

MEDIEVAL
FRENCH PLAYS

Translated by

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BASIL BLACKWELL

1971

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

by Jean Bodel

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

PREACHER (Prologue)
KING of Africa, Arabia and Saracen lands
SENESCHAL to the King
EMIR OF COINE
EMIR OF ORKENIE
EMIR OF OLIFERNE
EMIR FROM BEYOND THE WITHERED TREE
AUBERON, the courier
CONNART ('cuckold'), crier to the City governors
DURANT, jailer
ANGEL
SAINT NICHOLAS
THE GOOD MAN
CHRISTIANS
FIRST CHRISTIAN
YOUNG CHRISTIAN KNIGHT
TAVERNER
CAIGNET, barman
RAOUL, crier of wine to the townsmen
PINCEBDÉ ('Pinchdice') } thieves
CLIQUEUR ('Chatterbox') }
RASOIR ('Razor')
TERVAGAN, the Saracen idol
Saracen Knights

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

Text

Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas was probably written between 1199 and 1202, at the time of preparations for the Fourth Crusade. The author, Jean Bodel, was a native of Arras and was employed as a clerk to the city governors. He was a member of the *Confrérie des jongleurs et des bourgeois d'Arras* and composed lyrical poems, a *Congé* or formal farewell, and an epic, *La Chanson des Saxons*, as well as this play. The clerks who worked for the city government apparently had a guild of their own, dedicated to Saint Nicholas, whose feast they celebrated with wine paid for by their employers and, perhaps, with entertainments such as Bodel's play. The Prologue says that the performance is on the evening before Saint Nicholas' Day (i.e. on December 5). However, the odd and rather wordy Prologue spoken by the 'preacher' may be apocryphal and added some years after the play's composition.

Saint Nicolas has survived in one manuscript (c. 1300), which contains many other works in Picard dialect written mainly by Arras poets, one of them being Adam de la Halle. The manuscript text is good and the difficulties are mainly ones of interpretation. Some passages are obscure because of the richness of Bodel's language, his use of slang words and puns, and because he assumes a detailed knowledge of contemporary Arras tavern customs and dice games. Although the text is clear, the rubrics of the original are obviously faulty in places and some speeches are assigned to the wrong character. In our translation we are indebted to the many scholars who have contributed to the establishing of a satisfactory text. We have principally followed F. J. Warne's edition (Blackwell, 1951), because it is the one

most likely to be used by English readers. We have abandoned Warne's division into scenes but followed his line-numbering. We have also received considerable help from Albert Henry's edition (P.U.F. 1962). On several occasions we have preferred Henry's ascription of the speeches or his interpretation and these instances are recorded in the notes. In providing stage-directions for the doing we have gone slightly beyond the strict requirements of staging in order to make the stage action comprehensible to a reader. An explanatory note on *Hazard* is given in the Notes (1111).

Bodel is both a master of word-play and of verse-forms. *Saint Nicolas* is composed chiefly in octosyllabics, but Bodel changes the rhyme pattern constantly, alternating rhymed couplets with sextets and octets. The octosyllabics are rendered here in our staple four-stress line, with rhyme used only occasionally for the most formal speeches. Bodel's alexandrines, grouped in quatrains with a single rhyme (e.g. 239-50, 384-411), and his similarly grouped decasyllabics are translated into pentameters, with alternate rhymes where greater formality was required.

Staging

The text is not specific about the staging originally intended and gives only some hints of production detail. The story requires five distinct locales where action occurs: the Saracen King's palace, the tavern, the prison, the distant lands of the Emirs, the battlefield. Characters move freely from one to another without the action stopping, and the delightful interweaving of high and low plots is accompanied by corresponding shifts of locale. Although the play could be produced according to the conventions of modern staging with a changeable set, a great deal would be lost. Ideally the action should be presented as continuous on a 'simultaneous', all-embracing set. (Thus Auberon goes at the King's command to summon pagan armies and on his way is tempted into the tavern (251). Later, as the thieves fall asleep in the tavern over their stolen goods, the King wakes at the palace to find his treasure gone (1187).)

Only three actual 'houses' are necessary. At the back of the 'place' there are the Tavern, the King's Palace, the Prison. (The Prologue mentions a *manogue* (18)—a hut or possibly an oratory, where the Christian is found, but this is not important in the play itself.)

The Tavern should be a porch-like structure opening into the 'place' (the Taverner invites the passing Auberon to sit *en ceste achaine*—'in this corner' or perhaps even 'on this terrace'); it has a doorway at the back through which wine is brought to the tables and dicing board. Outside there is a barrel-hoop tavern sign (254).

The Palace may be simply an ornamental arch with the King's throne beneath it. Adjoining it to one side is the Temple, which need not be a separate 'house', but merely a flight of steps leading up to an altar where the idol Tervagan is enshrined. Tervagan could be a gilded body-mask which is occupied for the purpose of the lamentation (1517). The actor slips away before the 'empty bladder' is toppled down the steps (1530). The mask may also be animated for the smiling and weeping prophecy (182).

The Prison could be modelled on the Hell described in the rubrics of *Adam*, having barred gates and visible means of torture.

The Emirs may be located anywhere at the perimeter of the 'place' and may have standards proclaiming the names of their realms.

The dead Christians and the Angel present something of a problem which may be solved by the inclusion of a fourth 'house': an open-topped tower representing Heaven. The Angel standing on the top appears and disappears with ease, and he addresses the Christian Knights and, later, the Christian in prison, from a position of eminence. After encouraging the Christians to die gladly, he could descend into the 'place' to lead the bodies from the battlefield into the tower of Heaven.¹

¹ Cf. the Latin liturgical play, *Ordo Rachelis*, from the Fleury MS., in which an angel summons the slain innocents to rise; they enter the angelic choir singing joyfully.

The dialogue suggests some of the costumes and properties needed. The image of Saint Nicholas should be a small portable statue or even a painted icon, which shows Nicholas' cloven miter—the subject of the jokes about his 'horns' (458, 505). Its keeper, the Christian, is poorly dressed and has a hood which makes him look monkish (506). The crier of wine, Raoul, carries a stick and tankard, which he beats together to attract customers.

Although humour is by no means confined to the 'low' plot, the distinctive tone of the play depends upon the differences and contrasts between the world of the palace and that of the tavern. Consequently, two distinct styles of acting should be employed, one exaggeratedly formal, the other free and naturalistic.

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

The Prologue

PREACHER Oyez, Oyez, lords and ladies,
God's blessing be upon you all,
To keep you free from every harm!
We want to talk to you this evening
About Saint Nicholas, the Confessor,
Who did so many miracles.

The truth of the matter is, they say,
Exactly as we read in his Life.
There used to be a pagan king,
Whose country bordered on Christendom;
War raged all the time between them.

10

One day this pagan set upon
The Christians at the very moment
When they were least expecting it.
They were caught completely unawares
And many of them were killed or captured;
The pagans routed them easily.

20

At last they saw, inside a hovel,
A worthy man down on his knees
Saying his prayers before a statue
Of Nicholas, that valiant saint.
Those wicked bastards fell upon him
And shamefully maltreated him;
Seized both him and Nicholas's image,
Took firm hold and held him prisoner,
Until they came before the king,
Who was greatly elated at his triumph.
The soldiers told the king the story,
Shortly and briefly, about the Christian.

G

'You lout,' the king said to his prisoner,
 'Do you believe in this piece of wood?'
 'But, sir, it's made in the very likeness
 Of holy Nicholas, whom I love.
 I pray and call upon his name,
 Because no one who from his heart
 Calls him will ever be abandoned.
 And he is such an excellent guard
 That he gives back with interest
 Anything one entrusts to him.'
 'You wretch, I'll fry you to a turn,
 If Nicholas doesn't return my treasure
 With profits; I'll entrust it to him,
 To test the truth of what you say.'
 The king committed him to prison,
 An iron collar round his neck;
 Then he got his treasure-chests unlocked
 And had the statue laid on top.
 He said, if anyone harmed his treasure
 And Nicholas didn't make it good,
 The Christian would be drawn and quartered.
 And so he left his treasure in trust.
 Some robbers came to know of it
 And one night three of them got together,
 Approached the treasure and carried it off;
 And when they'd carried it away,
 God made them feel a strong desire
 To sleep; they felt so drowsy
 They fell asleep right in their tracks
 Somewhere or other, in a house.
 But, so as to cut this miracle short,
 I will pass on, as the good book does.
 Now when the king became aware
 That he had let his treasure go,
 Then he considered that he'd been duped.
 He had the fellow brought before him
 And seeing him asked him this question:
 'Fellow, why did you deceive me?'

