

THE BESTIARY OF GUILLAUME LE CLERC

Originally written in 1210-11

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
BY
GEORGE CLARIDGE DRUCE, F.S.A.

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About this Text

The *Bestiary* of [Guillaume le Clerc](#) was written around 1210. It is in rhyming verse in the Norman-French language. It was translated into modern English by George Claridge Druce (1860-1948), a member of the [Society of Antiquaries of London](#). Druce based his translation on the 1892 edition (*Le Bestiaire. Das Thierbuch des Normannischen Dichters Guillaume le Clerc*) by Dr. Robert Reinsch. Druce wrote extensively on Bestiary subjects; many of his articles are available in the Digital Text library of the [Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages](#) web site.

The book this text is taken from was printed in 1936, but was not actually published. As it says on the cover, “Printed for Private Circulation”, meaning Druce had it printed and distributed it himself, presumably to other members of the Society of Antiquaries and other interested parties. There is no indication of how many copies were printed, but it cannot have been a large number; the book is now quite rare.

The book was digitized by David Badke in 2024 from one of the printed copies, which has a presentation from Druce written on the cover: “Capt. Herbert Procter with the translator’s kind regards, October 1936”. Scans were made of each non-blank page, including the seven pages of plates. The scans were then processed with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software, and the resulting text proofread and reformatted.

Only the text is included in this edition; for the illustrations see the facsimile edition. The page and footnote numbering of this edition do not match the original book, though the line numbers in the poem do. A Table of Contents has been added; click any line to go to the corresponding section. Additional footnotes by the editor of this edition are marked [DB]; any not so marked are by Druce.

This PDF edition of the book is available in the Digital Text library of the [Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages](#) web site. The facsimile edition and a parallel text edition is also available from the same location.

<https://bestiary.ca/etexts/etext113694.htm>

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Introductory Note

The present work is intended to provide a simple rendering in English of the old Norman-French rhyming bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc, which was written first in 1210 or 1211. For this purpose use has been made of a transcription which was published with copious explanatory and critical notes and a Glossary under the title of *Das Thierbuch des Normannisch Dichters Guillaume le Clerc* by Dr. Robert Reinsch at Leipzig in 1890. His transcription is founded mainly on the text of a MS. in the British Museum (Egerton 613)¹ of the first half of the thirteenth century, the most complete of the twenty or more MSS. collated by him, with corrections or adjustments as suggested by other MSS. of the group. From indications pointed out by Dr. Reinsch this MS. is Anglo-Norman in character. The bestiary describes thirty-seven animals, birds and other objects with the religious or moral lessons founded upon them, and there is much other matter of a religious nature which is included in the 4,136 lines of the poem. This number is increased to 4,174 lines in the Egerton MS. by a very curious eulogy of his patron, one Ralph, for whom William carried out the work and who rewarded him handsomely.

William tells us that he was born in Normandy, but the place of his birth is unknown. Nor has his identity been established. He appears to have lived in England, and was evidently a very earnest and religious “clerc”. His language is simple and sincere, but his zeal leads him at times to request his readers to pay attention or to make no mistake in understanding him in somewhat decided tones.

The literary history and characteristics of Guillaume’s bestiary are very fully dealt with by Dr. Reinsch in his introduction and need not be repeated here, but there are one or two features of interest which may be mentioned.

William in his opening lines speaks of his intention

en romanz escrire²
De bon latin ou il le troeve

and Dr. Reinsch has shown that in all probability he used more than any other the well-known Latin version of the twelfth century attributed to Hugo de Sancto Victore. This provided the descriptions of the animals, etc., and much of the symbolism based on them; the remainder consists of the religious or moral teaching added by the author.

The date of the original composition may be safely judged from two references in the work in which he alludes to the great interdict of 1208:

“Ceste overaigne fu fete noeve
El tens ke phelipe tint France
El tens de la mesestance,
Ke Engleterre fu entredite
Si kil ni avoit messe dite
Ne cors mis en terre sacree”³

and goes on to mention many evils, which he bitterly laments but dares not say too much about. Further in the story of the turtle-dove, so faithful to her mate even when he is dead, and which William uses to illustrate the bond betwixt Christ and His church, he says:

1 Now [British Library, Egerton MS 613](#) [DB]

2 The Romance or French language.

3 MS. Egerton 613, line 10, etc.

“Toz jorz se tient a son pareil,
 Jhesu Crist, son leal feeil.
 Quant lator, ki rime a cest livre,
 Deveit ici entor escrivre,
 MuIt esteit tristes e dolanz;
 Kar aveit este dous anz
 Seinte eglise si dolerose
 E si mate e si pourose
 Ke meint quidouent par folie,
 Kc son espos leust guerpie.
 Kar ele nosout le chef lever,
 Poi i entrout gent pur orer
 En trestot lisle de Engleterre.”⁴

The poem contains many little personal expressions by William destined to keep the interest of his readers alive and to enable them to follow his argument. This assists in making it quite a human document. A typical example of the author's method is afforded by the lesson in the account of the lion in which he teaches that the divine nature of Christ when upon the cross could not be wounded or hurt. It is likened to a ray of the sun. Cut a notch in a great tree when the sun is shining. As the notch is made bigger the sun's ray becomes bigger too, but however wide the notch is cut, you cannot strike the ray or wound it, or hold it.

There are numerous quotations from the Bible, but they are rarely literal. The variations are the result of manipulation due to a desire to fit passages to the subject treated of and the requirements of rhyme. For instance in line 1591 the passage about the lion is made to fit the hyena; and in line 2628 the ostrich takes the place of the kite mentioned in Jeremiah viii. 7. There are also mistakes in the names of biblical authors, for instance in line 1627 the passage in the Epistle of James i. 8 is attributed perhaps not inappropriately to Solomon's "book of sermons". The references given are to the Vulgate of Sixtus and Clement.

The illustrations are mostly from different MSS. of Guillaume's version, but two are miniatures in MS. Roy. 2 B vii (Queen Mary's Psalter) and one in MS. 1444 (Fr.) Bibl. Nat. Paris, the last being a Bestiaire d'Amour. In both of these MSS. the pictures are associated with Guillaume's bestiary. The picture of the plucking of the mandrake is from MS. 14969 (Fr.) Bibl. Nat. Paris. It illustrates the picturesque procedure which is to be followed if fatal results are to be avoided. The mandrake was said to cry out and shriek when pulled out of the ground, and the man who gathered it fell dead on the spot. To circumvent this, directions are given that a dog which has been kept without food for three days is to be tied by a rope to the plant, and when offered meat it makes a violent spring and drags it out. The plant shrieks and the dog falls dead instead of the man. Although the virtues of the mandrake for medicinal purposes are mentioned in the Egerton MS., the method of extracting the plant is omitted, and there is no picture of it.

4 MS. Egerton 613, line 2705, etc.

I must express my sincere thanks to Mr. N. E. Toke of Folkesione for much assistance rendered. He has an intimate knowledge of old French, and has carefully checked my translation and made valuable suggestions where difficult passages occur. I am also indebted to Dr. F. W. Hardman, F.S.A, and to Mr. U. R. Gianetti for help in various ways; and to the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Royal Archaeological Institute for the use of blocks.

G. C. DRUCE.

The Bestiary

Whoso beginneth well and endeth well,—
It is a truth sound and excellent—
Whoever he may be, in all his undertakings
He ought to be praised for it.

- 5 A book with a good beginning
And which shall have a good ending
And good words and good matter
Wills William to write in romance⁵
From the good latin in which he finds it.
- 10 This work was newly done
At the time when Philip held France,
At the time of the great misfortune
When England was under interdict,
So that there was no mass said
- 15 Nor body laid in holy ground.
Of the interdict he is not pleased
To say more at this time
Because right goes a-begging
And honesty is weak and low.
- 20 All this thing William passes over
Who concerning it bitterly laments
That he dare not say what he wills
Of the deceit which runs
Both in the one and the other court.⁶
- 25 But he betakes himself to speak aloud,
For in this book he teaches us
The natures of beasts and their ways,
Not of all but of a good many,
In which will be much moral teaching
- 30 And a good share of theology.
By this may a man example take
To do well and to learn well.
It will be done in rhyming verses.
The clerk was born in Normandy
- 35 Who is the author of this story.
Now hear what the Norman saith.

When God first made the world
And put men and beasts therein,

5 i.e. in the French language.

6 French and English.

In all his creatures he
 40 Implanted diverse natures,
 And over all—this is the sum of it—
 He gave the lordship to man.
 To man he gave such power
 That he should know the difference
 45 There is betwixt good and evil,
 Twixt treachery and loyalty,
 Twixt paradise and hell.
 But by the sin of Lucifer,
 Who was angel and then devil,
 50 Was man disgraced and mocked
 And was driven out into the waste,
 Whence none who serveth not the lord God
 Shall ever come, despite the whole world;
 But is cast into the deep abyss
 55 Whence none shall ever return.
 To tell how Adam sinned
 And how he was exiled
 And from holy paradise driven,
 And how his line grew
 60 And who was born and who died
 And what happened to his heirs,
 And how the flood came
 How the ark was planned
 And what folk were saved in it,
 65 How Noah lived afterwards
 And how Abraham was born
 And Isaac and Ishmael;
 How from Isaac sprang Israel
 And his twin brother Esau
 70 And how Joseph was sold
 And how he served Pharaoh
 When he was out of prison,
 How Israel was in bondage
 In Egypt many a long year,
 75 How Moses brought them out
 Who so often spake to God,
 Who made the ark and the tabernacle
 And for whom God did many miracles
 And to whom he gave the law
 80 When the Jews in disobedience—

Who are still base unbelievers—
 Worshipped a golden calf.
 How after Moses came
 Joshua who upheld their law,
 85 And how Gideon did it
 Who slew the people of Midian.
 How the judges came after,
 Who judged the people harshly
 Until Saul the first king;
 90 How he was bitterly opposed
 Towards David who was upright;
 How Goliath was vanquished,
 How Solomon built the temple
 And spent nearly forty years on it;
 95 How after him came Rehoboam
 And how the lord Jeroboam
 Was then king of the ten tribes,
 How then they changed the laws.
 How there was the temple of Baal,
 100 How then illdoing began
 Which lasted the time of so many kings,
 How the people went astray,
 How they were in captivity
 In Babylon in prison,
 105 How Jerusalem was destroyed,
 How it was afterwards rebuilt.
 How the good Maccabees came
 Who took care of and maintained it,
 How it was then maltreated
 110 How it was subject to Rome.
 And how God all tender and kind
 Then took pity on his friends,
 How he came then on earth
 To seek his hundredth sheep,
 115 How he was born of Mary,
 And how by what treachery
 The innocents were slain
 More than a hundred and forty thousand.
 How Jesus Christ preached,
 120 Who gave the new law,
 How he was then martyred on the cross
 And crowned with thorns,

How he was laid in the tomb
How he promised to his friends
125 That on the third day he should rise from the dead.
How the ship came then to port⁷
Which had been so sorely in distress,
To tell you in full, how
Holy church grew and flourished,
130 How saint Paul was converted,
How the apostles bore themselves
And the martyrs who suffered so much,
That would be hard for me to relate.
But you shall hear about the bestiary,
135 As I have agreed with you;
So I shall begin at once.

Lion

It is right that we first tell you
Of the nature of the lion.
The lion is a wild beast
140 And bold in a great degree.
Three principal natures has
The lion which is so brave.
Each one shall be fully told you:
The first is that by its nature
145 It frequents the great mountains.
When by chance it happens
That it is pursued by the hunter
Of his spear it has great dread
If so be that he gets near it,
150 From afar it smells on the mountain
The smell of the hunter who follows it.
Then it covers its tracks with its tail,
That he may not see them or reach
Its lair, where it will lie up.
155 Its other nature is wonderful
For when it sleeps its eyes are awake,
When sleeping it has its eyes open
Clear and brilliant and alert.
Its third nature likewise
160 Is marvellously strange
And affords a wonderful example.

⁷ i.e. the ship of the church.

For when the female gives birth,
 The cub falls on the ground dead.
 Of life it will have no consolation
 165 Until on the third day the father
 Breathes upon and licks it lovingly.
 In such manner it gets its breath,
 Nor could it have other physician.
 In such way it comes to life.
 170 Now hear what this meaneth.

 There is a meaning very clear:
 When God our sovereign father,
 Who is the spiritual lion,
 Came for our salvation
 175 Here on earth by his grace,
 So wisely he covered his track
 That the hunter never knew
 That he was our Saviour
 And by nature was astonished
 180 How he came among us here.
 By the hunter ye must understand
 Him who made man go astray
 And who hunts him for to kill him.
 He is the devil who plots evil.
 185 When this lion was set upon the cross
 By the Jews, his enemies,
 Who judged him very wrongfully,
 His humanity there suffered death.
 When his spirit left his body
 190 On the holy cross he fell asleep,
 But then his deity was there awake.
 Do not understand it otherwise
 If ye wish to rise again,
 For the divine nature cannot
 195 Be bent at all or made to feel
 Or be scourged or struck.
 Man can wound the human form
 Without harming the divine nature.
 I shall show you this by example,
 200 So that ye have no doubt of it.
 Cut into a tree tall and big,
 When the sun shall be shining;

In the notch of the first cut
Ye shall see the sun's ray shining,
205 And as ye widen the notch in front
And the sun spreads through it
Ye will not be able to strike the ray,
Wound it or take it or hold it.
Ye can cut the tree right through
210 Without harming the sun at all.
So it was with Jesus Christ:
The humanity, which he took for us,
Which he donned for love of us,
The pain and woe and death felt,
215 The divine nature felt nothing.
Believe it so if ye will fare well.
When God was laid in the tomb,
Three days only was he there,
And on the third day the father
220 Breathed on him so that he revived,
Just as the lion
Breathes on his little cub.

Now we have told you the truth
About the lion according to the writing.⁸
225 The lion acts in a very noble way,
For to no poor man does he do hurt
If he meet him in his path.
What's more, unless keen hunger drive him,
To no man will he do hurt,
230 Unless he has first provoked him.
The lion which is so bold
Bears all his strength in his breast.
When he is approached by the hunter
Of his spear he has great dread.
235 He fears the creaking of wheels;
It astonishes me how it comes about
That he is so afraid of a white cock,
Do what he will, he will not face it.

Antelope

Now I shall tell you of another beast,
240 Which has two horns on its head

8 i.e. the Latin bestiary.

As sharp as a blade.
 This beast is so swift
 That no hunter can overtake it
 Unless it be too tired to run,
 245 And I can well assure you
 That with its horns it can cut through
 A tree stout and full-grown.
 This is proved and well-known.
 Aptalos is the name of this beast;
 250 It dwells in the region
 Where the river Euphrates flows.
 When it is thirsty it always runs
 To that river and drinks of the water.
 When it has drunk it goes straightway
 255 Where there is a little bush
 As thick as a bramble.
 There the branches are so little,
 So thick, so fine and so close,
 Where the beast goes thrusting.
 260 There it enjoys itself and plays so much
 With its horns down and up,
 That they are quite caught in.
 When its horns are entangled
 In the shoots, which are slender,
 265 And it is taken in the bramble
 Like a fish in a net,
 Then it pulls and tugs as hard as it can.
 When it cannot disengage its horns,
 It struggles harder, but nothing avails;
 270 Then it is angered and cries so loud,
 That one can hear it from afar.
 Then comes the hunter headlong,
 And finds it there entrapped.
 He strikes it with spear or sword
 275 Or other weapon, and kills it.
 For it cannot by any effort great or small
 Escape from there or defend itself.
 There it is fated to give up its life.

 My masters, this beast in truth
 280 Itself affords a great example.
 This beast signifies

Many men who are living,
 Who have indeed two horns.
 They are the one and the other testament
 285 Which they have learned and have by heart,
 And compared one with the other
 So that they know all parts of them;
 But for all that they do not prevent them
 From going to play in the bush
 290 And entangle their horns.
 And what bush could that be
 But this wicked world on earth,
 Which is so false and deceiving,
 Where some folk play so much,
 295 That they are taken and caught?
 The hunter—mark it well—
 Is he who hunts the foolish man
 Until he catch him in that place
 In the bush and kill him there
 300 Without resistance and without question;
 For God allows him the power.
 And that man does most foolishly
 Who takes such delight and pleasure
 In the world, that he is entangled too much in it,
 305 And cannot withdraw his horns.
 I call to mind most unwillingly
 Clerks who have the two horns,
 Who do it all quite usually.
 They play with the bush always,
 310 And then the hunter comes along
 Who pursues them to kill them.
 But ever doth vain glory attract them
 To itself and enjoyment
 Of this world which kills them,
 315 And which perplexes the wisest.
 It is so pleasant to be under the shadow
 Of the bush, wherein they so delight,
 That they dwell there too willingly.
 There rich foods engage them
 320 And fine drinks, delicate and choice,
 Beautiful women, beautiful clothes,
 Palfreys ambling and fat,
 Gold and silver and money,

Which does such harm to him amassing it.
 325 So long they live beneath this bush
 That the hunter as a thief
 Comes on them and thrusts them thro'
 With his sword straightway.
 Ha! for God's sake, man, take heed to thyself,
 330 Who in God hast belief and faith,
 Flee homicide, flee wantonness,
 Renounce pride, quit usury,
 Let go adultery, fly from drunkenness
 And envy which hurts the soul.
 335 If thou canst not free thy horns
 It shall be meet for thee to lose
 The life not only of the body,
 But that of the soul as well.
 Be not like this dumb beast
 340 Which from the bush does not stir
 Before it is caught there.
 If this lesson thou hast well learned,
 And wilt act according to it,
 Great good wilt thou gain from it.
 345 Our matter is very curious,
 For often it varies and changes,
 And nevertheless it is all one;
 For the examples which it gathers
 Are all for the betterment
 350 Of the man who wanders foolishly.

