Portrait, Preamble, Prologue and Tale of the Man of Law
Here is the description of the Man of Law from the General Prologue

The Sergeant of the Law is a successful but unostentatious, high-ranking lawyer who sometimes functions as a judge. We are told with just a touch of irony, that he is, like many of the pilgrims, the very best at what he does, a busy man, but "yet he seemed busier than he was."

A SERGEANT of the law, wary and wise
A ranking lawyer
That often hadd been at the Parvise
lawyer's meeting place
There was also, full rich of excellence.
great dignity
Discreet he was and of great reverence;
judge / circuit court
He seemèd such, his wordès were so wise.
knowledge
Justice he was full often in assize
By patent and by plain commission.¹
In books / judgements
For his sciènce and for his high renown
By patent and by plain commissïon.
knowledge
Of fees and robès had he many a one.
W. the Conqueror / handed down
So great a purchaser was nowhere none;
Phrases could also draw up documents
All was fee simple to him in effect.
easy money (pun)
His purchasingè might not be infect.
n'as = ne was = wasn't
Nowhere so busy a man as he there n'as,
n'as = ne was = wasn't
And yet he seemèd busier than he was.
In books / judgements
In termès had he case and doomès all
That from the time of King William were fall.
W. the Conqueror / handed down
Thereto he could endite and make a thing;
could also draw up documents
There couldè no wight pinch at his writing.²
no person c. complain
And every statute could he plein by rote.
knew completely by heart
He rode but homely in a medley coat
simply in a tweed (?)
Girt with a ceint of silk with barrès small.
bound w. a belt / stripes
Of his array tell I no longer tale.

Introduction

¹ 315: *patent / plain commission*: technical terms meaning by royal appointment.

² 326: "Nobody could fault any document he had drawn up" (*endited*). Clearly line 327 is a deliberate exaggeration.
to
The Man of Law’s Tale

The Man of Law’s tale belongs to the category of romance, and to its subcategory of pious romance, romances being stories of love and adventure in a world where the preternatural sometimes intervenes. In *this* pious romance, human love takes second place to love of the divine, the adventures are all trials of endurance in the service of God rather than of a human lover or lord, and the one central character who has the adventures is not a knight but a woman. The tale is, after a fashion, the life of a saint, the kind of woman we see again in the *Clerk’s Tale*, a Christian wife who endures impossible cruelties and misfortunes with a saintly patience which finally triumphs over everything. Miraculously surviving in a small boat on the sea for years, yes years, alone or with her little child only, she might well have figured in the *Golden Legend*, the great medieval collection of Saints’ lives, rather than in the Saints Legends of Cupid which, the Lawyer rightly says, Chaucer has written earlier to honor the “saints” of secular love. Perhaps Chaucer is writing this pious legend for some devout patroness to make up for that series of pagan stories, *The Legend of Good Women*, as he had written *that* in “penance” for having written badly of a woman in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

It is an old and respected critical practice to see if one can match the tale to the teller, as one can manage to do with a fair number of narratives in the *Canterbury Tales*, but it is difficult to match the successful, prosperous and not noticeably pious Lawyer of the General Prologue with this sentimental tale of female piety. Indeed, the whole manuscript compilation containing the tale is an odd mixture: first the rather pretentious showing off of Chaucer’s astronomical knowledge which is attributed to the Host of the pilgrimage, a simple innkeeper, followed by an equally unlikely philosophical outburst by the same Host, followed by a humorous passage where Chaucer has the Man of Law make fun of him, followed in turn by a kind of “copyright” or advertiser’s list of works Chaucer has written, followed by a promise to tell a tale in prose which then turns out to be verse (rhyme royal stanzas), and preceded by a prologue deploring poverty, which seems to have little to do with what precedes or follows. The whole thing bears all the marks of somewhat unfinished work.

This latter aspect is reinforced by the fact that the tale is not clearly textually connected with what goes before or after, but its positioning may well be Chaucer’s tentative effort at providing some diversity in the order of his narratives. The devotion and strenuous virtue of this tale’s protagonist are a noticeable contrast to the romping sexuality of the fabliau tales that go immediately ahead of it in the first fragment, and to the stout defence of frequent and
satisfying married sex in the Wife of Bath’s long prologue immediately after in the Ellesmere manuscript. The sexual virtue of this heroine is as lofty as her exalted rank.

A weakness for royalty and aristocracy afflicted even hagiographers in medieval times, so our heroine is one of the nobility like many other virgins and martyrs in the *Golden Legend* -- the daughter of an emperor, in fact. Custance or Constance, the well-named heroine of this tale, is not so much a character as a characteristic, a virtue, Constancy. She remains true to God and the faith no matter what misfortunes are inflicted by cruel mothers-in-law (a variant of cruel stepmothers). Mention of cruel mothers-in-law brings up the other category to which the story clearly belongs: the folktale, with unlikely coincidences and impossible adventures often balanced in twos or threes: Constance is married twice, she is subverted by a mother-in-law twice, she is abandoned to the sea twice, she is rescued twice, and so forth. The other “characters” in her tale are almost equally allegorical and lacking in interest for their own sake; indeed all but the most important are nameless, though most of them had names in Chaucer’s immediate source. Moreover, the narrator frequently injects himself into the tale with moralizing comments; sometimes expressing a wish for the success of the heroine or uttering execrations on her tormentors, after the fashion of romances that bear the marks of a minstrel’s oral recitation, like *Havelok the Dane*, though here at considerably more length. And it is this length of narratorial commentary that the *Man of Law’s Tale* parts company with the folktale or popular oral storytelling. It occupies about half of the space; leaving only the rest for the main narrative. This disproportion partially accounts for the lack of vigorous movement in the tale which does, nevertheless, arrive at a happy ending, of sorts

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**Preamble to the Man of Law's Tale**

*The narrator gets to display his astronomical knowledge*

Our Hostë saw well that the brightë sun  
The ark of his artificial day hath run  
The fourthë part, and half an hour and more,  
And, though he were not deep y-stert in lore,  
He wist it was the eighëteenëth day  
Of April, that is messenger to May;  
And saw well that the shadow of every tree  
Was as in length the samë quantity  
That was the body erect that causëd it.

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3 artificial day is the time the sun is above the horizon. Commentators tell us that on this date the shadow of an object was the same length as the object, a rare event. They also say that the Host or Chaucer has made an error and it is closer to 9 than to 10 o’clock.
And therefore by the shadow he took his wit
That Phoebus, which that shone so clear and bright,
Degrees was five and forty clomb on height;
And for that day, as in that latitude,
It was ten of the clock, he gan conclude.
And suddenly he plight his horse about.