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The Christian was hardly allowed to speak
 A word; the soldiers led him off
 Holding him by both his arms,
 The one pushing, the other pulling.
 The king ordered he should be put
 To an ugly and ignominious death.
 'For God's sake, Sir, give me respite
 For just one night', the Christian said,
 'To know for sure if Nicholas
 Will bring me freedom from my chains.'
 Grudgingly the king agreed.
 But—this is what the story tells—
 He had the man put back in jail.
 The Christian, captive once again,
 Spent the whole of the night in prayer;
 His crying never stopped a moment.
 Saint Nicholas then took to the road,
 Not once forgetting his disciple.
 He went to the robbers with all speed
 And woke them up (they were still asleep)
 And straight away, as soon as they saw him,
 They were suddenly full of eagerness
 To do exactly what he wished.
 So Nicholas, without delay,
 Made them carry back the treasure
 Without wasting a single moment
 And place his image on the top,
 Just exactly as they'd found it.
 When in this way the king had tested
 The Saint and his great miracle,
 He gave command for them to bring
 The Christian in and not to harm him.
 He had himself baptized at the font,
 Not only himself but the other pagans;
 He became an honest and decent Christian,
 And never wanted to sin again.
 Gentlemen, we find it in the *Life*
 Of the Saint whose vigil we keep tonight;

70

80

90

100

So don't be overmuch astonished
If you see some curious business here,
For whatever you see us doing
Will be a faithful attempt, it's certain,
At stage-depiction of the miracle
Just as I've recounted it.

110

The legend of Saint Nicholas

Is the theme and story of our play:
Give us some peace and you will hear it!

(Exit)

(Enter the King, Seneschal, Connart, attendants. Enter separately Auberon.)

AUBERON O King, Mahomet who begot you
Save and keep you and all your barons!
And give you strength to defend yourself
From those who are attacking you,
Ravaging and ruining your land.
Our gods they neither invoke nor honour
For they are Christians, a stinking tribe.

120

KING Away from me, by great Apollo!
Are Christians in my land, you say?
And have they mounted an attack?
Are they so impudent and bold?

AUBERON King, never, since Noah built the ark,
Was such an army, such a force,
As the one which has invaded us.
Their foragers run all over the place
Whores, and bawds, and lecherous brutes
Go burning your kingdom down to ashes.
King, unless you plan defence,
The land will go to rack and ruin.

130

KING to Tervagan Tervagan, son of a whore!
Have you permitted this to happen?
How I regret the gold with which
I cover your filthy face and body!

I swear, if my magic doesn't teach me
How to destroy every single Christian,
I'll have you burnt and melted down
And handed out around my people;
For you are worth far more than silver—
You're finest gold of Araby.

140

to Seneschal Seneschal, I'm almost mad—
Spite and anger are killing me.

SENESCHAL to King

Ah King, you never should have uttered
Such blasphemous and senseless things.
It doesn't become a count or a king
To pour such scorn upon his gods;
In doing so, you're much to blame.
But since I'm bound to give you counsel,
Let's go to Tervagan together
On our bare elbows, and bare knees—
To pray that he will give us pardon,
To pray that through his holy power
The Christians may be overcome,
And, if we are to win the day,
That he will clearly let us have
Some utterance, some kind of sign
By which we may be reassured.
There's no deceit in this advice;
You'd better promise Tervagan
Ten pounds of gold to fatten his face.

150

160

KING to Seneschal
Let's go then, since that's your advice.

(The King prostrates himself on the steps of Tervagan's altar.)

Tervagan, in a wicked mood,
I said many stupid things today—
Better for me they'd been unsaid!

But I was drunker than a coot.

I pray you mercy, confessing my sin
On naked elbows and naked knees.

Lord, support and succour me;

This day recall to mind our Faith

Which Christians think to take away;

Already they're spread through my vast realm.

By oracle and by prophecy

Show me how they can be dislodged.

Lord, show it clearly to your friend

By oracle or by magic art—

Shall I succeed in my defence?

This is the way to let me know:

If victory is mine, then smile;

But if I am to lose, then weep.

Seneschal, what's your opinion?

Tervagan has both wept *and* smiled:

Here's some deep significance.

170

SENESCHAL Your Majesty, you speak the truth;

From Tervagan's smile you can take

Great certainty and great confidence.

KING Seneschal, in Mahomet's name

As you are my loyal servant,

Plainly expound me this oracle.

190

SENESCHAL Your Highness, by my loyal bond,

If this prediction were declared,

I think it wouldn't please you at all.

KING Seneschal, don't be afraid:

I swear to you by all my gods,

Just let it be a game, a joke!

SENESCHAL Sir, I believe your godly oath;

But I'd believe you very much more,

If you'd tap your finger-nail on your tooth.

200

KING Seneschal, you've no need to fear

Look! the sign of highest trust!

If you had killed my very father

You'd have no further call for fear.

SENESCHAL Now I can let my tongue run freely;

The oracles shall be expounded:—

That Tervagan smiled first—it's good;

You'll be victorious over the Christians

At the moment you attack them.

And it was right that, next, he wept;

For it's a matter for grief and pity,

That in the end you'll give him up:

And this is what the future holds.

210

KING A hundred times cursed be he

Who uttered this, or even thought it!

But, by the faith I owe my friends,

If I hadn't placed finger on tooth,

Mahomet himself could not have saved you.

I would have had you done to death.

But what's the use? Now to our business:

Go now, and have the army summoned.

All are to come upon my business

From the Orient right to Catalonia.

220

SENESCHAL Connart, where are you? Cry this at once!

(*Connart runs through the 'place'.*)

CONNART Oyez, oyez, oyez, good men,

Your honour and your interest!

Summons from the King of Africa:

That all men come, both poor and rich,

Furnished with arms, as is required.

Let no man dally, from the land

Of Prester John to Caramania.

230

Alexandrians, Babylonians,
The Canaanites, the Achoparts,
Let all come armed, in this direction
And every other savage nation.
If anyone remains behind
Be sure the king will have him killed.
That's all; now you can yell again.

(Exit)

KING to Auberon

Hallo, there, messenger! Are you around?

(Enter Auberon)

AUBERON Yes, here, your Highness! Always dutiful. 240

KING Auberon, give your whole mind to courier-work!
Go all around, call Giants and Canaanites,
Display my letters patent, show my seal,
Tell how my Faith through Christians is destroyed.
Those who remain at home can be quite sure
They and their heirs will live as slaves for ever.
Be off! You should be miles away by now.

AUBERON My Lord, take heart! The fastest camel could run
A mile, and I would still have passed him by
And left him well behind at the halfway mark. 250

(Auberon leaves the palace and crosses the 'place' by the
tavern. Cliquet sits inside the tavern, drinking. The Tavernier
comes out of the tavern to attract Auberon's attention.)

TAVERNIER Dine well, inside! Dine well, inside!
We've got hot bread! Hot herring, too,
And wine of Auxerre by the barrel.

AUBERON Ah, holy Bene't, your ring-sign—
(he points to the tavern sign)

I'd like to meet it every day.
What are you selling?

TAVERNIER What am I selling?
My friend, a wine as thick as cream.

AUBERON How much do you charge?

TAVERNIER The local rate.
I'm never like to be in trouble
For over-charging or short-measure.
Take a seat in the bower here. 260

AUBERON Tavernier, you can draw me a pint.
And I'll despatch it standing up.
I don't intend to stay here long.
I have to see to my own affairs.

TAVERNIER Who is your boss?

AUBERON I'm the King's man.
I carry his seal and his authority.

TAVERNIER Take this, you'll feel the effects of it.
Drink up, the best is at the bottom.

AUBERON This tankard isn't very deep—
On'y adequate for a taster.
But tell me, how much do I owe you?
I'm a fool to hang about so long. 270

TAVERNIER Pay me a penny, and then next time
You'll have a pint for a halfpenny—
It sells at a shilling, and no mistake.
Pay me a penny, or have another!

AUBERON No, you shall have the halfpenny now—
And the penny next time that I come.

TAVERNER Are you trying to pull a fast one?

280

You owe me, at the least, three farthings.

Before you slip away from here,

I'm going to know just how I stand.

AUBERON But, Landlord, when I'm back again,
You'll get a penny for the pint.

TAVERNER Yes, that'll be when the cows come home—
You've nothing to gain by trying it on!

AUBERON I'll never be able to settle with you,
Unless I cut a halfpenny in two.

CLIQUEUR Who wants to gamble on the cut,
A little game, to keep us amused?

290

TAVERNER Did you hear, you courier?
Come and settle your affair.

AUBERON Well, for one farthing, to keep the peace!

CLIQUEUR One farthing! No, for all you owe.

AUBERON You must consult the taverner first.

CLIQUEUR That wouldn't be a bad idea.

Tell me, sir, will you settle at that?

TAVERNER Yes, before anyone makes off.

AUBERON Play 'Highest Points'! No cheating, now.

300

(*Cliqueur throws three dice.*)

CLIQUEUR There they go! I haven't touched them.

AUBERON Good heavens, you haven't a five or a six,
Double-three, only, and a one.

CLIQUEUR That only makes seven, bad luck!
The dice will never run right for me.

