

1380

CANTERBURY TALES

THE TALE OF MELIBEUS

Geoffrey Chaucer

Chaucer, Geoffrey (1343-1400) - English poet, known as the most important writer of Middle English. His *Canterbury Tales* (~1380) are told by traveling pilgrims who meet at a tavern and have a storytelling contest to pass the time. Each tale is preceded by an introductory prologue. *The Tale of Melibeus* - A tale told by Chaucer in which Melibeus struggles with the idea of revenge when he learns three of his enemies have killed his daughter and beaten his wife.

THE TALE OF MELIBEUS

A young man named Melibeus, mighty and rich, begot on Prudence, his wife, a daughter who was called Sophie.

It happened one day that, for his amusement he went into the fields to play. His wife and daughter remained at home, the doors of his house being all fast shut and locked. But three of his old enemies, having spied out the state of things, set ladders to the wall of the house and entered therein by a window; and they beat the wife and wounded the daughter with five dangerous wounds in five different places; that is to say, in her feet, in her hands, in her ears, in her nose, and in her mouth; and they left her for dead and went away.

When Melibeus returned to his house and saw all this mischief, he, like a madman, rending his clothes, began to weep and cry.

Prudence his wife, so far as she dared, besought him to cease his weeping; nevertheless he wept and cried but the more.

This noble wife Prudence remembered then the opinion of Ovid, in his book The Remedy for Love, wherein he says: "He is but a fool who interferes with the mother weeping for the death of her child, until she shall have wept her fill, and for a certain time; and only then may a man be diligent, with kind words, to comfort her, and pray her to forgo her tears." For which reason this noble wife Prudence suffered, her husband to weep and cry for a time; and when she saw her

opportunity, she spoke to him. “Alas, my lord!” said she, “Why do you allow yourself to act like a fool? For truly it becomes not a wise man to show such sorrow. Your daughter, by grace of God, shall be healed and will recover. And were she dead even now, you ought not, for this, to destroy yourself. Seneca says: ‘The wise man will not take too sorrowfully to heart the death of his children, but will suffer it with patience, just as he awaits the death of his own body.’”

Melibeus answered, saying: “What man should cease his weeping who has so great a cause to weep? Jesus Christ Our Lord Himself wept for the death of His friend Lazarus.”

Prudence replied: “Indeed, well do I know that moderate weeping is not forbidden to anyone who sorrows, among sorrowing folk; but, rather, it is permitted him to weep. The Apostle Paul writes unto the Romans: ‘Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.’ But though a tempered weeping may be granted, excessive weeping certainly is forbidden. Moderation in grief should be considered, according to the teaching of Seneca. ‘When your friend is dead,’ says he, ‘let not your eyes be too wet with tears, nor yet too dry; and though your tears rise to the eyes, let them not fall.’ So, when you have given over your friend, be diligent in procuring another; and this is wiser than to weep for the friend who is lost; for therein is no profit. And therefore, if you govern yourself with wisdom, put away sorrow out of your heart. Remember how Jesus son of Sirach says: ‘A joyous and glad heart makes a man flourish in his age; but truly a sorrowful heart drieth the bones.’ He says also that sorrow hath killed many a man. Solo-

mon says that as moths in the sheep's fleece annoy the clothes, and as small worms the tree, so sorrow annoys the heart. Wherefore we ought to be patient, not less for the death of our children than for the loss of worldly goods.

“Remember the patient Job, when he had lost his children and his substance, and had in his body received and endured many a grievous tribulation, yet said he thus: ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’”

To these things Melibeus answered, saying to Prudence his wife: “All your words are true, and likewise profitable, but verily my heart is troubled so grievously with this sorrow that I know not what to do.”

“Call, then,” said Prudence, “all of your true friends and those of your kindred who are wise; tell them your trouble and hearken to what they say in council; and then govern yourself according to their advice. Says Solomon: ‘Do nothing without advice, and thou shalt never repent.’”

Then, upon the advice of his wife Prudence, Melibeus called together a great gathering of people, old and young; and some among them were surgeons and physicians; and some were of his old enemies who seemed to have become reconciled to him; and there came some of his neighbours who respected him more out of fear than of love, as often happens; there came also a great many subtle flatterers; and there were wise advocates learned in the law.

And when all these folks were assembled together, Melibeus, with sorrowful words and mien, told them his trouble; and by the manner of his speech it appeared that in his heart he bore a savage anger, ready to take vengeance upon his foes, and was desirous that the war upon them should quickly come. Nevertheless, he asked their advice upon this matter. Then a surgeon, by leave and voice of all present who were wise, rose up and spoke to Melibeus as you shall hear.

“Sir,” said he, “as for us surgeons, it belongs to us that we do for everyone the best that we can, when we have been retained, and that we do no harm to our patients. Wherefore it happens, many times and oft, that when two men have wounded one another, the same surgeon heals them both. Therefore it does not become us to foment warfare nor to support factions. And certainly, as to the healing of your daughter, although she is dangerously wounded, we will be so attentive, by day and by night, that, with God’s grace, she shall be made sound and whole again, and that as soon as may be possible.”

Almost in the same words the physicians answered, save that they added: “Just as diseases are cured by their contraries, so shall men cure war by vengeance.”

His neighbours, full of envy, his false friends who feigned to be reconciled to him, and his flatterers, made a semblance of weeping; and they greatly aggravated the matter by praising Melibeus, speaking of his might, his power, his wealth, and his friends, and disparaging the strength of his enemies; and they said outright, that very swiftly he should begin the war and wreak vengeance upon his foes.

Then arose an advocate, a wise man, by leave and advice of others who were wise, and said: "Masters, the matter for which we are assembled here is a heavy thing, and a high, what with the wrong and wickedness that have been done, and by reason of the great evil that may follow hereafter from this same cause; and, too, by reason of the great wealth and power of both parties. For all of these reasons it were dangerous indeed to err in this matter. Wherefore, Melibeus, this is our judgment: we counsel you above all things, that, without delay, you take steps to guard your own person in such wise that you shall lack neither spy nor watchman. And we counsel, that in your house you establish a sufficient garrison, so that the house may be as well defended as you yourself. But, to say truth, as to initiating warfare in order to obtain a sudden revenge, we can give no opinion, in so short a time, on whether such a move will be profitable. Therefore we ask for leisure and time wherein to deliberate upon the matter more fully. For the common proverb runs 'Resolve in haste, in haste repent.' And besides, men hold that he is a wise judge who quickly understands a case and leisurely pronounces thereupon. For though delay may be annoying, nevertheless it is not to be blamed when it is a question of rendering just judgments, or of securing vengeance, when the delay is both sufficient and reasonable. And that was shown, in example, by Our Lord Jesus Christ. For when the woman taken in adultery was brought into His presence, in order to learn what He would have them to do with her, though He well knew what He would thereafter answer, yet would He not answer quickly, but deliberated; and He stooped down and wrote twice upon the ground. For all these

reasons, we ask time in which to deliberate, and thereafter we will counsel you, by the grace of God, as to the most profitable course.”

Up started, then, all of the young folk, at once, and the greater part of them scorned the counsel of the old wise men; and they raised a clamour and said: that just as it is well to strike while the iron is hot, so should men wreak their vengeance while they are fresh in anger. And they all cried loudly, “War, war!”

Upon this, one of the old wise ones arose, and with his hand commanding silence and attention, he said: “Masters, there is many a man to cry ‘War, War!’ who yet knows but little of the meaning of it. War, in the beginning, has so high an entrance, and so wide, that every man may enter when he pleases, and may find war easily. But truly, what the end of war shall be is not so easy to know. For when a war is once begun, many an unborn child shall die in the womb because of the strife, or else shall be born into sorrow and die in wretchedness. Therefore, ere any war begins, men should take much counsel together and act only after much deliberation.”

But when this old man thought to reinforce his words with reasons, then well-nigh all the younger folk arose and began to heckle him and to break up his argument, bidding him cut short his remarks. For indeed, he that preaches to those who have ears but hear not, makes of himself a nuisance. As Jesus son of Sirach says: “A tale out of season is as musick in mourning.” Which is to say, it avails as much to speak to folk to whom the speech is annoying as to sing before one who weeps. And when this wise man understood that he lacked an audience, he sat

down again, much confused. For Solomon says: “When there is none will hear thee, cease to speak.” “I see well,” said this wise man, “that the proverb says truth, which runs, ‘Good counsel is wanting when it is most needed.’”

Again, Melibeus had in his council many men who said one thing in his private ear and spoke otherwise in general audience.

When Melibeus heard that the greater part of his councillors were agreed on war, straightway he showed himself in accord with them and confirmed their judgment. Then Dame Prudence, seeing that her husband shaped his course for war and revenge, humbly and after biding her time, said to him: “My lord, I beseech you as earnestly as I dare and can, that you go not too hastily in this matter; and for your own good give me a hearing. For Petrus Alfonsus says: ‘And if one man do to another any good or any evil, let there be no haste to repay it in kind; for then will the friend remain friendly, while the enemy shall but the longer fear.’ The proverb has it: ‘He hastens well who wisely can delay.’ And in foolish haste there is no profit.”

