SIMPLE AND COY.

A NOTE ON FOURTEENTH CENTURY POETIC DICTION.

Nowhere else, perhaps, does Chaucer use with more consummate skill the subtle connotations of words and phrases than in his portraiture of the Prioress. His delicate irony — of the rare strain that has its roots in the perfect merging of artistic detachment with humorously sympathetic comprehension — is nowhere more pervasive; and the hovering of the worthy lady's spirit between "love celestial" and "chere of court" is depicted with unerring art. And the key of the whole is set at once by the famous second line.

For (it is perhaps worth noting) not only this line but the entire description is steeped in reminiscences of the poetry of courtly love, and to the readers of Chaucer's day must have carried nuances which we, whose familiar reading is not theirs, are apt to miss. Even we, of course, cannot fail to catch certain salient points. The exquisite incongruity of the gentle nun's self-chosen name;¹⁾ the flash of association

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¹⁾ Even that does not carry for us so effective a penumbra of associations as it did for readers who were familiar with things like this:

En une chambre cointe et grant,
Se sist bele Eglentine
Deseur .i. lit riche et plesant
Et enclos de cortine;
En sospirant
Va regretant
Ce qu'aime d'amor fine;
Puis va disant:
"Dieus! por qu'aim tant
Celui qui tant
Va demorant,

from the rehearsal of her dainty manners to the distinctly more mundane than pious intent of precisely these same manners as enjoined (among other things) with due zest by *La Vieille*; ¹⁾ and the happy ambiguity of the motto of the brooch ²⁾ — touches like these are manifest enough. Less obvious, perhaps, is the art of the five lines (152—56) in which the Prioress's features are described — every detail of which might have come from any fourteenth century lover's description of his mistress. ³⁾ Such descriptions, indeed, the lines must inevitably have recalled. And no less noteworthy than the skill with which they suggest still youthful flesh

Quant set que j'ai dolor si grant
Que nuit ne jor ne fine?
Or n'i sai medecine
Se plus atent."

Raynaud, *Recueil de motets fr.*,
I, 175—76 (no. clvii).

Or this:

Bele Aiglentine en roial chamberine
devant sa dame cousoit une chemise.
Ainc n'en sot mot quant bone amor l'atise.
or orrez ja

Comment la bele Aiglentine exploita —

and so on through the romance of "*Bele Aiglentine et li quens Henris*", in Bartsch (*Altfr. Romanzen und Pastourellen*, pp. 4—5).

¹⁾ *Roman de la Rose*, ed. Michel, ll. 14349 ff. (II, 88 f.).

²⁾ See *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, XXIII, 297, n. 2.

³⁾ Et puis après, Les yex vairs comme un faucons, Nés trettic, clers est ses frous, Polis, jolis et bien fès (*Froissart, Poésies*, ed. Scheler, II, 251); Sourcieus brunés et traitif nés . . . La bouche n'ot pas contrefaite, Vermeille iert, petite et bien faite (*Jean de Condé*, ed. Scheler, I, 310); Mais a son front ne fault amendement; Car grant et plain, ouny, blanc, proprement Comme yvoire ouvré poliement, Ert faconné . . . oeil vairs et rians . . . Beau nés traittis . . . Souef flairant La bouchete ot, petite et riant (*Christine de Pisan*, ed. Roy, II, 204); Vairs iex ot . . . simples à point, clers et rians, Nés traittis, vermeille bouchete (*Watriquet de Couvin*, ed. Scheler, p. 24); Ele avoit les euz si vairz Come faucon, Et si avoit bele bouche Et bele facon; ele avoit les euz rians, le nes traittis, Sa facete vermeillete Comme rosier floris (*Bartsch, Altfr. Romanzen und Pastourellen*, No. 52, p. 54); Blont chief, plain front, vis Com ros sor lis Assis, Euz vairs rians . . . biau nés traittis, Bouche vermeille, denz drus petis (*Chansonier de Montpellier*, Raynaud, *Recueil*, I, 17); S'ot front large et bien affaitié (*Watriquet de Couvin*, p. 333); Les iex rians, le nés traittis (*Jubinal, Nouv. Rec.*, II, 180); and so on ad libitum.

and blood behind the well-pinched wimple is the restraint which forgoes the remainder of the inevitable inventory, and leaves the Prioress charmingly human, without a suggestion of the sensuous.¹⁾ In a word, not only in his account of the amiable foibles of the Prioress herself, but in his own choice of words and phrases, Chaucer suggests the delightfully imperfect submergence of the woman in the nun. And his "simple and coy", as it happens, is by no means the least effective touch.