AUBERON At any rate, I'm still to throw—

(he throws)

Well, my good friend, whatever you've got,

You're paying for what you never tasted!

I've got two fours for my worst throw.

CLIQUEUR Damnation to all messengers,
They're always slippery customers.

310

AUBERON Sir, this young gentleman pays the bill.
He insulted me—but let that pass.

TAVERNER Get out! I wish we'd never seen you.

(*Auberon leaves the tavern and runs to the far edge of the
'place', where he salutes the Emirs in turn.*)

AUBERON In the King's name—Mahomet save
The Emir of Coine! The King commands
You come to his aid without default.

COINE Auberon, greet the King from me!

I shall bring him a mighty army;

There's nothing that can hold me back.

320

AUBERON Mahomet save and bless your honour,
Great Emir of Orkenie land!
In the King's name, who asks your aid.

ORKENIE Auberon, Mahomet keep him safe!

Go! I'll set off this very day,

Since that is what the King commands.

AUBERON Mahomet, ruler of all things,
Save you, great King of Olfierne!
In the King's name, who summons you.

OLIERNE Auberon, you can tell the King
That I will bring my total power:
I would not fail for all the world.

330

AUBERON Emir of lands beyond the Withered Tree,
The King of Air, Tranle, Araby,
In the struggle against the Christians
Asks you for your immediate aid.

WITHERED TREE Auberon, in the morning early
I'll bring a hundred thousand pagans.

(*Auberon returns through the 'place' to the palace.*)

AUBERON O King, Mahomet save and keep
You and your people.

340

KING And bless you too,
Auberon! How have you fared?

AUBERON Truly, sir, I've spurred so fast
Through Araby and pagan lands
That never the tenth of such an army
Was ever assembled by pagan King
As is coming to you, I do believe,
Counts and kings and princes and barons.

KING Go and rest now, Auberon

(*Exit Auberon. The Emirs proceed separately through the
'place' and arrive in turn at the King's palace.*)

COINE King, from Apollo and Mahound,
I greet you, as your loyal subject,
For I am come at your command:
I do so, as my bounden duty.

350

KING My good friend, you've acted wisely;
Always come, when I send for you.

COINE From far beyond the Fields of Nero,
The country where the gardens flourish,
I've come to save you from this threat.
You will do wrong ever to hate me;
I've travelled in my iron-shod shoes
For thirty days' across the ice.

360

KING Say, who are these men drawn up here?

ORKENIE Your Highness, from beyond Galatia,
Where the dogs excrete pure gold.
You ought to love me best of all,
For I have brought you over the sea
A hundred ship-loads of my treasure.

KING Your trials have earned my sympathy,
My lords.—Where are *you* from?

OLIERNE Abroad,
My lord—a land of burning heat.
Nor am I grudging in my gift:
I'm bringing to you thirty wagons,
Full of rubies and emeralds.

370

KING And you there, looking at me, where
Are you from?

WITHERED TREE Beyond the Withered Tree.
I cannot make a fitting gift,
For in our land we have no coinage
Apart from money made of millstones.

KING Away, in Lord Mahomet's name!
What wealth this fellow promises!
I see that I shall never be poor.

380

WITHERED TREE My lord, I shall not lie to you—
In our country one man alone
Will carry a hundred in his purse.

(*Enter the King's Saracen knights.*)

SENESCHAL My lord, your knights have come at your command.
Mount an attack at once against the Christians.

KING Seneschal, by Mahound, they won't lack war—
They'll either be killed or captured or put to flight.
Go on, good man, and give them my command
To put themselves at once in battle-order.

SENESCHAL My lords, in the King's name I speak to
you: 390

Go and exterminate the Christian faith.
To ruin the Christians you were summoned here;
The harm they've done to us must be put right.
Advance! At once! It is the King's command.

ALL TOGETHER Forward! And may Mahomet be our guard.

(*The Emirs and Saracen knights advance to meet the Christian knights who enter from the opposite side of the 'place'.*)

CHRISTIANS The Holy Sepulchre aid us! Now for great
deeds.

Pagans and Saracens come to destroy us;
Look, how their weapons shine! My heart lights up.
We'll do such deeds, our prowess will be seen;
Each one of us, it seems, must fight a hundred. 400

FIRST CHRISTIAN Comrades, fear not! This is your judgment
day:

I know we must all die here, serving God;
But I'll exact a price, while my sword holds.
Their turbans won't protect them, nor their mail.
Comrades, let each man vow himself today
To God; Heaven is for us, Hell for the pagans.
Manage the attack that they may meet our swords!

YOUNG CHRISTIAN KNIGHT Comrades, if I am young, despise
me not!

Each day we see great hearts in little bodies.
I'll strike this brigand—I chose him long ago. 410
Be sure I'll kill him, unless he kills me first.

(*Enter the Angel, in a high place.*)

ANGEL Good men, be easy in your minds—
Do not fear, nor hesitate!
I am the messenger of our Lord:
He will deliver you from pain.

Commit your brave and faithful hearts
To God! Don't let these infidels,
Who charge against you in a rabble,
Intimidate your sturdy hearts!
Boldly entrust your lives entire 420
To God: the death you'll meet today
Is one all people ought to die
Who love God and have faith in him.

FIRST CHRISTIAN Who are you, sir, who give us comfort thus
And bring so lofty a message to us from God?
Be sure, if this is true that you relate,
In fullest trust we'll face our mortal foes.

ANGEL Good friend, I am an angel of God.
He sent me here to comfort you.
Be firm, for in the skies above 430
God has appointed thrones for you.
Fight on now, you have started well!
For God you'll all be massacred,
But you shall have the highest crown.
I leave you now: God bless you all!

(Exit)

COMRE My friends, I am the eldest here
And have given much good advice before.
Believe me—it'll be best for you.

We are battle-tested warriors;
So if we come across the Christians,
Make sure no single one escapes.

440

ORKENIE Escape, you say! Those sons of whores!
I'll strike the first that comes—you'll see!
But take care no one gets away!

COINE My lords, you needn't be in doubt
That I shall mow the Christians down
Like Berengiers at the barley-harvest.

OLIFERNE You wholesale murderers, between you
Will you make such a total slaughter
There won't be a single one left for me?

450

WITHERED TREE Look, here they are, the loathsome crowd.
Knights of Mahomet, into battle!
Strike them, strike them all together.

*Now the Saracens kill all the Christians. (The Emirs discover
the one live Christian kneeling before the image of Saint
Nicholas.)*

ORKENIE Comrades in arms, come here quickly!
The marvels of the Christian army
Are all a joke compared with this—
Look at the wretch, white-haired old rogue,
Praying to an idol with horns.
Shall we kill him here, or take him alive?

OLIFERNE Let's not kill him for goodness sake!
We'll take him for the King to see:
He'll be dumbfounded, I promise you.
Get up, fellow and stir yourself!

460

WITHERED TREE My friends, you hold the prisoner fast
And I will carry this idol here.

*(The Emirs lead the Christian to the palace. Their knights leave
the 'piece'. The Angel re-enters.)*

ANGEL O Christian Knighthood, fallen here,
How fortunate your lot has been!
How worthy at this present time
You scorn the world where you endured!
But, to reward the pain you've suffered,
You know for sure, I have no doubt,

470

The joys that are in Paradise,
Where God puts all those whom he loves.
On you the whole world now is bound
To turn its gaze, and die like you;
For God receives with tenderness
All those who wish to come to Him.
The man who serves Him with good heart
Will never find his labour lost,
But, rather, crowned in heaven above
With such a crown as you now wear.

480

*(The fallen Christian knights stand up and may either leave
the 'piece' or ascend to 'Heaven' to join the Angel. Meanwhile,
the Good Man has been brought before the King.)*

GOOD MAN Saint Nicholas, worthy Confessor,
Have pity now upon your servant!
Grant me your help and your protection!
Good friend of God, true counsellor,
Keep watchful guard over your man,
Protect my life against these tyrants!

ANGEL Good man, cowering here in fright,
Be brave and wise, in the power of God!
And, if these traitors take you off,
Don't let that cause you any fear!
Put all your confidence in God;
Trust also, in Saint Nicholas,
For he will give you strength and comfort
Seeing you firm and strong in faith.

490

H

COINE O King, be gladder now than ever,
For we have turned your war to peace
Through our power and through our wisdom.
Dead are those villains, dead the cowards;
The battlefield is covered with them
For thirty miles in each direction.

500

KING My lords, you all have served me well . . . (*he sees
the prisoner with the image of Nicholas*)

But never was there such a ruffian
As I see over on the right:
That scarecrow in a cap with horns—
This villain in the hood right here!
Tell me, what on earth is up!

SENECHAL Your Majesty, just for the wonder of it,

We've brought him live for you to see.
Now, listen how he spends his time.
I found him on his knees, praying,
Clasping his hands together, weeping,
Before his idol with its horns.

510

KING Fellow, do you believe in *this*?

