Sickness, or woe, or what the stars have sent,

54 Anger, or wine, or change of temperament

55 Causes one oft to do amiss or speak.

56 For every wrong one may not vengeance wreak;

57 Conditions must determine temperance

58 In all who understand good governance.

59 And therefore did this wise and worthy knight,

60 To live in quiet, patience to her plight,

61 And unto him full truly did she swear

62 That never should he find great fault in her.

63 Here may men see an humble wise accord;

64 Thus did she take her servant and her lord,

65 Servant in love and lord in their marriage;

66 So was he both in lordship and bondage;

67 In bondage? Nay, but in lordship above,

68 Since he had both his lady and his love;

69 His lady truly, and his wife also,

70 To which the law of love accords, we know.

71 And when he was in this prosperity,

72 Home with his wife he went to his country,

73 Not far from Penmarch, where his dwelling was.

74 And there he lived in bliss and all solace.

75 Who could relate, save those that wedded be,

76 The joy, the ease, and the prosperity

77 That are between a husband and a wife?

78 A year and more endured this blissful life,

79 Until the knight, of whom I've spoken thus,

80 Who at Kayrrud I was called Arviragus,

81 Arranged to go and dwell a year or twain

82 In England, which was then known as Britain,

83 To seek in arms renown and great honour;

84 For his desire was fixed in such labour;

85 And there he lived two years (the book says thus).

86 Now will I hold from this Arviragus,

87 And I will speak of Dorigen his wife,

88 Who loved her husband as her heart's own life.

89 For all his absence wept she and she sighed,

90 As noble wives do at a lone fireside.

91 She mourned, watched, wailed, she fasted and complained;

92 Desire for him so bound her and constrained,

93 That all this wide world did she set at naught.

94 Her friends, who knew her grief and heavy thought,

95 Comforted her as they might do or say;

96 They preached to her, they told her night and day

97 That for no cause she killed herself, alas!

98 And every comfort possible in this pass

99 They gave to her, in all their busyness,

100 To make her thus put by her heaviness.

101 With passing time, as you know, every one,

102 Men may so long with tools engrave a stone

103 That thereon will some figure printed be.

104 And so long did they comfort her that she

105 Received at last, by hope and reason grown,

106 Imprinted consolations as her own,

107 Whereby her sorrow did somewhat assuage;

108 She could not always live in such a rage.

109 And, then, Arviragus, through all her care,

110 Had sent her letters home, of his welfare.

111 And that he would come speedily again;

112 Otherwise had this sorrow her heart slain.

113 Her friends saw that her grief began to slake,

114 And prayed her on their knees, for dear God's sake,

115 To come and wander in their company

116 And drive away her gloomy fantasy.

117 And finally she granted that request;

118 For well she saw that it was for the best.

119 Now stood her castle very near the sea,

120 And often with her good friends wandered she

121 For pleasure on the cliffs that reared so high,

122 Whence she saw many a ship and barge go by,

123 Sailing their courses where they wished to go;

124 But that was part and parcel of her woe.

125 For to herself full oft, Alas! said she,

126 Is there no ship, of many that I see,

127 Will bring me home my lord? Then were my heart

128 Recovered of its bitter pains that smart.

129 At other times there would she sit and think,

130 And cast her two eyes downward from the brink.

131 But when she saw the grisly rocks all black,

132 For very fear her heart would start aback

133 And quake so that her feet would not sustain

134 Her weight. Then on the grass she'd sit again

135 And piteously upon the sea she'd stare,

136 And say, with dull sighs on the empty air:

137 Eternal God, Who by Thy providence

138 Leadest the world with a true governance,

139 Idly, as men say, dost Thou nothing make;

140 But, Lord, these grisly, fiendish rocks, so black,

141 That seem but rather foul confusion thrown

142 Awry than any fair world of Thine own,

143 Aye of a perfect wise God and stable,

144 Why hast Thou wrought this insane work, pray tell?

145 For by this work, north, south, and west and east,

146 There is none nurtured, man, nor bird, nor beast;