For this phrase too belongs to the stock-in-trade of fourteenth century love poetry, and its associations are not without their interest. Too little attention, certainly, has been paid to Chaucer's individual use of conventional phraseology, and obviously conventions must be recognized as such before the individuality of their employment can be felt. Not only, then, for the particular interest of the phrase itself, but also as an indication of what might be done in other more important cases, an examination of the contemporary usage of "simple and coy" is perhaps worth while.²⁾ At all events, it may serve to exemplify the qualities of a poetic diction beside whose deadly yet fascinating monotony that of the eighteenth century is kaleidoscopic in its variety. Yet amazing as the jargon is, it has its spell, and one comes in the end to snatch a fearful joy in the settled assurance of the sort of thing predestined to confront one when the next page is turned. For, given certain familiar contexts, one may as securely count on the probable appearance (for instance) of

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¹⁾ Compare even Christine de Pisan's matter-of-course continuation of the description quoted above (from II, 204), with its detailed account of mentonnet, gorgete, poitrin, tetins, braz, corsellet, hanches, rains, ventre, jambes, piés — and add, of course, Chaucer's own description of the Duchesse Blanche. Nowhere did the mediæval predilection for interminable catalogues revel more at large than in the conventional registers of feminine charms, and Chaucer's reserve in this case meant more than similar restraint today.

²⁾ Few collectanea, I am inclined to think, would be of more value for the study of Chaucer than one which should give, for a hundred or so carefully selected words and phrases, a sufficient number of passages in which they occur (from contemporary French as well as English literature) to make it possible to feel their associations — a matter quite as important as the mere reconstruction of their definitions.

a "simple et coie" as one relies on this or that plant turning up in its due environment. And Chaucer's use of the phrase is racy with the flavor of its soil.

Simple alone, it may be noted first, is one of the commonest words in the vocabulary of the "lovers that can make of sentement". Chaucer's use of it in the Book of the Duchesse is typical enough:

And whiche eyen my lady hadde!
Debonair, goode, glade and sadde,
Simple, of good mochel, noght to wyde.¹⁾

Again and again simple is thus used by the lover of his lady's eyes:

Douce et simple iert con tortorelle,²⁾
Vairs iex ot, fendus, fremians,
Simples à point, clers et rians.³⁾

Even Medea's eyes were simple:

Mout i a Medea ses ieuз
Douз, frans e simples, senz orguieuз.⁴⁾

¹⁾ Ll. 859—61.

²⁾ Compare, for the association of simple with a dove, the account of Franchise in the Roman de la Rose: Et fu simple comme uns coulons (ed. Michel, l. 1204; cf. ME. Fragment A, l. 1219); and also the jealous husband to his wife: Ge voi que vous estes plus simple En cel sorcot, en cele guimple, Que torterele ne coulons (ed. Michel, ll. 9263—65). So Watriquet de Couvin again: car tourterelle N'a pas plus simple esgardeüre (ed. Scheler, p. 333); N'avoit pas la chièr grifaigne, Mais plus simple c'uns coulombiaus (ib., p. 338); cf. Simple comme est un coulombel, Et débonère comme aignel (Jubinal, Nouv. Rec., II, 261). Compare: Simple fu com une espousée (Roman de la Rose, ed. Michel, l. 1004; cf. ME. Fragment A, l. 1015); so Deschamps, V, 81, l. 7.

³⁾ Watriquet de Couvin, ed. Scheler, p. 24, ll. 734—36. Compare: Yeus simples, vairs et attraians (Froissart, ed. Scheler, II, 23); Simple et plaisant sont si vair oeil (id., II, 201); vos yeux douls, simples et joiens (id., II, 354); Vo oeil, qui tant sont gracieus, De douls regars, simples et precieus (id., I, 85); Euz vairs et rians, Simples, bien assis, Amorous a devis (Raynaud, Recueil, I, 35); Vos simple eulz vairs (id., II, 31).