GOOD MAN Yes, sir, I do! By the holy cross!
The whole world ought to worship him.

KING Tell me why, you horrid creature.

GOOD MAN My lord, this is Saint Nicholas,
Who helps all those who are distressed
His miracles are widely known:

520

He's able to retrieve all losses,
He puts lost travellers on their road,
He calls the faithless back to God,
He gives a light to those who are blind,
He brings the drowned to life again,
Nothing entrusted to his care,

Can ever be lost or badly damaged,
However long it is left unguarded—
Not even this palace, if filled with gold,
Provided his image lay on the treasure:
Such is the power that God has given him.

530

KING Fellow, that's what I'll soon discover:

Before I go away from here,
Your Nicholas will have his test.
I'll leave my treasure in his keeping.
But, if I lose a thimble-full,
I'll have you burnt, or broken on a wheel.
Seneschal, take him to Durant,
My torturer and executioner;
But see that he is safely guarded.

540

(*The Seneschal leads the Good Man to the prison.*)

SENECHAL Durant, Durant, open the prison;
I have a martyr's skin for you.

DURANT (*to the Good Man*)

By God, I'll give you a wicked welcome.

GOOD MAN Sir, what a massive club you have!

DURANT Come in, fellow, down in that pit!
The prison was completely empty.
So long as you are in my keeping,
My pincers won't be lying idle—
Not while there's still a tooth in your head.

(*The Good Man is chained.*)

ANGEL Good man, rejoice and cast away all fear!
Sustain your firm belief in Christ your Saviour,
And in Saint Nicholas.
I know it for a truth

550

That you will have his aid:
You will convert the King
And all his baronage
Out of their foolish faith;
And they will then believe
As Christians do, I know.

GOOD MAN I believe in Nicholas with all my heart. 560

(*The Seneschal returns to the palace.*)

SENESCHAL Your Majesty, he's in the prison.

KING Now Seneschal, my dear old friend,
All my treasures, whatever I have,
I want them all to be displayed,
The treasure-chests and boxes opened;
And put the 'Nicholas' on top.

(*The Seneschal brings out the King's treasure chests, sets them in full view of the audience and places the image of Saint Nicholas on top of the largest chest.*)

SENESCHAL Your orders, sir, are carried out;
I've left no watchmen there at all.
Now you can sleep in confidence!

KING Right! By the faith I owe Apollo, 570

If I lose as much as a single farthing,
That ruffian can tremble for his life.
He's very trusting in his God.
Now, quickly, send my criers out!
I want it known throughout the land.

(*Enter Connart.*)

SENESCHAL Here, you, Connart, proclaim to all,
The treasure's left without a guard.
That's a piece of luck for thieves!

(*Connart runs through the 'place'.*)

CONNART Oyez, oyez, gentlemen all,
Come along, give me a hearing!
On the King's behalf I have to tell you
That as from now his treasure hoard
Will not be under lock and key.
You'll find it all laid out, as if 580

On open ground, it seems to me;
Anyone can help themselves at will.
No one's left on guard at all
Except a single 'horned Mahomet',
Quite dead, he doesn't move a muscle.
Shame on the man who keeps it quiet!
590

(*Raoul enters the 'place' and passes the tavern.*)

TAVERNER Caignet, our sales have fallen off.
Go and tell Raoul to advertise
'Wine for sale'. They've had a glut.

CAIGNET Hi, there! Raoul, go round and shout,
We've opened up a new supply—
Wine of Auxerre, a barrelful.

CONNART What's this, you lout? What're you doing?
Are you trying to steal my trade away?
You just pack up! It isn't right.

RAOUL Now who are you, to give me orders? 600
God help you, tell me what you're called.

CONNART Connart is my name, my friend.
I'm the crier—like my father—
I work for the City magistrates.
I reckon it's sixty years and more
That I've got my living by this trade.
And who are you, if I may ask?

RAOUL. Raoul—I advertise the wine;
The folk of the Town are my employers.

CONNART. Clear off, you clown! Drop this act: 610
You haven't the real authentic 'cry'.
Throw away that stick and tankard!
I don't give a fig for you . . .

RAOUL. What's this, what's this? Who are you shoving?

CONNART. You! For twopence I'd set about you.
I tell you to throw away your pots;
Give up your claim to compete with me!

RAOUL. Just hear that! What a filthy speech!
He thinks I'll say goodbye to 'crying'!
Connart, don't preach that line to me 620
Or you'll be getting beaten up.
Cuckolds like you, just ask for it—
Not happy unless you're being beaten.

CAIGNET. Sir, sir, Raoul's in a fight—
Him and Connart, about their job.

TAVERNER. Hey, hey, you there! No need for that.
Calm down, Raoul! And you, Connart!
Let me decide the issue for you.
You'll both be better off for it.

RAOUL. All right by me.

CONNART. Yes, I agree too. 630
Even if it means I lose the lot.

TAVERNER. Don't be anxious; I'll judge it fairly.
Each one must have his rights in town:
Connart, you shall be town-crier
Under the King and the magistrates;

Raoul shall advertise the wines
So he at least can make a living.
And if Raoul happens to get drunk,
No one ought to hold it against him.
Go on, Raoul, make up the quarrel; 640
I don't want any disturbance here.

RAOUL. Shake on it, Connart, in the name of friendship!
We really ought to trust each other.

CONNART. It's peace, then! Go and 'cry' your wine!

RAOUL. New wine, just freshly broached,
Wine in gallons, wine in barrels,
Smooth and tasty, pure, full-bodied,
Leaps to the head like a squirrel up a tree.
No tang of must in it, or mould—
Fresh and strong, full, rich-flavoured,
As limpid as a sinner's tears; 650
It lingers on a gourmet's tongue—
Other folk ought not to touch it!

(*Pincédé enters the 'place'.*)

PINCÉDÉ. Well, this is one I ought to sample;
It's clearly tailor-made for me—
Mere common drinkers will be at it!
—And I'm a proper devotee.

RAOUL. Look how it swallows up its froth!
And leaps and sparkles, bubbles too!
Just hold it on the tongue a minute,
I tell you, you'll taste a super-wine. 660

PINCÉDÉ. By God! This is the real thing!
Just the stuff to set one up.

CLUQUET. Ah, Pincédé, make yourself at home;
It happens I was quite alone.

PINCEDÉ With pleasure, Cliquet, it won't be
The first time we have drunk together!

(*Pincédé joins Cliquet in the tavern.*)

CLIQUET Pincédé, what do you think of the wine?
I've got my clothes in pawn already.

PINCEDÉ So long as the wine's above halfway
I shan't want to pass the door.

670

CLIQUET Let's drink a pennyworth, anyway.
Draw us a couple of quarts, Caignet!

CAIGNET Sir, could you draw up Cliquet's bill,
Before he starts to run up another?

TAVERNER Cliquet you owed for half a gallon,
And then a penny on your gamble,
And for the messenger, three farthings.
That makes it fivepence, more or less.

CLIQUET Call it five! I don't care.
No taverner ever found me mean.

680

TAVERNER Caignet, now draw it off quite clear
For Pincédé who's just arrived.

CAIGNET Heavens! There's not much profit there:
We shall make nothing out of this.

CLIQUET Caignet, God damn you and your drawing,
And anyone else who draws short measure!
Why does he call on heaven so much,
This fellow who's always fleeing people?

PINCEDÉ You, bring us in some candle-light
If you've enough intelligence . . .

690

CAIGNET There you are, sir! Right by your hand;
Take it—that'll cost you twopence.

CLIQUET You're quick enough when it comes to counting—
Or to *mis*-counting, if we trusted you!

PINCEDÉ Pour out, Cliquet. Give me a drink!
My lips are dry enough to split.

CLIQUET All right, drink up! Who's stopping you?
Drink, for God sake! And good health with it!

PINCEDÉ Whew! What a wine! And ice-cold too!
Drink up, Cliquet—we're doing well.
He doesn't realize what he's selling:
It could be sold at twice the price.

700

CLIQUET Quiet, now—or the boss will hear,
Or his flunky who's sucking him dry!

PINCEDÉ True—and he cheats him of many a barrel
By drawing wine he hasn't paid for.

CAIGNET Cliquet, for heaven's sake, be quiet!
Keep your mouth shut—not another word.

CLIQUET Well, let's drink in peace and comfort.
There's still some wine left in the pot
From the first quart we had brought up;
And still some candle left to burn.

710

(*Rasoir enters the tavern.*)

RASOIR Good day to you, officers of the watch!
Now I have all I could desire—
Cliquet and Pincédé for company.
I've been longing to see them both.

CLIQUET Well, well! Come and sit down, Rasoir; You'll get some of our first round.

RASOIR A pleasure, gentlemen. I put myself Absolutely at your disposal:
We three are old acquaintances.

720

PINCEDE Come on, give him a drink, Cliquet.

CLIQUET Rasoir and his velvet tongue! Drink up, Rasoir; you're in luck: We've only ordered what you see. You've caught us up on the first lap.

