

Geoffrey Chaucer

The House of Fame

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Book I

God turn every dream to good!
For it's a marvel, by the rood,
To my mind, what causes dreaming
Either at dawn or at evening,
And why truth appears in some
And from some shall never come;
Why this one is a vision,
And that one a revelation,
Why this a nightmare, that a dream,
And not to every man the same;
Why this a phantom, why these oracles
I know not; but who of these miracles
Knows the cause better than me,
Let him explain, for certainly
I know it not, never thinking,
Nor busily my wits belabouring,
To know of their significance
The kinds, nor yet the distance
In time between them, nor the causes,
Or why this more than that a cause is;
As if folk's complexions
Made them dream their reflections,
Or else thus, as some maintain,
Because of feebleness of brain,
Through abstinence, or from sickness,
Imprisonment, or great distress;
Or else by the disordering
Of their habitual mode of living,
Because some man's too curious
In study, or melancholy, bilious,
Or so inwardly full of fear,
That no man may drag him clear;
Or else because the devotion
Of some, and contemplation,

Causes such dreams often;
Or that the cruel life, the harsh one,
To which those lovers are lead,
Who hope over-much or dread,
Simply through their emotions
Causes them to see visions;
Or if spirits have the might
To make folk dream at night,
Or if the soul, of its own kind,
Is so perfect, or such men find,
That it foresees what is to come
And gives warning, to all and some,
To each of them, of their adventures
Through visions or phantom figures,
Though our flesh lacks the might
To understand it all aright,
Since it is warned too darkly –
Yet what the cause is, ask not me.
Good luck in this to greater clerks
Who treat of these and other works,
For I of no firm opinion
Shall, for now, make mention,
Except that the holy rood
Turn our every dream to good!
For never a man since I was born,
Nor no man else who came before,
Dreamed, I believe steadfastly,
So wonderful a dream as me,
On the tenth day of December,
The which, as much as I remember,
I will you every detail tell.

THE INVOCATION

But in beginning, trust me well,
I shall make an invocation
With especial devotion
Unto the god of sleep anon,
Who dwells in a cave of stone
By a stream that comes from Lethe,
That flows out of Hell un-sweetly,
Near a folk men call Cimmerians.
There ever sleeps this god of dreams
With his thousand sleepy sons
For whom sleep ever is their wont.
And of this god whom I discuss
I pray that he'll grant me success
My dream for to tell aright,
If over all dreams he has might.
And he that Mover is of all
That is and was and ever shall,
Grant them joy, who do this hear,
Of all that they dream this year,
And may they stand in good grace
With their loves, or in that place
Where they would most prefer to be,
Shield them from harm and poverty
And from misfortune and disease,
And send them what may them please
Who take it well and scorn it not
Nor condemn it in their thought
Through malicious inclination.
And whoever from presumption
Or hate or scorn, or out of envy,
Disdain, contempt or villainy,
Condemns it, pray I Jesus God
That – dream he barefoot, dream he shod –

Every harm that any man
Has known since the world began,
Befall him thereof, ere he end,
And grant he may the whole attend,
Lo, with such a conclusion
As he had, from his vision,
Croesus, King of Lydia, high
Who there upon a gibbet died!
This prayer shall he have of me;
For I am no better in charity!
Now hearken, as I have spoken,
To what I dreamed ere I had woken.

THE DREAM

On December the tenth day
When it was night, down I lay
Right there as I was wont to do
And fell asleep wondrous soon,
As he that weary was as who
On pilgrimage went miles two
To the shrine of Saint Leonard,
To make easy what was hard.

But as I slept, I dreamed I was
Within a temple made of glass
In which there were more images
Of gold, tiered in sundry stages,
And more rich tabernacles,
And with more gemmed pinnacles,
And more curious portraiture,
And intricate kinds of figure
Of craftsmanship than ever I saw.
For certainly, I knew no more
Of where I was, but plain to see
Venus owned most certainly
That temple, for in portraiture
I at once saw her figure
Naked, floating in the sea.
And also on her head, indeed,
Her rose garland white and red,
And her comb to comb her head,
Her doves, and her blind son
Lord Cupid, and then Vulcan,
Whose face was swarthy brown.

And as I roamed up and down,
I saw that on a wall there was
Thus written on a piece of brass:
'I will now sing, if that I can,
The arms, and also the man

Who first, pursuing destiny,
Fugitive from Troy's country,
To Italy, with pain, did come,
To the shores of Lavinium.'
And then begin the tale at once,
That I shall tell to you each one.

First I saw the destruction
Of Troy, through the Greek Sinon,
Who with his false forswearing
And his outward show and lying,
Had the horse brought into Troy
By which the Trojans lost their joy,
And after this was engraved, alas,
How Ilium assailed was
And won, and King Priam slain,
And Polytes his son, for certain,
Cruelly by Lord Pyrrhus.

And next to this, I saw how Venus
When that she saw the castle's end,
Down from the heavens did descend
And urged her son Aeneas to flee;
And how he fled, and how that he
Escaped from all the cruelties,
And took his father Anchises
And bore him on his back away,
Crying, 'Alas!' and 'Well-away!'
That same Anchises, in his hand,
Bore the gods of the land,
Those that were not burnt wholly.

And I saw next, in this company,
How Creusa, Lord Aeneas' wife,
Whom he loved as he did his life,
And their young son Julius,
Also called Ascanius,
Fled too, and fearful did appear,
That it was a pity them to hear;
And through a forest as they went,

At a place where the way bent,
How Creusa was lost, alas,
And died, I know not how it was:
How he sought her and how her ghost
Urged him to flee the Greek host,
And said he must go to Italy,
Without fail, it was his destiny;
That it was a pity thus to hear,
When her spirit did appear,
The words that to him she said:
Let him protect their son she prayed.
There saw I graven too how he,
His father also, and company,
In his fleet took sail swiftly
Towards the land of Italy,
As directly as they could go.

There I saw you, cruel Juno,
That is Lord Jupiter's wife,
Who did hate, all their life,
All those of Trojan blood,
Run and shout, as if gone mad,
To Aeolus, the god of winds,
To blow about, all their kinds,
So fierce, that he might drench
Lord and lady, groom and wench,
Of all the Trojan nation
Without hope of salvation.

There saw I such a tempest rise
That every heart might hear the cries
Of those but painted on the wall.

There saw I graven there withal,
Venus, how you, my lady dear,
Weeping with great loss of cheer,
Prayed to Jupiter on high
To save and keep the fleet alive
Of the Trojan Aeneas,
Since that he her son was.

There saw I Jove Venus kiss,
And grant that the tempest cease.
Then saw I how the tempest went,
And how painfully Aeneas bent
His secret course, to reach the bay
In the country of Carthage;
And on the morrow, how that he
And a knight called Achates
Met with Venus on that day,
Going in her bright array
As if she was a huntress,
The breeze blowing every tress;
How Aeneas did complain,
When he saw her, of his pain,
And how his ships shattered were,
Or else lost, he knew not where;
How she comforted him so
And bade him to Carthage go,
And there he should his folk find
That on the sea were left behind.

And, swiftly through this to pace,
She made Aeneas know such grace
Of Dido, queen of that country,
That, briefly to tell it, she
Became his love and let him do
All that belongs to marriage true.
Why should I use more constraint,
Or seek my words to paint,
In speaking of love? It shall not be;
I know no such facility.
And then to tell the manner
Of how they met each other,
Were a process long to tell,
And over-long on it to dwell.

There was graved how Aeneas
Told Dido everything that was
Involved in his escape by sea.

And after graced was how she
Made of him swiftly, at a word,
Her life, her love, her joy, her lord,
And did him all the reverence
Eased him of all the expense
That any woman could so do,
Believing everything was true
He swore to her, and thereby deemed
That he was good, for such he seemed.
Alas, what harm wreaks appearance
When it hides a false existence!
For he to her a traitor was,
Wherefore she slew herself, alas!
Lo, how a woman goes amiss
In loving him that unknown is,
For, by Christ, lo, thus it fares:
All is not gold that glitters there.
For, as I hope to keep my head,
There may under charm instead
Be hidden many a rotten vice;
Therefore let none be so nice
As to judge a love by how he appear
Or by speech, or by friendly manner;
For this shall every woman find:
That some men are of that kind
That show outwardly their fairest,
Till they have got what they miss.
And then they will reasons find
Swearing how she is unkind,
Or false, or secret lover has.
All this say I of Aeneas
And Dido, so soon obsessed,
Who loved too swiftly her guest;
Therefore I will quote a proverb,
That 'he who fully knows the herb
May safely set it to his eye';
Certainly, that is no lie.

