

## The Pardoner's Tale

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Words of the Host to the Physician and the Pardoner*

Our Host began to swear as if gone mad.  
 "Harrow," said he, "by nails and blood! How bad,  
 How false a judge, how false a churl! Demise  
 As shameful as the heart may so devise 290  
 Come to these judges and their advocates!  
 This simple maiden's slain, as he relates,  
 She for her beauty paid, alas, too dearly!  
 I've always said what men may see so clearly,  
 That gifts of Fortune and of Nature bring 295  
 About the death of many a living thing.  
 Her beauty was her death, I dare to say.  
 She's slain, alas, in such a piteous way!  
 Both gifts of which I speak, as I maintain,  
 Have often brought men more to harm than gain. 300  
 But truthfully, my only master dear,  
 This is a tale that's pitiful to hear.  
 It can't be helped, let's move along our way.  
 God save your noble body, that I pray,  
 Your urinals and every chamber pot, 305  
 Each galen and hippocrates you've got,  
 Each flask full of the medicine you carry--  
 God bless them, and Our Lady, too, Saint Mary!  
 "As I may thrive, you are a proper man  
 And, by [Saint Ronyan](#), like a prelate! Can 310  
 I say it right? I can't speak learnedly  
 But well I know you've caused this heart in me  
 To grieve till I am near a cardiac.  
 By [corpus bones](#)! if remedy I lack,  
 If there's no musty draught of corny ale 315  
 Or I don't hear at once a merry tale,  
 My heart is lost in sympathy for her.  
[Bel ami](#), you," he said, "you Pardoner,  
 Tell jokes, some funny story, go ahead."  
 "It shall be done now, by Saint Ronyan!" said 320  
 The Pardoner. "But first, at this ale stake,  
 I'll have a drink and also eat a cake."  
 The gentlefolk cried out immediately:  
 "Don't let him tell us any ribaldry!  
 Tell us some moral thing, that we may learn 325  
 Some wisdom, and we'll gladly hear your turn."  
 "Granted, for sure," said he, "but I must think  
 Of something, then, that's fitting while I drink."

**Saint Ronyan** Perhaps a corruption of Ronan (a Scottish saint), a pun on the French word rognon (kidney), or both (Pardoner Intro [310](#), [320](#)).

**Corpus bones** - "God's bones" (Pardoner Intro [314](#); Monk ProI [1906](#)).

**bel ami** "Fine friend" (Pardoner Intro [318](#)).

## The Pardoner's Tale

### PROLOGUE

"My lords," said he, "in churches when I preach  
 I take great pains to have a haughty speech 330  
 And ring it out as roundly as a bell;  
 I know it all by heart, what I've to tell.  
 My theme's always the same and ever was:  
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.

"First I announce from where it is I come 335  
 And then show all my bulls, not only some.  
 My patent with the bishop's seal I show  
 To help safeguard my person as I go,  
 That no man be so bold, though priest or clerk,  
 As to obstruct me in Christ's holy work. 340  
 And after that my tales I start to tell,  
 And bulls of popes, of cardinals as well,  
 Of patriarchs and bishops, I display.  
 A few words in the Latin tongue I say  
 To add a little spice to what I preach 345  
 And stir men to devotion as I teach.

"And then I show to them like precious stones  
 My long glass cases crammed with rags and bones,  
 For these are relics (so they think). And set  
 In metal I've a shoulderbone I let 350  
 Them see, from the sheep of a holy Jew.  
 'Good men,' say I, 'pay heed to me. When you  
 Shall take this bone and wash it in a well,  
 If cow or calf or sheep or ox should swell  
 Because it ate a worm or it's been stung, 355  
 Take water from that well and wash its tongue  
 And right away it's whole. And furthermore,  
 From pox and scab and every other sore  
 Shall every sheep be whole that of this well  
 Drinks but a draught. Pay heed to what I tell. 360  
 If every farmer owning stock will go  
 Each week before the cock's had time to crow  
 And, fasting, from this well will take a drink  
 (This Jew once taught our elders so to think),  
 His beasts will be assured of progeny. 365  
 And, sirs, it also heals of jealousy;  
 For though a man by jealousy be wroth,  
 Use water from this well to make his broth  
 And nevermore shall he mistrust his wife,  
 Despite the truth about her sinful life, 370  
 With even priests as lovers, two or three.