147 It does no good, to my mind, but annoys.

148 See'st Thou not, Lord, how mankind it destroys?

149 A hundred thousand bodies of mankind

150 Have died on rocks, whose names are not in mind,

151 And man's a creature made by Thee most fair,

152 After Thine image, as Thou didst declare.

153 Then seemed it that Thou had'st great charity

154 Toward mankind; but how then may it be

155 That Thou hast wrought such means man to destroy,

156 Which means do never good, but ever annoy?

157 I know well, clerics gladly do attest,

158 By arguments, that all is for the best,

159 Though I can never the real causes know.'

160 But O Thou God Who made'st the wind to blow,

161 Keep Thou my lord! This is my argument;

162 To clerks I leave disputing on what's meant.

163 But O would God that all these rocks so black

164 Were sunken down to Hell for my lord's sake!

165 These rocks, they slay my very heart with fear.

166 Thus would she say, with many a piteous tear.

167 Her friends saw that to her it was no sport

168 To wander by the sea, but discomfort;

169 And so arranged to revel somewhere else.

170 They led her along rivers and to wells,

171 And such delightful places; and told fables,

172 And danced, and played at chess, and played at tables.

173 So on a day, all in the morningtide,

174 Unto a garden which was there beside,

175 Wherein they'd given command that there should be

176 Food and whatever else was necessary,

177 They went for pleasure all the livelong day.

178 And this was on the morning sixth of May,

179 And May had painted with his soft warm showers

180 This garden full of foliage and of flowers;

181 And work of man's hand had so curiously

182 Arrayed this lovely garden, truthfully,

183 That never was another of such price,

184 Unless it were the very Paradise.

185 The scent of flowers and the fair fresh sight

186 Would have made any heart dance for delight

187 That e'er was born, unless too great sickness

188 Or too great sorrow held it in distress;

189 So full it was of beauty and pleasance.

190 After their dinner all began to dance,

191 And sing, also, save Dorigen alone,

192 Who made alway her same complaint and moan.

193 For him she saw not through the dancing go,

194 Who was her husband and her love also.

195 Nevertheless, she must a time abide,

196 And with good hope held, let her sorrow slide.

197 Amid these mazes, with the other men,

198 There danced a squire before this Dorigen,

199 That was more blithe, and prettier of array,

200 In my opinion, than the month of May.

201 He sang and danced better than any man

202 That is, or was, since first the world began.

203 Therewith he was, description to contrive,

204 One of best conditioned men alive;

205 Young, strong, right virtuous, and rich, and wise,

206 And well beloved, and one to idealize.

207 And briefly, if I tell the truth withal,

208 Unknown to Dorigen- nay, least of all-

209 This pleasant squire, servant to Queen Venus,

210 The name of whom was this, Aurelius,

211 Had loved her best of anyone alive

212 Two years and more (since she did first arrive),

213 But never dared he tell her of his state;

214 Without a cup he drank his draught of fate.

215 He had despaired, for nothing dared he say,

216 Save that in songs he would somewhat betray

217 His woe, as of a general complaint;

218 He loved, but none loved him, though he went faint.

219 Of such a subject made he many lays,

220 Songs and complaints, rondels and virelays,

221 How that he dared not his deep sorrow tell,

222 But languished, as a fury does in Hell;

223 And die he must, he said, as did Echo

224 For her Narcissus, daring not tell her woe.

225 In other manner than you hear me say

226 Dared he not unto her his woe betray;

227 Save that, perchance, there would be times at dances,

228 Where young folk honoured all that makes romances,

229 It may well be he looked upon her face

230 In such wise as a man who sued for grace;

231 But nothing knew she of his love's intent.

232 Nevertheless it chanced, ere thence they went,

233 Because it happened he was her neighbour,

234 And was a man of worship and honour,

235 And she had known him in the time of yore,

236 They fell to talking; and so, more and more,

237 Unto his purpose drew Aurelius,

238 And when he saw his time addressed her thus:

239 Madam, said he, by God Who this world made,

240 So that I knew it might your sad heart aid,