⁴⁾ Benoît, Roman de Troie, ed. Constans, ll. 1275—76. Helen was simple too; Simple esteit tant e de bon aire Com l'on porreit plus retraire (id., ll. 5139—40); and Breseida: E si ert el mout vergondose, Simple e aumosniere e pitose (id., ll. 5287—88); and Andromache: Blois fu sis chiès e vair si ueil; Franche ert e simple senz orgueil (id., ll. 5521—22).

Times without number the word is used to characterize the lady's look, her face, her voice, her speech, her bearing.¹⁾ It occurs frequently in conventional lists of feminine virtues, as in the following from Raynaud:

Ele est docete,
Simplete,
Pleasant,
Sa vermetete
Bochete
Riant, etc.;²⁾

or in a lilting stanza of Guyot de Dijon:

Plus est que rose vermetete,
Cele por qui je vos chans;
S'est simple, jonc et tendrette,
Et grailete par les flans.³⁾

And finally (it is of special interest here to note) Jean de Brienne, King of Jerusalem, uses it in a reference to his lady's smile:

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¹⁾ I shall give but a few references, out of a list of many times the number: with regars, Raynaud, *Recueil*, I, 58; with regardeure, *Les Chansonniers de Champagne aux XII^e et XIII^e Siècles*, ed. Tarbé, p. 64; with esgardeure, id., p. 72; with vis, Blondel de Néele, ed. Tarbé, p. 51; with visaige, *Li Roumans dou Chastelain de Coucy*, ed. Crapelet, l. 834; with viare, Mätzner, *Altfr. Lieder*, p. 34; with chiere, *Trouvères belges*, ed. Scheler, II, 51; with contenance, Robert of Blois, ed. Ulrich, p. 102; with semblant, Froissart, ed. Scheler, II, 282; with maintien, *Chansons, Ballades el Rondeaux de Jehannot de Lescurel*, p. 23; with vois, *Le Songe Vert* (Romania, XXXIII), l. 248; with parler, *Les Chansonniers de Champagne*, p. 111; with parleüre, Benoît, *Roman de Troie*, ed. Constans, l. 1272: etc. etc.

²⁾ *Recueil*, I, 33. Compare: *Vo manierette Joliette, Simple, plaisans, faitissete, M'en donne desir* (*Chansons, Ballades et Rondeaux de Jehannot de Lescurel*, Paris, 1855, p. 25, No. XII).

³⁾ *Hist. littér. de la France*, XXIII, 610. So (as frequently) in Machaut: *Gent corps, faitis, cointe, apert et joly, Jeune, gentil paré de noble atour, Simple, plaisant, de bonté enriches* (*Voir Dit*, ed. P. Paris, p. 152; cf. pp. 4, 175, etc.; *Oeuvres*, ed. Tarbé, p. 63). Compare: *Damoiselle Simple et saige, bone et belle* (Bartsch, *Altfr. Romanzen*, etc., p. 309); *Douce, simple, cortoise, et sage* (*Jubinal, Jongl. et Trouv.*, p. 143; p. 183); Mätzner, *Altfr. Lieder*, pp. 38, 56; *De Venus la deesse d'Amors*, ed. Foerster, p. 20; etc.

Trop me seut bien esprendre et alumer
 Au bel semblant et au simplement rire;
 Nus ne l'orroit si doucement parler,
 Qui de s'amor ne cuidast estre sire.¹⁾

Like simple, coi also belongs to the conventional vocabulary of courtly love. Machaut writes, in the *Voir Dit*:

D'amer ne me puis tenir,
 Quant je voy
 Le mantien coy
 De son corps gent.²⁾

So Froissart, in *Le Joli Mois de May*:

Car ma dame très debonnaire,
 Lie, humble et quioie
 Est bien cause de mon affaire.³⁾

And the anonymous singers in Raynaud's great collection use the word freely enough:

Ne porrai estre garis,
 Se s'amor ne m'otroie
 La brunete coie
 A qui je suis amis;⁴⁾

Jolis est, biaux et de maintiens coi;
 Dieus! combien m'amour en li emploi;⁵⁾

Si trovoie
 Seule et coie
 A mon cois
 Pastourelle
 Cointe et belle.⁶⁾

¹⁾ Hist. littér. de la France, XXIII, 638.