This Melibeus answered Prudence his wife: “I purpose not to work by your counsel, for many causes and reasons. For truly every man would then take me for a fool; by which I mean: if I by your advising, should change things that have been ordained and confirmed by so many wise men. Secondly, I say that all women are evil and none good. ‘Behold, this have I found (saith the Preacher), counting one by one, to find out the account; which yet my soul seeketh, but I found not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all

those have I not found.’ And certainly, if I were to be governed by your counsel, it would appear as if I had given over to you my sovereignty; and may God forbid that such a thing should ever be. For Jesus son of Sirach says: ‘A woman, if she maintain her husband, is full of anger, impudence,’ and much reproach.’ And Solomon says: ‘Give not thy son and wife, thy brother and friend, power over thee while thou livest, and give not thy goods to another: lest it repent thee, and thou entreat for the same again. As long as thou livest and hast breath in thee, give not thyself over to any. For better it is that thy children should seek to thee, than that thou shouldest stand to their courtesy.’ And also, if I were to work according to your counselling, certain it is that my counsels must be kept secret until the proper time to make them known; and this could not thus be. For it is written that ‘The chattering of women can conceal nothing except that which they do not know.’ Furthermore, the philosopher says: ‘In evil counsel women surpass men.’ And for all these reasons I will not follow your advice.”

When Dame Prudence, very affably and with great patience, had heard all that her husband chose to say, then she asked of him leave to speak, and said: “My lord, as to your first reason, surely it may readily be answered. For I say that it is no folly to over-rule counsel when circumstances are changed, or when the cause appears otherwise than at the first. And, moreover, I say that though you have sworn and warranted to perform your enterprise, nevertheless, should you refuse for just cause to perform it, men will not therefore say that you are a liar and forsworn. For the book says that the wise man deals not falsely when he changes his

first purpose for a better one. And although your undertaking be ordained and established by a great many men, yet you need not accomplish it, unless you like. For the truth of things, and the profit thereof, are found rather among a few folk who are wise and reasonable than among the multitude, where every man cries and gabbles as he likes. Truly such a crowd is not worthy of honour. As to the second reason, wherein you say that all women are evil, then certainly, saving your grace, you must despise all women by so saying; and he that despises all displeases all, as the book says. And Seneca says that 'Whoso has sapience will not any man dispraise; but he will gladly impart such knowledge as he can, and that without presumption and pride. And for such things as he knows not, he will not be ashamed to inquire of and learn from lesser folk.' And, sir, that there has been many a good woman may be easily proved. For certainly, sir, Our Lord Jesus Christ would never have condescended to be born of a woman if all women had been evil. And thereafter, for the great worth that is in women, Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He had risen from death unto life, appeared to a woman, rather than to His disciples. And although Solomon says that he never found good in any woman, it follows not, therefore, that all women are wicked. For, though he may never have found a good woman, surely many another man has found full many a woman to be both good and true. Or perchance Solomon's meaning was this: that so far as the highest virtue is concerned, he found no such woman; which is to say, that there is no one who has sovereign goodness and worth, save God alone, as He Himself has caused to be recorded in His gospels. For there is no creature so good that he is not somehow wanting in the perfection of God, Who is his

Maker. Your third reason is this: You say that if you were to be governed by my counsel, it should appear as if you had given over to me the mastery and sovereignty of your person. Sir, saving your presence, it is not so. For, if it were true, then, in order that no man should ever be advised, save by those who had mastery over his person, men could not so often be advised. For truly, every man who asks counsel concerning any purpose yet retains his freedom to choose whether he will or will not proceed by that counselling. And as to your fourth reason, wherein you say that the chattering of women can hide things of the which they are not aware, as one might say that a woman cannot hide what she knows- sir, these words are only to be understood of women who are both evil and gossipy; of which women men say that three things will drive a man out of his own house: smoke, and the dripping of rain, and a wicked wife. And further, of such women, Solomon says: 'It were better to dwell in a corner of the housetop than with a brawling woman in a wide house.' And, sir, by your leave, that I am not; for you have often enough tested my ability to keep silence, and tried my patience, and even how I can hide and conceal matters that men ought to keep secret. And, in good truth, as to your fifth reason, wherein you say that in evil counsel women surpass men, God knows that this reason has no standing here. For understand now, you ask counsel to do wickedness; and if your will is to work wickedness, and your wife restrains such an ill purpose and overcomes you by reason and good counsel given, then, certainly, your wife ought rather to be praised than blamed. Thus should you understand the saw of the philosopher who says that in evil counsel women surpass their husbands. And whereas you blame all women

and their reasonings, I will show you, by many examples, that many women have been good and are yet, and have given counsel both wholesome and profitable. True, some men have said that the advice of women is either too dear or too cheap in price. But, be it that many a woman is bad, and her counsel vile and worthless, yet men have found many a good woman, full wise and full discreet in giving counsel. Behold how Jacob, by following the good advice of his mother Rebecca, won the blessing of Isaac, his father, and came to authority over all his brethren. Judith, by her good counsel, delivered the city of Bethulia, wherein she dwelt, out of the hands of Holofernes, who besieged it and who would have completely destroyed it. Abigail delivered her husband Nabal from David the king, who would have slain him, and appeased the anger of the king by her wit and good advising. Esther, by her good counsel, greatly exalted the people of God in the reign of King Ahasuerus. And men may tell much of the same excellence of good advice in many a good woman. Moreover, when Our Lord had created Adam, our forefather, he said thus: 'It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a help meet for him.' Here you may see that, if women were not good, and their counsels good and profitable, Our Lord God of Heaven would never have wrought them, nor called them the help of man, but, rather, the confusion of man. And once a writer said, in two verses: 'What is better than gold? Jasper. What is better than jasper? Wisdom. What is better than wisdom? Woman. And what is better than woman? Nothing.' And, sir, by many other examples you may see that women are good and their counselling both good and profitable. And thereupon, sir, if you will trust to my advice, I will restore to you your daugh-

ter whole and sound. And moreover, I will do for you so much that you shall come out of this affair with honour.”

When Melibeus had listened to the words of his wife Prudence, he said: “I see well that the word of Solomon is true. He says, ‘Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones.’ And, wife, because of your sweet words, and because, moreover, I have tried and proved your great wisdom and your great truthfulness, I will be governed in all things by your counsels.”

“Now, sir,” said Dame Prudence, “since you give yourself to be governed by my advice, I will tell you how to choose your councillors. You shall first, in all your works, meekly pray to the high God that He will be your adviser, and you shall mould your understanding in such wise that He may give you counsel and comfort, as Tobit taught his son, that is to say: ‘Bless the Lord thy God always, and desire of Him that thy ways may be directed and that all thy paths and counsels may prosper.’ And look to it that all your counsels are in Him for evermore. Saint James, also, says: ‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.’ And after that, then shall you take counsel within yourself, and examine well your thoughts, concerning all things that seem to be the best for your own profit. And then shall you drive from your heart three things that are opposed to the following of good counsel, and they are anger, and covetousness, and hastiness.

“First, he that takes counsel within himself, certainly he must be free from anger, and this for many reasons. The first one is this: He that has great ire and wrath within himself thinks always that he is capable of doing things that he can-

not do. Secondly, he that is angry and full of wrath cannot think or judge well, and he that cannot judge well cannot well advise. The third reason is this: That 'He that is angry,' as says Seneca, 'can speak only to berate and blame.' And thus with his vicious words he drives others into a like state.

“And too, sir, you must drive covetousness out of your heart. For the Apostle says that ‘The love of money is the root of all evil.’ And, trust me, a covetous man cannot judge correctly, nor can he think well, save only to the furtherance of his covetousness; and that, in truth, can never really be accomplished, because the richer he becomes, the greater desire has he for yet a larger abundance.

“And, sir, you must drive hastiness out of your inmost heart. For certain it is that you cannot hold to be best the sudden thought that comes into your heart, but you must weigh it and advise upon it. For, as you have heard before, the common proverb has it that he who resolves in haste soon repents. Sir, you are not always in like mood and of a like disposition; for surely that which at one time seems good to you, at another appears to be quite the contrary.

