



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The History Of English Poetry

From The Close of the Eleventh To The Commencement of the Eighteenth
Century

Warton, Thomas

London, 1774

Section XVI. Chaucer continued. Tale of the Nun's Priest. Its origin and allusions. January and May. Its imitations. Licentiousness of Boccacio. Millers Tale. Its singular humour and ridiculous ...

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-51377](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-51377)

S E C T. XVI.

THE TALE of the NONNES PRIEST is perhaps a story of English growth. The figment of Dan Burnell's Ass is taken from a Latin poem entitled SPECULUM STULTORUM^a, written by Nigellus de Wireker, monk and precentor of Canterbury cathedral, a profound theologian, who flourished about the year 1200^b. The narrative of the two pilgrims is borrowed from Valerius Maximus^c. It is also related by Cicero, a less known and a less favorite author^d. There is much humour in the description of the prodigious confusion which happened in the farm-yard after the fox had conveyed away the cock.

-----Aftir him they ran,
 And eke with stavis many anothis man.
 Ran Coll our dogge, Talbot, and eke Garlond^e,
 And Malkin with her distaffe in her hond.
 Ran cowe and calfe, and eke the very hogges.-----
 The duckis cryed as men would hem quell^f,
 The geese for fere flewin ovir the trees,
 Out of the hivis came the swarme of bees^g.

Even Jack Strawe's insurrection, a recent transaction, was not attended with so much noise and disturbance.

^a v. 1427. p. 172. Urr.
^b Or John of Salisbury. Printed at Coln in 1449.
^c v. 1100.

^d See Val. Max. i. 7. And Cic. de Divinat. i. 27.
^e Names of dogs.
^f Kill.
^g V. 1496.

So hidious was the noise, *ab Benedicite!*
 Certes ne Jacke Strawe, ne all his meine,
 Ne madin nevir shoutis half so shrill, &c^b.

The importance and affectation of sagacity with which dame Partlett communicates her medical advice, and displays her knowledge in physie, is a ridicule on the state of medicine and its professors¹.

In another strain, the cock is thus beautifully described, and not without some striking and picturesque allusions to the manners of the times.

----A cocke hight chaunticlere,
 In al the land of crowing nas his pere.
 His voice was merier than the merie organ
 On masse-daiès that in the churchis gon.
 Wel fikerer¹ was his crowing in his loge^m
 Than is a clock, or abbey horologe.----
 His comb was reddir than the fine corall,
 And battelledⁿ as it were a castill wall,
 His bake was blacke as any get it shone,
 Like asure were his leggis, and his tone^o:
 His nailis whiter than the lillie floure,
 And like the burnid golde was his colore^p.

In this poem the fox is compared to the three arch-traitors Judas Iscariot, Virgil's Sinon, and Ganilion who betrayed the Christian army under Charlemagne to the Saracens, and is mentioned by archbishop Turpin^q. Here also are cited, as writers of high note or authority, Cato, Physiologus or Pliny the elder, Boethius on music, the author of the legend

^b v. 1509. This is a proof that the CANTERBURY TALES were not written till after the year 1381.

¹ v. 1070.

² Organ.

³ Clearer.

^m Pen. Yard.

ⁿ Embattelled.

^o Toes.

^p v. 962.

^q v. 1341. See also Monk. T. v. 806.

of the life of faint Kenelme, Josephus, the historian of Sir Lancelot du Lake, Saint Austyn, bishop Brawardine, Jeffrey Vinefauf who wrote a monody in Latin verse on the death of king Richard the first, Ecclesiastes, Virgil, and Macrobius.

Our author's JANUARY and MAY, or the MARCHAUNT'S TALE, seems to be an old Lombard story. But many passages in it are evidently taken from the POLYCRATICON of John of Salisbury. *De molestiis et oneribus conjugiorum secundum Hieronymum et alios philosophos. Et de pernicie libidinis. Et de mulieris Epephinae et similium fide*. And by the way, about forty verses belonging to this argument are translated from the same chapter of the POLYCRATICON, in the WIFE OF BATH'S Prologue. In the mean time it is not improbable, that this tale might have originally been oriental. A Persian tale is just published which it extremely resembles; and it has much of the allegory of an eastern apologue.