241 I would, that day when your Arviragus

242 Went overseas, that I, Aurelius,

243 Had gone whence never I should come again;

244 For well I know. service is in vain.

245 My guerdon is the breaking of my heart;

246 Madam, have pity on my pains that smart;

247 For with a word you may slay me or save,

248 Here at your feet would God I found my grave!

249 Time to say more, at present naught have I;

250 Have mercy, sweet, or you will make me die!

251 So then she looked upon Aurelius:

252 Is this your will? asked she, And say you thus?

253 Never before have I known what you meant.

254 But since, Aurelius, I know your intent,

255 By that same God Who gave me soul and life,

256 Never shall I become an untrue wife

257 In word or deed, so far as I have wit:

258 I will remain his own to whom I'm knit;

259 Take this for final answer as from me.

260 But after that she said thus, sportively:

261 Aurelius, said she, by God above,

262 Yet would I well consent to be your love,

263 Since I hear you complain so piteously,

264 On that day when, from coasts of Brittany,

265 You've taken all the black rocks, stone by stone,

266 So that they hinder ship nor boat- I own,

267 I say, when you have made the coast so clean

268 Of rocks that there is no stone to be seen,

269 Then will I love you best of any man;

270 Take here my promise- all that ever I can.

271 Is there no other grace in you? asked he.

272 No, by that Lord, said she, Who has made me!

273 For well I know that it shall ne'er betide.

274 Let suchlike follies out of your heart slide.

275 What pleasure can a man have in his life

276 Who would go love another man's own wife,

277 That has her body when he wishes it?

278 Deep sighs Aurelius did then emit;

279 Woe was Aurelius when this he heard,

280 And with a sorrowful heart he thus answered:

281 Madam, said he, this were impossible!

282 Then must I die a sudden death and fell.

283 And with that word he turned away anon.

284 Then came her other friends, and many a one,

285 And in the alleys wandered up and down,

286 And nothing knew of this decision shown,

287 But suddenly began to dance anew

288 Until the bright sun lost his golden hue;

289 For the horizon had cut off his light;

290 This is as much as saying, it was night.

291 And home they went in joy and with solace,

292 Except the wretch Aurelius, alas!

293 He to his house went with a woeful heart;

294 He saw he could not from his near death part.

295 It seemed to him he felt his heart grow cold;

296 Up toward Heaven his two hands did he hold,

297 And on his bare knees did he kneel him down

298 And in his raving said his orison.

299 For very woe out of his wits he fled.

300 He knew not what he spoke, but thus he said;

301 With mournful heart his plaint had he begun

302 Unto the gods, and first unto the sun.

303 He said: Apollo, governor and god

304 Of every plant, herb, tree, and flower in sod,

305 That givest, according to thy declination,

306 To each of them its time of foliation,

307 All as thy habitation's low or high,

308 Lord Phoebus, cast thy merciful bright eye

309 On wretched Aurelius, who is lost and lorn.

310 Lo, Lord! My lady has my swift death sworn,

311 Without my guilt, save thy benignity

312 Upon my dying heart have some pity!

313 For well I know, Lord Phoebus, if you lest,

314 You can thus aid me, save my lady, best.

315 Now vouchsafe that I may for you devise

316 A plan to help me, telling in what wise.

317 Your blessed sister, Lucina, serene,

318 That of the sea is goddess chief and queen

319 (Though Neptune is the deity in the sea,

320 Yet empress set above him there is she).

321 You know well, Lord, that just as her desire

322 Is to be quickened and lighted by your fire,

323 For which she follows you right busily,

324 Just so the sea desires, and naturally,

325 To follow her, she being high goddess

326 Both of the sea and rivers, great and less.

327 Wherefore, Lord Phoebus, this request I make-

328 Without this miracle, my heart will break-

329 That at the time of your next opposition,

330 Which will be in the Lion, make petition

331 To her that she so great a flood will bring

332 That full five fathoms shall it over-spring

333 The highest rock in Armoric Brittany;

334 And let this flood endure two years for me;

335 Then truly to my lady may I say:

336 'Now keep your word, the rocks are gone away.'

