CHAUCEL AND LADY FORTUNE

Although Christianity was the faith of Europe in the Middle Ages, man had to face the problem of chance in that period as apparently in any other. It is all very well to have an official creed or a theoretical idealism, but practical necessity requires that one's principles shall be rigorously tested by personal application. Is the universe sufficiently well ordered for us to proceed on a belief that its laws are deeply fixed and ineluctable; or shall we fear that law is but another name for 'blind force'? Are the shipwreck and the earthquake only the expression of nature's caprice, or may we trust that not even a sparrow falls without Divine purpose? There is so much of the seemingly casual in ordinary life that some decision in the matter cannot be avoided if one is going to rely on any course of action whatsoever, even if it be nothing more than to 'take a chance.' The solution arrived at is, accordingly, an indication of a certain view of life; and it reveals, in some measure, the character of the person who arrives at it. The true rationalist must believe that reason has some inherent validity in life, however inconsistently maintained; and the temperament that cares less for system and order will find freedom in a universe in which the only plan seems to be that of adventure. As we think, so are we; and reflections of what men are may be found shining in the royal progress of the Goddess of Fortune through mediaeval literary history.

When Fortuna was taken over from Roman culture at the beginning of the period, she outlived the other pagan deities partly because she had been by far the most popular during the late Roman Empire, and partly because, unlike most of the rest, she was not a deity of a special function, but had almost taken unto herself the eminence of the supreme conception of monotheism. In faith she was the only alternative to a belief in a rational God. Moreover she was a convenient figure to blame when, dissatisfied with one's portion in life, one felt that circumstances so little pleasing to man could hardly be more pleasing to a competently rational Deity. Down through the Middle Ages she persisted, with her pagan dress and also with borrowed robes. Various and richly detailed are the descriptions afforded by different writers, who see her in their interesting and vivid ways. One of two solutions is adopted by most of them for the problem which she represents: some authors candidly accept her, or at least find in her a useful symbol; others, like
the Church Fathers and many of the philosophers, reject her utterly\(^1\). Some others still, with the desire perhaps to remain orthodox, or with indifference to consistency, seem to have tried to keep Fortune with the Christian God without reconciling the two. In this apparently impossible task, however, with true orthodoxy and philosophical consistency, the poet Dante succeeded in paying due tribute to chance and in keeping a rational God, and so gives us a third way of dealing with the question\(^2\). In a well-known passage in the seventh canto of the *Inferno* (ll. 70–96) Virgil describes to Dante the nature of Fortune, as a creature subordinate to the Christian God, a ministering angel who carries out the Divine bidding. For everything that she does she has reasons of her own; but she keeps her counsel and endures the abuse mortals fling at her:

\[
\text{Con l’ altre prime creature lieta} \\
\text{Volve sua spera, e beata si gode.} \\
\text{ (ll. 95–96.)}
\]

This serene figure Boccaccio and others tried to copy, but usually without much success, and, so far as I can discover, she is not to be passed along as a literary heritage.

These three points of view regarding chance were, then, familiar in the Middle Ages. Writers classify themselves almost automatically by the one they show: the romantic mind was content to leave things to chance, with or without personification; the rationalist, falling in with a tradition from Aristotle to St Thomas Aquinas, usually ended by denying Fortune’s existence; and some others, perhaps taking quality from both the romanticist and the rationalist, held to a belief in chance subordinate to reason, a kind of personification of Aristotle’s *causa per accidens*. In this third conception the poet simply outruns the hard-headed philosopher, who, in turn, pointing to the implicit contradiction in the idea, would probably insist that poets go too far. Yet the poet would have the advantage in replying that even the philosopher must admit the existence of apparent chance, and that the Christian conception of the angelic Fortuna really does no more than take full account of that. Classifying writers according to their views on this subject as on others must, however, always be a precarious business; for not every author is intent on expressing himself fully about chance or any other matter. But while we may be on our guard against judging individuals in that way, we may derive some profit from classifying opinions which

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\(^1\) A more detailed survey of the tradition will be found in my articles in the *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, iii, 3–4, pp. 131 ff. and iv, 4, pp. 1 ff.