The following description of the wedding-feast of January and May is conceived and expressed with a distinguished degree of poetical elegance.

Thus ben thei weddid with solempnite,
And at the feste sittith both he and she,

* L. viii. c. 11. fol. 193. b. edit. 1513.
* Mention is made in this Prologue of St. Jerom and Theophrast, on that subject, v. 671. 674. The author of the Polycraticon quotes Theophrastus from Jerom, viz. "Per-
tur auctore Hieronimo aureolus Theophrasti
"libellus de non ducenda uxore." fol. 194.
a. Chaucer likewise, on this occasion, cites
Valerie, v. 671. This is not the favorite
historian of the middle ages, Valerius Maxi-
mus. It is a book written by Walter Mapes,
archdeacon of Oxford, under the assumed
name of Valerius, entitled, *Valerius ad Ru-
finum de non ducenda uxore*. This piece
is in the Bodleian library with a large
Gloss. MSS. Dibg. 166. ii. 147. Mapes per-
haps adopted this name, because one Va-

lerius had written a treatise on the same
subject, inserted in St. Jerom's works.
Some copies of this Prologue, instead of
"Valerie and Theophrast," read *Paraphrasi*.
If that be the true reading, which I do not
believe, Chaucer alludes to the gloss above-
mentioned. *Helowis*, cited just afterwards,
is the celebrated Eloisa. Trotula is men-
tioned, v. 677. Among the manuscripts of
Merton College in Oxford, is, "Trotula
"Mulier Salernitana de passionibus mulie-
"rum." There is also extant, "Trotula,
"seu potius Erotis medici muliebrium li-
"ber." Basil. 1586, 4to. See also Mont-
fauc. Catal. MSS. p. 385. And Fabric.
Bibl. Gr. xiii. p. 439.

† By Mr. Dow, ch. xv. p. 252.

With othir worthy folk upon the deis^u:
 All ful of joye and blifs is the paleis,
 And ful of instruments and of vitaile,
 And the most dayntyist of al Itaille.
 Before him stode soche instruments of soun,
 That Orpheus, ne of Thebis Amphioune
 Ne madin nevir soche a melodie;
 At everie cours cam the loud minstralcie,
 That never Joab trompid^v, for to here,
 Neither Theodamas yet half so clere,
 At Thebis, when the cite was in dout^y.
 Bacchus the wine them skinkith^z al about,
 And Venus laughith blithe on everie wight,
 For January was become her knight,
 And wold in both assayin his corage
 In liberty and eke in marriage,
 And with her firebronde in her hond aboute
 Dauncith before the bride and al the route.
 And certeinly I dare say wel right this,
 Hymeneus that god of wedding is
 Saw never so mery a wedded man,
 Hold thou thy peace, thou poet Marcian^a,
 That writist us that ilk wedding merry
 Of Philology and of Mercury,
 And of the songis that the Muses song;
 Too smalle is both thy pen, and eke thy tong,

^u I have explained this word, p. 40. But will here add some new illustrations of it. Undoubtedly the high table in a public refectory, as appears from these words in Matthew Paris, "Priore prandente ad MAGNAM MENSAM quam DAIS vulgo appellamus." In Vit. Abbat. S. Albani, p. 92. And again the same writer says, that a cup, with a foot, or stand, was not permitted in the hall of the monastery, "Nisi tantum in MAJORI MENSA quam DAIS appellamus," Additam. p. 148. There is an old French word, DAIS, which signifies a throne, or

canopy, usually placed over the head of the principal person at a magnificent feast. Hence it was transferred to the table at which he sat. In the ancient French *Roman de Garin*;

Au plus haut DAIS fist roy Anseis.
 Either at the first table, or, which is much the same thing, under the highest canopy.

