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## Chaucer's gentils in their age

### Part 1

Toshinori HIRA

A good many of the Canterbury pilgrims (excluding the five churls who, Hammond suggests,<sup>1</sup> were added after the poet had fairly progressed with his work), who came in a company to the Tabard Inn, have nearly the same social standing as their creator's court, but not so highborn, audience and readers, as enumerated in Mr. Brewer's *Chaucer*.<sup>2</sup> Those pilgrims belong to the gentry<sup>3</sup>; not a nobleman nor a woman of high rank is included in some *nyne and twenty* pilgrims.<sup>4</sup> The knightly classes are represented by the *gentil* Knight, and his young son, the gay Squire; the clergy, regular and secular, the courteous

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<sup>1</sup> E. P. Hammond, *Chaucer: a Bibliographical Manual*, New York, 1933, pp. 254f.

<sup>2</sup> D. S. Brewer, *Chaucer*, London, 1953, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> In the later Middle Ages the gentry covered the class range between the lesser nobility and the upper middle class. See M. Bowden, *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, New York, 1957, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> The pilgrims have a total of thirty one, not (*l.* 24) *nyne and twenty* if *preestes thre* (*l.* 164) accompany the Prioress. See *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, Boston, 1957, p. 655. If *preestes thre* diminishes in number to one the pilgrims have a total of twenty eight. See J. M. Manly, *Some New Light in Chaucer*, New York, 1951, pp. 222f.

Prioress, the able Monk, the Nun's witty Priest and the learned Parson; and those who can be equated with the squire ranking next to a knight, judged according to Russell's *Boke of Nurture*<sup>5</sup>, the prominent men of the newly risen classes, such as the important Merchant, the five Burgesses suited for aldermen, the Franklin abled for the government service, the Sergeant of the Law active in the practice of his profession and the trained Doctor of Physic. The merchants, the leading tradesmen and men educated to the professions as well as the franklins were counted among the gentry in the later Middle Ages. Proper to the gentry was gentle birth or breeding.<sup>6</sup> Thus, to the gentry proper belong the Knight and the Squire, the Prioress and the Monk, who are of respectable birth, and who, whether knights or ecclesiastics, have the seigniorship of manors, that is, are bound to serve their lords, whether king, nobles or prelates, for the lands that they hold from their lords.<sup>7</sup> However, Chaucer's reference to the relation of those pilgrims with their manors is meagre.

The worthy Knight, gentle and polite, in his manners is a man of gentle birth, and he must hold from his lord an enfeoffed land, for which he is to bear arms<sup>8</sup> or serve his lord in the field. Chaucer insidiously refers to his Knight's service in *his lordes werre* (l. 47). This *worthy* Knight has gone in the army of his lord, most presumably to the Edward III's campaign against France (began in 1337).<sup>9</sup> In the course of this warfare he has

<sup>5</sup> *The Babees Book*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS, OS 32, London, pp. 186f.

<sup>6</sup> *OED*, s. vv. Gentry, 2; Gentleman, 1.

<sup>7</sup> See *OED*, s. v. Fee, sb,<sup>2</sup> 1.

<sup>8</sup> See *OED*, s. v. Arm, sb,<sup>2</sup> 4, c.

<sup>9</sup> *Chaucer: the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. R. T. Davies, London, 1953, p. 70.

gone on many an expedition against the heathen. Chaucer describes in detail it. The Knight has been with Alfonso, King of Castile, at the siege of *Algezir* of 1344; he, under the lord of Palatye, Peter I, King of Cyprus, has fought *for oure feith* in the Mediterranean campaigns of the late 1360's; and he has taken part with the Teutonic Knights in the Prussian campaigns, perhaps of 1385.<sup>10</sup> It is not likely, however, that any single knight has engaged in all these long term overseas campaigns. Manly finds a parallel for the Knight's career in the careers of three members of the Scropes, Sir Stephen Scrope, Sir William Scrope and Sir Geoffrey Scrope, whom Chaucer was acquainted with. Sir Stephen and Sir William went on an expedition to France and were beyond the *Grete See* in the company of the Earl of Hereford at *Satalye*, and Sir Geoffrey was with the Teutonic Knights in Prussia.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis laid on the Knight's expeditions against the infidel evidently shows the poet's attitude towards the war made on the infidel on behalf of *oure feith*. The Church instigated the warriors to make war on the infidel.<sup>12</sup> Any war, Gower says, is opposed to the law of God.<sup>13</sup> Apart from the historical counterparts of Chaucer's Knight the chivalric tradition of fighting the infidel was already unpopular in the fourteenth

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<sup>10</sup> J. M. Manly, 'A Knight Ther Was,' in *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. E. Wagenknecht, New York, 1959, pp. 49-56.