But let us speak of Aeneas,
How he betrayed her, alas,
And left her full unkindly.
So when she saw all utterly
That he would fail in loyalty
And go from her to Italy,
She began to wring her hands so.
‘Alas,’ quoth she, ‘here is my woe!
Alas, is every man untrue,
Who every year desires a new,
If his love should so long endure,
Or else three, peradventure?
As thus: from one love he’d win fame
In magnifying of his name,
Another’s for friendship, says he;
And yet there shall a third love be,
Who shall be taken for pleasure,
Lo, or his own profit’s measure.’
In such words she did complain,
Dido, in her great pain
As I dreamed it, for certain,
No other author do I claim.
‘Alas!’ quoth she, ‘my sweet heart,
Have pity on my sorrow’s smart,
And slay me not! Go not away!
O woeful Dido, well-away!’
Quoth she to herself so.
‘O Aeneas, what will you do?
O, now neither love nor bond
You swore me with your right hand,
Nor my cruel death,’ quoth she,
‘May hold you here still with me!
O, on my death have pity!
Truly, my dear heart, truly,
You know full well that never yet,
Insofar as I had wit,
Have I wronged you in thought or deed.

Oh, are you men so skilled indeed
At speeches, yet never a grain of truth?
Alas, that ever showed ruth
Any woman for any man!
Now I see how to tell it, and can,
We wretched women have no art;
For, certainly, for the most part
Thus are we served every one.
However sorely you men groan,
As soon as we have you received
Certain we are to be deceived;
For, though your love last a season,
Wait upon the conclusion,
And look what you determine,
And for the most part decide on.
O, well-away that I was born!
For through you my name is gone
And all my actions told and sung,
Through all this land, on every tongue.
O wicked Fame, of all amiss
Nothing's so swift, lo, as she is!
O, all will be known that exists
Though it be hidden by the mist.
And though I might live forever,
What I've done I'll save never
From it always being said, alas,
I was dishonoured by Aeneas
And thus I shall judged be:
'Lo, what she has done, now she
Will do again, assuredly';
Thus people say all privately.
But what's done cannot be undone.
And all her complaint, all her moan,
Avails her surely not a straw.
And when she then truly saw
That he unto his ships was gone,
She to her chamber went anon,

And called on her sister Anna,
And began to complain to her,
And said that she the cause was
That made her first love him, alas,
And had counselled her thereto.
But yet, when this was spoken too,
She stabbed herself to the heart,
And died of the wound's art.
But of the manner of how she died,
And all the words said and replied,
Whoso to know that does purpose,
Read Virgil in the Aeneid, thus,
Or Heroides of Ovid try
To read what she wrote ere she died;
And were it not too long to indite,
By God, here I would it write.
But, well-away, the harm, the ruth
That has occurred through such untruth,
As men may oft in books read,
And see it everyday in deed,
That mere thinking of it pains.
Lo, Demophon, Duke of Athens,
How he forswore himself full falsely
And betrayed Phyllis wickedly,
The daughter of the King of Thrace,
And falsely failed of time and place;
And when she knew his falsity,
She hung herself by the neck indeed,
For he had proved of such untruth,
Lo, was this not woe and ruth?
And lo, how false and reckless see
Was Achilles to Briseis,
And Paris to Oenone;
And Jason to Hypsipyle;
And Jason later to Medea;
And Hercules to Deianira;
For he left her for Iole,

Which led to his death, I see.
How false, also, was Theseus,
Who, as the story tells it us,
Betrayed poor Ariadne;
The devil keep his soul company!
For had he laughed, had he loured,
He would have been quite devoured,
If Ariadne had not chanced to be!
And because she on him took pity,
She from death helped him escape,
And he played her full false a jape;
For after this, in a little while,
He left her sleeping on an isle,
Deserted, lonely, far in the sea,
And stole away, and let her be,
Yet took her sister Phaedra though
With him, and on board ship did go.
And yet he had sworn to her
By all that ever he might swear,
That if she helped to save his life,
He would take her to be his wife,
For she desired nothing else,
In truth, as the book so tells.

Yet, to excuse Aeneas
Partly for his great trespass,
The book says, truly, Mercury,
Bade him go into Italy,
And leave Africa's renown
And Dido and her fair town.

Then saw I graved how to Italy
Lord Aeneas sailed all swiftly,
And how a tempest then began
And how he lost his steersman,
The steering-oar did suddenly
Drag him overboard in his sleep.

And also I saw how the Sibyl
And Aeneas, beside an isle,

Went to Hell, for to see
His father, noble Anchises.
How he there found Palinurus
And Dido, and Deiphebus;
And all the punishments of Hell
He saw, which are long to tell.
The which whoever wants to know,
He'll find in verses, many a row,
In Virgil or in Claudian
Or Dante, who best tell it can.

Then I saw graved the entry
That Aeneas made to Italy,
And with Latinus his treaty,
And all the battles that he
Was in himself, and his knights,
Before he had won his rights;
And how he took Turnus' life
And won Lavinia as his wife,
And all the omens wonderful
Of the gods celestial;
How despite Juno, Aeneas,
For all her tricks, brought to pass
The end of his adventure
Protected thus by Jupiter
At the request of Venus,
Whom I pray to ever save us
And make for us our sorrows light.

When I had seen all this sight
In the noble temple thus,
'Oh Lord,' thought I, 'who made us,
I never yet saw such nobleness
In statuary, nor such richness
As I see graven in this church;
I know not who made these works,
Nor where I am, nor in what country.
But now I will go out and see,
At the small gate there, if I can

Find anywhere a living man
Who can tell me where I am.'
When I out of the door ran,
I looked around me eagerly;
There I saw naught but a large field,
As far as I could see,
Without town or house or tree,
Or bush or grass or ploughed land;
For all the field was only sand,
As fine-ground as with the eye
In Libyan desert's seen to lie;
Nor any manner of creature
That is formed by Nature
Saw I, to advise me, in this,
'O Christ,' I thought, 'who art in bliss,
From phantoms and from illusion
Save me!' and with devotion
My eyes to the heavens I cast.
Then was I aware, at the last,
That, close to the sun, as high
As I might discern with my eye,
Me thought I saw an eagle soar,
Though its size seemed more
Than any eagle I had seen.
Yet, sure as death, all its sheen
Was of gold, it shone so bright
That never men saw such a sight,
Unless the heavens above had won,
All new of gold, another sun;
So shone the eagle's feathers bright,
And downward it started to alight.

Book II

THE INVOCATION

Now hearken every manner of man
That English can understand,
And listen: learn from my dream here;
For the first time now you'll hear
So excellent a vision, lo,
That Isaiah, no, nor Scipio,
Nor King Nebuchadnezzar,
Pharaoh, Turnus nor Elkanah,
Ever knew such a dream as this!
Now O fair blissful Cypris,
Show me your favour at this time!
And help me to create and rhyme
You, who on Parnassus dwell,
By Helicon the crystal well.

O Thought, that all I dreamed composed,
And in the treasury enclosed
Of my brain, now shall men see
If any virtue in you there be
To tell all my dream aright;
Now show all your skill and might!

THE DREAM

The eagle, of which I've told,
That shone with feathers of gold,
So high it began to soar,
That I beheld more and more
The beauty there and the wonder;
But never was there clap of thunder,
Nor that thing, the lightning-bolt
That sometimes towers to powder smote,

And in its swift coming burned,
So swiftly ever did descend
As this bird when all revealed
I was exposed in the field;
And with his grim talons strong,
Within his sharp claws and long,
Me, fleeing in a swoop he won,
And in his soaring rose at once,
Carrying me in his claws stark
As lightly as if I were a lark,
How high I cannot tell to you,
Because I rose, I know not how,
I was so astonished, overcome,
Every power of mind was stunned,
What with his soaring and my dread,
That all my senses were as dead,
Because of the sudden sharp assay.