²⁾ Ed. P. Paris, p. 178.

³⁾ II, 206.

⁴⁾ Recueil, I, 138.

⁵⁾ Id., I, 268.

⁶⁾ Id., II, 89. Compare: coie et mue (Jean de Condé, I, 170); si fu cois taisans (id., I, 238); Ce me fera coi et taisant (Jehannot de Lescurel, p. 60); cois et doutiex (id., p. 45); Mais de grant dueil qui me tient morne et coye (Christine de Pisan, I, 2); coys et honteux (Deschamps, III, 328; cf. VI, 205). Note especially the fine phrase of Jean de Condé: Si est saiges et bien apris Cieus qui mesure ses parolles Et qui retient coies les folles (I, 168).

Simple and coi then, taken separately, are obviously conventional in their employment.

But the phrase *simple et coie*¹⁾ is no less a commonplace. One of its favorite habitats is the *pastourelle*. The engagingly frank and often frail young persons who are the heroines of the genre are uncommonly likely to be *simple et coie*:

L'autre jour me chevauchois
 Delés une grant arbroie;
 Si m'arestois
 .I. petit.
 Si com dedens esgardeie,
 Vi pucele simple et coie,
 Qui disoit par grant despit:
 "Il jut anuit en mon lit
 Nuement en mes bras, li chaitis.
 Las! a pou que je n'ai tout dit:
 Mal feu soit il ars!
 Trop est couars."²⁾

Again:

En un petit praietel
 vert et flori de novel,
 trovai dame simple et coie,
 que dit 'lasse, trop me duell:
 Senz amor ne puis durer ne je ne vuell'.
 La dame fu simple et coie,
 en un chainse senz mantel, etc.³⁾

So, once more:

de joste une arbroie,
 pres d'un vergier,
 dame simple et coie
 vi onbroier.

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¹⁾ The examples of *simple et coie* that follow (like those of *simple and coi* severally) have been noted incidentally in connection with reading done for another purpose. Any systematic search would doubtless have increased the list indefinitely — and also quite needlessly.

²⁾ Raynaud, *Recueil*, I, 271.

³⁾ Bartsch, *Altfr. Romanzen und Pastourellen*, No. 40, p. 40.

mult estoit bele et polie,
cors bien fet, gorge jolie.¹⁾

The phrase, moreover, is very apt to turn up in the long-drawn catalogues of the lady's physical charms. The following is from the close of an extremely explicit inventory:

Ele a biaux rains et basses hanches,
Et petiz piez et basses jambes
Qui sont si beles et si blanches;
Je qu'en diroie?
Ele est tant simple, ele est tant coie,
Ele est tant bone, ele est tant vraie,
Et plus assez que ne porroie
A raconter.²⁾

Or compare lines like these:

Elle avoit lou cors sadet
et la crine bloie,
euz vairs, clair vis vermillet,
boche qui rouzoie.
li cuers m'atanroie,
leiz li fix arrest

¹⁾ Id., No. 49, p. 50. Add: Trovai par desoz un pin Pastorele au cors fin . . . Je la vi simplete et coie, Seule sans Robin (Raynaud, Recueil, I, 73); Pastorele Gent et bele, Truis, simple et coie (Hist. littér., XXIII, 560; cf. Bartsch, p. 235); Cuer qui dort, il n'aime pas: Ja n'i dormirai, Toz jors penserai Loiaument sans gas A vos, simple et coie, Dont j'atent joie Et solas; N'i dormirai tant que soie Entre voz douz bras (Raynaud, Recueil, I, 77); J'ai perdu ma joie, Ne serai mès liés Devant que je soie O vos, simple et coie, Cui mon cuer est otroiés (id., I, 87); Cant j'antendi le cri la simple et coie, Vers li tornai, de son anuit m'anoie (Bartsch, p. 168); Si li ait dit 'vilains floris' La dame simple et coie, 'J'ai bel amia coente et joli', A cui mes cuers s'otroie (Bartsch, p. 30; also Les Chansonniers de Champagne, p. 79); A oir me plout lai voie Et la melodie De la belle simple et coie (Bartsch, p. 152).