<sup>11</sup> Manly, *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>12</sup> See *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds*, ed. R. P. Miller, Oxford, 1977, pp. 176-177. See also *Piers the Plowman*, C-text, Passus X, 9-10: *Kynges and Knyghtes that holy kirke defenden, / And ryghtfulliche in reames ruelen the comune*. Edited by W. W. Skeat, vol. I, Oxford, 1954, p. 227.

<sup>13</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, Book III, 2251f. See the *English Works of John*

century.<sup>14</sup> In 1376-1377 Pope Gregory XI made war in Tuscany for his personal ends; he paid his army with the money he collected from the English clergy. Most English clergy had little shared the expenses needed for waging war against France.<sup>15</sup>

The Prioress, whom Chaucer calls her *Eglentyne*, is identified, Manly suggests,<sup>16</sup> with Madame Argentyn, nun of St. Leonard's at Stratford-Bow, but Argentyn was not the head of St. Leonard's. And the Prioress is considered to have a counterpart in Madame Mary, who was the head of St. Leonard's.<sup>17</sup> Whether or not the Prioress is identified as Mary she is the head of her convent, and at the same time must be the lord of her estate<sup>18</sup> although no reference to her estate is found in Chaucer's description of her. Her convent is probably smaller, but aristocratic, as was St. Leonard's. This Prioress, *simple and coy*,<sup>19</sup> whose endeavour is to command respect, imitates by taking pains a courteous, dignified port of a lady (I(A)137: ... *she was of greet desport, / And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port, / And peyned hire to countrefete cheere / Of court, and to ben holden digne of reverence*).<sup>20</sup>

Worldly is, likewise, the Monk who ignores the monastery

Gower, ed. G. C. Macaulay, I, EETS, ES 81, Oxford, pp. 287f.

<sup>14</sup> G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, Cambridge, 1961, p. 332.

<sup>15</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wycliffe*, 4th ed., London, 1948, pp. 72, 81-82.

<sup>16</sup> Manly, *New Light*, p. 206.

<sup>17</sup> Manly, *Ibid.*, pp. 207f.

<sup>18</sup> E. Power, *Mediaeval English Nunneries*, Cambridge, 1964, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> See *OED*, s. v. Coy, a, 2, a.

<sup>20</sup> Chaucer's quotations in this paper are from F. N. Robinson, *op. cit.*

regulations. He is occupied in riding out of his *cloystre*; Chaucer emphasizes his Monk's delight in hunting and disobeying the *reule of seint Maure or of seint Beneit*. This Monk keeps many a *deyntee hors* for hunting, and at the same time for supervising his estate.<sup>21</sup> However, we, as would be expected, only derive a slight suggestion on his supervision of the manor from the lines: *A Monk ther was, a fair for the maistrie, / ... / A manly man, to been an abbot able* (ll. 165, 167). He is a prior, probably of a relatively small monastery, or of the cell attached to a greater monastery. And or but he does not care a bit for the toiling and studying as St. Augustine bids; he is busy with looking into the cell which belongs to him, and with *prikyng* and hunting the hare. Chaucer's Monk is, Bressie suggests, identified with William de Cloun, Abbot of Leicester. She probably inferred from Knighton's *Chronicon* in which the author described de Cloun as a notable hunting monk that this abbot of Leicester was a model for Chaucer's Monk who *lovede venerie*.<sup>22</sup> Whether the Monk is modelled on de Cloun or not he holds his cell, and must owe knight service to the king for feudal tenure,<sup>23</sup> but his portrait contains no allusion to his knight service. The feudal lords, secular and ecclesiastical alike, did not fully render military service to the king's cause in the French war.<sup>24</sup> They, in fact,

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<sup>21</sup> See E. Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History*, Oxford, 1941, pp. 22-23. See also 'The Complaint of the Ploughman.' Quoted by Bowden in *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>22</sup> See Bowden, *op. cit.*, pp. 111, 115-116.

