INTRODUCTION

Item number 169 of Brown's Index of Middle English Verse lists two manuscripts of Cato's Distichs in six-line stanzas: MS Bodl. 3894 (Fairfax 14), fols. 122r-123v, and MS Bodl. 29003 (Add A. 106), fols. 15v-27v.1 The Fairfax version is a fragment of only two leaves, coming at the end of one of the manuscripts of Cursor Mundi.2 The version in MS Bodl. Add. A 106 is, in fact, an entirely different translation, unrelated to that in the Fairfax manuscript. Wells recognized this, and Förster demonstrated the difference by printing a few sample verses of the present poem.3

Brown's error persists, however. In one of the most recent discussions of the English versions of Cato, I.A. Brunner neglects to mention the Bodleian translation at all, although she discusses the Fairfax version.4 Furthermore, a mistake in the New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature obscures the information given there as well.5

MS Bodl. Add. A. 106 is a quarto volume of the fifteenth century, measuring 13.5 cms. x 20.5 cms. Six separate paper manuscripts are preserved together in the original fifteenth-century binding of leather over boards. The book is mainly a miscellaneous collection of medical and scientific information, but it also contains the Quatrefoil of Love.6
The translation of the Distichs occupies the present fols. 15v-27v. The hand is a secretary, with the initial capitals outlined in red. The rhyme scheme, aab ccb, is indicated by red pen lines connecting the rhyme words. The dialect of the translation is a northern one.

This version of the Distichs of Cato is translated, as Förster noted, directly from the Latin, without the aid of any of the French texts available at the time. The epigrammatic Latin of each distich has been expanded to fill six lines of English verse. The work was done by a translator who was not particularly competent at writing Middle English verse, and whose Latin, furthermore, appears to have been somewhat shaky. The result is a translation with a great many line fillers, and some very strained syntax. It is possible that this translation is the result of an exercise by a not very gifted schoolboy.

The translator's desperate attempt to fill up lines can result in a change in the meaning of the original. This sometimes takes the form of an appeal to reason (lines 39, 75, 224) or to public opinion (lines 60, 206, 549, 801). The translator gives the impression of sometimes urging ethical actions for immediate practical gain (lines 68, 239, 518-19, 633, 758-59) or, on the other hand, adds thoughts on the uncertainty of life and the necessity of living well in the face of death (lines 113-14, 130-31). Expansions of this kind, however, are quite compatible with the spirit of the original.

Distortion of a different kind occurs when the translator imposes his Christian habits of mind on his material. All things, both good and bad, come from God (lines 282, 293, 299, 364, 402, 445, 508, 586), even when, as in lines 402-05, this idea is very awkwardly combined with the image of Fortune's wheel. Good works are done for the glory of God (lines 89, 279, 296, 666, 887; cf. 499, 530, 844-49), while bad actions offend him (line 687) and must be atoned for (lines 679, 856). While the Latin distichs speak of a world of random events, in this translation God constantly watches over the affairs of men and sends suffering to test them (lines 429, 477, 777, 830; cf. 128). Paradoxically in a poem of advice attributed to the pagan Cato, knowledge is clearly felt to be Christian knowledge and God's law is the ultimate teacher (lines 568, 309). The greatest distortion of the original comes in Distich II 25 (lines 415-17),
where the stoic despair of the Latin is replaced by a promise of Salvation.

This translator's addition of Christian material is not a systematic re-interpretation of the Distichs such as those of Latin commentators on them. Rather, the author has translated the Distichs into the only context in which he could conceive them — that of a Christian universe.

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NOTES TO INTRODUCTION


5 George Watson, ed. The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, I (Cambridge 1974) col. 508. A line of type has been inadvertently omitted, thus implying that the present manuscript was published
in Archiv (1905-6). In fact, the manuscript there printed, Univ. Lib. Camb. Hh IV 12, contains Benedict Burgh's translation of the Distichs.

6 For a complete list of contents, see Falconer Madan, A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, V (Oxford 1905) 540-1.

7 The definitive edition of the Latin text is in Marcus Boas, ed. Disticha Catonis (Amsterdam 1952). Most of the manuscripts of the later Middle Ages, including the one used by this translator, are variants of Boas's text. For the various Old French versions see Robert Bossuat, Manuel bibliographique de la littérature française du moyen âge (Melun 1951) Nos. 2646-50, 5291; Ernstpeter Ruhe, Untersuchungen zu den altfranzösischen Übersetzungen der Disticha Catonis, Beiträge zur romanischen Philologie des Mittelalters, II (Munich 1968) 93-98. The Anglo-Norman translation of the monk Everard was well-known in England and was itself translated several times into Middle English.

8 The third and sixth lines of the stanzas particularly are often simply padding. See lines 57, 63, 69, 72, 121-23, 300, 303, etc.


11 I should like to thank the members of the editorial board of Florilegium who read this article with care and offered many valuable suggestions. Any remaining errors are, of course, entirely my own responsibility. A grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada enabled me to examine the manuscript at first hand.
All chylder pat wyll clergy kon,
Take hed how Catoun kenned his son
Of lely lyuyng to lere;
For to hym he told many a skyll
To lere pe gud & leue pe yll
Be ways many & sere.

I 1 Son (he sayd) sen it is so
Pat a God is withowtyn mo,
Maker of all mankynd,
Als bukes says, & wit perby
Hym sal pou serue all soueranly
With clen hert & clen mynd.

I 2 & son, to wake pou sal take kep
So pat pou be not gyfyn to slepe
Ne to vnrewleful rest;
For ydelnes oft sythes begynnes
To foster & forther many synnes
Wher vertus suld be fest.

I 3 The fyrst vertu to ald & jonge
Pat is to restrene pi tonge
In al reson unskyll;
For with God he is worthe to prays
Pat sothefastnes in seson says
& fro harm haldes hym still.

I 4 & perfor, sone, pou be awyse
When pou sall oper men chastysse
To putt owt all envye.

I 5 Son if pou wyll behald pi lyfe,
Or pe maners of man or wyfe,
I 6

Pan pat þou hopes may gretely greue,
Al if it lyke to þi releue,
Leue it for encheson;
For mekyll praises men erthely gud,
Bot mekyll mor men praises manhed
Wher it is rewled be reson.