337 Lord Phoebus, do this miracle for me;

338 Pray her she run no faster course, being free-

339 I say, Lord, pray your sister that she go

340 No faster course than you these next years two.

341 Then shall she be even at the full alway,

342 And spring-flood shall endure both night and day.

343 And save she vouchsafe, Lord, in such manner

344 To grant to me my sovereign lady dear,

345 Pray her to sink, then, every rock far down

346 Into that region dark and cold, her own,

347 Under the earth, the place Pluto dwells in,

348 Or nevermore shall I my lady win.

349 Thy temple in Delphi will I, barefoot, seek;

350 Lord Phoebus, see the tears upon my cheek,

351 And on my pain be some compassion shown.

352 And with that word in swoon he tumbled down,

353 And for a long time lay there in a trance.

354 His brother, who knew all his suppliance,

355 Found him, and took him, and to bed him brought.

356 Despairing in the torment of his thought,

357 Let I this woeful fellow-creature lie,

358 To choose, for all of me, to live or die.

359 Arviragus, with health, in honour's hour,

360 As he that was of chivalry the flower,

361 Came home again, with other gentlemen.

362 O happy are you now, my Dorigen,

363 Who have your pleasant husband in your arms,

364 The vigorous knight, the worthy man-at-arms,

365 That loves you as he loves his own heart's life.

366 Nothing he chose to question of his wife

367 If any man had said, while he was out,

368 Some words of love; of her he had no doubt.

369 He tended not that way, it would appear,

370 But danced and jousted, made for her good cheer;

371 And thus in joy and bliss I let them dwell

372 And of love-sick Aurelius will I tell.

373 In weakness and in torment furious

374 Two years and more lay wretched Aurelius

375 Ere foot on earth he went- aye, even one;

376 For comfort in this long time had he none,

377 Save from his brother, who was a good clerk;

378 He knew of all this woe and all this work.

379 For to no other human, 'tis certain,

380 Dared he his cause of illness to explain.

381 In breast he kept more secret his idea

382 Than did Pamphilius for Galatea.

383 His breast was whole, with no wound to be seen,

384 But in his heart there was the arrow keen.

385 And well you know that of a sursanure

386 In surgery is difficult the cure,

387 Unless they find the dart or take it out.

388 His brother wept, and long he sought about

389 Till at the last he called to remembrance

390 That while he was at Orleans in France-

391 For many young clerks are all ravenous

392 To read of arts that are most curious,

393 And into every nook and cranny turn

394 Particular strange sciences to learn-

395 He thus recalled that once upon a day,

396 At Orleans, while studying there, I say,

397 A book of natural magic there he saw

398 In a friend's room, a bachelor of law

399 (Though he was there to learn another craft),

400 Which book he'd privately on his desk left;

401 And which book said much of the operations

402 Touching the eight and twenty variations

403 That designate the moon, and such folly

404 As is, in our days, valued not a fly;

405 For Holy Church provides us with a creed

406 That suffers no illusion to mislead.

407 And when this book came to his remembrance,

408 At once, for joy, his heart began to dance,

409 And to himself he said in privacy:

410 My brother shall be healed, and speedily;

411 For I am sure that there are sciences

412 Whereby men make divers appearances,

413 Such as these prestidigitators play.

414 For oft at feasts, have I well heard men say

415 That jugglers, in a hall both bright and large,

416 Have made come in there, water and a barge,

417 And in the hall the barge rowed up and down.

418 Sometimes there seemed to come a grim lion;

419 And sometimes flowers sprang as in a mead;

420 Or vines with grapes both red and white indeed;

421 Sometimes a castle built of lime and stone;

422 And when they wished it disappeared anon.

423 Thus seemed these things to be in each man's sight.

424 Now, then, conclude I thus, that if I might

425 At Orleans some old school-fellow find,

426 Who has these mansions of the moon in mind,

427 Or other natural magic from above,

428 He could well make my brother have his love.

429 For with a mere appearance clerks may make

430 It seem in man's sight that all rocks that break

431 The seas of Brittany were banished, so

432 That right above them ships might come and go,

433 And in such wise endure a week or two;

434 Then were my brother cured of all his woe.

435 For she must keep the word she gave at feast.

436 Or he'll have right to shame her, at the least.

437 Why should I longer speak of this event?

438 He to the bedside of his brother went,