<sup>23</sup> H. M. Chew, *The Ecclesiastical Tenants-in-Chief and Knight Service*, Oxford, 1932, pp. 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Henry Despenser's crusade against the French and Flemings. Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-272.

had already ceased to give military service in person from the earlier age; they had rendered it to the king by scutage.

The young Squire<sup>25</sup> is most probably the eldest son of the Knight. Not a few of the young sons of knights were unwilling to be knighted. The Squire is being educated and well trained in *curteisie, songes, juste, daunce* and *purtreye*, and he has seen active service, for a *litel space*, presumably in the Flemish campaign. Chaucer does not speak of his Squire's military service in Flanders as his father's shield bearer,<sup>26</sup> but the Squire must have seen service in Despenser's campaign against the French Clementists.<sup>27</sup> Chaucer approaches the problem concerning his Squire's active service from the angle of knightly accomplishments. The Squire has served with distinction as a court lover (I(A)85: ... *he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie / In Flaundes, in Artoys, and Pycardie, / And born hym weel, as of so litel space, / In hope to stonden in his lady grace*). The squires,<sup>28</sup> also, did not perform knight service,<sup>29</sup> but hired themselves out to the king.<sup>30</sup> In the French war the knights were paid 4 shillings a day, and the squires 2 shillings.<sup>31</sup> The king probably

<sup>25</sup> See *OED*, s. v. Esquire, 2.

<sup>26</sup> *OED*, s. v. Esquire, 1, a.

<sup>27</sup> Bowden, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> The knights bachelor include those who rose to the rank of a squire by land or money.

<sup>29</sup> The earliest example of the word 'squire' cited in the *OED* is from the *Life and Martyrdom of Thomas Beket* (c 1290).

<sup>30</sup> Knight service was limited to fourty days a year, and for long term service the knights were paid a daily wage. A. L. Poole, *Obligations of Society in the XII and XIII Centuries*, Oxford, 1944, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> The knights banneret were paid 8 shillings a day. M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399*, Oxford, 1959, pp. 237-238.

paid both Chaucer's Squire and his father in daily wages for their services. We only derive a slight suggestion on the knight's indenture from the Knight's description of a contract between the god of Love and his servants, Palamon and Arcite (I(A)1802: *Thus hath hir lord, the god of love, ypayed / Hir wages and hir fees for hir servyse!*).

By the fourteenth century the wealthier freeholders,<sup>32</sup> restrained to knighthood,<sup>33</sup> had done duty for the knights, who were reluctant to perform knight service. They were used for public offices, military and civil alike. Thus, Chaucer's Franklin, who *After the sondry sesons of the yeer, / So chaunged . . . his mete and his soper* (ll. 347-348), and whose *. . . table dormant in his halle alway / Stood redy covered al the longe day* (ll. 353-354), is a freeholder worthy to be called St. Julian in his country. All kinds of delicacies with which his guests were entertained at a table dormant are indicative of his social position. He has held police, judicial, administrative offices in his county, and has represented the county in parliament. This Franklin's career, suggests Manly,<sup>34</sup> corresponds to John Bussy's. Bussy was a commoner, but was knighted as early as 1384. Very often served he as knight of the shire, as sheriff and as commissioners of the peace and other county business during the reign of Richard II.

Men who were originally not comprised in the basic classes of medieval society proper, and were lumped together in the

<sup>32</sup> See G. H. Gerould, *Chaucerian Essays*, Princeton, 1952, pp. 33f.

<sup>33</sup> All freeholders with £20 worth of land were knighted in 1278. See W. Stubbs, *Select Charters*, ed. H. W. C. Davis, 9th ed., Oxford, 1957, pp. 448-449.

<sup>34</sup> Manly, *op. cit.*, pp. 162f.

populace,<sup>35</sup> now, came to make a decent, comfortable livelihood by holding a certain amount of land sufficient to be knighted, by carrying on their trade and bringing skill to bear upon their works, or by utilizing their professional knowledge. Some rendered military or civil service to the king's cause and some sat in on a parliament or city councils. Those men, exalted in the social scale, came to be a fair match for their superiors. Chaucer's new-class pilgrims, therefore, almost free from worry, are lively as the Franklin told the fictional Chaucer, probably in gleeful mood, that he *heeld opinion that pleyn delit / Was ver-railly felicitee parfit* (ll. 337-338).