^v Such as Joab never, &c.

^y Danger.

^z Fill, pour.

^a See *supr.*, p. 39^u.

For

For to descrivin of his marriage,

When tendir Youth has married stooping Age.—

MAY that fittin with so benign a chere

That her to behold it semed a feirie^a:

Quene Hester lokid ner with soch an eye

On Affuere, so meke a loke hath she :

I may you not devis al her bewte,

But thus much of her bewte tel I may

That she was like the bright morowe of May,

Fulfilled of all bewte and plesaunce.

The JANUARY is ravished in a trance

At everie time he lokid in her face,

But in his hert he gan her to menace, &c.^b

Dryden and Pope have modernised the two last mentioned poems. Dryden the tale of the NONNES PRIEST, and Pope that of JANUARY and MAY: intending perhaps to give patterns of the best of Chaucer's Tales in the comic species. But I am of opinion that the MILLER'S TALE has more true humour than either. Not that I mean to palliate the levity of the story, which was most probably chosen by Chaucer in compliance with the prevailing manners of an unpolished age, and agreeable to ideas of festivity not always the most delicate and refined. Chaucer abounds in liberties of this kind, and this must be his apology. So does Boccacio, and perhaps much more, but from a different cause. The licentiousness of Boccacio's tales, which he composed *per cacciare le malincolia delle femine*, to amuse the ladies, is to be vindicated, at least accounted for, on other principles: it was not so much the consequence of popular incivility, as it was owing to a particular event of the writer's age. Just before Boccacio wrote, the plague at Florence had totally changed the customs and manners of the people. Only a few of the

^a A phantasy, enchantment.

^b v. 1225. Urr.

women had survived this fatal malady; who having lost their husbands, parents, or friends, gradually grew regardless of those constraints and customary formalities which before of course influenced their behaviour. For want of female attendants, they were obliged often to take men only into their service: and this circumstance greatly contributed to destroy their habits of delicacy, and gave an opening to various freedoms and indecencies unsuitable to the sex, and frequently productive of very serious consequences. As to the monasteries, it is not surprising that Boccaccio should have made them the scenes of his most libertine stories. The plague had thrown open their gates. The monks and nuns wandered abroad, and partaking of the common liberties of life, and the levities of the world, forgot the rigour of their institutions, and the severity of their ecclesiastical characters. At the ceasing of the plague, when the religious were compelled to return to their cloisters, they could not forsake their attachment to these secular indulgences; they continued to practice the same free course of life, and would not submit to the disagreeable and un-social injunctions of their respective orders. Cotemporary historians give a shocking representation of the unbounded debaucheries of the Florentines on this occasion: and ecclesiastical writers mention this period as the grand epoch of the relaxation of monastic discipline. Boccaccio did not escape the censure of the church for these compositions. His conversion was a point much laboured; and in expiation of his follies, he was almost persuaded to renounce poetry and the heathen authors, and to turn Carthusian. But, to say the truth, Boccaccio's life was almost as loose as his writings; till he was in great measure reclaimed by the powerful remonstrances of his master Petrarch, who talked much more to the purpose than his confessor. This Boccaccio himself acknowledges in the fifth of his eclogues, which like those
of

of Petrarch are enigmatical and obscure, entitled PHILOSOTROPHOS.

But to return to the MILLER'S TALE. The character of the Clerke of Oxford, who studied astrology, a science then in high repute, but under the specious appearance of decorum, and the mask of the serious philosopher, carried on intrigues, is painted with these lively circumstances.

This clerke yclepid was hend Nicholas ^c;
 Of dernè ^d love he couth and of solas :
 And therto was he sie, and right prive,
 And like unto a maidin for to se.
 A chambre had he in that hostelrie ^e
 Alone, withoutin any company,
 Ful fetously ydight with herbis sote ^f ;
 And he himself as swete as in the rote ^g
 Of licoris, or any seduwall ^h.
 His almagist ⁱ, and bokis grate and small,
 His afterlagour ^k longing for his art,
 His augrim stonis ^l lying feire apart,

^c The gentle Nicholas.

