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THE HISTORY OF REYNARD THE FOX

Willem die Madoc maecte

**THE HISTORY OF
REYNARD THE FOX**

WILLEM DIE MADOC MAECTE

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM CAXTON

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Here beginneth the History of Reynard the Fox

In this history ben written the parables, good lerynge,¹ and diverse points to be marked, by which points men may learn to come to the subtle knowledge of such things as daily ben used and had in the counsels of lords and prelates, ghostly and worldly, and also among merchants and other common people. And this book is made for need and profit of all good folk, as far as they in reading or hearing of it shall mowe² understand and feel the foresaid subtle deceits that daily ben used in the world; not to the intent that men should use them, but that every man should eschew and keep him from the subtle false shrews, that they be not deceived. Then who that will have the very understanding of this matter, he must oft and many times read in this book, and earnestly and diligently mark well that he readeth; for it is set subtly, like as ye shall see in reading of it ; and not once to read it, for a man shall not with once over reading find the right understanding ne comprise it well; but oftentimes to read it shall cause it well to be understood. And for them that understandeth it, it shall be right joyous, pleasant, and profitable.

¹ Leryng, doctrine

² Mowe, be able to.

How the Lion, King of all Beasts, sent out his commandments that all Beasts should come to his feast and Court

IT was about the time of Pentecost or Whitsuntide, that the woods commonly be lusty and gladsome, and the trees clad with leaves and blossoms, and the ground with herbs and flowers sweet smelling, and also the fowls and birds singing melodiously in their harmony, that the Lion, the noble King of all Beasts, would in the holy days of this feast hold an open Court at state; which he did to know³ over all in his land, and commanded by straight commissions and commandments that every Beast should come thither, in such wise that all the Beasts great and small came to the Court save Reynart the Fox: for he knew himself faulty and guilty in many things against many Beasts that thither should comen, that he durst not adventure to go thither. When the King of all Beasts had assembled all his Court, there was none of them all but that he had complained sore on Reynart the Fox.

³ Did to know, caused to be made known

The first complaint made Isegrim the Wolf on Reynart

ISEGRIM the Wolf, with his lineage and friends, came and stood before the King, and said, “High and Mighty Prince, my Lord the King, I beseech you that through your great might, right, and mercy, that ye will have pity on the great trespass and the unreasonable misdeeds that Reynart the Fox hath done to me and to my wife: that is to wit, he is comen in to my house against the will of my wife, and there he hath bepissed my children whereas they lay, in such wise as they thereof ben waxen blind. Whereupon was a day set, and was judged that Reynart should come and have excused him hereof, and have sworn on the holy saints that he was not guilty thereof. And when the book with the saints was brought forth, tho⁴ had Reynart bethought him otherwise, and went his way again into his hole, as he had naught set thereby. And, dear King, this knowen well many of the Beasts that now be comen hither to your Court. And yet hath he trespassed to me in many other things. He is not living that could tell all that I now leave untold. But the shame and villainy that he hath done my wife, that shall I never hide ne suffer it unavenged, but that he shall make to me large amends.

⁴ Tho, then

The complaint of Courtoys the Hound

WHEN these words were spoken, so stood there a little Hound and was named Courtoys, and complained to the King, how that in the cold winter in the hard frost he had ben sore forwintered, in such wise as he had kept no more meat than a pudding, which pudding Reynart the Fox had taken away from him.

Tho spake Tybert the Cat.

WITH this so came Tybert the Cat, with an irous⁵ mood, and sprang in among them, and said: “My Lord the King, I here hear that Reynart is sore complained on, and here is none but that he hath enough to do to clear himself. That Courtoys here complaineth of, that is passed many years gone, howbeit, that I complain not; that pudding was mine, for I had won it by night in a mill. The miller lay and slept. If Courtoys had any part hereon, that came by me too.”

Tho spake Panther,

“Think ye, Tybert, that it were good that Reynart should not be complained on? He is a very murderer, a rover, and a thief, he loveth no man so well, not our Lord the King here, but that he well would that he should lose good and worship, so that he might win as much as a leg of a fat hen. I shall tell you what I saw him do yesterday to Cuwart the Hare, that here standeth in the King’s peace and safeguard. He promised to Cuwart and said he would teach him his Credo, and make him a good chaplain. He made him go sit between his legs, and sang and cried loud, ‘Credo, Credo!’ My way lay thereby there that I heard this song. Tho went I near and found Master Reynart that had left that he first read and sang, and began to play his old play. For he had caught Cuwart by the throat, and had I not that time comen he should have taken his life from him, like as ye here may see on Cuwart the Hare the fresh wound yet. Forsooth, my Lord the King, if ye suffer this unpunished, and let him go quit that hath thus broken your peace, and will do no right after the sentence and judgment of your men, your children many years hereafter shall be misprised and blamed therefor.”

“Sikerly, Panther,” said Isegrim, “ye say truth. It were good that right and justice were done, for them that would fain live in peace.”

⁵ Irous, angry

How Grymbart the Dasse the Foxís sister’s son spake for Reynart and answered tofore the King

Dasse, Badger (Dutch, dasje).

THEN spake Grymbart the Dasse, and was Reynart’s sister’s son, with an angry mood.

“Sir Isegrim that is evil said. It is a common proverb an enemy’s mouth saith sold well. What lie ye and wite⁶ ye mine Eme⁷ Reynart? I would that ye would adventure that who of you twain had most trespassed to other should hang by the neck as a thief on a tree. But and if he were as well in this court and as well with the King as ye be, it should not be thought in him that it were enow that ye should come and ask him forgiveness; ye have bitten and nipped mine uncle with your fell and sharp teeth many more times than I can tell. Yet will I tell some points that I well know. Know not ye how ye misdealed on the plaice which he threw down from the car, when ye followed after from afar, and ye ate the good plaice alone, and gave him no more than the grate or bones which ye might not eat yourself. In like wise did ye to him also of the fat flitch of bacon which savoured so well that ye alone ate it in your belly, and when mine Eme asked his part tho answered ye him again in scorn, ‘Reynart, fair youngling, I shall gladly give you your part’—but mine Eme gat ne had nought, ne was not the better. Notwithstanding he had won the flitch of bacon with great dread, for the man came and threw him in a sack that he scarcely came out with his life. Such manner things hath Reynart many times suffered through Isegrim. O ye lordes, think ye that this is good? Yet is there more. He complaineth how that Reynart mine Eme hath much trespassed to him by cause of his wife. Mine Eme hath lain by her, but that is well seven years tofore, ere he wedded her; and if Reynart for love and courtesy did with her his will, what was that? She was soon healed thereof. Hereof by right should be no complaint, were Isegrim wise. He should have believed that he doth to himself no worship thus to slander his wife. She plaineth not. Now maketh Cuwart the Hare a complaint also. That thinketh me a vyseuase.⁸ If he read ne learned aright his lesson, should not Reynart his master beat him therefor? If the scholars were not beaten ne smitten and reprised⁹ of their truantry, they should never learn. Now complaineth Courtoys that he with pain had gotten a pudding in the winter, at such time as the cost¹⁰ is evil to find. Thereof him had be better to have held his peace, for he had stolen it. Male quaesisti et male perdidisti. It is right that it be evil lost that is evil won. Who shall blame Reynart if he have taken from a thief stolen good. It is reason. Who that understandeth the law, and can discern the right, and that he be of high birth as mine Eme Reynart is, knoweth well how he shall resseyue stolen good. Yet all had he Courtoys hanged when he found him with the menour¹¹ he had not much misdome nor trespassed, save against the Crown, that he

⁶ *Wite*, blame.

⁷ *Eme*, uncle.

⁸ *Visevase*, wish-wash.

⁹ *Reprised*, reprehended.

¹⁰ *Cost*, food (kost).

¹¹ *With the menour*, in the very act, i.e., with the thing stolen in his hands.

had done justice without leave. Wherefore for the honour of the King he did it not, all hath he but little thanks. What scathed it him that he is thus complained on? Mine Eme is a gentle and true man. He may suffer no falsehood. He doth nothing but by his priest's counsel. And I say you, sith that my lord the King hath do proclaim¹² his peace, he never thought to hurt any man; for he eateth no more than once a day; he liveth as a recluse; he chastiseth his body, and weareth a shirt of hair; it is more than a year that he hath eaten no flesh. As I yesterday heard say of them that came from him he hath left and given over his Castle Maleperduys and hath builded a cluse; therein dwelleth he and hunteth no more ne desireth no winning, but he liveth by alms and taketh nothing but such as men give him for charity, and doth great penance for his sins, and he is waxen much pale and lean of praying and waking, for he would be fain with God."

Thus as Grymbart his Eme stood and preached these words, so saw they coming down the hill to them Chanticleer the Cock and brought on a bier a dead hen of whom Reynart had bitten the head off, and that must be showed to the King for to have knowledge thereof.

¹² Hath do proclaim, hath caused to be proclaimed.

How the Cock complained on Reynart

CHANTICLEER came forth and smote piteously his hands and his feathers; and on each side of the bier wenten tweyne sorrowful hens, that one was called Cantart and that other good hen Crayant, they were two the fairest hens that were between Holland and Arderne. These hens bare each of them a burning taper which was long and straight. These two hens were Coppen's sisters, and they cried so piteously "Alas and weleaway" for the death of their dear sister Coppen. Two young hens bare the bier, which cackled so heavily and wept so loud for the death of Coppen their mother, that it was very hard. Thus came they together tofore the King.

And Chanticleer tho said, "Merciful lord, my lord the King, please it you to hear our complaint and abhor the great scathe that Reynart hath done to me and my children that here stand. It was so that in the beginning of April, when the weather is fair, as that I, as hardy and proud because of the great lineage that I am come of and also had, for I had eight fair sons and seven fair daughters which my wife had hatched, and they were all strong and fat, and went in a yard which was walled round about, in which was a shed wherein were six great dogs which had totore and plucked many a beast's skin in such wise as my children were not afraid. On whom Reynart the thief had great envy because they were so sure that he could none get of them; how well oftentimes hath this fell thief gone round about this wall and hath laid for us in such wise that the dogs have be set on him and have hunted him away; and once they leapt on him upon the bank, and that cost him somewhat for his theft, I saw that his skin smoked. Nevertheless he went his way. God amend it!

"Thus were we quit of Reynart a long while. At last came he in likeness of an hermit, and brought to me a letter for to read, sealed with the King's seal, in which stood written that the King had made peace over all in his realm, and that all manner beasts and fowls should do none harm nor scathe to any other. Yet said he to me more that he was a cloisterer or a closed recluse becomen, and that he would receive great penance for his sins. He showed me his slavyne and pylche¹³ and an hairen shirt thereunder, and then said he, 'Sir Chanticleer after this time be no more afraid of me, ne take no heed, for I now will eat no more flesh. I am forthon so old that I would fain remember my soul. I will now go forth, for I have yet to say my sexte, none, and mine evensong. To God I betake¹⁴ you.'" Tho went Reynart thence, saying his Credo, and laid him under an hawthorn. Then I was glad and merry, and also took none heed, and went to my children and clucked them together, and went without the wall for to walk; whereof is much harm comen to us, for Reynart lay under a bush and came creeping between us and the gate, so that he caught one of my children and laid him in his male.¹⁵ Whereof we have great harm, for sith he hath tasted of him there might never hunter ne hound save ne keep him from us. He hath waited by night and day in such wise that he hath stolen so many of my children that of fifteen I have but four, in such wise hath this thief forslongen¹⁶ them. And yet yesterday was Coppen my daughter, that here lieth upon the bier, with the hounds

¹³ Slavyne and pilch, old shoes (Dutch, sloffen) and skincoat.

¹⁴ Betake, commend, entrust

¹⁵ Male, bag, wallet

¹⁶ Forslongen (verschlungen), swallowed

rescued. This complain I to you, gracious King, have pity on mine great and unreasonable damage and loss of my fair children!”

How the King spake touching this complaint

THEN spake the King:

“Sir Dasse, hear ye this well of the recluse of your Eme? He hath fasted and prayed, that if I live a year he shall aby¹⁷ it. Now hark, Chanticleer, your plaint is enough. Your daughter that lieth here dead, we will give to her the death’s rite. We may keep her no longer, we will betake her to God. We will sing her vigil and bring her worshipfully on earth, and then we will speak with these lords and take counsel how we may do right and justice of this great murder, and bring this false thief to the law.”

Tho began they *Placebo domino*, with the verses that to longen,¹⁸ which if I should say were me too long. When this vigil was done and the commendation, she was laid in the pit, and there upon her was laid a marble stone polished as clear as any glass, and thereon was hewen in great letters in this wise: COPPE CHANTEKLEERS DOUGHTER, WHOM REYNART THE FOX HATH BYTEN, LYETH HIER VNDER BURYED, COMPLAYNE YE HER FFOR, SHE IS SHAMEFULLY COMEN TO HER DETH.

After this, the King sent for his lords and the wisest of his council for to take advice how this great murder and trespass should be punished on Reynart the Fox. There was concluded and appointed for the best that Reynart should be sent for, and that he left not for any cause, but he came into the King's court for to hear what should be said to him; and that Bruin the Bear should do the message.

The King thought that all this was good and said to Bruin the Bear, “Sir Bruin, I will that ye do this message; but see well to for yourself, for Reynart is a shrew, and fell,¹⁹ and knoweth so many wiles that he shall lie and flatter, and shall think how he may beguile, deceive, and bring you to some mockery.”

Then said Bruin, “What, good lord, let it alone! Deceiveth me the Fox, so have I ill learned my *casus*. I trow he shall come too late to mock me.” Thus departed Bruin merrily from thence, but it is to dread that he came not so merrily again.

¹⁷ Abye, pay for

¹⁸ To longen, belong thereto.

¹⁹ Fell, cruel

How Bruin the Bear was sped of Reynart the Fox

NOW is Bruin gone on his way toward the Fox with a stout mood, which supposed well that the Fox should not have beguiled him. As he came in a dark wood in a forest whereas Reynart had a bypath when he was hunted, there beside was an high mountain and land, and there must Bruin in the middle goon over for to go to Maleperduys. For Reynart had many a dwelling-place, but the Castle of Maleperduys was the best and the fastest burgh that he had. There lay he in when he had need, and was in any dread or fear. Now when Bruin was comen to Maleperduys, he found the gate fast shut. Tho went he tofore the gate, and sat upon his tail, and called, "Reynart, be ye at home? I am Browning. The King hath sent me for you that you should come to Court, for to plead your cause. He hath sworn there by his God, come ye not, or bring I you not with me, for to abide such right and sentence as shall be there given, it shall cost you your life. He will hang you or set you on the rack. Reynart, do by my counsel, and come to the Court."

Reynart lay within the gate, as he oft was wont to do, for the warmth of the sun. When Reynart heard Bruin, tho went he inward into his hole. For Maleperduys was full of holes, here one hole and there another, and yonder another, narrow, crooked and long, with many ways to go out, which he opened and shut after that he had need. When he had any prey brought home, or that he wist that any sought him for his misdeeds and trespasses, then he ran and hid him from his enemies into his secret chambers, that they could not find him; by which he deceived many a beast that sought him. And tho thought Reynard in himself how he might best bring the Bear in charge and need, and that he abode in worship.

In this thought Reynart came out, and said, "Bruin, Eme, ye be welcome! I heard you well tofore, but I was in mine evensong, therefore have I the longer tarried a little. Dear Eme, he hath done to you no good service, and I con him no thank,²⁰ that hath sent you over this long hill; for I see that ye be also weary, that the sweat runneth down by your cheeks. It was no need I had nevertheless comen to Court to-morrow: but I sorrow now the less, for your wise counsel shall well help me in the Court. And could the King find none less messenger but you for to send hither? That is great wonder. For next the King ye be the most gentle, and richest of levies and of land. I would well that we were now at the Court, but I fear me that I shall not con well go thither, for I have eaten so much new meat that me thinketh my belly will break or cleave asunder, and because the meat was new I ate the more."

Tho spake the Bear, "Lief Neve,²¹ what meat have ye eaten that maked you so full?"

"Dear Eme, that I ate, what might it help you that if I told you? I ate but simple meat. A poor man is no lord, that may ye know, Eme, by me. We poor folk must eat oftentimes such as we gladly would not eat if we had better. They were great honey combs; which I must needs eat for hunger. They have made my belly so great that I can nowhere endure."

²⁰ Con him no thank. To can or con thank was an old phrase for acknowledgment of thanks due

²¹ Lief neve, dear nephew

Bruin then spake anon, "Alas, Reynart, what say ye! Set ye so little by honey? Me ought to prize and love it above all meat. Lief Reynart, help me that I might get a deal of this honey, and as long as I live I shall be to you a true friend, and abide by you, as far as ye help me that I may have a part of this honey."

How Bruin ate the honey

BRUIN, Eme, I had supposed that ye had japed²² therewith.”

“So help me God, Reynart, nay. I should not gladly jape with you.”

Then spake the red Reynart, “Is it then earnest, that ye love so well the honey? I shall do let you have so much that ten of you should not eat it at one meal, might I get therewith your friendship.”

“Not we ten, Reynart Neve!” said the Bear. “How should that be? Had I all the honey that is between this and Portugal I should well eat it alone.”

Reynart said, “What say ye, Eme? Hereby dwelleth an husbandman named Lantfert, which hath so much honey that ye should not eat in seven years; which ye shall have in your hold if ye will be to me friendly and helping against mine enemies in the King’s Court.”

Then promised Bruin the Bear to him, that if he might have his belly full he would truly be to him tofore all other a faithful friend.

Hereof laughed Reynart the shrew,²³ and said, “If ye would have seven hamper barrels full I shall well get them and help you to have them.” These words pleased the Bear so well, and made him so much to laugh that he could not well stand.

Tho thought Reynart, “This is good luck; I shall lead him thither that he shall laugh by measure.”

Reynart said then, “This matter may not be long tarried. I must pain myself for you. Ye shall well understand the very yonste²⁴ and good will that I bear to you ward. I know none in all my lineage that I now would labour for thus sore.”

That thanked him the Bear and thought he tarried long.

“Now, Eme, let us go a good pace, and follow ye me. I shall make you to have as much honey as ye may bear.” The Fox meant, of good strokes; but the caitiff marked not what the Fox meant; and they went so long together, that they came unto Lantfert’s yard. Tho was sir Bruin merry.

Now hark of Lantfert. Is it true that men say, so was Lantfert a strong carpenter of great timber, and had brought that other day tofore into his yard a great oak, which he had begun to cleave. And as men be woned²⁵ he had smitten two betels²⁶ therein one after that other, in such wise the oak was wide open. Whereof Reynart was glad, for he had found it right as he wished, and said to the Bear all laughing, “See now well sharply to! In this tree is so much honey that it is without measure. Assay if ye can come therein, and eat but little, for though the honeycombs be sweet and good, yet beware that ye eat not too many, but take of them by measure, that ye catch no harm in your body; for, sweet Eme, I should be blamed if they did you any harm.”

²² Japed, jested.

²³ Shrew, malicious deceiver

²⁴ Yonste (gunst), favour.

²⁵ Woned, accustomed.

²⁶ Betels, heavy mallets used for beating in wedges, &c.

“What, Reynart, cousin, sorrow ye not for me! Ween ye that I were a fool?”

“Measure is good in all meat,” Reynart said. “Ye say truth. Wherefore should I sorrow? Go to the end and creep therein.”

Bruin the Bear hasted sore toward the honey, and trode in with his two foremost feet, and put his head over his ears into the clift of the tree. And Reynart sprang lightly and brake out the betle of the tree. Tho helped the Bear neither flattering ne chiding; he was fast shut in the tree. Thus hath the Neve, with deceit, brought his Eme in prison in the tree, in such wise as he could not get out with might ne with craft, head ne foot.

What profiteth Bruin the Bear that he strong and hardy is? That may not help him. He saw well that he was beguiled. He began to howl, and to bray, and crutched with the hinder feet, and made such a noise and rumour, that Lantfert came out hastily, and knew nothing what this might be, and brought in his hand a sharp hook. Bruin the Bear lay in the clift of the tree, in great fear and dread, and held fast his head, and nipped both his fore feet. He wrang, he wrestled, and cried, and all was for naught. He wist not how he might get out.

Reynart the Fox saw from far how that Lantfert the carpenter came, and tho spake Reynart to the Bear, “Is that honey good? How is it now? Eat not too much, it should do you harm; ye should not then well con go to the Court. When Lantfert cometh, if ye have well eaten he shall give you better to drink, and then it shall not stick in your throat.”

After these words tho turned him Reynart toward his castle, and Lantfert came and found the Bear fast taken in the tree. Then ran he fast to his neighbours and said “Come all in to my yard, there is a bear taken!” The word anon sprang over all in the thorp. There ne bleef²⁷ neither man ne wife, but all ran thither as fast as they could, every one with his weapon, some with a staff, some with a rake, some with a broom, some with a stake of the hedge, and some with a flail; and the priest of the church had the staff of the cross, and the clerk brought a vane. The priest’s wife Julocke came with her distaff,—she sat tho and span,—there came old women that for age had not one tooth in their head.

Now was Bruin the Bear nigh much sorrow that he alone must stand against them all. When he heard all this great noise and cry he wrestled and plucked so hard and so sore that he gat out his head. But he left behind all the skin and both his ears, in such wise that never man saw fouler ne loather beast, for the blood ran over his eyes. And or he could get out his feet he must lete²⁸ there his claws or nails and this rough hand. This market came to him evil, for he supposed never to have gone, his feet were so sore, and he might not see for the blood which ran so over his eyes.

Lantfert came to him with the priest, and forthwith all the parish, and began to smite and strike sore upon his head and visage. He received there many a sore stroke. Every man beware hereby: who hath harm and scathe, every man will be thereat and put more to. That was well seen on the Bear, for they were all fierce and wroth on the Bear, great and small, yea Hughelyn with the crooked leg, and Ludolf with the broad long nose, they were both wroth. That one had a leaden malle, and that other a great

²⁷ Bleef (blieb), remained

²⁸ Lete, leave

leaden wapper, therewith they wapped and all forslingred²⁹ him, Sir Bertolt with the long fingers, Lantfert, and Ottram the long. This did to the Bear more harm than all the other, that one had a sharp hook and the other a crooked staff well leaded on the end for to play at the ball. Baetkyn and Aue, Abelquak, my dame Baue, and the priest with his staff, and dame Julocke his wife, these wroughten to the Bear so much harm that they would fain have brought him from his life to death, they smote and stack him all that they could.

Bruin the Bear sat and sighed and groaned, and must take such as was given to him. But Lantfert was the worthiest of birth of them all, and made most noise; for dame Pogge of Chaforte was his mother, and his father was Macob the stoppelmaker, a much stout man. There as he was alone Bruin received of them many a cast of stones. Tofore them all sprang first Lantfert's brother with a staff, and smote the Bear on the head that he ne heard ne saw; and therewith the Bear sprang up between the bush and the river among a heap of wives, that he threw a deal of them in the river, which was wide and deep.

There was the parson's wife one of them, wherefore he was full of sorrow when he saw his wife lie in the water. He lusted no longer to smite the Bear, but called, "Dame Julocke in the water! Now every man see to, All they that may help her! Be they men or women, I give to them all pardon of their penance, and release all their sins!" All they then left Bruin the Bear lie, and did that the priest bade.

When Bruin the Bear saw that they ran all from him, and ran to save the women, tho sprang he into the water and swam all that he could. Then made the priest a great shout and noise, and ran after the Bear with great anger, and said, "Come and turn again, thou false thief!" The Bear swam after the best of the stream and let them call and cry, for he was glad that he was so escaped from them. He cursed and banned the honey tree, and the Fox also that had so betrayed him that he had crept therein so deep that he lost both his hood and his ears. And so forth he drove in the stream well a two or three mile. Tho wax he so weary that he went to land for to sit and rest him, for he was heavy; he groaned and sighed, and the blood leapt over his eyes, he drew his breath like as one should have died.

Now hark how the Fox did. Ere he came from Lantfert's house he had stolen a fat hen and had laid her in his male, and ran hastily away by a bye path where he weened that no man should have comen. He ran toward the river, that he sweat, he was so glad that he wist not what to do for joy, for he hoped that the Bear had been dead. He said, "I have now well sped, for he that should most have hindered me in the Court is now dead, and none shall wite³⁰ me thereof, may I not, then, by right be well glad?" With these words the Fox looked to the riverward, and espied where Bruin the Bear lay and rested him. Tho was the Fox sorrier and heavier than tofore was merry, and was as angry, and said in chiding to Lantfert, "Alas, Lantfert, lewd fool! God give him a shames death that hath lost such good venison, which is good and fat, and hath let him go which was taken to his hand! Many a man would gladly have eaten of him. He hath lost a rich and fat Bear." Thus all chiding he came to the river, where he found the Bear sore wounded, bebled, and right sick, which he might thank none better thereof than Reynart, which he spake to the Bear in scorn: "*Chiere priestre, Dieu vous garde!* Will ye see the red thief?"

²⁹ Wapped and forslingered, beat at and overwhelmed with blows. The Low German *slingen*, to swallow, is to be distinguished from Low German, *slingern*, the word here

³⁰ Wite, blame

Said the Bear to himself, "The ribaud and the fell deer,³¹ here I see him coming."

Then said the Fox, "Have ye aught forgotten at Lantfert's? Have ye also paid him for the honeycombs that ye stole from him? If ye have not, it were a great shame, and not honest; I will rather be the messenger myself for to go and pay him. Was the honey not good? I know yet more of the same prize. Dear Eme, tell me ere I go hence into what order will ye go that wear this new hood? Were ye a monk or an abbot? He that shaved your crown hath nipped off your ears, ye have lost your top and don off your gloves, I trow verily that ye will go sing compline."

All this heard Bruin the Bear, and waxed all angry, and sorry for he might not avenge him. He let the Fox say his will, and with great pain suffered it, and start again in the river, and swam down with the stream to that other side.

Now must he sorrow how that he should come to the Court, for he had lost his ears and the skin with the claws of his forefeet; for though a man should have slain him he could not go; and yet he must needs forth, but he wist not how.

