

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

SELECTIONS

FROM

THE PROLOGUE

(AFTER THE ELLESMERE MS.)



FAC. DE LETRAS

PORTO—1922

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Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth 5
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open yē, 10
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages):
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmers for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry lōndes;
And specially, from every shires ende 15
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke.
Bifel that, in that sesoun on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay 20
Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At night was come in-to that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle 25
In felawhipe, and pilgrims were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde;
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste, 30

So hadde I spoken with hem everichon,
 That I was of hir felawshipe anon,
 And made forward erly for to ryse,
 To take our wey, ther as I yow devyse.

But natheles, whyl I have tyme and space,
 35
 Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
 Me thinketh it acordaunt to resoun,
 To telle yow al the condicioun
 Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
 And whiche they weren, and of what degree;
 40
 And eek in what array that they were inne:
 And at a knight than wol I first biginne.

A Knight ther was, and that a worthy man,
 That fro the tyme that he first bigan
 45
 To ryden out, he loved chivalrye,
 Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye.
 Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
 And therto hadde he riden (no man ferre)
 As wel in cristendom as hethenesse,
 And evere honoured for his worthinesse.
 50
 At Alisaundre he was, whan it was womne;
 Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne
 Aboven alle naciouns in Puce.
 In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,
 No cristen man so ofte of his degree.
 55
 In Gernade at the sege eek hadde he be
 Of Algezir, and riden in Belmarye.
 At Lyeys was he, and at Satalye,
 Whan they were wonne; and in the Grete See
 At many a noble aryve hadde he be.
 60
 At mortal batailles hade he been fiftene,
 And foughten for our feith at Tramissene
 In listes thryes, and ay slayn his foo.
 This ilke worthy knight hadde been also
 Somtyme with the lord of Palaty,
 65
 Ageyn another hethen in Turkye:
 And everemore he hadde a sovereyn prys.
 And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
 And of his port as meek as is a mayde.
 He nevere yet no vileinye ne sayde
 70

In al his lyf, un-to no maner wight.
 He was a verray parfit gentil knight.
 But for to tellen yow of his array,
 His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.
 Of fustian he wered a gipoun 75
 Al bismotered with his habergeoun.
 For he was late y-come from his viage,
 And wente for to doon his pilgrimage.
 With him ther was his sone, a yong Squyer,
 A lovyer, and a lusty bacheler, 80
 With lokkes crulle, as they were leyd in presse.
 Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.
 Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,
 And wonderly deliver, and greet of strengthe. 85
 And he hadde been somtyme in chivachye,
 In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Picardye,
 And born him wel, as of so litel space,
 In hope to stonden in his lady grace.
 Embrouded was he, as it were a mede
 Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and rede. 90
 Singinge he was, or floytinge, al the day;
 He was as fresh as is the month of May.
 Short was his goune, with sleeves longe and wyde.
 Wel coude he sitte on hors, and faire ryde.
 He coude songes make and wel endyte, 95
 luste and eek daunce, and wel purtreye and wryte.
 So hote he loved, that by nightertale
 He sleep namore than doth a nightingale.
 Curteys he was, lowly, and servisable,
 And carf biforn his fader at the table. 100

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Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
 That of hir smyling was ful simple and coy;
 Hir gretteste ooth was but by seynt Loy; 120
 And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.
 Ful wel she song the service divyne,
 Entuned in hir nose ful semely;
 And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly,
 After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe, 125

For French of Paris was to hir unknowe.
 At mete wel y-taught was she with-alle;
 She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
 Ne wette hir fingres in hir sauce depe.
 Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe, 130
 That no drope ne fille up-on hir brest.
 In curteisye was set ful moche hir lest.
 Hir over lippe wyped she so clene,
 That in hir coppe was no ferthing sene
 Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
 Ful semely after hir mete she raughte, 136
 And sikerly she was of greet disport,
 And ful plesaunt, and amiable of port,
 And peyned hir to countrefete chere
 Of court, and been estatlich of manere, 140
 And to ben holden digne of reverence.
 But, for to speken of hir conscience,
 She was so charitable and so pitous,
 She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous
 Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde. 145
 Of smale houndes had she, that she fedde
 With rosted flesh, or milk and wastel breed.
 But sore weep she if oon of hem were deed,
 Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte:
 And al was conscience and tendre herte. 150
 Ful semely hir wimpel pinched was;
 Hir nose tretys; hir eyen greye as glas;
 Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to soft and reed;
 But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed.
 It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe; 155
 For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.
 Ful fetis was hir cloke, as I was war.
 Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar
 A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene;
 And ther-on heng a broche of gold ful shene, 160
 On which ther was first write a crowned A,
 And after, *Amor vincit omnia*.
 Another Nonne with hir hadde she,
 That was hir chapeleyne, and Preestes thre.
 A Monk ther was, a fair for the maistrye, 165