No line can be found which illustrates what the Merchant is, but his attire is suggestive of his social station (I(A)270: *A Marchant ...with a forked berd, / In mottelee ...hye on horse ...sat; / Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bever hat, / His bootes clasped faire and fetisly*). He is identified, Rickert points out,<sup>36</sup> with Gilbert Maghfeld, who was a wealthy merchant adventurer and a usurer who dealt in foreign exchange. Maghfeld served as keeper of the sea in 1383 and as sheriff. Several times was he elected alderman and served at the custom houses in Boston (1386) and in London (1388). Chaucer's Merchant deals in various commodities and trades most probably wool and cloth with the Low Countries. And he is necessarily anxious for the safety of the sea between Middleburgh and Orwell. The wool staple was at Middleburgh from 1384 to 1388.<sup>37</sup> From 1369 onwards

<sup>35</sup> See Poole, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> E. Rickert, *Chaucer's World*, ed. C. C. Olson and M. M. Crow, New York, 1948, pp. 185f.

<sup>37</sup> Manly, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

the tide of the French war turned against the English army. So, the Merchant *wolde the see were kept for any thyng* (l. 276). He, again, makes a profit on *chevyssaunce* and sells French *sheeldes* on the exchange. The homilists of the fourteenth century condemn the merchants for usury:<sup>38</sup> the usurers, created by the Devil, without fail are to go, they cry out, to hell in after-world. Chaucer's Merchant *ful wel his wit bisette* and always in an *estatly* attitude deals in bargaining, borrowing or lending. The immensely wealthy merchants in the fourteenth century met the king's financial needs and were rising to power and influence. They were offered government positions as a reward for their collaboration, but many went bankrupt<sup>39</sup> although they concealed outstanding debts. A few of these merchants, like the de la Poles, were raised to the peerage.<sup>40</sup>

The leaders of the great London guilds like those of the drapers,' the mercers,' and the grocers,' who were the municipal magistrates, were closely related to the king or the magnates.<sup>41</sup> Chaucer's five Burgesses are engaged in different trades, but, wearing *o lyveree*, are members of a parish guild,<sup>42</sup> most probably backed up by John of Gaunt, Richard II's uncle. Chaucer chooses those five from among the non-victualling guilds under

<sup>38</sup> See Owst, *op. cit.*, pp. 293, 553. See also *Piers the Plowman*, C-text, Passus X, 37-40.

<sup>39</sup> In 1378 a mission was sent out to Milan probably for the purpose of providing a finance to the king's war. Chaucer went there on the embassy with Sir Edward de Berkeley.

<sup>40</sup> J. J. Jusserand enumerates prominent financiers in his *Literary History of the English People*, I, New York, 1968, p. 256.

<sup>41</sup> See Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 278f.

<sup>42</sup> Bowden, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

the Duke of Lancaster, but neutral in the struggle of the London victualling guilds against the non-victualling guilds in the early 1380's.<sup>43</sup> Each of Chaucer's guildsmen obtains an influence with the guildsmen; he holds property (*catel* and *rente*) amply sufficient to *sitten on a deys* in a guild hall or a city hall. His wife takes a delight in being called "madame" and in going at the head of other people to the guild vigil.<sup>44</sup>

The Sergeant of the Law, the Doctor of Physic and the Parson are active in the practice of their learned professions. The Sergeant and the Doctor care for gold. On the other hand, the Parson abstains from gaining it. The Sergeant of the Law does good service to the cause of the king's justice.<sup>45</sup> He has often held circuits by *patente* and by *pleyn commissioun*, and exercised jurisdiction over counties with the assistance of justices of the peace like the Sergeant's *compaigne*, the Franklin. He knows about all the cases which have happened since the time of William the Conqueror. This Sergeant seems to have gained his legal knowledge in a university or one of Inns of Court.<sup>46</sup> He obtains renown as a *purchasour*; he uses his *science* for acquiring *fee symple* (I(A)318: *So greet a purchasour was nowher noon; / Al was fee symple to hym in effect; / His purchasyng myghte nat been infect*). Besides serving at the bar he is truly so busy

<sup>43</sup> See 'The Mercers' Petition to Parliament.' Printed in Mossé's *Handbook of Middle English*, tr. J. A. Walker, Baltimore, 1952, pp. 282-285.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. III(D)449: *In al the parissh wif ne was ther noon / That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon; / And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she, / That she was out of alle charitee.*

<sup>45</sup> Not only administered the sergeants of the law the Common Law, but rendered they service to the king's centralization of the government.