\(^2\) Boethius closely approximated his solution, but his suggestion is applied to Fate rather than Fortune. See the article cited above in Smith College Studies, iii, 4, pp. 190 ff.
have actually been held by men, and by such means it is possible that we may learn something as well about the men themselves.

In fourteenth-century England the problem of chance was emphatically brought to the attention of thoughtful writers. The part Fortuna had played in literature, at a time when source-hunting was an occupation even of authors, insured some degree of notice. Furthermore, political conditions were sufficiently restless during the Hundred Years’ War with France, the events of the reign of Richard II, and also those social upheavals which marked the beginning of a new era, to suggest that circumstances really turn on the wheel of the fickle goddess. In the air was the fragrance of the new wine that stirred men’s blood and that later brought them into a period very similar to that of the sceptical and adventurous Augustan Rome. The moral Gower deals with Fortune as we should expect, denying her existence, and calling on men to be masters of their souls; Lydgate takes over material from Boccaccio and other sources, inclining rather definitely to the Christian conception. References to the great problem appear all through the work of Chaucer; and he is both casual and systematic in his consideration of what is involved.

In what we may be reasonably sure was his earliest extensive and original work, the *Book of the Duchesse*, a long treatment of Fortune is introduced. At first sight this is a conventional poem of the Court of Love; but, as critics have observed, it is a Court of Love vision used as an elegy¹. If the Middle English *Pearl* shows a similar transformation of material, at least there the rue is worn with a difference; for there we find nothing of the humour which Chaucer has used in order to convey his caressing sympathy with more warmth. Moreover, in borrowing one convention after another, he has been able to keep something of the original implication of the literary forms: like everything addressed to such a lady as Blanche her elegy must be a love poem; the dream is really a dream, for the great John of Gaunt would not pour out his woes to Geoffrey Chaucer; the birds and their solemn service add a sweet note of portent; the long description of the lady is done in the best Court of Love manner, with every item told (although perhaps even then Chaucer knew better methods of description); and lastly false Fortune herself must be mentioned. In similar French poetry she had almost usurped the place of the God of Love². Ordinarily one would have supposed that such an addition would be out of key in an

² See *Smith College Studies*, iv, 4, pp. 15 ff. for instances.
elegy; but not so. Along with the rest of the apparatus so often employed to tell a desperate passion, where only a fickle deity holds sway, she now keeps her place in a poem where the passion is desperate indeed, and where her former meaning is made even more significant by the same alchemy which produced the other changes. The point is this: the sufferings of these present times, in the loss of the Duchess, are not to be ascribed to a rational God; they come from a whimsical deity, who is unconcerned with justice and mercy. And if John of Gaunt had read Chaucer's main source, Machaut's poem on the *Judgement dou Roy de Béaigne*¹, he would have felt the added consolation of reflecting that loss by death is better than loss by infidelity².

The usual formulæ associated with the tradition occur in the *Book of the Duchesse*, and similar apparatus appears again in the *House of Fame*, transferred, however, to Fame herself³. These instances show how well Chaucer knew the material. I shall pass on to a piece of work which he did probably some time between 1378 and 1381, if our guesses are correct. This was his translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius, which, partly through the borrowings in the *Roman de la Rose*, and partly through direct influence, so deeply affected his own thought. Here he found a wealth of detail regarding the pagan Fortune, especially in the second book, much of which he uses later, and he also found certain implications which lead naturally to the Christian figure. One can see the development of this idea in his translation, in lines which closely follow the Latin:

> For thy wenestow that thys mutacionys of fortune fleten with-outë governour....
> I have grete norisshinges of thyn hele, and that is, the sothe sentence of governaunce of the worlde; that thou bilevest that the gouverninge of it nis nat subiect ne underput to the folie of thys happe aventurous, but to the resoun of god....

(i, pr. vi, 61–69, ed. Skeat, p. 22.)