Thus long in his claws I lay,
Till at the last to me he spake,
In human voice and said: 'Awake!
And be less fearful, for shame!'
And called me by my name,
And, so I should wake easily,
I dreamt: 'Awake' he said to me
In tone and voice the very same
As one does use whom I could name;
And at that voice, truth to say,
My mind returned to me again,
For it was gently said to me,
As it has never wont to be.

And with all this I began to stir,
And he me in his claws to bear
Till he felt I'd regained heat
And also I felt my heart beat.
And then he began to console me
And with words to comfort me
And said twice: 'Saint Mary,

You are troublesome to carry,
Unnecessarily so, indeed!
For, so God's wisdom aid me,
You shall take no harm from this;
And all that befalls you is,
For your education, I vow.
Let's see if you dare look now.
Be full assured, for so say I,
I am your friend.' And therewith I
Began to muse in my mind.
'O God,' thought I, 'that made all kind
Of creature, is this to be my fate?
Where Jove shall me constellate,
Or what else may this signify here?
I am not Enoch, nor Elijah,
Nor Romulus, nor Ganymede,
Who was snatched away, men read,
To heaven by high Jupiter
And made the gods' own butler.'
Lo, this was then my fantasy!
But he that bore me suddenly
Knowing I so thought, said this:
'You understand yourself amiss;
For Jove is not hereabout –
I can rescue you from doubt –
To turn you yet into a star.
But ere I bear you wide and far,
I will tell you who I am,
And where you go, and why I came
To effect this, so you may take
Good heart, and not for fear quake.'
'Gladly,' quoth I, 'Well now,' said he.
'First, I who hold you with my feet,
Filling you with fear and wonder,
Dwell with the god of thunder,
Whom men call Jupiter,
Who often makes me fly far

To do his every commandment.
And for this reason he has sent
Me to you; now hark, by your truth.
Certain, he has for you ruth,
You who have so long and truly
Served so diligently
His blind nephew Cupid, oh
And fair Venus also.
Without reward as of yet,
And nevertheless have set your wit –
Although full little of it there is –
To make books, songs, ditties,
In rhyme or else in cadence,
As best you can, in reverence
Of Love and of his servants too,
Who have his service sought to do;
And you take pains to praise his art
Although in love you take no part;
Wherefore, as God may me bless,
Jove thinks it a sign of humbleness
And virtue too, that you do make
Often at night your head to ache,
That in your study you so write
And evermore of love indite
In honour of him, and him praising,
And his folks' cause furthering,
And from love's matter all devise
And him and his folk never despise
Although you go maybe in the dance
Of those he chooses not to advance.
Wherefore, as I said, it is
That Jupiter takes account of this
And also, good sir, other things:
That is, that you receive no tidings
Of Love's folk, whether they are glad,
Nor of ought else that God has bade;
And not only that from far country

No tidings ever come to thee,
But of your very own neighbours
That dwell almost at your doors,
You hear neither that nor this;
For when your labours finish,
And you've made your reckoning,
Instead of rest and new things,
You go home to your house anon;
And, as dumb as any stone,
You sit down to another book
Till full dazed is your look,
And live thus like a hermit,
Though abstaining never a bit.
And therefore Jove, of his grace,
Wills that I bear you to a place
Which is called the House of Fame
To pleasure you with sport and game
In some kind of compensation
For your labour and devotion
Which you have given, nonetheless
To Cupid, the thankless.
And thus this god of divine might
Would, with something, you requite,
So that you may be of good cheer.
For be sure that you will hear,
When we have come where I say,
More wondrous things, I dare claim,
Of Love's folk more tidings,
Both true things and lying,
And more of love new begun
And after long service love won,
And more of love chanced by,
That happens, and no man knows why,
But as a blind man starts a hare;
And more jollity and good fare
When that they find love of steel,
As they believe, and joyous feel;

More of discord, more jealousy,
More muttering, and subtlety,
And more dissimulation
And pretence at reparation,
And more beards in two hours
Shaved without razor or scissors
Than there were ever grains of sand;
And more swearing of false bonds
And also more renewals since
Of neglected acquaintances,
More settlements and accords,
Than on instruments are chords,
And then of love more exchanges
Than ever there was corn in mangers.
Are you ready to credit all this?’
Quoth he. ‘No, God save me,’ I said.
‘Why not,’ quoth he, ‘Ah, because it
Seems beyond the grasp of wit;
Even if Fame had all the magpies
In all the realm, and all the spies,
How she could ever hear all this,
Or they espy it.’ ‘Yes, oh yes!’
Quoth he to me, ‘that can I prove
By arguments of merit too,
If you will give all your attention
To understanding all I mention.

First shall you hear of where she dwells,
As your own book, Ovid’s, tells;
Her palace stands, as I do say,
Right in the midst of the way
Between heaven, earth and sea,
That whatsoever in all these three
Is spoken, privately or apart,
The way thereto is so overt,
And in so perfect a place
That every sound must to it race,
And whatsoever is on any tongue,

Whether whispered, said or sung,
Spoken securely, or in dread,
Certain it must thither have sped.

Now hearken well since I will
With true reason your mind fill,
And give logical demonstration
According to my imagination.

Geoffrey, you well know all this,
That every natural thing that is,
Has a natural place where it
May best in itself nurtured fit;
Towards which place everything,
Through its natural inclining,
Moves so as to come thereto
When that it is far removed;
For thus, lo, you may ever see
That anything heavy maybe,
Like stone, or lead or thing of weight,
Be it never so raised in height,
Let go your hand, and it falls down.

Just so, say I, with fire or sound
Or smoke or other things light,
Always they seek to reach a height;
While each of them is free at large,
Light things up, heavy downwards charge.

And for this reason you can see
That every river to the sea
Is disposed to flow, by kind,
And for this reason, as I find,
Fish dwell in flood and sea,
And in the earth grows the tree.
So everything, for this reason,
Has its own proper mansion,
And seeks to go there, where
Nothing shall it impair.
Lo this science lies all about,
In every philosopher's mouth,

Such as Aristotle, Plato
And other scholars also.
And to secure my ground,
You know this well, speech is sound,
Or else no man might it hear;
Now hark to what I teach you here.
 Sound is naught but air broken,
And every speech that is spoken,
Loud or quiet, foul or fair,
In its substance is but air;
For as flame is lighted smoke,
So is sound air that is broke.
But this occurs in many ways,
Of which I will but two display.
That is the sounds of pipe and harp.
For when a pipe is blown sharp
The air is split with violence
And rent; lo, this is my sense.
Also when men harp-strings smite,
Whether loudly or light,
Lo, with the stroke the air breaks;
Just so it breaks when words we say.
Thus you know now what thing is speech.
 Now you I'll furthermore teach
How every speech or noise or sound,
Through amplification around,
Though it were squeaked by a mouse,
Must needs come to Fame's House.
I prove it thus – take heed though –
By experience, for if you throw
Into water any stone,
You know it will make anon
A little wave in a circle,
As wide as a pot, a ripple;
And right away you will see
That wheel spawn another wheel,
And that a third, and so, brother,

Every circle makes another,
Wider than that before him,
And thus from first wave to rim,
Each about the other going,
Causes another's uprising,
And multiplying evermore,
Till it has gone so far
That it at both sides may be,
Though you may not it see
Above, it still lies under,
Though you think it a great wonder.
And whoso says from truth I vary,
Bid him prove the contrary.
And right thus every word, yes,
That loud or quiet spoken is,
First moves a mass of air about,
And by this moving without doubt
More of the air is swiftly moved.
As I have of the water proved
That every circle makes another,
So is it with the air, dear brother;
Each mass of air moves other air
More and more, and speech does bear;
Voice or noise or word or sound,
Through amplification around
Till it shall reach the House of Fame;
Take it in earnest or as a game.
Now I've told you, keep it in mind,
How speech or sound, by its kind,
Is upwards inclined to move –
This you may see me surely prove –
And that same place you'll find
To which everything is inclined
Is its own natural harbour.
It is plain, and no demur,
That naturally the mansion
Of every speech, of every sound,

Be it either foul or fair,
Has its own place in the air.
And since everything that is
Out of its natural place, thus,
Is moved thither ward to go
It if is set far from it, so –
As I before have proved to you –
It follows every sound, true,
Naturally moves at a pace
All unto its natural place.
And this place of which I tell,
Where Fame does choose to dwell,
Is set midway between these three,
Heaven, earth, and third the sea,
As most conserving of the sound.
And here is the conclusion, now:
That every speech of every man,
As I said when I first began,
Moves up on high at a pace
Naturally to reach Fame's place.
Tell me this truthfully,
Have I not proved quite simply,
Without any deep subtlety
Of speech, or great prolixity
Of terms from philosophy,
Of figures out of poetry,
Or fine displays of rhetoric?
Indeed you ought to relish it,
Since hard language and hard matter
Are both troublesome to hear
Together; do you not know this?
And I answered, and said: 'Yes.'
'Aha!' quoth he, 'see how I can
Simply, to an unschooled man,
Speak, and teach him with such skill,
That he may grasp it by the bill,
So palpable it proves to be.

