

## The Parson

A good man was there of religion,  
And (he) was a poor PARSON OF A TOWN,  
But he was rich in holy thought and work.  
He was also a learned man, a scholar  
He would devoutly teach his parishioners.  
He was gracious, and wonderfully diligent,  
And very patient in adversity,  
And such he was proven many times.  
He was very reluctant to excommunicate for (nonpayment of) his tithes,  
But rather would he give, there is no doubt,  
Unto his poor parishioners about  
Some of his offering (received at mass) and also some of his income.  
He knew how to have sufficiency in few possessions.  
His parish was wide, and houses far apart,  
But he did not omit, for rain nor thunder,  
In sickness or in trouble to visit  
Those living farthest away in his parish, high-ranking and low,  
Going by foot, and in his hand a staff.  
He gave this noble example to his sheep,  
That first he wrought, and afterward he taught.  
And this metaphor he added also to that,  
That if gold rust, what must iron do?  
For if a priest, on whom we trust, should be foul  
It is no wonder for a layman to go bad;  
And it is a shame, if a priest is concerned:  
A shit-stained shepherd and a clean sheep.  
Well ought a priest to give an example,  
By his purity, how his sheep should live.  
He did not rent out his benefice (ecclesiastical living)  
And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire  
And run to London unto Saint Paul's  
To seek an appointment as a chantry priest (praying for a patron)  
Or to be hired (as a chaplain) by a guild;  
But dwelt at home, and kept well his sheep fold (parish),  
So that the wolf did not make it go wrong;  
He was a shepherd and not a hireling.  
And though he was holy and virtuous,  
He was not scornful to sinful men,  
Nor domineering nor haughty in his speech,  
But in his teaching courteous and kind.  
To draw folk to heaven by gentleness,  
By good example, this was his business.  
Unless it were an obstinate person,  
Whoever he was, of high or low rank,  
He would rebuke him sharply at that time.  
He expected no pomp and ceremony,  
Nor made himself an overly fastidious conscience,  
But Christ's teaching and His twelve apostles  
He taught; but first he followed it himself