Now hear how he did. He sat upon his hams and began to rustle over his tail; and when he was so weary, he wentled³² and tumbled nigh half a mile; this did he with great pain so long till at last he came to the Court. And when he was seen so coming from far, some doubted what it might be that came so wenteling.

The King at last knew him, and was not well paid,³³ and said, "This is Bruin the Bear, my friend! Lord God, who hath wounded him thus? He is passing red on his head: me thinketh he is hurt unto the death. Where may he have been?"

Therewith is the Bear came tofore the king, and said:

³¹ Deer, wild beast

³² Wentled, twisted, wriggled round and round. There is a mollusc called for its spiral "wentle-trap" from G. wendel-treppe, a winding staircase

³³ Paid, satisfied

The complaint of the Bear upon the Fox

“I COMPLAIN to you, merciful lord, sir King, so as ye may see how that I am handled, praying you to avenge it upon Reynart the fell beast; for I have gotten this in your service. I have lost both my foremost feet, my cheeks, and mine ears, by his false deceit and treason.”

The King said, “How durst this false thief Reynart do this? I say to you, Bruin, and swear by my crown, I shall so avenge you on him that ye shall con me thank!”

He sent for all the wise beasts and desired counsel how that he might avenge this over-great wrong that the Fox had done. Then the council concluded, old and young, that he should be sent for, and dayed³⁴ earnestly again, for to abide such judgment as should there be given on him of all his trespasses. And they thought that the cat Tybert might best do this message if he would, for he is right wise. The King thought this counsel good.

³⁴ Dayed, cited for an appointed day

How the King sent another time Tybert the Cat for the Fox, and how Tybert sped with Reynart the Fox

THEN the King said, "Sir Tybert, ye shall now go to Reynart and say to him this second time, that he come to Court unto the plea for to answer; for though he be fell to other beasts, he trusteth you well and shall do by your counsel. And tell him if he come not he shall have the third warning and be dayed, and if he then come not, we shall proceed by right against him and all his lineage without mercy."

Tybert spake, "My lord the King, they that this counselled you were not my friends. What shall I do there? He will not, for me neither, come ne abide. I beseech you, dear King, send some other to him. I am little and feeble. Bruin the Bear, which was so great and strong, could not bring him. How should I then take it on hand?"

"Nay," said the King, "Sir Tybert, ye ben wise and well learned. Though ye be not great, there lieth not on. Many do more with craft and cunning than with might and strength."

Then said the Cat, "Sith it must needs be done, I must then take it upon me. God give grace that I may well achieve it, for my heart is heavy, and evil willed thereto."

Tybert made him soon ready toward Maleperduys. And he saw from far come flying one of Saint Martin's birds, tho cried he loud and said, "All hail, gentle bird, turn thy wings hitherward, and fly on my right side." The bird flew forth upon a tree which stood on the left side of the Cat. Tho was Tybert woe; for he thought it was a shrewd token and a sign of harm. For if the bird had flown on his right side he had been merry and glad, but now he sorrowed that his journey should turn to unhappe. Nevertheless he did as many do, and gave to himself better hope than his heart said. He went and ran to Maleperduys ward, and there he found the Fox alone standing tofore his house.

Tybert said, "The rich God give you good even, Reynart. The King hath menaced you for to take your life from you if ye come not now with me to the court."

The Fox tho spake and said, "Tybert, my dear cousin, ye be right welcome. I would well truly that ye had much good luck." What hurted the Fox to speak fair. Though he said well, his heart thought it not, and that shall be seen ere they depart.

Reynart said, "Will we this night be together. I will make you good cheer, and to-morrow early in the dawning we will together go to the Court. Good Nephew, let us so do, I have none of my kin that I trust so much to as to you. Here was Bruin the Bear,—the traitor! He looked so shrewdly on me, and methought he was so strong, that I would not for a thousand mark have gone with him; but, cousin, I will to-morrow early go with you."

Tybert said, "It is best that we now go, for the moon shineth all so light as it were day; I never saw fairer weather."

“Nay, dear cousin, such might meet us by day-time that would make us good cheer and by night peradventure might do us harm. It is suspicious to walk by night. Therefore abide this night here by me.”

Tybert said, “What should we eat if we abode here?”

Reynart said, “Here is but little to eat. Ye may well have an honeycomb, good and sweet. What say ye, Tybert, will ye any thereof?”

Tybert answered, “I set nought thereby. Have ye nothing else? If ye gave me a good fat mouse I should be better pleased.”

“A fat mouse!” said Reynart. “Dear cousin, what say ye? Hereby dwelleth a priest and hath a barn by his house; therein ben so many mice that a man should not lead them away upon a wain. I have heard the priest many times complain that they did him much harm.”

“Oh, dear Reynart, lead me thither for all that I may do for you!”

“Yea, Tybert, say ye me truth? Love ye well mice?”

“If I love them well?” said the Cat. “I love mice better than anything that men give me. Know ye not that mice savour better than, venison, yea, than flawnes³⁵ or pasties? Will ye well do, so lead me thither where the mice ben, and then shall ye win my love, yea all had ye slain my father, mother, and all my kin.”

Reynart said, “Ye mock and jape therewith.”

The Cat said, “So help me God, I do not!”

“Tybert,” said the Fox, “wist I that verily, I would yet this night make that ye should be full of mice.”

“Reynart!” quoth he, “Full? That were many.”

“Tybert, ye jape!”

“Reynart,” quoth he, “in truth I do not. If I had a fat mouse I would not give it for a golden noble.”

“Let us go, then, Tybert,” quoth the Fox, “I will bring you to the place ere I go from you.”

“Reynart,” quoth the Cat, “upon your safe-conduct, I would well go with you to Monpelier.”

“Let us then go,” said the Fox, “we tarry all too long.”

Thus went they forth, without letting³⁶ to the place whereas they would be, to the Priest’s barn, which was fast walled about with a mud wall. And the night tofore the Fox had broken in, and had stolen from the Priest a good fat hen; and the Priest, all angry, had set a gryn³⁷ tofore the hole to avenge him; for he would fain have taken the Fox. This knew well the fell thief, the Fox, and said, “Sir Tybert, cousin, creep into this hole, and ye shall not long tarry but that ye shall catch mice by great heaps. Hark how they pipe! When ye be full, come again; I will tarry here after you before this hole. We will to-morrow go together to the Court. Tybert, why tarry ye thus long ?

³⁵ Flawns, custard tarts

³⁶ Letting, hindrance

³⁷ Gryn, snare or trap. A word used by Chaucer

Come off, and so may we return soon to my wife which waiteth after us, and shall make us good cheer.”

Tybert said, “Reynart, cousin, is it then your counsel that I go into this hole? These Priests ben so wily and shrewish I dread to take harm.”

“Oh ho, Tybert!” said the Fox, “I saw you never so sore afraid. What aileth you?”

The Cat was ashamed, and sprang into the hole. And anon he was caught in the gryn by the neck, ere he wist. Thus deceived Reynart his guest and cousin.

As Tybert was ware of the gryn, he was afraid and sprang forth; the gryn went to. Then he began to wrawen, for he was almost y-strangled. He called, he cried, and made a shrewd noise.

Reynart stood before the hole and heard all, and was well paid, and said, “Tybert, love ye well mice? Be they fat and good? Knew the Priest hereof, or Mertynet, they be so gentle that they would bring you sauce. Tybert, ye sing and eat, is that the guise of the Court? Lord God, if Isegrim were there by you, in such rest as ye now be, then should I be glad; for oft he hath done me scathe and harm.”

Tybert could not go away, but he mawed and galped so loud, that Mertynet sprang up, and cried loud, “God be thanked, my gryn hath taken the thief that hath stolen our hens. Arise up, we will reward him!”

With these words arose the Priest in an evil time, and waked all them that were in the house, and cried with a loud voice, “The Fox is taken!”

There leapt and ran all that there was. The Priest himself ran, all mother naked. Mertynet was the first that came to Tybert. The Priest took to Locken his wife an offering candle, and bade her light it at the fire, and he smote Tybert with a great staff. There received Tybert many a great stroke over all his body. Mertynet was so angry that he smote the Cat an eye out. The naked Priest lift up and should have given a great stroke to Tybert, but Tybert that saw that he must die sprang between the Priest’s legs with his claws and with his teeth. That leap became ill to the Priest and to his great shame.

When Dame Julocke knew that, she sware by her father’s soul, that she would it had cost her all the offering of a whole year, that the Priest had not had that harm, hurt, and shame, and that it had not happened; and said, “In the Devil’s name was the gryn there set! See Mertynet, lief son, this is a great shame and to me a great hurt!” The Fox stood without, tofore the hole, and heard all these words, and laughed so sore that he vnnethe³⁸ could stand. Thus scorned and mocked the Fox the Priest’s wife, Dame Julocke, that was full of sorrow. The Priest fell down aswoon. They took him up, and brought him again to bed. Tho went the Fox again in to his burgh ward and left Tibert the Cat in great dread and jeopardy, for the Fox wist none other but that the Cat was nigh dead. But when Tibert the Cat saw them all busy about the Priest, tho began he to bite and gnaw the gryn in the middle asunder; and sprang out of the hole, and went rolling and wentling towards the King’s Court. Ere he came thither it was fair day, and the sun began to rise. And he came to the Court as a poor wight. He had caught harm at the Priest’s house by the help and counsel of the Fox. His body was all tobeaten, and blind on the one eye. When the King wist this, that Tibert was thus arrayed, he was sore angry, and menaced Reynart the thief sore, and

³⁸ Unnethe, not easily

anon gathered his council to wit what they would advise him, how he might bring the Fox to the law, and how he should be fetched.

Tho spake Sir Grymbart, which was the Fox's sister son, and said, "Ye lords, though my Eme were twice so bad and shrewish, yet is there remedy enough. Let him be done to as to a free man. When he shall be judged he must be warned the third time for all; and if he come not then, he is then guilty in all the trespasses that ben laid against him and his, or complained on."

"Grymbart, who would ye that should go and daye him to come? Who will adventure for him his ears, his eye, or his life; which is so fell a beast? I trow there is none here so much a fool."

Grymbart spake, "So help me God, I am so much a fool that I will do this message myself to Reynart, if ye will command me."

How Grymbart the Dasse brought the fox to the law tofore the King

“NOW go forth, Grymbart, and see well tofore you. Reynart is so fell and false, and so subtle, that ye need well to look about you and to beware of him.”

Grymbart said he should see well to.

Thus went Grymbart to Maleperduys ward, and when he came thither he found Reynart the Fox at home, and Dame Ermelyn his wife lay with her whelps in a dark corner.

Tho spake Grymbart and saluted his Eme and his Aunt, and said to Reynart, “Eme, beware that your absence hurt you not in such matters as be laid and complained on you; but if ye think it good, it is high time that ye come with me to the Court. The withholding you from it can do you no good. There is much thing complained over you, and this is the third warning; and I tell you for truth, if ye abide to-morrow all day, there may no mercy help you. Ye shall see that within three days that your house shall be besieged all about, and there shall be made tofore it gallows and rack. I say you truly ye shall not then escape, neither with wife ne with child, the King shall take all your lives from you. Therefore it is best that ye go with me to the Court. Your subtle wise counsel shall peradventure avail you. There ben greater adventures falle, ere this; for it may hap ye shall go quit of all the complaints that ben complained on you, and all your enemies shall abide in the shame. Ye have oftentimes done more and greater things than this.”

Reynart the Fox answered, “Ye say sooth. I trow it is best that I go with you, for there lacketh my counsel. Peradventure the King shall be merciful to me if I may come to speak with him, and see him under his eyen. Though I had done much more harm, the Court may not stand without me; that shall the King well understand. Though some be so fell to me ward, yet it goeth not to the heart. All the council shall conclude much by me. Where great Courts ben gathered, of kings or of great lords, whereas needeth subtle counsel, there must Reynart find the subtle means. They may well speak and say their advice, but tho mine is best, and that goeth tofore all other. In the Court ben many that have sworn to do me the worst they can, and that causeth me a part to be heavy in my heart, for many may do more than one alone that shall hurt me. Nevertheless, nephew, it is better I go with you to the Court and answer for myself, than to set me my wife and my children in adventure for to be lost. Arise up, let us go hence. He is over mighty for me. I must do as he will. I cannot better it; I shall take it patiently and suffer it.”

Reynart said to his wife Dame Ermelyn, “I betake you my children, that ye see well to them and specially to Reynkin, my youngest son. He beliketh me so well I hope he shall follow my steps. And there is Rossel a passing fair thief, I love them as well as any may love his children. If God give me grace that I may escape, I shall, when I come again, thank you with fair words.” Thus took Reynart leave of his wife.

Ah, gods! how sorrowful abode Ermelyn with her small whelps, for the victualler and he that sorrowed³⁹ for Maleperduys was gone his way, and the house not purveyed nor victualled.

³⁹ Sorrowed, took care (sorge)

How Reynart shrove him

WHEN Reynart and Grymbart had gone a while together, tho said Reynart, “Dear Cousin, now am I in great fear, for I go in dread and jeopardy of my life. I have so much repentance for my sins that I will shrive me, dear Cousin, to you; here is none other priest to get. If I were shriven of my sins my soul should be the clearer.”

Grymbart answered, “Eme, will ye shrive you, then must ye promise first to leave your stealing and roving.”

Reynart said, that wist he well. “Now hark, dear Cousin, what I shall say. *Confiteor tibi, pater*, of all the misdeeds that I have done, and gladly will receive penance for them.”

Grymbart said, “What say ye, will ye shrive you? Then say it in English, that I may understand you.”

Reynart said, “I have trespassed against all the beasts that live; in especial against Bruin the Bear, mine Eme, whom I made his crown all bloody; and taught Tybert the Cat to catch mice, for I made her leap in a grynne where she was all to-beaten; also I have trespassed greatly against Chanticleer with his children, for I have made him quit of a great deal of them. The King is not gone all quit, I have slandered him and the Queen many times, that they shall never be clear thereof. Yet have I beguiled Isegrim the Wolf, oftener than I can tell well. I called him Eme, but that was to deceive him; he is nothing of my kin. I made him a monk at Eelmare, where I myself also became one; and that was to his hurt and no profit. I made bind his feet to the bell rope, the ringing of the bell thought him so good that he would learn to ring; whereof he had shame, for he rang so sore that all the folk in the street were afraid thereof and marvelled what might be on the bell, and ran thither tofore he had comen to axe the religion, wherefore he was beaten almost to the death. After this I taught him to catch fish, where he received many a stroke; also I led him to the richest priest’s house that was in Vermedos, this priest had a spynde wherein hung many a good flitch of bacon wherein many a time I was wont to fill my belly; in this spynde I had made an hole in which I made Isegrim to creep. There found he tubs with beef and many good flitches of bacon, whereof he ate so much without measure that he might not come out at the hole where he went in; his belly was so great and full of the meat, and when he entered his belly was small; I went in to the village and made there a great shout and noise; yet hark what I did then, I ran to the priest where he sat at the table and ate, and had tofore him as fat capon as a man might find: that capon caught I, and ran my way therewith all that I might. The priest cried out, and said, ‘Take and slay the Fox! I trow that man never saw more wonder. The Fox cometh in my house and taketh my capon from my table: where saw ever man an hardier thief!’ and as me thought he took his table knife and cast it at me, but he touched me not. I ran away, he shoved the table from him and followed me crying ‘Kill and slay him!’ I too go, and they after, and many moo came after, which all thought to hurt me.

“I ran so long that I came whereas Isegrim was, and there I let fall the capon, for it was too heavy for me, and against my will I left it there, and then I sprang through a hole whereas I would be. And as the priest took up the capon, he espied Isegrim and

cried, ‘Smite down here, friends, here is the thief, the Wolf! See well to, that he escape us not!’ They ran all together with stocks and staves, and made a great noise, that all the neighbours camen out, and gave him many a shrewd stroke, and threw at him great stones, in such wise that he fell down as he had been dead. They slipped him and drew him over stones and over blocks without the village and threw him into a ditch, and there he lay all the night. I wot never how he came thence, sith I have gotten of him, for as much as I made him to fill his belly, that he sware he would be mine help a whole year.

“Tho led I him to a place where I told him there were seven hens and a cock which sat on a perch and were much fat. And there stood a falldoor by, and we climbed thereup. I said to him if he would believe me, and that he would creep into the door, he should find many fat hens. Isegrim went all laughing to the doorward, and crept a little in, and tasted here and there, and at last he said to me, ‘Reynart, ye bord and jape with me, for what I seek I find not.’ Then said I, ‘Eme, if ye will find, creep further in. He that will win, he must labour and adventure. They that were wont to sit there, I have them away.’ Thus I made him to seek further in, and shoved him forth so far, that he fell down upon the floor, for the perch was narrow. And he fell so great a fall, that they sprang up all that slept, and they that next the fire cryden that the falldoor was open and something was falle, and they wist not what it might be. They rose up and light a candle, and when they saw him, they smiten, beaten, and wounded him to the death. I have brought him thus in many a jeopardy, more than I can now reckon. I should find many more, if I me well bethought, which I shall tell you hereafter. Also I have bedriuen⁴⁰ with dame Ersewynde his wife. I would I had not done it. I am sorry for it. It is to her great shame, and that me repenteth.”

Grymbart said, “Eme, I understand you not.”

He said, “I have trespassed with his wife.”

“Ye shrive you, as though ye held somewhat behind. I wot not what ye mean, ne where ye have learned this language.”

“Ach, Dear Neve, it were great shame if I should say it openly as it happened. I have lain by mine aunt, I am your Eme, I should anger you if I spake villainy of women. Nephew, now have I told you all that I can think on. Set me penance, and assoil me, for I have great repentance.”

Grymbart was subtle and wise. He broke a rod off a tree and said, “Eme, now shall ye smite yourself thrice with this rod on your body, and then lay it down upon the ground, and spring three times thereover, without bowing of your legs and without stumbling, and then shall ye take it up and kiss it friendly in token of meekness and obedience of your penance that I gave you. Herewith be ye quit of all sins that ye have done to this day, for I forgive it you all.”

The Fox was glad.

Tho said Grymbart to his Eme, “Eme, see now forthon that ye do good works: read your psalms, go to church, fast, and keep your holydays, and give your alms; and leave your sinful and ill life, your theft, and your treason, and so may ye come to mercy.”

⁴⁰ Bedriven, had experience (Dutch, bedreven; German, betrieben)

The Fox promised that he would so do, and then went they both together to the Court ward.

A little beside the way as they went stood a cloister of black nuns, where many geese, hens and capons went without the walls; and as they went talking the Fox brought Grymbart out of the right way thither, and without the walls by the barn went the polaylle. The Fox espied them, and saw a fat young capon which went alone from his fellows, and leapt, and caught him that the feathers flew about his ears, but the capon escaped.

Grymbart said, “What, Eme, cursed man, what will ye do! Will ye for one of these pullets fall again in all your sins of which ye have shriven you? Ye ought sore repent you.”

Reynart answered, “Truly, cousin, I had all forgotten. Pray God that he forgive it me, for I will never do so more.”

Then turned they again over a little bridge, yet the Fox alway looked after the polaylle; he could not refrain himself; that which clevid by the bone might not out of the flesh: though he should be hanged he could not let the looking after the polaylle as far as he might see them.

Grymbart saw his manner, and said, “Foul false deceiver, how go your eyen so after the polaylle!”

The Fox said, “Cousin, ye misdo to say to me any such words. Ye bring me out of my devotion and prayers. Let me say a *pater noster* for all the souls of polaylle and geese that I have betrayed, and oft with falsehood stolen from these holy nuns.”

Grymbart was not well apaid, but the Fox had ever his eyen toward the polaylle⁴¹ till at last they came in the way again, and then turned they to the Courtward. How sore quaked tho Reynart when they approached the Court! For he wist well that he had for to answer to many a foul feat and theft that he had done.

⁴¹ Polaille, poultry

How the Fox came to the Court, and how he excused him tofore the King

AT the first when it was known in the Court that Reynart the Fox and Grymbart his cousin were comen to the Court, there was none so poor nor so feeble of kin and friends but that he made him ready for to complain on Reynart the Fox.

Reynart looked as he had not been afraid, and held him better than he was, for he went forth proudly with his nephew through the highest street of the Court, right as he had been the King's son, and as he had not trespassed to any man the value of an hair: and went in the middle of the place standing tofore Noble the King and said—

“God give you great honour and worship. There was never King that ever had a truer servant than I have been to your good grace, and yet am. Nevertheless, dear lord, I know well that there ben many in this Court that would destroy me if ye would believe them; but nay, God thank you, it is not fitting to your crown to believe these false deceivers and liars lightly. To God mote it be complained how that these false liars and flatterers nowadays in the lord's Courts ben most heard and believed, the shrews and false deceivers ben borne up for to do to good men all the harm and scathe they may. Our Lord God shall once reward them their hire.”

The King said, “Peace, Reynart, false thief and traitor! How well can ye bring forth fair tales! And all shall not help you a straw. Ween ye with such flattering words to be my friend, ye have so oft served me so as ye now shall well know. The peace that I have commanded and sworn, that have ye well holden, have ye?”

Chanticleer could no longer be still, but cried, “Alas, what have I by this peace lost!”

“Be still, Chanticleer, hold your mouth. Let me answer this foul thief. Thou shrewd fell thief,” said the King, “thou sayest that thou lovest me well: that hast thou showed well on my messengers, these poor fellows, Tibert the Cat and Bruin the Bear, which yet ben all bloody; which chide not ne say not much, but that shall this day cost thee thy life. *In nomine Paths et Christifilii.*”

Said the Fox, “Dear lord and mighty King, if Bruin's crown be bloody what is that to me? When he ate honey at Lantfert's house in the village and did him hurt and scathe, there was he beaten therefor; if he had willed, he is so strong of limbs, he might well have be avenged ere he sprang into the water. Tho came Tybert the Cat, whom I received friendly. If he went out without my counsel for to steal mice to a priest's house, and the priest did him harm, should I abye that, then might I say I were not happy. Not so, my liege lord. Ye may do what ye will, though my matter be clear and good; ye may siede⁴² me, or roast, hang, or make me blind. I may not escape you. We stand all under your correction. Ye be mighty and strong. I am feeble, and my help is but small. If ye put me to the death it were a small vengeance.”

Whiles they thus spake, up sprang Bellyn the Ram and his ewe Dame Olewey, and said, “My lord the King, hear our complaint.” Bruin the Bear stood up with all his lineage and his fellows. Tybert the Cat, Isegrim the Wolf, Cuwart the Hare, and

⁴² Siede, seethe, boil

Panther; the Boar, the Camel, and Brunel the Goose; the Kid and Goat; Boudewyn the Ass, Borre the Bull, Hamel the Ox, and the Weasel; Chanticleer the Cock, Pertelot with all their children, all these made great rumour and noise, and came forth openly tofore their lord the King, and made that the Fox was taken and arrested.

How the Fox was arrested and judged to death

HEREUPON was a Parliament; and they desired that Reynart should ben dead. And whatsomever they said against the Fox he answered to each to them. Never heard man of such beasts such plaints of wise counsel and subtle inventions. And on that other side, the Fox made his excuse so well and formably thereon, that they that heard it wondered thereof. They that heard and saw it may tell it forth for truth; I shall short the matter and tell you forth of the Fox. The King and the Council heard the witnesses of the complaints of Reynart's misdeeds. It went with them as it oft does, the feeblest hath the worst. They gave sentence, and judged that the Fox should be dead and hanged by the neck. Tho list not he to play. All his flattering words and deceits could not help him. The judgment was given, and that must be done. Grymbart, his nephew, and many of his lineage might not find in their hearts to see him die, but took leave sorrowfully, and roomed the court.⁴³

The King bethought him, and marked how many a youngling departed from thence all weeping, which were nigh of his kin, and said to himself, "Here behoveth other counsel hereto; though Reynart be a shrew, there be many good of his lineage."

Tybert the Cat said, "Sir Bruin and Sir Isegrim, how be ye thus slow? It is almost even. Here ben many bushes and hedges. If he escaped from us and were delivered out of this peril, he is so subtle, and so wily, and can so many deceits, that he should never be taken again. Shall we hang him? How stand ye all thus? Ere the gallows can be made ready it shall be night."

Isegrim bethought him tho, and said, "Hereby is a gibbet or gallows." And with that word he sighed.

And the Cat espied that, and said, "Isegrim, ye be afraid. Is it against your will? Think ye not that he himself went and laboured that both your brethren were hanged? Were ye good and wise, ye should thank him, and ye should not therewith so long tarry."

⁴³ Roomed, vacated (räumen).

How the Fox was led to the gallows

ISEGRIM balked⁴⁴ and said, “Ye make much ado, Sir Tybert; had we an halter which were meet for his neck and strong enough, we should soon make an end.”

Reynart the Fox, which long had not spoken, said to Isegrim, “Short my pain. Tybert hath a strong cord which caught him in the Priest’s house. He can climb well, and is swift; let him bear up the line. Isegrim and Bruin, this becometh you well, that ye thus do to your Nephew! I am sorry that I live thus long; haste you, ye be set thereto; it is evil doo that ye tarry thus long. Go tofore, Bruin, and lead me; Isegrim, follow fast, and see well to, and be ware that Reynart go not away.”

Tho said Bruin, “It is the best counsel that I ever yet heard, that Reynart here saith.”

Isegrim commanded anon and bad his kin and friends that they should see to Reynart that he escaped not, for he is so wily and false. They helden him by the feet, by the beard; and so kept him that he escaped not from them.

The Fox heard all these words, which touched him nigh, yet spake he and said, “Oh, dear Eme, methinketh ye pain yourself sore for to do me hurt and scathe. If I durst, I would pay you of mercy, though my hurt and sorrow is pleasant to you. I wot well, if mine Aunt, your wife, bethought her well of old ferners,⁴⁵ she would not suffer that I should have any harm; but now I am he that now ye will do on me what it shall please you. Ye Bruin and Tybert, God give you shames death but ye do to me your worst. I wot whereto I shall. I may die but once, I would that I were dead already. I saw my father die, he had soon done.”

Isegrim said, “Let us go, for ye curse us because we lengthen the time. Evil might we fare if we abide any longer.”