The Host turns philosopher

“Lordings,” quod he, “I warn you, all this rout,
The fourthé party of this day is gone.
Now, for the love of God and of Saint John,
Loseth no time, as farforth as you may.
Lordings, the timé wasteth night and day,
And steals from us, what privily sleeping,
And what through negligence in our waking,
As doth the stream that turneth never again,
Descending from the mountain into plain.
Well can Senec’ and many a philosopher
Bewaillen timé more than gold in coffer;
For loss of chattels may recovered be,
But loss of timé shendeth us,” quod he.
“It will not come again, withouten dread,
No more than willè Malkin’s maidenhead,
When she hath lost it in her wantonness.
Let us not mowlen thus in idleness.

The Host asks the Man of Law to tell a Tale. The Lawyer agrees,
and makes gentle fun of Chaucer

?Sir man of lawe,” quod he, “so have you bliss,
Tell us a tale anon, as forward is.
You been submitted, through your free assent,
To standen in this case at my judgement.
Acquit you now of your behest;
Then have you done your devoir at the least.”
“Hosté,” quod he, “depardieux, I assent;
To breakè forward is not mine intent.
Behest is debt, and I will holdé fain
All my behest, I can no better sayn.
For such law as a man gives another wight,
He should himselfen usen it, by right;
Thus will our text. But natheless, certáin,
I can right now no thrifty talè sayn
That Chaucer, though he can but lewèdly
On meters and on rhyming craftily,
Hath said them in such English as he can
Of oldè time, as knoweth many a man;
And if he have not said them, levè brother,
In one book, he has said them in another.
For he has told of lovers up and down
Morè than Ovid made of mention
In his epistelès, that been full old.
What should I tellen them, since they been told?

The Lawyer lists the names of aggrieved ladies in Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women

In youth he made of Ceyx and Alcyone,
And sithen has he spoke of every one, ¹
These noble wivès and these lovers eke.

Whoso that will his largè volume seek,
Cleped the Seintès Legend of Cupide,
There may he see the largè woundès wide
Of Lucrece, and of Babylon Thisbe;
The sword of Dido for the false Enee;
The tree of Phyllis for her Demophon;
The ’plaint of Dianire and of Hermyon,
Of Adriane, and of Isiphilee;
The barren islè standing in the sea;
The drownèd Leander for his Hero;

The tearès of Elaine, and eke the woe
Of Briseydè, and of thee, Ladomia;
The cruelty of thee, queen Medea,
Thy little children hanging by the hals,
For thy Jason, that was of love so false!
O Ypermystra, Penelope, Alceste,
Your wifehood he commendeth with the best!
But certainly no word ne writeth he
Of thilkè wick ensample of Canacee,
That loved her ownè brother sinfully;

Of suchè cursèd stories I say fie!
Or else of Tyro Appollonius,
How that the cursèd king Antiochus

¹ Many, though not all, of the stories mentioned here can be read in Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women, largely derived from Ovid’s Heroides.
The tale that follows is not in prose but in rhyme. Possibly the Lawyer was originally assigned a prose tale such as the Melibee, and when Chaucer changed his mind, he forgot to change this statement.

The prologue seems to have little to do with the Tale that follows, though it might be relevant to the prosperous Lawyer himself. It appears to deplore poverty and praise wealth.

Poverty, or rather the poor man afflicted with cold and hunger, is forced to beg or steal in spite of his shame.

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Thou blamest Christ, and sayst full bitterly,  
He mis-departeth riches temporal;  
Thy neighbor thou wittest sinfully,  
And sayst thou hast too little, and he hath all.  

“Parfay!” sayst thou, “some time he reckon shall,  
When that his tail shall burnen in the gleed,  
For he not helpeth needfull in their need.”

Hearken what is the sentence of the wise:  
Bet is to die than [to] have indigence;  
Thy selve neighbor will thee despise  
If thou be poor; farewell thy reverence!  
Yet of the wise man take this sentence:  
All the dayes of poor men been wick.  
Beware, therefore, ere thou come to that prick!

If thou be poor, thy brother hateth thee,  
And all thy friends flee from thee, alas!  
O rich merchants, full of weal been ye,  
O noble, O prudent folk, as in this case,  
Your bagges been not filled with ambes ace,  
But with sys cynk, that runneth for your chance;  
At Christemasse merry may you dance!

You seeken land and sea for your winnings;  
As wise folk you know all the estate  
Of regnes; you be fathers of tidings  
And tales, both of peace and of debate.  
I were right now of tales desolate,  
N’ere that a merchant, gone is many a year,  
Me taught a tale, which that you shall hear.

**The Man of Law’s Tale**

*Syrian merchants in Rome hear of the beauty and virtue of the Emperor’s daughter*

In Syria whilom dwelt a company  
Of chapmen rich, and thereto sad and true,  
That widè-herè sent their spicery,

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1 *ambes ace*: two ones, a losing throw; *sys cynk* (six cinque): 6 + 5, a winning throw.
Clothês of gold, and satins rich of hue.
Their chaffare was so thrifty and so new
That every wight hath dainty to chaffare
With them, and eke to sellen them their ware.

Now fell it that the masters of that sort
Have shapen them to Romè for to wend;
Were it for chapmanhood or for desport,
No other message would they thither send,
But come themselves to Rome, this is the end;
And in such place as thought them avantage
For their intent, they take their herbergage.

Sojournèd have these merchants in that town
A certain time, as fell to their pleasance.
And so befell that th' excellent renown
Of th’emperourès daughter, dame Custânce,
Reported was, with every circumstance,
Unto these Syrian merchants in such wise.
From day to day, as I shall you devise.

This was the common voice of every man:
Our emperor of Romè -- God him see! --
A daughter has, that since the world began,
To reckon as well her goodness as beatûy,
N’as never such another as is she.
I pray to God in honor her sustain,
And would she were of allè Europe queen.

In her is high beatûy, withouten pride,
Youthè, withouten greenhood or follý:
To all her workès virtue is her guide;
Humblëss hath slain in her all tyranny.
She is [the] mirror of all courtesy;
Her heart is very chamber of holiness,
Her hand, minister of freedom for almess.

And all this voice was sooth, as God is true.
But now to purpose let us turn again.
These merchants have done fraught their shippês [a]new,
And when they have this blissful maiden seen,
Home to Syríá been they went ful fain,
And done their needês as they have done yore,
And live in weal; I can say you no more.

*Back in Syria, the sultan, hearing the merchants’ report, falls in love with the Emperor’s daughter, sight unseen and regardless of religious differences between Christians and Muslims*

Now fell it that these merchants stood in grace
Of him that was the sultan of Syree;
For when they came from any strange place,
He would, of his benign courtesy,
Make them good cheer, and busily espy
Tidings of sundry reigns, for to lere
The wonders that they might see or hear.

Among other things, specially,
These merchants have him told of Dame Custâncé
So great noblesse in earnest, ceriously,
That this sultan hath caught so great pleasance
To have her figure in his rémembrance,
That all his lust and all his busy cure
Was for to love her while his life may dure.