Such passages raise the question at the start. Then take such a discussion as the following:

Thanne, whether that destinee be exercysed outher by some divyne spirits, servaunts to the divyne purviance, or elles by som sowle, or elles by alle nature servinge to god, or elles by the celestial moevinges of sterres, or elles by the vertu of angeles...the destinal ordinaunce is y-woven and accomplisshed. Certes, it is open thing that the purviance is an unmoevable and simple forme of thinges to done....

(iv, pr. vi, 65–71, p. 116.)


² The passage on Fortune in the *Book of the Duchesse* will be found in ll. 617 ff. It is hardly necessary here to give a full study of its sources, or to cite other studies of the kind, but see, in particular, *Pub. Mod. Lang. Assoc. of America*, xxx, pp. 1 ff.

Add to it the illustration furnished by the wheel, with its centre of
’stable simplicitee of purviaunce’ and its rim of ‘moevable destinee’1,
and the conception is almost complete. This development the refer-
ences in his own works seem to corroborate, as he reflects one suggestion
after another which was ready for him in the Latin.

In the Balade de Visage sans Peinture, in which, like Boethius, he
holds a dialogue with Fortune, a striking example of this process occurs.
The poem is sometimes dated late in his career2, and that may be where
it belongs; but, except perhaps for the Envoy, I should be inclined to
place it shortly after the Boethius, and not far from the Prologue to
the Legende of Good Women (in its first form), since in the Balade as
well as the Legende he shows dependence on the writings of Deschamps3.
The interesting feature to notice in this poem is that here Chaucer
introduces the Christian conception, familiar in Dante, but apparently
without the slightest trace of influence from the Italian. In giving an
account of her own nature, Fortuna clears up the whole matter:

Lo, theexecucion of the magestee
That al purveyeth of his rightwisnesse,
That same thing ‘Fortune’ clepen ye,
Ye blinde bestes, ful of lewednesse! (ll. 65–68.)

The poem was obviously not written to treat of philosophical subtleties,
and yet it is significant that the question is dealt with. The moral is
just what the poet wanted: he is in straitened circumstances, he implies,
and like many a mortal he is tempted to believe that the gods are
capricious with him; but he will not take his adversities in bad part—
he grants that behind all these is a righteous God; and also, his best
friend is still alive, and that’s something! The poem is thus at once a pat on
the shoulder and a tap on the back, and both without a coward’s whine.

1 iv, pr. vi, 81 ff. For the Latin see iv, pr. vi, 51 ff., etc., in the edition of Stewart and Rand, Loeb Library, London, 1918. Cf. also in Chaucer’s translation the discussion regard-
ing the beginnings of things, 1, pr. vi, and that on the control of fortune (the abstrac-
tion), v, metr. i, 13–16.

2 Bilderbeck’s interpretation of the Envoy is accepted by Brusendorff (The Chaucer
Tradition, pp. 199 f., n. 5). Some question remains, however, in the fact that the line which
seems to reveal the date is missing in all MSS. but one. Notice that Brusendorff thinks
that the whole Envoy of the Balade de Bon Consuel is spurious (ibid., pp. 246 ff.).