I 7

Be myld & meke in wordes & dedes
Ay whyls men resen to be bydes;
& also if men ryse
Be nyght or day to do þe wrange.
Pan sal þou schew manhed emange;
So wyrke þai þat er wyse.

I 8

& for þe wordes, son, of þi wyfe
Sall þou not with þi seruand stryfe
Hir malice to mayntene.
For oft sythes, as þe proces proues,
Þe wyfe hattes þat þe husband loues,
Som tym so it is seyn.

I 9

& if þi frend be fell of mode
And þou entyse hym vnto gud
& he þi rede refuse,
jitt sal þou noȝte sese þerfor
Bot hym amonysche mor & more;
Piselfe þan þou excuse.

I 10

To þam þou wat hase wordes in wayn,
Stire not þi steuen to stryn agayn,
If þat þou wil wys sem.
For wordes er gyfyn to ilka schrew,
& wysdam is gyfen bot to few,

Perfor fa[i]lyng is to þam.

I 11 Lufe al men in lele charyte,
Bot on al wyse luke þat þou be
Vnto piself moste here.
& to gud men þou do gudely
So þat þou be not harmed perby:
Þis calles men counsell cler.

I 12 Ple for to tell iapes or iangeloure,
So þat þou be not mad none autoure
Of tydynge, day nor nyte.
For to be still may noȝte dysplese,
& mekyll speche dose oft dysese,
Bot it be rewled be ryght.

I 13 Þam þat is hyght þe of þi brother,
Hyght it not to none oper
Tyll þou perfor be payd;
For som men wyll hete ful hertly
Þat ar ful faynte in to assy
When þe soth is assayed.

I 14 & if any oper man þe prayse,
Wheder it be soth he of þe says
Sese piselfe abowte;
& trew noȝte mor of oper men
Þan to þesel, þat suld þe ken
Soth, within & withoute.

I 15 & if þou se oper men well wyrke,
Both to God & holy kyrke,
& his wirkes be vnknawen,
Þou may it tell till oper men,
& say how þai his wirkes sal ken,
Bot prayse noȝte þine awne.
I 16 & son, if you be ald & wyse,
Of oper sail you not dyspsyse,
Nother in word ne in ded;
Bot vmbethynke piselfe alsone
Of al þe dedes þat you have done
In þeres of þi youthehed.

I 17 Son, when you syttes in company,
Wheder men speke lowd or priualy,
Haue pese & hald þe payd;
Forwhi mystrowand men alwayse
Weynes ilke word þat men stilly says
Of þaimself suld be sayd.

I 18 And son, when you hase hape & hele,
& al þi wil of worldly well,
Fro owtrag spence þe spar;
& when þat you comes to elde
þou sal noȝte þan piseluen weld
To wyn as þou dyd ayr.

I 19 For mans lyf is no lastand thyng;
Ne non wat tym of his endynge,
How ne whar ne when.
Perfor is foly for to abyd
Or trust in thyng þat sal betyde
Efter ded of oper men.

I 20 & if þi pore frend gyfe þe oghte,
Restaue it & refuse it noght,
All be it lesse or more.
Bot take gud tente to his pouerte,
& to his wil & hys gud harte,
& reward hym perfor.

I 21 & son þou well wat þou was wroght
A naked chyld, & had ryght noȝte,
Als is þe course of kynd.
And if pouert to þe fall,
Thole & thanke God of all,
With mekenes in þe mynd.

I 22
And do, son, in al þi ded
þi last day þou thar noȝte dred,
Ne commyng of ded;
For he þat thynkes on swylk thynge,
He loses his lyfe & lyffyng,
& is ay wyl of red.

I 23
And if þou haue don for many frend,
& non of þam will be so heng
For to thanke þe þerfor,
Gruche noȝte vnto God for þi,
Bot rewle þiself mor ryghtwysly
& do þou so no more.

I 24
& also I sal say þe, sone,
What worldy gud as þou hase won,
Spare it for þi spede.
For erteþly frendes wil fayntely fall,
& þan þi gud may most awyly
To helpe þe in þi ned.

I 25
A thynge þat þou may gyfe or lene,
Hyght it not twyse, ne to two men,
For paryng of þi name.
For what man so þe fayland fyndes
Wil say þi wordes as wast as wyndes;
Pan war þou worthy to blam.

I 26
& if þou her a man þe glose,
And þou dysayte in hym suppose,
Pat his hert lufes þe noȝte,
Speke þou ryght so to hym agayn;
So sal ye both be vn[certayne
What thing is in your tho[ste.

& when you seye soltle of sawe,
Frayne no[te ouer fayr for to knaw
\[ponynes of per priuytte,
For pe pipe makes gud melody
When pe birdes er begyled perby,
& son so may you be.

If you haue chylder fayr plente,
& no[te to leue p[am, gold ne fee,
When pat you f[alles quarte,
Gett p[am to craft whils pai er jingh
Wharby pai may haue per lyffynge,
& fond p[am from pou[ert.

Thyng lytil of prese son sal you prayes,
& thyng pat takes gret w[or]th always
Praise it not, lowd ne still.
So sal men deme pat you be wyse,
And excuse pe of couetyse,
& of skarsenes be skyll.

A thyng pat you was wont to blam,
Luke pat you do no[te be same,
Bot fay[n] it to refuse.
For ilk herd man aw for to lett,
To reproue seruand or sugett,
For thyng hymself wil vse.

& if you sal aske any thyng,
Luk pat r[ghtwys be pine askynge,
& honest in al kyn wise;
For it is foly for to craue
Thyng pat pe lawe wil no[te you haue,
& pat ryght pe denyse.
And son, lat no3te pi hert be drawn
Fro pi frend pat pou lang has knawen
For no new conysaunce;
For of pe knawen pou wate pe will,
& how pe new is, gud or ill,
pou wat not bot be chaunce.

& sen pou seys pi erthely lyfe
Is vncertayn, to man & wyfe,
And fals in to assy,
Euer ilka day pou pe awyse
To wirke so pat som profett ryse
To saule or to body.

& son, whar pou may, be mastry,
Ouercom any of pi company,
In word or els in dyd,
Suffre paim, & seke no wreke,
So sal men of pe worschepe speke,
& helpe if pou haue ned.

& if pou thynk, son, to aske oght
Of any man pat aw pe noght,
Al if pe gyfte be gret,
Dred pou no3te to gyfe lytil thyng,
For pat makes neighbors mery to syng,
& grace so sal pou gette.