Firestones

In the East there far above
 Are two stones on a high mountain
 Which have a very strange nature,
 For they bear fire and heat,
 355 They are as male and female.
 Did you ever hear a story
 More wonderful or more true,
 For the books make us believe it?
 When these stones are far apart,
 360 Fire does not issue for any purpose
 But when by chance it happens,
 That the one comes near the other,

They kindle and fire comes out
 Which burns up both the stones,
 365 And so greatly the fire waxes and grows
 That it kindles all the mountain
 And whatever there is on each side
 Of the mountain kindles and burns.

 By this must those example take
 370 Who wish to give themselves to God
 And who spend their life worthily.
 They must shun the company
 Of women most carefully
 And their carnal approaches,
 375 That this flame and this heat
 Which springs from carnal love
 Burn not the virtues which are in them,
 Which God, who is lord of the world,
 Has put in them by his grace.
 380 For in a little time are turned to ill
 The virtues, where this flame runs,
 Which springs from lewd women.
 For in truth we ought to know
 That always the felon angel has
 385 His trap to make the chaste man
 And upright man to sin,
 And the chaste woman likewise.
 Eve since the beginning
 Sinned through disobedience.
 390 From that sin is seed sown,
 Which ever grows and multiplies,
 For the devil never forgets.
 By the flame of that sin
 Has many a man been caught.
 395 Joseph was tempted and Samson,
 he one was overcome and the other not;
 The one was overcome, the other overcame,
 Nor did ever the flame corrupt him.

Sawfish

There is a beast, which has the name sawfish
 400 And which does not live on land,
 But in the great ocean dwells.

This beast is not little,
 But is very big bodied;
 Great wings has this dumb beast.
 405 When it sees on that sea
 Ships and swift vessels sailing,
 With the wind it fills its wings,
 Towards the ship it sails swiftly.
 The wind carries it over the waves
 410 Which are salt and very deep,
 So it goes sailing far
 Until it can go no farther.
 Then it falls back and gives up
 And the sea swallows it up
 415 And draws it down to the depths.
 The mariners who sail the sea
 Are not wishful to meet it,
 For it is a great peril of the sea,
 It often brings the ship to grief
 420 When it is able to reach it.

 This beast without doubt
 Bears a very great meaning.
 The sea, which is vast and deep,
 Signifies this present world,
 425 Which is very bad and bitter
 And perilous like the sea.
 They who go sailing on the sea
 Signify good folk who be,
 Who go voyaging through this world
 430 And steer their ship straight on
 Through the waves, through the storms,
 Against the dangers and the winds.
 This is the meaning to be understood:
 They are the good folk, whom the beast
 435 Cannot catch or cause to drown,
 Who never cease to battle,
 Through this world go sailing
 The wise men, steering their ship
 So straight that the fell adversary
 440 Is not able to wreck them.
 The beast, of which I have told you,
 Which on the sea sails a short way,

Then gives up and sinks into the deep,
 Signifies many who be
 445 Who commence by doing well,
 By serving God and loving him;
 And when they come in danger
 Of great comforts and of pleasures,
 Of desires which are great,
 450 And of the deceits of this world,
 Then they give up steering straight;
 Soon they suffer shipwreck
 And fall into adversities,
 Into sins, into wickedness
 455 Which drag them down to the depths below,
 Straight into the abode of hell.

Caladrius⁹

Caladrius is a bird
 Above all others courtly and pretty,
 And as white as is snow.
 460 Exceeding courtly is this bird.
 At times one finds it in
 The country of Jerusalem.
 When a man is so deadly sick,
 That they despair of his life,
 465 Then is this bird brought in.
 If he is to get better
 And recover from that sickness,
 The bird turns its face to him
 And takes upon itself his infirmity;
 470 And if he may not regain his health
 The bird turns the other way
 And will not have a look at him.

Now it is right that I tell you
 What this white bird stands for.
 475 It signifies without mistake
 Jesus Christ our saviour,
 Who never a black feather had
 But was all white like the plover.
 In him was never a black spot.
 480 He himself who is truth,

9 The identity of this bird is uncertain.

Saith in the gospel of himself:
 The prince of this world, he saith,
 Came to me, but found nothing in me¹⁰
 Of all that he imagined.
 485 That is to say nothing was in him
 To which he could attribute sin,
 However much he held to trickery;
 For God never committed sin
 Nor was there ever found in him
 490 Proof of any falsehood.¹¹
 This caladrius in truth
 Is our saviour Jesus,
 Who came of his great majesty
 To look upon the sickness
 495 Of the Jews, whom he had greatly loved
 And cared for and exhorted,
 So often fed and healed,
 So greatly honoured and favoured.
 And when he saw that they would die
 500 In the unbelief in which they were,
 Saw their malice and their stubbornness,
 And their evil heart and sloth,
 From their gaze he turned his face.
 By his benign and holy grace
 505 He turned him then towards our race,
 Which was weary and in pain,
 Without faith and without teaching,
 In great misery, in great torment.
 He visited our infirmities,
 510 And bore our sins in his body
 On the sacred wood of the true cross,
 Of which the devil is sore afraid.
 Thus it behoved him to do.
 Even as Moses had lifted up
 515 The serpent in the wilderness,
 So it behoved the son of man
 Openly to be lifted up¹²
 And hung on the holy cross
 (For to draw to him all the good,

10 John xiv. 30.

11 1 Peter ii. 22.

12 John iii. 14.

520 Who shall remain his without end).

Pelican

About the pelican we must tell you,
For there is much good sense and matter in it;
Ye will hear no better in many a year.
The Lord God speaks of the pelican
525 By the mouth of the good David,¹³
Who with his grace was so filled,
That he was made like to him.
The pelican is a wonderful bird,
It dwells in the region
530 Of a river which is named Nile.
It dwells on the shore of the Nile
And the written history tells me this:
That there are two kinds,
Those which dwell by rivers
535 And eat nothing but fish;
Those which do not eat fish
Dwell in the desert
And eat nothing but vermin.
About the pelican there's a wonderful thing:
540 For ne'er did any mother sheep
Love so much her little lamb
As does the pelican her little bird.
When she has hatched her young ones
She devotes all her pains and care
545 To feeding them both flesh and bones.
But her feeding is all ill-spent,
For when they are grown big
And are getting knowing and lusty
They peck their parents in the face,
550 And so knavish are they and rude to them,
That their parents at last get angry
And strike and kill them all.
On the third day the father comes to them,
He is overcome with pity and grief
555 So dearly he loves them with a perfect love,
That he returns and comes to them.
With his beak he strikes his side
Until he has drawn out blood from it.

¹³ Ps. cii. 6.

With this blood, which flows from him,
 560 He brings back life to the bodies
 Of his young ones—doubt it not at all—
 And in such way he brings them to life.

My masters, now hear what this denotes.
 You may have heard a story
 565 Of Arthur or of Charles or of Ogier.
 But here is drink and meat indeed
 For the soul of each of the faithful
 Who wills to have counsel with God.
 God is the true pelican,
 570 Who for us bore toil and stress.
 Hear what he saith in prophecy
 By the good prophet Isaiah¹⁴:
 I have begotten children, saith the lord God;
 When I brought them up and fed them,
 575 They despised and hated me
 And disobeyed my commandments.
 Indeed, my masters, it is truth,
 It is the true testimony:
 We are his children and little doves,
 580 Who like bad and wicked men
 Struck our lord in the face,
 When we in his presence served
 For many a day his created thing
 And never him as creator.
 585 Openly we denied him,
 When we worshipped stones and wood.
 Therefore was he angered towards us,
 He forsook us and drove us
 Into the hand of the cruel traitor.
 590 For our sins were we dead.
 When pity overcame the father for it
 He sent his dear son on earth,
 Our saviour Jesus Christ,
 To make peace from our war.
 595 God became man for our sins,
 Was circumcised and baptised
 And for our salvation
 Suffered torture and death.

14 Isa. i. 2.

He let himself be taken and seized
600 Bound and tied and scourged
And on the holy cross martyred
And crowned with thorns
And nailed through feet and hands.
The saviour filled with pity
605 Let him in the side be pierced;
We know well and truly,
That blood and water issued from it.
By that blood are we healed;
That sacred blood ransomed our life
610 And took us out of the power
Of the traitor who is named Satan.
God who is the true pelican
Redeemed us in this way
As people whom he held full dear.

Night Raven

615 Now we shall tell of the night raven,
A bird of evil race,
Fresaie¹⁵ is its name in good romance.
This bird is foul and stinking.
Day and sunlight alike it hates,
620 Always is its nature so.
It loves night and darkness ever,
It's quite plain that it is bad.

By this bird are figured
The false and wicked Jews
625 Who would not look at God
When he came here for to save us.
Of God, who is the true sun,
They would not follow the advice,
But refused it everywhere
630 And rejected him at once
And said quite plainly
That they would have no king but Caesar.¹⁶
Then God showed himself to our people,
Who were weary and in pain,
635 In a dark region.

15 Screech-owl.

16 John xix. 15.

In the shadow of death we sat.¹⁷
When the light was born in us
Which from the holy virgin brake,
Then were we enlightened,
640 Then was the time finished,
The time of pain and grief,
Which had beset us many a day.
Before that were we sad,
Of us saith God by the psalmist¹⁸
645 David, who was so favoured by him:
The people that I have not known
Saith our lord, served me
And with willingness obeyed me,
And strange children lied to me
650 And became halt and old.
They became old and halt
Because they followed not my commandments.
The Jews are in darkness
And see not the truth;
655 They loved the darkness more
Than the true sun above.

Eagle

The eagle is the king of birds.
When it is old it is renewed again
Through its most wonderful nature.
660 A fountain clear and pure,
Where the water springs fresh and bubbling,
When the sun is shining bright
The eagle seeks, when it is old
And its eyes are very dim
665 And each wing heavy and feeble.
In the air above this fountain
It begins to mount very high
In the face of the sun shining bright.
When up there it meets the heat,
670 Its eyes it fastens on the glare
Of the sun and gazes so hard on it
That it reckons to be all on fire.
There in the heat it burns

17 Isa. ix. 2.

18 Ps. xviii. 45.

Its eyes and its wings likewise;
675 Then it flies down into the fountain,
There where the water is most fresh and pure,
And dips and bathes three times,
Until it is—be well assured—
All fresh and all renewed
680 And from its old age healed.
So clear a vision has the eagle,
If it is as high up as a cloud
Up there in that air circling
And sees the fish swimming
685 Beneath it in river or sea,
Then it flies down to seize it;
It fastens on it and struggles so hard
That by force it draws it to the bank.

Another strange habit it has:
690 For whoever may change its eggs
And in its nest put others,
So that it neither knows nor sees;
When the little birds grow big,
Before they are able to fly well
695 It will carry them up in the air
Into the rays, into the glare
Of the sun, when shining its brightest.
That one which can well look into
The ray of the sun without blinking,
700 It will love and tend dearly;
And that which has no strength
To gaze against the glare,
As bastard it casts off
And cares for it no more.

705 The eagle which thus renews itself,
Gives us example good and excellent;
For thus should act
Man, who wishes to renew
His old garment, be he Pagan
710 Or be he Jew or Christian.
If the eyes of his heart should be
So darkened that they could not
See the sure salvation,
Then should he seek the fountain,

715 Which is spiritual and living:
 It is baptism which revives
 All those whom it sanctifies.
 For this I bring for warranty
 The gospel where I find written
 720 That he who of water and the spirit
 Should not be so sanctified
 Would not be born again and cleansed
 Nor could he in any sort of way
 Enter into the heavenly kingdom.¹⁹
 725 Whoso in this fountain clear
 Is baptized in the name of the father,
 Of the son and of the holy spirit,
 Quite certainly without gainsay
 Shall be able to see and gaze upon
 730 The true sun which shines so clear,
 That is Jesus Christ so tender, so kind.
 Whoso on him has fixed his gaze
 In gazing on him renews himself²⁰
 Just as did the little bird
 735 On the other sun which he made,
 Who established all the elements
 And who created all this world
 And all the things which are.

Phoenix

A bird which has the name Phoenix
 740 Dwells in India, where it always is;
 Elsewhere one is not wont to find it.
 This bird is always without a mate
 For there is but one of the kind
 Nor does any other resemble it
 745 Of like mien, of like fashion,
 Of like appearance or of like form.
 When five hundred years are passed,
 Then it seems to it that it is grown old;
 It loads itself with spices rare,
 750 Good and of divers kinds.
 From the wilderness it flies
 To the city of Heliopolis.

19 John iii. 5.

20 Ps. ciii. 5.

To a priest of the city
 Is signified truthfully
 755 By some sign or otherwise
 The approach of this bird;
 And when he knows that it must come,
 He gets twigs of brushwood gathered
 And tied in a bundle
 760 And lays them on a fine altar,
 Which for this bird is destined.
 And the bird, as I have said,
 Laden with spices comes to the place.
 With its beak it lights the fire
 765 For so briskly it strikes on the hard stone
 That by good luck fire breaks out
 Which sets all alight and burns
 The spices and the twigs.
 When the fire is bright and burning
 770 It sets itself thereon at once
 And burns all up to dust and ashes.
 Then comes the priest for to learn
 How the affair has gone:
 The ashes in a heap he finds.
 775 Then he opens them quite gently,
 So that he finds there a little worm,
 Which gives out a sweeter smell
 Than rose or any other flower.
 The priest returns next day
 780 For to see how it fares;
 The bird which has already taken shape
 On the third day is a bird complete;
 It has all that it ought to have.
 To the priest it verily makes a bow,
 785 Then turns away sprightly and gay;
 Nor does it return for five hundred years.

 By this bird you must understand
 Our lord, who willed to come
 Down for our salvation.
 790 With good perfumes was he fitly
 Laden when he came on earth
 For the captives detained in hell.
 On the altar of the holy cross

Which is so sweet and full of savour
 795 Was sacrificed this bird,
 Who on the third day rose anew.
 But many would not believe
 That the thing was really true;
 They are very wrong—that is my opinion—
 800 Since this bird which is called phoenix
 Submits to undergo death
 And on the third day renews its life,
 How much more easily may we believe
 About God, who hath to judge all,
 805 What he says in his discourse,
 Where there is nothing if not truth.
 This saith he who is truth:
 I have the power, he saith,²¹
 To lay down my soul and take it up again.
 810 Verily he saith, verily he maketh us understand,
 So ought we to hear him and reform:
 I come not, saith he, to destroy²²
 The law, but I come to accomplish it,
 And to set a crown upon it and fulfill it.
 815 Even so will the wise scribe
 Be sovereign in the kingdom of heaven,
 Who of his treasure sets before you
 As a clever and a learned man
 The old things and the new,²³
 820 Which alike are good and excellent.

Hoopoe

The hoopoe is a horrid bird,
 Its nest is not nice and clean
 But is made of mud and filth.
 But of a very good nature are
 825 The little birds, which are born to it;
 For when their parents are grown so old
 That they have lost all their strength
 For flying and for seeing,
 Then their children succour them.
 830 When they see them grown so old

21 John x. 18.

22 Matt. v. 17.

23 Matt. xiii. 52.

They tear out with their beaks
 Their old feathers unceasingly.
 Then they warm them soothingly
 And cherish them in like manner
 835 As these had done to them before
 Until they are restored and fresh
 And their sight made clear again
 And their feathers well grown.
 When they have thus restored them
 840 Well may their children say:
 Good father, good mother dear,
 Just as in like manner
 You have bestowed great care
 On us and on our sustenance,
 845 As recompense for such service
 Now have we devoted ourselves to you
 And rendered kindness for kindness
 So that there is nothing misreckoned.

 My masters, since this creature,
 850 Which by nature has no reasoning power,
 Acts in the way which I have told you,
 In what parlous state a man must be,
 Who is fully possessed of reason
 And who takes no heed to his ways.
 855 Alas, in what evil hour was he born
 Who dishonours father and mother,
 When he sees them before his eyes
 Sick and feeble and old
 And yet has no care or thought for them!
 860 How evil a nature has a man
 Who has understanding
 And hates his father and his mother
 And slanders them quite wrongfully.
 It were fit that he die a violent death!
 865 For God commanded in the law,²⁴
 Which we must keep faithfully,
 That a man should honour father and mother,
 And that he should serve and keep them;
 And promised that he shall die the death
 870 Who curseth his father or his mother.

24 Exod. xx 12; xxi. 17.

Ant

Solomon says about the sluggard²⁵

That if he will be brought back

From illdoing and from idleness,

He should regard the valour

875 Of the ant, which is so little.

Wise and prudent is the ant,

Which makes provision in summer time

So that it has plenty in winter;

And none other beast does this.

880 When they come forth from their home

They proceed right orderly

The one before the other straightly

Until they come to the ripe wheat,

There where it is full-grown and hard.

885 And when they are come to the corn

Of this you may be quite sure

By the smell of the stalk below

They are able to tell—so clever are they—

If it is barley or rye or wheat-corn.