But now I pray, tell this to me,
 What think you of my conclusion?
 'Full of a most fine persuasion,'
 Quoth I, 'it is, and like to be
 All true as you have proved to me.'
 'By God,' quoth he, 'and as I live
 You shall have yet, ere it be eve,
 Of every word of this science
 A proof from experience,
 And with your own ears be hearing
 Top and tail, and everything
 How every word that spoken is
 Comes to Fame's House, like this,
 As I have said; what wish you more?'
 And with this word upward to soar
 He began, saying: 'By St James
 Now will we speak of many a game.'
 'How fare you?' quoth he to me,
 'Well' quoth I. 'Now look' quoth he,
 'By your truth, yonder, down,
 And if you recognise some town
 Or house or any other thing.
 When you recognise something,
 Make sure to warn me of it too,
 And swiftly I'll tell to you
 How far away from it you wend.'
 And I began gazing then
 And beheld the fields and plains,
 Now the hills, now mountains,
 Now the valleys, now the forests,
 And scarce could discern large beasts,
 Now the rivers, now the cities,
 Now the towns, and now great trees,
 And now ships sailing on the sea.
 But after a little while he
 Had flown from the ground so high,
 That all the world then to my eye

Seemed less than a slight pin-prick,
Or else the air had grown so thick
That I could nothing there discern.
With that he spoke to me in turn
And said: 'Do you see any town
Or aught you know, yonder, down?'
I said: 'Nay.' 'No wonder that is,'
Quoth he, 'not half so high as this
Did great Alexander go,
Or the king, that Scipio
Who saw in dream, with his eyes
All Hell and Earth and Paradise,
Nor that wretched Daedalus,
Nor his lost child, Icarus,
Who flew so high that the heat
Made his wings melt till in the sea
He fell straight, and drowned he then,
For whom was made such great lament.
Now turn up,' quoth he, 'your face,
And behold this mighty space,
This air, but take care not to be
In dread of those whom you shall see;
For in this region now for certain,
Dwells there many a citizen
Of whom speaks the wise Plato.
These are the beasts of air, lo!'
And so I saw all that company
Both walk and fly alongside me.
'Now, cast up your eye,' quoth he,
See yonder, lo, the Galaxy,
Which men call the Milky Way,
Since it is white: and some they say
Simply name it Watling Street,
That once was burned with heat,
When the Sun's son, as we read,
Named Phaethon, chose to lead
His father's chariot on high.

The horses though soon did espy
That he knew not their governance
And they began to leap and prance
And carried him now back, now on,
Until he saw the Scorpion,
Which is a sign in Heaven yet,
And he from fear lost his wits
At that, and let the reins go
Of the horses; and they so
Began to climb and to descend
That both the earth and air burned,
Till Jupiter, lo, at last
Him slew, and from the chariot cast.
Lo, is it not a great mischance,
To let a fool have governance.
Of things that he cannot control?’

And with this word, you must know,
Higher, higher he began to soar
Yet comforted me more and more,
So sincerely to me spoke he.

Then I began to look beneath me,
And beheld the air-borne beasts,
Clouds, mists and tempests see,
Snow, hail, and rain and wind,
The forms in which they begin,
And all the height through which I came.
‘O God,’ quoth I, that Adam made,
Great is thy might and nobleness!’

And then I thought of Boethius,
Who writes: ‘A thought so high may flee
With feathers of philosophy
It flies beyond all elements;
And when it so far ascends
Then behind its back we see
Cloud, and all told previously.’

Then I began to sweat with fear,
And said: ‘I know that I am here;

But whether in body or in spirit
I know not, though God knows it!
For a clearer grasp of sense
Was never to me ever sent.
And then I thought of Martianus,
And also of *Anticlaudianus*,
That true was their description
Of all the vast heavenly region
Inasmuch as I saw the proof;
Therefore I can believe it sooth.

At this the eagle began to screech,
'Let be,' quoth he, 'your fantasy;
Would you learn of the stars aught?'
'Nay, for certain,' quoth I: 'naught.'
'And why?' 'Because I am too old.'
'If otherwise, I would have told,
You,' quoth he, 'the stars' names, lo,
And all the heavenly signs and so
Which ones they are.' No mind,' quoth I.
'Yes, truly,' quoth he, 'know you why?
For when you read in poetry,
How gods to stars altered be
Birds, fish, beasts, or him or her,
Such as Raven, or either Bear,
Or Arion's harp fine, such as
Castor, Pollux, or Dolphinus,
Or Atlas's fair daughters seven,
How all these are set in Heaven;
For though you oft have them on hand,
You do not know where they each stand.'
'No matter,' quoth I, 'what's the need?
I believe as well, so God me speed,
Those that write of all this matter,
As though I saw the places clear;
And then they shine here so bright,
It would ruin all my sight
To look at them.' 'That well may be,'

Quoth he. And forth he carried me
A while, and then began to cry,
That never heard I noise so high,
'Now lift your head, for all is well;
Saint Julian, lo, a fine hostel!
See here the House of Fame is, lo!
Can you hear what I hear though?'
'What?' quoth I. 'That mighty sound,'
Quoth he, 'that rumbles up and down
In Fame's House, all full of tidings
Both of fair speech and of chidings,
And of false and true compounded.
Listen well; it is full sounded.
Do you not hear the mighty roar?'
'Yes, indeed.' quoth I, more and more.'
'And what sound is it like? Quoth he.
'Peter! – The beating of the sea,'
Quoth I, 'against the rocks below,
When tempests do the ships swallow,
And let a man stand, without doubt,
A mile thence, he'll hear the rout;
Or else like the last rumblings
After a clap of thunder rings,
When Jupiter has struck the air;
But it makes me sweat with fear.'
'Nay, dread not thereof,' quoth he,
'It's nothing that will injure thee;
You shall not be harmed, truly.'
And with this word both I and he
To the place arrived as near
As a man might cast a spear.
I know not how, but on a street
He set me fairly on my feet
And said: 'Walk on now apace,
And take your chances in this case
As you shall find in Fame's place.'
'Now,' quoth I, 'while we have space

To speak, before I part from thee,
For the love of God, tell to me
What I in truth of you would learn,
If all this noise that I've heard
Is, as I did hear you tell
From folk who down on earth do dwell
And comes here in that same wise
As I heard you before advise;
And that no corporeal body lives
In all that house that yonder is
That makes all this loud affair?'
'No,' quoth he, 'by Saint Clare,
And as wise God advises me!
But of one thing I'll counsel thee
At which you will greatly wonder.
Lo, to the House of Fame yonder
You know how comes every speech,
There's no need for me to preach.
But understand now, right well, this:
When any speech incoming is
Up to this palace right anon,
It appears as the selfsame one,
Who that word on earth spoke,
In red or black be it cloaked;
And has so truly their likeness,
That spoke the word, you would guess
That the same body it must be,
Man or woman, he or she,
And is this not a wondrous thing?'
'Yes,' quoth I, 'by Heaven's King!'
And with this word, 'Farewell,' quoth he,
'And here now I will wait for thee,
And God from Heaven send you grace
To learn some good in this place!'
And I of him took leave anon,
And to the palace I was gone.