When pou has fo[n]don swylk a frend,
Be war alway whar pou sal wend,
No strif stir you betwyn.
For of hatered is Ire pe rute,
& acord is beyld & bute
Of loue, & kepes it clen.

& if pi servuand or pi wyfe
Stir be nto mony strife,
To Ire or to envye,
Lat pou pi witt pan pas pi wyll,
To reule pe be reson & skyll,
To venge pe not vyloosly.

I 38
For whomso pou ilk day may der,
Paim semes wel somtym to forber,
& nojte to wreke ilk wrang;
For pe most vertue pat may plese
Is to be sufferand in dyssese,
If pou of strengthe be strang.

18v
I 39
& guidus pat pou gyttes with trawele,
Kepe pam wel, for force wil fayle,
& trust of frendes is non.
For when pi labour is to pe grefe,
Pan falles pou son vnto myschefe,
& al pi guidus be gon.

I 40
Of mete to frendes luke pou be fre,
& pan wil pai gyf agayn to be:
So sal pou frenschep fell.
Bot how so euer 3e part 3our pelfe
Be pou most frendely to piselfe,
Els wil it nojte be welle.

II Pref. Son, if pou list to vnderstand
11.1-2 & ler how pou sal til pi land,
To Virgyll pan tak hed;
II Pref. & if pou wil haue knawyng cler
11.2-3 Of Herbes, pam Macer wil pe ler,
His romanse if pou red.

II Pref. & if pe lyke pan to ler more
11.4-5 Of batels pat hase ben befor,
In Rome & in Affrike,
Red Lucane, & pan may pou ler
Of Marte, & of oper many & ser,
    For he gaf tent to slike.

II Pref. & if pou wil, whils pou art 3onge,
11.6-7 To ler pe oght of lele l[o]fyng,
    Pan Ovyd bus pe vse.
II Pref. & if pi list be no3te parto,
11.7-9 Lere pe pan for to lyfe so
    Pat pou may syn refuse.

II Pref. A, der son, tent vnto me gitt,
1.10 & lere what is wysdom & wyt,
    & haue in mannes mynd;
    For wysdom is pe souerayne floure
    Pat brynges furth frute & swet sauour
    Of al virtuse be kynd.

II 1 & son, it is witt wel to do,
To vnknawen men pat comes pe to,
    & beyl paim as pi broder;
    For better it is gud frendes to haue
    Pan ony kyngdom for to craue
    With enmytes of oper.

II 2 & cast pe no3te to controue
Of heuenly thynkes pat ar abou,
    How pai par corse kepe;
    Bot of pe erth, sen pou is wro3te
Of erthely thynges, sal be pi tho3te
    Alway, to Godes worschop.

II 3 Do so, my son, in pi dyd
    Pe day of ded pat pou no3t dred,
    Whenso God wil it send;
    For whils pou dredis pat day of strife
    Pou loses pe lykyng of pi lyfe,
    In what land so pou lend.
II 4 & for þe thyng þat is in doute,  
If þou be greuyd, lat ire passe owt,  
& strife not þe þem for lang;  
For ire trublys mynd of men  
So þat þai may noȝte clargy ken,  
Whilk thyng is ryte or wrang.

II 5 Son, it is witt for to dyspend  
Erthly gud þat God wil send  
By ryght rewle, & be reson;  
& if þou sal gyf ony thyng,  
Luke it be gyfen to Godes louyng  
& seyn fytt in gud seson.

II 6 & fro al owtræg suld þou fle,  
& lytill thyng, if God gyf þe,  
Haue yoe þerof in harte;  
For a gret schippe may sykyrar be  
In lytil water þan in þe see  
To haue men in þer wharte.

II 7 & if any of þi company  
Til oper trespas pryuely,  
& non bot þou it knaw,  
Þan sal þou layn it on alwyse  
So þat no sclaunder þerof ryse;  
Þis lernys þe Godes lawe.

II 8 & men þat gyttes þer gudes with syn,  
Trowe þou noȝte þat þai sal wyn  
Gud hape to þer behoue,  
For al if syn som tym be hyd,  
Som tym it sal be kyd,  
Vnto þam gret reproue.

II 9 Lake noȝte þe strenght of litil men,  
For þer vertuse þou may not ken,
Bot witt pis wel alwas.
Sere men haue wit wel to do
Whom kynd wil gyf no strenght perto,
Wherfor men suld paim praies.

II 10 & if one be no3te lyke to pe,
Of strenght, ne state, ne of degre,
Mer þou hym neuer þe mor;
For ful oft sythes son may þou se
Pe ouercommer ouercommen be
With hym þat fel bel befor.

II 11 & son, agayns man þat þou knawes,
Strife not with vnsemly sawys,
Ne hald no childys lang;
For of few wordes, ful wel we wat,
Commes mekyll strif & gret debate
If þai be mayntened wrang

II 12 & gudes þat God gyfes þe of grace,
Cast þou not how þai com in plase,
Ne how God has þaim wro3t;
For al þat He has gyfen to þe,
At is wil He may flitte fro þe,
Wheder þou wil or no3te.

II 13 & sone, be bowne ever bysly
With al þi force to fle enuy
& Ire, þat is euyle syn;
For if it no3te to oper der,
To piself it is euyle to ber,
& hurtes þi hert within

II 14 & if þou be dyssesesed with wrang,
Accused, or demede to draw or hang,
With fals Iuge or vntrew,
Be þou of hert stalworte & stable:
To be it sal be profetable,
When pai ful sore sal rew.

II 15 & if pou haue ben at debate
With any man, arly or late,
& 3e be mad ful frendes,
Seke pou never vengeance for pat sam,
Ne pursches no3te to pare his name,
For pan al wrang pou wendes.

II 16 Prayse no3te piselfe if pou do well,
For pat after pat, as folk may [t]ell,
Followes vaynglorye;
Ne blam no3te piselfe out of skyll,
For, as clerkes acordes bertill,
Pat is ypocrysysye.

II 17 If God haue sent be grete plente
Of erthely gudes, as gold or fee,
Spend not euer fast perfor,
For pou gose lange abowte,
In litill space is spendytte oute,
When pou may gyte no mor.