He went forth with great envy on that one side, and Bruin stood on the other side, and so led they him forth to the gallows ward. Tybert ran with a good will tofore, and bare the cord; and his throat was yet sore of the grynne, and his croppe did him woe of the stroke that he was take in; that happened by the counsel of the Fox, and that thought he now to quit.

Tybert Isegrim and Bruin went hastily with Reynart to the place there as the felons ben wont to be put to death. Noble the King and the Queen and all that were in the Court followed after, for to see the end of Reynart. The Fox was in great dread if him myshapped, and bethought him oft how he might save him from the death; and tho three that so sore desired his death, how he might deceive them and bring them to shame; and how he might bring the King with leasings for to hold with him against them. This was all that he studied, how he might put away his sorrow with wiles, and thought thus: “Though the King and many one be upon me angry, it is no wonder, for I have well deserved it; nevertheless, I hope for to be yet their best friend. And yet shall I never do them good. How strong that the King be, and how wise that his

⁴⁴ Balked, brayed (Dutch, balken; vulg., b[^]lken)

⁴⁵ Old ferners, auld lang syne.

council be, if I may brook⁴⁶ my words I know so many an invention, I shall come to mine above⁴⁷ as far as they would comen to the gallows.”

Tho said Isegrim, “Sir Bruin, think now on your red crown which by Reynart’s mean ye caught; we have now the time that we may well reward him. Tybert, clime up hastily and bind the cord fast to the lynde, and make a riding knot or a strope, ye be the lightest; ye shall this day see your will of him. Bruin, see well to, that he escape not, and hold fast. I will help that the ladder be set up, that he may go upward thereon.”

Bruin said, “Do. I shall help him well.”

The Fox said, “Now may my heart be well heavy for great dread; for I see the death tofore mine eyen, and I may not escape. My lord the King, and dear Queen, and forth all ye that here stand, ere I depart from this world I pray you of a boone: that I may tofore you all make my confession openly, and tell my defaults all so clearly that my soul may not be acumbred, and also that no man hereafter bear no blame for my theft ne for my treason. My death shall be to me the easier, and pray ye all to God that he have mercy on my soul.”

⁴⁶ Brook, have use of (brauchen)

⁴⁷ Come to mine above, rise in the world.

How the Fox made openly his confession tofore the King and tofore all them that would hear it

ALL they that stood there had pity when Reynart said tho words, and said it was but a little request if the King would grant it him, and they prayed the King to grant it him.

The King gave him leave.

Reynart was well glad, and hoped that it might fall better, and said thus:

“Now help, *Spiritus Domini*, for I see here no man but I have trespassed unto. Nevertheless yet was I, unto the time that I was weaned from the teat, one of the best children that could anywhere be found. I went tho and played with the lambs, because I heard them gladly bleat. I was so long with them that at the last I bit one; there learned I first to lappen of the blood. It savoured well; me thought it right good. And after I began to taste of the flesh thereof, I was licorous; so that after that I went to the gate into the wood, there heard I the kids bleat and I slew of them twain. I began to wax hardy after. I slew hens, polaylle and geese wherever I found them. Thus worden⁴⁸ my teeth all bloody. After this, I wex so fell and so wroth that whatsomever I found that I might over, I slew all. Thereafter came I by Isegrim, now in the winter, where he hid him under a tree, arid reckoned to me that he was mine eme. When I heard him then reckon alliance, we became fellows, which I may well repent. We promised each to other to be true, and to use good fellowship, and began to wander together. He stole the great things and I the small, and all was common between us. Yet he made it so that he had the best deal;⁴⁹ I got not half my part. When that Isegrim gat a calf a ram or a wether, then grimmed he, and was angry on me, and drove me from him, and held my part and his too, so good is he. Yet this was of the least. But when it so lucked that we took an ox or a cow, then came thereto his wife with seven children; so that unto me might vnnethe come one of the smallest ribs, and yet, had they eaten all the flesh thereof, therewithall must I be content; not for that I had so great need, for I have so great scatte⁵⁰ and good of silver and of gold, that seven wains should not can carry it away.”

When the King heard him speak of this great good and riches, he burned in the desire and covetyse thereof, and said, “Reynart, where is the riches becomen? tell me that.”

The Fox said, “My lord, I shall tell you. The riches was stolen. And had it not be stolen, it should have cost you your life and you should have been murdered,—which God forbid!—and should have been the greatest hurt in the world.”

When the Queen heard that, she was sore afraid and cried aloud, “Alas and weleaway! Reynart, what say ye? I conjure you by the long way that your soul shall

⁴⁸ Worden, became

⁴⁹ Deal, share, division.

⁵⁰ Scatte, treasure, money; "shot" in the locker.

go, that ye tell us openly the truth hereof, as much as ye know of this great murder that should have been done on my lord, that we all may hear it!”—

Now hearken how the Fox shall flatter the King and Queen, and shall win both their good will and loves, and shall hinder them that labour for his death. He shall unbind his pack and lie, and by flattery and fair words shall bring forth so his matters that it shall be supposed for truth.

In a sorrowful countenance spake the Fox to the Queen, “I am in such case now that I must needs die, and had ye me not so sore conjured I will not jeopardise my soul, and if I so died I should go therefor in to the pain of hell. I will say nothing but that I will make it good, for piteously he should have been murdered of his own folk. Nevertheless they that were most principal in this feat were of my next kin, whom gladly I would not betray, if the sorrow were not of the hell.”

The King was heavy of heart, and said, “Reynart, sayest thou to me the truth?”

“Yes,” said the Fox. “See ye not how it standeth with me? Ween ye that I shall damn my soul? What should it avail me if I now said otherwise than truth? My death is so nigh. There may neither prayer ne good help me.” Tho trembled the Fox, by dissembling, as he had been afraid.

The Queen had pity on him, and prayed the King to have mercy on him, in eschewing of more harm, and that he should doo the people hold their peace, and give the Fox audience, and hear what he should say.

Tho commanded the King openly that each of them should be still, and suffer the Fox to say unberisped⁵¹ what that he would. Then said the Fox, “Be ye now all still, sith it is the King’s will, and I shall tell you openly this treason. And therein will I spare no man that I know guilty.”

⁵¹ Unberisped, untroubled, unexcited (Dutch, rispen).

How the Fox brought then in danger that would have brought him to death, and how he got the grace of the King

Now hearken how the Fox began. In the beginning he appealed Grymbart his dear Cousin, which ever had helped him in his need. He did so because his words should be the better believed; and that he forthon might the better lie on his enemies. Thus began he first and said:

“My lord, my father had found King Ermeryk’s treasure dolven in a pit; and when he had this great good, he was so proud and orguillous that he had all other beasts in despite which tofore had been his fellows. He made Tybert the Cat to go into that wild land of Ardenne to Bruin the Bear for to do him homage, and bad him say, if he would be King that he should come in to Flanders. Bruin the Bear was glad hereof, for he had long desired it, and went forth in to Flanders; where my father received him right friendly. Anon he sent for the wise Grymbart, mine nephew, and for Isegrim the Wolf, and for Tybert the Cat. Tho these five came between Gaunt and the thorp called Yfte, there they held their council an whole dark night long. What with the devil’s help and craft, and for my father’s riches, they concluded and swore there the King’s death. Now hearken, and hear this wonder. The four swore upon Isegrim’s crown that they should make Bruin a king and a lord, and bring him in the stool at Akon,⁵² and set the crown on his head; and if there were any of the King’s friends or lineage that would be contrary or against this, him should my father with his good and treasure fordrive, and take from him his might and power.

“It happed so that on a morrowtide early when Grymbart, my nephew, was of wine almost drunk, that he told it to Dame Sloepcade, his wife, in counsel, and bade her keep it secret. But she anon forgat it, and said it forth in confession to my wife upon an heath where they both wenten a pilgrimage, but she must first swear, by her truth and by the holy Three Kings of Cologne, that for love ne for hate she should never tell it forth, but keep it secret. But she held it not, and kept it no longer secret but till she came to me; and she then told to me all that she heard, but I must keep it in secret. And she told me so many tokens that I felt well it was truth; and for dread and fear mine hair stood right up, and my heart became as heavy as lead and as cold as ice. I thought by this a likeness which here aforetime befell to the frosshis⁵³ which were free and complained that they had none lord ne were not bydwongen,⁵⁴ for a comynte⁵⁵ without a governor was not good, and they cried to God with a loud voice that he would ordain one that might rule them, this was all that they desired. God heard their request, for it was reasonable, and sent to them a Stork which ate and swallowed them in, as many as he could find; he was alway to them unmerciful. Tho complained they their hurt, but then it was too late; they that were tofore free and

⁵² Akon, Aachen, Aix-la-Chapelle.

⁵³ Frosshis, frogs

⁵⁴ Bydwongen, held in restraint (Dutch, bedwingen; German, bezwingen).

⁵⁵ Comynte, community.

were afraid of nobody ben now bound and must obey to strength their king: herefor, ye rich and poor, I sorrowed, that it might happen us in likewise.

“Thus, my lord the King, I have had sorrow for you whereof ye can me but little thank. I know Bruin the Bear for such a shrew and ravener, wherefore I thought if he were king we should be all destroyed and lost. I know our sovereign lord the King of so high birth, so mighty, so benign and merciful, that I thought truly it had been an evil change for to have a foul stinking thief and to refuse a noble mighty stately Lion; for the Bear hath more mad folly in his unthrifty head, and all his ancestors, than any other hath. Thus had I in mine heart many a sorrow, and thought alway how I might break and foredo my father’s false counsel, which of a churl and a traitor and worse than a thief would make a lord and a king. Alway I prayed God that he would keep our King in worship and good health, and grant him long life, but I thought well if my father held his treasure he should with his false fellows well find the way that the King should be deposed and set aside. I was sore bethought how I might best wit⁵⁶ where my father’s good lay. I awaited at all times as nigh as I could, in woods, in bushes, in fields; where my father laid his eyen; were it by night or by day, cold or wet, I was alway by him to espy and know where his treasure was laid.

“On a time I lay down all plat on the ground and saw my father come running out of an hole. Now hark what I saw him do. When he came out of the hole, he looked fast about if anybody had seen him. And when he could nowhere none see, he stopped the hole with sand and made it even and plain like to the other ground by. He knew not that I saw it. And where his footspore stood, there stryked he with his tail, and made it smooth with his mouth, that no man should espy it. That learned I there of my false father, and many subtleties that I tofore knew nothing of. Then departed he thence and ran to the village ward for to do his things; and I forgot not, but sprang and leapt to the hole ward, and how well that he had supposed that he had made all fast I was not so much a fool but that I found the hole well, and scratched and scraped with my feet the sand out of the hole, and crept therein. There found I the most plenty of silver and of gold that ever I saw. Here is none so old that ever so much saw on one heap in all his life. Tho took I Ermelyne my wife to help, and we ne rested night ne day to bear and carry away, with great labour and pain, this rich treasure in to another place that lay for us better, under an hawe in a deep hole. In the mean while that mine housewife and I thus laboured, my father was with them that would betray the King. Now may ye hear what they did.

Bruin the Bear and Isegrim the Wolf sent all the land about if any man would take wages that they should come to Bruin and he would pay them their souldye or wages tofore. My father ran all over the land and bare the letters. He wist little that he was robbed of his treasure; yea though he might have wonnen all the world, he had not conne find a penny thereof.

“When my father had been over all in the land between the Elbe and the Somme, and had gotten many a soldier that should the next summer have comen to help Bruin, tho came he again to the Bear and his fellows, and told them in how great a venture he had be tofore the boroughs in the land of Saxon, and how the hunters daily ridden and hunted with hounds after him in such wise that he unnethes escaped with his life. When he had told this to these four false traitors, then showed he them letters that pleased much. To Bruin therein were written twelve hundred of Isegrim’s lineage by name, without the bears, the foxes, the cats, and the dassen, all these had

⁵⁶ Wit, know

sworn that with the first messenger that should come for them they should be ready, and come for to help the Bear if they had their wages a month tofore. This aspied I, I thank God. After these words my father went to the hole where his treasure had lain, and would look upon it. Tho began he a great sorrow; that he sought he found nothing. He found his hole broken, and his treasure borne away. There did he that I may well sorrow and bewail, for great anger and sorrow he went and hung himself. Thus abode the treason of Bruin by my subtilty after. Now see mine infortune. These traitors Isegrim and Bruin ben now most privy of counsel about the King, and sit by him on the high bench. And I, poor Reynart, have ne thanks ne reward. I have buried mine own father, because the King should have his life. My lord," said the Fox, "where ben they that would so do, that is, to destroy them self for to keep you."

The King and the Queen hoped to win the treasure and without council took to them Reynart and prayed him that he would do so well as to tell them where this treasure was.

Reynart said, "How should I tell the King, or them that would hang me for love of the traitors and murderers which by their flattery would fain bring me to death? Should I tell to them where my good is, then were I out of my wit."

The Queen then spake, "Nay, Reynart, the King shall let you have your life, and shall altogether forgive you, and ye shall be from henceforth wise and true to my lord."

The Fox answered to the Queen, "Dear lady, if the King will believe me, and that he will pardon and forgive me all my old trespasses, there was never King so rich as I shall make him. For the treasure that I shall do him have is right costly and may not be numbered."

The King said, "Ach Dame, will ye believe the Fox? Save your reverence, he is born to rob, steal, and to lie. This cleaves to his bones, and can not be had out of the flesh."

The Queen said, "Nay, my lord, ye may now well believe him. Though he were tofore fell, he is now changed otherwise than he was. Ye have well heard that he hath impeached his father and the Dasse his nephew, which he might well have laid on other beasts if he would have been false, fell, and a liar."

The King said, "Dame, will ye then have it so, and think ye it best to be don, though I supposed it should hurt me I will take all these trespasses of Reynart upon me and believe his words. But I swear by my crown, if he ever hereafter misdo and trespass, that shall he dear aby and all his lineage unto the ninth degree."

The Fox looked on the King stoundmele,⁵⁷ and was glad in his heart, and said, "My lord, I were not wise if I should say things that were not true."

The King took up a straw from the ground, and pardoned and forgave the Fox all the misdeeds and trespasses of his father and of him also.

If the Fox was tho merry and glad, it was no wonder; for he was quit of his death and was all free and frank of all his enemies.

The Fox said, "My Lord the king and noble Lady the Queen, God reward you this great worship that ye do to me. I shall think and also thank you for it in such wise that ye shall be the richest king of the world; for there is none living under the sun that I vouchsafe better my treasure on, than on you both."

⁵⁷ Stoundmele, for a space of time.

Then took the Fox up a straw and proffered it to the King, and said, “My most dear Lord, please it you to receive here the rich treasure which King Ermeryk had. For I give it unto you with a free will, and knowledge it openly.”

The King received the straw, and threw it merely from him with a joyous visage, and thanked much the Fox.

The Fox laughed in himself.

The King then hearkened after the counsel of the Fox. And all that there were were at his will.

“My Lord,” said he, “hearken and mark well my words. In the west side of Flanders there standeth a wood and is named Hulsterlo, and a water that is called Krekenpyt lieth thereby. This is so great a wilderness, that oft in a whole year man nor wife cometh therein, save they that will, and they that will not eschew it. There lieth this treasure hidden. Understand well that the place is called Krekenpyt, for I advise you, for the least hurt, that ye and my Lady go both thither; for I know none so true that I durst on your behalf trust; wherefore go yourself. And when ye come to Krekenpyt ye shall find there two birch trees standing althernext⁵⁸ the pit. My Lord, to tho birch trees shall ye go: there lieth the treasure untherdolven.⁵⁹ There must ye scrape and dig away a little the moss on the one side. There shall ye find many a jewel of gold and silver, and there shall ye find the crown which king Ermeryk wore in his days. That should Bruin the Bear have worn, if his will had gone forth. Ye shall see many a costly jewel, with rich stones set in gold work, which cost many a thousand mark. My Lord the King, when ye now have all this good, how oft shall ye say in your heart and think, ‘Oh how true art thou, Reynart the Fox, that with thy subtle wit delvest and hidest this great treasure! God give thee good hap and welfare wherever thou be!’ ”

The King said, “Sir Reynart, ye must come and help us to dig up this treasure. I know not the way. I should never conne find it. I have heard often named Paris, London, Aachen, and Cologne; as me thinketh this treasure lieth right as ye mocked and japed, for ye name Krekenpyt. That is a feigned name.”

These words were not good to the Fox, and he said with an angry mood, and dissembled and said, “Yea, my Lord the King, ye be also nigh that as from Rome to Maye. Ween ye that I will lead you to flume⁶⁰ Jordan. Nay, I shall bring you out of weening and show it you by good witness.”

He called loud, “Cuwart the Hare, come here tofore the King.” The beasts saw all thitherward and wondered what the King would.

The Fox said to the Hare, “Cuwart, are ye acold; how tremble ye and quake so? Be not afraid; and tell my Lord the King here the truth, and that I charge you, by the faith and truth that ye owe him and to my Lady the Queen, of such thing as I shall demand of you.”

Cuwart said, “I shall say the truth, though I should lose my neck therefor. I shall not lie, ye have charged me so sore, if I know it.”

“Then say, know ye not where Krekenpyt standeth? Is that in your mind?”

⁵⁸ Althernext, next of all.

⁵⁹ Untherdolven, dug under

⁶⁰ Flume, river

The Hare said, "I knew that well twelve year ago, where that standeth. Why ask ye that? It standeth in a wood named Hulsterlo, upon a warande⁶¹ in the wilderness. I have suffered there much sorrow for hunger and for cold, yea, more than I can tell. Pater Symonet the Friese was woned⁶² to make there false money, wherewith he bare himself out and all his fellowship but that was tofore ere I had fellowship with Ryn the Hound, which made me escape many a danger; as he could well tell if he were here, and that I never in my days trespassed against the King otherwise than I ought to do with right."

Reynart said to him, "Go again to yonder fellowship. Hear ye, Cuwart? My Lord the King desireth no more to know of you."

The Hare returned and went again to the place he came from.

The Fox said, "My Lord the King, is it true that I said?"

"Yea, Reynart," said the King, "forgive it me; I did evil that I believed you not. Now, Reynart, friend, find the way that ye go with us to the place and pit where the treasure lieth."

The Fox said, "It is a wonder thing. Ween ye that I would not fain go with you; if it were so with me that I might go with you in such wise that it no shame were unto your lordship, I would go. But nay, it may not be. Hearken what I shall say, and must needs, though it be to me villainy and shame. When Isegrim the Wolf, in the devil's name, went into religion and became a monk shorn in the order, tho the provender of six monks was not sufficient to him, and had not enough to eat, he then plained and wailed so sore that I had pity on him, for he became slow and sick. And because he was of my kin, I gave him counsel to run away, and so he did. Wherefore I stand accursed, and am in the Pope's ban and sentence. I will to-morrow betimes, as the sun riseth, take my way to Rome for to be assoiled⁶³ and take pardon. And from Rome I will over the sea into the Holy Land, and will never return again till I have done so much good that I may with worship go with you. It were great reproof to you, my Lord the King, in what land that I accompanied you that men should say ye reysed⁶⁴ and accompanied yourself with a cursed and person agravate."

The King said, "Sith that ye stand accursed in the censures of the Church, if I went with you men should arette villainy unto my crown. I shall then take Cuwart or some other to go with me to Krekenpyt; and I counsel you, Reynart, that ye put you yourself out of this curse."

"My Lord," quoth the Fox, "therefore will I go to Rome as hastily as I may. I shall not rest by night nor day till I be assoiled."

"Reynart," said the King, "me thinketh ye ben turned into a good way. God give you grace to accomplish well your desire."

As soon as this speaking was done, Noble the King went and stood upon an high stage of stone and commanded silence to all the beasts, and that they should sit down in a ring round upon the grass, everiche in his place after his estate and birth. Reynart the Fox stood by the Queen, whom he ought well to love.

⁶¹ Warande, warren, a place privileged by a franchise from the King for keeping or hunting certain animals, to the exclusion of all persons entering without permission

⁶² Woned, accustomed

⁶³ Assoiled, absolved.

⁶⁴ Reysed, travelled (reisen)

Then said the King, "Hear ye all that be poor and rich, young and old, that standeth here. Reynart, one of the head officers of my house, had done so evil, which this day should have been hanged, hath now in this Court done so much, that I and my wife the Queen have promised to him our grace and friendship. The Queen hath prayed much for him, insomuch that I have made peace with him. And I give to him his life and member freely again, and I command you upon your life that ye do worship to Reynart and his wife, and to his children, wheresomever ye meet them by day or night. And I will also hear no more complaints of Reynart. If he hath heretofore misdome and trespassed, he will no more misdo ne trespass, but now better him. He will to-morrow early go to the Pope for pardon and forgiveness of all his sins, and forth over the sea to the Holy Land, and he will not come again till he bring pardon of all his sins."

This tale heard Tyselyn the Raven and leapt to Isegrim to Bruin and to Tybert, there as they were, and said, "Ye caitifs, how goeth it now? Ye unhappy folk, what do ye here? Reynart the Fox is now a squire and a courtier, and right great and mighty in the Court. The King hath skylled him quite of all his brokes,⁶⁵ and forgiven him all his trespasses and misdeeds. And ye be all betrayed and appeached."

Isegrim said, "How may this be? I trow Tyselyn that ye lie."

"I do not, certainly," said the Raven.

Tho went the Wolf and the Bear to the King. Tybert the Cat was in great sorrow, and he was so sore afraid that for to have the Fox's friendship he would well forgive Reynart the loss of his one eye that he lost in the priest's house, he was so woe he wist not what to do, he would well that he never had seen the Fox.

⁶⁵ Skylled him quite of all his brokes, judged him acquitted of all his dealings

How the Wolf and the Bear were arrested by the labour of Reynart the Fox

ISEGRIM came proudly over the field tofore the King, and he thanked the Queen, and spake with a fell mood ill words on the Fox, in suchwise that the King heard it and was wroth, and made the Wolf and the Bear anon to be arrested. Ye saw never wood⁶⁶ dogs do more harm than was done to them. They were both fast bounden, so sore that all that night they might not stir hand ne foot. They might scarcely roar ne move any joint. Now hear how the Fox forth did. He hated them. He laboured so to the Queen that he got leave for to have as much of the Bear's skin upon his rigge⁶⁷ as a foot long and a foot broad, for to make him thereof a scrip; then was the Fox ready if he had four strong shoon. Now hear how he did for to get these shoon.

He said to the Queen, "Madam, I am your pilgrim. Here is mine Eme, Sir Isegrim, that hath four strong shoon which were good for me. If he would let me have two of them I would on the way busily think on your soul, for it is right that a pilgrim should always think and pray for them that do him good. Thus may ye do your soul good if ye will. And also if ye might get of mine aunt Dame Ersewynde also two of her shoon to give me, she may well do it, for she goeth but little out, but abideth alway at home."

Then said the Queen, "Reynart, you behoveth well such shoes; ye may not be without them. They shall be good for you to keep your feet whole for to pass with them many a sharp mountain and stony rocks. Ye can find no better shoes for you than such as Isegrim and his wife have and wear. They be good and strong. Though it should touch their life, each of them shall give you two shoes for to accomplish with your high pilgrimage."

⁶⁶ Wood, mad

⁶⁷ Rigge, back

How Isegrim and his we Ersewynde must suffer their shoes to be plucked off, and how Reynart did on the shoes for to go to Rome with

THUS hath this false pilgrim gotten from Isegrim two shoes from his feet, which were hauled off the claws to the sinews. Ye saw never fowl that men roasted lay so still as Isegrim did when his shoes were hauled off. He stirred not, and yet his feet bled. Then when Isegrim was unshod tho must Dame Ersewynde his wife lie down in the grass with an heavy cheer. And she lost there her hinder shoes.

Tho was the Fox glad, and said to his Aunt in scorn, “My dear Aunt, how much sorrow have ye suffered for my sake, which me sore repenteth, save this, hereof I am glad for ye be the liefest⁶⁸ of all my kin. Therefore I will gladly wear your shoes. Ye shall be partner of my pilgrimage and deal of the pardon that I shall with your shoes fetch over the sea.”

Dame Ersewynde was so woe that she unnethe might speak. Nevertheless this she said, “Ah, Reynart, that ye now all thus have your will, I pray God to wreak⁶⁹ it!”

Isegrim and his fellow the Bear held their peace and were all still. They were evil at ease for they were bound and sore wounded. Had Tybert the Cat have been there, he should also somewhat have suffered, in such wise as he should not have escaped thence without hurt or shame.

The next day, when the sun arose, Reynart then did grease his shoes which he had of Isegrim and Ersewynde his wife, and did them on, and bound them to his feet, and went to the King and to the Queen and said to them with a glad cheer, “Noble Lord and Lady, God give you good morrow, and I desire of your grace that I may have male⁷⁰ and staff blessed as belongeth to a pilgrim.”

Then the King anon sent for Bellyn the Ram, and when he came he said, “Sir Bellyn, ye shall do mass tofore Reynart, for he shall go on pilgrimage; and give to him male and staff.”

The Ram answered again and said, “My Lord, I dare not do that, for he hath said that he is in the Pope’s curse.”

The King said what thereof master Gelys hath said to us, if a man had don as many sins as all the world and he would tho sins forsake, shrive him and receive penance, and do by the priest’s counsel, God will forgive them and be merciful unto him. Now will Reynart go over the sea into the Holy Land, and make him clear of all his sins.

⁶⁸ Liefest, best loved

⁶⁹ Wreak, avenge

⁷⁰ Male, bag, scrip.

Then answered Bellyn to the King, "I will not do little ne much herein but if ye save me harmless in the spiritual court, before the bishop Prendelor and tofore his archdeacon Looswinde and tofore Sir Rapiamus his official."

The King began to wax wroth, and said, "I shall not bid you so much in half a year! I had liever hang you than I should so much pray you for it!"

When the Ram saw that the King was angry, he was so sore afraid that he quoke for fear, and went to the altar and sang in his books and read such as him thought good over Reynart, which little set thereby save that he would have the worship thereof.