730

RASOIR The merest trifle, gentlemen. If they had fetched you ten gallons out, I wouldn't sneak off to avoid the bill. Aren't the three of us old friends? Caignet! Draw us a full gallon— Lord knows, you'll get your money for it.

CLIQUET Rasoir must have sold his donkey, Ordering drinks so generously.

RASOIR But this is the way I always am. Let's drink what we want—all will be paid. If we owed them twenty shillings here I wouldn't be the least disturbed About the taverner getting his money Before the dawn—if he'll take a risk.

740

PINCEDE He has some thieving plan in mind When he talks boastfully like that.

RASOIR Stow it, stow it! Drink like men— Not chicken-hearts and draggle-tails!

CLIQUET Rasoir, we have drunk so much Our clothes will have to stay in pawn.

(*Caignet brings more wine.*)

CAGNET Take this, Cliquet. That makes fivepence: Three for this wine and two from before.

PINCEDE Will you swear it isn't watered?

750

CAGNET Of course it isn't—Christ almighty!

CLIQUET Unwatered, is it, you old ram? Drink some (*offering the wine*)—know what it is you sell. Take some, Rasoir, I bet you haven't Tasted wine like this all year.

RASOIR Cliquet, pour the wine in a flood! Let's try some of this new draught— There's some left in the barrel still— And then we'll settle what we owe.

PINCEDE Have you been eating salted herrings, Rasoir? You've certainly drunk your share

760

CLIQUET He's had a windfall, Pincede; I can see it with my own two eyes.

RASOIR Stow it, stow it! Farewell to our cares! Pour it out like the cheapest beer.

PINCEDE We're paying for your extravagance, Rasoir. We're not all well off. You must have been on the prow! last night, And now you're well and truly loaded.

RASOIR I'm not. I have some news for you Through which some good might come to us.

770

PINCEDE Then maybe you would come to some good If we could lay our hands on the stuff.

RASOIR Let's drink some more and chatter less,
Now all our losses are recovered:

The garters of the Lord are open
And nothing can stop us being rich,
For the King of Africa's treasure hoard,
His plates and cups and drinking bowls,
Are lying without lock or bolt—

780

No soldiers guarding night or day!
An old 'Mahomet' lies on top,
Of stone or wood—I don't know which.
The King won't hear as much as a whisper
From him if somebody steals the lot,
Or takes it off. Let's go today
When we've made sure the time is right.

PINCEDÉ But is this true, so help you God?

RASOIR Is it true? For heaven's sake,
I heard the crier shouting it out:
There won't be anyone on guard,
Whoever wants the stuff can have it.
Let's see if we can get credit on that.

790

CLIQUEUR Go on, Pincédé, pour him a drink.
Good news deserves a tankard full.

PINCEDÉ There you are, Rasoir. You can collect
The pool next time you see me gambling.
I never like to break my word:
My first winnings shall all be yours—
Take them, no matter when it is.
I shan't try to dodge my promise.
That reminds me, who's for a game?

800

CLIQUEUR Shall we toss for heads or tails?

PINCEDÉ No, let's throw dice, the three of us,
With the loot as credit—it'll bring us luck.

CLIQUEUR Landlord, lend me elevenience.
I'll owe you seventeen in all.

TAVERNER You're wrong.

CLIQUEUR How much?

TAVERNER It's more than that;
I'm afraid you're not so lucky

CLIQUEUR Count up every item then. 810

TAVERNER Your first gallon cost you threepence.

CLIQUEUR All right.

TAVERNER A penny hire of dice,
Three farthings you already lost—
Have I got it right so far?

CLIQUEUR Fivepence, if I still want to keep my word.
You're going to lend me elevenience now,
That's seventeen. That add up right?

TAVERNER Look after what you borrow, Cliquet.
You know perfectly well by now
That I shall want a guarantee.
You're rather cramped inside that coat—
I'm afraid it must part company
With you, before you leave the house.

820

PINCEDÉ Look, Landlord, we've heard all that.
The foot is on the other shoe—

We've drunk *five pennyworth* of your wine!
So first, let's toss for that, at dice.

CLIQUEUR Who's got some dice?

PINCEDE I have, square cut,
Regular, and standard size.

CLIQUET No dice of yours was ever square! 830

RASOR That shouldn't worry you, Cliquet.

CLIQUET No, not at all. Caignet, come here.
You know what you can do for us?
Look here, lend your dice to us
And take your usual share of the stakes.
It could be we'll have a bit of luck
And you'll benefit, I swear you will.

CAIGNET I can shift for myself, Cliquet.

PINCEDE Hey, you—Cliquet and Rasoir, say
If you want to settle your share of the wine,
Or shall we gamble for who's to pay? 840

RASOR The one with most points takes the stakes,
The one with least shall pay the drinks.

CLIQUET Caignet. I hope you choke unless
You lend your dice to us at once!

CAIGNET (*handing over his dice*)
Look after them for me, Rasoir—
I have had them officially tested.

RASOR This throw will settle who shall pay
For the wine we down before the morning.

PINCEDE Everyone throw with an open palm. 850

RASOR That's right.

CLIQUET I agree to that.

PINCEDE Throw, by Christ! No cheating now!

(*Rasoir throws three fives.*)

RASOR Fellows, look—it's fives all round!

PINCEDE May God send me so many sixes
That I can sell them by the dozen!

(*Pincede throws a total of five points.*)

RASOR Ha! That's a pretty feeble throw,
Pincede,—what you just put down.
He's hardly got a single point.

That one's going to cost you your jacket.
Five pence—so he throws five points!
That's his rule, you can count on it!

860

PINCEDE (*to Cliquet*)
I defy you to do worse!

RASOR (*to Pincede*)
Right, it's an insult to ask him to throw.

(*Pincede admits defeat and Cliquet puts the dice aside without throwing.*)

CLIQUET Just put it down to your account—
That's how decent folk behave.

PINCEDE Do you want to play for ready cash?

RASOR Yes, all right.

PINCEDE That's what I like.
Now, everybody turn his pockets out
And put down threepence beside the board,
And then the winner takes the lot.

870

I reckon there's no cheating then.
If you haven't any money, get some!

CLIQUET What game is it?

PINCEDE Whatever you like.

CLIQUET Highest Points?

PINCEDE So be it. Amen.

RASOIR I'll throw. God make it profitable!

(*Caignet interrupts, bringing a fresh candle.*)

CAIGNET Wait. You can't see much over there.
Let's have a bit of candle-light.

PINCEDE Treat us well and take your fee;
We shan't quarrel over that.

(*Rasoir throws quickly, before the light is set down.*)

RASOIR Good Lord! Twelve to start us off! 880

CLIQUET Two fours and a two—that gives you ten.

(*Pincede picks up the dice.*)

RASOIR There's some that hold the dice who throw
Much worse. I'll let you count mine for nine.

PINCEDE Pox anyone so asinine
To be afraid of losing to ten.

CAIGNET Are we supposed to light you for nothing?
(*He takes a penny from the stakes.*)

This one is mine, whatever happens.
(*Aside*) They'd not have asked for the bill for hours—
God blast the way they carry on!

CLIQUET Caignet, put our money down, 890
Until we've given you permission.

CAIGNET It's not a matter for your permission,
Cliquet. You're wasting this fat candle
And all our staff are staying up
Throughout the house, for the sake of your game.

PINCEDE I'm throwing. Gentlemen, he's right.

(*He throws eleven.*)

Aren't you interested, Rasoir?

RASOIR No, you've beaten me by one.

CLIQUET Now there's only me to throw.
I shall beat your eleven in two:
The third one needn't be counted at all.

900

(*Cliquet throws.*)

PINCEDE Hey! That throw doesn't count—
That was a bit of jiggy-pokery!

CLIQUET Well, anyway I get the beans:
I have two fours and a six.

(*He attempts to pick up the stake money.*)

PINCEDE Put that money down—or else—
You'll regret it! You're provoking me.

CLIQUET What right have you to contradict?
Haven't I three more than you?

PINCEDÉ Put down the cash, I'm asking you—
Before you make me flaming mad. 910

CLIQUET Damn your eyes! You shut your mouth—
You can see it come up on the dice!

PINCEDÉ Didn't I say that was no throw?
Do you want to run off with the lot?

(*He grabs Cliquet*).

CLIQUET What the devil . . . ? He's pulling so hard
He's almost ripping off my coat.

PINCEDÉ Here are your winnings—a poke in the face!
I'm glad to begin—I'm stronger than you.

CLIQUET I'll pay you back for that . . . so there! 920
Now you see how scared I am.

(*They fight, upsetting the tables etc.*)

CAIGNET Landlord, you're losing everything!
Run quick! They're ruining the clothes for pawn.
These bastards are ripping each other to shreds—
There's not a rag worth anything.