II 18 & som tym, son, it may be kenned
Pat witt bus be with foly blendyd,
Efter be cause wil craue;
& if pou feyn pe a ful to be,
Luke pat no foly be fon in pe,
Bot se piself to saue.

II 19 And luk pou be no3te lycherouse,
No nothyng in pine awn house,
Bot fie pat foule defame;
For couatyse in mans body,
With scarsenes & with lychery,
May lyghtely lose his name.
II 20 & if men tell pe tydthynges sale,
Leuf þou not þat al be lele,
Al if þai sothely say;
For sere men of sere maters melles,
& al is noȝte soth þat men telles;
Pis may þou witt alway.

II 21 Son, be wel war wyn for to drynk,
& if þou syn, son, it forthynde
& vnto schrift þe sped;
For þisef þo if þat þou schame,
þe wyn is nothyng for to blam,
Bot þou þat dose þe ded.

II 22 & son, tel noȝte þi hyd counsayle,
Bot to a frend þat wil not fayle,
& þat wil lely layne;
Ryght so a hurt man suld þou teche
To seke vnto a sothfast leche,
To legge hym of his payn.

II 23 If þou þi seruand or sugett se
May gett vnto a hy degre,
Gruche not what God wil send;
For fortune ofttymes turnes his whell,
Somtym to wo, somtym to well,
As common course is of kynd.

II 24 & son, of cases þat may fall,
Luke þat þou be war withall
& haue in mynd euermore;
For be it myrth, or els myschefe,
It sal noȝte gretely to þe grefe,
& þou knaw it before.

II 25 & if þi hape be noȝte ful gud,
Stand þou stably as þou stode,
& be no thyng abayste;
Bot trewly thynk in hert on pis: fol. 21r 415
God is of myght to mend al mys
Of men pat in Hym traste.

II 26 If pou se thyng to sel or by,
Take tent, & leue it noȝte lyghtely
    Wher pou may siluer saue;
For if pi fronte be ful of hare,
Afterward it may be bare,
    & non swilk happyne haue.

II 27 What tym is past, son, s[e] pou sal
& se whatym sal forther fall,
    Als fortherly as pou may;
For whoso wil his tym well spend,
S[e]th be begynynge, pe medes, & pe end,
    God wil hym help alway.

II 28 & alway in spence vse mesure,
So pat pou may piselfe succure
    & war pe wel fro wath;
With owtrage is euer euyle to del,
    & in mesure is hape & hele,
To saule & body bath.

II 29 & if pou sere folke assente
To dem, or gyfe a iugement,
    What thyng is don or sayd,
Deme pou noȝte pan per agayn;
For if pou dyd few wald be fayn,
    & many wald be il payd.

II 30 Son, whil pou space & hel may haue,
Seke pou how piself may saue,
    & piself scheld fro schame;
For if God grante pe sertan tyd
& pou lat it slyp & ouerslyd,
    Pe tym is noȝte to blam.

II 31  On dremes, son, thynke pou not lang,
    Bot als pai com, so lat paiȝ gange,
    & pas out of pi mynd.
    On days what syttes pi hert most nere,
    Pat sal in pi slepe apere;
    Pis is pe cours of mankynd.

III Pref. What man pat letter of clargy knawes,  fol. 21v
11.1-2 & herthly heres, or says my sawes,  fol. 21v
    Whilk I araye to rede,
    If he take tent to my counsayle,
    It may hym mend & mekyll awayle
    To fulfill it in ded.

III 1 & perfor, son, sese noȝte to ler,
    & hold in pi hert if pou oght her,
    & spend no tym in vayne;
    For man pat wil noȝte lerned be
    Is lyke ane ymage made of tre,
    Pat to no gud may gayne.

III Pref. & if pou wil wirke as I pe wryte,
11.3-4 It may be turn to grete profyte;
    & on pe sam manere
    If pat pe list not on it luke,
    Blam not me pat makes pe buke,
    Bot pe pat wil not lere.

III 2 Ay whils pou rewles pe ryghtwysly,
    & oper haue of pe enuy,
    Pou sett not be per sawes;
    For it is noȝte in our power
    A wikked tong to stynte & ster,
    Bot God al gud warkes knawes.
III 3

If domes her be landes law
For to ber wittnes wil pe draw
Soth of pi frend to say,
So pat pou bere piself no blame,
Be to saue pi frend fro scheme
In als mekyll as pou may.

III 4

Be war with men pat makes it quaynte,
& spakes to pe fayr wordes & faynte,
For falshed commes behynd;
& symple folke to noble fame,
Euer as pai meyn pai say pe sam,
Gud fayth pou sal per fynd.

III 5

& son, if pou wil haue pi qwarte,
Put heuynes owt of pi harte,
& be pou glad & blythe;
For heuynes of hert anely
Destruys pe strenght of pi body,
& gendirs euyle oft sythe.

III 6

Be no3te in hefynes ouer lange,
Bot mel with myrthis somtym emange,
& cache comforth perby.
So sal pou vnto God plese,
& lyghtlyer suffre dyssese
Pat falles oft sodanly.

III 7

What pou sees any do or say,
Scorne pam no3te, be nokyn way,
Bot haue pis in pi tho3te:
Pat to piself myght fall pe same;
& pan if ober men pe blame
Pou wald like it ry3te no3te.

III 8

& son, of gudes pat God has lente,
Ordeyn to make pi testament,
& onely of pyn awne.
Better is betym pe saule to tent
Pan for to purchesse land & rent
To gar pe name be knawen.

III 9 & when pou commes to course of held,
& hase grete welthes in pe weld,
Pan is tym to tak hed;
And gyfe gladly with pe hend,
For swylk meyd may pe mast mend
In tym when pou has ned.

III 10 & if pe seruand to pe say
In counsell pat amend pe may,
Refuse pou noste his red;
For in al thyng pat men sal vse
Per is no counsell to refuse
Pat may wele stand in sted.

III 11 & if pou fall, as dose ful fell,
Both of witt & warldy well,
Be noste þerof gruchand;
Bot soueryngly, as I ayr sayd,
Laud God, & hald pe payd,
As pe tym is ordand.

III 12 Son, wed no wyf for warldy med,
Bot bye lawe pe lyfe pou lede
In lufe & charite;
& if scho lufe aneoper louer
Pou lat hir wend hyr way foreuer,
Pat no wers worth of pe.