When Bellyn the Ram had all said his service devoutly, then he hung on the fox's neck a male covered with the skin of Bruin the Bear and a little psalter thereby. Tho was Reynart ready toward his journey. Tho looked he toward the King, as he had been sorrowful to depart; and feigned as he had wept, right as he had yamerde⁷¹ in his heart; but if he had any sorrow it was because all the other that were there were not in the same plight as the Wolf and Bear were brought in by him. Nevertheless he stood and prayed them all to pray for him, like as he would pray for them. The Fox thought that he tarried long and would fain have departed, for he knew himself guilty.

The King said, "Reynart, I am sorry ye be so hasty, and will no longer tarry."

"Nay, my Lord, it is time, for we ought not spare to do well, I pray you to give me leave to depart: I must do my pilgrimage."

The King said, "God be with you," and commanded all them of the court to go and convey Reynart on his way, save the Wolf and the Bear which fast lay bounden. There was none that durst be sorry therefor, and if ye had seen Reynart how personably he went with his male and psalter on his shoulder, and the shoes on his feet, ye should have laughed. He went and showed him outward wisely, but he laughed in his heart that all they brought him forth which had a little tofore been with him so wroth. And also the King which so much hated him, he had made him such a fool that he brought him to his owne intent. He was a pilgrim of deuce ace.

"My Lord the King," said the Fox, "I pray you to return again, I will not that ye go any further with me. Ye might have harm thereby. Ye have there two murderers arrested. If they escape you, ye might be hurt by them. I pray God keep you from misadventure!" With these words he stood up on his afterfeet, and prayed all the beasts, great and small, that would be partners of his pardon, that they should pray for him.

They said that they all would remember him.

Then departed he from the King so heavily that many of them ermed.⁷²

Then said he to Cuwart the Hare and to Bellyn the Ram merrily, "Here, friends, shall we now depart? Yea, with a good will accompany me further. Ye two made me never angry. Ye be good for to walk with, courteous, friendly, and not complained on of any beast Ye be of good conditions and ghostly of your living; ye live both as I did when I was a recluse. If ye have leaves and grass ye be pleased, ye reck not of bread of flesh ne such manner meat."

⁷¹ Yamerde, grief (jammer).

⁷² Ermed, grieved.

With such flattering words hath Reynart these two flattered that they went with him till they came tofore his house Maleperduys.

How Cuwart the Hare was slain by the Fox

WHEN the Fox was come tofore the gate of his house, he said to Bellyn the Ram, "Cousin, ye shall abide here without, I and Cuwart will go in, for I will pray Cuwart to help me to take my leave of Ermelyne my wife, and to comfort her and my children."

Bellyn said, "I pray him to comfort them well."

With such flattering words brought he the Hare into his hole in an evil hour. There found they Dame Ermelyne lying on the ground with her younglings, which had sorrowed much for dread of Reynart's death. But when she saw him come, she was glad. But when she saw his male and psalter, and espied his shoes, she marvelled and said, "Dear Reynart, how have ye sped?"

He said "I was arrested in the court, but the King let me gon. I must go a pilgrimage. Bruin the Bear and Isegrim the Wolf they be pledge for me. I thank the King he hath given to us Cuwart here, for to do with him what we will. The King said himself that Cuwart was the first that on us complained, and by the faith that I owe you I am right wroth on Cuwart."

When Cuwart heard these words he was sore afraid. He would have fled but he might not, for the Fox stood between him and the gate, and he caught him by the neck. Tho cried the Hare, "Help, Bellyn, help! Where be ye? This pilgrim slayeth me?" But that cry was soon done, for the Fox had anon bitten his throat a two.

Tho said he, "Let us go eat this good fat hare." The young whelps came also. Thus held they a great feast, for Cuwart had a good fat body. Ermelyne ate the flesh and drank the blood; she thanked oft the King that he had made them so merry. The Fox said, "Eat as much as ye may, he will pay for it if we will fetch it."

She said, "Reynart, I trow ye mock. Tell me the truth how ye be departed thence."

"Dame, I have so flattered the king and the queen that I suppose the friendship between us shall be right thin. When he shall know of this he shall be angry, and hastily seek me for to hang me by mine neck. Therefore let us depart, and steal secretly away in some other forest where we may live without fear and dread, and there that we may live seven year and more an they find us not. There is plenty of good meat of partridges, woodcocks, and much other wild fowl, Dame, and if ye will come with me thither there ben sweet wells and fair and clear running brooks; Lord God, how sweet air is there. There may we be in peace and ease, and live in great wealth. For the King hath let me gon because I told him that there was great treasure in Krekenpyt, but there shall he find nothing though he sought ever. This shall sore anger him when he knoweth that he is thus deceived. What! trow ye how many a great leasing must I lie ere I could escape from him. It was hard that I escaped out of prison; I was never in greater peril ne nearer my death. But how it ever go I shall by my will never more come in the King's danger. I have now gotten my thumb out of his mouth, that thank I my subtilty."

Dame Ermelyne said, "Reynart, I counsel that we go not into another forest where we should be strange and elenge. We have here all that we desire. And ye be here lord of

our neighbours; wherefore shall we leave this place and adventure us in a worse? We may abide here sure enough. If the King would do us any harm or besiege us, here ben so many by or side holes, in such wise as we shall escape from him; in abiding here we may not do amiss. We know all bypaths over all, and ere he take us with might he must have much help thereto. But that ye have sworn that ye shall go oversea and abide there, that is the thing that toucheth me most.”

“Nay, Dame, care not therefor. How more forsworn, how more forlorn. I went once with a good man that said to me that a bedwongen⁷³ oath, or oath sworn by force, was none oath. Though I went on this pilgrimage it should not avail me a cat’s tail. I will abide here and follow your counsel. If the King hunt after me, I shall keep me as well as I may. If he be me too mighty, yet I hope with subtlety to beguile him. I shall unbind my sack. If he will seek harm he shall find harm.”

Now was Bellyn the Ram angry that Cuwart his fellow was so long in the hole, and called loud, “Come out, Cuwart, in the devil’s name; how long shall Reynart keep you there? Haste you, and come! Let us go.”

When Reynart heard this, he went out and said softly to Bellyn the Ram, “Lief Bellyn, wherefore be ye angry? Cuwart speaketh with his dear Aunt. Methinketh ye ought not to be displeased therefor. He bade me say to you ye might well go tofore, and he shall come after; he is lighter of foot than ye. He must tarry awhile with his Aunt and her children, they weep and cry because I shall go from them.”

Bellyn said, “What did Cuwart? Methought he cried after help.”

The Fox answered, “What say ye, Bellyn? Ween ye that he should have any harm? Now hark what he then did. When we were comen into mine house, and Ermelyne my wife understood that I should go over sea, she fell down in a swoon; and when Cuwart saw that, he cried loud, ‘Bellyn, come help mine Aunt to bring her out of her swoon.’”

Then said the Ram, “In faith I understood that Cuwart had been in great danger.”

The Fox said, “Nay truly, or Cuwart should have any harm in my house I had liever that my wife and children should suffer much hurt.”

⁷³ Bedwongen, enforced.

How the Fox sent the head of Cuwart the Hare to the King by Bellyn the Ram

THE Fox said, "Bellyn, remember ye not that yesterday the King and his council commanded me that ere I should depart out of this land I should send to him two letters? Dear cousin, I pray you to bear them, they be ready written."

The Ram said, "I wot never. If I wist that your inditing and writing were good, ye might peradventure so much pray me that I would bear them, if I had anything to bear them in."

Reynart said, "Ye shall not fail to have somewhat to bear them in. Rather than they should be unborne I shall rather give you my male that I bear; and put the King's letters therein, and hang them about your neck. Ye shall have of the King great thanks therefor, and be right welcomen to him."

Hereupon Bellyn promised him to bear these letters.

Tho returned Reynart into his house and took the male and put therein Cuwart's head, and brought it to Bellyn for to bring him in danger, and hang it on his neck, and charged him not to look in the male if he would have the King's friendship. "And if ye will that the King take you into his grace and love you, say that ye yourself have made the letter and indited it, and have given the counsel that it is so well made and written. Ye shall have great thanks therefor."

Bellyn the Ram was glad hereof, and thought he should have great thanks, and said, "Reynart, I wot well that ye now do for me. I shall be in the Court greatly praised when it is known that I can indite and make a letter, though I cannot make it. Ofttimes it happeneth that God suffereth some to have worship and thank of the labours and cunning of other men, and so it shall befall me now. Now, what counsel ye, Reynart? Shall Cuwart the Hare come with me to the Court?"

"Nay," said the Fox, "he shall anon follow you. He may not yet come, for he must speak with his Aunt. Now go ye forth tofore. I shall show to Cuwart secret things which ben not yet known."

Bellyn said, "Farewell, Reynart," and went him forth to the Court. And he ran and hasted so fast, that he came tofore midday to the Court, and found the King in his palace with his Barons. The King marvelled when he saw him bring the male again which was made of the Bear's skin. The King said, "Say on, Bellyn, from whence come ye? Where is the Fox? How is it that he hath not the male with him?"

Bellyn said, "My Lord, I shall say you all that I know. I accompanied Reynart unto his house. And when he was ready, he asked me if I that would for your sake bear two letters to you. I said, for to do you pleasure and worship, I would gladly bear to you seven. Tho brought he to me this male wherein the letters be, which ben indited by my cunning, and I gave counsel of the making of them. I trow ye saw never letters better ne craftlier made ne indited."

The King commanded anon Bokart, his secretary, to read the letters, for he understood all manner languages. Tybert the Cat and he took the male off Bellyn's neck, and Bellyn hath so far said and confessed that he therefore was dampned.⁷⁴

The clerk Bokwart undid the male, and drew out Cuwart's head, and said, "Alas, what letters ben these! Certainly, my Lord, this is Cuwart's head."

"Alas," said the King, "that ever I believed so the Fox!" There might men see great heaviness of the King and of the Queen. The King was so angry that he held long down his head, and at last, after many thoughts, he made a great cry, that all the beasts were afraid of the noise.

Tho spake Sir Firapeel the Leopard, which was sybbe⁷⁵ somewhat to the King, and said, "Sire King, how make ye such a noise! Ye make sorrow enough though the Queen were dead. Let this sorrow go, and make good cheer. It is great shame. Be ye not a Lord and King of this land? Is it not all under you, that here is?"

The King said, "Sir Firapeel, how should I suffer this? One false shrew and deceiver has betrayed me and brought me so far, that I have forwrought⁷⁶ and angered my friends the stout Bruin the Bear and Isegrim the Wolf, which sore me repenteth. And this goeth against my worship, that I have done amiss against my best Barons, and that I trusted and believed so much the false Fox. And my wife is cause thereof. She prayed me so much that I heard her prayer, and that me repenteth, though it be too late."

"What though, Sir King," said the Leopard. "If there be any thing misdome it shall be amended. We shall give to Bruin the Bear to Isegrim the Wolf and to Ersewynde his wife for the piece of his skin and for their shoes, for to have good peace, Bellyn the Ram. For he hath confessed himself that he gave counsel and consented to Cuwart's death. It is reason that he abyte it. And we all shall go fetch Reynart, and we shall arrest him and hang him by the neck, without law or judgment. And there with all shall be content."

⁷⁴ Dampned, condemned

⁷⁵ Sybbe, related by blood.

⁷⁶ Forwrought, overwrought

How Bellyn the Ram and all his lineage were given in the hands of Isegrim and Bruin, and how he was slain

THE King said, "I will do it gladly."

Firapeel the Leopard went thó to the prison and unbound them first, and then he said, "Ye, sirs, I bring to you a fast pardon and my lord's love and friendship. It repenteth him, and is sorry, that he ever hath done spoken or trespassed against you, and therefore ye shall have a good appointment. And also amends he shall give to you, Bellyn the Ram and all his lineage fro now forthon to doomsday, in such wise that wheresomever ye find them, in field or in wood, that ye may freely bite and eat them without any forfeit. And also the King granteth to you that ye may hunt and do the worst ye can to Reynart and all his lineage without misdoing. This fair great privilege will the King grant to you ever to hold of him. And the King will that ye swear to him never to misdo, but do him homage and fealty. I counsel you to do this, for ye may do it honourably."

Thus was the peace made by Firapeel the Leopard, friendly and well. And that cost Bellyn the Ram his tabart⁷⁷ and also his life, and the Wolf's lineage hold these privileges of the King. And in to this day they devour and eat Bellyn's lineage where that they may find them. This debate was begun in an evil time, for the peace could never sith⁷⁸ be made between them.

The King did forth with his Court and feast length twelve days longer for love of the Bear and the Wolf, so glad was he of the making of this peace.

⁷⁷ Tabart, coat. The sleeveless coat of a labourer

⁷⁸ Sith, after

How the King held his feast, and how Lapreel the Cony complained unto the King upon Reynart the Fox

TO this great feast came all manner of beasts, for the King did do cry this feast over all in that land. There was the most joy and mirth that ever was seen among beasts. There was danced mannerly the hovedance,⁷⁹ with shalms, trumpets, and all manner of minstrelsy. The King did do ordain so much meat that everych found enough. And there was no beast in all his land so great ne so little but he was there, and there were many fowls and birds also, and all they that desired the King's friendship were there, saving Reynart the Fox, the red false pilgrim which lay in await to do harm and thought it was not good for him to be there. Meat and drink flowed there. There were plays and esbatemens. The feast was full of melody. One might have lust to see such a feast.

And right as the feast had dured eight days, about mid-day came in the Cony Lapreel tofore the King, where he sat on the table with the Queen, and said all heavily that all they heard him that were there, "My lord, have pity on my complaint, which is of great force and murder that Reynart the Fox would have done to me yester morrow as I came running by his borugh at Maleperduys. He stood before his door without, like a pilgrim. I supposed to have passed by him peaceably toward this feast, and when he saw me come he came against me saying his beads. I saluted him, but he spake not one word, but he raught out his right foot and dubbed me in the neck between mine ears that I had weened I should have lost my head, but God be thanked I was so light that I sprang from him. With much pain came I off his claws. He grimmed as he had been angry by cause he held me no faster. Tho I escaped from him I lost mine one ear, and I had four great holes in my head of his sharp nails that the blood sprang out and that I was nigh all aswoon, but for the great fear of my life I sprang and ran so fast from him that he could not overtake me. See, my Lord these great wounds that he hath made to me with his sharp long nails. I pray you to have pity of me, and that ye will punish this false traitor and murderer, or else shall there no man go and come over the heath in safety whiles he haunteth his false and shrewd rule."

⁷⁹ Hovedance, court (hof) dance

How Corbant the Rook complained on the fox for the death of his wife

RIGHT as the Cony had made an end of his complaint, came in Corbant the Rook flown in the place tofore the King and said, “Dear Lord, hear me. I bring you here a piteous complaint. I went to-day by the morrow⁸⁰ with Sharpebek my wife for to play upon the heath. And there lay Reynart the Fox down on the ground, like a dead caitiff. His eyes stared and his tongue hung long out of his mouth, like an hound had been dead. We tasted⁸¹ and felt his belly but we found thereon no life. Tho went my wife and hearkened, and laid her ear tofore his mouth for to wit if he drew his breath, which misfell her evil: For the false fell Fox awaited well his time, and when he saw her so nigh him he caught her by the head and bit it off. The was I in great sorrow and cried loud, ‘Alas! alas! what is there happened?’ Then stood he hastily up and raught so covetously after me that for fear of death I trembled, and flew upon a tree thereby, and saw from far how the false caitiff ate and slonked⁸² her in, so hungrily that he left neither flesh ne bone, no more but a few feathers. The small feathers he slang them in with the flesh; he was so hungry, he would well have eaten twain. Tho went he his strete. Tho flew I down with great sorrow, and gathered up the feathers for to show them to you here. I would not be again in such peril and fear as I was there for a thousand mark of the finest gold that ever came of Araby. My Lord the King, see here this piteous work. This ben the feathers of Sharpebek my wife! My Lord, if ye will have worship ye must do herefor justice, and avenge you in such wise as men may fear and hold of you, for if ye suffer thus your safe conduct to be broken, ye yourself shall not go peaceably in the highway. For the lords that do not justice, and suffer that the law be not executed upon the thieves, murderers, and them that misdo, they be partners tofore God of all their misdeeds and trespasses, and eueryche then will be a lord himself. Dear Lord see well to, for to keep yourself.”

⁸⁰ Morrow, morning

⁸¹ Tasted, touched

⁸² Slonked, swallowed (schlingen)

How the King was sore angry of these complaints

NOBLE the King was sore moved and angry when he had heard these complaints of the Cony and of the Rook. He was so frightful to look on that his eyes glimmered as fire; he brayed as loud as a bull, in such wise that all the Court quoke for fear; at the last he said, crying, "By my crown, and by the truth that I owe to my wife, I shall so awreak and avenge these trespasses that it shall be long spoken of after. That my safe conduct and my commandment is thus broken, I was over nice that I believed so lightly the false shrew. His false flattering speech deceived me. He told me he would go to Rome, and from thence over the sea to the Holy Land. I gave him male and psalter, and made of him a pilgrim, and meant all truth. Oh, what false touches can he! How can he stuff the sleeve with flocks! But this caused my wife. It was all by her counsel. I am not the first that have been deceived by women's counsel, by which many a great hurt hath befallen. I pray and command all them that hold of me, and desire my friendship, be they here or wheresomever they be, that they with their counsel and deeds help me to avenge this over great trespass, that we and ours may abide in honour and worship and this false thief in shame. That he no more trespass against our safeguard, I will myself in my person help thereto all that I may."

Isegrim the Wolf and Bruin the Bear heard well the King's words, and hoped well to be avenged on Reynart the Fox, but they durst not speak one word. The King was so sore moved that none durst well speak.

At last the Queen spake, "Sire, *pour dieu no croyes mye toutes choses que on vous dye, et ne lures pas legierment*. A man of worship should not lightly believe, ne swear greatly, unto the time he knew the matter clearly; and also he ought by right hear that other party speak. There ben many that complain on other and ben in the default themselves. *Audi alteram partem*: hear that other party. I have truly holden the Fox for good, and upon that that he meant no falsehood I helped him that I might. But howsomever it cometh or goeth, is he evil or good, me thinketh for your worship that ye should not proceed against him over hastily. That were not good ne honest, for he may not escape from you. Ye may prison him or flay him, he must obey your judgment."

Then said Firapeel the Leopard, "My Lord, me thinketh my Lady here hath said to you truth and given you good counsel; do ye well and follow her, and take advice of your wise council. And if he be founden guilty in the trespasses that now to you be showed, let him be sore punished according to his trespasses. And if he come not hither ere this feast be ended, and excuse him as he ought of right to do, then do as the council shall advise you. But and if he were twice as much false and ill as he is, I would not counsel that he should be done to more than right."

Isegrim the Wolf said, "Sir Firapeel, all we agree to the same; as far as it pleaseth my lord the King, it cannot be better. But though Reynart were now here, and he cleared him of double so many plights, yet should I bring forth against him that he had forfeited his life. But I will now be still and say not, because he is not present. And yet, above all this, he hath told the King of certain treasure lying in Krekenpyt in Hulsterlo. There was never lied a greater leasing; therewith he hath us all beguiled,

and hath sore hindered me and the Bear. I dare lay my life thereon that he said not thereof a true word. Now robbeth he and stealeth upon the heath all that goeth forth by his house. Nevertheless, Sir Firapeel, what that pleaseth the King and you that must well be done. But and if he would have comen hither he might have been here, for he had knowledge by the King's messenger.”

The King said, “We will none otherwise send for him, but I command all them that owe me service and will my honour and worship that they make them ready to the war at the end of six days, all them that ben archers and have bows, guns, bombards, horsemen and footmen, that all these be ready to besiege Maleperduys. I shall destroy Reynart the Fox if I be a king. Ye lords and sirs, what say ye hereto? Will ye do this with a good will?”

And they said and cried all, “Yea we, Lord, when that ye will, we shall all go with you!”

How Grymbart the Dasse warned the Fox that the King was wroth with him and would slay him

ALL these words heard Grymbart the Dasse, which was his brother son. He was sorry and angry. If it might have profited he ran then the highway to Maleperduys ward. He spared neither bush ne hawe, but he hasted so sore that he sweat. He sorrowed in himself for Reynart his rede Eme, and as he went he said to himself, "Alas, in what danger be ye comen in! Where shall ye become! Shall I see you brought from life to death, or else exiled out of the land! Truly I may be well sorrowful, for ye be head of all our lineage; ye be wise of council, ye be ready to help your friends when they have need, ye can so well show your reasons that where ye speak ye win all."

With such manner wailing and piteous words came Grymbart to Maleperduys, and found Reynart his Eme there standing, which had gotten two pigeons as they came first out of their nest to assay if they could fly, and because the feathers on their wings were too short they fell down to the ground; and as Reynart was gone out to seek his meat he espied them and caught them, and was comen home with them.

And when he saw Grymbart coming, he tarried and said, "Welcome, my best beloved Nephew that I know in all my kindred. Ye have run fast, ye ben all besweat; have ye any new tidings?"

"Alas," said he, "lief Eme, it standeth evil with you. Ye have lost both life and good. The King hath sworn that he shall give you a shameful death. He hath commanded all his folk within six days for to be here. Archers, footmen, horsemen, and people in wains! And he hath guns, bombards, tents, and pavilions. And also he hath do laden torches. See tofore you, for ye have need. Isegrim and Bruin ben better now with the King than I am with you. All that they will is done. Isegrim hath don him to understand that ye be a thief and a murderer; he hath great envy to you. Lapreel the Cony, and Corbant the Rook have made a great complaint also. I sorrow much for your life, that for dread I am all sick."

"Puf!" said the Fox. "Dear Nephew, is there nothing else? Be ye so sore afraid hereof? Make good cheer hardily. Though the King himself and all that ben in the Court hath sworn my death, yet shall I be exalted above them all. They may all fast jangle, clatter, and give counsel, but the Court may not prosper without me and my wiles and subtlety."

How Reynart the Fox came another time to the Court

“DEAR Nephew, let all these things pass, and come here in and see what I shall give you; a good pair of fat pigeons. I love no meat better. They ben good to digest. They may almost be swolowen in all whole; the bones ben half blood; I eat them with that other. I feel myself other while encumbered in my stomach, therefore eat I gladly light meat. My wife Ermelyne shall receive us friendly, but tell her nothing of this thing for she should take it over heavily. She is tender of heart; she might for fear fall in some sickness; a little thing goeth sore to her heart. And to-morrow early I will go with you to the Court, and if I may come to speech and may be heard, I shall so answer that I shall touch some nigh ynowh. Nephew, will not ye stand by me as a friend ought to do to another?”

“Yes truly, dear Eme,” said Grymbart, “and all my good is at your commandment.”

“God thank you, Nephew,” said the Fox. “That is well said: If I may live, I shall quite it you.”

“Eme,” said Grymbart, “ye may well come tofore all the lords and excuse you. There shall none arrest you ne hold as long as ye be in your words. The Queen and the Leopard have gotten that.”

Then said the Fox, “Therefor I am glad; then I care not for the best of them an hair; I shall well save myself.”

They spoke no more hereof, but went forth into the burrow, and found Ermelyne there sitting by her younglings, which arose up anon and received them friendly. Grymbart saluted his aunt and the children with friendly words. The two pigeons were made ready for their supper, which Reynart had taken. Each of them took his part, as far as it would stretch; if each of them had had one more there should but little have left over. The Fox said, “Lief Nephew, how like ye my children Rossel and Reynerdine? They shall do worship to all our lineage. They begin already to do well. That one catcheth well a chicken, and that other a pullet. They conne well also duck in the water after lapwings and ducks. I would oft send them for provender, but I will first teach them how they shall keep them from the grynnes, from the hunters, and from the hounds. If they were so far comen that they were wise, I durst well trust to them that they should well victual us in many good divers meats that we now lack. And they like and follow me well, for they play all grimming, and where they hate they look friendly and merrily; for thereby they bring them under their feet, and bite the throat asunder. This is the nature of the Fox. They be swift in their taking, which pleaseth me well.”

“Eme,” said Grymbart, “ye may be glad that ye have such wise children. And I am glad of them also because they be of my kin.”

“Grymbart,” said the Fox, “ye have sweat and be weary. It were high tide that ye were at your rest.”

"Eme, if it pleaseth you, it thinketh me good." Tho lay they down on a litter made of straw. The Fox his wife and his children went all to sleep, but the Fox was all heavy and lay, sighed, and sorrowed⁸³ how he might best excuse himself.

On the morrow early he roomed⁸⁴ his castle and went with Grymbart. But he took leave first of Dame Ermelyne his wife and of his children, and said, "Think not long. I must go to the Court with Grymbart, my cousin. If I tarry somewhat, be not afraid; and if ye hear any ill tidings, take it alway for the best. And see well to yourself and keep our castle well. I shall do yonder the best I can, after that I see how it goeth."

"Alas, Reynart," said she, "how have ye now thus taken upon you for to go to the Court again? The last time that ye were there, ye were in great jeopardy of your life. And ye said ye would never come there more."

"Dame," said the Fox, "the adventure of the world is wonderly; it goeth otherwhile by weening. Many one weeneth to have a thing which he must forego. I must needs now go thither. Be content. It is all without dread. I hope to come at altherlengest within five days again."

Herewith he departed; and went with Grymbart to the Court ward. And when they were upon the heath, then said Reynart, "Nephew, sith I was last shriven I have done many shrewd turns. I would ye would hear me now of all that I have trespassed in: I made the Bear to have a great wound for the male which was cut out of his skin; and also I made the Wolf and his wife to lose their shoon; I peased⁸⁵ the King with great leasings, and bare him on hand that the Wolf and the Bear would have betrayed him and would have slain him, so I made the King right wroth with them where they deserved it not; also I told to the King that there was great treasure in Hulsterlo of which he was never the better ne richer, for I lied all that I said; I led Bellyn the Ram and Cuwart the Hare with me, and slew Cuwart and sent to the King by Bellyn Cuwart's head in scorn; and I dowed⁸⁶ the Cony between the ears that almost I benamme⁸⁷ his life from him, for he escaped against my will, he was to me overswift; the Rook may well complain for I swallowed in Dame Sharpebek his wife. And also I have forgotten one thing, the last time that I was shriven to you, which I have sith bethought me; and it was of great deceit that I did; which I now will tell you.