Book III

THE INVOCATION

O god of science and of light,
Apollo, through thy greater might
This latest little book, guide thee!
Not that I wish for mastery,
That here poetic art be viewed,
But, as the rhyme is slight and crude,
Make it yet somewhat agreeable
Though some lines fail in a syllable;
And though I show no diligence
To show my craft, but, simply, sense.
And if, divine power, thou
Will help me to show right now
What in my head conceived is –
Lo, that is but to mention this,
The House of Fame to describe –
You'll see me go forth as blithe,
To the next laurel bough I see
And kiss it since it is thy tree.
Now enter in my breast anon!

THE DREAM

When I had from the eagle gone,
I began to gaze at this place.
And before further I did pace,
I will all the shape describe
Of house and city in every wise
And how I began my approach
To this place on so high a rock;
Higher stands there none in Spain.
But up I climbed with great pain,
And though to climb it grieved me,
Yet I was eager still to see
And peered about, bending low,
To see if I could some way know
What kind of stone this rock was,
Since it was like illumined glass,
Except it showed far more clear,
But of what congealed matter
It was I did not know, truly.

Yet I conned it thoroughly
And found that all did now reveal
A rock of ice and not of steel.
Thought I: 'By Saint Thomas of Kent,
This is a feeble fundament
On which to build a place so high!
He should not himself then glorify
Who built this: so God me save!'

Then I saw one side engraved
With famous folks names a plenty
That enjoyed great prosperity
And whose fame was widely known.
But I could scarcely find below
Any letters that I could read
That showed their very names, indeed

They were almost thawed through,
And of the letters but one or two
Were melted away of every name,
So un-famous had grown their fame;
As men say: 'What can ever last?'

Then in my mind I thought at best
That they had melted with the heat
Not worn away with storms' beat,
For the other side, I must say,
Of this hill, that northward lay,
I saw was written full of names
Of folk that had achieved great fame
In ancient times, and yet they were
As fresh as men had writ them there
That self-same day, that hour just ere
That I upon them came to stare,
Yet well I knew why they were saved;
It was protected by the shade –
All this writing that saw I –
Of a castle that stood on high,
And stood too in so cold a place
That it could not be thus defaced.

Then up the hill I started climbing,
And found upon the top a dwelling,
That all the men ever alive
Had not the cunning to describe
The beauty of that selfsame place,
Nor could compass in its space
Such another, its form to catch,
That might in beauty be its match,
Nor so wonderfully be wrought
That it still astounds my thought
And makes my spirits down to sink,
If on that castle I do think,
Such that the mighty beauty,
The cast of it, and the subtlety
I cannot to you now describe,

My wit indeed will not suffice.
Yet nonetheless all the substance
I have yet in my remembrance,
So that I thought, by Saint Giles,
All was of gemstone, of beryls,
Both the castle and the tower
And the hall too, every bower,
Without sections or joinings;
But many subtle compassings,
Gargoyles there and pinnacles,
Sculptures fine and tabernacles
I saw, and as many windows
As flakes fall in great snows.
And in each of the pinnacles
Were sundry niches and angles,
In which there stood, all without,
The whole castle, all about,
All manner there of minstrels
And entertainers, telling tales
Both with weeping, and in game,
Of all that belongs to Fame.
There I heard, playing on a harp
That sounded both loud and sharp,
Orpheus full skilfully,
And at his side, fast nearby,
Sat the harpist Arion,
And the Eacides, Chiron,
And other harpists many a one,
And the Breton Glascurion;
And lesser harpists at their ease
Sat below them on various seats,
And up towards them did gape
To copy them, as does an ape,
Or as art counterfeits nature.
Then behind them I saw there,
Far away, all by themselves,
Many thousand times twelve

Who made loud minstrelsy
On bagpipe and woodwind free
And many another kind of pipe,
Who skilfully began to pipe
Both on flute and on reed,
Played at feasts where men eat;
And many fifes and clarions,
And pipes made of green corn,
Like those the little shepherds wield
Who guard the sheep in the field.

There saw I no Tityrus then,
But Pseustis the Athenian,
And Marsyas who lost his skin,
From his face and chest, and shin,
Because he once purposed, lo,
To pipe it better than Apollo.
There saw I famous old, and young
Pipers of the German tongue,
Teaching love-dances, springs,
Reels, and such foreign things.

Then saw I in another place
Standing in a larger space,
Those that make a warlike sound
With trumpet, cornet, clarion,
Since in fighting and blood-shedding
There is commonly trumpeting.

There heard I, blowing, Misenus
Of whom great Virgil tells us.
There I heard Joab also,
Theodamas and others so,
And all who played the clarion
In Catalunya and Aregon,
Who famous in their time were,
As teachers, I saw blowing there.
There I saw sitting on other seats,
Playing on instruments a-plenty,
Which I cannot name even,

More than there are stars in Heaven,
About whom I choose not to rhyme,
For your ease, and to save time:
For time once lost, know it ye
In no way can recovered be.

There I saw conjurors' tricks,
Magicians and illusionists,
Spiritualists, enchantresses,
Old witches, and sorceresses,
Who employ incantations
And also their fumigations,
And scholars too, who know full well
All of magic natural,
Who skilfully work their intent
To make, at the ascendant sent,
Effigies, lo, through which magic
They strive to make men whole or sick.
There saw I you, Queen Medea,
And Calypso too and Circe;
There saw I Hermes Ballenus,
Elymas, and Simon Magus.
There saw I, and knew by name
Those who by such art win fame.
There saw I Colin, conjuror,
Upon a stage of sycamore
Perform a stranger thing to tell;
I saw him place a whole windmill
Underneath a walnut shell.

Why should I make a longer tale
Of all the people on display,
From now unto Doomsday?

When I did all these folk behold
And found myself free to go
And had mused a lengthy while
Upon these walls made of beryl,
That shone more brightly than does glass
And made greater than it was

Everything to seem that is,
As Fame's very nature is,
I began to roam until I found
The castle-gate at my right hand,
Which so well carved was
That never such another has
Been, yet was haphazardly
Wrought, as oft as designedly.
There is no need for me to tell,
Or make you too long to dwell,
Upon this gate's decorations,
Designs, and ornamentations,
Nor how they're named in masonry,
Such as corbels, filled with imagery.
But Lord, so fair it was to see,
For it was all with gold replete!
But in I went and that anon;
There met I crying many a one,
'Largesse, largesse, flow thee well!
God save the lady of this castle,
Our own gentle lady Fame,
And those that wish to win a name
From us!' Thus heard I cry them all,
And fast they came from the hall,
And scattered nobles and sterling.
And some were crowned like to kings,
With crowns with diamond lozenges;
And many ribbons, many fringes
Adorned their clothes right truly.
Then at last I perceived me
That heralds and their assistants
Who sound rich folks' praise, present
Were they all; and every man
Of them, as I tell and can,
Had each one donned a vesture
That men call their coat-armour,
Embroidered wonderfully rich,

Though none shared a like stitch.
But I am not, so may I thrive,
About to tell you and describe
All the heraldry that they wore,
That they on their tunics bore,
For to me it is impossible;
Men might make of them a bible
Twenty feet thick, as I know.
Truly, whoever watched that show,
Might there all the arms have seen
Of famous folk that there have been
In Europe, Africa, Asia's three,
Since first began true chivalry.
Lo, how could I now tell all this?
Nor of the hall now, what need is
To tell to you that every wall
Of it, and floor, and roof and all
Was plated half a foot all thick
With gold, and no inferior trick,
But like to prove in every wise
Fine as a ducat in Venice lies,
Of which too few now fill my purse?
And they were set as thick with bursts
Of gems, full of stones of beauty,
That men read of in *Lapidary*,
As grasses grow in the mead;
But it would take too long to read
The names, and therefore on I pace.
But in this rich delightful place
That which was called Fame's hall,
There was no press of folk at all,
Nor crowding of a mob always.
But all on high upon a dais,
Sat on a throne Imperial,
That was made of ruby all
The which carbuncle is called,
I saw perpetually installed,