Perâventure in thilk largè book
Which that men clepe the heavens, y-written was
With starrès, when that he his birthè took,
That he for love should have his death, alas!
For in the starrès, clearer than is glass,
Is written, God wot, whoso could it read,
The death of every man, withouten dreade.

In starrès, many a winter thereforeborn,
Was writh the death of Hector, Achilles,
Of Pompey, Julius, ere they were born;
The strife of Thebès; and of Hercules,
Of Samson, Turnus, and of Socrates
The death; but men’s wits be so dull
That no wight can well read it at the full.

This sultan for his privy council sent,
And, shortly of this matter for to pace,
He hath to them declarèd his intent,
And said them, certain, but he might have grace
To have Custâncé within a little space,
He n’as but dead; and chargèd them in hie
To shapen for his life some remedy.

Diversé men diversé thingés said;
They argumenten, casten up and down;
Many a subtle reason forth they laid;
They spoke of magic and abusioun.
But finally, as in conclusion,
They can not see in that no ávantage,
Nor in no other way, save marriæge.

Then saw they therein such difficulty
By way of reason, for to speak all plain,
Because that there was such diversity
Between their bothè lawès, that they sayn
They trowè, that no Christian prince would fain
Wedden his child under oure lawè sweet
That us was taught by Mahoun, our prophet.

And he answerd, “Rather than I loose
Custánce, I will be christened, doubtèless.
I must be hers, I may no other choose.
I pray you hold your argument in peace;
Saveth my life, and be not recchèless
To geten her that hath my life in cure;
For in this woe I may not long endure. ”

The match is formally arranged, and the lady sets out sorrowfully for Syria

What needeth greater dilatatïon?
I say by treaties and ambassadry,
And by the Popès mediatïon,
And all the Church, and all the chivalry,
That in destruction of mauemtry,
And in increase of Christè’s lawè dear,
They been accorded, so as you shall hear

How that the Sultan and his baronage
And all his liegès should y-christened be,
And he shall have Custánce in marriæge,
And certain gold, I n’ot what quantity;
And hereto found sufficient surèty.
This same accord was sworn on either side;
Now, fair Custánce, almighty God thee guide!
Now wouldé some men waiten, as I guess,
That I should telle all the purveiance
That th' emperor, of his great nobleness,
Hath shapen for his daughter, dame Custánce.
Well may men know that so great ordinance
May no man telle in a little clause
As was arrayed for so high a cause.

Bishops been shapen with her for to wend,
Lordés, ladies, knightés of renown,
And other folk enough,-- this is the end;
And notifié is throughout the town
That every wight, with great devotion,
Should prayen Christ that he this marriage
Receive in gree, and speed this viage.

260 The day is comen of her départíng;
I say, the woeful fatal day is come,
That there may be no longer tarrying,
But forward they them dressen, all and some.
Custánce, that was with sorrow all overcome,
Full pale ariest, and dresseth her to wend;
For well she sees there is no other end.

Alas! what wonder is it though she wept,
That shall be sent to strang nation
From friendés that so tenderly her kept,

270 And to be bounden under subjection
Of one, she know not his condition?
Husbandés been all good, and have been yore;
That knowen wives; I dare say you no more.

Father," she said, "thy wretched child Custánce,
Thy youngé daughter fostered up so soft,
And you, my mother, my sovereign pleasance
Over all thing, out-taken Christ on-loft,
Custánce your child her recommendeth oft
Unto your grace, for I shall to Syri',
Ne shall I never see you more with eye.

?Alas! unto the barbarous nation

1 The statement is, of course, deliberately ironic.
I must anon, since that it is your will;
But Christ, that starved for our redemption
So give me grace his hestês to fulfill!
I, wretched woman, no fors though I spill!
Women are born to thralldom and penânce,
And to be under mannês governance.”

I trow at Troy, when Pyrrhus broke the wall,
Or Ilion burned; at Thebês the citý;
N’ at Romê, for the harm through Hannibal
That Romans hath vanquished timês three,
N’as heard such tender weeping for pitý
As in the chamber was for her departing;
But forth she must, whe’r-so she weep or sing.

O firstê moving cruel firmament, ¹
With thy diurnal sway that crowdest aye
And hurlest all from east till occident
That naturally would hold another way,
Thy crowding set the heaven in such array
At the beginning of this fierce viage,
That cruel Mars hath slain this marriage.

Unfortunate ascendent tortuous,
Of which the lord is helpless fall, alas,
Out of his angle into the darkest house!
O Mars, O Atazir, as in this case!
O feeble moon, unhappy been thy pace!
Thou knittest thee there thou art not received;
There thou were well, from thence art thou waived.

Imprudent emperor of Rome, alas!
Was there no philosopher in all thy town?
Is no time bet than other in such case?
Of viage is there no election,
Namely to folk of high conditïon?
Not when a root is of a birth y-know?
Alas, we been too lewéd or too slow!

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¹ The complicated astrology -astronomy of this stanza and the next outlines the unfortunate disposition of the planets caused by the primum mobile ("first moving"), that is, in the Ptolemaic view of the heavens, the outside sphere of the nine spheres. At the time of Constance’s departure the position of Mars was malignant in some way, so that her marriage was doomed.
To ship is brought this woeful fairé maid
Solémpnély, with every circumstance.
“Now Jesu Christ be with you all” she said;
There n’is no more, but farewell, fair Custânce!
She paineth her to make good countenance;
And forth I let here sail in this mannér,
And turn I will again to my mattér.

The sultan’s mother cannot accept the proposed conversion to Christianity
but hides her resistance

The mother of the Sultan, well of vices,
Espiéd hath her son’s plain intent,
How he will let his oldè sacrifices;
And right anon she for her counsel sent,
And they been come to knowé what she meant. *
And when assembled was this folk in fere,
She set her down, and said as you shall hear.

“Lordés,” quod she, ?you knowen every one,
How that my son in point is for to let
The holy lawés of our al-Koran,
Given by Godde’s message Máhomet. *
But one avow to greatè God I hete,
The life shall rather out of my body start
Ere Máhomet’s law out of my heart!

What should us tiden of this newé law
But thralldom to our bodies and penánce,
And afterward in hellé to be draw,
For we renegéd Mahoun our créance?
But, lordés, will you maken ássurance,
As I shall say, assenting to my lore,
And I shall make us safe for evermore?”

They sworn and assenten, every man,
To live with her and die and by her stand,
And ever each, in the besté wise he can,
To strengthen her shall all his friendes fond;
And she hath this emprise y-take in hand,
Which you shall hearen that I shall devise,
And to them all she spoke right in this wise:
“We shall first feign us Christendom to take, --
Cold water shall not grieve us but a little
And I shall such a feast and revel make
That, as I trow, I shall the Sultan quite.
For though his wife be Christened ne’er so white,
She shall have need to wash away the red,
Though she a font full water with her led.”

