

Mekyll and littill, olde and yynge,
Herkyns all to my talkynge
Of whaym I will yow kythe.
Jhesu fadir of heven kyng,
Gyff us all thy dere blyssynge
And make us glade and blythe.
For full sothe sawis I will yow synge,
Off whaym the worde full wyde gan sprynge, 1
And ye will a stownde me lythe.
In the bukes of Rome als it es tolde
How byfelle amange oure eldyrs olde,
Full ofte and fele sythe.

Somtym byffell ane aventure,
In Rome ther was ane Emperoure,
Als men in romance rede.
He was a man of grete favoure
And levede in joye and grete honoure
And doghety was of dede.
In tornament nor in no fyghte
In the werlde ther ne was a better knyghte,
No worthier undir wede.
Octovyane was his name thughowte;
Everylke man hade of hym dowte
When he was armede one stede.

Ane Empryce he hade to wyffe,
One of fayreste that was one lyffe,
Thus thies clerkes sayne us so;
Seven yeres had thay samen bene
With joy and gamen tham bytwene,
And other myrthis moo;
The seven yere were comen and gone,
Bot child togedir had thay none
Getyn bytwene tham two,
That after tham thair land moghte welde,
When that thay drewe till elde:
And forthi tham in hert tham was full woo.

And als the Emperoure satt appon a daye,
In his chambir hym to playe
With his lady bryghte,
He byhelde hir faire lyre,
Was whyte so blossome on the brere,
That semly was of syghte.
A sorow than to his herte ther ranne
Forthi that thay childir hade nanne
Thaire landis to rewle one ryghte.
And by his lady so als he satte,
For sorowe his chekes wexe all wate,
That was so hende a knyghte.

Bot when the lady that gan aspye,
All chaunged than hir bryghte blyee

And scho syghede full sore.
Scho felle hir lorde one knees agayne,
And of his sorow scho gan hym frayne,
And of hs mekyll care.
"Sir," scho sais, "if it were your will
Youre concelle for to schewe me till
And of your lyffes fare,
Ye wote I ame youre werldes fere,
Obyn your herte unto me here,
Youre comforthe may be the mare."

Than in his armes he gan hir folde
And all his sorow he to hir tolde
And all his hertis wonde.
"Now hafe we seven yere sammen bene
And hafe no chylde us bytwene,
For fay we sall hythen fownde,
And I ne wote how this land sall fare
Bot lyfe in werre and in kare
When we are broghte to grownde.
Therefore I hafe so mekyll thoghte
That when I am to bedde broghte
I slepe bot littill stownde."

And than answerde that lady bryghte,
"Sir I kan rede yow full ryghte,
Gyffe yow nothyng ill.
A ryche abbaye schall ye do make
For oure swete lady sake,
And landis gyffe theretill,
And scho will pray hir Son so fayre
That we may samen gete an ayere,
This land to welde with skylle."
An abbaye than he gerte wyrke so
And sone he gatt knave childre two,
Als it was Goddis will.

With childe thane yode that lady thore;
Full grete scho wexe with paynnes sore,
That was so faire and free.
Till the tym felle that it was soo,
The lady hade knave childre two
That semly weren to see.
Tythande come to the Emperoure
There he laye in his ryche towre;
A full glade man was hee.
Two maydynes hym the bodworde broghte -
Withowtyn gyftes yede thay noghte:
Aythire hadde townnes three.

The Emperoure rosse with mylde mode
And till his chambir he hym yode
And thankes God His sande.
Erly are the daye gan sprynge,