439 And urged him eagerly to get him gone

440 To Orleans; he started up anon

441 And forward on his way at once did fare

442 In hope to be relieved of all his care.

443 When they were come almost to that city,

444 Perhaps two furlongs short of it, or three,

445 A young clerk walking by himself they met,

446 Who, in good Latin, heartily did greet,

447 And after that he said a wondrous thing.

448 I know, said he, the cause of your coming.

449 And ere a farther foot the brothers went,

450 He told them all the soul of their intent.

451 This Breton clerk asked after school-fellows

452 Whom he had known through former suns and snows;

453 And he replied to this that dead they were,

454 Whereat he wept, for sorrow, many a tear.

455 Down from his horse Aurelius leaped anon,

456 And onward with this wizard he was gone

457 Home to his house, where he was put at case.

458 To him there lacked no victuals that might please;

459 So well appointed house as was that one

460 Aurelius in life before saw none.

461 He showed him, ere he went to supper here,

462 Forests and parks full of the dim wild deer;

463 There saw he harts of ten with their horns high,

464 The greatest ever seen by human eye.

465 He saw of them a hundred slain by hounds,

466 And some with arrows bled, with bitter wounds.

467 He saw, when vanished all were these wild deer,

468 Some falconers by river flowing clear,

469 Who with their hawks had many herons slain.

470 And then he saw knights jousting on a plain;

471 And after this he did him such pleasance

472 That he showed him his lady in a dance

473 Wherein he also joined, or so he thought.

474 And when this master who this magic wrought

475 Saw it was time, he clapped his two hands, lo!

476 Farewell to all! the revels out did go.

477 And yet they'd never moved out of the house

478 While they saw all these sights so marvelous,

479 But in his study, where his books would be,

480 They had sat still, and no one but they three.

481 Then unto him this master called his squire,

482 And asked him thus: Is supper ready, sir?

483 Almost an hour it is, I'll undertake,

484 Since I bade you our evening meal to make,

485 When these two gentlemen came in with me

486 Into my study, wherein my books be.

487 Sir, said this squire then, when it pleases you

488 It is all ready, though you will right now.

489 Then let us sup, said he, for that is best;

490 These amorous folk must sometime have some rest.

491 After the supper they discussed, they three,

492 What sum should this said master's guerdon be

493 For moving all rocks Breton coasts contain

494 From the Gironde unto the mouth of Seine.

495 He played for time, and swore, so God him save,

496 Less than a thousand he would not have,

497 Nor eagerly for that would take it on.

498 Aurelius, with blissful heart, anon

499 Answered him thus: Fig for a thousand pound!

500 This great wide world, the which, men say, is round,

501 I'd give it all, if I were lord of it.

502 The bargain is concluded and we're knit.

503 You shall be truly paid, sir, by my troth!

504 But look you, for no negligence or sloth,

505 Delay no longer than tomorrow morn.

506 Nay, said this clerk! upon my faith I'm sworn.

507 To bed went this Aurelius and undressed,

508 And well-nigh all that night he had his rest;

509 What of his labour and his hope of bliss

510 The pain had left that woeful heart of his.

511 Upon the morrow, when it was full day,

512 To Brittany took they the nearest way,

513 Aurelius, with this wizard at his side,

514 And thus they came to where they would abide;

515 And that was, as the books say, I remember,

516 The cold and frosty season of December.

517 Phoebus was old and coloured like pale brass,

518 That in hot declination coloured was

519 And shone like burnished gold with streamers bright;

520 But now in Capricorn did he alight,

521 Wherein he palely shone, I dare explain.

522 The bitter frosts, with all the sleet and rain,

523 Had killed the green of every garden-yard.

524 Janus sat by the fire, with double beard,

525 And drained from out his bugle horn the wine.

526 Before him stood the brawn of tusked swine,

527 And Noel! cried then every lusty man.

528 Aurelius, in all that he could plan,

529 Did to this master cheerful reverence,

530 And prayed of him he'd use all diligence

531 To bring him from his pains that so did smart,

532 Or else with sword that he would slit his heart.

533 This subtle clerk such ruth had for this man,

534 That night and day he sped about his plan,

535 To wait the proper time for his conclusion;

536 That is to say, the time to make illusion,

537 By such devices of his jugglery

538 (I understand not this astrology)

