

The Pardoner's Tale
Geoffrey Chaucer



The Words of the Host to the Physician and the Pardoner.

Our Host began to swear as if he were mad; "Help! Alas! By the nails and cross of Christ, this was a false churl and a false justice! May as shameful a death as a heart can devise come to these judges and their lawyers! But all the same, this poor maiden is slain, alas! She bought her beauty at too high a price; therefore I say, as we may see, the gifts of Fortune or Nature are the cause of death to many creatures. 296

Her beauty was her death, I dare well say. Alas, how pitifully she was slain! From both these gifts I spoke of now, people often have more harm than profit. But truly, my own dear master, this is a piteous tale to hear. But nonetheless pass it over; it does not matter. I pray God to save your gentle body, and your urinals¹ and chamber pots, as well as your Hippocrateses and your Galens², and every box full of your syrup-medicine. God bless them and our Lady, Blessed Mary! As I live and prosper, you are a proper fellow and like a prelate³, by Saint Ronan⁴. 310

Did I not say it well? I cannot speak like a scholar, but I know well that you so made my heart ache, so that I have nearly had a heart attack. By Christ's bones! Unless I take medicine, or else a draught of fresh malt ale, or hear a merry tale right away, my heart is done for, in pity for this maid. 317

"You there, you Pardoner," he said, "tell us at once some mirth or sport." 319

¹ Urinals. Clear flasks used to observe urine, by which the physician could analyze the patient's illness. Chamber pots were, of course, used for the collection of bodily fluids.

² Hippocrateses and your Galens. The two physicians of greatest authority in the Middle Ages. Hippocrates, ca. 460-370 BC, "the father of medicine," radically changed medicine in ancient Greece. Galen, 129-216 AD, Greek Physician whose works were the most widely followed throughout the Middle Ages.

³ Prelate. A dignitary or officer of the Church.

⁴ Saint Ronan. A Scottish saint.

"By Saint Ronan, it shall be done," he said, "but first I will drink and eat a bit of bread here at this ale-house." But immediately the gentle people began to call out, "No, do not let him tell some ribald or coarse joke; tell us some moral thing that we may learn some wisdom, and then will we gladly listen." 326

"I agree, certainly," he said, "but I must have time to think up some virtuous thing while I drink." 328

Here follows the Prologue of the Pardoner's Tale.

*Radix malorum est cupiditas; Ad Thimotheum, sexto*⁵.

"Gentle people," he said, "when I preach in churches, I strive for a resounding voice, and I ring it out as round as a bell, for I know by heart all that I say. My theme is and always was one and the same: *Radix malorum est cupiditas*. 334

"First I pronounce where I come from, and then I show my bulls⁶, one and all, but first the seal of our liege lord the king on my patent⁷. I show that first to secure my body, lest any man, priest, or clerk would be so bold as to disturb me in Christ's holy labors. After that I then proceed with my tales, and show bulls of popes and cardinals and patriarchs and bishops, and I speak a few words in Latin to give a flavor to my preaching and to stir men to devotion. Then I show forth my long glass cases, crammed full of cloths and bones: all the people believe that they are holy relics⁸. I have a shoulder-bone set in brass which came from a holy Jew's sheep. 352

"'Good men,' I say, 'mark my words; wash this bone in any spring, and if a cow or calf or sheep or ox swell up that has been stung or bitten by any serpent, take water from this spring and wash its tongue and it will be healthy then. And moreover, every sheep that drinks a draught from this spring shall be cured of pox or scabs or sores. And mark what I say. 360

"If the man of the house who owns the beasts will drink, fasting, a draught from this spring every week before cock-crow, as this holy Jew taught our forefathers, his beasts and his stock shall multiply.

⁵ *Radix malorum est cupiditas*. Desire for earthly things is the root of evil. 1 Timothy 6.10.

⁶ Bulls. Letters of authorization from the pope and other high-ranking officials

⁷ Patent. Leather patent, indicating his authority to sell pardons.