"Here also is a mitten you may see.  
 Whose hand goes in this mitten will thereby  
 Find that his grain will greatly multiply  
 When he has sown, whether it's wheat or oats 375  
 (Provided he has offered pence or groats).

***Radix malorum est Cupiditas*** "Greed is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10)  
*clerk A; a student, being ostensibly an aspirant to the clergy*

"'Good men and women, of one thing I warn:  
 If in this church there's any fellow born  
 Who's done some horrid sin and who for shame  
 Does not dare to be shriven for the same, 380  
 Or any woman young or elderly  
 Who's done her husband wrong by cuckoldry,  
 Such folk shall have no power and no grace  
 To offer to my relics in this place.  
 But whoso finds himself without such blame, 385  
 Let him come forth and offer in God's name  
 And I'll absolve him by authority  
 That has by papal bull been granted me.'

"And with this trick I've won each year about 390  
 A hundred marks since first I started out.  
 I stand there in my pulpit like a clerk,  
 These ignorants sit down, and right to work  
 I go, I preach as you have heard before  
 And tell a hundred silly stories more.  
 And I take pains to get my neck to stretch, 395  
 To nod both east and west to every wretch  
 Just like a dove that's sitting on the barn.  
 My tongue and hands go spinning such a yarn  
 That it's a joy to see my craftiness.  
 Of avarice and all such cursedness 400  
 I always preach, to make them ever free  
 To give their pence (and give only to me);  
 For my concern is only with collection  
 And not with any sin that needs correction.  
 Once buried, they don't mean a thing to me 405  
 Though their souls pick blackberries. Certainly  
 Many a sermon seemingly well meant  
 Has often come from less than good intent:  
 To please the folks, to offer flattery,  
 To get promoted by hypocrisy, 410  
 Some for vainglory, some for simple hate.  
 For if I dare not otherwise debate,  
 My tongue in preaching will a sting impart  
 That no man can escape, he'll feel the smart  
 And falsely be defamed if ever he 415  
 Has done wrong to my brethren or to me;  
 For though I may not call him by his name,  
 All men shall be aware that he's the same  
 By signs or by what chances may permit.  
 Thus folks who wrong us I repay, I spit 420  
 My venom under holiness's hue,  
 That truthful I may seem and holy too.

"But briefly my intent I'll summarize:  
 It's greed alone that makes me sermonize.  
 And so my theme is yet and ever was: 425  
*Radix malorum est Cupiditas.*  
 Yes, I myself can preach against the vice  
 Of avarice that is my own device;  
 For though I'm guilty of that very sin,  
 These other folks I'm able still to win 430  
 From avarice and sorely they'll repent.  
 But that is not my principal intent,

I only preach to satisfy my greed.  
 Enough of that, for more there's not a need.  
 "I tell them many moral tales I know, 435  
 Old stories set in times of long ago;  
 The ignorant find in these tales much pleasure,  
 Such things as they can well repeat and treasure.  
 Do you believe, as long as I can preach,  
 Acquiring gold and silver while I teach, 440  
 That willfully I'd live in poverty?  
 It's never crossed my mind, quite truthfully!  
 No, I will preach and beg in sundry lands  
 And never will I labor with my hands  
 Or take up basketweaving for a living. 445  
 I won't be begging idly, they'll be giving.  
 Apostles I'll not try to counterfeit;  
 I'll have my money, wool, and food, though it  
 Be from some page whose poverty is dire  
 Or from the poorest widow in the shire; 450  
 Although her kids be starving, I'll be fine,  
 For I will drink the liquor of the vine  
 And have a jolly wench in every town.  
 But listen, lords, we'll set that matter down,  
 Your pleasure is that I should tell a tale. 455  
 Now that I've had my draught of corny ale,  
 By God, I hope to tell you something striking  
 That with good reason will be to your liking.  
 Though I'm a man of vices through and through,  
 I still can tell a moral tale to you, 460  
 One that I preach to bring the money in.  
 Now hold your peace, my tale I will begin."