O sultaness, root of iniquity!
Virago, thou Semirame the second! ¹
O serpent under femininity,
Like to the serpent deep in hell y-bound!
O feignèd woman, all that may confound
Virtue and innocence, through thy malice,
Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice!

O Satan, envious since thilkè day
That thou were chasèd from our heritáge,
Well knowest thou women the oldè way!
Thou madest Eva bring us in serváge;
Thou wilt fordo this Christian marriáge.
Thine instrument (so welaway the while!)
Makest thou of women, when thou wilt beguile.

This Sultaness, whom I thus blame and wary,
Let privily her counsel go their way.
What should I in this talè longer tarry?
She rideth to the Sultan on a day,
And said him that she would renege her lay,
And Christendom of priestès’ handès fong,
Repenting her she heathen was so long;

Beseeching him to do her that honoûr,
That she might have the Christian folk to feast, --
“To pleasen them I will do my laboûr.”
The sultan says: “I will do at your hest;”
And kneeling thanketh her of that request.
So glad he was, he n’istè what to say.
She kissed her son, and home she goes her way.

¹ Semiramis: a wicked queen of Babylon notorious to the people of the Middle Ages for her usurpation of power, her violence and lust.
The Christians arrive with the bride. They are invited to a great feast hosted by the sultan’s scheming mother.

Arrivèd been these Christian folk to land
In Syria, with a great solemnè rout,
And hastily this sultan sent his sond,
First to his mother, and all the regne about,
And said his wife was comen, out of doubt,
And prayed her for to ride against the queen,
The honour of his regnè to sustain.

Great was the press, and rich was the array
Of Syrians and Romans met yfere;
The mother of the Sultan, rich and gay,
Receiveith her with all so glad a cheer
As any mother might her daughter dear,
And to the nextè city there beside
A softè pace solémpnely they ride.

Not trow I the triumph of Julius,
Of which that Lucan maketh such a boast,
Was royaller ne morè curious
Than was th’ assembly of this blissful host.
But this scorpion, this wicked ghost,
The sultaness, for all her flattering,
Cast under this full mortally to sting.

The sultan comes himself soon after this
So royally, that wonder is to tell,
And welcomes her with allè joy and bliss.
And thus in mirth and joy I let them dwell;
The fruit of this mattèr is that I tell.
When timè came, men thought it for the best
That revel stint, and men go to their rest.

The timè came this oldè sultaness
Ordainèd hath this feast of which I told,
And to the feastè Christian folk them dress
In general, yea, bothè young and old.
Here may men feast and royalty behold,
And dainties more than I can you devise;
But all too dear they bought it ere they rise.
O sudden woe, that ever art successor  
To worldly bliss, spreyned with bitterness!  
Th’end of the joy of our worldly labor!  
Woe occupies the fine of our gladness.  
Harken this counsel for thy sikerness:  
Upon thy glad day have in thy mind  
The unaware woe or harm that comes behind.

For shortly for to t ell, at a word,  
The sultan and the Christians every one  
Been all to-hewn and sticked at the board,  
But it were only dame Custánce alone.  
This oldé sultanessé, cursed crone,  
Has with her friendés done this cursed deed,  
For she herself would all the country lead.

Constance, spared the sword, is put to sea in a boat.

Ne there was Syrian none that was converted,  
That of the counsel of the sultan wot,  
That he n’as all to-hewn ere he astarted.  
And Constance have they take anon, foot-hot,  
And in a ship all steerless, God wot,  
They have her set, and bid her learn [to?] sail  
Out of Syria againward to Itaille.

A certain treasure that she thither led,  
And, sooth to say, vitaillé great plentý  
They have given, and clothés eke she had,  
And forth she saileth in the salté sea.  
O my Custáncé, full of benignity,  
O emperorés youngé daughter dear,  
He that is lord of fortune be thy steer!

She blesseth her, and with full piteous voice  
Unto the cross of Christ thus saidé she  
?O clear, O wellful altar, holy cross,  
Red of the Lamb’s blood, full of pity,  
That washed the world from th’old iniquity,

1 The heroine’s name: on a few occasions I have used the spelling Constance rather than the original Custance when the rhythm of the line requires that the stress be on the first syllable as it is in the modern form of the name.
Me from the fiend and from his clawès keep,
That day that I shall drenchen in the deep.

Victorious tree, protection of true,
That only worthy werè for to bear
The king of heaven with his woundès new,
The whité Lamb, that hurt was with a spear,
Flemer of fiendès out of him and her
On which thy limbes faithfully extenden, ¹
Me keep, and give me might my life t' amenden.

Yearès and dayès floated this creatúre
Throughout the sea of Greece unto the Strait
Of Marrok, as it was her aventúre.
On many a sorry meal now may she baite;
After her death full often may she waite,
Ere that the wildè wavès will her drive
Unto the placè there she shall arrive.

470 Men mighten asken why she was not slain
Eke at the feast? who might her body save?
And I answer to that demand again:
Who saved Daniel in the horrible cave
There every wight save he, master and knave,
Was with the lion frete ere he astart?
No wight but God, that he bore in his heart.

God list to show his wonderful miracle
In her, for we should see his mighty works;
Christ, which that is to every harm triacle,
By certain means oft, as knowen clerks,
Does thing for certain end that full dark is
To man’s wit, that for our ignorance
Ne cannot know His prudent purveyance.

Now since she was not at the feast y-slaw,
Who kept her from the drenching in the sea?
Who keptè Jonah in the fish’s maw
Till he was spouted up at Nineveh?
Well may men know it was no wight but He
That keptè people Ebraic from their drenching,

¹ "Banisher of devils out of the man or woman over whom your arms extend."

the devil
the faithful
banisher of devils
Morocco, i.e. Gibraltar
feed
expect death
torn before he could escape
No one
God wanted
cure
as clerics know
human understanding
providence
slain
no one
Hebrew / drowning
The miraculous multiplication of five loaves and two fishes by Christ to feed a huge crowd is told in all four gospels: Matt:14:14-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13.

490 With dry feet throughout the sea passing.

Who bade the fouré spirits of tempest
That power have to annoyen land and sea,
Both north and south, and also west and east:
?Annoyeth, neither sea, nor land, nor tree"? 
Soothly, the commander of that was He
That from the tempest ay this woman kept
As well when she awoke as when she slept.

Where might this woman meat and drinkè have
Three years and more? how lasteth her vitaille?
Who fed th’Egyptian Mary in the cave,
Or in desert? no wight but Christ, sans fail.
Five thousand folk it was as great marvel
With loaves five and fishes two to feed.¹
God sent His foison at her greate need.

Finally she is driven ashore in England

She driveth forth into our ocëan
Throughout our wildë sea, till at the last
Under a hold that namen I ne can,
Far in Northumberland the wave her cast,
And in the sand her ship sticked so fast
That thencé would it not of all a tide;
The will of Christ was that she should abide.