⁸ Relics. Relics, any materials directly related to the physical presence of a holy person, were believed to have special powers of healing and were therefore valuable. The Pardoner's relics, of course, are not.

And sirs, it will cure jealousy also; though a man be fallen into a jealous fury, mix his broth with this water and he will never mistrust his wife again, even if he knows the very truth of her fault--although she has taken two or three priests. 371

“Here is a glove also. He who will put his hand in this glove shall see his grain multiply, whether it is wheat or barley; so he will offer pence, or else groats⁹. 376

“But, good men and women, of one thing I warn you; if any person is now in this church who has committed a horrible sin and dares not to be confessed of it because of shame, or if any woman, old or young, has made her husband a cuckold, such people shall have no power or grace to make offerings here to my relics. But whoever knows himself to be free from such fault, let him come up and make an offering in the name of God, and I will absolve him by the authority granted me by bull.’ 388

“With this trickery I have won a hundred marks, year by year, since I have been a pardoner. I stand like a cleric in my pulpit, and when the lay people are seated I preach as you have heard and tell a hundred more false stories. Then I take pains to stretch out my neck and bob my head east and west over the people, like a dove perched upon a barn. My hands and tongue move so briskly that it is a joy to see my movement. 399

“All my preaching is about avarice and such cursed things, to make them generous in giving their pence and especially to me. My aim is all for gain and not at all for the correction of sin. I do not care, when they are buried, even if their souls have gone blackberried¹⁰! 406

“Surely, many sermons arise from an evil intention, how to please and flatter people, to aim for promotion through hypocrisy, from vain glory and some from hate. For when I dare not otherwise dispute with someone, then I sting him with my bitter tongue as I preach, so that he cannot escape being falsely defamed, if he has trespassed against me or my brethren. For though I do not mention his name, people shall know whom I mean by hints and other circumstances. Thus I pay back people who do

⁹ Pence . . . groats. I.e., one small coin or another.

¹⁰ Blackberried. Though this phrase is usually glossed as “going blackberry picking,” the phrase clearly means more. The Pardoner does not care about the condition of their souls after death, whether they are pure white or black as a blackberry.

unpleasant things to us, and thus I spit out my venom under the guise of holiness, seeming holy and faithful. I say again, in a few words, I preach for no motive but avarice from which my theme is and always was, *Radix malorum est cupiditas*. Thus can I preach against that same vice which I practice, avarice. But though I may be guilty of it, I can make other people depart from avarice and repent sorely. But that is not my primary purpose; I preach for nothing but greed; and this should suffice for this matter. 434

“Then I tell them many examples from old stories of long ago. For simple people love old tales; such things they can well remember and repeat. 438

“What! Do you think that so long as I can preach and gain gold and silver through my teaching that I shall live in poverty willingly? 441

“Nay, nay, truly I never thought of it! I will preach and beg everywhere I go; I will not labor with my hands nor make baskets to live by, only because I will not be an idle beggar. I will imitate none of the apostles. I will have wool, wheat, cheese, and money, were it given by the poorest lad or widow in a village, though her children pine and starve! I will have a merry wench in every town and drink liquor from the vine. 453

“But listen, gentle people, in conclusion. Your will is that I tell a tale. Now that I have drunk a good draught of malty beer, by the Lord I hope I shall tell you a thing that ought by reason to be to your liking. For though myself be a vicious man, yet I know how to tell you a moral tale which I am wont to tell in my money-getting homilies. Now hold your peace, and I will begin.” 462

Here begins the Pardoner's Tale.

Once there dwelt in Flanders a company of young people who made a habit of folly, such as debauchery, gambling¹¹, brothels, and taverns, where with harps, lutes and citterns¹² they danced and played at dice day and night, and ate and drank more than they could, through which they did service to the Devil by unnatural excess within those Devil's temples. 471

¹¹ Gambling. Throughout the tale, the term “gambling” is used for Chaucer's “hasardrye,” which refers to gambling in general, but may at times refer to the specific game of dice known as Hazard.