539 That she and everyone should think and say

540 That all the Breton rocks were gone away,

541 Or else that they were sunken underground.

542 So at the last the proper time he found

543 To do his tricks and all his wretchedness

544 Of such a superstitious wickedness.

545 For his Toletan Tables forth he brought,

546 All well corrected, and he lacked in naught,

547 The years collected nor the separate years,

548 Nor his known roots, nor any other gears,

549 As, say, his centres and his argument,

550 And his proportionals convenient

551 In estimating truly his equations.

552 The eighth sphere showed him in his calculations

553 How far removed was Alnath, passing by,

554 From head of that fixed Aries on high,

555 That in the ninth great sphere considered is;

556 Right cleverly he calculated this.

557 When he the moon's first mansion thus had found,

558 The rest proportionally he could expound;

559 And knew the moon's arising-time right well,

560 And in what face and term, and all could tell;

561 This gave him then the mansion of the moon-

562 He worked it out accordingly right soon,

563 And did the other necessary rites

564 To cause illusions and such evil sights

565 As heathen peoples practised in those days.

566 Therefore no longer suffered he delays,

567 But all the rocks by magic and his lore

568 Appeared to vanish for a week or more.

569 Aurelius, who yet was torn by this,

570 Whether he'd gain his love or fare amiss,

571 Awaited night and day this miracle;

572 And when he knew there was no obstacle,

573 That vanished were these black rocks, every one,

574 Down at the master's feet he fell anon

575 And said: I, woeful wretch, Aurelius,

576 Thank you, my lord, and Lady mine Venus,

577 That have so saved me from my dreadful care.

578 And to the temple straightway did he fare,

579 Whereat he knew he should his lady see.

580 And when he saw his opportunity,

581 With fluttering heart and with an humble cheer

582 He greeted thus his sovereign lady dear.

583 My own dear lady, said this woeful man,

584 Whom I most fear and love best, as I can,

585 And whom, of all this world, I'd not displease,

586 Were it not that for you I've such unease

587 That I must die here at your feet anon,

588 I would not tell how I am woebegone;

589 But I must either die or else complain;

590 You slay me, for no crime, with utter pain.

591 But on my death, although you have no ruth,

592 Take heed now, ere you break your promised troth

593 Repent you, for die sake of God above,

594 Ere me you slay, because it's you I love.

595 For well you know your promise apposite;

596 Not that I challenge aught, of my own right,

597 In you, my sovereign lady, save your grace;

598 But in a garden, in a certain place,

599 You know right well what you did promise me;

600 And in my hand you plighted troth, said he,

601 To love me best, God knows you promised so,

602 Howe'er I may unworthy be thereto.

603 Madam, I say it for your honour's vow

604 More than to save my heart's dear life right now;

605 I have done all that you commanded me;

606 And if you will, you may well go and see.

607 Do as you please, but hold your word in mind,

608 For quick or dead, as you do, me you'll find;

609 In you lies all, to make me live or die,

610 But well I know the rocks are vanished, aye!

611 He took his leave, and she astounded stood,

612 In all her face there was no drop of blood;

613 She never thought to have come in such a trap.

614 Alas! said she, that ever this should hap!

615 For thought I never, by possibility,

616 That such prodigious marvel e'er might be!

617 It is against the way of all nature.

618 And home she went, a sorrowful creature.

619 For utter terror hardly could she go,

620 She wept, she wailed throughout a day or so,

621 And swooned so much 'twas pitiful, to see;

622 But why this was to not a soul told she;

623 For out of town was gone Arviragus.

624 But to her own heart spoke she, and said thus,

625 With her face pale and with a heavy cheer,

626 All her complaint, as you'll hereafter hear:

627 Of thee, she cried, O Fortune, I complain,

628 That, unaware, I'm bound within thy chain;

629 From which to go, I know of no succour

630 Save only death, or else my dishonour;

631 One of these two I am compelled to choose.

632 Nevertheless, I would far rather lose

633 My life than of my body come to shame,

634 Or know myself untrue, or lose my name;

635 By death I know it well, I may be freed;

636 Has there not many a noble wife, indeed,

637 And many a maiden slain herself- alas!-

638 Rather than with her body do trespass?

639 Yes, truly, lo, these stories bear witness;

640 When Thirty Tyrants, full of wickedness,

641 Had Phido slain in Athens, at a feast,

642 They gave command his daughters to arrest,

643 And had them brought before them, for despite,

644 All naked, to fulfill their foul delight,

645 And in their father's blood they made them dance

646 Upon the pavement- God give them mischance!

647 For which these woeful maidens, full of dread,

648 Rather than they should lose their maidenhead,

649 Unseen they all leaped down into a well

650 And drowned themselves therein, as old books tell.

651 They of Messina did require and seek

652 From Lacedaemon fifty maids to take,

653 On whom they would have done their lechery;

654 But there was none of all that company

655 Who was not slain, and who with good intent

656 Preferred not death rather than give consent