A feminine creature;
That never, formed by Nature,
Was such another ever seen.
At first, truth to tell it seemed
To me that she appeared so slight,
That the length of a cubit quite
Was longer than she seemed to be;
But a short while later, she
Stretched herself so wonderfully
That with her feet on earth was she,
And with her head she touched Heaven
Where shine the planets seven.
And thereto, according to my wit,
I saw a greater wonder yet
When I her eyes did then behold;
Their number never could be told,
For as many eyes had she
As feathers upon fowls be,
Or were on the beasts four
That to God's throne did honour,
As John wrote in *Apocalypse*.
Her hair, so wavy was and crisp,
As burnished gold it shone to see.
And truth to tell, also she
Had as many pricked-up ears
And tongues as on beasts are hairs,
And on her feet growing free
Partridges wings, assuredly.
But Lord, the jewellery and riches
I saw sitting on this goddess!
And Lord, the heavenly melody
Of songs, filled with harmony
I heard about her throne, they sang
That all the palace walls they rang;
So sang the mighty Muse, she
Who is called Calliope,
And her eight sisters of the peak,

Who by their faces seem so meek.
And evermore, eternally,
They sing of Fame, and thus to me:
'Praised be thou and thy name,
Goddess of renown or fame!'
Then was I aware at last
As I my eyes upward cast,
That this same noble queen
On her shoulders did sustain
The coats of arms and the name
Of those who had mighty fame:
Alexander, and Hercules –
A poisoned shirt caused his decease.
And thus I found seated there this goddess
In majesty, honour and riches,
Of which I'll cease for now
To tell you more of anyhow.
Then saw I standing on each side,
Right down to the doors wide
From the dais, many a pillar
Of metal shining not full clear;
But though of no great richness,
Yet they were made for nobleness,
And in them great significance.
And folk worthy of reverence,
Of whom I'll tell you and can,
Upon the pillar saw I stand.
First of all, lo, there saw I
Upon a pillar standing high
That was of lead and iron fine,
Him of the sect Saturnine,
The Hebrew Josephus, the old,
That the Jewish chronicles told,
And bore on his shoulders he
All the fame of Jewry.
And by him stood another seven,
Wise and worthy to mention,

To help him bear the charge
It was so heavy and so large.
And since they wrote of battles
As well as other marvels,
Therefore was, lo, this pillar
Of which I tell you here
Of lead and iron both, for this
Iron Mar's own metal is,
Who is the god of battle,
And the lead, without fail,
Is, lo, the metal of Saturn
Who does in full large circuit turn.
Then stood forth in many a row,
Lines of those whom I did know
Though I shall not their order tell,
To leave more time to dwell
On these, of whom you'll read.
There I saw standing, indeed,
Upon an iron pillar strong
That painted was all along
With tigers' blood on all its faces,
He of Toulouse, that high Statius,
Who bore of Thebes the fame
Upon his shoulders, and the name
Also of cruel Achilles.
And by him stood, if you please,
Full wondrous high on a pillar
Of iron, he the great Homer,
And with him Dares and Dictys
In front, and also Lollius,
And Guido delle Colonne, so,
And Geoffrey of Monmouth; lo,
And each of these, as I have joy,
Industriously wrote of Troy.
So heavy thereof was the fame
That to bear it was no game.
Yet I began full well to see

Between them lay some enmity.
The one said Homer told lies,
Feigning in his verses wise,
And to the Greeks was favourable,
Therefore he held it but a fable.

Then saw I standing on a pillar
Of tin-plated iron clear
That Latin poet, mighty Virgil,
Who had borne a long while
The fame of pious Aeneas.

And next him on a pillar was
In copper, Venus' clerk, Ovid,
Who has wondrously spread
The great god of Love's name
Abroad: he bore well his fame
Upon his pillar also high,
So I might see it with my eye,
Because this hall of which I write
Had grown in length, breadth and height,
Greater by a thousand fold
Than before, I did behold.

Then, on a pillar, did I see,
Of iron wrought full sturdily,
The great poet, mighty Lucan,
He on his shoulders bore then
So high up, that I might see,
The fame of Caesar and Pompey.
And by him stood all those clerks.
Who wrote of Rome mighty works,
That if I wished their names to tell
All too long I here would dwell.

Next to him on a pillar stood
Of sulphur, as in some mad mood,
Claudian, the truth to tell,
Who bore all the fame of Hell,
Of Pluto and of Proserpine,
Who queen is of its dark design.

What shall I tell you more of this?
The hall was as full, and is,
Of those who wrote of ancient quests
As in a wood there are rooks' nests;
But it would be a troubled matter
Were all those quests to be writ here
They wrote, or to name them right.
But while I beheld this sight,
I heard a noise approach, as live
Bees will make inside a hive,
Before their time of out-flying;
Just such a kind of murmuring,
For all the world it seemed to me.

Then I looked about me carefully,
And there came entering the hall
A right great company withal,
And that from sundry regions,
Of all kinds and all conditions
That dwell on earth under the moon,
Poor and rich. And began as soon
As they had come into the hall,
Down upon their knees to fall
Before that same noble queen,
And said: 'Grant us, lady, e'en
Of thy grace, each one a boon!'
And some she granted it right soon,
And some refused, fair and kindly,
And some granted the contrary
Of all their asking, utterly;
But this I do tell you truly,
What her reasoning was, I missed.
For of this folk, I do insist,
They each had true fame deserved,
Though they were diversely served,
Just as her sister, Dame Fortune,
Is accustomed to serve us too.

Now listen then how she would pay

Those who of her grace did pray,
And yet, lo, all this company I
Heard tell the truth, never a lie.

‘Madame,’ said they, ‘we be
Folk who here beseech of thee
That you grant us now our fame
And let our works acquire a name;
In full compensation
For good work grant expectation.’

‘I deny it,’ quoth she anon,
‘Of fame from me you’ll get none,
By God, and therefore go your way.’

‘Alas!’ quoth they, ‘and well-away!
Tell us what the cause might be?’

‘Because I like it not,’ quoth she;
‘No man shall speak of you amiss,
No harm, nor good, nor that nor this.’
And with that word she did call
Her messenger within the hall
And bade that he be swiftly gone,
On pain of blindness anon,
To fetch Aeolus, god of winds:
‘In Thrace, you’ll discover him,
And bid him bring his clarion
That is full various in its sound,
And is named Great Renown,
With which he noises all around
Those names to be praised by me;
And also say to him that he
Must bring his other clarion,
Men call Slander in every town,
With which he is wont to defame
Whom I wish, and bring them shame.’

The messenger was swiftly gone
And found where, in a cave of stone
In that country known as Thrace,
Aeolus, far from any grace,

Held the winds in his recess
And did them so tight compress,
That they like wild bears did roar,
He bound, and pressed them so sore.

The eager messenger did cry:
'Rise up,' quoth he, 'and swiftly fly
Till at my lady's house you be,
And take your clarions with thee,
And speed thee.' Aeolus anon
Gave to a servant called Triton
His clarions to bear, and lo
Allowed a certain wind to blow
That blew so hideous and high,
No cloud was left in all the sky
Throughout the heavens long and wide.

Aeolus nowhere did abide
Till he had knelt at Fame's feet,
With the man called Triton, he
Then stood there as still as stone.
And here withal there came anon
Another huge company
Of good folk, who began to plead,
'Lady, grant us now our fame,
And let our works acquire a name
Now, in honour of nobleness,
And that God your soul may bless!
For we have deserved it all,
And it is right we find reward.'

'As I may thrive, 'quoth she, 'you fail;
Good works shall you naught avail
To obtain your fame from me.
But know you I shall grant ye
All the evils known to fame
Ill reputation, and worse name,
Though you good have deserved;
Now go your way, for you are served.
And you, Aeolus,' quoth she,

‘Take up your trumpet, let all see,
Known as Slander, the foolish one,
And blow their fame, so everyone
Will speak harm of them, nastiness,
Instead of good and worthiness.
You must blow the contrary there
Of what they’ve done, well or fair.’