^d Secret.

^e *Hospitium*, one of the old hostels at Oxford, which were very numerous before the foundation of the colleges. This is one of the citizens houses: a circumstance which gave rise to the story.

^f Sweet.

^g Root.

^h The herb Valerian.

ⁱ A book of astronomy written by Ptolemy. It was in thirteen books. He wrote also four books of judicial astrology. He was an Egyptian astrologist, and flourished under Marcus Antoninus. He is mentioned in the *Sompnour's Tale*, v. 1025, and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, v. 324.

^k Afterlabore. An astrolabe.

^l Stones for computation. Augrim is *Algorithm*, the sum of the principal rules of

common arithmetic. Chaucer was himself an adept in this sort of knowledge. The learned Selden is of opinion, that his *Astrolabe* was compiled from the Arabian astronomers and mathematicians. See his Pref. to Notes on Drayt. Polyolb. p. 4. where the word *Dulcarnon*, (*Troil. Cr. iii. 933, 935.*) is explained to be an Arabic term for a root in calculation. His CHANON YEMAN'S TALE, proves his intimate acquaintance with the Hermetic philosophy, then much in vogue. There is a statute of Henry the fifth, against the transmutation of metals, in Statut. an. 4 Hen. V. cap. iv. viz. A.D. 1416. Chaucer, in the *Astrolabe*, refers to two famous mathematicians and astronomers of his time, John Some, and Nicholas Lynne, both Carmelite friars of Oxford, and perhaps his friends, whom he calls "reverent clerkes." *Astrolabe*, p. 440. col. i. Urr. They

On shelvis, al couchid at his beddis hede ;
 His presse ^m ycoverid with a folding rede :
 And all above there lay a gay fautrie ⁿ,
 On which he made on nightis melodie
 So swetely that al the chamber rung,
 And *Angelus ad Virginem* he fung ^o.

In the description of the young wife of our philosopher's host, there is great elegance with a mixture of burlesque allusions. Not to mention the curiosity of a female portrait, drawn with so much exactness at such a distance of time.

Faire was this yongè wife, and therwithall
 As a wefill ^p her bodie gent and small.
 A seint she werid, barrid all with silk ^q,
 A barmecloth ^r eke, as white as morrow milk,
 Upon her lendis, full of many a gore ^s.
 White was her smok, embroudid all bifore ^t,
 And eke behind, on her colere about,
 Of coleblak silk, within, and eke without.
 The tapis ^u of her whitè volipere ^x
 Were of the famè fute of her colere ^y.

They both wrote calendars, which, like Chaucer's Astrolabe, were constructed for the meridian of Oxford. Chaucer mentions Alcabucius, an astronomer, that is, Abdilazi Alchabitius, whose *Isagoge* in astrologiam was printed at Venice, 1485, 4^o. Ib. fol. 440. col. ii. Compare Herbelot. *Bibl. Oriental.* p. 963. b. V. КЕТАВ. *Alasthorlab.* p. 141. a. Nicholas Lynne abovementioned is said to have made several voyages to the most northerly parts of the world, charts of which he presented to Edward the third. Perhaps to Iceland, and the coasts of Norway, for astronomical observations. These charts are lost. Hakluyt apud Anderson. *Hist. Com.* i. p. 191. sub. ann. 1360. (See Hakl. Voy. i. 121. seq. ed. 1598.)

^m Press.

ⁿ Pfaltery. An instrument like a harp.

^o v. 91. p. 24. Urr.

^p Wealle.

^q "A girdle edged with silk." But we have no exact idea of what is here meant by *barrid*. See *supr.* p. 377. The *Doctor of Phisicke* is "girt with a *seint* of silk " with *barris* female." *Prol.* v. 138. I once conjectured *barded*. See *Hollingh. Chron.* iii. 84. col. ii. 850. col. i. &c. &c.

