A sermon from the Northern Homily Cycle, a rhymed sermon collection from the early 14th c. (translated by FG from The Vernon manuscript : a facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. poet. a.1 [D.S. Brewer, 1987])

In our gospel, says Saint Matthew
(that many of Christ's deeds knew,)
Christ, he said, took ship over a sea
And came in to his own city
And men brought before him a man
That was with the palsy taken.
And soon, when Christ their truth could see,
To them he wished to show his potency.
He spokē then full mildly
To him that lay in palsy.
"My son," he said "You believe in me;
Your sins have been forgiven thee."
The envious Jews that were standing by
Thought his words were pure folly
And said "This man speaks confusion
About God and draws Him to derision."
And as soon as Jesus was aware
What their wicked thoughts were
He spoke to them and asked them why
They thought his words were such folly
When he said to the sick man
"All your sins have been forgiven."
This he said to make you see
That the Son of Man has the ability
On earth to forgive cleanly
Man's sins through his mercy.
Then said Christ to that sick man
Before the Jews, every one,
"Rise up," he said, "all whole and strong;
Bear forth your bed and go along."
The sick man rose up all hale
And felt relief from his bale.
He took his bed and home he sped
And Christ was blessed for his good deed.
For all the folk that stood about
Saw this miracle and had no doubt
And said, "God, blessed might you be,
Who has given man such great potency."
This is the strength of our gospel
As Saint Matthew the story tells.

About this gospel speaks a clerk,
Who understands much about spiritual work,
Who says the sea does symbolize
The world, with sorrow and care and sighs,
And the ship, within which Christ rode,
The Holy Church that Christ has made
To help men pass through this worldly sea,
Flowing with pride and knavery.
For a ship floats upon the flood,
And Holy Church, with traits so good
Floats above this world that floweth
All over those that therein roweth
With fleshly lust and covetousness
With the trading of false merchandise
With gluttony and sins yet more
But Holy Church flees all this woe
And passes quite apart from sin
So that bliss may be ours to win.
I call them limbs of Holy Church
That will allow God's will to work.
In this ship passed Christ over the sea
And came into his own city:
When he, through a holy man's prayer,
Makes a sinful soul whole and fair.
For man's soul is his city,
Wherein he wishes to be.
Evermore he dwells therein
While a man is out of deadly sin;
But deadly sin drives him away
And lets Satan his foe have his way.
He has a very unhappy rest,
Whoever harbors in him such a guest.
But as soon as a man himself shrives Satan away from him he drives.
Though a sinful man may not so do
Unless Christ comes spiritually thereto
And makes him shrive himself openly
And heals his soul of the palsy.
For just as the palsy
Attacks the limbs of man's body,
So encumbers deadly sin our ghosts
For all our soul's strength it wastes
And leaves the soul encumbered so heavily
That it may neither hear nor see.
For a preacher's lore it may not learn
Unless Christ makes it whole and firm
And turn a man's heart to repentance
And makes him do worthy penaunce.
This is the healing of palsy
That deadly is, spiritually.
Yet will we see wherefore and why
This man fell into the palsy
And why our lord suffers man
To be with sickness taken.
For five reasons is man sick.
The first is for to make him meek:
For if sickness were a thing more rare
Over-proudly would men fare
And be scornful of the feeble and weak
And train their hearts sin to seek
And therfore God is full wise
That man with sickness will chastise.
Thus was Saint Paul chastised
Who was full dear to Jesus Christ
For he said a word in a sermon
That closely relates to our reason:
Therfore he said that deeds sly
Shall not make bear myself too high;
My lust full well chastised is
By pricking of my own flesh.
As Hosea says, "Lust makes me very sick
And makes my heart be very meek."
The next reason why sinful man
Is often with great sickness taken
Is to warn him of his sin
And teach him it to shun.
For unless man once in a while sick were
He would do sin ever more and more
And forget God almighty
And take his soul's fate lightly.
Therfore God has of him mercy
and sends him sickness in his body
And pains him with hard throws
Through which his sins well he knows
And amends well his life.
For sickness makes him often scribe:
Moses' sister, for this reason
Was made unwhole from foot to crown
For she gruched against Moses
As in the Holy Book written is.
For God himself those men hates
That complain against their prelates;
That was with Moses' sister seen
Who spoke about Moses words keen
And insulted him behind his back
Therefore our lord her pride broke
And made her fall into sickness
Because she gruched against Moses.
The third reason why man is
Sometimes chastised with sickness
Is to make him have the more meed,
In heaven and in earth, for his good deed.
Thus God permitted Satan
To test Job, who was a good man.
The fiend struck him with sickness
In order to test his sufferance
And because he endured this testing well
Our lord doubled his cattle
And gave him much worldly bliss
And heavenly riches, where he now is.
And good Tobias in this manner
Was tested fully seven years
He was made completely blind
As we in the Holy Book do find
His wife with her earnings fed
Him for five years lying in bed
And therefore our lord of heaven
Sent him goods times seven
As ever yet he sent him before
And much better he made him fare
And gave him at his ending day
The joy of heaven that lasts always.
Therefore when the fiends tests us
Or when we lie in God's bonds
We ought to thank God almighty
Who with sickness will us chastise
For naturally he loves that man best
That here endures sickness the strongest
Better it is that God us here chastise
Than we in hell grimace and cry
For in that pain there is no mercy
But sorrow and care for eternity.
The fourth reason wherefore and why
Man sometimes has sickness in body
Is to make all of us who say
The creed
Love God's might and his good deeds.
For we love God as it right is
When a man is healed of sickness
So did the Jews for Lazarus
As Saint John's gospel tells us
For Christ raised him on the fourth day
From death where he in the tomb lay
Our lord suffered him to endure
Hard sickness and afterwards die
In order to make the Jews see
Christ's might and his potency
And love God for his quickening.
For his might is over all things
For when Christ reared him from the dead
Many folk in that place said,
"Thanks be to God!" with a loud cry.
For there they saw that Christ was mighty.
In many other places we find
That deaf men, dumb and blind
Were healed, and for their healing
Men thanked God, the almighty king.