(*The Taverner runs out from inside*)

TAVERNER What's this, Cliquet? Is it a fight?
Let go of him! You too, leave off!
Go and sit down, the pair of you,
And each will get what he deserves.
Rasoir, tell us the cause of this—
You must know who was in the wrong.

930

RASOIR It's better to have them make it up;
This rough-house doesn't agree with me.

Ask Caignet whose fault it was;
Get him to tell it truthfully.

CLIQUET He leaves it all to you, Caignet.

PINCEDÉ I won't quarrel with his judgment.

CAIGNET Put all the money that there is
Down on top of the dicing board.

CLIQUET All right. There—all eight pennies. 940
And now, decide for us like a friend.

CAIGNET Gentlemen, since it's up to me,
You know I can't afford to lose.

Twopence is mine for candles and wine,—
The other six divide between you.

If one man were to get it all

There'd always be someone with a grudge.

Now Cliquet, you pour out some wine

And offer Pincédé a drink.

I want you two to make it up,

Since the problem is in my hands.

950

CLIQUET Pincédé I apologize;
I give you this wine a sign of peace.

(*Cliquet pours wine for Pincédé and they drink in turn from
the same tankard.*)

PINCEDÉ I'll let you off for quarrelling, Cliquet.
I know it was wine that made you do it.

CLIQUET Let's talk about some other business,
So everyone here can pay his debts.
Most of the night is gone already—
High time to go prowling in the dark,
Because the moon has set by now.
We're earning nothing sitting here!

960

RASOIR Landlord, do a favour for us.

We owe you a matter of some pence,
But we know where there's a heap of stuff
And we can make a massive haul.

We'll take the whole lot in one go.

This place we know is a treasure hoard,
With platters made of gold and silver—
Each man loaded till he bends.

I want to make a deal with you,
The like of which you've never had:

You shall harbour what we get
And so you'll become one of the gang.
You'll divide up and draw the lots
And out of that get what we owe.
No worries about getting paid!

970

TAVERNER Can I be absolutely sure
Of what Rasoir has promised me?

CLIQUEUR If God almighty keeps me free
From failure, infamy and jail—

980

And provided no one catches us
In the act and we all get hanged—
Then you'll be lavishly repaid:
You'll have a barrel full of gold.
But first, make us the loan of a sack
So we can put the stuff away.

TAVERNER Caignet, go and get them a sack.
It's going to pay for its way, by Christ!

(*Caignet fetches a sack.*)

CAIGNET Here you are, Cliqueur. It holds four bushels. 990
Off you go—God speed you back!

PINCEDÉ Goodbye, landlord. Pray for us.
Wish our enterprise success.

TAVERNER God bless you, lads! Good luck to you!

(*The three thieves leave the tavern and go towards the King's palace.*)

RASOIR Pincédé, you've made an art of it;
Sneak very quietly through that way
And spy out if the King's asleep.

(*Pincédé goes into the palace and returns.*)

PINCEDÉ Come on, quick, you thieving bastards!
The King's asleep, and all his lords—
So sound, they might as well be dead.

1000

(*They enter the palace. Rasoir picks up the image of Saint Nicholas.*)

RASOIR He didn't set much store by his goods
If he left this horny tramp in charge
Guarding such a priceless treasure!

CLIQUEUR Rasoir, help lift this heavy chest.
Look, it's full of golden coins.

RASOIR The devil it is! What a weight!
Move the sack closer, Pincédé.
This coffer's heavy as a flagstone;
One ounce more would rupture me.

PINCEDÉ Tip everything into a heap!

1010

I don't want to leave the chest behind—
I'd rather break my back with it.
Watch me while I try my strength!
No one else is going to take it.

(*Pincédé picks up the largest chest.*)

Load me up then, if you will.

(*Rasoir and Cliquet lift the sack on to his shoulders.*)

RASOIR Here you are. We'll help you anyway.

CLIQUET Let's get on the road, my lads,
While our luck is holding out.

(*They return to the tavern.*)

RASOIR Landlord, landlord, open the door!
We haven't brought your sack back empty—
We don't want to swindle you.

1020

TAVERNER Welcome, welcome, gentlemen!
Quickly, Caignet, give them a hand.
A pleasure to welcome such a guest!

PINCEDE (*setting down the sack*)
Fellows, what a load that was!
I don't think it would be amiss
For me to have a drink at this point.

CLIQUET Blow anyone who'd begrudge you that.
Good wine helps all *my* aches and pains.

1030

TAVERNER Gentlemen, you shall have a fire
And comfortable chairs, don't you worry,
And wine that's not the least bit ropy—
A vintage from a mountain-side.

(*Caignet starts to draw the wine.*)

RASOIR Caignet, lean it so the tap is lower—
Let's taste the rich stuff at the bottom.

CLIQUET Landlord, my friend, have him bring
A candle of the double size.

TAVERNER He won't come back empty-handed,
I can guarantee you that.

CAIGNET There's candle-light, and wine that's better
Than what is higher up the cask. 1040

RASOIR Ah! Dear God, blessed be the hour
This wine descended into the tun!

CLIQUET Give us some now, Pincede.
Now our pawn shall be redeemed.
Ah, God! How wine restores the soul!
At last we're well provided for.
Curse anyone who doesn't drink
A lot. Our tankard's big enough.

PINCEDE Come on, let it circulate.
I want to have a crack at it.

1050

(*They pass the tankard round.*)

CLIQUET Drink then—but not the tankard too!
No one's standing over you.

PINCEDE Goodness, this is real vintage!
I can't drink enough of it.

CAIGNET Do you want me to fetch my dice?

RASOIR Oh yes. Let them be put in their place.

PINCEDE Now you're talking. Let's have a game.

CLIQUET There's plenty to draw on now, Pincede.
(*He points to the treasure.*)

116 LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

RASOR Right! For our gambling and our spending 1060
We'll take a risk on the hangman's rope.

PINCEDÉ Rasoir, shall we play Hazard?
I've a fistful of halfpennies tucked away.

RASOR All right. I never let a chance go by.
Everyone put his stake, and good luck!

CLIQUET It's Hazard then, on the dicing plate.
I'll take my share. All do the same.

(Cliquet takes a fistful of coins from the treasure sack and the other two follow suit.)

PINCEDÉ My handful's about the same as yours.

RASOR And mine, as close as I could judge.

TAVERNER May I take a fistful, gentlemen? 1070
(They restrain him.)

But it's only what is due to me.

CLIQUET When it's time for sharing out
We'll protect your interests.

PINCEDÉ Rasoir, throw for who plays first,
And don't let anyone jog the board!

(Rasoir and Pincédé go to one side of the dicing board, Cliquet to the other. The board slopes down towards Cliquet's side.)

RASOR *(noticing his advantage)*
God damn anyone who tips it!
It's the flattest, truest board on earth.

117 LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

CLIQUET Hey, no! I'll have to throw up hill:
It's resting higher on your side.

PINCEDÉ By heavens, Cliquet, that's a lie!
I'll bet you one of those gold bits. 1080

RASOR Put a pea in the centre of the board
And it will roll straight over here.

CLIQUET Get on and throw, I'll take a chance.

(Rasoir throws.)

RASOR They're off! Watch what happens now.

CLIQUET There you are. Seven.

RASOR Watch it! Watch it!
Those last two dice are loaded ones.

PINCEDÉ No, Rasoir, your hand's too sweaty;
Rub it in the dust a bit.
This is how I make them roll . . . 1090

(Pincédé throws.)

Two sixes and five, that's seventeen!

CLIQUET I'm blowed if I will take my turn.
Let's stake, Rasoir; he gets first throw.

RASOR Good Lord, Cliquet, you should wake up!
He's expert at laying the dice.

(Caignet brings a fresh candle over to the dicing table.)

CAIGNET You must see clearly for this game;
They're not glass marbles you're playing for.
Cliquet, put this candle there,
Then you'll have a better view.

118

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

CLIQUET Caignet, when this game is over,
You'll get a penny from each of us.

1100

CAIGNET But why not give me some from the bank—
Three of them, made of shiny red gold?

PINCEDE Did you hear this greedy magpie?
When would there be an end of his grabbing?

TAVERNER Caignet, let them gamble in peace.
I'm expecting more than that from them.

RASOR You'll lose nothing by it, landlord;
I'll look after things for you.

TAVERNER Carry on.

PINCEDE Gentlemen, my throw.
I have first dice; I throw for the pool.

1110

CLIQUET I hope the first two give you seven.

PINCEDE God forbid! Hazard or sixteen!
Hazard, O God!

(*Pincede throws thirteen points.*)

RASOR That thirteen's ours.
Now we'll gladly give you Hazard.

PINCEDE No you won't. God forbid it!

(*Pincede prepares to throw again and lets one dice slip. Noticing that it turns up a three, he tries to claim it as a throw.*)

A runaway! Look, for Pete's sake!

CLIQUET That's no throw! Shake them properly
In your palm—never mind what it was.

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

119

PINCEDE Are you trying to cut me short?
At least you ought to let me finish.