“When you have taken counsel within yourself, and have, after due deliberation, deemed such, or such, a thing to be for the best, then, I advise you, keep it secret. Reveal not your intentions to any person, save to such as you may certainly know will be of help to render your position more tenable through such revelation. For Jesus son of Sirach says ‘Whether it be to a friend or a foe, talk not of other men’s lives; and if thou canst without offense, reveal them not. For he heard and observed thee, and when time cometh he will hate thee.’ And another writer

says: 'Hardly shalt thou find one person who can keep secrets.' The Book says: 'While thou dost keep thy counsel in thine own heart, thou keepest it imprisoned; and when thou revealest it to anyone, he holdeth thee imprisoned.' And therefore it is better that you hide your thoughts within your own heart, than pray to him to whom you have told them that he will be close and keep silence. For Seneca says: 'If thou canst not keep thine own counsel, how darest thou beg of another that he will do so?' But, nevertheless, if you deem certainly that the revealing of your secret to anyone will better your condition, then tell it to him in this wise. First, you shall give no indication whether you prefer peace or war, or this or that, and show him not your determination and intent; for, trust me, councillors are commonly flatterers, especially the councillors of great lords. For they are at pains always to speak pleasantly, inclining toward the lord's desire, rather than to use words that are, in themselves, true and profitable. And therefore men say that the rich man rarely receives good counsel, save as he has it from himself. And after that, you shall consider your friends and your enemies. Touching your friends, you must consider which of them are most old and faithful, and wisest, and most approved in counselling. And of them shall you ask advice, as the event requires.

"I say that first you must call into council such of your friends as are true. For Solomon says: 'Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.' He says also: 'Nothing doth countervail a faithful friend, and his excellency is invaluable.' For certain it is that neither gold nor silver are worth so much as the goodwill of a true friend. Again he says: 'A faith-

ful friend is a strong defence: and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure.'

“Then, too, shall you consider whether your real friends are discreet and wise. For the Book says: ‘Stand in the multitude of the elders, and cleave unto him that is wise.’ And for this reason you should call to your council, of your friends that have arrived at a proper age, those who have seen and experienced many things, and who have been approved in parliaments. For the Book says: ‘With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding.’ And Tullius says: ‘Great things are not accomplished by strength and activity of body, but by counsel, authority, and knowledge; and these things do not become enfeebled with age, but rather grow stronger and increase day after day.’

“And then you shall keep this for a general rule. First, you shall call to your council but a few of your most special friends. For Solomon says: ‘Have thou many friends, but of a thousand choose but one to be thy councillor.’ And although you should, at the first, tell your secrets to but a few, afterward you may tell them to others, if there be need. But look to it always that your councillors have the three attributes that I have mentioned, namely: that they are true, wise, and experienced. And act not always, and in every need, by the advice of one councillor alone; for sometimes it is well to have the advice of many. Says Solomon: ‘Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of councillors they are established.’

“Now that I have told you of the sort of folk by whom you should be counselled, I will teach you which sort of counsel you ought to eschew. First, you shall avoid the counselling of fools. For Solomon says: ‘Consult not with a fool, for he cannot keep counsel.’ It is said in a book that the characteristic of a fool is this: he readily believes evil of everyone. and as readily believes all good of himself. You shall also eschew the counselling of all flatterers, such as force themselves rather to praise your person than to tell you the truth about things.

“Wherefore Tullius says, that of all the pestilences of friendship, the greatest is flattery. And so it is more needful that you eschew and fear flatterers than any other kind of men. The Book says that one should rather flee from and fear the sweet words of flatterers than the earnest words of the friend who tells one the truth. Solomon says that the words of a flatterer are a snare wherewith to catch innocents. He says also, that he who speaks sweet words to his friend, sets before his feet a net to catch him. And therefore says Tullius Cicero: ‘Incline not thine ears to flatterers, nor take counsel of flattering words.’ And Cato says: ‘Be well advised, and avoid sweet and pleasant words.’ And you must also eschew the counsels of such of your former enemies as have become reconciled to you. The Book says that no one can safely trust to the goodwill of a former enemy. And Aesop says: ‘Trust not to those with whom you have been sometime at war or in enmity, neither tell them of your intentions.’ And Seneca tells us the reason for this. ‘It may not be,’ says he, ‘that, where fire has long existed there shall remain no vapour of heat.’ And thereto says Solomon: ‘The kisses of an enemy are deceit-

ful.' For, certainly, though your enemy may be reconciled, and appear before you in all humility, and bow his head to you, you should never trust him. Surely he feigns this humility more for his advantage than for any love of you; for he thinks to gain some victory over you by such feigning, the which he could not gain by strife of open war. And Petrus Alfonsus says: 'Have no fellowship with ancient foes; for if you do good to them, they will pervert it into evil.' And, too, you must eschew the advice of those who are your own servants and bear themselves toward you with all reverence; for perchance they speak more out of fear than for love. And therefore says a philosopher thus: 'There is no one perfectly true to him of whom he is afraid.' And Tullius says: 'There is no power of any emperor, fitted to endure, save it be founded more in the love of the people than in the fears.' You must also avoid the counselling of drunkards; for they can retain nothing. Solomon says that there is no secrecy where drunkenness reigns. You should also suspect the counsels of such as advise you privately to one thing and to a contrary thing in public. For Cassiodorus says that it is but an artifice to hinder when a man does one thing openly and its contrary in private. You should also hold suspect the counselling of the wicked. For the Book says that the advice of the wicked is always full of fraud. And David says that he is a happy man who has not followed the counselling of villains. You should also avoid and shun the advice of the young; for their judgments are not mature.

“And, now, sir, that I have shown you as to the folk from whom you may take counsel, and what counsel you may accept and follow, now will I teach you how

that counsel should be examined, according to the doctrines of Tullius. In bringing a councillor to the test, you must consider many things. First, you should consider that, in this very thing that you purpose, and upon which you are in need of advice, only the truth may be told; that is to say, state your case truthfully. For he that lies or prevaricates may not well be counselled, at least in so far as he has deceived. And after this, you must consider the things that agree with your purpose in council; whether reason agrees therewith; and whether you have power to attain your purpose; and whether the major and the better part of your council agree with it. Then shall you consider the probable result of acting upon all your advices: as hate, peace, war, honour, gain, loss, and many other things. And in all these things you must choose the best and avoid all else. Then must you take into consideration the root whereof is grown the matter of your counselling, and what fruit it may engender. Then, too, you shall consider all of the causes and examine into the causes of causes. And when you have examined your counselling as I have outlined to you, and have determined which part of it is the better and more profitable, and have found it to be approved by many wise and elderly men: then shall you consider whether you have power to carry it to a good end. For surely reason will not permit a man to begin a thing, save he carry it through as he should. Nor should anyone take upon himself a burden so heavy that he cannot bear it. For says the proverb: He that too much embraces, confines but little. And Cato says: 'Attempt only what thou hast power to do, lest the great task so oppress thee that it shall behoove thee to forgo that which thou hast begun.' And if it be that you are in doubt whether you can perform a thing, choose rather to suf-

fer than to begin. For Petrus Alfonsus says: 'If you have power to do any thing which you must later regret, it is better to say nay than yea.' That is to say, it is better to keep silence than to speak. Then may you apprehend, and for stronger reasons, that if you have the ability to carry out any work whereof it is likely that later you must repent, then it is better to suffer it to remain undone than to begin it. Well do they speak who forbid a man to attempt a thing of which he has doubt of his ability to perform it. And afterward, when you have thoroughly examined your counsels, as I have set forth, and are convinced that you can carry through your enterprise to its goal, conform to it, then, gravely and carefully to the end.

'Now it is time that I instruct you when and for what you may change your intention without reproach. For truly a man may change purpose and plan when the cause for them is removed, or when a new condition arises. For the law says that new conditions demand new counsels. And Seneca says: 'If thy plan be come to the ears of thine enemy, change thy plan.' You may also change your plan if it develops that, through error or for other reason, harm will ensue from following it. Also, if your counselling is dishonest, or comes of a false premise, change your plan. For the laws provide that all dishonest mandates are invalid. And plans may be altered if they are impossible of fulfilment, or may not well be performed.

“And take this for a general rule: That every counsel that is so rigorously established that it cannot be altered, for any condition that may arise, I say that counsel is vicious.”

This Melibeus, when he had heard all the doctrines of his wife, Dame Prudence, answered her thus: “Dame, so far you have well and agreeably taught me, in a general way, how I should govern myself in the choosing and in the rejecting of councillors. But now I would fain have you descend to the particular, and tell me how you like them and how they appear to you- I mean, the councillors who have been already chosen in the present need.”

“My lord,” said she, “I beg of you, in all humility, that you will not wilfully object to my reasons, nor allow anger to enter your heart, even though I should say things that must displease you. For God knows that, as for my intention, I speak to your best interest, your honour, and your advantage. And, truly, I hope that your benignity will take it all in patience. Trust me, your counselling in this case should not be called counselling, properly speaking, but only a motion to do folly; and you have erred in many ways.