The constable of the castle down is fare
To see this wreck, and all the ship he sought,
And found this weary woman full of care;
He found also the treasure that she brought.
In her language mercy she besought,
The life out of her body for to twinn,
Her to deliver of woe that she was in.

A manner Latin corrupt was her speech,
But algates thereby was she understood.

¹ The miraculous multiplication of five loaves and two fishes by Christ to feed a huge crowd is told in all four gospels: Matt:14:14-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13.
She kneeleth down and thanketh God’s send;  
But what she was she wouldè no man say,  
For foul nor fair, though that she shouldè die.

She said she was so mazèd in the sea  
That she forgot her mindè, by her truth.  
The constable hath of her so great pity,  
And eke his wife, that they wept for ruth.

She was so diligent, withouten sloth,  
To serve and pleasen ever each in that place,  
That all her love that looken in her face.

This constable and dame Hermengild, his wife,  
Were pagans, and that country everywhere;  
But Hermengild loved her right as her life,  
And Constance has so long sojournèd there,  
In orisons, with many a bitter tear,
Till Jesus has converted through his grace  
Dame Hermengild, constabless of that place.

In all that land no Christian durste route;  
All Christian folk been fled from that country  
Through pagans that conquered all about  
The plages of the north, by land and sea.

But yet n’ere Christian Britons so exiled  
That there n’ere some that in their privity  
Honourèd Christ, and heathen folk beguiled,
And nigh the castle such there dwelten three.

Bright was the sun as in that summer’s day,  
For which the constable and his wife also  
And Constance have y-take the rightè way
Toward the sea a furlong way or two,  
To playen and to roamen to and fro;
And in their walk this blindè man they met,
Crooked and old, with eyen fast y-shut.
In name of Christ,” cried this blind Britoun,
Dame Hermengild, give me my sight again!”
This lady waxed affrayéd of the sound,
Lest that her husbond, shortly for to sayn,
Would her for Jesus Christe’s love have slain,
Till Constance made her bold, and bade her work
The will of Christ, as daughter of his Church.

The constable wax[ed] abashed of that sight,
And saidé ¿What amounteth all this fare?
Custánc answerd, ¿Sir, it is Christ’s might,
That helpeth folk out of the fiendé’s snare.”
And so farforth she gan our law declare
That she the constable, ere that it was eve
Converted, and on Christ made him believe.

This constable was no thing lord of this place
Of which I speak, there he Custánc found,
But kept it strongly many a winter’s space
Under Alla, king of all Northumberland,
That was full wise, and worthy of his hand,
Against the Scottés, as men may well hear;
But turn I will again to my mattér.

Another plot against Constance

Satan, that ever us waiteth to beguile,
Saw of Custáncé all her perfection,
And cast anon how he might ‘quite her while,
And made a young knight that dwelt in that town
Love her so hot, of foul affection,
That verily him thought he shouldé spill,
But he of her might oncé have his will.

He wooeth her, but it availeth not;
She wouldé do no sinné, by no way.
And for despite he compassed in his thought
To maken her on shameful death to die.
He waiteth when the constable was away,
And privily upon a night he crept
In Hermengildé’s chamber, while she slept.

Weary, for-wakéd in her orisons,
Sleepeth Custânce, and Hermengild also.
This knight, through Sathanas’ temptations,
All softly is to the bed y-go,
And cut the throat of Hermengild a-two,
And laid the bloody knife by Dame Custânce,
And went his way, there God give him mischance!

Soon after comes this constable home again,
And eke Alla, that king was of that land,
And saw his wife despitously y-slain,
For which full oft he wept and wrung his hand,
And in the bed the bloody knife he found
By Dame Custânce. Allas! what might she say?
For very woe her wit was all away.

To king Alla was told all this mischance,
And eke the time, and where, and in what wise
That in a ship was founden this Custânce,
As here-before that you have heard devise.

The king’s heart of pity gan agrise,
When he saw so benign a creature
Fall in dis-ease and in misaventure.

For as the lamb toward his death is brought,
So stands this innocent before the king.
This falsé knight, that hath this treason wrought,
Bears her on hand that she hath done this thing.

But nathless, there was great mourning
Among the people, and say they can not guess
That she had done so great a wickedness;

For they have seen her ever so virtuous,
And loving Hermengild right as her life.
Of this bore witness ever each in that house,
Save he that Hermengild slew with his knife.
This gentil king hath caught a greet motive
Of this witness, and thought he would enquire
Deeper in this, a truth for to lere.

Alas! Custânce, thou hast no champion,
Nor fighté canst thou not, so welaway!
But he that starved for our redemption,
And bound Satan (and yet lies where he lay),
So be thy strongè champion this day!
For, but if Christ open miracle kithe,
Withouten guilt thou shalt be slain as swithe.

She set her down on knees, and thus she said
Immortal God, that savedest Susanne
From falsè blame, and thou, merciful maid,
Mary I mean, daughter to Saint Anne, 
Before whose child angels sing Hosanne,
If I be guiltless of this felony,
My succour be, for elsè shall I die! ”

Have you not seen some time a palè face,
Among a press, of him that hath been led
Toward his death, where as him got no grace,
And such a color in his face hath had,
Men mightè know his face that was bestad,
Amongèst all the faces in that rout?
So stands Custánce, and looketh her about.

O queenès, living in prosperity,
Duchesses, and you ladies everyone,
Haveth some ruth on her adversity!
Have pity
An emperor’s daughter stands alone;
She hath no wight to whom to make her moan.
O blood royal, that standest in this dread,
Far be thy friendes at thy great need!

This Alla king hath such compassion,
As gentil heart is fulfilledd of pitý,
That from his eyen ran the water down.
Now hastily do fetch a book,” quod he,
?And if this knight will swearen how that she
This woman slew, yet will we us avise
Whom that we will that shall been our justice.”

She is saved by a miracle, and is married to a king

A Briton book, written with Evangiles,
the Gospels in Celtic

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1 Susannah in the OT book named for her was falsely accused by the elders but was saved by David’s investigation. St. Anne was the mother of Mary the mother of Jesus before whom the angels sings Hosanna in heaven.
Was fetched, and on this book he swore anon
She guilty was. And in the meané while
A hand him smote upon the necké-bone,
That down he fell at oncé -- as a stone,
And both his eyen burst out of his face
In sight of every body in that place.

A voice was heard in general audience,
And said: Thou hast deslandered, guiltéless,
The daughter of holy church in high présénce;
Thus hast thou done, and yet hold I my peace!"
Of this marvel aghast was all the press;
As mazéd folk they stooden every one,
For dread of wretché, save Custáncé alone.

Great was the dread and eke the repentance
Of them that hadden wrong suspicion
Upon this sely innocent, Custáncé;
And for this miracle, in conclusion,
And by Custáncé’s mediatión,
The king -- and many another in that place --
Converted was, thankéd be Christ’s grace!