The fifth reason wherefore and why
Mankind is pained in body
Is for us all to understand
That there are some unhappy men
Who are so rooted in their sin
And go so far forth therein
That God permits, righteously,
The fiend to have of them mastery
Who makes them leap the devil's lope
Into the sin of wanhope.
And when they have therein loped
Then has the fiend roped
Them in wanhope so wretchedly
That they may never find mercy
For ever the more sin that they do
The more eager are they more to do;
Ever are they ready to do ill
And to do the fiend's will.
But such men full thoroughly
Are both pained here in body
And after in hell with the fiend
Where they shall dwell without end
As did Herod the cursed king
That went to hell at his ending.
For here he suffered too, indeed,
Such great sickness in his body
That maggots and worms in him grew.
When he toward his death drew
He was so rotten and so stinking
That no one might by him stand
So many worms grew in him
That no tongue may tell half his pain
His knee bones stuck all out
And on him maggots crawled all about
Because he sought Jesus Christ to kill
And in his deeds he was so fell
That he his own child slew
As he toward his death drew
And he had other wicked goals
That make him burn now in hot coals
And thus took God of him vengeance
Because he never had repentance
Therefore his pain and his sickness
Derive from God's righteousness
For to the fiend he was given
When he against Jesus had striven
For all the children's blood he spilt
In Bethlehem, without guilt
And sought among them Christ to slay
Therefore he cries now "Weylayaw!"
Well may we call him a caitiff
For his pain began in his life
And continues on without end
Where he is forever with the fiend.
Allas, caitiff, that he was born
For shamefully he is now forlorn.

Now have you heard the reasons five
Wherefore man is sick in his life:
The first is man's pride to break
That next his sin for to evoke
The third to make man have more reward
The fourth to love God in the world
The fifth to make their pain here begin
Who will not here leave their sin
And make it last without end
In hell-pain with the fiend.
But that man in palsy fell
Of whom speaks our gospel
Was chastised for his folly
When he fell in palsy
And when he was enough chastised
Our lord Jesus him remedied
As you a while ago heard me say
In our gospel of today.
But yet will we look further more
What we may understand there
That our gospel will show:
How Jesus the truth saw
Of those that brought him this sick man.
This same text I will explain.
Our gospel says that Jesus the lord
This man of of his palsy cured
When he saw the truth and knew the thought
Of those that this sick man to him brought.
By this one word may we see aright
That truth is of so much might
That if a man ask a boon therein
And he be out of deadly sin
He may be sure to have his boon
If it be reasonable that it be done.
And although he ask unskillfully,
Yet will God have of him mercy.
That may you see well by a tale
That I right now tell you shall.