890 If it is really barley or rye,

They leave it and pass on

Until they are come to the wheat.

Then they climb up to the ear.

When they are laden and supplied,

895 To their home back they turn

In order all the way.

Every day they come and go.

And do ye know what those approaching do,

When they meet the others laden?

900 They do not say—mark it well—

Give us of your corn,

But they keep quite wisely

To the track the others had come,

Until they reach that place

905 Where these had loaded themselves up.

Then they load up with the wheat

And return well laden.

More wise are they and clever

Than the foolish virgins were;²⁶

25 Prov. vi. 6.

26 Matt. xxv. 3.

910 For when they should enter to the marriage,
 Were their lamps all empty
 And nothing had they in their vessels.
 The five wise were furnished;
 The five foolish begged them
 915 Of their oil, but none of it they got,
 However much they prayed them for it.
 Utterly did they fail them
 And plainly answered them
 That they would not give them any at all;
 920 Let them go where they had
 Bought it and buy again.
 Or purchase some in another way.
 While these had gone therefor
 The wise who were well supplied,
 925 Entered to the marriage.
 When those others had returned,
 So fast was the gate shut
 That no one had entry there.

 My masters, let us take heed to the ant,
 930 Which so labours and provides
 By having worked so hard in summer
 That in winter it has full plenty.
 Still another clever thing it does,
 Which must not be left forgotten.
 935 When it has stored its corn
 Which has cost it so dear,
 Each grain it has it splits in two,
 And thus preserves and keeps it
 That it neither sprouts nor rots,
 940 Nor does any germ grow there.

 Thou christian, who in God believest
 And the scripture hearest and seest,
 Split and divide wisely
 The letter of the old testament.
 945 That is to say and be understood,
 That thou must by no means take
 All what the scripture saith
 According to the letter, which kills,²⁷
 But according to the spirit, which gives life.

27 2 Cor. iii. 6.

950 This must thou not forget.
The Jews who do not wish to find
Meaning or symbol in the letter,
Are deceived most foully;
They do not see deeply.
955 The corn they keep entirely whole,
Until it rots in their garner.
Much greater sense has the ant,
Which provides thus in time
That of its corn it has all the use
960 When the proper time comes round.

Ant-lion. (1)

There are ants of another kind
In Ethiopia—far up there;
Of dogs they have all the form
And are just of their size.
965 These are of a strange sort
For out of the ground and from the dust
They scratch up and dig pure gold;
So much that I cannot tell the sum of it.
And whoso wills to take this gold from them
970 Rues it sore and is sorry for it.
For straightway they pursue him
And if they reach him eat him quickly.
The folk who live near there
Know how savage and hot they are,
975 And that they have of gold great plenty,
So have a device ready:
They take mares, which have foals,
When they are young and milk-fed;
Three days they keep them starving,
980 On the fourth day they saddle them,
And to the saddles fix small boxes
As shining as is fine gold.
Between them and the country of the ants
Runs a river very swift.
985 With the mares to the river they come,
Keeping back the foals behind them.
Then they drive the mares across
Which are hungry both in heart and tooth.
On the other side is grass, lush

990 And thick and well-grown.
There go the mares feeding;
And the ants at once
When they see the boxes shining
Think they have a good place there
995 For to stow and hide their gold.
Then is no need to bid them
Fill and charge the boxes
With the good gold precious and dear.
So they all day carrying go
1000 Until it draws towards dusk,
When the mares are sated
And have their bellies big and round.
When they hear their foals hinky
Then they hasten to return;
1005 The river now they cross again.
The people take their gold and heap it up.
Now are they rich and opulent,
And the ants are very sad.

Ant-lion. (2)

There is still another ant
1010 Which is none of those I told you of;
It has the name ant-lion.
Of ants this is the lion.
It is the smallest of all,
The most bold and most clever.
1015 Other ants it hates bitterly.
In the dust quite deftly
It buries itself, so cunning it is.
When the others come laden,
Out of the dust it jumps on them,
1020 And attacks and kills them.

My masters, for God's sake—who lies not—
Give heed to the little ant,
Which is so provident and wise
In knowing where its well-being is.
1025 Look well ahead and prepare,
So long as the summer is so fine
So long may you have your ease.
But assuredly you must come

To the hard winter, that is to say
 1030 To that day of pain and wrath,
 When the good shall go to the right
 And the evil to the left.
 Be ye thoughtful and careful
 To enter to the marriage with the bridegroom,
 1035 If so be that your lamps are full
 Of good works and constant.
 For into the marriage they shall not enter
 Who have not their lamps indeed
 Full of good oil,
 1040 That is the oil of charity.
 They shall enter—I do assure you—
 With the bridegroom to the rich feast
 Who shall have their lamps full
 Of good works in their lives.
 1045 But whoso shall have his lamp empty,
 Be certain that he shall not enter there,
 But will remain in good truth
 In pain and in misery,
 In burning fire and great torment
 1050 Which shall endure without end,
 From which may the lord God deliver us all,
 And set us with him in his joy.

Syren

Of the syren we shall tell you,
 Which has a very strange form.
 1055 For from the waist upwards
 She is the most beautiful thing in the world
 Fashioned in the form of woman.
 The other part is shaped
 Like a fish or like a bird.
 1060 So sweetly does she sing and well
 That they who go sailing on the sea
 As soon as they hear that song,
 Cannot forbear
 From letting their ship approach.
 1065 So soothing seems the song to them,
 That in their ship they fall asleep,
 And when they are so fast asleep,
 Then are they deceived and trapped;

For the syrens kill them
 1070 Without their uttering shriek or cry.

 The syren, who sings so sweetly
 And enchants folk by her song
 Affords example for instructing those
 Who through this world must voyage.
 1075 We who through this world do pass
 Are deceived by such a sound,
 By the glamour, by the lusts
 Of this world, which kill us
 When we have tasted of such pleasures:
 1080 Wantonness and bodily ease,
 And gluttony and drunkenness,
 Slothfulness and riches,
 Palfreys, fat horses,
 The splendour of rich draperies.
 1085 Always we incline that way;
 About the future we are slow to think.
 So great is our delight in them
 That perforce we fall asleep.
 Thereupon the syren kills us,
 1090 It is the evil one who uses us so ill,
 Who makes us plunge into vice so much,
 That he entangles us in his snares.
 Then he attacks us, then he falls upon us,
 Then he kills us, then he does us to death,
 1095 Just as the syrens do
 To the mariners who sail the seas.

 But there is many a mariner
 Who knows how to keep watch and ward.
 When he goes sailing on the sea
 1100 He is wont to stop his ears
 That he hear not the song which deceives.
 Just the same must the man do,
 Who passes through this world.
 Chaste he must keep himself and pure
 1105 And stop his ears,
 That he hear nothing said or spoken
 Which may lead him into sin.
 And so do many protect themselves:
 They shut their ears and their eyes,

1110 That they do not hear and do not see
The evil pleasures and the vanities,
By which many are seduced.

Hedgehog

The bestiary has much to say,
Fit examples and good matter.
1115 Good parables and great good sense.
Now we shall tell you of the hedgehog,
Which is like a little pig in shape
When it is a tiny suckling.
Very fully is it armed
1120 For by nature it has prickles;
And when it hears or sees or feels
Near itself either beast or folk,
Within its armour it shuts and locks itself,
Then fears their attack no whit.
1125 From man it cannot defend itself,
But if a beast will seize it
I know not how it could devour it
So badly will it be pricked.
Very knowing is the hedgehog
1130 Which frequents the woods and bushes.
A very pretty trick it has
When it goes to seek its food.
As fast as its little footsteps can
It goes away to the vine when ripe;
1135 When by its pains it has climbed the vine
Where are grapes in great plenty,
It shakes it so smartly
That they fall thickly.
When they are spread upon the ground,
1140 And it has got right down,
On top of them it rolls its back
And all along and all across
Until the grapes are stuck
On its prickles, which are slender.
1145 When it feels full laden,
It makes its way straightly
Back to its little ones at home.
And as long as the season lasts,
To the apples it does the same

1150 As to the grapes, of which I have told you.
Good christian, thou who dost understand,
Forget not this example,
But guard thee from the hedgehog,
From that treacherous rascal thief,
1155 Guard thy vine and thine apple tree
From the deceiving thieving robber,
The evil one who ever plots
How he may take the fruit of thy vine.
If thou hast not done good work,
1160 The devil always watches
Until he have betrayed and caught thee
And driven thee into sinning,
So that he may shake off the fruit
Which should help and support thee.
1165 As soon as the devil learns,
That the cares of the world take thee
He hastes to drag thee fully in,
He wastes thy spiritual fruits,
He shakes thy vine and thine apple tree;
1170 Thus he wars on thee all round.

Ibis

There is a bird—never was one like it—
Which in latin has the name ibis.
Its name in romance I know not,
But it lives a very evil life.
1175 None is more dirty or more bad.
This bird ever dwells
On the shore of pond or sea
To look if it can find
Either carrion or putrid fish,
1180 For on such food it lives.
The carrion which the sea throws up,
Man or beast, shell or other fish,
This bird seizes and consumes
When it is cast upon the shore.
1185 Into the water it dares not go,
For it knows not how to swim,
Nor does it wish to trouble
Or take pains to learn it.

On the shore it stays hungry,
 1190 So bad and lazy it is,
 That into clear water it will not go,
 Nor will it eat the good fish there;
 But always feeds on rotten stuff,
 And never cares for what is clean.

1195 A good christian, who will learn,
 Must to this story listen,
 And he will hear what signifies
 This bird of evil life.
 It signifies in truth

1200 The wretched suffering sinner
 Who dwells and stays in sin
 And attains at no time
 To spiritual foods,
 But is ever fixed on carnal.

1205 And what are carnal foods?
 Verily, when thou asketh me,
 I will tell thee what saint Paul saith
 And what I find in his writing;
 None should hold it up to mockery.

1210 The works of the flesh,²⁸ saith he
 Are manifest and very evil,
 For the soul they create great ills.
 How are these works called?
 Pride and fornication,

1215 Covetousness, drunkenness, greed,
 Envy, which is a very evil vice.
 Such foods the wretched man uses
 Who dares not or wills not
 Step into the fair clear water

1220 Nor learn to swim in it
 After the good fish which he would find
 If he came into the clear water.

The good christian does otherwise
 Who is baptized holy

1225 And is renewed by water and the spirit.
 This one enters without question
 Into the clear and pleasant waters,
 That is into the spiritual services

28 Gal. v. 19.

Where the good meats are,
 1230 Which bring deliverance to the soul.
 There man lives on wholesome foods,
 Good and clean and sure
 Which the apostle in good truth
 Calls joy and charity,²⁹
 1235 Humility and patience,
 Faith, chastity, and temperance.
 These foods in truth
 Make the wise man live and flourish.
 For them must man take pains
 1240 To swim strongly, to keep afloat.
 Just so are we in this world,
 As on the great and deep sea
 Which plagues us and encumbers us.
 So many ills there are, too many to number.
 1245 Wisely he should strive to swim
 Who would overcome them all.
 It behoves him to bear a mark,
 Who in the name of Jesus Christ
 Signs himself and prays to him devoutly.
 1250 This man swims well and safely.
 Devoutly ought we to pray
 And raise our hands to heaven
 And say to God with simple mien:
 Lord, the light of thy countenance³⁰
 1255 Is marked upon us
 In thy holy glorious sign.
 When we raise our hands on high
 The sign of the cross is there on them,
 And if we pray from a good heart,
 1260 Quite straight to the lord God we swim
 Through this perilous world
 Where the most part are hungry
 For lack of spiritual foods.
 They do not want to do so,
 1265 Or to take trouble or thought
 How to know through the storms
 Of this wicked world to swim.
 Therefore it is meet that they founder.

29 Gal. v. 22.

30 Ps. iv. 6.

For God's sake, my masters, then let us learn
 1270 In what way we ought to swim.
 To God who is gentle and kind,
 We must lift both hearts and hands.
 That is the sign which we bear,
 By which to the lord God we swim.
 1275 If the ship spread not its sail,
 When it sails a course by the star
 It would not be able to sail.
 The bird could not fly
 If it did not spread its wings.
 1280 If the moon displayed not
 Its horns, it would be always dark.
 When the children of Israel of old
 Fought against Amalek,
 At all times they conquered
 1285 When Moses lifted up his hands.
 And as often as he lowered them
 Were the Jews worsted.
 And so there is abundant work for him
 Who can pass through this world
 1290 Without being perforce engulfed
 In adversities which are great,
 Which drag man down to the deep vale.
 Very bad is he who fails to learn
 To swim spiritually
 1295 And who lives on carnal foods.
 With the dead he dies most certainly.
 As Jesus Christ, our real master,
 Saith in the gospel:
 Let the dead cover up their dead,³¹
 1300 Bury and entomb them.
 And God, who governs all the good,
 Knows our sail and our mast,
 How we through this present world
 Shall be able to pass safely
 1305 By swimming, that we perish not,
 But may reach the right port.

Fox

You have often heard the story

³¹ Matt. viii. 22.

How Reynard is wont to steal
 The poultry of Constant de Nowes.
 1310 Eagerly does he stuff his cheeks
 The fox—at all times—
 With fowls and with capons.
 At all times he lives by robbery,
 By thieving, by trickery;
 1315 So wicked and evil-natured is he.
 Hear what the bestiary says about it:
 The fox is full of tricks;
 When he is getting hungry
 And does not know where to look for prey,
 1320 Through the hunger which sore oppresses him
 He goes to where the earth is red;
 There he rolls and wallows and smears himself,
 Until he looks as if all bloody.
 Then he goes to lie down slyly
 1325 In a place quite open
 And free to these birds.
 Within his body he holds his breath,
 So keeps his stomach firm and full.
 The rascal who knows so many tricks
 1330 Puts out his tongue out of his mouth,
 Shuts his eyes and shows his teeth,
 And in such wise deceives
 The birds who see him lying;
 For certainly they think him dead.
 1335 Then they come down for to peck him,
 But when he feels them coming near,
 Close to his teeth, and he sees his chance,
 Then shamelessly he snaps them up;
 When in his jaws they are entrapped
 1340 All is devoured both flesh and bone.

 The fox who knows pretence so well,
 And which we here call Reynard
 Signifies the bad fox
 Who drives people to destruction.
 1345 He is the evil one, who wars against us,
 Each day he comes to prey on us.
 To those who live carnally,
 He really feigns to be quite dead

So that he may draw them nearer;
 1350 But there is no mercy at all.
 Once he has them in his jaws,
 This thief devours them all
 Like the fox does the bird
 When he feels it close to his mouth.
 1355 But there are divers birds
 Who the snares and the tricks
 Of the fox perceive well;
 They will not come down for anything.
 The jay comes down there and the magpie
 1360 And many who know not how
 To look for the great fraud.
 Easy are many of them to ensnare.
 With foolish people it is just the same,
 So much are they accustomed to and given up
 1365 To lechery, to evil living,
 That they will not be punished for it
 Until they fall into Reynard's teeth;
 Then there comes the punisher at last.
 The wise man who well perceives
 1370 The thief who deceives the foolish,
 Withdraws himself from lecheries,
 From drunkenness, from drinking bouts,
 On which most filthy habits feed,
 So that body and soul perish together.

Unicorn

1375 Now I shall tell you of the unicorn,
 A beast which has but one horn
 Set in the middle of its forehead.
 This beast is so daring,
 So pugnacious and so bold,
 1380 That it picks quarrels with the elephant.
 It is the fiercest beast in the world
 Of all those which are in it.
 It fights with the elephant and wins.
 Its weapon is so strong and piercing,
 1385 And the point of its weapon so sharp
 That nothing can be struck
 Without being pierced and ripped,
 Nor can the elephant defend

1390 Itself when it meets it.
 For under its belly it strikes it
 With its weapon sharp as a blade
 So hard that it is ripped right open.
 This beast has such strength
 That it fears no hunter.
 1395 They that would ensnare it
 Go there first to spy
 When it is gone to disport itself
 Either on mountain or in valley.
 When they have found its haunt
 1400 And have well marked its footprints,
 They go for a young girl,
 Whom they know well to be virgin.
 Then they make her sit and wait
 At its lair, for to capture the beast.
 1405 When the unicorn is come back
 And has seen the damsel,
 Straight to her it comes at once;
 In her lap it crouches down
 And the girl clasps it
 1410 Like one submitting to her.
 With the girl it sports so much,
 That in her lap it falls asleep.
 Those who are spying at once rush out:
 There they take it and bind it.
 1415 Then they drive it before the king
 By force and despite its struggles.

 This wonderful beast,
 Which has one horn on its head,
 Signifies our lord,
 1420 Jesus Christ, our saviour,
 He is the spiritual unicorn,
 Who took up in the virgin his abode,
 Who is so especially worthy.
 In her he assumed his manhood,
 1425 In which he appeared to the world.
 His people of the Jews
 Believed him not, but spied on him,
 And then took him and bound him.
 Before Pilate they led him

1430 And there condemned him to death.
 That horn verily,
 Which the beast has—the only one—
 Signifies his manhood,
 As God saith in truth
 1435 In the gospel plain and clear:
 We are one—I and my father.³²
 And the good priest Zacharias,
 Before that God was born of Mary,
 Saith that in the house of David,
 1440 His good child, his well-beloved,
 The lord God should exalt his horn.³³
 And God himself saith further
 By David, who cries with trumpet voice:
 Like the horn of the unicorn³⁴
 1445 Shall my horn be exalted,
 As God had covenanted
 Was this saying fulfilled
 And the word in the prophecy,
 When Jesus Christ was crowned
 1450 And on the true cross suffered.
 The savage nature signifies—
 With which this beast is filled—
 What the powers of heaven
 Could never really know,
 1455 Neither thrones nor dominations
 The work of the incarnation.
 He never knew its course or path—
 The devil—who took great pains
 To know and schemed,
 1460 But he knew not how that went.
 What great humility God showed,
 When he took human form for us,
 As he himself saith
 In the gospel where it is written:
 1465 Learn of me, so saith God,³⁵
 Whom you see among you here
 How meek and gentle I am,
 Humble of heart and free from pride.