657 To be thus ravished of her maidenhead.

658 Why should I then hold dying in such dread?

659 Lo, too, the tyrant Aristoclides,

660 Who loved a maiden called Stimphalides.

661 Whenas her father had been slain by night,

662 Unto Diana's temple she took flight

663 And grasped the image in her two hands so

664 That from this image would she not let go.

665 No one could tear her hands from that embrace

666 Till she was slaughtered in that self-same place.

667 Now since these maidens showed such scorn outright

668 Of being defiled to make man's foul delight,

669 Well ought a wife rather herself to slay

670 Than be defiled, I think, and so I say.

671 What shall I say of Hasdrubal's fair wife,

672 Who in Carthage bereft herself of life?

673 For when she saw that Romans won the town,

674 She took her children all and leaped right down

675 Into the fire, choosing thus to die

676 Before a Roman did her villainy.

677 Did not Lucretia slay herself- alas!-

678 At Rome, when she so violated was

679 By Tarquin? For she thought it was a shame

680 Merely to live when she had lost her name.

681 The seven maidens of Miletus, too,

682 Did slay themselves, for very dread and woe,

683 Rather than men of Gaul should on them press.

684 More than a thousand stories, as I guess,

685 Could I repeat now of this matter here.

686 With Abradates slain, his wife so dear

687 Herself slew, and she let her red blood glide

688 In Abradates' wounds so deep and wide,

689 And said: 'My body, at the least, I say,

690 No man shall now defile,' and passed away.

691 Why should I of more instances, be fain?

692 Since that so many have their bodies slain

693 Rather than that they should dishonoured be?

694 I will conclude it better is for me

695 To slay myself than be dishonoured thus.

696 I will be true unto Arviragus,

697 Or else I'll slay myself in some manner,

698 As did Demotion's virgin daughter dear

699 Because she would not violated be.

700 O Cedasus, it rouses great pity

701 To read of how your daughters died, alas!

702 That slew themselves in such another case.

703 As great a pity was it, aye and more,

704 That a fair Theban maid, for Nicanor,

705 Did slay herself in such a kind of woe.

706 Another Theban maiden did also;

707 For one of Macedonia her had pressed,

708 And she, by death, her maidenhead redressed.

709 What shall I say of Nicerates' wife,

710 Who, for like cause, bereft herself of life?

711 How true, too, was to Alcibiades

712 His love, who chose to drain death to the lees

713 And would not let his corpse unburied be!

714 Lo, what a wife was Alcestis, said she.

715 What says Homer of good Penelope?

716 The whole of Hellas knew her chastity.

717 Pardieu, of Laodamia they wrote thus,

718 That when at Troy was slain Protesilaus,

719 No longer would she live after his day.

720 The same of noble Portia may I say;

721 Without her Brutus could she no wise live,

722 To whom in youth her whole heart she did give.

723 The perfect wifehood of Artemisia

724 Was honoured throughout all old Caria.

725 O Teuta, queen! Your wifely chastity,

726 To all wives may a very mirror be.

727 The same thing may I say of Bilia,

728 Of Rhodogune and of Valeria.

729 Thus Dorigen went on a day or so,

730 Purposing ever that to death she'd go.

731 But notwithstanding, upon the third night

732 Home came Arviragus, this worthy knight,

733 And asked her why it was she wept so sore.

734 And thereat she began to weep the more.

735 Alas! cried she, that ever I was born!

736 Thus have I said, quoth she, thus have I sworn-

737 And told him all, as you have heard before;

738 It needs not to re-tell it to you more.

739 This husband, with glad cheer, in friendly wise,

740 Answered and said as I shall you apprise:

741 Is there naught else, my Dorigen, than this?

742 Nay, nay, said she, God help me, as it is

743 This is too much, though it were God's own will.

744 Yea, wife, said he, let sleep what's lying still;

745 It may be well with us, perchance, today.

746 But you your word shall hold to, by my fay!

747 As God may truly mercy have on me,

748 Wounded to death right now I'd rather be,

749 For sake of this great love of you I have,

750 Than you should not your true word keep and save.

751 Truth is the highest thing that man may keep.

752 But with that word began he then to weep,

753 And said: I you forbid, on pain of death,

754 That ever, while to you last life and breath,

755 To anyone you tell this adventure.

756 As I best may, I will my woe endure,

757 Nor show a countenance of heaviness,

758 That folk no harm may think of you, or guess.

759 And then he called a squire and a maid:

760 Go forth anon with Dorigen, he said,

761 And bring her to a certain place anon.

762 They took their leave and on their way were gone.

763 But nothing knew of why she thither went

764 Nor would he to a soul tell his intent.

765 Perhaps a lot of you will certainly

766 Hold him a wicked man that wilfully

767 Put his wife's honour thus in jeopardy;

768 Hearken the tale, ere you upon her cry.

769 She may have better luck than you suppose;

770 And when you've heard all, let your judgment close.

771 This squire I've told you of, Aurelius,

772 Of Dorigen he being so amorous,

773 Chanced, as it seems, his lady fair to meet

774 In middle town, right in the busiest street,

775 As she was going forth, as you have heard,

776 Toward the garden where she'd pledged her word.

777 And he was going gardenward also;