²⁾ Salut d'amors, Jubinal, Nouv. Rec., II, 260. The following is the beginning of a similar description which stops at nothing:

Douce dame, simplete et coie,
Sage, cortoise, bone et bele,
Je vous aport une novele
Qui vous doit le cuer esjoir.

(Le Sort des Dames, Jubinal, Jongl. et Trouv. p. 182.)

et li priaï en bacet
'Chanteïs, simple et coie.¹⁾

Or this:

J'ai amiete simple et coie
Brunete,
Jonete,
Tendrete,
Bien faite;
Bien poi li flourete
La mamelete.
Hé! hai! Dieus! sa très douce gorgete,
Qui tant est savourousete.²⁾

In contexts with less of the savourous, the phrase appears as one of the stock conventions of the "sweet jargonizing" of mediaeval lovers. It is common in Machaut,³⁾ and Froissart,⁴⁾

¹⁾ Bartsch, p. 165. Compare further:

C'est la rosete, c'est la flor,
La violete de douçor;
Sa grand biauté, sa grant valour
Mi fet penser et nuit et jour,
Et tient mon fin cuer en baidour:
Simplete et coie,
Blanchete et bloie,
Dieus vos doinst joie
Et grant honor!

(Raynaud, Recueil, I, 150).

²⁾ Raynaud, Recueil, I, 233—34.

³⁾ Ma douce dame simple et coie (Voir Dit, ed. P. Paris, p. 211); Quant je ne vous voy, tres-douce, simple et coie! (id. p. 239). Compare especially the following:

Quant j'avoie aucune pensée
Contre moi ou mal ordenée,
Et la maniere simple et coie
De ceste ymage regardoie,
Tous mes pensers estoit taris,
Et tous mes maus estoit garis (id. p. 64).

⁴⁾ La très douce, simple et quoie, Que j'aim loyalmment (Poésies, ed. Scheler, I, 178); De la plaisans, simple, amoureuse et quoie Qu'ai tant amé (id., I, 351); Son doulc arroi Simple et quoi (id., II, 261); Et la simple, douce et quoie, Qui la flour Est de valour (id., II, 278); cf. II, 299, quoted below.

and Jehannot de Lescurel;¹⁾ it occurs in Gower²⁾ and Deschamps;³⁾ it is a favorite locution of Christine de Pisan.⁴⁾ And it is scattered broadcast through the pages of the other love poets of the day.⁵⁾

I have reserved until the last one of the most attractive of the settings of the phrase, in order to modulate back from the more sensuous contexts in which it has appeared to the key of Chaucer's portraiture. The poem is graceful enough to give in its entirety:

J'aim la plus sade riens
Qui soit de mere née,

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¹⁾ Qu'à vostre cors gent, Simplete et coie, Servir sans detri (Chansons, Ballads et Rondeaux de Jehannot de Lescurel, Paris, 1855, p. 23); L'espoir qu'ai, qu'encore m'aint La doucette simple et coie (id. p. 31).

²⁾ Plesante, sage, belle, simple et coie (Works, ed. Macaulay, I, 340).

³⁾ Car vous estes ... tresloyal, belle et bonne, Et de maintien simple et quoye (Oeuvres, III, 334). In Balade No. 305 Deschamps elaborates his distaste for the chase, and concludes:

Prince, mieulx vouldroit, simple et coye,
Dame en chambre ou l'en se soulace
Que tel riot, mieulx l'ameroye (IV, 320).

See also VIII, 263, quoted below.

⁴⁾ Combien qu'adès ne vous voie, Simple et coye Ou est ma joye, Que j'aim et serfs loiaument (Oeuvres poétiques, ed. Roy, I, 173); douce simplete et quoye (id., I, 291); Ha! simple et coye, Au moins voiez comment plour et larmoye Pour vo depart (id., III, 104); Vostre beaulté ... simple et coye (id., III, 108); Pour Dieu! ma très douce dame ... Je vous suppli, simple et coye Qui m'entame (id., III, 199); Loyalle, vraie, simple et quoye (id., III, 272).