32 John x. 30.

33 Luke i. 69.

34 Ps. xcii. 10

35 Matt. xi. 29.

Only by the will of the father
1470 Was God born of a virgin mother
And the word was made flesh—³⁶
Without her virginity being broken—
And dwelt among us,
So that we beheld his great glory
1475 As of the true begotten
Full of grace and truth.

Beaver

There is a beast which is named beaver,
A little bigger than a hare, 'tis thought,
Very gentle and exceeding wise.
1480 It is not domestic, but is wild,
And they make of its genitals
Medicines for many purposes.
When it is pursued by the hunter,
And he has so nearly reached it
1485 That it sees that it cannot escape,
Then it hastens to cut right off
Those members all at one bite.
In such wise it ransoms its body.
So great favour has God given it,
1490 That it knows well why man pursues it.
So it preserves itself full dearly
And fitly through its members.
In front of the hunter it leaves them,
And the hunter slackens speed
1495 And comes no farther, but leaves it alone;
For he has got then what he sought.
In such wise it saves its life
And its body by the one part.
And if it chanced another time
1500 That it found itself in such straits
And that a hunter pursued it
In the hope that its members were there,
When it is so hard pressed
That it cannot run farther,
1505 Right round it would turn itself
And display to the hunter
That there is nothing there to hope for;

³⁶ John i. 14.

So will it make him desist.

Just the same do wise men do,
1510 Wisely and prudently,
When the hunter follows them close,
The subtil cunning thief
Who ever seeks for their undoing.
But they throw in front of him
1515 That which is his, that is to say:
Fornication and adultery,
All kinds of sin.
When man has cut that off from him
And thrown it in the devil's face,
1520 Then he leaves him I do assure you.
When he sees there is nothing there of his,
He appears to him to be no good.
When the good man sees himself pursued
By the devil, then must he cut off
1525 From himself all vices and all faults.
Thus can he escape quite safely.

By the example of this beast
The apostle admonishes us³⁷
That we should render service and tribute
1530 To him to whom we owe it,
And there where we have honour to pay
Let us render it with fear and love.
Verily must we understand
That we must first give up
1535 That which we owe to the devil.
And what is that? That we renounce him
And all his works completely;
So shall we be out of his clutches.
The sinner who would be wise
1540 In such way should guard himself
And ransom himself from him
Who ever strives for his undoing.
The works which please the flesh,
In which all evils grow and dwell,
1545 He who is wise cuts off from him.
When he has rendered to him
This tribute as that which is his,

³⁷ Rom. xiii. 7.

As his prey and his booty,
 And has thrown it in his face,
 1550 Then that one stops and loses his track,
 Which he no longer marks nor sees,
 Since he adopts the holy life.
 There he finds such spiritual fruits
 As I have told you about already,
 1555 Faith, patience, humility,³⁸
 Abstinence and loving-kindness,
 And charity and joy and peace,
 Joy which shall never fail.
 So he finds before his face
 1560 That whereby he has lost his track.
 Of him he has no smell or trace,
 And 'tis not right that he gets joy of it.
 And God, who of joy is master,
 Brings us to the greater joy,
 1565 Which has no end and is unchangeable,
 But endures always and for aye.

Hyena

There is much to say and to relate
 About the examples of the bestiary,
 Which are of beasts and of birds.
 1570 Profitable and good and excellent
 Is the book; for it teaches
 In what form evil still exists
 And the way which he should go
 Who wills to return to God.
 1575 The bestiary reminds us
 Of a beast which is bad and filthy
 And has the name hyena in greek.
 Its name in french I do not know.
 But the law prohibits and forbids
 1580 That man eat of it at all
 Nor thing which is like it;
 For it is not suitable,
 But is all bad and foul.
 For it feeds on the dead,
 1585 And dwells among the graves.
 It devours and gobbles up

38 Gal. v. 22.

All those which it can get at,
 Therefore must one keep away from it.
 About this beast so hated
 1590 Saith the prophet Jeremiah:³⁹
 The den of the hyena in the wood
 This is, he saith, my heritage.
 This beast carries in its eye
 A stone of which I want to say:
 1595 Whoever under his tongue should keep it,
 They say that he should foretell
 Things which are to happen
 In the events of this world.
 This beast has two natures,
 1600 Which has its dwelling thus in graves.
 But of this ye will not hear speak.
 They say, that ye will find it
 At one time male, at other female
 With breasts and with teats,
 1605 A most strange and wonderful thing
 So to change its externals.

 This beast—doubt it not—
 Denotes the children of Israel,
 Who at first firmly believed
 1610 In the true father omnipotent
 And held to him loyally,
 But afterwards became as females.
 When they partook of delicate foods
 And gave themselves up to pleasures,
 1615 To the flesh and to luxury
 No more did they regard the lord God,
 But forsook him and were so foolish
 That they worshipped idols.

 Many are the folk, it seemeth to me,
 1620 Who are like to this beast;
 I shall tell you what people they are.
 Far too many there are in the world
 Who are neither male nor female,
 In a word, in practice they are twins,
 1625 Double-minded and weak and lying;
 Nor in any way are they stable.

³⁹ Jer. xii. 8.

Of these is the word of Solomon,⁴⁰
 Who made the book of sermons:
 A double-minded man, false and dissembling,
 1630 Who at no time is constant
 In anything which he does or says,
 His is a very evil life.
 He desires to serve both you and me
 But will not keep faith with any.
 1635 Jesus Christ, our true master,
 Speaks this word in the gospel:⁴¹
 No man can serve two masters
 Nor fulfil their commands;
 He will love the one, and hate the other.
 1640 What God says shall never fail:
 The one he will despise and hate
 And the other love and support.

Hydrus and Crocodile

There is a kind of serpent
 Which has its abode in water.
 1645 Hydrus is its name, it is very wise,
 For it knows full well how to do hurt
 To the crocodile which it hates;
 It knows how to entrap it cunningly.
 I shall tell you first clearly
 1650 How this creature entraps it so cleverly.
 The crocodile is a wild beast
 And dwells ever on the bank
 Of that river which is named Nile.
 It is like an ox in some respects.
 1655 It is full twenty cubits long,
 And is as stout as the trunk of a tree.
 Four feet it has and great claws
 And teeth sharp and cutting.
 With these it is fully armed.
 1660 So hard and firm is its skin
 That it cares not a sprig of hemlock
 For the blows of big sharp stones.
 No man ever saw such a beast!
 For it lives on land and in water;

40 Jas. i. 8.

41 Matt. vi. 24.

1665 By night it keeps sunk in water
 And by day rests on land.
 If it meets a man and overcomes him
 It eats him and nothing is left.
 But always thereafter weeps for him
 1670 So long as it remains alive.
 To this beast alone it happens
 That it holds its lower jaw
 All quite still when it eats
 And moves the one above.
 1675 This nature is not given
 To any other creature born.
 Of its dung truly
 They are wont to make an ointment.
 Old women smear themselves with it;
 1680 With this ointment may be smoothed
 Wrinkles on the face and forehead,
 And many do it still.
 But when the sweat runs down,
 Know that it is no more use to them.
 1685 The other beast of which I told you,
 Which lives always in the water,
 Hates the crocodile with deadly hate,
 And it the other and no mistake.
 Much is it filled with hatred,
 1690 But the other is much more cunning.
 When on land it sees it sleeping
 And when sleeping to open its jaws,
 In mud and slime it bathes,
 And rolls in it and smears itself
 1695 For to be more slippery.
 Then it goes straight for that devil,
 Down its throat it darts and is
 Swallowed by it into its belly.
 And there is no great time passed
 1700 Before it bursts it open and tears
 All the entrails of its belly
 And its bowels and intestines.
 It seeks a way out quickly,
 And so gets out quite safely.
 1705 And the other dies; for die it must,
 For of its wounds it cannot recover.

Here may we a lesson take
 And a great meaning learn.
 The crocodile signifies
 1710 Death and hell; doubt it not at all.
 Just as the serpent
 Of which I told you at first
 Attacks and kills the crocodile
 And finds a way out safely,
 1715 So did our lord Jesus Christ;
 For in the flesh which he took for us,
 So wisely he wrapped himself,
 That he choked death and hell.
 Thence he brought forth his good friends,
 1720 Who were held captive there,
 As the prophet said
 When he prophesied of Christ:⁴²
 O death, I shall be thy death.
 God who is our great consolation,
 1725 Destroyed death for us when dying
 For which is hell ever lamenting.
 By his resurrection he restored
 Life to us which shall not fail.

Goat

Beasts there are very foolish and wise;
 1730 Some are domestic and some wild.
 Ye hold the hare for timid
 And ye hold the goat for foolish.
 But in the goat notwithstanding
 We have an example to be noted.
 1735 Buc the male is named in romance.
 Beards they have long and hanging
 And horns long and sharp,
 And their skins exceeding hairy.
 In the high mountains they love to stay
 1740 In the highest and steepest;
 In the valleys near they feed
 And eat their fill and grow fat.
 Very keen-sighted are they;
 When they are up on the mountain top,
 1745 Very far they see and high and clear.

⁴² Hosea xiii. 14.

When they see folk moving,
 At once they can recognize
 Whether they are hunters or wayfarers.
 This beast which sees so clearly
 1750 And which from so far perceives
 Its enemy who seeks its hurt,
 Has provided a symbol of God;
 For God, who is lord of the world
 And dwells above the highest mountains,⁴³
 1755 From far regards, perceives, and feels
 Whatever here and there folk do.
 As true lord he sees and feels
 All whatever man may think and say.
 Before that the heart has conceived,
 1760 The thought has he known.
 In the churches which are happily
 Established throughout this world
 Is God fed and watered
 By the alms and acts of charity
 1765 Which faithful christians do,
 Who have his grace and counsel.
 When we for love of God
 Feed a poor man or when we clothe him,
 When we visit him in prison,
 1770 In sickness or confinement,
 When we harbour the pilgrim
 Who has neither shelter nor house,
 For God we do it simply,
 Who receives it with his blessing;
 1775 For as he saith himself
 In the gospel, where it is written:
 When he shall come to judge all people,
 To those on his right hand he will say:⁴⁴
 Come ye blessed of my father,
 1780 In this mansion high and light,
 Which was prepared for you
 Before that man was conceived.
 When ye saw me naked and poor
 Then ye fed and clothed me.
 1785 When I was thirsty ye gave me drink,

43 Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

44 Matt. xxv. 34.

And in prison ye visited me.
 For that ye have deserved
 The joy of life eternal.
 This good word shall they hear
 1790 Who shall be on the right hand.
 Those on the left hand⁴⁵
 This promise shall not hear,
 But shall hear quite the contrary.
 God shall say to them: Ye evil doers,
 1795 Go ye into the fire which shall not fail,
 But shall endure for ever.
 Once ye had no pity on me,
 When I was hungry and thirsty,
 Ye did not want to shelter me
 1800 Nor give me to drink or eat.
 Nor visit or bury me
 Nor warm or clothe me.
 Then shall these say: Lord, have mercy,
 When did we see thee in such plight?
 1805 God shall answer at the end:
 When ye saw the poor man
 Or poor woman or orphan
 Or the pilgrim in need,
 Who for love of me begged for help
 1810 And ye did nothing for him,
 Then ye saw me begging bread
 And as a poor pilgrim wandering.
 Therefore shall ye go to the deep valley
 Where Satan and his angels are;
 1815 That place is prepared for you
 Since the beginning of the world.
 For God's sake, my masters, listen to this,
 Which ye have heard so many times,
 That good works extinguish sin.
 1820 Do good then to the needy,
 When he in God's name shall beg you,
 Hear how this will reward you.
 God will place you for it on his right
 In the celestial glory above,
 1825 In the joy which shall never fail
 But will endure for ever and ever.

45 Matt. xxv. 41.

And may God grant us so to work
That we may be able to reign there for ever.
Out from pain and from sin
1830 May God bring us to safety.

Wild Ass

About the wild ass we shall tell
The truth—which we shall never gainsay—
As the book teaches us
Which does not fail nor err
1835 In showing examples sensible
And true and pleasure-giving.
The book is not full of idle talk,
Examples it has most pleasing
With a wealth of mystery behind,
1840 Which we put clearly in writing,
That one shall be able openly
To see the mystery laid bare.
In the desert of Africa the great
The man who goes seeking them
1845 Finds these asses, of which I tell you,
There are none so big in all the world
And so they are not tamed.
In the deserts and the leafy woods,
In the valleys and the mountains,
1850 Are herds of great numbers.
In each herd moreover
There is no more than one male
And he lords it over the females
Both in the plain and pastures.
1855 The herd has but one stallion.
When the female has a foal,
If it is female, a female let it be,
But if the father perceives
That it is male, he loses no time
1860 But cuts off its organs
With his teeth, for he does not wish—
I believe it is due to jealousy—
That with its members when full grown
It may be able to cover the herd.
1865 When the month of March has come

And twenty and five days have passed,
 Then the wild ass brays
 Either in the plain or in the woods.
 In the day it brays twelve times
 1870 And in the night twelve—know that—
 Then do the country folk know well,
 Who in the neighbourhood are settled,
 That then are the night and the day
 In a like state and of equal length.
 1875 Because it brays twelve times
 From daybreak until evening
 And twelve times likewise in the night,
 They recognize without fail
 That then is the equinox exactly
 1880 At that time and at that place.

This beast quite rightly
 Bears the image of the evil one.
 Job relates, who does not lie,⁴⁶
 That the wild ass does not bray
 1885 At any time, save hunger oppress it.
 Just so is he who makes war on us,
 Our enemy, our adversary,
 Who never stops from doing us ill,
 Wherefore saint Peter commands us,⁴⁷
 1890 That we do not fall asleep,
 But that we watch and pray;
 For he ever goes about us
 Like a lion to devour us,
 If he can find us off our guard.
 1895 When he saw the people come
 Under God's law and be converted,
 Who sat in the shadow of death
 And in darkness and comfortless,
 Then was he pained and brayed
 1900 And will go on braying more
 When he shall see all people
 Coming to God in a body.
 When he shall see the Saracens
 And the Jews who are wretched,
 1905 Gather together within God's law,

46 Job vi. 5.

47 1 Peter v. 8.

Then can he gape with hunger
 For he will have lost his meat,
 Which he has had so long.
 When he shall see them in the faith,
 1910 Then shall he feel hunger and thirst.
 Just as the ass brays
 At midnight and midday,
 At the twenty and four hours which are
 And which make a night and a day,
 1915 Satan shall have pain and anger when
 He shall see the whole kingdom of the world
 Coming in belief and in faith
 To Jesus Christ, the true king,
 Who must save and judge all.
 1920 Then shall the adversary have great grief,
 And this grief shall never cease.
 Then must he bray continually
 Like one who shall remain for ever
 In pain which shall never cease.
 1925 From such pain may God preserve us
 And from our sins correct us.

Ape

There is another beast quite horrible
 Wholly ugly and foul.
 It is the ape, which ye see,
 1930 Of which great folk make pets.
 The ape is ugly and misshapen,
 Many times ye have seen it.
 However ugly it is in front,
 Behind it is too indecent.
 1935 A head it has, but tail has not.
 At all times it plans robbery.
 When the mother has young ones
 That which she loves most, she will carry
 In her arms in front of her.
 1940 The other which she cares not for
 Clings on behind her,
 And thus she carries the pair of them.

This beast—so it seems to me—
 Stands for and resembles the devil.

1945 The devil at first had a head,
For in the beginning he was
An angel in heaven, but through envy,
Through pride and through presumption
He lost his head—that is the truth—
1950 And fell into the blackness of hell,
From which he never shall get out,
But shall stay there for ever in pain.
There is nothing I can liken to the ape
For it is all bad and dirty.
1955 More than three kinds there are;
Some such as have great tails
And several with head like a dog.
About other apes we know well
Which live here among us,
1960 That they are full melancholy.
So long as the moon is waxing
They are quite gay and joyful;
But when it starts to wane
They are sad and miserable.

Coot (?)

1965 Now we shall describe to you a bird
Which is extremely courtly and pretty,
And very wise and understanding.
Always it lives in water;
In the pools it ever stays
1970 Right in the water it builds its nest
Or among rocks in the sea,
Where no man can dwell.
Always it stays continually
In one place only,
1975 At no time does it want to stir,
For all is there which it needs;
And nevertheless when it feels
That there must be a storm coming,
Then it goes to a shallow to dip
1980 And to sport and enjoy itself.
Then it returns to its abode.
Always it eats good fish,
And never lives on carrion,
And ye may know how the writing says

1985 That its flesh is very much like
That of a heather hare.

This bird—to sum it up—
Signifies the wise and upright man
Who in holy church spends his time

1990 And there watches and prays and worships,
And lives on daily bread⁴⁸
In the manner of a good christian,
That is on the word of God,
Which he keeps and makes use of.