### The Pardoner's Tale

In Flanders some time back there was a troop  
 Of youths who were a folly-loving group,  
 What with their parties, gambling, brothels, bars, 465  
 Where with their harps and lutes and their guitars  
 They'd dance and play at dice both day and night.  
 They also ate and drank beyond their might,  
 So that they gave the devil sacrifice  
 Within the devil's temple by the vice 470  
 Of gluttony, which is abomination.  
 Their oaths were great, so worthy of damnation  
 It was a grisly thing to hear them swear;  
 The body of our blessed Lord they'd tear  
 As if the Jews had not torn him enough. 475

**Flanders** A leading medieval cloth-producing country (now part of Belgium and France), including the cities of Bruges, Ghent, and Ypres

Each laughed at every other's sinful stuff  
 And right away came dancing girls to boot,  
 All neat and trim, and young girls selling fruit,  
 Singers with harps, then bawds, girls selling cake--  
 All agents of the devil, no mistake, 480  
 All kindlers of the fire of lechery  
 That goes so hand in hand with gluttony.  
 My witness is God's Holy Writ, no less,  
 That lechery's in wine and drunkenness.  
 Behold how drunken Lot unnaturally 485  
 Lay with his daughters both, unwittingly,  
 So drunk he was unconscious of the deed.  
 King Herod, about whom one well should read,  
 When at a feast much wine he had been swilling,  
 Gave orders at the table for the killing 490  
 Of John the Baptist, guiltless as could be.  
Seneca says good things undoubtedly;  
 He said that not one difference could he find  
 Between a man who's gone out of his mind  
 And one who's drunk (except that madness will, 495  
 In one whose nature is already ill,  
 Be longer lasting than will drunkenness).  
 O gluttony, so full of cursedness!  
 O first cause of our trial and tribulation,  
 O origin of all our souls' damnation 500  
 Till we were purchased back by blood of Christ!  
 How dearly, I'll say briefly, it was priced,  
 How much was paid for this depravity!  
 Corrupt was all the world with gluttony.  
 Our father Adam and his wife also 505  
 From Paradise to labor and to woe  
 Were driven by that vice, and do not doubt it.  
 While Adam fasted, as I read about it,  
 He was in Paradise, but then when he  
 Ate of the fruit forbidden on the tree 510  
 He was at once cast out to woe and pain.  
 O gluttony, with reason we complain!  
 O if one knew how many a malady  
 Must follow such excess and gluttony,  
 To eat with moderation he'd be able 515  
 Whenever he is sitting at his table.  
 Alas! the short throat and so tender mouth  
 Make men both east and west, both north and south,  
 In water, earth, and air, work to produce  
 Fine meat and beverage for a glutton's use! 520  
 How well this matter, O Saint Paul, you treat:  
 "Meat's for the belly, belly's for the meat,  
 God shall destroy both"--so Paul is heard.

**Seneca** Roman philosopher and dramatist (3 B.C.-A.D. 65), known particularly for his moral philosophy

Alas! for by my faith it is a word  
 So foul to have to say (but foul's the deed) 525  
 That so much white and red a man should need  
 He makes his throat his privy hole, no less,  
 Because of such accurst excessiveness.

The Apostle has with so much pity mourned: (The Apostle Paul)  
 "So many walk that way whom I have warned-- 530  
 I say this weeping, with piteous voice--  
 Foes of the cross of Christ, if that's their choice,  
 For which the end is death. Their god's the belly."  
 O gut, O bag, O belly foul and smelly,  
 So full of dung and of corruption found! 535  
 From either end of you foul is the sound.  
 By what great cost and labor you have dined!  
 These cooks, how they must pound and strain and grind,  
 And transform substance into accident,  
 Until your glutton's appetite is spent! 540  
 From hard bones they knock marrow for one's taste,  
 For there is nothing they let go to waste  
 That's soft and sweet and might the gullet suit.  
 With spices of the leaf, the bark and root,  
 His sauces will be made for such delight 545  
 He'll wind up with a whole new appetite.  
 But he who lets such pleasures so entice  
 Is dead while he is living in such vice.

A lecherous thing is wine, and drunkenness  
 Is full of striving and of wretchedness. 550  
 O drunken man, disfigured is your face,  
 Sour your breath, you're foul to the embrace!  
 And through your drunken nose it seems the sound  
 Is "Samson, Samson" that you would expound, 555  
 Though, God knows, Samson never drank of wine.  
 You fall as if you were a stricken swine;  
 Your tongue is lost, your self-respect you gave  
 To drunkenness, which is the very grave  
 Of man's discretion and intelligence. 560  
 When drink in him has taken dominance  
 One cannot keep a secret, truly said.  
 So keep yourself away from white and red,  
 Especially from Lepe white wine bought  
 In Cheapside or Fish Street. This wine that's brought  
 From Spain is known to creep up subtly 565  
 In other wines grown in proximity,  
 From which there then arise such heady fumes  
 That when a man three draughts of it consumes,  
 Though he thinks he's in Cheapside at his home,  
 He'll find to Lepe, Spain, he's come to roam 570  
 And not off to Bordeaux or La Rochelle--  
 And "Samson, Samson" he'll be saying well.