An out-rydere, that lovede venerye;
 A manly man, to been an aboot able.
 Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable:
 And, whan he rood, men mighte his brydel here
 Gingen in a whistling wynd as clere, 170
 And eek as loude as doth the chapel-belle,
 Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.
 The reule of seint Maure or of seint Beneit,
 By-cause that it was old and som-del streit,
 This ilke monk leet olde thinges pace, 175
 And held after the newe world the space.
 He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,
 That seith, that hunters been nat holy men;
 Ne that a monk, whan he is cloisterlees,
 Is likned til a fish that is waterlees; 180
 This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloistre.
 But thilke text held he nat worth an oistre.
 And I seyde his opinioun was good.
 What sholde he studie, and make him-selven wood,
 Upon a book in cloistre alwey to poure, 185
 Or swinken with his handes, and labource,
 As Austin bit? How shal the world be served?
 Lat Austin have his swink to him reserved.
 Therfor he was a pricasour aright;
 Grehoundes he hadde, as swifte as fowel in flight; 190
 Of priking and of hunting for the hare
 Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare. —
 I seigh his sleeves purfild at the hond
 With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;
 And, for to festne his hood under his chin, 195
 He hadde of gold y-wrought a curious pin:
 A love-knot in the gretter ende ther was.
 His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
 And eek his face, as he hadde been anoint.
 He was a lord ful fat and in good point; 200
 His eyen stepe, and rollinge in his heed,
 That stemed as a forneys of a leed;
 His botes souple, his hors in greet estat.
 Now certainly he was a fair prelat;
 He was nat pale, as a for-pyned goost. 205

And short and quik, and ful of hy sentence.
 Sowninge in moral vertu was his speche,
 And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.
 A Sergeant of the Lawe, war and wys,
 That often hadde been at the parvys, 310
 Ther was also, ful riche of excellence.
 Discreet he was, and of greet reverence:
 He scmed swich, his wordes weren so wyse,
 Iustice he was ful often in assyse,
 By patente, and by pleyn commissioun; 315
 For his science, and for his heigh renoun
 Of fees and robes hadde he many oon.
 So greet a purchasour was nowher noon.
 Al was fee simple to him in effect,
 His purchasing mighte nat been infect. 320
 Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas,
 And yet he semed bisier than he was.
 In termes hadde he caas and domes alle,
 That from the tyme of king William were falle.
 Therto he coude endyte, and make a thing; 325
 Ther coude no wight pinche af his wryting;
 And every statut coude he pleyn by rote.
 He rood but hoomly in a medlee cote
 Girt with a ceint of silk, with barres smale;
 Of his array telle I no lenger tale. 330
 A Frankeleyn was in his compaignye;
 Whyt was his berd, as is the dayesye.
 Of his complexioun he was sangwyn.
 Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn.
 To liven in delyt was evere his wone, 335
 For he was Epicurus owne sone,
 That heeld opinioun that pleyn delyt
 Was verrailly felicitee parfyt.
 An housholdere, and that a greet, was he;
 Seynt Iulian he was in his contree. 340
 His breed, his ale, was alwey after oon;
 A bettre envyned man was nevere noon.
 With-oute bake mete was nevere his hous,
 Of fish and flesh, and that so plentevous,
 It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke, 345

Of alle deyntees that men coude thinke.
 After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
 So chaunged he his mete and his soper.
 Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in mewe,
 And many a breem and many a luce in stewe. 350
 Wo was his cook, but-if his sauce were
 Poynaunt and sharp, and redy al his gere.
 His table dormant in his halle alway
 Stood redy covered al the longe day.
 At sessiouns ther was he lord and sire. 355
 Ful ofte tyme he was knight of the shire.
 An anlas and a gipser al of silk
 Heng at his girdel, whyt as morne milk.
 A shirreve hadde he been, and a countour;
 Was nowher such a worthy vavasour. 360

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A Cook they hadde with hem for the nones,
 To boille chiknes with the mary-bones, 380
 And poudre-marchant tart, and galingale.
 Wel coude he know a draughte of London ale.
 He coude roste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,
 Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.
 But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me, 385
 That on his shine a mormal hadde he:
 For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.