III 13 & son, what [men] of wysdom wirk
To se pat suld pou noste be irke,
& tak gud tent þerto;
& if pou se þer warkes well sped,
Take þou ensample of þer ded
& do þiself ryght so.

III 14
& luke þou take no charge on hand
Bot [þ]at þou may þerforme to end
Als þer hase don beforne;
For if þou take on þe trawale,
& or þou end it fayntly falle,
So sal som men þe scornne.

III 15
Bot & þou a comon synner know
þat will not mend hym for no sawe
To sle a foul defam,
His syn þou sal noȝte hald þr[i]ue,
Lesse þat som men say of þe
þou assentes to þe sam.

III 16
If wikkyd law agayns þe wend,
þan most þou make þe iuge þi frend,
Als bes þou noȝt excursed;
Bot frend or foo wheder he be,
Þe law is gud in his degre
If þat it be well vsyd.

III 17
If þiself haue don a trayn
Wharfor þe aw to suffre payn
As sothfastnes will dem:
If þou be angerd for þat ded
Suffre it mekly for þi med,
Þus þiself suld deme.

III 18
& son, ler lessons of holy writt,
& wyrk þereþer with þi witte,
& trew no talles in wayn.
For þ[þ]ettes tales mervels alway,
Bot al is noȝte soth þat þai say,
Al if þai sem certayne.
& if thou sittest at maungery,
Cast be to carpe curtasly
Wher many men are mette;
For he that will be halden wyse,
Of all his wordes wil hym awyse,
& se he be well sett.

If thy wife with thy men
So that she greet when she is greued,
Be thou pan war perby;
For when he greet pan women layte
Other to say or to debayte
To veng paim vyously.

& if thou have good of God's gyfte
Wast it note in non vnryght,
Bot to thy house behowe;
For if thou wast thy awn perchaunce,
Pan bus pe make wrang cheuesaunce
That may turn to reprowe.

& do so, der son, I pe red,
That ther note thy drede to ded
Be mydday morn pe prime;
For ded is end of alkyn thyng,
& no man knowes of his commyng;
Perfor be war betym.

& if thy wife tell be a tayle,
Wheder it suld be to blis or bayle,
Suffre & say note far;
For if thou wilt not suffre hir saw
Ne hald in priuy as be aw
It mon worth vnto war.

& lufe thy kyn with consciens cler,
& to thy moder on all maner
Sal þou be seruiaasable;  
For if þou trespas hir vnco  
þou greues þi fader & oper also:  
Þis sal þou fynd no fable.

IV Pref. And if þou wyll lyf sykerly,  
11.1-2 Both vnco saul & to body,  
Refuse foly of schrewes,  
& put away al wikked thyng  
Þat may þe lett of lele lyfynge,  
& gyf þe to gud thewys.  
fol. 23v 610

IV Pref. & if þou will rewele þi deid,  
11.3-4 Per resons oft sythes suld þou red,  
Wher þou may fynd expreste  
Whylk thynges er honest for to vse,  
& whilk þe aw to refuse,  
& forber for þe beste.  
615

IV 1  
Ryches, my sone, þou sal dyspyce,  
& chache away so couatyse;  
Lat it not with þe lend.  
For ryche men her hase grete trawell,  
& oft sythes may men se þaim falle,  
& far euyl or þai end.  
620

IV 2  
Bot & gudes be gyfen be grace,  
Or els be kynd in any place,  
Loue God of al his send.  
Pan sal þi gud to þe awyle,  
Þat lyfys fude þou sal not faile,  
& far well at þine end.  
630

IV 3  & if þou be raklesse & lyghte,  
Þat þou reule noȝte þi gudes ryght,  
þitt sal þou noȝte forþi  
Say pus: þat þi hape is blynd.  
635
Bot defaute in piselfe þou fund,
     Þat rewles it wrangwysly.

IV 4
Lufe þe peny with luf perfyte,
Bot sett noȝte þerouer þi delyte
     With hert to hald it still;
For holy men may haue monye
& spend it furth in gud degre,
     Als reson is & skyll.

IV 5
For if þou be seke, hed or hend,
Pan may þi monye þe amend,
     Som salfe þerfor to seche;
& if þou wil not parte þat pelfe,
Bot lat it lige & lose piselfe,
     Pan wirkys þou als a wrecch.

IV 6
Son, seyn þou suffers for leryng
Of straunge masters hard chastesynge,
     Mor blith þan sal þou be
To suffre wilfully always
Whatso fader or moder says
     Or dose in gude degre.

IV 7
Son, ordeyn þe to do swilk ded
     Þat may to þe be menske & med,
     With ryghtwysnes to rys.
& thyng þat may turne to reproue,
Fle it for þine awne behoue;
     Pan wirkes þou als þe wise.

IV 8
& of þine awn her what þou has,
Gyfe gladly vnto þam þat craues
     In Godes nam, & has ned.
& if þou gyf þi gud gladly
Gret thanke her may þou gytt forpi,
     & to þi saul mor med.
IV 9
& if you have suspecyon
Of thyng bat pe falles be reson,
Pou sal enquire;  
For somthyng to piself may plesse
Bat afterward may be dyssese  
Bot if be cause be cler.

IV 10
& son, if women with foly,  
Or flessche with luf of lychery
Ler be vnlefull lawes,  
Pan bus be pay God fast forbi
& fond to fle il company
Pat to swilk doyng drawes.

IV 11
And son, you hafe a dred be [k]ynd  
of wyld bestes, bat men may bynd
& in stedes stik paime still;  
Pan mekyll mor be awe to dred
A wekkyd man, bat pou sees leyd
His lyf agaysns Godes will.

IV 12
If you be large in bred & lengthe,  
A stalworth man of mekyll strenght,
Pan reul pe ry3twysly,  
& wirke als wysely as pou can
So bat you may be fonden a man
In saul & in body.

IV 13
& if you haue any aduersite,  
To man bat is most trist to be
Wyghly sal pou wend,
& wirk pou sal as he wil tech,
For on lyf is no better leche
Pan is a faithful frend.

IV 14
& if you haue selenes of ded  
Pan may it stand no thyng in sted
On frend to call or craue.

If pou se ober dy or lyfe
Pat may no trest vnto pe gyfe
Her langer hel to haue.