This falsé knight was slain for his untruth
By judgémént of Alla, hastély;
And yet Custáncé had of his death great ruth.
And after this Jesus, of his mercy,
Made Alla wedden full solemnely
This holy maid, that is so bright and sheen;
And thus hath Christ y-made Custáncé a queen.

But who was woeful, if I shall not lie,
Of this wedding but Donegild, and no mo’,
The kingé’s mother, full of tyranny?
Her thought her curséd hearté burst a-two.
She wouldé not her soné had done so;
Her thought a déspite that he shouldé take
So strange a créature unto his make.

Me list not of the chaf, nor of the straw,
Maken so long a tale as of the corn. ¹
What should I tellen of the royalty
At marriage, or which course goes beforne;
Who bloweth in a trumpet or in a horn.
The fruit of every tale is for to say:
They eat and drink and dance and sing and play.

They go to bed, as it was skill and right;
For though that wivès be full holy things,
They mustē take in patience at night
Such manner necessaries as been pleasing
To folk that have y-wedded them with rings,
And lay a lite their holiness aside,
As for the time, — it may no bet betide. ²

On her he got a knavè child anon,
And to a bishop, and his constable eke,
He took his wife to keep when he is gone
To Scotldond-ward, his foemen for to seek.
Now fair Custánce, that is so humble and meek,
So long is gone with childè, till that still
She holds her chamber, abiding Christè’s will. ³

The time is come a knavè child she bore;
Mauricius at the fontstone they him call.
This constable does forth come a messenger,
And wrote unto his king, that cleped was All,
How that this blissful tiding is befall,
And other tidings speedful for to say.
He takes the letter, and forth he goes his way.

This messenger, to do his avantáge,
Unto the kingè’s mother rideth swithe,
And saluteth her full fair in his language
Madame,” quod he, “you may be glad and blithe,
And thanketh God an hundred thousand sithe!
My lady queen hath child, withouten doubt,
To joy and bliss to all this reign about.

Lo, here the letters sealèd of this thing,

¹ He says he wants to dwell on the substance, not on the unimportant details like what courses were served in what order, and who blew the trumpets (at the wedding). He gets past that in the last line of this stanza.
That I must bear with all the haste I may.
If you will aught unto your son the king,
I am your servant, bothè night and day."

Donegild answered: ?As now at this time, nay;
But here all night I will thou take thy rest.
To-morrow will I say thee what me lest.”

_Another angry mother-in-law; another plot_

This messenger drank sadly ale and wine,
And stolen were his letters privily
Out of his box, while he slept as a swine;
And counterfeited was full subtilly
Another letter, wrought full sinfully,
Unto the king direct of this mattér
From his constable, as you shall after hear.

The letter spoke the queen delivered was
Of so horrible a fiendly créâtúre
That in the castle none so hardy was
That any whilè durstè there endure.
The mother was an elf by aventúre
Y-come, by charms or by sorcery,
And every wight hateth her company.

Woe was this king when he this letter had seen,
But to no wight he told his sorrows sore,
But of his ownè hand he wrote again:
?Welcome the send of Christ for evermore
To me that am now learned in his lore!
Lord, welcome be thy lust and thy pleasance;
My lust I put all in thine ordinance.

?Keepeth this child, all be it foul or fair,
And eke my wife, unto my home-coming.
Christ, when him list, may sendè me an heir
More agreeable than this to my liking.”
This letter he seals, privily weeping,
Which to the messenger was taken soon,
And forth he goes; there is no more to doon.

O messenger, fulfilled of drunkenness,
Strong is thy breath, thy limbs falter aye,
And thou bewrayest allè secretness.
Thy mind is lorn, thou janglest as a jay,
Thy face is turned in a new array.
There drunkeness reigns in any rout,  
There is no counsel hid, withouten doubt.

O Donegild, I [ne] have no English digne  
Unto thy malice and thy tyranny!  
And therefore to the fiend I thee resign;  
Let him enditen of thy traitory!  
Fie, mannish, fie! -- O nay, by God, I lie --  
Fie, *friendly* spirit, for I dare well tell,  
Though thou here walk, thy spirit is in hell!

This messenger comes from the king again,  
And at the king’s mother’s court he light,  
And she was of this messenger full fain,  
And pleasèd him in all that ever she might.  
He drank, and well his girdle underpight;  
He sleepeth, and he fnorteth in his guise  
All night, until the sunnè gan arise.

Eft were his letters stolen every one,  
And counterfeited letters in this wise:  
?The king commands his constable anon,  
Up pain of hanging, and on high juyse,  
That he ne shouldè suffer in no wise  
Custáncé in-with his realm for to abide  
Three days, and one quarter of a tide;  
Again

?But in the samè ship as he her found,  
Her, and her youngé son, and all her gear,  
He shouldè put, and croude her from the land,  
And charge her that she never eft come there.  
O my Custáncé, well may thy ghost have fear,  
And, sleeping, in thy dream be in penance,  
When Donégild cast all this ordinance.

This messenger on morrow, when he woke,  
Unto the castle holds the nexté way,  
And to the constable he the letter took;  
And when that he this piteous letter saw,  
Full oft he said, ?Alas!” and ?Welaway!”  
?Lord Christ,” quod he, ?how may this world endure,  
So full of sin is many a créature?

?O mighty God, if that it be thy will,  
Since thou art rightful judge, how may it be  
That thou wilt suffer innocents to spill,
And wicked folk reign in prosperity?
O good Custânce, alas! so woe is me
That I must be thy tormentor, or die
On shame’s death; there is no other way.”

Constance is abandoned to the sea in a boat once more

Weepen both young and old in all that place
When that the king this cursed letter sent,
And Cústnec, with a deadly pale face,
The fourthè day toward her ship she went.
But nathelees she takes in good intent
The will of Christ, and kneeling on the strand,
She said: ➔Lord, aye welcome be thy send!

?He that me kepté from the falsé blame
While I was on the land amongest you,
He can me keep from harm and eke from shame
In salté sea, although I see not how.
As strong as ever He was, He is yet now.
In Him trust I, and in His mother dear,
That is to me my sail and eke my steer.”

Her little child lay weeping in her arm,
And kneeling, piteously to him she said:
?pEace, little son, I will do thee no harm.”
With that her coverchief off her head she braid,
And over his little eyen she it laid,
And in her arm she lulleth it full fast,
And unto heaven her eyen up she cast.

?Mother,” quod she, ?and maiden bright, Marie,
Sooth is that through woman’s eggement
Mankind was lorn, and damned aye to die, ¹
For which thy child was on a cross y-rent.
Thy blissful eyen saw all his torment;
Then is there no comparison between
Thy woe and any woe man may sustain.