But listen, lords, to this one word, I pray:  
 All of the sovereign actions, I daresay,  
 All victories in God's Old Testament, 575  
 Through grace of him who is omnipotent,  
 Were all achieved in abstinence and prayer.  
 Look in the Bible and you'll learn it there.

Behold Attila: that great warrior died  
 While in a shameful sleep, unglorified, 580  
 His nostrils pouring blood, a drunken sot.  
 A captain's life should be a sober lot.  
 You should above all else consider well  
 The wise commandment given Lemuel  
 (Not Samuel but Lemuel I said), 585  
 Expressly in the Bible to be read,  
 On serving wine to justices at court.  
 That should suffice, no more need I report.  
 On gluttony I've said a thing or two,  
 And now from gambling I'd prohibit you. 590  
 For gambling is the source of every lie,  
 Of all deceit that curses men to die.  
 It's blasphemy of Christ, manslaughter, waste  
 Of time and property. To be disgraced,  
 That's what it is, dishonorable, defaming, 595  
 To be held one who takes to common gaming.  
 The higher one might be in social station  
 The more he'll be accused of depravation;  
 If there's a prince who gambles constantly,  
 On all his governance and policy 600  
 The judgment of opinion will be such  
 His reputation's bound to suffer much.  
 A wise ambassador named Stillbon, sent  
 From Sparta, in great pomp to Corinth went  
 To arrange for an alliance. When he came, 605  
 It happened that by chance he found, for shame,  
 That all the greatest who were of that land  
 Were at the game of hazard, dice in hand.  
 With that, as soon as Stillbon could get started,  
 Back home to his own country he departed, 610  
 And said, "In Corinth I'll not lose my name  
 Nor take upon myself so great a shame,  
 I'll not ally you with such hazarders.  
 Send to them other wise ambassadors,  
 For on my oath I'd perish in defiance 615  
 Before I'd make for you such an alliance.  
 For you, with honors that have been so glorious,  
 Shall not ally with gamblers so notorious--  
 Not by my will or treaty anyway."  
 That's what this wise philosopher had to say. 620  
 At King Demetrius now take a look:  
 Parthia's king, so we're told in the book,  
 Sent him in scorn a pair of golden dice;  
 For playing hazard long had been his vice,  
 For which Demetrius's fame and glory 625  
 To Parthia's king were a worthless story.  
 Cannot lords find some other forms of play  
 Honest enough to pass the time of day?  
 And now on oaths, when false or indiscreet,  
 A word or two, such as the old books treat. 630  
 Strong swearing is an awful thing to do  
 And worse yet when you swear what isn't true.  
 The Lord on high forbade we swear at all,  
 As Matthew tells. Especially recall  
 What holy Jeremiah says about it: 635

"Speak truth, not lies, in oaths, that none should doubt it;  
 Swear but for justice and for righteousness."  
 But idle swearing is a cursedness.  
 Behold and see in that first table of  
 The worthy laws God gave us from above: 640  
 The second of these laws is very plain  
 To say, "Thou shalt not take my name in vain."  
 The Lord forbids such swearing sooner, then,  
 Than homicide and many a curséd sin.  
 I tell it in the order that it stands-- 645  
 As he who God's commandments understands  
 Is well aware, the second one is that.  
 And furthermore I now will tell you flat  
 That vengeance on his house will be unsparing  
 When one engages in such awful swearing 650  
 As "By God's precious heart," and "By his nails,"  
 And "By the blood of Christ that is in Hales,  
 My chance is seven, yours is five and three!"  
 "By God's arms, if you play deceitfully  
 You'll see how well your heart this dagger hones!" 655  
 This is the fruit of those two curséd bones:  
 Forswearing, ire, deceit, and homicide.  
 So for the love of Christ who for us died,  
 Leave off your oaths, the small ones and the great.  
 Now, sirs, my tale I further will relate. 660  
 These three young revelers of whom I tell  
 Much earlier than nine by any bell  
 Were sitting in a tavern and were drinking.  
 And as they sat, they heard a bell go clinking:  
 A corpse was being carried to its grave. 665  
 Then one of them called over to his knave  
 And said, "Go quickly, ask without delay  
 What corpse that is that's passing by the way,  
 And see that you report his name correctly."  
 "No need for that," the boy replied directly, 670  
 "Two hours before you came here, sir, they told  
 Me who he was. The fellow was an old  
 Comrade of yours, one who was slain at night  
 With suddenness. While he sat drunk, upright,  
 There came a stealthy thief that's known as Death, 675  
 Throughout this country robbing folks of breath;  
 And with his spear he smote his heart in two,  
 Then went his way without a word. And through  
 This plague he's slain a thousand. Master, ere  
 You come into his presence anywhere, 680  
 I think that it is very necessary  
 That you beware of such an adversary.  
 To meet him, sire, be ready evermore.  
 My mother taught me this. I say no more."  
 "By Saint Mary," the tavern keeper said, 685  
 "The child is right! This year he's left for dead  
 In just one town (a mile from here, I'd gauge)  
 Both man and woman, child and knave and page--  
 I think his habitation must be there.  
 It would be very wise, then, to beware 690  
 Lest he should do a fellow a dishonor."