3 See Brusendorff, op. cit., pp. 242 ff. Notice that Brusendorff suggests that Balades
cclxxxvi–vii on Fortune accompanied the complimentary Balade (cclxxxv) to Chaucer
(there is a misprint in the numbering of the Balades in his note, p. 244, n. 2). That
Chaucer’s reply to the complimentary poem was the use of material from Deschamps in
the Prologue of the Legende was suggested by Kittredge, Mod. Philol., 1, p. 6; approved by
Lowes, Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc., xix, p. 641 and n. 1; and see Mod. Lang. Notes, xxxiii,
p. 278, n. 35. Brusendorff does not seem to have noticed another Balade by Deschamps
on the subject, Bal. clx (Œuvres, Soc. des Anc. Textes Fr., i, pp. 289 f.) with a similar theme;
and cf. the material in the Miroir de Mariage, ii. 1 ff. (Œuvres, ix, pp. 3 ff.). On the problem
of the date, however, cf. Brusendorff, pp. 489 ff., with his doubtful suggestion for the
Legende (neglecting the problem in Cant. Tales, B. 60 ff.), based, apparently, on the desire to
posit only one volume from Deschamps; and cf. Fortune, l. 7 with the Parson’s Tale, i, 248.
One might hold that this passage on Fortune is hardly more than the negation offered by the philosophers, as a sort of poetic embodiment of St Thomas’s phrase: ‘Non tamen bene usi sunt nomine fortunae’. In my opinion it is something more than that, however, and in any case it shows thought with regard to the problem. In the Knight’s Tale, written not many years after the translation of Boethius, another solution is offered, similar, nevertheless, in many respects to that in the Balade. There is much about Fortune in Boccaccio’s Teseide; but at the point where Duke Theseus comes upon Palamon and Arcite fighting their terrible duel in the grove, the use of the element of chance puts a heavy demand on poetic faith. Theseus happened to be out hunting, and the deer happened to take his course that way. If this were done in the spirit of pure romance, it would hardly matter; but Chaucer makes the plot too real for that. It is interesting to observe that a preposterous story is often carried less easily by the power of realism than by the illusion of romance, wherefore the mistake of some writers who try to rationalise absurdities. Boccaccio got round his difficulty by the method, rather startling here, of direct appeal: ‘But as we sometimes see things happen that don’t happen again for a thousand years...’ etc. This passage Chaucer fortified by additions:

The destinee, ministre general,
That executeth in the world over-al
The purveyance, that God hath seyn biforn,
So strong it is, that, though the world had sworn
The contrarie of a thing, by ye or nay;
Yet somtyne it shal fallen on a day
That falleth nat eft with-inne a thousand yere. (A. 1663–69.)

Here there is something like the ‘execucion of the magestee’ referred to in the Balade, but the wording reminds one as well of the phraseology of Dante, where Fortune is ‘general ministra e duce’, and also of Boccaccio’s expression ‘L’ alta ministra del mondo Fortuna,’ in a passage which perhaps recalled Dante to Chaucer’s mind in this connection. Why then did he change the allusion from that to Fortune into the other to Destiny? Perhaps because he found his initial suggestion in Boethius, where the full conception of the Christian Fortune is not presented, but where Destiny has many of the attributes ascribed to the fickle goddess. In this respect, therefore, the passage in the

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1 Commentaria Physicorum Aristotelis (Opera, ed. Pope Leo XIII, ii, p. 77, 9).
2 Inferno, vii, 78.
3 La Teseide, vi, 1 ff. which echoes Dante. This occurs a little later than the scene corresponding to that in Chaucer where Destinee is mentioned. Cf. Tese, v, stanza 77.
4 In Book iv, pr. vi, l. 35 ff. (Chaucer’s translation, ed. Skeat, p. 115) in a passage which Skeat cited for the corresponding lines about Fortune in the Balade. It is significant that both the Balade and the Knight’s Tale seem to derive at least in part therefrom.
Knight's Tale seems earlier than that in the Balade, except for the echo of Dante; and one may suspect that the discussion in the Consolation of Philosophy, together with that in the Inferno, was what led Chaucer to his own ideas on the subject. Thus in recasting the plot of the Teseide he reduced the element of chance, and turned instead to a kind of fatalism, in which Palamon (unlike his prototype in the Italian) receives some degree of poetic justice. Even Arcite has his appropriate reward; for he wins the tournament, but fails to get the lady, on whom, after all, Palamon had prior claim. Arcite it was who broke the oath of brotherhood, and, following passion rather than loyalty, caused all the trouble. We like him rather better, I think, than we do Palamon, just because he is headlong. But we are bound to admit that he is subject to no irrational destiny, and that he has been touched, however slightly, with the follies of love and 'worldly vanitee.'