¹² Citterns. Guitar-like instruments.

Their oaths were so great and so damnable that it was grisly to hear them swear; they tore our blessed Lord's body into pieces anew (as if the Jews had not torn him enough), and each laughed at the others' sins. And then came graceful and slim dancing girls, young girls selling fruit¹³, singers with harps, pimps and confectioners, who are all true officers of the Devil to kindle and blow that fire of lust, which is allied to gluttony. I take Holy Scripture as my witness that lechery is in wine and drunkenness. 484

Lo, how drunken Lot¹⁴, against nature, lay with his daughters, unwittingly; he was so drunk he knew not what he did. 487

Herod¹⁵ (let any one look up the history), when he was full of wine at his feast, gave the command at his own table to slay the Baptist John, guiltless. 492

Seneca¹⁶, doubtless, also says a good word; he says he can find no difference between a man that is out of his mind and a man who is addicted to drink, except that madness, when it attacks a wretched creature, endures longer than drunkenness. O gluttony, full of cursedness! O first cause of our ruin! O origin of our damnation, until Christ redeemed us with His blood! 501

Lo, how dearly was this cursed sin paid for! This whole world was ruined by gluttony! Our father Adam and his wife in truth were driven from Paradise to labor and woe for that vice. For while Adam fasted, I say, he lived in Paradise, and when he ate of the forbidden fruit of the tree, he was cast out to woe and pain. O gluttony, well may we accuse you! If a man only knew how many maladies follow from gluttony and excess, he would be more moderate in his diet as he sits at table. 516

Alas! The short-lived pleasure of swallowing, the delicate mouth, causes men everywhere, east, west, north, and south, labor in every way, with earth, air, and water, to get fine meat and drink for a glutton. On this, O Paul, well can you explain: 'Meat into the stomach and stomach also to the meat, God shall destroy both¹⁷,' as Paul says. Alas! It is foul to say, by my faith, but fouler is the act, when a man drinks so of the white and red that he makes a toilet of his throat through this accursed excess. 528

¹³ Girls selling fruit. This is sometimes a metaphor for prostitutes, or at least the occupations at times coincided.

¹⁴ Lot. See Genesis 19. 30-38.

¹⁵ Herod. See Matthew 14.1-12.

¹⁶ Seneca.

¹⁷ God shall destroy both. See 1 Corinthians 6.13.

The apostle, weeping, says piteously, "There walk many of whom I have told you, and I say it now weeping and with a piteous voice, they are enemies of the cross of Christ, their end is death; their god is their belly¹⁸." O belly! O stinking bag! Full of corruption! What a labor and cost it is to provide for you! How these cooks pound and strain and grind, and turn substance into accident¹⁹, to satisfy all your greedy taste! Out of the hard bone they knock the marrow, and cast away nothing that may go through the gullet soft and sweet. The glutton's delicious sauce is made of spices from the leaf, bark, and root and leaf, to get him ever a new appetite. But he that follows after such delights, surely, is dead while he lives in those vices. 548

Wine is a lecherous thing, and drunkenness is full of wretchedness and of contention. O drunken man, your face is disfigured: your breath is sour, you art foul to clasp in arms, and the sound through your drunken nose seems as if you always said, "Sam-soun, Sam-soun!" And yet Samson²⁰ never drank wine, God knows. 555

You fall like a stuck pig, your tongue is lost, and so to is your sense of decency, for drunkenness is the very tomb of man's wit and discretion. He over whom drink has power can keep no secret, surely. Now keep yourself away from the wine white and red, and chiefly from the white wine of Lepe²¹ for sale in Fish Street, or Cheapside²². This Spanish wine insidiously creeps through other wines growing nearby, and such fumes arise from it that after two or three sips, though a man think himself to be at home in Cheapside, he is at the town of Lepe in Spain, not

¹⁸ Their god is their belly. See Philippians 3.18-19.