1995 He eats his body and drinks his blood,
Worthily he keeps and receives it.
In well doing he stays right to the end
Like a good and true christian.
He does not go fooling up and down

2000 Nor hankering after meats,
Which cause the soul to perish in pain,
For to minister to the body's ease.
In holy church he ever stays
In joy, in love and in peace.

2005 That is the good meat and pure,
Which guards and keeps safe the soul,
And is sweeter and more savoury
Than any honey or honeycomb.
Hear what the psalmist David

2010 Saith, who wrote the psalms:⁴⁹
Sweeter are thy words to me
In my cheeks and in my teeth,
Good lord God, who dwelleth in heaven,
Than is the honeycomb or honey.

2015 My masters, for God's sake, the king of glory,
Put to use and keep in mind
These examples which ye hear.
In holy church make your abode
In good faith and in belief,

2020 In charity, in hope.
If ye will persevere in good,
The gospel really promises you⁵⁰
That ye will be saved at the end

48 Matt. iv. 4.

49 Psalm cxix. 103.

50 Matt. x. 22.

As good and true christians.
2025 Ye have no mother except holy church
Who in love and sincerity
Admonishes you and teaches you
That ye live a good life ever.

Panther

The beast which has the name panther,
2030 In romance strictly love cervere⁵¹
Must certainly be mentioned here.
Never was its fellow seen
More good-tempered or more gentle
For it is white and light blue and dark
2035 And yellow and green and russet-brown
And coloured in many a way.
All beasts alike
Except the dragon quite alone
Love its company always;
2040 But this hates it with a life-long hate.
When this beast is well-filled
Whether in mountain or in valley
With good food of all kinds—
No beast ever seeks better—
2045 Into its den it goes and lies.
Until the third day it sleeps and rests;
On the third day, when it has risen
And from its den gone out,
Then it utters a great roaring,
2050 Which can be heard clearly
Throughout the whole country.
Then from its mouth there issues
A smell in truth so sweet
That in the whole neighbourhood
2055 There is no beast can help
But come to it at once.
To it come all together
For the smell which seems to them so sweet
And all follow the panther.
2060 But the dragon holds back;
So soon as he hears the sound
And marks the sweetness of the smell,

51 "Love cervere" is a name for the lynx.

He cannot endure it long
 But is obliged to go to earth
 2065 And bury himself deep,
 So that he cannot for all the world
 In no way stir any more;
 There must he remain.

 In this beast without doubt
 2070 There is a beautiful meaning.
 Panther means, who understands it rightly,
 Just “beast which takes all”,⁵²
 And signifies without mistake
 Jesus Christ our saviour,
 2075 Who by his great humility
 Donned our mortal flesh
 And drew the whole world to himself.
 For us he suffered hunger and thirst
 And death upon the cross at the end
 2080 As true and sovereign God.
 The third day he rose from the dead
 And gained all the world.
 He himself had said before,
 When he went preaching in the world:
 2085 When from earth I be lifted up⁵³
 All things will I draw unto me.
 Elsewhere the scripture repeats as well⁵⁴
 How Jesus Christ mounting on high
 Bore our pains
 2090 And gave gifts unto men.
 And another prophet saith⁵⁵
 About our lord Jesus Christ:
 I am in the house of Judah
 As the lordship and the lion,
 2095 In the house of Ephraim the panther.
 Thus is in many a way
 Our saviour figured;
 For he has called unto himself
 The pagan and the Jewish peoples
 2100 Who believe a law only.

52 A play on the Greek word.

53 John xii. 32.

54 Eph. iv. 8.

55 Hosea v. 14.

Solomon says in his parable⁵⁶
 That Christ is the wisdom of God,
 A many-sided spirit,
 Subtil, moving, and understanding,
 2105 Sure, true in everything,
 Gentle and pure and loving well,
 Full of pity and loving-kindness,
 Sure and firm and stable,
 That no one hinders in well-doing,
 2110 Sweet and true and kindly,
 Who regards all and who sees all,
 And through whom everyone had being.
 Saint Paul repeats to us in a sentence:⁵⁷
 Christ is the wisdom of God.
 2115 About the panther, which is beautiful,
 David repeats yet other news,
 When of the beauty of Christ he spake
 In the verse “speciosus forma”.⁵⁸
 Of the beast which is so sweet
 2120 We have again a lesson ready:
 For sweetness is an attribute of God.
 Isaiah in very truth
 Utters the prophecy: Wherefore,⁵⁹
 Daughter of Sion, dost thou rejoice?
 2125 Thy king shall come gentle and mild,
 He is not wicked or proud.
 The beast which is sated
 And then reposes denotes
 Jesus Christ our saviour,
 2130 Who to Judas the betrayer
 Let himself be given up and sold,
 And to the Jews to be bound and taken
 And beaten, and bound and scourged
 And tormented and mocked.
 2135 When he was covered with insults,
 With pains and with blows,
 On the holy cross he fell asleep.
 Then he dwelt until the third day
 In the dear and glorious tomb.

56 Wisdom vii. 22.

57 Cor. i. 24.

58 Ps. xlv. 2.

59 Isa. Ixii. IT.

2140 Then he went straightway
 To harrow hell, and bound the dragon
 Who held his people in prison.
 And when he was risen from death,
 So strong went forth the sweet odours
 2145 Of his words and of his name
 And so far abroad went the sound of it,
 So far spread out his sweet smell,
 That all the world was the better for it.
 The odour of the resurrection
 2150 Smelled so very sweet
 That all the world was healed,
 Which before that was perished.
 The odour of the incarnation
 Of his death, of his passion,
 2155 If the resurrection had not been,
 Would have been no use to us.
 Completely by the resurrection
 Was our salvation accomplished.
 Then said our master Jesus
 2160 That he had overcome the world,⁶⁰
 And that we should much rejoice in it;
 And said, as we read:
 Holy father, I have well cared for⁶¹
 That which thou hast entrusted to me,
 2165 So that not one of them is lost
 Save him who has rightly perished.
 These words he spake—doubt it not—
 Of the miscreant Judas.
 To his disciples he appeared,
 2170 And to Thomas, who disbelieved him,
 Showed the places, as the scripture saith,
 And made him place his finger in
 Where the nails had been.
 Then he said, when were gathered
 2175 The apostles all together:
 I go to my father and to yours⁶²
 And when I shall have come to him
 I will send to you the spirit

60 John xvi. 33.

61 John xvii. 12, 22.

62 John xiv. 26.

Which shall teach you all things
2180 Which ye ought to do at once.
These words he spake to them;
Well has he accomplished what he promised.

My masters, for God the true king's sake,
Then let us think and be concerned
2185 How we and in what manner
Will follow the true panther.
For God's sake and the true cross,
Let us hear his word and his voice,
For from his mouth issues a smell,
2190 Than which no man ever smelled a better.
More sweet are his commandments
Than sweet spices and ointments.
If we do his commandments
Rich will be the reward.
2195 God will set us in his palace
In the beautiful city of peace,
In the heavenly Jerusalem,
On the high hill, where it is so good to be,
Where no one will be sad.
2200 Then may we say with the psalmist:⁶³
Thou city of God, glorious words
Are spoken and written of thee.
In such fashion have we heard it;⁶⁴
In such manner we see it.
2205 In such form have we seen it
In the city of the mighty king.

My masters, listen to this moral,
Do not be like the dragon,
Who cannot suffer the sweetness
2210 Nor hear the word of God.
It is the wicked man indeed
Who cannot remain
In the place where spreads the odour
Of the word of the saviour
2215 Be it in minster or in graveyard
Where he may hear good sermon preached;
He cannot stop and wait there,

63 Ps. lxxxvii. 3.

64 Ps. xlviii, 8.

But in a word he goes elsewhere to hear.
The good smell is a load and burden
2220 To the dragon and the wicked man.

Dragon

Now it is right that we tell you
Of the form of the dragon.
Of all the beasts which creep
Is the dragon far the biggest.
2225 The real dragon—it is found
In the kingdom of Ethiopia.
It has a little mouth and a big body;
In the air it glows like fine gold.
It has a long tail and great crest.
2230 Great trouble it makes for the elephant,
For with its tail it strikes it
In the legs so that it throws it down;
It bears no deadly poison,
But is vastly big and strong,
2235 And with its tail it scourges
Everything within its reach;
Nor does it do great hurt
Save with its tail only.

Sea-Tortoise⁶⁵

Next we wish to tell you
2240 About a great marvel of the sea.
In the sea are divers fish
As in the earth are worms
And birds up in the air.
Some are white, others parti-coloured,
2245 One is black, another brown.
So in the sea, I do assure you,
Are fish of different kinds.
But one cannot in the same way
Know the natures of these
2250 As one really can of beasts.
In the sea which is big and full
Is the sturgeon and the whale
And the turbot and the porpoise,

65 From *Aspidochelone*, a compound of Greek *aspis* (shield) and *chelone* (turtle), usually referring to the whale.
[DB]

And a big one called the graspeis.⁶⁶
 2255 But there is a wonderful monster,
 All too cunning and dangerous.
 Cetus is its name in latin.
 To mariners it is a bad neighbour.
 Just like unto sand
 2260 Is the crest on top of its back.
 When it rises to the surface in the sea,
 They who are wont to sail that way
 Quite believe it is an island,
 But hope deceives them.
 2265 Because of his great size
 There they come for safety
 From the storm which drives them.
 They think to be in a safe place,
 They throw out their anchors and gangway,
 2270 Cook their food, light their fire,
 And for to make their ship fast
 Drive great stakes into the sand
 Which is like land in their opinion.
 Then they light their fire, I do assure you.
 2275 When the monster feels the heat
 Of the fire which burns on top of him,
 Then he makes a sudden plunge
 Down into the great deep
 And drags the ship along with him,
 2280 And all the crew perish.

 Just the same are deceived
 The wretched miserable unbelievers
 Who in the devil put their trust
 And make delay and postponement
 2285 Of their works, as sin wills it,
 For which the wretched soul suffers.
 Then when they take least care,
 Comes the thief who burns with evil fire;
 When he feels them fast tied up to him
 2290 With them right down he plunges,
 Down to hell's greatest depth;
 They are lost who go in there.

66 = Craspois, lit. a big fish. Here probably the sperm whale, not grampus. Vide *Archaeologia Cantiana*, Vol. XLVII.

This fish when hunger takes him
 Opens his mouth wide;
 2295 Then there issues from his mouth a smell,
 Which has an excellent savour.
 This way come now
 The little fish pell-mell.
 They hurry in a mighty shoal
 2300 All together into his jaws
 For the smell which seems so good to them,
 And he shuts his jaws up tight
 When he feels his mouth quite full;
 All he swallows at a gulp
 2305 Into his belly, which is as wide
 As a valley would be.

 The devil does likewise;
 His mouth is open wide
 For the people of little faith
 2310 Until he has drawn them to him.
 For those who have but little faith
 And are such weak believers
 Are most easy to catch on the hook
 Of him who knows how to allure them.
 2315 He sets a bait for them,
 Which at first smells very sweet,
 As is some carnal pleasure like
 Having a fair woman in bed,
 Good drinking, good eating,
 2320 Or the greed of riches,
 Which at first smells very sweet
 But then ends in bitterness.
 When he has set them such a bait
 And feels that they are well hooked,
 2325 He opens his jaws and swallows them,
 Nor is he sated, however many are in.
 The big fish take good care
 That he does them no harm.
 And do ye know who the big ones are?
 2330 The good folk who have firm belief,
 Who are ever strong and steadfast
 In God the spiritual father.
 Over them who have him in their mind

The devil shall have no victory.
2335 But they suffer—the unbelievers,
Who go doubting in the faith of God,
And are little in their faith;
These run after pleasures,
And the devil who deceives them
2340 Opens wide his mouth and takes them in.
But may the Lord God omnipotent
Put us in his own safe keeping
And into his great joy bring us,
Healed from sin and from suffering.

Partridge

2345 It pleases me to tell you now
About a bird of a very deceiving nature.
It is the partridge which we see,
Which we eat so willingly.
All the same it is not clean
2350 But is both dirty and mischievous,
And has a very bad habit,
For male mates with male;
So hot is their desire
That they forget the law of nature.
2355 The partridge is very treacherous,
For in the way of a thief
She steals and sits on the eggs of others.
But the young birds are no good to her
By the theft which she committed.
2360 Now you must hear how that is.
When she has hatched the strange eggs
And has reared the little birds,
So soon as they come and go
And have noticed
2365 When they hear their mother call
By her voice which is not clear,
From that place they hasten to go;
For by nature they know
And recognize her by her note.
2370 They leave her who fed them,
To their real mother they go off
And evermore they cling to her.
The false mother is left alone;

By her trickery and her deceit
 2375 She loses the half of her lifetime,
 She does not hold herself as clever
 For the trouble she has taken
 So long in the service of another;
 For now she sees that all her pains
 2380 Were not worth to her a bit of garlic.

 My masters, here is a pretty lesson,
 Which stirs my heart anew.
 Just as the partridge
 Which has fed the children of another
 2385 And then in the end loses them,
 So it happens quite plainly
 To the devil—and quite rightly too—
 When he steals the people
 Of God our sovereign father,
 2390 And feeds them as a wicked thief
 On wickedness and lechery,
 On wantonness and drunkenness;
 He thinks to make them his children.
 When he has long fed them
 2395 And they hear the voice of their father
 In the church, their real mother,
 Then they know that he has betrayed them;
 For from their father he stole them.
 But as soon as they hear his word
 2400 They come and give themselves to him,
 And he receives and feeds them,
 Beneath his wings protects them.
 My masters, in faith—there is no doubt—
 There is not in any company, however bad it be,
 2405 No miserable wretched sinner
 Who, so long as he be alive and well
 And wishes to retract and repent,
 Cannot come to God.
 Holy church will receive him,
 2410 Under its wings it will protect him,
 When he comes to her for safety.
 And the angels are more joyful⁶⁷
 Over a sinner who cries for pardon

67 Luke xv. 7.

And repents of his folly
2415 As the scripture testifies
Than over the ninety and nine elect
Who have no need of repentance;
So says the scripture without doubt.

Weasel. Asp.

About the weasel is a great marvel,
2420 For she brings forth by the ear
And by the mouth receives
The seed whereby she conceives.
From the male when he comes to her,
She takes the seed by the mouth,
2425 And within her belly feeds it
And by the ear it issues forth.
This little dumb beast
Carries its young and shifts
Oft-times from place to place,
2430 And holds no place in fee.
Serpents and mice it hates,
It drives them away where it knows them to be.
Are they fools, who go affirming
That she receives and discharges
2435 The seed through the hearing?
Surely this is not the case.

With this (creature) are compared
Sundry (folk) who are zealous
To behave well, to serve God,
2440 And to hear the word of God.
Eager they are, much they hear it,
In their zeal they surrender to God,
And begin by doing well
By serving God and loving him;
2445 But in a little while they fall away
And what they have heard they disbelieve;
They are not obedient
To do his commandments,
As they have promised before.
2450 To the serpent, which is named asp
May such again be likened.
I will tell you of the habit

This serpent has of which I speak,
 Nevertheless I have never seen it,
 2455 But the truth of it is proved.
 When it is afraid of being enchanted⁶⁸
 By the enchanter whom it fears,
 One of its ears it presses
 On the ground quite firmly
 2460 And with its tail deftly
 Stops the other ear so
 That with it the enchanter
 Cannot be heard in no wise.
 Of such sort is its cunning.

 2465 Just of such kind are
 The rich men of this world.
 All are encumbered and laden
 With riches and with sins.
 When they hear speak of God
 2470 They cannot turn their ear that way.
 By riches are they deafened
 And by covetousness absorbed,
 That they neither hear nor see at all;
 Ever hold they on their evil way.
 2475 The very gospel proclaims:⁶⁹
 A harder thing it is for a rich man
 To enter into the glory of heaven
 Than to make a camel pass
 Through the eye of a needle
 2480 Which is narrow and very little.
 Cursed be these riches
 Which bring the soul to such distress,
 Into pain which endures always
 Into the furnace and the heat
 2485 Of the stench which burns for ever.
 Riches are an evil portion.
 For with great labour are they gained,
 And with great fear are preserved,
 And with great grief are left behind,
 2490 And lost and parted with.
 See how well a wise man once did,
 Who had greatly all his life

68 Ps. lviii. 4.

69 Matt. xix. 23.

Paid attention to his riches
 So that he had lost all memory
 2495 Of serving God and honouring him.
 One day he betook himself to think;
 He was undecided what to do:
 Whether to visit his vines
 Or his reapers in the meadows.
 2500 Completely was he in doubt
 About his beasts which were dying,
 About his ships which sailed the seas;
 About his mills did he ponder
 Whether they always had water.
 2505 Then there came to him messengers
 That he could gain so much.
 Other messengers came after
 Who brought different news
 Of how he had lost so much
 2510 That none knew the sum of it.
 Then when he was in such distress,
 He looked up and raised his eyes
 Towards God who fashioned all the world,
 And thought of his riches
 2515 Which had made him forget
 What he ought to love more.
 And so much he had his heart in them,
 That he could not in any way
 Detach himself nor give them up,
 2520 Nor honourably escape from them.
 Then he reflected very deeply,
 How he might get rid of all together.
 His possessions and his treasure
 All he sold, and purchased gold.
 2525 Whatever he had into gold he changed it;
 In one lump he gathered it
 Like to a millstone of a mill.
 When he had sold all at last,
 So that there was nothing left to sell
 2530 For which one could get a farthing,
 All his clothes he sold piecemeal
 Except his hose and his shirt,
 Which left nothing else to sell.
 His gold he rolled before him,

2535 And when he had gathered it all
 And had so prepared it
 That he held it with a chain,
 Yet he did not finish till he came
 On to a rock near to the sea.
 2540 Then began the tide to flow.
 When it was all smooth and full,
 This man pushed with feet and hands
 His gold into the greatest depths.
 Then he exclaimed, "Go, ye riches,
 2545 To a thousand and fifty devils!
 No more shall ye be along with me
 For ye thought to drown me;
 But I shall drown thee first.
 Cursed be all thy life with me!
 2550 He who has set his heart on thee
 Cannot keep on a good course
 Nor attain to the fulness of joy!"