‘Alas,’ thought I, ‘what misadventures
Have come to these sorry creatures,
For they, amongst all the press,
Shall thus be shamed, though guiltless!
But what, then! It needs must be.’

What did Aeolus next but he
Took up his black trumpet of brass
That fouler than the devil was,
And began this trump to blow
As if all the world he’d overthrow,
So that through every region
Went this foul trumpet’s sound
As swift as pellet from a gun
When fire’s through the powder run.
And such a smoke began to wend
Out of his foul trumpet’s end,
Black, blue, greenish, darkest red,
As is formed where men melt lead,
Lo, all on high from the fuel!
Another thing I saw right well,
That the further that it ran
To wax the greater it began,
As does the river from a well,
And stank, like the pit of Hell.
Alas, thus was their shame rung,
Though guiltless, on every tongue!

Then came a third company
And to the dais went swiftly,
Down on their knees fell anon
And said: ‘We are, every one,

Folk who have full and truly
 Deserved fame all rightfully,
 And pray you that all may know
 This, as is right, and trumpet blow.’
 ‘I grant,’ quoth she, ‘since I so wish,
 That the works you’ve accomplished
 Be known, and you’ll have, readily,
 So you may spite your enemies,
 More fame than you earned, anon.
 Now,’ quoth she, ‘your trumpet down,
 You Aeolus, so black of brow,
 And take your other trumpet now
 They call Renown, and blow it so
 That through the world their fame shall go
 All leisurely, and not too fast,
 Yet let it still be known at last.’
 ‘Full gladly, lady mine,’ he said,
 And trumpet of gold took instead
 And set it swiftly to his mouth
 And blew it east and west and south
 And north, as loud as any thunder,
 That everyone thought it a wonder,
 So far it ran ere it was spent.
 And all the breath, in truth, that went
 Out of that trumpet’s mouth smelled
 As if men a pot of balsam held
 Within a basket full of roses;
 Such favour to their fame he shows.
 And along with this I did see,
 There came a fourth company,
 But certain they were wondrous few,
 And they stood in line, anew,
 And said: ‘For certain, lady bright,
 We’ve done well with all our might;
 Yet we care naught for our fame.
 Hide our works and our name,
 For God’s love, it’s certain we

Have done the whole gratuitously,
And for no other manner of thing.’
‘I grant you all of your asking,’
Quoth she: ‘let your work be as dead.’
With that about I turned my head
And saw anon a fifth crowd
Who to this lady began to bow
Down on their knees anon to fall,
And then they begged her all
To hide their good works, and more
They said they gave not a straw
For fame or any such renown,
For they, in contemplation
For love of God had them wrought;
Nor of fame desired they aught.
‘What?’ quoth she, ‘and are you mad?
Do you prefer good works to bad,
And yet would earn from them no fame?
Are you too proud to bear my name?
Nay, you’ll live, each and every one!
Blow your trumpet, and that anon,’
Quoth she, ‘you, Aeolus, these folk’s
Work ring out, I command, in notes
That all the world may of it hear.’
And he did blow their fame so clear
On his golden clarion
That through the world went the sound
Both keenly and slow and soft,
Till at last it was aloft.
Then came the sixth company,
And cried to Fame earnestly.
Right verily in this manner
They said: ‘Mercy, lady dear!
To tell it honestly, as it is,
We have done neither that nor this,
But idled, all our lives, you see.
Nevertheless, yet pray we,

That we might have as wide a fame
And renown, and well-known name,
As they who have done noble deeds
And all their wishes have achieved
In love as in all other things,
Though to us came never a ring,
Nor aught else, by women sent,
Nor in their hearts had they intent
To show us more than friendship here,
Rather they'd see us on our bier.
Yet let us to the people seem
Such as the world may deem
Ones that women love madly.
It shall do as much good surely,
And our hearts as much avail
To balance comfort with travail
As if we'd won it with much labour;
For it's a dearly bought honour
That costs us our mortal ease.
And yet you may us further please:
Let us be considered thereto
Worthy, wise and good also.
And rich, and fortunate in love.
For God's love, who sits above,
Though we may not the bodies gain
Of women, yet, so God you save,
Let men glue on us the name;
Suffice it that we win the fame.'
 'I grant it,' quoth she, 'by my troth!
Now Aeolus, without sloth,
Take your golden trumpet, see,
And blow as they have asked of me,
So every man were at his ease,
Though he fish in barren seas.'
Aeolus began so to blow
That through the world all was known.
 Then came the seventh group anon

And fell to their knees, each one,
And said: 'Lady, grant us soon
The same thing, the same boon,
As for these last folk was done.'
'Fie on you,' quoth she, 'each one,
You fattened swine, idle wretches,
Full of rotten slothful itches!
What, false thieves, is it you would
Be famous, and yet no way could
Deserve it, and care not a jot?
Men rather to hang you ought!
For you are like the lazy cat
That wanted fish, but know you what,
He refused to wet his paws.
Foul food come to your jaws
And to mine too if this I grant,
Or do you favour as you want!
You Aeolus, King of Thrace,
Go, blow these folk a sorry grace,'
Quoth she, 'anon, would you know how,
Just as I'll tell to you right now:
Say: "These are they that wanted honour
Yet would do no kind of labour,
Nor no good, yet their fame result,
And men to think the belle Iseult
For love of them did ever burn,
When she that grinds at a quern
Is far too good to ease their heart.'"

Then Aeolus up did start,
And with his black clarion
Began to blast out a sound
As loud as blows the wind in Hell.
And also, the truth to tell,
The sound was as full of japes,
As grimaces bands of apes.
And it went all the world about,
So that all at them did shout

And laugh at them, as they were mad,
Such merriment of them they had.

Then came another company,
That had committed treachery,
The harm of which is wickedness
Greater than any heart could guess,
And begged her to grant them fame
And bring upon them no shame,
But grant them praise and wide renown,
And trumpet them by clarion.
'Not so!' quoth she, 'it would be vice;
Although in me no justice lies
It pleases me not this to do,
Nor do I wish to grant it you.'

Then came some leaping in a rout,
Hitting, striking, all about,
Every man upon the crown,
That all the hall began to sound,
And saying: 'Lady, loved and dear,
We are such folk as you may hear,
To tell all the tale aright,
Who are scoundrels, take delight
In every kind of wickedness
As good folk do in their goodness,
And joy in being known as scoundrels
Full of vice and wicked rascals,
Wherefore we pray you, in a row,
That our fame as such be known
In every way just as it is.'

'I grant you' quoth she, 'all this.
But who are you, this tale telling,
Who wear a stripe on your legging
And on your hood a little bell?'
'Madame,' quoth he, 'truth to tell,
I am the very scoundrel, that is
He who burned the shrine of Isis
In Athens, lo, that selfsame city.'

‘And wherefore did you so?’ quoth she.
‘By my thrift,’ quoth he, for fame:
I would have gladly won a name,
As other folk had in that town,
Although they were of great renown
For virtue and their qualities;
Yet rogues have fame as well as these,
Thought I, for their wickedness,
As good folk have for their goodness,
And since I may not win the one,
The other shall not be foregone.
And to earn from Fame my hire,
The temple I set all a-fire.
Now let our fame be trumpeted,
And may you be truly blessed.’

‘Gladly,’ quoth she; ‘you, Aeolus,
Did you hear what they ask of us?’
‘Madame, yes, full well,’ quoth he,
And I will trumpet it indeed!’
And took his black trumpet fast,
And began to puff and blast,
Till it had reached the world’s end.

At that I began about to wend,
For one who close at my back stood
Spoke as if to do me good
Saying: ‘Friend, what is your name?
Have you come hither to win fame?’
‘Nay, friend’ quoth I, ‘forsooth.
I came not hither, thanking you,
For any such cause, by my head,
Enough for me that when I’m dead
No man on my name sets hand.
I myself best know how I stand:
As to what I feel or think,
I will myself drink that drink,
Truly, for the greater part,
Insofar as I know my art.’