¹⁹ Turn substance into accident. Turn that which is meant to sustain the body into something that is meant to be a delicacy. The Pardoner uses the philosophical terms "substance" (the essence or true purpose of the thing) and "accident" (the external form of the thing) to further his argument that eating fine gourmet food is a form of gluttony, while eating simple food is acceptable behavior.

²⁰ Samson. Old Testament Israelite strongman whose strength was in his hair (or his promise to God that he would not cut his hair). When his hair had grown again, after Delilah betrayed him and cut it off, he knocked down the temple pillars, killing his enemies (the Philistines) and himself. The story of his troubles with Delilah is told in Judges 16. 15 and retold in the Monk's Tale 2015-94.

²¹ Lepe. Town in Spain, or the vineyard district surrounding it, near Cadiz.

²² In Fish Street, or Cheapside. In London.

at Rochelle nor at Bordeaux²³; and then he will say,
"Sam-soun, Sam-soun!" 572

But listen to one word, I ask you, gentle people; the supreme acts of victory in the Old Testament, I dare say, were done through the help of the true omnipotent God in abstinence and prayer. Look into the Bible and there you may see it. Look too at Attila, the great conqueror, who died in shame and disgrace, bleeding at his nose in a drunken sleep. A great captain should live soberly. And furthermore, consider very carefully what was commanded to Lemuel-- not Samuel²⁴, I say, but Lemuel. Read the Bible and find it expressly set down as to giving wine to them that have oversight of justice. But no more now, for this may suffice. 588

Now that I have spoken of gluttony, I will forbid gambling to you, which is the very mother of lies, deceit, and cursed perjuries, of blasphemy of Christ, manslaughter, and waste of money and of time; and furthermore, it is a disgrace and against all honor to be known as a common gambler. And the higher a man's estate, the more abandoned he is considered to be. If a prince practices gambling, he will be held lower in reputation in all government and political affairs, by common opinion. 602

Stilbon²⁵, the wise ambassador, was sent to Corinth in great pomp from Lacedaemon to make an alliance; and when he came he happened to find all the greatest men of that land gambling. For this reason, as soon as he could, he went home again to his country and said, "I will not lose my good name there, nor will I take on me such a shame as to ally you to gamblers. Send other wise ambassadors; for by my word I would rather die than ally you with gamblers." For you who are so glorious in honors shall not be allied with gamblers by my will, or treaty of my making." Thus spoke this wise philosopher. 620

Note also how the king of the Parthians, as the book tells us, sent in scorn a set of golden dice to King Demetrius because he had practiced gambling. For this reason the king of the Parthians held King Demetrius' glory and renown to be of no value. Lords may find other kinds of virtuous diversion to pass the day with. 628

²³ Rochelle nor at Bordeaux. Regions in France producing fine wine.

²⁴ to Lemuel-- not Samuel. Lemuel, biblical king of Massa. Samuel: last of the judges of Israel, who anointed the Saul as the first king of Israel and later David as his successor. See Proverbs 31.4-5.

²⁵ Stilbon. Perhaps a Greek philosopher.

Now I will speak a word or two about false and frequent oaths, which old books discuss. Violent swearing is an abominable thing, and frequent swearing is still more reprehensible. The almighty God, as Matthew witnesses, forbade swearing entirely²⁶; but especially the holy Jeremiah says of swearing, "You shall say your oaths in truth, and not lie, and swear in judgment and righteousness²⁷." 637

And idle swearing is a wicked thing. Behold how on the first table of the almighty God's glorious commandments²⁸ the second commandment is, "Take not my name in vain or amiss." Lo, He forbids such swearing before He forbids homicide or many other cursed things. I say that this is the order in which the commandments stand; anyone knows who understands His commandments, knows why it is the second commandment. 647