IV 15
& son if pou sal seke a frend
Whame pou wil lufe to pi lyfys end,
Behald no3t his haueynge,
Bot her what men wil of hym meyn,
& luke his lyf be gud & cleyn
& honest in al thyng.

IV 16
The gudes pat pou gettes with purchasse
Spend parwil whils pou has spasse,
For menske & for pi med.
What helpes it her ryches to haue,
& be countede for a knawe
When men spekes of pi sped?

IV 17
And if pou be man of noble fame,
& couettes for to kepe pi name,
Pou reule pe ryghtwysly;
& haue no lykynge in pi harte,
Ne ioy of ober men euyl quarte,
For pat is euyl envy.

IV 18
& whyls pou hase pi wyttes in weld,
Scorne not paim pat falles in eld,
Bot of paim make pou pi mark.
For if pou be wyght & weld,
In eld pou sale be als a chyld,
Both of witt & of warke.

IV 19
& whils pou art 3ong, ler som gud
Pat may pe help to pi lyfes fude
In tym when pou has ned;
For warldly gud may fayntly fall,
& pay may konnyng mekyll awayll
& do som honest ded.

IV 20 When _pou_ heres _men_ speke gud or ill,
Here _paim_ well & hald _pe_ still,
Al if _per_ talk be lange;
For _pou_ take tent to _oper_ sawe,
So may _pou_ _per_ condycyons knawe,
Wheder _pai_ meyn well or wrang.

IV 21 & _if_ _pou_ couett to _kon_ clargy,
Pan _vse_ _pe_ scolles contynuly
In _jeres_ whils _pou_ art _jongh._
For as _pi_ hand thurght _vs_ is able,
So in _studys, if _pou_ be stable,
It kennes _pe_ cler konnyng.

IV 22 & haue [no] car for tym to come,
For _ded_ ne for _pe_ day of _dome,
& see _encheson why:
Whoso _pis_ lyf can wyl dyspys,
& wirkes well in _alkyn wyse,
Hym thar not dred to dye.

IV 23 For _& _pou_ wil _lere_ gud thewys
Of _wytty_ _men_, & _fle_ _fro_ _schrewys,
Do _nojt_ _efter_ _per_ _ded;
& _tech_ _pou_ _paim_ _pan_ _pat_ can _lesse;
So sal _pou_ come to _connynngnesse,
& _also_ _serue_ _gret_ _mede.

IV 24 & _son, if _pou_ will _haue_ _pi_ _hell,
With _mekyll_ _drynk_ _pou_ _sal_ _not_ _dell,
For _mannes_ witt it _wastes;
& _oft_ _men_ _seys_ of _dyuers_ _drynkes,
Sere _sekenes_ in _mans_ _body_ _synkes,
Pat _vnto_ _ded_ _hym_ _hastes_.

fol. 25v
& if pou ons haue praysed a man
Pat he is gud, or els gud cane,
Wheder it be so or no3te,
Pe sam man seyn sal pou neuer lake,
Pof som men say behynd pi bake
Pou art flittand of thoght.

When pou fares wele, pe most be war,
Lesse thar may fall aneoper char
Of wo whar pou non wened;
& if pou haue aduersite,
Thynke wele it sal better be,
For God al mysse may mend.

& stynt not for to see & here
Whar pou may any lesson ler,
Or takyns pat ar trew;
For by vse waxys witt always,
& proued witt is more to prayse
Pan pat is neuend on new.

Vse no3te to prayse ouer commonly,
Al if pou thynke a man worthy
& his warke wele arayd;
For som day sal his wirkes schew
Wheder he be gudman or schrewe,
& pai be well assaye.

Syen pat pou couettes for to ken,
Schame no3te to ler of lerned men,
Ne to com to per scole;
For by lerynge men waxes wyse,
& he pat leryng wyll dyspyse
He sal be fonden a fol.

Couetouse men, son, wele pou wate,
& lycherouse men, makes oft debate,
& rasys foule defam.
If pai wil mend pam, beld paim by,
& els fle fro per company
Lesse pou lose pi gud name.

IV 31  Son, som men pat wil lytyll say
Wyll thynk enuy in per hert alway,
With paim pe most bewar.
For whar pe strem is stable & still,
Par is pe watter depe, be skyll,
& most euyle to owerfare.

IV 32 & son, if fortoun turn his whele,
So pat pi welth be not so wele
Als it was wont to be
Be oper men pou be awye;
For kynd is for to fall & ryse,
To pam & als to be.

IV 33 & if welthe be lang & large,
Pan take to pe no gretter charge
Pan pou may vndergange;
For better is nere pe land to rowe
Pan in pe see with wynd to blow,
Wher pe stremes ar more strange.

IV 34 When pou knawes ry3htwyse men & gud,
Mell pe no3te to menge per mode,
To wreth paim wrangwysly;
For God wil al gudnes reward,
& wikkednes sal not be spard,
Bot wrokyn as it is worthy.

IV 35 If pou haue lose of erthely gud,
Be enmys or by fyre or flode,
Mourne no3t, lowd ne still.
Bot more pou may mak yoy always,
& thynk þat God so pe assays,
If pou be stable of wyll.

IV 36

Of worldly gud pou make no frese,
Wheder it enpayre or it encrese,
Tak pe tym as it wil fall.
Bot & pou lose a faythfull frenal,
Þat is a losse withowtyn end;
Perfor be war withal.

IV 37

& trest pou noȝte to lyf lange,
For whederseuer pou ryd or gange
Þus suld pou thynk in thoght:
Ded folowes þe with gret fors,
Ryght as þi schawdowe dose þi horse,
Þat lyghtly leues it noȝte.

IV 38

& worschope God, son, on alwyse,
With encense & with sacrafyse
Of gud lyfyng & lele.
If synfull men per offerand make,
Bot if þai wil per syn forsake,
God wil not with þaim dele.

IV 39

To ryche meri sal pou do honour,
Because þat þai sal þe socour
In cause þou to þaim call.
& also son þe bus forbere
Euyl men, þat may to þe der,
For mor il þat myȝte befall.

IV 40

& if þou trespas, to God Almyȝty,
Mend þiself, & ask þe mercy,
Sorowyng for þi syn.
If þou be hurt, in hed or hend,
With scharp medcyngs it bus be mend,
To wele so may þou wyn.
IV 41 A frend þat has ben to þe trew,  
Al if he make his maners new  
Be honours or rychesse,  
Change þou þi maners neuer þe more,  865  
Bot thynke how it hase ben befor,  
& luf hum neuer þe lesse.