My masters, for God almighty's sake,
 Be not like the serpent
 2555 Which stops its ear with its tail
 And presses it against the earth,
 That it hear not the enchanter.
 When ye shall hear the word of the saviour,
 Do not stop up
 2560 Either sight or hearing.
 The asp much fears enchantment.
 Of its race there are many;
 The dipsas of them is the villain
 And altogether bad and treacherous.
 2565 So soon as it has bitten a man
 His body dies from agony of thirst;
 Another there is of them—the prialis—
 Which is of the family of asps
 And kills people when asleep
 2570 As the bestiary says:
 The queen Cleopatra
 Who so feared the footstep of death,
 Took in with her an asp
 And died as if sleeping.
 2575 Another there is so very fierce

And of a dangerous kind,
 Like pure blood is its colour,
 It strikes with such savage force
 Man or woman and hurts him so
 2580 That each vein bursts in him.
 He bleeds as much as he can bleed,
 And after the bleeding he must die.
 There is still another worse,
 Which has much venom in its mouth.
 2585 Whomever it strikes, he never recovers,
 For the body putrifies at once
 And falls in dust and ashes,
 And must render up its soul forthwith.

Ostrich

I shall not refrain from telling you
 2590 Of the nature of the ostrich.
 It is a wonderful bird
 Which by nature is forgetful.
 They call it assida in hebrew
 And camelos is its name in greek.
 2595 It has feet like a camel.
 Its nature astonishes me,
 For it has feathers and great wings,
 And yet at no time flies.
 At the season when it lays,
 2600 It lays its eggs in the sand
 And leaves them there and forgets,
 And mark that it does not lay
 Except about June in summer time.
 When it has gazed its due time
 2605 And sees rising in the sky
 A star which shines brightly,
 Which star has the name Virgilia,⁷⁰
 Then it lays at that time
 And buries its eggs in the sand
 2610 And neither hatches nor disturbs them more.
 To its eggs it never returns.
 Right on the star its attention is,
 And it forgets and leaves its eggs.
 But God, who made all the world,

70 The Pleiades; mentioned in Job ix. 9.

2615 Helps them in such a way
 That in the sand and drift-sand,
 By the air which is soft and mild
 And at evening and morning time
 Is serene and favourable,
 2620 In the sand and in the dust
 The eggs grow and make little birds;
 It is one of the miracles of the world.

 This bird signifies
 The man of sound and holy life
 2625 Who abandons earthly things
 And betakes himself to those of heaven.
 Of that (bird) which forgets its eggs,
 Says the prophet Jeremy,⁷¹
 That it is possessed of so great sense
 2630 That it knows in the sky its time.
 When the bird leaves behind
 Its offspring in the dust
 For that which pertains to heaven,
 O lord God, why is it not in the mind of man,
 2635 Whom God made with reasoning power
 And knowing and understanding,
 To forget the things of earth
 For to gain the joys of heaven?
 He cannot attain to God
 2640 Who will not leave and let go
 The false joys of this world.
 Nay! he will not attain to heaven above.
 Our lord himself saith,
 And in the gospel it is written:⁷²
 2645 He who loves his father more than me,
 His son or his sister or his mother,
 Is not worthy to have part with me.
 Thus said God and thus it's true.

Turtle-dove

Now we shall tell you of another bird
 2650 Which is altogether courtly and fair,
 And is very loving and beloved.
 It mostly dwells in leafy woods.

⁷¹ Jer. viii. 7.

⁷² Matt. x. 37.

It is the turtle dove of which we speak
 Which loves its mate so dearly.
 2655 The female with the male keeps company,
 Always are they two and two together
 Whether on mountain or in desert;
 And if by chance the female
 Loses her companion
 2660 Then never at any time or hour
 Does she cease lamenting him.
 Never o'er green field or leafy tree,
 Although she may, will she settle.
 Always will she await her mate,
 2665 To know if he will return.
 To another will she not join
 For aught that may happen,
 So much to him she wishes to keep loyal.
 As this bird stays chaste
 2670 And keeps all her life
 Loyal to her mate,
 I am astonished at a man or woman
 Who promises to God to keep chaste
 And then later breaks his vow.
 2675 Many wicked folk there are
 Who love not with a constant love
 As does the turtle-dove
 Which renews not her affection
 To other than her first love.
 2680 Never will she let him out of mind
 And if he dies, has no care for other.
 There are not many people
 Of such nature in this world,
 For they will not keep to one
 2685 Husband or wife for their mate.
 When one has just buried the other,
 Before he has eaten two meals
 He wants to have another in his arms.
 The turtle-dove does not do thus.
 2690 Always she looks for her love,
 Always she waits for his return,
 And for him to keep company with her.
 The turtle-dove which so looks out,

Which ever keeps so chaste and clean,
 2695 Denotes holy church for us;
 I will tell you in what way.
 When holy church saw Jesus Christ,
 Her loyal spouse, bound and struck,
 And hanged and crucified,
 2700 Much was her heart distressed.
 Always since has she held to him,
 Nor does she wish to be the loved one of another
 Nor to join him nor go with him.
 Towards him is all her desire.
 2705 Always she keeps to her mate,
 Jesus Christ, her true and faithful one.
 When the author, who made this book in rhyme,
 Was constrained to write on this
 Much was he sad and grieving;
 2710 For for two years had holy church
 Been so mournful,
 So cast down, so fearful,
 That many a one foolishly imagined
 That her spouse had forsaken her;
 2715 For she dared not raise her head.
 Few folk entered there to pray
 In the whole of England's isle.
 Much was the dame in harsh warfare
 Throughout the realm in that time,
 2720 And in danger and in grief,
 For her children in particular
 Entered the lists against her.
 The more part of knighthood
 Would not enter there at that time,
 2725 No more than into a heathen temple.
 Many a man suffered from stripes
 And was thrown into prison.
 Never were folk so few in number
 In the whole of great Britain
 2730 Who were not false and wicked.
 For the goods which they obtained
 From the church, which they guarded,
 Were the highest divided in dispute
 Against the peace of holy church.
 2735 By deeds of force and by threats

They warred against God and his grace.

Stag

We must not leave forgotten
The story and the meaning
Of the stag, which acts so strangely
2740 When it eats the serpent,
That is, when it has grown old;
Then it is quite healthy and restored.
When it feels old and feeble,
It goes quite carefully to seek
2745 The hole where the serpent sleeps,
Which fears it much and hates it with a deadly hate.
The writing testifies to us,
When it has filled its mouth with water,
Into the mouth of the hole it spues it,
2750 And the serpent at once
Comes out, and cannot stay there;
For from the nostrils of the stag comes forth
And from its mouth issues a blast
Which fetches it out perforce.
2755 Right out it comes with jaws agape
And the stag kills and destroys it.

Just the same did our lord
Jesus Christ, our saviour,
When he burst the gates of hell
2760 And destroyed the devil.
In him wells up the clear fountain,
Which is full of wisdom,
Of which the devil cannot endure
The word nor abide it.
2765 When on earth he went preaching
And like the true God working,⁷³
A devil entered into a man
And tormented him sorely,
And when our lord came there
2770 The devil demanded of him:
Son of God, why art thou come so soon
To torment us and our host?
On hearing these words he spake

73 Mark v. I, etc.

And our Lord asked him—
 2775 Not that he did not know—
 What name this devil had;
 And he replied: Legion.
 A thousand we are, who serve this one.
 Then they prayed Jesus himself
 2780 That he would not send them into the pit,
 But if he would cast them out thence
 That into a herd of swine he would
 Send them, which was near by
 In a pound, where they fed.
 2785 Our Lord said to them: Go!
 At once are they entered into the swine.
 Two thousand there were of them quite,
 Which then were good for nothing;
 But straight to the sea they made their way
 2790 And plunged into the midst.
 My masters, of this be not in doubt,
 The devil cannot hear
 The words of our lord
 Without suffering pain and grief.
 2795 The apostle says truly
 That our lord at the end
 Will slay that scoundrel devil
 By the word which shall issue
 From his blessed mouth;
 2800 That is a very certain thing.

 The stag, as I have told you,
 Rejuvenates and lives long after.
 At the sound of the pipe it is startled.
 When it has cocked its ear
 2805 It hears clearly, and when it lowers it
 I tell you that its hearing stops.
 At need it is quite able to cross
 A great river or arm of the sea.
 It dwells in the mountains willingly,
 2810 Those are its haunts which it loves most.
 By the mountains we must understand
 The prophets of great renown
 Who were aware of the coming of God,
 And the apostles who were with him;

2815 And by the stag, we must understand
Those who will to give themselves to God;
For they find in the mountain
Him who teaches the way of salvation,
As the psalmist says
2820 In a psalm which is a little one,
To the hills, he saith, I lifted up mine eyes,⁷⁴
Whence I had help and I was the better for it.

Salamander

The salamander is a beast,
Which in tail and in head
2825 And in body is like a lizard.
It has no fear that any fire burn it,
For of fire, it does not fear the heat.
Many diverse colours it has.
If in fire by chance it gets
2830 The fire it will put out straightway;
No matter how big a blaze there is,
It is all put out at once.
It carries poison of such strength
That it has struck down a man at once,
2835 And it would do great damage
If it climbed up an apple tree.
The apples it so poisons that
Whoever eats them, he is done for.
And if it fall into a great well
2840 It will poison all the water,
So that none can drink it and survive;
So powerful is its venom.

This beast signifies
The man of sense and holy life,
2845 Who is so filled with perfect faith
That he puts out around him
The fire and heat of lust
And the burning heat of vices.
Pray don't think I lie to you.
2850 The fire which torments souls
Can have no strength for those
Who serve our lord well

⁷⁴ Ps. cxxi. 1.

In good and perfect faith.
 They fear no burning
 2855 Which the devil may prepare for them,
 Who is so wicked and scheming.
 In fire were Ananias,
 Misael and Azarias;
 In no way were they hurt there,
 2860 Because they were sustained by faith.
 My masters, there is no doubt of it,
 By faith and by good belief
 May man surely overcome
 All kinds of torment.
 2865 The scripture testifies to us,
 It is written in Isaiah,⁷⁵
 That by faith the saints completely have
 Overcome sin and put out fire.
 Whoso should have so strong belief
 2870 And firm faith as he ought,
 Could cause the mountains by his word⁷⁶
 To remove from one place to another.
 Surely whoso is loyal in the faith
 Is himself rich in strength.
 2875 In all ways he comes to the top
 Who lives in faith and charity.
 But if he had not charity⁷⁷
 No strength would avail him.
 Saint Paul tells us they avail nothing:
 2880 Alms nor any other good
 Nor belief nor loyalty
 If there be not charity with them.

Doves

Among all the other birds
 Is the dove a courtly and pretty one
 2885 And has a good meaning.
 The holy spirit in the likeness of it
 Descended at the baptizing
 Of Jesus Christ without doubt,
 And many a time it has happened

75 Isa. Xliii. 2; Hebrews xi. 34.

76 Matt. xvii. 20.

77 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

2890 That in its likeness has come
 The holy spirit for to comfort
 Those whom man is wont to persecute,
 To make them forsake that God
 Who is quite able to save and heal them.
 2895 Formerly each year was one used
 In the city of Jerusalem
 To see on the eve of Easter
 A white dove really come,
 Which brought the new fire.
 2900 In the dove you have a very sweet bird
 Without guile and without bitterness;
 It has a pretty habit,
 For in billing they are so associated,
 That when billing they are inflamed with love.
 2905 When they are within the dovecote—
 Two or three hundred or a thousand—
 One there is which is very bold.
 When he moves, they move all of them.
 He leads them from all sides
 2910 To the mountains and forest glades,
 To the open fields and ploughlands,
 And to the fields of sown corn.
 And when he finds the wild pigeons,
 He is so clever and wise,
 2915 That he brings them to his dovecote.
 In such way he makes them leave the wood
 And forget their wild nature,
 And makes them consort with him.

 This bird signifies to us
 2920 Jesus, who in his charge has all,
 Who governs all and who does all.
 And who from all parts brings
 The pigeons to his pigeon-cote,
 Both field and wood pigeons.
 2925 His pigeon-cote is holy church,
 Where he brings to his service
 By good preaching
 Us who were wild.
 Out of Saracens and of Pagans
 2930 He has often made good christians,

And will cause toward the end
 All people to gather together
 In one common faith.
 Then shall come the two laws into one;
 2935 For the law which was wild
 Will be brought into the right course.
 God is the spiritual dove;
 Good is he and fair, and broad and tall,
 And his wings are so wide
 2940 That they cover all the world.
 The way which he teaches us
 We must go—let no one neglect it.
 If we surely do that
 He will lead us all to safety.
 2945 You ought not to hope,
 That Moses or Isaiah
 Or prophet or messenger
 That God had ever held so dear
 May lead us to salvation,
 2950 But he by his incarnation,
 Who came down from the father on high,
 Gave us healing and life.
 God, who willed to redeem the human race,
 And to bring it out of bondage
 2955 And gather it in holy church,
 Sent formerly in many a guise
 Down on earth to preach
 Many a prophet, many a messenger,
 By whom the holy spirit spake
 2960 And in many a way preached
 How our lord should come
 To save the world which was perishing.
 We have something more to say
 About the doves and their story.

The Tree and its Shadow

2965 A tree there is in India the great
 Beautiful and full of leaf and shady,
 Fruit it bears good and sweet and choice,
 And I can well assure you
 As the writing apprises me,
 2970 That great is the shade which it gives.

Beautiful it is within and around
 And they say it has the name
 Paradixion in greek.
 That sounds the equivalent in french
 2975 Of saying "environ la destre".
 Beneath this tree 'tis very nice to be;
 In it there stay and dwell
 Doves in great enjoyment,
 For they are sated with the fruit
 2980 And rest beneath the shadow.
 From there indeed they need not stir,
 For they have all that they need.
 There is a dragon in that country
 Which to the doves is enemy,
 2985 For he eats and devours them.
 But that which dwells under the tree
 And within the shadow continually stays
 Has nothing to doubt or fear.
 The doves who know quite well
 2990 That he hates them above all things,
 Keep ever under the tree,
 Unless there be one foolish and silly.
 Which of them stupidly goes out,
 When it has gone, it repents fully.
 2995 The doves fear the dragon,
 And contrariwise the dragon fears
 To approach the tree and its shadow.
 At no time does he hurt the doves
 If he does not find them outside the shadow;
 3000 If he so finds them, they are lost.
 For he is always on the watch.
 When this tree casts its shadow
 On the side towards the right
 Then is the dragon on the left.
 3005 When the shadow turns toward the left
 The dragon returns to the right.
 He could not endure the shadow,
 Which in its course is never doomed to die.
 The doves which are knowing and wise,
 3010 Keep ever beneath the shadow
 Of the tree so that their enemy
 Cannot do them any harm;

But if any one foolishly goes out,
 He catches it as he can do.
 3015 At once he has devoured it,
 For he finds it very savoury.

 We christians who know well
 What is this tree and how 'tis named,
 Ought always to stay
 3020 Beneath the shadow and to come to it;
 For thence springs all our good;
 Of evil thing there is nothing.
 It is our almighty father
 Who spreads his shadow and his branches
 3025 Over all those who come to him
 For to get protection and refuge.
 The fruit of the tree signifies
 Jesus, the son of saint Mary.
 That is the fruit which healed us,
 3030 When we were dead and perished.
 By the fruit which Adam tasted
 He deprived us of joy;
 The son of God who tasted gall,
 Restored to us the joy of heaven.
 3035 The fruit of the tree betrayed us,
 The son of God redeemed and healed us,
 Who on the tree-stem let himself be hung,
 Drank the vinegar and ate the gall.
 Now must we clearly understand
 3040 What is the tree, what is the fruit.
 The tree is father, the fruit is son,
 And the shadow is the holy spirit,
 As the angel said to Mary,⁷⁸
 The holy flower-crowned queen:
 3045 The holy spirit shall come upon thee
 And the power of the lord most high
 Shall overshadow thee;
 Of thee shall be born the saviour.
 By the tree must we without mistake
 3050 The person of the father understand,
 By the fruit the person of the son,
 The third is the holy spirit

78 Luke i. 35.

Which from the one and the other springs.
 So it behoves us to believe
 3055 If we wish to save our souls.
 If outside it he can find us—
 The wicked dragon who betrays us—
 At once he will of life deprive us.