1120

CLIQUET Go on, throw—with an open hand.
I hope you damn well get Hazard!

PINCEDE On the contrary, my count is eight;
That's better than Hazard anyway.

CLIQUET You covered yourself with that fallen three:
The other two are ace and four.

PINCEDE So now my eight fights your thirteen.
Come on, this game will soon be over.

CLIQUET Well, I'm damned! Blast those fingers
That keep on fiddling all the time!

1130

(*Pincede throws again, trying to repeat his eight. The others watch for a thirteen. First he throws a seven.*)

PINCEDE Ah, Christ! One more! That would have been
Well thrown. I shouldn't have made that seven.

CLIQUET Now thirteen is what we want,
If it will turn up for us again.

PINCEDE No, Saint Leonard, send the lower chance
And then the matter will be settled.

(*Pincede throws fourteen.*)

CLIQUET Holy Nicholas, send one point less!

(*Pincede throws his eight again.*)

PINCEDE That's it! Eight old friends again.
(*He goes to pick up the bank.*)

120

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

MAY I pick this lot up now?
That's quite a handsome brood of chicks.

1140

(*Rasoir forestalls him.*)

RASOIR Thanks, Pincédé, I'll take the winnings
You promised me some time ago.
You definitely swore an oath
That I would get the first game's stakes.

PINCÉDÉ What are you talking about, you devil?
This lift is worth a hundred pounds!
Do you think that I was drunk enough
To promise you the evening's coup?
That was the game with Paris pence.
Now when we play to get more wine . . .

1150

RASOIR Shout your head off! I wouldn't give
Two rotten eggs for your promises!

PINCÉDÉ But, Rasoir, you'll be better off.

CLIQUEUR Oh, sure, sure! We can believe that!
PINCÉDÉ God damn and blast you, Rasoir,
For trying to pocket our money!

RASOIR Well, whatever's on the board,
You're going to have to give it up.

PINCÉDÉ Then you'll have to take me too:
You won't get it otherwise.

1160

(*Rasoir and Pincédé fight over the stake money.*)

RASOIR Leave 'em alone!

PINCÉDÉ Get your hands off,
Before I smash out both your eyes!

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

121

CAIGNET Landlord! They're tearing each other's hair!
Can't you hear the row they're making?

(*The taverner comes running.*)

TAVERNER What's up? Pincédé, are you mad?
Let go at once—you too, Rasoir.
Come over here and sit down quiet.
I know how the quarrel arose.
Now bind yourselves over to me on oath—
I don't want to victimize.

1170

PINCÉDÉ All right, I won't touch the gold.

RASOIR Nor me—can't say I'm happy though.

TAVERNER Caignet, pick up all these coins
And put them back into the chest.

CLIQUEUR You won't get less than we offered you.
That's the lot. I can't see more.

TAVERNER Good. Now we're quits. Everything
As it was before, in the common pile.
And now, let everyone take his share.
What's up? What are you waiting for?

1180

RASOIR Listen, landlord, wait a bit.
We're all of us worn out because
We've stayed awake the whole night through.
Of course we'll share it out like friends,
But first, why don't we get some sleep?

(*The thieves sleep. At the King's palace the Seneschal wakes.*)

SENECHAL O gods! Apollo and Mahomet!
I had a curious dream in which
I saw the King's own mighty treasure

Lost beyond recovery:
The earth was caving in beneath it,
So that it plunged down into hell.
I shan't be happy till I've seen it.

1190

(*He discovers the theft and runs to wake the King.*)

Your Majesty—a dreadful thing—
It would be treason not to tell you!
Get up, you most unhappy King!
Your priceless treasure has been stolen.

KING What's that? The devil! Who wakes me up?
Seneschal, what's that you say?

SENESCHAL Oh, King, you're poor—you're made a
beggar!

1200

You can't blame anyone for this,
Because you entrusted the greatest treasure
That ever was known, to a wooden man.
Look at him—lying on the ground!

KING Seneschal, are you telling the truth?
Have I really lost my treasure?
That white-haired fool, he made me do it,
Coming here preaching the other day.
Have him brought to me at once.
His day of judgment is at hand.

1210

(*The Seneschal goes to the prison.*)

SENESCHAL Hey, you, Durant, jailer! Come here!
Is your prisoner still alive?
The King would like to look at him.

DURANT Oh, yes. Here, wretch! For your disgrace
Today I'll make you take three steps
Along the road of no return!

(*He takes the Good Man to the King.*)

Your Majesty, he's here. Please God
No one else be allowed to put him to death
But me: I ask it as my reward.

KING Fraudulent wretch! A poor return
Of yours for my colossal hoard!

1220

What a price I've paid for hearing you preach.
Your god cannot protect you now:
Durant, now we must make our plans
For a cruel death to shatter his bones.

DURANT My lord, I am overjoyed to have him;
I'll keep him at death's door, alive,
For two whole days before he dies.

GOOD MAN Oh, King! Don't act so spitefully!

1230

Give me one more day of freedom,
So they don't kill or torture me!
God is still where he always is,
He'll help me if it is his will.
A day's grace is worth a hundred pounds
And often has turned a war to peace.

KING Why not? Durant, leave him alone,
But bring him back to me tomorrow.

(*Durant drives the Good Man back to the prison.*)

DURANT In front—you beast! Back to the chains!
Oh, how I wish all Christians
Had just begun their Passion Week!

1240

GOOD MAN Saint Nicholas, may you be blessed!
Help me now in my distress,
For I have reached my life's last hour:
My enemies hold me in their power.
In time of need one finds one's friends—
Master, to your servant send

124

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

Help against this threatening pagan king!
He longs for my death; in the morning
My time runs out. I stand condemned
Unless the treasure is returned.
O Lord, deliver me from these fears,
From perishing in pain and tears!

1250

DURANT You swine! By all the gods, we shall see
The day when you must learn to serve
Your grueling apprenticeship!
I don't care for your god and your prayers.
I am going to make you a scarf
Out of a rope tied full of knots.

GOOD MAN Saint Nicholas, help me, oh help!

1260

The time of grace allowed to me
By my enemy is running out.
Saint Nicholas, look down on me!
I have trusted myself to your charge—
Where nothing can ever come to harm.

(*The Angel enters.*)

ANGEL Come, good Christian, comfort! Do not weep.
You shall conquer those that now oppress you.
Pray to Saint Nicholas to succour you,
And in a little while he will send help.

'God will deliver you; pray ceaselessly to the Saint.
God will never fail his servant.'

1270

Suffer affliction with bravery and with patience
And keep Saint Nicholas always in your heart.
You must not doubt that he will do his part,
He will effect your safe deliverance.

If you have served and loved him as your lord,
Do not renounce your faith, but serve him still!
Cease not your prayers nor dry your tears until
God grants you for your pains his great reward.

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

125

(*At the tavern, Saint Nicholas appears to the sleeping thieves.*)

ST NICOLAS Criminals, enemies of God,
Arise, for you have slept too long!
You shall be hanged without reprieve!
Woe to those who stole the treasure,
And woe the taverner who received it!

1280

PINCEDE What was that? Who woke us up?
Good Lord, how heavily I slept!

ST NICOLAS Sons of whores, you're as good as dead:
This minute the gallows are prepared.
And you shall forfeit your three lives
If you do not obey my voice.

PINCEDE Your Honour, you have frightened us—
Who are you? You terrify us all.

1290

ST NICOLAS You wretches, I am Saint Nicholas,
I who put wanderers back on the road.
Retrace your steps along the way
And carry this treasure back to the King!
You have done something criminal
In daring even to think of theft.
The treasure should have been well guarded
By my statue laid on top:
Make sure it is put there again
When you have put the treasure back.
If your lives are worth anything to you,
Return the statue to its place!
I shall leave you now, at once.

1300

(*Exit*)

PINCEDE (*crossing himself*) Per signum sancte cruchetis!
Cliquet, what do you think of that?
And Rasoir, what have you to say?

K

RASOIR Jesus, I think the religious fellow
Spoke the truth. It's shaken me.

CLIQUET I'm miserable; I've never been
So scared of a man in all my life.

1310

TAVERNER I have nothing to do with this,
If you men have overstepped the law.
Go on—get out! Out of my house!
I won't harbour stolen goods.

PINCEDÉ Just now you were our accomplice—
Since we're going to tell home truths.
Each must take his proper share
Of the profits and the loss.

TAVERNER Get out, you bastards! Greedy swine!
Do you want to heap the blame on me?
Collect the pawn for what they owe,
Caignet, and throw them out of my house.

1320

CAIGNET Now then, Cliquet, no way out—
Just you rid yourself of that cape!
What can we expect but trouble
From harbouring the likes of you?

(*Caignet starts to strip off Cliquet's cape. Rasoir and Pincédé pick up the treasure and slip unobtrusively out of the tavern into the 'place', where they wait for Cliquet.*)

CLIQUET How much do I owe?

