

The Book of Courtesy

From Sloane Ms. 1986 in the British Museum

From an English copy circa 1430-1440

Probably written in Scotland circa 1420

A Transliteration by Douglas Strong

Here begineth the second Book of Courtesy

If thou be a young child
And in school thou doth act wild
This lesson shall gain thy master's mark
Christ's cross give thee speed in all thy work
To Say thy *Pater Noster* we will teach,
As Christ's own apostles did preach;
After thy *Ave Maria* and the *Creed*
That shall let thy soul be freed.

Then after to bless thee with the
trinity

In nomine Patris he will teach thee;
The with Mark, Matthew Luke and John
With *Per crucis* and the high name¹
To shrive thyself in general shall thee learn
By *confiteor* and *misereatur* in turn;
~~To seek the kingdom of god, my child,~~
Thus, I say be thou not wild

Therefore worship god, both old and
young,

Be in body and soul both rich and strong.
When thou comes to the church door,
Take holy water that stands on the floor.

Read or sing or say a prayer
For all good Christians everywhere;
Be courteous to God and kneel down before
him

On both knees that you may adore him.
To men thou shall kneel on but one knee,
The other to thyself held only by thee.
When the priest thou ministers at the altar
With both hands serve him lest thou falter

¹ Lines 151 and 152 do not rhyme in the original text.

The one to stabilize the other
Lest thou fail, my dear brother.

Another Curtesy I will thee teach
Thy father and mother, with mild speech,
In worship and serve with all thy might,
That thou dwell the longer in the earthly light.

To another man do no more amiss
Ten you would be done of him and his;
So Christ thou please, and gets his love
Of men and God that sits above.

Be not too meek, in the mean thou should
hold,

Or else named a fool, that thou will be told
He that to righteousness does incline,
As holy writ says, is well and fine
His seed shall never go search for bread,
Nor suffer by man and no shames dread.

To forgive shall thou be fast;
To vengeance look thou but last;
Draw thee to peace with all thy strength;
From strife and battle keep thee at length.

If man asks for goods for God's sake
And thee wants things whereof to take,
Give him good words and manner fair.
With glad semblance and pure good cheer.

Also of service shall thou give free
To every man in his right degree.
Thou shall never lose by being kind
Whoever forgets has another in mind.

If any man gives thee a gift,
With him thou makes an even shift.
Wait not for praise with gift in hands,
Thou art uncourteous if thus thou stands.

Go on pilgrimages if thou has the

will,
 For such a promise must thou fulfill,
 Lest God strike thee with great vengeance,
 And put thee into sore penance.
 Believe not all met that speak to thee
 fair,
 Whether they're common, burgess or mayor;
 In sweet words the adder was hiding,
 Deceiving ever and misguiding;
 Wherefore thou art the blood of Adam,
 Beware of thy words except when maddened:
 The short word is commonly truth,
 That first slides from a man's tooth
 See that a liar thou never become,
 Keep thy word for all and some.
 Laugh not out loud, for that's not polite,
 At no kind of mirth that any man likes;
 For he who laugh for men to see,
 A shrew or fool does he seem to be.
 Three enemies in this world are there
 my boy
 That desire all men, for to destroy
 The devil, the flesh and the world also,
 that makes men's lives be full of woe:
 If thou destroys these enemies three,
 Thy place in heaven secured shall be.
 Also my child, against thy lord
 Cause him no strife with thy word,
 No wager with him should thou lay,
 Nor at dice with him should thou play.
 Him that thou knows thy estate is
 under,
 Be not his fellow in battle nor slumber,
 If thou are out in a strange country,
 look for no more than falls to thee;
 Take no more to do in thy hand,
 Then thou would have done in thy own land.
 If thou sees a man fall in the lane
 Laugh not at him in the sun or rain
 But help him up with all thy might,
 So does St. Ambrose teach us right;
 Thou who stands so sure in the street,
 Beware lest thy head fall to thy feet.
 My child if thou goes to the mass,
 And understands both more and less,
 If the Priest reads not what thou will,

Reproach him not but stand thee still.
 If thou, a secret is told unto,
 Beware of telling it to a shrew,
 Lest he slander thee with his tounge
 Among all men both old and young.
 Pointing and beconing, thou should not use,
 And secret whisperings should thou refuse.
 If thou meet knight, common or knave.
 Hail him anon, "Sire, God thou save"
 if he speeks first upon thee there
 answer him gladly without any more.
 Go not forth as a dumb freak,
 since God has let thy tounge speak;
 lest thy kith and kins should say
 "there is a man whose mouth's away"
 Speak never dishonestly of
 womankind,
 nor let these thoughts run in thy mind.
 the book of life does call him a churl
 that vilanously speeks of woman or girl.
 for all have been of women born,
 and our fathers too, like us before;
 therefore it is a dishonest thing
 to speak of them with any loathing.
 Also a wife is full of right
 who worships her husband both day and
 night,
 to do his bidding and be obedient,
 and him to serve with out offence.²
 If two brothers be at debate,
 see that thou never further their hate,
 but help to staunch them of this emnity
 then thou art frend to both continually
 If thou goes with another to the gate
 and if thou be of one estate,
 be curteous and let him have the way,
 that is not wrong, as men may say;
 and if he comes of great kindred
 go not before him though thou be bid;
 and if that he thy master by,
 go not before, him for curtesy.

²These lines do not rhyme in the original text. The author has paired obediente and offence.

never in the field, woods nor other land
walk even with him, lest he command.

if though shall on pilgrimage go
be not a third man for good or woe.
three oxen in plow nay never well draw,
neither in craft, right, or law.

If though be offered to drink of a cup,
Drink not all of it and no way sup;
drink meekly and gif it again,
that is curteousm to speek plain.

If sharring a bed thou will be,
will fellow, or master, or like degree,
to tell thou, curteously request,
in what part of the bed he will rest.
be curteous and lay far from he
that thou art wise others shall see.