^r Apron.

^s Plait. Fold.

^t Edged. Adorned.

^u Tapes. Strings.

^x Head-dress.

^y Collar.

Her

Her fillit ^u brode of filke, and fet ful hie,
 And fikerly ^v she had a licorous eie.
 Full small ypullid ^x were her browis two,
 And tho ^y were bent ^z and blak as any flo.
 And she was moche more blisfull for to se
 Than is the newè perienet ^a tre;
 And softer than the wool is of a wether:
 And by her girdil hong a purse of lether,
 Tassid ^b with filke, and parlid ^c with latoun ^d.
 In all this world to sekin up and down,
 There nis no man so wise that couthè thence
 So gay a popelete ^e or so gay a wench.
 Full brightir was the shining of her hewe
 Than in the Towre the noble ^f forgid newe.
 But of her song she was so loud and yerne ^g,
 As any swallow fitting on a berne.
 Therto she couthe skip, and make a game,
 As any kid or calfe foll'wing her dame.
 Hir mouth was swete as brackit ^h or the methe,
 Or hord of applis layd in hay or heth.
 Winsing she was as is a jolly colt,
 Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt ⁱ.
 A broche ^j she bare upon her low collere
 As brode as is the bossè of a bokelere ^k.
 Her shoes were lacid on her leggis hie, &c ^l.

Nicholas, as we may suppose, was not proof against the charms of his blooming hostess. He has frequent opportu-

^u Knot. Top-knot.

^v Certainly.

^x "Made small or narrow, by plucking."

^y They.

^z Arched.

^a A young pear-tree. Fr. *Poir jeunet*.

^b Tassled. Fringed.

^c I would read *purfeld*.

^d Latoun, or chekelaton, is cloth of gold.

^e "So pretty a puppet."

^f A piece of money.

^g ShriU.

^h Bragget. A drink made of honey, spices, &c.

ⁱ "Straight as an arrow."

^k A jewel.

^l Buckler.

^m v. 125. Urr.

nities of conversing with her: for her husband is the carpenter of Osney Abbey near Oxford, and often absent in the woods belonging to the monasteryⁿ. His rival is Abfalom, a parish-clerk, the gaiest of his calling, who being amorously inclined, very naturally avails himself of a circumstance belonging to his profession: on holidays it was his business to carry the censer about the church, and he takes this opportunity of casting unlawful glances on the handsomest dames of the parish. His gallantry, agility, affectation of dress and personal elegance, skill in shaving and surgery, smattering in the law, taste for music, and many other accomplishments, are thus inimitably represented by Chaucer, who must have much relished so ridiculous a character.

Now was ther of the chirch a parish clerke,
 The which that was yclepid Abfalon,
 Crull was his heere, and as the gold it shone,
 And stroutid as a fannè longe and brode,
 Ful straight and even lay his jolly shode^o.
 His rude^p was redde, his eyin gray as gose,
 With Poulis windows carvin on his shose^q.
 In hofin red he went ful fetoufly:
 Yclad he was ful smale and propirly
 Al in a kirtil^r of a light watchet,
 Ful fayre, and thickè be the pointis fet:
 And thereuppon he hadde a gaie surplice
 As white as is the blofome on the rice^s.
 A merie child he was, fo god me save,
 Well costth he lettin blode, and clip, and shave.

ⁿ See v. 557.

----I trow that he bewent
 For timber, there our abbot hath him sent:
 For he is wont for timber for to go,
 And dwellin at the grange a day or two.

^o Hair.
^p Complexion.
^q See p. 379. supr.
^r Jackst.
^s Hawthorn.

Or

Or make a chartre of land or acquittance;
 In twentie manir couth he trip and daunce,
 After the schole of Oxenfordi tho,
 And with his leggis castin to and fro.
 And pleyin songis on a smale ribible',
 Therto he sometimes foud a long quible'.

His manner of making love must not be omitted. He fe-
 renades her with his guittar.