“First and foremost, you have erred in the method and manner of assembling your councillors. For you should have called, at first, but a few, and thereafter, had there arisen a need, you might have called in more. But, indeed, you have suddenly called into council a great multitude of persons, all very burdensome and all very tiresome to hear. Also, you have erred thus: whereas you should have called into council only your true friends, elderly and wise, you have gathered here many strange men, and young men, false flatterers, reconciled enemies, and men who do you reverence without love. Again, you have erred in that you have brought with you into council anger, covetousness, and hastiness, the which three

things are antagonistic to every honest and profitable parliament; nor have you voided nor destroyed them, either in yourself or in your councillors, as you ought to have done. You have erred, again, in that you have revealed your wishes to your councillors, and your desire to make war and obtain vengeance; they have learned from your speeches the thing toward which you incline. Therefore, they have advised you agreeably to your wishes, rather than to your profit. You have erred, also, in that it appears to have sufficed you to be counselled by these councillors only, and with little advising; whereas, in so great and high a matter, it was really incumbent upon you to have procured more councillors and to have deliberated longer upon the means of performing your enterprise. Again you have erred, for you have not examined and tested your council in the manner aforesaid, nor in any manner required by the cause. You have erred, again, in that you have made no division between your councillors; that is to say, between your true friends and your feigned; nor have you learned the desire of your true friends, the elderly and wise of them; but you have cast the words of every man into a hotchpot, and you have then inclined your heart toward the majority, and upon that side have you stooped to folly. And since you well know that men must always exhibit, in any gathering, a greater number of fools than of wise heads, therefore in those councils composed of large numbers, where rather is considered the will of the majority than the wisdom of individuals, you may see easily enough that in such cases the fools must have the mastery.”

Melibeus answered her again, saying: “I grant that I have erred; but since you have already told me that he is not to blame who changes councillors under certain conditions and for just causes, I stand ready to change mine, just as you shall prompt. The proverb runs: To err is human, but to persist in sin is the work of the devil.”

To this replied Dame Prudence: “Examine your council, and let us see which of them have spoken most reasonably and given the best advice. And since such an examination is necessary, let us begin with the surgeons and physicians who spoke the first in this cause. I say that the surgeons and physicians have spoken discreetly, as they should; and they wisely spoke when they said that to their profession belongs the duty of dealing honourably with every man, and to his profit, and to harm no one; and, according to their skill, to set diligently about the healing of those under their care. And sir, since they have answered wisely and discreetly, I advise that they be richly and nobly rewarded for their noble speech, and, too, that they may be the more attentive to the healing of your dear daughter. For, though they are your friends, you must not suffer it that they serve you for nothing; you ought, indeed, but the more to reward them and to give them largess. And, touching the proposition that the physicians introduced into this case, namely, that, in diseases, the thing is cured by its contrary, I would fain learn how you understand that saying and what is your opinion of it.”

“Indeed,” said Melibeus, “I understand it thus: That just as they have done me an injury, so should I do them another. For just as they have revenged themselves

upon me, and have thereby done me a wrong, so shall I now take my revenge and do them a wrong. And then shall I have cured one contrary by another.”

“Lo, lo,” exclaimed Dame Prudence, “how easily is every man inclined toward his own desire and to the securing of his own pleasure! Surely the words of the physicians should not have been interpreted in this sense. For, indeed, wickedness is not the contrary of wickedness, nor is vengeance of vengeance, nor wrong of wrong; but they are their likenesses. And therefore one vengeance is not to be cured by another vengeance, nor one wrong by another wrong; but, rather, each of them fructifies and engenders upon the other. But the words of the physicians should be understood in this wise: good and evil are opposites, and peace and war, revenge and forgiveness, discord and concord, and many others. But, certainly, wickedness shall be cured by goodness, discord by concord, war by peace, and so on of other things. And with this Saint Paul the Apostle accords in many places. Says he: ‘See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.’ And in many other places he admonishes to peace and harmony.

“But now will I speak of the counselling that was given by the lawyers and suchlike wise men, who were all of one accord, as you heard: to the effect that, above all else, you should be diligent in guarding your person and in garrisoning and provisioning your house. And they held, also, that in these matters you ought to act advisedly and after much deliberation. Sir, as to the first point, which touches upon the safety of your person, you must understand that he who is at

war should meekly and devoutly pray, above all things, that Jesus Christ, of His great mercy, will keep him under His protection and be his sovereign and very present help in time of need. For assuredly, in this world there is no man who can be safeguarded by advice, save and except he be within the keeping of Our lord Jesus Christ. With this opinion agrees the prophet David, who says: 'Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain.' Now then, sir, you shall commit the guarding of your person to your true friends, approved and well known; for of them only should you ask such help. For Cato says: 'If thou hast need of aid, ask it of thy friends; for there is no physician so valuable as thy true friend.' And hereafter you must keep always from all strange folk, and from liars, and hold them always suspect. For Petrus Alfonsus says: 'Never take company of a strange man, on the way, unless it is that you have known him longer than the present moment. And if it be that he fall in with you by accident, and without your assent, inquire then, as subtly as you may, into his conversation and into his life, and do you dissemble for yourself; say that you are going where you do not intend to go; and if he carry a spear, walk upon the right side of him, and if he bear a sword, walk on his left.' And hereafter shall you wisely hold yourself verily aloof from the sorts of people I have described, and eschew both them and their counsel. And you shall not presume so much upon your strength that you are led to despise and hold as naught the might of your adversary, thus endangering your person by this presumption; for every wise man fears his enemy. And Solomon says that it is well for him that suspects all others; for verily he that, because of the courage of his heart and the strength of his body, presumes too much upon

them- him shall evil befall. Then, you should guard always against all ambushments and all espionage. For Seneca says: 'The wise man that fears danger avoids danger; he does not fall into peril who peril shuns.' And though it may seem that you are secure in a place, yet shall you be always upon your guard; that is to say, be not negligent either before your greatest enemy or, your least. Seneca says: 'A man that is well advised dreads his weakest foe.' Ovid says that the little weasel may kill the great bull and the wild hart. And the Book says that a little thorn may sorely prick a great king; and that a hound will hold the wild boar. But, nevertheless, I do not say that you are to be so cowardly as to be afraid where there is no just cause for fear. It is said in a book that some folk have a great wish to deceive, who yet fear deception. But you shall fear poisoning, and withhold yourself from the company of scoffers. For the Book says that with the scoffer one should have no fellowship, and should avoid his words as venom.

"Now, as to the second point, wherein your wise councillors have advised you to provision and garrison your house, I would know how you understand their words, and what is your opinion of them."

Melibeus answered and said: "Verily, I understand them in this wise: that I am to equip my house with towers, such as castles have, and other such buildings, and with armour and with artilleries; by means of which I may keep my house and may so defend and keep my person that my enemies will not dare to approach me."

To this judgment Prudence then replied: “The garrisoning, provisioning, and equipping of high towers is sometimes but the pandering to pride. And it sometimes happens that even when men build high towers and great fortresses, at much cost and with untold labour, when they are completed they are not worth a straw, unless they be defended by true friends, who are both old and wise. And understand well that the greatest and strongest garrison a powerful man may have, as well to defend his person as his property, is the love of his vassals and his neighbours. For Tullius says that there is a kind of garrison which no man can vanquish or disperse, and that is the love of a lord’s own citizens and people.

“Now, sir, as to the third point, whereof your older and wiser councillors averred that you ought not suddenly and hastily to proceed in this matter, but that you should provide for and array yourself with great diligence and after much careful thought, indeed I think that they spoke wisely and truthfully. For Tullius says: ‘In every act, or ever thou begin it, array thyself with great diligence.’ Then, say I, in seeking vengeance, in war, in battle, and in making arrangements, before you begin you must thoroughly prepare yourself and do it with much forethought. For Tullius says that a swift victory is the result of long preparation. And Cassiodorus says that the garrison is the stronger for being well prepared.