My masters, on this let us ponder,
 3060 Let us keep beneath this tree;
 For we are fed with the fruit
 And so well defended by the shadow
 That the wicked jealous dragon
 Shall not come nigh us.

3065 Let us keep within holy church
 In good faith, in God's service.
 If outside the faith we stray
 We shall be delivered to the dragon,
 Who waits without that he may catch

3070 The silly fool who goes outside.
 Of this let us be certain and sure:
 If in the name of the father and of the son
 And of the holy spirit we keep
 In the holy religion

3075 Which holy church teaches us,
 And to the sweet appeal and sign
 Of the sacred cross adored,
 Will our life be blessed.
 And know well, he who disbelieves

3080 That one God is in three persons,
 Who created all and who made all,
 He is of the anti-christian race.
 We are the faithful doves
 Who on the grace and counsel

3085 Of our lord shall be able to live,
 As long as we keep under the tree.
 Jesus himself, our lord,
 Exhorts us in the gospel,
 Whereby we ought to believe him:

3090 Let us be simple as doves⁷⁹
 And as wise as serpents!
 And what then is the meaning

79 Matt. x. 16.

Of this hidden saying?
 I will show it to you plainly.
 3095 It is to say that we should be
 So simple, that we do not plot
 Ill schemes against our neighbour;
 And so wise, that the deceit
 And lying in wait of our enemy
 3100 Can nowhere do us harm.
 My masters, for the most high king's sake,
 In holy church and in the faith
 Let us dwell and ever stay,
 For at the end we shall be safe in it.

 3105 It is still needful that I distinguish for you
 Some doves which are light and dark.
 The one sort has the colour of the air
 And the other has it greenish.
 Some are parti-coloured, others russet,
 3110 Some bright red, others of ashy tint.
 And of the doves there are several
 Which have all these colours.
 That which is in varied colours
 Gives me my theme and my verse.
 3115 It shows forth the diversity
 Of the prophets verily;
 Of the twelve, who in different ways
 Announced the coming
 Of our lord, but nevertheless
 3120 All are completely in accord,
 Which should enable us to understand
 The words of each and interpret them aright.
 But it will be convenient in my text
 To give a right interpretation.
 3125 In the dove which is like to ash

 We must certainly understand
 The good prophet Jonah,—
 This you must not misbelieve,—
 Who in sackcloth and ashes
 3130 Went to the Ninevites
 And preached our lord as true
 To people misbelieving and false.

And God rewarded him for it,
 When he in the belly of the fish
 3135 Saved and preserved him from death
 And then brought him safe to land.
 The dove which is like the air
 Signifies as it seems to me
 The prophet who was taken up.
 3140 He is Elijah of whom I tell you,
 Who, we believe, is still alive.
 And the white dove signifies
 Saint John, who first
 Began baptizing
 3145 In the name of him who was coming,
 Who was yet to come.
 By baptism—know it well—
 Is man washed from sin.
 The prophet Isaiah said⁸⁰
 3150 Long time before John came:
 Wash ye and be ye clean!
 Remove ill thoughts from your hearts!
 For if ye were black before
 Verily ye shall be all white.
 3155 The red dove rightly
 Signifies the passion,
 When Jesus shed his blood,
 Which gave us life and joy,
 Otherwise were we dead everlastingly.
 3160 The dove which is dark green
 Should mark for us saint Stephen,
 Who for God's sake let himself be tortured,
 And was the first rewarded
 Through martyrdom, which he suffered,
 3165 By seeing the son of God standing
 At his right in heavenly joy.
 Now ye have heard the chapter
 Of the doves, which is full long;
 And if ye have grasped it well,
 3170 Great benefit have ye got from it.
 For a good lesson ye can get from it.
 If ye wish to understand aright
 And will act on it in future,

80 Isa, i. 16.

Great good can ye obtain therefrom.

Elephant

- 3175 We ought not to hold the story
Of the elephant to ridicule.
It is the biggest beast there is
And can carry the biggest loads.
It is full wise and understanding.
- 3180 In battle it is very useful;
There it plays a great part.
The Indians and the Persians
When they engage in great combats
Are wont to load great towers on it
- 3185 Of worked wood well embattled.
When they come into a great fight
There mount up the archers,
The squires and the knights,
For to shoot at their enemies.
- 3190 The female I am told
Carries two years when pregnant,
Then gives birth and not before;
Nor will she ever—know this—
Give birth more than once
- 3195 And then she will have but one calf.
She fears so much a dragon,
That in a pond she goes to calve
For to keep her young from death;
And the male keeps watch outside
- 3200 To guard and defend them both.
The writing says of the elephants
That they live quite two hundred years.
In India and in Africa is their abode;
In these countries they used to be born,
- 3205 In Africa they are born no more,
But in India they still remain.
When the male will beget young
By his companion and mate
To the east together they go
- 3210 To a mountain hard by paradise
There where the mandrake grows,
Of which we shall make mention later.
The female of the elephant

Goes to the plant at once,
 3215 She eats of the plant first,
 And the male without ado
 Eats of it too when he sees that,
 For the female beguiles him.
 When both have eaten of it
 3220 And have played and frolicked
 And come together to their business
 As beasts should do,
 The female at once conceives,
 And the calf which she gets
 3225 She bears two years, as I have told you.
 Near her time she is in great fear
 Of the dragon which spies on them.
 In a pond very deep she goes
 To give birth because of the dragon,
 3230 That he may not steal away her calf;
 For if she had it out of the water
 The dragon would devour it.

 In these beasts verily
 Are Eve and Adam figured
 3235 When they were in paradise
 Set in plenty and in joy.
 They did not know what evil was
 Nor whence came carnal pleasure.
 But when Eve tasted of the fruit
 3240 And persuaded her lord
 That he should eat of it against command,
 They were driven out forthwith
 And cast into the deep pool
 And great waters of this world,
 3245 Into great dangers and torments
 Which cause many folk to drown,
 Of which the prophet David said⁸¹
 In a psalm which he wrote:
 Save me, O God, by thy mercy
 3250 From the great perils in which I am,
 For down within my soul are entered
 Many great waters and floods.
 And in a verse elsewhere repeated

81 Ps. lxix. 1.

How the lord God succoured him.
 3255 I waited for my lord, he saith,⁸²
 And he heard me by his goodness
 And drew me out of the lake of misery,
 From the mire and dirt in which I was.
 When Adam was disinherited
 3260 And cast out of paradise,
 In pain and in corruption
 He then begat his race.
 But our lord pitied him;
 For a ransom for that sin
 3265 He inspired the new Adam
 Who for us bore pain and toil
 And put us all to ransom.
 That is always my song
 Which I ever sing and repeat to you:
 3270 By him are we saved from death.
 He who came from the bosom of the father,
 Took human flesh, became man.
 On a firm rock he set our feet,
 In our mouth—know this—
 3275 He put a new song and taught us⁸³
 The holy prayer, which he uttered,
 Which we call “pater noster”,
 Without ceasing must we say it.

 Of the elephant I dare tell you:
 3280 Good is the skin, good are the bones,
 And who would burn them in fire,
 Know that the smell would drive away
 All serpents which might be near
 And which had venom in them.
 3285 No venom may dwell there
 Where man burns the bones.
 Of the bones they make precious ivory,
 Which they fashion in many a way.
 The elephant has a very big body;
 3290 When it comes to a rich meadow,
 Out of its mouth issues a pipe
 With which it feeds itself in the pasture,
 Else it would not reach its food

82 Ps. xl. 1.

83 Matt. vi. 9.

Without kneeling down so low.
3295 And if it were on its knees,
Indeed it could not get up by itself.

Mandrake

The mandrake is a wild plant,
None other of its kind there is,
And I tell you that from its root
3300 One can make many a medicine.
If you would observe the root
You would find it has a form
Like to the form of a man.
The rind is most valuable;
3305 When it is well boiled in water,
It availeth much for many a malady.
This plant when it is full-grown
Is plucked by those skilled in medicine,
And they say when it is plucked,
3310 That it moans and shrieks and cries,
And if anyone hear its cry,
Dead would he be and done to death.
But they that pluck it, do so
So wisely that they take no hurt.
3315 When from the earth it is taken out
For many a thing is the body good.
Should a man suffer in his head,
Or in his body, which was paining him,
Or in his foot or in his hand,
3320 By this plant would he be cured.
There where the man might feel the pain
He should take for that very spot
Some of the plant which should be bruised;
And when the man had drunk of it
3325 Quite gently would he fall asleep,
And feel the pain no more.
Of this plant which is so potent
There are always two kinds,
The one male, the other female.
3330 The leaf of both is beautiful;
The female has a thick leaf
Just like the wild lettuce.

Diamond

Far away up in the East
There is a high mountain stretching far,
3335 Where one finds a hard stone
When one looks for it on a dark night.
It does not shine at all by day
For then it loses its brightness.
The brilliance of the sun in truth
3340 Robs it of its own strong light.
It is the diamond of which I tell you,
There is no stone in the world so hard.
No other stone can break it
Nor iron nor fire destroy it.
3345 But they who wish to split it
Are used to break it with an iron hammer
When it has been steeped in he-goat's blood.
In this way is it fractured.
But it is needful that the blood
3350 Be quite fresh and not be cold.
With the pieces may one cut
Gems and iron and steel.
And moreover I teach you of the diamond
That the stone is not big at all.
3355 Its colour is like to iron
And its lustre to crystal.

Some say of the diamond
That it is potent against poison,
And that it drives away vain fears,
3360 So that the wiles of enchanters
Cannot enchant him
Who is wont to carry this stone.

The diamond which has such virtue
Denotes Jesus the king,
3365 As the prophet records⁸⁴
In accordance with this writing:
I saw upon a mountain of diamonds
Saith the prophet, a man standing
In the midst of the people of Israel.
3370 This man was well favoured.

84 Amos vii. 7.

The mountain where the stone is found,
 Which is so hard and tried
 Signifies God our father;
 The stone which shines by night
 3375 Must signify Jesus Christ,
 Who for us took human flesh.
 He visited us in darkness,
 With light he enlightened us.
 In the holy writing we find,
 3380 Which we call the gospel,
 What the saviour said of himself⁸⁵
 I am in the father and he in me,
 And whoso sees me, he sees my father.
 He who was born of the virgin mother,
 3385 Jesus Christ our saviour,
 Visited us in darkness.
 Very much should a man rejoice
 When he found such a diamond
 Which from darkness has brought him out.
 3390 That is the saviour who moves
 Over the stones firm and hard,
 Which in spite of blows and knocks
 Do not fail him nor will fail,
 But will keep themselves ever firm.
 3395 In these stones ye understand
 The blessed apostles,
 The prophets and the good saints,
 Who were never false nor faint.
 Never when tormented did they flinch,
 3400 But for God's sake suffered martyrdom
 And such toil and so great pain,
 That now they have a certain joy.
 As to the man who finds the stone
 This signifies by ample proof
 3405 That our lord hid himself
 When he came down here on earth.
 The hosts which dwell on high
 Knew not what he came down to do,
 Nor how he took human flesh.
 3410 But when he had suffered the pain
 Of death and was risen,

85 John x. 38.

And ascended to heaven above,
True man whole and perfect,
Then the heavenly host
3415 Held great conference about it
And without jealousy demanded:
Whence comes he, who is this king of glory,⁸⁶
Who has so great honour and victory?
Who is this? It is easy to say:
3420 It is the lord of all the realm,
He it is who holds all at his right hand,
He is the glorious king of heaven,
He is the lord of all might,
It is he who fought for us,
3425 In battle he is powerful and strong,
For he hath slain death.

My lords and ladies and noble folk,
The mouth of man cannot tell
The sum of the humility
3430 Nor the sweetness nor the pity
Which our Lord showed for us,
When of his dear and precious blood
He ransomed us and redeemed us
In the battle which he waged,
3435 When he despoiled hell
And confounded and banished it.

Good people, may God treat you well
And give you of his love and grace.
Now listen and so hear me
3440 And take better heart.
I have taken much trouble to recount
These lessons of the bestiary
According to the writing until now.
Now we pray you by God's mercy,
3445 If we have there said anything
Which may be written down as good
That ye take example by it
Both to speak well and to do well;
And if we have there spoken amiss,
3450 Foolishly or through forgetfulness,
For the love of God we ask of you

⁸⁶ Ps, xxiv. 8.

Pardon for our ignorance,
 And for our forgetfulness as well.
 For all that I pray your forgiveness.
 3455 If I have mis-stated aught in my work
 And it could be bettered by anyone
 Who may be wiser and of greater worth,
 No jealousy therefor afflicts me.
 I told you at the beginning
 3460 And promised that this book should have
 A good ending, and God would grant it.
 God commands us and he is right
 That we multiply his talents
 And carry out our work
 3465 For to increase his great riches
 And if we neglect this through idleness
 Much shall we be censured for it
 And by our master blamed.

 Now hear what he tells us of it
 3470 In the gospel, where it is written⁸⁷
 How he spake of a wise and prudent man,
 Who went on a far journey.
 The gospel bids us to believe
 That before he set out on his way
 3475 He called three of his servants;
 To one he gave five talents,
 To another two and to the third one.
 In this way he delivered to each
 As he knew and recognized his power.
 3480 Then he departed where he had to go.
 So soon as he was gone
 The servant who had received
 The five talents made such use
 That he gained of them as much again,
 3485 And the second did likewise.
 But the third did foolishly
 For he made a hole in the earth
 And put in the talent of his lord.
 And when the lord returned,
 3490 He questioned his three servants
 How they had done with his property.

87 Matt. xxv. 14.

The first told him with truth:
 Sir, said he, thou deliveredst to me
 Five talents, when thou wentest away,
 3495 And I have made such use of them,
 That I have made another five.
 Thou hast done well, my friend, said he,
 Of my profits thou hast taken care.
 Now shalt thou be for thy devotion
 3500 Lord of many good things;
 I will give thee greater possessions,
 Enter into the joy of thy lord!
 The second addressed him: Good sir,
 Of my share I can give a good account,
 3505 Of your two talents I have made four.
 Then must I not punish thee,
 Saith the lord, for thy service
 My part shalt thou have for thy share,
 For so I promised and vowed it thee.
 3510 The third who had made no use
 Came to the master and spake just this:
 Lord, see, here is thy talent,
 Quite whole have I preserved it.
 And the lord replied—By God,
 3515 Thou art not a good or faithful servant,
 Thou shalt not be in my counsels
 Nor shalt thou partake of my joy;
 Out of my house shalt thou go
 And from all my company.
 3520 For thou hast failed by thine illdoing
 To multiply my goods.
 My masters, such is the scripture.

 But there is a great meaning;
 Our lord, who created all,
 3525 Must be understood as the prudent man;
 The two servants—this is the gist of it—
 Are all those who exalt his name
 And maintain and extol his law.
 And these shall enter into his joy
 3530 When all things shall end.
 But he shall have no footing there,
 Who shall have hidden his treasure

Just as many people do.
 Very foolish is he who buries it
 3535 And leaves it in the earth to rot,
 But he who toils to make it grow
 And to increase and multiply it,
 He shall certainly have joy.
 Still each day does our master
 3540 Deliver to his servants
 His talents to be multiplied
 When he makes a good knight
 Or a good clerk or a wise man,
 Who may be able by his understanding
 3545 To counsel all the realm of Rome;
 And the other has no will to work,
 But all his life idly waits
 And uses no one of his gifts
 In the service of our master.
 3550 When he shall come in the last day
 Think ye that God will not ask him
 What he has done with his talent?
 Yea, I know quite well.
 Lord God giveth largely
 3555 To one prowess, to one power,
 To one strength, to one knowledge,
 To one understanding or eloquence,
 And whoso getteth no seed from them
 All the time that he can
 3560 Buries the talent of his master.
 Then I proved it by this gospel.
 When God granted me his grace
 To speak out, I was not to tarry,
 But to take up his talent and increase it.
 3565 With eloquence has God made me rich.
 It was not fortune unless I am mistaken.
 Of great use it could be to me,
 But neither science nor knowledge
 Nor manners nor bravery
 3570 Nor adornment nor honour
 Avail to fight against her.
 At one time she never let me reach
 Port, before that she drove me
 Long hours on the high sea

3575 Full of tempest and of storms,
 So evil-hearted was she toward me.
 But to the master, who sees all
 And who knows how greatly I desire,
 Do I pray that he grant me so
 3580 That at some time he bring me into port;
 For surely there be hour and season for it.
 Here shall I delay no more,
 God's talent will I put out to profit
 For to defeat the devil.
 3585 There are diversities of gifts,
 And they who have them ought
 To put them to gain and to usury.
 And so I tell you I had no thought,
 When God delivered his talent to me,
 3590 That it be hidden or buried.
 That science is lost
 Which is not shared and known.
 Understanding is a rich possession,
 As a book of sermons says:
 3595 But he who has no care for the master
 Will indeed not make his abode with him.
 With him there's many a one who leaves
 And abandons it sooner or later,
 If there comes to him noble rank,
 3600 For it loves munificence so much,
 And to hold man in so little esteem,
 That with him it does not deign to stay.