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A good Wyf was ther of bisyde Bathe, 445
 But she was som-del deaf, and that was scathe.
 Of cloth-making she hadde swich an haunt,
 She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.
 In al the parisshes wyf ne was thier noon
 That to the offring before hir sholde goon, 450
 And if ther dide, certeyn, so wrooth was she,
 That she was out of alle charitee.
 Hir coverchiefs ful fyne were of ground;
 I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
 That on a Sondag were upon hir heed. 455

Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
 Ful streite y-teyd, and shoos ful moiste and newe.
 Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.
 She was a worthy womman al hir lyve,
 Housbondes at chirche-dore she hadde fyve, 460
 Withouten other compaignye in youthe;
 But therof nedeth nat to speke as nouthe.
 And thryes hadde she been at Ierusalem;
 She hadde passed many a straunge stroom;
 At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne, 465
 In Galice at seint lame, and at Coloigne.
 She coude moche of wandring by the weye.
 Gat-tohede was she, soothly for to seye.
 Up-on an amblere esily she sat,
 Y-wimpled wel, and on hir heed an hat 470
 As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;
 A foot-mantel aboute hir hipes large,
 And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe.
 In felaweschip wel coude she laughe and carpe.
 Of remedies of love she knew per-chaunce, 575
 For she coude of that art the olde daunce.
 A good man was ther of religioun,
 And was a povre Persoun of a toun;
 But riche he was of holy thoght and werk.
 He was also a lerned man, a clerk, 480
 That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;
 His parissshens devoutly wolde he teche.
 Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,
 And in adversitee ful pacient;
 And swich he was y-preved ofte sythes. 485
 Ful looth were him to cursen for his tythes,
 But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,
 Un-to his povre parissshens aboute
 Of his offring, and eek of his substaunce.
 He coude in litel thing han suffisaunce. 490
 Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer a-sonder,
 But he ne lafte nat, for reyn ne thonder,
 In siknes nor in meschief to visyte
 The ferreste in his parisshe, moche and lyte,
 Up-on his feet, and in his hand a staf. 495

This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,
 That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte;
 Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte;
 And this figure he added eek ther-to, 500
 That if gold ruste, what shal yren do?
 For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,
 No wonder is a leved man to ruste;
 And shame it his, if a preest take keep,
 A (spotted) shepherd and a clene sheep.
 Wel oghte a preest ensample for to yive, 505
 By his clenness, how that his sheep shold live.
 He sette nat his benefice to hyre,
 And leet his sheep encombred in the myre,
 And ran to London, un-to sēynt Poules,
 To seken him a chaunterie for soules, 510
 Or with a bretherhed to been wilholde;
 But dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde,
 So that the wolf ne made it nat miscarie;
 He was a shepherde and no mercenarie.
 And though he holy were, and vertuous, 515
 He was to sinful man nat despitous,
 Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne,
 But in his teching discreet and benigne.
 To drawn folk to heven by fairnesse
 By good ensample, this was his bisynesse: 520
 But it were any persone obstinat,
 What so he were, of heigh or lowe estat,
 Him wolde he snibben sharply for the nones.
 A bettre preest, I trowe that nowher non is.
 He wayted after no pompe and reverence, 525
 Ne maked him a spyced conscience,
 But Cristes lore, and his apostles twelve,
 He taughte, but first he folwed it him-selve.
 With him ther was a Plowman, was his brother,
 That hadde y-lad of dong ful many a fother, 530
 A trewe swinkere and a good was he,
 Livinge in pees and parfit charitee.
 God loved he best with al his hole herte
 At all tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte,
 And than ne his neighebour right as him selve. 535

He wolde thresshe, and thier-to dyke and delve,
 For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,
 Withouten hyre, if it lay in his might.
 His tythes payed he ful faire and wel,
 Bothe of his propre swink and his catei. 540
 In a tabard he rood upon a mere.

* * * * *

Now have I told you shortly, in a clause, 715
 Thestat, tharray, the nombre, and eek the cause
 Why that assembled was this compaignye
 In Southwerk, at this gentil hostelrye,
 That highte the Tabard, faste by the Belle.
 But now is tyme to yow for to telle 720
 How that we baren us that ilke night,
 Whan we were in that hostelrye alight.
 And after wol I telle of our viage,
 And al the remenaunt of our pilgrimage.
 But first I pray yow of your curteisye, 725
 That ye narette it nat my vileinye,
 Thogh that I pleynty speke in this matere,
 To telle yow hir wordes and hir chere;
 Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.
 For this ye knowen al-so wel as I, 730
 Who-so shal telle a tale after a man,
 He moot reherce, as ny as evere he can,
 Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
 Al speke he never so rudeliche and large; 735
 Or elles he moot telle his tale untrewre,
 Or feyne thing, or fynd wordes newe.
 He may nat spare, al-thogh he were his brother;
 He moot as wel seye o word as another.
 Crist spak him-self ful brode in holy writ,
 And wel ye woot, no vileinye is it. 740
 Eek Plato seith, who-so that can him rede,
 The wordes mote be cosin to the dede.
 Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,
 Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
 Here in this tafe, as that they sholde stonde; 745
 My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.