“But let us now speak of the counsel that was given by your neighbours, those who do you reverence without love; by your old reconciled enemies; by your flatterers who counselled you privately to certain things and openly to quite others; and by the younger men, also, who advised a speedy taking of vengeance and an

immediate opening of hostilities. And certainly, sir, as I have said before, you were greatly in error in calling such folk into your council; such councillors are sufficiently discredited by the reasons hitherto adduced. But, nonetheless, let us descend to the particular. You should first proceed after the teaching of Tullius. Certainly the truth of this matter, or of this counselling, needs no long inquiry. For we know well who they are that have done to you this injury and this villainy, and how many offenders there are, and in what manner they have wrought against you this wrong and harm. And after this, then shall you examine the second condition which this same Tullius added. For Tullius puts forth a condition which he calls 'complying,' by which he means: who they are, and how many of them, that complied with your wishes to do hasty vengeance on your enemies, as you expressed it in council. And let us consider, also, who they are and how many, that complied with the wishes of your adversaries. As to the first group, it is well known who they are that complied with your hasty wilfulness; for truly all those who counselled you to make a sudden war are not your friends. Let us now consider who they are that you hold so steadfastly to be friends of your person. For though you are a mighty man, and a rich, true it is that you do but stand alone. For you have no child, save a daughter; nor have you any brothers, or cousins, or other near kinsmen for the dread of whom your enemies might forgo treating with you or attempting to destroy your person. You know also that your wealth, when apportioned out, will be distributed to a few men not closely related to you; and when each of them shall have received his share, then he will have but little incentive to avenge your death. But your enemies are three, and they have many children,

brothers, cousins, and other near kinsmen; and though it were that you had slain two or three of them, yet, there should remain enough to avenge those deaths by killing you. And though it were that your own kindred are true and more steadfast than those of your enemies, yet, nevertheless, your own kinsmen are but distantly related to you, whereas the kinsmen of your adversaries are closely sib to them. And, certainly, as for that, their condition is better than yours. Then let us consider, also, whether the advice of those who urged you to a sudden vengeance accords with reason. Certainly you know here that the answer is nay. For you know well that there is no man who may take vengeance upon anyone, save the judge who has proper jurisdiction, and when it has been to him to take such vengeance, hastily or slowly, as the law requires. And, moreover, as to that same word which Tullius calls 'complying,' you should consider whether your might and power may consent to comply with your wilfulness and that of your councillors. And, surely, to that also you must answer no. For indeed, properly speaking, we should do nothing save such things as we may do rightfully. And, in truth, rightfully you may take no vengeance as of your own authority. Thus you may see that your power does not rightfully consent to comply with your wilfulness. Let us now examine the third point, which Tullius calls the 'consequence.' You must understand that the vengeance which you purpose is the consequence. And from that follows another vengeance, another peril, and another war, and further injuries and damages without number whereof we are not at this time aware. And, touching the fourth point, which Tullius calls 'engendering,' you should consider that this wrong done to you was engendered of the hate of your enemies; and of the venge-

ance taken on that evil would be begotten another vengeance, and therewithal much sorrow and wastage of wealth, as I have pointed out.

“Now, sir, as to the point which Tullius calls ‘causes,’ which is the last point to consider, you must understand that the wrong that has been done you had certain causes, the which scholars call Oriens and Efficens, and Causa longinqua and Causa propinqua, which is to say, the ultimate cause and the proximate cause. The ultimate cause is Almighty God, Who is the Cause of all things. The proximate cause is your three enemies. The accidental cause is hate. The material cause is the five wounds of your daughter. The formal cause is the method of their working who brought ladders and climbed in at your windows. The final cause was the wish to slay your daughter; it hindered them not, in so far as they did their best. But, to speak now of the ultimate cause, as to what end they shall reach, or what shall finally betide your enemies in this case, I cannot judge, save in conjecture and supposition. Yet we may suppose that they shall come to an evil end, for the Book of Decrees says: ‘Seldom, and only with great pain, are causes brought to a good end, when they have been badly begun.’

“Now, sir, if men ask me why God has suffered men to do this villainy, certainly I can answer nothing in any reliable language. For the Apostle says that the wisdom and the judgments of Our Lord God Almighty are very deep, whereof no man may comprehend anything, nor search into them. Nevertheless, by certain presumptions and conjecturings, I hold and believe that God, Who is justice and righteousness, has permitted this villainy upon a just and reasonable cause.

“Your name is Melibee, which is to say, a man who drinks honey. You have drunk so much of the sweet honey of mundane riches and delights and honours that you are intoxicated therewith, and have forgotten Jesus Christ, your Creator: you have not honoured Him as you should have done, nor have you showed Him a proper reverence. Nor have you well observed those words of Ovid, who says: ‘Under the honey of the good things of the flesh is hidden the venom that slays the soul.’ And Solomon says that if you have found honey, eat of it only a sufficiency; for if you eat of it overmuch, you shall vomit, and so be again hungry and in want. And perchance Christ holds you in scorn, and has turned away His face from you, and shut up the ears of His mercy; and also He has suffered it that you have been punished in that manner in which you have sinned. You have sinned against Our Lord Christ; for, certainly, those three enemies of mankind, the world, the flesh, and the devil, you have wilfully suffered to enter into your heart through the windows of your body, and you have not sufficiently defended yourself against their assaults and temptations, so that they have wounded your soul in five different places; that is to say, the deadly sins that have entered into your heart through your five senses. In the same manner Our Lord Christ has willed and permitted it that your three enemies have entered your house through the windows thereof, and have wounded your daughter in the manner whereof you know.”

“Certainly,” said Melibeus, “I see well that you so strengthen your arguments that I shall not revenge myself upon my enemies, showing me thus the perils and

the evils that may result from this taking of vengeance. But if everyone were to consider, in every revenge, the dangers and ills that might ensue therefrom, no man would ever take vengeance, and that would be harmful; for by vengeance-taking the wicked are set apart from the good men. And they that have the will to do wickedly restrain their evil purpose when they see the punishment and chastisement of other wrongdoers.”

To this replied Dame Prudence: “Surely,” said she, “I grant that much good and much evil come of vengeance; but vengeance-taking does not belong to everyone, but only to judges and such as have a proper jurisdiction and authority over wrongdoers. And I say, further, that just as an individual sins in wreaking vengeance upon another man, so sins the judge if he does not fully exact payment from those who have deserved to be punished. For Seneca says: ‘That is a good master who convicts criminals.’ And as Cassiodorus says: ‘A man shrinks from crime when he understands and knows that it angers the judges and the sovereigns.’ And yet another says: ‘The judge who fears to deal justly makes criminals of men.’ And Saint Paul the apostle says in his Epistle to the Romans that not without reason are the fasces borne before the magistrates. For they are borne to punish criminals and miscreants, and for the security of good and just men. If, then, you would have revenge upon your enemies, you should turn to and have recourse unto the judge having a proper jurisdiction over them; and he will punish them as the law demands and requires.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Melibeus. “This idea of vengeance is no longer to my liking. I remember, now, how Fortune has nourished me from my childhood, helping me over many a difficult place. I give heed to this; and now will I make trial of her again, believing that, with God’s help, she will aid me to avenge my shame.”

“Indeed,” said Prudence, “if you will act according to my advice, you shall not make trial of Fortune in any way; you shall not bow down before her. For, to quote Seneca: ‘Things done foolishly and in the hope of Fortune, shall never come to any good end.’ And as the same Seneca says: ‘The clearer and the more shining Fortune appears, the more brittle she is and the more easily broken.’ Trust not in her, for she is neither steadfast nor stable; for when you believe yourself to be most secure and most certain of her help, she will deceive and fail you. And whereas you say that Fortune has nourished you from your childhood, I say that by so much the less should you trust now to her and to her ingenuity. For Seneca says: ‘As for the man who is nursed by Fortune, she will make of him a great fool.’ Now then, since you desire and demand vengeance, and since the sort of vengeance that is to be had according to law and before a judge is not to your taste, and since the vengeance that is attempted in reliance upon Fortune is dangerous and uncertain, then remains to you no other remedy than to have recourse unto the sovereign. Judge Who punishes all villainies and avenges all wrongs. And He will avenge you, as He Himself promises, for ‘Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.’”

Melibee answered: "If I do not revenge myself for the injury that men have done to me, I invite and advertise to those who have injured me, and to all others, that they are free to do me another wrong. For it is written: 'If thou take no revenge for an old injury, thou invitest thine enemies to do thee a new evil.' And also, what of my sufferance, men would do to me so much of villainy that I could neither endure it nor sustain it; and I should be held in contempt. For men say: 'In patient sufferance shall many things happen to one, the which one may not grin and bear.'

"Certainly," said Prudence, "I grant you that too much of sufferance is not a good thing; but yet it follows not therefrom that every person to whom men do a rascality may take vengeance for it; for that is the duty of and belongs only to the proper judges. Wherefore the two authorities that you have quoted are only to be understood as speaking to and of the judges; for when they suffer overmuch that wrong and crime remain unpunished, they not only invite new injury and wrong, but they command that they be done. Also a wise man says: 'The judge who does not chasten the sinner, bids him to sin again.' And it is conceivable that the judges and sovereigns of any realm might show so much leniency to criminals and evil-doers that, from such sufferance, in process of time, they might so wax in power as to turn out the judges and the monarchs from their places, and thus, at last, deprive them of the mastery.

"But now let us assume that you have a proper leave to avenge yourself. I say that you have not now the power to avenge yourself. For if you will compare your

own with the power and might of your adversaries, you shall find, in many ways, as I have previously pointed out, that their condition is better than yours. And therefore say I that it is well, as for this time, to suffer your injuries in patience.