"Yea, by God's arms!" declared this rioter,  
 "Is he so very perilous to meet?  
 I'll seek him in the by-ways and the street,  
 I vow it by the worthy bones of God! 695  
 My friends, are we not three peas in a pod?  
 Let's each hold up a hand to one another,  
 Each of us will become the others' brother.  
 With this false traitor Death we'll do away;  
 The slayer of so many we shall slay 700  
 Before it's night, by God's sweet dignity!"  
 Together then they made their pledge, the three,  
 To live and die each of them for the others  
 As if they'd been born naturally as brothers.  
 Then up they jumped in drunken agitation 705  
 And headed down the road, their destination  
 The village they had just been told about.  
 And many a grisly oath they shouted out  
 And tore Christ's blessed body limb from limb--  
 Death shall be dead if they get hold of him! 710  
 When they had gone not fully half a mile,  
 And were about to step across a stile,  
 They met a poor old man. Upon their meeting,  
 The old man very meekly gave them greeting:  
 "My lords," he said, "may God watch over you." 715  
 To which the proudest of this rowdy crew  
 Replied, "What's that, you churl of sorry grace?  
 Why are you all wrapped up except your face?  
 Why live to be so ancient? Tell us why!"  
 The old man looked the fellow in the eye 720  
 And said, "Because I'd never find a man,  
 Were I to walk as far as Hindustan,  
 In any town or village, who would give  
 His youth for my old age. So I must live,  
 I'm destined to remain an old man still, 725  
 As long a time as it may be God's will.  
 And Death, alas! won't take my life, and so  
 I walk, a restless wretch, and as I go  
 I knock with this my staff early and late  
 Upon the ground, which is my mother's gate, 730  
 And say, 'Beloved Mother, let me in!  
 Look how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin!  
 Alas! when will these old bones be at rest?  
 How gladly, Mother, I'd exchange my chest,  
 Which has so long a time been on my shelf, 735  
 For haircloth in which I could wrap myself!'  
 And yet she won't allow me such a grace,  
 That's why so pale and withered is my face.  
 "But, sirs, you show a lack of courtesy  
 To speak to an old man so brutishly, 740  
 Unless he has trespassed in word or deed.  
 In Holy Writ you may yourself well read:  
 'Before an old man with a hoary head  
 You should arise.' I counsel as it's said,  
 No harm to an old fellow you should do, 745  
 No more than you would have men do to you  
 When in old age, should you so long abide.  
 Now God be with you where you go or ride,

I must go on to where I have to go."

"No, you old churl, by God, that isn't so!" 750  
The gambler said at once. "You won't be gone  
So lightly on your way, no, by Saint John!  
What of that traitor Death were you just saying?  
Our friends in all this country he is slaying.  
I promise you--since you're a spy of his-- 755  
You'll pay if you don't tell us where he is,  
By God and by the holy sacrament!  
For truly you and he have one intent,  
To kill us who are young, you thief and liar!"