778 For he was always watching when she'd go

779 Out of her house to any kind of place.

780 But thus they met, by chance perhaps or grace;

781 And he saluted her with good intent,

782 And asked her, now, whither it was she went.

783 And she replied, as if she were half mad:

784 Unto the garden, as my husband bade,

785 My promise there to keep, alas, alast

786 Aurelius then pondered on this case,

787 And in his heart he had compassion great

788 On her and her lamenting and her state,

789 And on Arviragus, the noble knight,

790 Who'd bidden her keep promise, as she might,

791 Being so loath his wife should break with truth;

792 And in his heart he gained, from this, great ruth,

793 Considering the best on every side,

794 That from possession rather he'd abide

795 Than do so great a churlish grievousness

796 Against free hearts and all high nobleness;

797 For which, and in few words, he told her thus:

798 Madam, say to your lord Arviragus

799 That since I see his noble gentleness

800 To you, and since I see well your distress,

801 That he'd have rather shame (and that were ruth)

802 Than you to me should break your word of truth,

803 I would myself far rather suffer woe

804 Than break apart the love between you two.

805 So I release, madam, into your hand,

806 And do return, discharged, each surety and

807 Each bond that you have given and have sworn,

808 Even from the very time that you were born.

809 My word I pledge, I'll ne'er seek to retrieve

810 A single promise, and I take my leave

811 As of the truest and of the best wife

812 That ever yet I've known in all my life.

813 Let every wife of promises take care,

814 Remember Dorigen, and so beware!

815 Thus can a squire perform a gentle deed

816 As well as can a knight, of that take heed.

817 Upon her bare knees did she thank him there,

818 And home unto her husband did she fare,

819 And told him all, as you have heard it said;

820 And be assured, he was so pleased and glad

821 That 'twere impossible of it to write.

822 What should I further of this case indite?

823 Arviragus and Dorigen his wife

824 In sovereign happiness led forth their life.

825 Never did any anger come between;

826 He cherished her as if she were a queen;

827 And she to him was true for evermore.

828 Of these two folk you get from me no more.

829 Aurelius, whose wealth was now forlorn,

830 He cursed the time that ever he was born;

831 Alas! cried he, Alas! that I did state

832 I'd pay fine gold a thousand pounds by weight

833 To this philosopher! What shall I do?

834 I see no better than I'm ruined too.

835 All of my heritage I needs must sell

836 And be a beggar; here I cannot dwell

837 And shame all of my kindred in this place,

838 Unless I gain of him some better grace.

839 And so I'll go to him and try, today,

840 On certain dates, from year to year, to pay,

841 And thank him for his princely courtesy;

842 For I will keep my word, and I'll not lie.

843 With sore heart he went then to his coffer,

844 And took gold unto this philosopher,

845 The value of five hundred pounds, I guess,

846 And so besought him, of his nobleness,

847 To grant him dates for payment of the rest,

848 And said: Dear master, I may well protest

849 I've never failed to keep my word, as yet;

850 For certainly I'll pay my entire debt

851 To you, however after I may fare,

852 Even to begging, save for kirtle, bare.

853 But if you'd grant, on good security,

854 Two years or three of respite unto me,

855 Then all were well; otherwise must I sell

856 My heritage; there is no more to tell.

857 Then this philosopher soberly answered

858 And spoke in. this wise, when these words he'd heard:

859 Have I not fairly earned my promised fee?

860 Yes, truly, you have done so, sir, said he.

861 Have you not bad the lady at your will?

862 No, no, said he, and sighed, and then was still.

863 What was the reason? Tell me if you can.

864 Aurelius his tale anon began,

865 And told him all, as you have heard before;

866 It needs not I repeat it to you more.

867 He said: Arviragus, of nobleness,

868 Had rather die in sorrow and distress

869 Than that his wife were to her promise false.

870 He told of Dorigen's grief, too, and how else

871 She had been loath to live a wicked wife

872 And rather would that day have lost her life,

873 And that her troth she swore through ignorance:

874 She'd ne'er before heard of such simulance;

875 Which made me have for her such great pity.

876 And just as freely as he sent her me,

877 As freely sent I her to him again.

878 This is the sum, there's no more to explain.

879 Then answered this philosopher: Dear brother,

880 Each one of you has nobly dealt with other.

881 You are a squire, true, and he is a knight,

882 But God forbid, what of His blessed might,

883 A clerk should never do a gentle deed

884 As well as any of you. Of this take heed!

885 Sir, I release to you your thousand pound,

886 As if, right now, you'd crept out of the ground

887 And never, before now, had known of me.

888 For, sir, I'll take of you not one penny

889 For all my art and all my long travail.

890 You have paid well for all my meat and ale;

891 It is enough, so farewell, have good day!

892 And took his horse and went forth on his way.

893 Masters, this question would I ask you now:

894 Which was most generous, do you think, and how.

895 Pray tell me this before you farther wend.

896 I can no more, my tale is at an end.