 Good people, kind and well-disposed,
 You remember how beautiful
 3605 Are the lessons of the bestiary.
 See the wickedness of the world
 How it ever grows and thrives;
 See how contends and strives
 Treachery against right;
 3610 See in what a costly carriage
 Man passes through this world;
 See how great evil abounds there,
 See how man is deceived,
 See how he is conceived,
 3615 See how he is covered,

See to what trouble he is born,
 See what a child he is,
 How foolish and ignorant;
 See when he comes of age,
 3620 How proud he is of heart,
 When he ought to praise him
 Who has made him to walk and speak,
 To feel and see and hear.
 Then he is not willing to obey,
 3625 When he is handsome, rich and strong
 And not so minded to remember
 His master who has made him so
 And from a mean state brought him.
 No one cares a brass farthing
 3630 Or believes that his great power
 Or riches will ever fail him.
 But when death turns toward him,
 Who watches him with open jaws,
 Then is his pride surrendered,
 3635 His body is buried in the earth,
 Eaten and destroyed of worms;
 Then his soul departs wandering,
 Which cannot have a scrap
 Of whatever he once gained.
 3640 A new heir has his goods,
 Which indeed will do nothing for him,
 Nor are worth to him more than a dog.
 For this reason, by God, he does but grieve
 Who in this life is too slack
 3645 In serving God and worshipping;
 In this ought no one to delay.
 How many a man in this life
 Does so and stays in idleness and folly
 Instead of serving that master
 3650 Who gives life after death.
 In his vineyard works the good labourer,
 For as soon as it comes to eventide
 Then can man earn his bread;
 Yea! None shall work there in vain.
 3655 Now hear what the gospel says:
 It relates to me that our lord

Told his disciples one day
 A lesson of great sweetness:
 For he told them that a goodman⁸⁸
 3660 From his house went forth one day,
 In the morning for to hire labourers,
 Who should work in his vineyard.
 Those which he found at first
 He hired and agreed with them
 3665 That to each he should give a penny.
 These made no demur; soon
 Were they entered into the vineyard,
 And dug and worked.
 When it came to the third hour after prime,
 3670 Lo! There is the lord himself,
 Who met other labourers,
 And sent them with the first
 And promised that he would give them
 Of his means as much as would be right.
 3675 Near midday he found more
 Idle folk, and hired them.
 Towards the ninth hour he found others idle,
 And said to them: What do ye?
 Go and work in my vineyard.
 3680 They too did not bargain
 But went there straightway.
 But the day wore on
 And the afternoon approached
 And the goodman went down
 3685 Straight to the market of the city;
 Over the stations he looked,
 And saw other idle labourers
 Who were there assembled.
 What have ye done all day? said he.
 3690 Sir, said they, it goes ill with us now,
 We could not find to-day
 A man who would hire us.
 Then ye are unfortunate, he said.
 Go up there at once
 3695 Into my vineyard to the other labourers.
 And I shall give you willingly
 Of my means so much as shall be right,

88 Matt. xx. 1.

According to the day and season.
 These sprang up and went to work,
 3700 But never did they need to sweat,
 For soon it was time to leave off work.
 Then did the goodman call
 His steward and said: Good friend,
 Now go, as I have promised,
 3705 And pay all my labourers,
 And begin with the last
 And so on up to the first,
 And put into the hand of each
 A penny, and let them go.
 3710 Then began the steward
 To call them and set them in order
 And gave to each a penny.
 They who were come in the morning
 Thought, when they saw
 3715 Each one get his penny,
 That they ought to receive more,
 And grumbled and murmured
 And parleyed with the master thereon.
 Sir, said they, what means this?
 3720 Since the morning have we borne
 The toil and burden of heavy labour.
 Now has each but one coin,
 And they who have come just now
 Who have borne no toil of labour,
 3725 Have just as much as we have.
 Sirs, replied the goodman,
 I have done you no wrong, be sure,
 Since you have your agreement
 Does it vex you how I do my favour?
 3730 Is it not allowed me to bestow
 My own gifts where it pleases me?
 At these words each kept silence.
 When God had told this story,
 He had opened and described to them
 3735 A parable quite simple.
 So, saith he, they shall be last
 Who are come first,
 And before them those behind.
 Of those who are called there are many,

3740 But the chosen are few.
 Now ye have heard the gospel,
 But ye know not what it means
 Several of you, if they are not clerks
 Or if they have not learned from clerks.
 3745 But I shall tell you on my part
 What I hear and see.
 The goodman who in the day
 First set his labourers to his work,
 Signifies the king of glory
 3750 Who gives victory to his labourers.
 When God had in the great flood
 Saved Noah within his ark,
 And his household and his children,
 Forthwith was the great world by it
 3755 Restored and once more increased.
 Then is our lord gone forth
 From his house and gone to seek
 Labourers for to labour on his land.
 Then God hired his labourers.
 3760 Abraham was of all the first,
 Who was prince of wise and prudent men,
 Of whose seed we are.
 About the third hour he returned,
 As it was meet for him to come,
 3765 To hire the valiant Moses,
 Who at the vineyard had a hard task.
 Then did our lord, as I told you,
 Return towards midday;
 He hired the good David,
 3770 Who was filled with his grace.
 At the ninth hour he took Daniel
 And Jeremiah and Joel
 And the others who foretold
 The things which were to come.
 3775 Towards even God went down
 Straight to the market of the city;
 For he came at the end of the world
 And took up his abode
 And dwelling in the pure queen
 3780 By his deity and by a miracle,

And hid—it is a certain thing—
 His deity in human flesh
 And came into the world to preach
 And teach the way of life.
 3785 Then found he people, unbelievers,
 And asked of them what they did,
 And these then answered him
 That they had never found any
 Who might tell or show them
 3790 The way for their salvation.
 Then God taught them the law;
 Then he called to him
 Peter, Paul, John and Andrew;
 These were to work in the vineyard
 3795 Of God so loyally and so hard.
 Never through fear of death
 Did they fail their master,
 And he paid them so great honour,
 That he gave them the penny of gold
 3800 And delivered to them his treasure
 To divide and expend;
 And they did it so without mistake.

 Moreover it is right that I set out for you
 Why the periods of the world
 3805 Are compared with those of the day
 And thus have you freed from error.
 Just as the day has lasted longest
 At the hour when it is evening
 Compared with that which is to come,
 3810 So can ye grasp it
 That the world had lasted longest
 When God came down on earth
 Compared with that which was to come.
 So it was explained to me
 3815 By the good bishop of Paris
 Maurice, from whom I learned it,⁸⁹
 And from other latin sources too.
 God hires labourers in the morning
 When he takes men in infancy
 3820 In good faith and in belief.

89 Maurice de Sully.

At the third hour he hires some
 When he takes them thirty years old
 In his law and in his service.
 And midday again shows us
 3825 Those whom at forty years the grace
 Of the holy spirit visits.
 At the ninth hour God hires again
 Labourers when he takes of them
 Such as have spent their life
 3830 In doing his commandments.
 Toward evening he comes down again
 So sweet and so noble;
 For he takes them in their weakness
 And at the end of their old age.
 3835 And when they come to the point of death,
 Man may find one who is chastened
 And repents and cries for mercy,
 And acknowledges his falseness,
 And with very great devoutness
 3840 Beseeches God in confession
 And labours in the field a short spell,
 Before that death attacks him
 Now quite repentant and confessed.
 He has not borne the burden
 3845 Really like the first;
 But he shall have the whole penny,
 So bountiful is God and tender-hearted.
 Now suppose that someone who is proud
 Addresses God and thus says to him:
 3850 God, now have I all my life
 Here in thy vineyard laboured
 And suffered rain and storm,
 And thou makest this man equal me
 Who has not laboured at eventide
 3855 Not even a short spell.
 And God replies: I am all quits
 With thee by right, good friend,
 Thou hast all that I promised thee,
 Thou hast the eternal kingdom.
 3860 Is it not allowed me to be merciful
 Toward those who came just now?
 What would avail my authority

If of my means I might not give
All for nothing, if I willed it?

3865 Now you may hear, my masters,
How very near is God's help to him
Who calls on him from a full heart.
But no one should in any way
Delay through this hope

3870 To be a labourer in God's vineyard.
Many a fool thinks in his heart:
God, surely I may have leave,
Says he, to commit this sin,
Until old age has set its mark on me

3875 And forced me out of youth.
This thought is very painful,
Very wicked and dishonest,
And comes through the devil's wiles,
For no one knows the time of his end.

3880 Such a one is dead since this morning,
Whom one had found yester eve
Full of health and strength.

My masters, for God's sake take heed
How the thief, whom evil fire inflames,

3885 Lies in wait to find you asleep
So fast that he may despoil you.
Do as the knights do

To their quarters, when they are afraid
They may be attacked in the night.

3890 Their enemies they know and see
That they will surround them in the night.
Then you will see they will be fully armed,
That they be not surprised by armed opponents.
Likewise do they who believe in God;

3895 For with alms and with charity
And with real love of God
And of his neighbour as himself,
In loyalty, in good faith
They build around them a wall so strong

3900 And so thick and so sound
That there is no hole or breach,
And that the thief, who watches all
And is very anxious to get in,

Cannot find a way to pass.
 3905 Now let us arm in such manner
 That at sight of our banner
 The traitor dare not meddle with us.
 And that we may never be beaten back
 Even a half-foot by all his host.
 3910 We who have wasted time so long,
 How do we expect to labour
 If it begins to get dusk
 And the night find us idle,
 Which is so black and gloomy?
 3915 That is death, which spares nothing.
 Never the day when we shall see
 The clear light of the kingdom above,
 Never from the smoke below
 Shall we be fated to come forth,
 3920 If we on that morning or before night
 Fail to arm ourselves.
 Fools we are there to wait;
 Great danger and great fear there is
 Of waiting too long in hope.
 3925 Many a man in awaiting pardon
 Is deceived, I do assure you;
 For while he is waiting,
 He must fall into condemnation,
 Into condemnation and into judgment,
 3930 And be fated to come before the judge.

 For God's sake, my masters, and for his saints,
 Let us not be idle or remiss;
 Too long we wait from day to day
 To come to our saviour.
 3935 Who looks for ease, ease evades him.
 Woe to the tree which bears no fruit!
 It must be cut down and cast into the fire.
 Too much are we given to pleasure.
 Too much are we allured by vices.
 3940 How long shall we guard the gates
 For the citizen whom we serve?
 Great hunger in his service we have
 And great thirst and very great misery,
 And well we know that in great comfort

3945 Are all the last-come fellows
 With our father in his mansion.
 And if we turned back
 Beseeching pardon with humble face
 We know well that he would come
 3950 To meet us and would provide
 Wherewith to clothe anew and warm us
 And would bring us much to eat
 And great entertainment and feasting.
 Never did I see anything so foolish
 3955 As we are, as surely as God sees me,
 We who recognize the right road
 And yet willingly go the wrong.
 On our necks we bind the noose
 Which destroys and which hangs us.
 3960 Very foolish is he who does not repent,
 While he has time and opportunity.
 My masters, may God grant you pardon;
 Go to seek pardon and beg for it
 While ye can find it;
 3965 Otherwise ye may never have it.
 Call whilst he is near
 To our master and he will hear you.
 Yea, without pardon he will not leave you
 If ye will ask for it in time.
 3970 But if ye make delay in that,
 So long that ye cannot speak
 Or pray or call to him
 Then will he be so far from you
 That hardly will ye find pity there.
 3975 Draw near by repentance
 By confession and by penitence.
 Plainly have ye heard it stated
 That a man may be reconciled to him
 Through faith and through confession,
 3980 Through alms and through prayer.
 When ye know this remedy,
 And what peace of mind ye have of it,
 Take pains to heal your sores
 And do not let them fester,
 3985 For if they are grown hard,
 Scarcely can they then be cured.

Regard the meaning of the word
 Of the gospel, which says to us:
 Brethren, pray and so watch
 3990 That ye be ready and prepared,
 For ye know not when will come
 The flag-bearer who will summon you
 And will cry: Get up, arise,
 Enter with the bridegroom to the marriage!
 3995 If then ye have to get your oil,
 The porter who shuts the door,
 Will shut you out—make no mistake—
 Out from the grand company,
 From the joy which ever endures.
 4000 Never from the dark valley
 Will ye go forth, but everlastingly
 Will ye remain in the stinking hole,
 In the eternal prison
 Within the devil's abode.
 4005 From going there may God defend us!
 For then there is no use for amendment,
 For crying for mercy or any other thing;
 But before that the door is shut,
 Let us be ready and behave wisely;
 4010 For that message is indeed gone out
 And comes with very great speed,
 And will summon us either at nightfall
 Or the morning as it may happen.
 Always our end approaches,
 4015 We know well that we shall die,
 Of nothing are we more certain.
 Of nothing are we less certain
 When that will be, to-day or to-morrow,
 And since we are certain of dying
 4020 And do not know when it must come,
 Surely we ought to look out
 Both day and night, morning and evening,
 That we be so prepared
 That we can enter into the marriage,
 4025 So soon as we be summoned.
 My masters, for God and his name's sake,
 Take heed that I have not sown
 Neither my seed nor my wheat

Among thorns or in barren ground
 4030 Or on stones or in sand,
 But in earth which produces fruit.
 Be ye so provided and instructed
 By the lessons of the bestiary
 That ye leave off to do ill
 4035 And take pains to labour for good
 For to obtain the certain joy;
 For the joy here on earth
 Cannot be for long
 Nor be maintained or be lasting.
 4040 No one should rely on it,
 For it is my opinion as I imagine,
 That we are in the worst times
 Which have been since the incarnation
 In any generation which
 4045 Has practised the christian law.
 Where is to-day loyalty and faith?
 Where is almsgiving and charity?
 Where is honesty and truth,
 Chastity and religion?
 4050 Where is mercy, where is pardon?
 Where is honour, where is generosity?
 Where is love, where is simplicity?
 Where is tenderness and courtesy?
 Where is pity, where is help?
 4055 Where is telling truth and justice?
 Who does not lay him out for bribes?
 Where is agreement and true peace?
 These virtues do not prevail.
 And if they prevail in any one
 4060 Ye will not find him in a thousand.
 The world to-day is so disloyal
 And so treacherous and so false,
 So cunning, so evil-minded,
 So unjust, so greedy for gain,
 4065 So envious, so given to slander,
 So untruthful, so carping,
 So vile and so knavish,
 So bad and so vagabond,
 So deceitful, so quarrelsome,
 4070 So avaricious, so false in judgment,

So proud and so tyrannical,
 So shifty and so combative,
 So covetous in every way,
 So forgetful of good service,
 4075 So treacherous, so scheming,
 So grasping and calculating,
 So smooth-tongued, so flattering,
 So greedy for drink and food,
 So full of vices and filthy ways,
 4080 That it is wonderful that it lasts so long.
 When the world is so disloyal
 Then I say how very brave
 Is he who is able to pass through it
 Without meeting with a fall
 4085 And is not cowardly or vanquished
 By quarter staff and buckler.
 It is granted him to know full well
 To whom God gives the power.
 This battle is calamitous
 4090 And hard and dangerous and grave,
 For as soon as man is on the field
 He has to fight three enemies
 Evening and night and day,
 Which engage him in great combat.
 4095 All too heavy is the fight,
 For if he live a hundred years
 He must fight without ceasing
 Against those who would strike him down.
 From these three he must defend himself,
 4100 Or acknowledge himself beaten.

 The devil is the first enemy,
 Who lies in wait to make him sin.
 This world is the second enemy,
 Who casts him down with many a blow.
 4105 The third, it is his own flesh
 Which assails and overcomes him
 More than do the other two;
 It is the worst enemy that he has.
 He must be held for a valiant knight,
 4110 Who from these three can keep himself.
 The wise man guards himself therefrom,

That he be not overcome at all;
For he has armour to put on
To protect him and save him.
4115 This armour is in truth
Faith, hope and charity.
Who is well endowed with these
In the battle loses nothing,
But the three completely conquers
4120 Who attack him with such force.

Now let us pray God who created us,
Who caused our birth and who
Has set us on the field of battle,
That he counsel us and make us strong
4125 And that he grant us by his mercy
To fight so hard, and to pass here
Through things temporal,
That we in no wise lose
The things spiritual.
4130 Such should be our prayer.
And may God by his sanctifying grace
So counsel us and do to us so,
And grant us such repentance,
That we on the day of judgment
4135 May sit on his right hand.
Amen, Amen may each one say to that.

William, who wrote this book,
In conclusion says so much
About Sire Ralph, his lord,
4140 For whom he undertook this work,
That he has well rewarded him,
Has promised and freely given;
Well has he kept his word with him.
For Ralph has it turned out well,
4145 For he has had his name published
And not had it left forgotten.
This is how his name divides,
And I am proud of the way I make use of it.
This name Ralph sounds very fine,
4150 And now we shall teach you its meaning:
Three syllables there are conjoined
Which from three names are cut off.

Three syllables there are, no more:
The ra and the dul and the fus.⁹⁰
4155 The ra is derived from “ratio”
And the dul comes from “dulcedo”
And the third syllable fus
Is the equivalent of “fultus”.
If the name is explained exactly,
4160 “Fultus” is placed in the middle.
“Tunc erit fultus undique
Ratione dulcedine.”⁹¹
It is that the name Ralph is supported
Both by reason and by pity;
4165 Pity and sweetness and reason
Have in his heart made their abode.
And God vouchsafes him by his grace
That he prepare for him so good a dwelling
And serve him well and love him so much,
4170 That to the joy on high where God dwells
He may be able to rise in that day
When the upright and the sinner
Before the judge shall tremble
And shall await their sentence.

Amen.

90 Radulphus.

91 “Then he will be supported on all sides by the sweetness of Reason.” [DB]