And furthermore, I tell you flatly that vengeance will not depart from the house of one who is too outrageous in his oaths. "By God's precious heart," and "By His nails" and "By the blood of Christ in the abbey of Hales²⁹, my chance is seven; yours is five and three!" "By God's arms, if you play falsely, this dagger shall go through your heart!" This is the fruit that comes of the two cursed dice: perjury, anger, dishonesty, murder. 657

Now for the love of Christ Who died for us, forsake your oaths, great and small. But, sirs, I will now tell my tale. These three rioters of whom I speak, long before any bell had rung for prime³⁰, were sitting in a tavern to drink. And as they sat, they heard a bell tinkle that was carried before a corpse to his grave. One of them called to his servant, "Go quickly," he said, "and ask without delay what corpse passed by here, and see that you report his name correctly." 669

"Sir," said the boy, "there is no need. It was told to me two hours before you came here; he was an old friend of yours, by God, and he was slain suddenly in the night, as he sat very drunk on his bench. A stealthy thief that men call Death, who slays all the people in this country-side, came with his spear and struck his heart in two, and went his way without a word. He has slain a thousand in this pestilence; and master, before you come before him, it seems to me

²⁶ As Matthew witnesses. See Matthew 5.36.

²⁷ Righteousness. See Jeremiah 4.2.

²⁸ Commandments. I.e., the ten commandments.

²⁹ Abbey of Hales. In Gloucestershire, which claimed to have a vial of Christ's blood, which was said to be visible only to those who were pure in heart.

³⁰ Prime. 9 am.

that you would be best if you were wary of such an adversary. Be ready to meet him at all times; my mother taught me this. I can say no more. 684

"The child speaks the truth, by Blessed Mary," said the tavern-keeper, "for over a mile from here, in a large village, he has slain both man and woman, child, servant, and page. I believe his habitation to be there. It would be a bit of great wisdom to be forewarned before he does him great dishonor." 691

"Yes, by God's arms!" said this reveler, "Is it really such peril to meet with him? I vow to God's bones I will seek to meet him in the highways and the byways. Listen, friends, we three are all one in this; let each of us hold up his hand and become the others' brother, and slay this false traitor Death. He shall be slain before night that slays so many, by God's dignity!" 701

These three pledged their word together, each to live and die for the rest as if he were their sworn brother, and up they all started in this drunken fury, and forth they went toward that village of which the tavern-keeper had spoken; and they swore many grisly oaths, and Christ's blessed body they rent to pieces--Death shall be dead if they can catch him! 710

When they had gone only a little way, just as they were climbing over a fence, an old and poor man met them, and greeted them meekly, and said, "Now, gentle people, God be with you!" 715

The proudest of these three revelers answered, "What, churl, bad luck to you! Why are you completely wrapped up except your face? Why live you so long to such a great age?" 719

This old man began to peer into his face, and said, "Because I cannot find a man, even if I should walk from here to India, in city or in village, who will exchange his youth for my age. And therefore I must keep my old age as long as it is God's will. Alas, death will not take me! Thus I walk, a restless wretch, and thus day and night I knock with my staff upon the ground, which is my mother's gate, and say, "Dear mother, let me in. Lo, how I vanish away, flesh and skin and blood! Alas, when shall my bones be at peace? Mother, I would exchange my chest with you³¹, which has been long time in my chamber, yes, for a hair-cloth shroud to wrap myself in!" But still she will not do me that favor; wherefore my face is pale and withered. 738

³¹ My chest. I.e., his chest containing valuables.