Another poem, and a much greater, in which Chaucer shows similar deliberations is the Troilus, written in the same general period. In the Filostrato, its source, the lovers come together of their own volition; and when Chaucer set about to rework it to his purpose, he found the element of chance in control, except, strangely enough, in the scene where Griseida, torch in hand, goes to meet Troilo and is in no point deceived about his intentions. But Chaucer's Criseyde cannot permit herself to act so simply. Candid as she usually is in facing the facts of life, nevertheless, like many a modern, 'To herself she must seem to have yielded only to inevitable fate; but to her lover she wished to be not a helpless victim but an offering of free love.' So she consents to go to her uncle's house, not without an inkling that Troilus may be found near by, and after supper, when she is about to leave, a storm happens to come up. She cannot go home again in the rain. It is at this juncture that Chaucer adds a passage about Fortune, which, it will be seen, recalls the other lines in the Balade and the Knight's Tale, and gives an indubitable portrait of the Christian figure:

But O, Fortune, executrice of wierdes,
O influences of thise hevenes hye!
Soth is, that, under God, ye ben our hierdes,
Though to us bestes been the causes wrye. 

The idea of men as poor 'beasts' is like that in the Balade; the reference to the hidden causes makes one think of similar lines in Dante2: Boethius,

2 Inferno, vii, 82 ff. For 'executrice of wierdes' cf. the phrase in the Laurent de Premierfait translation of the De Casibus; see Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, iv, 4, pp. 35 ff.
too, is behind this passage, as we have seen in touching on the discussion of Destiny in the Consolatio. And the meaning is that the storm has arrived in accordance with a Divine plan and not through chance. This meaning is deepened if we observe a passage too often neglected in this connexion, where even before she goes to Pandarus's house Criseyde remarks: 'It rayneth; lo, how sholde I goon?' (iii, 562). Soon after, she asks whether Troilus is out of town; and what she thinks at the reply of Pandarus, Chaucer is not prepared to say—at least so he tells us. In that way Criseyde seeks to delude herself and to be the willing victim of circumstances. The finesse with which this scene is developed gives us the proper parallel in lighter vein for such an episode as the murder of Raffles in Middlemarch, which requires even less than the proverbial twist of the wrist. Criseyde takes every precaution to guard her modesty, and does nothing else except just—to yield.

At the next crisis in the story, at the moment when Criseyde is unfaithful to Troilus, Fortune is again held responsible, but again she is described as only the agent of God's will. Through her it is brought about that Troilus suffers his great loss and Diomede receives favour (iv, Stanzas 1–2). The fate of Troy, which so deeply involves that of the lovers, really lies in the hands of Fortune:

Fortune, whiche that permutacioun
Of thinges hath, as it is hir committed
Through purveyaunce and disposicioun
Of heighe Iove, as regnes shal ben flitted
Fro folk in folk, or whan they shal ben smitted,
Gan pulle awey the fetheres brighte of Troye
Fro day to day, til they ben bare of Ioye.

(v, 1541–47.)

But again it is exceedingly important to notice that neither of the lovers is helpless in the matter: their debate about the wisdom of separating at least temporarily shows their free choice on that point; Criseyde takes her time, not too much perhaps, but a judicious amount, in yielding to Diomede; and Troilus, first tempted to put the blame on circumstances like many another, finally sees his own deliberate part in his tragedy. The business of Fortune, in this case as in the other,