"Now, sirs," said he, "if you have such desire 760  
To find Death, then turn up this crooked way--  
I left him in that grove. I truly say,  
Beneath a tree he was; there he'll abide,  
Your boasting will not make him run and hide.  
See yonder oak? He's there, as you will find. 765  
God save you, as he ransomed all mankind,  
And mend you!" So replied this aged man.  
And each of these three revelers then ran  
Until he reached the tree, and there they found  
Some florins, coined of gold and fine and round-- 770 (florin- a gold coin)  
Well nigh eight bushels, that was their impression.  
To seek Death was no longer their obsession,  
As each of them, so gladdened by the sight  
Of golden florins, all so fair and bright,  
Sat down beside the hoard that they had found. 775  
The worst of them was first to speak a sound.

He said, "My brothers, heed what I've to say,  
My wits are keen although I joke and play.  
It's Fortune that has given us this treasure  
That we may live our lives in mirth and pleasure. 780  
As easy as it comes we'll spend it. Aye!  
Who would have thought this very morning, by  
God's dignity, we'd have so fair a grace?  
And if this gold be carried from this place  
Home to my house, or else to yours--be it 785  
Well understood, it's our gold every bit--  
Then we'll be in a high and happy way.  
But truly it cannot be done by day,  
We'd be accused of brazen thievery  
And for our gold they'd hang us from a tree. 790  
This treasure we must carry home by night,  
As cleverly and slyly as we might.  
So I advise that lots among us all  
Be drawn, and let's see where the lot will fall;  
And he who draws the lot then cheerfully 795  
Shall run to town, and do that speedily,  
To bring some bread and wine back on the sly,  
While two of us shall carefully stand by  
To guard this treasure. If he doesn't tarry,  
When it is night this treasure we will carry 800  
To where we all agree it would be best."  
In that one's fist were lots held for the rest,  
He bade them draw to see where it would fall.  
It fell upon the youngest of them all,  
Who started off to town immediately. 805

No sooner had he left their company  
 When that one of those staying told the other,  
 "Now you know well that you are my sworn brother;  
 Here's something that will profit you to know.  
 Our friend back into town has had to go, 810  
 And here is gold in plentiful degree  
 That is to be divided by us three.  
 But nonetheless, if I could work it so  
 Between us two we split it when we go,  
 Would I have not done you a friendly turn?" 815  
 "But how?" the other answered with concern.  
 "For he will know the gold is with us two.  
 What shall we say to him? What shall we do?"  
 "Shall it be kept our secret?" said the first.  
 "Then in a few short words you shall be versed 820  
 In what we'll do to bring it all about."  
 "I grant it," said the other, "do not doubt,  
 You have my oath, I'll not be false to you."  
 "Now," said the first, "you know that we are two,  
 And two of us are stronger than is one. 825  
 As soon as he sits down, as if for fun  
 Arise as though you'd have with him some play,  
 Then in both sides I'll stab him right away  
 While you and he are struggling as in game.  
 And with your dagger see you do the same. 830  
 Then all this gold, dear friend, when we are through  
 Shall be divided up twixt me and you;  
 The two of us can then our lusts fulfill  
 And play at dice as often as we will."  
 So these two rogues agreed they would betray 835  
 And slay the third, as you have heard me say.  
 Meanwhile the youngest, who had gone to town,  
 In his mind's eye saw rolling up and down  
 The beauty of those florins new and bright.  
 "O Lord," said he, "if only that I might 840  
 Have all this treasure for myself alone!  
 There is no man who lives beneath God's throne  
 Who could then live as I, so merrily!"  
 And then at last hell's fiend, our enemy,  
 Put in his mind that poison he should buy 845  
 And give to his two mates and let them die.  
 The fiend had found this man's life so profane  
 He used his leave to bring the man to pain,  
 For it was plainly this man's full intent  
 To slay them both and never to repent. 850  
 So forth he went--no longer would he tarry--  
 Into the town to an apothecary,  
 Whom he asked that he sell to him if willing  
 Some poison: he had rats that needed killing,  
 And in his yard a polecat, so he said, 855  
 Was reason why his capons now were dead,  
 And he'd wreak eager vengeance if he might  
 On vermin that were ruining him by night.  
 The apothecary answered, "Let me tell you,  
 So help me God, here's something I will sell you, 860  
 And there is not a creature anywhere  
 That eats or drinks this mixture I prepare,

Though in amount as little as a kernel,  
 That will not go at once to the eternal--  
 Yea, he will die, and in a shorter while 865  
 Than it would take you, sir, to walk a mile,  
 This poison is so strong and virulent."