But sirs, it is not a courteous thing to speak rudely to an old man, unless he should trespass in act or word. You may read yourselves in Holy Scripture, "Before an old hoary head man you shall arise³²." For this reason I counsel you, do no harm now to an old man, no more than you would like it to be done to you in your old age, if you remain so long. And now God be with you, wherever you may walk or ride; I must go where I have to go. 749

"Nay, old churl, not so fast, by God," said this second gambler without delay. "By St. John, you shall not depart so easily! You spoke just now of that traitor Death who slays all our friends in this countryside. By my word, you are his spy! Tell where he is, or, by God and the Holy Sacrament, you shall pay for it. Truly you are in conspiracy with him to slay us young people, false thief." 759

"Now sirs," he said, "if you are so glad to find Death, turn up this crooked path; for by my faith I left him in that grove under a tree, and there he will wait, and for all your boasting will he hide. Do you see that oak? There you shall find him. May God, Who redeemed mankind, save you and amend you!" Thus spoke this old creature. 767

And each of these revelers ran until he came to that tree, and there they found nearly eight bushels, as it seemed to them, of florins coined of fine round gold. They no longer sought then after Death, but each was so glad at the sight, for the florins were so beautiful and bright, that they sat themselves down by this precious hoard. 775

The worst of them spoke the first word. "Brethren," he said, "heed what I say; though I jest often and make sport, I have a good mind. Now Fortune has given us this treasure so that we may live the rest of our lives in mirth and jollity, and as easily as it comes, so too we will spend it. Ah! God's precious dignity! Who would have thought today that we should have so wonderful a grace! Could this gold be but carried from here to my house or else to yours--for you know well all this gold is ours--then would we be in great joy. But truly it may not be done during the day. People would call us harsh thieves and hang us for our own treasure. It must be carried by night, as wisely and slyly as can be. Therefore I advise that we draw straws among us all, and he that draws the shortest shall run with a happy heart to the town and do so quickly, and secretly bring us wine and bread. And two of us shall secretly guard this

³² You shall arise. See Leviticus. 19.32.

treasure, and at night, if he does not delay, we will carry it where we all agree is safest." 801

One of them brought the straws in his fist and told them to draw, and see where the lot would fall. It fell to the youngest of them and he went forth without delay toward the town. As soon as he was gone, the second said to the third, "You well know you are my sworn brother, and now I will tell you something to your advantage. Here is a great abundance of gold to divide among the three of us; and you know well our friend is gone. Now if I can plan it so that it will be divided among the two of us, will I not have done you a friendly turn?" 815

"I do not know how that can be," the other answered. "He knows the gold is left with us two. What shall we do? What shall we say to him?" 817

"Shall it be a secret?" said the first villain. "I shall tell you in few words what we shall do to carry it out successfully." 821

"I agree," said the other, "not to betray you, by my word." 823

"Now," said the first, "you know well we are two and that two shall be stronger than one. See to it that when he is set down; you will arise and scuffle with him as in sport, and I will pierce him through the two sides, and you will see to it that you do the same with your dagger. And then shall all this gold be shared between you and me, dear friend. Then may we both fulfill all our desires, and play at dice at our own pleasure." And thus were these two villains agreed to slay the third, as you have heard me say. 836

The youngest, going to the town, turns over and over in his heart the beauty of those bright new florins. "O Lord," he said, "if only I could have all this treasure to myself, no man living under God's throne should live as merry as I!" And at last the fiend, our enemy, put it into his mind to buy poison with which to slay his two friends; for the fiend found him in such a way of life that he had permission to bring him to ruin, for utterly his full purpose was to slay them both and never to repent. And he went forth without delay into the town to an apothecary, and asked him to sell him some poison so that he might kill his rats; and there was a pole-cat in his yard, he said, which had killed his capons, and he would gladly avenge him upon the pests that ruined him by night. 858

"And you shall have such a thing," answered the apothecary, "that, so may God save my soul, no creature in all this world who can eat or drink the

amount of a grain of wheat of this compound without dying immediately. Yes, he shall die, and will do so in less time than you can walk a mile, this poison is so violent." 867

This cursed man gripped the box of poison in his hand, and then ran into the next street to a shop and borrowed three large bottles. Into two of them he poured his poison, but the third he kept clean for his own drink, for he planned to labor all night long carrying away the gold. And when this reveler (may the Devil take him!) had filled his three great bottles with wine, he returned again to his friends. 878