1 This phase of the situation is fully discussed in a study of Troilus's monologue on predestination, Journ. Eng. Germ. Phil., xvii, pp. 399 ff. (see also Mod. Lang. Notes, xl, pp. 270 ff.). Such a tragedy as this is a sufficient answer to Farnham's theory about Renaissance developments, Journ. Eng. Germ. Phil., xxv, pp. 66 ff. As a matter of fact the idea that man may be master of his fate is essential to scholastic philosophy, and touches mediæval plots about as often as it does those of later periods. The development has not been in the direction of richer significance in tragedy, but, especially since the late seventeenth century, the sentimental type has more and more dominated the stage. It seems likely that with the growth of modern determinism this will continue to be the case, although it is amusing to see the determinist trying to straddle both positions: cf. F. H. Hankins, Journ. Philos., xxii, pp. 617 ff.
is therefore to prepare the way for the deliberate act of Criseyde. The opportunity for self-expression includes the expression of weakness as well as of strength. The philosophical tradition of Fortune from the time of Aristotle maintained that chance makes room for human free will. So Criseyde is unfaithful—honest with herself when it comes to desire, even to the point of being unscrupulous in the expression of it (Chaucer’s harshest treatment of her is in the quality of her letter, v, 1590 ff., especially 1614 f., and in the comment on her gift of the brooch, v, 1040); but she tries her old trick of self-deception when it comes to blame in the matter, only to discover that this time it won’t work. ‘To Diomede algate I wol be trewe’ (v, 1071)! Henryson in writing his Testament of Cresseid saw the implications of that line; the girl who had looked facts in the face with all the ‘calculinge’ worthy of her father Calchas had descended to such futility!

The passage about Fortune quoted above shows again the indebtedness to Boethius and the echo of the other passages, in the Knight’s Tale and perhaps in the Balade, together with a marked dependence this time on Dante. Clearly the poet was interested in the problem of chance in the decade after 1378. Reading Boethius stirred his consideration of the matter; but after the death of Edward III England was politically in a turmoil, with the peasant revolt, the difficulties following the succession of young Richard, the rise of Lollardy, and a touch of warfare to add to the excitement. Moreover, Chaucer’s personal fortunes had their ups and downs at this time. One has only to scan the events that mark this period in his life, with his loss of the Controllership of the Customs and that of the Petty Customs, and the connexion of his affairs with the rise and fall of Mayor Brembre, to see that his thoughts might well turn on:

The pow’r that ministers to God’s decrees,
And executes on earth what Heaven foresees,
Call’d Providence, or Chance, or Fatal Sway.

What seems like a reversion to the pagan idea appears in another of Chaucer’s poems, the Monk’s Tale. Here various ‘world figures’ are described, from Lucifer and Adam to Crœsus and Julius Cæsar, and one after another their stories are told: how with unaware stroke Fortune assailed them. Like the Mirror for Magistrates of a later century, the plan of the narrative is to show the ‘slipery deceiptes of the wavering

1 Inferno, vii, 79–80. This is the passage reflected in the Teseide, vi, 1 ff. Note also Chaucer’s lines which embody a Christian idea of Fate, as in the Knight’s Tale, but here in the persons of the Parcae, Troilus, v, 1 ff.
2 Dryden, Palamon and Arcite, ii, ll. 210–12.
lady,' although not always to exhibit the 'due rewarde of all kinde of vices'; for both documents take account of the fact that Fortune does not limit herself to the punishment of sin. The Monk tries to explain her deeds in this way; but as he goes on with his succession of pathetic episodes it is clear that in the case of Sampson, Zenobia, and especially Peter of Spain (John of Gaunt's father-in-law) we have sentimental tragedies, where the main point is our expected grief. This is the pagan goddess who does her business here, covering her face against both the unjust and the just. Perhaps the story came early in Chaucer's career; but apparently some of the sentimental tragedies did not. And, in any event, why did he allow it to appear unchanged among the *Canterbury Tales*?

The answer is to be found, I feel sure, in the character of the Monk. He is a prime sentimentalist himself. Somewhat modern in his point of view on things religious, holding after the new way, he maintained that life was meant to be enjoyed. What an excellent time he had in the process of enjoying it! Full many a dainty horse he had, and his bridle jingled with bells to keep music for ever in the air; his sleeves were lined with fur at the wrist, and that the finest of the land; his hood was fastened with an elaborate pin in the shape of a love-knot; his boots were supple and easy on the soft flesh of his feet; his skin is full fair; he is sleek, well fed, and knows the flavour of a fat swan. Constraint is not for him, but license and pleasure. There is no more emancipated worthy in literature until we come to Browning's Bishop ordering his own tomb with Renaissance grace. Another figure like this Monk might have told less moral stories, and have kept more assiduously to happy endings. But such a man would have been the less skilful in draining life's sensations dry. This Monk knows how to squeeze the juice even out of pathos and to feel the respectable luxury of piety.