CAIGNET Seventeen pence:
Five for the wine and twelve for the loan.
Where have Rasoir and Pincédé gone?
Well, leave your cloak for everything.

1330

CLIQUET You've turned very nasty, Caignet.

CAIGNET What's that? Didn't I count up right?
In fact, I'm doing you a favour
By troubling to take your cloak in pawn.

CLIQUET For taking pawn and giving short
There's no one to match you from here to the coast!

CAIGNET Now go to hell, the lot of you!

(*Caignet turns Cliquet into the 'place', where he rejoins Rasoir and Pincédé.*)

PINCEDÉ We're worse off than we were before—
The devil's casting a spell on us,
He wants to bring us all to ruin.
Wealth can come and wealth can go,
But if we're destroyed and torn to pieces
No one can put us together again!

1340

(*to Rasoir*)

Damn and blast you for your deals!

RASOIR Here, take hold. Pincédé, load up.
You carried it here, you carry it back.

(*They load up Pincédé with the treasure.*)

CLIQUET The landlord will be glum today—
He reckoned up worse than he ever thought:
He never charged us for the sack!

1350

PINCEDÉ Lads, now take a risk with me!
Everyone grab himself a fistful
Of these gold coins—it wouldn't show.

CLIQUET Shut up, you fool! It'd ruin us
If we were ever caught with it.

(*They enter the palace.*)

RASOIR Put it here—that's where we got it.
And put the image back on top.

PINCEDÉ Down you go! God blast the hour
I ever picked you up last night!

CLIQUET Don't get so upset, Pincédé.
Take the advice of a fool like me
That we all go our separate ways,
Then one of us is sure to get a break.

PINCEDÉ All right.

RASOIR Agreed. Nothing good
Will happen while we stick together.
I've got my eye on a bedroom wall,
Which I shall soon have drilled right through
To get my hands on a bride's fine clothes,
That are packed away in a chest of oak.

CLIQUET And I shall go to Fresnes, my lads,
A little way beyond Cavrelle.
If I conduct my business right
The mayor of Fresnes will feel the pinch.

PINCEDÉ The mayor's wife is pretty sharp,
She'll know you if you pass the house.
I shan't bother to go so far:
Just a stone's throw away from here
I caught sight of a line of washing.
I think I'll lend a hand with the rinse.

RASOIR Well, Pincédé, have good pinching!
1380

PINCEDÉ God lead us all in the paths of wealth!

RASOIR Adieu, Cliquet!

CLIQUET Adieu, Rasoir!

(*They part and disappear from the 'place'.*)

(*At the palace the King wakes.*)

KING Mahomet, make everything I saw
In my dream come true in life!
May Tervagan expound it favourably!
I had just called my noblest lords
To come and attend me at my court,
And I had had a new crown made . . .
Seneschal, are you awake or asleep?

SENESCHAL Sir, neither: I had a marvellous dream. 1390
I hope it may be interpreted
As good. It soothed me as I slept.
The treasure was brought back again
And the thieves who had stolen it were hanged.

KING What? Seneschal, at least go and look!

(*The Seneschal discovers the treasure and returns to the King.*)

SENESCHAL Your Majesty, my dream's explained.
Your treasure has come back again—
It's greater than before the theft!
I reckon it's twice the size it was,
And Saint Nicholas is still on top.

KING Seneschal, are you mocking me?
1400

SENESCHAL Your Majesty, I never heard
Of such a hoard—it's greater than that
Of Octavian, or Caesar, or Herakles!

KING My word! What a miracle!
Go quickly for the Christian.

130 LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

(*The Emirs and the King's court assemble while the Seneschal goes to the prison.*)

SENESCHAL Durant, bring the Christian out;
He needn't fear you any more.

(*Aside*) Why should I conceal the news?

DURANT You miserable wretch! I was a fool
Not to have hanged you by your thumbs
And pulled out all your molar teeth!

1410

(*They lead the Good Man to the King.*)

SENESCHAL I've brought the man, Your Majesty.
It lies within your power and will
Whether he's to live or die.

GOOD MAN Saint Nicholas, in whom I trust,
And whom I'll never cease to serve,
Shield my body, send me rescue!
Take care of your own man today,
And temper the anger of this king
Who threatens to tear me limb from limb—
His hatred of me is so great.

1420

KING Tell me, Christian, my friend,
Do you believe he could do that?
Do you think he could make me change my faith?
Do you think he could send my treasure back?
Is your belief in him so strong?

GOOD MAN Ah, King! Why should he not do that?
He helped the three young girls in need,
And once revived three clerks from death.
I'm sure that he could vanquish you
And make you leave your pagan faith
Which you should be called a fool to hold.
In him are all the seeds of good.

1430

LE JEU DE SAINT NICOLAS

131

KING Good Christian, he has started well:
My treasure has returned to me.

His miracles are evident,

Since he brings lost things to light again.

I'd not have believed it of anyone.

Seneschal, what good would lying be?

My heart is so utterly convinced,

I'll never seek another god.

1440

SENESCHAL My lord, I have not dared to speak,
But I have reproached you in my heart
For not telling me your mind before,
Because I have the same desire.

KING Good man, go fetch Saint Nicholas;
I shall serve him without question.

(*The Good Man fetches the statue of Saint Nicholas.*)

GOOD MAN O God, may you be thus adored,
For you have filled with heavenly grace
This king who fought against your word.
The man who disbelieves is as false
As he who slackens in your service.
Your power shines forth in every place.
King, cast your pagan folly out,
Lift up your hands and heart to God,
Asking him for his forgiveness,
And pray to our lord Saint Nicholas.

1450

DURANT (*Aside*) You Christian, you Christian!
I'm sorry I have spared you so long!

1460

KING Saint Nicholas, I give myself
To your protection, and ask your mercy,
Without deceit or treachery.
Master, I swear that I am your man.
I renounce Apollo and Mahomet
And this pagan bastard Tervagan.

SENESCHAL My King, exactly as you've done,
I bind myself, body and soul,
To our new master, Nicholas.
I spurn Mahomet and Apollo
And all their pagan race of Gods,
And Terragan—that filthy fiend.

1470

COME Your Highness, as you've been converted,
We emirs, who hold our fiefs from you,
Will also change our faith with yours.
My lords, get down upon your knees,
And all of you do as I do.

ORKENIE Most willingly.

OLIFERNE

And I shall too.
Now let us be good Christians,
Obedient to Saint Nicholas—
His virtues are so excellent!

1480

WITHERED TREE Do not count me in, my lords:
I am quite deaf to this Christian tale.
Cursed be the man who counsels me
That I become a renegade.
Wretched King, you should be drowned
Like a traitor and a recient
For turning into an infidel!
You should be burned or flayed alive!
You and your wisdom and your power
Aren't worth an empty ear of corn.
Beware! I defy you and give back
Your homage and the fief I hold.

1490

KING Quickly, my lords! By my crown
I shall force him against his will
To obey my pleasure and commands.
Hurl him to the ground by force!

(*The emirs struggle with him.*)

ORKENIE Here, help, my lords! He's very strong,
You must take him from behind.

WITHERED TREE Damn you—devils! Do you think
you'll take me
As long as Mahomet gives me strength?
Fly, you knights, you hypocrites!
I don't care for you and your tricks.

1500

OLIFERNE You will come here . . . I've got you now.

(*They force him to his knees before the King.*)

ORKENIE Your Majesty, behold your traitor.

WITHERED TREE Oh, King, mercy for Mahomet's sake!
Do not make me renounce my gods—
I'd rather have my head cut off,
Or my body torn apart by horses.

KING Upon my life, I swear you shall
Do what I do; you must learn that.

1510

WITHERED TREE Saint Nicholas, against my will
I have been forced to worship you,
You'll get nothing but my skin.
By my words I become your servant,
But my faith is in the god Mahomet.

(*The idol of Terragan speaks.*)

TERVAGAN Palas aron ozinommas
Baské bano tudan donas
Gebeamel cla orlay
Berec-he-pantaras tay.

1520

GOOD MAN King, what is he trying to say?

KING My friend, he's dying of grief and anger,
Because I renounced him and turned to God.
I take no notice of his preaching.
Seneschal, go for me and hurl
His statue from the synagogue.

(*The Seneschal carries the statue of Tervagan to the steps of the temple.*)

SENESCHAL Tervagan, in your misery,
You'll soon see the prophetic truth
Of the smiles and tears that you have shown.
Prophecy how many steps!

1530

(*He hurls the statue down.*)

Down! Curse you if you're ever raised!
You're empty as a bladder of wind!

(*He returns to the King.*)

My King, I've smashed him into pieces.

KING Christian, we shall be baptized.
As soon as it is possible.
I long to prove myself God's servant.

GOOD MAN (*to the converts and to the audience*)
Let us sing to God for evermore
'Te Deum laudamus'.

*Here ends the play of Saint Nicholas that Jean Bodel made.
Amen.*

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