IV 42 & if þou haue office for to kepe,  
Be to saue þine awn worschype,  
& war þe wel fro wice. 870  
So sal þou be of noble fame,  
& no man sal gyf þe þis name:  
Loser of office.

IV 43 Be noȝt ouer ferd in feld ne town,  
Ne haue non euyl suspecyon,  875  
Noþer to man ne wyfe;  
For he þat wil be ferd for noȝte,  
Or haue suspecyon euyl in thoght,  
Wer gud out of þis lyfe.

IV 44 If þou haue seruandes at þi will,  
Says þaim in reson & in skyll,  
So þat þai do þer dette.  
Reproue þaim noȝt ouervilansly.  
Thinke þai ar men als wil as I,  
Al if þai be þus sett. 885

IV 45 If þou haue mynd her for to make  
Any gud worke, for Godes sake,  
Do tyte & tary it noȝte;  
For it may fall so manyfald  
Þou sal not wirke it when þou wald,  
& so may it be vnwroȝte. 890

IV 46 & if synfull men dye sodanly,  
Haue no yoy in þi hert for þi,
Bot sorrow for per vnsele.
& po pat lyfes ever as pai aw,
If men pai hed or hang or draw,
We sal trow pai dy well.

IV 47
Or if wekked men pi wyf haue blamed,
& with pi frend falsly defamed,
& be soth be no3t so,
Pan sal pou suffre & forber,
No3te wrangwysly pi wyf to der,
& mak pi frend pi foo.

IV 48
& son, if pou haue mekyll seyn,
& mekyll hard wher pou hase ben,
Be kennyng of clergy,
Vse it in werke pan it is won;
For mekyll to lere & lyttyll to kon,
Pat is bot vylany.

IV 49
& haue no merwale in pi mynd
If wyse men som defaute fynd
Or mysse emang my ded.
Because I couthe no better do
Ay til on sentence wer is two
Ar arayd for to red.

& now is endytt hat was begon
Dis boke, how Caton taught his son
Gud counsels for to ken.
He hat arayd it pus to rede,
God graunte hym Heuen to his med,
Wher euer is myrth. Amen.
TEXTUAL NOTES

10 wit superscript.
26 oper p oper, with p cancelled.
52 pi superscript.
63 falllyng falllyng.
118 frend superscript.
143 as has.
158 vnertayne vnertayne.
173 worth wroth.
180 fayn fayr.
184 pou superscript.
214 fondon fordon.
216 jou jou.
231 strengthe th superscript.
257 lofyng lyfyng.
359 tell fell.
397 teche teche, with t cancelled and c superscript.
409 myrth superscript.
424 sel so.
428 seth soth.
538 men werk.
545 pat at.
553 priue proue.
565 for with cancelled and for superscript.
571 poettes pettes.
607 pou superscript.
666 Godes d Godes, with d cancelled.
680 fond faond.
682 kynd bynd.
688 lengthe th superscript.
697 tech tech, with th cancelled.
748 no om.
757 pou repeated, second pou cancelled.
770 pi h pi, with h cancelled.
795 He & he, with & cancelled.
NOTES TO TEXT

7-12 The Latin has been given a Christian context.

25-7 The first three lines of Distich I 4 have been inadvertently omitted from the manuscript.

37-9 These lines do not complete Distich I 6, which reads "Utilitas opibus praeponi tempore debet."

40-5 The sense of the Latin is badly garbled here: "Clemens et constans, ut res expostulat, esto: / temporibus mores sapiens sine crimine mutat."

60 The translator has added this consideration for public opinion.

75 The translator adds this exception to his Latin, which says simply "nocet esse locutum."

76 "Pou" was probably originally "Pat," Latin "Rem."

79-81 The lines are at best a paraphrase of "rara fides ideo est, quia multi multa locuntur."

89 This clearly Christian reference has been added to the Latin.

113-4 The Latin says simply "Cum dubia et fragilis nobis sit vita tributa." The translator elaborates on the suddenness and unpredictability of one's own death.

128 In giving the Latin a Christian context, the translator has also strengthened the sentiment. The Christian must actually thank God for poverty, instead of simply "paupertatis onus patienser ferre memento."

130-1 The original version simply stresses the senselessness of fearing death. The Christian translator, on the other hand, is sure that it is the knowledge of a righteous life which enables one not to fear it.

145-7 These do not translate the second part of the distich: "utque quod est servus, semper deesse putato."

168 "When your health fails" is added to the Latin.

180 "Be happy to refuse it."
"herd man" here must be a compound with "herd" in the sense of MED herd n. (2) 2 (b): "a temporal ruler . . . master, director."

The translator has missed the point of "pro lucro tibi pone diem, quicumque sequetur."

The translator somewhat alters the sense of "obsequio quoniam dulces retinetur amici."

The translator has tried to make the two parts of the distich fit together better than they do in Latin, and has changed the sense somewhat in his attempt. Cf. "Ne dubita cum magna petas impendere parva: / his etenim rebus coniungit gratia caros." Boas calls these "Versus inconcinni" (p. 77).

This expands the Latin "ipse tibi moderare."

The translator adds a more practical reason for generosity to the Latin.

Not in the Latin.

This line is not in the Latin and changes the meaning of the distich.

The translator has had to re-interpret the Latin "cum sis mortalis quae sunt mortalia cura" in Christian terms. Lines 277-8 are clearly a reference to Genesis, and he has added line 279 to avoid seeming to urge secular values.

Again the translator stresses the unpredictability of death (cf. lines 113-4) and adds that the timing is controlled by God.

"clergy" is in apposition to "Whilk thyng is ry3te or wrang," although the construction is awkward.

The whole distich has been given a Christian reference: "Fac sump-tum propere, cum res desiderat ipsa: / dandum etenim est aliquid, cum tempus postulat aut res." The Middle English version says that material goods come from God and must be distributed for His sake. Line 297, "and [be] seen fit in good season" ("and be ap-propriate and timely"?) is a final attempt to translate "cum tem-pus postulat aut res."

The reference to God is the translator's addition to "parvo gau-dere memento."