Greet chere made our hoste us everichon,
 And to the soper sette he us anon;
 And served us with vitaille at the beste.
 Strong was the wyn, and wel to drinke us leste. 750
 A semely man our hoste was with-alle
 For to han been a marshal in an halle;
 A large man he was with eyen stepe,
 A fairer burgeys was ther noon in Chepe:
 Bold of his speche, and wys, and wel y-thaught, 755
 And of manhod him lakkede right naught.
 Eek therto he was right a mery man,
 And after soper pleyen he bigan,
 And spake of mirthe amonges othere thinges,
 Whan that we hadde maad our rekeninges; 760
 And seyde thus: 'Now, lordinges, trewely
 Ye ben to me right welcome hertely:
 For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,
 I ne saugh this yeer so mery a compaignye
 At ones in this herberwe as is now. 765
 Fayn wold I doon yow mirthe, wiste I how.
 And of a mirthe I am right now bithoght,
 To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.
 Ye goon to Caunterbury; God yow spede,
 The blisful martir quyte yow your mede. 770
 And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
 Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;
 For trewely, confort ne mirthe is noon
 To ryde by the weye doumb as a stoon;
 And therefore wol I maken yow disport, 775
 As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort.
 And if yow lyketh alle, by con assent,
 Now for to stondem at my Iugement,
 And for to werken as I shal yow seye,
 To-morwe, whan ye ryden by toe weye, 780
 Now, by my fader soule, that is deed,
 But ye be merye, I wol yeve yow myn heed.
 Hold up your hond, withoute more speche.
 Our counseil was nat longe for to seche;
 Us thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys, 785
 And graunted him with-uten more avys,

And bad him seye his verdit, as him leste.
 'Lordinges', quod he, 'now herkneth for the beste;
 But tak it not, I prey yow, in desdeyn;
 This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyn, 790
 That ech of yow, to shorte with our weye,
 In this viage, shal telle tales tweye,
 To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,
 And hom-ward he shall tellen othere two,
 Of aventures that whylom han bifalle. 795
 And which of yow that bereth him best of alle,
 That is to seyn, that telleth in this cas
 Tales of best sentence and most solas,
 Shal han a soper at our aller cost
 Here in this place, sitting by this post, 800
 Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.
 And for to make yow the more mery,
 I wol my-selven gladly with yow ryde,
 Right at myn owne cost, and be your gyde.
 And who-so wol my lugement withseye 805
 Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye.
 And if ye vouche-sauf that it be so,
 Tel me anon, with-uten wordes mo,
 And I wol erly shape me therfore.'
 This thing was graunted, and our othes swore 810
 With ful glad herte, and preyden him also
 That he wold vouch-sauf for to do so,
 And that he wolde been our governour,
 And of our tales luge and reportour, 815
 And sette a soper at a certeyn prys;
 And we wolde reuled been at his devys,
 In heigh and lowe; and thus, by oon assent,
 We been acorded to his lugement.
 And ther-up-on the wyn was fet anoon;
 We dronken, and to reste wente echoon, 820
 With-uten any lenger tarynge.
 A-morwe, whan that day bigan to springe,
 Up roos our host, and was our aller cok,
 And gadrede us togidre, alle in a flok,
 And forth we riden, a litel more than pas, 825
 Un-to the watering of saint Thomas.

And there our host bigan his hors areste,
 And seyde; 'Lordinges, herkneþ if yow leste
 Ye woot your forward, and I it yow recorde. 830
 If even-song and morwe-song acorde,
 Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale.
 As evere mote I drinke wyn or ale,
 Who-so be rebel to my lugement
 Shal paye for al that by the weye is spent.
 Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twinne; 835
 He which that hath the shortest shal biginne.'
 'Sire knight,' quod he, 'my maister and my lord,
 Now draweth cut, for that is myn acord.
 Cometh neer,' quod he, 'my lady prioresse;
 And ye, sir clerk, lat be yor shamfastnesse, 840
 Ne studieth noght; ley hond to, every man.'
 Anon to drawen every wight bigan,
 And shortly for to tellen, as it was,
 Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,
 The sothe is this, the cut fil to the knight, 845
 Of which ful biythe and glad was every wight;
 And telle he moste his tale, as was resoun,
 By forward and by composicioun,
 As ye han herd; what nedeth wordes mo?
 And whan this goode man saugh it was so, 850
 As he that wys was and obedient
 To kepe his forward by his free assent,
 He seyde: 'Sin I shal biginne the game,
 What, welcome be the cut, a Goddes name!
 Now lat us ryde, and herkneþ what I seye.' 855
 And with that word we riden forth our weye;
 And he bigan with right a mery chere
 His tale anon, aud seyde in this manere.

**Heere endith the prolog of this book; and heere
 bigynneth the first tale which is the Knyghte(s)
 Tale.**

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