“Furthermore, you know well the common saw: It is madness in a man to strive with one who is stronger than himself; and to strive with a man of even strength is dangerous; but to strive with a weaker man is foolish. And for this reason a man should avoid all strife, in so far as he may. For Solomon says that it is to a man’s honour if he withhold himself from noise and strife. And if it so happen that a man of greater power or strength does you an injury, make it your business to study how to stop the pain of it, rather than how to avenge it. For Seneca says: ‘He puts himself into great peril who strives with a greater than himself.’ And Cato says: ‘If a man of higher degree or estate, or one more mighty than thou do thee an annoyance or grievance, tolerate him; for he that once has grieved thee, at another time he may relieve and help.’ Yet I am assuming that you have both the power and the license to avenge yourself. I say, nevertheless, that there are very many things which ought to constrain you to withhold your punishment, and make you rather incline toward sufferance and to have patience under whatever may have been done to you. First and foremost, if you will, consider the faults in your own person, for which defects God has permitted that you have this tribulation, as I said before. For the poet says that we ought patiently to endure the tribulations that come to us when we think upon and well consider that we have deserved them. And Saint Gregory says: ‘When a man considers well the

multitude of his faults and sins, the trials and tribulations that he suffers will seem but the lighter to be borne; and just in so much as he holds his sins to be the more heavy and grievous, in so much will seem his pains the lighter and the easier to be borne.' Also, you ought to incline and bow down your heart to observe and learn the patience of Our Lord Jesus Christ, as Saint Peter says in his Epistle. 'Jesus Christ,' he says, 'hath suffered for us, and hath given example to every man to follow Him and to pray unto Him; for He did never sin, nor ever came there a vicious word out of His mouth; when men cursed Him, he cursed them not, and when men belaboured Him with blows, He would not menace them.' Also, the great patience which the saints in Paradise showed in bearing the tribulations of this world, and all without their deserving or their guilt- this ought greatly to prompt you to patience. Furthermore, you should enforce patience upon yourself when you consider that the tribulations of this world can but a little while endure, being soon over and ended. But the happiness that a man looks to receive by bearing tribulations patiently is perdurable, as the apostle says in his Epistle. 'The joy of God,' he says, 'is perdurable.' Which is to say, it is everlasting. Also, hold and believe steadfastly that he is neither well bred nor well taught who cannot have patience, or will not receive training in patience. For Solomon says that the belief and the knowledge of a man are known by his patience. And in another place he says that he who is patient will govern himself prudently. And this same Solomon says that the angry and wrathful man is noisy, while the patient man moderates and quiets noise. He says, also, that it is better to be patient than to be very strong; and he that governeth his own heart is more praiseworthy than he that taketh a

city. And thereto says Saint James in his Epistle: 'Let patience have her perfect work.'"

"Surely," said Melibeus, "I will grant you, Dame Prudence, that patience is a great virtue of perfection; but every man may not attain to the perfection that you seek; nor am I of the number of perfect men, for my heart will never find peace until I have revenged myself. And though it was dangerous to my enemies to do me an injury in taking vengeance upon me, yet took they no heed of their own peril, but fulfilled their evil purpose. And therefore it seems to me that men ought not to find fault with me if I incur a little peril in taking vengeance, even though I go to great excess, that is to say, that I avenge one outrage with another."

"Ah," said Dame Prudence, "you speak out of your purpose as you desire it to happen; but never in this world should any man commit an outrage or go to excess to obtain his vengeance. For Cassiodorus says: 'As much evil does he who avenges himself by outrage as did he who first committed outrage.' And therefore you must avenge yourself in an orderly manner, and rightfully, that is to say, according to law, and not by excess nor by outrage. For if you avenge yourself in any other way, you sin. And thereupon Seneca says: 'A man must not avenge villainy with villainy.' If you say that right demands that a man defend himself violently against violence, and fightingly against fighting, certainly you speak but the truth, when the fighting is done immediately, without interval of tarrying or delay, and simply for defence and not for vengeance. And it behooves a man that he conduct his defence with such moderation that men will have no cause to ac-

cuse him of excess and outrage; for otherwise the thing were unreasonable. By God, you know well that you are not now defending yourself, but are going to revenge yourself; and so it follows that you have no wish to do your deed with moderation. That is why I hold that patience would be good for you. For Solomon says: 'He that is not patient shall endure great evil.'

"Certainly," said Melibeus, "I grant you that when a man is impatient and wroth because of that which touches him not, and in no way concerns him, if he be harmed thereby it is not to be wondered at. For the law provides that he is culpable who interferes or meddles with what does not concern him. And Solomon says that he who interferes in the strife of other men is like one who seizes a hound by the ears. For just as he who takes a strange dog by the ears is likely to be bitten, just so is it reasonable to suppose that he may be injured who, by his impatience, meddles in the strife of other men, when it does not concern him. But you know well that this deed, that is to say, my grief and unrest, touches me closely. Therefore, if I am angry and impatient, it is no marvel. And, saving your presence, I cannot see wherein it can greatly harm me if I wreak my revenge: for I am richer and stronger than are my enemies. And well do you know that with money and great possessions are governed all the matters of this world. Solomon says that all things obey great wealth."

When Prudence had heard her husband boast thus of his possessions and money, despising the power of his enemies, she answered and said: "Surely, dear sir, I grant that you are mighty and rich, and that wealth is a good thing for those

who have acquired it honestly and know well how to use it. For just as the body of man cannot live without the soul, neither can it exist without worldly goods. And by means of riches a man may acquire powerful friends. Thereupon says Pamphilius: 'If a cowherd's daughter be rich, she may make choice of a thousand men, which she will take for her husband; for, of a thousand, not one will forsake or refuse her.' And this Pamphilius also says: 'If thou be very happy, that is to say, if thou be very rich, thou shalt find a great many comrades and friends. And if thy fortune change, so that thou become poor, then farewell fellowship and friendship; for thou shalt be left alone, without any company, save it be the company of the poor.' And still further says Pamphilius: 'Those who are thralls and born of bondmen's blood shall be made worthy and noble by wealth.' And just as from riches come many good things, so from poverty come many ills and evils. For deep poverty forces a man into evil deeds. Therefore Cassiodorus calls poverty the 'mother of ruin,' which is to say, the mother of overthrowing or of falling down. And thereupon says Petrus Alfonsus: 'One of the greatest adversities of this world is when a man free by kindred and birth is constrained by poverty to eat of the alms of his enemy.' And the same thing is said by Innocent in one of his books, for he says: 'Sorrowful and unhappy is the condition of the poor beggar; for if he beg not his food, he dies of hunger; and if he beg it, he dies of shame; and yet necessity constrains him to beg.' And thereupon Solomon says that it is better to die than to live in poverty. And this same Solomon says that it is better to die the bitter death than to live in such wise. For these reasons that I have given, and for many others that I could adduce, I grant you that riches are good for those

who have well acquired them, and for those who use them well. And therefore will I show you how you should bear yourself in acquiring wealth, and how you should use it.

“First, you should get it without any great desire, and leisurely, and gradually, and not over eagerly. For the man who is too desirous of gathering riches abandons himself first to theft and to all other evils. And thereupon says Solomon: ‘A merchant shall hardly keep himself from doing wrong, and a huckster shall not be freed from sin.’ He says also: ‘The wealth that cometh hastily unto a man goeth soon and passeth lightly away from him; but the wealth that cometh by a little and a little waxeth alway and multiplieth.’ And, sir, you shall acquire riches by your wisdom and by your labour to your own profit; and that without wronging or doing harm to any other person. For the law provides that no man shall legally become rich who injures another in the process; that is to say, that Nature forbids, and rightfully, that a man acquire wealth at another’s expense. And Tullius says: ‘No sorrow, no fear of death, nay nothing that may befall a man, is so much against Nature as for a man to increase and take his profit at the expense of another. And though the great man and the mighty man acquire riches more easily than thou, yet be not idle nor slow in gaining thine own profit; for thou must, in all things, avoid idleness.’ For Solomon says that idleness teaches a man to do many evil things. And the same Solomon says that he that labours and busies himself to till his land shall eat bread; but he that is given over to idleness and has no business or occupation shall fall into poverty and die of hunger. And he that is

idle and slow can never find a convenient time wherein to transact his business. For there is a versifier who says: 'The lazy man excuses himself in winter because of the great cold, and in summer because of the great heat.' For these reasons Cato says: 'Wake, and be not overly inclined toward sleep; for a superfluity of rest causes and nourishes many vices.' And thereupon says Saint Jerome: 'Do some good deeds, that the Devil, our Enemy, find you not unoccupied. For the Devil takes not easily into his service those whom he finds occupied in good deeds.'