"I came with the Wolf walking between Houthulst and Elverdyng. There saw we go a red mare, and she had a black colt or a foal of four months old which was good and fat. Isegrim was almost storven for hunger, and prayed me go to the Mare and wit of her if she would sell her foal.

"I ran fast to the Mare and asked that of her. She said she would sell it for money.

"I demanded of her, how she would sell it.

"She said, 'It is written on my hinder foot. If ye can read and be a clerk ye may come see and read it.'

"Tho wist I well where she would be, and I said, 'Nay, for sooth, I cannot read. And also I desire not to buy your child. Isegrim hath sent me hither, and would fain know the price thereof.'

⁸³ Sorrowed, took careful thought

⁸⁴ Roomed, vacated

⁸⁵ Peased, pacified, appeased

⁸⁶ Dowed, struck

⁸⁷ Benamme, took away

“The Mare said, ‘Let him come then himself, and I shall let him have knowledge.’

“I said, ‘I shall;’ and hastily went to Isegrim, and said, ‘Eme will you eat your bellyful of this colt, so go fast to the Mare for she tarrieth after you. She hath do write the price of her colt under her foot. She would that I should have read it, but I can not one letter, which me sore repenteth for I went never to school. Eme will ye buy that colt? Can ye read, so may ye buy it.’

“ ‘Oh, Nephew, that can I well. What should me let? I can well French, Latin, English, and Dutch. I have gone to school at Oxenford, I have also with old and ancient doctors been in the audience and heard pleas, and also have given sentence, I am licensed in both laws; what manner writing that any man can devise I can read it as perfectly as my name: I will go to her, and shall anon understand the price,’ and he bade me to tarry for him, and he ran to the Mare, and asked her how she would sell her foal or keep it. She said, ‘The sum of the money standeth written after on my foot.’ He said, ‘Let me read it.’ She said, ‘Do,’ and lifte up her foot, which was new shod with iron and six strong nails; and she smote him, without missing, on his head, that he fell down as he had been dead. A man should well have ridden a mile ere he arose. The Mare trotted away with her colt, and she left Isegrim lying shrewdly hurt and wounded. He lay and bled, and howled as an hound. I went tho to him and said, ‘Sir Isegrim, dear Eme, how is it now with you? Have you eaten yenowh of the colt? Is your belly full? Why give ye me no part? I did your errand. Have slept ye your dinner? I pray you tell me, what was written under the mare’s foot? What was it, prose or rhyme, metre or verse? I would fain know it. I trow it was *cantum*, for I heard you sing, me thought, from fear; for ye were so wise that no man could read it better than ye.’

“ ‘Alas, Reynart, alas!’ said the Wolf, ‘I pray you to leave your mocking. I am so foul arrayed and sore hurt than an heart of stone might have pity on me. The Mare with her long leg had an iron foot, I weened the nails thereof had been letters, and she hit me at the first stroke six great wounds in my head that almost it is cloven. Such manner letters shall I never more desire to read.’ ‘Dear Eme, is that truth that ye tell me? I have great mervaylle. I held you for one of the wisest clerks that now live. Now I hear well it is true that I long since have read and heard, that the best clerks ben not the wisest men. The lay people otherwhile wax wise. The cause that these clerks ben not the wisest is that they study so much in the cunning and science that they therein doole.’ Thus brought I Isegrim in this great laste and harm, that he vnneth byhelde his life.

“Lief Nephew now have I told you all my sins that I remember. Whatsoever falle at the Court—I wote never how it shall stand with me there—I am not now so sore afraid, for I am clear from sin. I will gladly come to mercy and receive penance by your counsel.”

Grymbart said, “The trespasses ben great. Nevertheless who that is dead must abide dead, and therefore I will forgive it you altogether, with the fear that ye shall suffer therefor ere ye shall conne excuse you of the death, and hereupon I will assoil you. But the most hinder that ye shall have shall be, that ye sent Cuwart’s head to the Court, and that ye blinded the King with sutthe⁸⁸ lies. Eme, that was right evil done.”

The Fox said, “What, lief nephew! Who that will go through the world this to hear and that to see and that other to tell, trully it may not clearly be done. How should

⁸⁸ Sutthe, flattering.

any man handle honey but if he licked his fingers? I am oftentimes rored and pricked in my conscience as to love God above all thing and mine even Crysten as myself, as is to God well acceptable and according to his law. But how ween ye that reason within forth fighteth against the outward will, then stand I all still in myself, that me thinketh I have lost all my wits, and wote not what me aileth, I am then in such a thought I have now all left my sins, and hate all thing that is not good, and climb in high contemplation abone his commandments. But this special grace have I when I am alone; but in a short while after, when the world cometh in me, then find I in my way so many stones, and the foot spores⁸⁹ that these loose prelates and rich priests go in, that I am anon taken again. Then cometh the world and will have this; and the flesh will live pleasantly; which lay tofore me so many things that I then lose all my good thoughts and purpose. I hear there sing, pipe, laugh, play, and all mirth, and I hear that these prelates and rich curates preach and say all otherwise than they think and do. There learn I to lie, the leasings ben most used in the lord's courts; certainly lords, ladies, priests, and clerks, maken most leasings. Men dare not tell to the lords now the truth. There is default. I must flatter and lie also or else I should be shut without the door. I have often heard men say truth and rightfully, and have their reason made with a leasing like to their purpose, who brought it in and went through because their matter should seem the fairer. The leasing oftentimes cometh unavised, and falleth in the matter unwittingly, and so, when she is well clad, it goeth forth through with that other.

“Dear Nephew thus must men now lie nere and there, say sooth, flatter and menace, pray and curse, and seek every man upon his feeblest and weakest. Who otherwise will now haunt and use the world than devise a leasing in the fairest wise, and that bewimple with kerchiefs about in such wise that men take it for a truth, he is not run away from his master. Can he that subtilty in such wise that he stammer not in his words, and may then be heard, Nephew, this man may do wonder. He may wear scarlet and grise.⁹⁰ He winneth in the spiritual law and temporal also, and wheresomever he hath to do. Now ben there many false shrews that have great envy that they have so great fardel,⁹¹ and ween that they can also well lie; and take on them to lie and to tell it forth. He would fain eat of the fat morsels. But he is not believed ne heard. And many ben there that be so plump and foolish that when they ween best to pronounce and show their matter and conclude, they fall beside and out thereof, and cannot then help themselves, and leave their matter without tail or head; and he is acompted for a fool; and many mock them therewith. But who can give to his leasing a conclusion, and pronounce it without tatelying, like as it were written tofore him, and that he can so blind the people that his leasing shall better be believed than the truth: that is the man. What cunning is it to say the truth that is good to do? How laugh these false subtle shrews that give counsel, to make these leasings and set them forth, and maken unright go above right, and maken bills and set in things that never were thought ne said, and teach men see through their fingers; and all for to win money and let their tongues to hire for to maintain and strengthen their leasings. Alas, Nephew, this is an evil cunning, of which life-scathe and hurt may come thereof.

⁸⁹ Spores, tracks.

⁹⁰ Grise, fur

⁹¹ Fardel, burden

“I say not but that otherwhile men must jape, bourd,⁹² and lie in small things; for whoso saith alway truth, he may not now go nowhere through the world. There ben many that play *Placebo*. Whoso alway saith truth, shall find many lettings in his way. Men may well lie when it is need, and after amend it by counsel. For all trespasses there is mercy. There is no man so wise, but he dooleth⁹³ other while.”

Grymbart said, “Well, dear Eme, what thing shall you let? Ye know all thing at the narrowest. Ye should bring me hastily in doting; your reasons passen my understanding. What need have ye to shrive you? Ye should yourself by right be the priest, and let me and other sheep come to you for to be shriven. Ye know the state of the world in such wise as no man may halt tofore you.”

With such manner talking they came walking in to the Court. The Fox sorrowed somewhat in his heart, nevertheless he bare it out and striked forth through all the folk till he came into the place where the King himself was.

And Grymbart was alway by the Fox and said, “Eme, be not afraid, and make good cheer! Who that is hardy, the adventure helpeth him.⁹⁴ Ofttimes one day is better than sometime a whole year.”

The Fox said, “Nephew, ye say truth. God thank you, ye comfort me well.”

And forth he went, and looked grimly here and there, as who saith, “What will ye? here come I.” He saw there many of his kin standing which yonned⁹⁵ him but little good, as the Otter, Beaver, and other to the number of ten whom I shall name afterward. And some were there that loved him.

The Fox came in and fell down on his knees tofore the King, and began his words and said:—

⁹² Bourd, jest

⁹³ Dooleth, errs (Dutch, doolen)

⁹⁴ Fortune favours the bold.

⁹⁵ Yonned, conceded. First English unnan, to grant

How Reynart the Fox excused him before the King

“GOD from whom nothing may be hid, and above all thing is mighty, save my Lord the King and my Lady the Queen and give him grace to know who hath right and who hath wrong. For there live many in the world that seem otherwise outward than they be within, I would that God showed openly every man’s misdeeds, and all their trespasses stoden written in their foreheads, and it cost me more than I now say; and that ye, my Lord the King, knew as much as I do how I dispose me both early and late in your service. And therefore am I complained on of the evil shrews, and with leasings am put out of your grace and conceit, and would charge me with great offences, without deserving, against all right. Wherefore I cry out harowe on them that so falsely have belied me, and brought me in such trouble. Howbeit, I hope and know you both my Lord and my Lady for so wise and discreet, that ye be not led nor believe such leasings ne false tales out of the right way, for ye have not be woned so to do. Therefore, dear Lord, I beseech you to consider by your wisdom all things by right and law. Is it in deed or in speech, do every man right. I desire no better. He that is guilty and found faulty, let him be punished. Men shall well know ere I depart out of this Court who that I am. I cannot flatter, I will always show openly my head.”

How the King answered upon Reynart's excuse.

ALL they that were in the palace weren all still and wondered that the Fox spake so stoutly.

The King said, “Ha, Reynart, how well can ye your fallacy and salutation doon! But your fair words may not help you. I think well that ye shall, this day, for your works be hanged by your neck. I will not much chide with you, but I shall short your pain. That ye love us well, that have ye well showed on the Cony and on Corbant the Rook. Your falseness and your false inventions shall without long tarrying make you to die. A pot may go so long to water, that at the last it cometh tobroken home. I think your pot, that so oft hath deceived us, shall now hastily be broken.”

Reynart was in great fear of these words. He would well he had ben at Cologne when he came thither. Then thought he I must here through, how that I do.

“My Lord the King,” said he, “it were well reason that ye heard my words all out. Though I were dampned to the death, yet ought ye to hear my words out. I have yet heretofore time given to you many a good counsel and profitable, and in need always have biden by you where other beasts have wyked⁹⁶ and gone their way. If now the evil beasts with false matters have tofore you with wrong belied me, and I might not come to mine excuse, ought I not then to plain? I have tofore this seen that I should be heard before another; yet might these things well change and come in their old state. Old good deeds ought to be remembered. I see here many of my lineage and friends standing, that seem they set now little by me, which nevertheless should sore dere⁹⁷ in their hearts, that ye, my Lord the King, should destroy me wrongfully. If ye so did, ye should destroy the truest servant that ye have in all your lands. What ween

⁹⁶ Wyked, flinched (Dutch, wyken; German, weichen)

⁹⁷ Dere, take hurt

ye, Sir King, had I knowen myself guilty in any feat or broke,⁹⁸ that I would have comen hither to the law among all mine enemies? Nay, sire, nay. Not for all the world of red gold. For I was free and at large. What need had I to do that? But, God be thanked, I know myself clear of all misdeeds, that I dare welcome openly in the light and to answer to all the complaints that any man can say on me. But when Grymbart brought me first these tidings, tho was I not well pleased but half from myself, that I leapt here and there as an unwise man, and had I not been in the censures of the Church I had without tarrying have comen, but I went dolyng⁹⁹ on the heath, and wist not what to do for sorrow. And then it happened that Mertyne, mine Eme, the Ape, met with me, which is wiser in clergy than some priest. He hath ben advocate for the Bishop of Cameryk nine year during. He saw me in this great sorrow and heaviness, and said to me, ‘Dear Cousin, me thinketh ye are not well with yourself, what aileth you? Who hath displeased you? Thing that toucheth charge ought to be given in knowledge to friends. A true friend is a great help; he findeth oft better counsel than he that the charge resteth on, for whosomever is charged with matters is so heavy and acombred with them that oft he can not begin to find the remedy, for such be so woe like as they had lost their inwytte.’¹⁰⁰ I said ‘Dear Eme, ye say truth, for in likewise is fallen to me. I am brought into a great heaviness, undeserved and not guilty, by one to whom I have alway been an hearty and great friend; that is the Cony which came to me yesterday in the morning whereas I sat tofore my house and said matins.’

“He told me he would go to the Court, and saluted me friendly, and I him again.

“Tho said he to me, ‘Good Reynart, I am an hungred and weary. Have ye any meat?’

“I said, ‘Yea, ynowh; come near.’

“Tho gave I him a couple of manchets¹⁰¹ with sweet butter. It was upon a Wednesday, on which day I am not wont to eat any flesh, and also I fasted because of this feast of Whitsuntide which approached. For who that will taste of the overest wisehede, and live ghostly in keeping the commandments of our Lord, he must fast and make him ready against the high feasts. *Et vos estote parati*. Dear Eme, I gave him fair white bread with sweet butter, wherewith a man might well be eased that were much hungry.

“And when he had eaten his bellyful, tho came Rossel, my youngest son, and would have taken away that was left. For young children would alway fain eten. And with that he tasted for to have taken somewhat, the Cony smote Rossel tofore his mouth that his teeth bled, and he fell down half aswoon. When Reynardyn, mine eldest son, saw that, he sprang to the Cony and caught him by the head, and should have slain him had I not rescued him. I helped him, that he went from him, and beat my child sore therefor.

“Lapreel the Cony ran to my Lord the King and said I would have murdered him. See, Eme, thus come I in the words and I am laid in the blame. And yet he complaineth, and I plain not.

“After this came Corban the Rook fleeing with a sorrowful noise. I asked what him ailed.

⁹⁸ Broke, usage.

⁹⁹ Dolyng, grieving

¹⁰⁰ Inwytte, inner consciousness

¹⁰¹ Manchets, small loaves of white bread.

“And he said, ‘Alas my wife is dead. Yonder lieth a dead hare full of moths and worms, and there she ate so much thereof that the worms have bitten atwo her throat.’

“I asked him how cometh that by. He would not speak a word more, but flew his way, and let me stand.

“Now saith he that I have bitten and slain her. How should I come so nigh her? For she fleeth and I go afoot. Behold, dear Eme, thus I am born on hand. I may say well that I am unhappy. But peradventure it is for mine old sins. It were good for me if I could patiently suffer it.

“The Ape said to me, ‘Nephew, ye shall go to the Court tofore the lords, and excuse you.’

“ ‘Alas, Eme, that may not be, for the Archdeacon hath put me in the Pope’s curse because I counselled Isegrim the Wolf for to leave his religion at Elmare and forsake his habit. He complained to me that he lived so straitly, as in long fasting, and many things reading and singing, that he could not endure it; if he should long abide there, he should die. I had pity of his complaining, and I holpe him as a true friend, that he came out. Which now me sore repenteth, for he laboureth all that he can against me to the King for to do me be hanged. Thus doth he evil for good. See, Eme, thus am I at the end of all my wits and of counsel. For I must go to Rome for an absolution, and then shall my wife and children suffer much harm and blame. For these evil beasts that hate me shall do to them all the hurt they may, and fordrive them where they can. And I would well defend them if I were free of the curse, for then I would go to the Court and excuse me, where now I dare not. I should do great sin if I came among the good people, I am afraid God should plague me.’

“ ‘Nay, cousin, be not afraid. Ere I should suffer you in this sorrow, I know the way to Rome well. I understand me on this work. I am called there Mertyne the bishop’s clerk, and am well beknownen there. I shall do cite the Archdeacon and take a plea against him, and shall bring with me for you an absolution against his will, for I know there all that is for to be done or left. There dwelleth Simon, mine Eme, which is great and mighty there. Who that may give aught, he helpeth him anon. There is Prentout, Wayte, Scathe, and other of my friends and allies. Also I shall take some money with me if I need any. The prayer is with gifts hardy;¹⁰² with money alway the right goeth forth. A true friend shall for his friend adventure both life and good, and so shall I for you in your right. Cousin, make good cheer! I shall not rest after tomorrow till I come to Rome, and I shall solicit your matters. And go ye to the Court as soon as ye may. All your misdeeds and the sins that have brought you in the great sentence and curse, I make you quit of them and take them in myself. When ye come to the Court ye shall find there Rukenawe my wife, her two sisters, and my three children, and many more of our lineage. Dear cousin, speak to them hardily. My wife is sondrely¹⁰³ wise, and will gladly do somewhat for her friends. Who that hath need of help shall find in her great friendship. One shall alway seek on his friends, though he hath angered them, for blood must creep where it cannot go. And if so be that ye be so overcharged that ye may have no right, then send to me by night and day to the Court of Rome, and let me have knowledge thereof, and all tho that ben in the land, is it King or Queen, wife or man, I shall bring them all in the Pope’s Curse and send there an interdict that no man shall read ne singen ne christen children, ne bury the

¹⁰² Hardy, bold

¹⁰³ Sondrely, peculiarly.

dead, ne receive sacrament, till that ye shall have good right. Cousin, this shall I well get, for the Pope is so sore old that he is but little set by, and the cardinal of Pure Gold hath all the might of the Court. He is young and great of friends, he hath a concubine whom he much loveth, and what she desireth that getteth she anon. See, Cousin, she is mine niece, and I am great and may do much with her, in such wise what I desire I fail not of it but am alway furthered therein. Wherefore, Cousin, bid my Lord the King that he do you right I wote well he will not warn¹⁰⁴ you, for the right is heavy enough to every man.'

"My Lord the King, when I heard this I laughed, and with great gladness came hither, and have told you all truth. If there be any in this Court that can lay on me any other matter with good witness, and prove it, as ought to be to a noble man, let me then make amends according to the law; and if ye will not leave off hereby, then set me day and field, and I shall make good on him all so ferre as he be of as good birth as I am and to me like, and who that can with fighting get the worship of the field, let him have it. This right hath standen yet hitherto, and I will not it should be broken by me. The law and right doth no man wrong."

All the beasts both poor and rich were all still when the Fox spake so stoutly. The Cony Lapreel and the Rook were so sore afraid that they durst not speak, but piked and striked them out of the Court both two, and when they were a room far in the plain they said, "God grant that this fell murderer may fare evil. He can bewrap and cover his falsehood, that his words seem as true as the gospel. Hereof knoweth no man than we: how should we bring witness. It is better that we wyke¹⁰⁵ and depart, than we should hold a field and fight with him; he is so shrewd, yea though there of us were five we could not defend us, but that he should slay us all."

Isegrim the Wolf and Bruin the Bear were woe in themself when they saw these twain room the court.

The King said, "If any man will complain, let him come forth, and we shall hear him: yesterday camen here so many, where ben they now Reynart is here?"

The Fox said, "My Lord, there ben many that complain that and if they saw their adversary they would be still and make no plaint; witness now of Lapreel the Cony and Corbant the Rook, which have complained on me to you in my absence, but now that I am comen in your presence they flee away, and dare not abide by their words. If men should believe false shrews it should do much harm and hurt to the good men, as for me it skilleth not. Nevertheless, my lord, if they had by your commandment asked of me forgiveness, how be it they have greatly trespassed, yet I had for your sake pardoned and forgive them; for I will not be out of charity, ne hate ne complain on mine enemies. But I set all thing in God's hand, he shall work and avenge it as it pleaseth him."

The King said, "Reynart, me thinketh ye be grieved as ye say. Are ye withinforth as ye seem outward? Nay, it is not so clear ne so open, nowhere nigh, as ye here have showed. I must say what my grief is, which toucheth your worship and life, that is to wit that you have done a foul and shameful trespass when I had pardoned you all your offences and trespasses, and ye promised to go over the sea on pilgrimage, and gave to you male and staff. And after this ye sent me by Bellyn the Ram the male again and therein Cuwart's Head. How might ye do a more reprovabable trespass? How

¹⁰⁴ Warn, refuse

¹⁰⁵ Wyke, flinch, yield.

were ye so hardy to dare to me do such a shame? Is it not evil done to send to a lord his servant's head? Ye cannot say nay hereagainst, for Bellyn the Ram, which was our chaplain, told us all the matter how it happed? Such reward as he had when he brought us the message, the same shall ye have, or right shall fail."

Tho was Reynart so sore afraid that he wist not what to say. He was at his wit's end, and looked about him piteously, and saw many of his kin and allies that heard all this, but nought they said. He was all pale in his visage, but no man proffered him hand ne foot to help him.

The King said, "Thou subtle fellow and false shrew, why speakest thou not? Now dumb?"

The Fox stood in great dread, and sighed sore that all heard him. But the Wolf and the Bear were glad thereof.

How Dame Rukenawe answered for the Fox to the King

DAME Rukenawe the She Ape, Reynart's Aunt, was not well pleased. She was great with the Queen and well beloved. It happened well for the Fox that she was there, for she understood all wisdom, and she durst well speak, where as it to do was. Wherever she came everich was glad of her.

She said, "My Lord the King, ye ought not to be angry when ye sit in judgment, for that becometh not your nobleness. A man that sitteth in judgment ought to put from him all wrath and anger. A lord ought to have discretion that should sit in justice. I know better the points of the law than some that wear furred gowns, for I have learned many of them and was made cunning in the law. I had in the Pope's palace of Woerden a good bed of hay, where other beasts lay on the hard ground, and also when I had there to do I was suffered to speak, and was heard tofore another because I knew so well the law. Seneca writeth that a lord shall overall do right and law, he shall charge none to whom he hath given his safeguard to above the right and law; the law ought not to halt for no man. And every man that standeth here would well bethink him what he hath done and bedriven¹⁰⁶ in his days, he should the better have patience and pity on Reynart. Let every man know him self, that is my counsel. There is none that standeth so surely but otherwhile he falleth or slideth. Who that never misdide ne sinned is holy and good, and hath no need to amend him. When a man doth amiss and then by counsel amendeth it, that is humanly and so ought he to do; but alway to misdo and trespass and not to amend him, that is evil and a devily life. Mark then what is written in the gospel, *Estote misericordes*, be ye merciful; yet standeth there more, *Nolite fudicare et non fudicahimini*, deem ye no man and ye shall not be deemed. There standeth also how the pharisees brought a woman taken in adultery and would have stoned her to death. They asked Our Lord what he said thereto; he said, 'Who of you all is without sin let him cast the first stone.' Tho abode no man but left her there standing. Me thinketh it is so here. There be many that see a straw in another's eye that can not see a balke in his own. There be many that deem other, and himself is worst of all. Though one fall oft, and at last ariseth up and cometh to mercy, he is not thereof damned. God receiveth all them that desire his mercy. Let no man condemn another though they wist that he had done amiss; yet let them see their own defaults, and then may they themself correct first, and then Reynart my Cousin should not fare the worse. For his father and his grandfather have alway been in more love and reputation in this Court than Isegrim the Wolf or Bruin the Bear with all their friends and lineage. It hath been heretofore an unlike comparison, the wisdom of Reynart my Cousin, and the honour and worship of him, that he hath done, and the counsel of them; for they know not how the world goeth. Me thinketh this Court is all turned upside down. These false shrews, flatterers, and deceivers, arise and wax great by the lordes, and ben enhanced up; and the good, true, and wise ben put down, for they have been wont to counsel truly and for the honour of the King. I can not see how this may stand long."

¹⁰⁶ Bedriven, experienced (Dutch, bedreven).

Then said the King, "Dame, if he had done to you such trespass as he hath done to other it should repent you. Is it wonder that I hate him? He breaketh away my safeguard. Have ye not heard the complaints that here have been showed of him, of murder, of theft, and of treason? Have ye such trust in him? Think ye that he is thus good and clear? then set him up on the altar, and worship and pray to him as to a saint. But there is none in all the world that can say any good of him; ye may say much for him, but in the end ye shall find him all nought. He hath neither kin ne one friend that will enterprise to help him. He hath so deserved. I have great marvel of you. I heard never of none that hath fellowshipped with him that ever thanked him or said any good of him, save you now, but alway he hath striked them with his tail."

Then the She Ape answered and said, "My lord, I love him and have him in great charity. And also I know a good deed that he once in your presence did, whereof ye could him great thank. Though now it be thus turned, yet shall the heaviest weigh most. A man shall love his friend by measure, and not his enemy hate overmuch. Steadfastness and constancy is fitting and behoveth to the lords, how soever the world turneth. Me ought not to praise too much the day, till even be come. Good counsel is good for him that will do thereafter."

A parable of a Man that delivered a Serpent from peril of death

“NOW two year past came a Man and a Serpent here into this Court for to have judgment, which was to you and yours right doubtful. The Serpent stood in an hedge whereas he supposed to have gone through, but he was caught in a snare by the neck that he might not escape without help, but should have lost his life there. The Man came forth by, and the Serpent called to him and cried, and prayed the Man that he would help him out of the snare, or else he must there die.

“The Man had pity of him, and said, ‘If thou promise to me that thou wilt not envenom me, ne do me none harm ne hurt, I shall help thee out of this peril.’

“The Serpent was ready, and swore a great oath that he now ne never should do him harm ne hurt.

“Then he unloosed him and delivered him out of the snare. And they went forth together a good while that the Serpent had great hunger, for he had not eaten a great while tofore, and sterte to the Man and would have slain him. The Man sterte away and was afraid, and said, ‘Wilt thou now slay me? hast thou forgotten the oath that thou madest to me that thou shouldest not misdo ne hurt me?’

“The Serpent answered, ‘I may do it good tofore all the world that I do. The need of hunger may cause a man to break his oath.’

“The Man said, ‘If it may be not better, give me so long respite till we meet and find that may judge the matter by right.’

“The Serpent granted thereto. Thus they went together so long that they found Tyseln the Raven and Slyndpere his son; there rehearsed they their reasons.

“Tyseln the Raven judged anon that he should eat the Man. He would fain have eaten his part, and his son also.