<sup>46</sup> See Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 659.

in contriving to *purchasen londis*! The sergeants of the law in Chaucer's time were few in number and only a score could be counted. Manly found in Thomas Pynchbek the model from whom Chaucer's Sergeant of the Law had probably been drawn.<sup>47</sup> Pynchbek was of a landless family, but was made a sergeant of the law as early as 1376.

The Doctor of Physic, trained in astrology as well as in medicine, is meagre in point of Scripture knowledge.<sup>48</sup> He cares for gold, for he takes *gold in phisik* good for health (I(A)443: *...gold in phisik is a cordial, / Therefore he lovede gold in special*). He has used *magyk natureel* for gaining gold, in especial during the years of pestilence. He observes his patients through the astrological hours most favorable for recovery, and imbues the waxen images of his patients with the powers of the stars.<sup>49</sup> His astrological skill is to be distinguished from cupping, leeching and teeth extraction although he applies a treatment of disease to spiritual matters. And he knows many medical authorities, such as Hippocrates, Galenus, Avicenna and Averroes, so he seems to have studied for a long time at a university or a medical school. The doctors of physic of Chaucer's day were commonly considered to be inferior to clerics. Their love of gold forms an apt parallel of the sergeants of the law's greed of gain. The ignorance of people was taken gross advantage of by these educated men greedy of gain.<sup>50</sup> Miss Bowden proposes as the

<sup>47</sup> Manly, *op. cit.*, pp. 148f.

<sup>48</sup> W. C. Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*, New York, 1960, pp. 29-31.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7f.

<sup>50</sup> See the *Romance of the Rose*, tr. F. S. Ellis, ll. 5403f. Quoted by Bowden, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

actual doctor as whom Chaucer's Doctor can be identifiable John Arderne, who received a degree from Montpellier and as an army doctor distinguished himself in the service of Henry of Lancaster during the early years of the French war.<sup>51</sup>

Manly advances a suggestion as to the actual counterpart of the Nun's Priest that the Priest was modeled on Geoffrey de Neunton.<sup>52</sup> The will of Elizabeth of Hainault, Queen Philippa's sister, a nun of St. Leonard's, contains a mention of Geoffrey de Neunton, who was a chaplain of the parish at St. Leonard's and served as the nuns' priest of the convent. Chaucer's Nun's Priest is probably a learned cleric in view of his witty *Tale* concerning the cock and the fox, which was derived from the fable of Marie de France.<sup>53</sup>

The Parson is a brother to the Plowman and is probably of humble birth. He is rich in *hooly thoght and werk*. Unlike many an ill-educated parson of Chaucer's day<sup>54</sup> Chaucer's Parson is a cleric and can preach the Gospel to his parishioners.<sup>55</sup> Poor as he is in worldly goods he, loath to hire himself out to do chantry service for some guild or nobleman, stays at his parish and does all that is required of him by setting a good example (I(A)507: *He sette nat his benefice to hyre / And leet his sheep encombred in the myre / And ran to Londoun unto Seinte Poules / To*

51 Bowden, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-209.

52 Manly, *op. cit.*, pp. 207, 222-224.

53 Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

54 See Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

55 R. S. Loomis argues in his 'Was Chaucer A Laodicean?' that Chaucer's emphasis on the Gospel and Christ's teachings is suggestive of his Parson's being a *Lollere*. See *Chaucer Criticism*, pp. 291-310. Cf. II(B<sup>1</sup>) 1173.

*seken hym a chaunterie for soules, / Or with a bretherhed to been withholde; / But dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde).* This Parson pays his poor parishioner's tithe in his place; he gives a portion of his *offryng* and *substaunce* to his parishioner. A small minority of the parsons of the fourteenth century, of course, tried to live up to their ideal,<sup>56</sup> but many of them were easygoing and inattentive to their studies of the Bible. They, commonly incapable of preaching,<sup>57</sup> hired out their revenues and left their parishioners to stick themselves in the mire while they obtained well-paid guild employment as chantry priests. Those absentee incumbents had difficulty in collecting their tithes from their parishioners who were reluctant to pay tithes.