“Thus, then, in getting riches, you must avoid idleness. And afterward you shall use the wealth, which you have acquired by your knowledge and by your labour, in such manner that men will not hold you to be too stingy, or too sparing, or too foolishly generous, that is to say, too great a spendthrift. For just as men blame an avaricious man for his meanness and penuriousness, in the same wise is he to be blamed that spends too freely. Thereupon says Cato: 'Use the wealth which thou hast acquired in such manner that men shall have no reason to call thee either wretch or niggard; for it is shameful for a man to have a poor heart and a rich purse.' He says also: 'Use the wealth, which thou hast measureably.' That is to say, spend it within measure; for those who foolishly spend and waste what riches they have, when they have no longer any property of their own, scheme then to take that of another man. I say, then, that you shall flee avarice; using your riches in such manner that men shall not say that you have buried them, but that you hold them in your power and at your wielding. For a wise man reproves an

avaricious man thus, in two verses: 'Wherefore and why does a man bury his wealth, of his great avarice, when he knows well that he must needs die; for death is the end of every man in this present life? And for what cause or occasion does he join or knit himself so closely to his goods that all his wit may not dissever or part him therefrom; when he knows, or ought to know, that when he is dead he shall have borne with him nothing at all from this world? Thereupon says Saint Augustine: 'The avaricious man is like unto Hell; for the more it swallows the more desire has it to swallow and devour.' And just as you would hate to be called an avaricious man, or a stingy, just so should you govern yourself that men will not call you a spendthrift. Therefore says Tullius: 'The riches of thy house should not be hid, nor should they be kept so closely that they may not be opened by pity and good will.' That is to say, in order to give a part to those in need. 'But yet thy wealth should not be so openly exposed as to become the goods of every man.' Afterward, in getting your wealth and in using it, you should have always three things in mind, that is to say, Our Lord God, conscience, and your own good name. First, you have God in your heart, and for the sake of no riches at all should you do anything which may in any manner displease God, Who is your Creator and Maker. For, after the word of Solomon: Better it is to have little and therewith the love of God, than great riches and treasure and the loss of God's love thereby. And the prophet says that it is better to be held for a good man and to have but little of the wealth and treasure of this world, than to be held for a villain and have great riches. And yet say I still, that you should always do your business in the gathering of wealth so that you gather it with a good conscience. And

the apostle says that there is not anything in all this world whereof a man should have so great a joy as when his conscience bears a good witness unto himself. And the wise man says that the substance a man has is righteous when sin lies not upon the conscience of that man. Afterward, in gathering your riches and in the using them, you must busy yourself and be diligent to observe that your good name be kept and conserved. For Solomon says: 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' And thereupon he says elsewhere: 'Do thy diligence in keeping of thy friend and of thine own good name; for these shall abide longer than any treasure, be it never so precious.' And surely he should not be called a good man who, after God and his own conscience, in all things else is not diligent in the business of maintaining his good name. Cassiodorus says: 'It is a sign of a good heart in a man when he loves and desires to have and to keep an honoured name.' And thereupon says Saint Augustine: 'Two things there be which are necessary and needful, and they are: good conscience and a good name; that is to say, a good conscience for the sake of thy soul, and a good name for the sake of thy neighbour.' And he who will trust so much in his own good conscience that he reckes not of displeasing and setting at naught the value of his neighbour's opinion of his good name, and cares nothing if he keep not his good name toward his neighbour- he is but a boor.

“My lord, now have I showed you how you should act in acquiring riches, and how you should employ them; and well I understand that, because of the faith you rest in your wealth you will move toward war and battle. I counsel you that

you begin no war upon faith in the continuance of your wealth; for your wealth is not sufficient to maintain war. Wherefore says a philosopher: 'He who intrigues for and will always have war, shall never have sufficient funds; for the richer he is, the more must his expenses be, always providing he wants respect and victory.' And Solomon says that the greater a man's riches the more leeches hang upon him. And, dear sir, though because of your wealth you may have many followers, yet it behooves you not, nor is it a good thing, to initiate a war when you may have a peace, and that to your own honour and profit. For victory in battle in this world lies not in a great multitude of people, neither lies it in the virtue of man; but it lies alone within the will and in the hands of Our Lord God Almighty. And therefore Judas Maccabeus, God's own knight, when called upon to fight against an adversary greatly superior in numbers and stronger than his own people, comforted his little army, saying: 'As easily may Our Lord God Almighty give victory unto a few as unto a multitude; for the fortune of war lieth not in numbers, but cometh solely from Our Lord God of Heaven.' And, dear sir, for as much as there is no man certain whether he be worthy that God give him the victory, any more than he can be certain whether he is worthy of the love of God, therefore Solomon says that every man should greatly fear to begin a war. Also, in battle, many perils befall, and many chances of evil, and therein is a great man as easily slain as a poor; and thereupon is it written in the Second Book of the Kings that the issue of battle is all at chance and is not to be known beforehand; for as easily hurt with a spear is one man as any other. And since there lies great peril in war, therefore should a man flee and eschew warfare, in so far as he may

with honour. For Solomon says: 'He that liveth by the sword shall perish by the sword.'"

After Dame Prudence had spoken in this manner, Melibeus answered and said: "I see well, Dame Prudence, that by your fair words and by the reasons you have adduced before me, you are not in favour of war; but I have not yet heard you advise as to what course I ought to pursue in this extremity."

"Certainly," quoth she, "I counsel you that you accord with your adversaries, and that you have peace with them. For Saint James says in his Epistle that by concord and peace little fortunes grow great, and by discord and warfare are great fortunes brought low. And well you know that one of the greatest things there is in all this world is unity and peace. Wherefore says Our Lord Jesus Christ in this wise to His disciples: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.'"

"Ah," said Melibee, "now do I see well that you love neither my honour nor my reputation. You know well that my adversaries have begun this quarrel and contention by their outrage; and you see well that they neither require nor ask peace from me, nor even do they ask to be reconciled. Will you, then, that I go and show myself meek and make myself humble before them, and cry mercy of them? Forsooth that were not to my honour. For just as men say that too much familiarity breeds contempt, so fares it with overmuch humility or meekness."

Then began Dame Prudence to make a show of wrath, and she said: "Certainly, sir, saving your grace, I love your honour and your profit as I do my own,

and so have I ever; nor have you or any other hitherto said anything to the contrary. And yet, if I had said that you should have bought a peace and a reconciliation, I had not been much mistaken nor said very far amiss. For the wise man says that dissension begins with another, but reconciliation with oneself. And the prophet says: 'Flee evil and do good; seek peace and follow it.' Yet say I not that you shall rather sue to your enemies than they to you; for well I know that you are so hard-hearted that you will do nothing for me. And Solomon says that he that is too hard of heart shall in the end have evil fortune."

When Melibee had heard Dame Prudence show anger thus, he said: "Dame, I pray you that you be not displeased at things I say, for you know well that I am in my angry mood, and that it is no wonder; and that those who are angry cannot judge well of what they say or do. Wherefore the prophet says: 'The troubled eyes have no clear sight.' But speak to and counsel me as you like; for I am ready to do as you wish; and if you reprove me for my folly I am but bound the more to love you and praise you. For Solomon says that he that reproves him who has done a folly shall have more grace than he that deceives him with sweet words."

Then said Dame Prudence: "I make no show of wrath or anger save for your great profit. For Solomon says that more worth is he who reproves and chides a fool for his folly than is he that supports him and praises him and laughs at his foolishness. And this same Solomon says that by the sorrowful visage of a man (that is to say, by the sorry and heavy countenance of a man) the fool corrects and amends himself."

Then said Melibee: “I shall not know how to answer so many fair and good reasons as you show and lay before me. Speak out briefly your counsel and your wish, for I am ready to fulfill and to perform it.”

Then Dame Prudence showed him all her wish and desire, saying: “I counsel you, above all things, that you make peace with God and become reconciled to Him and to His grace. For, as I have heretofore said, God has suffered you to have this tribulation and unrest because of your sins. And if you do as I tell you to do, God will send your adversaries unto you and make them fall at your feet, ready to do your will and to obey your commands. For Solomon says that when the condition of a man is pleasant and to God’s liking, He changes the hearts of that man’s enemies and constrains them to seek peace of him, and grace. And I pray you, let me have private speech with your adversaries; for they shall not know that it is done with your consent. And then, when I have learned their whole intent and will, I may the more surely counsel you.”

“Dame,” quoth Melibee, “do your whole will and whatsoever pleases you. For I put myself entirely at your disposal and command.”

Then Dame Prudence, when she saw the goodwill of her husband, deliberated and took advice of herself how she might bring this whole matter to a good end. And when she saw her time, she sent for these adversaries to come to her privately; and truly showed them the great good to be gained from peace and the great harms and dangers that are in war, and told them in a gracious manner that

they ought to be repentant for the injury and wrong they had done to Melibee, her lord, and to herself, and to her daughter.

And when they heard the gracious words of Dame Prudence they were so taken by surprise and so ravished with delight of her, that it was wonderful to tell. “Ah, lady,” they said, “you have showed us the ‘blessings of sweetness’ in the words of David the prophet; for the reconciliation we are in no way worthy of, though we ought but in the greater contrition and humility to ask it- this, of your goodness, you have offered to us. Now see we well that the wisdom and knowledge of Solomon are true indeed, for he says that sweet words multiply and increase friends and cause villains to become courteous and humble.