“The Serpent said to the Man, ‘How is it now? What think ye? Have I not won?’

“The Man said, ‘How should a robber judge this? He should have avail thereby. And also he is alone: there must be two or three at least together, and that they understand the right and law, and that done let the sentence gon; I am nevertheless ill on enough.’

“They agreed and went forth both together so long that they found the Bear and the Wolf, to whom they told their matter.

“And they anon judged that the Serpent should slay the Man. For the need of hunger breaketh oath alway. The Man then was in great doubt and fear, and the Serpent came and cast his venom at him; but the Man leapt away from him with great pain, and said, ‘Ye do great wrong that ye thus lie in await to slay me. Ye have no right thereto.’

“The Serpent said, ‘Is it not enough yet? It hath been twice judged.’

“‘Yea,’ said the Man, ‘that is of them that ben wont to murder and rob. All that ever they swear and promise they hold not. But I appeal this matter into the Court tofore

our Lord the King, and that thou mayst not forsake.¹⁰⁷ And what judgment that shall be given there, shall I obey and suffer, and never do the contrary.'

"The Bear and the Wolf said that it should be so, and that the Serpent desired no better. They supposed if it should come tofore you it should go there as they would. I trow ye be well remembered hereof. Tho came they all to the Court tofore you; and the Wolf's two children came with their father, which were called Empty Belly and Never Full, because they would eat of the Man; for they howled for great hunger. Wherefore ye commanded them to avoid your Court.

"The Man stood in great dread, and called upon your good grace, and told how the Serpent would have taken his life from him, to whom he had saved his life, and that, above his oath and promise, he would have devoured him.

"The Serpent answered, 'I have not trespassed, and that I report me wholly unto the King. For I did it to save my life, for need of life one may break his oath and promise.'

"My Lord that time were ye and all your Council herewith accombred. For your noble grace saw the great sorrow of the Man, and ye would not that a man should for his gentleness and kindness be judged to death. And on that other, sith hunger, and need to save the life, seeketh narrowly to be holpen, here was none in all the Court that could ne knew the right hereof. There were some that would fain the Man had be holpen. I see them here standing. I wot well they said that they could not end this matter.

"Then commanded ye that Reynart, my nephew, should come and say his advice in this matter. That time was he above all other believed and heard in this Court, and ye bade him give sentence according to the best right and we all shall follow him, for he knew the ground of the law.

"Reynart said, 'My Lord, it is not possible to give a true sentence after their words, for in hearsaying ben oft leasings. But and if I might see the Serpent in the same peril and need that he was in when the Man loosed him and unbound, then wist I well what I should say. And who that would do otherwise he should misdo against right.'

"Then said, ye, my Lord, 'Reynart, that is well said. We all accord hereto; for no man can say better.'

"Then went the Man and the Serpent into the place whereas he found the Serpent. Reynart bade that the Serpent should be set in the snare in likewise as he was. And it was done.

"Then said ye, my Lord, 'Reynart, how thinketh you now? What judgment shall we give?'

"Then said Reynart the Fox, 'My Lord, now ben they both like as they were tofore. They have neither won ne lost. See, my Lord, how I judge for a right, also ferre as it shall please your noble grace. If the Man will now loose and unbind the Serpent, upon the promise and oath that he tofore made to him, he may well do it. But if he think that he for anything should be encumbered or hindered by the Serpent, or for need of hunger would break his oath and promise, then judge I that the Man may go freely where he will, and let the Serpent abide still bounden, like as he might have done at the beginning: for he would have broken his oath and promise, whereas he

¹⁰⁷ Forsake, deny

help him out of such fearful peril. Thus thinketh me a rightful judgment that the Man shall have his free choice like as he tofore had.’

“Lo my Lord this judgment thought you good, and all your council which at that time were by you; and followed the same, and praised Reynart’s wisdom, that he had made the Man quit and free. Thus the Fox wisely kept your noble honour and worship, as a true servant is bound to do to his Lord. Where hath the Bear or the Wolf done ever to you so much worship? They conne well huylen and blasen, steal and rob, and eat fat morsels and fill their bellies, and then judge they for right and law that small thieves that steal hens and chickens should be hanged, but they themself that steal kine, oxen, and horses, they shall go quit and be lords. And same as though they were wiser than Solomon, Avicene, or Aristoteles; and each will be holden high proud, and praised of great deeds and hardy; but and they come where as it is to do, they ben the first that flee. Then must the simple go forth tofore, and they keep the reward behind. Och, my Lord, these and other like to them be not wise, but they destroy town, castle, land, and people. They reck not whose house burneth, so that they may warm them by the coals. They seek all their own avail and singular profit. But Reynart the Fox and all his friends and lineage sorowen¹⁰⁸ and think to prefer the honour, worship, fordeel,¹⁰⁹ and profit of their lord, and for wise counsel which oft more profiteth here than pride and boast. This doth Reynart, though he have no thank. At long it shall be well known who is best and doth most profit. My Lord, ye say that his kin and lineage draw all afterward from him, and stand not by him for his falsehood and deceivable and subtle touches. I would another had said that; there should then such wrake be taken thereof that him might growl that ever he saw him. But, my Lord, we will forbear you; ye may save your pleasure; and also I say it not by you. Were there any that would bedrive anything against you, with words or with werkes, him that would we so do to, that men should say we had been there. There as fighting is, we ben not wont to be afraid. My Lord, by your leave, I may well give you knowledge of Reynart’s friends and kin. There ben many of them that for his sake and love will adventure life and good. I know myself for one. I am a wife. I should, if he had need, set my life and good for him. Also I have three full waxen children which ben hardy and strong, whom I would all together adventure for his love, rather than I should see him destroyed; yet had I liever die than I saw them miscarry tofore mine eyes, so well love I them.

¹⁰⁸ Sorowen, take care

¹⁰⁹ Fordeel, advantage (Dutch, Voordeel; German, Vorthail).

Which hen friends and kin unto Reynart the Fox

“THE first child is named Bytelouse, which is much cherished and can make much sport and game, wherefore is given to him the fat trenchours and much other good meat, which cometh well to profit of Fulrompe his brother. And also my third child is a daughter, and is named Hatenit, she can well pick out lice and nits out of men’s heads. These three ben to each other true, wherefore I love them well.”

Dame Rukenawe called them forth and said, “Welcome, my dear children: to me forth, and stand by Reynart, your dear nephew.”

Then said she, “Come forth all ye that be of my kin and Reynart’s, and let us pray the King that he will do to Reynart right of the land.”

Tho came forth many a beast anon, as the Squirrel, the Muskrat, the Fitchews, the Marten, the Beaver with his wife Ordegale, the Genete,¹¹⁰ the Otter, the Boussyng, and the Ferret, these twain eat as fain polaylle as doth Reynart. The Otter and Pantecroet his wife, whom I had almost forgotten, yet were they tofore, with the Beaver, enemies to the Fox, but they durst not gainsay Dame Rukenawe, for they were afraid of her. She was also the wisest of all his kin of counsel and was most doubted.¹¹¹ There came also more than twenty other, because of her, for to stand by Reynart. There came also Dame Atrote with her two sisters, Weasel and Hermelin, the Ass, the Badger, the Water-rat, and many more to the number of forty, which all camen and stoden by Reynart the Fox.

“My Lord the King,” said Rukenawe, “come and see here if Reynart have any friends. Here may ye see we ben your true subjects, which for you would adventure both life and good if ye had need. Though ye be hardy, mighty, and strong, our well-willed friendship cannot hurt you. Let Reynart the Fox well bethink him upon these matters that ye have laid against him, and if he cannot excuse them, then do him right. We desire no better. And this by right ought to no man be warned.”¹¹²

The Queen then spake, “This said I to him yesterday. But he was so fierce and angry that he would not hear it.”

The Leopard said also, “Sire, ye may judge no further than your men give their verdict; for if ye would go forth by will and might, that were not worshipful for your estate. Hear always both parties, and then by the best and wisest counsel give judgment discreetly according to the best right.”

The King said, “This is all true, but I was so sore moved when I was informed of Cuwart’s death and saw his head, that I was hot and hasty. I shall hear the Fox Can he answer and excuse him of that is laid against him, I shall gladly let him go quit; and also at request of his good friends and kin.”

¹¹⁰ The genete is related to the civet cat.

¹¹¹ Doubted, feared.

¹¹² Warned, refused.

Reynart was glad of these words, and thought, God thank mine Aunt, she hath the
rys do blosme again.¹¹³ She hath well holpen me forth now. I have now a good foot to
dance on. I shall now look out of mine eyen, and, bring forth the fairest leasing that
ever man heard, and bring myself out of this danger.

¹¹³ She has made the twig blossom again

How the Fox with subtlety excused him for the death of Cuwart the Hare and of all other matters that were laid against him, and how with flattering he gat again his peace of the King

THEN spake Reynart the Fox and said, "Alas, what say ye! is Cuwart dead? And where is Bellyn the Ram? What brought he to you when he came again? For I delivered to him three jewels; I would fain know where they ben becomen. That one of them should he have given to you, my Lord the King, and the other-two to my Lady the Queen."

The King said, "Bellyn brought us nought else but Cuwart's head, like as I said you tofore; whereof I took on him wrake. I made him to lose his life, for the foul caitiff said to me that he himself was of the counsel of the letters making that were in the male."

"Alas, my lord, is this very truth? Woe to me caitiff that ever I was born! Sith that these good jewels be thus lost, mine heart will break for sorrow. I am sorry that I now live! What shall my wife say when she heareth hereof? She shall go out of her wit for sorrow. I shall never, all so long as I live, have her friendship. She shall make much sorrow when she heareth thereof."

The She Ape said, "Reynart, dear Nephew, what profiteth that ye make all this sorrow? Let it pass, and tell us what these jewels were. Peradventure we shall find counsel to have them again. If they be above earth Master Akeryn shall labour for them in his books, and also we shall curse for them in all the churches, unto the time that we have knowledge where they been. They may not be lost."

"Nay, Aunt, think not that, for they that have them will not lightly depart from them. There was never King that ever gave so rich jewels as these be. Nevertheless ye have somewhat with your words eased mine heart and made it lighter than it was. Alas, lo, here ye may see how he or they to whom a man trusteth most is often by him or them deceived. Though I should go all the world through, and my life in adventure set therefor, I shall wit where these jewels ben becomen."

With a dismalled and sorrowful speech, said the Fox: "Hearken ye all my kin and friends, I shall name to you these jewels what they were, and then may ye say that I have a great loss. That one of them was a ring of fine gold, and within the ring next the finger were written letters enamelled with sable and azure, and there were three Hebrew names therein. I could not myself read ne spell them, for I understand not that language; but Master Abrion of Trier he is a wise man, he under-standeth well all manner of languages and the virtue of all manner herbs, and there is no beast so fierce ne strong but he can dompte him, for if he see him once he shall do as he will, and yet he believeth not on God. He is a Jew, the wisest in conning, and specially he knoweth the virtue of stones. I showed him once this ring. He said that they were the three names that Seth brought out of Paradise when he brought to his father Adam

the Oyle of Mercy, and whosomever beareth on him these three names he shall never be hurt by thunder ne lightning, ne no witchcraft shall have power over him, ne be tempted to do sin. And also he shall never take harm by cold though he lay three winters long nights in the field, though it snowed, stormed, or frore, never so sore, so great might have these words, witness of Master Abrion. Without forth on the ring stood a stone of three manner colours; the one part was like red crystal, and shone like as fire had been therein, in such wise that if one would go by night him behoved none other light, for the shining of the stone made and gave as great a light as it had been midday; that other part of the stone was white and clear as it had been burnished, who so had in his eyen any smart or soreness, or in his body any swelling, or headache, or any sickness, withoutforth if he striked this stone on the place where the grief is he shall anon be whole; or if any man be sick in his body of venom, or ill meat in his stomach, of colic, strangulation, stone, fistel, or cancer, or any other sickness, save only the very death, let him lay this stone in a little water and let him drink it, and he shall forthwith be whole and all quit of his sickness. Alas,” said the Fox, “we have good cause to be sorry to lose such a jewel! Furthermore the third colour was green like glass, but there were some sprinkles therein like purple; the master told for truth, that who that bare this stone upon him should never be hurt of his enemy, and was no man, were he never so strong and hardy, that might misdo him; and wherever that he fought he should have victory, were it by night or by day, also ferre as he beheld it fasting; and also thereto, wheresomever he went and in what fellowship, he should be beloved, though he had hated him tofore, if he had the ring upon him they should forget their anger as soon as they saw him. Also though he were all naked in a field again an hundred armed men, he should be well hearted and escape from them with worship; but he must be a noble gentleman and have no churl’s conditions, for then the stone had no might. And because this stone was so precious and good, I thought in myself that I was not able ne worthy to bear it, and therefore I sent it to my dear Lord the King, for I know him for the most noble that now liveth, and also all our welfare and worship lieth on him, and for he should be kept from all dread, need, and ungheluck.¹¹⁴

“I found this ring in my father’s treasure, and in the same place I took a glass or a mirror and a comb which my wife would algates have. A man might wonder that saw these jewels. I sent these to my Lady the Queen, for I have founden her good and gracious to me. This Comb might not be too much praised. It was made of the bone of a clean noble beast named Panthera, which feedeth him between the great Inde and Earthly Paradise. He is so lusty fair and of colour, that there is no colour under the heaven but some likeness is in him; thereto he smelleth so sweet, that the savour of him boteth¹¹⁵ all sickness; and for his beauty and sweet smelling all other beasts follow him, for by his sweet savour they ben healed of all sickness. This Panthera hath a fair bone, broad and thin; when so is that this beast is slain all the sweet odour rested in the bone, which cannot be broken, ne shall never rot, ne be destroyed by fire, by water, ne by smiting, it is so hardy, tight and fast, and yet it is light of weight. The sweet odour of it hath great might; that who that smelleth it sette nought by none other lust in the world, and is eased and quit of all manner diseases and infirmities, and also he is jocund and glad in his heart. This Comb is polished as it were fine silver, and the teeth of it be small and strait, and between the greater teeth and the smaller is a large field and space where is carven many an image subtilly made and enamelled about with fine gold; the field is checked with sable and silver,

¹¹⁴ Ungheluck, misfortune (unglück)

¹¹⁵ Boteth, is boot for, remedies.

enamelled with cybore¹¹⁶ and azure, and therein is the history how Venus, Juno, and Pallas strove for the apple of gold which each of them would have had, which controversy was set upon Paris that he should give it to the fairest of them three.

“Paris was that time an herdman, and kept his father’s beasts and sheep without Troy. When he had received the apple, Juno promised to him if he would judge that she might have the apple, he should have the most riches of the world. Pallas said if she might have the apple she would give him wisdom and strength, and make him so great a lord that he should overcome all his enemies and whom he would. Venus said, ‘What needest thou riches or strength, art not thou Priamus’ son, and Hector is thy brother, which have all Asia under their power? Art not thou one of the possessors of great Troy? If thou wilt give to me the apple, I shall give thee the richest treasure of the world, and that shall be the fairest woman that ever had life on earth, ne never shall none be born fairer than she. Then shalt thou be richer than rich, and shalt climb above all other, for that is the treasure that no man can prize enough; for honest fair and good women can put away many a sorrow from the heart, they be shamefast and wise, and bring a man in very joy and bliss.’ Paris heard this Venus, which presented him this great joy and fair lady, and prayed her to name this fair lady that was so fair, and where she was. Venus said, ‘It is Helen, King Menelaus’ wife of Greece, there liveth not a nobler, richer, gentler, ne wiser wife in all the world.’ Then Paris gave to her the apple, and said that she was fairest. How that he gat afterward Helen by the help of Venus, and how he brought her in to Troy and wedded her, the great love and jolly life that they had together, was all carven in the field, everything by himself, and the story written.

“Now ye shall hear of the Mirror. The glass that stood thereon was of such virtue that men might see therein all that was done within a mile, of men of beasts and of all thing that me would¹¹⁷ desire to wit and know. And what man looked in the glass, had he only disease of pricking or motes, smart, or pearls in his eye, he should be anon healed of it, such great virtue had the glass. Is it then wonder if I be moved and angry for to lose such manner jewels? The tree in which this glass stood was light and fast and was named Cetyne.¹¹⁸ It should endure ever ere it would rot, or worms should hurt it, and therefore King Solomon ceiled his temple with the same wood withinforth. Men praised it dearer than fine gold; it is like to tree of hebenus, of which wood King Crompart made his horse of tree for love of King Morcadigas’ daughter that was so fair, whom he had weened for to have won. That horse was so made within, that whosoever rode on it, if he would, he should be within less than one hour an hundred miles thence; and that was well proved, for Cleomedes the king’s son would not believe that that horse of tree had such might and virtue. He was young, lusty, and hardy, and desired to do great deeds of praise for to be renowned in this world, and leapt on this horse of tree. Crompart turned a pin that stood on his breast, and anon the horse lift him up and went out of the hall by the window, and ere one might say his pater noster he was gone more than ten mile away. Cleomedes was sore afraid, and supposed never to have turned again, as the history¹¹⁹ thereof telleth more plainly. But how great dread he had, and how far that he rode upon that horse made of the tree of hebenus ere he could know the art and craft how he should turn him; and how joyful he was when he knew it; and how men

¹¹⁶ Cybore, “cyboire” was the decorated case that contained the consecrated elements of the host. From Greek κιβώριον.

¹¹⁷ Me would, one would. “Man” and “me” were our Teutonic forms for the French “on.”

¹¹⁸ Shittim wood.

¹¹⁹ The romance of Clyomon and Clamydes.

sorrowed for him; and how he knew all this, and the joy thereof when he came again, all this I pass over for losing of time; but the most part of all came to by the virtue of the wood, of which wood the tree that the glass stood in was made. And that was, without forth of the glass, half a foot broad, wherein stood some strange histories, which were of gold, of sable, of silver, of yellow, azure, and cynope, these six colours were therein wrought in such wise as it behoved; and under every history the words were graven and enamelled, that every man might understand what each history was. After my judgment there was never mirror so costly, so lustly, ne so pleasant. In the beginning stood there an Horse, made fat, strong, and sore envious upon an Hart which ran in the field so far and swiftly that the Horse was angry that he ran so far tofore him and could not overtake him. He thought he should catch him and subdue him, though he should suffer much pain therefor. The Horse spake tho to a Herdman in this wise, 'If thou couldst taken an Hart that I well can show thee, thou shouldst have great profit thereof; thou shouldst sell dear his horns, his skin, and his flesh.' The Herdman said, 'How may I come by him?' The Horse said, 'Sit upon me, and I shall bear thee, and we shall hunt him till he be take.' The Herdman sprang and sat upon the Horse, and saw the Hart; and he rode after; but the Hart was light of foot and swift, and outran the Horse far. They hunted so far after him that the Horse was weary, and said to the Herdman that sat on him, 'Now sit off, I will rest me, I am all weary, and give me leave to go from thee.' The Herdman said, 'I have arrested thee; thou mayst not escape from me; I have a bridle on thy head and spurs on my heels; thou shalt never have thank hereof; I shall bedwyng and subdue thee, hadst thou sworn the contrary.'

"See how the Horse brought himself in thralldom and was taken in his own net. How may one better be taken than by his own proper envy suffer himself to be taken and ridden. There ben many that labour to hurt other, and they themselven ben hurt and rewarded with the same.

"There was also made an Ass and an Hound which dwelled both with a rich man. The man loved his Hound well, for he played oft with him as folk do with Hounds. The Hound leapt up and played with his tail, and licked his master about the mouth. This saw Howdwin the Ass, and had great spite thereof in his heart, and said to himself, 'How may this be? and what may my lord see on his foul Hound, whom I never see doth good ne profit save springeth on him and kisseth him? But me, whom men putten to labour, to bear and draw and do more in a week than he with his fifteen should do in a whole year,—and yet sitteth he nevertheless by him at the table and there eateth bones, flesh, and fat trenchours,—and I have nothing but thistles and nettles, and lie on nights on the hard earth, and suffer many a scorn. I will no longer suffer this. I will think how I may get my lord's love and friendship, like as the Hound doth.' Therewith came the lord, and the Ass lift up his tail and sprang with his fore feet on the lord's shoulders and blared, grinned, and sang, and with his feet made two great boles about his ears, and put forth his mouth and would have kissed the lord's mouth as he had seen the Hound done. Tho cried the lord, sore afraid, 'Help! help! this Ass will slay me!' Then came his servants with staves and smiten and beat the Ass so sore that he had weened he should have lost his life. Tho returned he to his stable and ate thistle and nettles and was an Ass as he tofore was. In likewise whoso have enough and spite of another's welfare, and were served in likewise, it should be well behoveful. Therefore it is concluded that the Ass shall eat thistles and nettles and bear the sack. Though men would do him worship he cannot understand it, but must use old lewd manners. Whereas asses getten lordships, there men see seldom

good rule. For they take heed of nothing but on their singular profit; yet ben they take up and risen great, the more pity is.

“Hearken further how my father and Tybert the Cat went together, and had sworn by their truth that for love ne hate they should not depart. And what they gat they should depart to each the half. Then on a time they saw hunters coming over the field with many hounds. They leapt and ran fast from themward all that they might, as they that were afraid of their life.

“‘Tybert,’ said the Fox, ‘whither shall we now best flee? the hunters have espied us. Know ye any help?’ My father trusted on the promise that each made to other, and that he would for no need depart from him. ‘Tybert,’ said he, ‘I have a sackful of wiles if we have need; as far as we abide together we need not to doubt hunters ne hounds.’

“Tybert began to sigh and was sore afraid, and said, ‘Reynart, what availen many words? I know but one wile, and thither must I too.’

“And tho clamb he up on a high tree into the top under the leaves, whereas hunter ne hound might do him none harm, and left my father alone in jeopardy of his life, for the hunters set on him the hounds all that they could. Men blew the horns, and cried, and hallooed, ‘The Fox! Slee and take!’ When Tybert the Cat saw that, he mocked and scorned my father and said, ‘What, Reynart, cousin, unbind now your sack where all the wiles ben in! It is now time. Ye be so wise called; help yourself, for ye have need.’

“This much must my father hear of him to whom he had most his trust on, and was almost taken, and nigh his death. And he ran and fled with great fear of his life, and let his male slide off because he would be the lighter. Yet all that could not help him, for the hounds were too swift and should have bitten him; but he had one adventure that thereby he found an old hole, wherein he crept, and escaped thus the hunters and hounds.

“Thus held this false deceiver Tybert his sykernes that he had promised. Alas, how many ben there now a days that keep not their promise, and set not thereby though they break it! And though I hate Tybert herefor, is it wonder? But I do not. Sikerly, I love my soul too well thereto. Nevertheless, if I saw him in adventure and misfall in his body or in his goods, I trow it should not much go to my heart, so that another did it. Nevertheless, I shall neither hate him ne have envy at him. I shall, for God’s love, forgive him. Yet is it not so clear out of mine heart but a little ill-will to himward abideth therein as this cometh to my remembrance; and the cause is that the sensuality of my flesh fighteth against reason.

“Ther stood also in that Mirror, of the Wolf, how he found once upon a heath a dead horse flayen, but all the flesh was eaten. Then went he and bote great morsels of the bones, that for hunger he took three or four at once and swallowed them in, for he was so greedy that one of the bones stack thwart in his mouth. Whereof he had great pain, and was of great fear of his life. He sought all about for wise masters and surgeons, and promised great gifts for to be healed of his disease. At last, when he could nowhere find remedy, he came to the Crane with his long neck and bill, and prayed him to help him, and he would love and reward him so well that he should ever be the better. The Crane hearked after this great reward, and put his head into his throat, and brought out the bone with his bill.

“The Wolf start aside with the plucking, and cried out, ‘Alas, thou doest me harm! but I forgive it thee. Do no more so, I would not suffer it of another.’

The Crane said, ‘Sir Isegrim, go and be merry, for ye be all whole. Now give to me that ye promised.’

“The Wolf said, ‘Will ye hear what he saith? I am he that hath suffered and have cause to plain, and he will have good of me! He thanketh not me of the kindness that I did to him. He put his head in my mouth, and I suffered him to draw it out whole without hurting; and he did to me also harm. And if any here should have a reward, it should be I, by right.’

“Thus the unkind men nowadays reward them that do them good. When the false and subtle arise and become great, then goeth worship and profit all to nought. There ben many, of right that ought reward and do good to such as have helpen them in their need, that now find causes and say they be hurt, and would have amends where they ought to reward and make amends themself. Therefore it is said, and truth it is, who that will chide or chastise see that he be clear himself.

“All this and much more than I now can well remember was made and wrought in this glass. The master that ordained it was a cunning man and a profound clerk in many sciences. And because these jewels were over good and precious for me to keep and have, therefore I sent them to my dear Lord the King and to the Queen in present. Where ben they now that give to their lords such presents. The sorrow that my two children made when I sent away the glass was great; for they were wont to look therein and see themself how their clothing and array became them on their bodies. Oh, alas! I knew not that Cuwart the Hare was so nigh his death when I delivered him the male with these jewels. I wist not to whom I might better have taken them, though it should have cost me my life, than him and Bellyng the Ram. They were two of my best friends. Out, alas! I cry upon the murderer. I shall know who it was, though I should run through all the world to seek him, for murder abideth not hid, it shall come out. Peradventure he is in this company that knoweth where Cuwart is becomen, though he telleth it not; for many false shrews walk with good men, from whom no man can keep him, they knowen their craft so well and can well cover their falseness. But the most wonder that I have is that my Lord the King here sayeth so felly, that my father nor I did him never good. That thinketh me marvel, of a king. But there come so many things tofore him that he forgetteth that one with that other, and so fareth by me. Dear Lord, remember not ye when my Lord your father lived, and ye an youngling of two year were, that my father came from school from Montpellier whereas he had five year studied in recipes of medicines. He knew all the tokens of the urine as well as his hand, and also all the herbs, and nature of them which were viscous or laxative. He was a singular master in that science. He might well wear cloth of silk and a gilt girdle. When he came to Court he found the King in a great sickness, whereof he was sorry in his heart, for he loved him above all other lords. The King would not forego him, for when he came all other had leave to walk where they would; he trusted none so much as him. He said, ‘Reynart, I am sick, and feel me the longer the worse.’ My father said, ‘My dear Lord, here is an urinal: make your water therein, and as soon as I may see it I shall tell what sickness it is and also how ye shall be holpen.’ The King did as he counselled him, for he trusted no man better that lived. Though so were that my father did not as he should have done to you, but that was by counsel of evil and foul beasts —I had wonder thereof— but it was a raising against his death. He said, ‘My Lord, if ye will be whole ye must eat the liver of a wolf of seven year old, that may ye not leave or else ye shall die; for your urine showeth it plainly.’