These gentle pilgrims, whether of gentle birth or of newly risen classes, judged according to the Christian ideal of society,<sup>58</sup> mostly sin against God's teachings, and are little conscious of sins, with the exception of the Knight and the Parson. Conspicuous for his impiety is the Monk, who, in defiance of the monastic regulations compelling him to seclude himself from the world, follows the newer trends among worldlings (I(A)173: *The reule of seint Maure or of seint Beneit, / By cause that it was old and somdel streit / This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace, / And heeld after the newe world the space*). He has no thought of serving the world by studing and labouring as St. Augustine bids in his cloister. Chaucer does not specifically describe his

<sup>56</sup> See 'A Model Parish Priest,' in G. G. Coulton, *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation*, London, 1956, pp. 213-214.

<sup>57</sup> See the *English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. F. D. Matthew, EETS, OS 74, London, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> See above n. 12.

Squire's campaign in Flanders as of religious nature, nor does he mention that the Squire, as his father's shield bearer, has engaged himself in an overseas campaign against the heathen. Any other pilgrim, originally comprised in the populace, but, now, exalted in the social scale, does not cultivate intimacy with the soil.<sup>59</sup> By Chaucer's time the change of the living conditions of peasants has been caused by the Assizes of Arms the kings had issued from time to time, the gradual increase in chartered towns, and the three-time visitations of the Black Death which were raging in Chaucer's England.<sup>60</sup> The freeholders do duties for knights and cover up the shortage of the number of the knightly-class men who have unwillingly performed their duties, but they have not already performed manual service. Chaucer's Franklin, qualified to render civil service, lives up to his principles based on Epicureanism with a background of immense quantities of food and drink. He tells of the bountiful crops which his *twenty pound worth lond* yields. Chaucer's reference to farming<sup>61</sup> is scanty. His Plowman is described as a model of the same Christian ideal as Langland's Piers. Unlike Chaucer Langland has a true appreciation of the advantage of a plowman living close to the soil. So, he condemns a usurious merchant as lost beyond redemption (*Piers C, Passus x 22: Marchans in the margine · hadden menye yeres, / Ac â pena et â culpa · Treuthe nolde hem graunte*). Almost every Canterbury pilgrim of the

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<sup>59</sup> See Owst, *op. cit.*, pp. 553f. See also *Piers the Plowman*, B-text, Passus V, 552: *I (a plowman) dyke and I delue · I do that treuthe hoteth.*

<sup>60</sup> See H. S. Bennett, *Life on the English Manor*, Cambridge, 1956, pp. 118f., 239, 299.

<sup>61</sup> See J. Horrell, 'Chaucer's Symbolic Plowman,' in *Chaucer Criticism*, pp. 84-97.

middle class works for profit. The Merchant sets his wits to work; every Burgess of different craft guilds has a modest competence. Men of the legal and medical professions turn to account their knowledge. Chaucer represents such a middle-class man with realism. When his Merchant deals in foreign exchange he knows, Chaucer tells us, how to make an illegitimate profit out of selling *sheeldes* on the exchange if *eschaunge* is counted part of the dealings of Langland's Avarice<sup>62</sup> (I(A)278 : *Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle*). However, Chaucer's flat reference to his Merchant's dealings in foreign exchange will not affect the Merchant's sin against God.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See *Piers the Plowman*, C-text, Passus VII, 278 : *And yf ich (Avarice) sente oure see · my seruauant to Brugges, / Other in-to Prus my prentys · my profit to a-waite, / To marchaunde with monye · and maken here eschaunge, / Myghte neuere man comforty me · in the meyn tyme, / Neither matyns ne masse · ne othere manere syghtes, / And neuere penaunse performede · ne pater-noster seyde, / That my mynde ne was · more in my goodes / Than in godes grace · and hus grete myghte.*

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Gower's attitude towards a merchant (*Mirour de l'omme*, 25909f.). Quoted by M. E. Thomas in her *Medieval Skepticism and Chaucer*, New York, 1950, pp. 71-72.