“Certainly,” said they, “we will put our actions and all our matter and cause wholly in your good keeping; and we stand ready to obey the word and command of Lord Melibee. Therefore, dear and benign lady, we pray and beseech you, as humbly as we can, that it shall please you, in your great goodness, to fulfill your goodly words in deeds; for we consider and acknowledge that we have offended and grieved Lord Melibee beyond measure; so far indeed that it lies not within our power to make him any amends. Therefore we obligate and bind ourselves and our friends to do whatsoever he commands. But perchance he has for us such a heaviness of wrath, what of our offense, that he will impose upon us so great a pain of punishment that we shall not be able to bear it. And therefore, noble lady, we beseech you of your womanly pity to take such advisement in this need that we, and our friends, shall not be disinherited and destroyed because of our folly.”

“Certainly,” said Prudence, “it is a hard thing, and a dangerous, for a man to put himself utterly into the arbitrament and judgment and into the might and power of his enemies. For Solomon says: ‘Give not thy son and wife, thy brother and friend, power over thee while thou livest, and give not thy goods to another: lest it repent thee, and thou entreat for the same again. As long as thou livest and hast breath in thee, give not thyself over to any.’ Now, since he counsels that a man give not even to a brother or a friend the power over his body, by a stronger reason he forbids a man to give himself over to his enemy. Nevertheless, I counsel you that you mistrust not my lord. For I know well and truly that he is kindly and meek, large-hearted, courteous, and nothing desirous nor covetous of goods and riches. For there is nothing in all the world that he desires, save only respect and honour. Furthermore, I know well and am right sure that he will do nothing in this case without my counsel. And I shall so work therein that, by the grace of Our Lord God, you shall be reconciled unto us.”

Then said they with one voice: “Worshipful lady, we put ourselves and our property all fully at your command and disposal; and we are ready to come, upon whatever day is agreeable to your goodness, to make and give our obligation and bond, and that as strong as your goodness may desire: all that we may fulfill your will and that of Lord Melibee.”

When Dame Prudence had heard the answers of these men, she sent them away again, secretly. And she returned to Lord Melibee and reported to him how

she had found these adversaries ready to suffer pain and punishment, praying him, however, for mercy and pity.

“Then,” said Melibee, “he is well worthy of pardon and to have his sins forgiven who excuses not his crime but acknowledges it and repents, asking indulgence. For Seneca says: ‘There is the remission and the forgiveness where confession is.’ For confession is neighbour to innocence. And he says in another place: ‘He that is ashamed for his sin and acknowledges it, is worthy of remission.’ Therefore I assent to peace; but it is best that we do this with the advice and consent of our friends.”

Then was Dame Prudence right glad and joyful, and she said: “Certainly, sir, you have well answered. For just as by the counsel, assent, and help of your friends you have been stirred to avenge yourself and go to war, just so you should not, without their consent, accord and make peace with your adversaries. For the law says: ”There is nothing so good in kind as that a thing shall be unbound by him by whom it was bound.”

And then Dame Prudence, without delay or tarrying, sent messengers for their kindred and for their old friends who were true and wise, and told them in detail and in order, in the presence of Melibee, all of this matter, as it has been here expressed and declared; and she prayed them that they would advise and counsel what best were to be done in this need. And when Melibee’s friends had taken their advices in this said matter, and had examined into it with diligence, they

gave their counsel for peace and rest; and that Melibee should receive, with good heart, the prayers of his adversaries for forgiveness and mercy.

And when Dame Prudence had heard the assent of her lord, Melibee, and the counsel of these friends, how they accorded with her will and intention, she was wonderfully glad of heart; and she said: “There is an old proverb which advises that the goodness you may do this day, do it; and delay it not until the morrow. Therefore I counsel you that you send wise and discreet messengers to your adversaries, bidding them that, if they are still minded to treat with you of peace and concord, they come hither to us without delay or tarrying.”

Which thing was done. And when these trespassers and repentant folk, that is to say, the adversaries of Melibeus, had heard the messengers’ words, they were right glad and joyful, and they replied full meekly and favourably, yielding grace and giving thanks to their Lord Melibee and to all his party; and they made ready, without delay, to accompany the messengers in obedience to the command of Lord Melibee.

Soon, then, they took their way toward Melibee’s court, and they took with them some of their true friends to stand as sureties for them, and as hostages. And when they were come into the presence of Melibee, he spoke to them as follows: “It stands thus, and true it is, that you, without just cause, and without right or reason, have done great injury and wrong to me, to my wife Prudence, and to my daughter also. For you have entered my house with violence, and you did such outrage here that all men know well enough that you have fully deserved death;

therefore do I ask of you whether you will leave the punishment, the chastisement, and the vengeance of this thing to me and to my wife Prudence? Or will you not?"

Then the wisest of these three answered for all of them, saying: "Sir, we know well that we are unworthy to come into the court of so great and so worthy a lord as you are. For we have so greatly erred, and have offended guiltily in such wise against your lordship, that verily we have been deserving of death. But yet, for the great goodness and kindness that all the world witnesses in your person, we submit ourselves to the excellence and benignity of your gracious lordship, and stand ready to obey all your commands, beseeching you, that of your mercy and pity you will consider our great repentance and humble submission, and will grant us forgiveness for our outrageous trespass and offence. For well we know that your liberal grace and mercy reach out farther into goodness than reach our outrageous guilts and trespasses into wickedness; and this despite the fact that we have wickedly and damnably offended against your high lordship."

Then Melibee took them benignly up from the ground, and received their obligations and bonds, by their oaths, and their pledges and sureties and hostages, and assigned a day for their reappearance before his court to receive and accept his sentence and judgment, the which he should impose; and after this, each man returned to his own home.

And when Dame Prudence saw her opportunity, she asked her lord, Melibee, what vengeance he purposed taking on these adversaries.

To which Melibee replied: “Surely I think and fully purpose to confiscate all that they have and to strip them out of their inheritances, and then to send them into perpetual banishment.”

“Certainly,” said Dame Prudence, “that were a cruel sentence and much against reason. For you are rich enough, and have no need of other men’s property. And you could easily in this way acquire a name for covetousness, which is a vicious thing and ought to be avoided by every good man. For, after the word of the apostle, covetousness is the root of all evil. Therefore were it better for you to lose an equal property of your own than to take theirs from them in this manner. For better it is to lose goods with honour than to win them by villainy and shame. And every man ought to be diligent about getting and keeping a good name. And he should not only busy himself with the keeping of a good name, but he should impose upon himself the constant task of renewing it. For it is written that ‘The good fame or good name of a man is soon passed and forgotten, unless it be renewed.’ And touching what you say, that you will exile your adversaries, that seems to me much against reason and out of all measure, considering how they have placed themselves within your power. And it is written that ‘He deserves to lose his privilege who abuses and misuses the might and the power that are given to him.’ And I submit that, even if you might impose upon them that pain by right and by law, which I think that you could not, I say that you might not be able to put it into execution, by some chance, and then were you as likely to fall again into war as you were before. Therefore, if you would have men render you obedi-

ence, you must judge more courteously, that is to say, you must give more easy sentences. For it is written that 'He who most courteously commands, men most readily obey.' Therefore I pray you that in this need you contrive to conquer your own heart. For Seneca says: 'He that overcomes his own heart, conquers twice.' And Tullius says: 'There is nothing so commendable in a great lord as when he is kindly and meek and easily satisfied.' And I pray you that you will forgo your vengeance in this manner, in order that your good name may be kept and preserved; and that men may have cause and reason to praise you for pity and for mercy, and that you yourself shall not have cause to repent for what you have done. For Seneca says: 'He conquers but evilly who repents of his victory.' Wherefore, I pray you, let there be mercy in your mind and in your heart, to the end that God Almighty may have mercy upon you at His last judgment. For Saint James says in his Epistle: 'For he shall have judgment without mercy, who hath showed no mercy.'"

When Melibee had heard the great arguments and reasons of Dame Prudence, and her wise information and teaching, his heart began to incline toward the desire of his wife, considering her true intent; and he conformed his will to hers and assented fully to her counselling. And he thanked God, from Whom proceeds all virtue and goodness, that He had sent him a wife of so very great discretion.

And when the day arrived for his adversaries to appear before him, he spoke to them kindly, in this wise: "Howbeit that of your pride and presumption and folly, and in your negligence and ignorance, you have borne yourselves badly and

have trespassed against me, yet for as much as I see and behold your great humility and that you are sorry and repentant for your crimes, it constrains me to show you grace and mercy. Therefore do I receive you into my grace and forgive you utterly all the offences, injuries, and wrongs that you have done against me and mine; to this effect and to this end: that God of His endless mercy will, at our dying day, forgive us our sins that we have sinned against Him in this wretched world. For doubtless, if we be sorry and repentant for the sins and crimes which we have committed in the sight of Our Lord, He is so free and so merciful He will forgive us our guilt and bring us into His everlasting bliss. Amen.”

**HERE ENDS CHAUCER’S TALE OF
MELIBEE AND OF DAME PRUDENCE**