With this in hand, this curséd fellow went  
 (He took it in a box), and then he ran  
 Up the adjoining street to see a man 870  
 Who loaned him three large bottles. Of the three,  
 He poured his poison into two, for he  
 Would keep the third one clean for his own drinking.  
 "I'll be at work all night," so he was thinking,  
 "To carry all the gold out from that place." 875  
 And when this ne'er do well of such disgrace  
 Had filled with wine three bottles to the brim,  
 He went back to his mates awaiting him.

What need is there to preach about it more?  
 For just as they had planned his death before, 880  
 So by them he was slain right on the spot.  
 Then that one, when they'd carried out the plot,  
 Said, "Let us sit and drink and make us merry,  
 And afterwards his body we will bury."  
 It happened then by chance that with that word 885  
 He took the bottle poisoned by the third  
 And drank from it, then gave some to his mate,  
 And both of them met promptly with their fate.

But surely Avicenna, I suppose,  
 Did not include in all his canon's prose 890  
 More wondrous symptoms of a poisoned state  
 Than these two wretches suffered in their fate.  
 So these two killers met with homicide,  
 And also their false poisoner has died.

O curséd sin, so full of wretchedness! 895  
 O homicidal traitors! Wickedness!  
 O gluttony! O gambling! Lechery!  
 You blasphemers of Christ with villainy,  
 With mighty oaths from habit and from pride!  
 Alas, mankind, how can it so betide 900  
 That to the Lord who made you, your Creator,  
 Who with his dear heart's blood redeemed you later,  
 You are so false and so unkind? Alas!

Now, good men, God forgive you your trespass  
 And guard you from the sin of avarice. 905  
 My holy pardon saves you from all this;  
 If you will offer nobles, sterlings, rings,  
 Some brooches, spoons or other silver things,  
 Just bow your head beneath this holy bull.  
 Come up, you wives, and offer of your wool; 910  
 Your name I'll here enroll, then you may know  
 Into the bliss of heaven you will go.  
 My high power will absolve you, to be sure,  
 If you will give. You'll be as clean and pure  
 As when first born.--And, sirs, that's how I preach. 915  
 Now Christ, physician to the soul of each  
 Of us, grant you his pardon to receive,  
 For that is best, and you I'll not deceive.

But, sirs, one thing that slipped my memory when

I spoke my tale: I've relics, pardons in 920  
 My pouch, in England none could finer be,  
 The pope's own hand entrusted them to me.  
 If anyone devoutly has resolved  
 To make a gift and by me be absolved,  
 Come forth at once and meekly on your knees 925  
 Receive my pardon. Or, if you so please,  
 Take for yourself a pardon as you go--  
 One fresh and new at every town--just so  
 You offer to me, all the while we ride,  
 Some pence and nobles that are bonafide. 930  
 It is an honor for each one who's here  
 To have a competent pardoner near  
 To absolve you in the country as you ride,  
 In view of all the things that may betide.  
 There may be one (if not two) on the trek 935  
 Who falls down off his horse and breaks his neck;  
 Look what security it is for all  
 That in your fellowship I chanced to fall,  
 Who can absolve you all from first to last  
 Before your soul has from your body passed. 940  
 Let me advise our Host here to begin,  
 For he's the one enveloped most in sin.  
 Come forth, Sir Host, and offer first right now,  
 And kiss then each and every relic. How?  
 For just a groat! Unbuckle now your purse." 945  
 "Nay, nay," said he, "then I would have Christ's curse!  
 It shall not be, if I should live in bliss!  
 Your breeches, I am sure, you'd have me kiss  
 And swear they were the relic of a saint,  
 Though of your foul behind they bear the taint. 950  
 But by the cross that Saint Helena found,  
 Your balls I'd like to have my hand around  
 Instead of relics or a reliquary!  
 Let's cut them off, I'll even help to carry,  
 We'll find a hog, enshrine them in his turd." 955  
 The Pardoner then answered not a word,  
 He was too mad to have a thing to say.  
 "Now," said our Host, "I will no longer play  
 This game with you, or any angry man."  
 And right away the worthy Knight began, 960  
 When he saw all were laughing at the spat:  
 "Now quite enough, let's have no more of that!  
 Sir Pardoner, be merry, of good cheer.  
 And you, Sir Host, who are to me so dear,  
 I pray that you will kiss the Pardoner; 965  
 And, Pardoner, I pray, draw near him, sir,  
 And as we did now let us laugh and play."  
 They kissed at once and rode along their way.