⁵⁾ Douce, simple et coie (Raynaud, Recueil, I, 93); Tout li cuers me rit de joie De vostre biauté veir; Mès ce qu'il m'estuet partir De vous, plaisant, simple et coie ... Fet ma joie en duel vertir (id., I, 95); Trop fu li regart amer, Qui mon cuer fait fremier, En voz, dame simple et coie (id., I, 116); Plaisant brune, simple et coie, Se voz me degniés amer, De tous mauz garis seroie (id., I, 121); Por l'amour De la simple coie que je n'os nommer, Pour les felons medisans (id., I, 249); Belle, simple, et coie, De vos me vient ma grant joie (Les Chansonniers de Champagne, p. 58); Sé la simple et coie Daignast amender Que je fusse en joie Por moi conforter, Plus ne li quier demander (id., p. 38); Ne puet faillir que Dame simple et coie, Sage et vaillans et de bon ensient, Doive souffrir que je serve in perdon (id., p. 53); Son choïs de simple et de coie (Raynaud, Recueil, I, 163).

En cui j'ai trestot mis
 Cuer et cors et pensée.
 Li dous Diex, que ferai
 De s'amor qui me tue?
 Dame qui vuet amer
 Doit estre simple en rue¹⁾;
 En chambre, o son ami,
 Soit renvoisie et drue.

N'est riens qui ne l'amast,
 Cortoise est à merveille;
 Plus est blanche que flor,
 Comme rose est vermeille.
 Li dous Diex . . .

Elle a un chief blondet,
 Eus vers, bouche sadete,
 Un cors por embracier,
 Une gorge blanchete.
 Li dous Diex . . .

Elle a un petit pié,
 Si est si bien chaucie;
 Puis va si doucement
 Desus cele chaucie.
 Li dous Diex . . .

Quant el vet au moustier,
 Si simple est et si coie²⁾

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¹⁾ Compare the following lines, in which the lady speaks:

Amis, je soloie,
 Quel part que j'aloie
 Estre simple et quoie.

(Froissart, II, 299).

²⁾ Compare Christine de Pisan's "plus simple qu'une religieuse" (I, 19). The phrase (this time "coies et simples") has an interesting context in Deschamps's *La Fiction du Lyon*, ll. 503—14 (VIII, 262—63). Compare Faulx-Semblant's words in the *Roman de la Rose*:

Cuidiés-vous que ne triche et lobe,
 Por ce se ge vest simple robe,
 Sous qui j'ai maint grant mal ovré?
 Jà par Dieu mon cuer n'en movré;

Jà ne fera semblant
De riens que ele voie.
Li dous Diex . . .

Que irai jou disant?
N'est nule qui la vaille;
Se plaine ert de pitié,
Il n'est rien qui i faille.
Li dous Diex . . .¹⁾

The Prioress herself could scarcely have resented that! And the gently ironical humor of Chaucer's delineation of her engaging inconsistencies surely loses nothing from an attempt to catch once more the forgotten flavor — subtly suggestive of her beloved "chere of court"! — of a felicitously chosen phrase.²⁾

Et se j'ai simple chièrre et coie,
Que de mal faire me recoie?

(ed. Michel, II, 42, ll. 12936—41).

See also Roman de la Rose, ll. 4172—74:

Si fu humilians et simple,
Ele ot un voile en leu de gimple,
Ainsinc cum nonain d'abéie.

(ed. Michel, I, 117).

¹⁾ Richard de Semilli (Hist. littér. de la France, XXIII, 734—35).

²⁾ Since the above was in type I have noted the following additional occurrences of the phrase in Machaut, *Poésies lyriques*, ed. Chichmaref: p. 37, Bal. XXII, ref.: *ma dame simple et coie*; p. 77, l. 15: *ma dame, simple et coie*; p. 104, Bal. ci, l. 2: *gentil dame, simple et coie*; p. 133, Bal. cxli, ref.: *Quant je ne voy ma dame simple et coie*; p. 147, l. 23: *très douce, simple et coie*; p. 242, l. 53: *Si maniere Humble et simple, son maintieng coy*; p. 355, l. 86: *Plus simple et plus quoie*; p. 452, ll. 37—38: *le plaisant viaire Simple et coy*; p. 470, l. 91: *A vous doulce, simple et coie*; p. 603, l. 39: *dame simple et quoie*; p. 633, l. 7: *Vostre dous maintieng simple et coy*; p. 647, ll. 10—11: *la simple et coie Au gent corps*.

SAINT LOUIS.

JOHN LIVINGSTON LOWES.