“The Wolf stood thereby and said nought.

“But the King said to him, ‘Sir Isegrim, now, ye hear well that I must have your liver if I will be whole.’

“Tho answered the Wolf and said, ‘Nay my lord not so, I wot well I am not yet five year old. I have heard my mother say so.’

“My father said, ‘What skilleth these words? Let him be opened, and I shall know by the liver if it be good for you or not.’

“And therewith the Wolf was taken to kitchen, and his liver taken out, which the King ate and was anon all whole of all his sickness. Then thanketh he my father much, and commanded all his household upon their lives that after that time they should call him Master Reynart.

“He abode still by the King, and was believed of all things, and must always go by his side; and the King gave to him a garland of roses which he must always wear on his head. But now this is all turned. All the old good things that he did be forgotten, and these covetous and ravenous shrews ben taken up and set on the high bench, and ben heard and made great, and the wise folk ben put aback, by which these lords oft lack, and cause them to be in much trouble and sorrow. For when a covetous man of low birth is made a lord, and is much great, and above his neighbours hath power and might, then he knoweth not himself, ne whence he is comen, and hath no pity on no man’s hurt, ne heareth no man’s request, but if he may have great gifts. All his intent and desire is to gather good, and to be greater. Oh, how many covetous men ben now in lords’ courts! They flatter and smeke,¹²⁰ and please the prince, for their singular avail, but and the prince had need of them or their good, they should rather suffer him to die, or fare right hard, ere they would give or lend him. They be like the Wolf that had liefer the King had died than he would give him his liver. Yet had I liefer ere that the King or the Queen should fare amiss, that twenty such wolves should lose their lives; it were also the least loss. My lord, all this befell in your youth, that my father did thus. I trow ye have forgotten it.

“And also I have my self done you reverence, worship, and courtesy. Unroused be it, though ye now thank me but little, but peradventure ye remembered not that I shall now say,—not to any forwitting of you, for ye be worthy all worship and reverence that any man can do; that have ye of Almighty God by inheritance of your noble progenitors, wherefore I your humble subject and servant am bounden to do to you all the service that I can or may. I came on a time walking with the Wolf Isegrim, and we had gotten under us both a Swine. And for his loud crying we bit him to death; and, sire, ye came from far out of a grove against us. Ye saluted us friendly, and said we were welcome, and that ye and my Lady the Queen, which came after you, had great hunger and had nothing for to eat, and prayed us for to give you part of our winning. Isegrim spake so soft that a man unnethe might hear him, but I spake out and said, ‘yea, my lord, with a good will. Though it were more, we will well that ye have part.’ And then the Wolf departed as he was wont to do; departed, and took that one half for himself, and he gave you a quarter for you and for the Queen. That other quarter he ate and bit as hastily as he might, because he would eat it alone. And he gave to me but half the lungs, that I pray God that evil might he fare.

“Thus showed he his conditions and nature. Ere men should have sungen a *Credo*, ye, my lord, had eaten your part, and yet would ye fain have had more, for ye were not full. And because he gave you no more, ne proffered you, ye lift up your right foot

¹²⁰ Smeke, flatter (schmeicheln)

and smote him between the ears that ye tore his skin over his eye, and tho he might no longer abide, but he bled, howled, and ran away, and left his part there lying. Tho said ye to him, 'Haste ye again hither, and bring to us more. And here after see better to how ye deal and part.' Then said I, 'My lord, if it please you I will go with him, I wot well what ye said.' I went with him. He bled and groaned, as sore as he was, all softly; he durst not cry loud. We went so far that we brought a calf. And when ye saw us come therewith ye laughed, for ye were well pleased, ye said to me that I was swift in hunting: 'I see well that ye can find well when ye take it upon you. Ye be good to send forth in a need. The calf is good and fat, hereof shall ye be the dealer.' I said, 'My lord, with a good will. The one half, my lord, shall be for you. And that other half for my lady the Queen. The moghettis, liver, lungs, and the inward, shall be for your children. The head shall Isegrim the Wolf have, and I will have the feet.' Tho said ye, 'Reynart, who hath taught you to depart so courteously?' 'My lord,' said I, 'that hath done this priest that sitteth here with the bloody crown. He lost his skin with the uncourteous departing of the swine, and for his courtesy and ravin he hath hurt and shame.'

"Alas there be many wolves now a days that, without right and reason, destroy and eat them that they may have the overhand of. They spare neither flesh ne blood, friend ne enemy. What they can get that take they. O, woe be to that land and to towns where as the wolves have the overhand!

"My lord, this and many other good thing have I done for you, that I could well tell if it were not too long, of which now ye remember little by the words I hear of you. If ye would all thing oversee well, ye would not say as ye do. I have seen the day that there should no great matter be concluded in this Court without mine advice. Albeit that this adventure is now fallen, it might happen yet that my words shall be heard and also believed as well as another's, as far as right will, for I desire none other. For if there be any can say and make good by sufficient witnesses that I have trespassed, I will abide all the right and law that may come thereof; and if any say on me anything of which he can bring no witnesses, let me then be ruled after the law and custom of this court."

The King said, "Reynart, ye say reasonably. I know not of Cuwart's death more than that Belyn the Ram brought his head hither in the male. Thereof I let you go quit, for I have no witness thereof."

"My dear lord," said Reynart, "God thank you. Sykerly ye do well. For his death maketh me so sorrowful that methinketh my heart will break in two. Oh, when they departed from me, mine heart was so heavy that I should have swooned. I wot well it was a token of the loss that tho was so nigh coming to me."

All the most part of them that were there and heard the Fox's words of the jewels, and how he made his countenance and stretched him, had verily supposed that it had not be feigned but that it had be true. They were sorry of his loss and misadventure, and also of his sorrow. The King and the Queen had both pity of him, and bade him to make not too much sorrow, but that he should endeavour him to seek them. For he had so much praised them that they had great will and desire to have them. And because he had made them to understand that he had sent these jewels to them, though they never had them yet they thanked him, and prayed him to help that they might have them.

The Fox understood their meaning well, he thought toward them but little good for all that. He said, "God thank you, my lord and my lady, that ye so friendly comfort

me in my sorrow. I shall not rest night ne day, ne all they that will do anything for me, but run, and pray, threaten, and ask all the four corners of the world, though I should ever seek, till that I know where they ben bicomen. And I pray you, my Lord the King, that if they were in such place as I could not get them by prayer, by might, ne by request, that ye would assist me and abide by me; for it toucheth yourself, and the good is yours; and also it is your part to do justice on theft and murder, which both ben in this case.”

“Reynart,” said the King, “that shall I not leave, when ye know where they ben. Mine help shall be alway ready for you.”

“Oh, dear lord, this is too much presented to me. If I had power and might I should deserve against you.”

Now hath the Fox his matter fast and fair, for he hath the King in his hand as he would. Him thought that he was in better case than it was like to have be; he hath made so many leasings that he may go freely where he will, without complaining of any of them all, save of Isegrim, which was to himward angry and displeased, and said, “O noble King, are ye so much childish that ye believe this false and subtle shrew, and suffer yourself with false lies thus to be deceived? Of faith it should be long or I should believe him, he is in murder and treason all bewrapped, and he mocketh you tofore your visage. I shall tell him another tale. I am glad that I see now him here. All his leasings shall not avail him ere he depart from me.”

How Isegrim the Wolf complained again on the Fox

“MY lord, I pray you to take heed. This false thief betrayed my wife once foul and dishonestly. It was so that in a winter’s day they went together through a great water, and he bare my wife an honde that he would teach her take fish with her tail, and that she should let it hang in the water a good while and there should so much fish cleave on it that four of them should not conne eat it. The fool, my wife, supposed he had said truth. And she went in the mire ere she came into the water, and when she was in the deepest of the water he bad her hold her tail till that the fish were comen. She held her tail so long that it was frozen hard in the ice and could not pluck it out. And when he saw that, he sprang up after on her body. She could not defend herself, the silly beast, she stood so deep in the mire. Hereof he cannot say nay, for I found him with the deed. Alas, what pain suffered I tho at my heart! I had almost for sorrow lost my five wits, and cried as loud as I might, and when he saw me so nigh he went his way. I went to her in a great heaviness, and went deep in that mire and that water ere I could break the ice, and much pain suffered she ere she could have out her tail, and yet left a gobbet of her tail behind her. And we were like both thereby to have lost our lives, for she yelped and cried so loud for the smart that she had ere she came out, that the men of the village came out, with staves and bills, with flail and pickforks, and the wives with their distaffs, and cried despitously, ‘Slay! slay! and smite down right!’ I was never in my life so afraid, for unnethe we escape. We ran so fast that we sweat. There was a villain that stake on us with a pike which hurted us sore; he was strong and swift a foot. Had it not be night, certainly we had been slain. The foul old queans would fain have beaten us. They said that we had bitten their sheep. They cursed us with many a curse. Tho came we in a field full of broom and brambles, there hid we us from the villains, and they durst not follow us further by night, but returned home again. See my lord this foul matter. Ye ought to do justice thereon sharply.”

Reynart answered and said, “If this were true, it should go too nigh mine honour and worship. God forbid that it should be found true! It is well true that I taught her how she should in a place catch fish, and showed her a good way for to go over into the water without going into the mire. But she ran so desirously when she heard me name the fish, that she neither way ne path held, but went into the ice wherein she was forfrorn. And that was because she abode too long. She had fish enough, if she could have be pleased with measure. It falleth oft, who that would have all loseth all. Over covetous was never good. For the beast cannot be satisfied, and when I saw her in the ice so fast I went to have holpen her, and to have brought her out, but it was all pain lost, for she was too heavy for me. Tho came Isegrim, and saw how I did all my best, and he, as a foul churl, foul and rybadously slandereth me with her, as these foul unthrifts ben wont to do. But, my dear Lord, it was none otherwise. He belieth me falsely. Peradventure his eyen dazzled as he looked from above down. He cried and cursed me, and swore many an oath I should dear abyte it. When I heard him so curse and threaten I went my way, and let him curse and threaten till he was weary. And tho went he and help his wife out, and then he leapt and ran, and she also, for to get them an heat and to warm them, or else they should have died for cold. And

whatsomever I have said, afore or after, that is clearly all truth. I would not for a thousand mark of fine gold lie to you one leasing. It were not fitting for me. Whatsomever fall of me, I shall say the truth, like as mine elders have always done sith the time that we first understood reason. And if ye be in doubt of anything that I have said otherwise than truth, give me respite of eight days, that I may have counsel, and I shall bring such information with good true and sufficient record that ye shall all your life during trust and believe me, and so shall all your council also. What have I to do with the Wolf? It is tofore clearly enough showed that he is a foul villainous caitiff, and an unclean beast, when he dealed and departed the swine. So it is now known to you all by his own words, that he is a defamer of women as much as in him is, ye may well mark euerychone. Now ask ye his wife if it be so as he saith. If she will say the truth I wot well she shall say as I do.”

Tho spake Ersewynde the Wolf's wife, “Ach, fell Reynart, no man can keep himself from thee,—thou canst so well utter thy words and thy falseness and reason set forth. But it shall be evil rewarded in the end. How broughtest thou me once into the well, where the two buckets hung by one cord running through one pulley, which went one up and another down, thou sattest in that one bucket beneath in the pit in great dread. I came thither and heard thee sigh and make sorrow, and asked thee how thou camest there. Thou saidst that thou hadst there so many good fishes eaten out of the water that thy belly would burst. I said, ‘Tell me how I shall come to thee.’ Then saidst thou, ‘Aunt, spring into that bucket that hangeth there, and ye shall come anon to me.’ I did so; and I went downward, and ye came upward. Tho was I all angry. Thou saidst, ‘Thus fareth the world, that one goeth up and another goeth down.’ Tho sprang ye forth and went your way, and I abode there alone, sitting an whole day sore and hungered and a cold; and thereto had I many a stroke ere I could get thence.”

“Auntie,” said the Fox, “though the strokes did you harm, I had liever ye had them than I, for ye may better bear them; for one of us must needs have had them. I taught you good, will ye understand it and think on it, that ye another time take better heed and believe no man over hastily, is he friend or cousin, for every man seeketh his own profit. They be now fools that do not so, and specially when they be in jeopardy of their lives.”

A fair parable of the Fox and the Wolf

“MY Lord,” said Dame Ersewynde, “I pray you hear how he can blow with all winds, and how fair bringeth he his matters forth.”

“Thus hath he brought me many time in scathe and hurt,” said the Wolf. “He hath once betrayed me to the She Ape, mine aunt, where I was in great dread and fear, for I left there almost mine one ear. If the Fox will tell it, how it befel, I will give him the fordele thereof, for I cannot tell it so well but he shall beryspe me.”

“Well,” said the Fox, “I shall tell it without stammering. I shall say the truth. I pray you hearken me. He came into the wood and complained to me that he had great hunger; for I saw him never so full but he would always have had fain more. I have wonder where the meat becometh that he destroyeth. I see now on his countenance that he beginneth to grymme for hunger. When I heard him so complain, I had pity of him. And I said, I was also hungry. Then went we half a day together and found nothing. Tho whined he and cried, and said he might go no further. Then espied I a great hole, standing in the middis¹²¹ under an hawe which was thick of brambles, and I heard a rushing therein, I wist not what it was. Then said I, ‘Go therein and look if there be anything there for us; I wot well there is somewhat.’ Tho said he, ‘Cousin, I would not creep into that hole for twenty pound, but¹²² I wist¹²³ first what is therein. Methinketh that there is some perilous thing. But I shall abide here under this tree, if ye will go therein tofore. But come anon again, and let me wete¹²⁴ what thing is therein. Ye can many a subtlety, and can well help yourself, and much better than I.’ See my Lord the King, thus he made me, poor wight, to go tofore into the danger, and he, which is great, long, and strong, abode without and rested him in peace. Await if I did not for him, there. I would not suffer the dread and fear that I there suffered, for all the good in earth, but if I wist how to escape. I went hardily in. I found the way dark, long, and broad. Ere I right in the hole came, so espied I a great light which came in from that one side. There lay in a great Ape with twain great wide eyen, and they glimmed as a fire; and she had a great mouth with long teeth, and sharp nails on her feet and on her hands; I weened it had be a mermouse, a baubyn, or a mercatte, for I saw never fouler beast. And by her lay three of her children, which were right foul, for they were right like the mother. When they saw me come, they gapeden wide on me and were all still. I was afraid and would well I had been thence; but I thought, I am therein, I must there through, and come out as well as I may. As I saw her, me thought she seemed more¹²⁵ than Isegrim the Wolf, and her children were more than I. I saw never a fouler meyne.¹²⁶ They lay on foul hay which was all bepissed. They were beslabbed and beclagged to their ears too in her own dung. It stank that I was almost smothered thereof. I durst not say but good, and then I said, ‘Aunt, God give you good day, and all my cousins, your fair children, they be of their age the fairest that ever I saw. O, Lord God, how well please they me! how lovely! how fair be they!’

¹²¹ Middis, midst.

¹²² But, except

¹²³ Wist, knew.

¹²⁴ Wete, know

¹²⁵ More, bigger.

¹²⁶ Meyne, household.

Each of them for their beauty might be a great king's son! Of right we ought to thank you, that ye thus increase our lineage. Dear Aunt, when I heard say that ye were delivered and laid down I could no longer abide, but must come and friendly visit you. I am sorry that I had not erst knowen it.'

"'Reynart, cousin,' said she, 'ye be welcome. For that ye have found me, and thus come see me, I thank you. Dear cousin, ye be right true, and named right wise in all lands, and also that ye gladly further and bring your lineage in great worship. Ye must teach my children with yours some wisdom, that they may know what they shall do and leave. I have thought on you, for gladly ye go and fellowship with the good.'

"Oh how well was I pleased when I heard these words. This deserved I at the beginning when I called her aunt; howbeit that she was nothing sybbe to me; for my right Aunt is Dame Rukenawe that yonder standeth, which is wont to bring forth wise children.

"I said, 'Aunt, my life and my good is at your commandment, and what I may do for you by night and by day. I will gladly teach them all that I can.'

"I would fain have be thence for the stench of them; and also I had pity of the great hunger that Isegrim had.

"I said, 'Aunt, I shall commit you and your fair children to God and take my leave. My wife shall think long after me.'

"'Dear cousin,' said she, 'ye shall not depart till ye have eaten; for if ye did I would say ye were not kind.'

Tho stood she up and brought me in another hole, whereas was much meat of harts and hinds, roes, pheasants, partridges, and much other venison, that I wondered from whence all this meat might come. And when I had eaten my bellyful, she gave me a great piece of an hind for to eat with my wife and with my household when I come home. I was ashamed to take it, but I might none otherwise do. I thanked her and took my leave. She bade me I should come soon again. I said I would, and so departed thence merrily that I so well had sped. I hasted me out, and when I came, saw Isegrim which lay groaning. And I asked him how he fared. He said, 'Nephew, all evil, for it is wonder that I live. Bring ye any meat to eat? I die for hunger.' Tho had I compassion of him and gave him that I had, and saved him there his life; whereof then he thanked me greatly, howbeit that he now oweth me evil will.

"He had eaten this up anon, tho said he, 'Reynart, dear cousin, what found ye in that hole? I am more hungry now than I was tofore. My teeth ben now sharpened to eat.'

"I said then, 'Eme, haste you then lightly into that hole. Ye shall find there enough. There lieth mine Aunt with her children; if ye will spare the truth, and lie great leasings, ye shall have there all your desire. But and ye say truth, ye shall take harm.'

"My Lord, was not this enough said and warned, who so would understand it, that all that he found, he should say the contrary. But rude and plump beasts cannot understand wisdom; therefore hate they all subtle inventions, for they cannot conceive them. Yet nevertheless, he said he would go in, and lie so many leasings, ere he should mishap, that all men should have wonder of it; and so went forth into that foul stinking hole, and found the marmosette. She was like the devil's daughter, and on her hung much filth clotted in gobbets.

“Tho cried he, ‘Alas, me growleth of these foul nickers! Come they out of hell? Men may make devils afraid of them. Go and drown them, that evil might they fear! I saw never fouler worms, they make all mine hair to stand right up.’

“ ‘Sir Isegrim,’ said she, ‘what may I do thereto? They ben my children, and I must be their mother. What lieth that in your way, whether they be foul or fair? They have you nothing cost. Here hath been one to-day before you which was to them nigh of kin, and was your better and wiser; and he said that they were fair. Who hath sent you hither with these tidings?’

“ ‘Dame, will ye wit, I will eat of your meat. It is better bestowed on me than on these foul wights.’

“She said, ‘Here is no meat.’

“He said, ‘Here is enough.’

“And therewith he stert with his head toward the meat, and would have gone into the hole where the meat was. But mine aunt stert up with her children, and run to him with their sharp long nails so sore that the blood ran over his eyen. I heard him cry sore and howl, but I know of no defence that he made but that he ran fast out of the hole. And he was there scratched and beaten, and many an hole had they made in his coat and skin. His visage was all on a blood and almost he had lost his one ear. He groaned and complained to me sore: then asked I him if he had well lied. He said, ‘I said like as I saw and found, and that was a foul beast with many foul wights.’

“ ‘Nay, Eme,’ said I, ‘ye should have said Fair niece how fare ye and your fair children which ben my wellbeloved cousins?’ The Wolf said, ‘I had liefer that they were hanged ere I that said.’

“ ‘Yea, Eme, therefore must ye receive such manner payment. It is better otherwhile to lie than to say truth. They that ben better wiser and stronger than we be have done so tofore us.’

“See, my Lord the King, thus got he his red coif. Now standeth he all so simply as he knew no harm. I pray you ask ye him if it was not thus. He was not far off, if I wot it well.”

How Isegrim proffered his glove for the Fox to fight with him

THE Wolf said, "I may well forbear your mocks and your scorns and also your fell venomous words, strong thief that ye are. Ye said that I was almost dead for hunger, when ye help me in my need. That is falsely lied, for it was but a bone that ye gave to me, ye had eaten away all the flesh that was thereon. And ye mock me and say that I am hungry, here where I stand. That toucheth my worship too nigh,—what many a spity word have ye brought forth with false leasings!—and that I have conspired the King's death, from the treasure that ye have said to him is in Hulsterlo,—and ye have also my wife shamed and slandered that she shall never recover it, and I should ever be disworshipped thereby if I avenged it not. I have forborne you long, but now ye shall not escape me. I can not make hereof great proof, but I say here tofore my lord and tofore all them that ben here that thou art a false traitor and a murderer, and that I shall prove and make good on thy body within lists in the field, and that body against body, and then shall our strife have an end. And thereto I cast to thee my glove, and take thou it up I shall have right of thee or die therefor."

Reynart the Fox thought, How come I on this campaign? we ben not both like. I shall not well conne stand against this strong thief. All my proof is now come to an end.

How the Fox took up the glove. And how the King set to them day and field for to come and do their battle

Yet thought the Fox I have good advantage: the claws of his forefeet ben off, and his feet ben yet sore thereof, when for my sake he was unshoed. He shall be somewhat the weaker.

Then said the Fox, “Who that saith that I am a traitor or a murderer, I say he lieth falsely; and that art thou specially Isegrim. Thou bringest me there as I would be. This have I oft desired. Lo here is my pledge that all thy words ben false, and that I shall defend me and make good that thou liest.”

The King received the pledges, and admitted the battle, and asked borowes¹²⁷ of them both that on the morn they should come and perform their battle, and do as they ought to do. Then the Bear and the Cat were borowes for the Wolf; and for the Fox were borowes Grymbart the Dasse and Byteluys.

¹²⁷ Borowes, sureties

How Rukenawe the She Ape counselled the Fox how he should behave him in the field against the Wolf

The She Ape said to the Fox, “Reynart Nephew, see that ye take heed in your battle. Be cold and wise. Your Eme taught me once a prayer that is of much virtue to him that shall fight; and a great master and a wise clerk, and was abbot of Boudelo, that taught him, he said, who that said devoutly this prayer fasting shall not that day be overcomen in battle ne in fighting. Therefore, dear Nephew, be not afraid, I shall read it over you to-morrow, then may ye be sure enough of the Wolf. It is better to fight than to have the neck asunder.”

“I thank you, dear aunt,” said the Fox. “The quarrel that I have is rightful, therefore I hope I shall speed well, and that shall greatly be mine help.”

All his lineage abode by him all the night and holp him to drive away the time.

Dame Rukenawe the She Ape, his aunt, thought alway on his profit and fordele. And she did all his hair from the head to the tail be shorn off smooth; and she anointed all his body with oil of olive; and then was his body also glat¹²⁸ and slipper that the Wolf should have none hold on him. And he was round and fat also on his body.

And she said to him, “Dear cousin, ye must now drink much that tomorrow ye may the better make your urine; but ye shall hold it in till ye come to the field. And when need is and time, so shall ye piss full your rough tail and smite the Wolf therewith in his beard. And if ye might hit him therewith in his eyen, then shall ye byneme him¹²⁹ his sight. That should much hinder him. But else, hold alway your tail fast between your legs that he catch you not thereby; and hold down your ears lying plat after your head that he hold you not thereby; and see wisely to yourself. And at beginning flee from his strokes, and let him spring and run after you, and run tofore where as most dust is, and stir it with your feet that it may flee in his eyen, and that shall much hinder his sight. And while he rubbeth his eyen, take your advantage and smite and bite him there as ye may most hurt him, and alway to hit him with your tail full of piss in his visage, and that shall make him so woe that he shall not wit where he is. And let him run after you for to make him weary. Yet his feet ben sore of that ye made him to lose his shoes, and though he be great he hath no heart. Nephew, certainly this is my counsel. The connyng goeth tofore strength; therefore see for yourself, and set yourself wisely at defence, that ye and we all may have worship thereof. I would be sorry if ye mishapped. I shall teach you the words that your Eme Martin taught me, that ye may overcome your enemy, as I hope ye shall do without doubt.”

Therewith she laid her hand upon his head, and said these words: “Blaerde Shay Alphenio Kasbue Gorfons Alsbuifrio. Nephew, now be ye sure from all mischief and

¹²⁸ Glat, smooth

¹²⁹ Byneme him, take away from him.

dread. And I counsel you that ye rest you a little, for it is by the day ye shall be the better disposed; we shall awake you in all in time.”

“Aunt,” said the Fox, “I am now glad. God thank you, ye have done to me such good I can never deserve it fully again. Methinketh there may nothing hurt me sith that ye have said these holy words over me.”

Tho went he and laid him down under a tree in the grass, and slept till the sun was risen. Tho came the Otter and waked him, and bad him arise, and gave him a good young duck and said, “Dear cousin, I have this night made many a leap in the water ere I could get this young fat duck. I have taken it from a fowler. Take and eat it.”

Reynart said, “This is good handsel. If I refused I were a fool. I thank you, cousin, that ye remember me. If I live I shall reward you.”

The Fox ate the duck without sauce or bread. It savoured him well, and went well in. And he drank thereto four great draughts of water. Then went he to the battle ward, and all they that loved him went with him.

How the Fox came into the field and how they fought

WHEN the King saw Reynart thus shorn and oiled he said to him, “Ey, Fox, how well can ye see for yourself!”

He wondered thereof; he was foul to look on.

But the Fox said not one word, but kneeled down low to the earth unto the King and to the Queen, and striked him forth into the field.

The Wolf was there ready and spake many a proud word. The rulers and keepers of the field were the Leopard and the Losse.¹³⁰ They brought forth the book on which sware the Wolf that the Fox was a traitor and a murderer, and none might be falsier than he was, and that he would prove on his body and make it good. Reynart the Fox sware that he lied as a false knave and a cursed thief, and that he would do good on his body.