What need to describe it more? For just as they had planned his death, even so they slew him, and did so quickly. When this was done, one of the two said, "Now let us sit and drink and make merry, and then we will bury his body." 884

And with that word he happened to take one of the bottles where the poison was, and he drank and gave his friend a drink also. Therefore, they both died soon. And surely Avicenna³³ never wrote in any canon or any chapter more wondrous signs of poisoning than these two wretches showed before they died. Thus these two murderers met their end, and the false poisoner also. 894

"O cursed sin³⁴, full of cursedness! O treacherous homicide! O wickedness! 896

"O gluttony, lust and gambling! You blasphemer of Christ with insult and great oaths, habitual and proud! Alas mankind, how may it be that you art so false and unkind to your Creator, Who made you and redeemed you with His precious heart's blood, alas! 903

"Now, good men, God forgive you your trespasses and guard you from the sin of avarice. My holy pardon will cure you all, provided that you offer nobles and other sterling coin, or else silver rings, brooches, spoons. Bow your heads, bow them under this holy bull! Come up, wives, offer of your wool! See, I enter your name here in my roll; you shall enter into heaven's bliss; I absolve you by my high

³³ Avicenna. Eleventh-century Arab (Persian) physician, who compiled the important treatise on medicine, "The Book of the Canon of Medicine."

³⁴ O cursed sin. Though there is no formal break in the manuscripts, the tale is clearly finished and the Pardoner's address to the other pilgrims begins. Thus the convention of adding quotation marks for the speech of the characters resumes here.

power, you that will make offerings, as clear and clean as when you were born. Lo, sirs, thus I preach). And may Jesus Christ, our soul's physician, grant that you may receive His pardon; for that is better than mine, I will not deceive you. 918

"But sirs, one word I have forgotten to say. Here in my bag I have relics and indulgences, as fair as any man's in Britain, which were given to me by the pope's own hand. If any of you of devotion will make an offering and have my absolution, come forth now and kneel down here and meekly receive my pardon; or else take pardons all new and fresh as you go along, at every town's end, so that you offer again and again nobles and pence which are good and sound. It is an honor to every creature here to have a competent pardoner to absolve you as you ride through the lonely country, in case of a misadventure which might happen. 934

"By chance one or two may fall down from their horses and break their necks in two. Look what a security it is to you all that I, who can absolve you all, high and low, when the soul shall pass from the body, fell into your company! I advise that our Host here be the first, for he is most enveloped in sin. 942

"Come forth, Sir Host, and offer first, and you shall kiss all the relics, yes, for a groat³⁵; without delay unbuckle your purse." 945

"No, no!" he said, "may I have the curse of Christ if I do so!" he said. "Leave me alone; it shall not be, I swear. You would make me kiss your old breech and swear it is a saint's relic, no matter how foul it may be! But by the Holy Cross that St. Helen³⁶ found, I wish I had your testicles in my hand instead of relics or a sanctuary³⁷. Let them be cut off, and I will help you carry them. They shall be enshrined in a hog's turd!" 953

This Pardoner answered not a word; he was so angry, he would not speak. 955

"Now," said our Host, "I will not talk with you longer, nor with any other angry man." 957

But when the worthy Knight saw all the people laughing, he said, "Enough, no more of this. Sir Pardoner, be cheerful, and I pray you, Sir Host, who

is so dear to me, kiss the Pardoner. And Pardoner, I pray you draw near again, and let us laugh and make sport as we did before." 967

And without delay they kissed and rode on. 968

Here is ended the Pardoner's Tale.

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³⁵ Groat. Small coin.

³⁶ St. Helen. Mother of the Emperor Constantine, who was believed to have miraculously found the Holy Cross on which Christ was crucified.

³⁷ Sanctuary. Box for holding relics.