‘What are you here for, then?’ quoth he.
Quoth I, ‘That will I tell thee,
The reason why I stand here:
Some new tidings for to hear,
Some new thing, I know not what,
Tidings of either this or that,
Of love or such things glad.
For certainly he that me bade
Come hither, he said to me
I should both hear and see,
In this place, wondrous things;
But there are no such tidings
As I do mean.’ ‘No?’ quoth he,
And I answered: ‘No indeed!
For well I know, and I knew it
Since ever I first had wit,
That some folk desire fame,
In diverse ways, renown and name;
But true I never knew how
Or where Fame dwelt till now,
Nor anything of her description,
Nor also of her condition,
Nor the ordering of her domain,
Until the time I hither came.’
‘What then be, lo, these but tidings:
That you yourself now hither bring,
Which you have heard?’ quoth he to me.
‘But now, no matter, since I see
What you now desire to hear.
Come forth, and stay no longer here,
And I will you, with word and deed,
To such another place lead,
Where you’ll hear tidings, many a one.’
Then with him forth I was gone
Out of the castle, truth to speak.
Then saw I standing in a valley,
Below the castle fast by us,

A house, and that House of Daedalus,
That the Labyrinth named is,
Was not so wonderful as this,
Nor half so cunningly wrought.
And evermore, as swift as thought,
This wondrous house about went
Its turning movements never spent.
And from it came so great a noise,
That, had it stood upon the Oise,
Men might have heard it easily
In Rome, I believe that truly.
And the noise that I there heard,
For all the world, forth it fared
As does the whirring of a stone
From a siege-engine thrown.

This house, to which I was led,
Was made of twigs, yellow, red,
And green too, and some were white,
Of which men make bird-cages tight,
Or of which they make panniers,
Or else the baskets for carriers;
So that because of wind and twigs,
The house was filled with squeaks
And also full it was of creaking
And full of much loose working;
And this house too had entrances
As many as leaves on the trees
In summer when they are green;
And in the roof you might have seen
A thousand holes, or even more,
To let the sound out of it soar.

And by day, at every tide,
All the doors were open wide,
And by night too all unlocked;
No doorkeeper's there to stop
Any strange tiding, in they race;
No rest is there within that place

For it is always full of tidings,
Of loud ones or of whisperings;
And every corner there does ring,
With gossip and with murmuring
Of war, of peace, of marriages,
Of rest, of labour, voyages,
Of abodes, of death, of life,
Of love, of hate, accord, of strife,
Of fame, of loss, and of winning,
Of health, of sickness, of building,
Of fair winds, and also tempests,
Of pestilence in folk and beasts,
Of diverse transmutations
Of power, and of kingdoms,
Of trust, of fear, of jealousy,
Of wit, of wisdom, of folly,
Of plenty, and of great famine,
Of dearth, of scarcity, of ruin,
Of good or misgovernment,
Of fire, and diverse accident.

And lo, this house of which I write,
Be sure, it was no petty sight,
For it was sixty miles in length;
Though the timbering lacks strength,
Yet it is built to long endure
While it pleases Chance, for
She is the mother of all tidings,
As the sea is of wells and springs;
And it was shaped like a cage.

‘For sure,’ quoth I, ‘despite my age,
I never saw house as here there is.’
And as I wondered at this,
Upon the house aware was I
How my eagle, fast nearby,
Was perched high upon a stone;
And to him straight I did go
And said thus: ‘I pray thee

To wait awhile here for me
 For love of God, and let me see
 What wonders in this place there be,
 For yet, perhaps, I may hear
 Some good from it, or something here
 That would please me ere I went.’
 ‘Peter! – that is my intent,’
 Quoth he to me; ‘therefore I wait;
 But one thing now I must state:
 That, unless I lead you within,
 No way will you ever get in,
 Or find the way, without a doubt,
 So fast it whirls, lo, about.
 But since that Jove of his grace,
 As I have said, would you solace,
 Finally with all these things,
 With strange sights and tidings,
 To rid you of your heaviness –
 Such pity has he on your distress
 Which you suffer graciously,
 Knowing yourself utterly
 Deprived of every bliss,
 Since Fortune, working amiss,
 The fruit of all your heart’s rest
 Makes languish, at point of death –
 And he, through his power over all,
 Would bring you ease, though it be small,
 And gave an express commandment
 To which I am obedient,
 To aid you with all my might
 And guide and teach you aright
 Of where you might most tidings hear;
 You’ll soon learn many of them here.’
 With these words, without a pause,
 He caught me up between his claws,
 And at a window in me brought,
 So in the house I was, I thought,

And with that, it's turning spent,
No longer about, I thought, it went,
And he set me on the floor a-down.
But such a congregation I found
Of folk that seemed to roam about,
Some within, and some without,
As never was seen, nor shall be yet;
That surely in this world is not
So great a number formed by Nature,
Nor have died so many a creature;
So that scarcely in that place
Had I a foot's breadth of space;
And everyone that I saw there
Whispered in each other's ear
A new tiding privately
Or else spoke out openly
Right thus and said: 'Do you know
What happened just lately, lo?'
 'No' quoth the other, 'tell me what;
And then he told him this and that,
And swore thereto that it was true:
'Thus did he say' and 'Thus did do,'
'Thus shall it be,' 'Thus I heard said,'
'This you'll find,' 'That I dare allege' –
So that all the folk now alive
Have not the skill to describe
The things that I heard there,
Aloud and whispered in my ear.
But the great wonder was this:
When one had heard a thing, his
First act was to go find another
And swiftly tell to his brother
The same that to him was told
Before it was two minutes old,
And added something to each,
To each tiding, in his speech,
Making more of it than before.

And no sooner had the other
Parted from him than he met
With a third; and ere he yet
Had paused a moment, told him all;
Whether the news was true or false,
Yet he would tell it nonetheless,
And evermore with more excess
Than at the first. Thus north and south
Went every speck from mouth to mouth,
And that increasing ever so
As fire is wont to catch and flow
From a spark blown amiss
Till all the city ruined is.

And when it had fully sprung,
And waxed more on every tongue
Than ever it was, it went anon
Up to a window and was gone;
Or, if it might not out there slip,
It would creep out at some crevice,
And fly forth fast and at once.

And sometimes I saw anon
A falsehood, and a truth all sober
That by chance arrived together
Out at a window for to race,
When they met there at that place,
They were checked both the two,
And neither of them could get through
For the other, so in a crowd
Each of them began to cry aloud,
'Let me go first!' – 'Nay, let me!
And here I will promise thee,
On condition you'll do so,
That I will never from you go,
But be your own sworn brother!
We will meld us each with other,
That no man be he ever so wrath,
Shall handle one of us, but both

At once, whatever he believe,
Come we at morrow, or at eve,
Be we cried, or whispered around.'
Thus saw I false and true compound
Together, and fly abroad as one.

Thus out of the holes were gone
Every tiding straight to Fame,
And she gave every one a name
According to their disposition,
And gave them also a duration,
Some to wax and wane soon,
As does the fair, white moon,
And let them go. There I might see
Winged wonders swiftly flee,
Twenty thousand in a rout,
As Aeolus blew them about.

And Lord, in that house I was in
Was many a sailor, and pilgrim
His satchel full of lies, therein
Intermingled with tidings,
And then alone by themselves,
O, many a thousand times twelve,
Saw I also pardoners,
Couriers, and messengers,
Their boxes full of lies crammed
As vessels ballasted with sand.
And as I roamed and fastest went
Of all, about my own intent,
For to amuse myself and learn,
And also some new tidings earn
That I might hear from some country
Which shall not be revealed by me –
Since there is no need, truly;
Folk can sing them better than me,
For all must out, sooner or later,
All the barn's sheaves through the gate here –
I heard a great noise withal

In a corner of the hall,
Where men of love tidings told,
And I thither ward did behold
How came rushing everyone
As fast as ever they could run;
And each cried: 'What's this I hear?'
And others replied: 'I've no idea'
And when they were all in a heap,
Those behind began to leap
And clambered over each other fast
And up their nose and eyes did cast,
And trod fast on each other's heels,
And stamped as men do driving eels.
At the last I saw a man,
Whose name I have not to hand,
Yet he seemed to me to be
A man of great authority...

Chaucer left the House of Fame unfinished

End of the House of Fame