He wakith al the night, and al the day,
 He kembith his lockes brode, and made him gay.
 He woith her by menis and brocage",
 And swore that he would ben her ownè page.
 He fingith broking" as a nightingale.
 He sent her piment", methe, and spicid ale,
 And wafirs piping hot out of the glede',
 And, for she was of town, he proffred mede".---

* v. 224. A species of guittar. Lydgate, MSS. Bibl. Bodl. Fairf. 16. In a poem never printed, called *Reason and Sensualite*, compiled by Jhon Lydgate.

Lutys, rubibis, (l. ribibles) and geternes,
 More for estatys than tavernes.

† Treble.

‡ By offering money: or a settlement.

§ Quavering.

¶ Explained above, p. 178.

‡ The coals. The oven.

* See RIME OF SIR THOPAS, v. 3357. p. 146. Urr. Mr. Walpole has mentioned some curious particulars concerning the liquors which antiently prevailed in England. Anecd. Paint. i. p. 11. I will add, that cyder was very early a common liquor among our ancestors. In the year 1295, an. 23 Edw. I. the king orders the sheriff of Southamptonshire to provide with all speed four hundred quarters of wheat, to be collected in parts of his bailiwick nearest the sea, and to convey the same, being well winnowed, in good ships from Portsmouth to Winchel-

sea. Also to put on board the said ships, at the same time, two hundred tons of cyder. Test. R. apud Canterbury. The cost to be paid immediately from the king's wardrobe. This precept is in old French. Registr. Joh. Pontiffar. Episc. Winton. fol. 172. It is remarkable that Wickliffe translates, Luc. i. 21. "He schal not drinke "wyn ne fydyr." This translation was made about A. D. 1380. At a visitation of St. Swithin's priory at Winchester, by the said bishop, it appears that the monks claimed to have, among other articles of luxury, on many festivals, "Vinum, tam al. "bum quam rubeum, claretum, medonem, "burgarastrum, &c." This was so early as the year 1285. Registr. Priorat. S. Swith. Winton. MS. supr. citat. quatern. 5. It appears also, that the *Horarius* and *Camerarius* claimed every year of the prior ten *denia vini*, or twenty pounds in money, A. D. 1337. Ibid. quatern. 5. A benefactor grants to the said convent on the day of his anniversary, "unam pipam vini pret. xx. s." for their refection, A. D. 1286

Sometimes to shew his lightness and maistry
He playith heraudes' on a scaffold hie.

Again,

When that the firstè cok hath crow anon,
Uprift this jolly lovir Abfolon;
And him arayith gay at point devise.
But first he chewith greyns^b and licorice,
To smellin fote, ere he had kempt his here.
Under his tongue a true love knot he bare,
For therby wend he to be graciouse;
Then romith to the carpenteris house^c.

In the mean time the scholar, intent on accomplishing his intrigue, locks himself up in his chamber for the space of two days. The carpenter, alarmed at this long seclusion, and supposing that his guest might be sick or dead, tries to gain admittance, but in vain. He peeps through a crevice of the door, and at length discovers the scholar, who is conscious that he was seen, in an affected trance of abstracted meditation. On this our carpenter, reflecting on the danger of being wise, and exulting in the security of his own ignorance, exclaims,

A man wott littil what shall him betide!
This man is fallen with his astronomy
In some wodeness, or in some agony.

Ibid. quatern. 10. Before the year 1200, "Vina et medones" are mentioned as not uncommon in the abbey of Evesham in Worcestershire. Stevens Monast. Append. p. 138. The use of mead, *medo*, seems to have been very antient in England. See Mon. Angl. i. 26. Thorne, Chron. sub. ann. 1114. Compare DISSERTAT. i.

^a Speght explains this "feats of activity, " furious parts in a play." Gloss. Ch. Urr. Perhaps the character of HEROD in a MYSTERY.