An Emperor was once in Rome
Who was full righteous in his dooms.
He was called Sir Trajan.
Allas, he died a heathen man!
He was full of charity,
Of mirth and mercy and pity,
But because he died a saracen
His soul went down to hell's pain,
Allas, allas, that such a king
Should go to hell for misbelieving.
Many years thereafter came
Saint Gregory, the pope of Rome
Before the Emperor's gate
And for him sorely he began to lament.
He had heard men speak of his goodness,
Of his mirth and of his righteousness,
And therefore had he great pity
That such a king should damned be
He prayed for him and said, "Jesus
Have thou mercy on Trajanus
And bring his soul out of hell
And let it not long therein dwell."
He kneeled before an altar
And as he was in his prayer
He fell asleep and as he lay
He heard an angel to him say
"Thy lord Christ hath granted thee
That Trajanus well may be,
But look thou pray no more for a man
That to the pain of hell has gone.
Unskillful are such prayers
It is not right that God them hears."
Here may you see what truth may do
For a man who gives his heart there
to
Forsooth he has his boon in haste
Who is in truth steadfast,
And though he pray unskillfully,
As did the pope Gregory,
Ever shall his prayer and what he bids
Stand him in full good stead.
Yet will I more of truth tell
If you will listen to my spell.
God of heaven a people chose
As in the Bible written is.
These folk were called the Jews
That God for his people chose.
Of twelve brethren came their kind
But their insight was ever so blind
That God's might would they not know
Despite all the miracles that they saw.
God over the sea dry-footed them led
And after in the wilderness them fed
Forty winters with heavenly food.
And they did evil against good,
For false Gods honored they
And ever did their God betray
And other sins did they more
Wherefore they suffered much woe.
It would take too long now to relate
What woe they suffered and how great
For as often as they God forsook,
As often vengeance God upon them took.
But of them will I tell here
A thing that touches our matter.

The king of Babylon
Had many Jews in his town.
And sent them into the wilderness
For their sins and their wickedness.
And after he made it clear
That none of them were to dare
To pass out of that wilderness
That far beyond Arabia is.
This wilderness, as the book us tells,
Is completely surrounded by high hills.
Many winters after this affair
The king Alexander came through there
When he had all this world conquered
And all people were of him afeared.
The aforesaid Jews that dwelled there
Petitioned the king with much care
That he would give them leave to go
Out of that wilderness of woe.
He asked, as the book us tells,
Why they were imprisoned in the hills?
A sergeant to the king explained
And said those Jews were there restrained
Because they so often God forsook
And to false idols took
And ever unnatural had they been
As had been often of them seen.
For God had done for them well more
Then ever for any folk he had before
And ever they did evil again
And to their lord were unkind.
Therefore willed he as good right it is
That they must dwell in the wilderness.
When the king these words heard
To the Jews he answered
"Since you have our God forsaken
And to idolatry you have yourselves betaken
I shall undertake to imprison you more
Now before I further fare."
And he called all his workmen anon
And made them work in clay and stone
In order to stop up all the corners
Between the valleys and the hills.
But when he saw that man's travail
Might not in such a task avail,
And that man's work might not fulfill
The king's desires and his will,
The king himself kneeled there
And prayed to God with all good cheer
That He should fulfill his longing
And each hill to the other bring.
And anon as he had prayed
The great hills that wide were strayed
Were so knit together fast
That South nor North, East nor West
May no thing pass out of that place
Unless it be the birds flying through space.
Yet dwell many Jews there,
And so they shall ever more
Until the approach of doomsday.
Then shall they all from thence stray.
In many lands shall they travel
And Christendom shall they assail,
For go wherever they will
Christian folk shall they shall kill.
They shall believe in Antichrist
And think that he is Jesus Christ.
All this tale I have you told
To make you in your hearts hold
That all that a Christian man will crave
In steadfast truth he may it have.
That may you see by this king
That with good truth got his asking,
And yet was he a heathen man.
And thereby may we see each one
That a Christian man ought much more
To get if he in truth were
Than a saracen that believes not
That Jesus Christ on the Cross hath him bought.
Therefore it behoves a Christian man
That God's mark has on him taken
Wanhope out of his heart to cast,
That he might be in truth steadfast.
For God might he not otherwise repay,
Nor no good prayer may he pray.
God give us grace so to hold
And so in righteous deeds be bold
That we may at our lives' end
Into the bliss of heaven wend. Amen.