So with magnificent pomp, with morality based in his own case on pride, he tells these moral stories, in which pride is castigated—or else is not—but, whether or no, we are led to feel deeply saddened by the cruelty of circumstance, and the Host is incidentally rebuked for imputing evil ways to this honourable dignitary. At last only the Knight can interrupt this rosary of tears; and the Host gets his chance to give proper criticism, using the very words of the Monk, and adding:

No remedie
It is for to biwaille, ne compleyne
That that is doon, and als it is a peyne,
As ye han seyd, to here of hevinesse.  

(B. 3974–77.)
The Monk himself is reduced to mortification by the turn of events. The Host makes fun of the very style of his speech. When his most affecting mood is broken into thus harshly, like any sentimentalist he is sullen, and like any sentimentalist he insists that he himself has been deeply moved all along. He won't tell another story:

‘Nay,’ quod this monk, ‘I have no lust to pleye.’ (B. 3996.

Some years before the Monk told this story on the way to Canterbury Chaucer himself may have taken Boccaccio's moral treatise in earnest. In a serious mood he may have set about translating the De Casibus because it was edifying. But he apparently did not finish the work, and later, as in the case of the Melibeus and the story of Griselda, he saw it in a different light. In this way it becomes transformed for us in the Canterbury Tales, and the Monk, in giving forth the tragedies as monotonously as the tolling of his chapel bell, only shows his own character.

Fortune reappears in the other Canterbury Tales. In the Man of Law's Tale there is a suggestion of the Christian figure, although astrological influence receives more attention. In the Nun's Priest's Tale, as if by way of glancing back at the Monk, we are told that Fortune turns the hope and pride of her enemy. In the Clerk's Tale the whims of Fortune really seem to be the design of Walter in testing his wife. In the Merchant's Tale, after an ironical allusion, the goddess seems to work the will of a sane and prudent Fate. She separates the lovers in the Squire's Tale; and a complaint is addressed to her in the Franklin's Tale, although ultimately her action seems fair enough. The Parson's Tale has some material on her gifts, but shows nothing particularly new. Other instances might be cited, but from these which I have passed in review we obtain sufficient information about the poet's attitude.

In brief, Fortune's gifts are 'richesses, highe degrees of lordshipes, preisinges of the peple,' and obviously sometimes success in love. These she doles out, subject to a rational Deity, whose plan she puts in operation. In the Balade de Bon Conseyl, in advising men not to kick against

1 Lydgate translated Boccaccio's work later from the French version of Laurent de Premierfait. From the latter he seems to have got the Christian conception of Fortune. Of their ideas the most recent editor says: 'The most that may be said of either of them is that he was able to recognize that, in general, men reap what they have sown,' Early Eng. Text Soc., Lydgate's Fall of Princes, London, 1924, i, p. xxii.
3 B. ll. 4593 ff.
4 E. ll. 2057 ff. with the familiar scorpion figure.
5 Parson's Tale, section 27, 454 (Skeat, p. 596).
the pricks but to seek that peace which is found in truth, Chaucer warns them to keep from putting any confidence in Fortune. The moral of the problem, therefore, is to turn away from her double face to the God who 'nil falsen no wight.' In this he is in accord with the French poets, Philippe de Beaumanoir, Watriquet de Couvin, and others, and with Boethius and Dante. With him and with Dante tragedy gains in significance, for in their telling it becomes moral rather than sentimental, and the moral values attain a spiritual validity in the philosophy which they both hold. The universe, as they see it, is neither surrendered to the workings of chance, nor given up to the laws of blind fate which ultimately are just as capricious in their effect on man. Instead it is based on intelligence, and that is how one may hold the conviction that 'Trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede.' Chaucer's counsel implies a belief in free will, and, at the very opposite pole from cynicism, a sure hope in the meaning of existence.

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1 Troilus, v, 1845.
2 Balade de Bon Conseyl, l. 7, etc.