When this was done, the governors of the field bade them do their devoir. Then roomed they all the field, save Dame Rukenawe the She Ape, she abode by the Fox and bade him remember well the words that she had said to him. She said, “See well to. When ye were seven years old ye were wise enough to go by night without lantern or moonshine where ye wist to win any good. Ye ben named among the people wise and subtle. Pain yourself to work so that ye win the prize, then may ye have ever honour and worship, and all we that ben your friends.”

He answered, “My dearest aunt, I know it well. I shall do my best, and think on your counsel. I hope so to do that all my lineage shall have worship thereby, and mine enemies shame and confusion.”

She said, “God grant it you.”

¹³⁰ Losse, lynx (Dutch, los).

How the Fox and the Wolf fought together

THEREWITH she went out of the field and let them twain go together. The Wolf trode forth to the Fox in great wrath, and opened his forefeet, and supposed to have taken the Fox in them. But the Fox sprang from him lightly, for he was lighter to foot than he. The Wolf sprang after, and hunted the Fox sore. Their friends stood without the lists and looked upon them. The Wolf strode wider than Reynart did, and oft overtook him, and lift up his foot and weened to have smitten him. But the Fox saw to, and smote him with his rough tail, which he had all bepissed, in his visage. Tho weened the Wolf to have ben plat blind; the piss started in his eye. Then must he rest, for to make clean his eye. Reynart thought on his fordele, and stood above the wind scraping and casting with his feet the dust, that it flew the Wolf's eyeful. The Wolf was sore blinded therewith, in such wise that he must leave the running after him, for the sand and piss cleaved under his eye, that it smarted so sore that he must rub and wash it away.

Tho came Reynart in a great anger and bote¹³¹ him three great wounds on his head with his teeth, and said, "What is that, Sir Wolf! Hath one there bitten you? How is it with you? I will all otherwise on you yet. Abide. I shall bring you some new thing. Ye have stolen many a lamb, and destroyed many a simple beast, and now falsely have appealed me and brought me in this trouble. All this shall I now avenge on thee. I am chosen to reward thee for thine old sins, for God will no longer suffer thee in thy great raven and shrewdness. I shall now assoil thee, and that shall be good for thy soul. Take patiently this penance, for thou shalt live no longer. The hell shall be thy purgatory. Thy life is now in my mercy, but and if thou wilt kneel down and ask me forgiveness, and knowledge thee to be overcomen, yet though thou be evil, yet I will spare thee. For my conscience counselleth me I should not gladly slay no man."

Isegrim weened with these mocking and spiteous words to have gone out of his wits; and that dered¹³² him so much that he wist not what to say, buff ne haft, he was so angry in his heart. The wounds that Reynart had given him bled and smarted sore, and he thought how he might best avenge it.

With great anger he lift up his foot and smote the Fox on the head so great a stroke that he fell to the ground. Tho stert the Wolf to, and weened to have taken him. But the Fox was light and wily, and rose lightly up, and met with him fiercely. And there began a fell battle which dured long. The Wolf had great spite on the Fox, as well it seemed. He sprang after him ten times each after other, and would fain have had him fast. But his skin was so slipper and fat of the oil, that alway he escaped from him. O, so subtle and snelle¹³³ was the Fox, that many times when the Wolf weened well to make sure of him, he stert then between his legs and under his belly, and then turned he again and gave the Wolf a stroke with his tail in his eye, that Isegrim weened he should have lost his sight, and this did he often times. And alway when he had so smitten him, then would he go above the wind and raise the dust, that it made his

¹³¹ Bote, bit

¹³² Dered, injured.

¹³³ Snelle, quick

eyen full of stuffs. Isegrim was woebegone, and thought he was at an afterdele;¹³⁴ yet was his strength and might much more than the Fox's. Reynart had many a sore stroke of him when he raught¹³⁵ him. They gave each other many a stroke and many a bite when they saw their advantage, and each of them did his best to destroy that other. I would I might see such a battle. That one was wily, and that other was strong. That one fought with strength, and that other with subtlety.

The Wolf was angry that the Fox endured so long against him. If his foremost feet had been whole, the Fox had not endured so long; but the sores were so open that he might not well run. And the Fox might better off and on than he, and also he swang his tail oft under his eye, and made him that him thought that his eye should go out.

At last he said to himself, I will make an end of this battle. How long shall this caitiff dure thus against me? I am so great, I should, if I lay upon him, press him to death. It is to me a great shame that I spare him so long. Men shall mock and point me with fingers to my shame and rebuke, for I am yet on the worst side. I am sore wounded; I bleed sore; and he drowneth me with his piss and casts so much dust and sand in mine eye that hastily I shall not conne see, if I suffer him any longer. I will set it in adventure and seen what shall come thereof.

With that he smote with his foot Reynart on the head that he fell down to the ground, and ere he could arise he caught him in his feet and lay upon him as he would have pressed him to death. Tho began the Fox to be afraid, and so were all his friends when they saw him lie under. And on that other side all Isegrim's friends were joyful and glad. The Fox defended him fast with his claws as he lay upward with his feet, and gave many a clope.¹³⁶ The Wolf durst not with his feet do him much harm, but with his teeth snatched at him as he would have bitten him. When the Fox saw that he should be bitten and was in great dread, he smote the Wolf in the head with his foremost claws and tare the skin off between his brows and his ears, and that one of his eye hung out; which did him much pain. He howled, he wept, he cried loud, and made a piteous noise, for the blood ran down as it had been a stream.

¹³⁴ At an afterdele, about to pass away. Dutch, dalen, is to sink, as the sun when it is setting, begint to dalen

¹³⁵ Raught, reached him

¹³⁶ Clope, blow (Dutch, klop).

How the Fox, being under the Wolf, with flattering wordes glosed him, that the Fox came to his above again

THE Wolf wiped his eyen, the Fox was glad when he saw that. He wrestled so sore, that he sprang on his feet while he rubbed his eyen. The Wolf was not well pleased therewithal, and smote after him ere he escaped, and caught him in his arms, and held him fast, notwithstanding that he bled. Reynard was woe then. There wrestled they long and sore. The Wolf waxed so angry that he forgot all his smarts and pain, and threw the Fox all plat under him, which came him evil to pass, for his one hand, by which he defended him stert in the falling into Isegrim's throat, and then was he afraid to lose his hand.

The Wolf said tho to the Fox, "Now choose, whether ye will yield you as overcome or else I shall certainly slay you. Thy scattering of the dust, thy piss, thy mocking, ne thy defence, ne all thy false wiles, may not now help thee. Thou mayest not escape me. Thou hast heretofore done me so much harm and shame, and now I have lost mine one eye and thereto sore wounded."

When Reynart heard that it stood so rowme¹³⁷ that he should choose to knowledge him overcomen and yield him or else to take the death, he thought the choice was worth ten mark, and that he must say that one or that other. He had anon concluded what he would say, and began to say to him with fair words in this wise:

"Dear Eme, I will gladly become your man with all my good. And I will go for you to the holy grave, and shall get pardon and winning for your cloister of all the churches that ben in the holy land, which shall much profit to your soul and your elders' souls also. I trow there was never such a proffer proffered to any king. And I shall serve you like as I should serve our holy father the Pope. I shall hold of you all that I have, and ever ben your servant, and forth I shall make that all my lineage shall do in like wise. Then shall ye be a lord above all lords. Who should then dare do anything against you? And furthermore whatsoever I take of polaille, geese, partridge, or plover, fish or flesh, or whatsoever it be, thereof shall ye first have the choice, and your wife and your children, ere any come in my body. Thereto I will always abide by you, that where ye be there shall no hurt ne scathe come to you. Ye be strong, and I am wily: let us abide together that, one with the counsel and that other with the deed, then may there nothing misfall to usward. And we ben so nigh of kin each to other that of right should be no anger between us. I would not have foughten against you if I might have escaped. But ye appealed me first unto fight, tho must I do that I not do would gladly. And in this battle I have ben curtoys to you, I have not showed the utterest of my might on you like as I would have done if ye had been a stranger to me; for the Nephew ought to spare the Eme, it is good reason and it ought so to be. Dear Eme, so have I now do, and that may ye mark well when I ran tofore you, mine heart would not consent thereto. For I might have hurt you much more than I did, but I thought it never; for I have not hurt you, ne done you so much harm that may hinder

¹³⁷ Rowme, ruefully (Dutch, rouw, sorrow).

you, save only that mishap that is fallen on your eye. Ach! therefore I am sorry, and suffer much sorrow in my heart. I would well, dear Eme, that it had not happed you, but that it had fallen on me, so that ye therewith had been pleased; howbeit that ye shall have thereby a great advantage. For when ye hereafter sleep ye need not to shut but one window where another must shut two. My wife and my children and my lineage shall fall down to your feet, tofore the King and tofore all them that ye will, desire and pray you humbly that ye will suffer Reynart, your nephew, live; and also I shall knowledge oft to have trespassed against you, and what leasings I have lied upon you. How might any lord have more honour than I proffer you. I would for no good do this to another. Therefore I pray you to be pleased herewithall. I wote well, if ye would, ye might have slew me; but and ye so done had, what had ye won? So must ye ever after this time keep you from my friends and lineage. Therefore he is wise that can in his anger measure himself, and not be over hasty, and to see well what may fall or happe afterward to him. What man that in his anger can well advise him, certainly he is wise. Men find many fools that in heat hasten them so much that after they repent them and then it is too late. But, dear Eme, I trow ye be too wise so to do. It is better to have praise, honour, rest, and peace, and many friends that be ready to help him, than to have shame, hurt, unrest, and also many enemies lying in a wait to do him harm. Also it is little worship to him that hath overcomen a man then to slay him. It is great shame, not for my life, though I were dead that were a little hurt.”

Isegrim the Wolf said, “Ay, thief, how fain wouldest thou be loosed and discharged from me, that hear I well by thy words. Were thou now from me on thy free feet thou wouldest not set by me an egg shell. Though thou promisedst to me all the world of fine red gold, I would not let thee escape. I set little by thee and all thy friends and lineage. All that thou hast here said is but leasings and feigned falseness. Weenest thou thus to deceive me? it is long since that I knew thee. I am no bird to be locked, ne take by chaff. I know well enough good corn. O, how wouldest thou mock me if I let thee thus escape. Thou mightest well have said this to one that knew thee not, but to me thou lovest thy flattering and sweet fluting, for I understand too well thy subtle lying tales. Thou hast so oft deceived me that me behoveth now to take good heed of thee. Thou false stinking knave, thou sayest that thou hast spared me in this battle. Look hitherward to me. Is not mine one eye out? And thereto hast thou wounded me in twenty places in my head. Thou wouldest not suffer me so long to rest as to take once my breath. I were over much a fool if I should now spare thee or be merciful to thee. So many a confusion and shame as thou hast done to me; and that also that toucheth me most of all, that thou hast disworshipped me and sklaundred Ersewynde my wife, whom I love as well as myself, and falsely deceivedst her, which shall never out of my heart: for as oft as it cometh to mine mind all mine anger and hate that I have to thee reneweth.”

In the meanwhile that Isegrim was thus speaking, the Fox bethought him how he might help himself, and stuck his other hand after between his legs, and grepe the Wolf fast. And he wrong him so sore that for woe and pain he must cry loud and howl. Then the Fox drew his other hand out of his mouth. The Wolf had so much pain and anguish of the sore wringing, that he spit blood.

How Isegrim the Wolf was overcomen and how the battle was taken up and finished. And how the Fox had the worship

THIS pain did him more sorrow and woe than his eye did that so sore bled, and also it made him to overthrow all in a swoon. Then Reynart the Fox leapt upon him with all his might, and caught him by the legs, and drew him forth through the field that they all might see it, and he stack and smote him sore. Then were Isegrim's friends all full of sorrow, and went all weeping unto their Lord the King, and prayed him that he would do cease the battle, and take it up into his hand.

The King granted it. And then went the keepers of the field the Leopard and the Lossem and said to the Fox and to the Wolf, "Our Lord the King will speak with you, and will that this battle be ended. He will take it into his hand. He desireth that ye will give your strife unto him, for if any of you here were slain it should be great shame on both sides. For ye have as much worship of this field as ye may have."

And they said to the Fox, "All the beasts give to you the prize that have seen this battle."

The Fox said, "Thereof I thank them, and what that shall please my lord to command that shall not I gainsay. I desire no better but to have won the field. Let my friends come hither to me. I will take advice of them what I shall do."

They said, "That they thought it good; and also it was reason in weighty matters a man should take advice of his friends."

Then came Dame Slopecade and Grymbart the Dasse her husband, Dame Rukenawe with her two sisters, Byteluys and Fulrompe her two sons and Hatenit her daughter, the Flyndermows¹³⁸ and the Weasel. And there came more than twenty which would not have come if the Fox had lost the field. So who that winneth and cometh to hys aboue, he getteth great loos and worship: and who that is overthrown and hath the worse, to him will no man gladly come. There came also to the Fox the Beaver, the Otter and both their wives Panthecrote and Ordegale. And the Ostrole, the Marten, the Fitchews, the Ferret, the Mouse, and the Squirrel, and many more than I can name. And all because he had won the field. Yea some came that tofore had complained on him, and were now of his next kin, and they showed him right friendly cheer and countenance. Thus fareth the world now. Who that is rich and high on the wheel, he hath many kinsmen and friends that shall help to bear out his wealth but who that is needy and in pain or in poverty findeth but few friends and kinsmen; for every man almost escheweth his company and way.

There was then great feast. They blew up trumpets and piped with shalmoyses.

¹³⁸ Flyndermows, bat

They said all, "Dear Nephew, blessed be God that ye have sped well. We were in great dread and fear when we saw you lie under."

Reynart the Fox thanked all them friendly, and received them with great joy and gladness. Then he asked of them what they counselled him. If he should give the field unto the King or no?

Dame Slopecade said, "Yea hardily cousin. Ye may with worship well set it in to his hands, and trust him well enough."

Tho went they all with the keepers of the field unto the King. And Reynart the Fox went tofore them all, with trumpets and pipes and much other minstrelsy. The Fox kneeled down tofore the King.

The King bad him stand up, and said to him, "Reynart ye be now joyful. Ye have kept your day worshipfully. I discharge you, and let you go freely quit where it pleaseth you. And the debate between you, I hold it on me, and shall discuss it by reason and by counsel of noble men, and will ordain thereof that ought be done by reason, at such time as Isegrim shall be whole. And then I shall send for you to come to me, and then by God's grace I shall give out the sentence and judgment."

An ensample that the Fox told to the King when he had won the field

“MY worthy and dear Lord the King,” said the Fox, “I am well agreed and paid therewith. But when I came first into your Court there were many that were fell and envious to me, which never had hurt ne cause of scathe by me. But they thought that they might best over me, and all they crieden with mine enemies against me and would fain have destroyed me, because they thought that the Wolf was better withholden and greater with you than I was, which am your humble subject. They knew none other thing, why ne wherefore. They thought not as the wise be wont to do, that is what the end may happen.

“My lord these ben like a great heap of hounds which I once saw stand at a lord’s place upon a dunghill, whereas they awaited that men should bring them meat. Then saw they an hound come out of the kitchen and had taken there a fair rib of beef ere it was given him. And he ran fast away withal; but the cook had espied or¹³⁹ he went away, and took a great bowl full of scalding water and cast it on his hips behind; whereof he thanked nothing the cook, for the hair behind was scalded off and his skin seemed as it had be through sodden. Nevertheless he escaped away and kept that he had won.

“And when his fellows the other hounds saw him come with this fair rib, they called him all and said to him, ‘Oh how good a friend is the cook to thee, which hath given to thee so good a bone, whereon is so much flesh.’

“The hound said, ‘Ye know nothing thereof. Ye praise me like as ye see me tofore with the bone. But ye have not seen me behind. Take heed, and behold me afterward on mine buttocks, and then ye shall know how I deserved it.’

“And when they had seen him behind on his hips how that his skin and his flesh was all raw and through sodden, tho growled they all and were afraid of that syedyng water; and would not of his fellowship, but fled and ran away from him, and let him there alone.

“See, my Lord, this right have these false beasts. When they be made lords, and may get their desire, and when they be mighty and doubted,¹⁴⁰ then ben they extortioners and scatte and pylle the people and eaten them like as they were forhungred hounds. These ben they that bear the bone in their mouth. No man dare have to do with them, but preyse all that they bedrive.¹⁴¹ No man dare say otherwise but such as shall please them, because they would not be shorn. And some help them forth in their unrighteous deeds because they would not have part, and lick their fingers, and strengthe them in their evil life and works. O, dear Lord, how little seen they that do thus after behind them, what the end shall be at last. They fall from high to low in great shame and sorrow, and then their works come to knowledge and be open in such wise that no man hath pity ne compassion on them in their mischief and trouble, and every man curse them and say evil by them to their shame and villainy.

¹³⁹ Or, ere

¹⁴⁰ Doubted, feared

¹⁴¹ Bedrive, experience.

Many of such have been blamed and shorn full nigh, that they had no worship ne profit but lose their hair as the hound did, that is their friends which have help them to cover their misdeeds and extortions like as the hair covereth the skin. And when they have sorrow and shame for their old trespasses, then each body plucketh his hand from him, and flee, like as the hounds did from him that was scalded with the syedyng water, and let him these extortions in their sorrow and need.

“My dear Lord King, I beseech you to remember this example of me; it shall not be against your worship ne wisdom. What ween ye how many ben there such false extortioners now in these days,—yea much worse than an hound that beareth such a bone in his mouth—in towns, in great lords’ courts, which with great facing and bracing oppress the poor people with great wrong, and sell their freedom and privileges, and bear them on hand of things that they never knew ne thought, and all for to get good for their singular profit. God give them all shame, and soon destroy them, whosomever they be that so do!

“But God be thanked,” said the Fox, “there may no man indite me, ne lineage, ne kin, of such works, but that we shall acquit us, and comen in the light. I am not afraid of any that can say on me any thing that I have done otherwise than a true man ought to do. Alway the Fox shall abide the Fox, though all his enemies had sworn the contrary. My dear Lord the King, I love you with my heart above all lords, and never for no man would I turn from you, but abide by you to the utterest. How well it hath been otherwise informed your highness, I have nevertheless alway do the best, and forth so will do, all my life that I can or may.”

How the King forgave the Fox all things, and made him Sovereign and greatest over all his lands

THE King said, “Reynart, ye be one of them that oweth me homage; which I will that ye alway so do. And also I will that, early and late, ye be of my council and one of my justices. See well to that ye not misdo ne trespass no more. I set you again in all your might and power, like as ye were tofore, and see that ye further all matters to the best right. For when ye set your wit and counsel to virtue and goodness, then may not our Court be without your advice and counsel, for here is none that is like to you in sharp and high counsel, ne subtler in finding a remedy for a mischief. And think ye on the example that ye yourself have told, and that ye haunt righteousness and be to me true. I will from henceforth work and do by your advice and counsel. He liveth not that if he misdid you, but I should sharply avenge and wreke it on him. Ye shall overall speak and say my words, and in all my land shall ye be, above all other, sovereign and my bayle.¹⁴² That office I give you. Ye may well occupy it with worship.”

All Reynart’s friends and lineage thanketh the King highly.

The King said, “I would do more for your sake than ye ween. I pray you all that ye remember him that he be true.”

Dame Rukenawe then said, “Yes sykerly, my Lord, that shall he ever be, and think ye not the contrary. For if he were otherwise, he were not of our kin ne lineage, and I would ever missake him, and would ever hinder him to my power.”

Reynart the Fox thanked the King with fair courteous words, and said, “Dear Lord, I am not worthy to have the worship that ye do to me. I shall think thereon and be true to you all so long as I live, and shall give you as wholesome counsel as shall be expedient to your good grace.”

Herewith he departed with his friends from the King.

Now hark how Isegrim the Wolf did. Bruin the Bear, Tybert the Cat, and Ersewynde and her children with their lineage drewen the Wolf out of the field, and laid him upon a litter of hay, and covered him warm, and looked to his wounds which were well twenty-five. And there came wise masters and surgeons which bound them and wash them. He was so sick and feeble that he had lost his feeling, but they rubbed and wryued¹⁴³ him under his temples and eyen, that he sprang out of his swound, and cried so loud that all they were afraid. They had weened that he had been wood.¹⁴⁴

But the masters gave him a drink that comforted his heart and made him to sleep. They comforted his wife, and told to her that there was no death-wound ne peril of

¹⁴² Bayle, bailiff, deputy, one, who keeps in custody

¹⁴³ Wryued, rubbed (Dutch, wryven, to rub).

¹⁴⁴ Wood, mad

his life. Then the Court brake up; and the Beasts departed and went to their places and homes that they came from.

How the Fox with his friends and lineage departed nobly from the King and went to his castle Malperduys

REYNART the Fox took his leave honestly of the King and of the Queen. And they bade him he should not tarry long, but shortly return to them again.

He answered and said, "Dear King and Queen, alway at your commandment I shall be ready, if ye need anything, which God forbid. I would alway be ready with my body and my good to help you, and also all my friends and lineage in likewise shall obey your commandment and desire. Ye have highly deserved it, God quite it you, and give you grace long to live. And I desire your license and leave to go home to my wife and children. And if your good grace will anything, let me have knowledge of it, and ye shall find me alway ready."

Thus departed the Fox with fair words from the King.

Now who that could set him in Reynart's craft, and could behave him in flattering and lying as he did, he should I trow be heard, both with the Lords Spiritual and Temporal. They ben many, and also the most part, that creep after his way and his hole. The name that was given to him abideth alway still with him. He hath left many of his craft in this world which alway wax and become mighty: for who that will not use Reynart's craft now is nought worth in the world, nor in any estate that is of might. But if he can creep in Reynart's net and hath been his scholar, then may he dwell with us, for then knoweth he well the way how he may arise, and is set up above of every man. There is in the world much seed left of the Fox which now overall groweth and cometh sore up. Though they have no red beards, yet there ben founden more foxes now than ever were heretofore. The righteous people ben all lost; Truth and Righteousness ben exiled and fordriven; and for them ben abiden with us Covetyse, Falsehood, Hate, and Envy; these reign now much in every country. For is it in the Pope's court, the Emperor's, the King's, Duke's, or any other lord's, wheresomever it be, each man laboureth to put other out from his worship, office and power, for to make himself to climb high, with lies, with flattering, with simony, with money, or with strength and force. There is nothing beloved ne known in the court nowadays but Money. The Money is better beloved than God. For men do much more therefor: for whosomever bringeth Money shall be well received, and shall have all his desire, is it of lords or of ladies or any other. That Money doth much harm. Money bringeth many in shame and dread of life, and bringeth false witness against true people for to get Money. It causeth uncleanness of living, lying, and lechery. Now clerks gon to Rome, to Paris, and to many another place, for to learn Reynart's craft: is he clerk, is he layman, everiche of them treadeth in the Fox's path, and seeketh his hole. The world is of such condition now, that every man seeketh himself in all matters. I wot not what end shall come to us hereof. All wise men may sorrow well herefor. I fear that for the great falseness, theft, robbery, and murder, that is now used so much and commonly, and also the unshamefast lechery and

avoultry,¹⁴⁵ bosted, blowen abroad with the avaunting of the same, that without great repentance and penance therefor that God will take vengeance and punish us sore therefor. Whom I humbly beseech, and to whom nothing is hid, that he will give us grace to make amends to him therefor and that we may rule us to his pleasure.

And herewith will I leave; for what have I, to write of these misdeeds? I have enough to do with mine own self. And so it were better that I held my peace and suffer, and the best that I can, do, for to amend myself now in this time. And so I counsel every man to do, here in this present life, and that shall be most our profit. For after this life cometh no time that we may occupy to our advantage for to amend us. For then shall every man answer for himself and bear his own burthen.

Reynart's friends and lineage to the number of forty have taken also their leave of the King, and went all together with the Fox, which was right glad that he had so well sped and that he stood so well in the King's grace. He thought that he had no shame, but that he was so great with the King that he might help and further his friends, and hinder his enemies, and also to do what he would without he should be blamed; if he would be wise.

The Fox and his friends went so long together that they camen to his burgh to Malperduys, there they all took leave of each other with fair and courteous words. Reynart did to them great reverence, and thanked them all friendly of their good faith and also worship that they had done and showed to him. And proffered to each of them his service, if they had need, with body and goods. And herewith they departed, and each of them went to their own houses.

The Fox went to Dame Ermelyne his wife, which welcomed him friendly. He told to her and to his children all the wonder that to him was befallen in the Court, and forgot not a word, but told to them every deal how he had escaped. Then were they glad that their father was so enhanced and great with the King. And the Fox lived forthon with his wife and his children in great joy and gladness.

Now who that said to you of the Fox more or less than ye have heard or read, I hold it for leasing. But this that ye have heard or read, that may ye believe well. And who that believeth it not, is not therefore out of the right belief; howbeit there be many if that they had seen it they should have none less doubt of it. For there ben many things in the world which ben believed though they were never seen: also there ben many figures, plays, founden that never were done ne shaped, but for an example to the people that they may there learn better to use and follow virtue and to eschew sin and vices. In like wise may it be by this book that who that will read this matter, though it be of japes and bourds, yet he may find therein many a good wisdom, and learnings by which he may come to virtue and worship. There is no one man blamed herein; it is spoken generally. Let every man take his own part as it belongeth and behoveth, and he that findeth him guilty in any deal or part thereof, let him repent and amend him. And he that is verily good, I pray God keep him therein. And if any thing be said or written herein that may grieve or displease any man, blame not me but the Fox, for they be his words and not mine.

Prayeng aile them that shal see this lytyl treatis to correcte and amende. Where they shal fynde faute. For I haue not added ne mysnusshed but haue folowed as nyghe as I can my cotype whiche was in dutche and by me william Caxton translated in to this rude and symple englyssh in thabbey of westmestre. fynysshed the vj daye of Juyn

¹⁴⁵ Avoultry, adultery.

the yere of our lord M.CCCC.LXXXI.¹⁴⁶ and the XXI yere of the regne of kynge Edward the IV.

THE END

I'm Julie, the woman who runs [Global Grey](#) - the website where this ebook was published. These are my own formatted editions, and I hope you enjoyed reading this particular one.

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