¹ A reference to the biblical story in Genesis of how Eve got Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit, the Original Sin for which we all must die, a sin that also had to be atoned for by the death of the Man-God Jesus Christ, the son of Mary. Possibly also a reference to the notion that the cross on which Christ was crucified (’y-rent”) was made from the tree from which the forbidden fruit had been taken in paradise; and a reference also to the medieval wordplay on Eva and Ave, the first word of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation: ➔Ave, gratia plena: Hail, full of grace.” Mary is the second Eve who helped our redemption as the first Eve had caused our downfall.
Thou saw thy child y-slain before thine eyen,  
And yet now lives my little child, parfay!  
indeed

Now, lady bright, to whom all woeful crien,  
Thou glory of womanhood, thou fair may,  
maid
Thou haven of refuge, bright star of day,  
Rue on my child, that of thy gentillesse,  
Indeed Have pity  
Ruest on every rueful in distress.  

?O little child, alas! what is thy guilt,  
That never wroughtest sin as yet, pardee?  
committed sin / indeed
Why will thine hard father have thee spilt?  
O mercy, dear constable,” quod she,  
killed
?As let my little child dwell here with thee;  
And if thou darest not saven him, for blame,  
So kiss him onc in his father’s name!”

Therewith she lookèd backward to the land,  
And saidè: ?Farewell, husband ruthless!”
 rises
And up she rist, and walketh down the strand  
Toward the ship, -- her follows all the press, --
the crowd follows her
And ever she prays her child to hold his peace;  
And takes her leave, and with an holy intent  
She blesseth her, and into ship she went.  

She makes the sign of the cross

Vitaillèd was the ship, it is no dread,  
Stocked
Abundantly for her full longè space,  
And other necessaries that should need  
praised be
She had enough, heried be God’s grace!  
For wind and weather almighty God purchase,  
(may) God bring  
And bring her home! I can no better say,  
But in the sea she driveth forth her way.

Here ends Part II

Part III

The king discovers the plot, and punishes the guilty

Alla the king comes home soon after this  
Unto his castle, of the which I told,  
And asketh where his wife and his child is.  
The constable gan about his heartè cold,  
got cold around the heart
And plainly all the manner he him told  
As you have heard -- I can tell it no better --  
And shows the king his seal and eke his letter,
Up pain of death, so have I done, certain."
This messenger tormented was till he
Must be know and tellen, plat and plain,
From night to night in what place he had lain;
And thus, by wit and subtle inquiring,
Imagined was by whom this harm gan spring.

The hand was knowen that the letter wrote,
And all the venom of this cursed deed,
But in what wise, certainly, I ne wot.
Th' effect is this, that Alla, out of dread,
His mother slew -- that may men plainly read --
For that she traitor was to her 'ligiance.
Thus endeth old Dongild, with mischance!

The sorrow that this Alla night and day
Makes for his wife, and for his child also,
There is no tonguè that it tellè may.

But now will I unto Custáncé go,
That floateth in the sea, in pain and woe,
Five years and more, as likèd Christès send,
Ere that her ship approachèd unto land.

Constance makes land once more. Another unwanted lover.

Under a heathen castle, at the last,
Of which the name not in my text I find,
Custáncé and eke her child, the sea up cast.
Almighty God, that saveth all mankind,
Have on Custáncé and on her child some mind,
That fallen is in heathen hand eftsoon,
In point to spill, as I shall tell you soon.

Down from the castle comes there many a wight
To gauren on this ship and on Custáncé.
But shortly, from the castle, on a night,
The lord's steward -- God give him mischance! --
A thief, that had reneged our créance,
Came into ship alone, and said he should
Her lemman be, whe'r-so she would or n'ould.

Woe was this wretched woman then begon;
Her child cried, and she cried piteously.

But blissful Mary helped her right anon;
For with her struggling well and mightily
The thief fell over board all suddenly,
And in the sea he drownèd for vengeance;  
And thus hath Christ unwemmèd kept Custánce.

O foulè lust of luxury, lo, thine end!  
Not only that thou faintest manne’s mind,  
But, verily, thou wilt his body shend.  
The end of thy work, or of thy lustès blind,  
Is complaining. How many one may men find  
That not for work some time, but for th’ intent  
To do this sin, been either slain or shent!

How may this weakè womman have this strength  
Her to defend against this renegate?  
O Goliath, unmeasurable of length,  
How mightè David makè thee so mate,  
So young and of armoûr so desolate?  
How durst he look upon thy dreadful face?  
Well may men see, it n’as but Goddè’s grace.

Who gave Judith courage or hardiness  
To slay him Holofernes in his tent,  
And to deliver out of wretchedness  
The people of God? I say, for this intent,  
That right as God spirit of vigor sent  
To them, and savèd them out of mischance,  
So sent he might and vigor to Custánce.

Forth goes her ship throughout the narrow mouth  
Of Gibraltar and Ceuta, driving aye  
Some timè west, and sometime north and south,  
And sometime east, full many a weary day,  
Till Christè’s mother -- blessed be she aye! --  
Hath shapen, through her endeœees goodness,  
To make an end of all her heaviness.

The Roman Emperor’s general punishes the guilty in Syria

Now let us stint of Constance but a throw,  
And speak we of the Roman emperor,  
That out of Syria has by letters know  
The slaughter of Christian folk, and dishonor  
Done to his daughter by a false traitor,  
I mean the cursed wicked sultaness  
That at the feast let slay both more and less.

For which this emperor has sent anon
His senator, with royal ordinance, orders
And other lordès, God wot, many a one, God knows
On Syrians to taken high vengeance. They burnen, slay, and bring them to mischance
Full many a day; but shortly, this is th' end, get ready to go
Homeward to Rome they shapen them to wend.

Constance is rescued once more

This senator repaireth with victöry
To Romé-ward, sailing full royally, Virgin Mary
And met the ship driving, as saith the story, more
In which Custáncè sat full piteously.
No thing ne knew he what she was, nor why she was in such array, ne she n’ill say
Of her estate, although she shouldé die. her rank

He bringeth her to Rome, and to his wife
He gave her, and her youngé son also;
And with the senator she led her life.
Thus can Oure Lady bringen out of woe Woeful Custáncé, and many another mo’.
And longé timé dwelt she in that place, In holy workés ever, as was her grace.

The senator’s wife her aunté was, of whom I spoke before
But for all that she knew her ne’er the more.
I will no longer tarry in this case,
But to king Alla, which I spoke of yore, I’ll leave
That for his wife weepeth and sigheth sore,
I will return, and let I will Custáncé
Under the senatoré’s governance.

King Alla goes to Rome on penitential pilgrimage

King Alla, which that had his mother slain, at pope’s command
Upon a day fell in such répentáncé In everything
That, if I shortly tellen shall and plain,
To Rome he comes to receive his penance;
And put him in the popé’s ordinance
In high and low, and Jesus Christ besought
Forgive his wicked workés that he wrought.