^b Greyns, or grains, of Paris, or Paradise,

occurs in the ROMANT OF THE ROSE. v. 1369. A rent of herring pies is an old payment from the city of Norwich to the king, seasoned among other spices with half an ounce of grains of Paradise. Blomf. Norf. ii. 264.

^c v. 579. It is to be remarked, that in this tale the carpenter swears, with great propriety, by the patroness saint of Oxford, saint Frideswide, v. 340.

This carpenter to bliffin him began,
And seide now helpin us saint Frideswide.

I thoughtin

I thoughtin ay wele how it shuldè be:
 Men shuldè not know ^d of gods privite.
 Yea bleffid be alway the lewdè-man^e;
 That nought but only his belefe can^f.
 So farde another clerke with astronomy;
 He walkid in the feldis for to pry
 Upon the starres to wate what shuld bifall
 Tyll he was in a marlèpit yfall;
 He saw not that. But yet, by seint Thomas,
 Me ruith fore on hendè Nicholas:
 He shall be ratid for his studying.

But the scholar has ample gratification for this ridicule. The carpenter is at length admitted; and the scholar continuing the farce, gravely acquaints the former that he has been all this while making a most important discovery by means of astrological calculations. He is soon persuaded to believe the prediction: and in the sequel, which cannot be repeated here, this humourous contrivance crowns the scholar's schemes with success, and proves the cause of the carpenter's disgrace. In this piece the reader observes that the humour of the characters is made subservient to the plot.

I have before hinted, that Chaucer's obscenity is in great measure to be imputed to his age. We are apt to form romantic and exaggerated notions about the moral innocence of our ancestors. Ages of ignorance and simplicity are thought to be ages of purity. The direct contrary, I believe, is the case. Rude periods have that grossness of manners which is not less friendly to virtue than luxury itself. In the middle ages, not only the most flagrant violations of modesty were frequently practised and permitted, but the most infamous vices. Men are less ashamed as they are less polished. Great refinement multiplies criminal pleasures, but

^d "Pry into the secrets of nature." ^e Unlearned. ^f "Who knows only what he believes." Or, his Creed.

at the same time prevents the actual commission of many enormities: at least it preserves public decency, and suppresses public licentiousness.

The REVES TALE, or the MILLER of TROMPINGTON, is much in the same style, but with less humour¹. This story was enlarged by Chaucer from Boccacio^k. There is an old English poem on the same plan, entitled, *A ryght pleasant and merye history of the Mylner of Abington, with his Wife and faire Daughter, and two poore Scholars of Cambridge*^l. It begins with these lines.

“Faire lordinges, if you list to heere
“A mery jest^m your minds to cheere.”

This piece is supposed by Wood to have been written by Andrew Borde, a physician, a wit, and a poet, in the reign of Henry the eighthⁿ. It was at least evidently written

¹ See also THE SHIPMAN'S TALE, which was originally taken from some comic French trobadour. But Chaucer had it from Boccacio. The story of Zenobia, in the MONKES TALE, is from Boccacio's *Caf. Vir. Illustr.* (See Lydg. *Boch.* viii. 7.) That of Hugolin of Pisa in the same Tale, from Dante. That of Pedro of Spain, from archbishop Turpin, *ibid.* Of Julius Cesar, from Lucan, Suetonius, and Valerius Maximus, *ibid.* The idea of this TALE was suggested by Boccacio's book on the same subject.

^k Decamer. *Gjom.* ix. Nov. 6.

^l A manifest mistake for Oxford, unless we read Trumpington for Abingdon, or retaining Abingdon we might read Oxford for Cambridge. Imprint. at London by Rycharde Jones, 4to. Bl. Let. It is in *Bibl. Bodl. Selden, C.* 39. 4to. This book was probably given to that library, with many other petty black letter histories, in prose and verse, of a similar cast, by Robert Burton, author of the ANATOMY of MELANCHOLY, who was a great collector of such pieces. One of his books

now in the Bodleian is the HISTORY of TOM THUMB; whom a learned antiquary, while he laments that antient history has been much disguised by romantic narratives, pronounces to have been no less important a personage than king Edgar's dwarf.