This is the usual mediaeval interpretation of this distich, although
Boas interprets its grammar differently. "Quod pudeat, socios prudens celare memento, / ne plures culpent id, quod tibi displicet uni." Mediaeval scribes and commentators commonly took "socios" as the object of the verb "pudeat." See Boas (at n. 7) 106-7.

The Latin does not mention God's law.

The translator interprets this distich in terms of material goods, but the Latin is more general: "Quid deus intendat . . . ." For the translator, God is the source of all gifts.

The Latin distich stresses that sometimes it is prudent to seem foolish: "Stultitiam simulare loco prudentia summa est." The Middle English translation changes the emphasis.

The Latin originally referred to the twin crimes of Luxuria and Avaritiae, but many mediaeval versions of the distich translate Luxuria as lechery.

The Latin manuscript used by the translator here must have read "quia multi multa locuntur." See Boas (at n. 7) 123.

To produce lines 400-1, the original Latin must have read: "Successus indignos," rather than "pravos" or "dignos." Cf. Boas (at n. 7) 129. Although God is not mentioned in the Latin, line 402 fits in well with the distich's emphasis on the ultimate punishment of the unworthy. However, lines 403-5 change this completely by substituting the idea of the chance element in Fortune's wheel. Here, as in line 808, Fortune is masculine.

The translator has replaced the Latin stoicism with the hope of a Christian salvation. Cf. "spes una hominem nec morte relinquit."

The Latin reads "Rem tibi quam scieris aptam dimittere noli: / fronte capillata, post haec occasio calva." This verse was generally misinterpreted by translators. See George Lyman Kittredge, "To Take Time by the Forelock," MLN 8 (1893) 466.

Although the distich originally referred to the double-headed god Janus, this was often changed in mediaeval translations to refer to the Christian God who can see both beginnings and endings. The translator of this manuscript, however, shows himself unaware of this tradition and Christianizes the Latin in a different way.

For "wath" see OED wothe: "hurt or harm."
This does not translate the Latin, which reads: "Iudicium populi numquam contemperis unus, / ne nulli placeas, dum vis contemnere multos."

The translator adds the idea that it is God who grants us time.

The translator, presumably for the sake of the rhyme, has altered the Latin image "quasi mortis imago."

The translator adds the idea that God watches over us constantly.

The Latin is about sloth rather than heaviness of heart: "Segni-tiem fugito, quae vitae ignavia fertur; / nam cum animus languet, consumit inertia corpus." The translator has looked ahead to the next distich.

There is no suggestion in the Latin that this conduct will please God.

Again the translator specifies that worldly goods come from God.

These lines exactly reverse the meaning of the Latin distich.

The motive which the translator gives for being generous sounds almost cynical compared to the Latin "munificius facito vivas, non parcus, amicus."

"witt" translates "sensu," rather than "censu" which appears in the Latin.

The Latin does not mention loving God here.

These lines are pure padding and interrupt the sense of the stanza. However, they do provide a glimpse of the translator's idea of the ideal married state.

The translator appeals to public opinion, which the Latin does not.

The Latin simply refers to laws, not to scripture.

The translator repeats the idea that men should be careful of weeping wives, but omits the Latin urging not to worry about angry ones.

Again the translator states that good things come from God.

"But it is necessary for your house."

The tone of the Latin is less moral: at least death will end our troubles.

The translator has missed the point here, and does not understand the meaning of "frugi."
608 The point of the Latin is that one should not offend a mother in order to please a father. The translator has reversed the sense.

622-7 The Latin stresses that the avaricious are always in need. The translator has missed this.

628-9 The phrase "be kynd" is parallel to "be grace," not to "be gyfen."

630-3 The translator suggests that the love of God will bring both worldly happiness and salvation. Neither idea is in the Latin.

643-5 This does not translate the Latin "quam nemo sanctus nec honestus captat habere." The translator has tried to make sense of the distich in the light of the following one.

666 The reference to God is absent from the Latin.

673 This changes the sense of the Latin: "primo quae sunt neglecta."

679 The translator takes a harsher view of sin than the Latin writer did. He stresses the necessity for atonement, while the original distich only asks that you not combine sins: Cum te detineat Veneris damnosa voluptas, / indulgere gulae noli, quae ventris amica est."

686-7 The translator has added the Christian interpretation to "hominem plus esse timendum."

710-1 The translator elaborates on the virtues a friend should possess.

721-3 Not a close translation of the Latin: "Fac fugias animo, quae sunt mala gaudia vitae."

758-9 The Latin does not specify why you should teach.

777 The translator adds the reference to God.

778-83 This badly misrepresents the sense of the Latin, which exactly contradicts line 781: "Discere ne cessa, cura sapientia crescat: / rara datur longo prudentia temporis usu."

796 The Latin refers to men who drink too much, not covetous men.

799-801 The meaning of the Latin has been twisted here: "Quod lautum est, animo complectere, sed fuge lites." The translator again appeals to public opinion in line 801.

803 The Latin does not mention envy, although it is clearly implied.

808 The translator has given Fortune a wheel. Cf. above lines 400-1.

830-1 The Latin does not have the idea that misfortune is God's test of one's will.
835-7 The translator's Latin may have had another second line here, as the Middle English does not translate the alternatives given by Boas.

842 The word "horse" was probably originally "corse," Latin "corporis," although "horse" makes reasonable sense here.

845-6 For the Christian translator the proper sacrifice is in living a good life. The meaning of the Latin is more literal: "Ture deum placa, vitulum sine crescat aratro."

850-5 The Middle English is a mistranslation of "Cede loco laesus, fortunae cede potenti: / laedere qui potuit, poterit prodesse aliquando."

856 The Latin does not mention God.

868,873 The Latin "officium" has been simply adopted into the Middle English without a translation of its meaning "service." "Loser of office" is an especially literal version of "officiperdi."


887 The Latin implies that one should seize all opportunities, not merely those to do good works. The translator has also introduced the idea of God here.

895-7 The tone of the Latin is ironical, implying that there are not many men who die happy because they have lived blamelessly. The translator misses this.

898-903 The translator has reversed the sense of the Latin, which urges caution with friends: "Cum coniux tibi sit, ne res et fama laboret, / vitandum ducas inimicum nomen amici."

907 The point of the Latin is not that you should use your learning but that you can learn from life as well as from books: "Cum tibi contigerit studio cognoscere multa, / fac discas multa, vita nescire doceri."