The fame anon through Romé town is borne, news at once
How Alla king shall come in pilgrimage,
By harbingers that wenten him beforómessengers

For which the senator, as was usage,
Rode him against, and many of his lineage,
As well to show his high magnificence
As to do any king a reverence.

Great cheer doth this noble senator
To king Alla, and he to him also;
Ever each of them does other great honor.
And so befell that in a day or two
This senator is to king Alla go
To feast, and shortly, if I shall not lie,
Custánc’s son went in his company.

Some men would say at request of Custánc
This senator hath led this child to feast;
I may not tellen every circumstance, --
Be as be may, there was he at the least.
But soothe is this, that at his mother’s hest
Before Alla, during the meaté’s space,
The child stood looking in the kingé’s face.

This Alla king hath of this child great wonder,
And to the senator he said anon,
?Whose is that faire child that standeth yonder? ”
?I n’ot,” quod he, ?by God, and by Saint John!

A mother he hath, but father hath he none
That I of wot ”-- and shortly, in a stound,
He toldé Alla how that this child was found.

?But God wot,” quod this senator also,
?So virtuous a liver in my life
Ne saw I never as she, nor heard of mo’,
Of worldly women, maiden, nor of wife.
I dare well say her had lever a knife
Throughout her breast, than be a woman wick;
There is no man could bring her to that prick.

Now was this child as like unto Custánc
As possible is a créature to be.
This Alla hath the face in rémembrance
Of Dame Custánc, and thereon muséd he
If that the childé’s mother were aught she
That is his wife, and privily he sighed,
And sped him from the table that he might.

?Parfay,” thought he, ?phantom is in my head!
I oughte deem, of skillful judgément,
That in the saltē sea my wife is dead.”

1040 And afterwards he made his argument
?What wot I if that Christ have hither sent
My wife by sea, as well as He her sent
To my country from thencē that she went?

And after noon, home with the senator
Goes Alla, for to see this wonder chance.
This senator doth Alla great honour,
And hastily he sent after Custānce.
But trusteth well, her listē not to dance,
When that she wist wherefore was that send;
Unnethe upon her feet she mightē stand.

Family Reunion

When Alla saw his wife, fair he her gret,
And weptē that it ruth was for to see;
For at the firstē look he on her set,
He knew well verily that it was she.
And she, for sorrow, as dumb stands as a tree,
So was her heartē shut in her distress,
When she remembered his unkindēness.

Twice she swoonēd in his ownē sight;
He wept, and him excusēth piteiously.

1060 ?Now God,” quod he, “and all his hallows bright
So wisly on my soul as have mercy,
That of your harm as guiltēless am I
As is Maurīce my son, so like your face;
Elsē the fiend me fetch out of this place!”

Otherwise may the devil

Long was the sobbing and the bitter pain,
Ere that their woful heartēs mightē cease;
Great was the pity for to hear them 'plain,
Through whichē plaintēs gan their woe increase.
I pray you all my labor to release;
I may not tell their woe until to-morrow,
I am so weary for to speak of sorrow.

But finally, when that the sooth is wist
That Alla guiltēless was of her woe,
I trow an hundred timēs been they kissed,
And such a bliss is there betwixt them two
That, save the joy that lasteth evermo,’
Alla was not so diplomatically naive as to send a child as ambassador to the chief Christian monarch. He must have gone himself (taking the child with him presumably).

There is none like that any creature
Hath seen or shall, while that the world may dure.

Then prayéd she her husband meekely,
In relief of her longé, piteous pine,
That he would pray her father specially
That of his majesty he would incline
To vouchsafe some day with him to dine.
She prayed him eke he should by no way
Unto her father no word of her say.

Some men would say how that the child Maurice
Doth this message unto this emperor;
But, as I guess, Alla was not so nice
To him that was of so sovereign honour
As he that is of Christian folk the flour,
Sent any child, but it is bet to deem
He went himself, and so it may well seem.

This emperor hath granted gentilly
To come to dinner, as he him besought;
And well read I he lookéd busily
Upon this child, and on his daughter thought.
Alla goes to his inn, and as him ought,
Arrayéd for this feast in every wise
As farforth as his cunning may suffice.

The morrow came, and Alla gan him dress,
And eke his wife, this emperor to meet;
And forth they ride in joy and in gladness.
And when she saw her father in the street,
She lighted down, and falleth him to feet.
"Father," quod she, "your youngé child Custáncé
Is now full clean out of your rémembránce.

"I am your daughter Cónstancé," quod she,
That whilom you have sent unto Syria.
It am I, father, that in the salté sea
Was put alone and damnéd for to die.
Now, goodé father, mercy I you cry!
Send me no more unto no heatheness,
But thank my lord here of his kindéness."

1 Alla was not so diplomatically naive as to send a child as ambassador to the chief Christian monarch. He must have gone himself (taking the child with him presumably).
Who can the piteous joyê tellen all
Betwixt them three, since they been thus y-met?
But of my talé make an end I shall;
The day goes fast, I will no longer let.
These gladé folk to dinner they them set;
In joy and bliss at meat I let them dwell
A thousand fold well more than I can tell.

This child Mauríce was sithen emperor
Made by the pope, and livéd Christianly;
To Christê’s Church he didê great honour.
But I let all his story passen by;
Of Constance is my talé specially.
In th’oldé Roman gestês may men find
Mauríce’s life; I bear it not in mind.

**Alla and Constance return to England together. One last time Fate intervenes.**

This king Alla, when he his timê saw,
With his Custánce, his holy wife so sweet,
To England been they come the rightè way,
Where as they live in joy and in quiet.
But little while it lasteth, I you het,
Joy of this world, for time will not abide;
From day to night it changeth as the tide.

Who livéd ever in such delight one day
That him ne movéd either conscïence,
Or ire, or talent, or some kind affray,
Envy, or pride, or passion, or offence?
I ne say but for this end this senténce:
That little while in joy or in pleasánce
Lasteth the bliss of Alla with Custánce.

For death, that takes of high and low his rent,
When passéd was a year, even as I guess,
Out of this world this king Alla He hent,
For whom Custánce hath full great heaviness.
Now let us prayen God his soulè bless!
And dame Custâncê, finally to say,
Toward the town of Romè goes her way.

To Rome is come this holy creâtûre,
And findeth heré friendês whole and sound;
Now is she scapèd all her áventûre.
And when that she her father hath y-found,
Down on her knees falleth she to ground;
Weeping for tenderness in heartè blithe,
She herieth God a hundred thousand sithe.

In virtue and in holy almès-deed
They liven all, and never asunder wend;
Till death departeth them this life they lead.
And fare now well! my tale is at an end.

Now Jesus Christ, that of his might may send
Joy after woe, govérn us in His grace,
And keep us allè that be in this place! Amen