^m Story.

ⁿ See Wood's *Athen. Oxon.* BORDE. And Hearne's *Bened. Abb.* i. *Praefat.* p. xl. lv. I am of opinion that Solere-Hall, in Cambridge, mentioned in this poem, was Aula Solarii. The hall, with the upper story, at that time a sufficient circumstance to distinguish and denominate one of the academical hospitia. Although Chaucer calls it, “a grete college,” v. 88. Thus in Oxford we had Chimney-hall, Aula cum Camino, an almost parallel proof of the simplicity of their antient houses of learning. Twyne also mentions Solere-hall, at Oxford. Also Aula Selarii, which I doubt not is properly Solarii. Compare Wood. *Ant. Oxon.* ii. 11. col. i. 13. col. i. 12. col. 2. Caius will have it to be Clare-hall. *Hist. Acad.* p. 57. Those who read
Scholars-

after the time of Chaucer. It is the work of some tasteless imitator, who has sufficiently disguised his original, by retaining none of its spirit. I mention these circumstances, lest it should be thought that this frigid abridgment was the ground-work of Chaucer's poem on the same subject. In the class of humorous or satirical tales, the SOMPNOUR'S TALE, which exposes the tricks and extortions of the mendicant friars, has also distinguished merit. This piece has incidentally been mentioned above with the PLOWMAN'S TALE, and Pierce Plowman.

Genuine humour, the concomitant of true taste, consists in discerning improprieties in books as well as characters. We therefore must remark under this class another tale of Chaucer, which till lately has been looked upon as a grave heroic narrative. I mean the RIME OF SIR THOPAS. Chaucer, at a period which almost realised the manners of romantic chivalry, discerned the leading absurdities of the old romances: and in this poem, which may be justly called a prelude to Don Quixote, has burlesqued them with exquisite ridicule. That this was the poet's aim, appears from many passages. But, to put the matter beyond a doubt, take the words of an ingenious critic. "We are to observe, says he, " that this was Chaucer's own Tale: and that, when in the " progress of it, the good sense of the host is made to break " in upon him, and interrupt him, Chaucer approves his " disgust, and changing his note, tells the simple instructive " Tale of MELIBOEUS, *a moral tale vertuous*, as he terms it; " to shew what sort of fictions were most expressive of real " life, and most proper to be put into the hands of the " people. It is further to be noted, that the *Boke of The " Giant Olyphant, and Chylde Thopas*, was not a fiction of

Scholars-hall (of Edw. iii.) may consult Wacht. V. SOLLER. In the mean time for the reasons assigned, one of these two halls or colleges at Cambridge, might at first have been commonly called Soler-hall. A

hall near Brazen-nose college, Oxford, was called Glazen-hall, having glass windows, antiently not common. See Twyne Miscel. quaedam, &c. ad calc. Apol. Antiq. Acad. Oxon.

" his

" his own, but a story of antique fame, and very cele-
 " brated in the days of chivalry: so that nothing could
 " better suit the poet's design of discrediting the old ro-
 " mances, than the choice of this venerable legend for the
 " vehicle of his ridicule upon them". But it is to be re-
 membered, that Chaucer's design was intended to ridicule
 the frivolous descriptions, and other tedious impertinencies,
 so common in the volumes of chivalry with which his age
 was overwhelmed, not to degrade in general or expose a
 mode of fabling, whose sublime extravagancies constitute the
 marvellous graces of his own *CAMBUSCAN*; a composition
 which at the same time abundantly demonstrates, that the
 manners of romance are better calculated to answer the pur-
 poses of pure poetry, to captivate the imagination, and to
 produce surprize, than the fictions of classical antiquity.

° See Dr. Hurd's *LETTERS ON CHIVALRY AND ROMANCE*, Dialogues, &c. iii.
 218. edit. 1765.

S E C T.